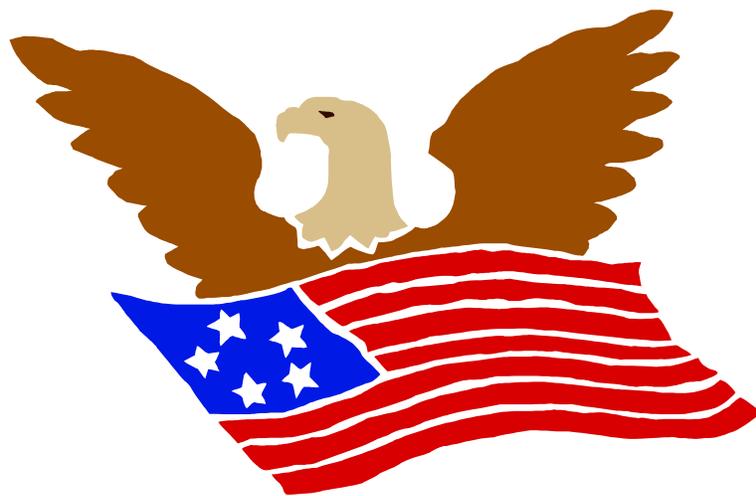


The Eagle's Eye:
The La Salle American
Studies Student Review



Volume III, Number I
Spring 2006

Welcome to *The Eagle's Eye*

As a discipline, American Studies is as wonderfully diverse as America itself. In this, the third issue of *The Eagle's Eye*, which is dedicated to publishing the best research essays written this year by La Salle University's American Studies students, diversity of all sorts—of topic, of approach—is certainly well exhibited. Although three of the five essays concern the intense relationship between Americans and their food, each pursues the topic in a strikingly unique fashion. In “Supermarkets: The Attraction and the Trap,” Kari Piekieski scrutinizes the surreptitious manner in which supermarkets manipulate the physical layout of their floor space in an effort to maximize consumer spending. Margaret M. Hardiman, on the other hand, explores the odd triptych of capital punishment, last meals, and the American public in “Feasting on Death Row: America's Fascination with Last Meals.” And then we have Kathryn Mullin's essay, “A Century of Change: The Influence of the Food Industry on Selected American Painters,” which examines paintings by William Sydney Mount, Thomas Hart Benton, and Idelle Weber in terms of how they mirror the evolution of food production (and comment upon the ramifications of this evolution on human interaction) in the United States.

From food we then turn to another object of American obsession: football. In “Football as the New American Religion,” Kristen McGuriman argues that America's most popular sport has replaced organized religion as the primary provider of comfort and stabilizing narratives for a substantial portion of the population. To support herself, she effectively illustrates how football possesses “traditions of sacred time and space, community, and culminating festival,” much in the same fashion that organized religions do. Moving away from an analysis of specific aspects of culture (be they past or present) to a critique of the manner in which contemporary America narrates its past to itself, Aaron Fraver takes American History textbooks to task in his essay, “Counterfeit History: Myths, Untruths, and Omissions in American Historical Education.” Contrasting standard textbook representations of both Christopher Columbus and the Vietnam War with historical evidence, Fraver argues that America, when it tells its history to itself, frequently does so in such a way that its sins and mistakes are excused, avoided, or overlooked, much to the detriment of its citizens.

Special thanks and recognition go to Dr. Francis Ryan, director of American Studies, the American Studies advisory board, and contributors for their time and expertise in creating the third publication of *The Eagle's Eye*.

Dr. Kevin Grauke
Faculty Adviser
The Eagle's Eye

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Supermarkets: The Attraction and the Trap

Kari Piekieski

On Saturday mornings, as cars pile into the local supermarket and frugal shoppers emerge from their cars with coupon books and children in hand, the notion of accomplishing the weekly shopping while saving a few pennies is so strong that it is almost detectable in the air. Since the distinctively American marketing innovation of the modern supermarket, customers have been offered extensive commodities, convenience, and practicality within one establishment (Leed 1). However, the combination of a variety of goods under one roof was not always as common as it is now. As time progressed; the food industry grew to meet the needs of changing consumers.

Though the core initiative in the creation of supermarkets is expediency for the customers, the retailers are stakeholders as well. With every ring of the cash register, the retail company's profit expands. This drives retailers to convince shoppers to add to their shopping carts, ultimately increasing the money the company makes. Supermarket owners are very successful at this objective. According to an expert on consumer behavior, Paco Underhill, two-thirds of what shoppers buy in supermarkets is unintentionally purchased (Squires 1). This rather large number suggests that stores are somehow getting people to spend more money than planned, and purchase things they do not need. This paper will examine more closely the strategies intentionally used within supermarkets to persuade shoppers.

The existing food stores during the early periods of American history adapted to the needs of the consumer base. The earliest of these, trading posts, were found along the settlements of frontiersmen strewn along the east coast (Peak 3). As its name suggests, business was performed through the trading of materials. Without monetary funds, these early settlers traded items they had for things they needed. There generally was not a market for many food items during these early years. At this time, families made their own butter and bread and raised their own animals. Typically, any food items needed were obtained at home. Therefore, trading posts were developed to cater to the needs of these consumers (Peak 4). Instead of offering things like bread and butter, which were already available to them, they offered salts, teas, firearms, and furs in exchange for their self-made products. This strongly reveals the beginning of accommodating the customers' needs.

As time progressed, trading posts emerged into general stores as the country and its consumers began to change. More items were offered for the farm and home, such as household items, tools, medicines, and hardware (Peak 4). Here, customers were waited on by the store clerks and prices were often negotiated (Peak 5). The general store began to disappear during the second half of the 19th Century as the agricultural consumer base steadily declined and the industrial economy was established. This change brought about the specialty food store. A little more than a century ago, the American shopper, typically the woman of the family, would go to a separate butcher, bakery, dairy store, and fruit stand to gather the needed groceries (Peak 6). This made grocery shopping

rather time-consuming and a difficult task. In addition, the products were not stocked decisively, often piled onto shelves in no precise order (Peak 6). This greatly differs from the efforts taken in supermarkets today to display merchandise.

The specialty food stores became unpopular with the invention of combination food stores which joined two or more specialty stores together, generating the innovative idea of convenience that encapsulates supermarkets today (Peak 9). Instead of traveling from store to store, the housewife of the era could now abbreviate her shopping trip. This newfound idea of convenience together with cultural developments such as radio and magazine advertising, the production of more appealing packaging of items, and an automobile to bear the burden of the shopping trip, shaped the future establishment of the modern supermarket (Peak 12).

Whether the first supermarket was King Kullen in New York or Big Bear in New Jersey, the creation and development of the institution itself goes unparalleled (Peak 13). Supermarkets are packed with items of necessity and desire. They appeal to the consumer in a unique way by attracting them to merchandise through low price claims and specialized placement of items. Even the most experienced shopper is susceptible to the advertising ploys of the retailers and the predetermined geography of the supermarket. Many shoppers may subconsciously notice these things, but most do not entirely take into consideration the effect they can have on their shopping decisions. Every aspect of the layout and geography of the store influences consumer spending (Squires 1).

The objective of supermarket layout is to “maximize sales and profit consistent with customer convenience” (Leed 240). The second half of this idea is of particular importance. It is necessary for retailers to maintain customer satisfaction to create store loyalty and recurring sales from each customer. This must be the primary factor in design decisions if a supermarket is to continue to be a profitable establishment over time (Leed 240). Without customer satisfaction, there is no profit for the retailer. To increase profit while simultaneously maintaining customer convenience, it is necessary for the retailer to subtly guide the shoppers through the store, exposing them to the maximum amount of merchandise during their shopping trip. Since most shoppers are not interested in every item and aisle available, the goal of the retailer is to create this interest (Leed 240). An effective store layout is the first phase in achieving profit for the retailer while providing convenience for the shopper.

The typical layout of a supermarket positions perishable items around the perimeter to increase customer circulation throughout the entire store (Brand 167). This space is allocated to dairy, produce, and meat. Necessity items from these categories are sought at a demanding rate by consumers. The strategic placement of them around the edge of the market encourages full-store shopping, increasing the possibility that a customer will be distracted by a display or tempted to venture down the dessert aisle. Though the goal of the retailer is to create an attractive, inviting, and convenient atmosphere to which customers will likely return, maximizing profit is also a retailer’s key interest (Brand 162). These perishable departments are areas which produce relatively high profit for the retailer. It is therefore logical to locate these on the outer portion of the supermarket, where the majority of shopping traffic passes.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effect of department location on overall sales. One study performed by the USDA found that exposure and sales in the

produce department are from 1 to 1 ½ percent greater when this department is located in the front of the store rather than in a position further into the store (Leed 250). An interview with Julie Riley, a former sales representative intern for Nabisco, reiterated the findings from this study. It was again revealed that the placement of the produce section closer to the front increases profit for the retailer (Piekielski). Produce has profitability, so by displaying it here the customer does not have a choice in entering the section. The placement ensures it. Both the study and interview suggest the importance of departmental placement within a supermarket. The selective placement of these food categories maximizes profit for the retailer and leaves the center of the supermarket available for stocking household needs and food items of indulgence.

Aisles dissect the center of a supermarket and use the bulk of the building's physical space. The long rows are designed without breaks, compelling the shopper to continue down the entire length of the aisle before beginning the next. Aisle width is of importance as well. Many operators believe that six to seven foot aisles benefit both the store and customers (Brand 167). If aisles are too spacious, shoppers tend to shop only half of the aisle and will likely not continue back down the other side. This decreases sales and profit for the store. If aisles are too narrow, maneuvering down the tight rows becomes an inconvenience for shoppers and many may not return to the store (Brand 167). Added aisle space is also necessary in front of the checkouts (Peak 102). Depending on the size and sales volume of a supermarket, this space is typically a minimum of eight feet. This allows sufficient room for customers to continue their normal shopping pattern without being hindered by those waiting in line. Accessibility within aisles is a major issue, but the accessibility of the merchandise is perhaps more important.

Experts like Craig Childress, director of prototype design research at Envirosell, a behavioral market-research and consulting company, and Wendy Liebmann, founder and president of WSL Strategic Retail, agree that placement of items within aisles is not arbitrary (Squires 3). In each aisle, there are four areas designated for product placement. These are the top, bottom, bulls-eye, and kids' eye level. Each area has its own purpose and its own appeal.

The top shelf usually carries minor brands that give the supermarket a distinguishing quality from its competitors (Squires 3). These brands give the store character, and attract shoppers interested in gourmet items or merchandise different from what an ordinary supermarket carries. The next zone, directly below the top shelf, is recognized as the bulls-eye, or eye-level area (Squires 3). Supermarkets stock these shelves with demand and popular merchandise to increase their profit. If the least expensive brands were placed in this location, it would generate little revenue for the retailer. This area is in the direct line of sight for most shoppers. It is the area where customers are likely to look first, and therefore, the area from which they will most likely buy. According to Julie Riley, high-priced Nabisco products, such as Oreos, are placed at eye-level (Piekielski). The manufacturers must compensate the supermarket for placement in the bulls-eye zone (Squires 3). Pricier brands usually have a higher budget, so they have the money to spend for the best supermarket placement. In contrast, cheaper store-brands are typically located lower on the shelf due to their lack of profit potential (Squires 3). Shoppers looking for a bargain are willing to search for these items (Squires 3).

Slightly above the bottom shelves are those dedicated to attracting children. Shelves at this level are stocked with products with youthful appeal (Squires 3). Children encompass a large portion of a supermarket's consumer base.¹ They are also very influential on parents' shopping decisions (Newman 138). With the strategic placement of products that appeal to children, such as toys, soft drinks, and cereals, retailers take into serious consideration the sales potential of this age group, and ultimately increase the possibility of a sale. Similarly, candy bars, chewing gum and other impulse items that attract children are deliberately positioned to guarantee they will be seen.

Studies by Craig Childress indicate that time spent waiting in line is approximately three minutes (Squires 2). Consequently, this is a supermarket's most lucrative section (Squires 2). Tests show that customers become restless after waiting in line for just fifteen seconds (Peak 280). While waiting in line, shoppers are tempted to read a magazine or give candy to their child in order to make the time pass by more quickly. These are items that are usually bought without intention, but because of their properly selected placement, the irresistible urge while waiting increases sales in this area (Peak 281). Product placement and store layout effectively contribute to the retailer's objective. However, these are not the only techniques used by supermarket designers and retailers to manipulate consumers. Creating a favorable price impression is beneficial as well.

Displays are an invaluable addition to the supermarket floor. It is estimated by one northeast regional chain that twenty percent of weekly dry grocery sales come from displays (Leed 207). Every item in the supermarket is displayed in a particular manner, but special displays dispersed throughout the store function to meet the retailer's fundamental goal of maximizing sales (Leed 207). Complimentary to this main goal are several secondary goals such as creating a low price impression, affecting the shopper's passage through the store, and presenting the sense of high sales volume (Lead 207). Brian Wansink, a marketing faculty member at Cornell University, claims that many shoppers say they purchase in excess because of the good deal they are getting (Gemperlein 2). Displays, meeting one of the retailers' prime objectives, often communicate sales and savings of certain products.

Retailers approach sale displays in a number of ways. Regardless of which style is used, the overall impression that is created is that of a bargain. Displays serving this goal are visibly price marked, frequently with the original sale price of the item clearly shown (Leed 208). This allows the shopper to compare between the prices and see that the sale is lower than the regular price. Common versions of this type of display include "buy one get one free deals" and sales with limits. These psychologically lure shoppers in with the idea that they are getting an item at no cost (Gemperlein 2). The effectiveness of this sale has been recorded in a consumer survey done by ESA Market Research, which shows that almost 70 percent of consumers prefer "buy one get one free" promotions.² Once the product is purchased in twice the quantity needed, the retailer has successfully eliminated the possibility that the customer will go to a competitor for that purchase (Gemperlein 2). A similar result occurs with limit-sales displays. In these displays, the

¹ In 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau stated that children under the age of 18 make up 26% of United States population (Meyer 1).

² While this study was performed in the United Kingdom, it is indicative of the overall popularity of this sale type among supermarket shoppers.

customer is restricted to purchasing a certain amount of a product, for example “Limit 5.” According to Robert Cialdini, Arizona State University psychology professor, these psychological ploys created by retailers successfully deceive shoppers into believing that the product is scarce and must be of value (Gemperlein 2).³ This encourages shoppers to purchase the limit amount even if they do not necessarily need the quantity. Again, this reduces the possibility of the customer shopping at a competitor store for the product he or she accumulated from the sale (Gemperlein 2). Though supermarkets have numerous displays in place to impart a favorable price impression, displays are also cleverly placed to benefit the store.

Although demand items are typically dispersed fairly evenly throughout the store to ensure even customer circulation, there are inevitably areas of the supermarket that have low profitability (Brand 171). Displays are creatively placed in these areas to attract consumers to the parts of the store where there is less product movement or where they may not usually shop (Leed 210). Displays used for this purpose must appeal to the consumer in a specific manner. The display may boast of a sale, carry a new and well advertised product line, promote seasonal or holiday items, or show an impulse item that is in high demand. With any of these approaches, the supermarket attracts the shopper to a less profitable area of a store, affecting the customer traffic flow and encouraging purchase (Leed 210).

