

# Clio's Scroll



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*Clio's Scroll*, the Berkeley Undergraduate History Journal, is published twice yearly by students of the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. The journal aims to provide undergraduates with the opportunity to publish historical works and to train staff members in the editorial process of an academic journal. *Clio's Scroll* is produced by financial support from the Townsend Center for the Humanities, the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), and the Department of History. *Clio's Scroll* is not an official publication of the ASUC or UC Berkeley. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the journal, the editors, the university, or sponsors.

## Note from the Editors

Dear readers,

From the editorial board to you, thank you for picking up the latest edition of Clio's Scroll. This edition features the work of three outstanding undergraduate historians who completed their theses during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Their research demonstrates the authors' exceptional resourcefulness and perseverance. We hope the fruit of their intellectual labor is passed down to our readers not only as valuable contributions to the field of history, but also as enjoyable insights into yet unexamined perspectives. Our editor board chose these three papers for their cogent, creative analyses of primary sources, from newspapers to archival documents and a memoir.

First, Grinnell College alumni Kiran Loewenstein's meticulous dissection of the English-language press response to the 1952 Cairo Fire provides a fresh take on the role typically assigned to the Fire in the scholarship on Egyptian decolonization. Next, Columbia University alumni Marco Balestri brings New York into the Southern-centered historiography of disenfranchisement in the U.S. His essay details how policymakers designed the New York State Literacy Test to exclude immigrant populations from the vote. Finally, UC Berkeley alumni Andrew Soohwan Kim examines the development of Iri, modern-day Iksan, under Japanese colonial rule in Korea through an intricate analysis of a prominent Japanese settler's memoir.

In addition to the hard work of our three writers, this edition would not have been possible if not for the dedication of our board of associate editors. To our editors who have been with Clio's Scroll for years to those who just joined this semester, thank you. This journal is a reflection of your hard work and the excellent analytical and editorial skills you have developed during your time at Berkeley. To our readers, thank you for your interest in the work of undergraduate historians, and please enjoy this edition of Clio's Scroll.

Sincerely,

Miranda Jiang and Reva Kale  
*Co-Editors in Chief*

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## Editorial Board

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### CO-EDITORS IN CHIEF

**MIRANDA JIANG** is a senior majoring in History and French. Her senior thesis focuses on crime and print culture in 1920s French-occupied Vietnam. She has previously worked on Chinese American history with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley and the 150 Years of Women at Berkeley History Project. She has worked as a SURF and URAP summer fellow. She loves playing the carillon, writing creatively, and practicing languages with friends, family, and strangers.

**REVA KALE** is a junior studying History and minoring in Public Policy. She is interested in legal history as well as the history of South Asian migration to the United States. In addition to Clio's Scroll, she works as an organizer for a nonprofit, serves as a volunteer tutor, and is hoping to become fluent in Spanish. She enjoys binge-watching Game of Thrones and exploring all the good places to eat in the Bay!

### MANAGING EDITOR

**KATHERINE BOOSKA** is a fourth-year student from rural Angwin, California, majoring in History, with a minor in Politics, Philosophy, and Law. She is interested in religious history, intellectual history, the history of conservatism, and intersections between law and religion in the United States. Katherine also studies Russian and Hebrew. Outside of her classes, Katherine is a Conduct caseworker at the Student Advocate's Office and improvises with Best Laid Plans Improv. Katherine loves long trail runs in the hills of Berkeley, visiting independent bookstores, and watching the newts at the UC Botanical Garden.

### ASSOCIATE EDITORS

**BELLA AN** is a fourth-year student from Orange County, CA majoring in History and Legal Studies. Her focus is on how early Christianity and law shaped the Roman Empire. Her other interests include Bay Area politics and legal theory. In her free time, Bella enjoys film photography, exploring different coffee shops around the Bay, and going on really, really long walks.

**PARKER BOVÉE** is a senior from Sacramento, California majoring in History. Coming from a family with two other History majors, he has always been deeply interested in understanding the past. Parker hopes to focus his undergraduate work and beyond on the American West in exploring differing notions of American identity along ethnic and economic lines. Aside from worrying too much about exams, he is regularly disappointed by his hometown Sacramento Kings, frustrated by Liverpool FC, and captivated by a wide array of music.

**KACIE COSGROVE** is a second-year student from Valley Springs, California. She is majoring in History and French, and her emphasis in history is on the cultural history of the United States in the 20th century. She hopes to write her senior thesis

on the topic of forced sterilization of indigenous women in the United States in the late 20th century. Outside of Clio's Scroll, she is a caseworker for the Suitcase Clinic at UC Berkeley and is a member of the UC Rally Committee. In her free time, she enjoys eating Thai food, writing letters to friends and family, and being in nature.

**ADAM HAGEN** is a junior from Sacramento, California majoring in history. He is interested in the political and economic ideologies of Modern Europe, especially their manifestation in the great conflicts of the twentieth century. Outside of class, he enjoys watching movies, binging Survivor, keeping a finger on the cultural pulse, and pining for the modest enchantment of the Central Valley.

**PHIL HANNA** is a senior from Southern California majoring in History and German, with an emphasis on the social history of 20th century Germany, specifically the Weimar period. In his senior thesis, he hopes to explore this period through the lens of military youth groups across the political spectrum. Among his other interests are the history of fascism, ideological extremism, and youth history. After his time at Berkeley, he hopes to continue to complete a Ph.D. and work in the field of historical research.

**BRIAN HO** is a third-year transfer student from Palo Alto, California majoring in History and minoring in Chinese. He is interested in studying East Asian history with a focus on technological development in relation to the rest of the world. He is currently studying Taiwan's social history of firearm usage and working to become proficient in Mandarin. During his free time, he enjoys running and hiking the Bay Area trails, reading English and Chinese literature, watching movies, and drinking boba milk tea.

**HANNAH PEARSON** is a third-year transfer student from Concord, California majoring in History. It was during her senior year in high school that she found her calling in history, thanks to her teacher, Dr. Andrew Hubbell. Her area of interest is in American History, specifically 20th century conflicts. She also has an interest in the Atlantic Revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th century. In her free time, she enjoys watching TV shows and movies, listening to Spotify playlists, and planning her next adventures. She hopes to become a historian and work for the US government.

**ANTHONY LIN** is a second-year history major from the Bay Area minoring in anthropology and Chinese. His current focus is on US immigration history, prompting him to work with URAP projects studying immigrant interviews. He enjoys over-consuming coffee and a casual game of chess.

**VINCENT LIU** is a sophomore from Los Angeles pursuing a majoring in history. His focus is mainly on 20th century America, specifically its foreign policy and

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changing relationships with other countries. In his spare time, Vincent enjoys watching basketball, playing video games, and walking his dog.

**XIAOLU "NINA" LIU** is a sophomore History major. Her current focus is China in the modern period. She is committed to learning more about conflicts in human societies from a historical perspective and ways to promote justice, unity and equity, using historical knowledge. Academic interests aside, she is an avid reader, a passionate novelist, a film aficionado and a TV-drama fan who often cries herself to sleep when deeply touched. She loves art and museums as well as music – all soul-shaking experiences with one's innermost being that makes one human.

**JADE LUMADA** is a senior from Long Beach, California majoring in history and Southeast Asian studies. Her studies focus on marginalized groups in the United States, but she is also interested in analyzing the cultural implications of activism and resistance in the Philippines. Outside of school, Jade works as a peer adviser for the College of Letters and Science. Jade likes to unwind by crocheting, embroidering, and making jewelry for her family and friends.

**RONAN MORRILL** is a sophomore from Redwood City, California majoring in history. He is interested in the history of the ancient Mediterranean as well as 20th century American and Irish history. In his free time, Ronan enjoys watching soccer, reading, running, and listening to music.

**ELLIOTT NERENBERG** is a senior studying world history in the 20th century, with a focus on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He has also studied the Russian language and the history of Japan. Before deciding on the history major, he also spent some time studying political theory. This foundation has informed his other interest in political history. In his free time, when he's not glued to a screen reading for his history classes, he likes to draw, play video games, read manga, and write silly short stories for his friends.

**DAVID VILLANI** is a third year history major. He's originally from Pisa, Italy, and went to school in the DC area. His research interests lie in the transformations of French society and economy over the course of the Second Empire, and in the sub-Saharan colonial project. He enjoys Italian movies, Russian novels, and cooking on a budget. He also writes for the Daily Californian.

**ASHLEY YANG** is a second-year transfer from UCSC double majoring in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies and History. Her research interests lie in the politics in art and visual culture. In her free time, Ashley enjoys tending to her many plants as well as avoiding any and all translations possible until the very last minute to preserve her sanity.

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## Author Biographies

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**KIRAN LOEWENSTEIN** graduated from Grinnell College with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Religious Studies in May 2022. She is interested in ideas of secularism, modernity, and the decolonial in both American and Middle Eastern history. In her free time, Kiran enjoys learning 80s music trivia, reading, and running. She is currently working in a 12-month education position at Big Hole National Battlefield. She would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Prevost for her guidance and support throughout this project, Dr. Adey Almoshen who helped with historiographical sources, and her advisors, Dr. Elias Saba and Dr. Mervat Youssef who introduced her to Arabic and Middle Eastern histories.

**MARCO BALESTRI** is a life-long New Yorker, a community organizer, and a recent graduate of Columbia University where he majored in American history. Marco graduated *cum laude* from Columbia and won the 2022 Chanler Historical Prize for his thesis "[The Fight to Read, Write, and Vote: The New York State Literacy Test, 1922-1965.](#)" The thesis was inspired by Marco's work at the Brennan Center for Justice and for various political campaigns and government offices including the New York State Assembly, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Senate, where he experienced firsthand the many challenges and inequalities in the American electoral system. He aspires to transform American democracy's outdated electoral system by eliminating barriers to participation and expanding access to the ballot box. Currently, Marco works as a Legal Advocate at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, where he represents and advocates for indigent New Yorkers facing eviction proceedings in Housing Court. Marco can be reached for questions and inquiries at [marcofinebalestri@gmail.com](mailto:marcofinebalestri@gmail.com).

**ANDREW SOOHWAN KIM** graduated from UC Berkeley with a BA in History in December 2021. He graduated *summa cum laude*, with a perfect 4.0 GPA and with departmental honors in the History Department. His academic concentration is in East Asian History, and he has studied abroad in South Korea and Taiwan. He is fluent in English and Korean and is gaining proficiency in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese. Last summer, he received special permission from Cal's history department to write his senior thesis in Korea. He conducted field research in Iksan and Jeonju in North Jeolla Province. An abridged version of his resulting thesis is featured in this edition. Andrew would like to thank Chair Cathryn Carson of the History Department for giving him permission to write his thesis in Korea. He would also like to thank Professors Christine Philliou of UC Berkeley and Byung-jae Lee of Yonsei University, Dr. Shin Gwi-baek (a regional Iksan scholar), the Iksan Culture and Tourism Foundation, and local libraries, universities, and organizations in Iksan and Jeonju for their material and advisory assistance in the writing of his paper. His hobbies include writing, blogging, traveling, and listening to a good piece of classical music. Currently, he is looking forward to postgraduate study in South Korea.

# Newspapers, Power, and the Cairo Fire

Kiran Loewenstein

"The Cairo Fire was the first sign of the social revolution against the corrupt institutions. The Cairo Fire expressed the people's anger, when Egypt was bending beneath the yoke of feudalism, speculation, and capitalism," President Gamel Abdel Nasser said to the Egyptian parliament in 1960.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of widespread nationalizations, Nasser reflected on the destruction and popular uprising on January 26, 1952. Conflict in the Suez Canal Zone had escalated, leading to British forces killing forty-six Egyptian police officers in Ismailia. The next day, Cairo exploded in response with protest and the destruction of much of the European sector of the city, resulting in what became known as Cairo Fire.<sup>2</sup>

Both then and now, scholars and reporters agree that arson and destruction during the Cairo Fire were partly carried out by "organized elements," a term used that implies some groups planned actions to carry out during the Fire. The actors (likely non-British Cairo residents) were never identified. Despite this ambiguity, modern historiography situates the Cairo Fire as part of a series of events leading to the July 1952 Revolution and Nasser's consequent rise in power and popularity. The Free Officers Movement's coup is usually considered a clear break in the history of Egypt, and the Cairo Fire is seen, when noted, as leading up to that event. There are notable exceptions; Nancy Reynolds, Ann-Claire Kerboef, and Eugene Rogan have clearly laid out the progression of events of January 26 in their own right. Most scholars of popular history—including Tarek Osman, and Stephan Cook—have situated the Cairo Fire, in passing reference, as part of a

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Claire Kerboef, "The Cairo Fire of 26 January 1952 and the Interpretations of History," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 201.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 279.

teleology leading up to the July Revolution. Neither strand of thought adequately addresses the role the Cairo Fire played in British colonial conceptions of their own power in Egypt.

In extant historiography, the Fire is overvalued in Egyptian nationalist portrayals and undervalued in imperialist/post-Colonial histories. However, the events of January 26, 1952 were subject to their own forces, and were in response to the specific situation on January 25 in the occupied Canal Zone. At the time, there was no indication that the Cairo Fire would lead to a coup. My investigation critiques the common teleology of Egyptian history which claims that the Cairo Fire is only relevant in its relationship to the July Coup. Even if the Cairo Fire was ultimately necessary for the success of the July Coup, examining what contemporaries viewed as the causes of the January instability provides a different and revelatory perspective on Egyptian politics in 1952. The contemporary reporting suggests that the Cairo Fire created a power vacuum but not a people's awakening.

In this paper, I will examine newspaper coverage in three British-owned, English-language newspapers from January 28 to March 29, 1952. The three papers are the *Times* (London), showing what information was deemed important in the metropole, the *Iraq Times* (Baghdad), which provides a regional perspective targeted towards European expatriates, and the *Egyptian Gazette* (Cairo), with a similar audience to the *Iraq Times* but situated in Cairo. All three papers' coverage show that European observers did not find the events of the Cairo Fire significantly destabilizing in the immediate two months following the event, nor did they worry that the essential edifice of the empire had come unhinged. In each paper, I located passages which allocated blame to groups and/or individuals during the events of the Cairo Fire. By examining contemporary coverage, the Cairo Fire can be removed from—or better understood within—an Egyptian grand narrative of progression centering the July Revolution.

The Cairo Fire serves as an alternative way to examine the narrative surrounding the July Revolution and Egyptian modernization. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between news coverage in the moment with power reveals the political implications of blame, and how at-the-time interpretations show that there was not one path Egypt could have taken in 1952

and beyond. Finally, analyzing newspapers, even those with obvious biases, can help us see both what people thought was happening at the time, and how the perception and presentation of events by the press may have changed what happened next, as well as some of the structures and views of those in power.<sup>3</sup> Together, the evidence reveals that foreign newspapers following the Cairo Fire of 1952 began by blaming general “organized agitators,” moved to blaming communists, and ended by specifically accusing and discrediting the Wafd party. This reflected political currents and power struggles, mediated by the British papers’ audience and ownership, and understandings of colonialism and control. Contemporary observers saw the Fire as important, but not necessarily for the reasons that later explanations would attribute to it.

### **The Cairo Fire, Then And Now**

In 1950, the Wafd party was elected with a majority on a platform of independence from Britain. Once in government, the Wafd proceeded to abrogate the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 which required the UK to remove all troops from Egypt except the ten thousand troops and auxiliary personnel required to protect the Suez Canal. Furthermore, the treaty required the UK to supply the Egyptian army and assist in defending it in war. The British refused to accept this abrogation and maintained their troops.

Beginning in 1951, guerilla warfare, carried out by liberation battalions, began to escalate in the Suez Canal Zone. The Wafd tacitly supported these efforts, and so did the police force in Ismailia who often assisted the battalions by providing supplies. The Muslim Brotherhood also played a large role in gathering support and enthusiasm for the liberation battalions. On January 25, 1952, the British military took a hardline response towards what they viewed as Egyptian police subversion. Trapping the police in their headquarters in Ismailia, the British forces sieged the building, leaving forty-six police officers dead, eighty injured, and over a thousand troops captured, including officers and the commander.

In response to the events in Ismailia, Cairo rioted. At first made up of auxiliary police, university students, and railway

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<sup>3</sup> Jerry W. Knudson, “Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources.” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* 31, no. 7 (1993).

workers, the protests spread. Protesters appealed to the government for a response to the British attack, and chanted slogans denouncing King Farouk. The crowd set a total of 217 fires, beginning with an attack on the Casino Opera nightclub, continuing to cinemas, and then attacking official British establishments. By the late afternoon, the arson had turned towards commercial shops. At least twenty-six died in the demonstrations, and over five hundred were left wounded. Between fifteen and thirty-thousand employees were out of work.<sup>4</sup>

The morning of January 27, residents of Cairo found themselves subjected to martial law, massive arrests, a suspended constitution, and a ruined city. Following martial law, the Wafd government of Nahas Pasha was dismissed by King Farouk. He appointed Aly Maher Pasha who promised to investigate the riots. However, barely over a month later, Farouk dismissed Aly Maher Pasha in favor of independent Hilaly Pasha, who took a hardline approach towards the Wafd. Each respective government worked to investigate the Cairo riots.

Despite the amount of coverage, speculation, and political movement occurring at the time of the Cairo Fire, the mystery of the perpetrators has never been solved. The Egyptian government has never opened the archives to release investigations done at the time, nor any other official document findings. Egyptian historian Khaled Fahmy writes, "But we don't know, and we cannot know, or rather start the path to know, before we start to put our hands on the documents related to whatever happened on that day."<sup>5</sup> Coverage of the Cairo Fire after the fact varies drastically, perhaps because of the lack of official sources. Without them, it may be wholly impossible to know the true story due to the passage of time, though a number of scholars use the available information to situate the Fire within a larger picture of Egyptian history.

Nancy Reynolds is one scholar who found the Cairo Fire a key site of study. Her book, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt*, complicates

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 182.

<sup>5</sup> Khaled Fahmy, "65 years later: The 'Cairo fire' of 1952 revisited," *Ahram Online*, January 29, 2017, web.

previous understandings of the Cairo Fire but still views it as part of a longer nationalist process. Reynolds lays out the events of the Cairo Fire and analyzes Cairo's culture of consumption, including nationalist interpretations of consumer goods, the relationships between the local and the colonial, and how commercial penetration led into destruction and anti-colonial resistance, all through the lens of the Fire.<sup>6</sup> Reynolds' insertion—in both the importance of the Cairo Fire, and the importance of examining the material—is foundational in modern studies of the Cairo Fire, though she situates the Fire itself similarly to other scholars.

Authors addressing the Cairo Fire briefly within larger histories of Egypt, such as Tarek Osman, read the events of Black Saturday as leading to the inescapable end of the Kingdom of Egypt. One textual example of this is in Osman's popular history of Egypt:

"In January 1952, as a result of a chain reaction of provocations and confrontations between the British army, the Egyptian police, the Palace and Al-Wafd, a number of riots in some Cairene neighborhoods descended into anarchy and mayhem....It was a clear indication that the regime had no future."<sup>7</sup>

He then moves on to describing and explaining the July Coup, as if nothing happened in the middle. Osman's use of the words "chain reaction" and "clear indication" in his brief overview of the Fire show that he views the Fire as a part of an inevitably connected series of events. On the other hand, Cook does not mention the Cairo Fire in his text about the July Revolution. As opposed to

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<sup>6</sup> Yasser Elsheshtawy's article on urban transformations advances this argument further, examining the path of Cairo's urban development after the Cairo Fire, creating new developments, a founding myth of a Cairo reborn, and understanding the spatial impact of the violence. Reynolds and Elsheshtawy insert the Cairo Fire into a historiography that is missing solid analysis of the event and its impact. Reynolds connects the histories of the material and commercial with people's lived realities, connecting it to themes of urban growth, British colonialism, and the rise of Nasser. She complicates the idea of the local and follows the politics of both colonialism and consumption, the people who participated, the history of boycotts and campaigns, the transitional post-WWII era, and the importance of the Cairo Fire in the story of nationalism, the foreign, and the local.

<sup>7</sup> Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 47.

Osman and Cook's readings of the event that the end of the regime was clearly near, King Farouk still held some political power, as demonstrated by his government appointments, and the government was still functional in day-to-day matters.<sup>8</sup>

Peter Gran's *The Persistence of Orientalism: Anglo-American Historians and Modern Egypt* argues that Western orientalist logic creates narratives around the Cairo Fire (such as Osman's) that are limited and reduce a complex history to a simplistic view. He claims that exploring history in such a way ignores power dynamics and only understands history in an elite context. Gran argues that Western writing still falls into orientalist traps, over forty years after Edward Said took academia by storm with his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Gran provides the outline for the development of Egypt as a subject of orientalist writings and histories, tracing it through British colonialism, missionary writings, and then finally, history as a discipline. Together, colonialism and missionary work created Egypt as the model of Oriental despotism that undergirds modern scholarship, including that which discusses the Cairo Fire.<sup>9</sup> Gran writes:

"The Oriental paradigm assumes that there is an enormous gap between ruler and ruled, that Cairo is the center of power, that little or no power exists on the provincial level, and that the provinces are simply out there and essentially interchangeable. The ruler, in effect, is an autocrat more so than rulers in other countries. The population at large is understood to be powerless...When change occurs, it comes from the outside."<sup>10</sup>

According to Gran, the "oriental paradigm" leads to a focus on forces – such as the coup – coming from outside the main structures of daily governance and changing Cairo's history in a blast. Both nationalist and imperial/post-colonial narratives of the Cairo Fire ignore the internal power dynamics key to the Cairo Fire. Particularly in imperial/post-colonial narratives, histories are concerned with the unknown instigators (the so-called "organized

<sup>8</sup> Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, 182.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Gran, *The Persistence of Orientalism: Anglo-American Historians and Modern Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2020), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Gran, *The Persistence of Orientalism*, 4.

elements”), rather than focusing on why the Fire massive popular uprising.<sup>11</sup> While the riots did start near the King’s palace, as the day progressed they minimally involved the ruler, and did not involve the provinces.<sup>12</sup>

The Cairo Fire was important because it occurred in the capital of Egypt, and because it altered the development of politics and commerce in Egypt, although it has largely been viewed through elite lenses rather than from a popular history perspective. Darwin shares the assumption that the Cairo Fire was a turning point that went unnoticed, something true of both British colonial and Egyptian historiography. Both nationalist and imperialist/post-colonial historiography use the same framework of thought, despite their differing conclusions; they select only specific lines of inquiry to follow, determined by what Gran calls “paradigmatic logic.”<sup>13</sup> Regarding the Cairo Fire, authors focus on blaming specific groups with power in society, such as the Wafd party or the communists, or only understand the Cairo Fire in the context of the July Revolution, as opposed to an important event in its own right.

Examining revolutionary and elite narratives as well as the orientalist and colonial perspectives of many historians, Yoav Di-Capua in his book *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* analyzes how power and political structures affect the Egyptian discipline of history. He argues that many scholars of Egyptian historiography emphasize the changing images of rulers and popular leaders, as opposed to the process of history.<sup>14</sup> Di-Capua outlines the development of Egyptian historiographies, beginning in the 1920s as part of the royal project. The trends that came out of this project were considered universal and shaped local and Western scholarship, and were “blinded to the human experience of entire groups and

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<sup>11</sup> Anne-Claire Kerboeuf, “The Cairo Fire of 26 January 1952 and the Interpretations of History” In *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 194.

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, 182.

<sup>13</sup> Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (University of California Press, 2009), 247.

classes and were ready to ignore them as they went about the creation of a full-fledged nation-state system.”<sup>15</sup>

Because of such nationalist interests, Di-Capua argues that Egyptian historiography prioritized understanding the entirety of Egyptian history as it connected to the 1952 July Revolution, as opposed to understanding the complexities of a multiplicitous historical past. Instead, history served to legitimate political power and rule, and served nationalist ends.<sup>16</sup> After July 1952, Di-Capua writes that “Egyptian historiography took a self-congratulatory and metahistorical turn, that to some degree, detached it from the study of the past and from the value of historical truthfulness.”<sup>17</sup> Histories of Egypt became reduced to mere “revolutionary turning points” that all led up to the July Revolution, which was also part of a tendency towards strong and oft-reductive periodization.<sup>18</sup> Periodization in Egypt around 1952 was useful in the sense that it helps to create one national narrative and one set of national aims. Di-Capua writes that modern historical narration creates periods and eras, names them, and then reduces them to something that simply fits an easily usable narrative, which we can see in texts such as Osman’s.<sup>19</sup>

Gran and Di-Capua challenge and complicate the traditional narrative around the Cairo Fire by situating it within larger reductive trends of historiography. Meanwhile, Reynolds provides an example of how the Cairo Fire can be analyzed as a part of larger questions as an important event in its own right, shedding light on colonial power, consumption, and popular agency alike. The lack of coherence around the actual Cairo Fire - the lack of information, the way a culprit has never been found - make it difficult to deal with as part of a historical narrative. However, these limitations should not leave the Cairo Fire out of historiography altogether.

The Cairo Fire has often been undervalued because of larger historiographical trends and omissions, including the impact of

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<sup>15</sup> Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 338.

<sup>16</sup> Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 249.

<sup>17</sup> Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*, 245.

orientalist and colonial perspectives and scholarship, but can be better understood through reading British newspaper sources, which can elicit unintended colonial meanings. The Cairo Fire revealed not a nationalist threat but colonial control. English-language newspapers expressed little concern regarding the political situation in Egypt and were only interested in how each successive government would negotiate with Britain regarding their presence in Egypt and the Canal Zone. Although the consequences of the Cairo Fire led to a political situation which made space for the coup, including falling popular confidence in the government and exacerbated partisan divisions, the July Coup was not inevitable as some authors imply. Even if it was, the Cairo Fire was not the beginning of the end. While the coup was a response to the political mess formed after the Fire, the events of the Cairo Fire did not lead directly, in any teleological sense, to the July Revolution. There were many other paths that Egypt could have taken.

### Coverage at the Time

From the day of the Cairo Fire, participants, observers, reporters, and politicians all noted that “organized elements” were involved in the events of January 26, 1952, especially arson. Newspapers, reporting on the events of that day as well as the political developments immediately connected with it, at first shied away from blaming any particular political faction. However, newspapers with an English audience soon coalesced on blaming the Wafd for negligence, increasing the strength and specificity of that blame over time.

The *Times* (London) consistently blamed the Wafd for the fire, while providing coverage of talks between Britain and Egypt after the Cairo Fire. The first instance of blame in *Times* was immediately after the riots on January 28, 1952, stating “The chief responsibility was clearly with the Egyptian government.”<sup>20</sup> The next day, the *Times* also blamed the police, and “extreme left wing elements,” including the Muslim Brotherhood (the only organization specifically named).<sup>21</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood was mentioned as possible instigators twice more, on Jan 31 and on Feb

<sup>20</sup> “Troops Quell Disorders,” *Times*, January 28, 1952, 6.

<sup>21</sup> “Unanimous Vote for Aly Maher Pasha,” *Times*, January 29, 1952, 5.

