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JEANNE DE CLISSON

A CLASSIC REVENGE TALE OR A PRODUCT OF HER CIRCUMSTANCES?

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A big problem with storytelling is that—more often than not—once a story is told, it is considered to be over with all being said and done. This pattern is especially troubling when it appears in the telling of history, whether one is looking at a massive historical event such as a war or an empire or something as specific as a single human life. One such life is that of Jeanne de Clisson, a French woman born at the dawn of the fourteenth century who would go down in infamy as a revenge-crazed killer who turned to piracy after her husband's death. Some historians have indicated that there were other factors which may have contributed to her choice to become a pirate. The telling of Jeanne's story always returns to the 'more interesting' narrative of retribution—after all, who does not love a good revenge story? It is simpler to understand, easier to pin everything on a desire for vengeance than to try to analyze the context for less-obvious motives hidden in plain view. Could this woman have been motivated by vengeance alone? Perhaps. However, it is not necessary to accept that as the only motivation just because it stands as a readily available answer. Jeanne de Clisson could have begun her thirteen-year career in piracy for the purpose of revenge, but there were underlying factors in the political, social, and economic spheres of her time which contributed to the decisions she made.

Before a deeper analysis can begin, the story of Jeanne de Clisson as it is usually told must be reviewed. Jeanne de Clisson née de Belleville was a noblewoman by birth, heiress to the Belleville estate and a woman noted to be of exceptional beauty[1]. Her first marriage took place when she was twelve, and it produced two children by the time Jeanne was first widowed in 1326, when she was roughly twenty-six[2]. Four years later, Jeanne married Olivier de Clisson and have five more children[3]. Olivier became involved in the War of Breton Secession on the side of Charles de Blois, his friend who stood against the English powers in France to claim power for himself as the duchy, but this eventually led to Olivier's demise[4]. He was executed for treason by the French king Philip VI in 1343 due to accusations by de Blois, tricked into a trap and beheaded with his severed head being placed on display[5]. Many believed that this was wrongful due to a lack of evidence, but no one was more outraged than Jeanne[6]. Olivier's widow reacted with violence by raising a force to enact her revenge, becoming the Lioness of Brittany: the pirate commander of the Black Fleet in the English Channel[7]. This brutal force struck, three unmistakable black ships with crimson sails[8], and left only one or two survivors once Jeanne was through in order to tell the tale[9]. Jeanne wanted her enemies to know who was responsible for this carnage, theft, and destruction. After thirteen years of violence, Jeanne retired from the pirate's life—having never been caught[10].

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[1] Laura Sook Duncombe, *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas* (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2017), 47.

[2] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 47.

[3] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 48.

[4] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 48.

[5] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 48.

[6] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 48.

[7] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51.

[8] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50-51.

[9] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51.

[10] Alan Axelrod, *Mercenaries: A Guide to Private Armies and Private Military Companies (*Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2014), 79.

What can be said about this story? Clearly, having her husband and the father of five out of her seven children executed—whether he was guilty or not—would have been cause for fury. As Jeanne had married Olivier in 1330 and he died in 1343, the five children would have still been adolescents when their father was killed. This in mind, there are reports of Jeanne having taken her sons to see their father's head where it was on-display in Nantes[11]. Given the youth of these boys, these seem to be less the actions of a mother and more the actions of a woman fixated on the event which she was drawing her boys' attention to with little to no concern for how the sight of their father's severed head affected her children. The gruesome methods of the Black Fleet must also be considered; it was said that Jeanne slaughtered all but a few of the crewmembers and personally beheaded any French noblemen she found aboard the ship[12], looting the ship of its goods before burning it[13]. These violent actions seem indicative of rage, a desire for vengeance so strong that it drove a noblewoman and mother of seven to go to sea for the purpose of killing.

The problem with this common retelling is that much is left unexplained. Jeanne de Clisson *was* a noblewoman and a mother. Why throw her lot in with crime and violence, even if revenge was what she desired? She had seven children to look after, five of which were thirteen or younger, and it was not as if she came from a place of poverty before Olivier or had not remarried before. What would drive her to these measures with those factors in play? Another point for consideration is that Jeanne de Clisson retired from piracy with her husband's death left unavenged. Philip VI passed in 1350[14], but Jeanne continued her spree until she married the English Sir Walter Bentley in 1356[15]—at which time de Blois was still alive and the conflict Jeanne had thrown herself into

[11] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[12] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[13] Axelrod, *Mercenaries*, 79.
[14] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51.
[15] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51-52.

was still brewing[16]. If revenge was her sole motivation, why stop before she succeeded when she was never caught?

To begin, the political side of this narrative should be delved into with greater scrutiny—especially regarding treason in medieval France. Olivier de Clisson supposedly confessed to the crime of treason, having apparently turned against his friend and long-time ally Charles de Blois to support his rival Jean de Montfort and stand with Edward III of England while he was being held in captivity[17]. Officially, Olivier was convicted of "several treasons and other crimes perpetrated by him against the king and the crown of France, and for alliances he made with the king of England"[18]. Some sources say that de Blois reported Olivier to the king after Olivier was returned from capture for too small a ransom.[19] This was not a very good reason to kill off a loyal supporter and friend, so it could be speculated that de Blois fell into a state of paranoia throughout the conflict. O another reason being that there was some secret vendetta that brewed between the two friends which is left unknown. Other sources say that the English Earl of Salisbury reported Olivier to French King Philip VI, a supposed act of his own revenge for the "alleged" rape of his wife by Edward III[20]; in this case, it would mean that the words of an embittered Englishman were taken over the words of a Frenchman, and execution was the result. Paranoia and personal vendettas may have struck on both sides of the conflict in order to produce Olivier's demise—that, or this was all just a story told to maintain the verdict which shocked the public. As all of this was occurring, Jeanne may not have been an innocent bystander. Following the death of her husband in the summer of 1343, Jeanne created an army of four-hundred men to attack French forces on

[16] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51.
[17] S.H. Cuttler, *The Law of Treason and Treason Trials in Later Medieval France* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 147.
[18] Froissart, *Croniques*, III, p. ix. n. 3.
[19] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[20] Cuttler, *Treason*, 147.

land before ultimately moving to the sea to become the famed pirate[21]. One must wonder how this could have happened so fast. As it turns out, in March of 1343—before Olivier was slain—Jeanne and some of the men she already had under her command as a noble were summoned to Parliament for rebellious acts. After five defaults, they were all convicted of treason in December 1343—months after Olivier's demise[22]. Jeanne had already risen in infamy at this point, but the fact remains that Jeanne had been noticed by the Parliament as a source of rebellion before her husband's execution and even summoned for her deeds; it took nine months for her to be declared a traitor, but she was not just an innocent wife and mother before the execution. Olivier's death may have just fueled his widow's pre-existing capability for crimes against the crown.

This brings up the question of what Jeanne's place was following Olivier's death, being that she was a widowed woman in medieval times. Historian Laura Sook Duncombe wrote, "Whether they were rich or poor, most medieval women could not be said to have pleasant lives. They had two role models: Eve, the fallen woman, and the Virgin Mary (the original manifestation of the Madonna/whore dichotomy)"[23]. Eve was represented by the occupation of prostitution, but a noblewoman and mother who had already cheated death so many times with the birth of so many children[24] would not have seen this as an acceptable course of action. Another option was to become a midwife, as this was a necessary occupation: "An estimated 20 percent of all women in the Middle Ages died in childbirth, 5 percent during the birth itself and another 15 percent due to complications after labor"[25]. This was trade open to women[26], but again—likely one Jeanne would have avoided due to her station. Jeanne did have several paths open to her:

[21] Cuttler, *Treason*, 147.
[22] Cuttler, *Treason*, 147.
[23] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[24] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50.
[25] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50.
[26] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50.

> many scholars claim that after the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, the status of medieval women briefly went up due to the dearth of people left alive. Surviving women could receive better wages due to better-paying jobs being available and thus delay marriage, increasing their chances of survival.[27]

However, none of the common options offered power befitting a noblewoman and commander of men. One occupation which did offer the chance of elevation was the joining of a religious order; nuns in medieval times were probably best-off; they labored, but they could be educated and their position had the potential for advancement and power[28]. Abbesses—the highest female role in an order—could be incredibly powerful; as far back as 930, a Benedictine sister recalled her own abbess: "The authority of the abbess was supreme; she had her own court; she sent her own men-at-arms into the field; she coined her own money"[29]. This abbess, like Jeanne, had once been a powerful noblewoman[30]. However, while Jeanne might have found station and success in a religious order, there was still the matter of her children. Her children by her first marriage were already grown, but her children by her second marriage were not by the year 1343. A mother might choose to enter a nunnery as an elderly woman, either when widowed or with the consent of her husband[31]—but the age of consent was twelve[32], and many of her children could not have made that cut. Her daughters, if twelve, could have joined with her or married—but what of her sons? Despite the tales of Jeanne's harshness at Nantes, she likely would have been unwilling to abandon her sons and younger daughters to join an order—if she would have even thought she would be content with convent life at all. It is however important to note that, at this time, the members of religious orders had taken on interesting traits:

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[27] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50.
[28] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50.
[29] Linda Rouillard. "Church and the Clergy" in *Handbook of Medieval Culture. Volume 1*, edited by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 176.
[30] Rouillard, "Church and the Clergy", 176.
[31] Penelope D. Johnson. *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 19.
[32] Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 15.