Another strategically placed display is the end of aisle, or end-cap, display. These displays are not necessarily ones that consistently hold markdown items, but rather are mainly used for innovative or well-liked products (Squires 2). The private label, Tastykake, is an example of a product line located on an end-cap display. Though this merchandise is not always on sale, the products belong to the popular brand name Tastykake, which has the capital to pay for the advantageous area where it is placed. End-cap displays are effective because of their high visibility to consumers. Even if a shopper does not venture down a particular aisle, he or she still notices the high profit items displayed here, increasing the possibility of purchase (Peak 320).

Along with the location of a display, a display’s size can also be effective. Some displays are built by retailers to create an image of elevated sales volume (Leed 209). To create this image the display must be large and prominent. Similar to limit sales, these displays achieve the sense of consumer demand for an item, making it more appealing and likely to be purchased (Leed 209). If a retailer dramatically increases the number of a product to be sold to the consumer, the customers get the impression that if the retailer bought it at such a high quantity, it must be a worthwhile purchase (Leed 209). The approach varies widely among retailers regarding the use of this type of sale display. Some choose to use it as part of their weekly sale procedure, while others reserve this massive display for exclusive promotions, special purchases, or seasonal items (Leed 209). Whichever way retailers use these displays, they elicit profitable responses among customers.

³ In a study done by Cialdini, participants were asked to evaluate cookies in two separate jars. One of the jars contained many cookies, while the other had only a few. They consistently rated cookies in the jar with many higher than the ones in the other jar. When told they could only have a limited number of the cookies because of scarcity, these cookies were also steadily given a higher rating than those that were unlimited (Gemperlein 3).

Though displays that show a mass quantity of a single item can be effective with consumers who are interested in that product, displays that present several items together appeal to more customers and achieve maximum sales (Brand 89). A form of display that uses multiple items is known as the tie-in display. This display helps to increase profit through the suggestive selling of merchandise. Tie-in displays group two or more products together that are related. A peanut butter and jelly combination display suggests the purchase of both products, even if the consumer is planning to buy just one. By linking two products together, the retailer is signifying a relationship between them of which the customer is already aware, as in the previous example. However, retailers also group together larger numbers of products in related item displays that do not necessarily go hand-in-hand, but can all be used together in some way. This concept is illustrated in a breakfast food display that includes items such as coffee, butter, syrup, and pancake mix. Coffee is not closely related to butter, but in this type of display a relationship is created to increase sales (Peak 321). Retailers use similar logic by grouping together related fast moving and slower moving items such as paper plates and folding chairs, suggesting the purchase of these picnic supplies. By placing these products together, sales of both are improved (Peak 321). In an effort to maximize sales, accommodations are found within many supermarkets to enhance convenience for the consumer whenever possible (Squires 2).

Areas such as the flower department, bakery, bank, and pharmacy increase the length of the customer's shopping trip while ultimately increasing sales for the supermarket (Squires 2). Also, the inclusion of these departments in the store create a convenient atmosphere to which the customer will likely return. Eliminating multiple store shopping helps supermarkets monopolize consumer spending.

Beyond the tangible features available to the consumer are services built into the supermarket that provide comfort and convenience for the shopper. Customer services such as pleasant music and organized appearance create an enjoyable ambiance for the consumer, who because of these additions, can be expected to return to the particular supermarket regularly (Brand 6). Loyal customers often spend more time during each trip, especially within a pleasant environment. Additional venues can result in more spending from that shopper, increasing supermarket profit (Brand 6). Though efforts have been taken by supermarket retailers to expand what is offered at their stores, embody consumer convenience, and eliminate competition, there has recently been an ongoing movement of shoppers towards supermarket alternatives (Orgel 1).

Results from the Food Marketing Institute's 2005 Trends report show over fifty percent of consumers shop at alternative food stores (Orgel 1). This is a startling figure that has caused many to question the reason consumers are beginning to shop at other food retail stores in such great numbers. Supermarket merchandise is marketed towards the American family. Items given attention to are typically substantial enough in size to sustain a whole family until the next shopping trip (Orgel 2). Family-sized foods and bulk products do not attract other groups that compose the American population such as single adults and college-aged kids living on their own. Consumer Network director, Mona Doyle, claims the shift to alternative formats is caused by clever marketing by other food distribution stores. When a group of teens was asked if they shop at supermarkets, they unanimously responded with an immediate "no," not even imagining a reason why they would (Orgel 2). This poses the concern that supermarkets may lose

an entire generation, who will eventually be the future population of the country, to competitors. According to Doyle, supermarkets are not lacking in the desired merchandise, but they must better promote items that appeal to different groups (Orgel 2).

Supermarket substitutes gaining new customers include convenient stores like Wawa and 7-Eleven, and novel superstores like Trader Joe's. Despite subtle differences between convenient stores, they share a key marketing concept. They are successful in appealing to the needs of individuals who are single, young, or taking a quick lunch break. In general, they offer quicker service, smaller portions, and advertise new products more effectively than supermarkets. Many convenient stores have recently increased popularity of fresh takeout foods like deli-made, individualized sandwiches that appeal to people other than full families (Orgel 2). Supermarket retailers are beginning to gratify needs of a diverse consumer base by adding trendier food choices, like ethnic options and private label products. By observing cultural progress and attempting to accommodate a new customer base, supermarkets are adapting to fit the needs of consumers.

The early years of the food selling business provided trading posts and general stores that adequately supplied the needs of the people. As the time and culture advanced, so did the general stores and other amenities available to the public. Presently, supermarkets are continuing to adapt to the needs of a changing society through the expansion of merchandise and more effective marketing strategies that appeal to groups other than families. Examples of this are the salad bars and the availability of single serving quick purchase items like bottled water, smaller snacks, and quarts of milk (Squires 2). In this staunch effort to regain business lost to convenient stores, supermarkets are simultaneously beginning to perceive the culture as one made up of different people with different needs (Squires 2). Supermarkets that once embodied the myth of the American family are now initiating changes to reduce their reliance on this sole consumer source.

For years, supermarkets and the merchandise within them have been geared towards the traditional American family. Scholarly sources from decades ago, and even some more recent ones, note the shopper as a woman or mother. For example, in *Eating in America*, it is stated that supermarkets should be observed more intensely, particular in the area of their effect on the American housewife (Root 444). Also, in *The Supermarket Trap*, the shopper is consistently described as female, and an indication of supermarkets' focus on the family meal is illustrated well by this statement that references to, "the quite reasonable theory that the housewife thinks in terms of meals rather than individual products." (Cross 72). The decline in supermarket sales can be attributed to the fact that the traditional American family no longer makes up the population (Orgel 2). In fact, the ideal setup of a mother that stays at home, a father that provides for the family, and two children is the description of fewer than one-fourth of American families (Klink 1). To regain popularity among a new generation and thrive in their business of food retail, it is necessary for the executives who control supermarkets to adapt to cultural changes. They are finally starting to make this progress.

The research prompted interesting questions, which for the sake of coherency and space, were not completely examined in this paper. The topic of the supermarket as it relates to the culture and the consumer has numerous subdivisions. Recommendations

for further research include looking further into matters such as changes in food consumption and practices over time. Also, supermarket promotional activities of the past and consumer activities as they relate to socio-economic status deserve consideration. A more current glimpse into the recent alternatives to supermarkets and their appeal to the American consumer is a point of interest as well. Although there are many intriguing possibilities for further research, the information collected on the topic of supermarket layout and display reveal a great deal about the food retail business.

The supermarket, though not immediately detectible upon entrance, is a systematic and strategic set up that is designed to maximize profit for the retailer. Every aspect of the store layout contributes to this chief goal. Statistics show shoppers are highly susceptible to supermarket ploys of persuasion, and although they have recently been rivaled by alternative channels, supermarkets remain a lasting element in American life.

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Feasting on Death Row: America's Fascination with Last Meals

Margaret Hardiman

Commonplace in American news media, capital punishment is a heatedly debated topic. Aside from being a much debated topic, capital punishment is often surrounded by intrigue and mystery. Through the ages, capital punishment has shifted from being a brutal public spectacle, to a more humane phenomenon. However barbaric the practice is, America, a supposedly civilized super power, is a participant.

There is nothing more intriguing to the human mind than something it has not yet experienced. Although most normal Americans would never want to die at the hands of the government, there is a mysterious connection between the death penalty and American curiosity. Many movies have been written and produced that deal with the topic of the death penalty, illustrating America's intrigue. Most often movie viewers travel on a cathartic journey of redemption, forgiveness, and bitterness, along with the convicted criminal. There is usually emphasis placed on the condemned eating a last meal, lifting a mundane human practice to a higher emotional function.

Any person reading newspapers or watching a news channel will, at some point, encounter a report of a last meal. The Texas Department of Corrections supported a web-journal of the last meal orders of its convicted and condemned criminal inmates. After the website was refurbished, the list was removed; however, many other websites decided to publish the last foray into epicurean delight of the inmates at the Walls Unit in Huntsville, Texas.

Although the topic is still a rather taboo subject of conversation, many people still wonder what they would choose as their last meal. It is a question that is strange; yet, the speculation can last for hours. If a person could have one last meal, what would it be?

The question leads to a broader question: why are Americans fascinated by last meals on death row?

Media and other information outlets publish or broadcast the last meals of people on death row. The information may seem to humanize these people, some of whom are monsters, to the public outside of the jails. Within the jails, especially in Huntsville, Texas, which leads the nation in death row executions, carrying out approximately one third of the nation's executions, the last meal is a common occurrence (Texas Department of Corrections). These inmates live for years inside of the death row prisons, and no one is concerned with what they eat, except for the prison cook. What makes the difference when it is the last meal?

Beginning the journey to find an answer requires one to look at the history of capital punishment, both nationally and internationally. The intended message of execution by the state or government was to create fear in the minds of the masses, to show that crime goes punished, to serve as a deterrent. The beginnings of capital punishment were varied throughout different civilizations, but a common factor was brutality.

Methods of execution were barbaric. In the ancient civilizations of Greece, Egypt, and Rome, capital punishment was created as a public spectacle. In ancient Rome, many criminals and slaves were taken to the Coliseum and thrown into battle with lions and other violent creatures. For committing minor crimes, which today wouldn't even be considered criminal acts, people were burned alive or flayed open for everyone to see. People would often line up to see a string of executions occur (Caldwell 596).

In the Middle Ages, the most serious offenses would be punished by drawing and quartering, hanging, stretching, and the most popular method, beheading. Of the common types of punishment during the Middle Ages, imprisonment was used the least. It did not become a popular form of punishment until the 16th century. For lesser crimes, corporal punishment was used. This type of punishment caused the body pain and forced the criminals to remember their criminal activity by leaving them with scars. They were often branded or mutilated (Caldwell 596).

In the 17th century, the United States was started as a group of fledgling colonies. Because the colonies were created by English immigrants, the law obviously came from the mother country, England. At the time of the formation of the colonies, there was no "uniform criminal law." Punishments varied from colony to colony. A person might have been killed in Massachusetts for what was considered a petty crime in Pennsylvania (Caldwell 597). Pennsylvania was considered more lenient than the other colonies, primarily because it was founded largely by Quakers.

The notion of capital punishment was greatly affected by the Enlightenment, a movement and a period in European history that transferred across the ocean to the colonies in the late 18th century. The movement changed society's position on the punishment of criminals. Instead of the justification of the "eye for an eye" theory from the Bible, the philosophers of the Enlightenment period championed the cause of reason and humanity (Caldwell 597).

In the young United States, Michigan, in 1847, became the first state to abolish capital punishment, except for in cases of treason. The rest of the states followed Michigan's example; they did not abolish the use of the death penalty, but they greatly reduced the number of crimes that could warrant the death penalty. There were few

crimes that received the death penalty as punishment; murder and treason were among them. The southern states maintained the use of the death penalty for more crimes than the north, and that trend remains the same when current execution statistics are analyzed between states (Caldwell 597).

State	Number of Executions
Texas	355
Virginia	94
Georgia	39
Maryland	5
Pennsylvania	3
Connecticut	1

"Texas Department of Corrections." Death Row Information. Texas Department of Corrections. 13 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/stat/deathrow.htm>>.

Many arguments have surrounded the death penalty and have spurred changes to capital punishment policy after its major reform in the Enlightenment period. One major change in capital punishment policy has been the notion of mental competency. If the perpetrator of the crime is found to be mentally incompetent, he or she can not be sentenced to death; he or she will be given life imprisonment or consecutive life sentences to serve. Another major change to the death penalty which occurred in the 20th century was that children became exempt from the death penalty. Although there has been a growing trend towards convicting older teenagers as adults, most children who commit heinous crimes are not sentenced to death (Caldwell 597).

In the past, capital punishment has been carried out as a gruesome and public spectacle. In modern times, the death penalty is carried out behind closed doors. Eyewitnesses to crime and punishment in ancient civilizations and the Middle Ages seemed to have come equipped with an iron stomach, in order to be able to watch criminals be murdered, no matter how heinous the crime. This is not the case with modern eyewitnesses. What they see and report often suggests that modern day executions are too gruesome for public viewing.

Most often executions are closed to the media and the public. Protestors for and against the death penalty gather outside of prisons to fight for their side of the argument; however, they are not admitted to the execution. Family members of the condemned and of the victims of the crimes are usually present at executions, seeking revenge. Most often what they witness is not something that reconciles the criminal with the family of the victims.

The government has moved from public spectacle as a deterrent to a secret meeting of jail employees and a small number of people gathered to pay witness to the killing. The government has also moved from brutal executions to gentle executions in the night. Most executions are carried out at midnight.

Based on the history of the death penalty, many changes have come in recent years. Based on the 8th Amendment to the United States Constitution, cruel and unusual punishment is not permitted. Arguments against the death penalty still suggest that the

means of capital punishment in the United States are inhumane (Bill of Rights). The arguments were more potent when the states used hanging, firing squads, and the electric chair as methods of execution. Modern death penalty executions are carried out using lethal injection. The combination of chemicals set off a chain reaction within the body of the condemned person. The chemicals used are sodium thiopental which is an anesthetic; this chemical reaches the brain within thirty seconds. The second chemical that is administered is pancuronium bromide; this chemical is a muscle relaxant which paralyzes the diaphragm and ends breathing. The third and final chemical used is potassium chloride; this chemical induces cardiac arrest because it restricts nerve messages to the brain (amnesty.org).

Although capital punishment is moving in a more humane direction, opponents to the death penalty find a way to argue that the government is still using cruel and unusual punishment. Austin Sarat, an author and activist, suggests that, "Where science makes available technologies for ending life that serve the same goals, but with markedly lower risk of imposing pain, the Constitution *requires* that the state follow science." Sarat makes this claim as a strong opponent to the death penalty. Sarat suggests that science should always search for a less painful and more humane way of continuing the death penalty, and when those advances are made in science and technology, that the government has no choice but to embrace it, according to the language of the Constitution (Sarat 75).

There is a rub, however. Families of victims, and possibly the government itself, want to prove their own point. Making capital punishment painless and hidden defeats the purpose to some who believe that the death penalty has become too humane. Sarat explains,

The United States law seems reconciled to state-imposed death, but it is set on a quest to force the state to kill softly, gently, to impose no pain at all, or no more pain than is necessary. That the law requires the state to kill in this manner seems, in one way, counterintuitive...

The law is looking for ways to make capital punishment in the United States less painful, but what do the condemned feel when they are in various stages of death? Essentially this problem comes down to the activists fighting for abolition of the death penalty. Countless family members have argued that their families were not spared the pain of death, murder, and recovery, so why should a common criminal be given that luxury?

Sarat goes on to suggest that searching for painless methods of execution may not be as counterintuitive as it seems. He uses an explanation given by a legal scholar Alan Hyde:

Law's requirement that the state kill gently follows a common pattern in which the humanistic, sentimentalized body in pain emerges as a sight of empathy and identification in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sentimentalizing the body of the condemned establishes a bridge between the criminal and the public.