29, as they were a minor recipient of blame as the situation unfolded, likely because of the role the Muslim Brotherhood played in supporting the liberation battalions the Canal Zone.<sup>22</sup> The first individual to be blamed was Serag ed Din, the Minister of the Interior and Finance, who was first mentioned on January 30 but continued to face backlash throughout February and March.<sup>23</sup> The Wafd government of Nahas Pasha continued to receive blame throughout the month of February.<sup>24</sup> Ahmed Hussein and the Socialists were blamed as of February 4, and Hussein was the first named arrest in relation to the Fire.<sup>25</sup> Although blame by the end of February had mostly coalesced around the Wafd, with the British blaming the Egyptian police and army, the *Times* continued to implicate left-wing groups.<sup>26</sup> Reports on the official inquiry came out on March 7 which accused Serag ed-Din of negligence and lambasted the police for their response to the Fire.<sup>27</sup> Hilaly Pasha, the newly appointed government head, also blamed the Wafd wholly for the January 26 disturbances.<sup>28</sup> Finally, on March 20, the *Times* reported on the the dismissal of three police chiefs and the acting governor of Cairo for administrative responsibility for the Cairo Fire, blaming the Wafd.<sup>29</sup>

*The Iraq Times* provided the most constant, vehement, and front-page coverage of the Cairo Fire, and often blamed the Wafd as well as leftist parties. *The Iraq Times* was the only English-language newspaper circulated in Baghdad during the mandate era. In the first issue following the fire, the paper blamed “dissident

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<sup>22</sup> “Direct Contacts Resumed,” *Times*, January 31, 1952, 4, and “Tasks in Egypt, the Wafd as an obstacle to agreement,” *Times*, February 29, 1952, 5.

<sup>23</sup> “Defence of Canal Zone,” *Times*, January 30, 1952, 7.

<sup>24</sup> “To the editor: Organized Hostility,” *Times*, February 2, 1952, 5.

<sup>25</sup> “Maher Pasha’s Policy,” *Times*, February 4, 1952, 4. On February 4, the *Iraq Times* reported on the arrest of Socialist leader Ahmed Hussein, but did not directly connect it to the riots, only to his anti-British sentiments.

<sup>26</sup> “Connivance in Cairo Riots, Government Blamed in British Note,” *Times*, February 8, 1952, 4, “Communists and Cairo Fires,” *Times*, February 11, 1952, 3, and “Tasks in Egypt, the Wafd as an Obstacle to Agreement,” *Times*, February 29, 1952, 5.

<sup>27</sup> “Wafd Minister Accused, Findings of Cairo Riots Inquiry,” *Times*, March 7, 1952, 6.

<sup>28</sup> “Hilaly Pasha on Wafd’s Record, 25 Years of Failure,” *Times*, March 17, 1952, 3.

<sup>29</sup> “More retirements in Egypt,” *Times*, March 20, 1952, 4.

Egyptian elements.<sup>30</sup> In the article, Premier Nahas Pasha attempted to distance both himself and his government from accountability for the Cairo Fire. *The Iraq Times* repeatedly referred to the actions of January 26 as “terrorist activities.” On February 2 in a comment submitted to the paper, a contributor individually blamed Nahas Pasha in the first instance of the blame being laid on one specific person.<sup>31</sup> On February 4, the paper began explicitly blaming the government, reporting on the dispute over responsibility as Serag ad-Din and Nahas Pasha were both allegedly attending to personal matters.<sup>32</sup> A few days later, on February 8, a page six headline read “Naha’s Government Responsible.”<sup>33</sup>

Coverage on the Cairo Fire dropped off until it was brought back into the headlines of the *Iraq Times* by the appointment of Hilal Pasha in March, and the release of a report on the Fire. On March 10, the *Iraq Times* front page headline read “Wafd Indicted for Riots.” The article reported on an Egyptian government report which blamed “Wafdist Interior Minister Serag el Din.”<sup>34</sup> Hilal Pasha continued to blast the Wafd, blaming the Wafdists for “fomenting and encouraging sedition,” especially with regards to January.<sup>35</sup> On March 18, Serag ed Din and others were placed under house arrest, and days later four senior officials were placed on pension due to “administrative negligence in connection with the Cairo Riots of January 26.”<sup>36</sup> While the *Iraq Times* did cover the development of political blame, they continuously covered the prosecution of regular people who participated in the riots, focusing on military court trials of young people arrested for participation, as well as other military sentences for arson and looting.

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<sup>30</sup> “Arson, Looting in Cairo Riots, Martial Law Enforced,” *Iraq Times*, January 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>31</sup> “Comment: In Cold Blood,” *Iraq Times*, February 2, 1952, 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Serag Was Buying While Cairo Was Burning,” *Iraq Times*, February 4, 1952, 1.

<sup>33</sup> “Nahas Government Responsible” *Iraq Times*, February 8, 1952, 6.

<sup>34</sup> “Wafd Indicted for Riots,” *Iraq Times*, March 10, 1952, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Hilaly Blasts the Wafd, Egypt to be “Purged,” *Iraq Times*, March 17, 1952, 1.

<sup>36</sup> “Late News,” *Iraq Times*, March 18, 1952, 1, & “Egypt Pensions Officials,” *Iraq Times*, March 21, 1952, 1.

The *Egyptian Gazette*, which was published in Cairo, had both the least amount of information on the riots and the weakest delivery of blame.<sup>37</sup> On January 28, an author in the *Egyptian Gazette* claimed that Wafdist leaders “displayed a sense of responsibility,” implying that they deserved some blame.<sup>38</sup> On February 3, the paper reported on the arrest of Socialist Party leader Ahmed Hussein, and notes that “reports suggested that members of the organization were at least partly responsible for last Saturday’s disorders in Cairo.”<sup>39</sup> However, other political parties such as the Saadists and Liberals pinned the blame on the Wafd party, noting that the new government should avoid the Wafd’s “disturbing policy.”<sup>40</sup> On February 10, the paper specifically examined the actions of the ministers on January 26 and blamed them for their lack of attention and failure to respond, pinning responsibility on them.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, a British note reported on February 16 blamed the previous Egyptian government.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the rest of February and early March, the paper reported on popular and political frustration regarding how the government report on responsibility had not been released. That report was finally made public on March 7 after Hilaly Pasha took power. The report blamed the Fire on the failure of the responsible authorities to take action, while also defending the actions of the army.<sup>43</sup> Hilaly Pasha fervently pinned blame on the Wafd,

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<sup>37</sup> The *Egyptian Gazette* was published on Saturdays as the *Egyptian Mail*. This paper will refer to both iterations of the paper as *the Egyptian Gazette*. Furthermore, Egypt was under martial law for much of the time period I examined. I have not discovered that it significantly interrupted patterns of coverage in the *Egyptian Gazette*, but further study could pursue this relationship.

<sup>38</sup> “Law and Order,” *Egyptian Gazette*, January 28, 1952, 3.

<sup>39</sup> “Ahmed Hussein is Arrested,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 3, 1952, 3. On March 26, another arrest of a socialist leader was noted in relation to the Cairo Fire, though it is unclear if his arrest was due to the events of January 26.

<sup>40</sup> “Liberal Attitude same as Saadists: Want Pure Administration and Punishment of Guilty,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 5, 1952, 3; “Liberal Leader Blames Wafd for Jan 26 Riots,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 8, 1952, 5.

<sup>41</sup> “Ministerial Activities while Cairo Burned, 'Akhbar el Yom's' challenge,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 10, 1952, 3.

<sup>42</sup> “British protest on Jan 26 events,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 16, 1952, 5.

<sup>43</sup> “Responsibility for Jan 26,” *Egyptian Gazette*, March 7, 1952, 1.

denouncing them on multiple occasions.<sup>44</sup> On March 20, the four senior police chiefs were blamed and placed on pension, noting that “administrative responsibility...was established and the unjustifiable exceptional promotions were also cancelled.”<sup>45</sup> The *Egyptian Gazette* provided English-language coverage which mostly paralleled the *Iraq Times* and *London Times*, despite being at the heart of Egypt.

The *Egyptian Gazette* and *Iraq Times* also provided coverage on the arrest and trials of everyday people, including raids in the slums for those who made off with loot from January 26.<sup>46</sup> The *Iraq Times* focused relatively more on those who carried out the looting.<sup>47</sup> For example, on February 1, an article specifically pointed to “young men of the Effendi class” targeting British residents.<sup>48</sup> On February 19, the new Minister of the Interior Ahmed Mortada el Mataghy Bey stated that the government had “arrested all the ringleaders,” but did not mention organizations or names.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, coverage of trials for everyday people began to pick up in the *Egyptian Gazette* after Hilaly Pasha’s ascension.

Occasionally, Arabic newspapers were cited in British newspapers for English speakers to see what was published in the Arabic language press. Such practice was especially prominent in the *Iraq Times* which had a section each day called “Arabic Press Review.” The first instance of a translated instance of blame was from *Al Balagha*, which blamed Britain for the events of the Cairo Fire because of their actions in Ismailia.<sup>50</sup> *Akher Lahza*, on the other hand, blamed the Egyptian government on February 1.<sup>51</sup> On

<sup>44</sup> “Premier Denounces Wafd’s ‘Campaign of Deceit,’” *Egyptian Gazette*, March 16, 1952, 1.

<sup>45</sup> “Police Chiefs Retired for Jan 26 Failures,” *Egyptian Gazette*, March 20, 1952, 1.

<sup>46</sup> “Heavy arrests for Cairo looting,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 4, 1952, 3; “Raids in the Slums,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 11, 1952, 3.

<sup>47</sup> “Martial Law Enforced,” *Iraq Times*, January 28, 1952, 31.

<sup>48</sup> “British Mutliated in Cold Blood,” *Iraq Times*, February 1, 1952, 1.

<sup>49</sup> “Ministers Report on January 26: Cairo criminals arrested,” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 19, 1952, 5.

<sup>50</sup> “Arabic Press Review: ‘Al Balagh’ Blames Britain,” *Egyptian Gazette*, January 28, 1952, 2.

<sup>51</sup> “Tell the Nation the Full Story of the Traitors: ‘Akher Lahza,’” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 1, 1952, 2.

February 4, a review of Egyptian Weeklies declared that the “riots were a result of Wafd Rule” in the paper *Akhbar El Yom*. On February 4, *Akhbar El Yom* also blamed Serag ed Din specifically, and again on February 17 and March 9.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, *al-Ahram* blamed the police for their poor response.<sup>53</sup>

Comparing the three newspapers, the *Iraq Times* had the greatest number of stories regarding Egypt on the first page relative to the number of total stories, while the *London Times'* stories were relatively buried. The *Iraq Times* and *Egyptian Gazette* were more concerned with on-the-ground punishments of those who participated in the riots, while the *London Times* was primarily concerned with political blame and high-level effects. One minor comparison is between coverage on reports on the arrest of Socialist leader Ahmed Hussein - the *Iraq Times* did not connect it to the riots, while the other two papers did. Additionally, the *Egyptian Gazette* was by far the most vehemently anti-Communist in their overall rhetoric, although the *Iraq Times* linked communism more closely to the January 26 events. The *London Times* was not similarly concerned. All three papers blamed the socialists, the Wafd, and the police, at various times. The strength of their condemnation increased over time and aligned with Hilaly Pasha's rise to power and the release of his government's report on the Cairo Fire. Overall, coverage of the Cairo Fire in English-language newspapers shows that, at the time, the British were largely confident about their interests in Egypt and did not recognize the risk that the power struggles following the Cairo Fire posed to the British establishment.

### What The Coverage Reflects

Issues of power, control, and the future of Egypt reverberated throughout Egypt after the event. Accordingly, coverage at the time of the Cairo Fire reflected political currents and power struggles, mediated by the British paper's audience and ownership, and understandings of colonialism and control, but

<sup>52</sup> “Early Report on Cairo Riot,” *Times*, February 21, 1952, 3, “Review of Egyptian Weeklies: ‘Riots a result of Wafd Rule,’” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 4, 1952, 3, “Review of Egyptian Weeklies: ‘Prime Minister not deceived by Wafd’” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 17, 1952, 3; “Thirty-three Jan 26 cases now ready” *Egyptian Gazette*, March 9, 1952, 3.

<sup>53</sup> “Early report on Cairo Riot,” *Times*, February 12, 1952, 3.

didn't seem to undercut the foundational establishment as the British seemed to maintain confidence in their position in Egypt.

British officials wished to keep their country on top after World War II, but also knew that they could not survive another World War. British power drew from the larger web of British connection which promoted the British empire at the center of a global web of connections, which deteriorated after World War II. The new British strategy, one with the goals of restoring security and prosperity, focused on areas of their colonial empire which had been previously of only marginal value, such as the Middle East.<sup>54</sup> Post-WW2, the Middle East became "a base from which to defend Britain itself against the daunting threat from the East."<sup>55</sup> Egypt was essential for the British post-war Empire, but the costs and risks fell entirely on Britain. Many small political shifts (such as nationalist resistance, a quarrel with an ally, or economic weakness) could "produce symptoms of crisis" for Britain and its empire.<sup>56</sup> According to Frank Heinlein, Britain needed to avoid anything that made it appear it was losing power on a world stage, as policy makers believed their economic power was due to Britain's world standing.<sup>57</sup>

Strategic command of the Middle East would help to keep Britain a world power. Egypt was essentially important due to its regional power, centrality, labor supply, and the Suez Canal.<sup>58</sup> Britain needed Egypt due to previous losses of power and influence, such as in Palestine/Israel and Iraq. As of 1951, the British knew that they could not evacuate Egypt and believed that their requirements in Egypt surpassed those of the 1936 treaty.<sup>59</sup> There was a significant disconnect between British policy and what the Egyptian government would accept. Despite trouble in Iran, Britain decided that they could "seal off the Canal Zone and send

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<sup>54</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>55</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Heinlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonisation, 1945-1963: Scrutinising the Official Mind* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 88, 90.

<sup>58</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 555.

<sup>59</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 556.

troops into Cairo and Alexandria to protect their citizens and enforce a change of government" if need be.<sup>60</sup>

However, Britain's assumptions regarding the canal zone changed between late 1951 and early 1952, hastened by the Wafd party's abrogation of the 1936 treaty, the expulsion of Egyptian labor from the Canal Zone, Egyptian police becoming hostile to the British, the liberation battalions, and finally, the culmination of the events at Ismailia which led to the Cairo Fire.<sup>61</sup> Despite the British generals having a plan in place - "Operation Rodeo" - that would bring British troops into Cairo, they did not act, as they were unsure of the security of the Canal Zone, and did not think they could make the operation work. According to Darwin, two things changed that winter: popular nationalism, and the risk of a clash with the Egyptian Army.<sup>62</sup> At the time, the crisis blew over. However, for Britain, the value of Egypt and the Canal Zone was clear, and Britain's presence in the Canal Zone was used to pressure Egyptian leaders to take a realistic view of their interests, accepting their position in a British-dominated world, although the Egyptian liberation battalions attempted to undermine Britain's relative positionality.<sup>63</sup>

The *Iraq Times* and the *Egyptian Gazette* were targeted towards British expatriates and the effendiyya class, serving as a mouthpiece for the British to defend their policy.<sup>64</sup> According to Sills, the *Iraq Times* was a "reliable mouthpiece for the British administration, from which policy could be publicly communicated and defended." He argues that the *Iraq Times* can help the modern scholar understand Britain's vision in the Middle East, as well as how Britain understood various obstacles.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 563.

<sup>61</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 563.

<sup>62</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 564.

<sup>63</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 591.

<sup>64</sup> The effendiyya meant both large landowners, the ruling elite, and Ottoman bureaucrats, and the more Westernized modern middle class. In Egypt, the effendiyya was the primarily urban more-Westernized middle class. Further information can be found in Michael Eppel, "Note About the Term Effendiyya in the History of the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East studies* 41, no. 3 (2009): 535–539.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Sills, "Propaganda, State Power and the Press in the Post-Ottoman Middle East," Master's Thesis (Athens: University of Georgia, 2018), 7.

The *Iraq Times* was exclusively published in English, which meant that its intended audience was British officials and expatriates, as well as “members of the emergent effendiyya class.”<sup>66</sup> The effendiyya class, through their connections with British government, lended credibility to the so-called Iraqi-British partnership. Additionally, selectively allowing mobility for some Iraqis helped to define the colonial hierarchy, embedded British control while tying the interests of middle-upper class Iraqis with the mandatory regime.<sup>67</sup> Sills writes that the *Iraq Times*, among other pro-British newspapers, “worked to improve the image of the British in Iraq, downplaying their responsibility in issues such as the Israel/Palestine crisis.”<sup>68</sup> Despite the scant context available on the *Iraq Times*, Sill’s explanation of trends in the 20s seem to have held true into the 1950s due to continuing trends of politics in Iraq and the Middle East. Similarly, the *Egyptian Gazette* is the oldest English-language newspaper in the Middle East. Due to the similarities in rhetoric and political positioning within the paper, I posit that the *Egyptian Gazette* had a similar audience to that of the *Iraq Times* - English-speaking expatriates, and perhaps elements of a more Westernized middle class. The *Egyptian Gazette* captures the local audience in Cairo and provides an important English-language perspective as to what was happening on the ground.

The *London Times*, published at the heart of the metropole, provided the British colonial mouthpiece, balancing various interest groups and British desires while denying all comprehensive reform, focusing instead on order, values, and colonial conservatism. Like the *Iraq Times* and the *Egyptian Gazette*, the *Times* generally also blamed the Wafd and was concerned with issues of British colonial power, showing a consensus on coverage of Egypt and the Cairo Fire between the metropole and colonial British perspectives. The *Times* shared similar concerns relevant to an English-speaking audience, despite the geographical separation. By the 1950s, the rhetoric of the *London Times* focused on “denial of all comprehensive reform” of the throne, constitution, church, and empire, focusing instead on law and order, principles and values,

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<sup>66</sup> Sills, “Propaganda, State Power and the Press,” 8.

<sup>67</sup> Sills, “Propaganda, State Power and the Press,” 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Sills, “Propaganda, State Power and the Press,” 17.

uniting the nation under conservatism.<sup>69</sup> Through the 50s, the paper remained economically conservative, but attempted to recognize the “reality of Britain’s position in the modern world.”<sup>70</sup> The *Times* served as a voice for the modern British perspective throughout events of decolonization, such as the Cairo Fire, connecting British values to the news of the day.

Many narratives circulated after the Cairo Fire, but English-language newspapers only conveyed certain information, and mainly blamed the Wafd (as opposed to the King) because this served British colonial purposes. The coverage in the *Times*, the *Iraq Times*, and the *Egyptian Gazette* exposes some of the power dynamics at play. Fahmy writes that the three most prominent narratives were that the Cairo Fire was executed by the King Farouk “to further increase the political dilemma the British occupation was facing in the wake of its confrontation with police in Ismailiya,” another was that it was angry students and demonstrators protesting the British presence, and the third blamed it on political forces opposed to King Farouk “that wished to further complicate his already confused relation with the British occupation.”<sup>71</sup> However, only the Wafd emerged as the main perpetrator in papers catering to an English-speaking audience, a sympathetic readership which shared much of their imperial perspective and wanted to portray the news in a way related to British interests. The British saw that the government - more or less - was working and was doing so in a way that was actually favorable for British interests. As aforementioned, the British knew that full military intervention was not in the cards for them, but they were adamant and confident in their negotiating position with regards to talks. The debate was very much partisan. The British did not want to work with the Wafd - the party which abrogated the 1936 Treaty - and were not thrilled with anyone who went against their own interests.

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<sup>69</sup> Joris van Eijnatten, “On Principles and Values: Mining for Conservative Rhetoric in the London Times, 1785–2010,” *New International Perspectives on Research and Teaching*, 4-5.

<sup>70</sup> van Eijnatten, “On Principles and Values,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Fahmy, “65 years later,” web.

Through the papers, we can see where British concern lay and also how developments resulting from the Fire - such as the appointment of Hilal Pasha - did not undermine the colonial establishment or cause concern and were even seen as beneficial. The *Times* had a number of articles calling for negotiations after the Cairo Fire, though with the caveat that the new leader Aly Maher Pasha was no friend to the British as he was still a member of the Wafd.<sup>72</sup> Continuing the trend, the paper published a similar headline on February 6, saying "House of Commons, Search in Settlement in Egypt" and that the British were anxious to reach an agreement with Egypt.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the British saw that the structures of government and the powers of the King were working approximately as normal. For example, King Farouk operated normally in his ability to dismiss and appoint leaders and governments and fix administrative order and disorder.<sup>74</sup> In the *Times*, the British were most concerned about what the events in Egypt mean for the British talks and relationship with their government. Similarly, the *Iraq Times* was focused on the British, noting their political developments and the way that British victims did "not die in vain."<sup>75</sup> The *Egyptian Gazette* held a perhaps more forceful opinion, blaming the government, and tracing the development of Egyptian policy by how favorable it was to the British. For example, on February 5th, they wrote that the new government "should avoid the disturbing policy of its predecessor," while a month later, wrote that the new government of Hilal Pasha was far better for British interests due to his amenability towards British interests and a softer British exit from Egypt.<sup>76</sup>

With this in mind, we can ask the question: what was the political purpose of blaming the Wafd rather than the king? For English-language newspapers, blaming the Wafd (who were the

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<sup>72</sup> "Desire to Negotiate with Egypt," *The Times*, January 29, 1952, 3.

<sup>73</sup> "House of Commons, Search in Settlement in Egypt," *The Times*, February 6, 1952, 7.

<sup>74</sup> "More "Retirements" in Egypt," *Times*, March 20, 1952, 4.

<sup>75</sup> "Socialist Chief Arrested," *Iraq Times*, February 2, 1952, 4.

<sup>76</sup> "Liberal Attitude same as Saadists," *Egyptian Gazette*, February 5, 1952, 3; "Sudden Change of Govt, Hilal Pasha succeeds Aly Maher Pasha as Premier," *Egyptian Gazette*, March 2, 1952, 1.

ones who abrogated the 1936 treaty) was convenient as most other acceptable and organized political actors were less radical or less centralized than the Wafd, and therefore better for the British to negotiate with. The British rhetoric regarding cause and effect showed that they hoped that the Cairo Fire could lead to a turn back towards the British and away from nationalism. As Darwin writes:

The immediate crisis blew over; Nahas was dismissed by Farouk; the desultory talks were resumed. But, almost unnoticed, the armed strength that had underlain British influence in Egypt since 1882, and which had given the Residency its 'whisper behind the throne', was melting away. The decolonisation of Egypt that Nasser completed was now under way.<sup>77</sup>

The events following the Cairo Fire did consist of a major break for the British because their nonaction - and non-desire-for-action - exposed their underlying weakness in the post-War era. The military power which the British wielded had slipped away underneath their noses, but their need for the Middle East in their role as a world power remained. Even so, the British responded to the Cairo Fire as if they did not consider it a major threat because they had to appear somewhat in control of the situation, and because they did not truly believe that Egypt - a country with long formal and informal connections to Britain - would slip out of their realm of influence. While Darwin shares the assumptions of other authors that the Cairo Fire was a turning point, he notes that the British establishment either did not notice or ignored the Fire's importance. Instead, the British considered control of the Canal Zone most important and most realistic for their interests and were willing to ignore unrest in Cairo if they maintained some military imperial presence. One example of this was in British Foreign secretary Anthony Eden's speeches, in which he only mentioned the Cairo Fire explicitly once and was only concerned with the Canal Zone.<sup>78</sup>

By looking at English-language newspapers immediately after the coup, we can see that understandings at the time do not

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<sup>77</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 564.

<sup>78</sup> "Mr Eden's Statement on Events in Egypt," *Times*, January 30, 1952, 6.

necessarily align with post-event analyses. There was no necessary inkling of full government dissolution or an inevitable military coup. It is important to explore the reasoning behind the British and the alternative directions that history could have gone, stemming from that reasoning and the positioning of events as they happened. Additionally, understandings at the time do not necessarily agree with post-event analyses as time happens, perspectives change, and the ruling power rights the history. Furthermore, political understanding at the time did not necessarily align with political understanding afterwards. Newspapers at the time were more concerned with colonial control than Egyptian nationalism, due to the best part of Egypt in British eyes - the Canal Zone - being under British control. The heart of colonial power was seen to be strong enough.

The *Egyptian Gazette* in its Arabic Press review wrote that Al-Ahram compared the British press over the past several years, saying that they no longer are “clamoring for the use of force but instead for compromise and cooperation.”<sup>79</sup> This quote effectively illustrates how the British viewed the Cairo Fire - as a change, but not as a fundamental one. Their methods changed due to constraints, but their desire to remain essential in Middle Eastern power struggles did not. British newspaper coverage at the time represented the political currents and power struggles, as well as the positionality of the papers and their audience, and understandings of colonialism. What my analysis of three newspapers shows is not that all the British believed the state of affairs was beneficial to the British, but it does reveal that the British used the Cairo Fire as an opportunity to understand their role in Egypt as secure, and that talks were just around the corner. At least in their own discourses, British colonial control - at least what they could maintain in the Canal Zone - was still clearly in place.

### Conclusion

The Cairo Fire was both more and less important than it has subsequently been considered. Perhaps it is more important than previous histories posit because it was actually a major popular

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<sup>79</sup> “Arabic Press review: ‘Change in British and US opinion,’” *Egyptian Gazette*, February 6, 1952, 4.

turning point, destabilizing the ruling Wafd party and creating political space and instability which the Free Officers Movement took advantage of in July 1952. Histories rarely recognize the role that the Cairo Fire played in the deterioration of Egyptian politics, nor do they recognize the way that it slipped underneath the British radar due to the structure of British thinking, priorities, and politics. On the other hand, the Cairo Fire is less important than those who include it in a grand revolutionary teleology argue, because it was not recognized as important or significantly different than events before or after, which were part of a larger trend of popular dissent, governmental inaction and instability while stuck in deadlock negotiations with the British, and because the events which occurred in the Canal Zone were far more impactful in Egyptian-British relations, and the legitimacy of both British involvement and the Egyptian government. Both trends of insight require more research into Cairo Fire, the reactions around it, and a nuanced understanding of its political understanding, as in history, the Fire has been underrepresented and understudied. The Cairo Fire was an important event in Egyptian decolonization, although it went mostly unrecognized at the time.

Fahmy writes “it is important that we learn what happened there because it would help us decipher the power dynamics among state institutions in charge of collecting information – and this is not a minor issue because these dynamics remain significant, as we saw during the January Revolution and beyond.”<sup>80</sup> By examining English-language newspaper coverage of the Cairo Fire, the political purposes of blaming the Wafd party can be connected to political currents and power struggles through the British media perspective. Newspaper understandings of the Cairo Fire showed that the British hoped that the Cairo Fire would shore up British colonial power and reassert colonial control, interests, and sensibilities through press discourses. This angle, as Fahmy implies, has long been ignored in studies of the Cairo Fire, as it is ignored in favor of a revolutionary teleology.

Through a thorough re-examining the Cairo Fire and 1952 as a site of Egyptian historiographical split, we can explore whether the Cairo Fire is a site of an alternative telling of the history of 1952

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<sup>80</sup> Fahmy, “65 years later,” web.

and the July revolution. By disconnecting the Cairo Fire from traditional Egyptian teleology and removing from the grand narrative, we can further question its position as a historiographical gap in Egyptian history and better understand it as either a site of indigenous Egyptian nationalism or as a representation of Britain's colonial relationship with Egypt. By not focusing on a series of revolutionary events, the Cairo Fire can expose not only elite interpretations of the event, as this paper has done, but also popular, everyday dynamics of protest and dissent at work. Overall, the Cairo Fire is in desperate need of more scholarship addressing its causes, actors, and aftermath in both English and Arabic. Further scholarship could use the Cairo Fire as a case study in understanding the changing development of historiographical rhetoric from coverage at the time to today, tracing that coverage through Nasser and Mubarak. Perhaps this could also lead to the discovery of more primary source documents from the time from the Egyptian government. Finally, further interest in the Cairo Fire - widely regarded as very important but little studied - could perhaps answer the largest question relating to those events of January 26, 1952: Who were the "organized elements" who set fire to much of the city that day? However, for the moment, we must be content to examine the sources available and understand how the information that can be known reflects issues of power and control in the process of Egypt's decolonization.