> Rather than embracing asexual images, medieval religious men and women often embraced hybrid sexual images. For instance, spectacularly virtuous women were ascribed to the category of virago, or manly women. The word "abbess" is derived from "abbas" which designates an abbot or a father, and thus implies a woman-father.[33]

Abbesses were thought to be as powerful as a woman could be without being a queen[34], and they took on masculine traits as they wielded that might. Some sources say that Jeanne sold her body to raise money for the Black Fleet.[35] The question arises of could Jeanne de Clisson have been inspired by abbesses and other religious when she left the conventional options behind and took on the masculine role of a killing commander at sea in the masculine-dominated fields of piracy and privateering, forging her own role to fill as she saw fit? Jeanne may not have become a pirate for revenge, but instead to maintain her autonomy in a society which did not suit her needs as a woman who came from power—and the destruction and killing was just another way for her to display the might she wielded at sea, away from the laws and restrictions of the land.

Still, it begs the question: why would Jeanne de Clisson, a woman of noble birth who married well, be driven to crime or even a common occupation in order to care for her family? As it turns out, according to the *lex Quisquis*—the French law on treason at this time—a traitor's lands were to be confiscated and never passed on to his sons so as to impoverish and dishonor the bloodline, but their widows would still hold claim over their dowries and their daughters could each take a fourth of that dowry[36]. Women were supposed to be granted pardon regarding their male relatives' treason because it was thought that French courts "ought to be softer against those who we trust will dare less because of the infirmity of their sex"[37]. Women's right to their property has been upheld in court cases against men even in 1343, as seen in the case of Lord Bertrand vs.

[33] Rouillard, "Church and the Clergy", 183.
[34] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50.
[35] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[36] Cuttler, *Treason*, 7-8.
[37] Cuttler, *Treason*, 8.

Lady Bernice in March of that year[38], but the concept of property in the tale of Jeanne de Clisson complicates matters. Some sources claim that Jeanne did everything she could to raise money for her Black Fleet and thirteen-year revenge streak, including selling off what was left of her property after Olivier's treason[39]. However, despite the protective provisions of *lex Quisquis*, there are records of Jeanne de Clisson's dowry—the land of de Belleville, her birthright—being taken as the de Clisson land was taken[40]. Confiscated land was given away by the king to enrichen his relatives; the land shared by Olivier and Jeanne was given to Louis de Poitiers, the count of Valentinois and Diois, and he utilized it through means such as rents while the de Belleville land was given to Jean, duke of Normandy, who also used ~~it~~ the land for profit[41]. If Jeanne's lands were taken from her unfairly, it would not have been an isolated incident. The crown many times over confiscated the property of the wives of traitors as well as that of their husbands, leaving entire families in destitute for lack of any assets[42]. In April 1344, Jeanne de la Roche-Tesson's widow—and the mother of two children, who relied upon the income from her land—petitioned the king, "according to written law, a married woman ought not to lose her dowry because of the crime of her husband, be it for treason or otherwise"[43]. In January of the next year, "Philippe VI annulled all grants of land made on her dowry, and instructed the *bailli* of Contentin to seise her of the property that was hers"[44]. Even though they were barred from inheritance, sons would try to help their mothers get their confiscated land back, such is the case with the widow of Jacques Coeur[45]. If Jeanne's lands were taken by force, her children would have been young and likely unable to

[38] "A suit was moved in our Court between our proctor and Bertrand, lord of the castle of Oupia, on one side, and Beatrice, lady of Saissac, on the other side; 15 March 1343" (*Fordham University*, 1996).
[39] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[40] Cuttler, *Treason*, 125.
[41] Cuttler, *Treason*, 125.
[42] Cuttler, *Treason*, 120.
[43] Cuttler, *Treason*, 120.
[44] Cuttler, *Treason*, 120-121.
[45] Cuttler, *Treason*, 121.

offer any aid even if they were capable of providing it. Still, in light of this, it is important to harken back to how sources differ on Jeanne de Clisson's position at this time; some paint her as having been an innocent bystander driven to rage while Others claim that she had already turned against the king, so perhaps the confiscation of her land was legal[46]. It is important to note that Jeanne was not declared a traitor until December of 1343[47], so a confiscation of her lands before then would have been wrongful. Regardless of whether or not the seizing of her lands was legal, with her husband deceased and five children to care for, Jeanne's options were numbered and her frustration was high.

Does the idea of confiscated land tie-in to Jeanne de Clisson's actions? It was said that Jeanne took her sons to Nantes to see their father's head[48]; was she showing them their father's remains to inspire revenge in them for what she felt was an unjust death, or was there more to it: a graphic, physical depiction of how their future wealth and place in society had been stripped away? Jeanne only targeted French ships in the English Channel, killing all crew except for one or two passengers to serve as messengers and beheading any nobleman she encountered[49]; she destroyed ships after claiming the cargo[50]. Perhaps this was a message sent to the entire system of nobles and royalty; she would take their property, their livelihood, and even their lives as she claimed their cargo, their crews, and their heads. After one of her sons died, Jeanne de Clisson left her other son to be raised by de Montfort—her husband's former adversary and later supposed ally, who would one day become Duke of Brittany—in England[51]. A strategy to ensure his legacy even without his father's land as she hunted for their enemies? Could Jeanne de Clisson's actions as the Lioness of

[46] Cuttler, *Treason*, 147.
[47] Cuttler, *Treason*, 147.
[48] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.
[49] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51.
[50] Axelrod, *Mercenaries*, 79.
[51] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 51.

Brittany been sourced by a wrongful land seizure by the crown, resulting in an escalation of pre-existing rebellious behavior in a violent retaliation? Jeanne retired and married the English Sir Walter Bentley, who held lands in England and Brittany before her revenge was complete[52]. This context could indicate an ulterior motive for the marriage, marking it as a strategic move Jeanne made for herself and her children. Did the Lioness of Brittany end her thirteen-year run, having never been caught, because she found a way to reclaim what her family had lost? It was not as if Jeanne had never remarried before, and—vengeful or not—she was clearly a strategist.

Jeanne de Clisson may very well have been out for retribution, but oversimplifying the tale into a tale of vengeance for lost love when the political, social, and economic climate of the time was so important to the analysis of the actions she took is a gross injustice. Historical figures—well-known and lesser-known, famous and infamous—are oftentimes much more complex than their best-known interpretation and it is the duty of a historian to go beyond the simple explanation and uncover clues within the context. Jeanne could have been a grieving widow driven by fury, but she was also a rebel, a noblewoman, and a mother. Jeanne de Clisson née de Bellville had her own reasons—connected to and yet still separate from her husband Olivier—which pulled her to become the Lioness of Brittany.

[52] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 52.

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“FOR THE GOOD OF ALL MEN”

RHETORIC AND RESISTANCE IN AMERICA’S SPACE RACE

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In considering the greatest American achievements of the twentieth century, the development of a space exploration program that culminated with the moon landing in 1969 would certainly rank among those events. Popular memory holds that the moon landing was a unifying moment in American society, a brief moment of shared national pride amid the tumultuous end of the 1960s. However, the reality is much more complex. The space program itself lacked broad public support, and many activists offered acerbic, insightful critiques of the program and what it symbolized in a nation torn by racial and class divides. While President John F. Kennedy did not live to see the fulfillment of his goal to land a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s, he spoke on the topic of space exploration more than any other president of the space race. Analysis of Kennedy’s space race rhetoric reveals recurrent themes about the nature of the American space program and of America itself. The reactions of civil rights and antiwar activists to these ideas and the similarities they bear to Soviet rhetoric shed light upon the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy, particularly amidst great national division.

Upon taking the oath of office in 1961, President John F. Kennedy inherited the duty to lead the nation's burgeoning space exploration efforts. He had to strike a balance between his own idealism, his inclination toward peace, military pressures, and the established rhetoric of space as the newest front of the Cold War. As Kennedy sought to assert the strength of his leadership against the threat of the Cold War, he emphasized the notion that space exploration was a competition with the Soviets requiring an American victory. [53] While his predecessor Dwight D. Eisenhower had referenced this theme, "it was Kennedy who made racing with — and beating — the USSR the centerpiece of the US space program."[54] In October 1960, before he even won the presidential election, Kennedy issued a statement characterizing the American space program as a competitive effort.[55] He emphasized the grave significance of the space race, suggesting that its outcome would determine the fate of the world: "To insure peace and freedom, we must be first."[56] A week after Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin completed the first human spaceflight in 1961, Kennedy penned a memorandum to Vice President Johnson concerning the American space program. [57] The timing alone suggests that it was motivated by the recent Soviet achievement, and its content affirms this. [58] Kennedy clearly framed the American space program as being in competition with that of the Soviet Union by using the language of victory and defeat. [59] The foremost question to consider, according to Kennedy, was whether the Americans could "beat" the Soviets in space: "Is there any

[53] W.D. Kay, "John F. Kennedy and the Two Faces of the U.S. Space Program, 1961-1963," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1998): 573, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551902.

[54] Kay, "Kennedy," 573.

[55] Glen Swanson, "'Space, the Final Frontier': *Star Trek* and the National Space Rhetoric of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and NASA," *The Space Review*, April 20, 2020, https://www.thespacereview.com/article/3923/1.

[56] Kennedy qtd. in Swanson, "Final Frontier."

[57] John Kennedy, "Memorandum for Vice President," memorandum (Washington, DC: White House, April 20, 1961), from Presidential Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, https://history.nasa.gov/Apollomon/apollo1.pdf.

[58] John Kennedy, "Memorandum."