A relationship is created between the criminal and the public by the 8th Amendment, which was created as a result of the landmark court case *Furman V. Georgia*. This case ruled that capital punishment was cruel and unusual punishment, and for the first time in the history of the United States, capital punishment was outlawed (Hickey 2). This began

the search for better methods of execution. Although the victim's family members may not feel that their revenge has been satisfied, the state has created a relationship between the two parties, much like publishing the last meal of a condemned person creates a relationship with the greater public.

The emotional tension created by knowing exactly when one is going to die launches the process of eating a last meal into the forefront of the public mind. Although capital punishment may be considered cruel and unusual punishment, suffering through a last solitary meal may be considered just that, cruel and unusual.

Last meals have served as connections for ages. Every single mass that is celebrated in the Roman Catholic faith is celebrated with Jesus' last meal at the center. The act of eating for the last time is commemorated and it is central to the Roman Catholic religion. Recounting this meal is intended to bring the devout closer to God and is symbolic of Jesus living on through his followers.

The importance of this event has also been recounted in world renowned paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci and other masters. Da Vinci recreated the *Last Supper* in fresco form in a church in Milan, Italy. The fresco is located in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie (Rogov 2). Visitors to Italy complete their vacations by pondering this painting, which is the subject of myth until it comes to life before their eyes. Although many spectators of this art are not there as Catholics, the importance of this piece of art is communicated by the many students who choose to analyze the painting. The *Last Supper*, as recounted by Leonardo Da Vinci, has reached millions of viewers, and it would not be important had it not been for that particular event in the life of Jesus Christ.

The Last Meal eaten by Jesus was shared between Him and His followers to celebrate the end of his life. It was an integral part of the Passion story recounted in the Gospels in the Bible and, as stated, is celebrated at every Catholic mass. Although many victims of capital punishment do not give up their life to better serve others, which is what Jesus Christ did at His last meal, he did set aside the special meal of broken bread and wine as a celebration of His dying so that others could live.

Although there are written accounts of Jesus' last meal in the New Testament written by Saint Mark and Saint Matthew, the actual meal remains a mystery. By looking at the season that the meal probably occurred in, historians have suggested that Jesus was participating in a Seder dinner. Many Jewish people at the time of Jesus Christ's life were eating meals of unleavened bread, wine, and salted water in a small bowl with marror, which are bitter herbs. Freshly picked herbs and fresh fruits would have been present at this meal because it is speculated that the last supper was during the spring harvest (Rogov 3).

At the time of Jesus' last supper, He was a well known public figure. He would have been a special guest to have and suggested by His place among His followers, Jesus' hosts would probably have spared no cost for Him. At this time in Jewish history, rich hosts would often prepare roasted lamb, which was a meal that was valued highly. At this time desserts were not presented to guests; however meals, were usually concluded with fresh fruits and nuts that were in season (Rogov 3).

Victims of capital punishment choose their last meal, not so much as a celebration but as a last experience as a human person. They do not offer up their meal as atonement for their sins, nor do most repent at their deaths in front of witnesses. Their last meal is

not as noble as was Jesus Christ's, so some might criticize the connection; however, it cannot be overlooked as a symbolic celebration of life on earth and passing into death.

Prior to the *Furman V. Georgia* ruling in 1972, not much is known about rituals prior to being executed. There are stories that circulate of people trying to save themselves the disgrace of the death penalty by eating too much. One story from Washington state accuses a man of eating too much, to the point where he would not fit through the trapdoor when he was being hanged. Another story tells of a criminal named David Schneider, who tried to stuff himself so he could not fit into the electric chair (Hickey 2).

The modern history of last meals can be traced back into British history. "A prisoner would be given an elaborate banquet-and the services of a prostitute- before being walked to the execution site." It is also a piece of British history that the party traveling to the place of execution would stop in pubs along the way and drink excessively. By the time the condemned person arrived to be executed, he or she would most likely be drunk (Hickey 2).

The history of last meals is rich and dates back as long as the notion of capital punishment. Ancient civilizations almost all incorporated a final meal in the process of execution. German history suggests that condemned prisoners would feast for three days before being executed and ancient Aztecs would feed a human sacrifice for a full year before they were actually sacrificed (Hickey 3).

America's fascination with last meals on death row might begin at the thought of their relation to the person dying. Although many Americans will never experience the wrath of the death penalty, curiosity is peaked when Americans put themselves in the shoes of the condemned. The importance of meals in general to everyone varies on the level of food's function in one's life. Some people may hold food in high regard, but most people connect a last meal with one of the last earthly experiences before dying.

Food is often seen as an element of this earth. There is no way of knowing how one will enjoy food in the next life. Using food as a form of spirituality may be a reason why Americans are fascinated with last meals on death row. People on death row may use food as a spiritual comfort. Many people on death row fast; they are beginning to detach from their earthly ways, because they experience the disadvantage of knowing exactly when and how they are going to die. They may also fast as a way to turn from the earth to the afterlife. The condemned are, "essentially minimizing their earthly appetites." (Carocchia).

Food often has a strong emotional connection. For people serving time on death row, food may be used as a comfort to help them through a stressful period in their lives. Knowing that the day of doom is closing in does not serve to ease one's conscience. Some people may choose to gorge themselves as comfort, to fill the void of leaving this life. Food consumption is often a signal of one's emotional state. It is used either restrictively to gain control, to punish, to comfort, or to help bring one back to a previous state of happiness (Carocchia).

Food often becomes a pawn of emotions when someone is experiencing emotional or mental stress. Although many people on death row do not express regret or remorse for their actions, it is safe to say that knowing when one is going to die cannot be comforting. Becoming detached is one way that many death row inmates cope with their anger or frustration.

Psychologists who study the effects of death and dying on the human mind are known as thanatologists. Thanatologists identify stages that people experiencing death move through. Although the order of the stages may be different for each person, they will experience all of these stages before being executed.

The different stages of death are: denial and isolation, anger, rage, envy, resentment, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Frederick 2). It is a common trait for death row inmates to go through these different stages of dying if they are remorseful. Many inmates especially go through the bargaining phase of coping with death. The prisoners who plead for appeals and stays of execution claim that they would live good lives free from crime if they were pardoned. This trait of prisoners about to be executed is manipulative. Most criminals are behind bars because they have committed heinous crimes, which are unforgivable to most people.

The prisoners tend to reach out to abolitionist organizations, family, and friends, claiming that they have been reformed. In fact, it is their want to survive for themselves, not to change their life in any way, which is why they plead so hard for life in most cases. They convince people that they have been converted towards religion and use this as a bargaining tool. An example of bargaining behavior is Karla Faye Tucker.

Karla Faye Tucker was convicted of murder and sentenced to death in 1983. After a night of hard partying, abusing alcohol and drugs, she paid a friend a visit. With two friends as accomplices, she went to the home of Jerry Dean and killed him and his girlfriend. Karla Faye Tucker had been bragging about wanting to murder Jerry Dean for a long period of time because he owed her money. Although the female companion of Jerry Dean was uninvolved with Tucker and her qualms with Dean, she was also killed. Deborah Thornton was killed when Tucker bludgeoned her with a three foot pickaxe. The woman begged for her life in fear (Price 97).

Karla Faye Tucker bragged to friends later in the evening of murdering Jerry Dean and Deborah Thornton. At the time of their murder, she was high and not worrying about the consequences she would face. A friend of Tucker's went to the police after she bragged about the murders. She was indicted on murder charges and later convicted of the murders of Jerry Dean and Deborah Thornton; her sentence was death by lethal injection (Price 98).

During her stay in prison Karla Faye Tucker claimed to have found Jesus. She was remorseful for the crimes that she had committed and had taken responsibility for those crimes. As her date with lethal injection approached, she appealed her case. The then governor of Texas, George W. Bush, although aware of the claims of her conversion, denied her a thirty-day stay of execution. The rationale behind denying her appeal was that she could still be a menace to society. Although she was denied her stay by the governor, many people who worked in the prisons and also people outside of the prison were shocked because she had become a Godly woman (Price 99).

The prison chaplain, Chaplain Brazzil, had visited with Tucker before she was to go under the lethal injection. He had been receiving calls from people all over the world who were watching her case, who like him, believed that she had changed her ways. The Karla Faye Tucker murder case and pardon plea had been highly publicized by the media; however, it did not help her receive a stay (Price 103).

She may have had people fooled, or maybe she really was a changed person, but how is anyone to judge her actual conversion when so many people manipulate when

bargaining? Who could tell if she were spared that she would be loyal to her bargain or if she would return to life as a prostitute and drug addict?

Brian D. Price was the prison cook who prepared Karla Faye Tucker's last meal. She requested, "Peaches, a banana, and a garden salad with ranch dressing for her final meal, but apparently had lost her appetite, as her tray went untouched." She had requested these special items which were not available in the Walls Unit prison. A friend of hers, Captain Parkins, provided these items for her last request (Price 99). Karla Faye Tucker was executed on February 3, 1998, after fifteen years on Texas' death row.

Brian D. Price was serving a sentence in the Huntsville, Texas, prison Walls Unit. He was sentenced fifteen years for sexually assaulting his ex-wife, to which he regretted pleading guilty. However, during his stay at the Walls Unit, he learned much about life and the fairness of the death penalty (Price 139). At the end of serving eleven years as a prison chef, he decided to publish a book of the deaths he participated in. Although he only helped as a cook, he was deeply affected by the state sanctioned murder.

He agreed to be a prison cook because no one else wanted the job. Helping prepare last meals was described as giving other men "the creeps". Price's only qualifications were that he had worked in a pizza parlor when he was younger (Price 1). After he completed the first eleven years of his sentence, he was released on parole for being cooperative, but he had prepared almost 200 meals for death row prisoners prior to their execution (Price 15).

There are common misconceptions about death row which Price discusses in his memoir, Meals to Die For (2004). In his book, he gives recipes of meals that he prepared on death row and also provides facts and photos of the inmates who were executed and summaries of their crimes. One of the major misconceptions that Price discusses is that not all people working on death row truly believe in what they do, and they are not so cold as the media likes to portray. Many officers and officials working on Texas' death row often cry and develop relationships with prisoners. They are compassionate and caring for the criminals that they help to die (Price 140).

Another misconception that Price discusses is that often there is more than one last meal for criminals on death row. They go through the appeals process and sometimes receive stays of execution. No less care is given to these prisoners in preparing their last meals; they are just repeat customers, according to Price.

If food items were not available at the prison, Brian Price would try to make something close to the request to satisfy the prisoner's last wish. Sometimes chaplains and officers would bring food items if a prisoner requested something special. Karla Faye Tucker was one such prisoner who received special food to fulfill her request (Price 141). Price insists that compassion existed in the Walls Unit. Price says, "I believe prison officials bent the rules for inmates who behaved well on death row."

Although Brian Price was not a direct participant in the execution of the prisoners in Texas, he felt that he played an integral part. He tried his best to make their last meals something they would enjoy. Interviews with Price often include the question: do you think the prisoners enjoyed their last meal? Price's answer to this question is usually one that is marked by hope. Prisoners have expressed their gratitude to him through prison chaplains who are usually the last people to converse with prisoners before they die. Price says, "I took my job seriously, and it made me feel good that I was able to give the condemned at least a piece of a free world as they remembered it" (Price 2).

Now that Price is a free man, he has become a writer, and he also owns a radio station that broadcasts to prisons in Texas. He has quite an audience; the area that he resides in is densely populated by prisons. The radio station is religious, and he hopes that it gives comfort to his listeners, in what could be their last moments on earth. When Price wrote his memoirs, instead of including only recipes, he researched the cases that surrounded the people he knew as identification numbers. He included backgrounds of their crimes because knowing what one requests to eat as a last meal is only one piece of the puzzle. Brian Price also realized that there were many Americans struggling with the idea of capital punishment, and how it is covered in mystery.

The notion of capital punishment, however mysterious it may be, can be understood to a certain extent. Although most Americans won't ever be touched by capital punishment, they are curious, which may be because it is obscure. There are many psychological effects that capital punishment has on the American public.

Dr. Marie Mele is a professor working in the Sociology, Criminal Justice, and Social Work Departments at La Salle University. She began to decipher American's fascination with last meals on death row. Her conclusion was that it leads back to American's fascination with criminals, to start. She said,

Many people think of criminals as some other type of person- something that you or I could never become. We set ourselves apart from those who commit crime and consider them different from us in many ways. This tendency is exaggerated with those who commit murder.

Dr. Mele maintains that some are fascinated because they are set apart from these people. They are in prisons with maximum security, and cannot even walk outside without permission or supervision. In the most basic ways of being human, people are all similar. Their actions, however cruel, have set them apart from regular citizens.

Being prisoners, they are considered special only when their cases make the news and their last meals published. Although Dr. Mele agrees that we share a collective curiosity as Americans, she thinks that our fascination is short lived. Death row victims are not immortalized by the publishing of their meals; in fact, she contends that they are too soon forgotten.

In a recent high-profile execution, Tookie Williams did not request a last meal. Long before his execution, he was forgotten by the public at large. Spectators have yet to see how long it will take for his name to be forgotten after breaking into the media with his execution. Dr. Mele states, "In the case of death row inmates, we exterminate them and wash our hands of their misfortunate lives." We do not lament their deaths and most Americans do not think that Williams should have lived; he is only a story in the news now.

Americans' morbid fascination can be fulfilled in many ways, especially with a rich resource in the internet. There are many websites on the internet dedicating their cause to whetting American's appetite for the slightly psychotic and gruesome. Although America receives notice of horrible events via the news every night, they still find a need to search the internet for gruesome photos, revealing to them the true story of what happens when the news and censor boards draw the line.

One such website is Wrotten.com. This website features links to hundreds of pictures, sound clips, and video clips. Some of the most popular links are the morgue

photos of celebrities and the video clips of beheadings in the Middle East. If anyone ever wanted to know what someone looks like when they are run over by a locomotive, they would be certain to find it on this website.

Another website which teases the American need to know is Deadmaneating.com. This website, although not gruesome, discusses capital punishment at length. There are forums on this website where any topic relative to the death penalty is bound to be discussed at one time or another. This website also picks up where the Texas State Department website left off, publishing the last meal requests of inmates and the menu at the Walls Unit in Huntsville, Texas.

Americans' sense of curiosity surrounding the death penalty also infiltrates the amusement business. *The Washington Post* printed an article during the summer of 2000. The article, "Death Row at the Arcade," discusses the appearance of rides at arcades that mimic an outdated method of capital punishment, the electric chair. The ride is called "The Original Shocker" and was manufactured and designed in the United Kingdom. Most Americans see this as a joke, but onlookers have noted the accuracy to the real electric chair. One bystander is quoted as saying, "It borders on bad taste—especially the smoke—but that's Americans for you: Europeans tour torture museums; Americans participate." (Philip 2). The general manager of the Dave and Buster's restaurant and arcade where the ride is featured in Rockville, Maryland, says, "We wouldn't offer a last meal to go with the ride—that might bother people for real." (Philip 3).

Rowan Philip, the author of the article, suggests that, "for the good-guy-wins Americans, it strips away every traditional value except courage." Aside from giving riders a thrill, the ride helps to prove a myth of American culture. The British want to save face, but Americans have proven themselves courageous. The American market has fed right into the pocket of the British creator of "The Original Shocker," Nova (Philip 2).

