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A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

As director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics, it is my honor to present the 2025 Hinckley Journal of Politics. This marks the 26th edition of the Journal, showcasing the Hinckley Institute's continued pursuit of publishing exceptional academic research papers written by students at the University of Utah.

The Hinckley Journal of Politics was established in 1998 with the intent to share the superior research and writing of Hinckley students with a wider audience. Director Ted Wilson had been reading and grading the intern papers submitted each semester for over a decade, and had been struck by the excellence of the students' research and writing. With the encouragement of colleagues in the Department of Political Science, student leaders were selected to make the Journal a reality.

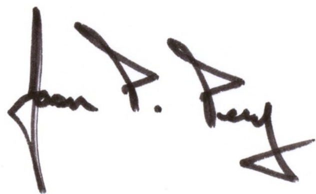
For the past 26 years, the Hinckley Journal of Politics has met its missions to "publish scholarly papers of exceptional caliber, promoting the intellectual talents and understanding of University of Utah students." The excellent research completed by our students highlights some of the major issues our state and nation are facing.

The Journal has always included contributions from community leaders as well. Each edition provides officials an avenue to highlight the policies and research they are focused on. This edition features articles from Noah Baskett, CEO of the Salt Lake City Public Library on the critical social role libraries play in building social infrastructure; John C. Downen, a senior researcher from the Kem C. Gardner policy Institute on Utah's preparation to host the 2034 Olympic Winter Games; and a Moving message entitled "Resilience and Resistance" by Darren Parry, University of Utah Visiting Professor and Former Chairman of the Shoshone Nation.

This publication was made possible through the diligence of the 2025 Journal editors Nayra Green, Aidan McMillan, Ella Sjoblom and their student editorial board members. We also recognize the University of Utah Political Science Department and the important contributions of our faculty editors and advisors Professors Tyler Pack and David De Micheli. I would also like to express my gratitude to the dedicated staff of the Hinckley Institute, particularly Alex Macfarlane, program coordinator, Brooke Doner, director of marketing, and Morgan Lyon Cotti, associate director, for their commitment and supervision of the publication.

Through the Hinckley Institute of Politics, University of Utah students are able to apply the practical politics they learn in the classroom to real world experiences. To date, the Hinckley Institute has placed and supported over 10,000 interns in offices throughout Utah, in Washington, D.C., and the world.

Sincerely,



Jason P. Perry
Director, Hinckley Institute of Politics
Vice President, Government Relations

A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

To Readers,

Thank you for reading the 26th volume of the Hinckley Journal of Politics. This past year, our team witnessed a pivotal presidential campaign, election, inauguration, and regime change, which altered our perceptions of politics and civic engagement. In particular, our editorial board and the authors who submitted work began to interpret rhetoric surrounding political engagement with a new scrutiny. We accordingly present four student papers that consider rhetoric in politics and examine the societal implications of that rhetoric and how we as people respond to it. These papers investigate how musical theatre is a valuable tool for capturing historical memory, how political revolutions can emerge from grassroot student activism and union organizing, how blending technocratic policy with populist messaging can tackle climate change, and how diversion programs in the criminal justice system are contemplated and implemented. Each of these papers adds to the growing conversation on rhetoric in political exchanges, and serve as vital instruction in a world where such rhetoric has to be handled with vigilance.

This unique opportunity to serve as co-editors of the Journal brought us closer as friends and introduced us to many other incredible members of the campus and broader Utah policy community. We would first like to acknowledge the unwavering support of the Hinckley Institute staff throughout the editing and publication process. Dr. David de Micheli and Dr. Tyler Pack, our faculty advisors, provided specialized expertise and detailed feedback that helped refine our student papers. We also thank Darren Parry, Noah Baskett, John Downen, and Nate Lloyd for their contributions to this edition of the Hinckley Journal as well as their exemplary public service to our state.

The Hinckley Journal of Politics would not exist without the countless hours of student work between our student authors and editorial board members. We congratulate the student authors we worked with, including those who were not ultimately published, for their dedication, creativity, and flexibility throughout the editing process. Finally, we would like to thank our student editorial board for their continuous engagement, attention to detail, and commitment to the Journal's mission this past year. Working with such talented peers greatly inspired us and we cannot wait to see what the future holds for them.

Many of the most profound and formative lessons we have learned over our four years as students at the University of Utah have come from dialogues with our peers and professors both in and outside of the classroom. We are proud to have crafted a journal that reflects the diverse perspectives of our campus, the insights of an emerging class of professionals, and the sentiments of a developing student body that have proved instrumental in our own academic journeys. As you read, our hope is that we can impart a comparable educational endeavor that made our experience at the University of Utah so impactful. If we can replicate this forum of thoughts and ideals together, then we feel confident that the research, argumentation, and perspectives present in this journal have real potential to provoke thoughtful discussions, self-reflection, and informed policy action.

Sincerely,

Nayra Green
Co-Editor

Aidan McMillan
Co-Editor

Ella Sjoblom
Co-Editor

EDITORS' NOTES

HINCKLEY JOURNAL OF POLITICS MISSION STATEMENT

The *Hinckley Journal of Politics* is one of the only undergraduate-run journals of politics in the nation and strives to publish scholarly papers of exceptional caliber from University of Utah students in the fields of politics and public policy as well as opinion essays from local, state, and national public officials. Contributing research articles and opinion essays should address relevant issues by explaining key problems and potential solutions. Student research papers should adhere to the highest standards of research and analysis. The *Journal* covers local, national, and global issues and embraces diverse political perspectives. With this publication, the Hinckley Institute hopes to encourage reader involvement in the world of politics.

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The *Hinckley Journal of Politics* welcomes research paper submissions from University of Utah students of all academic disciplines, as well as opinion essays from Utah's public officials. Any political topic is acceptable. The scope can range from University issues to international issues. Research papers should adhere to submission guidelines found on the *Hinckley Journal* website: hinckley.utah.edu/journal.

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Research paper submissions will be reviewed by the *Journal* editors, members of the editorial board, and faculty advisors. Submission of a research paper does not guarantee publication. Papers that do not adhere to submission and style guidelines will not be considered for publication. Acceptance to the *Journal* is competitive. The co-editors will notify potential authors when the decision has been made regarding which papers have been selected for publication.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC OFFICIAL OPINION ESSAYS

The *Journal* will consider for publication opinion essays written by national, state, and local public officials and community leaders. The opinions expressed by public officials are not necessarily those of the University of Utah, the Hinckley Institute of Politics, the Student Media Council, the editors, faculty advisor, or the Editorial Board. Officials should contact the *Journal* editors for additional information.

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ABOUT THE HINCKLEY INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

The Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah is a nonpartisan institute dedicated to engaging students in governmental, civic, and political processes; promoting a better understanding and appreciation of politics; and training ethical and visionary students for service in the political system. Robert H. Hinckley founded the Hinckley Institute of Politics in 1965 with the vision to "teach students respect for practical politics and the principle of citizen involvement in government." Since its founding, the Hinckley Institute has provided a wide range of programs for students, public school teachers, and the general public including: internships, courses, forums, scholarships, and mentoring. The Hinckley Institute places emphasis on providing opportunities for practical experience in politics.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

A nationally recognized program and the heart of the Hinckley Institute, the Hinckley internship program places more than 300 students every year in government offices, non-profits, campaigns, and businesses. The Institute provides internships opportunities to students from all majors for academic credit in Utah, Washington, D.C., and in more than 50 countries.

CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT MINOR

The Hinckley Institute of Politics is proud to offer one of the nation's only minors in Campaign Management. The program is designed to provide undergraduate students the opportunity to learn the theory and practices that will allow them to be effective participants in election and advocacy campaigns. Students are required to complete a political internship and an interdisciplinary series of courses in areas such as campaign management, interest groups, lobbying, voting, elections, and public opinion, media, and other practical politics.

PUBLIC FORUMS AND EVENTS

The Hinckley Institute hosts weekly Hinckley Forums where politicians, policy makers, activists, academics, and influencers address public audiences in the Hinckley Caucus Room. Hinckley Forums enable students, faculty, and community members to gain insight into and discuss a broad range of concepts on local, national, and international levels. Past guests include Presidents Bill Clinton and Gerald Ford; Senators Orrin Hatch, John McCain, Harry Reid, and Mitt Romney; Utah Governors Jon Huntsman, Jr., and Gary Herbert; Nobel Peace Prize Winner Suzi Snyder; Civil Rights Activist Dolores Huerta, and many other notable politicians and professionals. The forums are reaired on KCPW 88.3 FM and video recordings are archived on the Hinckley Institute website.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The Hinckley Institute provides more than $600,000 in financial support to students annually. The Hinckley Institute is also the University of Utah's representative for the Harry S. Truman Congressional Scholarship – one of America's most prestigious scholarships.

HUNTSMAN SEMINAR FOR TEACHERS

The Huntsman Seminar in Constitutional Government for Teachers is a week-long seminar sponsored by the Huntsman Corporation. The primary focus of the seminar is to improve the quality of civic education in Utah schools by bringing Utah educators together with political experts and visiting politicians to discuss current events in Utah and American politics. The Huntsman Seminar is truly a unique opportunity for teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of local and national political issues.

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Hinckley Institute values its relationship with the Department of Political Science. The Institute's programs provide students the opportunity to enrich their academic studies with experiences in practical politics, which complement the academic offerings of the Political Science Department. Courses are available in five subfields of the discipline: American Politics, International Relations, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, and Public Administration. If you have questions about the Department and its programs, please visit poli-sci.utah.edu or call (801) 581-7031.

ROBERT H. HINCKLEY

A man of vision and foresight, a 20th-century pioneer, a philanthropist, an entrepreneur, and an untiring champion of education and of the American political system—all are apt descriptions of Robert H. Hinckley, a Utah native and tireless public servant. Robert H. Hinckley began his political career as a state legislator from Sanpete County and a mayor of Mount Pleasant. Hinckley then rose to serve as the Utah director for the New Deal program under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Hinckley went on to serve in various capacities in Washington, DC, from 1938 to 1946 and again in 1948. During those years he established and directed the Civilian Pilot Training Program, served as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Air, and directed the Office of Contract Settlement after WWII. In these positions, Hinckley proved to be, as one of his colleagues stated, "One of the real heroes of the Second World War." Also in 1946, Hinckley and Edward Noble jointly founded the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), and over the next two decades helped to build this company into the major television network it is today.

Spurred by the adverse political climate of the '40s, '50s, and '60s, Hinckley recognized the need to demonstrate that politics was "honorable, decent, and necessary," and to encourage young people to get involved in the political process. After viewing programs at Harvard, Rutgers, and the University of Mississippi, Hinckley believed the time was right for an institute of politics at the University of Utah. So in 1965, through a major contribution of his own and a generous bequest from the Noble Foundation, Robert H. Hinckley established the Hinckley Institute of Politics to promote respect for practical politics and to teach the principle of citizen involvement in government.

Hinckley's dream was to make "Every student a politician." The Hinckley Institute of Politics strives to fulfill that dream by sponsoring internships, scholarships, forums, mentoring, and a minor in Campaign Management. Today, nearly 60 years later, Hinckley's dream is a reality. More than 9,400 students have participated in programs he made possible through the Hinckley Institute of Politics. Many of these students have gone on to serve as legislators, members of Congress, government staffers, local officials, and judges. All participants have, in some measure, become informed, active citizens. Reflecting on all of his accomplishments, Robert H. Hinckley said, "The Hinckley Institute is one of the most important things I will have ever done."

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS

“Willkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome”: *Cabaret* as a Case Study of Historical Memory in the 1960s and Present-Day America

By Hannah Salas
University of Utah

Abstract:
In a day and age where most Holocaust survivors have passed or will pass away from old age, questions of how best to continue Holocaust commemoration in a post-survivor century arise. It is crucial that those who did not experience the Holocaust first-hand contribute to memorialization efforts to ensure that survivors are remembered and honored long into the future and ensure that no such genocide happens again. Musical theatre is a severely underestimated medium that can be used to commemorate historical events as well as provide opportunities for audiences to reflect on the consequences of those events, including their own complicity in the present day. The 1966 Broadway musical Cabaret provides an excellent case study of this idea. Cabaret demonstrates that the power musicals have for commemoration is the direct result of their ability to reflect the social and political divisions of any given historical moment, including the present day. In the 21st century, Cabaret provides a unique medium through which to continue Holocaust commemoration because the form of a musical appeals to a wide audience, combats Holocaust fatigue by being shocking and different, and lends validity to the experience of survivors through the academic ideas of co-witnessing and postmemory. While the nationalistic, racist, classist and overall hateful dynamics that lead to genocide require more exploration to fully understand, Cabaret introduces the idea that these dynamics are ubiquitous regardless of geographic region, political system, or time period. Cabaret also serves the mission of Holocaust commemoration by explicating an allegorical warning. It argues that the same sociopolitical forces that enabled genocide in 1939 can resurface in any era – 1966, 2025, and beyond. Cabaret urges audiences to fight future genocides by teaching them to recognize the warning signs of rising nationalism, political apathy, and authoritarianism through the form of a musical.

Key words: Holocaust, historical memory, co-witnessing, postmemory, musical theatre, Cabaret, Harold (Hal) Prince, concept musical, historical allegory, 1960s America

“Those who convey the grand messages, they should have had the sensibilities of an artist…he is closer to the search for truth than the average person.”
- Avraham Kimmelman[1]

Introduction and Argument

“There was a Cabaret and there was a Master of Ceremonies and there was a city called Berlin in a country called Germany and it was the end of the world…” (Masteroff, Kander, and Ebb, 1998, p. 96). These are the closing lines of the 1966 Broadway musical *Cabaret*, a musical that illustrates the rise of the Nazi Party against the backdrop of a gaudy, glamorous Berlin nightclub. The “end of the world” refers to the unprecedented scale of the violation of human rights that occurred during the Holocaust that forced members of the global community to re-evaluate their role in protecting ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. While much work has been done since the 1940s to prevent future genocides and persecution, new challenges have arisen that call for innovative methods of historical education and commemoration. Holocaust survivors are continuing to pass away from old age, and soon first-person accounts will no longer be a viable option for carrying on the memory of the Holocaust. Additionally, intergenerational trauma often affects the second and third generations of Holocaust survivors, which can interfere with accurate historical

1 RG-50.562.0009, Oral history interview with Avraham Kimmelman, The Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, 396.

retellings (Hirsch and Kacandes, 2004). An excellent example of this is depicted in the graphic novel Maus, in which the son of two Holocaust survivors details his father's story of survival while also exploring what it is like to be a second-generation survivor.

It is crucial that those who did not experience the Holocaust first-hand contribute to memorialization efforts to ensure that survivors are remembered and honored long into the future and ensure that no such genocide happens again. This paper argues that musical theatre is a severely underestimated medium that can be used to commemorate historical events as well as provide opportunities for audiences to reflect on the consequences of those events, including their own complicity in the present day.

The Broadway musical *Cabaret* is one of the earliest examples of a work of fiction that tackled the subject of the Holocaust and fascism. It opened on Broadway in 1966, just 21 years after the Holocaust's official end. This paper demonstrates that the power musicals have for commemoration is the direct result of their ability to reflect the social and political divisions of any given historical moment, including the present day. The social and political turmoil of 1960s America due to the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement provided inspiration for the creation of *Cabaret*. The show was intended to force audiences to reflect on the rise of fascism in Germany that led to the Holocaust by acknowledging that the social and political dynamics that produce genocide are not limited to Nazi Germany. This socio-political adaptability demonstrates that musicals can be effective vehicles for historical remembrance. In the 21st century, *Cabaret* provides a unique medium through which to continue Holocaust commemoration because the form of a musical appeals to a wide audience, combats Holocaust fatigue by being shocking and different, and lends validity to the experience of survivors through the academic ideas of co-witnessing and postmemory.

This paper will begin by tracing the historical development of Holocaust commemoration from the 1940s to the late 1960s before diving into the history and message of the original Broadway production of *Cabaret*. Following a discussion of the plot, design elements, and

reviews of the musical, the paper will go on to examine how the ideas of co-witnessing and postmemory allow for *Cabaret* to be used as a unique tool of Holocaust commemoration both in the 1960s and the present day. The paper will end with a comparison of the three most popular versions of *Cabaret* and what they add to the discussion of commemoration before concluding that *Cabaret* is relevant to Holocaust remembrance and education in 1966, 2025, and beyond.

The Problem of Holocaust Fatigue

The Holocaust began in 1933 when fascist dictator Adolf Hitler was appointed to the German chancellorship and began implementing policies intended to purge Germany of all people that he considered undesirable. He imprisoned communists and political enemies, then Roma and Sinti people, homosexual men, disabled Germans, and murdered 6 million Jews through a system of concentration camps. This systematic, government-ordained genocide became known as the Holocaust, which officially ended with the liberation of the camps by the soldiers of the United States and Soviet Union in 1945. Perpetrators of this horrific violence were punished in the highly publicized Nuremberg Trials of 1945 and 1946. These trials exposed many Americans to the Holocaust for the first time and provided the basis for American public memory of the Holocaust. Prior to the trials, the majority of Americans did not fully understand what the Holocaust was, so this publicized exposure illuminated the need for Holocaust commemoration globally. In the following months, years, and decades, questions of how best to memorialize such a horrific event arose.

In the decades following the Holocaust, most historians considered firsthand experience to be the prerequisite for appropriate Holocaust literature out of respect to survivors. Thus, only the testimony of survivors and nonfiction accounts were accepted as a means of commemoration (Siertsema, 2022). For decades, American teachers integrated first-person memoirs and books like *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Night* into their curriculum, hosted Holocaust survivors at assemblies to share their stories, took students to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and taught from textbooks filled with images of the camps at liberation, all in the hopes that students would internalize the gravity of the Holocaust. Throughout the late 20th and early 21st century, the prerequisites for appropriate Holocaust material expanded to include works of historical fiction. Hollywood has found immense success in making movies about the heroes, villains, and victims of the Holocaust. Films like *Schindler's List* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* continue to be popular to this day, and this development in Holocaust remembrance opens the door for an examination of Holocaust fiction as well as nonfiction.

However, the American obsession with the Holocaust is beginning to desensitize the public to its implications. Historian Simone Schweber (2015) describes "Holocaust Fatigue" as the growing public apathy toward Holocaust memory caused by its overexposure in American culture. Rather than deepening historical understanding, excessive repetition risks making the Holocaust feel distant and impersonal. The public has received

so much information regarding the Holocaust that it is starting to lose its gravity. This fatigue is not limited to the Holocaust; it is a phenomenon that is portable in history. The topic of genocide has resurfaced continuously since the end of the Holocaust in 1945; the Cambodian genocide of 1975, the Bosnian genocide of 1992, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 all serve as reminders that genocide has not been limited to Nazi Germany. It can and has happened again. Even today, the conversation of genocide remains relevant, one reason being the decades long conflict between Israel and Palestine, though there are other examples that this paper unfortunately does not have the space to dive into. Because genocide is a crime that continues to reverberate as global violence continues, it is important that the Holocaust be remembered. To let the Holocaust fade into the past would mean acknowledging that there is nothing that can be done to prevent genocide. For decades, Holocaust survivors have implored the world to "never forget," and the cessation of remembrance efforts would not honor that. The global world must "never forget."

The Rise of Holocaust Commemoration in America

There are dissenting opinions about when Holocaust commemoration in America first began. Historian and diplomat Deborah Lipstadt (1996) argues in her article, "America and the Memory of the Holocaust, 1950-1965," that the American Jewish community barely considered the Holocaust in the wake of World War II, and she offers several explanations as to why this may be the case (Lipstadt, 1996). She argues that, for the most part, survivors felt that Americans had no interest in their Holocaust stories because the American people were full of a "can-do optimistic spirit" during the postwar era and felt that there was no need to focus on a traumatic event that seemingly had no connection to America (Lipstadt, 1996). While there were works of art that acknowledged the Holocaust published in the 1950s, including the play version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, these art pieces usually ignored the darker implications of the Holocaust and instead focused on the idea that good always prevails in the end (Lipstadt, 1996).

Lipstadt also reasons that Americans may have chosen to avoid active confrontation with Nazism in the 1950s and 60s because of the rise of Soviet communism and the Cold War. Germany provided a buffer state between Soviet communism and democratized Europe, and Americans did not want to provoke their only barrier to the perceived threats of communism by portraying the Germans as villains that murdered millions of people in the Holocaust (Lipstadt, 1996) Additionally, many American Jews found themselves depicted as communist conspirators by American propaganda and after the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Lipstadt argues that it was reasonable to expect American Jews to lie low and remain silent about the Holocaust Germany's guilt (Lipstadt, 1996). Lipstadt contends that it was not until after the Adolf Eichmann trial in 1961 that the Holocaust gained mainstream notoriety, and that it would take the Six Days War, the social unrest during the Vietnam War, the rising cultural awareness of different ethnicities, and the coming of age of the post-Holocaust generation for the American public to begin questioning what the Holocaust meant for them individually (Lipstadt, 1996).