[59] John Kennedy, "Memorandum."

[...] space program which promises dramatic results in which we can win?"[60] This private memorandum reveals that Soviet space achievements, not humanitarian idealism, primarily motivated Kennedy's "desire to accelerate the space program and put a man on the moon."[61]

According to Kennedy's space race rhetoric, the space race was not just a test of two rivals' scientific and military capabilities; it was a competition of ideological superiority. In an address given May 25, 1961, Kennedy discussed the progress of the American space program, declaring, "This nation will move forward, with the full speed of freedom, in the exciting adventure of space."[62] He also described the Cold War as a struggle between "freedom and tyranny" in which the space race's outcome would be decisive.[63] His language positioned the United States as the champion of freedom and suggested that America's achievements in space would be due to its political ideology.[64] To capitalize on these perceived ideological differences, government officials tried to make the American space program seem "'open' and 'peaceful'" in contrast to the "secretiveness, [...] overt political nature, [and] militarism" of the USSR's space program.[65] Thus, this rhetorical theme established both the conduct of the American government and the outcome of the space race as determining factors of the superior Cold War ideology.

Kennedy also worked to establish the motives of the United States in pursuing space exploration as morally superior to the motives of the Soviet Union, even though both nations shared a primary aim in the context of the space race: to outperform the other. In his famous

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[60] John Kennedy, "Memorandum."

[61] Lina Mann, "Lyndon B. Johnson: Forgotten Champion of the Space Race," *The White House Historical Association*, July 15, 2021, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/lyndon-b-johnson-forgotten-champion-of-the-space-race.

[62] John Kennedy, "Special Message by the President on Urgent National Needs" (speech, Washington, DC, May 25, 1961), 10, *Digital Public Library of America*, https://dp.la/item/0f7032c62e1cb4b6939694b0a808124c.

[63] Kennedy, "Special Message," 8.

[64] Kennedy, "Special Message," 8-10.

[65] Kay, "Kennedy," 583.

address at Rice University in 1962, Kennedy drew a moral distinction between American space exploration and that of its competitor: "We have vowed that we shall not see [space] governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace [...] The vows of this Nation can only be fulfilled if we in this Nation are first."[66] He reiterated this idea throughout the speech, claiming that "only if the United States occupies a position of pre-eminence can we help decide whether this new ocean will be a sea of peace or a new terrifying theater of war."[67] The nation would pursue exploration "for the good of all men."[68] According to this rhetoric, just as the Soviet Union represented tyranny, its efforts in space represented militaristic expansionism; just as the United States represented freedom, its space program purely sought to benefit humanity.

Throughout his brief presidency, Kennedy recognized Americans' desire for a renewed commitment to patriotic purpose. This was apparent in his inaugural address, with its resounding exhortation to "ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country."[69] In his public addresses discussing space exploration, he attempted to capitalize on that idealistic zeal by emphasizing the potential of space exploration as a "great new American enterprise."[70] He openly acknowledged that accelerating space exploration would be burdensome and requested a resounding commitment from the American people.[71] Kennedy wanted the American people to take pride in supporting the space program and said that the effort belonged

[66] John Kennedy, "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort" (speech, Houston, Sept. 12, 1962), *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-at-rice-university-on-the-nations-space-effort.

[67] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."

[68] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."

[69] John Kennedy, "Inaugural Address" (speech, Washington, DC, Jan. 20, 1961), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/inaugural-address.

[70] Kennedy, "Special Message," 8.

[71] Kennedy, "Special Message," 9-10.

not only to the scientists and astronauts themselves, but to the entire nation.[72] Kennedy's speech at Rice University the following year was even more strident, as he delivered the iconic lines, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard [...] because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept."[73] Throughout the address, he discussed the high cost and uncertain rewards of the space program. Yet his conviction that the space program was worth the cost never wavered — not only because it presented practical intellectual and economic gains, but also because it offered the chance for Americans to set off on "the greatest adventure on which man has ever embarked" and in doing so reach a higher level of national unity.[74] Kennedy's use of this theme helped him secure the funding he needed to set the nation on track to reach the moon. Its success at genuinely motivating Americans, however, is less certain.

While Kennedy developed multiple existing rhetorical themes in discussing the space race, he introduced two new themes corresponding to the unique rhetoric of his own administration. The first of these involves 'peaceful' conquest as a fundamental element of American culture, in continuity with the key role of an American frontier in shaping the nation's path.[75] In campaigning for the presidency, Kennedy proposed a 'New Frontier': "the frontier of the 1960s, the frontier of unknown opportunities and perils."[76] He intended to galvanize the American people into greater civic engagement, and his reference to the frontier tied his rhetoric to the historic Manifest Destiny narrative of divinely-ordained exploration and expansion.[77] Kennedy secured his presidential

[72] Kennedy, "Special Message," 9.
[73] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."
[74] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."
[75] Kennedy qtd. in Swanson, "Final Frontier."
[76] Kennedy qtd. in Swanson, "Final Frontier."
[77] Swanson, "Final Frontier."

victory "in part by impressing voters with his claim that America had gone soft and needed to regain the hardiness of its frontier heritage."[78] He advanced the notion that Americans could direct their exploratory impulse toward the stars, saying that "space is our great New Frontier."[79] The concept of the frontier is already fraught, given the long, bloody history of white supremacist violence against native peoples in the name of national expansion. Kennedy did not intend to evoke negative associations, though for most Americans more than a half century later, it is impossible to think of 'the frontier' without also conjuring the bloody history of American conquest and imperialism.

Kennedy's address at Rice University drew upon the rhetoric of the frontier and American conquest. Once again, he described space exploration as a "historic challenge to explore a new frontier," a phrase reminiscent of calls from the prior century for white Americans to settle in the West.[80] In fact, Kennedy directly referenced the settlement of the West to establish the rhetorical connection even more firmly, saying, "This country was conquered by those who moved forward — and so [too] will space."[81] In an ironic contradiction, Kennedy used the language of conquest to characterize American exploration of space moments apart from his vow that "we shall not see [space] governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace."[82]

Kennedy's denunciation of conquest by "hostile" nations and promotion of the conquest of space by the United States as a positive good suggests his belief in American exceptionalism. He expressed this belief throughout the speech, operating from the assumption that the United States

[78] Brenda Plummer, "The Newest South: Race and Space on the Dixie Frontier," in *NASA and the Long Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Brian Odom and Stephen Waring (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019), 70.

[79] Kennedy qtd. in Swanson, "Final Frontier."

[80] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."

[81] Kennedy, "Address at Rice"

[82] Kennedy, "Address at Rice"

must "be the leader of other nations."[83] American exceptionalism, in his view, benefited not only the United States but the whole world.[84] Space exploration specifically provided an opportunity for the United States to "solve [mysteries] for the good of all men," and American primacy in space was necessary to determine whether outer space "will be a sea of peace or a new terrifying theater of war."[85] American exceptionalism was intertwined with the second rhetorical theme that Kennedy introduced: the notion that space exploration provided opportunities for international cooperation but only as long as the United States remained the global hegemon.[86] This theme aligned with American foreign policy goals in the decades following World War II; the nation emerged from the war as the dominant global superpower, shaping the postwar order via its overwhelming influence in the creation of instruments of peace like the United Nations.

Despite the presence of American exceptionalism in this rhetorical theme, and despite frequently expressing that a primary motive for space exploration was competition with the Soviets, Kennedy demonstrated a genuine commitment to the concept of space exploration as an avenue for international cooperation. From the moment he took office, "he called for the United States and the USSR to 'explore the stars together.'"[87] Kennedy's first State of the Union suggested that space exploration could become a "forum for dialogue and peace" and a "focal point of the greater human good," as he proposed the removal of space exploration from the realm of the "bitter and wasteful competition of the Cold War" and announced America's willingness to collaborate with the Soviet Union.[88] In September 1963, he went so far as to propose a joint moon mission

[83] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."
[84] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."
[85] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."
[86] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."
[87] Kay, "Kennedy," 577.
[88] Bradley Shreve, "The US, the USSR, and Space Exploration, 1957-1963," *International Journal on World Peace* 20, no. 2 (2003): 71, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20753399; Kennedy qtd. in Shreve, 71.

involving Soviet cosmonauts sometime before the end of the 1960s.[89] This escalation suggests that the various foreign policy crises of Kennedy's tenure — most notably the Cuban Missile Crisis — led to a softening of rhetoric between the two superpowers and prompted Kennedy to commit more deeply to peaceful policy. In the remaining months of his presidency, Kennedy did not pursue the notion of a joint moon mission further, but its suggestion in a global forum after years of competitive rhetoric may indicate Kennedy's true personal feelings on US-Soviet relations with regard to the space race.[90]

Despite Kennedy's oratorical skill, the American public did not wholeheartedly accept the rhetorical themes he put forth. Those most ardently opposed to the effort cited reasons that markedly parallel the very themes Kennedy utilized to garner support. Kennedy claimed that the effort to put a man on the moon would bring Americans together, yet "throughout the 1960s a majority of Americans did not believe Apollo was worth the cost."[91] The only time that the effort gained majority support from the public was July 1969, when the euphoria of the program's success was still high. Even then, public support sat at a mere 53 percent, and within a year most Americans "did not believe that the moon landing was worth the overall cost of the program."[92] Rather than embrace the space program as an opportunity for worthwhile collective effort, most Americans balked at the high price tag, which became even more problematic as the idealism of the early 1960s was eclipsed by the costly tragedy of the Vietnam War.[93]

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[89] John Kennedy, "Address Before the 18th General Assembly of the United Nations, September 20, 1963" (speech, New York, Sept. 20, 1963), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/united-nations-19630920.