The fact that Americans are much more hands-on and eager to participate can be traced back to the frontier migration in colonial America, and was introduced to the community of Americans at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 in the thesis "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" by Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner linked the frontier migration experience to many American traits, including rugged individualism. Although the connection here is stretched, it fits in the way that Americans are not afraid to push the envelope; they are constantly looking for new experiences, and are, as stated, more eager to participate than to watch.

Another connection to the Turner thesis is found in Americans' constant return to the primitive aspects of society. The connection relates to America being a super power on the world stage; however, the United States remains, along with Japan, one of the only major powers to enforce the death penalty as punishment (Coburn 1). Turner states, "American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area." There has been much speculation into the capabilities of capital punishment as a deterrent. Although the leaders of the United States must be aware of these reports, they choose what has worked in previous times. The death penalty, after all, finds its origins in public spectacle and fear. One can only question if this attitude, which is described by Turner, is holding the United States back from abolishing the methods of execution that do not seem to deter violent crime.

Turner goes on to say, “This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.” It is no small wonder why Americans tend to go back to their touch with primitive society. It has worked in the past as a deterrent. Capital punishment may not function in today’s society; however, Americans have developed a tendency to go back to previous states of equilibrium in front of the law, according to Turner.

The thesis presented by Turner may also illustrate this point. At the end of the presentation, Turner says,

The inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons.

Although Americans have experience as frontiersmen, each new frontier has forced them to start fresh. However, capital punishment has been used for ages, and Americans are leaning towards ignoring the lessons that should be learned from its pointlessness.

The strong polarity in public opinion takes many forms. One form of activism that has been used in strong connection with capital punishment is art. “The Waiting Room” is an exhibit in the Huntsville, Texas, death row museum. It is a testament to the abolitionist feelings of an artist hailing from San Francisco. His art has carried the theme of death row since 1979 (Coburn 2).

Richard Kamler debates the death penalty by taking the side of abolition. He has had a strong and highly effectual experience with the death penalty. He spent time in the waiting room of the San Quentin prison, which houses California’s death row. Although it was not himself serving time, he spent enough time there to feel imprisoned by the plastic waiting room chairs, and the pointless message that the death penalty communicated to him.

The art installation piece is visited by many museum onlookers, some who agree and some who disagree with his message. His art is characterized by its symbolism, reality, and “community conversations.” The focus of these conversations is to enlighten people to different points of view and to encourage the abolition of the death penalty (Chavis 1). Upon entering into the installation, a visitor can pick a tray and share a symbolic meal with other visitors or they can just watch the ticking clock that is projected onto metal bars and listen to the heart beat. The heart beat goes on continuously except for momentary pauses to symbolize the death of an inmate (Coburn 1).

There are also thirteen hanging banners made of lead. Lead is a common theme throughout the exhibit because of its toxicity to the human body, and the violent behavior lead causes when introduced to the human body in high quantities (Chavis 2). The banners are copies of prison rules: no extended kissing, no short sleeved shirts, and no wearing bras with wires in them (Coburn 1).

Visitors can sit in the recreated plastic waiting chairs with a tray describing one victim of the death penalty. A photo is inscribed onto the tray along with a brief description of the committed crime, and the last meal request of the inmate. Guests can

also choose to place food recreated in lead onto their tray to feel more connected to the experience (Coburn 3).

Other artists have used capital punishment as their topic of choice; however, Kamler's seems the most potent. It takes visitors on a journey through the experience of dining with the prisoner, following in the inmate's footsteps to a death they would never want to experience. Death at the state's hands can never be pleasant; experiencing the installation piece has evoked such feelings from its visitors (Chavis 3).

The trend in real death row requests tends to be simplistic and resonates with an idea of home. Brian Price has said, "I think that through their meals, they were seeking a small bit of comfort and courtesy. Food can take you back to a better time in your life." Most meal requests were for filet mignon or other steak products, mashed potatoes, hamburgers with and without cheese, Coca Cola, fries, ice cream, fried chicken, salads, coffee, iced tea, milk shakes, and eggs (Price 141).

The meal requests for fried chicken and mashed potatoes or fries are extremely reminiscent of southern cooking. Most of the men and women that are on death row have grown up in Texas and have also committed their crimes in Texas. Any extravagant meal requests, for instance filet mignon or specialty deserts, were commuted into other options like T-bone steak and pudding. As was stated earlier, the prison chef, Brian Price, did his best to fulfill the requests with what was available at the prison. Sometimes specialty items became available through benevolent persons.

The requests are often more humble than not, although some people choose to write out extravagant requests. They are filled to fit a regular meal. One such request came from, David Earl Gibbs, who was executed on August 23, 2000. He requested,

Chef Salad (any kind of dressing except oil and vinegar). Two bacon cheeseburgers all the way (cut the onions), deep fried home fries (with chili powder on top), pitcher of fruit flavored milkshake, two scotch eggs (boiled and packed in a sausage roll, batter and deep-fried and served with syrup), and a slice of pie.

His meal request was fulfilled according to Price's writings, although this is unusual because of the size of the request (Price 421).

Many prisoners request cigarettes to accompany their last meal; however, their request is denied. The then governor of Texas, George W. Bush, outlawed cigarettes on death row, on "health grounds." This is ironic because the condemned are just that, condemned to die. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to this ruling, but the Texas State Department of Corrections must abide by it (Ferguson 1).

Denying a dying person a last wish seems unforgivable on the part of the system, but the rules govern. Last meals are requested and eaten alone unless the presence of the chaplain is requested. Prisoners use this as a contemplative time, to think and reflect.

Meals in America and throughout the world are used as time of reflection. Many families ask questions, such as "How was your day," in hopes of starting a conversation and to share news. Some inmates choose to withdraw from the last meal experience, deciding for their own personal reasons not to eat. Maybe it is that eating by one's self is lonesome, especially when the only thing that person can think of is his or her ensuing death. This draws a parallel to the experience of old Eben Flood, the main character in "Mr. Flood's Party," written by E.A. Robinson in 1920.

Mr. Flood travels alone in the poem and carries on a conversation with The Poet, who is Mr. Flood himself. His drunkenness is evident by the care he gives to setting down his jug and the simple fact that he is speaking with himself and laughing. Mr. Flood is reflecting on his life filled with happy memories and sad (Robinson 997). Although it is a connection that is not clearly illustrated, the parallel to prisoners eating their last meal is undeniable.

Old Eben Flood could be in the mind of anyone eating for the last time. Mr. Flood mulls over a lifetime full of memories, looking down on a town that is foreign to him. He has extricated himself from the town because all of his friends have passed on, much like prisoners are extricated from society to live a solitary existence in jail. Mr. Flood experiences isolation at the end of the poem:

He raised again the jug regretfully and shook his head, and was again alone. There was not much that was ahead of him, and there was nothing in the town below- Where strangers would have shut the many doors that many friends had opened long ago.

Mr. Flood is alone now, and this parallels the experience of prisoners. They reflect on a life where before being convicted of crime they had friends and a life not shamed by crime. After living in prison, it may seem to them that they are forgotten and alone, but in fact, unlike Mr. Flood, many will remember them and lament their lives on death row (Robinson 998).

America's fascination with last meals on death row seems to focus on the isolation of death row inmates. As Dr. Mele explained, "We set ourselves apart from those who commit crime and consider them different from us." Citizens of America allow the stigma of being on death row infiltrate their collective thoughts. Americans no longer see people, they see crimes. Our collective fascination with last meals on death row may seek to humanize these "monsters," who have committed brutal crimes, but in effect are still humans.

As Americans, or possibly as humans, there is a tendency toward a voyeuristic nature. People find comfort in experiencing someone else's plight, at arm's length. Most Americans and people in general do not want to come close to the death penalty; however, most would like to get as close as they can, in order to begin identifying with those people (Caroccia).

Time magazine undertook to answer the question of Americans' fascination with last meals on death row and provided an answer: "Perhaps our culture has evolved this ritual of the à la carte last meal to sugar coat what remains a grim act of violence by the state to redress a previous wrong." As a conclusion drawn from this statement, one cannot help but notice that this may be correct. Americans are unified in their quest to see things that are wrong and continue watching them happen, much like a criminal committing a crime even though he or she knows that it is wrong (Karon 2).

Throughout the course of this research, many other questions were discovered that could foster further research. Some of the topics that were found were regionalism in food, the psychological and physiological effect of food as an emotional tool, the validity of the death penalty as a deterrent, methods of execution and the American notion of pain. Although these topics would be riveting to research, they cannot be included within the research presented here because they would detract from the original purpose. A nomination for further research would also go to the topic chosen for this paper,

America's fascination with last meals on death row. Most information gleaned was from interviews, and even then the questions were something new to consider. Any information gained from research also only touched on our psychological preoccupation with last meals.

In conclusion, America's fascination with last meals on death row is a multi-faceted and an under researched topic. The information that exists on the topic does not delve into the emotional implications of eating for the last time and often deals with surface matter, for example the meal requests. Less fascinating are the meal requests than where the prisoners are coming from and the personality that is communicated through their choices of food.

The limitations provided for this paper mostly originated from lack of interest or curiosity into this topic by sociologists, criminologists, and psychologists. Although this topic should not be overlooked, it lives in the shadow of other psychological and physiological effects of depression and other issues that accompany life on death row; however, it is a valid topic for further research. This subject provides vivid snapshots into the minds of the condemned. The fascination Americans have with last meals is complex and captivating, much like the American character as a whole.

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Interview Questions: Dr. Marie Mele

1. Where do you think our curiosity as Americans comes from? What part of our social history do you think this part of our collective behavior comes from?
2. Just as our fascination with celebrity lives is indulged by the press, do you think that there is a connection from this celebrity life fascination to other people's lives? Do you think that people interested in knowing what Death Row inmates eat as their last meal has anything to do with our fascination with other people's lives?
3. Can you explain voyeurism to me; I have heard from other therapists that our curiosity has to do with a voyeuristic quality of our collective personalities?
4. Do you think that having last meals published immortalizes people in some ways? In some ways people liken this event to the last meal of Jesus Christ, who died for a purpose or so we are taught, do you think there is a connection here?

Interview Questions: Sharon Caroccia

1. What do you think the role of food plays on death row?
2. Is there any mindset you can attribute last meals to?
3. How would it feel to be asked to write your last meal request?
4. If it is a spiritual journey, what makes it so?
5. Do you find the last meal experience of convicted felons to have any parallels to Jesus Christ's experience?
6. Why do you think people leave their requests blank?
7. Why do you think people use sarcasm in their last meal request? (i.e., someone said they wanted "dirt".
8. Are these people trying to make a statement?

A Century of Change: The Influence of the Food Industry

on Selected American Painters

Kathryn Mullin

Throughout history, art has been used, among other things, to depict cultural interactions, rituals, and changes within society. The creators of this artwork, specifically painters, use their abilities to manipulatively portray people, places, or events for aesthetic pleasure and, more importantly, to suggest an underlying theme or message about the events occurring at that time in history. Though these historical themes, or myths, may be more obscure when viewed with an untrained eye, a critical analysis of the artwork will show that paintings offer the viewer a chance to investigate the values and traditions of a society that may no longer exist. They present a modern society with the opportunity to evaluate how the past and present differ, yet somehow still correspond to each other in both content and application. As Dennis Sporre suggests, “By using symbols, artworks can relay meanings that go well beyond the surface of the work and offer glimpses of human reality that cannot be sufficiently described in any other manner” (16).

In this analysis, three American Painters and their selected works will be used to investigate the impact of the Industrial Revolution on America’s depictions of food. The paintings of William Sydney Mount, Thomas Hart Benton, and Idelle Weber are all exemplary works that portray the economic shift from agriculture to industry that took place in America during the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Each artist provides a look into America’s perception of food regarding four major factors of social and cultural history. The paintings will be analyzed to find examples of the dehumanization of the food industry, the bifurcation of work and food preparation in daily life, the decreased time Americans give to the consumption of food, and the shift in American culture from a society that utilizes everything to a society plagued with pollution.

1. *Farmer’s Noonning*

In William Sydney Mount’s painting *Farmer’s Noonning*, the life-altering effects of industrialization are not yet visible. (See Appendix A) This work, which was created by Mount in 1836, depicts a group of farmers taking a break from their daily chores in the land around them, which resembles a Midwestern farm. Although the viewer is not told whether the farm belongs to the subjects or not, one can assume that the men in the picture are involved in working the land. The equipment that is scattered around them is visible, but it is not being used by anyone with the exception of the boy to the left who is holding a small file in his lap that has probably been used to whet his scythe. The ages of the people in the painting range from children to adults, and the races shown are white as well as African-American. This suggests that although all of the people may not be related, they may be hired hands who live and work on the farm together.

The food industry seen in this painting is clearly an agricultural economy, and the society that these men were a part of stressed farming for self-sustenance rather than for commercial use. As J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur suggests in *Letters from an American Farmer*, “Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to

West Florida. We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws, without dreading their power, because they are equitable.” (Letter III, 49). The farmers in Mount’s painting embody the physiocratic ideals of early America expressed by Crèvecoeur. They portray the agricultural community as a major contribution to the American character and boast the importance of self-reliance in a pre-industrial world.

The need for cooperation and assistance on a farm such as this one fostered a sense of community between everyone who was involved in the food making process. This is seen throughout the construction of the painting itself. The juxtaposition of one person toward the others leads the viewer to see the communal aspect of the composition. The farmers are all gathered in a circular pattern and there is a clear relationship between at least two of them. The focal point of this painting is located in the center of this circular interaction, stressing the importance of cooperation, which was vital to the farmer’s existence.

In the painting, the five men are not only working in the field together, but they are also resting together. Even though they are visibly not all related, there is still a family-like orientation that each of the subjects has with one another. The young boy is playing with the African-American man, while the other three young men are all in relaxed positions under the tree. The men work together, rest together, and most likely live together, as most farm hands did during the 1830s. As William Sydney Mount suggests in a diary entry twelve years after the completion of this painting, “I know a farmer, he is now about forty years old, he never was in the City. This feeling, bound to one place for life, I do not believe in. It is all habit. It may do for farmers- but it will not do for artists.” (Frankenstein 197) Again, this statement iterates the importance of community and proximity of human interaction with food in the agricultural society at the time of the painting. By including all of these diverse subjects together, the artist has created a portrait of a typical eighteenth and nineteenth century household. At this time, extended families were characteristic of life on the farm because, as Tamara Hareven suggests, the amount of children a couple had was directly related to the amount of help that was needed on the farm. This explains why so many people who worked on the farm actually lived there, and also why there is such a close bond between the diverse people in Mount’s painting. Their job was to work with one another, as mentioned previously, and the need for constant interaction with one another and with the production of food led to an increase in the amount of people who actually lived near or with one another on the farm.

The time that was given to the actual consumption of food in the time of Mount’s painting has changed significantly over the past hundred years. The title of this work, *Farmers Noonning*, suggests that lunch was not just a fifteen to twenty minute break. The way that the farmers are relaxing and enjoying each other’s company under the tree suggests that they took as much time to eat and rest as they saw fit for the work they were doing. If they needed to stay on break for a few extra minutes, there was no time clock that told them to get back to work. Likewise, if there was one chore that needed to be done without delay, they would put all of their time and effort into completing that one task before taking a break. They directly benefited from the work that was put into the

farm, and consequentially discriminated between what had to be done immediately and what could be done after they were able to rest.