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# The Fight to Read, Write, and Vote

*The New York State Literacy Test, 1922-1965*

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This paper is an excerpt from a larger thesis entitled "*The Fight to Read, Write, and Vote: The New York State Literacy Test, 1922-1965.*"

The entire thesis can be accessed at: [https://history.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/05/Balestri-Marco\\_Final-Thesis.pdf](https://history.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/05/Balestri-Marco_Final-Thesis.pdf)

## Introduction

In the United States, there is no set definition of the right to vote. In fact, there is no constitutional guarantee of the right to vote for citizens. In the early 20th century, New York was the center of a rapid influx of immigrants, many of whom were the target of a concerted effort to exclude them from the electoral process. Literacy tests in New York, promoted as a means to improve the quality of the electorate through education, were, in actuality, vehicles to disenfranchise "undesirable" minority groups seen as threats to the electoral system. By examining the history of the New York State Literacy (NYSL) test, particularly its passage, implementation, and eventual abolition, reveals the persistent tension between citizenship and suffrage. New York has a dark history of disenfranchisement. In fact, such as when the New York State literacy law was passed in 1921, New York was the only state in the Union that devised a unique, standardized literacy test which shrouded discrimination and disenfranchisement under the guise of science and education. I use the NYSL Test as a case study to interrogate the history behind the prevailing assumption that citizenship guarantees a right to vote. This thesis argues the history of New York's literacy law is a crucial addition to the historiography of disenfranchisement in the United States, which typically focuses on the South. Ultimately then, history of the NYSL Test reveals that the right to vote has only ever been a guarantee for white, male, native-born citizens and a false promise

for underrepresented groups, including women, people of color, and foreign-born citizens.

New York's passage of the literacy test amendment to its State Constitution redefined citizens' right to vote through a literacy requirement. The implementation of the NYSL Test, and its abolition some forty years later, reignited 19th century debates about citizenship, voting rights, and literacy that remained contentious and unresolved throughout the 20th century. Passage of the literacy proposal came in the wake of white, native-born lawmakers' great anxiety about the new, expansive American electorate whom the political elite believed would pose a challenge to their power. As historian Alexander Keyssar argues, policymakers worried they would lose control of the state "under conditions of full democratization."<sup>81</sup> In a concerted effort by New York legislators, the disenfranchisement of "undeserving" immigrants was codified in law. However, New York was not the only center electoral change. Beginning in the second half of the 19th century, the nation witnessed a dramatic expansion of voting rights in the form of nearly universal male suffrage. The expansion of citizenship and voting rights under the U.S. Constitution's 14th, 15th, and 19th Amendments, which passed in 1868, 1869 and 1920, respectively, led to intense debates on the relationship between citizenship and suffrage. Following the abolition of enslavement, the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution ostensibly granted Black Americans citizenship, codified equal protection under the law, and guaranteed the "right of citizens of the United States to vote."<sup>82</sup> In 1920, the 19th Amendment expanded voting rights to women, enfranchising the remaining half of American citizens.

At the same time as this expansion of the right to vote, there were significant transformations of both the Southern and Northern electorates. In the South, there was a reshaping of the electorate as Black Southerners made up substantial pluralities and majorities in jurisdictions throughout the region, resulting in the

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<sup>81</sup> Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 169.

<sup>82</sup> U.S. Const. amend. XIV; U.S. Const. amend. XV.

election of thousands of Black Americans to state and federal offices.

Around the same time, the North witnessed a reshaping of its electorate in the form of massive waves of immigration: Between 1880-1924, 23.5 million immigrants came to the United States.<sup>83</sup> The vast majority entered through Ellis Island in New York and settled in the Northeast, millions of whom would become naturalized citizens during this period. Such waves of immigration would spark a desire to restrict the ability to immigrate and become citizens. This mass movement to restrict immigration began in the 1880s, with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, suspending Chinese immigration and declaring Chinese immigrants ineligible for naturalization, thus barring them from voting. Furthermore, both the assassination of President William McKinley by an immigrant in 1901 and World War I (1914-1918) exacerbated fears of the “other” and led to intense anti-immigrant hysteria. Lawmakers feared that the massive rise in immigration would result in the unruly influences of socialism and anarchism and change the very fabric of American society.<sup>84</sup> In response, Congress passed a barrage of restrictive laws, in 1907, 1917, and 1924, which tightly narrowed the path to citizenship by instituting a national origins quota and a literacy test. Such laws thus helped set the precedent for New York to further restrict the rights of millions of “undesirable” immigrants through a literacy test for new voters.

However, literacy tests were among the most contentious devices deployed during the 19th and 20th centuries to undermine the 15th Amendment and exclude citizens from the electoral process. Between 1855 and 1965, 24 states passed literacy requirements for voting.<sup>85</sup> While the intended use of literacy tests to disenfranchise and dilute “undeserving” voters was similar in the North and South, the applications of the literacy test were quite different between the regions. Keyssar writes that Jim Crow literacy tests in the South were far more “draconian, sweeping, and

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<sup>83</sup> Alan M. Kraut, “Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter, 1988), 378.

<sup>84</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 146.

<sup>85</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, Table A.13. The vast majority of literacy requirements for voting were introduced in the late-20th and early-20th centuries.

violent” and always administered “with overtly discriminatory intent.”<sup>86</sup> For instance, voters in Alabama were required to “understand and explain” an article of the U.S. Constitution and voters in Georgia were instructed to complete a 30-question test in under ten minutes, answering impossibly difficult questions such as “Who is the Solicitor General of your State Judicial Court?”<sup>87</sup> Many Black Americans lacked the resources or means to pass these tests as Southern states restricted access to educational opportunities and segregated Black Americans into inadequate schooling systems, resulting in disproportionately lower literacy rates.<sup>88</sup> There were no schools to train Black Americans for these literacy tests, and unsurprisingly, virtually no Black Americans passed them. In contrast, literacy tests in the North came in the form of more simple, standardized examinations that required applicants to read and write short passages from government documents. Nevertheless, they were extremely effective at barring immigrants from voting. In fact, literacy tests in the North were so successful in limiting the electorate that they inspired Southern lawmakers to implement tests of their own. While there were systems in place to improve immigrant literacy through public evening schools and Americanization courses, Northern legislatures refused to supply the proper funds and resources to address immigrant illiteracy.<sup>89</sup>

This thesis charts the history of the NYSL Test, which provided states with a roadmap for disenfranchising “undeserving” voters while purporting to tackle the problem of illiteracy. Throughout its history, the NYSL Test was a tool used to

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<sup>86</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 170.

<sup>87</sup> “It’s Easy to Register! Georgia Voter Registration Training, The 30 Questions,” *The Civil Rights Movement Archive*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.crmvet.org/info/lithome.htm>.

<sup>88</sup> George D. Strayer, “Report of National Education Association Legislative Commission,” *National Education Association of the United States*, 1922, 51. For instance, in Louisiana the illiteracy rate of Black Americans in rural communities was 45.4 compared to 16.3 percent of white Americans. In urban communities, 22.1 percent of Black Americans were illiterate compared to only two percent of white Americans.

<sup>89</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 170. Keyssar summarizes this distinction: “In New York and Massachusetts, an illiterate immigrant could gain the franchise by learning to read; for a black man in Alabama, education was beside the point, whatever the law said.”

distance suffrage from citizenship for groups of citizens who the government deemed “undesirable.” While the test was abolished in 1965, its legacy carries on today. As this thesis demonstrates, the NYSL should serve as a reminder that laws which seek to improve the quality of the electorate disproportionately restrict groups of voters who threaten the white, native-born control of the electoral process.

### I. The “Good Citizen”: Literacy, Immigration, and the Right to Vote in New York

Between 1900 and 1915, the United States experienced swift demographic changes as more than 15 million immigrants entered the country: equal to the total number of new immigrants in the previous 40 years combined.<sup>90</sup> In 1907, the peak year for immigration in the entire century, 1,285,000 immigrants arrived—more than two-thirds of whom came through Ellis Island in New York.<sup>91</sup> With the sudden increase in population, government officials began to call for immigration reform and a crackdown on the supposed “ills of foreign influence in America.”<sup>92</sup> Frank P. Sargent, the Census Commissioner and former U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration in the early 1900s stated, “Immigration is a menace to the peace, good order and stability of American institutions, which will grow and increase with the generations and finally burst forth in anarchy and disorder.”<sup>93</sup>

Measures to restrict immigration through literacy tests gained traction with the unprecedented wave of “undesirable” Europeans, mainly Southern and Eastern Europeans, arriving in the country: Between 1880 and 1910, 12.5 million immigrated to the U.S. from Southern and Eastern Europe.<sup>94</sup> At this time, immigrants

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<sup>90</sup> Robert F. Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900-1927*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>91</sup> Alan M. Kraut, “Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter, 1988), 379.

<sup>92</sup> Albert J. McCulloch, *Suffrage and Its Problems* (Baltimore: Warwick and York, 1929), 144.

<sup>93</sup> McCulloch, *Suffrage and Its Problems*, 144.

<sup>94</sup> Ron Hayduk, *Democracy for All: Restoring Immigrant Voting Rights in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 26.

made up about one-third of the total U.S. population.<sup>95</sup> In the early 1900s, Dr. Joseph Senner, President Grover Cleveland's appointed Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island, developed a three-pronged approach for implementing successful immigrant restrictions: literacy tests to keep out "undesirable aliens," distribution of new immigrants over the entire country to lighten the burden on the cities, and the disfranchisement of all "ignorant and unassimilated foreigners" by strict voting laws.<sup>96</sup>

Despite growing pressure for literacy tests to restrict immigration at the turn of the 20th century, it would take over 20 years for the idea to become law. Literacy tests were controversial at a time when open immigration policies were lauded: Congress passed bills to institute literacy tests in 1895, 1903, 1912, and 1915, only to be defeated by the vetoes of Presidents Grover Cleveland, Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson.<sup>97</sup>

The rise of nativism and the impending U.S. intervention into World War I led to a zeitgeist supporting "one hundred percent Americanism."<sup>98</sup> It is no coincidence that in 1917, during WWI, the literacy test bill was finally passed following the congressional overrides of President Wilson's veto.<sup>99</sup> Supporters believe the literacy test would reduce the number of new Southern and Eastern European arrivals by more than 40 percent, but in reality, only 1,450 of the 805,000 new arrivals between 1920 and 1921 were excluded on the basis of literacy.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Hayduk, *Democracy for All*, 26.

<sup>96</sup> McCulloch, *Suffrage and Its Problems*, 149.

<sup>97</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Margaret C. Wood, "One Hundred Percent Americanism: Material Culture and Nationalism, Then and Now," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2014), 277.

<sup>99</sup> Claudia Goldin, "The Political Economy of Immigration Restriction in the United States, 1890 to 1921," National Bureau of Economic Research, (January 1994), 226. The overrides required a two-thirds majority in both chambers—the House voted 287 to 106 and the Senate voted 62 to 19.

<sup>100</sup> Goldin, "The Political Economy of Immigration Restriction," 238; McCulloch, *Suffrage and Its Problems*, 145. In 1929, Albert J. McCulloch, a professor of history and political science, wrote that "[t]he wisdom of the Immigration Law of 1917 has been questioned: It may not have been the best means of restricting the flood of immigrants but at least it was a restriction."

Although the Act of 1917 was deemed to be of only moderate success in restricting immigration, it set in motion an anti-foreign, restrictive immigration agenda. In 1921, Congress authorized the Emergency Immigration Act that generated the country's first quota system for immigration: the act restricted the number of immigrants admitted annually from any country to three percent of the 1910 Census figures.<sup>101</sup> The act led to a stark drop in newly admitted immigrants, from 805,228 in 1921 to 355,825 in 1922.<sup>102</sup> George D. Strayer, the chairman of the National Education Association Legislative Commission in 1922, reflected that although the 1921 act had greatly reduced the number of new immigrants, "[t]he door had been closed too late" and the nation would need to find a way to restrict "the great mass of unassimilated Southern and Eastern aliens [already] within our borders."<sup>103</sup>

After the passage of restrictive immigrant policies, attention turned to the millions of "undesirable" European immigrants already in the United States. They were building new lives in America and were reshaping neighborhoods and communities across the country. Many would become naturalized citizens soon and be entitled to the privileges of citizenship, which included the right to vote. Emboldened by the success of federal immigration restriction, New York's ruling elite would go on to launch a prominent campaign to restrict the voting rights of its foreign-born citizens.

### **New York's Literacy Test Debate**

New York was at the center of the debate on how to restrict the rights of foreign-born citizens. By the early-20th century, New York was the most populous state in the nation and home to the largest share of immigrants; in 1910, more than three-fourths of New York City's population were either immigrants or first generation Americans.<sup>104</sup> The New York State Legislature became concerned with the foreseeable demographic shift in the voting bloc

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<sup>101</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 311. Higham claims that this legislation proved to be "the most important turning-point in American immigration history."

<sup>102</sup> Strayer, "Report of National Education Association Legislative Commission," 35.

<sup>103</sup> Strayer, "Report of National Education Association Legislative Commission," 36.

<sup>104</sup> Albert J. McCulloch, *Suffrage and Its Problems*, 142.

and followed in the footsteps of the dozens of state legislatures around the country calling for “a more intelligent ballot.”<sup>105</sup>

Connecticut passed the nation’s first literacy test in 1855 and Massachusetts subsequently adopted a reading and writing requirement for voters in 1857.<sup>106</sup> These states were the first to implement universal white male suffrage and as a response to this rapid expansion of voting rights, the two state legislatures implemented literacy tests explicitly to bar illiterate immigrants from voting.<sup>107</sup> It was not until 1890 that educational qualifications for voting became law in many other states. Several state legislatures passed literacy tests in response to the rapidly growing political power of immigrants in Northern cities and newly enfranchised African-Americans in the South.<sup>108</sup> By 1920, 19 states had adopted constitutional provisions related to literacy tests for voting qualifications.<sup>109</sup>

A reading and writing qualification for voting was first proposed at the New York constitutional convention of 1846,<sup>110</sup> but was met with immense scorn, due to general support of pro-immigration policies.<sup>111</sup> The literacy test became a partisan fight, as it was proposed by Republicans at the constitutional conventions of 1867-1868 and 1894, but was “vigorously opposed” by

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<sup>105</sup> F. G. Crawford, “The New York State Literacy Test,” *The American Political Science Review* 17, no. 2 (May, 1923): 260.

<sup>106</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 86.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> J. Cayce Morrison, “New York State Regents Literacy Test,” *The Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1925), 145. By 1920, the following states had a literacy or educational test in their constitution or by law: Alabama, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wyoming, and Washington. In 1921, New York and Louisiana adopted literacy requirements for suffrage. In 1924, Oregon was the final state to pass a literacy test law.

<sup>110</sup> N.Y. Const. Conv. (1846), *Proceedings and Debates*, 820.

<sup>111</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 143; Young-In Oh, *Struggles over Immigrants’ Language: Literacy Tests in the United States, 1917–1966*, (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 137.

Democrats.<sup>112</sup> The literacy test issue again became a central point of contention at the 1915 constitutional convention, with Republicans stating the belief that English was a requirement to participate in American democracy and Democrats decrying literacy tests as arbitrary, restrictive measures that were not determinant of “good citizenship.”<sup>113</sup> The proposal narrowly failed as the convention voted 77 to 67 to reject the literacy test, with all Democrats voting against the measure.<sup>114</sup>

However, the rise of anti-immigrant and anti-socialist hysteria during WWI weakened resistance to literacy tests in New York.<sup>115</sup> On January 12, 1921, Assembly Member Louis Martin, a Republican representing the Upstate town of Oneida, introduced a literacy bill, “proposing an amendment to section one of article two of the Constitution, in relation to qualification of voters.”<sup>116</sup> The bill proposed a constitutional amendment for a literacy test: “After January 1, 1922 no person shall become entitled to vote by attaining majority, by naturalization or otherwise, unless such person is also able, except for physical disability, to read and write English; and suitable laws shall be passed by the Legislature to enforce this provision.”<sup>117</sup>

Despite almost uniform opposition from Democrats and Socialists, Republicans passed the literacy bills the following week, demonstrating the partisan history behind New York’s literacy test law: the Senate vote was 33-16<sup>118</sup> and the Assembly vote was 86-

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<sup>112</sup> N.Y. Const. Conv. (1867–1868), *Proceedings and Debates*, 491; N.Y. Const. Conv. (1894), *Record Vol. II*, 713.

<sup>113</sup> “Kill the Literacy Test for Future Voters,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1915.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 146; Rebecca A. Kobrin, “Global Perspectives on Jewish Immigrant New York and the 1917 Mayoral Election,” unpublished oral presentation notes, 2017, 3. In 1917, New York City held a highly consequential mayoral election, in which the Socialist Party played a significant role. New York City’s immigrant Jews had already helped elect one congressman and ten state assemblymen on the Socialist ticket.

<sup>116</sup> *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York* (Albany, 1921:1), 39.

<sup>117</sup> New York Legislative Record and Index (Albany: Legislative Index Publ. Co, 1921); Senate Introductory Number Record, p. 3; Assembly Introductory Number Record, 122; “The Literacy Test,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1921.

<sup>118</sup> *Journal of the Senate of the State of New York* (Albany, 1921:2), 1279.

47.<sup>119</sup> The successful votes were due to the fact that the 1921 legislature was “distinctly Republican” and was dominated by the Republican governor, Nathan L. Miller.<sup>120</sup> Reflecting on the bill’s passage, Assembly Majority Leader Simon L. Adler of Rochester defended the literacy test proposal and claimed that “a common language makes for a common understanding, common citizenship and for solidarity in government” and that every one “must understand our language to understand our governmental institutions.”<sup>121</sup>

Despite relative ease in passing the literacy bill in the Republican-dominated legislature, Democratic lawmakers attacked the legislation as anti-immigrant. Assemblyman Benjamin Antin, a Russian immigrant who represented the Bronx, spearheaded the opposition and asserted that the literacy test was “an unjust attempt to deprive citizens of their right to vote” and was not a fair test of voters’ intelligence nor a measure of “good citizenship.”<sup>122</sup> He claimed that the literacy test would “drive thousands of citizens away from the polls.”<sup>123</sup> Keyssar finds that the amendment had the potential of disenfranchising hundreds of thousands of Yiddish-speaking Jews, Italians, as well as 189,000 recently enfranchised, illiterate women.<sup>124</sup> The potential impact of this amendment cannot be overstated: By 1920, Jewish and Italian immigrants made up over two-fifths of the total population of New York City.<sup>125</sup> The bill was swiftly signed into law by Governor Miller, and the proposal was added to the 1921 general election ballot.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>119</sup> “Rush On At Albany,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1921. The bill was opposed by 21 Republicans.

<sup>120</sup> Arthur W. Bromage, “Literacy and the Electorate,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1930), 956. The 1921 legislature was referred to as “Miller’s Mill.” The Republican majorities in the state legislature were significant: In the Assembly, there were 109 Republicans and 36 Democrats and in the Senate, there were 30 Republicans and 21 Democrats.

<sup>121</sup> *New York Times*, April 15, 1921.

<sup>122</sup> “Rush On At Albany,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1921.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 146.

<sup>125</sup> Nancy Foner, “How Exceptional is New York? Migration and Multiculturalism in the Empire City,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 6, (2007), 1001.

<sup>126</sup> *New York Times*, April 15, 1921.

Immigrant advocacy groups expressed swift opposition to the literacy test. On May 25, 1921, Simon Wolf submitted a report to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Buffalo and urged that the literacy test proposal be rescinded.<sup>127</sup> Wolf, who was serving as the Chairman of the Board of Delegates on Civil Rights of the Union, believed that the English literacy test was an arbitrary measure meant to prevent Jews and other immigrants from voting. He reiterated the notion that hard work and stellar contributions to American society—not English literacy—conferred “good citizenship”: “The immigrant capable of working brings a valuable asset to the wealth of the nation without endangering its future.”<sup>128</sup>

Jewish rights activist Max Kohler argued that the literacy test plan was so haphazard and ill-conceived that it would result in the disenfranchisement of native citizens. The lack of educational resources to remedy the “temporary curtailment” of voting would only be exacerbated in rural areas where educational opportunities were significantly worse than in New York City.<sup>129</sup> He also paralleled this impulsive disenfranchisement movement to the disenfranchisement of Black Southerners. It was hypocritical that the New Yorkers and Northerners would “emphatically decry the action of the South” in preventing Black Americans from voting, while disenfranchising hundreds of thousands of future foreign-born citizens in their own home.<sup>130</sup> He concluded that the New York literacy proposal should not be characterized as a way to Americanize and educate immigrants, but as a tool of “Know-Nothingism propaganda.”<sup>131</sup>

While immigrant activists such as Wolf and Kohler demanded the potential amendment be rejected, a powerful coalition of nativist organizations, newspapers, good-government reform groups, and educational officials actively promoted voting “Yes” on the amendment.<sup>132</sup> Anti-immigrant nativist groups such as

<sup>127</sup> Simon Wolf, “Ask for Repeal of Literacy Test,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1921

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Kohler, “Case Against the Proposed Amendment,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1921.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> “The Literacy Test,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1921.

the Allied Patriotic Societies aided the literacy test movement by inflaming racial tensions in New York City. The mission of APS included “prohibiting the speaking of foreign languages on public streets and squares in the City of New York.”<sup>133</sup> Nativist groups such as the APS viewed the foreign-born as second class citizens and portrayed newcomers as being genetically and morally inferior, whose cultural habits and foreign languages made them “unable or unwilling to ‘assimilate’ into the ‘mainstream’ of American culture.”<sup>134</sup> The APS saw the literacy test as an effective means of ensuring immigrants were barred from the political process.<sup>135</sup>

At the same time, the *New York Times*’ editorial board argued that the test would not be discriminatory, but instead it would actually promote literacy and lead to a more educated electorate.<sup>136</sup> They reiterated Republicans’ claims that knowledge of English, the language of the Constitution, was a “just and elementary requirement of citizenship” and that it was necessary for New York, a state with so many foreign languages, to have a “common language.”<sup>137</sup>

According to Keyssar, Progressive Era reform groups backing the amendment, including Citizens Union and the Honest Ballot Association, were antagonistic toward working-class, foreign-born voters and “unabashedly welcomed the prospect of weeding such voters out of the electorate.”<sup>138</sup> Keyssar writes that many of these native-born, upper-class progressive reformers opposed immigrants’ participation in elections because recently arrived immigrants were deemed to be “insufficiently tutored in American values and the workings of American democracy.”<sup>139</sup>

Educational officials in support of the literacy test often cited statistics from the United States Census Bureau to demonstrate the

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<sup>133</sup> “Asked Ban in Public on Foreign Tongues, The Allied Patriotic Societies,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1922.

<sup>134</sup> Ron Hayduk, *Democracy for All*, 26.

<sup>135</sup> *New York Times*, December 20, 1922.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 159.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

grave threat of immigrant illiteracy in the country and specifically in New York, the immigration hub. Commissioner Strayer reported that in 1920 that there were 1,500,000 people over ten years old in the nation “who are unable to speak English” with many more who are sufficiently able to speak English to pass the Census enumerator, “yet not have that degree of literacy which means ability to comprehend the fundamental principles of our Government.”<sup>140</sup> New York was heavily scrutinized in the report because it was the epicenter of the illiteracy problem: With 425,022 illiterate people in 1920, New York had higher illiteracy than any state in the nation.<sup>141</sup> Although illiteracy decreased in the country between 1910-1920, the number of illiterate people in New York increased from 406,020 to 425,022.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, the New York State Board of Regents reported in 1919 that 597,000 foreign-born residents in New York could not speak English.<sup>143</sup> While the 1910 census reports showed that illiteracy in New York was slightly lower than the national average (5.5 percent compared to 6 percent), the sheer number of illiterates was a cause for alarm among public officials.<sup>144</sup>

On November 8, 1921, voters in New York state were presented with seven legislatively referred constitutional amendments, including the literacy test, denoted as Amendment No. 3.<sup>145</sup> Five of the amendments, including the literacy test, passed.<sup>146</sup> The literacy test returned the second-largest majority of

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<sup>140</sup> Strayer, 36.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* The other states with the highest number of illiterates were Pennsylvania (312,699), Georgia (328,838), Alabama (278,082), Mississippi (229,734). New York still had nearly 100,000 more illiterates than the closest state.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Journals of the Meetings of the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York, *The Department of Education*, January 30, 1919.

<sup>144</sup> Kohler, “Case Against the Proposed Amendment,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1921.

<sup>145</sup> “Literacy Test May Carry,” *New York Times*, November 9, 1921. The other amendments included soldiers’ preference in civil service, increases in legislators’ salaries from \$1,500 to \$3,000 per year, creation of a state children’s court, new municipal governments for Westchester and Nassau counties, and two amendments that dealt with abandoned lands along the Erie Canal.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

all seven amendments, with 869,355 “Yes” votes and 632,144 “No” votes.<sup>147</sup> Because of the successful advocacy work of the literacy test movement, voters in New York set the stage for the use of an English literacy test for voters in the country’s most populous state.

## II. Testing the Test: The Implementation of New York’s Literacy Test Law

The overwhelming success of the literacy test referendum vote catalyzed a movement to define citizenship and suffrage through literacy and education. On January 1, 1922, the literacy test amendment was officially ratified to the State Constitution and “literacy” was now a “condition of voting” in the state of New York.<sup>148</sup> Any new resident of New York who had previously voted in one or more states but moved to New York State *after* Jan 1, 1922 was required to prove their literacy.<sup>149</sup> However, any citizen who was qualified before January 1, 1922, regardless of whether they had voted previously, was grandfathered in and exempt from the literacy requirement. The potential impact of the proposed law change was tremendous: it was estimated that there were upwards of 200,000 new voters annually.<sup>150</sup>

However, the amendment did not implement any specific literacy test, but required “the Legislature to prescribe the method by which ‘literacy’ shall be determined.”<sup>151</sup> On January 17, State Senator James L. Whitley, a Republican representing Monroe, introduced a bill to establish a functional literacy test under the provisions of the amendment.<sup>152</sup> The bill provided for two methods to prove literacy: literacy tests administered by the local elections boards and certificates of literacy.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>147</sup> “Literacy Test Approved,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1921. The literacy test came second to an uncontroversial amendment establishing state children’s courts.

<sup>148</sup> “The Literacy Test,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1921.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* Much emphasis was made of the fact that many of the retroactively-qualified voters were women who “have not yet taken advantage of the federal suffrage amendment and who will vote for the first time this year.”

<sup>150</sup> “Fix the Literacy Test Rules,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1923.

<sup>151</sup> *New York Times*, January 25, 1921. Kohler, *New York Times*, October 23, 1921.

<sup>152</sup> “Bill Is Introduced to Make Literacy Test for Voters Effective.” *New York Times*, January 17, 1922.

<sup>153</sup> Crawford, “The New York State Literacy Test,” 261.

The original version of the NYSL Test was similar to several of the tests in other states that required voters to read and write in English. According to the bill, the Secretary of State's office would prepare 100 different extracts of 50 words from the State Constitution and from these 50-word extracts, the prospective voter would read aloud the entire section and write out 10 words of the words—chosen by the election inspector.<sup>154</sup> However, following the bill's introduction, reports emerged that civic organizations and educators throughout the state were “not in accord with the Whitley plan of making election officials the arbiters in these educational tests.”<sup>155</sup>

Education officials viewed the passage of the literacy test amendment as a mandate for reforming the New York election system through Americanization and English-language education. Lewis A. Wilson, the Director of the Division of Vocational and Extension Education at the Department of Education, argued that literacy tests designed by education officials would force the state to reckon with “its illiteracy problem among the 400,000 foreign-born residents who are deficient in English reading and writing” and believed that the New York State Department of Education should certify the qualifications of voters under the literacy law.<sup>156</sup>

Educators were successful in their attempts to gain control over administration of the literacy test. The Legislature added a literacy certificate program—run by the Board of Regents—into Section 166 of the revised election law of 1922.<sup>157</sup> New York's creation of a literacy certificate through its educational arm of government became the first of its kind in the nation. State Commissioner of Education Dr. Frank Graves then organized a commission to study the creation of a literacy certification process

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<sup>154</sup> University of the State of New York, “University of the State of New York Bulletin,” Vol. 744 (Albany, N.Y., 1921), 5.