[90] Kay, "Kennedy," 581.

[91] Roger Launius, "Public Opinion Polls and Perceptions of US Human Spaceflight," *Space Policy* 19, no. 3 (2003), https://doi.org/10.1016/S0265-9646(03)00039-0.

[92] Victoria Combs, "The Dark Side of the Moon: Unpacking Civil Rights and Student Antiwar Criticism of the Apollo Program" (Undergraduate honors thesis, Butler University, 2021), 53.

[93] Combs, "Unpacking," 53.

While cost-hesitancy was widespread, opposition to the space program was highest among Black Americans, who understood the racial dimension of exploration's high price.[94] In 1966, the federal budget allotted four times more funding for space exploration than for economic opportunity programs.[95] Prominent civil rights leader Martin Luther King pointed out the disparity, saying, "'Without denying the value of scientific endeavor, there is a striking absurdity in committing billions to reach the moon where no people live, and from which none presently can benefit, while the densely populated slums are allocated miniscule appropriations.'"[96] Even the success of the moon landing did not sway the opinions of many Black Americans. Voicing the same criticism that King had expressed, activist and future Washington, D.C. mayor Marion Berry asked, "Why should blacks rejoice when two white Americans land on the moon, when white America's money and technology have not yet even reached the inner city?"[97] Reporters covering public reactions to the moon landing were met with indifference and even anger when they canvassed Harlem, where the mention of the event at a soul concert drew booing and jeers from a crowd of 50,000.[98] One Black bar patron expressed an additional criticism widely held by Black Americans: Not only does "'The whole thing [uses] money that should be spent right here,'" but "'There ain't no brothers in the program.'"[99] Kennedy had promoted the selection of Black pilot Edward Dwight for an astronaut position, but this did not come to fruition.[100] The lack of diversity

[94] Matthew Tribbe, *No Requiem for the Space Age: The Apollo Moon Landings and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 38.

[95] Combs, "Unpacking," 26-27.

[96] King qtd. in Combs, "Unpacking," 28.

[97] Barry qtd. in Neil Maher, "Raised Fists and Lunar Rockets," *PBS American Experience*, June 19, 2019, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/chasing-moon-raised-fists-lunar-rockets/..

[98] Maher, "Rockets"; Bryan Greene, "While NASA Was Landing on the Moon, Many African Americans Sought Economic Justice Instead," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 11, 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/nasa-landing-moon-many-african-americans-sought-economic-justice-instead-180972622/.

[99] Maher, "Rockets."

[100] Combs, "Unpacking," 22-23.

in the space program further alienated non-white Americans, whose criticisms justifiably suggested that the space endeavor was far from democratic in its representation of America. [101]

Black newspapers across the nation published opinion articles and political cartoons lambasting the space program, but the most acute and poignant criticism came in the form of a spoken-word poem by Gil Scott-Heron.[102] In "Whitey's on the Moon," Heron juxtaposed the litany of real-life struggles of Black Americans — like a lack of healthcare, high rent, unsanitary conditions, rising food costs, drug addiction, and high taxes — with the sardonic refrain, "but Whitey's on the moon."[103] His repetition of the phrase highlights the contrast between the focus of mainstream national attention on the moon landing and the actual needs of Black Americans. Scott-Heron concluded by sarcastically declaring that he would send his bills "to Whitey on the moon."[104] Clearly, the American space program was not the vehicle for democratic cohesion that Kennedy had spoken of in his public addresses.

Nor was it a demonstration of American moral superiority, according to hardcore critics who claimed that the government's focus on space exploration demonstrated the nation's moral bankruptcy. [105] Many critics questioned the nation's priorities, wondering what it said about the United States that addressing poverty and discrimination seemed like less of a victory for American democracy than sending a man to the moon.[106] Rather than perceive the success of the moon program as a sign of more American achievements to come, the critical view was that "[America's] priorities were so distorted that it would sooner send a man to the moon than help its

[101] Maher, "Rockets."
[102] Gil Scott-Heron, "Whitey's on the Moon," 1970, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goh2x_G0ct4.
[103] Scott-Heron, "Whitey."
[104] Scott-Heron, "Whitey."
[105] Combs, "Unpacking," 55.
[106] Combs, "Unpacking," 55.

wretched poor and crumbling cities."[107] Student antiwar activists, already disillusioned by government expenditures on war-making rather than on social issues, were particularly strident in voicing this critique.[108]

This perspective was not limited to radical underground newspapers; it appeared in mainstream liberal media as well.[109] In July 1969, for example, the *Washington Post* published a cartoon by Herb Block depicting a satirical image of an American man perched on the moon with his face glued to a television set, utterly transfixed. He is ignorant to the Earth below; the planet is polluted by clouds of war, poverty, and prejudice.[110] The cartoon appears critical of space exploration and of America's fascination with it, lambasting it as a distraction from the pressing problems facing humanity.[111] To many, America's failure to address its social problems proved "that America is not committed to ending [issues like] discrimination, hunger, and malnutrition. Walking on the moon proves that we do what we want to do as a nation."[112] After all, Kennedy had described America as "rich and powerful" — an ironic declaration in the context of the late 1960s and the nation's failure to fully address the issue of poverty.[113] Ultimately, critics concluded, a nation that did not prioritize the plight of its poorest, most disenfranchised citizens had no right to claim the flag of moral superiority — at home or in space.[114]

In his space race rhetoric, Kennedy evoked notions of American exceptionalism, linking the space endeavor to the conquest of the American West.[115] He intended to stir pride and support,

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[107] Tribbe, "Requiem," 37.
[108] Combs, "Unpacking," 4-5.
[109] Tribbe, "Requiem," 36.
[110] Herbert Block, "Transported," *The Washington Post*, July 18, 1969, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012637949/.
[111] Block, "Transported."
[112] Greene, "Economic Justice."
[113] Kay, "Kennedy," 574.
[114] Greene, "Economic Justice."
[115] Kennedy, "Address at Rice."

but for civil rights and antiwar activists, this rhetoric had the opposite effect. [116] Far from being a matter of national pride, they viewed America's history of conquest as proof of imperialist tendencies.[117] The moon itself was simply the newest target of American colonialism and imperialism.[118] A student activist writing for underground newspaper *Fifth Estate* expressed that concern, sarcastically stating that the moon landing proves "that no territory in the Universe is safe from US expansionism [...] [it makes] one grateful that at least there are no 'Indians' on the moon who will have to be slaughtered for their resistance to 'progress.'"[119]

The Vietnam War, a clear manifestation of American imperialism, forced activists to consider the connection between the war and the space program. The idea that the moon landing represented democratic triumph was undermined by the ongoing violence; while this surface-level contradiction was easily perceptible, civil rights and antiwar activists went further in criticizing the moon landing itself as another manifestation of imperialism.[120] Author and activist Norman Mailer claimed that the moon landing exemplified America's senseless conquering impulse, which had motivated the "WASP establishment" for centuries and which explained America's involvement in Vietnam. [121] To Mailer, the moon landing was "chilling in its self-evident futility."[122] Student activist Don Kaufman concurred. Citing the cost of the program — funds, he argued, that should have been spent on food and housing — Kaufman sarcastically commented, "But let's not go so far as to charge that the moon shot was a tragic waste. After all, WE'RE NUMBER ONE!"[123] Between the failure to address social problems and the imperialist undertones

[116] Combs, "Unpacking," 49.
[117] Combs, "Unpacking," 49.
[118] Combs, "Unpacking," 49.
[119] *Fifth Estate* qtd. in Combs, "Unpacking," 49.
[120] Combs, "Unpacking," 45.
[121] Gopnik, "Between."
[122] Gopnik, "Between."
[123] Kaufman qtd. in Combs, "Unpacking," 47.

of the moon landing and of the Vietnam War, activists concluded that the United States had no right to claim that its political system was superior and that its motives for space exploration were not as morally pure as the nation's leadership claimed.[124] Clearly, Kennedy's rhetorical themes of American superiority were undermined by activists' perception of the nation as morally bankrupt and fundamentally imperialist.

Ironically, the space race rhetoric of the Soviet Union bore remarkable similarities to that of the United States. The Soviet government naturally emphasized the nature of the space race as a competition, but it also promoted space exploration as a unifying collective endeavor, as a test of ideological superiority, and as a matter of conquest. Collectivism as a rhetorical theme was especially prominent in Soviet rhetoric.[125] Soviet propaganda posters emphasized the collective nature of space exploration to evoke support; one poster with the message "Glory of the Space Heroes — Glory of the Soviet People!" depicted cosmonauts alongside Soviet scientists, factory workers, and farmers.[126] It suggested that the Soviet people should share the pride of Soviet achievements in space.[127] The announcement of the *Sputnik* launch in Soviet state newspaper *Pravda* credited "intensive work by scientific research institutes and design bureaus," impersonal language that reiterated the message of collectivism.[128]

Just as Kennedy repeatedly linked the success of American space ventures to the viability of American democracy, Soviet achievements "were quickly turned by Soviet propaganda into

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[124] Kaufman qtd. in Combs, "Unpacking," 47.

[125] "Posters of the Golden Age of Space Cosmonauts," *BBC News*, September 19, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34281621.

[126] "Posters."

[127] "Posters."