The human interaction with food in an agricultural community like the one in Mount's painting was a necessary component to the economy of the 1800s. It was also, in most cases, the livelihood of the men and women who worked on the farm. Their simple machinery, natural resources, and strong work ethic were all that these people had to provide for themselves and each person had to make good use of all the resources that had been given to him/her. This need for utilization among early farming communities can be seen in Fredrick Turner's thesis *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. Turner addresses this topic while referencing Peck's *New Guide to the West*, "Generally, in all the western settlements, three classes, like the waves of the ocean, have rolled one after the other. First comes the pioneer, who depends for the subsistence of his family chiefly upon the natural growth of vegetation, called the 'range,' and the proceeds of hunting. His implements of agriculture are rude, chiefly of his own make, and his efforts directed mainly to a crop of corn and a 'truck patch' (qtd. in Turner, ch. 1). This first wave of immigration as described by Peck, is in fact the essence of Mount's art. The tools, the fence in the distance, and the pile of hay in the center of the scene are all products of the surrounding resources that have been used to promote a chiefly self-sustaining society. These men are not concerned with making a profit, but see this land as an opportunity to make a new life and provide for themselves. Their cooperation, family oriented setting, and frugal mentality toward resources all contribute to the way in which these people interacted with each other. They all have the same agenda each day and work together toward the common goal of producing food. They make use of everything that is available to them and are wary of how much waste is produced due to their crude means of disposal that include using animal waste as fertilizer and burning or burying other forms of garbage in trash pits, which are located on the property.

2. Oil

By 1930, the self-reliance that had been so revered by men such as Jefferson and Crevecoeur began to decrease in importance. As Peck states, "The next class of emigrants purchase the lands, add field to field, clear out the roads, throw rough bridges over the streams, put up hewn log houses with glass windows and brick or stone chimneys, occasionally plant orchards, build mills, school-houses, court-houses, etc., and exhibit the picture and forms of plain, frugal, civilized life" (qtd. in Turner, ch. 1). This shift to a more civilized life was seen somewhat in the work of Mount, but is clearly represented in a series of murals for the New School for Social Research in Manhattan, painted by Thomas Hart Benton.

The murals are done in a more modern style than the paintings of Mount and begin to reflect the changes brought about in America due to the rise of the Industrial Revolution. In Benton's mural entitled *Oil* (see appendix B), there is a more symbolic representation of "the traditional verities that he believed had made the nation great and that it had lost." (McCoubrey 69) The booming effects of industry are clearly represented in the foreground of this painting, and there is only a small dedication to the traditional farmland of America in the upper right hand corner. The men in the painting are all engaged in different activities, and are portrayed as dehumanized, a state captured

by the lack of expression or clarity in their faces. Each person is shown either downcast or in profile, revealing a work that can be interpreted individually rather than something that provokes the same reactions from every viewer. The painting is vertically bisected by a large billow of black smoke and a series of oil derricks, which divide the industrial and technological improvements on the left with the traditional methods of farming on the right, a technique that had also been employed by fellow American painter John Gast in his 1872 painting *American Progress*. (See Appendix D)

Unlike Mount's painting, the men in Benton's work are individually portrayed through different scenes. This symbolizes that the men are no longer part of the same agrarian community where everyone works together toward a common goal. The influence of new machinery and the competitive work ethic toward self-improvement begins to take over the painting just as these social changes began to take over the food industry of the early 1900s. The billowing black smoke and giant oil derricks represent the larger-than-life industry that became the main source of economic improvements throughout this period in American history. With the technological advances in transportation, such as the expanding railroad lines and formation of highways, farmers could sell their products for a large profit to companies that might have been unreachable before. They became more interested in farming for profit rather than simply farming for self sustenance and with the advances in technological machinery, required less help in the form of manual labor.

A decrease in the amount of manual labor also led to a decrease in the amount of people needed on the farm. The shift in the American family began to go from an extensive, all encompassing community to a more private, nuclear affair. The men and women who had worked on the farm were now employed in the growing factories. They lived with their immediate relatives and left home to go to work; the bifurcation of work and food production had begun. The men who worked in the factories no longer cared if they were able to grow food for themselves, just as long as they were able to make money to buy food for their families. They were able to profit indirectly through their work, which also led to a shift from a communal to an individual mentality among American workmen and finally to the dehumanization of food preparation. Even if the factories where these men worked produced some form of packaged foods, the amount of human interaction with the actual process was beginning to be replaced by technology. Machines were able to help mass produce items at a more efficient rate than humans, and many of the workers were only responsible for one part of the food preparation instead of being involved in the entire process.

The need for human interaction and cooperation is essential on a farm, but it carries much less importance in a factory-based society. The small town farmers of the early 19th century worked and rested together, as in Mount's painting, and shared in the abundance of their hard work when it came time to eat. They all took part in the process of growing or producing their food and, provided that nature was cooperative, shared a healthy diet with one another which sustained them throughout the year. Farming to produce their food was a part of their daily life. The life of a factory worker, however, differed from this wholesome gastronomic background. As Wilbur O. Atwater, a professor of agricultural chemistry, claimed in 1902, "American workmen were not eating enough energy building foods for the efforts required of them" (Root 227). Food and work became bifurcated within the daily lives of these blue-collar workmen. They

no longer worked to directly produce their meals, and they no longer ate with the men they worked with. The two became separate, yet still equally important factors of life for the general population of America.

Within this new working environment came a change in time that was designated to food consumption. In Mount's painting, the farmers decided when to take a break and how long they should sit before heading back to the fields. With the industrial workers like the men in Benton's painting, however, the amount of time that they spent eating resulted in a lower income at the end of the day. Many workmen had to find something quick to eat so that they would not go over their time limit and also so that they could make the most money out of the time that they had. This fast-paced lunch fostered a new concept in the preparation of food that would eventually lead to the modern-day diner. As Andrew Hurley states in his famous article on the transformation of the American diner, "Prefabricated diners owed their origin to the horse-drawn lunch carts that prowled factory districts at night in the late nineteenth century, offering quick and cheap nourishments to the industrial workers." (Hurley 1284).

The utilization of plants and animals continued through most of the early 20th century. Upton Sinclair offered one infamous description of the changing food industry in his book *The Jungle* by stating, "They don't waste anything here" (38). The author then went on to describe the grotesque practices of the meat-packing industry and the distorted means that these companies had gone through in an effort to utilize their resources. The food-processing industries began to exploit their resources for a profit rather than use them for nourishment.

Although Benton's *Oil* does not directly show this exploitation, there is another problem that becomes evident through the picture. The black smoke in the middle of the page shows something that was not presented anywhere in the scenes of Mount's paintings: pollution. Along with the growth of industry and exploitation of plants and animals came a rise in the amount of waste produced by the country. The increase in factories and most forms of transportation, for people as well as goods, produced an excess amount of refuse that was often seen as only a small price to pay in exchange for the vast improvements made in the production of goods.

3. Nugget: 1975 East 126th Street

The advances in technology and dehumanization of the food industry continued throughout much of the twentieth century. As the size and predominance of many factories increased, the importance of human interaction with food decreased. In *Nugget: 1975 East 126th Street* by Idelle Weber, the picture itself is evidence of the aftermath of the changing food industry during the late 20th century. (See Appendix C) Weber captures the audience's attention by presenting garbage as art. As Donna Gustafson mentions in her book *Thou Art What Thou Eat*, "Her depictions of urban debris are perceived as evidence of the habits of the people and the state of the environment at the time the work was created. Weber has recorded the end product of the contemporary food chain." (86). Unlike the previous two paintings, Weber discounts any inclusion of the farming industry as a part of the food procedure and focuses instead on America's total reliance upon packaging and processing plants as a means of gaining sustenance. The painting itself consists of individual wrappers, cans, bottles, and boxes intertwined with other trash such

as a newspaper and a shoe, which are all strewn together in a pile on top of a gutter. The items centralize the focal point to the middle of the canvas, and the remains of the canned vegetables, chewing gum, cigarettes, soft drinks, and beer become a reminder of the influence that the industrial revolution has had on every aspect of modern day American life, including food consumption.

Weber's use of items that have been mass produced informs the viewer that the human involvement in the production of these goods has not only been diminished, replaced by machinery that is able to make goods faster and more efficiently. "Industrial robots on the factory floor [were] introduced in the late 1970s. These computer-controlled welding arms and grippers could perform simple tasks such as attaching a car door quickly and flawlessly 24 hours a day. This too cut costs and improved speed." ("Factory" 1). It would be nearly impossible to have humans produce the amount of Pepsi, Miller High Life, or Bazooka Bubble Gum needed to feed the continuously booming American economy. The inclusion of machinery was also a cost effective way to further production. Company owners began to maximize their profit by capitalizing on this new technology. As Peck concludes, "Another wave rolls on. The men of capital and enterprise come. The settler is ready to sell out and take the advantage of the rise in property, push farther into the interior and become, himself, a man of capital and enterprise in turn. The small village rises to a spacious town or city; substantial edifices of brick, extensive fields, orchards, gardens, colleges, and churches are seen" (qtd. in Turner, ch. 1). This new American mentality marked the switch from the characteristic self-reliance of J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur to the interdependence and self-importance of many Americans today.

The cans of Nugget brand carrots suggest that the work that many Americans accomplish during the day is unrelated to the production of food. With the rise of prepackaged products such as canned goods and microwavable meals, people were able to go to work and still provide a meal for the family after they returned home. The actual process of growing carrots, slicing them, and then cooking them as it would have been in Muntz's painting has been completely replaced. People no longer work on the farm to produce their own food; likewise, very few people work in the factory or package the goods themselves. The involvement of the jobs in the factories has now been reduced to men and women looking over machinery that process and package the goods for them. People are working for money to afford food rather than working to produce it.

The size of the items in the painting reveals another cultural transformation that took place during this era. The growing market and mass production of food led to altering marketing strategies that were geared toward the individual consumer. With more individually packaged items, such as the bottles, cans, and even bubble gum, people were able to eat independently. The idea of gathering together for a home-cooked family meal was quickly replaced by a world of TV dinners and other single-serving, microwavable dishes. The idealistic nuclear family of the 1940s and 1950s was no longer seen as a necessary component of the American Dream. People began to disengage from one another within this once solid unit and saw no need to consider each member of the nuclear family in every aspect of their daily life.

With her choice of subjects matter, Weber also suggests that the amount of time Americans take to prepare and eat food has diminished significantly from the time of Muntz's painting. The food in this picture is made for people who are continuously

moving from one place to another and rarely take the time to stop and enjoy a nice long meal. The convenience of being able to have something already prepared and individually packaged allows people to take the food with them almost anywhere they need to go and dispose of the remains along the way. The people in Benton's painting may have had prepackaged food for lunch, but they still took a break from their long day, even if it was just a few minutes, to sit and eat it. In the rapidly moving society of America after the 1970s, many people do not take long enough breaks to eat, let alone digest their food properly. The factor of time can also be seen in the growth of fast food restaurants, which began to gain popularity over the traditional diners that provided workers with food during the time of Benton's painting.

The mass production of goods and the wide use of more individualized packaging also led to an increase in solid waste. Ironically, it is this waste that has become the subject of Idelle Weber's 1975 painting. Although the artist is said to describe her work as, "beautiful garbage" (Dubier 1), there is no doubt that the underlying theme within her work suggests a society that is plagued with pollution so much that to see it in the streets has actually become a social norm. As Anna Gustafson notes, "Her work provides disturbing evidence of the proliferation of packaging and the crisis of waste that has ensued. Although Weber insists that she perceives the refuse of civilization as an aesthetic resource, rich in textures, colors, shadows, and highlights, it is difficult not to become aware of the careless nature of the material consumption and the magnitude of non-edible material that is produced along with food" (86).

Recommendation for Future Research:

While analyzing these three paintings and researching the styles used by each artist, there seemed to be a connection between the techniques that were introduced after the industrial age and the individualization of American society. The style of painting shifted from traditional realist techniques to more modern interpretational work, which relies heavily on individual interpretation rather than widespread approval. By looking at Benton's other murals for the New School for Social Reform in Manhattan and exploring and analyzing the work of one of his most famous students, Jackson Pollock, the use of abstract expressionism may reveal the underlying themes of individuality expressed throughout this paper. There is also some speculation that ironically ties this new work back to a form of Indian painting from the Western frontier that was seen in the book *American Painting 1900-1970*. More information on this subject can be found in:

- McCoubrey, Dr. John W., et al. *American Painting 1900-1970*. Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdett Company, 1970.

Conclusion

As this analysis has shown, the Industrial Revolution caused many changes in the role of food production for the American culture. The decreasing amount of human interaction throughout the three paintings reflects an ongoing process of dehumanization and increased technology that permeated American society even beyond the food industry. The jobs that were once done manually have been replaced by faster, more efficient machines and the direct relationship between work and food production, as seen in Mount's painting, has in most cases ceased to exist. People have changed their

priorities from working to produce food for themselves, to working to produce food for others, and finally to working for money so that they can pay for food to sustain themselves. Individual packaging has made it possible for people to eat quickly in a rapidly paced society and has also caused a redefinition of the family unit that had at one time encompassed an entire farming community. This self-concerned, individualistic mentality, which is reflected in the content as well as the style of the art that has been reviewed, has lead people away from the self-reliance of early America toward a society obsessed with capitalizing on anything that will yield a profit. Finally, the increase in production due to this faster more efficient machinery has also fostered a rise in the amount of goods produced as well as a rise in the amount of waste scattered throughout the environment. Ironically, the infiltration of this waste parallels the infiltration of industrialization on American society throughout the past century. The three paintings that have been analyzed then become more than just art. They become a window of opportunity to explore the nation's history and act as a nostalgic remembrance of the physiocratic ideals upon which America was built.