<sup>155</sup> “Bill Is Also Introduced to Make Literacy Test for Voters Effective,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1922.

<sup>156</sup> “University of the State of New York Bulletin,” 3.

<sup>157</sup> Morrison, “New York State Regents Literacy Test,” 146. The amendment empowered the Board of Regents to “adopt and enforce rules governing the issuance, and further authentication, of such certificates of literacy and the preparation or examination of applicants therefor.”

and to formulate a plan for designing and administering the test.<sup>158</sup> The goal of the Graves Commission was to create a literacy test that would assess a voter's ability "to read and write intelligently."<sup>159</sup> The commission argued that "literacy" required a voter to be able to "read current political discussions in order to vote intelligently" and to "express his thoughts through the medium of written English."<sup>160</sup>

The commission found that the original literacy test could not properly assess its definition of "literacy." From a word study of the State Constitution, the commission found that not only were half the words above the fourth-grade reading level—the minimum level under the law—but more than a quarter of the words were not contained in Dr. Edward Thorndike's "The Teachers' Word Book" of 10,000 most common words.<sup>161</sup> The commission reported that the Constitution contained "archaic or strictly legal terms almost never used outside of legal writing."<sup>162</sup>

Due to its findings, the Graves Commission was able to persuade the Secretary of State to allow the creation of a new literacy test, which excluded "archaic or usual words" from the test.<sup>163</sup> This new test was to conform to Dr. Thorndike's list and would consist of one reading selection followed by ten questions based on the selection, with single-word or short answers.<sup>164</sup>

In order to test the efficacy of its selections, the committee gave 30 test versions to more than 200 fourth-grade students in the public schools of Troy, Albany, Schenectady, and New York City.<sup>165</sup> Every selection required a minimum passing rate of 75 percent of

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<sup>158</sup> Morrison, "New York State Regents Literacy Test," 147.

<sup>159</sup> Crawford, "New York State Literacy Test," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1925), 262.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>161</sup> Morrison, "New York State Regents Literacy Test," 148; Edward L. Thorndike, *The Teachers' Word Book*, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1921).

<sup>162</sup> Morrison, "New York State Regents Literacy Test," 147.

<sup>163</sup> Morrison, "New York State Regents Literacy Test," 150.

<sup>164</sup> Rejall, "A New Literacy Test for Voters," 235.

<sup>165</sup> Morrison, "New York State Regents Literacy Test," 150.

the fourth graders, or else they would be scrapped.<sup>166</sup> In order to ensure the tests were standardized, the committee selected a wide range of schools, including those situated in high immigrant populations and schools in wealthier residential districts.<sup>167</sup> This literacy test system was novel: no other state structured their literacy tests from the results of meticulous scientific experimentation. In the summer of 1922, the Department of Education and the Board of Regents approved the literacy test system devised by the Graves Commission and prepared the tests for the October 1922 voter registration window.<sup>168</sup>

Dr. J. Cayce Morrison, the head researcher for the Department of Education and a member of the commission, claimed that it was evident in text of the law, as well as in the debates that had preceded its enactment, that the literacy test was enacted to “deprive new voters, who had not gained the ability to read and write the English language, of the privilege of the ballot and [to] raise the general educational average of the new electorate.”<sup>169</sup> Unlike the visible intentions of the literacy laws in the South that used literacy tests to explicitly bar Black voters and did not include any educational purposes behind the restrictive measures, the public understanding of the New York literacy law was that it would serve a dual purpose: barring illiterate voters *and* raising the literacy rates of the electorate through education.

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<sup>166</sup> “30 out of 333 Failed Literacy Test,” *White Plains Reporter*, October 25, 1924, Roll #2, Box 8, Folder 9, A0063, NYSA.

<sup>167</sup> Morrison, 151.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

<sup>169</sup> Morrison, 149.

## The following is a sample selection of the Regents literacy test<sup>170</sup>:

### NEW YORK STATE REGENTS LITERACY TEST

Write your name here..... **Test 2**  
 Write your voting address here.....  
 Write the date here.....  
 Month Day Year

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEST

This is a test to see whether you can read and write English. On the other side of this sheet there is a selection for you to read. First, read the selection. Next, read the first question. Then, go back and read the selection until you find the answer to this first question. Usually, the answer will be only one or two words. When you have found the correct answer, write it on the dotted line after the first question. You need not answer in a complete sentence. Write the answer as plainly as you can, for this is a test of both reading and writing. Answer all the other questions in the same way. When you have answered every question, read the selection and answers to your questions over again, and make sure you have made no mistakes.

- 1 Is there anybody who does not know what we are to do?
- 2 When you turn the sheet, what are you to do first?
- 3 Where will you find the answers to the questions?
- 4 Where are you to write the answer to each question?
- 5 Do you need to answer in a complete sentence?
- 6 How many words will there usually be in the answer?

If you have any other questions, ask them now.

Do not write in the space below.

Turn your paper over—begin reading.

#### (TO BE FILLED IN BY THE EXAMINER)

Number of answers correct.....  
 Candidate's rating.....  
 F (passed) F (failed)  
 Place where examination was held.....  
 County (City, village, town).....  
 Certificate of literacy was.....  
 (mailed or delivered in person).....  
 Signature of examiner.....  
 Title of examiner.....  
 Notify unsuccessful candidates that they may take examination given by local election officials.....  
 Examiner will preserve both successful and unsuccessful papers for at least three months after election day—they should then be destroyed.

<sup>\*</sup>This sentence is omitted from editions published since the revision of the law in 1925.

### NEW YORK STATE REGENTS LITERACY TEST

**Test 2**  
 Read this and then write the answers. Read it as many times as you need to.

A milk wagon was passing along a street, loaded with boxes of empty milk bottles. One box fell off and the bottles were smashed all over the street. The angry driver stopped, picked up the box, and drove off. But two boy scouts who were passing stopped. They patiently picked up the broken glass. They wrapped it in a newspaper, and carried it to an ash can not far off. Why did they take so much trouble? Because they realized that the street was a place that belonged to them. They knew that, if the glass stayed there, somebody's automobile tires would suffer.

- 1 What sort of wagon was passing along the street?.....
- 2 With what was the wagon loaded?.....
- 3 How many boxes fell off the wagon?.....
- 4 Who was angry?.....
- 5 Who were passing when the accident occurred?.....
- 6 What was wrapped in a newspaper?.....
- 7 What part of the automobile would be damaged?.....

The scoring key for the six tests was printed on the two sides of a sheet 5 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 9 inches. The heading and key for Test 2 follow.

#### THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEW YORK STATE REGENTS LITERACY TEST KEY FOR SCORING PAPERS

#### Test 2

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Milk wagon.....  | <i>Incorrect</i> |
| 2. Boxes of empty milk bottles, empty milk bottles—milk bottles |                  |
| 3. One box.....   |                  |
| 4. Driver.....  | man              |
| 5. Two Boy Scouts, Some Boy Scouts.....                         | two boys         |
| 6. Broken glass, broken bottles.....                            | bottles          |
| 7. Tires.....   |                  |
- Required number of correct answers for passing credit—6.

## The Initial Impact of the NYSL Test

The NYSL Test was a clear success for its supporters: in the elections following the enactment of the law, tens of thousands of immigrants failed to pass the NYSL Test and were barred from voting. Following the results of the highly anticipated 1924 presidential election—the first use of the NYSL Test in a presidential election in New York—newspapers reported that 23 percent of applicants failed the literacy test in New York City.<sup>171</sup> Roughly 80 percent of applicants in New York City were foreign-

<sup>170</sup> Morrison, "New York State Regents Literacy Test," 152.

<sup>171</sup> William O'Shea, "Literacy Test of Voters is Pronounced a Success," *New York Times*, January 4, 1925. 10,274 people failed the test out of 44,941 in New York City, resulting in a failure rate of 23 percent (8,345 people received certificates without taking the test by presenting diplomas).

born citizens.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, all 10,274 failures were foreign-born citizens.<sup>173</sup> Conversely, outside New York City, over 14,614 applicants passed the literacy test out of a total of 16,203 applications: The failing rate was 9.8 percent, less than half that of New York City.<sup>174</sup> A small Albany newspaper commented that the results showed that “it is not enough to be a citizen, one must be a literate citizen to enjoy the privilege of casting one’s vote.”<sup>175</sup>

The greatest public critique of the literacy test program came from State Senator Benjamin Antin, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Education and a prominent adversary of the literacy test in 1921. In an op-ed, Antin stated his belief that the literacy test was a “useless test of citizenship” and claimed that the law had accomplished its intended goal of disenfranchising thousands of foreign-born citizens.<sup>176</sup> He argued that English should not be forced upon naturalized citizens and that English literacy did not confer intelligence, nor informed citizenship.

Furthermore, Antin rejected the notion that illiterate immigrants could not be informed citizens and voters, which he considered “a slur upon the millions of foreign-born who can read and write their own language.”<sup>177</sup> He cited the fact that foreign-

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<sup>172</sup> O’Shea, “Literacy Test of Voters is Pronounced a Success,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1965.

<sup>173</sup> “Literacy Test,” *Olean Herald*, January 29, 1925. The *New York Times* also confirmed that all the failures came from foreign born applicants.

<sup>174</sup> “Literacy Test,” *Olean Herald*, January 29, 1925. Rejall, *Administration of the Literacy Law for New Vote*, (New York: State Department of Education, 1930). I aggregated this percentage from the *New York Times* report of New York City failure rates and from the total passage rates in New York State collected by a 1930 Department of Education report. There were 61,144 total tests taken in 1924: 24,888 applicants passed, 12,256 applicants failed. Subtracting the 44,941 tests in New York City from the total tests results in 16,203 tests taken Upstate. Then, subtracting the 10,274 successful applicants in New York City from the 24,888 successful applicants across the state results in 14,614 successful applicants outside of New York City. 14,614/16,203 equals a passing rate of 90.2 percent and a failure rate of 9.8 percent.

<sup>175</sup> “38 Failed in Literacy Test of 245 Examined in Albany,” *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, October 30, 1923, Roll #2, Box 11, Folder 7, A0063, NYSA.

<sup>176</sup> Antin, “The Test for New Voters,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1924. Antin replied directly to the *Times*: “According to your own admission, it has disfranchised thousands of foreign-born citizens under the guise of a useless educational test.”

<sup>177</sup> Antin, “The Test for New Voters,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1924.

language news outlets were extremely active in American affairs and government: A Columbia University study at the time concluded that the foreign language press “excels the English newspapers in the matter of printing accurate information about governmental activities and the duties of citizenship.”<sup>178</sup>

Education officials lauded the NYSL Test and recommended it be replicated around the nation. William O’Shea, the New York City Superintendent of Schools, wrote an op-ed on January 4, 1925 and claimed the results of the NYSL Test were “so satisfactory” that other states would replicate New York’s system.<sup>179</sup> Alfred Rejall, the Supervisor of Immigrant Education at the New York State Department of Education, proposed a federal literacy test law for both voting and naturalization, which would be based on the NYSL Test.<sup>180</sup> To Rejall’s wishes, the NYSL Test did have a lasting impact on education and citizenship in the country: the test became the pilot of New York’s standardized Regents tests for high schoolers and the model of the U.S. Citizenship test used today to determine naturalization.<sup>181</sup>

In New York City, the results of the NYSL directly correlated to immigrant education and class. The lowest percentage of failures was in a school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan near Columbia University, where there were only 13 failures out of 1,364 tests.<sup>182</sup> In Greenwich Village, where there was a large number of high-class Italians, Spaniards, and Greeks, only 11 failed out of 633 applicants. Conversely, the highest percentage of failures came from a school district that was almost exclusively Italian: 314 out of 592 applicants failed. Another Italian and Jewish district saw a nearly 50 percent failure rate. The highest failure rates were always found in “Ghetto districts” where single nationalities, especially

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<sup>178</sup> Antin, “The Test for New Voters,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1924.

<sup>179</sup> O’Shea, “Literacy Test of Voters is Pronounced a Success,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1925.

<sup>180</sup> Rejall, *Thirty and One Reading Tests for Voters and Citizenship*, 5.

<sup>181</sup> Serviss, Patricia, “Activists, Immigrants, Citizens: Grounding Rhetorical Conceptions of Literacy,” (Ph.D., -- New York, Syracuse University, 2010), 141.

<sup>182</sup> O’Shea, “Literacy Test of Voters is Pronounced a Success,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1925.

Italian and Jewish, were “compactly segregated.”<sup>183</sup> O’Shea claimed that the 23 percent rate of failure was commendable news, which indicated the literacy test was successful in disenfranchising “undesirable” foreigners.<sup>184</sup>

In 1930, Rejall released a report on administration of the Regents Literacy Test from<sup>185</sup> Between 1923 and 1929, 55,000 people failed the English literacy test, amounting to roughly 15 percent of applicants.<sup>186</sup> However, an unknown number of potential voters—perhaps tens of thousands—did not even attempt to take the test and register to vote out of fear that they had little to no chance of passing.<sup>187</sup> F. G. Crawford, a professor of political science at Syracuse University, published a review of the Department of Education’s report in 1931 and wrote that the results demonstrated the success of the NYSL Test: “The success of the law in New York is unquestioned... The Americanization movement in New York state has furnished aliens the opportunity to learn English when applying for citizenship and an equal chance to comply with the state educational qualification for voting.”<sup>188</sup>

Other academic scholars and literacy advocates around the nation took note of New York’s success. In 1930, Arthur Bromage, a professor at the University of Michigan, wrote that the NYSL was a great achievement: “It not only provided a new impetus for evening school work among adults, but it also directly linked the state education department with the maintenance of an electorate

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<sup>183</sup> O’Shea, “Literacy Test of Voters is Pronounced a Success,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1925.

<sup>184</sup> O’Shea, “Literacy Test of Voters is Pronounced a Success,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1925.

<sup>185</sup> Rejall, *Administration of the Literacy Law for New Vote*, (New York: State Department of Education, 1930). Crawford, “Operation of the Literacy Test for Voters in New York,” 345. Despite the use of literacy tests in the country since 1855, the NYSL Test program was the first to keep official records and have “objective material as to its effectiveness.”

<sup>186</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 146. 55,000 persons out of 472,000 failed the literacy test during this period.

<sup>187</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 146. Keyssar argues “Thousands of people failed the test each time that it was given, and thousands more were believed to have foregone the opportunity to vote because they chose not to be tested.”

<sup>188</sup> Crawford, “The New York State Literacy Test,” 263.

literate in the English language.”<sup>189</sup> Bromage argued that the expansion of voting rights only diluted the quality of the electorate and that restrictive acts like the NYSL Test were necessary to protect the ballot from “undesirable” citizens. He applauded the practice of administering state literacy tests to disenfranchise illiterates, proclaiming that education was a requirement of suffrage: “With our present systems of compulsory and adult education...it is no injustice to ask the voter to learn the English language. Nor is it a denial of the right to vote.”<sup>190</sup>

The NYSL Test worked just as its founders had intended and it became a model for the nation. Despite its success, states did not follow New York’s lead as Rejall and others had hoped and the movement to expand the scientific, education-based literacy test across the country failed to materialize: Oregon, in 1924, was the last state to institute any literacy test requirement for voting.<sup>191</sup> Even in New York, the literacy test failed to expand; in 1934, the Honest Ballot Association lobbied for an amendment that would have required literacy of all (not only new) voters, but it was quickly stopped by the state’s supreme court.<sup>192</sup> While no new state instituted a literacy test for voting, there were few movements to expand suffrage: no state repealed its literacy test laws in the decades following World War I.<sup>193</sup> From the 1930s to the 1940s, New York’s literacy test was an undisputed component of its election law. However, drastic demographic changes in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s would shift the target of the NYSL Test from immigrants to Spanish-speaking citizens. This would lead to a fierce battle over voting rights in New York that would capture the attention of the nation once again.

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<sup>189</sup> Bromage, “Literacy and the Electorate,” 961.

<sup>190</sup> Bromage, “Literacy and the Electorate,” 961.

<sup>191</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 228.

<sup>192</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 228.

<sup>193</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 228.

### III. “Aquí Se Habla Inglés”: Puerto Ricans’ Fight to Abolish New York’s English Literacy Test

#### The Unique Case of Puerto Ricans

Over the decades following the enactment of the constitutional amendment, the NYSL Test faded from the news and went unchallenged in both the courts and in the State Legislature. Despite several changes to the State Constitution, the literacy test amendment remained a key provision in Article II, the election law.<sup>194</sup>

However, the rapid growth of the Puerto Rican population in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s reignited the argument that the English literacy test was a discriminatory tool to prevent minority groups from participating in the political process. Between 1946 and 1960, approximately 600,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States and more than three-quarters of the group chose New York City as their new home.<sup>195</sup> By 1965, Puerto Ricans were 730,000 strong in New York City, making up almost one-tenth of the city’s population.<sup>196</sup>

The case of Puerto Ricans was unique because inhabitants of the island became U.S. citizens not through immigration and naturalization, but through annexation.<sup>197</sup> As a Spanish-speaking people, they became a linguistic minority upon arriving in the U.S. mainland. In 1898, the territory of Puerto Rico was annexed to the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War.<sup>198</sup> Under the Treaty of Paris, Congress was authorized to determine the “civil rights and political status of the native inhabitants [of Puerto

<sup>194</sup> “Aquí Se Habla Inglés,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1963. The State Constitution was rewritten in 1938 and Article II was amended three times (1943, 1945, and 1951) without any changes to the literacy requirement.

<sup>195</sup> Arnold H. Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” *Revista Jurídica de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, Vol 39, No. 3 (1970), 370.

<sup>196</sup> Richard M. Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” (M.A., -- New York, Columbia University, 1966), 27.

<sup>197</sup> Oh, *Struggles over Immigrants’ Language*, 162.

<sup>198</sup> Selma C. Berrol, Randall M. Miller, and William Pencak, *Immigration To New York*, (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991), 181.

Rico].<sup>199</sup> However, Congress failed to act swiftly on the matter of Puerto Rican citizenship. After years of protest, Congress and the Wilson administration finally passed the Jones Act in 1917, which granted automatic citizenship to all Puerto Rican natives.<sup>200</sup> Puerto Ricans could now enjoy the privileges and liberties guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, including the right to “move freely to the mainland.”<sup>201</sup> Professor Richard M. Pious argues that the Jones Act created the opportunity for Puerto Ricans’ “mass participation in political life.”<sup>202</sup>

As citizens, Puerto Ricans were exempt from the quota system under the Immigration Act of 1924 and their movement to the mainland was unrestricted. In 1920, there were only 11,811 Puerto Ricans in the United States.<sup>203</sup> By 1960, there were 892,513 Puerto Ricans in the United States—642,622 of whom resided in New York State.<sup>204</sup> In New York City, the rapid increase of the Puerto Rican population after World War II was especially notable: Between 1950 and 1960, the Puerto Rican population in Manhattan rose near doubled from 138,507 to 225,639 and in the Bronx, the population tripled from 61,924 to 186,885.<sup>205</sup> Most Puerto Ricans came to New York to escape the mass poverty of the Caribbean and because of their impoverishment, Puerto Ricans were the most

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<sup>199</sup> Treaty of Paris, 1898. 30 Stat. 1754. *People ex rel. Juarbe v. Board of Inspectors*, 67 N.Y.S. 236 (Sup. Ct. 1900). Congress’ neglect to act on the matter of Puerto Rican citizenship led to court challenges. A year after the Treaty of Paris, a lawsuit was filed by a Puerto Rican national seeking the right to vote in New York. Mr. Juarbe had served with the U.S. Army in Puerto Rico and “adopted” the nationality of the U.S. upon moving to New York City in 1899. Given the fact that Congress had failed to act upon its powers—which included the ability to establish collective naturalization for Puerto Rican natives—the Court ruled that Juarbe could not claim U.S. citizenship and therefore was denied the right to vote in New York.

<sup>200</sup> Berrol, *Immigration To New York*, 181.

<sup>201</sup> Berrol, *Immigration To New York*, 181.

<sup>202</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 4.

<sup>203</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 15. “A Summary of Facts and Figures” distributed on Pious’ request by the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Migration Division (1963).

<sup>204</sup> Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” 370.

<sup>205</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 15.

economically depressed group in New York City through the early 1960s.<sup>206</sup>

Economic impoverishment went hand in hand with high rates of illiteracy. In 1930, only 58.6 percent of Puerto Ricans were literate in any language.<sup>207</sup> By 1960, that figure had risen to 83 percent, however, less than 40 percent of Puerto Ricans in New York City were literate in English.<sup>208</sup> With approximately 25,000 Puerto Ricans migrating to the country each year throughout the 1960s, government officials were concerned with the large numbers of illiterate Puerto Ricans in the United States.<sup>209</sup>

Despite many concerted attempts, the U.S. government failed to impose English on the Puerto Rican education system. In response to the efforts to Americanize the island, the Partido Popular Democratico rose to power in 1944 and doubled down on Spanish-language instruction in Puerto Rican schools.<sup>210</sup> Arnold H. Leibowitz, the General Counsel of the United States Commission on the Status of Puerto Rico in the 1960s, wrote that the rise of Puerto Rican nationalism led Congress to grant Puerto Rico “a great deal of autonomy” over its educational system, wrestling in minimal focus on English-language learning.<sup>211</sup>

The Puerto Rican movement to embrace Spanish ran counter to the naturalization movement at the time, which demanded English literacy. The Nationality Act of 1940 included a clause that required naturalized citizens demonstrate “an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language.”<sup>212</sup> Following this measure, the Immigrant Naturalization Act of 1952 was passed,

<sup>206</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 15.

<sup>207</sup> “Literacy: Puerto Rico and the United States; Ability to Speak English: Puerto Rico; 1910-1960,” United States-Puerto Rico Commission on the Status of Puerto Rico (1966). Emphasis added.

<sup>208</sup> Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” 370.

<sup>209</sup> Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” 370.

<sup>210</sup> Aida Negrón de Montilla, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public School System 1900-1930*, San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico, (1975), 3; Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” 331.

<sup>211</sup> Aida Negrón de Montilla, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public School System 1900-1930*, 334, 370.

<sup>212</sup> Nationality Act of 1940, section 304. 8 U.S.C. § 1423 (1964)

which made English literacy a condition of naturalization.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, citizenship was now officially linked to English literacy. However, because Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans were automatically granted citizenship through annexation and were exempt from the English literacy requirements for citizenship, attention shifted to the NYSL Test, which became a powerful tool used to impose English on Spanish-speaking citizens and strip them of their access to the ballot.

### Nuyoricans and the Demand for Political Power

Given the rapid increase in Nuyoricans, a portmanteau of “New York” and “Puerto Ricans,” there was growing demand in the 1940s and 1950s for political representation in the city.<sup>214</sup> The first significant mobilization of Puerto Rican voters came in the mid-1930s where Puerto Ricans backed Vito Marcantonio, an Italian Congressman from East Harlem.<sup>215</sup> Marcantonio was recognized as “de facto Congressman for Puerto Rico” and championed Puerto Rican independence on the national stage.<sup>216</sup> In 1937, Oscar García Rivera was elected to the State Assembly, becoming the first Puerto Rican elected to office in the country.<sup>217</sup> However, there were no Puerto Rican New York City Councilmembers, state Senators, nor congressional representatives until 1965.<sup>218</sup>

Puerto Rican community leaders noticed the lack of proportional representation in New York City. They demanded

<sup>213</sup> Ariel Loring, “The Meaning of Citizenship: Tests, Policy, and English Proficiency,” *The CATESOL Journal*, Vol. 24. No. 1 (2012), 200.

<sup>214</sup> Andrés Torres, *Between Melting Pot and Mosaic: African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the New York Political Economy*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 65. The Puerto Rican population in New York City increased by 50 percent from 1930 to 1940 and quadrupled from 1940 to 1950.

<sup>215</sup> Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician 1902-1954*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 171.

<sup>216</sup> Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio*, 171.

<sup>217</sup> Juan Cartagena, “Puerto Ricans and the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act,” *Centro Voices E-Magazine*, City University of New York, July 28, 2015, <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/centrovoices/current-affairs/puerto-ricans-and-50th-anniversary-voting-rights-act>.

<sup>218</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 21, 24.

more accessibility and changes to city administration and services, such as more signs in Spanish in hospitals, polling booths, and police stations.<sup>219</sup> Local civic groups and Puerto Rican governmental agencies, such as the New York City branch of the Migration Division of the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico, began an annual voter registration drive in 1954.<sup>220</sup> Nick Lugo, the director of campaigns for the Legion of Voters, recognized the importance of increasing Puerto Rican participation and stated, “The voting franchise is the greatest treasure of a democracy.”<sup>221</sup>

Despite these community-driven efforts to increase Puerto Rican participation, there was little change, due largely in part to the continuation of the English literacy test for new voters. State and city lawmakers were aware of the rapid increase in the Nuyorican population and backed the NYSL Test in order to stunt the growth of the Spanish-speaking electorate. Young-In Oh writes that the “target of the English literacy test law had been changed.”<sup>222</sup> Aware that voter registration drives and political mobilization could only go so far in face of mass disenfranchisement, Puerto Rican activists shifted their strategy to demand for the abolition of the English literacy test.

### **A Grocer’s Plan to Take Down The English Literacy Test**

Without an overhaul of the election system, the English literacy test would continue to disenfranchise a great number of U.S. citizens in New York. Advocacy to reform the election law began in an unusual way. In 1957, the friendship between Jose Camacho, a 58-year-old grocer from Puerto Rico and resident of the Bronx, and Gene Crescenzi, an immigrant and a young lawyer recently discharged from the Army, led to a court case which challenged the literacy test for the first time in decades.<sup>223</sup> In 1966, Richard Pious interviewed Crescenzi. Reflecting on the reasons he

<sup>219</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 21, 24.

<sup>220</sup> “Campaigns Opened to Register Thousands of Voteless in City,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1964.

<sup>221</sup> *El Diario*, September 24, 1965.

<sup>222</sup> Oh, *Struggles over Immigrants’ Language*, 165.

<sup>223</sup> Layhmond Robinson, “Suit Seeks to End State Voter Test: Puerto Rican Says English Requirement is Invalid,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1961.

decided to challenge the NYSL Test on Camacho's behalf, Crescenzi said he believed "American democracy would be strengthened if the barriers to assimilation and participation were struck down" and that "the literacy test should be challenged as one of the steps toward providing full equality for Puerto Ricans."<sup>224</sup>

Crescenzi decided to test the constitutionality of the English literacy test and filed a petition on October 4, 1958 in the State Supreme Court in Bronx County.<sup>225</sup> The petition stated that Camacho, a U.S. citizen, was educated in Spanish and had previously voted in Puerto Rico—where there was no literacy test—before moving to New York.<sup>226</sup> Camacho claimed that because he was unable to demonstrate literacy in English to qualify as a voter, he was denied his right to vote.<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, he argued that his 14th Amendment and 15th Amendment rights to equal protection were violated "because my racial ancestry is Spanish," and that the amendments made no distinction based on race or color.<sup>228</sup> He also argued that the NYSL Test added to the citizenship requirements laid out by Congress under the Jones Act and that New York had no authority to supersede Congress' power to determine U.S. citizenship.

Camacho did not seek to overturn the literacy test law, but rather to produce an order requiring the Board of Elections to allow him to prove his literacy in Spanish. Crescenzi acknowledged that they were not challenging the constitutionality of literacy tests for voting, since the courts had previously upheld the English literacy test.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, he felt that the optics of illiterates voting due to the abolition of the literacy test would be heavily criticized.<sup>230</sup>

The Office of the Corporation Counsel of New York City, representing the Board of Elections, rejected Camacho's 14th and 15th Amendment claims, as well as the claim that New York had unconstitutionally altered the federal requirements of citizenship.