[128] *Pravda*, "Announcement of the First Satellite," Moscow, October 5, 1957, Historical Reference Collection, NASA History Division, https://history.nasa.gov/sputnik/14.html.

tangible proofs of the technological and political superiority of socialism."[129] In describing the success of *Sputnik, Pravda* claimed that "our contemporaries will witness how the freed and conscientious labor of the people of the new socialist society makes the most daring dreams of mankind a reality."[130] Soviet propaganda posters echoed this idea, glorifying the Communist Party as responsible for Soviet progress in space.[131] One stated that the "triumph in space is the hymn to Soviet country," while another referenced the October Revolution of 1917: "October opened the road to space."[132]

Finally, the theme of space exploration as conquest appeared in Soviet as well as American rhetoric. For the Soviets, this manifested in their very language; they "widely used the terms 'conquering' (pokorenie) and 'mastering' (osvoenie)" when referring to their efforts in space.[133] Soviet propaganda referenced ideas of peace, science, and progress alongside exhortations to "conquer space" and praise for cosmonauts: "Glory to the conquerors of the universe."[134] According to the messages from the Soviet government, "Soviet space exploration inherited the rhetoric of war; it was about the 'storming of space.'"[135] The rhetorical parallels between the United States and the Soviet Union challenge the American claim to a moral high ground in the space race, as they suggest that, at least in the realm of space, both Americans and Soviets were imperialists at heart.

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[129] Slava Gerovich, "'Why Are We Telling Lies?' The Creation of Soviet Space History Myths," *Russian Review* 70, no. 3 (2011): 460, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289978?seq=25#metadata_info_tab_contents.

[130] *Pravda*, "Announcement."

[131] "Posters."

[132] Laura Stampler, "These Soviet Space-Race Propaganda Posters Retain Their Delusional Intensity 50 Years Later," *Business Insider*, April 26, 2012, https://www.businessinsider.com/here-are-the-soviets-extremely-intense-space-race-propaganda-posters-from-1958-1963-2012-4.

[133] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 461.

[134] Stampler, "Propaganda."

[135] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 467.

Just as Americans criticized their nation's space program, so too did the Soviet people. Their criticisms echoed those of their American counterparts. To many Soviet citizens, the space race was simply not as important as the immediate struggles in their daily lives. [136] This was especially true once the Soviets lost their lead in the space race; by 1969, "the Russian people had many problems in day-to-day life, [so] they were not too concerned about the first man on the moon."[137] To many, the government expenditures on space exploration were a waste of resources when so many citizens lived in poor conditions: "As food and goods shortages plagued the economy, the public increasingly questioned the lavish funding of the space program," which included the logistical costs of the program as well as publicity tours for the cosmonauts.[138] In words that echoed those of American student activist Don Kaufman, one young Soviet man wrote a letter to a youth newsletter criticizing the wastefulness of the Soviet program. He questioned its benefit for ordinary Soviets: "What's in it for me? [...] On the eve of the launch rocket, [I] received 300 rubles salary, and this is what I still receive, in spite of the successful launch [...] Rocket, rocket, rocket — what's it needed for now? To hell with it [...] give me something better for my table."[139] Despite American claims to ideological superiority, the complaints of American citizens align with those of the Soviets, suggesting that both governments failed to provide for the needs of their citizens.

Just as space exploration illuminated the imperialist tendencies of the American government in the eyes of many activists, the Soviet space program reinforced the secrecy and deception of the Soviet regime. While the United States acknowledged the accidents and failures of its program, its rival did not: "To the [Soviet] public, there were no errors or cancelled programs

[136] Khrushchev qtd. in Das, "Soviet Eyes."
[137] Khrushchev qtd. in Das, "Soviet Eyes."
[138] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 476.
[139] Alexei N. qtd. in Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 476.

or failed missions."[140] By the late 1960s, when it was clear that the Soviet advantage in space was lost and unrecoverable, the Soviet people had become cynically aware of their government's deceit. [141] They "now greeted official reports of Soviet triumphs in space not merely with skepticism, but with ridicule."[142] The endeavor that had once been a matter of national pride, hailed as a sign that the Soviet Union might eclipse the United States in power and prestige, had become a laughingstock and a hallmark of the Soviet Union's flaws. [143]

Likewise, the rhetoric of the space race reveals both the strengths and flaws of American democracy. Even aside from the objective significance of the moon landing, a comparison of how Americans versus Soviet citizens aired their grievances about the space program suggests the tangible importance of the American right to free speech. In the Soviet Union, public criticism of the government's actions, including actions related to space exploration, was generally taboo. Criticism of the space race "[was] not publicly discussed, only occasionally surfacing in readers' letters or private conversations."[144] This contrasts starkly with the public discussion of discontent in the United States, where Black newspapers, mainstream media like the *Washington Post,* and underground activist newspapers all criticized the space program with relative freedom. Additionally, the conduct of the two Cold War nations with respect to government openness reveals another strength of American democracy. Americans felt that the Soviet space program displayed "secretiveness, overt political nature, [and] militarism," so American officials sought to highlight the differences between the Soviet and American system by making the American space

[140] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 468.
[141] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 475.
[142] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 475.
[143] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 475.
[144] Gerovitch, "Space History Myths," 476.

program seem "'open' and 'peaceful.'"[145] In the realm of space, at least, the United States outperformed the Soviets at displaying honesty and acknowledging failures.

While the significance of the American space program, with its capacity to inspire and advance human knowledge, should not be downplayed, numerous grave flaws in American democracy became apparent through the evaluation of America's space race rhetoric. First, the rhetorical connection between America's history of conquest and the space race suggests a troubling tendency to view American conquest and expansionism with pride rather than remorse. The activists who expressed concern at the fate of the moon as the latest target of American imperialism were a small minority, especially considering that these pro-imperialist messages came from the highest realms of the government. A further weakness of American democracy is the blind conviction that the United States' professed commitment to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness confers an unquestionable moral high ground. Kennedy's space race rhetoric stressed the theme of American moral superiority, yet activists offered valid criticisms undermining this claim. Finally, and most significantly, the space race and the work of the activists who criticized it show the failure of the United States to address the needs of marginalized groups. Certainly, the American space program was — and remains — a significant achievement. Yet one must question whether a country in which sending a man to the moon seemed like a more worthy endeavor than long-term efforts to eradicate poverty and correct racial disparities is truly committed to the democratic equality of its citizens.

The rhetorical themes Kennedy cultivated in his addresses on America's space program reveal common convictions about American democracy: the superiority of the American system, the American occupation of a moral high ground, and the unselfconscious pride in a history of

[145] Kay, "Kennedy," 583.

conquest. These themes, coupled with a comparison of between American and Soviet rhetoric — from both the government and those critical of their governments' space programs — provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy. Today, the United States is experiencing political division on a scale not seen since the 1960s. Then, even the effort to put a man on the moon proved divisive rather than unitive on a national scale. With the increasing privatization of space exploration by corporations like SpaceX and Blue Horizons, the democratic potential of space exploration — that is, as a unifying national endeavor whose purposes purportedly benefit American citizens — seems more likely to wane than to expand. Thus, in looking to the stars, Americans face not only the longstanding promise of new knowledge and material benefits, but a profound challenge as well: how to liberate the space endeavor from the weaknesses of American democracy that the Apollo program could not resolve. Ultimately, with the future of both space exploration and American democracy uncertain, one must ask whether the urge to reach for the stars can ever help the nation plot a more democratic course here on Earth — one that is truly for the good of all mankind.

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THE NUCLEAR OPTION

AMERICA'S FEAR & FASCINATION WITH NUCLEAR ENERGY

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The United States: once a fledgling nation obsessed with the idea of being a land chosen by God, now an overheated global superpower heading for what seems like an inevitable end. As we pass our 246th year as a nation, the statistic that the average empire only lasts about 250 years looms heavy as threats of old and new world-ending catastrophes have become constant and inescapable. It permeates our entertainment industries, our news and media cycles, the very fabric of our culture. Some will say that this apocalyptic mindset stems from 9/11, watching as the symbol of "globalization and America's economic power and prosperity" fell at New York City's feet in a billowing plume of debris and ash.[146] While it is no wonder that some believe 9/11 to be the titular turning point, it was instead the mushroom cloud that changed the lives of not just Americans, but the lives of every person, forever. The shockwaves of using atomic warfare under the justification of ending World War II are still rippling through the globe, years after that initial detonation. The question is, why has the zeitgeist of fear surrounding nuclear armageddon stuck around in America, even as potentially more or equally dangerous events have entered the cultural landscape?

[146] "9/11 FAQs," 9/11 Memorial & Museum, last modified 2023, https://www.911memorial.org/911-faqs#:~:text=The%20Twin%20Towers%2C%20as%20the,symbol%20of%20American%20military%20power.

One possible answer could be that it was destruction like no one had ever seen, let alone used. Alex Wellerstein wrote for the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* that there were a "fundamentally unknowable" number of lives lost, many of them civilians.[147] The horror wasn't over after the smoke cleared, either. "In the days after the bombings… symptoms of radiation poisoning began. These included hair loss, bleeding gums, loss of energy, purple spots, pain, and high fevers, often resulting in fatalities."[148] Instantaneous death sounds almost humane in comparison to what those who had the misfortune of surviving a nuclear attack, "known as *hibakusha* (literally "atomic bomb-affected people")" experienced.[149] Susan Southard wrote in her book *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War* that "life or death was a matter of chance, of fate, and the dividing line between the man being cremated and the doctor cremating him was slight."[150] For a nation that believed itself to be the pioneering pinnacle of God's favor and suddenly gained this power over the world, it is no wonder that the atomic bomb has remained ingrained in our lives.