Some historians like Hasia R. Diner argue instead that American Jews were very concerned with remembering the Holocaust post-World War II, but that the "colossal size" and "mammoth funding" of later Holocaust commemoration efforts overshadowed the smaller, more experimental efforts of the post-war generation (Diner, 2009, p. 17). In her book, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962,* Diner refutes Lipstadt's argument nearly claim-for-claim. She conducted research in the archives at the Center for Jewish History in New York City that memorialized the daily life of American Jews after World War II and found that the generation of Jewish Americans who lived through the Holocaust did create memorials of words, images, and music to honor the memory of the Jews who died (Diner, 2009). She found outpourings of artistic and creative endeavors including dances, dramas, pageants, poems, scholarly works, and graphic images that "recalled the painful loss" of the Holocaust and used the millions of deaths as a "rhetorical weapon" to affect American politics and hold the guilty accountable for their crimes (Diner, 2009, p.12). From Diner, we learn that some of the earliest Holocaust commemoration efforts began as artistic pursuits.

Not only does Diner research the subject of early Holocaust commemoration but she also examines why the 1960s was a turning point for Holocaust memory. 1960s America was a time of cultural revolution. The social environment of the 1960s preached, for the first time, that differences should not be made to subscribe to the mainstream culture, but that instead cultural differences and individual identities should be celebrated as long as they did not make demands on society as a whole. These new beliefs heavily affected the generation of young American Jews who had grown up far removed from their European origins and did not experience the Holocaust firsthand (Diner, 2009). This new Jewish-American generation felt a sense of pride in their heritage and culture; they created movements to experiment with new modes of worship, created new Jewish practices, supported Jewish day schools, and found new ways to fit their Jewish heritage into their communal lives (Diner, 2009). The generation of American Jews who were raised in the wake of genocide also had very different ideas about how to handle the memory of the Holocaust that their parents passed down to them. It was in this era of Jewish

reinvention and cultural destabilization that the musical *Cabaret* found its origins.

The Story of Cabaret

The story of *Cabaret* is based on the 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin* by Christopher Isherwood and the subsequent play adaptation of John Van Druten's *I Am a Camera*. Isherwood's novel contains a myriad of short stories that are loosely based on his time in Berlin during the twilight of the Weimar Republic[2] , and his stories reveal many of the attitudes of everyday Germans towards politics and the Nazi Party, Jews, homosexuals and sexual freedom, and the economic depression of the 1930s. *I Am a Camera* focuses specifically on the short story titled "Sally Bowles," in which main character Christopher Isherwood meets a chanteuse of the same name and details the story of their time together as roommates in the Nollendorfplatz in Berlin (Isherwood, 1966). It is from this short story that *Cabaret* takes its inspiration.

Cabaret tells two stories at once: the real-world story of the main characters Cliff Bradshaw, Sally Bowles, Fraulein Schneider, and Herr Schultz, and that of the musical revue hosted at the Kit Kat Klub by the character known only as the Emcee, which provides social commentary on the real-world story. The show opens with the Emcee welcoming the audience to the cabaret. We then meet Cliff Bradshaw, an American writer who arrives in Berlin to write his next novel and meets British chanteuse Sally Bowles, the star of the Kit Kat Klub. The two begin an ill-fated relationship. A secondary plot involves Fraulein Schneider, the German owner of the boarding house in which Cliff and Sally reside, and Herr Schultz, a Jewish fruit-shop owner. He and Fraulein Schneider begin a timid relationship, and at the end of Act 1, he proposes. At the engagement party, a friend of both Schneider and Schultz reveals a Nazi armband under his coat. From here, the show becomes more overt with its display of Nazi ideology, including explicit mentions of *Mein Kampf,* allusions to Kristallnacht[3], and discussions of politics among the main characters.

Act Two opens with a kick line in the cabaret, which quickly turns into a military goose step, demonstrating that Nazi ideologies have pervaded the seemingly untouchable world of the cabaret. Later, a brick is thrown through the window of Herr Schultz's fruit shop in an act of blatant antisemitism that is meant to resemble Kristallnacht. Schneider becomes afraid and breaks off the engagement under the guise that "one can no longer dismiss the Nazis" (Masteroff, 1966, 2;2;3). She is afraid to lose her business and livelihood, as many Germans were in the 1930s. In the next scene, Cliff neatly summarizes the message of the show in response to Sally's queries over "what [politics] has to do with us?" (Masteroff, 1996, 2;4;8). He says "can't you see - if you're not against all this, you're for it - or you might as well be" (Masteroff, 1996, 2;4;8).

This is the overarching message of *Cabaret* to American audiences. This attitude was commonly held in Berlin; politics were not seen as important to daily life, and so the Nazis came to power under everyone's noses and could not be stopped. Schultz comes to see Cliff off to America, and when urged to leave Germany, he states that "it will pass - I promise you…I know I am right! Because I understand the Germans…after all, what am I? A German" (Masteroff, 1996, 2;6;20). Unfortunately, this statement is an accurate reflection of the feelings many German Jews held at the time. Because Jews had been persecuted for centuries, many believed that this was just another instance of discrimination and not the beginning of an unprecedented massacre.

The ending of this musical is incredibly impactful and has been interpreted differently over time. In the 1966 production, the ending unfolds as a series of vignettes, with each character repeating their most memorable lines against a discordant version of the opening number. The Emcee delivers a chilling 'auf Wiedersehen' (goodbye) before vanishing, leaving behind an empty stage with only street lamps, the '*Cabaret*' sign, and a looming mirror. This ambiguous conclusion forces the audience into uncomfortable reflection, offering no clear resolution – only unanswered questions. Every choice made by director and producer Harold Prince, set designer Boris Aronson, and lyricist Fred Ebb was intentionally designed to create these questions and force the audience to reflect on the piece of theatre they had just seen.

The plot itself is a major indicator of what the production team wanted audiences to gain from this production. The fact that *Cabaret* is not actually a musical about the events of the Holocaust itself is a benefit for the use of this musical in historical commemoration in several ways. *Cabaret* makes no attempt to depict the ghettos, the concentration camps, or the killing of millions of people. Instead, it provides a glimpse into the lives of normal, everyday Germans during the rise of the Nazi Party. The imagery used in the musical is quite subtle; there are no shots fired, no characters killed, and Hitler himself makes no appearance like in other depictions from this time period. Stephen Skybell, the actor portraying the role of Herr Schultz on

2 The Weimar Republic is the democratic government that was created after the collapse of the German Empire post World War I, and lasted until the rise of Nazism in Germany in 1933.

3 Kristallnacht, or "The Night of Broken Glass" was a pogrom carried out by the Nazis against the Jews in 1938. It involved the physical destruction of many Jewish businesses and storefronts, including the smashing of windows, which is where the name comes from.

Broadway in the current 2024 revival, says "the thing that is so heartbreaking is that it [*Cabaret*] is not a Holocaust musical…it's a companion piece to what is going to happen" (Skybell, 2024). He goes on to discuss how *Cabaret* is important not because it depicts the death and horror of the Holocaust itself but because it demonstrates how the actions of the people living in Berlin at the time may have unconsciously enabled the Holocaust. It is a musical that tries to exhibit how there were signs of the Holocaust before it happened, but because many citizens in Germany chose to believe that Hitler and his politics would subside quickly, the Holocaust escalated into an unprecedented horror.

While *Cabaret*'s plot is about the rise of the Holocaust on the surface, and can therefore certainly be a means of Holocaust commemoration, *Cabaret* was actually intended to contemporize historical events for the political and cultural revolutions of 1960s America by conveying the message that the Holocaust was something that could happen again.

The Emergence of the Concept Musical

The concept musical was a style of musical created in the 1960s in response to the unrest caused by the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. This style of musical was not focused on the plot and characters alone as musicals had been in decades past, but instead was "governed by a central metaphor or statement rather than by the narrative itself" (Garebian, 2011, p. 19). *Cabaret* is widely considered to be one of the pioneering musicals of this particular theatrical style. Reflecting on the domestic turmoil of the 1960s, Harold Prince wanted a show that would force audience members to reflect on their own complicity in the events of the 1960s. He endeavored to remind Americans that events similar to the Holocaust could happen at home if they were not careful and politically active in the face of racial and political injustice. By using a story that is centered on the rise of fascism, Prince hoped to bring America's attention to the similarities between pre-war Berlin and 1960s America as a means to warn them that the events of the Holocaust were not limited to Europe. He enlisted the help of prominent set designer Boris Aronson to design a show that would enhance this directorial vision.

Boris Aronson's designs were intentionally created to provoke discussion and a sense of restlessness in American audiences. Instead of a classic theatrical set that featured a small town, a more abstract set took shape for *Cabaret*. In Prince's own words, "*Cabaret*, for one, was a black box with selective bits of scenery and one huge surprise…there was this waffled, wobbly funhouse mirror angled at the audience…and it's like saying 'that's your metaphor folks!'" (Prince, 2012, 40:19). Oftentimes audiences are much closer to the stage in a black box setting, and the stage is not elevated the way it is in a typical theatre. Prince and Aronson did not want there to be a distance between the audience and the action onstage; he wanted the audience to feel as though they were actively involved in the show to make the story come alive. Aronson's mirror design also contributed to this sense of audience participation by providing a literal reflection for the audience to examine their role in this show (Aronson, accessed 2024). The mirror elicits questions like, "If you were here, in 1939 Berlin, what would you have done?" Since *Cabaret* was intended to be a reflection of American society in the 1960s, perhaps the audience would have also asked themselves "what can we do differently as a society to ensure this doesn't happen here?" It was precisely these questions that Harold Prince hoped would surface from his new conception of a musical.

The unusual set and provocative plot warranted very mixed reactions from critics and audiences alike because they expected something specific from Broadway at that time that *Cabaret* did not deliver. These expectations are reflected in a New York Times review by famed theatre reviewer Walter Kerr, who raved about the show in every aspect but one. He complained that Jill Haworth is "essentially flavorless" and "neutral" in her portrayal of Sally Bowles and that because of her, the "tangled love story vanishes" (Kerr, 1966). This review reflects the expectations of musical theatre to have a beautifully talented heroine and a strong, manly hero who fall in love and live happily ever after. In several interviews, Hal Prince reveals that he intended to break this expectation by giving *Cabaret* a weak heroine and a throw away love story. By destroying societal expectations of what musicals should be, audiences were made to think more critically about the content, giving them the opportunity to find the deeper message hidden by the artistic team. For the most part, audiences seemed to understand this fact, but some did not go that far in their thinking and stayed stuck in the conventions of the American musical theatre of ages past.

To demonstrate this point, Harold Prince tells an anecdote of a woman asking why the theatre did not sell dolls of the Emcee in the lobby because she found his performance so charming, and Prince responded by asking "with or without the swastika?" (Prince, 2024). Some audience members were too caught up in the scintillating characters and boisterous Kit Kat Klub to notice what was going on behind the scenes. The democratic nature of the Weimar Republic led to freedoms and lifestyles that had never before been allowed to exist in Germany. When mixed with the chaos of the economic depression, Germans were blinded to the sinister reality that was unfolding before their eyes. This same thing was happening in America during the 1960s. The freedom of cultural, gender, and sexual expression was leaving Americans blind to the atrocities occurring overseas in Vietnam and at home in the South during the

Civil Rights Movement. The creative team of *Cabaret* wanted to emulate these sentiments onstage, and some audience members unintentionally proved the point that the opulence of daily life made normal people susceptible to massive political shifts that were later perceived as occurring overnight.

Postmemory and Co-Witnessing

Even though *Cabaret* may have been intended to force reflection on issues of civil rights and unjust warfare, it nonetheless contributes to Holocaust remembrance through the use of generational memory, co-witnessing and postmemory. Even though Holocaust survivors made efforts at remembrance in the wake of World War II, it is the second generation of survivors that came of age during the 1960s that brought Holocaust remembrance to the forefront of American consciousness. With this knowledge, it is important to examine the ways in which this commemoration evolved from survivors to the second generation.

In her book, *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust,* Professor Marianne Hirsch at Columbia University coined the term "postmemory" to identify "an intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, linked to cultural or collective trauma" (Hirsch and Kacandes, 2004, p. 14). In this case, the generational trauma experienced by the global Jewish community due to the Holocaust can be used as a form of second generation memory. She explores the idea that postmemory is a powerful and important form of memory because it does not rely on recollection, but instead relies on the "imaginative investment and creation" of the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22). This provides a new perspective of the Holocaust because it allows future generations of Holocaust survivors to interpret the events that occurred to their family members more creatively. The creative liberties that may be taken in this instance are more easily acceptable because the second and third generations still have direct ties to Holocaust survivors.

In her book *Being Contemporary*, German and Literature professor Irene Kacandes expands on the ideas of postmemory with regards to the Holocaust in her chapter titled "From 'Never Forgetting' to 'Post-Remembering' and 'Co-Witnessing'." Kacandes proposes the term "co-witnessing" to explain the phenomenon in which the victim of trauma uses a person who did not experience the trauma to communicate their memories through generations (Kacandes, 2016 p. 203). Her argument is that when a person who is outside of the traumatic event – in this case, the Holocaust – retells the story of a victim, they lend legitimacy to the trauma of the event itself and are often better able to express what happened (Kacandes, 2016). She also argues that using someone removed from the trauma actually helps to reinforce the tragic, criminal acts that occurred during the Holocaust. This idea of co-witnessing is instrumental to keeping contemporary memories of the Holocaust alive in a post-survivor century because it allows space for people who did not experience the Holocaust to tell the stories of survivors, whether that person be a member of the second and third generations, a completely removed scholar, or even a filmmaker, playwright, or director.

Cabaret lends validity to the experience of survivors through these ideas of co-witnessing and postmemory, particularly throughout the pre-Holocaust period. Harold Prince intended this show to be about the rise of the Nazi Party, and while he used the rise of the Nazi Party for other metaphors, the historical events described in the script are true. It is also important to note that none of the team involved with creating *Cabaret* are Holocaust survivors. While Harold Prince does come from a Jewish background, as does librettist Joe Masteroff, they are still telling this story from the point of view of someone who has only heard what happened through research and the words of others. In other words, the creative team behind *Cabaret* are co-witnesses to the atrocities of the Holocaust and are using the concepts of postmemory to convey the rise of fascism to their audience. Prince, Masteroff, Kander, Ebb, Aronson, and others lend legitimacy to the trauma of the Holocaust by choosing to retell the story of German Jews living during the Weimar Republic in hopes of expressing what happened from an outsider's point of view. Their work on this show indicates the pervasion of the Holocaust into the general American consciousness and marks a shift in the acknowledgement of the Holocaust as something that did not just affect Germany, but also the world.

While this kind of co-witnessing and postmemory may not be what Hirsch and Kacandes had in mind, it is still extremely important to give voice to what it was like to be a Jewish person living under the shadow of fascism. Herr Schultz in *Cabaret* provides a poignant picture of this, and because of him, audiences are made aware of just how subtly a phenomenon like the Holocaust began. The ability to identify the signs of a political takeover or of an unusual ideological shift are paramount to the prevention of future genocides. The creative team's use of co-witnessing and postmemory to focus on the rise of facism over the death camps further indicates the importance of this point, and demonstrates the usefulness of these two ideologies for contemporary Holocaust remembrance.

Cabaret as a Tool of Holocaust Commemoration

Musicals are in question as a medium of memory because they are often stereotyped as silly fictional entertainment pieces

that should not be taken seriously. In reference to the acceptability of fictional retellings of the Holocaust, author and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote that "'a novel about Majdanek [a concentration camp] is about blasphemy. Is blasphemy'" (Wiesel, 1990, p.7). While this quote is specifically referencing novels, it nonetheless demonstrates that oftentimes, works of fiction are seen as entertainment rather than as educational or informative, implying that stories of the Holocaust have no place in a genre that seems to be written purely for entertainment. However, *Cabaret* does not seek to depict the Holocaust in a whimsical way, but instead hopes to illustrate the actions and consequences that led to the Holocaust by creating an atmosphere similar to that of the Weimar Republic in musical form. This avoids any reinterpretation of the events of the Holocaust while still implying what is going to happen in a unique format. In contrast to Elie's Wiesel statement on works of fiction being blasphemous, many survivors of the Holocaust have instead stated that "dance, choreography, music composition, painting, and poetry all lend themselves beautifully to the interpretation of the stories," that is, of the stories of Holocaust survivors (Child Survivors of the Holocaust, 2011, p. xvii). Holocaust survivor Avraham Kimmelman says that works of Holocaust commemoration "require a certain class…I'd say, requires artistic sensibility" in order to convey information about the Holocaust without leaning too far into the morbid curiosity that can be seen as dishonoring the memory of those who passed. *Cabaret* uses a stylized, artistic framework to explore the beginnings of the Third Reich accurately and respectfully while still providing room for audience interpretation and reflection.

Musical theatre as a form of remembrance also speaks to the mainstream commemoration of the Holocaust. Theatre and the arts appeal to a wide audience, as exemplified by the reviews and the long-term success of the show. This means that many people will be exposed to the story of the Holocaust in a manner that forces reflection and empathy, instead of simply evoking sadness or disgust. Musical theatre demonstrates that Holocaust commemoration does not need to be limited to factual retellings to have an impact; in fact, reviews of *Cabaret* praise the musical for its massive impact on the general public. These reviews applaud the show for its ability to "treat a serious theme within the framework of musical comedy," (Mootz, accessed 2024), and emphasized the fact that it "accepts the premise that mature themes aren't inimical to the musical genre" (Gilman, accessed 2024).

Beyond a musical's ability to appeal to a wide variety of people and its use of art to tell a serious story, the intimacy that a theater provides is another unique feature that strengthens its ability to be used as a tool of commemoration. There is less separation between an audience and a performer than between an audience and a film screen or a reader and a book. Audience members are meant to feel as though they are part of the story, which allows for a much more visceral experience. It is much harder to ignore the real people taking part in the story because the real people are alive and in the room. It is also hard to create an immersive Holocaust experience without encountering the problem of what images are too horrific to present. *Cabaret* creates an immersive experience that gives the audience enough of a clue towards what happens next without being overly gruesome and violent. In a day and age where Holocaust fatigue is a problem, utilizing a method of communication the public has never experienced before is something to be praised.

Cabaret flips the narrative that musicals do not have the ability to tell serious, impactful stories and illustrates that musicals can successfully convey important messages. Musicals automatically require extreme suspension of disbelief; the audience knows that singing and dancing does not happen in real life. Therefore, a musical has the potential to challenge the traditional boundaries of storytelling because audiences must already accept the possibility that this is a world where anything can happen. The fact that musicals are easily dismissed and seen as mere entertainment is precisely why musicals are so important. Musicals fly under the radar, capture the attention of audiences, and ultimately succeed at introducing a wide variety of people to their themes and lessons. The supposed weaknesses of a musical are in fact its strengths.

Despite all of these caveats, *Cabaret* may still seem like an odd choice to memorialize the Holocaust since the plot concerns the rise of fascism instead of the ghettos, concentration camps, gas chambers, and death marches that were so central to the Holocaust. However, it is the absence of all these things that makes *Cabaret* so effective as a tool of memory. The focus on the rise of fascism means that the story is politically applicable to numerous scenarios since the Holocaust and will continue to be relevant as the world remains vigilant against the tell-tale signs of fascism.

Actor Joel Gray, who debuted the role of the Emcee in the original Broadway production in 1966, recently wrote an opinion piece for the New York Times titled "I Starred in '*Cabaret*.' We Need to Heed Its Warning." In this piece, Gray revisits the creation of *Cabaret* as a response to the turmoil of the 1960s and recounts his reactions to audience responses. More importantly, however, he ties the message of *Cabaret* to the present day. The piece closes with a discussion on the election of President Donald Trump and how his second term has left many Americans either feeling as though "they have seen this show before" and know how it ends, or that this election will not affect their day to day lives (Gray, 2024). While this paper does not have the time or space to dive into the intricacies of modern-day American politics, the policies of President Trump, or the varied political opinions of the American public, it is worth noting that there are many in America who believe that the events depicted in *Cabaret* are about to unfold again. There is again a belief that, just like in the 1960s, Americans have fallen

into a "velvet enrobed sense of security" that will inevitably leave the public surprised by the outcome of forthcoming events, even though it is a story that has played out many times before (Gray, 2024). Gray's piece reminds Americans yet again that the story of *Cabaret* is just as relevant to the events of 2025 as it was to the events of the 1960s, and as it will inevitably be relevant again in the future.