<sup>224</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 42.

<sup>225</sup> *Camacho v. Doe*, 221 N.Y.S.2d 262 (1959).

<sup>226</sup> Robinson, *New York Times*, June 13, 1961.

<sup>227</sup> Robinson, *New York Times*, June 13, 1961.

<sup>228</sup> *Camacho v. Doe*, 221 N.Y.S.2d 262 (1959).

<sup>229</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 44.

<sup>230</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 44.

They claimed that it was incorrect to state that Camacho's "failure to read and write English is due to his racial ancestry."<sup>231</sup> The Bronx Supreme Court denied Camacho's petition and held that the literacy test was constitutional and did not deny Camacho the right to vote: "Under the laws of this State...he must first learn to read and write English. This cannot be deemed an unreasonable requirement."<sup>232</sup> On November 19, 1959, the highest court in the state, the Court of Appeals, upheld the literacy test in a one-sentence opinion.<sup>233</sup>

Amidst this loss, Camacho and Crescenzi quietly laid the groundwork to prove their case to the nation. During the court cases, Camacho filed a separate complaint before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and claimed that the NYS literacy test was discriminatory and constituted a denial of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the 14th Amendment.<sup>234</sup> The Commission's report noted that there were an estimated 600,000 Puerto Ricans living in New York City in 1959 and that about 190,000 members of this group had lived in the state long enough to satisfy the residency requirements for voting.<sup>235</sup> The report argued that while nearly 60 percent of Puerto Ricans in New York City could only read and write in Spanish, many were well-informed of public affairs because of the excellent news coverage of the three available Spanish-language newspapers, which reached more than 82,000 Spanish speakers.<sup>236</sup> The report also cited a prior Supreme Court ruling that upheld the rights of non-English-speaking Americans: "The protection of the Constitution extends to all to those who speak other languages as well as those born with English on the tongue."<sup>237</sup> The Commission concluded that "Puerto Rican

<sup>231</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 43.

<sup>232</sup> *Camacho v. Doe*, 221 N.Y.S.2d 262 (1959).

<sup>233</sup> Pious, 45. 7 N.Y. 2nd 762. "Order appealed from herein be and the same is affirmed, without costs."

<sup>234</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, *One Nation under God, Indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All: An Abridgment of the Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights*, (Washington, D.C., 1959), 57.

<sup>235</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, *One Nation under God*, 57.

<sup>236</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, *One Nation under God*, 58.

<sup>237</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, *One Nation under God*, 58; *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 401 (1923).

American citizens are being denied the right to vote, and that these denials exist in substantial numbers in the State of New York."<sup>238</sup> While the Commission explained that it could not offer legal remedy to Puerto Ricans and that interpretation was up to the courts, the report was an enormous boost to Camacho's cause.

### **Camacho's Case is Presented to the Nation**

In 1961, Camacho brought his case to the federal courts and despite an eventual unsatisfactory ruling, his impassioned argument would become a rallying cry for the Puerto Rican voting rights movement. In 1960, Paul O'Dwyer, a prominent New York attorney and an immigrant from Ireland, reached out to Crescenzi to take over the case and present it to the federal courts. O'Dwyer was also the younger brother of New York City's former Democratic Mayor William O'Dwyer and had run unsuccessfully for Congress as a Democrat in 1948.<sup>239</sup> Crescenzi said he turned over the case to O'Dwyer due to his belief that "a case handled by a more distinguished lawyer would bring publicity to his cause."<sup>240</sup> However, Pious argues that O'Dwyer "was acting ostensibly as a public spirited lawyer, but partisan considerations were undoubtedly involved."<sup>241</sup> O'Dwyer's political motivation was similar to that of the Democratic Party in the 1920s, who were also aware that the literacy test would negatively impact the party's powerful immigrant voting base.

On September 8, 1960, O'Dwyer filed a lawsuit in the Federal Court of the Southern District of New York.<sup>242</sup> While retaining many of the arguments from Crescenzi's case, O'Dwyer used a new argument that would bring further national attention to the case; O'Dwyer claimed that the NYSL Test was in violation of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, "by establishing a practice or pattern in the deprivation of the right to vote of United States citizens."<sup>243</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1957 empowered the Attorney-

<sup>238</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 58.

<sup>239</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 47.

<sup>240</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 48.

<sup>241</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 47.

<sup>242</sup> *Camacho v. Rogers*, 199 F. Supp. 155 (S.D.N.Y. 1961).

<sup>243</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 47.

General and federal prosecutors to bring lawsuits against jurisdictions that interfered with the right to vote, while the 1960 law allowed lawsuits to be brought directly against officers of the State.<sup>244</sup> The suit was political in nature as O'Dwyer, a Democrat, was now able to bring action against Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Republican Attorney-General Louis Lefkowitz, and Republican United States Attorney General William Rogers.<sup>245</sup> The brief called for Attorney General Rogers to file suit to compel the New York City Board of Elections to allow Camacho to take the literacy test in Spanish and be eligible to vote in the next election.<sup>246</sup>

O'Dwyer further sensationalized the brief by claiming that the legacy of the NYSL Test was rooted in racism. O'Dwyer proclaimed, "The English language literacy requirements for the exercise of the right to vote is merely a remaining burden wished upon our society by an obsolete Anglo-Saxon racist conspiracy fanned into new life by a Joint Legislative Investigation on Seditious Activities and Report on Revolutionary Radicalism of 1920."<sup>247</sup> He mentioned that the NYS literacy test emerged during "a time of hysteria against foreign-born people."<sup>248</sup>

To win the case, O'Dwyer would need to prove that the NYSL Test was a discriminatory literacy test. The constitutional standard on literacy tests at the time was established in 1959 in *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections*.<sup>249</sup> In *Lassiter*, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upheld a North Carolina statute requiring voters to read part of the state constitution in English.<sup>250</sup> The Court reasoned that the language of literacy tests was "neutral" and thus they were not discriminatory.<sup>251</sup> Writing on behalf of the Court, Justice William Douglas claimed that English

<sup>244</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1957, 71 Stat. 634. The Civil Rights Act of 1960, 74 Stat. 86.

<sup>245</sup> Robinson, *New York Times*, Jun 13, 1961. The U.S. Attorney General William Rogers was named in the lawsuit because Camacho claimed that the Attorney General had failed to initiate suits against the literacy test in New York State to prevent discrimination.

<sup>246</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 65.

<sup>247</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 65.

<sup>248</sup> Robinson, *New York Times*, Jun 13, 1961.

<sup>249</sup> *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959).

<sup>250</sup> *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959).

<sup>251</sup> *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959).

literacy tests would ensure a more intelligent and enlightened electorate.<sup>252</sup> He also set criteria for literacy tests: “Of course, a literacy test, fair on its face, may be employed to perpetuate that discrimination which the Fifteenth Amendment was designed to uproot.”<sup>253</sup> Leibowitz criticized the Court’s opinion and argued that a neutral English literacy test was “a totally unreal situation.”<sup>254</sup> He claimed that every literacy test had racial characteristics that excluded certain ethnic or racial groups: “English literacy tests were formulated with the very purpose of discriminating against a particular group clearly identified by race, religion or country of origin.”<sup>255</sup> The *Lassiter* decision rendered O’Dwyer’s chances unlikely, as he would need to prove that the NYS test violated the 15th Amendment.

During oral arguments, O’Dwyer did not argue that literacy tests were inherently unconstitutional, but instead that the NYSL Test was a unique case of disenfranchisement: the test was only administered in English, and therefore infringed on the rights of Puerto Ricans in New York, a unique group who were U.S. citizens educated in Spanish.<sup>256</sup> This narrow approach—instead of advocating for solidarity with Black Americans in the South—demonstrated the impregnability of literacy test laws at the time. Instead, O’Dwyer claimed that the Court had not ruled explicitly on the question of *English* literacy tests and thus Camacho’s request for a Spanish literacy test was still valid. O’Dwyer noted that although 19 states had literacy tests for voting, virtually all of them “merely require that the applicant be able to read the U.S. or State Constitutions,” compared to the NYS test which required reading comprehension.<sup>257</sup> By this reasoning, New York’s reading comprehension test disenfranchised Spanish-speaking citizens

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<sup>252</sup> *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959). Justice Douglas held that “[t]he ability to read and write... has some relation to standards designed to promote intelligent use of the ballot.” He also cited the fact that 19 states in the nation had literacy tests, implying that they must be reasonable.

<sup>253</sup> *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959).

<sup>254</sup> Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” 370.

<sup>255</sup> Leibowitz, “English Literacy: Legal Sanction for Discrimination,” 370.

<sup>256</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 54.

<sup>257</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 56. Emphasis added.

because it demanded a higher standard of literacy compared to literacy test standards in every other state.

O'Dwyer introduced several expert witnesses, including Stanley Ross, the editor of New York City's largest Spanish newspaper, *El Diario*. Ross testified that *El Diario* covered "all the nuclei of Spanish-speaking residents in the State" and "devotes more space, proportionately to politics, than any other newspaper in the country."<sup>258</sup> O'Dwyer also called on Stanley Lowell, Chairman of the State Committee on Intergroup Relations, who estimated that 190,000 Puerto Ricans were denied the right to vote due to the NYS literacy test.<sup>259</sup>

Aware that court precedent was against him, O'Dwyer used his concluding remarks to raise awareness to the discrimination occurring in New York. O'Dwyer's first noteworthy statement mentioned the hypocrisy of the NYSL Test, which became a galvanizing argument utilized by Puerto Rican activists in the near future: "It is incredible to think that the United States Government has seen fit to say to these people, you can learn your history in Spanish, you can learn civil government in Spanish, you can be educated as an American in a Spanish tongue, but you may not use it in New York City."<sup>260</sup> O'Dwyer then questioned, "Would the tests be permitted to stand, given federal policy and adequacy of mass media coverage, if they were enacted in 1961?"<sup>261</sup> This query strikes at the core of the tension surrounding literacy tests and voting rights in New York. Why was this law still necessary in 1961? If the literacy test emerged from a moment of postwar, anti-immigrant hysteria, would it not be arbitrary and burdensome forty years later?

Despite the new and provocative arguments, Camacho's case was unsuccessful yet again. District Judge Metzner read the

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<sup>258</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 57. *Cardona v. Power*, 384 U.S. 672 (1966). This point was repeated in *Cardona v. Powers*, an almost identical case in which Martha Cardona, a Puerto Rican and New York City resident since 1948, claimed that "New York City Spanish-language daily newspapers and other periodicals provide proportionately more coverage of government and politics than do most English-language newspapers."

<sup>259</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 57.

<sup>260</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 59.

<sup>261</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 59.

opinion of the court on October 19, 1961, holding that the NYS literacy test did not infringe on Camacho's 14th and 15th Amendment rights and found the NYSL Test was constitutional. He determined Camacho was "not being denied the right to vote because of his race, creed or color, but because of his illiteracy in the English language."<sup>262</sup> The court considered the quantity and quality of Spanish newspapers and media in the state to be "immaterial."<sup>263</sup> In order to justify the literacy test, Metzner mentioned the many other requirements the courts have upheld previously, including residency requirements and poll taxes.<sup>264</sup> Metzner also made an oft-repeated claim among literacy test proponents: "It is not unreasonable to expect a voter not only to be conversant with the issues presented for determination in choosing between candidates for election, but also to understand the language used in connection with voting."<sup>265</sup> To this point, Metzner mentioned that voting instructions and logistics were all printed in English.

Despite this seemingly final loss in the courts, Camacho issued another complaint to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1961.<sup>266</sup> The Commission reiterated its belief that a large number of Puerto Ricans were being denied the right to vote in New York City. The Commission also noted that of the 382 total complaints, all but three were submitted by Black Americans alleging violations of voting rights in Southern states: the three exceptions were Puerto Ricans in the Bronx, including Camacho. While the national spotlight was on Black Americans and their fight for voting rights, Puerto Ricans in New York were quietly building a compelling case for the abolition of literacy tests.

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<sup>262</sup> Camacho v. Rogers, 199 F. Supp. 155 (S.D.N.Y. 1961).

<sup>263</sup> Camacho v. Rogers, 199 F. Supp. 155 (S.D.N.Y. 1961)..

<sup>264</sup> Camacho v. Rogers, 199 F. Supp. 155 (S.D.N.Y. 1961)..

<sup>265</sup> Camacho v. Rogers, 199 F. Supp. 155 (S.D.N.Y. 1961)..

<sup>266</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Commission on Civil Rights Report: Vol. I*, (Washington, D.C., 1961), 21.

## Principles or Politics: New York Reckons with Its Literacy Nightmare

Following the unsatisfactory court ruling, Puerto Rican community leaders turned their attention to community mobilization and advocacy efforts in the city and state legislatures. During Camacho's case, Robert F. Wagner, the Democratic Mayor of New York City, came out in support of repealing the English literacy test amendment and pressured Republicans in the state legislature to support his proposal.<sup>267</sup> Wagner instructed the Corporation Counsel's office to withdraw from the Camacho case, stressing that it was the State Attorney General's job to defend the state constitution. AG Lefkowitz was none other than the Republican candidate in the 1961 New York City mayoral race—Wagner's opponent.

The day prior, an editorial in *El Diario* bashed Lefkowitz, claiming that the AG had reneged on his promise to allow a Spanish literacy test option.<sup>268</sup> *El Diario* also criticized the top Republican in the state, Governor Rockefeller, who opposed a Spanish test option.<sup>269</sup> *El Diario* demanded a response from Lefkowitz, asking "What is the position of candidate Lefkowitz on the concrete case after the unfortunate statements of the Governor?"<sup>270</sup> A Lefkowitz spokesperson refused to respond and instead stated that it was the AG's statutory duty to defend the state constitution in the courts.<sup>271</sup> Aware of the political momentum of Puerto Ricans' cause, Wagner proclaimed that his father, the late Senator Robert Wagner (a Democrat and immigrant from Prussia), and the late Democratic Governor Al Smith had fiercely fought the law back in 1922 and had admonished the law for targeting Eastern

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<sup>267</sup> Peter Kihss, "State Dispute on Literacy Test Intrudes in Lefkowitz Campaign," *New York Times*, June 28, 1961.

<sup>268</sup> "Rocky Betrays Us," *El Diario*, June 27, 1961.

<sup>269</sup> "Rocky Betrays Us," *El Diario*, June 27, 1961. Rockefeller offered Puerto Ricans an unsatisfactory compromise; he proposed the possibility of requiring answers in English with questions explained in Spanish. This offer was insulting to the editorial board of *El Diario* and Puerto Rican community leaders.

<sup>270</sup> Kihss, *New York Times*, June 28, 1961.

<sup>271</sup> Kihss, *New York Times*, June 28, 1961.

and Southern European immigrants.<sup>272</sup> This strengthened Wagner's claim that the Democratic Party stood on the right side of history.

Less than two weeks before the 1961 general election, Puerto Rican leaders challenged Lefkowitz again. In late October, the Puerto Rican Home Towns Council held a meeting with more than thirty civic organizations and dozens of Hispanic leaders to develop a plan to pressure Lefkowitz close to election day. Speaking on behalf of the representatives, Narciso Puete Jr., a member of the Puerto Rican Bar Association, publicly called on Lefkowitz to oppose the English literacy tests and to stand with Wagner's call for repeal of the English tests.<sup>273</sup> At the same time, O'Dwyer and Crescenzi went to the major news outlets and declared that the literacy law "is no different than the poll tax requirement in the Southern areas."<sup>274</sup>

In 1961, there was a large discrepancy in the number of registered Spanish-speaking voters and the total number of Spanish-speaking citizens: 230,000 Puerto Rican and other Spanish-speaking voters were registered out of a 3.6 million total registered voters in New York City.<sup>275</sup> However, these 230,000 registered voters represented only 12 percent of the city's 900,000 Spanish-speaking citizens, while 47 percent of the general citizen population was registered to vote.<sup>276</sup> The *New York Herald Tribune* estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 of the 400,000 Puerto Rican adults in New York City were barred from voting due to the literacy requirements.<sup>277</sup> The gap was stark and the politics of the abolition movement were evident; Democrats were cognizant of the fact that repealing the English literacy test would add a great number of Democratic voters to the rolls and their solidarity with Puerto Ricans would likely be rewarded with further control of the city

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<sup>272</sup> Kihss, *New York Times*, June 28, 1961.

<sup>273</sup> "Puerto Ricans Urge Lefkowitz to Oppose Literacy Test Ruling," *New York Times*, October 23, 1961.

<sup>274</sup> "Puerto Ricans Urge Lefkowitz to Oppose Literacy Test Ruling," *New York Times*, October 23, 1961.

<sup>275</sup> Kihss, *New York Times*, June 28, 1961.

<sup>276</sup> Kihss, *New York Times*, June 28, 1961.

<sup>277</sup> Laurence Barrett, "Non-English Speaking Voters-- a Wagner Plan to Ensure Victory?" *New York Herald Tribune*, December 11, 1961.

and increased power in the state government. At the same time, Puerto Ricans leaders knew that the quickest way to unlock their political power would be to back Democrats and put pressure on key Republican legislators, such as Rockefeller and Lefkowitz.

On December 6, 1961, following a 15-point victory, Wagner filed a proposal for an amendment to the State Constitution to permit citizens to take literacy tests in “any language in which a daily or weekly newspaper is published in this state,” which constituted at least 27 languages.<sup>278</sup> The proposal would affect hundreds of thousands of citizens from New York’s other major linguistic groups, including Italian, Polish, German, Chinese, and Yiddish-speaking citizens. This marked a strategic shift from the previous proposals that offered an exception for Spanish-speaking citizens. The new proposal reflected activists’ realization that expanding their coalition to all foreign-language speakers was more compelling.

Senator James L. Watson, an African-American Democrat from Harlem, and Assemblyman Felipe N. Torres, a Puerto Rican Democrat from the Bronx, introduced Wagner’s proposal as a legislatively referred constitutional amendment to the State Constitution at the beginning of the 1962 legislative session.<sup>279</sup> Wagner capitalized on the momentum by promoting the democratic electoral system he imagined if the amendment were to pass. Attached to his proposal was a memorandum written by City Corporation Counsel Leo Larkin, who reiterated the racist origins of the law but argued for a broader solidarity of all foreign language-speaking U.S. citizens: “Chauvinism whether it be that of a Czar seeking to impress the Russian language upon Poles, Finns, and other people of other ethnic origins, or that of the Anglo-Saxon seeking to impress the English language upon United States citizens of different ethnic origins, is equally repulsive to the democratic principles we advocate.”<sup>280</sup> This appeal struck a new

<sup>278</sup> Charles G. Bennett, “Language Choice for Voting Asked,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1961.

<sup>279</sup> “Mayor Backs Ban on Literacy Tests,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 27, 1962. The amendment would need to pass two successive legislative sessions and then be approved by voters in the November 1963 general election. Thus, the earliest date that the proposed constitutional change could go into effect was January 1964.

<sup>280</sup> Bennett, *New York Times*, December 7, 1961.

political message: the nation was multicultural and multiethnic and equality meant rejecting the Anglo-Saxon English-language model in favor of a democracy that represented all Americans, regardless of national origin.

Major newspapers, including *The New York Times* and *The New York Herald Tribune* adamantly supported the English literacy test and pushed back on the Wagner proposal. The editorial board of the *Tribune* considered it both a dangerous expansion of democracy and a partisan ploy to increase Democratic power.<sup>281</sup> In addition, they called Wagner's amendment a "transparent play for ethnic support" that would allow Wagner to "pose as champion of the dispossessed."<sup>282</sup> They claimed that passage of the amendment would have "obvious political advantages for the Mayor, since those principally affected are the overwhelmingly Democratic Puerto Ricans."<sup>283</sup>

The *Tribune* also reckoned with the fact that Republicans faced a political dilemma, as the future of the bill rested with the Republican majority in the Legislature and the proposal was becoming popular: "Do they approve the amendment, and thus hand the Democrats many votes, or do they kill the measure and give the Democrats an excellent talking point for years to come?"<sup>284</sup> Moreover, they conceded that "the proposition that no citizen should be deprived of his right to vote is difficult to oppose," and that Wagner's case was bolstered by the fact that the English-only

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<sup>281</sup> Sam Roberts, "Recalling a 'Writer's Paper as a Name Fades,'" *The New York Times*, March 7, 2013. The *Tribune* was known as the voice for "Rockefeller Republicans," and was considered a "Republican paper, a Protestant paper and a paper more representative of the suburbs than the ethnic mix of the city."

<sup>282</sup> "Keep the English Literacy Requirement," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961.

<sup>283</sup> "Keep the English Literacy Requirement," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961. The *Tribune* noted that during the heated campaign, Wagner "campaigns vigorously in Puerto Rican neighborhoods" and appointed several Puerto Ricans to his administration between August and November.

<sup>284</sup> Barrett, "Keep the English Literacy Requirement," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961.

requirement was not instituted until 1922 when “the xenophobia generated by WWI still had wide appeal.”<sup>285</sup>

Akin to the arguments used to justify the law in the 1920s, the *Tribune* made clear that the issue before them was not the right of citizenship but “merely” the privilege of suffrage.<sup>286</sup> According to the *Tribune*, the government was obligated to safeguard democracy from unintelligent, “undeserving” citizens. They reiterated the talking points of legislators and newspapers in 1921, including the notion that constitutional restrictions of suffrage all “center on competence to exercise the franchise intelligently” and the belief that “successful democracy requires an informed electorate.”<sup>287</sup> In a crude conclusion, the *Tribune* remarked, “If they want to vote, fine. But let them learn English first.”<sup>288</sup>

### **Bobby Kennedy and the Voting Rights Spotlight on New York**

Despite the pushback from Republicans and major newspapers, the case for abolition of the NYSL Test grew stronger. The Civil Rights Movement forced popular lawmakers, including President John F. Kennedy’s brother, Robert Kennedy, to take note of the voting rights movement in New York. During JFK’s presidential campaign in 1960, Robert “Bobby” Kennedy served as campaign manager and he was keenly aware of the demands of Hispanic voters: he established “Viva Kennedy” clubs and made several campaign trips to California, Texas, and New York.<sup>289</sup> Bobby became an early supporter of Puerto Ricans’ effort to

<sup>285</sup> Barrett, “Keep the English Literacy Requirement,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961.

<sup>286</sup> Barrett, “Keep the English Literacy Requirement,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961.

<sup>287</sup> Barrett, “Keep the English Literacy Requirement,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961.

<sup>288</sup> Barrett, “Keep the English Literacy Requirement,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1961.

<sup>289</sup> Karen G. Bates, “Mexican-American Vets Ignited Kennedy Latino Support,” National Public Radio archives from 1970, Nov. 21, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/11/21/246412894/mexican-american-vets-ignited-kennedys-latino-support/>.

eliminate the English literacy test requirement.<sup>290</sup> In 1962, he testified before Congress in his new position as the U.S. Attorney General and declared that penalizing citizens literate in Spanish “would be plain discrimination.”<sup>291</sup> At the same time, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and Republican Everett Dirksen sponsored a bill S. 2750—with JFK’s approval—which would have effectively eliminated literacy tests, qualifying any voter that provided proof of completing the sixth grade in American schools, including Puerto Rican schools.<sup>292</sup> Although the bill failed to pass due to a filibuster by Southern Senators, the measure was bipartisan, with both Bobby Kennedy and New York Governor Rockefeller voicing support for the bill.<sup>293</sup>

In New York, Democratic lawmakers capitalized on this momentum to introduce the most radical anti-literacy test legislation to date. On January 26, 1963, Assemblymember Thomas Jones of Brooklyn, a freshman Black lawmaker representing Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, introduced a bill to eliminate the literacy test amendment in the State Constitution.<sup>294</sup> Abolishing the literacy test requirement was Jones’ legislative priority and he denounced the test as an “outdated restriction on voting” and “the last vestige of 18th and 19th century measures designed to keep working people and minority groups from using the ballot.”<sup>295</sup> He also claimed there was widespread solidarity against the English literacy tests, stating that they barred “thousands of Spanish-speaking people...[and] thousands of white and Negro working

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<sup>290</sup> Karen G. Bates, “Mexican-American Vets Ignited Kennedy Latino Support,” National Public Radio archives from 1970, Nov. 21, 2013.

<sup>291</sup> Cartagena, “Puerto Ricans and the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act,” July 28, 2015.

<sup>292</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 75.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* Rockefeller notably supported the bill without commenting on the aspect of Spanish literacy.

<sup>294</sup> “Assemblyman Would Stop Literacy Test.” *New York Amsterdam News* (1962-1993), Jan 26, 1963. A concurrent resolution was introduced by Senator Ivan Warner of the Bronx. Jones was a local ally of Bobby Kennedy’s and worked closely with Kennedy to improve conditions in New York’s most impoverished communities.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

people from active participation in government.”<sup>296</sup> It is important to note that two of the most vocal proponents of reforming the literacy test law, Assemblymember Jones and Senator James L. Watson (who proposed abolishing the English-only test in 1962), were Black legislators. This contrast from O’Dwyer and Wagner’s strategies, that focused on Puerto Ricans exclusively, was indicative of a major change in public opinion in New York and across the nation.

At the same time, Puerto Rican community leaders campaigned vigorously for a Spanish literacy test option in the likely event Jones’ bill would fail in the Republican-controlled legislature. Similar bills had all failed to get out of committee in the past three legislative sessions.<sup>297</sup> The leaders of the campaign formed an organizing committee that embarked on a new approach. Representing the small Puerto Rican caucus in the legislature, Assemblymember Carlos Ríos declared that the previous bills were unsuccessful because they were too partisan and politicized and that Democrats had not successfully consolidated the support of the Puerto Rican community.<sup>298</sup> The caucus’ new goal was to galvanize nonpartisan support by an extensive publicity campaign in New York City’s Hispanic communities. The chairman of the organizing committee, Puerto Rican attorney and Republican congressional candidate Oscar González Suárez, said that the facilities of *El Diario* and *La Prensa* would support the drive to make their constitutional amendment “the Number 1 political demand of the Puerto Rican community.”<sup>299</sup>

During the summer of 1963, *El Diario* and *La Prensa* printed daily articles and editorials endorsing the plan.<sup>300</sup> *El Diario* even had

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<sup>296</sup> “Assemblyman Would Stop Literacy Test,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 26, 1963.

<sup>297</sup> “Vote Drive Begun by Puerto Ricans: They Seek State Law for Literacy Test in Spanish,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1963.

<sup>298</sup> “Vote Drive Begun by Puerto Ricans: They Seek State Law for Literacy Test in Spanish,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1963.

<sup>299</sup> “Vote Drive Begun by Puerto Ricans: They Seek State Law for Literacy Test in Spanish,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1963.

<sup>300</sup> “Vote Drive Begun by Puerto Ricans: They Seek State Law for Literacy Test in Spanish,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1963.

a bus that drove through Puerto Rican neighborhoods to publicize the campaign. The committee also planned to organize huge rallies on the eve of the reopening of the legislature. Due to their advocacy, the committee secured bipartisan support from countless New York Congressmen. In support of the campaign, Kennedy wrote a letter to the publisher of *El Diario* stating, "It is important that an effort be made to change the law in New York."<sup>301</sup> Suárez claimed that Governor Rockefeller and other top Republicans would be won over by an "insistent popular campaign."<sup>302</sup>

On July 31, 1963, Wagner and City Council President Paul Screvane voiced their support for abolishing the literacy test entirely at a City Hall ceremony sponsored by *El Diario* and *La Prensa*.<sup>303</sup> Wagner vouched for a Spanish literacy test option if the broader amendment failed, stating that "Spanish is the second language of New York City."<sup>304</sup> Screvane went on the offensive and criticized the Republican-controlled legislature for being "in no hurry to grant full rights to the foreign-language groups of our state," and fearful of the fact that "political scales might be tipped if all our citizens were given equal representation through the right to vote."<sup>305</sup> Repeating the rallying cries of Jones and Puerto Rican leaders, Screvane declared, "The literacy test is nothing more than the perpetuation of discrimination and the exercise of the racist policies that have formed and are forming a black chapter in our nation's history."<sup>306</sup>

One of the popular opinion pieces to be published during the campaign was authored by Joseph Monserrat, the director of the Department of Labor for the Migration Division of Puerto Rico, who responded to a *New York Times* editorial piece that lambasted

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<sup>301</sup> "Vote Drive Begun by Puerto Ricans: They Seek State Law for Literacy Test in Spanish," *New York Times*, July 7, 1963.