Another potential reason for the nuclear fascination could be that the difference between a regular bomb and a nuclear bomb is that regular bombs don't mutate a person's DNA. An article written by Dan Listwa of Columbia University states that "in theory, ionizing radiation can deposit molecular-bond-breaking energy, which can damage DNA, thus altering genes."[151] So not only is nuclear warfare physically destructive on a massive scale, but it is also seen as biologically destructive, if not even more so. It was theorized that these mutated genes could be passed on to children, thus altering an entire family line for generations to come. Listwa even found that

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[147] Alex Wellerstein, "Counting the Dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, August 4, 2020, https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/.

[148] "Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki", Atomic Heritage Foundation, last modified July 27, 2017, https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/survivors-hiroshima-and-nagasaki.

[149] "Survivors", Atomic Heritage Foundation.

[150] Susan Southard *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War* (Penguin Books, 2016), 99.

[151] Dan Listwa, "Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Long Term Health Effects, *"Columbia Center for Nuclear Studies: K=1 Project*, August 9, 2012, https://k1project.columbia.edu/news/hiroshima-and-nagasaki.

"studies, such as one led by E. Nakashima in 1994, have shown that exposure led to increases in small head size and mental disability, as well as impairment in physical growth."[152] Why does this matter? Because thankfully, while "so far, no radiation-related excess of disease has been seen in the children of survivors" the fear of radiation poisoning is still prevalent today.[153] David Ropeik, an instructor at the Harvard Extension School, states in his article for Aeon Magazine:

> Radiation = Danger = Fear. Period.
> The truth, however, is that the health risk posed by ionising radiation is nowhere near as great as commonly assumed. Instead, our excessive fear of radiation – our radiophobia – does more harm to public health than ionising radiation itself.
> In 2006, UNSCEAR [the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation] reported: 'The mental health impact of Chernobyl is the largest public health problem caused by the accident to date … Rates of depression doubled. Post-traumatic stress disorder was widespread, anxiety and alcoholism and suicidal thinking increased dramatically. People in the affected areas report negative assessments of their health and wellbeing, coupled with … belief in a shorter life expectancy. Life expectancy of the evacuees dropped from 65 to 58 years. Anxiety over the health effects of radiation shows no signs of diminishing and may even be spreading.'
> Fear of radiation has deep roots. It goes back to the use of atomic weapons, and our Cold War worry that they might be used again. Modern environmentalism was founded on fear of radioactive fallout from atmospheric testing of such weapons. A whole generation was raised on movies and literature and other art depicting nuclear radiation as the ultimate bogeyman of modern technology. Psychologically, research has found that we worry excessively about risks that we can't detect with our own senses, risks associated with catastrophic harm or cancer, risks that are human-made rather than natural, and risks that evoke fearful memories, such as those evoked by the very mention of Chernobyl or Three Mile Island. Our fear of radiation is deep, but we should really be afraid of fear instead.[154]

Ropeik's findings show the lasting impacts of not just the fear of nuclear attack, but the fear of the aftermath as well. This leads to a population of terrified citizens, worried that at any moment they will either be vaporized or wishing that they'd been so lucky. Who wants to survive the end of the world? Who doesn't? There is no good answer, no good outcome. Even other forms of potentially

[152] Listwa, "Health Effects."
[153] Listwa, "Health Effects."
[154] David Ropeik, "Fear of Radiation Is More Dangerous than Radiation Itself," in *Aeon Magazine,* ed. Pam Weintraub, December 8, 2022, https://aeon.co/ideas/fear-of-radiation-is-more-dangerous-than-radiation-itself.

world-ending events seem more ‘winnable’ than some far-away villain one day deciding to blow up the world with the press of a button.

Climate change, for example, is similar but could be solved. A report done by NASA written by Brian Dunbar gives us a bleak look at a reality in which the Earth’s ozone layer has been destroyed:

> The year is 2065. Nearly two-thirds of Earth's ozone is gone -- not just over the poles, but everywhere. The infamous ozone hole over Antarctica, first discovered in the 1980s, is a year-round fixture, with a twin over the North Pole. The ultraviolet (UV) radiation falling on mid-latitude cities like Washington, D.C., is strong enough to cause sunburn in just five minutes. DNA-mutating UV radiation is up 650 percent, with likely harmful effects on plants, animals and human skin cancer rates.[155]

This, especially the part about DNA-mutating radiation, is remarkably similar to the effects an atomic bomb might impose, except much more widespread. One would think that this would be more cause for concern, then. However, we cannot talk about American culture without also talking about American exceptionalism. There are ways that Americans, at least, believe they can ‘beat’ climate change, including but not limited to transporting ourselves, at least those that can afford it, to Mars or another planet if Earth were no longer habitable. All this despite never having sent a manned mission to Mars. On the other hand, someone nationally viewed as being a coldhearted dictator, like Russia’s Vladimir Putin or China’s Xí Jìnpíng, having not only the access but the will and motivation to target the United States, seems more threatening. Or, at least more pressing. In a poll done by the American Psychological Association, it was found that “69% of adults reported they are worried the invasion of Ukraine is going to lead to nuclear war, and that they fear that we are at the beginning stages of World War III.”[156] Conversely, in a study conducted

[155] Brian Dunbar, “New Simulation Shows Consequences of a World without Earth's Natural Sunscreen,” *NASA*, https://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/world_avoided.html.

[156] “Stress in America: On Second Covid-19 Anniversary, Money, Inflation, War Pile on to Nation Stuck in Survival Mode,” American Psychological Association, last modified March 2022, https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/march-2022-survival-mode.

by Yale University, only 47% of Americans claimed they believed that "global warming will harm me personally," despite nearly 80% believing that it is indeed happening and that it's a problem that needs solving.[157]

Part of the persistence of fear is due to the secrecy and circumstance the military and government have afforded the topic. They want the bomb to be feared, or else it wouldn't be effective. If America, its allies, and its enemies don't fear it, then it fails to be the preventative force it is currently being used as. The concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) hinges on this. Fear of the bomb has maintained its longevity, despite 77 years having passed, largely because of its fantastic PR team. Countless movies, books, documentaries, and think pieces have been produced, some even under the direction of military officials, the Pentagon, and even presidents. They all have one thing in common, whether it is for the use of nuclear energy or against it: in the wrong hands, nuclear power could be apocalyptic. Even though the film itself is presented as satire, Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* is a prime example of this. Though Kubrick seems to be critiquing MAD, his film is just one of many that make the bomb out to be this annihilating force that is not secure and is constantly in threat of use. Its use, of course, is in the hands of mostly male officials who can safely hide away in their bunker while the average citizen gets maybe 30 minutes to panic before dying a brutal, fiery death.[158]

Violence and military might under pressure is a cornerstone of the American experience. Author Kellie Carter Jackson writes that "American history is characterized by its exceptional levels of violence. It was founded by colonial occupation and sustained by an economy of enslaved people who were emancipated by a Civil War with casualties rivaling any conflict of nineteenth-

[157] "Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2021," Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, February 23, 2022, https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/.

[158] *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (Columbia, 1964), 1 hr., 35 min.

-century Western Europe."[159] What could be more violent than the ability to wipe out an entire city in less than an hour? There is always talk about how the massive loss of lives in every conflict is regrettable and, at the time, condemnable. Not something that should be repeated. Except, when the next conflict comes along, the potential for lost lives suddenly seems like a necessary evil. The reason nuclear weapons haven't been in any hurry to be taken off the table is similar to why gun control has been so difficult. Talk about being 'characterized by violence,' the 'right to bear arms' is the Second Amendment of our Constitution. But it's not just the Second Amendment that hinders gun reform. In a study done by analyst Katherine Schaeffer of Pew Research Center, they found that:

> Gun owners were most likely to cite personal safety or protection as the reason they own a firearm. Roughly six-in-ten (63%) said this in an open-ended question. Considerably smaller shares gave other reasons, including hunting (40%), nonspecific recreation or sport (11%), that their gun was an antique or a family heirloom (6%) or that the gun was related to their line of work (5%).[160]

This is essentially MAD on a smaller scale. If the United States is an individual, then nuclear weapons are its protective firearm. Those against regulating guns often say things like 'a criminal will still find a way to kill you if they want to, it doesn't matter if it's illegal,' which is the same logic used for why the U.S. doesn't want to give up its arsenal. Like most gun owners, they would likely hate to use it, but they would hate not having it in an emergency even more. "Around half of Americans (48%) see gun violence as a very big problem in the country today."[161] This is comparable to the fact that, according to a blog post on GlobalAffairs.Org written by Craig Kafura, "Today, most Americans don't want a world with nuclear weapons. According to the 2020

[159] Kellie Carter Jackson, "The Story of Violence in America," *American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, https://www.amacad.org/publication/story-violence-america.

[160] Katherine Schaeffer, "Key Facts about Americans and Guns," *Pew Research Center*, September 13, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/13/key-facts-about-americans-and-guns/.

[161] Schaeffer, "Key Facts."

Chicago Council Survey two-thirds of Americans (66%) believe that no country should be allowed to have nuclear weapons."[162] And yet, both guns and nuclear weapons remain.