Differing Interpretations

Each revival brings its own interpretation to the story of the Holocaust and chooses to focus on different aspects of the production. The 1998 Broadway revival, directed by Sam Mendes, focused on creating a show with massive shock value. The Emcee in this production is less mechanical and doll-like. Instead, he is charismatic, seductive, and provocative. He opens the show by throwing off his trench coat to reveal a raunchy costume that matches that of the nightclub performers (Envy-Central, 2024, 1:46:33). He carries the audience and the characters throughout the show in the same way as the original, but instead of simply running away at the end of the show, he repeats his opening striptease to reveal a concentration camp uniform with three stars: yellow for Jew, red for political enemy, and pink for homosexual. This directorial choice is the complete opposite of Harold Prince's original character design of a Nazi-sympathizing Emcee, but was equally effective. A New York Times review states that Mendes' Cabaret is "seedier, raunchier, and more sinister…it wants nothing more than to shock" (Brantley, 1998, pg. 67, 96). This particular review paints the 1998 revival in a negative light, arguing that the shock value makes the production less effective. However, the shock value of this production does the exact opposite.

There is no room for debate that this version of Cabaret is about the Holocaust. It plays into the idea that many Jewish Germans did not particularly stand out from their surroundings because of their ethnicity. Many people could not even tell a Jewish German from an Aryan German. The Emcee hid himself in his job, and ultimately was not successful. This throughline provides the audience with an opportunity to reflect on the reality of the Holocaust and the people it affected; there is no room to question what the musical is trying to convey. The fictional tale of Sally, Cliff, the Emcee, and others is an effective tool that forces audiences to remember the Holocaust because they have to stare at its consequences right in front of them on a stage. The version of Cabaret that is currently on Broadway pays homage to the original 1966 and 1988 versions, albeit more subtly than the darker Mendes revival. The set design, costume design, and directorial differences aspire to put audiences into the world of the Kit Kat Klub in a much more immersive way than the 1966 and 1998 versions, which again provides a new way to remember the Holocaust. The theatre is usually set up as a proscenium stage, but has been renovated for Cabaret to be performed in the round to ensure the audience feels as much a part of the show as possible. The actors interact with the first few rows of audience members, and even pull a few up on the stage after intermission. The whole experience is so distracting and disorienting that it becomes easy to forget the serious plot contained within the spectacle. However, the absolute spectacle of this show serves as a reminder to audiences that getting too caught up in the distractions of society means that they are not paying attention to the sinister plot unfolding behind the scenes. The Emcee helps to lull the audience into a false sense of security with his opening lines: "Leave your troubles outside…in here, life is beautiful!" (Masteroff, 1998, p.6). And in the 2024 production, life is beautiful for both the audience and the characters, at least for a little while.

The 2024 production focuses on the individual journeys of each character, even those in the ensemble, and paints them in a fun-loving, carefree way. In the opening number, the Emcee dons a party hat, introduces each character by name, and attaches each of them to a personality trait. We follow every character through the plot of the show, and slowly, Nazi ideology creeps in. Actor Stephen Skybell says that the director was intent on not "bathing the stage" in Nazi emblems, so there is only the Nazi armband and a small Nazi flag in one of the dance numbers, but the Holocaust imagery is present in many other ways (Skybell, 2024). The most notable change in staging is present in the scene in which a brick is thrown through the window of Herr Schulz' fruit shop. At the beginning of Act 2, the Emcee, as a background character, silently wraps a glass cup in a white napkin, and steps on it to trigger the sound effect of glass shattering in a nod to a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. As the glass shatters, small pieces of white paper drift from the rafters and remain on the stage and in the audience for the rest of the show. This imagery is meant to directly evoke Kristallnacht, and the audience is not allowed to forget what happened because the paper shards of "glass" remain. Immediately, the audience is taken out of the transcendent Kit Kat Klub, never to return. They must now face the reality of the rise of fascism onstage, and must also face the reality that they themselves were just as easily distracted by the magnificent Weimar Republic as the Germans were. The ending of this version is much more subtle, and ends with all the colorful, individual characters of the Cabaret standing together in a circle, all wearing the same gray suit, with no differentiating features whatsoever.

When asked about the director's theme for this production, Stephen Skybell said, "the journey goes from the individualistic liberation of Weimar Germany, [but] by the end, we're circling in the same suit; all made monolithically the same" (Skybell, 2024). The Nazi regime essentially forced all Germans to look,

think, and act exactly alike. Those who were different were not accepted. This production contributes to Holocaust remembrance by allowing audience members to experience what it may have been like to be blinded by the freedom of the Weimar Republic, only to wake up one morning and realize that they did not see, or did not care, about the regime change taking place. Much the same as the 1966 Cabaret, its meaning is twofold: it promotes Holocaust remembrance for the sake of Holocaust remembrance, but also serves as a warning to Americans to see through the distractions. Otherwise, a similar fate could be waiting.

Conclusion

All three versions of Cabaret are examples of innovative works that have contributed to the commemoration of the Holocaust, and have successfully reflected American society through the theatre. All those associated with Cabaret can be considered co-witnesses to the tragedy of the Holocaust. They have willingly taken on the responsibility of sharing what pre-war Berlin and the build up to the Holocaust looked like to ensure that American audiences do not forget what happened. They carry on the legacy of Holocaust survivors by sharing stories about their lives before the war. Cabaret does not attempt to describe the death and destruction of the Holocaust and does not rely on gruesome images to captivate the audience. By choosing to only allude to the events of the Holocaust, Cabaret shows respect to survivors by allowing that to remain their personal experience to tell, and instead it does what it can to prevent genocide from happening again by providing the audience with a depiction of the subtle warning signs.

Cabaret demonstrates that musicals have the power to adapt to whatever society needs to hear at the time, while simultaneously commemorating tragedies like the Holocaust in a respectful, meaningful way4. The fact that musicals are easily dismissed and seen as mere entertainment is precisely why musicals are so important. Musicals fly under the radar, capture the attention of audiences, and ultimately succeed at introducing a wide variety of people to their themes and lessons. The supposed weaknesses of a musical are in fact its strengths.

By examining what happened in the shadow of the Holocaust, *Cabaret* provides a way for audiences to see and remember how this genocide was enabled, and also provides a mode of self-reflection (Skybell, 2024). At the time of *Cabaret*'s creation in 1966, American society needed a reminder that complicity in racist, hateful, and murderous politics was not limited to the Nazi regime in Germany. In modern day America, *Cabaret* serves as a reminder to be aware that the freedoms of democracy can make citizens blind to subtle yet catastrophic political shifts like those that occurred in Nazi Germany. Those freedoms can and have been taken away in an instant. The nationalistic, racist, classist and overall hateful dynamics that lead to genocide require more exploration to fully understand, but *Cabaret* introduces the idea that these dynamics are ubiquitous regardless of geographic region, political system, or time period. Beyond commemorating the Holocaust, *Cabaret* serves as an allegorical warning. The same sociopolitical forces that enabled genocide in 1939 can resurface in any era – 1966, 2025, and beyond. It urges audiences to recognize the warning signs of rising nationalism, political apathy, and authoritarianism before history once again repeats itself.

4 This paper does not have the space to fully discuss other musicals and the societal needs they meet, but I did want to provide a few more examples for anyone interested in further research. A popular example of the 21st century is Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton, which revitalizes the story of America's beginnings by using hip hop music and a leading cast of actors of color to juxtapose America's ideals with the people America did not initially include. The lesser-known musical Urinetown provides a comedic yet poignant commentary on capitalism, Fiddler on the Roof is another musical that comments on the Eastern European Jewish community before the Russian Revolution, and the musical Spring Awakening forces reflection on what should be taught in schools. There are many more examples, but these are just a few musicals that show how varied the message of a musical can be.

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The Political Foundations of the Sandinista Revolution

The Organizational and Community Efforts that Paved the Way for a New Nicaragua

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Abstract:

This paper examines the political foundations of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN) and the broader Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, emphasizing the pivotal roles of university activism, labor union efforts, and Ecclesial Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, CEBs). This paper argues that these grassroots efforts were instrumental in forging a cross-class coalition that provided the ideological and structural support necessary to solidify the foundation for revolutionary success. Through a synthesis of historical records and existing scholarship, this study demonstrates how grassroots organizing, ideological development, and strategic alliances enabled the Sandinistas to consolidate mass support and ultimately overthrow the authoritarian Somoza dynasty in 1979.

Key words: Coalition-building, Latin America, comparative politics , Nicaragua, revolution, cross-class , foreign policy, imperialism

Introduction

By the mid-twentieth century, the colonial city of León had become a cultural and intellectual hub in Nicaragua. The city is also home to The National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, UNAN), where one of the first major national student strikes in Nicaraguan history originated. As opposition to the tyrannous Somoza regime grew, UNAN became a focal point of student activism, contributing to the broader revolutionary movement. These early mobilizations exemplify how grassroots efforts—particularly among students, labor organizers, and rural communities—can challenge entrenched authoritarian rule and shape the trajectory of political transformation. Following the assassination of President Anastasio Somoza García in 1956—a key member of the authoritarian Somoza family dynasty—the government intensified its repression. The area surrounding UNAN was transformed into a militarized zone, where hundreds of students were detained. This crackdown underscored the regime's increasing reliance on force to silence dissent.

In 1958, just a year before the Cuban Revolution, students across Nicaragua mobilized in response to the Somoza regime's refusal to release their imprisoned peer, Tomás Borge. These protests coincided with UNAN gaining institutional autonomy, a development many students believed would create a space free from government intervention. However, this belief was shattered when the National Guard violently repressed peaceful demonstrations, killing four students. This act of state violence served as a stark reminder of the regime's unyielding grip on power and its willingness to suppress opposition. The university-led protests and nationwide strike in León, while not immediately achieving all their objectives, catalyzed a broader revolutionary movement that would shape Nicaragua's political trajectory. These protests underscored the potency of student activism as an impetus for mass mobilization, demonstrating how youth-led dissent can generate broader political consciousness and sustain long-term resistance (Rueda, 2019). Over the next two decades, the persistence of economic inequality and state repression under the Somoza regime exacerbated grievances across multiple sectors of Nicaraguan society, fueling the momentum of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) (Merrill, 1993).

The eventual success of the Sandinista revolution was rooted in three primary pillars: the grassroots organizing efforts of the Ecclesial Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, CEBs), the mobilization of labor unions, and sustained student activism. The CEBs, influenced by Liberation Theology, provided a moral and ideological framework that connected political struggle with religious and social justice imperatives, thereby expanding the movement's legitimacy among rural populations (Sawchuk, 1997; Williams, 1985). Meanwhile, labor unions served as crucial sites of resistance, threatening economic disruption to challenge the regime's authority (Brentlinger, 1995). As observed in León, university activism functioned as both an incubator for radical political thought and a strategic space for mass organizing, helping to bridge ideological divides between middle-class intellectuals and working-class revolutionaries (Rocha, 2018).

From a broader theoretical perspective, the Sandinistas' success exemplifies how revolutionary movements coalesce through cross-class coalition-building. The FSLN's ability to integrate disparate social sectors into a unified front highlights the role of collective identity and framing processes in mobilization (Polletta, 1999). This case also reflects Latin American patterns of contentious engagement, where prolonged political repression paradoxically fosters heightened political participation, particularly when state violence delegitimizes existing institutions (Moseley, 2015; Eckstein & Merino, 2001). Ultimately, the overthrow of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979 was not simply the result of spontaneous rebellion but a structured, multi-decade movement in which students, laborers, and religious communities played vital roles in dismantling entrenched authoritarian power.

Nicaragua's Neocolonial Struggles

Since the Spanish conquest in 1522, Nicaragua has been shaped by colonial domination, imperial ambitions, and resistance. While the nation officially gained independence in 1838, it remained subject to foreign influence, particularly from the United States, which saw Central America as a strategic military region. The legacy of conquest, manifest destiny, and imperialism defined Nicaraguan politics for centuries, laying the groundwork for later conflicts and resistance movements. Less than a century after establishing an independent republic, Nicaragua became a focal point of United States intervention during the Banana Wars (1898–1934) (Livingstone, 2013). As part of its broader strategy to secure influence in Latin America, the United States occupied Nicaragua to maintain regional stability, defend the flanks and sea routes of the Panama Canal, and safeguard the potential Nicaraguan canal route (Delgadillo, 2004). However, the United States' military presence was met with fierce resistance, particularly from the Nicaraguan revolutionary Augusto César Sandino.

Born in Masaya, Nicaragua, Sandino was shaped by his experiences as a laborer and his exposure to socialist and nationalist ideologies while working in Mexico's oil industry. Inspired by the revolutionary climate in Mexico, he returned to Nicaragua and organized a guerrilla resistance force against the United States Marines occupying Nicaragua. His movement gained international recognition despite betrayals and scarce resources, prompting the United States to escalate military efforts against him. After years of resistance and political betrayals, Sandino traveled to Managua to negotiate with President Juan Bautista Sacasa (1933–1936) and military leader Anastasio Somoza to release his captured men. Instead, the National Guard ambushed and executed him and his forces. (ViaNica, 2023). Though his life ended in assassination, Sandino's ideology endures, inspiring Nicaraguan revolutionary movements, including the FSLN, which honors him as a symbol of resistance.

Nicaragua Under Somocismo

The successful 1936 coup staged by Somoza and the National Guard—a force created and trained by the United States Marines—marked the beginning of one of Nicaragua's most oppressive family dynasties. That December, Somoza won the presidency through a blatantly fraudulent election which the United States government nonetheless recognized. However, securing political power was just the first step; Somoza strategically revised the Nicaraguan constitution to maintain his rule, consolidating power and ruling directly or through puppet presidents for the next two decades (Britannica, 2023). Two key pillars upheld the Somoza regime: the National Guard and the backing of the United States (Booth, et al., 2014). The 'Somoza Boys' knew how to secure the American's continued support; "[t]hey expertly cultivated Americans. Each was educated in the United States, spoke fluent vernacular English, and knew how to be a 'good old boy' among ethnocentric, often homesick North American diplomats and visitors" (Booth et al., 2014, p. 99). This close relationship ensured continued military and financial aid for the Somoza regime, reinforcing its grip on Nicaragua.

Beyond diplomacy, the Somozas strategically aligned themselves with American military interests. By allowing Nicaragua to serve as a staging ground for multiple CIA-led operations, including invasions of neighboring countries, and offering military support when requested, the regime secured unwavering American protection. The infamous quote attributed to Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch," encapsulates the United States government's attitude toward the dictatorship (Drum, 2022). For almost half a century, the Somozas seemed invincible. The

National Guard was loyal to and always overseen by a Somoza. For many Nicaraguans, it felt as though no matter where they turned, the hand of the Somozas was present.

The Somoza dynasty was not just a political dictatorship but also an economic empire. The family and its close associates controlled vast amounts of Nicaragua's wealth, including sugar plantations, coffee haciendas, ranches, car dealerships, factories, radio stations, newspapers, and financial institutions (Sierakowski, 2019). Political power was intricately tied to economic privilege, as Somoza loyalists were rewarded with public lands, government contracts, and limitless access to credit. However, those outside the regime's inner circle faced a starkly different reality. While elites thrived, working-class Nicaraguans had only poorly paid employment and lived under an arbitrary legal system that served the interests of the ruling class (Sierakowski, 2019). Somoza's associates shamelessly acquired the land and resources of the working class. Sierakowski (2019) states that "[o]ver the long years of the Somoza dictatorship, local landowners consistently used their political office to gain access to previously public lands, such as municipal lands or Indigenous community holdings" (p. 28). By erasing the legal legitimacy of indigenous land claims, the government ensured that landowning elites remained loyal while deepening social and economic inequalities across the nation.

Apart from economic exploitation, the regime also embedded a culture of political subjugation and social control in Nicaragua. Each election was a charade with the sole purpose of legitimizing Somoza's regime. The regime also embedded harmful aspects of masculinity into the core of Nicaraguan society by embracing, rather than challenging, the existing issues of widespread alcoholism, gambling, and domestic violence (Sierakowski, 2019). The regime approached each election strategically by reinforcing the poor conditions and subservience of the Nicaraguan people. During election cycles, the regime took advantage of these conditions to manipulate voters through "celebratory" giveaways of cash, food, and guaro (alcohol) by regime agents (Sierakowski, 2019).

The National Guard's unchecked power also contributed to growing resentment. Functioning as a lawless entity, the National Guard was involved in widespread illegal activities, including excessive violence, prostitution, and gambling rings. Discontent with the regime spanned all social classes, from campesinos to the middle class and student groups. Despite their unpopularity, the Somozas' 40-year rule appeared unshakable throughout much of the regime's history. Nonetheless, even during the many years of Somocismo, organizational efforts across the nation began chipping away at the foundations established by the Somozas. Amid growing discontent and repression, universities—especially UNAN—emerged as critical spaces for political organizing, where student activism began to challenge the foundations of the Somoza regime.

University Activism & Political Opportunity

Since its founding in 1812, the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in León has played a key role in Nicaraguan culture, society, and politics. In 1958, Luis Somoza sought to project an image of democratic reform and decentralized power by granting UNAN full autonomy. This decision unintentionally fostered new free spaces—small-scale environments within communities or movements that operate beyond the direct control of dominant groups (Polletta, 1999). Political scientists often view such openings—however limited—as crucial moments of opportunity within authoritarian regimes, where state concessions can inadvertently empower dissent. Nicaragua was one of the last countries in the Americas to establish an autonomous university, reflecting the political and regional context to which Somoza was attempting to adapt (Rueda, 2019). By appointing non-family members like René Schick as Minister of Education and Mariano Fiallos Gil as UNAN's rector, Luis Somoza sought to maintain a democratic façade using educational reform. Regardless of Somoza's true intentions, these moves allowed UNAN students to exchange ideas and organize politically. The Somoza regime also viewed UNAN's autonomy with suspicion, accusing students of espionage and showing little respect for their independence.

While UNAN's autonomy and the 1953 Cuban Revolution's victory fueled political mobilization, particularly among students, university protests in Nicaragua had begun earlier. Before 1951, the country had another university—Managua's Central University, founded by Somoza García in 1941. Despite his investment, students there organized against his regime, nearly overthrowing it. As a result, the university was shut down after just five years. Reflecting on this, Somoza remarked, "I had two daughters during my government: the Military Academy and the Central University. I considered both the apple of my eye. However, the second one turned out to be a whore" (Rocha, 2018). This quote illustrates not only the patriarchal authoritarianism of the Somoza regime but also the extent to which higher education was seen as both a threat to and a tool of political control.

Following the spark lit by the attempted assassination of Somoza, at least five insurgent efforts took place between 1956 and 1959, many of which became more radical in response to the regime's harsh crackdown in the aftermath (Rueda, 2019). In the 1950s, various groups, including conservatives, leftists, military officials, students, and guerrilla movements, attempted insurgencies against the Somoza regime. International efforts, such as the 1959 El Chaparral incident in Honduras, saw Honduran and Cuban support materialize but failed to prevent a massacre. Claudia Rueda (2019) notes these movements lacked

"the popular support and urban organizing" needed to sustain a prolonged fight against Somoza's well-trained military (p. 90). These failed insurgencies underscore the importance of internal political organization and coalition-building—particularly in urban centers and among students—as a precondition for successful opposition under repressive regimes.

A Small, Great Republic

Mariano Fiallos Gil, a University of Michigan–educated lawyer and beloved professor, was among Nicaragua's brightest minds. Gil's appointment as UNAN's rector was pivotal for Nicaraguan university activism, bolstering the FSLN movement in the process. Gil's philosophy that "the university should not merely produce professionals; it should mold an engaged citizenry," was key in establishing a culture of political thought and participation within the university community in Nicaragua, which he sought to turn into a small, great republic (Rueda, 2019, p. 91). Though Gil previously held positions under the Somoza regime, he grew disillusioned with its authoritarianism. His swift shutdown of Central University during student uprisings reassured Luis Somoza of his loyalty, but Gil claimed he acted to protect students. Fearing he would become a pawn of the new dictator, he accepted the role of university rector only under the condition that he controlled hiring and the budget (Rueda, 2019). Through his limited freedoms at UNAN, Gil created a new university environment that nurtured the expansion of free spaces at UNAN. Gil also pushed students to see higher education as an institution that "empower[s] students to take an active role in the world around them, including in contemporary debates and struggles" (Rueda, 2019, p. 92). His leadership exemplifies how institutional actors within authoritarian regimes can act as reformist gatekeepers, opening space for oppositional movements.