<sup>302</sup> "Vote Drive Begun by Puerto Ricans: They Seek State Law for Literacy Test in Spanish," *New York Times*, July 7, 1963.

<sup>303</sup> "Mayor Asks End of Literacy Test," *New York Times*, July 31, 1963.

<sup>304</sup> "Mayor Asks End of Literacy Test," *New York Times*, July 31, 1963.

<sup>305</sup> "Mayor Asks End of Literacy Test," *New York Times*, July 31, 1963.

<sup>306</sup> "Mayor Asks End of Literacy Test," *New York Times*, July 31, 1963.

efforts to abolish the literacy requirement.<sup>307</sup> The *Times'* editorial piece, titled "Aquí Se Habla Inglés," was extremely contentious—the title translates to "English is Spoken Here" and was an insulting and racially-charged play on "Aquí Se Habla Español," a common phrase displayed in front of Latino businesses and storefronts to signal a Spanish-speaking space.<sup>308</sup> The *Times* argued that Wagner's proposal would "have the effect of perpetuating language ghettos and defeating the idea of a truly integrated community."<sup>309</sup>

In his response, Montserrat conceded that states had the right to require its voters to be well-informed, but argued that it was clear the law had "become a gimmick to disenfranchise."<sup>310</sup> Montserrat spoke of the "shame" and "embarrassment" that the test brought unto the Puerto Rican community, even for many Puerto Ricans who could pass the test but were afraid to take it "because they have been made to feel that they will fail and that therefore it is better not to waste time."<sup>311</sup> He noted that many Puerto Ricans felt the test was an "affront [to] their political dignity."<sup>312</sup> Pushing back on the *Times'* claim that learning English was not a "burdensome" requirement of voters, Montserrat wrote that English "is not learned in a day" and that it was unjust to tell Puerto Ricans to "take your citizenship rights later rather than sooner."<sup>313</sup> In addition, Montserrat stated that the process of taking the literacy test was a significant economic burden for Puerto Ricans, who were the poorest ethnic group in New York City: the loss of a day's pay to go take the test was "a sacrifice they cannot afford."<sup>314</sup> Montserrat made clear that gaining the right to vote was not merely a matter of politics for Puerto Ricans, who would have

<sup>307</sup> Joseph Monserrat, "For Spanish Literacy Test English-Language Requirement is Held Unfair to Puerto Ricans," *New York Times*, August 6, 1963.

<sup>308</sup> "Aquí Se Habla Inglés," *New York Times*, August 1, 1963.

<sup>309</sup> "Aquí Se Habla Inglés," *New York Times*, August 1, 1963.

<sup>310</sup> Monserrat, *New York Times*, August 6, 1963.

<sup>311</sup> Monserrat, *New York Times*, August 6, 1963.

<sup>312</sup> Ronald Sullivan, "Puerto Ricans Bid for More Voters: Drop Drive to Abolish Test," *New York Times* (1923-), Mar 22, 1964. Montserrat and Herman Badillo, the Puerto Rican Commissioner of Relocation, stressed these points.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> Ronald Sullivan, "Puerto Ricans Bid for More Voters: Drop Drive to Abolish Test," *New York Times*, March 22, 1964.

to wait months, or even years, to qualify to vote under the English literacy test.

On July 2, 1964, after decades of protest and agitation by African Americans, the Civil Rights Act was signed into law.<sup>315</sup> The law was a watershed moment for civil rights in the nation, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The bill also strengthened the enforcement of voting rights and the desegregation of schools. With advocacy efforts stalled in New York, the literacy test abolition movement shifted to Washington. Less than two weeks before Election Day in 1964, Bobby Kennedy, a candidate for U.S. Senate in New York, attempted to court the Puerto Rican section of the All Americans Council at the Democratic State Convention by proclaiming that he would repeal the NYS literacy test if elected.<sup>316</sup> Other New York representatives in Congress were pressured to introduce legislation to abolish literacy tests. Legion del Voto, a Puerto Rican civic organization, successfully lobbied Congressman Jacob Gilbert to introduce provisions relating to Puerto Ricans in the Civil Rights Act by eliminating the English literacy test.<sup>317</sup> Gilbert represented the 22nd congressional district in the Bronx, which was home to the greatest percentage of Puerto Ricans in the city at 31.2 percent.<sup>318</sup> Congressman William F. Ryan, a Democrat who represented the Upper West Side of Manhattan, would introduce H.R. 2477 on January 12, 1965 to eliminate all literacy tests in state and national elections.<sup>319</sup>

On March 7, 1965, civil rights leaders and protestors were brutally attacked by police on the Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama for testing compliance of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>320</sup> On March 15, President Lyndon B. Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress and called for legislation to guarantee the right to vote for all American citizens: "Every American citizen must have an equal

<sup>315</sup> "Civil Rights Act," *New York Times*, July 5, 1964.

<sup>316</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 91.

<sup>317</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 82.

<sup>318</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 82.

<sup>319</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 86.

<sup>320</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 78. Civil rights leaders tested compliance by leading a voter registration drive to Selma.

right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right."<sup>321</sup> This led Gilbert to reintroduce his amendment.

On March 19, hearings on the new voting rights bill began in the House Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights and Gilbert questioned Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach who stated that the bill would need to conform with the Civil Rights Act, which required certificates be from schools "where English is the predominant language of instruction."<sup>322</sup> Katzenbach testified that Congress could abolish literacy tests entirely and he state his belief that Congress should abolish New York's discriminatory law: "I think that the use of the English language test in New York with respect to Puerto Ricans serves to disenfranchise a great number of intelligent and able people. I think that is all wrong and I have never understood why the State of New York had it and why they didn't do something about getting rid of it."<sup>323</sup> Katzenbach had set the stage for Congress to abolish literacy tests. On March 25, Herman Badillo, the vice-president of the Legion of Voters, testified before the committee on the NYSL Test issue.<sup>324</sup> Badillo asserted that the issue had become significantly worse since the U.S. Civil Rights Commission's 1959 report: There were now 730,000 Puerto Ricans in New York City and he estimated there were 480,000 potential voters, with only 150,000 registered to vote.<sup>325</sup> Thus, 330,000 Puerto Ricans were disenfranchised due to the literacy test.

On April 5, Senator Kennedy spoke on the floor of the Senate and offered an amendment to the voting rights bill: "Congress can and should find that the operation of New York's literacy test to deprive literate Puerto Ricans of the right to vote is state action

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<sup>321</sup> President Lyndon Johnson's Speech to Congress on Voting Rights, March 15, 1965. RG 46, Records of the United States Senate, National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/johnson.html>.

<sup>322</sup> Pious, "Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test," 84.

<sup>323</sup> House Hearings Before Subcommittee 5 of the House Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 89th Congress, First Session, Serial No. 2 (1965), 100.

<sup>324</sup> House Hearings Before Subcommittee 5 of the House Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 89th Congress (1965), 508.

<sup>325</sup> House Hearings Before Subcommittee 5 of the House Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 89th Congress (1965), 508.

arbitrarily denying the franchise to a class of citizens.”<sup>326</sup> Kennedy gained a big victory by convincing New York’s senior U.S. Senator Jacob Javits, a Republican, to co-sponsor the bill. Other Senators remarked on the discriminatory nature of Puerto Ricans’ status in New York. On May 19, Senator Russell Long, the Democratic Party whip and a Southerner, proclaimed: “I do not believe that a person born in Puerto Rico, having attended the schools there, should, when he moves to New York, be required to be learned in the English language in order to qualify to vote.”<sup>327</sup> Another Southern Senator, Spessard Holland, offered insight into the disparate treatment of Puerto Rican citizens in New York and other U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent in Florida:

In the State of Florida, there are tens of thousands of citizens of Latin American lineage, many of them not yet able to speak in the English language but yet amply educated to know what they are doing. For years, we have permitted them to vote, and we are very happy in the fact that the great State of New York now turns to us for some guidance in democracy, which we believe the State of New York has needed for some time.<sup>328</sup>

The “Puerto Rican” amendment was approved that day by a vote of 48 to 19.<sup>329</sup> The amendment, known as section 4(e) to the Voting Rights Act (VRA), prohibited states from administering literacy tests to U.S. citizens who completed the sixth-grade in American schools where the language of instruction was in Spanish—this applied only to Puerto Ricans.<sup>330</sup> The bill also

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<sup>326</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 92. Amendment 64 to S. 1564.

<sup>327</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 95.

<sup>328</sup> Quote from U.S. Senator Spessard Holland of Florida during the debates on the Voting Rights Act. “Proceedings and Debates of the U.S. Congress,” *Congressional Record*, May 19, 1965, 10688.

<sup>329</sup> *Congressional Record*, May 19, 1965, 10688.

<sup>330</sup> The Voting Rights Act of 1965, 79 Stat. 437, Section 4(e), 42 U.S.C. § 1973b(e): “No person who demonstrates that he has successfully completed the sixth primary grade in a public school in, or a private school accredited by, any State or territory, the District of Columbia, or the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in which the predominant classroom language was other than English, shall be denied the right to vote in any Federal, State, or

suspended the use of literacy tests in any state in which less than 50 percent of voting-age citizens were registered as of November 1, 1964, or had voted in the 1964 presidential election.<sup>331</sup>

On May 26, the same day the Senate voted to pass its version of the Voting Rights Act, the NYS Legislature passed a bill to reduce literacy requirement in English to sixth-grade level, in conformity with the Civil Rights Act.<sup>332</sup> Governor Rockefeller signed the bill in July, capitalizing on the moment to claim that he was a champion of Puerto Rican civil rights. Surrounded by three Puerto Rican Assemblymen, an editor from *El Diario*, and the president of the National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights, Rockefeller spoke to the public in Spanish: “The Puerto Rican community of this city has contributed a great deal to the cultural and economic enrichment of the State of New York...I am pleased and proud to sign this law, which will permit Puerto Ricans to participate actively in our state politics as well.”<sup>333</sup> Rockefeller’s words were reminiscent of Antin and Smith’s statements in the 1920s which promoted the cultural and economic contributions that immigrants made to America. Rockefeller’s move also signaled the awareness among Republicans that literacy tests were no longer supported and that it was politically advantageous to begin courting Puerto Rican voters.

At the end of July 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act and President Johnson signed the bill into law on August 7.<sup>334</sup> Pious writes that while most of the focus was on the abolition of literacy tests in Southern States, “hardly anyone was aware of the Puerto Ricans themselves.”<sup>335</sup> However, Puerto Ricans played a

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local election because of his inability to read, write, understand, or interpret any matter in the English language...”

<sup>331</sup> The Voting Rights Act of 1965, 79 Stat. 437, Section 2, Pub. L. 89-110.

<sup>332</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 99.

<sup>333</sup> *El Diario*, July 17, 1965. Translated by Pious at 105.

<sup>334</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 111.

<sup>335</sup> Pious, “Puerto Ricans and the New York State Literacy Test,” 111, 113. In the 1965 elections, the impact of the abolition of the literacy test was noticeable. The increase in Puerto Rican voters helped Herman Badillo narrowly defeat Ivan Warner in the Democratic primary for Bronx Borough President and he was elected in the general election by just 2,000 votes, becoming the highest ranking Puerto Rican official in the state. Pious notes that 4,000 new voters were registered in the Bronx under the new law,

major role in the expansion of the right to vote. In 1966, New York challenged the Voting Rights Act, claiming that section 4(e) was unconstitutional, since the power to set nondiscriminatory voter qualification tests was reserved to the states.<sup>336</sup> In *Katzenbach v. Morgan* the Court upheld the VRA and section 4(e), and thus permanently banned the use of the NYSL Test.<sup>337</sup> Justice William J. Brennan wrote for the Court's opinion, holding that "'illiterate people' should not be equated with '[un]intelligent voters.'"<sup>338</sup> In 1970, Congress expanded the literacy test ban to all states in the country.<sup>339</sup> In effect, the VRA ended the practice of conditioning citizens' right to vote based on literacy. Finally, English literacy was no longer a source of disenfranchisement in New York and in the nation.

### Conclusion

The New York Literacy Act of 1922 and its standardized, education-based literacy test demonstrate the incredible lengths that those in power have gone to restrict the right to vote for certain citizens. This history serves as a cautionary reminder that voting restrictions do not need to be overtly discriminatory to effectively disenfranchise. Restriction is often shrouded in societal benefits, such as education and election integrity. In the specific case of the NYSL Test and its abolition exemplifies how the history of the right to vote is nonlinear—movements to expand voting rights are often met with movements to restrict and disenfranchise.

The passage of the Puerto Rican amendment to the Voting Rights Act paved the way for bilingual voting rights, marking a decisive rejection of the literacy test movement. In 1965, Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act, which abolished

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which "definitely gave Badillo the narrow victory." Badillo would go on to become the first Puerto Rican Congressman in 1970 and later the first Puerto Rican mayoral candidate in a major city in the continental United States. In addition, Puerto Rican Assembly candidates in Manhattan and the Bronx, would go on to win by historic margins, due largely in part to the abolition of the literacy test that energized Puerto Rican voters. Pious notes that the margin of these victories were "quite impressive, even by New York standards."

<sup>336</sup> *Katzenbach v. Morgan*, 384 U.S. 641 (1966).

<sup>337</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 267.

<sup>338</sup> *Katzenbach v. Morgan*, 384 U.S. 641, (1966).

<sup>339</sup> Keyssar, 265.

the 1924 national origins quota and established a new policy that reopened the nation to immigration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.<sup>340</sup> It is not coincidental that this momentous expansion of suffrage occurred just as the nation reopened its borders to immigrants. In 1975, Congress passed the Bilingual Amendments to the VRA, doubling down on its rejection of racist literacy and language requirements for voting. The Voting Rights Act and the Bilingual Amendments fundamentally changed the notions around voting, language, and literacy in America. One no longer needs to read and write in English to be an American.

However, this progress is not linear. In 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* struck down key provisions of the VRA, resulting in the emergence of voter restriction laws throughout the United States.<sup>341</sup> On November 4, 2021, the United States Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against the State of Texas over its new election law, alleging it would infringe on “the core right to meaningful assistance in the voting booth” and thus “disenfranchise eligible Texas citizens who seek to exercise their right to vote.”<sup>342</sup> Voting rights advocates, such as Ari Berman, worry the law will disenfranchise citizens with limited English proficiency. Appearing on Democracy Now, Berman warned Americans of the dangerous erosion of voting rights: “We are seeing the greatest rollback of voting rights since the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 and the greatest attempt to reduce the influence and power of voters of color since the Voting Rights

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<sup>340</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 3.

<sup>341</sup> *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013). Jesse H. Rhodes, *Ballot Blocked: The Political Erosion of the Voting Rights Act*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2017), 24. The Court struck down the VRA’s coverage formula in section 4(b), rendering preclearance, one of the most effective parts of the law, inoperable.

<sup>342</sup> *United States of America v. State of Texas*, No. 5:21-cv-1085, Department of Justice Complaint (Nov 2021), 2. Moreover, the law prohibits assistants from answering voters’ questions and responding to requests to clarify ballot translations. The DOJ’s complaint stated that the law violated the VRA by “improperly restricting what assistance in the polling booth voters who have a disability or are unable to read or write can receive. Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act guarantees that “voters who require assistance to vote by reason of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write may receive assistance by a person of the voter’s choice.”

Act.”<sup>343</sup> Today, States across the country are passing restrictive voting measures similar to Texas’s, stemming from unsubstantiated fears of widespread voter fraud perpetrated by illegal immigrant voters.<sup>344</sup>

These restrictive measures in 2021 coincide with the exponential rise of the nonwhite and foreign-born voting populations, similar to what occurred in New York over the twentieth century. According to the 2020 Census, people of color make up 95 percent of Texas’ population growth, with the state gaining nearly eleven Hispanic residents for every new white resident since 2010.<sup>345</sup> The Immigrant Act of 1965 reshaped the “undesirable” immigrant narrative again onto new immigrants who were deemed “illegal” and a threat to the American body politic. Fear of the foreign-born citizenry usurping the American electoral system—whether it be a Jewish socialist in 1922, a middle-aged Puerto Rican grocer in 1957, or a Mexican laborer in 2017—is deeply embedded in the history of the United States. For these populations, there has always been “a price to pay” for the right to vote.

Despite the regressive decision in *Shelby County v Holder*, there may be hope for the future of voting rights. This hope lies in the very same place that perpetuated disenfranchisement more than fifty years ago. In New York City, the debate between citizenship and voting rights has reemerged and assumed a new, more expansive shape. On December 9, 2021, the New York City Council<sup>344</sup> passed a bill to allow green card-holding residents to vote

<sup>343</sup> Ari Berman, “Democracy Now,” Twitter Post, November 17, 2021, <https://twitter.com/democracynow/status/1460963716267139073?s=21>.

<sup>344</sup> “Voting Laws Roundup: October 2021,” Brennan Center for Justice, October 4, 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-october-2021>. Robert C. Smith, “‘Don’t Let the Illegals Vote!’: The Myths of Illegal Latino Voters and Voter Fraud in Contested Local Immigrant Integration,” *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (July, 2017): 148-175. Between January 1 and September 27, 19 states enacted 33 laws that make it harder for Americans to vote. In one case study in Port Chester, New York during the 2016 presidential election, white voters’ and politicians’ fear of “illegal” Latino voters led to the stigmatization of and discrimination against Latino citizen voters.

<sup>345</sup> Carla Astudillo, et. al., “People of Color Make up 95% of Texas’ Population Growth, and Cities and Suburbs Are Booming, 2020 Census Shows,” *The Texas Tribune*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/08/12/texas-2020-census/>.

in municipal elections.<sup>346</sup> The bill would allow 800,000 noncitizens to vote, making New York City the largest municipality in the country to grant noncitizens suffrage.<sup>347</sup> At a 2020 rally for noncitizen voting rights, Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic and author of the bill, said that tax-paying immigrants deserve the right to determine how their money is allocated and that it is “un-American” to leave them out of the political process.<sup>348</sup>

This proposal represents the next frontier in the debate over citizenship and suffrage. In her first speech before the New York City Council, Council Member Tiffany Cabán, a 34-year old socialist from Queens and the child of Puerto Rican parents, voiced her support of the noncitizen voting bill and succinctly summarized the importance of expansionary voting laws. Cabán declared, “Expanding the right to vote for some does not in any way diminish the right to vote for others.”<sup>349</sup> The expansion of voting rights, even to noncitizens, will give millions of immigrants the ability to shape the political system that has historically excluded and restricted them. Confronting the fact that mass disenfranchisement did not occur only in the Southern United States and will strengthen the movement to expand voting rights, a movement which may never see linear progress. In the face of widespread voter suppression and racist election reform laws, not

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<sup>346</sup>Annie Correal and Jeffery C. Mays, “New York City Gives 800,000 Noncitizens Right to Vote in Local Elections,” *New York Times*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/nyregion/noncitizens-voting-rights-New-York-City.html>.

<sup>347</sup>Annie Correal and Jeffery C. Mays, “New York City Gives 800,000 Noncitizens Right to Vote in Local Elections,” *New York Times*, December 9, 2021; Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, Table A13. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, 20 states extended voting rights to immigrants who had declared intention to become citizens. However, now there are just a few jurisdictions that allow non-citizens to vote: Fourteen municipalities across the nation currently allow noncitizens to vote in local elections with eleven in Maryland, two in Vermont, and the other is San Francisco, California.

<sup>348</sup>Emma Whitford, “‘No taxation without representation’ — noncitizens rally for New York City voting rights,” *Queens Daily Eagle*, January 23, 2020, <https://queenseagle.com/all/no-taxation-without-representation-noncitizens-rally-for-nyc-voting-rights>.

<sup>349</sup>Tiffany Cabán, “Debate on Intro 1867,” Twitter Post, December 9, 2021, <https://twitter.com/AnuJoshi22/status/1469051122874818562?s=20>

only must we protect the right to vote, but we must also expand it in order to ensure a more just and representative democracy. History shows that democracy is stronger when we all participate.<sup>350</sup>



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<sup>350</sup> This photo was taken of a young child at a 2020 rally, where more than 100 immigrants and their advocates, including Councilmember Rodriguez, gathered in support of noncitizen voting rights.

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# Ambitious Policies and Ideal Colonists

*Building a Colonial City in Iri, North Jeolla Province*

Andrew Soohwan Kim

Iksan, known until 1995 as Iri, is a medium-sized city situated on the so-called Jeonbuk Plain, a characteristically flat area of modern-day North Jeolla Province, South Korea.<sup>351</sup> By virtue of the area's topographical features and the historical legacy of decades of Japanese colonial exploitative development, present-day Iksan is known for its modern ties to industrial agriculture and rail transport, with the old core of the current city situated in an area around Iksan Station which was developed during the colonial period of Korea (1910-1945). In colloquial and academic parlance, the urban area constituted by Iksan-si, the second most populous *si* (city) in the province behind the traditional administrative hub of Jeonju, a provincial capital since dynastic times, is known as a 'colonial city'<sup>352</sup> in light of the fact that the modern city was essentially created through colonial fiat.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>351</sup> Iksan was known as the city of 'Iri' throughout the Japanese colonial period and the early Republic of Korea until an administrative merger with 'Iksan-gun' resulted in the modern-day city of Iksan. Modern Iksan-si has a population of nearly three hundred thousand (per 2020 data from KOSIS). For comparison, this is a population smaller than many of Seoul's twenty-five constituent districts.

<sup>352</sup> The singular English translation of 'colonial city' alone does not reflect the nuanced ways in which usage of that term differs within Korean academic discourse. My usage of 'colonial city' hews closer to its usage by regional scholars of Iksan (i.e. 'colonial cities' as urban entities that have been born as a direct result of colonial intervention). Such a characterization fits Lee Myung-jin's use of 식민도시, which conveys the meaning of 'a city built/created by colonial power.' For more on this topic see Myung-jin, Lee, *Jeonbuk iri(裡里) ui singminjibae chejewa jeohang yeongu 전북 이리(裡里)의 식민지배 체제와 저항 연구* [A Study on the Colonial Rule and Resistance in Iri, Jeonbuk Province], (Wonkwang University Graduate School Korean Studies Department, 2021).

<sup>353</sup> Of the 23 significant cities named as 'designated myeon' 制定面 in the June 1917 inauguration of the 'myeon' administration system by the Japanese colonial administration, such cities as Suwon, Jeonju, Gongju, Gwangju, Jinju, Haeju, Chuncheon, and Hamheung were major traditional cities that had already served

The process of creating this unique space in modern Korean history entailed a combination of policy initiatives and hordes of ambitious Japanese colonists who effectuated colonial policy priorities by settling these formerly rural spaces in Korea's provincial hinterland. First, in terms of colonial policies, the initiatives of the imperial state were aimed at instrumentalizing the rural hinterland of Korea as a breadbasket for Japan's East Asian bloc empire. In the context of colonial Iri, this meant a push to foster Japanese settler migration to Korea, construct a rail transport system that could facilitate grain and resource extraction, and develop agriculture to the level of a modernized industry.

In practice, these broad policy objectives were realized by thousands of avaricious Japanese colonial migrants who settled in Korea in pursuit of a myriad of personal and organizational enterprises. As a new urban entity founded by migrant settlers from Japan, known at this time as the *naichi* (lit. inner lands), Iri in its nascent stages featured an overwhelmingly Japanese population in its urban core, which was surrounded by a vast decentralized rural population of native Koreans. The result was a unique enclave of alien colonial settlers within a provincial corner of Korea, a colonial space created by colonists that starkly differed from other native urban spaces that predated Korea's annexation and subsequent colonial rule by Japan.

This paper will analyze the instrumental policies and colonists that contributed to the genesis of a 'colonial city' in the form of colonial Iri. I will first detail Japanese colonial policies dealing specifically with ethnic-Japanese migration, construction of transportation infrastructure and rail formation in Iri, and agricultural development in the Jeonbuk Plain. Following this general overview of colonial policies, I will discuss the phenomenon of settler migration to the Jeonbuk Plain through the

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as provincial capitals under the '13 도제' (lit. thirteen provinces system) administrative regime of the Daehan Empire, fourteen years prior to annexation. Others 'designated myeon' like Cheongju, Uiju, and Gaeseong were also well established prior to Japanese colonialism, with some boasting ancient heritages. On the other hand, those urban entities with ties to the rail transport infrastructure network on the Korean peninsula such as Yeongdeungpo, Daejeon, Gimcheon, and of course Iri (Iksan) were more indicative of the process of city formation during the colonial period. These are the urban entities that are the most apposite examples of the specific definition of a 'colonial city' that is referenced in this paper.

specific case study of a particularly prominent settler and leading figure in colonial Iri. This will be done using an important source in the history of the colonial city, the memoir of Ōhashi Sokujō (大橋 即淨), a Nichiren Buddhist monk who remarkably lived in Korea (and almost exclusively in Iri) through virtually the entirety of the 36-year colonial period. This paper examines city formation in Iri through this source, focusing on Ōhashi's establishment of a new life in Iri, his financial and organizational success there, his ideological bent as a fluent mouthpiece for imperial ideology, and his relations with subaltern Koreans. I argue that Ōhashi represented an ideal colonist for the imperial state, one whose personal ambitions dovetailed with the colonial mission to establish a colonial city in Iri.

### The Case of Iksan and Background of Colonial Policy

Iksan is located on the so-called *jeonbukpyeongya* or Jeonbuk Plain, one of the only true flat plain areas of significant scale on the peninsula.<sup>354</sup> This made the locale historically a natural choice for agricultural interest from well before the modern era. Within the context of Korea, which was steeped for millennia in the *modus operandi* of agricultural production, the region boasted a rich association with traditional Korean societies built on the cultivation and consumption of rice. Indeed, much of the area's present-day cultural and historical capital as a hub for domestic tourism stems from the rich archeological heritage present in various excavation sites in the region.<sup>355</sup> One common theme echoed throughout all the historical speculation regarding these sites is the belief that Iksan played a key role as a regional hub for ancient agricultural societies in south-western Korea, a theory that makes sense given the region's topographical affinity for agriculture and rice production as well as the existence of nearby water arteries leading to the western seas such as the Mangyeong River in the immediate

<sup>354</sup> There is actually a local festival that celebrates the view of a 'flat horizon' or *jipyyeongseon* in nearby Gimje called the Gimje Jipyyeongseon Festival. Apparently, this is the only site where a flat horizon can be viewed in South Korea.

<sup>355</sup> The area is associated with such ancient kingdoms as the Geonma Kingdom 乾馬國 of the ancient Mahan Confederacy and the Baekje Kingdom (18BC-668AD) of the Three Kingdoms Period of Korea. This historical association is far from just a local reputation, as Iksan (along with sites in Gongju and Buyeo) forms a major part of the 'Baekje Historical Areas' UNESCO World Heritage Site.

vicinity of what became colonial Iri and the Geum River, situated a bit further to the north.