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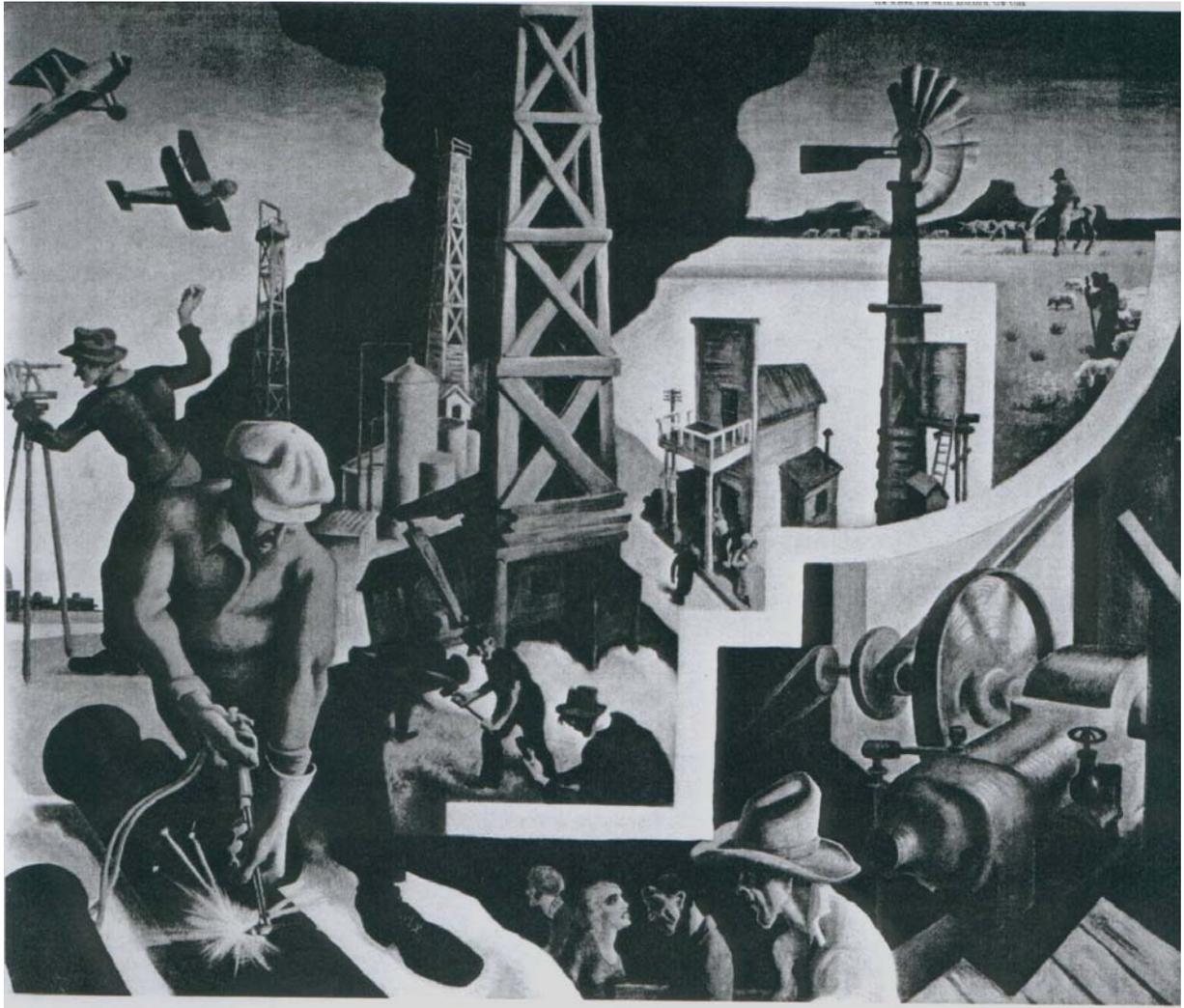
Appendix A

William Sydney Mount's *Farmers Noonning*



Appendix B

Thomas Hart Benton's *Oil*



Appendix C

Idelle Weber's *Nugget*: 1975 East 126th Street



Appendix D

John Gast's *American Progress*



Football as the New American Religion

Kristen McGuriman

Throughout the course of American history, organized religion has dominated the lives of American people. It has provided for them a set of beliefs, practices, and institutions to account for the aspects of life that were otherwise inexplicable.⁴ But today, in the midst of the technological revolution, many find blind faith in organized religion too abstract for their liking. Many scholars theorize that in present-day America, sport is taking the place of organized religion. The two share many important features. In both cases, the needs of spirit rather than the flesh are attended to. Both provide an escape from the pressures of the working world.⁵ And, as Michael Mandelbaum puts it, “Team sports provide three satisfactions of life to twenty-first-century Americans that, before the modern age, only religion offered: a welcome diversion from the routines of daily life; a model of coherence and clarity; and heroic examples to admire and emulate.”⁶ The strong parallels that exist between these two facets of American life offer a clear indication of the shift from religion towards sport. Of all the sports that have grown to importance, football has become the pinnacle of American sport culture. Football, through its traditions of sacred time and space, community, and culminating festival, has become the new American religion.

If organized religion has played such a strong role in American lives for so long, there must be a substantial reason for this shift away from it. Bonnie Miller-McLemore, in her article, “Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage,” discusses what she believes to be the reasoning behind this shift:

Technological society bears a close resemblance to what Eliade describes as the case of the “otiose god” in which the “Supreme Being” is “forgotten.” God withdraws from humankind and loses “religious actuality.” In the modern scientific world, we observe a “progressive descent of the sacred into the concrete.” Modernity entails an eclipse of the sacred in which people endeavor to pass from the profane to the sacred less frequently than primitive peoples did...The triumph of the experimental sciences, an intellectualized rationality and technology, and the artificial environment these foster, create a chasm between the sacred and the profane...The distinctiveness of the modern person “lies precisely in his determination to regard himself as a purely historical being, in his wish to live in a basically desacralized cosmos...The life of modern man is swarming with half forgotten myths, decaying hierophanies and secularized symbols...The nostalgia for the regeneration of time remains a universal: “we find in man at every level, the same longing to destroy profane time and live in sacred time.” People remain in need of myths.⁷

⁴ McGuire, Meredith. *Religion: The Social Context*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987. 11-12.

⁵ Mandelbaum, Michael. “A Variety of Religious Experience” in *The Meaning Of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football, and Basketball and What They See When They Do*. United States: PublicAffairs, 2004.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. “Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage” in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 119-120.

What McLemore suggests is that the great advances Americans have made in science and technology take any “god” out of the picture. Modern men no longer need a “god” to have created the universe, earth, or themselves. They can be sure, scientifically, how all of these things occurred without any Supreme Being behind them. But even without the need for this figure in their lives, the American people still look for some escape from the harsh realities of life, an escape that they used to find in their “god.” In modern culture, people begin to find this escape in the play of sport.

It is through the transcendent power of the play of sport that many experience their own kind of religious escape. Lonnie Kliever, in her article “God and Games in Modern Culture,” discusses this power of play, saying, “The common denominator of all forms of play is the experience of transcendence. Play takes us out of the limitations and obligations of the everyday world. In play, we are able to break out of the normal patterns of our social arrangement and psychic states.”⁸ In a time when a “god” is no longer the source of transcendence, play is effectively fulfilling this role. While playing, children and adults alike are able to escape the stresses and responsibilities of life, to revel in the beauty of the world around them, and to share in glorious abstractions from every day commitment. Michael Novak, as quoted in Robert Higg’s *God in the Stadium*, reinforces this power of play, stating, “*Being, beauty, truth, excellence, transcendence* – these words, grown in the soil of play, wither in the sand of work. Art, prayer, worship, love, civilization: These thrive in the field of play.”⁹ For many, this transcendent field of play occurs when participating in or watching a game of American football.

The progression from organized religion to the religion of Football has been developing since the beginning of the game. Originally founded during the Industrial Revolution, the game of football represents the struggle to persist in the face of hardship, suffering, injustice, physical strain, unequal odds, and the uncertainty dealt by fate that people were faced with every day.¹⁰ Football parallels this struggle to survive with its own struggle to preserve, what Price calls, “the egg of life through the rigors of the impending winter.”¹¹ It represents for Americans modern depictions of heroes caught in the battle between Good and Evil, or in the American case, wealth and poverty. It reflects a fundamental longing for perfection and salvation through transcendence of the limits of the human condition that are so highly valued in American culture.¹²

Football is a uniquely American game, failing to catch on with such enthusiasm anywhere else in the world. Thomas Lifson, in his article “The Sacred and the Profane,” contends that football is a culmination of American values:

Then there is the V-word (the one which isn’t followed by “monologues”): values. Football is a tough sport, not for sissies. If you play it, you can expect to get injured.

⁸ Kliever, Lonnie D. “God and Games in Modern Culture” in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed. Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pg 42.

⁹ Higgs, Robert. “From Sabbath Bans to Super Sunday” in *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion in America*. KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995. Pg. 19.

¹⁰ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. “Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage” in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 127-127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹² *Ibid.*, 121.

Football also requires brains, planning, and the ability to scramble when plans go awry. These are the skills which we Americans celebrate. We love the huddle- the quick gathering of the troops, to agree on What We Do Next. We love the tension leading up to the snap, when it all comes together in a glorious choreography of combat. Anything can happen from the sack to the long bomb. What a perfect metaphor for the land of unlimited opportunity! Parents like to teach their children about the importance of self-discipline, of practice-until-perfect, of teamwork, and of willingness to endure short term pain, to take the hits life deals out, and to triumph in the end, even if it means graciously accepting a loss and vowing to do better next weekend.¹³

If what Lifson says is true, and football has become the outlet of American values, then organized religion continues to be replaced by it. In history, a person's values stemmed from his religion. Today, with American values focused more on success, money, and opportunity as Lifson points out, it is obvious that they must stem from somewhere else. The strong correlation of football, throughout its existence, and these American values allows for the religion of football to have replaced organized religion in American culture. Looking further into the parallels the religion of football creates with organized religion, those of sacred time and space, community, and ultimate festival, one can easily see the transition from organized religion to football.

The first facets of organized religion that the religion of football has wholeheartedly adopted are those of sacred time and space. Mircea Eliade, a renowned religious scholar, says of football, "The sacred makes itself known through the ordinary and through the temporary suspension of the ordinary. Such is the case with football. Noticed or not, football expresses a complex system of coherent affirmations about ultimate reality through its creation of sacred time and sacred space."¹⁴ As organized religion has its sacred time of liturgical calendars and sacred spaces of shrines, temples, and cathedrals, the religion of Football has its sacred time of the game clock and its sacred space of the stadium.

Sacred time is significantly different from historical time. It is characterized by cycles and seasons that parallel historical events but infuse them with communal significance. Sacred time is a time when mystery manifests itself, allowing for hope and promise in the coming season.¹⁵ It emphasizes life and possibility. Michael Novak, in his *The Joy of Sports*, says, "Sacred time is sacred because it stores up possibilities of the heroic; so long as sacred time exists, the heroic is in incubation. Sacred time teaches humans never to quit, to count upon and entrust themselves to the potencies of life, redemption, beauty. One never knows."¹⁶ As organized religion has sacred time, so does the religion of football. Each season celebrates the possibilities of teams, players, and fans. Each season brings with it new beginnings, a chance to disregard all that has happened in the past and look to the promise of the future.

¹³ Lifson, Thomas. "The Sacred and the Profane." *The American Thinker*. 2003-04. http://www.americanthinker.com/articles.php?article_id=3381.

¹⁴ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. "Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage" in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 121.

¹⁵ Price, Joseph L. "From Season to Season: The Rhythmic and Religious Significance of American Sports Seasons." *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 53-56.

¹⁶ Novak, Michael. *The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit*. New York: Basic Books, 1976. Pg. 127

More significant than the football season is the game clock. Though it holds within it sixty minutes of playing time, the minuscule amount of that time that will actually be used for movement of the ball makes those seconds that much more momentous. As Novak says, "As long as there are seconds on the clock, anything can happen; maximal efforts may be crowned with success."¹⁷ The sacred time of the game clock is those last fifty-two seconds of the fourth quarter, when the Dolphins are down by six at their own ten-yard line with only one timeout remaining. Dan Marino steps back into the pocket; Cornelius Bennett of the Buffalo Bills is coming in for the sack, Marino spins him off, steps up and fires to Irving Fryar, who has a step on the corner back on the left side of the field. Fryar catches the ball at the twenty-eight yard line and gets pushed out of bounds at the thirty-five; forty-four seconds remain. Marino steps back and hits a short-out to O.J. McDuffie, who makes it out of bounds, all the way to the Bills forty-eight yard line. With thirty-six seconds remaining, Marino takes the snap; out of nowhere, Cornelius breaks through the line to record the sack for a loss of six yards. The Dolphins are forced to use their last time out. With thirty-one seconds left on the clock, Marino takes the snap and hits Clayton down the right side. Clayton turns it up-field to the Bills' twenty-four; twenty-one seconds remain. Marino takes a snap; Cornelius sacks him again for a loss of seven yards. The clock is ticking. Marino rushes everyone back to the line. He quickly snaps the ball and spikes it to stop the clock. Eight seconds remain. Marino takes the final snap, scrambles right, sees McDuffie on the slant in the end-zone and hits him in stride for the touchdown as time expires. Pete Stoyanovich kicks the extra point for the win.¹⁸ Mircea Eliade sums up this sensation of sacred time that players and fans alike escape into during a final fifty-two seconds like this one, saying, "Sacred time [means] intense, momentary, eternal presence. Persons become completely immersed in the present due to the high intensity and the extreme concentration and the mental attention necessary for perfect execution."¹⁹

Sacred spaces are places where struggle and perseverance have occurred. They are places in which one is surrounded by the memory of past heroes, in remembrance of sacred events. Edward Linenthal and David Chidester discuss this idea of sacred space, in their article "American Sacred Space":

First, we can identify sacred space as ritual space, a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances. As sacred space, a ritual site is set apart from or carved out of an "ordinary" environment to provide an arena for the performance of controlled, "extraordinary" patterns of action. Second, sacred space is significant space, a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world. Third and finally, sacred space is inevitable contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols. Sacred space is fundamental in any exercise of power.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., Pg. 137

¹⁸ Situation created by John Deery, Jr. as told to Kristen McGuriman on May 3, 2005.

¹⁹ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. "Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage" in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 127.

²⁰ Linenthal, Edward and David Chidester., eds. *American Sacred Space*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. Pgs. 9-15.

The sacred spaces of the world are represented by shrines, temples, and cathedrals. They are conceived of by many as an organized universe unto themselves. They are the zone where the sacred occurs. The construction of the football stadium itself parallels this organized, self-sustaining universe of a sacred space. At the farthest concentric circle arise walkways for spectators. Circling around it, one will find all of the necessities of life: food, restrooms, and first aid. Moving inside, the space becomes increasingly narrowed downward and focused to the middle of the playing field, where the action will occur. The intricate patterns of five- and one- yard line markings, the rectangular plots at both ends, and above all, the sacred space in the air marked by the two goal posts give the central space further meaning and reality.²¹ Like a cathedral for Christians or a temple for Jews, the sacred space of the football stadium is where the followers gather to worship.

The second facet of organized religion that the religion of football has assumed is that of community. Community means focusing on the group rather than the self. It expects that all members will be treated the same. As a whole, the human race is a community, intertwined groups of people existing together. Thus, as community is such a basic foundation of humanity, it would also be an important aspect of any small group. In any organized religion, one would find a sense of community among those who are worshipping and those who are leading the worship. Such is the case with the religion of football. There is a strong sense of community among the fans, among the players, and among the two groups conjoined in a love of the game. In her article on football as a religious rite of passage, Bonnie McLemore discusses the feeling of community that football lovers experience:

The exploits and failures of the team have the power to exult or depress. The greater the degree of participation, the more the onlooker takes on the characteristics of a member of a family or tribe: the person shares the elation of victory or the despair of defeats, learns the secrets and the lore, wears its symbols, complains about the decisions of its chiefs, and fundamentally, hates the opposition. A deep sense of communal participation arises...In an odd sort of camaraderie among strangers, viewer and participants care about each other in joy at a play well-executed; they grieve with each other over the one point loss during the final few seconds. The outcome of each game would have little meaning or existence beyond that shared by the wide collective of observer-participants and the meanings that they construct and believe in together.²²

The community that is created among the fans and the players is the most important aspect of football as the new American religion.

Within the larger community of football lovers, there are two small communities of players and fans. The community of players is a community of chosen ones. It consists of those deemed worthy enough to have the fate of the game rest on their shoulders.

²¹ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. "Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage" in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 128-129.

²² Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. "Through the Eyes of Mircea Eliade: United States Football as a Religious Rite de Passage" in *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Ed Joseph L. Price. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. Pgs. 123.

These men give themselves to the team as ritual victims.²³ The community among the players is imperative for the success of the game. No single player can successfully win a game, playing all the positions, by himself. Each player must be in-tune with his team community in order to complete a play effectively. As the saying goes, “There is no ‘I’ in ‘team.’” Michael Novak acknowledges this importance of community among players, saying, “In football, no one offensive player can execute a play, and no one defensive player can cover the entire field. In the rapidly changing patterns of play, each player must recognize instinctively what each of his teammates will do...a team depends on equal intensity on the part of all.”²⁴ The community on the field is of the utmost importance to the success of the game.