Following the 1956 assassination of Somoza García and the imprisonment of hundreds of students, including politically active student Tomás Borge, the violence and repression of the regime became clear. The efforts to have Borge released were met with anger and threats. When meeting with Fiallos Gil and other students, Somoza stated:

> "I'm warning you that I cannot control the soul of a soldier who could very well shoot a student in the head. It would mean little to me to split the heads open of 100 students, arrest 500, and finish with those subversive acts in the way they deserve" (Rueda, 2019, p. 98).

Such statements revealed the regime's intent to crush dissent through fear and physical violence. Still, they also had the unintended consequence of further radicalizing student organizers who came to view peaceful negotiation as futile. The regime's blatant lack of empathy or respect for students made UNAN activists certain of the need for mobilization. They mobilized using many strategies: first, students alerted the media of their organized, peaceful, two-day strike; second, to further rally support, students encouraged Borge's mother to participate in calling attention to the imprisonment of her son; lastly, they began to call upon support from university students in other parts of the nation. However, because the same autonomy as UNAN did not protect other university students, many were reluctant to join the efforts. Nonetheless, outraged high school-age students began to mobilize thanks to the Centro Universitario de la Universidad Nacional (University Center of the National University, CUUN) members, who sent representatives nationwide to encourage student activism.

During their visits across the country, CUUN representatives hosted assemblies where they spoke to prospective participants of the mobilizations. Their goals were clear: they were not mobilizing with purely political intentions but demanded respect and recognition that they were the future of Nicaragua. The UNAN students' organizing strategies and utilization of free spaces promoted the creation of many other student-led associations from different educational backgrounds, including the Students of the Escuela Nacional de Agricultura y Ganadería (National School of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, ENAG). These students declared their manifesto at an assembly in Matagalpa that stated:

> "[W]e the students have not been taken into consideration, as if we do not constitute an important part of the popular voice of this nation, . . . [W]e protest the disparagement with which students from throughout the nation have been treated and demand with our voices raised that we have a right to be heard as an integral part of the Nicaraguan pueblo." (Rueda, 2019, p. 99)

The two-day strike in Managua was powerful and one of the first major protests of the 20th century, with young students from across the nation actively speaking out against the actions of Luis Somoza. However, the strikes inevitably led to violence and repression of other protests by the National Guard. Though this nationwide protest was quickly and violently cut short, the fact that Somoza and the National Guard had made their intentions to ignore the grievances and requests of the student activists apparent led to a new set of strategies that would change the fight against Somocismo forever. These events illustrate how contentious politics, even when repressed, can create political learning and organizational infrastructure that build momentum over time (Moseley, 2015; Eckstein & Merino, 2001). The student movement's use of free spaces, strategic framing, and coalition-building across educational and regional lines laid the ideological and tactical foundation for broader anti-Somoza mobilization—ultimately contributing to a revolutionary coalition capable of sustaining long-term resistance. In this way, students emerged not as isolated agitators but as central actors in a broader anti-authoritarian front—one that would soon find its most enduring partners in organized labor.

The Labor Unionists of Estelí

By the 1960s, UNAN student activists familiar with Somoza's brutality sought to expand their network. Sierakowski (2019) notes, "When student activists at the National University in León began searching out potential guerrilla fighters and civilian backers in Estelí, they found the labor movement sympathetic to their calls" (p. 71). Though unionization efforts predated Somoza García's rule, they remained largely unorganized and were swiftly repressed. In 1944, Somoza García legalized labor unions to gain working-class support, but as they grew stronger, they threatened his control. Over time, labor unionists' strategies and organizational efforts rapidly improved. For example, in the northern department of Estelí, young working-class men established one of the first influential labor unions in Nicaragua, the Shoemakers' Union of Estelí (Sindicato de Zapateros de Estelí, SZE). The first shoemakers of this union, particularly Ramón Altamirano, who participated in a failed insurgent attempt, were active members of the Independent Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Independiente, PLI) and passionate anti-Somocistas (Sierakowski, 2019).

The SZE quickly became an environment where the young shoemakers could learn self-respect, foster group identity, and create free spaces where political conversations could occur. When Altamirano's long-time friend Dávila Bolaños, a doctor from Masaya and a Marxist, became a regular member of this free space, the shoemakers began to learn about the class struggle in a way they never had before. One shoemaker recalled his experience learning from Dr. Bolaños:

> "With a piece of chalk and a blackboard … he [Dávila Bolaños] taught … the class struggle in a nice and simple way. He explained to them that the history of Nicaragua since the beginning of the Spanish colony has always involved the oppressors above—the owners of the wealth—and the oppressed always below, accepting the yoke, as was happening in the Somoza dictatorship in present times" (Sierakowski, 2019, p. 65).

During the Somoza dictatorship, political parties, particularly the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), dominated labor unions. Inspired by Bolaños' teachings, many young shoemakers joined the Nicaraguan Socialist Youth (JSN), a PSN offshoot, and began advocating for land reform, workers' rights, neighborhood improvements, and social equality. This organizing mirrored broader patterns of politicization among working-class Nicaraguans, where economic hardship catalyzed class consciousness and collective action (Gould, 1990). As the SZE became a key organizing space for Estelí's shoemakers, its union rapidly gained members. Workers across professions soon recognized the SZE as a reliable force for addressing unmet needs. Meanwhile, as UNAN students radicalized under state repression, they found in the labor organizers of Estelí a parallel movement whose political awakening had followed a similar trajectory. This shared oppositional consciousness would become the foundation for future alliances.

The FTE

UNAN student activists began taking advantage of the shifts in political dynamics that emerged during the proxy presidency of René Schick (1963–1966). While Schick largely served as a figurehead under Somoza's rule, his administration introduced limited institutional changes that inadvertently created spaces for political engagement. These small openings allowed students to mobilize more effectively, expand their networks, and push the boundaries of dissent under the guise of academic freedom. Synchronously, labor unions in the Segovia region, particularly in Estelí, experienced significant growth in membership, demonstrating how moments of perceived political flexibility can create opportunities for mobilization across different sectors. This parallel expansion of student activism and labor organizing highlights the broader structural conditions that contributed to the rise of the Sandinista movement as opposition groups increasingly coordinated efforts to challenge the Somoza regime.

Labor unionists took advantage of the fact that they could organize themselves more freely and openly, and by the mid-1960s, five operating labor unions in Estelí came together to officially form the Federation of Workers of Estelí (Federación de Trabajadores de Estelí, FTE). The FTE rapidly took on a broad role in the affairs of workers all over the department and in different trades. One significant example from 1962 was the government's implementation of the regime's Labor Code in the Segovias. In response, trade unionists in Estelí quickly expanded their organizing efforts beyond the shoe industry, working to establish the Sindicato de Oficios Varios (Various Trades Union), which unified artisans from multiple trades (Sierakowski, 2019).

The FTE became a force to be reckoned with. Through strategic organizing, members of the FTE could orchestrate large strikes and mobilizations successfully. Each first of May, the unionists held protests commemorating International Workers' Day. Despite consistently being met with force from the National Guard, these mobilizations demonstrated the growing influence and relevance of the FTE among the public of many classes in Estelí. Support from Estelians was undeniable as they shouted, "Long live the working class! Long live the first of May!" (Sierakowski, 2019, p. 67). The persistent violence from the National Guard hardened union leaders, who grew unafraid to challenge soldiers and continued their May protests

without hesitation. Over time, their demands became more direct. In May 1964, Estelí's unions united behind Bolaños to demand an end to underage employment. The boldness and growing influence of the FTE created a culture of action among the citizens of Estelí. Shortly after the May 1964 protests, dozens of coffee pickers, "boys between the ages of seven and twelve—filed a complaint at the Labor Court in Estelí against their employer" of their own accord (Sierakowski, 2019, p. 75). These moments of grassroots resistance reflect what scholars like Eckstein and Merino (2001) frame as "power from below"—collective action rooted in lived experiences that contest elite domination and reclaim political agency.

Beyond their political activism, FTE members also worked to challenge the recreational norms for men promoted by Somoza's regime. Through community organizing, they fostered stronger ties among Estelí's residents and encouraged alternative leisure activities for men. One example was the creation of a baseball league featuring teams from various trades, such as the Zapateros' team, Los Salvajes, which transformed the sport into both a recruitment tool and a space for open discussion beyond employers' oversight (Sierakowski, 2019). Additionally, they condemned the excessive use of prostitutes and casinos as a pastime by going throughout Estelí and smashing slot machines and shutting down brothels. These acts were moral and political, a form of social resistance aimed at rejecting the exploitative masculinity reinforced by authoritarianism (Sawchuk, 1997). Such actions fostered a new sense of community and unity in Estelí.

Estelian Unionists & the Early FSLN

Seeking expansion, unionists, like UNAN student activists, explored nationwide collaborations. Early SZE members Filemón and Adrián connected with León activists, including Carlos Fonseca, an FSLN co-founder. Fonseca saw value in allying with unionists and using Nueva Segovia as a base for the FSLN's rural operations. Unionists and early FSLN members united around social equality, joining UNAN students in investigating conditions in the Segovias. Expanding their efforts beyond urban Estelí, they advocated for better wages and living conditions for rural farmers. With FSLN guerrilla support, they launched educational outreach, using language rooted in farmers' experiences.

> "[U]nionist Adrián Gutiérrez recalled: … 'We [won't] preach philosophical things because that is what the Socialist Party did. So Carlos told us … we're going to talk to the people simply and clearly, with no theory. We're going to explain, especially to the campesino [farmer], how much they got paid and how much goes to the patrón and ask the campesino if that was fair. Ask if he could send his kids to school and who it was that made the landowners into millionaires. Ask the campesinos if they could go to the doctor and explain that the children of the landowners went to study abroad to come back later and keep exploiting the campesinos [farmworkers]'" (Sierakowski, 2019, p. 74).

Each weekend, unionists would travel to rural towns and use their labor unionizing skills to organize farmers outside Estelí and the small town of Condega, where they would recreate the free spaces they utilized in the SZE. Not only did they cultivate a space where people could speak freely, but they also advocated for farmers facing exploitation by their employers, offering legal assistance that helped workers navigate labor disputes and assert their rights. Over time, these efforts shifted power dynamics in rural areas, giving campesinos the tools and confidence to challenge local elites and participate more actively in organizing efforts. This mirrors what Gould (1990) identified in other parts of rural Nicaragua: the emergence of political consciousness through localized activism and peer-based learning, particularly among campesinos previously disconnected from formal politics.

FSLN founders and unionists helped farmers develop a new awareness of their social rights and the power they held to demand them. This growing rural mobilization—rooted in material grievances, personal networks, and ideological clarity—formed a key part of the Sandinistas' cross-class coalition and marked a break from earlier, top-down revolutionary models (Brentlinger, 1995). This did not stop the Somoza regime and their wealthy, local-level associates from lashing out at their organizing efforts. Local authorities quickly began spouting out accusations about these unionists and anyone who supported them:

> "[W]hen the government's own labor inspector in Estelí, Carlos Talavera, attempted to apply the Labor Code as written, even he was 'accused of being a communist by the hacendados [landowners], who allegedly warned him he 'could lose his job for attacking the rich (la parte adinerada)'" (Sierakowski, 2019, p. 76).

This resistance from elites—using anti-communist rhetoric and threats to silence reformers—was characteristic of what Livingstone (2013) describes as U.S.-backed regimes' reliance on local oligarchs to suppress grassroots challenges to the social order. Despite the tension and complications that were to come for labor unionists in Estelí, the early establishment of connections between student activists, founding FSLN members, and labor unions set the stage for the support the FSLN would receive from the working class, especially in the Nueva Segovia region, in the decade that followed. These alliances helped transform the FSLN from a marginal guerrilla faction into a national movement capable of mobilizing broad segments of society against Somoza's regime (Booth, Wade, & Walker, 2018).

The Catholic Church in Nicaragua

The Catholic Church has historically dominated Nicaragua and all of Latin America. During the 1970s, the Roman Catholic population in Nicaragua had reached 90% (Gooren, 2005). Religious traditions like La Purísima and La Gritería, which occur each December, encapsulate the importance and influence that the Catholic Church has over Nicaraguan culture and society. Historically, and

throughout most of the Somoza regime's rule, the Catholic Church openly opposed leftist politics and even the labor unionization efforts occurring in the Estelian countryside. Everything changed, however, following the 1968 Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellín, Colombia.

Liberation Theology

The emergence of a new philosophy, widely known as Liberation Theology, was one of the most pivotal turning points in the church's views and actions toward politics in Latin America and a juncture in the decades-long revolutionary struggle against Somoza. The conference in Medellín employed a social science theory called dependency theory to examine Latin American poverty and society. Under this theory, conference attendees concluded that widespread violence and injustice caused Latin American suffering. As Christians, they believed they were called to oppose poverty, stand with the oppressed, and push for social change (Sawchuck, 1997).

Throughout the continent, and most strikingly in countries such as El Salvador and Brazil, the findings of this conference and newfound ideology "set in motion a broad range of innovations, including stress on … participation, more attention to the promotion of justice (and the denunciation of injustice),

and more effective evangelization among the popular classes." (Eckstein & Merino, 2001). The shift from a faithful acceptance of one's socioeconomic status and sole focus on life after death to a mindset of equality and societal liberation kick-started the massive Latin American rejection of neoliberalism during the late twentieth century. The rise of Liberation Theology set off a chain reaction that gave rise to one of the FSLN's most crucial grassroots tools: Ecclesial Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, CEBs).

CEBs

Globally, the Catholic Church's internal hierarchy has played a critical role in how the church operates. In Nicaragua especially, the social pyramid (in which the Somozas were at the top) was the dominant aspect of society. For decades, the church's hierarchy worked harmoniously with Somoza's social pyramid in Nicaragua. The Catholic Church functions hierarchically, with each position having varying prestige and responsibilities. One could divide the church's hierarchy into two groups: first, the pope, cardinals, and archbishops, whose roles are more prestigious and less interactive with the public, and second, the bishops, priests, deacons, and clergy members whose role largely consists of public interaction. The higher a position on the church's pyramid, the less they are connected with the people they serve. Previously, the Catholic Church was not supportive of the ongoing organizational struggles for social equality. During the conscientization of the lower classes due to the work of CEBs, it was mostly the "lower half" of the church's hierarchy that "were personally confronted with the extreme suffering of the poor and … saw the faces behind the sociological analysis of Medellín and Liberation Theology" (Sawchuck, 1997, p. 45).

In the years following the Medellín Conference, the promotion of ideals that empowered and legitimized protest and social movements was done specifically through the community outreach work of CEBs. Eckstein conceptualizes Ecclesial Base Communities as small, relatively homogenous groups characterized by their strong ties to the Church and their foundational position, either as grassroots members within the ecclesiastical hierarchy or as marginalized populations within the broader social structure (Eckstein & Merino, 2001). Introducing CEBs into society created a distinct connection between religion and politics in Latin America. CEBs are similar to free spaces in that they are environments where thoughts can be expressed openly; however, CEBs differ because they function outside the reach of dominant groups and are directly linked to the institution of the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, their direct link to the Church did not stop them from becoming communities where social ideologies were shared and promoted. The efforts of CEBs in Latin America typically consisted of regular weekly or bi-weekly meetings where poor members of a village or neighborhood met to read and discuss the Bible (Eckstein & Merino, 2001). However, as Eckstein clarifies, many groups and organizations can technically be labeled CEBs, making them extremely diverse and unique to the country and specific area (2001).

Nicaragua saw an immense surge in CEBs throughout its rural regions during the 1960s and 70s. With the inspiration of the new ideologies promoted by the Catholic Church, hundreds of Catholic students, priests, and religious workers went to live in the countryside to assist the poor in any way they could. As their presence among oppressed communities grew, they began establishing CEB programs, such as the Jesuit-run Comite Evangelico de Promocion Agraria (Evangelical Committee for Agrarian Promotion, CEPA) (Sawchuck, 1997). During their meetings, while reading the Bible, members of these CEBs encouraged people to recognize that their poverty was against

God's will and that their faith could justify the struggle for change. They also began to incorporate concepts from Marxist analysis into their discussions: "[M]embers came to understand the complex reality of poverty and oppression … and came to acknowledge the need to work against these factors as a principle of faith" (Sawchuck, 1997, p. 45).

As Nicaraguan CEBs expanded throughout the country, their members increasingly engaged in political activism and supported social equity and prosperity efforts. During the early 1970s, grassroots organizations began to embed themselves into the emerging CEB culture spreading across Nicaragua. Organizations such as the student-based Revolutionary Christian Movement (Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario, MCR) became increasingly politically active in collaboration with the FSLN. The MCR started implementing strategic efforts such as organizing strikes and occupations of churches to protest human rights violations. In 1973, certain priests supported the students during the church occupations, becoming the first clergy to confront the Somoza regime openly (Williams, 1985).

The Shift to Support for the Revolution

For many years, the Catholic Church continued to support the Somoza regime in Nicaragua. It was not until 1970 that Nicaraguan bishops began to distance themselves from the Somozas publicly. In Sawchuck's analysis of the Catholic Church's role in the revolution, he recounts the story of the prominent Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo:

> "As the story goes, when Somoza gave the Archbishop a Mercedes-Benz as a gift, Obando sold the car and gave the money to the poor. This act, interpreters often comment, 'symbolized' Obando's concern for the oppressed and his break with Somoza. However, we must consider that in fact Obando unabashedly used the luxury vehicle until anti-Somoza Catholics turned it into a source of embarrassment." (Sawchuck, 1997, p. 42)

This example demonstrates how the emergence of Liberation Theology and the broader push to denounce injustice did not affect all levels of the Church's hierarchy equally. Despite the growing discontent with Somoza and the spread of revolutionary ideologies across social classes, higher-ranking clergy in Nicaragua clarified that they preferred to remain silent about their anti-Somoza sentiments rather than openly support the FSLN. However, as the Church hierarchy and elite classes began to experience the consequences of Somoza's unchecked greed, the bourgeoisie started to organize in opposition to his regime.

The transition of CEBs from small community groups focused on the Bible's connections with Liberation Theology to strong political organizations who fought for equality and solidarity became evident in 1972 when Managua was hit with a massive earthquake. The earthquake exposed Somoza's facade and corruption on an international level through his mishandling of international aid; "[t]he hierarchy came to oppose Somoza openly only after … their realization that Somoza's greed was leading to their own socioeconomic marginalization" (Sawchuck, 1997, p. 42). Only after this did the higher levels of the church's hierarchy in Nicaragua become fortified in their anti-Somoza sentiments.

As support for a revolution flourished within different groups of Nicaraguans, including the working class, students, and now the middle and upper classes, the Church felt increasingly compelled to openly support the increasingly popular FSLN and their encroaching victory to maintain the Church's influence. The role of CEBs in the strengthening of Nicaraguan activism and uprising against Somoza is undeniable. After their emergence in the late 1960s, "CEBs became one of the focal points of activism in the cities" (Sawchuck, 1997, p. 45). Apart from establishing numerous national political organizations, they bred a new generation of young, patriotic Nicaraguans who joined the revolutionary struggle alongside the FSLN. Some of the earliest members of the Revolutionary Christian Movement, such as Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal, passionately joined the FSLN in 1972 as combatants, like many other Nicaraguan youth of the time. By the late 1970s, more than a decade after its founding, the FSLN gained widespread support by blending nationalism, Marxism, and progressive Catholicism. This fusion made the Sandinista revolution unique, enabling Christian participants to engage in the struggle without compromising their faith.

The Original Sandinismo

Gradually, FSLN founders Tomás Borge, Carlos Fonseca, and Silvio Mayorga channeled their outrage at Nicaragua's conditions under Somoza into a nationwide, cross-class revolution. During their time at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, Borge, Fonseca, and Mayorga were nationalistic and heavily politically involved students taking full advantage of the free spaces present at the university. With what initially started as a student activist group at the UNAN whose early members were imprisoned and repressed by Luis Somoza, a political organization with growing numbers emerged. Their study of Marxist-Leninism, inspiration from Augusto Sandino, and admiration of the victory of the Cuban revolution influenced the formation of Sandinismo, which defined the FSLN during the 1960s and 70s. Through their alliances with labor unionists and the organizations that stemmed from CEBs, the FSLN's membership rapidly grew. Its advocacy of agrarian reform and campaigns for education and health resonated with

many and mobilized the population. The support from growing numbers of Nicaraguans and their alliances with organizations gave the FSLN the platform to launch military operations in Nueva Segovia.