It is safe to say that the development of the atomic bomb in 1945 led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Paranoid that Saddam Hussein was developing a nuclear program, The U.S. and Britain justified their unprovoked attack against Iraq by claiming that the smoking gun will come "in the form of a mushroom cloud,"[163] drumming up fears that if they waited until Iraq attacked first, it would be too late. It is interesting that, though the war continued for seven years, no WMDs were found. This is reminiscent of documents like the Gaither Report[164] and the Missile Gap[165], inflated projections of Soviet arsenals that were given to the president so that they would give the go-ahead to the military to keep expanding the nuclear stockpile. This is yet another example of how fear of violence and retaliation has cemented nuclear weapons as part of our history, from its conception to today.

Other than violence, films like the 1951 version of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* gives us an idea of how, as conversations regarding the usage of nuclear weapons were beginning, nuclear energy could be seen as a good thing – in the right hands.[166] Klaatu, an alien who comes from a world both enhanced technologically and protected by nuclear energy, comes to America to warn of the dangers of nuclear war, trying instead to proselytize the merits of using it for peace. Matthew Etherden of the University of Sydney writes that "The links or similarities between Klaatu and

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[162] Craig Kafura, "Americans Want a Nuclear-Free World," *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, August 6, 2020, https://www.globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/americans-want-nuclear-free-world.

[163] Simon Jeffery, "'We Cannot Wait for the Smoking Gun,'" *The Guardian*, October 8, 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/oct/08/iraq.usa.

[164] "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, National Security Policy, Volume XIX - Office of the Historian," *n.d. History.state.gov,* https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d155.

[165] "What Was the Missile Gap? | CIA FOIA (Foia.cia.gov)." *n.d. Www.cia.gov*, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/collection/what-was-missile-gap#:~:text=The%20Missile%20Gap%20was%20in.

[166] *The Day the Earth Stood Still,* directed by Robert Wise (20th Century Studios, 1951), 1 hr., 32 min.

Jesus show that it was likely that Klaatu was modeled upon Jesus."[167] This shows us another layer of American exceptionalism. Out of all the places Klaatu could have landed, he just so happened to have landed not only in the United States but in the nation's capital. Out of any country, America is the one responsible for hearing Klaatu's message.

The idea that nuclear energy could be used for peace instead of violence echoed the sentiments expressed during that period. These claims aren't unfounded, either. There are benefits of using nuclear energy, though not as drastic as what was initially believed. The Department of Energy claims that "nuclear energy protects air quality by producing massive amounts of carbon-free electricity. It powers communities in 28 U.S. states and contributes to many non-electric applications, ranging from the medical field to space exploration."[168] So perhaps it is not just fear that keeps America fascinated with all things nuclear. It could even be a solution to climate change. The Nuclear Energy Institute claims that "as our largest source of carbon-free energy, nuclear power is critical to reducing greenhouse gas emissions."[169] Somewhat ironically, ionizing technology has opened up doors for the development of lifesaving medical technology. The CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) explains that "nuclear medicine uses radioactive material inside the body to see how organs or tissue are functioning (for diagnosis) or to target and destroy damaged or diseased organs or tissue (for treatment)."[170] So, while there may not be flying

[167] Matthew Etherden, "'The Day the Earth Stood Still': 1950's Sci-Fi, Religion and the Alien Messiah," *DigitalCommons@UNO*, Omaha; University of Nebraska, 2005. https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol9/iss2/1/.

[168] "Advantages and Challenges of Nuclear Energy," Office of Nuclear Energy, March 29, 2021, https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/advantages-and-challenges-nuclear-energy.

[169] "Climate," Nuclear Energy Institute, https://www.nei.org/advantages/climate.

[170] "Radiation in Healthcare: Nuclear Medicine," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. October 20, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/radiation/nuclear_medicine.htm#:~:text=Nuclear%20medicine%20uses%20radioactive%20material,or%20tissue%20(for%20treatment).&text=Images%20of%20the%20body%20show%20where%20and%20how%20the%20tracer%20is%20absorbed.

cars powered by tiny nuclear reactors, it may have just as many life-giving qualities as it does life-ending qualities.

Living in a post-nuclear, post-9/11 world that is simultaneously dealing with a rapidly worsening climate crisis while trying to claw its way out of a poorly handled pandemic has undoubtedly changed the way we view the world. Whether you believe that the world will end under a mushroom cloud, underwater, or that humans will once again prove too resistant to kill, one thing is for certain. Hope and fear are not so different. You can hope for a better future but still fear that this time, things won't get better. You can fear for the world, yet still hope that things will turn out okay. In the end, all we can do is continue living while we still can. Being paralyzed by fear is no way to live. So, if the world is destined to end, make like the bomb, and go out in a blaze of glory (metaphorically, of course).

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IS HIS TRUTH REALLY MARCHING ON?

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MORMON CHURCH

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the LDS Church or the Mormon Church, has shown their influence around the world for nearly 200 years. Founded by Joseph Smith in 1831, the Mormon Church has since grown to over 16 million members, with over 200 temples operating, under construction, or under renovation. The Mormon Church has been known among both members and non-members as a church that is always looking to serve others, whether through food drives, singing Christmas carols, or clean-ups. However, as with any other religious institution, there's more than meets the eye. Unbeknownst to most non-members, and neglected by members and their leaders, the history of the Mormon Church has been marred by racism, polygamy, misogyny, and homophobia. Brigham Young, the second president of the Mormon Church, had 55 wives at one point and condemned minorities, especially Black people, and prevented them from joining the Church, a notion that would stay put until the 1970s. Even today, the rate of minorities that are a part of the Mormon Church is extremely low, despite what the demographics have claimed. However, there is one thing that ought to be known about the Mormon Church: the leaders that have come and gone during this time were all well aware of the

injustices and the harm that was being done to these people, so why, despite this knowledge, did they choose to ignore these claims and carry out their duties regardless of the protests, the cries for help, and calls to dismantle? The Mormon Church was built on lies because it promised eternal life with the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, but did not deliver because of polygamy, misogyny, racism, and homophobia.

The Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or the FLDS Church, is not associated with the Mormon Church in any way. An extreme sect, they still practice ideologies generally frowned upon such as wearing colonial-style clothing, child marriage and, most importantly, polygamy, the act of a man having multiple wives. Although the FLDS Church is not affiliated with the Mormon Church that most know of, that does not mean that the Mormon Church is not guilty of the biggest of these transgressions: polygamy. The existence of polygamy dates back to the beginning of the Mormon Church, where Joseph Smith, the church's founder, had at least 49 wives, with his successor, Brigham Young, having 55 wives. Surprisingly, the FLDS Church has done things that the Mormon Church is just as guilty of. Women in these sects would be married off and have children while they were still teenagers, such as Elissa Wall's mother, who "was fourteen years older than I was, and she and I had rarely spoken during our family visits. I was much friendlier with her three younger sisters, who were closer to my age."[171] This explains that the age Wall's mother was when she gave birth to her and Wall's age when she was married off to her cousin were the same. Which further proves the point of women having children the second they mature in order to populate the earth with Mormon followers. Although this was an occurrence from as recent as the 1980s, even women from the beginning of the Mormon Church's

[171] Elissa Wall, *Stolen Innocence: My Story of Growing Up in a Polygamous Sect, Becoming a Teenage Bride, and Breaking Free of Warren Jeffs* (William Morrow and Company, 2008), 21.

history had concerns over how women were being treated in polygamous relationships. Mrs. T.B.H. Stenhouse, who was in a polygamous marriage during the mid-1800s, was led to understand that "it is a Mormon woman's 'privilege' to sit and 'listen' to the 'lords of creation,' without joining in the conversation at all, I had then, of course, that same privilege of listening while dinner was preparing."[172] Despite their uncertainty, the women never questioned it, so the leaders continued to remain silent on the matter. However, despite these troublesome comments, this was only the beginning of what Wall would endure during her time in the FLDS sect.

Wall experienced this misogyny and borderline pedophilic nature when she was married off to her 19 year old cousin at the tender age of 14, to which she responded,

> Panic swelled inside of me, and I searched my mind for what to say next. 'I don't know if this is right for me,' I told [Uncle Fred] after a long pause. 'I don't feel ready. I don't feel like this is what I should be doing because I'm really young. And I think there are so many other girls in the house who would be more ready for this calling.'[173]

It even caused dissatisfaction among leaders of the Mormon Church, such as Brigham Young, and as a result, "The feeling of dissatisfaction at the distance placed by the Prophet between himself and his followers, has grown, as that distance became more perceptible, until it has become quite universal among the poorer classes. He sees the smile and kind word, which should be given to his suffering and down-trodden people, lavished upon a harlot. He turns in disgust, and with a weary and troubled spirit, seeks temporary rest in his own humble home."[174] It's these stories, from the beginning of the Mormon Church's history to recent times in similar sects, that show people just

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[172] Fanny Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy in Utah* (New York: American News Company, 1892), 22.
[173] Wall, *Stolen Innocence*, 126.
[174] C. V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem* (Cambridge: Riverdale Press, 1866), 189-190.

how mistreated women have been within the Mormon Church and why misogyny has been so prominent.