During the Joseon Dynasty, the last Korean kingdom on the peninsula prior to Japanese annexation, the Iksan area was home to an administrative unit known as Iksan-gun or Iksan county. It was a largely agricultural and decentralized area, as evidenced by dynastic records kept by the royal court. According to the "Geographical Records" (地理誌) featured in the Sejong Jangheon Daewang Sillok (The Veritable Records of King Sejong), a constituent text of the Joseon Wangjo Sillok (Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty), Iksan-gun featured a humble population of 1,623.<sup>356</sup> The area boasted an even mix of fertile and dry land, with significant plots of cultivated land or *ganjeon* amounting to 3,726 *gyeol*<sup>357</sup> in total area. Amongst the various regional specialties listed for Iksan-gun were the so-called "five grains," referring to the agricultural staple crops of rice, barley, foxtail millet, beans, and common millet. According to the annals, other agricultural specialties for the Iksan region included "mulberry trees, ginseng, and paper mulberries." Per this description, it would be fair to characterize dynastic Iksan-gun as a rural county oriented towards agriculture, featuring cultivated land, decent agricultural production, and a developing but non-urban native population.

With its forced annexation of Korea, the invading Japanese were thus given access to a Jeonbuk plain of unprecedented geographical utility, the traditional productive orientation of which (agriculture) could be exploited using the right mix of colonial infrastructure (urban, transport, and human). The Japanese push to maximize the agricultural production of regions within Korea already steeped in the practice was part and parcel of what can perhaps be termed

<sup>356</sup> *Sejong Sillok 151 Gwon, Jiriji Jeollado Jeonjubu Iksangun*, [Records of King Sejong Book 151, Geographical Records Jeolla Province, Jeonju-bu, Iksan-gun], 세종실록 151 권, 지리지 전라도 전주부 익산군.

<sup>357</sup> *Gyeol* (結) was a unit of farmland which was calculated throughout Korean history for the purpose of taxation. The exact area represented by a single *gyeol* varied across history, but a legal reform in 1444 set the area of one *gyeol* at 9,859.7m<sup>2</sup>, which represented two-thirds of the size of the previous *gyeol* unit left over from the preceding Goryeo Dynasty. Although this change was made during the reign of King Sejong, considering the fact that the Geographical Records cited above for Iksan-gun were completed in 1432, it remains likely that the *gyeol* units mentioned in relation to the cultivated land area in Iksan-gun were the earlier, larger Goryeo-era *gyeol* units.

'peripheral instrumentalization,' a practice pursued by imperial Japan to create a virtuous regional system in which Japan's peripheral colonies, the so-called *gaichi* or outer lands, were exploited to serve its East Asian bloc empire and especially its *naichi* metropole with maximum utility.

Japan's 'instrumentalization' of its colonies involved identifying regional and national products within the colonized nation and elevating industries tasked with producing these goods to the level of major industries. This process was facilitated by a targeted combination of strategic policy, rampant settler migration, and urban and technological development. An important first step was meticulous, even obsessive, field research of the prospective colony by a horde of colonial actors. From the historical moment of the Unyō Incident and the subsequent signing of the unequal Ganghwa Treaty in 1876, Korea's first modern treaty (and the first of many unequal treaties it signed with westernized foreign powers), Japan made sure to include a legal provision to allow Japanese ships to conduct surveys and mapping missions of Korean coastlines and waterways, extending to even surveys of the depths of Korean coastal waters.<sup>358</sup> From 1895 to 1906, even before the arrival of complete Japanese hegemony after the Russo-Japanese War, the General Staff of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) secretly made the first modern map of the entire Korean peninsula in the form of the *Guhanmalhanbandojihyeongdo*, which of course also included an extremely detailed section view of pre-colonial Iri.

Such developments, which preceded the final *de jure* surrender of Korean national sovereignty in 1910, were par for the course for an imperial power during an age of new imperialism. Like other imperial powers, Japan used its peripheral colonies as sites for migration of excess populations, exploitation of local resources, and facilitation of new markets. For example, the Japanese converted the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan into bases for sugar and rice production, with the legacy of early colonial mass production of sugarcane still evident today in Taiwan in the form of the venerable Taiwan Sugar Corporation (台灣糖業股份有限公司), which succeeded a variety of Japanese sugar companies in the island colony. In Manchuria, heavy strategic industries—coal, iron, magnesite, and other raw materials—were the choice extractive

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<sup>358</sup> *Ganghwa Joyak*, [Treaty of Ganghwa], Article 7, February 27, 1876.

industry, which accompanied another golden resource in the form of an enormous market for cheap Japanese goods, with Manchukuo's population, estimated in 1940 to have numbered approximately 43,234,000,<sup>359</sup> serving as a gargantuan laboring and consuming class.

Within this regional bloc empire, Korea was 'instrumentalized' for the purpose of food production. With the Meiji-era demographic boom in Japan, a country notorious for its lack of arable land, the focus soon shifted to fostering agriculture on a limited scale in Taiwan and to an industrial scale in rice-rich neighbor Korea. The resulting policy was a colonial initiative pursued mostly through the 1920s which is known in Korean academia as the so-called 'plan to increase rice-production' or *sanmijeungsikgyehoeok*. As Carter Eckhart similarly points out in English scholarship, "To Japanese colonizers in this early period, the primary economic functions of Korea, or Chōsen, as the colony was called, were to serve as an inexpensive export granary for Japanese consumption and as a market for Japanese manufactured goods," with industrialization being restricted mostly to the "construction of a modern infrastructure (including roads and railways) geared toward the primary sector and trade with Japan."<sup>360</sup> Carter asserts that, "Factories and other business firms established during this period were also generally engaged in activities like rice milling that accommodated these same interests." Thus, the main focus of early colonial economic and developmental policy vis-à-vis Korea was industrial agriculture for the purpose of consumption by the metropole, which was fostered through a modernized system of trade and transport. Urban nodes along this national exploitative system were steeped in commercial activities pertaining to agriculture and service industries such as those dedicated to processing grains. Iri as a colonial city was a direct product of these larger colonial ambitions.

### **Migrants, Rail, and Agriculture: Colonial Policy and Iri**

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<sup>359</sup> *Asahi Nenkan 1943* (Tokyo: Asahi Simbunsha, 1943), in Peter Duus, "Introduction: Wartime Empire: Problems and Issues," in *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945*, eds. Peter Duus, et al., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), xiii.

<sup>360</sup> Carter J. Eckhart, "Total War, Industrialization, and Social Change in Late Colonial Korea," in *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945*, eds. Peter Duus, et al., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4.

Imperial Japan's broad policy designs for transforming Iksan (Iri) and its surrounding Jeonbuk Plain into a hub for grain extraction were effectuated by the encouragement of colonial migration from the *naichi* to the Korean peninsula, the formation of a regional transport hub, and the infrastructural development of industrial agriculture. In terms of ethnic-Japanese migration to Korea, in 1901—after decades of penetration into Korea's byzantine maze of coastal waters and building of new treaty ports—Japan revised immigration laws to allow liberty of nautical passage to Joseon Korea and Qing China. Three years later, the imperial state exempted visas for its citizens seeking entry into the Korean peninsula.<sup>361</sup> By 1910, after three decades of eroding Korea's legal sovereignty, the number of Japanese that had migrated to Korea reached 170,000.<sup>362</sup> Korea eventually became the Japanese colony with the single highest number of Japanese migrant residents with the raw numbers reaching 750,000 by the tail end of the colonial era. As has been noted by Lee Gyu-su, this number, not including temporary residents and passersby, was roughly equivalent to the population of a small Japanese prefecture (府縣),<sup>363</sup> a fact that attests to the immense success of the colonial migration project.

It was amidst this feverish atmosphere of the early colonial period that migration to North Jeolla Province and the Honam Plain started to pick up speed. The first immigrant to the Iri area was an individual from Fukuoka named Tanaka Tomijirō 田中富次郎, who was involved in rice brokerage and the hospitality business<sup>364</sup> (the latter enterprise seemed to be a natural fit due to Iri's location in between the regional capital of Jeonju and the region's major port hub of Gunsan). Thousands followed in just

<sup>361</sup> Sil Jin, 일제강점 초기 일본인의 이리 이주와 도시 형성 [Japanese migrating to the city of "I-ri" and formation of city in the earlier days of the Japanese Occupation] (Graduate School of Jeonbuk University Department of History, 2014), 8.

<sup>362</sup> Sil Jin, 일제강점 초기 일본인의 이리 이주와 도시 형성, 7.

<sup>363</sup> Gyu-su Lee, '재조일본인' 연구와 '식민지수탈론' [The Study of 'The Japanese resided in Korea' and 'The Colonial Exploitation Theory'], *Ilbonyeoksayeongu* 33 (2011), 144.

<sup>364</sup> Gwi-baek Shin, 재조 승려 오하시의 이리(裡里)에서의 식민활동 연구: 회고록 <조선 주재 36년>을 중심으로 [A Study on the Colonial Activities of the Japanese monk Ohashi in Iri city (裡里市), Based on the memoir 『36 Years in Joseon』 by Ohashi], *Jibangsawa jibangmunhwa* 23, no. 2 (2020), 124.

the space of a single decade. In 1906, the Japanese population of Iri grew slightly from four people in 1906 to sixteen in 1910, the final year of Korea's nominal sovereignty.<sup>365</sup> Starting the very next year (1911), the Japanese population grew to 224 and grew exponentially to over a thousand by 1913, just two years later. By the time Yamashita Eiji wrote his 1915 primary source, a book widely referenced by local Iksan historians, advertising Iri as a so-called 'Treasure of Honam' 湖南寶庫,<sup>366</sup> the population had nearly doubled. As a 'colonial city' established by ambitious first-wave Japanese migrants, the initial city proper of Iri was initially overwhelmingly Japanese while the population of its surrounding rural environs were almost completely Korean. In 1915, the number of Japanese in Iksan-gun was 3,440 while the number of Koreans was 94,286. The city of Iri itself, on the other hand, had a population of 1,893 Japanese compared with just 348 Koreans.<sup>367</sup> A 'Japan-town' of significant size had been built in a regional corner of Korea within the space of just a few years.

Much has already been noted in modern academia about both the dichotomy between 'traditional' Korean urban spaces like Jeonju and colonial Japanese spaces like Iri and the larger ethnical contest between Korean and Japanese-dominated spaces that this rivalry represented.<sup>368</sup> The immediate situation of the Iksan region during the start of the colonial period likewise exhibited a certain 'contest' between the old-town administrative hub of Geumma left over from the dynastic period and the new colonial 'Japan-town' of colonial Iri. According to Ōhashi Sokujō's memoir, the original *gun*

<sup>365</sup> Yamashita Eiji 山下英爾, *Honambogo iriannae: bugeunjeopjisajeong 호남보고 이리안내: 부근접지사정* [Guidebook of Iri], 1915, 10; [朝鮮總督部統計年報] 1912-1919, in Sil Jin, *일제강점 초기 일본인의 이리 이주와 도시 형성* [Japanese migrating to the city of "I-ri" and formation of city in the earlier days of the Japanese Occupation] (Graduate School of Jeonbuk University Department of History, 2014), 14-15.

<sup>366</sup> Yamashita Eiji, 山下英爾, *Honambogo iriannae: bugeunjeopjisajeong*.

<sup>367</sup> [朝鮮總督部統計年報] 1912-1919, in Sil Jin, *일제강점 초기 일본인의 이리 이주와 도시 형성*, 14-15.

<sup>368</sup> As noted by local scholar Shin Gwi-baek, such scholars as Kim Kyung-nam had posited the existence of a 'competitive' battleground between the Korean space of the traditional walled city of Jeonju and the Japanese space constituted by Iri. See Gwi-baek Shin, *재조 승려 오하시의 이리(裡里)에서의 식민활동 연구: 회고록 <조선 주재 36년>을 중심으로*, 126.

county office<sup>369</sup> of Iksan-gun was situated 31 *li*<sup>370</sup> away from Iri at a place corresponding to modern-day Geumma-myeon. While relating an episode during his years as head of Iri Private Primary School pertaining to his struggles with the local administration and a rival school principal Hayashida Kakutarō 林田格太郎, Ōhashi notes that Geumma was also the site of the only public primary school within the county. He then alludes to a critical tension that existed between the traditional town within that region and the new boom town of Iri, stating that "signs of the [Geumma] school spirit waning began to surface," the old-town institution having been "overwhelmed" by the booming new city center constituted by the colonial city.<sup>371</sup> Eventually, a new school, Iri Public Primary School, was founded in Iri, which absorbed Ōhashi's earlier private, religious institution in the urban hub. An administrative and institutional creep from the traditional space of Geumma to the new Japanese 'colonial city' of Iri could be glimpsed throughout the latter's formation and development. For example, the Iksan-gun county office, the local military police squad, and an electrical substation were some institutions that relocated from Geumma to Iri during the early period of city formation in the latter.<sup>372</sup> The colonial policy of encouraging migration of Japanese colonists and city formation in Iri was a resounding success.

What happened during those intervening years to cause such exponential growth? This was where the second component of Japanese policy regarding colonial city creation, large-scale construction of transportation infrastructure, came into play. The first major piece of colonial infrastructure in the region of Iri and the Jeonbuk plain was the opening of Gunsan Harbor in 1899. From the legalistic verbiage of the Ganghwa Treaty two decades earlier, one can already make out Japan's desire for widespread penetration into Korea's core provinces, including Jeolla

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<sup>369</sup> Iksan-gun being the administrative unit of Iksan left over from dynastic times into the early colonial period. Before 1906, while the Korean empire was still nominally extant, the area comprising Iri was a part of Jeonju-gun.

<sup>370</sup> Approximately 11.78 kilometers.

<sup>371</sup> Ōhashi Sokujō 大橋即淨, *Joseon jujae 36 nyeon*, [36 Years in Joseon], Original title: 駐鮮三十六ヶ年, 1954, trans. Yang Eun-yong 양은용 (Iksan: Iksanmunhwagwangwangjaedan munhwadosisaepdan, 2020), 45.

<sup>372</sup> *Iksansisa* 익산시사 [Iksan City History] (Iksan: Iksan City History Publication Committee, 2001), 423.

Province.<sup>373</sup> The imperial state saw its wish to infiltrate the North Jeolla Province region fulfilled by the opening of Gunsan Harbor in 1899, which naturally brought attention to the plain dividing this coastal hub of transport and commerce and the regional capital of Jeonju (the latter during dynastic times housed the Jeolla Gamyeong or the Jeolla Provincial Government Office). In 1907, the Japanese-controlled administration of the Daehan Empire (Korea's last dynastic phase) set to work building a road between Jeonju and the new port of Gunsan, the Jeonju-Gunsan Road or Jeon-Gun Road (*jeongungado*) for short. Goods and grains that would have been ferried through the unreliable Mangyeong River found passage through this avenue. Nevertheless, the fact that the riverine passage coursed through the environs of Iri probably shined an even brighter spotlight on the region for potential development.

However, it was the building of rail infrastructure that made Iri into a bona-fide colonial city and that formed the basis for the basal urban geography of Iksan which persists to this day. In 1912, the Honam rail line (which had been pursued as a key infrastructure plan by the native Korean dynastic state even before the Japanese colonial period) reached Iri, which became the site for a new train station. This new Iri-yeok or Iri Station became the central anchor of the modern city of Iri and is the site of today's Iksan Station. Around the same time, construction was underway on two other major rail lines that intersected the nexus of Iri-yeok. In 1912, two years before the completion of the Honam Main Line from the inland city of Daejeon to the southern port of Mokpo, the Gunsan Line was completed between Iri and Gunsan. This was a logical construction which sought to connect a grain-rich breadbasket region with a nearby port capable of facilitating cargo passage to Japan. Thus, those lines which directly intersected Iri-yeok connected Iri to the port cities of Gunsan and Mokpo. More

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<sup>373</sup> Article 5 of the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876 stipulated that Joseon needed to open two ports within the following five key candidate provinces: Gyeonggi, Chungcheong, Jeolla, Gyeongsang, and Hamgyeong. The middle three (i.e. Chungcheong, Jeolla, and Gyeongsang) are colloquially known in Korean history as the *하삼도* or 'lower three provinces' and have a reputation for being Korea's breadbasket. Honam or Jeolla Province's reputation for agriculture is the most prominent of the three, and the Jeonbuk Plain *전북평야* forms one of the region's main agricultural sites.

immediately, however, Iri did need to be connected to the regional administrative hub of Jeonju, and this was done through the completion of the Jeonbuk Light Railway (*jeonbukgyeongpyeoncheoldo*) in 1914. This initial stretch of rail eventually became a portion of the larger Jeolla Line, which, under the direct ownership of the Government General of Korea, was expanded from a more narrow 'light railway' to a full-scale rail line and was linked to the southern coastal city of Yeosu, a site of seagoing and naval operations since dynastic times. Of course, the lines emanating from Iri would cross other major rail lines, ultimately linking this scarcely developed city nucleus to ports and major cities across Korea.

The Honam, Gunsan, and Jeolla lines, with their respective expansions and renovations throughout the colonial period, not only jumpstarted the city of Iri at a time when the city was miniscule in population but also became the basal framework for the region's rail transport system to the present-day. To this day, all three lines, now modernized and operated by Korail, still very much follow the same basic routes. Modern day Iksan's urban geography, anchored by the main rail station (and a supplementary station located in an area originally known as "Old Iri" and later known as "East Iksan," which also traces its origins to the colonial period), has a striking visual similarity to the original colonial city of Iri. City genesis had, in effect, been facilitated through rail transport. Ōhashi Sokujō, who arrived in Iri less than six years after the groundbreaking arrival of Tanaka Tomijirō and during a year when the Japanese population was still under a thousand despite skyrocketing growth, noted this when he wrote that Iri, as a hub of transportation with the backdrop of the vast agricultural infrastructure constituted by the vast Jeonbuk Plain, had all the elements needed for "future development" and that very many people were already migrating to the colonial city to seize this opportunity.<sup>374</sup>

The other main colonial infrastructure policies in the region pertain to the third main colonial policy push in the creation of Iri: agricultural development. In many ways, the story of what Korean scholars call 'colonial exploitation' pertains directly to this story of land and grain development and exploitation. Particularly

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<sup>374</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae 36 Nyeon*, 31.

infamous was the role of Japanese cadastral surveys in formalizing ownership of land, which often simply meant a transfer of ambiguous or unstated ownership by illiterate Korean farmers to a prospective Japanese landowning class armed with both capital and avarice. Of course, the interests of the Japanese ethnic ruling class were also buttressed by extensive support by the colonial state and by such enterprises as the notorious Oriental Development Company, which helped to support migration and procurement of land for Japanese settlers. As an area naturally suited to these sorts of exploitative operations, colonial Iri hosted a branch office of the Oriental Development Company.

Japanese landowning in the Gunsan-Iksan region of North Jeolla Province had already started to occur around 1894,<sup>375</sup> a date that suggests a very early interest in the region even prior to port formation in Gunsan. Large Japanese farm-estates (農場), as well as farms by pro-Japanese Koreans who seemed to have undergone *changssigaemyeong* or adoption of Japanese names, started to appear in the regions such major cities as Gunsan, Jeonju, and Ganggyeong even before annexation.<sup>376</sup> Near modern-day Iksan, Japanese farms centering around Osan-myeon, Hwangdeung-myeon, and Chunpo-myeon were established in rapid order around even before the fall of the Korean Empire. In 1904, the 真田農場, 藤本農場, 全坂農場, 細川農場 farms were founded in the Iksan area.<sup>377</sup> This was followed by the founding of 今村農場, 片棟農場, 森谷農場 farms in 1906 and the more well-known 大橋農場 farm in 1907.<sup>378</sup>

These were colonial enterprises that boasted a truly vast scale. For example, the 真田農場, one of the region's foundational industrial-scale farms in the Osan-myeon area of Iksan-gun, was founded in April 1904 by Japanese settler 真田尚治, who eventually

<sup>375</sup> Sun-cheol Shin, 1920 nyeondae gunsan·okgujiyeoge daehan ilbonui tojisutal, 1920 년대 군산·옥구지역에 대한 일본의 토지수탈 [Land Theft in the Gunsan·Okgu area during the 1920s Japanese Occupation] (Master's Degree Thesis, Wonkwang University, 2002).

<sup>376</sup> Yeonho Kang, et al., *Iksan, dosiwa saram* 익산, 도시와 사람 [Iksan: City and People] (Iksanmunhwagwangwangjaedan munhwadosisaeopdan, 2019), 205.

<sup>377</sup> Yeonho Kang, et al., *Iksan, dosiwa saram*, 206.

<sup>378</sup> The 大橋農場 farm complex is now a Registered Cultural Property No. 209 in South Korea.

assumed ownership over 3,000 *jeongbo*<sup>379</sup> of land.<sup>380</sup> Given its agricultural potential, Iri attracted the attention of some of the most influential people in Japan. According to the city histories, 細川農場 was founded by Hosokawa Moritatsu 細川護立,<sup>381</sup> a marquess (侯爵) of the *Kazoku* (華族) hereditary peerage system. As a head of one of Japan's preeminent ancient noble clans, the Kumamoto-Hosokawa clan, Hosokawa was in-laws with Prince Fumimaro Konoe. His grandson, Hosokawa Morihiro 細川護熙, is a prominent politician who served as Prime Minister of Japan from 1993 to 1994.

The undeveloped nature of the area around the flood-prone Mangyeong River to the south of the city precluded real agricultural strides from occurring in the region during the late dynastic period. A major policy initiative was to clean up this portion of the Jeonbuk plain via agricultural technology and engineering projects. The colonial state went all in on building dikes and hemming in the river for *chisu* or 'water control' purposes. These efforts eventually culminated in a river straightening project that redirected the formerly unruly river's route and flow. These efforts were bolstered by *gancheok* or land reclamation projects to eliminate wetlands and flooded fields. Of course, restricting water was just one half of the equation: Irrigation associations and projects in the Iksan region reached a truly massive scale, one of which was the largest in Korea at the time.<sup>382</sup> Images of well-irrigated fields surrounded by a neat system of waterways and dikes in Iri were soon commodified in the form of promotional postcards, which displayed the advances of agricultural development in Iri.<sup>383</sup> The output of these cultivated fields were also processed in Iri, which hosted such grain processing facilities as rice mills (精米所).

In his memoir, Ōhashi Sokujō praises the infrastructural progress of industrial agriculture in Iri by recalling an excursion

<sup>379</sup> A single *jeongbo* (町步) is equivalent to around 3,000 *pyeong* (坪) or around 9,917.4m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>380</sup> *Iksansisa*, 425.

<sup>381</sup> *Iksansisa*, 425.

<sup>382</sup> The Ik'oksurihohap Irrigation Association. Its European-style former headquarters is a 'National Registered Cultural Site' in Iksan.

<sup>383</sup> "Beautiful Scenes and Famous Place of Riri, Chosen," n.d., Photograph Postcard, Gunsan Dongguk Temple Collection.

conducted as part of a regular assembly of the "Honam Mujin Association." The association members were treated to views of 大雅里 dam, which Ōhashi dubs as the dam "boasting the largest size in East Asia."<sup>384</sup> The dam was indeed a massive arch dam project, which was designed by German engineers and which constituted the oldest modern dam in Korea. Amongst the Japanese ruling class, the overall impression given by this impressive development of industrial agriculture was one of prosperity, productivity, and the feeling that the region was faithfully undertaking its role as a granary for the empire. In 1943, towards the end of Japan's three-decade intervention in the region, a song titled "New Year's Morning" was broadcast in Iri with lyrics likening the fall harvest to a "treasure" to be "transported out for the nation."<sup>385</sup>

Despite the glamorous veneer given to this system by Japanese colonists, this was essentially a two-tiered society in which native Koreans struggled under sadistic tenant conditions under Japanese landowners. They also had to bear significant taxes, including water taxes and fees for the irrigation services described above. The other infrastructure projects related to transportation also contributed to Korean immiseration as traditional market hubs in Ganggyeong and smaller ones in Iksan were essentially replaced by the might of Gunsan Harbor, Japanese retailers, and large-scale, modern Japanese farms with access to the entirety of the Japanese road and rail transportation network. The age of such mobile Korean merchants as the *bobusang* was effectively over,<sup>386</sup> superseded by a Japanese ruling class with access to both urban technologies and a rich labor force provided by the Korean underclass. Korean landowning, agriculture, and commerce were replaced by a Japanese domination of these enterprises.

Although such developments were no-doubt helped by Iksan's unique geographical conditions, one cannot say that similar trends were not set in motion elsewhere. Indeed, Son Kyung-hee has written about similar trends of settler migration and agricultural management by Japanese colonists in Gyeongsan-gun in North

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<sup>384</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae 36 Nyeon*, 83.

<sup>385</sup> Ōhashi, 97.

<sup>386</sup> Sil Jin, *일제강점 초기 일본인의 이리 이주와 도시 형성*, 43.

Gyeongsang Province.<sup>387</sup> Despite diversity in local circumstances,<sup>388</sup> these regional systems were united in the fact that they all reflected an inherently exploitative colonial order in which capital, infrastructure, administrative biases, and imperial policies always favored the larger project of planting Japanese settlers into the rich land of the colonies, which had the reverse effect of uprooting the power of the native Koreans and their institutions which originally occupied these spaces. Thus, the story of colonial policy vis-à-vis Korea was one that contained within it the paradoxical coexistence of development and exploitation. Imperial Japan was building not just 'colonial cities' in places like Iri and Gyeongsan but also regional systems of exploitation that always privileged Japanese settlers, the new ethnic ruling class, over native Koreans.

*An Ideal Colonist in the Colonial City: The Memoirs of Ōhashi Sokujo*

Of course, whether one references Iri with its typological reality as a 'colonial city' or its structural reality as a 'system of exploitation,' it is evident that the new city, as a colonial creation, could not have been formed simply by policy initiatives by the imperial metropole alone. Rather, it was the hordes of interloping Japanese settlers who were willing to invade and dominate spaces deep in the hinterlands of the Korean peninsula that were responsible for putting the goals of empire into motion in places like the Jeonbuk Plain. The perspective of these settlers is critically important for understanding how such larger colonial policies as the building of colonial cities in Iri or the instrumentalization of Korea as a granary for the *naichi* were manifested through the quotidian lives of Japanese imperial subjects at the local or regional level. Fortunately, amongst the settlers to this region, front-end colonist and prominent local functionary Ōhashi Sokujo (大橋即淨) wrote down his lived experiences in the form of a memoir (written in 1954 and recently translated into Korean in 2020), which provides an intimate look at the life of a settler colonist in a colonial

<sup>387</sup> Kyung-hee Son. *Iljesigi gyeongbuk gyeongsangunui ijuilbonin jeunggawa nongeopyeongyeong*, 일제시기 경북 경산군의 이주일본인 증가와 농업경영 [Increased Migration of Japanese and Agricultural Management in Colonial Era Gyeongbuk Gyeongsan-gun], *Yeoksawa gyeonggye* 100 (2016).

<sup>388</sup> Though smaller in scale, Gyeongsan-gun shares topographical similarities to Iksan in its access to a plain area (the Daegu Plain) and a river (the Geumho River). Meanwhile, regional circumstances more unique to Gyeongsan also made the area conducive to stock farming and not just agriculture.

city. I will use this vital source in my analysis of colonial life for Japanese settlers in the new space of a colonial city.

Ōhashi Sokujō (1885-1955) was a Nichiren Buddhist monk who lived in Korea through almost the entirety of the colonial period from 1910 to his final forced repatriation back to Japan in 1945 after Japan's defeat in WWII. Of those thirty-six years, he spent thirty-four in colonial Iri, arriving in March of 1912 right around the time when rail and urban formation were occurring rapidly in the region. Thus, he is considered to be a first wave Japanese colonist in the region, and his lengthy and particularly eventful stay in Iksan meant that he was able to comment on colonial life in Iri throughout the entirety of the three-decade colonial period. Meanwhile, his personal investment in the imperial project makes his experiences an invaluable insight into how individual Japanese colonists, who chose a life in the unfamiliar surroundings of a 'colonial city' out of personal ambition, helped to effectuate imperial policy goals.