In 1979, after years of revolutionary struggle, guerrilla warfare based in the rural north of Nicaragua, and inhumane violence from the Somoza regime, the FSLN established the National Patriotic Front (Frente Patriótico Nacional, FPN). In doing so, the Sandinistas united multiple independent organizations from across the nation behind their mutual goal: the end of Somoza's tyranny. The FPN included groups like Los Doce, the PLI, and the Popular Social Christian Party (Partido Popular Social

Cristiano, PPSC). Their union garnered broad support throughout Nicaragua. Merrill reflects on this pivotal moment: "After the formal unification of the Sandinista guerrillas … heavy fighting broke out all over the country. [However,] the FSLN was better equipped, with weapons flowing from Venezuela, Panama, and Cuba. The FSLN launched its final offensive during May 1979, just as the National Guard began to lose control of many areas of the country" (1993). These strategic advances helped transform the FSLN from one of many opposition groups into the leading force against Somocismo, culminating in their victory later that year.

Conclusion

The Sandinista's victory on July 19, 1979, in what is now known as the Revolutionary Plaza, could not have occurred without the foundations established by years of organizing efforts nationwide. Before the FSLN was founded, student and faculty activists fought for autonomous spaces where political thought and participation were encouraged. The FSLN became nationally recognized and supported after establishing connections with labor unionists, who fought for equality and fair treatment in the workplace and society for years. The emergence of CEBs created a culture of conscientization and political activism that exposed numerous youths to the FSLN's fight against Somocismo and tyrannical capitalism and corruption. The patriotic and revolutionary spirit of the Nicaraguan people throughout history is a testament that the Sandinista victory was inevitable. Thanks to university activists, the work of labor unionists, and Comunidades Eclesiales de Base in rural Nicaragua, the FSLN achieved a historic feat. Without the foundations of these community and national efforts, the Sandinistas would not have had the platform to gain national, cross-class support in overthrowing Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979.

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Impacts of Diversion Programs

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Abstract:

This paper explores the implementation and impact of diversion programs as alternatives to traditional prosecution within the criminal justice system. With a focus on rehabilitation and reducing reincarceration rates, the paper analyzes various diversion models that address substance use disorders, mental illness, and social service needs among low-level offenders. Case studies including the Montgomery County Deflection Model, the Washington State Diversion Program, and the Monmouth County Restart Program highlight how early intervention, risk assessment, and cross-system collaboration can prevent incarceration and promote community health. Additionally, the paper examines the integration of police social workers as part of a co-responder model to bridge the gap between law enforcement and social services. Through a multidisciplinary review of data and practices, this paper underscores the necessity of embedding diversion programs within both the criminal justice and healthcare systems to foster lasting reform and reduce systemic harm.

Key words: Diversion programs, criminal justice reform, recidivism reduction, substance use disorder (SUD), mental health, incarceration, police social workers, rehabilitation, public safety, community-based intervention, co-responder models

Introduction

In recent years, significant efforts have been made to reform the criminal justice system and address longstanding obstacles to rehabilitation. One key approach has been the adoption of diversion programs, which serve as alternatives to traditional prosecution by redirecting eligible offenders toward rehabilitative support. These programs need to be fully integrated into the criminal justice system to effectively tackle underlying issues such as substance abuse and mental illness. Additionally, for diversion programs to maximize their impact, they require strategic implementation and ongoing evaluation. When implemented effectively, diversion programs not only enhance public safety but also reduce recidivism—defined as the tendency of individuals with prior criminal justice involvement to reoffend—and foster healthier communities by addressing the root causes of criminal behavior. The consistent objectives of diversion across various disciplines are rehabilitation, efficient case processing, and reducing resource use (Stott et al., 2023). The purpose of this paper is to review the existing evidence on the effectiveness of diversion programs corrections through examples in various circumstances.

Diversion and Illicit Drug Usage

This section examines the connection between illicit drug use and the criminal justice system, emphasizing the need for diversion programs to address substance use disorder (SUD) before individuals become trapped in cycles of incarceration. Across the nation, 87% of males test positive for at least one illicit drug at the time of their arrest, but only 12% of the incarcerated population will receive drug treatment while in custody (Charlier, 2015). This exacerbates recidivism rates, allowing these individuals to be pushed back into their communities, which are disproportionately communities of color, without having received treatment for the disease of addiction. The cycle persists as these individuals continue using drugs, potentially leading to another encounter with the police. Prebooking deflection models, such as the model utilized in Montgomery County, Maryland, serve as early intervention strategies that enable law enforcement to assess individuals' risk levels and treatment needs before formal entry into the criminal justice system.

The Montgomery County, Maryland Deflection Model

The Montgomery County Deflection Model, initiated by the Montgomery County Government, empowers police officers to identify individuals exhibiting behaviors indicative of drug use during their interactions. Officers conduct standardized screenings to assess the person's risk and treatment needs. Based on the assessment, individuals are either directed toward preventive measures or intervention services, ensuring immediate access to treatment and support resources (Charlier, 2015).

After identifying at-risk behavior, the police officer screens the individual to determine that person’s criminogenic risk using a form of assessment known as the Proxy Risk Tool and treatment need using Texas Christian University Drug Screen (TCUDS), a 15-item screening tool that helps identify drug use or dependency profile. Depending on the outcomes of these assessments, certain individuals are deflected to community-based case management services for full assessment and referral to treatment resources to address their underlying SUD. Case managers monitor individuals’ compliance with the treatment program and share this information with relevant law enforcement agencies, courts, and probation offices. Case managers focus on rapid treatment access, retention, motivation, engagement, and completion. They may also make referrals to ancillary services such as housing, employment, food, clothing, and recovery support (Charlier, 2015).

By integrating evidence-based practices from the criminal justice system, the model enables law enforcement to identify and address substance use issues early in the diversion process. The model contains aspects of both prevention and intervention. When no criminal charges are present, the focus is on prevention, whereas the focus is on intervention if there are charges present. Both processes involve voluntary entry into treatment. Prevention stops future entry into the criminal justice system by providing the individual with a case manager and peer mentor, along with access to treatment that will reduce criminogenic behavior. Intervention stops immediate entry into the system following police contact by providing the individual with a case manager and peer mentor. Additionally, it provides them with real time access to treatment that will reduce repeat incidents while allowing them to safely remain in the community. Intervention aims to reduce the likelihood of collateral consequences from justice processing and the negative impacts associated with even short-term incarceration for low-risk individuals, such as increased reincarceration rates, disruptions to employment and housing, and racial and socioeconomic disparities (Charlier, 2015).

While specific quantitative data on the effectiveness of the Montgomery County Deflection Model is limited, the program is modeled after successful initiatives like Seattle's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), which have demonstrated reductions in recidivism and improved public safety (Charlier, 2015). However, a 2025 study evaluating policies to reduce juvenile recidivism in Montgomery County highlighted the need for greater family involvement and recommended the use of diversion and court-initiated alternative sentencing programs rather than incarceration. Participants in the study unanimously agreed that current policies were ineffective in lowering juvenile recidivism and emphasized the importance of pursuing alternatives to sentencing individuals for first-time, minor offenses (Kulumba, 2025).

Diversion in Healthcare

The ideal outcomes of diversion in the health care system include stabilization of mental health symptoms, increased access to and use of medication, and a reduced number of acute mental health episodes (Stott et al., 2023). The programs provide pre-arrest, pre-booking, post-booking, post-charge, and post-adjudication opportunities for individual and societal success. An outdated belief surrounding mental illness that has inhibited progress toward the widespread use of diversion programs is “that mental illness puts individuals at a higher propensity for crime and creates perceptions where the belief is individuals with mental illness should be managed differently than average citizens” (Stott et al., 2023, p. 467). The result of this assumption is that instead of providing mentally ill individuals with the assistance they need, they “get treated as criminals, arrested, charged, and jailed for a longer time in jail compared to the general population” (Stott et al., 2023, p. 468). These findings highlight the connection between mental health crises and recidivism rates, while emphasizing the importance of programs that address these issues.

The Washington State Diversion Program and The Monmouth County, New Jersey Restart Diversion Program represent two distinct models of integrating healthcare into legal intervention. The Washington State Diversion Program is a multi-county initiative focused on Medicaid-enrolled individuals that takes a broad, public health-centered approach, while the Restart program takes a more localized and individualized approach.

Washington State Diversion Program

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services compared and contrasted three prosecutorial diversion programs known as the Lourdes Counseling Center, King County Legal Intervention and Network of Care Program, and the Spokane County Diversion Program. The three programs focus on Medicaid-enrolled participants and assess outcomes such as re-arrest rates, incarceration days, psychiatric hospitalizations, and engagement with community-based mental health services (Becker et al., 2022). In a study published by

the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, the annualized arrest rate was significantly lower for participants in the study's diversion programs. Participants saw 2.1 arrests versus 3.0 arrests for the comparison group, which indicates fewer arrests during the twelve months after the study was implemented (Becker et al., 2022). Additionally, the study participants in Washington State's diversion programs spent significantly fewer days incarcerated. Over a 12-month follow-up, they averaged 25 total days in jail or Department of Corrections custody, compared to 41 days for the non-diversion group (Becker et al., 2022). Additionally, the study participants in Washington State's diversion programs spent significantly fewer days incarcerated. Over a 12-month follow-up, they averaged 25 total days in jail or Department of Corrections custody, compared to 41 days for the non-diversion group (Becker et al., 2022).

It is important to understand that "incarcerated individuals are 3-5 times more likely to have a diagnosed mental illness as adults in the general population and individuals with mental illness are charged with minor offenses 'just to get them off the streets as a means of obtaining mental health treatment [that is] not available' in the community" (Gittner & Dennis, 2023, p. 475). In the criminal justice system, the objective of diversion is to reduce the number of individuals with mental illnesses in detention, with successful outcomes including a reduced length of jail stay, reduction in charges, and lower rates of recidivism. However, lower recidivism rates rely on the healthcare system to sustain mental health treatment of at-risk individuals. These two bodies often act as independent entities, highlighting the need for a more interconnected system. Neither system alone resolves the underlying issue because neither system can truly make a difference without the other system's support (Gittner & Dennis, 2023).

Monmouth County, New Jersey Restart Diversion Program

The Restart Diversion Program (Restart), led and implemented by the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO), hopes to advocate for non-violent, low-level offenders with pending 3rd or 4th degree charges in the Monmouth County Superior Court. The Restart program works with candidates who agree to comply with supervised treatment plans and rehabilitative addiction therapy provided by mental health professionals at New Hope Behavioral Healthcare. Once they begin, the aim is to lower recidivism rates and equip individuals with tools for successful completion of the program. Restart prioritizes participants who have a suspected mental health disorder that may have led to their conviction. The process starts with admission into the program if eligibility requirements are met, followed by acceptance of charges and plea, compliance, and eventual graduation (Restart Diversion, 2024).

There is a legal and clinical screening process prior to acceptance into the program, with specific qualification criteria. Admission depends on residency in Monmouth County, an eligibility evaluation, pending charges, and prior criminal history, with the requirement that all criminal acts be non-violent. Exclusion criteria range from violent criminal history, involvement in sexually based crimes, offenses involving firearms or arson, substance use as the primary mental health diagnosis, and criminal conduct with no relation to mental health disorders (Restart Diversion, 2024).

Upon acceptance into the program, the defendant must plead guilty with a recommended jail alternative. The defendant is required to agree to an Order of Acceptance, which details the logistics and conditions of Restart. The defendant's sentence is temporarily suspended throughout this process. The defendant will continuously be represented by a defense attorney, and they are required to appear before the court for routine reviews determined by the Restart team. If a compliance violation such as failure to appear in court, missed treatment sessions, positive drug tests, or new criminal offenses occurs, the clinical team and Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office determines a verdict. This decision is not subject to further review or deliberation. Once terminated, the defendant's case will no longer be suspended, and the prior plea will not be withdrawn. Should the individual successfully graduate from the program, a motion for their dismissal will be made (Restart Diversion, 2024). According to the Restart program's data, participants who completed the program were 67% less likely to reoffend than those who did not participate in diversion (Restart Diversion, 2024). With high reduction in reoffending rates among participants, these data highlight the program's ability to provide effective rehabilitation.

Law Enforcement Related Diversion

Police social workers (PSWs) were originally conceptualized over 100 years ago without the necessary funding for proper implementation. With public safety revision becoming an increasingly important topic, the PSW model has been posed as a potential solution. According to the Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, "up to 80% of police calls may be related to social services, demonstrating a need that could be filled by social workers" (Ban & Riordan, 2023, p. 540). With many officers not receiving specialized training to address mental health or social issues, PSWs have been emphasized as a way to fulfill a currently unmet need in the public safety system.

The Embedded Police Social Worker Model

In a case study conducted in Bloomington, Indiana, the

role of PSWs was examined in co-responder models, where social workers collaborate closely with police departments. The study highlighted the lack of research on the effectiveness of PSWs but suggests that they can play a crucial role in improving resource delivery and diverting individuals in crisis from the criminal justice system. The study spanned seven months of analysis and found that PSWs were far more efficient than officers in making referrals for high-needs clients and clients with unmet basic needs. The PSW program experienced significant growth, with referrals increasing from 115 in 2019 to 265 in 2020, and 142 in the first half of 2021. Total client interactions also rose from 740 in 2019 to 2,185 in 2020, and 1,389 in the first half of 2021, averaging eight interactions per client. Additionally, the number of follow-up calls in individual cases have decreased from 22 to zero once PSW services were in place, easing the burden on emergency services and enhancing community safety (City of Bloomington, 2023).

Depending on the police department, "PSWs [can] conduct case management with clients after a police interaction, organize social service agencies around community needs, and/or act as a co-responder alongside officers to social service-related calls, typically as a second responder" (Ban & Riordan, 2023, p. 538). By using this model, PSWs have the potential to improve community well-being by "increasing use of social services, lowering recurring crisis rates, and easing burdens on the justice and health care systems" (Ban & Riordan, 2023, p. 544). In order to achieve these outcomes PSWs require specialized skills such as crisis intervention, mental health assessment, de-escalation techniques, and extensive knowledge of social services and resources (Ban & Riordan, 2023).

Veteran Diversion Program

There are many challenges facing military service members, particularly veterans, ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), illicit drug usage, and other issues as a result of their service. These challenges, including difficulty adjusting to civilian life, coping with trauma, and engaging in destructive behaviors, can lead to conflicts with the law. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that nearly one in five veterans suffers from PTSD, which can manifest as depression, detachment, irritability, and anger. The unstructured nature of civilian society can exacerbate these issues. The Veterans Diversion Program (VDP) aims to address these issues by recognizing the unique obstacles faced by justice-involved veterans and providing them with specialized support (Hille et al., 2022).

The VDP has shown significant success in New Jersey counties such as Atlantic and Cape May. In Atlantic County, 46 veterans have enrolled, with a 92% graduation rate, and in Cape May County, there were nine graduates and no terminations. The VDP provides justice-involved veterans access to VA care and links them to necessary services. It is available to active, retired, and reserve service members facing non-violent charges, provided they have a mental illness related to the offense. If the offender chooses to participate, positive outcomes include dismissal of charges, access to treatment and support services, and avoidance of incarceration. The program involves collaboration between state and county law enforcement, the county's Department of Human Services, and federal veterans' agencies to compile treatment services. Mentors, often active-duty service members or veterans, provide support throughout the process (Hille et al., 2022).

Police can recommend veterans for the VDP and defense counsel can seek admission before the case's disposition. Offenders of crimes such as drug possession, criminal mischief, shoplifting, trespassing, and prescription fraud, are eligible for the VDP. The prosecutor determines eligibility based on various factors, including the nature of the offense and the veteran's amenability to participation. If admitted, the veteran must comply with the terms of the diversion agreement for up to two years. Compliance with treatment plans, attendance at court reviews, ongoing participation, and successful completion results in charges being dismissed. Additionally, veterans can be admitted to the VDP more than once, unlike other diversion programs (Hille et al., 2022).

Limitations of Diversion

According to Leah Wang, Senior Research Analyst at the Prison Policy Initiative, diversion programs remain an effective way to reduce reincarceration rates while increasing access to social services, but these opportunities are often not equally accessible to all demographics. Variables such as narrow eligibility criteria and prosecutorial discretion in the selection process can leave racial minorities and repeat offenders with less access to such programs (Wang, 2023).

Racial Disparities in Diversion

Nancy Nicosia, John MacDonald, and Jeremy Arkes examined how racial and ethnic disparities in prison and diversion to drug treatment among drug-involved offenders could be attributed to factors such as current arrests and prior criminal history, and whether these disparities were reduced following the implementation of California's Proposition 36 (Nicosia et al., 2013). The analysis of approximately 170,000 drug-related arrests from 1995 to 2005 revealed that Black and Hispanic offenders were more likely to be incarcerated and less likely to be offered a diversion program alternative compared to white

offenders. Proposition 36 mandated that individuals with fewer than three prior drug related convictions and no prior violent convictions be offered drug treatment instead of incarceration. Before the implementation of Proposition 36, in comparison to white offenders, Black offenders were 33% less likely to receive pretrial diversion, and Hispanic offenders were 34% less likely to receive pretrial diversion. After the implementation of Proposition 36, Black offenders were still 26% less likely to receive pretrial diversion while Hispanic offenders were still 17% less likely to receive pretrial diversion than white offenders, highlighting the issues of prejudicial selection and narrow eligibility criteria (Nicosia et al., 2013).

Diversion policies and programs, as they are currently designed, unintentionally leave people of color disadvantaged, perpetuating their involvement in the criminal justice system. By failing to confront these disparities, the system risks deepening racial inequality, reserving its most punitive measures for communities of color while affording more lenient alternatives to white individuals (Wang, 2023). In order to rectify this, diversion programs must be restructured to ensure fairness, particularly by expanding eligibility criteria to better include Black and Hispanic communities. Additionally, the collateral consequences of a conviction can be mitigated by offering automatic expungement upon successful completion of a diversion program. Moreover, research on the intersection of race, ethnicity, and diversion remains limited, and more comprehensive data is needed to fully assess and address the inequities within diversion programs (Wang, 2023).

Conclusion

Diversion programs represent a promising shift in the criminal justice system by offering alternative pathways through the conventional prosecutorial and punitive process. While these programs show potential in reducing recidivism and improving community safety, their effectiveness is limited by structural inequalities, particularly racial disparities in eligibility and access. To maximize the positive impacts of diversion programs, systemic changes must be made to ensure equity through expansion of eligibility criteria and addressing collateral consequences of conviction. By integrating these reforms and building upon existing successful models, such as the Washington State Diversion Program and Restart, diversion programs can become a key tool in building a justice system that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment and fosters a healthier, more equitable criminal justice system.

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The Case of Rising Populism in Mexico and Climate Reform Paralysis from 2006 to 2024 – *an Examination of* Climate Change as Class *War Against Socialist Conceptions of the "Professional Class"*

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Abstract (English):

The following paper seeks to apply the intersectional class-and-climate theories developed in Mathew Huber's Climate Change as Class War: Building Socialism on a Warming Planet *(2022), to the Mexican case of climate and energy reform from 2006 to 2024. The paper covers the presidential administrations of Felipe Calderón (PAN), Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA). The evaluation of Huber's theories against these presidencies reveals that Huber significantly misrepresents the theoretical nature of his intellectual "professional class," the vital connector of his strategy which ties together professional class interest and working-class power. The case of Mexico, a nation where class has been a divisive and definitive factor of political dynamic since its inception, reveals the critical limitations of Huber's proposed framework. It reveals that presidents who pursued climate reform did not do so to gain broad popular support for climate reform. Rather, climate constituted a part of their technocratic, neo-liberal agenda secondary to more salient and visible issues. This is a distinction that has been clear with the rise of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's popular leftist party, MORENA, which has viewed climate reform skeptically–even as antagonistic–to the will of the Mexican people.*

Key Words: Mexico; climate change; populism; Marxism; socialism

Introduction

As of 2020, U.S. federal entities have identified around 300 Mexican municipalities highly vulnerable to floods, droughts, hurricanes, mudslides, fires, vector diseases, and other adverse impacts of climate change (Amerena, 2020). With these impending natural hazards, it does not seem presumptuous to speculate that the Mexican government would be incentivized to legislate climate mitigation measures. Yet, over the past two decades, climate and energy reform in Mexico has been intractable at worst, and dependent on transient political ambitions at best."