With polygamy comes misogyny, the act of treating women as inferiors. Since the dawn of modern civilization, women were seen to be useful for three reasons: to care for the home, to care for her husband, and to produce and care for her children. As having more wives meant having more children to populate the Earth and spread the Mormon faith, polygamy was practiced within the Mormon Church until the early 1900s. While there are rules outlined in the Mormon scriptures on how polygamy is to be followed, the guidelines set for the women involved are very skewed. As explained by Jeremy Runnells,

> The only form of polygamy permitted by [Doctrine & Covenants] 132 is a union with a virgin after first giving the opportunity to the first wife to consent to the marriage. If the first wife doesn't consent, the husband is exempt and may still take an additional wife, but the first wife must at least have the opportunity to consent. In case the first wife doesn't consent, she will be 'destroyed.' Also, the new wife must be a virgin before the marriage and be completely monogamous after the marriage or she will be destroyed.[175]

Runnells' CES Letter is a piece of material often read by those questioning the Mormon faith, as it often serves as a source of all of their answers. Despite this, polygamy persisted in the Mormon church for a significant amount of time, with millions being blind to the truth that lies outside of it.

While polygamy was widely accepted throughout the early Mormon Church, polyandry, the act of a woman having multiple husbands, was generally frowned upon, despite many Mormon men marrying women that already had husbands, such as Joseph Smith, who had at least 11 wives that were already married when he married them. Smith was led to believe that "some of the

[175] Jeremy T. Runnells., *CES Letter: My Search for Answers to my Mormon Doubts* (CES Letter Foundation, 2011), 55.

marriages to these women included promises by Joseph of eternal life to the girls and their families, or threats that he (Joseph) was going to be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if the girls didn't marry him."[176] Still, women were subject to mistreatment by their husbands, as explained by Stenhouse:

> Husbands who were dissatisfied with their wives could leave them and their families, also, and go to 'Zion' alone, if the wife and family refused to accompany them. The husband was the head of the wife, and should do his own duty, whether his wife and children did theirs or not. If his family did not follow him, he could take a young wife or wives there, and 'lay the foundation anew' for another family; arid in his experience he believed that the promise was singularly fulfilled, that 'he who forsaketh wife or child for my sake shall have a hundred fold.' That run-a-way husband was, of course, entitled to a hundred young girls, if he could only get them and keep them.[177]

Even today, women are not seen as equal to men. If one looks at the chart of the General Authorities, women only head three areas: Relief Society (women), Young Women, and Primary (children). This solidifies their only purpose of being housewives and mothers, no matter how successful they may be. The history of the Mormon Church is a lot like American history; women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community have been mistreated for far too long, and are still facing scrutiny to this day. Even now, the Mormon Church is no stranger to mistreating people of color or those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Imagine there was a religious text that said there were two groups of people: those who believed in God and those who did not. According to this religious text, the people who did not believe in God were cursed with dark skin, while those who believed in God maintained their pure, white skin. How would the world react to hearing about this religious text? Considering the Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate movements, there would be a lot of uproar, but this scenario is

[176] Runnells, *CES Letter*, 54-55.
[177] Stenhouse, *Exposé*, 46.

written nearly verbatim in the Book of Mormon, one of the primary religious texts that the Mormon Church uses. In the Doctrine and Covenants, another religious text that serves as a sort of biography of Joseph Smith, there is a story of Smith and his companions spreading the gospel to the countryside. In here, and the Book of Mormon, the believers in God are called "Nephites" and those that did not believe in God are called "Lamanites." In this story, Smith and his companions offer copies of the Book of Mormon to some "Lamanites," which are further described as Native Americans. However, African Americans faced the most contempt over attempting to join the Mormon Church, most especially by Brigham Young, Smith's successor. In 1852, Young implemented the priesthood ban, which stated that African American men could not receive the priesthood, and this ban would remain in place until the late 1970s. This was in part due to two African American members receiving the priesthood before proceeding to perform controversial behavior, such as unauthorized polygamist practices and the organization of a schismatic Mormon group.[178] Unfortunately, this is a pattern that would only continue for the next century and more, even continuing in a way to this day.

Despite disapproval from many other religions and institutions, even including the President of the United States, this behavior would continue for the next 125 years, with a particular instance occurring in the 1950s. At this time, temples were continuing to be announced, but the Mormon Church's presence in South Africa, where apartheid was just adopted, concerned president David O. McKay, who stated that he was concerned "about the present practice in South Africa of not conferring the priesthood" on black Africans, who constituted about 68 percent of the population, and felt that it would be difficult "to determine who had 'negro' blood and who did

[178] Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 30.

not."[179] Even while other religious institutions, such as Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant spokesmen, were advocating for racial equality, the Mormon Church was actively advocating against it. With J. Reuben Clark, a member of the First Presidency, stating that "at the end of the road of the struggle to break down all race prejudice...is intermarriage" in 1946.[180] The Mormon Church also released a statement in 1949 that stated, "The attitude of the Church with reference to Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time," and included a quote from Brigham Young in which he said:

> Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the holy priesthood, and the law of God. They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the holy priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will then come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to.[181]

While today's Mormon Church does not regularly acknowledge this, it is something that cannot be missed, with people of color not seen in many General Authority roles. The same goes for LGBTQ+ individuals, who might have suffered from the most backlash of all.

Spencer Kimball, a president of the Mormon Church in the 1970s, proclaimed in a pamphlet created in 1970 with Mark Petersen, "REMEMBER: Homosexuality CAN be cured, if the battle is well organized and pursued vigorously and continuously."[182] This is a battle that has

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[179] Harris and Bringhurst, 63.

[180] Harris and Bringhurst, 64.

[181] Harris and Bringhurst, 66.

[182] Gregory A. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church: Intended Actions, Unintended Consequences* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 23.

been ongoing even into the 21st century. In 2015, shortly after same-sex marriage was legalized across the United States, a statement was released by the Mormon Church that explained that same-sex couples could not be allowed to enter the temple and be sealed for all eternity, and that children of same-sex couples could not be baptized until they were 18 years old. This was met with much contention across the nation, but these problems have been lingering since long before the LGBTQ+ community was widely accepted. The Mormon Church and Brigham Young University, the main educational campus that the Mormon Church uses, has even advocated conversion therapy to "cure" homosexuality. However, these practices have been known to be ineffective and even harmful. When the self-help approach to "cure" homosexuality proved wrong, "Gradually, an intervention-based approach emerged as an alternative. Generally called 'reparative therapy' but sometimes going by other names such as 'conversion therapy' or 'sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE),' it implicitly acknowledged the futility of self-help approaches by introducing therapists to effect the 'cure'—generally licensed psychiatrists and psychologists, but often unlicensed entrepreneurs."[183] The Mormon Church has also had their own problems when it comes to transgender individuals, with Dallin H. Oaks saying in 2015 that "I think we need to acknowledge that while we have been acquainted with lesbians and homosexuals for some time, being acquainted with the unique problems of a transgender situation is something we have not had so much experience with, and we have some unfinished business in teaching on that."[184] The Achilles heel of the Mormon church over the years since its formation is that despite the views that they have held, no matter how much they deny holding those views later on in history, it always comes back to nip them in the bud.

[183] Prince, *Gay Rights*, 61.
[184] Prince, *Gay Rights*, 166.

Interestingly enough, if one looks up the question "Why does the website not discuss gender dysphoria or transgender issues?" on the Mormon Church's website, this is the answer that is given:

> Many of the general principles shared on this website (for example, the importance of inclusion and kindness) apply to Latter-day Saints who experience gender dysphoria or identify as transgender. However, same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria are very different. For example, those who experience gender dysphoria may or may not also experience same-sex attraction, and the majority of those who experience same-sex attraction do not desire to change their gender. From a psychological and ministerial perspective, the two are different.[185]

As a result, this has led to teenage suicide rates in Utah, the most Mormon state, being among the highest in the country. This is often as a result of PTSD among LGBTQ+ church members, which is frequently caused by members being ostracized or even disowned by their families and churches for coming out as LGBTQ+. As explained by scholar Laura Dulin:

> I think a lot of people are misdiagnosed. They may show up as classic depression, but the actual trauma is what it means to be rejected by your family, told by your bishop that you have committed a sin next to murder, and you are integrating some idea about yourself as a sexual deviant who is dangerous. And then the symptoms showing up are more like people having flashbacks and being triggered into fight or flight, or having nightmares about what happened. Or, just by walking into a church or anticipating seeing their families again, their whole body is getting into distress. These are more the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder than they would be a classic anxiety disorder or depression.[186]

In Church magazines, the word "transgender" is only seen once—and even then, the acronym "LGBT" is used and then followed parenthetically by the meaning of that acronym. This further explains that not only are the leaders of the Mormon Church deliberately ignoring these concerns, but they are also allowing the harm done to those that are suffering.

[185] Prince, *Gay Rights*, 166-167.
[186] Prince, *Gay Rights*, 177.

The Mormon Church has been built on lies. It has continuously discussed controversial topics and its controversial stance on these topics, but it continues to cover up its tracks and wash the blood off its hands regardless. Brigham Young's Sunday School Manual blatantly stated that "the only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy."[187] There are even disturbing notions that the Mormon Church supports, such as paying 10% tithing no matter what, and that "If paying tithing means that you can't pay for water or electricity, pay tithing. If paying tithing means that you can't pay your rent, pay tithing. Even if paying tithing means that you don't have enough money to feed your family, pay tithing. The Lord will not abandon you."[188] Would a loving and benevolent God allow His children to choose between keeping a roof over their head and paying 10% of their savings to a religious institution? Unfortunately, in the Mormon Church, one is forced to make these sacrifices. Matthew 25:35-36 states, "For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me." However, whether one is poor, naked, sick, in prison, a person of color, or an LGBTQ+ member, the Mormon Church continues to let these individuals suffer while remaining silent on the issue, because they're not "pure".

[187] Runnells, *CES Letter*, 115-116.
[188] Runnells, *CES Letter*, 117.

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