The players are also the leaders of the religion. If not for them, the religion of football would not exist. For this reason, Novak compares players to priests. He says, “Once an athlete accepts the uniform, he is in effect donning priestly vestments. It is the function of the priest to offer sacrifices. As at the Christian Mass, in athletics the priest is also the victim: he who offers and he who is offered are one in the same.”²⁵ He goes on to discuss the importance of players as leaders of the fans. On this, Novak writes, “Always the sacrifice is ritual: the athlete bears the burden of identification...Others are living in him, by him, with him. He has given up his private persona and assumed a liturgical persona...Only by some such an interpretation can we explain the dynamics of the psychic bond between the athlete and the fans.”²⁶ This bond between players and fans is much the same as the bond between a priest or rabbi and his followers.

Outside of the players, there is a community among fans. As Novak says, there is an “odd sort of camaraderie” among football fans. Thousands of people come together to root for one team; few of them know each other, but still they become a sort of family, one unit that feels happiness at their team’s success and sadness at their team’s defeat together. Michael Mandelbaum, in his *The Meaning of Sports*, talks about this community among fans, saying, “Emotional commitment to particular teams, which is part of a basic human tendency, the identification with larger groups, also helps to account for the emergence of organized team sports”²⁷ The feeling of belonging to a community accounts for one of the most basic human needs. Found in organized religion in the past, this need is now fulfilled by the religion of football.

The final fact of organized religion that is embraced by the religion of football is that of the ultimate religious festival. In most organized religions, there is a culmination festival at the end of the liturgical calendar. In the early days of humankind, these festivals were held to honor the gods. Today, similar festivals are held to venerate other sorts of beliefs. In the religion of football, there is a clear indication of the ultimate festival, the Super Bowl. In the football calendar, the Super Bowl is the culmination of

²³ Novak, Michael. *The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

²⁴ Novak, Michael. *The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit*. New York: Basic Books, 1976. Pg. 146-147.

²⁵ Ibid., Pg. 140.

²⁶ Ibid., Pg. 141.

²⁷ Mandelbaum, Michael. “A Variety of Religious Experience” in *The Meaning Of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football, and Basketball and What They See When They Do*. United States: PublicAffairs, 2004. Pg. 31.

the whole year. The entire season is spent in anticipation of this one night. It is a milepost by which Americans measure their lives. It celebrates the American values of success, opportunity, and money. As Thomas Lifson says, "People live differently afterward than they did before. Men, quite simply, have extra time for other activities, now that their weekend afternoons are free."²⁸ The rituals, pageantry, and myths of the Super Bowl elevate the event from simply a seasonal culmination into a religious festival.

The Super Bowl is more than just a culmination of the football season. Price discusses its importance to American culture, saying, "There is a remarkable sense in which the Super Bowl functions as a major religious festival for American culture, for the event signals a convergence of sports, politics and myth....The Super Bowl succeeds in reuniting these now disparate dimensions of social life."²⁹ The rituals of the Super Bowl create a connection between the past, present, and future, much like religious rituals make the same connections. Before the game, there is a time a remembrance of past heroes. They are honored as gods for their accomplishments on and off the field. After the game, there is the ritual of naming the Most Valuable Player.³⁰ Again, portrayed as a demigod, this person is lifted onto a pedestal to be worshiped by all fans. These rituals honor great men in the religion of football in the same way that festivals like All Saints Day or Ramadan honor the saints/god of their own religions.

The pageantry of the Super Bowl, through the elaborate shows during pre-game, half-time, and post-game, again lifts the Super Bowl out of the realm of an ordinary seasonal culmination to that of a religious festival. The great costumes worn and the shows put on create a spectacle of godly proportions. In ancient times, great performances like these were put on to honor the gods. Today, they are put on for the same purposes. The pageantry of the games also brings together a larger audience than might normally watch a football game. Like in Christianity, where one finds "Chriseaster Christians," in the religion of football, one finds the same type of followers that are there only for the spectacle and magnitude of the event instead of for their loyalty to the religion.

Finally, the myths that the Super Bowl carries with it give the event much greater significance than an ordinary seasonal culmination. The myths of American identity lie within this festival. First, the myth of Manifest Destiny is played out within the game. The object is to conquer unknown territory and bring order to it.³¹ American identity is based on this idea of conquering territory from one side of the country to the other. This is paralleled by the movement on the football field. The second great American myth within the Super Bowl is that of innocence. Through the half-time show, fans are able to turn from the violence of the game and escape into their fantasies.³² America is a nation built on the fantasies of freedom and success of its founding fathers and all those that followed them. The religious festival of the Super Bowl allows Americans to reconnect with these myths that are such a large part of the American identity.

²⁸ Lifson, Thomas. "The Sacred and the Profane." *The American Thinker*. 2003-04. http://www.americanthinker.com/articles.php?article_id=3381.

²⁹ Price, Joseph L. "The Super Bowl as Religious Festival."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Price, Joseph L. "The Super Bowl as Religious Festival."

³² Ibid.

As Mircea Eliade states, though technological society has negated the need for a “god,” people remain in need of myths. Since they can no longer turn towards religion, they must now turn somewhere else. In the case of the United States, this turn is towards American football. The myths of the sacred time and space that the game creates allow Americans an escape from the rigor of everyday life. It allows them to transcend their responsibilities into a place where fate rules. Within sacred time and space, anything is possible. Nowhere else in American life can one find such possibility. The myth of the players, and the community that is created among and around them, fulfills the basic human need to be part of something bigger than oneself. The players represent mythic heroes who once stemmed from religious tales, but now originate in fantastic plays and amazing come-backs. No matter if Americans need a “god” to turn towards, they will always want a role model to emulate, those which can be found on the field. Finally, the myths of the Super Bowl allow Americans a culmination of their values. Through the game, Americans relive their myths of manifest destiny and national innocence. The Super Bowl provides Americans with the pageantry, costumes, and festivities that no religion would be without. As Americans find it harder and harder to place blind faith in a “god” that they cannot see or experience, they search for somewhere else to put their faith. Through its connection with the values of their lives, Americans have now turned to football as their new universal religion.

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Counterfeit History: Myths, Untruths, and Omissions in American Historical Education

Aaron Fraver

In the United States of America, one of the most prominent and important subjects taught throughout elementary, middle, and high school is the subject of history. The subject, usually with an extra emphasis on American history, is introduced early on in a child’s school experience, commonly beginning with a lesson on the Pilgrims, Indians, and other early Americans. Historical figures such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr., are often discussed early on as well, giving a student a small introduction to the past. As the grades progress, a more global perspective of history is introduced. Finally, as a student reaches high school, he is presented with a more in depth look at American, European, and global history.

When a student reads, hears, or otherwise learns information in a history class, that student is likely to think that that information is correct. This is especially true when American students are being taught American history – they simply accept what their teachers tell them as being true, as they would have no reason not to. History is commonly viewed as “what happened in the past,” and that the study of history is merely a reporting on previous occurrences.³³ Unfortunately, this view of history is flawed. Truthfully, many students cannot really be held at fault for subscribing to this view, because that is how they are taught in schools. Beginning with the earliest levels of American education, teachers teach and students learn many myths, exaggerations, and untruths about American History.

The idea of American historical misinformation being taught in American schools is an intriguing one. To study this phenomenon, some specific myths that are taught are examined in this paper. What is actually written in the textbooks and taught by the teachers will be compared to the best historical evidence available. (I hesitate to use the word ‘fact,’ because it is quite rare that a piece of history of any sort of complexity can

³³ Davidson, James. *After The Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, fifth edition. McGraw-Hill, 1992.
p.XV

be described as being absolutely, irrefutably true.) Once some of these disparities between what is taught and what is evidenced to be true are examined, some possible theories concerning why these disparities exist will be looked at. These questions cannot be answered definitively, but rather theorized upon by looking at America's cultural traits and how they may influence our educational system. Finally, ideas concerning the effect of the teaching of myths, untruths, and exaggerations on our culture will be brought to light. Again, the question of what the effect is on American society cannot be answered specifically, as it is difficult to identify exact effects. This concept can certainly be theorized upon, though, and examined from a scholarly point of view.

One of the earliest pieces of history taught to children in schools is the story of Christopher Columbus and his brave adventure that led to the discovery of America. From the youngest ages, Americans learn of the hero Columbus, his knowledge of a round world when everyone else thought it was flat, his three ships and their perilous journey, and his discovery of a wonderful new continent that would later be home to the United States of America. More importantly, Columbus is not only a hero to schoolchildren, but a hero to Americans as a whole. It is likely that if you were to ask an average American citizen who discovered America, Columbus would be the name that most would come up with. Furthermore, he is celebrated in the United States with his own national holiday, the only person besides Martin Luther King, Jr. to receive this distinction, now that Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays have been combined into Presidents Day.³⁴ The problem with the way Columbus and the "discovery" of America is taught in schools is that it is oftentimes flat out wrong, and many negative and violent aspects of the encounters between Columbus and his men and the native peoples are either omitted, glossed over, or presented in a way that affords them no importance.³⁵

To begin with, I examined an American History textbook entitled *Our Country*.³⁶ This book, published in 1995, is an elementary-level text likely aimed at 4th or 5th graders. After a brief unit on the geography of the United States, *Our Country* begins the story of American history with a chapter on the Native Americans. This chapter consists of eighteen pages out of almost 700 in the whole book. Essentially, this short treatment relegates at least 12,000 years of human history (and possibly many thousands of years more)³⁷ to a brief, forgettable mention in the very beginning of the textbook. This portrayal of the native inhabitants of the land that is now America makes them out to be unimportant, perhaps preparing schoolchildren to accept their slaughter and displacement by the hero Columbus.

Conversely, Columbus himself is covered extensively: on the average, in American History textbooks Columbus is covered with around 800 words, many times with an accompanying picture or map.³⁸ This holds quite true for *Our Country*: Columbus is given five pages, five pictures, and a map.³⁹ So, to compare: in this elementary school text, the hundreds of diverse tribes that comprised the native

³⁴ Loewen, James. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. Touchstone, 1996. p.38

³⁵ Loewen, p.39

³⁶ Bass, Herbert. *Our Country*. Silver Burdett Ginn, 1995.

³⁷ Loewen, p.47

³⁸ Loewen, p. 38

³⁹ Bass, p. 120-124

inhabitants of America are given only a slightly greater consideration than the white, European man who “discovered” them. What do schoolchildren take away from this lesson? That for tens of thousands of years, an indigenous population of many different tribes and cultures was not relevant until it was contacted by a white man.

This slight presentation of pre-Columbian America is not limited to textbooks intended for a younger audience. Besides *Our Country*, I also examined *American History: A Survey*,⁴⁰ a textbook used in an Advanced Placement American History high school class in the 2000-2001 school year.⁴¹ The first chapter of the book starts off with a statement: “The discovery of America did not begin with Christopher Columbus.”⁴² Despite this disclaimer of sorts, the pre-Columbian Native Americans, the “true discoverers” of America, are given a mere nine pages out of an 1159 page upper-level textbook. Again, what is suggested in the early grades is reinforced in the latter: what happened in America before the arrival of Europeans is not important.

After taking an Advanced Placement course in high school, it is common for students to prepare for the end of the year test with a review book. *The Best Test Preparation for the Advanced Placement Examination in United States History*⁴³ is an example of one of these very books. In this test review, there is absolutely no information given regarding the peoples of pre-Columbian America. In fact, the title of the first review chapter is “The Colonial Period (1500-1763).”⁴⁴ This exam review, and the test that it prepares students for, again suggests that the Native Americans hold no importance. Furthermore, the exam review only encourages students to learn the history that is needed for the test, and nothing else besides that. A student may think: if the Native Americans are not covered in the AP test, why should I care about them?

The difference of coverage between Columbus and the Native Americans in history textbooks may not seem like a huge issue in historical education. True, while it is extremely important in the study of American history to include the native population, Columbus’s discovery did pave the way for European conquest and exploration, good or bad, of the Americas. While Columbus was not the first European to reach the Americas (the Norse most likely did around the year 1000),⁴⁵ his voyages were unquestionably important with regards to the changes that took place on the two continents in the last five centuries. As such, the major issue I have with Columbus is not how much he is presented in history lessons, but how those lessons actually portray him.

The historical evidence that Christopher Columbus led a campaign of murder and kidnapping against the Arawak Indian population of the island known as Hispaniola is strong. As soon as Columbus landed, he began his search for gold. He conscripted groups of Arawaks to find gold on the island of Hispaniola, and demanded that they find a certain quantity of gold every three months. When these impossible demands were not met, Columbus cut off the hands of individual Arawaks, allowing them to bleed to death.⁴⁶ When not enough gold could be found to fill the ships, Columbus and his men

⁴⁰ Brinkley, Alan. *American History: A Survey*. McGraw-Hill, 1999

⁴¹ McQuaid Jesuit High School, Rochester, NY

⁴² Brinkley, p.3

⁴³ McDuffie, et al. *The Best Test Preparation for the Advanced Placement Examination in United States History*. Research and Education Association, 1993

⁴⁴ McDuffie, et al. p.3

⁴⁵ Loewen, p.48

⁴⁶ Zinn, Howard. *A People’s History of the United States*. Perennial, 1980. p.4

resorted to taking the Arawaks as slaves.⁴⁷ When the Arawaks tried to resist this brutality, Columbus and his Spanish sailors ridiculously interpreted this as an act of aggression, and used it as an excuse to kill as many of the natives as they could. This genocide and enslavement of the natives, along with the suicide and infanticide practiced by the Arawaks to protect themselves from the brutality of Columbus and the Spaniards, led to the extinction of native peoples from the island of Hispaniola by the year 1555.⁴⁸

Obviously, this representation of Columbus is quite different than the one taught in schools across the United States. The historian Howard Zinn notes in his *A People's History of the United States*:

Thus began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas. That beginning... is conquest, slavery, death. When we read history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure – there is no bloodshed – and Columbus Day is a celebration.⁴⁹

Predictably, *Our Country* makes absolutely no mention of any sort of violence committed either by Columbus himself or under his command. Rather, it suggests Columbus belongs in “the Hall of Fame” for the history of early America. In the next chapter, the book does mention that the Spanish explorers who came with and after Columbus were “sometimes cruel,” but then later goes on to state that they “were some of the best conquerors in history.”⁵⁰ Whenever violence between Europeans and natives is mentioned, it is discussed in the sense of warfare between two armies, and never in terms of murder or genocide.

To its credit, *American History: A Survey* does not give Columbus the hero's treatment that pervades many of the perceptions about him. Rather, it simply gives a brief account of his voyages, and what he incorrectly thought he had discovered. On the other hand, as much as the text does not treat Columbus as a national hero, it makes no mention of any connection between him and violence either. The Arawak Indians are not given a word.

The myth of Christopher Columbus is a significant part of American cultural heritage. Believed by many to be the discoverer of America, it is unlikely that Columbus will be forgotten in the near future of the United States. He is truly a national hero, and an American icon. His status then begs the question: how should the history of this man be taught in schools? Currently, his actions are both glorified and ignored in the younger grades, depending on what actions are being discussed. It is inappropriate to teach a 2nd grader the explicit detail of Columbus's atrocities against the Arawaks. A wiser course of action might be to mention the fact that Columbus did kill many Indians. In high school, Columbus could be presented evenly and truthfully: as an important and significant explorer who paved the way for the Europeans in the Americas, and also as a man who committed and permitted many atrocities against fellow humans. Additionally, the history of Native America before Columbus should be presented in greater scope and detail, as the downplaying of one's history because of race can have important consequences.