From 2006 to 2018, the country's leaders propelled progressive climate policies on both international and domestic fronts, with the potential to help Mexico address the globalized and localized effects of future climate catastrophe. However, since 2018 the nation has experienced a paralysis in climate mitigation legislation, amounting to a political countermovement against the progressive climate policies of earlier administrations. This inflection of the political environment initiated in 2018 with the rise of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (often referred by his initials, AMLO). Under the mandate of his left-wing National Regeneration Party (abbreviated to MORENA) whose populist narratives claim to represent the will of the "pure, true people" against the transgressions of "privileged elites, perverted feminists and corrupt experts" (Dresser, 2022, p. 89), AMLO and his allies have sought to restore a state-controlled energy grid through policies classified as a re-nationalization of Mexico's energy sector, discouraging private sector investments in renewable energy development.

As such, the case of climate and energy reform in Mexico presents a worrisome paradox. It opposes the Global North's consensus regarding the urgency and massive scale of reform needed to prevent the worst effects of a warming planet. Simultaneously, the trend coincides with a radical transformation in the Mexican political environment as the electorate has been increasingly receptive to MORENA and its candidates. Under this paradigm the need to analyze the Mexican government's response to climate change as a fundamentally socio-political issue becomes evident.

With this impetus, the following paper seeks to apply the

intersectional class-and-climate theories developed in Mathew Huber's *Climate Change as Class War: Building Socialism on a Warming Planet* (2022), to the Mexican case of climate and energy reform from 2006 to 2024. The paper covers the presidential administrations of Felipe Calderón (PAN), Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA). The evaluation of Huber's theories against these presidencies reveals that Huber significantly misrepresents the theoretical nature of his intellectual "professional class," the vital connector of his strategy, which ties together professional class interest and working-class power. Doing so, exposes the critical shortcoming of his proposed framework for impactful climate legislation. As a whole, this paper hopes to contribute to an ongoing academic conversation that frames the global community's current inability to combat the climate crisis as one that stems from the socio-economic dynamics that govern political will by providing the case of a country–Mexico–where class has been a divisive and definitive factor of political dynamics since its inception.

Climate Change as Class War, and its Mexican Relevance

In his 2022 book, *Climate Change as Class War: Building Socialism on a Warming Planet*, Matthew T. Huber, an environmental researcher at Syracuse University, addresses what he argues is the unsuccessful nature of status-quo climate politics by attempting to apply a– modernized–critical Marxist theory to the issue of climate change. In doing so, he lays out a case framing social class dynamics as the political element critical for achieving lasting environmental reform.

Huber's framework rests upon a traditional Marxist definition of class supplemented with novel ecological elements. In his conceptualization, the profit-seeking *capitalist class* controls the means of production that contaminate the natural environment and is chiefly responsible for climate change.

Additionally, Huber proposes an interpretation of a middle, petty-bourgeois class or professional-managerial class, *the professional class*–a middle class of highly educated "NGO staff, scientists, journalists, think tank analysts, and aspirant professionals" with a relative degree of material security. It is this material stability that enables the professional class's values of meritocratic ideology and economic "consumer sovereignty," a neoclassical theory that asserts that "consumers drive the economy and production with their choices." These thought systems in turn lead the professional class into the erroneous belief that they (middle class consumers) are responsible for the warming planet. As such, the professional class's opposition to climate change emphasizes reducing individual consumption–a disposition Huber calls a "politic of less."

For Huber the *working class* represents the majority of the population which lacks the "means of life" and seeking wages and social reproduction. It is a class severed from nature as a source of direct income and, therefore, dependent on the markets, a state that Huber defines as lacking "control over the ecological conditions of existence" (p. 67).

The ecological denotations of Huber's definitions come together to form his *proletarian ecology*, whereby working-class life is defined by "lack of control over the basics of life (food, energy, land, housing, etc.)" (p. 21). Simultaneously, all significant emissions and environmental degradation can be traced "back to for-profit production" (p. 12).

Huber posits that the dysfunction of climate politics stems from the professional class's interest in solving climate change through the dissemination and application of climate change knowledge: science communicators', policy technocrats', and anti-system radicals' solutions are technocratic, market-corrective, and immensely removed from the realities of the majority working class. Meanwhile, "the struggle to survive in the market means climate change seems 'abstract' and remote from more immediate material concerns" to the working class (p. 18). As evidence of this disconnect, Huber invokes the 2018 Yellow Vest Protests in France, where the French working class resisted carbon fuel taxes imposed by neoliberal President Emmanuel Macron. The movement asserted: "The politicians care about the end of the world when we have to care about the end of the month," a motto which elegantly encompasses the clash between the professional class's attempt to oppose climate change and the working class's necessity to secure basic human needs.

Conscious of the working class's material needs and the professional class's ineffective emphasis on knowledge, Huber poses his guiding question: "What if we tried to forge a politics that connected these two issues on the terrain of a 'politics of life" (p. 144). Under this impetus, Huber outlines a new direction for climate reform that utilizes the working class's innate authority over climate change, through its capacity and strategic position to cease production and apply democratic weight to ensure lasting production reform. To bridge the gap between the two classes Huber argues that "we need to articulate a more standard working-class politics for climate change that appeals to more everyday material concerns" (18). That is, to engage the democratic and organized labor power of the working class, the professional class must construct "*ecological interests* that aim to simultaneously deliver more secure access to the basics of survival and restructure production to ensure the survival of all life on the planet" (64). Huber writes that this approach allows governments and academics to speak to the experiences of the working class to gain their support in the fight against climate change:

> By linking climate solutions to practical improvements in workers' everyday lives, climate politics need not

> remain so reliant upon the masses' learning the truth' of the greenhouse effect or experiencing the effects of climate breakdown. Climate politics will simply mean improvements in one's material life —the ecology that counts for most people (p.19).

Written on the advent of the "Green New Deal" in the United States (which Huber celebrates in its capacity to bridge professional class climate policy with working-class material interests), *Climate Change as Class War* is fundamentally written in a U.S. context. While Huber does cite the power of the working class as a global entity and calls for international engagement: "Global production must be socially coordinated to stave off climate catastrophe," the book overwhelmingly operates on general categorizations of the three social classes, which are reinforced primarily by American historical and political events (p. 214). Accordingly, it is imperative that the validity of Huber's work be tested against the contexts of diverse states and government structures.

This paper posits Mexico–a country distinct from the United States–for the application of Huber's theories. Mexico, per Huber's social model, presents a socio-economically stratified state with a "professional class" that has exhibited an interest in addressing climate change through neoliberal and technocratic avenues and institutions but has not had the political leverage to ensure lasting change and a large "working class" with the potential political means to enable such a reform. Nevertheless, the Mexican case of climate legislation from 2006-2024 also provides a case where past professional-class political ambitions regarding climate change have rendered energy reform politically unviable in an emerging era of populist politics in Mexico. Such a trajectory fundamentally challenges Huber's key assumption that his theories are desirable in shaping government policies as Huber's book does not recognize that neoliberal and technocratic government is not a constant, and once it disappears, so too does the political will for climate and energy reform. Accordingly, the Mexican case challenges Huber's original impetus: to conceptualize climate issues at the intersection of the professional class sphere and the working-class sphere, suggesting that climate is a purely professional class issue. In Mexico, climate change does not mobilize the working-class majority and, therefore, does not win elections. Ergo, efforts to resolve climate change have only occurred in the context of strengthening professional class institutions or they have been secondary to issues with the potential to activate the working class, suggesting that Huber's professional-working class partnership against the capitalist class is derived from a flawed interpretation of the theoretical nature of a professional class in critical theory and unlikely in a country where a massive sociocultural divide renders the two classes politically incompatible.

Climate Change as Class War and Mexican Climate and Energy Reform from 2006-2025

2006-2012: Felipe Calderón's (PAN)– a Mexico of Multilateral Climate Cooperation

In stark contrast to the current rhetoric, Mexico began the 2000s as a vocal advocate for multilateral climate reforms, an effort that culminated in the country's hosting of the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 16 and CMP 6) in Cancún, Mexico and the ratification of the Mexican 2012 General Climate Change Law.

In 2007 the government of President Felipe Calderón presented the National Strategy on Climate Change (ENACC), which identified opportunities for emission reduction on a voluntary basis while describing measures necessary for the development of national and local climate responses, including the proposed implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies in several sectors of the Mexican economy (UNDP: Climate Change Adaptation: Mexico, n.d). The Calderón administration's progressive climate position was further advanced by the Special Program on Climate Change (PECC), which set short, medium, and long-term emission reduction goals culminating with a 50% reduction of 2000 levels by 2050, and the Law on Renewable Energy Use and Financing the Energy Transition (LAERFTE) passed in 2008, which added environmental impact considerations to the Federal Commission on Electricity (CFE)'s selection of electric generation sources (Environmental Defense Fund [EDF] & International Emission Trading Association [IETA], 2014; Grunstein, 2023). These actions placed Mexico as one of the first developing countries to announce voluntary emission reduction pledges (Ramírez, 2014).

Building on its international impression and disruption of international norms for developing countries, Mexico proposed the creation of a Global Green fund at the fifth EULAC (EU, Latin American and the Caribbean) meeting as a mechanism to funnel funds for climate crisis mitigation from developed countries towards developing countries (Ramírez, 2014). Simultaneously, the Calderón administration launched a successful campaign to host the 16th Conference of Parties (COP 16) in Mexico (Ramírez, 2014). And while the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference's successes were "modest," it gave Mexico an opportunity to affirm confidence in the multilateral model of climate mitigation while emphasizing the proportional responsibilities of developing countries to reduce carbon emissions (Ramírez, 2014). Calderón remained loyal to his climate agenda and signed the Mexico Global Climate Change Program in 2012, the last year of his presidential term. The program ratified a five-year $70 million U.S.-Mexico bilateral

cooperative program to aid Mexico to develop a "green economy" (Environmental Defense Fund [EDF] & International Emission Trading Association [IETA], 2014). He also signed the General Climate Change Law, Mexico's first successful legislation unequivocally expressing the country's response to climate change. The Law established a foundational legal framework for Mexico to develop a national climate change policy. It tasked several federal agencies with "developing a holistic mitigation and adaptation national policy, [...] an information system of climate change indicators, [...] the national inventory of GHG emissions," and the Climate Change Fund–placing Mexico as one of the first developing countries to adopt a domestic measure aimed at countering Climate Change (de Obeso, 2012). Both Cancún (on the multilateral front), and the General Climate Change Law (on the domestic front) represent Calderón's final and most significant attempts to establish what he called: "efforts that have made Mexico an international leader in environmental protection" (BBC, 2012).

However, it is essential to note that Calderón's climate policies were not central to the popular appeal of his campaign that brought him to power, even though Calderon had previously served as Energy Secretary under his predecessor Vicente Fox (Joyce, 2015, p. 5). Instead, his presidential campaign for the 2006 general election centered on improving public infrastructure, combating Mexican drug cartels and reducing organized crime. The exclusion of climate reform from the campaign suggests that in the early 2000s, the Mexican electorate, of which 49% likely received basic education as their highest level of education1 – a factor positively associated with income and a potential measure for socio-economic status–did not perceive climate reform as a major issue that might sway their vote (2020). Yet, the Calderón administration did pursue climate reform.

The discrepancy between the interest of the 35.86% of the Mexican population that successfully elected Calderón (Instituto Nacional Electoral, 2006) and his climate actions suggest that they were not based in the will of his mass constituency; rather they constituted a technocratic political calculus as Calderón attempted to establish Mexico's position as a multilateral leader of developing countries in climate reform and as a vocal advocate of the responsibilities of developing countries within the global system of climate crisis mitigation. This motivation becomes evident when considering that during Calderón's administration, Mexico was neither classified among the most climate-vulnerable countries nor a major global emitter. However, as the G5 nation with the highest per capita income and human development indicators, Mexico leveraged climate action to solidify its role as a multilateral leader among developing nations (Ramírez, 2014).

Therefore, Calderón's desired international recognition appealed to his global peers and the "professional class" of academics and intellectuals that have powered efforts to achieve multilateral climate aims. This approach to climate-conscious reform as a professional and technocratic topic has been reinforced through Calderón's actions since vacating the presidency, including a 2014 discussion on "Economic Arguments Needed to Fight Climate Change" at Harvard Business School, one of the most prestigious–professional class–institutions of the capitalist world (Nobel, 2014).

Climate reform under Felipe Calderón's administration was fundamentally a policy of the "professional class" as one Calderón used to achieve "professional class" goals (setting up Mexico's international stance) through "professional class" avenues (international organizations, informed by the predictions of academic and scientific climate reform advocates).

2012-2018: Enrique Peña Nieto's (PRI) – a Mexico of Privatized Energy Reform.

Calderón's successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, belonged to The Institutional Revolutionary Party (Spanish: *Partido Revolucionario Inatitucional*, abbreviated to PRI), the conservative and autocratic party that dominated Mexico's politics during a series of uninterrupted presidencies lasting 71 years, from 1929 to 2000. Peña Nieto's presidential victory was described by Dan La Botz as "a disheartening signal of defeat to the country's workers," specifically a defeat of independent unions and democratic labor movements in favor of the "profoundly corrupt labor unions that belong to the PRI" signaling Peña Nieto's staunch position as a professional class president (2012). Similarly to his predecessor, Peña Nieto did enter not the presidency on a campaign centered around energy reform. Instead, his ascendency to the office was marked with promises to prevent crime, reform the penal code to limit criminal impunity in Mexico, and fight poverty (Archibold & Zabludovsky, 2012; Peña Nieto, 2012).

Even though Peña Nieto had not campaigned on energy and climate reforms, his administration did see significance in climate reform, including his milestone, the 2013 Energy Reform, which allowed for private investment in both electric and petroleum sectors for the first time since 1938, in the context of modernizing Mexico's energy (Vietor & Sheldahl-Thomason, 2017). Yet, similarly to Calderón's climate reform advancements, it is imperative to frame these as a secondary effect of a more visible and politically salient issue. In Mexico, between "2018 and 2023, crude oil production shrank by 0.22 million barrels per day (MMbd), or 12%" and that refineries' utilization rate has been below 50% since 2017

[1] (According to 2020 Mexican education date gathered by INEGI in Mexicans aged 15+)

contributing to the national petroleum company (PEMEX)'s dire state as the "world's most indebted oil company" with a total financial debt of $105B since 2018. (Duhalt et al., 2024). Peña Nieto's climate action may therefore be attributed to the more urgent and visible energy reform platform aimed at alleviating the economic tragedy that is PEMEX, a company plagued with inefficiency amounting to a net loss of 67.7 billion pesos in the first 9 months of 2011 (PEMEX; 2011). The inclusion of renewable energy as a component of the solution occurred due to the timeline of the Peña Nieto administration which governed as the global community became increasingly interested and receptive in climate-related reforms. The ensuing climate reform happened to be a ramification of energy evolution in the 21st century. Once again in a continuing trend, none of these policies stemmed from the Mexican working class.

As shown in the cases of the Calderon and Peña Nieto administrations, climate policy has never been one that arises directly from the interest of their constituents; instead, it has been the byproduct of specialized political ambitions: in the case of Calderon establishing Mexico as a leader of developing countries in multilateral relations and for Peña Nieto, reforming an energy sector dependent on a notoriously broken, corrupt and inefficient state-run monopoly on Mexican petroleum. In both cases, climate action was undertaken it was a "professional class" impulse motivated by academic and intellectual predictions on how to establish Mexico's international and domestic stability into the future, it was not an issue presented by the "working class" as one that might immediately improve the working class's standard of living.

The fault of Calderon and Peña Nieto's climate ambitions was that they were fundamentally short lived and unraveled with the ascension of AMLO and the MORENA party, a movement that was able to successfully tap into the power of the working class in Mexico.

2018-2024: Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (MORENA) Mexico of "el Pueblo"

By 2018, Mexico experienced a political transformation as the emerging leftist party MORENA rose to power with newly elected President AMLO at its lead who invoked a "Fourth Transformation" of Mexican society as "a political project that aims at changing the direction of the country from a rightist, neoliberal course towards a more progressive direction grounded in societal change" (Villaneuva Ulfgard & Villaneuva, 2020, p. 1027).

AMLO's political momentum resulted in a counter movement against past presidential administration that ALMO and his allies perceived as overrun by corruption and, a sentiment affirmed by the 53% Mexicans who elected him (MILENIO, 2018). Among AMLO's initial proposed counter-reforms were: successful modifications to Mexico's General Climate Law (GLCC) in November 2020, which eliminated the country's Climate Change Fund (articles 80 and 83 of the GLCC) and the highly debated yet persistent Electricity Reforms, which sought to roll back the climate-forward *Reforma Energetica* (Energy Reform) of the previous Peña Nieto administration, by prioritizing the production of Mexican electricity to the state-owned company CFE (Commission Federal de la Electricidad) (Colín, 2020; Secretaría de Gobernación, 2020; CNN Español, 2022). The latter, AMLO's Electric Industry Law (Ley de la Industria Energetica or LIE) was proposed in September of 2021 and debated mid-April of the following year, but ultimately failed to garner the super majority needed to propel the proposed reforms through the lower chamber of the Mexican Congress (AQ Editors, 2022; Jorgic & Graham, 2022).

Yet, days before AMLO's LIE reform was presented to legislators, a lesser reform–a law passed March 2021–which gave CFE priority on dispatch and had been suspended by lower courts on the ground that it violated antitrust laws, was upheld by the country's Supreme Court, reversing the lower court's decision (Reuters, 2022). However, on January 31, 2024, the Mexican Supreme Court did not grant an Appeal for Review for proponents of the LIE bill that was killed in Congress back in 2022 (AP, 2024; Forbes, 2024).

Regardless, in 2022 Mexico submitted an updated NDC goal, and increased its emissions reduction goal by 2030 to 40%, up from 36%, both goals being classified as conditional on additional international support (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales [SEMARNA] & Instituto Nacional de Ecología y Cambio Climático [INECC], 2022). However, Climate Action Tracker has exposed that the updated NDC "lacks transparency and disguises its lack of ambition by counting forests differently in the base and in the target year," and would lead to higher emissions (2022). The update removes a former goal to peak emission by 2026 and makes no mention of a net zero goal. Mexico has not submitted an updated climate promise to the UNDP, leading Climate Action Tracker to rate both Mexico's "Policy and Actions," and "Conditional NDC Target" as "Highly Insufficient" (the second worst ranking) and the country's "Unconditional NDC Target" as "Critically Insufficient (the worst ranking) (Climate Action Tracker, 2022; UNDP, 2022).

Discussion: Marxist Precedent of Huber's *Professional Class* and Mexican Application

Climate Change as Class War is constructed upon the idea of building social justice alongside climate justice, yet this effort is constructed upon a flawed interpretation of Marxist

and socialist ideology.

Unlike Huber's framework which presents three classes (capitalist, professional and working), classical Marxist theory only advances two classes: the working class (proletariat) and the capitalist class (bourgeoisies). The former owns the means of production and employs the later to produce goods and services. The proletariat is routinely exploited by the bourgeoisie to the extent that the capitalist system leads to a proletariat revolution and a socialist society, where private property is replaced by cooperative ownership based on ensuring the needs of the population. Noticeably absent from this rough outline of Marxist ideology is the perseverance of the middle class within the capitalist system. Rather, Marx conceptualizes the middle class (later called the *petit bourgeois*) as an artifact of the pre-industrial era, a class that formerly engaged in manufacturing but was pushed aside with the advent of steam and machinery power and whose work was replaced "by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois" (Marx, 1848, p.8). The middle class becomes further irrelevant in the capitalist system as it is absorbed into the proletariat, and accordingly this proletarianized lower-middle class, is not as revolutionary as the working class. Through its conservative nature, it seeks to preserve its middle-class status against the imposition of capitalism, not as a revolutionary force, but through a desire to retreat towards the social structures of the past (Marx, 1848, p.15).

As for intellectuals, Marx does identify a "portion of the bourgeois ideologists ("*Bourgeoisideologen*") who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical [socialist] movement as a whole" (Marx, 1848, p.15). Yet, he does not attribute these assimilated intellectuals a clear role in the proletarian revolution, only mentioning that it is a group that is not responsible for the revolution, rather joins "when the class struggle nears the decisive hour" (Gleberzon, 1987, p. 82 citing Marx). Marx however, left a "rather vague notion of the relationship between the more perceptive *Bourgeoisideologen* and the proletariat" (Gleberzon, p. 89).

The Orthodox German Marxists who proceeded Marx, Engels and Kautsky were largely suspicious and hostile towards intellectuals. Out of the three groups comprising intellectuals (literati, technocrats, and students), Engels tolerated only the technocrats, citing their skills as necessary for a future socialist society. This position was informed by his belief that intellectuals stemmed from the aristocracy and pursued self-interested elitism. As such, Engels did not consider himself or his fellow Marxist thinkers as intellectuals, as intellectuals were an impediment to socialism (Gleberzon, p. 85). While his positions overwhelmingly mirrored those of Engels, Kautsky perceived intellectuals as part of the "new middle class," the first Marxist thinker to assign intellectuals a distinct social stratum. Yet, Kautsky affixed intellectualism to revisionism, implying their non-proletarian nature (Gleberzon, p. 86).

A conceptualization of the middle, intellectual class as an asset for socialism did not emerge until Lenin, who posited that workers alone would not achieve socialism, rather they needed to be led by a "higher consciousness:" the *intelligentsia* (Gleberzon, p. 89). Accordingly, Lenin considered Marx and Engels to be bourgeois intellectuals. Yet, his position was also qualified under the assertion that while intellectual revolutionaries are responsible in the formation of effective working-class revolutionaries, the latter "will be on the same level in regard to Party activity as revolutionaries from amongst the intellectuals" (Gleberzon, p. 90). Under Lenin's ideological leadership in Russia, post-1917 "intellectual" became synonymous with Lenin's "intelligentsia," and by extension intellectuals became associated with revolutionary ideology (Gleberzon, p. 92).

In Italy, Antonio Gramsci devolved a more conservative framework (in regard to conforming to the original Orthodox German notions of Marxist ideology and class roles) also involving intellectuals. However, Gramsci conceptualizes intellectuals as supporting actors of the proletariat not the leaders of the proletarian revolutions. In Gramscian thinking, the term "intellectual" involves two distinct categories: traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. The prior represents a group responsible for the subaltern functions of the ruling, capitalist class. They are those intellectuals who, informed by their narrow discipline lens and denial of the class character of their perspective, legitimize the dominance of the bourgeoise through their power over the education and books that dull society's critique of the capitalist system (Bodenheimer, 1976). Gramsci argues that these traditional intellectuals gain privilege by employing their skills at the service of the bourgeois, even though they falsely perceive themselves as classless (Bodenheimer, 1976, p. 22). However, Gramsci also argues that the accumulation of knowledge and thought is not unique to the upper class; organic intellectuals emerged from the working class. These individuals are versed in the "day-to-day understanding of the capitalist labor process, how the labor process dehumanizes the worker and how the conception of proletarian socialism can only come through domination of this labor process" (Bodenheimer, 1976, p. 23). Accordingly, these individuals pair their intellect with action. They engage as organizers, teachers and leaders of the proletarian movement (Bodenheimer, 1976, p. 23). However, these organic intellectuals are often absorbed into the stratum of traditional intellectuals, through the public education system that identifies academic excellence and directs it towards the avenues beneficial to the capitalist class (Bodenheimer, 1976, p. 24). Gramsci argues that to counter this phenomenon, the proletariat must provide a "school and instrument" for organic intellectuals to unite and direct the working class: the Leninist Party. The party is also incentivized by Gramsci to "gain ideological hegemony over the entire stratum of traditional intellectuals" by absorbing them into the movement because while the Leninist Party is

not in need of traditional intellectuals' political worldview, they do benefit from the intellectuals' skills and knowledge which may be applied within the proletariat cause (Bodenheimer, 1976, p. 26). A secondary motivation for "winning over traditional intellectuals" is found in the need for proletarian thought to gain ideological hegemony, which traditional intellectuals dictate. In this position they are responsible for shaping the norms and "common sense" of a society, as Gramsci believed (according to Bodenheimer):

> The task of the intellectuals organically associated with the working class is to win over the traditional intellectuals to socialism; then they must together transform the new conception of the world into "common sense..." (from Guiseppe Fiori, Antonio Gramsci, Life of a Revolution) (p. 27)

In all the above-described interpretations of Marxist or socialist ideology, the middle, professional or intellectual class–when present and assigned an active role–facilitates the proletarian revolution. Only in Leninism does the middle class direct the working class and its interest, as posited by Huber. Huber's flexible and classless professional class, directly concerned, with interacting and 'providing' for the working class is theoretically distinct from the professional/intellectual/middle classes of the original Marxist and socialist scholars. Huber's professional class does not emerge from the working class (in the case of Gramsci) and is more likely detrimental to the professional class and its ambitions as suggested by the mistrust of Engels and Kautsky. Huber's argument is fundamentally impeded by his own professional class identity, which blinds him to the reality of the working class and its interests. That is Huber is led by his impression of the professional class as a dynamic and "classless institution," and falls into the same trap of virtue hoarding and paternalism over the working class that has been previously identified by Catherine Lui in her work on the Professional Managerial Class:

> The PMC as the proxy for today's ruling class is shameless about hoarding all forms of secularized virtue: whenever it addresses a political and economic crisis produced by capitalism itself, the PMC reworks political struggles for policy change and redistribution into individual passion plays, focusing its effort on individual acts of 'giving back' or reified form of self-transformation (2021, pp. 1-2).

While Huber's professional class echoes Lui's emphasis on individual effort, Huber himself is unable to overcome this hurdle. According to Huber's model the professional class is the fundamental catalyst for climate reform, which then activates the working class. Huber's use of professional-class framing is equivalent to the manipulation of the working class, the same qualities that Lui argues place the PMC as antagonistic to the working class and enabled the rise of leftist populism in Mexico.

The trajectory of energy and climate reform from 2006-2024 in Mexico empirically reflects Huber's error. Climate reform in Mexico was only achieved under technocratic presidents Calderón and Peña Nieto, whose popularity among the Mexican public was marginal compared to AMLO's administration, which was fundamentally derived from a mass popular movement, a theme that was reflected in AMLO's term that ended in a 71% approval rating (Zissis, 2024).

AMLO and his party's popularity was unsurprising in an environment primed to receive the populist message of MORENA. From the 1920s until the election of AMLO in 2018, presidential administrations' political leadership increasingly skewed towards politicians with "middle/upper-class social origins, with a singular president, Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), presenting an administration in which over 40% of political leadership was represented by individuals of modest socio-economic background (Ai Camp, 2012, p. 291). This trend, paired with previous leaders' inabilities to address the material concerns of the Mexican working class, including security threats posed by organized crime and narcotraffic groups, which Calderon's "War of Drugs" failed to end and rampant corruption, with Peña Nieto blatantly violating its anticorruption commitments and standing accused of accepting $100M from drug cartel kingpin "El Chapo") amounted to the Mexican populace's fundamental disenfranchisement with what it perceived as an elitist system of governance (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Morris, 2019; BBC, 2019).

With this background, the MORENA popular movement allowed AMLO the freedom to exercise the 'peoples' agenda,' which he interpreted as a need to reform the fundamental pillars of Mexican democracy enshrined in the Constitution. The twenty proposed reforms ranged from modifying the selection of Supreme Court justices from executively proposed and legislatively confirmed to popularly elected to eradicating systemic dependencies and protections of certain cooperations instilled in the neoliberal era of Mexican government (López Obrador, 2024), all in an effort to maintain a high level of popularity with the "working class" Mexican majority, which AMLO describes as "returning humanity and public spirit to the document" (AMLO, 2024).

However, none of these reforms explicitly aimed at making progress on the climate issue. The closest AMLO addressed climate was in the context of presenting a commitment to the international community's consensus on the issue as demonstrated in his 2023 speech to the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Action, an occasion that was convened by American President Joe Biden and attended by multiple nations leading substantial climate centric reforms, including the EU and Canada among others (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Fundamentally, climate merely represented a visage of

international conformity given that to AMLO, the climate was never the domestic issue that won him the popular vote. AMLO presented something that his predecessors did not: the widespread support of the Mexican "working class," yet this power as clearly defined by Huber was not exercised toward climate action, suggesting that the political support of the "working class" alone lacks the directionality to address what is fundamentally as "professional class" issue, climate change. While the very nature of climate change reform in Mexico suggests that the professional class's guidance of the working class is unlikely to occur on this issue, the transformations in political attitudes from progressive climate and energy reform in the Calderón-Peña Nieto eras to doubt and opposition in the AMLO era make clear that the working class is unlikely to engage in a mass climate movement as defined by Huber, because climate is not an inherent policy interest of the working class, and the professional class does not need to engage the working class on this issue, and if it does (as in the case of Huber) it will come from a position of distain towards the working class, which is ultimately ineffective and further drives the two classes apart. Here, we find this paper's principal critique of Huber's theory. Huber contends that under professional class leadership, climate reform may be accomplished by appealing to the material insecurity of the working class, yet this has not been the case in Mexico.

In Mexico, not only has the will of the "working class" (as represented by AMLO's popular actions) not been fundamentally aligned with the professional class's interest in mitigating climate change, but there has been no significant effort from the professional class to frame its climate policies in the manner Huber argues, appeals to the working class. As previously discussed, the technocratic administrations that did challenge climate change did so in isolation of the working class. Calderón embrace climate as an issue with the potential to raise Mexico's status among the global professional class of technocrats and experts, while Peña Nieto's climate reform was secondary to the more visible issue of reforming the Mexican energy sector. When these "elitist" politicians left office, so too did Mexico's ambitions for climate reforms. Further demonstrating the professional class and working class's antithetical positions was AMLO's reactions to his processor's climate reforms: to attempt to repeal and destroy them as artifacts of the professional-technocratic class that has so misunderstood and subverted the interests of the working Mexican public.

In the last two decades, the Mexican case essentially presents a state that has adopted a populist ideology, under which climate action has stagnated as such, it affirms Huber's notion that class and climate are deeply interconnected, however, it complicates the notion that a joint social movement of the working and professional class is probable or even feasible. Finally, it is the hope of this paper that the observations propped up by the analysis suggest that an issue as complex and multifaceted as climate and energy reform cannot be achieved solely through a lens of socio-economic class. Rather for an issue that will span the entirety of human experience as our very surroundings being to warm up and deteriorate, professional-class policy makers and analysts will need to think dynamically beyond solutions that begin and end with them. Climate as an issue that will affect all of society, will require us to gather the strategies of those who have not had the privilege to influence policy before. Huber's faults demonstrate that for all the professional and technocratic class's interest in solving climate change, as the minority of the population they will not be the ones to solve climate change: the professional class will not be successful is translating socialist theory into action on the issue of climate change. The type of class solidarity needed to do so, will not the professional class dominated kind proposed by Huber. If simultaneous climate and socialism movements are possible, they will implicate organic and grassroots engagement with the working class, not the same top-down approach that has harvest resentment and class-divides in Mexico.

Looking Forward: 2024-2030: Claudia Sheinbaum's (MORENA) Mexico of...?

As for Mexico's climate change future, this paper's conclusion comes at the start of another unprecedented moment in Mexican sociopolitical history. During the 2024 Presidential Elections, the popularity of AMLO and his MORENA message was affirmed with the election of his protégé Claudia Sheinbaum, who won the presidency that year with 59% of the vote, demonstrating a negative correlation with ascending levels of education and wealth (Hidalgo Pérez et al., 2024).

However, Claudia Sheinbaum presents a novel interpretation of MORENA's ideology. A career academic in the field of–none other than–environmental engineering, Sheinbaum presents an inconsistency in MORENA's brief history. In many ways, Sheinbaum is the antithesis to AMLO in her personal identity and background. Unlike AMLO she does not publicly trace her familial roots to the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Additionally, unlike AMLO she has spent years as a published academic and in her past, she has publicly advocated for climate reform in Mexico as a climate scientist and environmental engineer.

Yet on October 30, 2024, President Claudia Sheinbaum carried on the legacy of Former President AMLO by signing a measure to empower PEMEX and CFE as state energy companies (Arista, 2024; MND Staff, 2024). On November 6, 2024, she presented the National Strategy for the Electricity Sector, a part of her administration's National Energy Plan, which would strengthen and grow CFE by guaranteeing it 56% of

Mexico's electricity-production market, contributing approximately $US400 million investment in the state-owned electricity producer over Sheinbaum's six-year term, by refining the language and objectives around PEMEX and CFE in the Constitution (Rojas, 2024) She additionally confirmed that these secondary laws around the re-expropriation of CFE and PEMEX could be presented in detail in the first months of 2025. Sheinbaum has detailed that her proposed reforms will include two programs of Energy Justice that will replace firewood stoves with conventional stoves and will install photovoltaic panels in homes without electricity in two states in the northern region of the country (Presidencia de la Republica, 2024). However, the Mexico Center at the Williams Center of UCLA has concluded that Sheinbaum's energy reforms will" impair fair market competition and investment in reliable and clean energy supply" (Calderón & Polo Anaya, 2024), given that the national Mexican energy sector, including the CFE, is fundamentally dependent on the use of conventional fossil fuel methods for the generation of electricity (accounting for the generation of 68.8% of Mexico's electricity in 2022) (Secretaría de Energia [SENER], 2023). This means that the MORENA administration's policies, therefore, present an impediment to achieving the 2015 Paris Agreement's (of which Mexico is a signatory) objective of containing global warming to "well below" +2°C above pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, n.d).

Even as a climate scientist who has advocated for the diversification of Mexico's energy matrix into cleaner, renewables and for more ambitious national climate goals, the policy influence of her predecessor and mentor AMLO, remain present in Sheinbaum's energy policies (Ramírez & Díaz, 2024; Almaraz Petrie et al., 2024).

Sheinbaum's dual identity as a professional operating within MORENA's populist framework, poses a compelling case for further examining the validity of Huber's theoretical lens against Mexico's energy and climate reforms.

This paper shared Huber's assumption that the "professional class" is acutely aware of and active in addressing the climate crisis. Therefore, we would presume that Sheinbaum would be uniquely positioned to address climate change in Mexico as a "professional" with a climate interest and the support of the Mexican "working class." Nevertheless, as previously described, we continue to see trends aligned with AMLO's approach, further casting doubt on Huber's depiction of the benevolent (not-Marxist) professional class. However, should Sheinbaum change her trajectory and commence advocating for climate and energy reforms aligned with sustainability objectives, the analysis of this paper may need to be re-examined as she may be (according to Huber) in a unique position as a joiner of professional class's climate directionality and working class's position of mass impact. In this scenario, Sheinbaum may be able to address the issues as none of her predecessors have been able to do. However, if this paper's argument holds, she is unlikely to do so, and climate change mitigation in Mexico is bound for a more complicated–and likely *warmer*–future.

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PUBLIC OFFICIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Resilience and Resistance

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We are not the ones to go quietly; we are the thunder rolling across these lands, the drumbeat that never ceased. For centuries, they tried bury us, but like seeds in the spring, we rose again. Our voices were silenced, our languages erased, but we are still here, speaking in tongues they swore would die, in words that hold the fire of our ancestors.

We have carried this pain, yes, but we carry pride too, pride that sits in our chest like a stone, pride there refuses to be broken, even in the hardest of winds. We are still here, and not as shadows, not as whispers, but as the ones who remember, the ones who reclaim. We remember who we are, we remember where we came from, and that memory will never be taken, never be stolen from us again.

So, to those who stand in our way, who think that they can silence us still, hear this: we are rising, we are rising like the mountains that they could not tear down, like the rivers that they could not stop flowing. We are the ones who know this land, who are bound to it, who will defend it. We are warriors of memory and of spirit, of resistance and of the earth. This fight is in our blood, a promise written across generations.

We stand not for anger's sake, but for justice and for all that is sacred. So, if you see rage in our eyes, know that it is love too, a love as deep as time, a love as strong as any stone. We are here, unafraid, and unbowed, ready to protect what was given to us. We do not ask for permission to exist, we are here to live, we are here to speak, we are here to stand, and we are here to resist. And we will not go quietly!

Imagine an Indigenous world where traditional knowledge and practices are respected and integrated into modern society, where land and the natural resources are preserved and protected, where community is prioritized over individualism, where diversity and inclusion are celebrated and where indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups have full agency and control over their own lives and future.

A world where people lived in harmony with one another, recognizing the inherent value and worth of every individual regardless of their background.

Imagine a world where the water and air are clean and pure. A world where we are taught to love one another and be united in all things, and to be thankful for the favors we received.

This was the world of my ancestors, the Native American people who lived on this land long before the arrival of Europeans. They had a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things and they lived in balance with the natural world. They honored the spirits of the earth, the sky, and the water, and recognized the vital role that each play in sustaining life.

But then, everything changed. With the arrival of colonizers came a wave of destruction, devastation and despair. The land was taken from the native people, their sacred sites destroyed or desecrated, their culture and tradition suppressed or banned.

But, even in the face of this darkness, our spirits were not

extinguished. Even though they took the land, even though they tried to break us, they could not break the bond that ties us to this earth, and to each other, and to the spirit of life itself. Generations endured, carrying the embers of our traditions, keeping alive the songs, and the languages spoken in quiet defiance. Even as they sought to sever us from our roots, those which grew deeper, finding strength in the very soil they tried to take from us.

And now, we stand at a turning point, a resurgence of indigenous nation-building, a time of remembering and reclaiming who we truly are. We know that the path forward is not in the systems designed to erase us but in returning to the wisdom that has always guided us. It is a call to return our languages, to the spiritual practices that connect us to all living things, a call to reimagine education not as a tool of assimilation, but as a process of awakening. This resurgence is a return to the sacred, to the knowledge of our ancestors who understood that true strength is not found in division, but in community, and in honoring of all of our relations.

To rebuild our nations, we must break free from the structures that have confined us, structures that prioritize the individual over the collective, that teach separation instead of unity. State education systems were never meant to serve us; they were meant to mold us into what the colonizers needed us to be, to uphold a system that was never ours.

But we have a different vision. A vision rooted in our own ways of knowing, a vision where our children learn the truth about who they are, empowered by the teachings of our elders, where they grow in strength and in spirit, connect to the land that has always been ours.

This resurgence of indigenous nation building will require generations of indigenous peoples, to be immersed in our own languages and spirituality. This may require a radical break from the systems… Systems that are designed to produce communities of individuals willing to uphold settler colonialism.

The Shoshone people use stories to advocate for a reclamation of land as pedagogy, in order to nurture a generation of indigenous peoples that already have the skill and knowledge, and values, to rebuild our own nation, according to our own worldviews and values.

We need to begin to have important discussions on how to ethically and responsibly, bring indigenous knowledge into academia, as a way of legitimizing the knowledge of indigenous peoples, as an intellectual system on par with western traditions.

We need to produce more indigenous scholars as a mechanism for having a stronger presence within the colonial system. We need elders on faculty who gain tenure based on their expertise and indigenous knowledge, not based on their western credentials.

Indigenous people need to stop looking for legitimacy within the colonizers education system and return to valuing and recognizing their own individual and collective intelligence.

If academia is really concerned about protecting and maintaining indigenous intelligence, then academia must make a conscious decision to become the decolonizing force in the intellectual lives of indigenous people. Join us in dismantling settler colonialism and actively protect the source of our knowledge, which comes from the land.

200 years ago, Shoshone elders were not preparing their children for successful career paths in a capitalistic system. Their stories were meant to create self-motivated, self-directed, community minded, brilliant loving citizens, who, at their core, upheld ideals around family and community.

It encouraged their children to find their joy, and place it at the center of their lives. It encouraged their children to value consent. This was key to the building of nations where exploitation, extraction, and depletion was unthinkable. The beauty of a culturally inherent resurgence, is that it challenges the system, it challenges settler colonialism.

For my ancestors, education was not about career paths or climbing ladders in the system to exploit the earth and its people. It was about preparing each generation to live in harmony with the land, to be stewards of the world around them, to care for one another in a way that ensured the survival of the whole community.

Our elders were not concerned with creating cogs for the capitalistic machine; they were nurturing individuals who can think critically, act compassionately, and live responsibly. Their stories were lessons in resilience, in resisting the forces sought to fragment us, teaching us how to stay whole in the face of relentless change.

This is the beauty of culturally inherent resurgence: it does more than preserve our traditions; it actively challenges the capitalistic system that prioritizes profit over people, over the earth, over the very things that sustains life itself.

If we are to truly transform our future, we must rethink what education means. It cannot simply be about producing graduates that fill roles in a unsustainable system. Instead, it must be about empowering individuals to serve their communities, to heal the land and to uplift one another.

We need education that teaches not just skills, but values; not just knowledge, but wisdom; an education that prepares us to face the challenges of tomorrow with a deep sense of responsibility to the earth and all living things.

This shift requires us to move away from the narrow focus on economic outcomes, and to embrace a holistic view that integrates the wisdom of our ancestors with the knowledge of

today.

Can you imagine if our science classrooms were guided, not just by scientific method, but by traditional knowledge that understands the earth as a living, breathing entity, where we are not separate from the ecosystems, but part of them.

Imagine if business schools taught not just how to maximize profits, but how to maximize the well-being of communities and the health of the planet. What if future business leaders were trained to see beyond quarterly earnings, and to consider the impact of their decisions on the next seven generations?