⁴⁷ Loewen, p.62

⁴⁸ Loewen, p.63

⁴⁹ Zinn, p.7

⁵⁰ Bass, p.135

A more recent, and also very important, event in the history of the United States is the Vietnam War. Like the legend of Columbus and the story of the first European arrivals in the Americas, the story of Vietnam is one that is told in a skewed and oftentimes inaccurate way in American textbooks. In American popular culture, the veterans of most wars are treated as heroes. Schoolchildren learn of the quiet, strong leadership of George Washington during the American Revolution, the heroic battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, and the “Greatest Generation” that led our nation through the trying times of World War II. But what of Vietnam Vets? What do children in schools learn about what took place in Vietnam during the war, and how does the coverage of Vietnam compare to other wars? The two examined textbooks provide some interesting looks into how the Vietnam War is mythologized in American history classes.

It is a difficult task to present war to younger children. Surely, detailed atrocities and violence should not be discussed and depicted in the lower grades of elementary school. Still, war is an important and significant part of history, and it should in some way be made a significant part of the curriculum. Surprisingly though, the previously mentioned elementary school textbook, *Our Country*, makes almost no mention of the war at all. The Vietnam War is tucked away in one section of one lesson of the last chapter. A map of Vietnam is shown, along with a picture of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. The coverage of the entire conflict is limited to two pages.⁵¹ This compares to over twelve pages and multiple pictures covering WWII. Also, Christopher Columbus receives about two and a half times more coverage than Vietnam.

What might this suggest to young children? That the Vietnam Veterans’ contributions were not as important as the contributions of the veterans of World War II? That since the Vietnam War has not been considered a “success” for America, it should not be taught to young children? True, some things should not be taught to children of a certain age. It would serve no purpose, as they would not understand many of the atrocities that were committed in a situation like that of Vietnam. Conversely, it is not wise to teach children that the American military is invincible. This sort of shielding of important truths can set a dangerous precedent for the future.

American History: A Survey, the upper level history textbook, commits more pages to Vietnam than does *Our Country*. Proportionally though, their coverage of the war is roughly the same. *American History: A Survey* does not have a specific chapter or section on Vietnam. Rather, it spreads the information on the war out over two chapters entitled “The Ordeal of Liberalism” and “The Crisis of Authority.” Breaking up information on the Vietnam War is coverage of popular music trends, the election of 1968, feminism, and Latino worker rights. The text treats the war as more of a backdrop to the culture of the 1960’s and 1970’s than a major United States military action. Furthermore, the massacres and atrocities committed during the war are merely mentioned in passing, oftentimes in a paragraph with some other information.⁵²

Undoubtedly, the War in Vietnam was a very significant event in American history. However, the war is barely presented to younger students, and older students are be given the glossed-over version. Most importantly, these history texts do not mention the multiple atrocities committed by American forces, under direction of American

⁵¹ Bass, p.601-602

⁵² Brinkley, p.1047-1089

generals and American politicians. Howard Zinn gives an account of some of the fighting that likely few Americans have heard:

At the height of the war, 65,000 to 70,000 people were held and often beaten and tortured...American advisors observed and often participated. By the end of the Vietnam War, 7 million tons of bombs had been dropped on Vietnam, more than twice the total of bombs dropped on Europe and Asia in World War II...poisonous sprays were dropped by planes to destroy trees and any kind of growth – an area the size of the state of Massachusetts was covered with such poison.⁵³

While many Americans, especially the ones who lived through the Vietnam era, are aware of the atrocities that occurred there, the new generation of citizens needs to be educated in a truthful manner about Vietnam, so that the same mistakes made in that war are not made in later ones.

One of the best ways to convey a historical event is through the use of pictures. Pictures can bring alive what is described in the text, and make learning about an event seem more interesting and dynamic. Also, depending on what pictures are shown, an event can take on several different meanings. In *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, the author surveyed a number of older Americans and asked them what five photographic images tell the most about the Vietnam War. The five selected were: the Buddhist monk burning himself alive in protest of the war, the naked girl running away from the Napalm attack, the execution of a suspected Viet Cong sympathizer by the South Vietnamese police chief, the pile of dead bodies after the Mai Lai massacre, and the Americans fleeing the embassy before the fall of Saigon.⁵⁴

After identifying these photos, the author goes on to explain that he examined twelve secondary American History textbooks to see how they presented the war. Shockingly, only one single textbook out of the twelve includes one of the five photographs. Not only that, but none of the books he examined include a single shot of destruction inflicted by Americans, whether it be a civilian or a military target. The photos they do include are non-controversial, such as soldiers on patrol.⁵⁵ *Our Country*, the elementary school textbook, does not include any of the five photographs, nor should it. While the text is extremely lacking in its Vietnam War coverage, the aforementioned photos would be too intense for a younger audience. *American History: A Survey* includes one of the five pictures: the American embassy being evacuated.⁵⁶ Interestingly, this is the one picture that does not depict any violence.

While the Vietnam War was one of the largest and most significant wars in American history, it is not presented as such to American students. It is given limited coverage in both elementary and secondary texts, and the coverage that is given is glossed over, making the war look like just another event that was part of the turbulent sixties and seventies. It is a shame that this is so, as by learning about the mistakes of history, one can avoid repeating them, as the old saying goes. Years from now, school children who received a sub-par, edited, glossed-over education on Vietnam will be the ones who will be making the decisions that affect all Americans. Also, these children are

⁵³ Zinn, p.478

⁵⁴ Loewen p.241-245

⁵⁵ Loewen p.243-246

⁵⁶ Brinkley, p.1089

the future voters and responsible citizens of the United States. War, unfortunately, will likely be an issue that these people will have to decide on. Without adequate knowledge of the wars of the past, it will be difficult for them to make decisions regarding the wars of the future.

American culture is a complicated, diverse creature. It would be impossible to pin down exactly what about it describes why history is often taught in the aforementioned ways. However, the answer to this question can most certainly be contemplated and discussed. In their book *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*, authors Gert Jan Hofstede, Paul B. Pederson, and Geert Hofstede identify five distinct dimensions that can help explain what a culture is like. The five dimensions and their extremes, are as follows: Identity (Collective and Individual), Hierarchy (Large vs. Small Power Distance), Gender (Masculine and Feminine), Truth (Strong vs. Weak Uncertainly Avoidance) and Virtue (Long Term vs. Short Term Orientation.)⁵⁷ By looking at a few of these cultural traits and how they relate to the culture of the United States, some ideas can be drawn concerning why history is taught as it is.

Throughout the seminar, the class as a group decided which sides of the certain cultural dimensions apply to America. For the aspect of power distance, the class decided that America has a high power distance. For cultures that have a high power distance, the aforementioned authors argued that these were some of the key elements that these cultures shared: a respect for status, might makes right, power is good, and power, status, and privilege go together.⁵⁸ In the United States, it seems that these traits do indeed apply. Powerful people, such as the President and people with a large amount of wealth, are famous, respected, and looked up to. Powerful people are the ones who enjoy the greatest privileges. Keeping this in mind, it can be seen how America, having a high power distance relates to how history is taught.

To view this, let us turn back to the two previously mentioned examples. The story of Columbus and the European conquest of America is a perfect example of might supposedly making right. The Europeans were more powerful than the Native Americans, so it was apparently their 'right' to displace them from their lands. Because of their power, they enjoyed status and privilege, and should be looked upon highly for this. This view of the story plays directly into the ideas behind a culture of a high power distance. Possibly, this fact could explain why the story of Columbus is given so much positive coverage in American history classes and textbooks. He exemplifies perfectly what the culture of a high power distance is all about.

America being a society of a high power distance can also lend an explanation to its treatment of the Vietnam War. The story of this event in history is the opposite of that of Columbus: might did not make right, power ended up not doing any good, and the powerful entity in the story did not enjoy status and privilege. In Vietnam, the most powerful military in the world tried to exert its influence on a tiny nation halfway around the world, and failed. Of course, this mighty nation that failed is America. The story of American involvement in Vietnam runs contrary to the ideas of a large power distance

⁵⁷ Hofstede, et al. *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures* . Intercultural Press, 2002. p.92

⁵⁸ Hofstede, et al. p.98

society. This may be a reason why the Vietnam War is covered up and minimized the way that it is in American schools.

Another important cultural dimension mentioned in *Exploring Culture* is gender. For this category, the seminar decided that the United States was masculine, as opposed to feminine. Some aspects and values of a masculine culture are the importance of winning, conflicts being resolved by fighting, failing is a disaster, and material success and progress are to be admired.⁵⁹ In many ways, all of these traits are fairly consistent with those of America. The masculinity of American culture can also lend a possible explanation as to why American history is taught as it is.

Just like the story of Columbus and the conquest of the Americas fits right in with a culture with a high power distance, the story of Vietnam also conforms well to masculine cultural ideals. Winning is a concept that is stressed very much in American society. From young ages, children compete with each other in both athletics and academics, with an emphasis on being the best at the expense of others. Columbus, as viewed by a masculine society, was the ultimate ‘winner’ – he led an exploration that eventually led to the conquest of an entire continent. When confronted by a problem (the Arawaks), he used violence to solve it. His actions define what a masculine society, like America, supposedly values. Thus, it would make sense to teach the children about the exploits of someone who fits in so well with their society.

The story of America in Vietnam, of course, would be a shame to a masculine culture. While America did attempt to solve its problems by fighting, it was extremely unsuccessful. The war has been regarded by most as a failure, something that is totally unacceptable in a masculine society. No material success or progress was accomplished. In a masculine society, the authorities would want to teach the young about its successes, not its failures. A masculine society would trump up its victories, and play down its defeats. This is almost exactly what American textbooks have done with Vietnam. The idea that America shows traits of masculine society may explain its treatment of the Vietnam War in the classroom.

The way that a society teaches its young people about its past most certainly has a great effect on that society. A student’s opinion and view of his homeland can be shaped in a big way by the history that he learns in school. As such, those who control what is taught in history classes can greatly influence how much of the general American public views the nation. These people in power may want to impose a certain set of values and beliefs on the American public, and a good way for them to do so is by influencing impressionable children through the educational system. “Many of our stories personify the values we hold dear and exemplify the attributes we would like to possess.”⁶⁰ Therefore, these ‘stories’ that supposedly make up the history of America can serve to further the values and ideals of the people who teach them, rather than to educate the people about the history of their homeland. Of course, many times the values of the people in power will differ from the values of many Americans, and this is where the problem with teaching false history arises.

A significant effect that the teaching of mythologized history can have on the public is that it creates a false sense of patriotism. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, it seems that many people in America have become obsessed with the idea of being

⁵⁹ Hofstede, et al. p.100

⁶⁰ Raphael, Ray. *Founding Myths: Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past*. The New Press, 2004. p.92

a 'patriot' and 'patriotic.' After the attacks, American flags flew in places they had never flown before, and people all over the nation joined in 'supporting our troops.' The aforementioned ways that history is taught in America fit perfectly with this movement. Columbus was revered as a national hero, and to criticize him would be 'unpatriotic.' Just like the treatment of Vietnam in the textbooks, hardly anyone questioned whether the war in Afghanistan (and the many civilian deaths) was necessary. Children learned in school all the feel-good country-loving stories out of America's past, whether these stories were true or not.

The problem with this is that it creates a love for one's country on false pretenses. A stronger citizenry would be created by teaching the truth about America's past.

Although getting history wrong is bad enough in itself, it has further consequences. Our view of history shapes our perceptions of political processes, in the present as well as the past. It is through the study of history that young people first learn about politics and power.⁶¹

When a person learns history incorrectly, his knowledge of the way that people interact and live will also be distorted. This is dangerous for American society, as an educated and civically responsible citizenry is a key component of an effective democracy. If the American people want to continue to live in a free and democratic society, the population must be competent in the history of America, so that they can make informed and responsible decisions in the future.

While the teaching of a false history can create an uneducated, irresponsible population, it can also allow this population to be controlled by the powers that be. History can be constantly spun and twisted to tell the people whatever story that someone else wants them to hear. "Storytelling has become a science, not just an art, and is used audaciously to manipulate public opinion."⁶² This manipulation of the truth is both scary and dangerous. Since America's inception, one of the biggest fears of the American people has been an all-powerful controlling federal government. Through the teaching of their own versions of history, those who are powerful in the government can influence and control the American people in a big way.

In *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, author James Loewen notes how the United States is a highly stratified society, comprised of a wealthy controlling elite coupled with a general populace. In this theory that he discusses, Loewen shows how the wealthy elite (which includes the government) uses historical education to maintain this stratified society.⁶³

If members of the elite come to think that their privilege was historically justified and earned, it will be hard to persuade them to yield opportunity to others. If members of deprived groups come to think of deprivation as their own fault, then there will be no need to use force or violence to keep them in their places.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Raphael, p.273

⁶² Raphael, p.276

⁶³ Loewen, p.274

⁶⁴ Loewen p.274

While the bad intentions indicated by this theory may be a bit of an exaggeration, the results surely seem logical. When the idea of social status is repeated and ingrained into people throughout their lives, it is difficult to undo. The teaching of American history that promotes victories of the powerful and downplays their defeats will likely uphold social stratification.

The way history is taught in America can, in a way, be viewed as a vicious cycle. From the earliest days that history in America was taught, it was mainly the history of white males. As such, it would be the white males that would be most interested in history in school, and the white males that would be the most successful in that subject. In turn, it would be these white males that would become the next generation of historians and history teachers, educating the next crop of students in a way that they saw fit. “The way American history is taught particularly alienates students of color and children from impoverished families. Feel-good history for affluent white males inevitably amounts to feel-bad history for everyone else.”⁶⁵ This is not merely a politically correct protest of a slight injustice in education; rather, it is a serious problem for American society. Not only are many important and interesting parts of American history being left out of textbooks and classrooms, but a large number of possible historical contributors and scholars are being alienated from the field.

The way that American history is taught to American students in American schools is undoubtedly an important influence on contemporary society in the United States. By mythologizing and falsely teaching this history, the government, textbook companies and other influential leaders in the educational field have done America a great disservice. The teaching of American history in a truthful, honest, all-encompassing way allows a citizen to develop a love and appreciation for his country based on fact rather than fiction. The importance of history is noted by James Loewen:

History is central to our ongoing understanding of ourselves and our society. We need to produce Americans of all social-class and racial backgrounds and of both genders who command the power of history – the ability to use one’s understanding of the past to inspire and legitimize one’s actions in the present. Then the past will seriously inform Americans as individuals and as a nation, instead of serving as a source of weary clichés.⁶⁶

If this all-important history is taught in a way that does not reflect its reality, then the critical measures noted above will not be able to take place, seriously damaging American society.

Frederic Douglass once said, “He is a lover of his country who rebukes and does not excuse its sins.”⁶⁷ Up to this point, many American textbooks and classrooms have been excusing the sins of America, and not rebuking them. Students should not be taught to hate America because of the wrongs committed in the past, nor should they be taught to love America based on the omissions of said wrongs. Rather, students in the American History classrooms need to learn the truth about their shared past and heritage. When students know the truth, they can develop their own thoughts, feelings, and opinions about their homeland. This is a more favorable alternative compared to the idea of a false

⁶⁵ Loewen p.301

⁶⁶ Loewen p.318

⁶⁷ Loewen quotes Douglas from Robert Moore, *Reconstruction: The Promise and Betrayal of Democracy*

history begin taught to coerce students into thinking a certain way about America. When American history is taught in a truthful, balanced manner, then American students will truly be able to develop the freedom to become educated, democratic, responsible American citizens.

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