Imagine a curriculum that emphasizes reciprocity and stewardship over exploitation; where students learn the principles of sustainable resource management, rooted in indigenous teachings. In this vision, business education would shift from competition to collaboration, teaching that true success is not measured by financial gain, but by the strength and resilience of the community.

Students would learn that the land is not a commodity to be consumed, but a relative to be cared for, that economies thrive, not by extracting and depleting, but by giving back, regenerating, and supporting ecosystems.

Imagine if entrepreneurship were taught as a means of serving the greater good, where the creation of value includes nurturing social bonds, uplifting marginalized voices, and ensuring balance between humans and the natural world. This would be a business education rooted in the understanding that we are all interconnected, that our success is bound to the well-being of the earth and each other.

Imagine if our social sciences were grounded in indigenous wisdom, where the study of human behavior in societies is not detached and objective, but deeply relational and compassionate.

What if anthropology, sociology, and political science, embrace the understanding that our identities are woven together with the land, with each other, and with the spirits that guide us?

Imagine a shift where research is conducted not on communities, but with them, honoring their knowledge and lived experiences as equal to academic theories.

In this vision, social scientists would learn that every culture holds its own valuable truths, that resilience is found in the strength of community bonds, and that healing societal issues requires a holistic approach; one that includes spirituality, ceremony, and the honoring of ancestors.

The focus would not be on categorizing or controlling human behavior, but on nurturing empathy, building bridges of understanding, and fostering interconnectedness. This is a social science that doesn't just analyze the world, but seeks to heal it, guided by the belief that the well-being of one is tied to the well-being of all.

Imagine if our law schools embraced the ancient principles of restorative justice, where the goal is not punishment but healing, not retribution but restoration. What if, instead of focusing on adversarial courtrooms and punitive measures, we taught future lawyers to seek justice as a process of repair, of making whole what has been broken?

Imagine a legal education that emphasizes responsibility to mend relationships, to restore harmony within the communities, rather than merely to win a case. In this vision, our legal system would prioritize the well-being of individuals, families, and communities, ensuring that everyone has a voice, that every harm is acknowledged, and that healing can take place.

This is the justice my ancestors practiced, where conflict was resolved through dialogue, where solutions were sought not in isolation, but in the wisdom of the collective.

What if law schools taught consensus-building as a foundational skill, honoring the indigenous practice of making decisions through community agreement rather than top-down rulings?

Imagine a new generation of lawyers trained not only in statutes and regulations, but also in the art of listening, and the patience it takes to reach a consensus that truly reflects the will of the people.

This would be a radical shift from the current system, where the law often serves to protect the powerful, to a system that seeks balance, fairness, and respect for all. In this reimagined legal system, the focus would not be on winning or losing, but on finding paths forward that honors the interconnectedness of all living beings.

This is a law rooted in the understanding that justice is not an abstract concept, but a living practice, one that must reflect our shared humanity and our sacred relationship with the land.

What if psychology could be transformed to honor not just the mind, but the spirit, the community, and the land that sustains us. Instead of reducing wellness to chemical imbalances and diagnoses, what if we embraced an approach that recognizes the deep connections between our mental health and our relationships with others, and with the earth, and with the sacred?

What if healing practices included ceremonies, storytelling, and traditional medicines, honoring the wisdom passed down through generations? Imagine a psychology that sees trauma not just as an individual experience, but as a collective wound that requires community healing; psychology that teaches resilience not as a solitary string but as the ability to draw from the strength of one's people, one's ancestors, and the natural world.

In this reimagining space, therapy would be more than a conversation behind closed doors; it would be a reconnection with places and practices that ground us, a return to the circle where healing is shared, and where the stories of our elders guide us back to balance. This is the psychology our ancestors understood, one that we can reclaimed and reshaped to serve all people today.

To truly embrace resilience and resistance in our education systems, we must break the mold, and create spaces where indigenous wisdom can thrive alongside modern knowledge.

We must teach our children not just how to survive in the world, but how to build a world that can be: one where the waters run clean, where the air is pure, where communities are strong, and where the spirit of the land is honored. This is the education that serves not the market; but the people, our communities, and the earth itself.

We are not the ones to go quietly. We are the thunder rolling across these lands, the echoes of our ancestors' songs, the prayers whispered to the wind. For too long, we have been told to conform, to adapt, to fit ourselves into a system that was never built for us. But we are still here.

And we are reclaiming our right to reimagine a world where education does not break our spirits, but uplifts them; where the lessons we pass down are not shaped by the demands of the market, but by the wisdom of the earth, by the teachings of our elders, by the values that have sustained us for generations.

This is our resistance. A refusal to accept an education that strips us of our identity, that disconnects us from the land, that molds us into instruments of a system that prioritizes profit over people.

We stand against this with a resilience forged in fire, with the strength of knowing who we are, where we come from, and what we are fighting for. We are the ones who dream of a different future — where our business schools teach reciprocity, our sciences honor the sacredness of all living things, our social sciences build bridges of understanding, and our law schools fight for justice rooted in respect.

We carry the teachings of our ancestors not as relics of the past, but as blueprints for a future that embraces balance, community, and compassion. We are the rivers that will not be dammed, the forests that will not be cut down, the mountains that will not be moved. And in this spirit, we call for an education that heals, that nourishes the soul, that connects us back to what truly matters — our people, our communities, and our sacred land.

This is our act of resistance: to refuse to let the system define us, to reclaim our voices, our stories, and our power.

So let us move forward, guided by the wisdom of those who came before us, rooted in resilience, driven by resistance. We will not be silent. We will not go quietly into the shadows. We are here to transform, to reimagine, to rebuild.

We are the thunder that will awaken the world, the fire that will light the way. And together, we will create an education that serves not just the individual, but the whole, that nurtures not just the mind, but the spirit, that honors the land and all its living beings.

This is our vision. This is our fight. And we will rise, resilient and unbroken, to build the world that our ancestors dreamed of, and the world that our children deserve.

Public Libraries - Core Social Infrastructure for a Lonely World

Noah Baskett,
CEO, Salt Lake City Public Library

"We live, as we dream—alone." – Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

Few challenges rise to the level of concern and ubiquity across the US as the widespread epidemic of loneliness and disconnection that we face today. Despite the promises of recent technological advances—social networks meant to foster community across distances, web resources that provide instant connectivity to information and resources—these technologies have ushered in an age where we now experience the exact opposite of such promises: deeper disconnection and rapidly fraying social bonds.

In 2023, when the US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy released the report, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community,* this sounded the alarm bells for the very real public health implications of our current loneliness crisis (*Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community,* 2023). According to a 2015 study, the negative health effects of loneliness are comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes per day and a greater health risk than either obesity or lack of physical activity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Similarly, a 2020 study that explored social isolation in older adults found that social isolation was associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke (*Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System*, 2020).

This crisis may be impacting no group more so that youth and young adults, particularly with online communication supplanting in-person social connection. According to Harvard University's 2020 "Loneliness in America" report, 61% of young adults report feeling serious loneliness (Weissbourd et al., n.d.). Consequently, the experience of loneliness in youth and young adults is associated with higher risks of depression, suicidal ideation, and other mental health challenges.

The effects of such national trends can be acutely felt across the state of Utah as well. According to a recent Household Pulse Survey conducted by the US Census Bureau, 42.5% of Utahns report feeling lonely, surpassing the US national average of 40.3%, and a concerning 21.6% of Utah High Schoolers report feeling frequently lonely and isolated in 2023, a statistic trending upward (US Census Bureau, n.d.).

With the technological advancement that has shaped these trends only expected to grow exponentially in the years ahead, what are we to do to address our nation's loneliness crisis? As local leaders, legislators, and community members seek to mitigate the worst of these effects both locally and across the US, what investments and interventions hold the most promise? What institutions are up for this tremendous challenge before us?

You would be forgiven if it hadn't crossed your mind to immediately consider your humble local library branch to address one of the greatest social challenges of our day. In popular imagination, public libraries are often thought of as a remnant of a distant, dusty, analog, card-catalog-filled past overseen by unwelcoming librarians in horn-rimmed glasses - certainly no longer an institution relevant in a day when the entire world's store of information can be carried around and accessed with the phone in your pocket–certainly not an engine for social innovation and connection in our disconnected world! Yet you would be mistaken. There is likely no better positioned institution to address this seemingly impossible challenge we are faced with.

Today's public libraries have evolved from quiet places of reading into vibrant hubs of activity where community members from all walks of life come together to connect, collaborate, and learn. Public libraries are trusted places where everyone is welcome and invited, where everyone belongs. As institutions experience all-time low levels of trust, public libraries have become an indispensable resource for neighborhood vibrancy in cities, suburbs, and rural communities throughout the world.

> *"Libraries are the kinds of places where people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can take part in a living democratic culture. They offer free and open access to information and social resources, and they help level the playing field by giving everyone a place to learn, study, and connect. When they're working well, libraries provide the kind of contact and companionship that are essential for democracy itse*lf." (Eric Klinenberg, Palaces for the People, pg Page 221).

The excerpt above from sociologist Eric Klinenberg's Palaces for the People, points to the unique role that libraries play in today's public landscape of providing what he calls, "social infrastructure." Distinct from the concept of "social capital" popularized by Robert Putnam in his seminal Bowling Alone, social infrastructure refers to the kind of built infrastructure within a community that provides the necessary fertile soil from which healthy and vibrant communities can grow (Putnam, 2000). Klinenberg research demonstrates that even in vulnerable and low-income communities, residents are healthier and happier when social infrastructure like parks, sidewalks, churches, recreation centers, and importantly, public libraries are present.

Every single day of the week, the Salt Lake City Public Library system is sustaining this kind of robust "social infrastructure" for Salt Lake City and its neighborhoods that Klinenberg speaks of through its robust mix of programming, services, collections, and open spaces. Daily, young parents and primary caregivers bring their children to their local library branch to engage in our "Book Baby" and "Toddler Storytime" programs. Not only do caregivers get to learn from trained librarians how to best nurture early literacy in their children, they also get to relationally connect with others in a similar life-stage - a stage that, for many, can often be one of the most isolating.

Come to any Salt Lake City Public Library branch in the hours after school, and you will be greeted by a rambunctious group of teens hanging out, playing video games, doing homework, studying for the ACT, or writing their college entry exams. Many young people, particularly in Salt Lake's underserved neighborhoods who often lack access to other afterschool programs or activities, find a safe place full of welcoming and caring adult staff in their local library branch.

On just about any weekend that you find yourself at Salt Lake City's award-winning downtown Main Library, you will be greeted by its bustling "Urban Room," with nearly all of the city's rich diversity present in one place at one time. You might find a free public opera or ballet performance, a free film screening in the library's auditorium, or a variety of free workshops - from how to operate a 3-D printer to how to launch a small business. The operative word is "free" - no other public good exists in the US today that offers such a variety of services, programming, and opportunities for citizens of all ages to connect as the public library system.

The Salt Lake City Public Library system continues to be a nationally recognized leader, with its downtown main library, opened in 2003 and designed by the world-renowned architect Moshe Safdie. In a recent international poll published by the Deseret News, the building was identified as the 15th most popular library building in the world.

And it is a library system beloved by its city's residents. In one of our recent public sentiment surveys, 91% of surveyed SLC residents regarded the City Library as a trusted institution, and 94% of patrons regard their most recent library experience as good or excellent (Salt Lake City Public Library, 2023). With 74% of residents as library card holders, and with an active number of patrons growing faster than the City's residential population, Salt Lakers love their libraries!

As we look to the future at the Salt Lake City Public Library, we are doubling down on our evolving role as the connective glue of our city—a platform that nurtures belonging and meaningful connection among Salt Lake City residents. We envision the Library as a vital bridging institution, uniquely positioned to bring people together across geographic, demographic, and ideological divides. Deeply embedded in the heart of the city and its diverse neighborhoods, the City Library system will be a catalyst for connection, community, and holistic wellbeing. In an increasingly fragmented world, we believe the future of libraries is more essential than ever—not just as places of information and learning, but as places that hold us together and make our communities whole.

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Back to the Future: Utah Begins Preparing to Host the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Again

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In the summer of 2024, the International Olympic Committee selected Salt Lake City to host the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. This represents Salt Lake's second turn hosting the Winter Games, after a successful first run in 2002. One factor contributing to the city's attractiveness as a repeat host is the state's stewardship of its 2002 Olympic facilities.

Preparing for and hosting the Games involves billions of dollars of spending over the next decade. The Salt Lake City-Utah Committee for the Games expects to invest $3.2 billion (in 2024 dollars) between 2024 and 2034 for the 2034 Winter Games. It plans to spend nearly $1.8 billion of that amount in Utah. This investment includes annual employment, which the committee expects to grow from five jobs in 2024 to 661 by 2032, then jump to 2,323 in 2033 and 4,450 in 2034. These jobs will be paid a cumulative $354.6 million in compensation. In addition, the committee anticipates the federal government will spend $196.5 million between 2030 and 2034 for security at the Games. Adding an estimated $670.8 million in spending by out-of-state visitors brings total Olympics-related expenditures in Utah to over $2.6 billion over the next decade. This does not include an unknown amount of additional spending by Olympic sponsors.

This spending will have economic ripple effects in the state. The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute estimates that, between 2024 and 2035, preparing for and hosting the 2034 Winter Games will create cumulative total economic impacts in Utah of $6.8 billion (in 2024 dollars) in industry sales, almost $4.0 billion in state gross domestic product, and $2.6 billion in personal income. Expected annual total employment impacts range from eight jobs in 2024 to 6,800 in 2033 and 28,500 in 2034.

Hosting the Olympic Games requires a substantial investment in athletic facilities (for example, skating rinks, ski jumps, and athlete housing). The Salt Lake Organizing Committee spent the equivalent of $293.6 million in 2024 dollars on permanent structures for the 2002 Winter Games, including reimbursement of a $97.9 million ($59 million nominal) state and local sales tax diversion used to build the Utah Olympic Park. The 2002 facilities include the Utah Olympic Park in Park City, Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, the Olympic Oval in Kearns, Peaks Ice Arena in Provo, the Maverik Center in West Valley City, and the Weber County Sports Complex in Ogden.[1]

All these facilities are still in use and will serve as venues for the 2034 Winter Games. In fact, Utah's stewardship of its

1 Other infrastructure investments for the 2002 Games include the Olympic Village at the University of Utah, which now pro-vides student housing, and expansion of the university's Rice-Eccles Stadium.

2002 Olympic infrastructure contributed to its attractive candidacy to host the 2034 Games.

The Utah Legislature established the nonprofit Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation (UOLF) in 1994 to serve as a steward of the main facilities developed for the 2002 Winter Games.[2] UOLF manages the Utah Olympic Park, Soldier Hollow, and the Olympic Oval, maintaining them as training sites for elite athletes and providing opportunities for community participation in winter sports.[3] With an initial endowment of $76 million ($130.6 million in 2024 dollars) at the completion of the 2002 Games, part of the Foundation's mission has been to ensure that Utah is "Olympic ready." This means that the three primary venues will meet Olympic standards for sport competitions by 2027 (Figure 1).[4] In addition to the venues maintained and operated by the UOLF, Provo, West Valley City, and Weber County manage three former Olympic venues: the Peaks Ice Arena, the Maverik Center, and the Weber County Sports Complex, respectively. Deer Valley, the Delta Center, Park City Mountain Resort, and Snowbasin are privately owned facilities that hosted events dur-ing the 2002 Games. All these sites continue to serve the public and will provide venues for training and competition during the 2034 Games.

Besides UOLF's work preserving Utah's Olympic facilities, the state itself has invested in maintaining its Olympic venues. Most recently, in fiscal years 2019 through 2026, the Utah Legislature appropriated a total of $100.6 million in one-time and ongoing funds to maintain and upgrade the state's winter sports facilities, including $40 million in FY 2024 for the Olympic and Paralympic Venues Grant Fund (Table 1).[5] In the 2025 legislative session, the Legislature allocated $7.3 million from the Venues Grant Fund for renovations of the Weber County Sports Complex ($3.8 million), Peaks Ice Arena ($3.0 million), and the Maverik Center ($500,000)."[6]

Table 1
Winter Sports Venue Appropriations from Utah Legislature

Fiscal Year	One-Time	Ongoing	Total
2019	$6.0	$3.0	$9.0
2020	$0.0	$3.0	$3.0
2021	$0.0	$3.0	$3.0
2022	$8.6	$3.0	$11.6
2023	$22.0	$3.0	$25.0
2024	$40.0	$3.0	$43.0
2025	$0.0	$3.0	$3.0
2026	$0.0	$3.0	$3.0
Total	**$76.6**	**$24.0**	**$100.6**

Source: Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst, Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation Funding Items; Utah State Legislature, Compendium of Budget Information.

Because of this stewardship and state appropriations, the Organizing Committee for the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games expects to spend much less on capital investment in preparation for the 2034 Winter Games than it did for the 2002 Games. The 2002 organizing committee invested approximately $293.6 million (in 2024 dollars) in permanent facilities for the 2002 Winter Games. In comparison, the 2034 committee has budgeted just $32.2 million in permanent capital

2 UOLF was created by the Utah State Legislature in 1994 through a joint resolution with the purpose to maintain and operate Utah's Olympic venues and foster Utah's Olympic legacy through sports development in the event that Utah wins a fu-ture Olympic bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

3 Beagley, M., Pratoomchat, P., Lloyd, N., & Summers, L. 2024. A Living Legacy: The Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/UOLF-July2024.pdf.

4 Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation strategic plan. Retrieved from https://utaholympiclegacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/UOLF-Strategic-Plan-Document1.pdf.

5 Utah's Infrastructure and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation Funding Items (2023). Retrieved from https://le.utah.gov/interim/2023/pdf/00005026.pdf.

6 2025 H.B. 3, lines 2724–2739.

investments for the 2034 Winter Games. Instead of constructing new facilities, the investments will go toward improvements at the Utah Olympic Park, Soldier Hollow, and the Utah Olympic Oval. The committee also plans to invest $218.2 million in temporary infrastructure, including at the competition, training, and ceremony venues, for power generation, and for signage and wayfinding.

The organizing committee's preparations for the 2034 Winter Games will take place over five phases. The initial Transition phase occurs from January 2025 through December 2027 and includes the establishment of the organizing committee and the beginning of community engagement. The Strategy phase runs from January 2028 through December 2029. During this period the committee begins high-level, long-term planning and stakeholder engagement. This includes confirming venues, bringing on major sponsors, and developing strategic plans. Games Planning begins in earnest in the third phase, from January 2030 through December 2031. The organizing committee begins developing detailed event operations plans to deliver the Games, brings on additional sponsors, and begins working on concepts for the opening and closing ceremonies. The handover ceremonies from the 2030 Winter Games in the French Alps occur in March of 2030. January 2032 through October 2033 represents the Readiness phase. At this point the organizing committee becomes fully staffed and launches its volunteer program, develops its final operations plans, conducts readiness exercises, and runs test events. This is also when public ticket sales begin. Finally, the Games phase runs from November 2033 through March 2034, and begins with the Olympic Torch Relay.

The 2034 Winter Games also spur additional investment in the state. Project Alta, a coalition of industry, government, and higher education led by Utah's aerospace, defense, and cyber industry association 47G, aims to develop a system of electric-powered air taxis and air cargo in Utah in time for the 2034 Winter Games. 47G recently announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding with electric aircraft developer Beta Technologies, supported by the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity and the Utah Department of Transportation. The MOA describes a plan to create airborne options for transporting people and goods around the state[7] UDOT plans improvements to the I-80/SR-224 interchange and along SR-224 at Kimball Junction near Park City to better accommodate growth and increased visitation during the 2034 Winter Games. The agency is also double-tracking sections of the FrontRunner commuter rail service to increase train frequency and improve reli-ability between Ogden and Provo, both of which host Olympic venues.

Utah demonstrated foresight with the steward-ship of its 2002 Olympic venues. This helped earn it the honor of hosting the Winter Games again in 2034 while reducing necessary investment expenses. Utah will be a very different place in 2034 than it was in 2002. The state's larger economy, larger, more diverse population, and expanded infrastruc-ture, combined with planning and preparations now, will help ensure it hosts a successful 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

7 Raymond, A. (2025, January 28). Takeoff: New agreement clears the runway for Utah electric aircraft network. Deseret News. Re-trieved from https://www.deseret.com/business/2025/01/28/air-taxis-electric-aircraft-advanced-air-mobility-utah-beta-technologies-47g/.

"*Most everything worthwhile is borne of some dreamer's dream*."

-Robert H. Hinckley