Ōhashi's experiences are now accessible for us nearly seventy years after his death due to his proclivity to engage in vigorous self-promotion via writing, a trait which was manifested even during his three-decade stint as a prominent community leader in Iri in the form of various opinion-editorials written for various regional newspapers such as the *Jeonbuk Ilbo* and the *Gunsan Ilbo*. As a religious leader, Ōhashi also used the pen to express his religious beliefs as a devoted member of the Nichiren Buddhist sect, an exclusivist belief system<sup>389</sup> with a pre-war reputation for ultra-nationalism (which at the time continued to pursue the now-defunct Meiji Restoration-era statist religious practice of *Nichirenshugi*). His religious bona fides were affirmed throughout his time in Iri via his role as head monk of Yeongguksa Temple in the colonial city of Iri. As a civic leader with great personal ambitions, he played various roles in Iri's Japanese community as a neighborhood leader, a prominent member of myriad committees and organizations, an educator with a seminal role in the founding of an elementary school, a ruthlessly cunning businessman with ties to real-estate and money-lending enterprises, and even as an

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<sup>389</sup> Nichiren Buddhism holds itself as the only correct tradition within Buddhism, thus distinguishing itself from other schools of Buddhism by adhering to a religious exclusivism similar to many Western religious traditions.

ex-soldier who was later tasked with numerous military roles in the self-defense and operation of wartime Iri.

In many ways, the breadth of his communal activism demonstrated the ways in which his personal ambition and the interests of Japan's empire proved to be complementary elements throughout Ōhashi's life. In all his endeavors, Ōhashi reified the colonial state in Korea and its ideology, which to Ōhashi were sources of both material benefits (given his status within the privileged ethnic ruling class) and spiritual ones (given his dual spiritual allegiance to both his religious sect and the state). In this light, he constituted an ideal colonist for the imperial state, precisely the sort of migrant who could be instrumentalized as a building block for establishing a colonial order in places like Iksan. I will focus on three elements of Ōhashi Sokujō's life in Iri (i.e. his transition to life in Korea and Iri, his business activities and civic life in Iri, and his role as a religious and ideological enforcer of state orthodoxy) in order to demonstrate how such an ideal colonial settler went about the processes of migrating to, establishing a livelihood in, and propagating imperial orthodoxy in colonial Iri. His relationships with and attitudes towards subaltern Koreans in the colonial city will also be discussed, a discussion which addresses Ōhashi's own opinions regarding the larger colonial project itself.

### **Background: Establishing a New Life in Iri**

Even amongst the Japanese migrants who swarmed Korea at the very outset of the colonial period, Ōhashi Sokujō's experience with Korea began from an unusually young age. As a result of this uncommonly long relationship with Korea, Ōhashi's early life was in many ways indicative of the larger story of Japan's eventual capture of Korea during the tail end of Korean sovereignty and the 'age of opening ports.' Indeed, it was at a first-generation treaty port city, Busan, where Ōhashi first entered Korea in 1903 at the tender age of eighteen as a student pursuing Korean language study at the local 'Busan Formal Korean Language School' (釜山正則韓語學校).

After graduating in the first class of that institution, Ōhashi returned to Japan for secondary study within a Nichiren Buddhist institution for higher education (a five-century old school now known as Risshō University in Tokyo) but later dropped out in order to join the army. While on duty, he was sent to serve as a

Japanese cavalry soldier in the Korean capital of Hanyang (modern-day Seoul). In doing so, he was again in the vanguard of colonial change. In 1907, during his deployment, Imperial Japan disbanded Korea's armed forces, including its nascent modernized military core. Japan's military had previously maintained a foothold in Korea at many junctures throughout the 'opening-ports era' and kept a permanent presence after the crushing of the Donghak Rebellion and the conclusion of the First Sino-Japanese War. However, the 1907 disbandment, in which the Daehan Empire's entire military and native police force was disbanded almost overnight (albeit not without violent resistance amongst disbanded Korean soldiers and so-called 'righteous army' militias), assured that Japanese units deployed in Korea, including Ōhashi's, became a colonial military force both in name and in reality, with policing and military duties in Korea being outsourced completely to Japanese police-militias and the Imperial Japanese Army. Ōhashi's personal stint as a member of a Japanese cavalry unit stationed in Korea's capital was thus indicative of this larger geopolitical sea change in which Korea lost its right to self-defense.

Ōhashi was also a front-end beneficiary of Japan and Nichiren Buddhism's increasing interest in fostering academic and religious institutions within the Korean peninsula. According to his memoirs, Ōhashi, having been discharged in 1908, returned to Japan and occupied the position of head monk of a local temple (榮久寺) in his native Fukui Prefecture (福井県). While in this position, he received a letter in December of 1910, four months after the formal annexation of Korea, in which he was summoned via letter by an assistant administrator within the Nichiren religious order to "make all preparations to leave from Tokyo to Korea by the 20th."<sup>390</sup> Ōhashi was sent to Korea on a special scholarship funded by the Nichiren sect as part of an inaugural wave (he was selected with just one other person) of Nichiren Buddhists selected by the sect to pursue advanced Korean language study in Korea. Ōhashi writes that the scholarship seemed to have been a high-profile project for the religious sect, noting with pride how senior members of the Nichiren organizational hierarchy sent the two prospective students off with a special banquet, causing him to

<sup>390</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae 36 Nyeon*, 25.

wonder aloud why he was receiving such unprecedented treatment from Nichiren's top brass.<sup>391</sup>

Of course, this 'unprecedented' treatment was part and parcel of a Nichiren plan to proselytize its exclusivist and nationalist sect of Buddhism within the religious frontier constituted by the new colony of Korea.<sup>392</sup> Nichiren Buddhists established their presence on the peninsula just five years after the legal establishment of treaty ports, with the establishment of a mission called the 日宗會堂 in Busan in 1881.<sup>393</sup> This initial beachhead was widened by the entry of Nichiren Buddhist missionaries into Seoul after Japanese lobbying of the Kim Hong-jip cabinet (Kim being the instigator of the pro-Japanese Gabo reforms). This is a significant event not just in the context of colonial history but also in the context of the Joseon Dynasty, which had maintained, for hundreds of years, a socio-religious policy known as *eokbulsungyu* 抑佛崇儒 (lit. suppress Buddhism, elevate Confucianism). The ultra-nationalist Japanese Buddhist sects soon achieved, of course with the assistance of imperial coercion, the goal of *haegeum* (lit. removal of a ban) regarding Buddhist monks' entry into the capital, assuring that the road was opened for Japanese nationalist religious ideologies to become mainstream belief systems in Korea rather than simply the alien religious curiosities of a neighboring nation.

Of course, as a de-facto junior partner of imperial ideology, Nichiren Buddhism did not limit its operations to just Korea. In a later section of his memoirs, Ōhashi recalls a time in 1940 during which he received an invitation from Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro 近衛文麿 to attend the 紀元二千六百年記念行事 celebrations at the imperial palace commemorating the 2,600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mythical founding of Japan by the legendary Emperor Jimmu. Ōhashi's credentials as a model local functionary in the colonial city of Iri secured him a place amongst the 50,000 subjects of national merit who were invited to take part in the 2,600<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations at the imperial palace. Among these top 50,000 dignitaries of an imperial state at its zenith of

<sup>391</sup> Ōhashi, 27.

<sup>392</sup> The exclusivist nature of the sect meant that other sects of Buddhism and Christianity were its direct competitors, assuring a more aggressive and competitive push for proselytization.

<sup>393</sup> Sun-cheol Shin, "1920 nyeondae gunsan-okgujiyeoge daehan ilbonui tojisutal," 130.

power (scarcely a year prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor), twelve were members of the Nichiren Buddhist hierarchy. According to Ōhashi's account, the dozen leading imperialists of the Nichiren Buddhist community who were invited to personally witness the presence of the emperor and empress hailed from seven different Japanese prefectures, Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>394</sup> The Korean and Taiwanese presence, a fourth of the delegation, was proof of the fruits of Nichiren's efforts as seen above to sponsor the overseas success of ambitious monks like Ōhashi Sokujō. The presence of the Taiwanese delegate, 丸井智選, attests to the existence of more Ōhashi-like colonial functionaries operating under the Nichiren umbrella in Taiwan.

Thus settled in Korea with the pecuniary, religious, and academic assistance of his nationalistic sect, Ōhashi studied at the "Keijō campus" of *Tōyōkyōkaisennmongakkō* 東洋協會專門學校. This was a branch campus of the modern-day Takushoku University 拓殖大学 in the Bunkyo District of Tokyo. This institution is known to have been founded by the Tōyō Kyōkai as a "colonizer preparatory school," designed to train prominent Japanese colonists first in Taiwan and then in Korea to feed the colonial administrations there with intellectuals versed in "colonial thought."<sup>395</sup> One of the founders of this institution was none other than the imperialist Prime Minister Katsura Tarō, one of the two parties to the infamous Taft-Katsura Memorandum of 1905 with his American counterpart, future US president William Howard Taft (the resulting memorandum informally acknowledging the United States' recognition of Japan's imperial stake in Korea in return for Japan's recognition of the Americans' own empire in the Philippines). Tarō, who oversaw the forced annexation of Korea in 1910 during his second prime ministerial administration, casts a long shadow across the institution's history as a training ground for colonial migrants (his bronze statue continues to cast a literal shadow across Takushoku University's Tokyo Hachiōji campus). Even the name Takushoku 拓殖, with its connection to the notorious Oriental Development Company 東洋拓殖株式會社, is

<sup>394</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae* 36 Nyeon, 92-93.

<sup>395</sup> Ohkuma Tomoyuki, [The Emigrant Education and Transition of a "Colonizer Preparatory School" by Toyo Kyokai – From Taiwan Kyokai Gakko to Shokumin Senmon Gakko], *Hanilminjongmunjeyeongu* 27 (December 2014): 5-38.

basically a byword in modern-day Korea, the word itself referring to the process of developing undeveloped land in an alien country for migration of one's own people to settle in. Could there be a more apt description of the *raison d'être* of the 'colonial city' of Iri and of its most ambitious settlers like Ōhashi Sokujo?

After receiving Korean language training from this preparatory school for prospective colonists, Ōhashi quickly transitioned from study to finding a new place to set up his Nichiren Buddhist 'mission' in anticipation of eventually building a full-scale temple. The beginnings of this endeavor were humble, starting with an inspection tour of the southwestern Honam region with a Nichiren superintendent. At their first stop in Daejeon, Ōhashi writes that a personal friend and Buddhist missionary of the Jōdo-shū (Pure-Land School) introduced the Honam region to him.<sup>396</sup> This teacher named 久納洞察 introduced Ōhashi to a new colonial city called Iri, noting that the city was the center of an ongoing rail construction project from his base of operations in Daejeon to the southern port of Mokpo (i.e. the Honam Line). Of course, other lines were also either already built or under construction (i.e. the Gunsan Line to the port of Gunsan and the Light Rail Line to Jeonju). This teacher went on to appraise the future potential of the area highly.

His interest piqued by this introduction, Ōhashi went to the new city. Ōhashi noted that the new city seemed to be centered around the new train station. True to the nascent city's initial roots in the lodging business, his stay in Iksan began in an inn run by a Japanese settler. With the help of a Japanese acquaintance of the Daejeon Pure-Land teacher and a passing Korean, he decided on a plot of elevated land with a "forest of pine trees" situated a decent distance away from the station and being sold by a Japanese landowner for the price of 1 yen and 70 sen per 坪 (approximately 3.3058m<sup>2</sup>). Noting with glee that the landowner, Mr. Saito, was living too far away from Iri to know about the skyrocketing prices in the region post-rail construction, Ōhashi honed his uncompromising and cutthroat business instincts to coax and persuade Mr. Saito into selling more than 800 坪 of land for a price that can only be described as a steal. He also mentioned the low price as being, in part, a donation in nature, implying that he might have used his religious position to guilt the hapless landowner into

<sup>396</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae 36 Nyeon*, 30.

selling the plot for 1 yen and 60 sen per 坪 instead of the standard price for the area of 5 yen per 坪, thus procuring the property for less than a third of the market price.<sup>397</sup>

Shockingly, Ohashi completes his ruthlessly calculating 'art of the deal' contract with the landowner without actually having a single yen on hand to pay him. Despite his stated claim to have relied on the grace of the Buddha, it is clear that he intended to pay for the new land by wresting money away from another party, this time his own Nichiren Buddhist sect. He had signed the contract without approval from the Nichiren superintendent in Korea, clearly intending to coerce or convince him to pay for the purchase after the provisional contract had already been signed. When this failed due to the superintendent's absence, he used his quick wits to convince the monk of a Nichiren temple in Seoul to pay the sum in the spirit of religious donation. While Ohashi made sure to thank the Buddha's grace for his good fortune, his coup was achieved by his willingness to forcefully exploit the networks of Japanese settlers and religious connections around him. He continued to exploit these human resources while in the colonial city, using money borrowed from another prominent Japanese settler, 家扇榮助, to build the mission that would eventually become Yeongguksa Temple (榮國寺).

It is clear from the story of Ohashi's establishment in Korea and in the 'colonial city' of Iri that early Japanese migrants relied heavily on human contacts amongst their fellow ethnic compatriots in order to transition into life in an alien setting. Nevertheless, it is clear that even amongst the colonial settler class, which universally benefitted from the establishment of a two-tiered ethnic hierarchy in the peninsula post-annexation, few people could boast the same uncanny luck and connections that brought success to Ohashi Sokujō within a relatively quick timeframe. Indeed, it is hard to think of anyone who benefitted from private connections, an entire religious order, newly formed academic institutions for 'preparing' colonists, and the institution of the Imperial Japanese Army within the matter of a few years in Korea like Ohashi did. Despite his business instincts, it was these institutions, and not aspects of Ohashi's personal character, that furnished his initial three excursions to Korea and helped him to eventually settle there.

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<sup>397</sup> Ohashi, 31-32.

*Success in Iri*

Ōhashi's memoir provides insight into the lives that Japanese colonists lived within the alien setting of a regional corner of a neighboring country. In particular, it sheds light on how livelihoods were made in a colonial city, especially in one which straddled major rail lines and which was situated in the massive Jeonbuk Plain. Ōhashi himself was a representative case of achieving pecuniary success as a colonial settler in a colonial city: a ruthlessly calculating businessman donning the robes of a religious man, he was involved with various enterprises involving moneylending, informal loan clubs, real estate speculation, and tenant farming. His motto was to reconcile religion with moneymaking and a more-than-ample livelihood. He summarized his philosophy in his memoirs, stating that he had serious interest in the concept of the so-called "temple economy" and its role in the mission of proselytization.<sup>398</sup> He lambasted the "parasitical" tendencies of past generations of Buddhist monks who relied on the charity of temple parishioners and donors, arguing that they needed to learn the art of economic "self-reliance" and "self-management" and that there was no value in only discussing religion while ignoring financial matters. His vision of the 'temple economy' was one in which the head monk was a money-making entrepreneur able to finance his endeavors through wealth creation rather than just begging.

Ōhashi couched this capitalist-friendly vision of the temple in terms of religious principle and the traditional doctrinal divide between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists (with Nichiren Buddhism belonging to the latter school). In his op-ed to the *Gunsan Ilbo* in January 1934, he observed that the *sangha* of the traditionalist Theravada school were not supposed to own personal wealth, while the forebears of Mahayana Buddhism allowed for the vast accumulation of pecuniary resources for the purpose of Buddhist proselytization (弘法傳道).<sup>399</sup>

Of course, one can take these written statements either as proof of Ōhashi's religious convictions regarding mammon or as the religious arguments Ōhashi simply employed to justify his vast wealth accumulation. He initially entered into the realm of land speculation, low hanging fruit for any resident of a new, fast-

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<sup>398</sup> Ōhashi, 40.

<sup>399</sup> Ōhashi, 88.

growing 'colonial city' like Iri. Speculative land purchases seemed to be a lucrative activity in early Iri with many prospective buyers. As Ōhashi noted about early Iri, "the price of land rose day-by-day" so that a plot that had a "value of 3 yen yesterday would show a worth of 5 yen today."<sup>400</sup> Ōhashi received a large financial boon when a rich disciple decided to ask Ōhashi for his services (and Korean language ability) to mediate the purchase of land. He agreed to leave the management of the land as well as the capital needed for purchasing land to Ōhashi (in light of the cumbersome physical distance separating the disciple from these properties). Ōhashi aggressively purchased plots originally belonging to native Koreans at dirt cheap prices, eventually accumulating 20 *jeongbo* of land. He also exploited the widespread practice of tenant farming and extracted farm rent from tenant farmers. Given the dark history of exploitation of Korean farmers and usurious rent gouging glimpsed throughout the colonial period and given Ōhashi's hard pursuit of profits, conditions on the monk's lands would have mirrored the pitiful conditions featured throughout the agricultural regime of colonial Korea.

Ōhashi's next enterprise came in the form of the management of private funds. By the end of the decade, in 1919, he expressed fatigue with the troubles of having to move through all of his scattered land possessions, especially in order to sign new contracts with tenant farmers. Riding across the plain from one isolated land possession to another was a lengthy process that took three whole days to complete, even with the assistance of a "Korean horse" and a "horse driver."<sup>401</sup> Ōhashi decided to sell all but 3 *jeongbo* of his land and to use the large sum of capital from the sales to start a private fund association. *Gye* associations, or what Japanese commonly called *tanomoshikō* (頼母子講),<sup>402</sup> were a form of traditional private fund popular amongst Koreans during this era (and extant even to this day). In a *gye*, members contribute a fixed and modest sum of money at regular intervals for a fixed number of times and take turns receiving a sizable lump sum from the

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<sup>400</sup> Ōhashi, 32.

<sup>401</sup> Ōhashi, 51.

<sup>402</sup> Written as 頼母子講 in modern Kanji. *Tanomoshikō* were mutual aid organizations that are known to have originated in the Kamakura Period; they grew in popularity during the Edo Period and equivalent organizations operated under different names including "mujin" (無盡).

resulting capital. At a time when modern banking and other financial institutions were scarce, these informal organizations provided Iri settlers with a way to procure capital for their new projects in the Jeonbuk Plain, and hence constituted an important feature of pre-modern finance as a mutual financing association.

A *tanomoshikō* (頼母子講) was essentially the Japanese version of this organization, a *gye* association with a competitive bidding process deciding who was qualified to be a due-paying member. Amongst the Japanese settlers of the region, who like Ōhashi possessed substantial capital from investment in land in the Jeonbuk Plain, this was nothing less than a mainstay institution. As Ōhashi himself noted, by 1924, the only two financial institutions in colonial Iri were a single bank and a single "financial cooperative," the latter referring to an organization that lent money to individuals involved in agriculture (later renamed as "agricultural cooperative associations").<sup>403</sup> In this situation, 頼母子講 became what he termed as a "financial institution for the common man." He noted the fact that he was known as "the 頼母子講 man of Iri," given his position as the head of two of such organizations in Iri. He also noted that corruption, personal favoritism amongst members, forgery of documents, and unpaid lump sums were rife within the 頼母子講 community in Iri. Ōhashi dealt with this on a personal level by engaging in careful management of organization accounts. In his later op-ed in the *Gunsan Ilbo*, he actually called for the elimination of the 頼母子講 system in favor of the Mujin Company (無盡會社) system (a similar financial institution to the 頼母子講, except with a company apparatus and official, legal backing by the colonial administration under the 1922 Mujin Law), he argued that "strictness" in supervision was a key component in the success of these low-level financial institutions. He argued that the colonial Mujin system, a stricter and vastly more organized version of these private associations, constituted a "more Buddhist" version of the 頼母子講.<sup>404</sup>

This change of opinion regarding a financial institution he was long involved with coincided with the outbreak of a financial crisis caused by delinquent Iri 頼母子講 organizations in 1928, a crisis of

<sup>403</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae 36 Nyeon*, 57.

<sup>404</sup> Ōhashi, 186-192.

a scale that warranted an investigation by the provincial government. Finance in Iri shifted somewhat towards the Mujin system, and once again Iri's "賴母子講 man" found a way to advance himself amidst a crisis that, on the surface, should certainly have negatively affected him. It seemed that his marriage of organizational administration with Buddhist ethics spared his organization from the mismanagement that affected other 賴母子講 associations. Out of the more than forty such organizations in Iri, Ōhashi's two organizations were found to be free from organizational rot. Armed with this credibility as well as with 100,000 yen in capital, Ōhashi sought to capitalize on the new Mujin Company model. After a three-year battle involving painstaking negotiations among Ōhashi and his supporters in Iri, a rival company in Gunsan, and the provincial government, Ōhashi received approval to independently operate 'Iri Mujin Company' as a financial institution based solely in Iri. Ōhashi was quickly elected as the company's "head director" (a position equivalent to that of a Chief Executive Officer). In 1932, there were just thirty-four such Mujin companies in the whole of colonial Korea,<sup>405</sup> effectively meaning that Ōhashi Sokujō had joined the front ranks of businessmen involved in a financial institution that had only gained official sanction in Korea just ten years prior (and just four years after a major financial crisis in Iri).

By this time of his financial success, he had also become a fixture of Iri's social elite, maintaining a heavy presence in colonial life as a civic leader in the colonial city. Iri's new civic culture was made possible by the construction of new civic institutions (and institutions in general) in the colonial city following a major uptick in population. Ōhashi's memoirs provide an intimate look into the city growth that underpinned his career as a prominent colonial figure in the North Jeolla region. In terms of new institutions in the city, Ōhashi noted that soon after the building of the Honam Rail Line the city added "a county office, a police branch for the military police, a court and registration office, an office of public works, various other administrative offices including a town office, and a

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<sup>405</sup> Giju Park. "무진회사(無盡會社)." Encyclopedia of Korean Culture. The Academy of Korean Studies, 2016.  
<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Item/E0078074>.

school for Japanese students called Iri Public Elementary School."<sup>406</sup> Other fixtures included "a bank, companies, irrigation associations, financial associations, and large-scale farms of the Oriental Development Company." He claimed the population of the early city (with Koreans) to be around 6,000 in total.

Ōhashi's early contribution to the colonial city was enabled by his role as a religious educator, with Ōhashi perhaps drawing from his own experiences as a colonist effectively educated by the auspices of a munificent religious establishment. His crowning achievement in this field was his opening of the Iri Private Primary School (the precursor to modern-day Iri Elementary School). During the school's short stint at independence (before it and another rival school from the old regional center of Geumma were reopened as a single, larger primary school in the heart of Iri named Iri Public Primary School), Ōhashi and another high-ranking Nichiren official in Korea served as the heads of the school, which served to teach Korean children (no doubt using a curriculum that hewed closely to the ideological nationalism and religious doctrines of the school's Nichiren leaders). Teaching the Japanese language to Koreans also became an objective of Ōhashi and his fellow colonial educators, with Koreans eagerly responding to the opportunity. In light of the new two-tiered ethnic hierarchy of colonialism, Koreans had little choice but to learn Japanese in order to enjoy any decent opportunity within the new social order. Whatever the attitudes of the Korean population to these new academic decisions, the colonial state soon made their own educational decisions for them, banning the use of Korean in schools, changing Korean names into Japanese ones, and pursuing a coordinated decades-long attempt to eradicate Korean language, history, and ethnic identity.

In other fields as well, Ōhashi was a communal fixture. He actively participated as a standing member of the neighborhood council of the *machi* (町) or "neighborhood" of his residence in Iri's 日出町. After leading a neighborhood split, he became the neighborhood chief of 常盤台町, becoming a low-level administrator of the imperial state in his own right. He played a leading role in the Imperial Veterans Association of Iri: it was Ōhashi who drafted plans to build a town hall as well as a hall for

<sup>406</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae* 36 Nyeon, 43-44.

soldiers in Iri. He was an executive director of the "Iri Public Interest Association," incorporator of the "Iri Loving Chrysanthemums Association," a hygiene association chief, a census committee member, chairman of a networking association, sponsorship president of Iri Girl's Public High School, and a prominent leader in the self-defense forces that emerged in Iri after Japan's instigation of war with China in the 1930s. During World War II, he played even more prominent roles, taking control of the distribution of his neighborhood's supplies and even personally taking up the job of selecting forced laborers from the Korean population to be sent abroad (for which he received the malice of the Korean community). His various communal roles and the myriad of awards he received from colonial and religious authorities were too numerous to state for the purposes of this paper. All the while, Ōhashi kept up his civic activism via his pen, writing opinion-editorials lambasting the practice of recreational hunting, what he interpreted as hypocrisies evident in a local Christian temperance movement, and the evils of private *gye* associations led by unscrupulous organizational leaders. He was thus deeply interested in the upkeep of social and civic ethics in the public arena as well as in the religious sphere. Through all his endeavors, Ōhashi Sokujō represented the ideal communal leader for the imperial state, a multipurpose tool whose utility in benefiting the regional colonial order could be felt across the worlds of finance, religion, and civic life.

### Ōhashi Sokujō: Ideology of an Ideal Colonist

As seen through his organizational activities, Ōhashi Sokujō was an ideal colonist for the empire not only as an active citizen (imperial subject) but also as a fluent propagator of imperial ideology within the colonial city of Iri. Much has already been noted and written on the topic of Nichiren Buddhism and its de-facto status as a partner ideology to the statist *kokutai* ideology of Japanese fascism. Scholars have located the most direct link between Nichiren thought and pre-war Showa ultra-nationalism in the writings of Tanaka Chigaku (1861-1939), the founder of the so-called *Nichirenshugi* or Nichirenism movement.<sup>407</sup> Tanaka's acolytes included a famed writer Takayama Chogyū, popularly known as

<sup>407</sup> Sato Hiroo, "Nichiren Thought in Modern Japan: Two Perspectives," *The Journal of Oriental Studies, The Institute of Oriental Philosophy* 10, Sp. Edition., (2000), 46.

the "Nietzsche of Japan," as well as Kanji Ishihara of the Imperial Japanese Army, who conceptualized the coming of a climactic "Final War" between Japan and the United States. As the main proponent of *Nichirenshugi*, Tanaka wrote in his introductory text to his religious philosophy work *Nichirenshugi Gairon* (An Introduction to Nichirenism):

In Japan the Son of Heaven is the Path. The emperor, embodiment of morality, monarchical authority and the Imperial throne, and by virtue of the throne given the eternal ranking of emperor and eternal endorsement, is the representative in this world of the Path. Thus, as water joins water and air joins air the Son of Heaven is of the Lotus Sutra.<sup>408</sup>

Tanaka thus drew a direct connection between the emperor and Nichiren Buddhism's foundational religious text, the Lotus Sutra. He went on to explicate the Nichiren religious ideal of universality, making clear that his conception of "universality" posited the supremacy of the Japanese imperial institution and the position of the Japanese nation itself as the center of the universe. As historian Hiroo Sato states, "Nichiren was the 'great holy man of Japan' precisely because he 'demonstrated to the world the nobility of the great nation of Japan, disclosing its truth and deep significance, and was a powerful advocate on a grand scale of Japan's mission to unite the world.'"<sup>409</sup>

I include this rather lengthy segment of quotes by Tanaka Chigaku, considered to be a radical even within the nationalistic Nichiren sect, as I want to illustrate the ideological contrast (or lack thereof) between the belief systems of an infamous Japanese fascist and the attitudes of a mundane low-level colonial administrator living in a colonial city like Ōhashi Sokujō. This is easy to do given the volume of Ōhashi's writings on his own ideological and religious ideals (from prose to poetry and song lyrics). What is evident from these written expressions is that Ōhashi's ideological bent did not fundamentally differ from that of one of the most rabid proponents of Shōwa-era fascism. Rather, his day-to-day

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<sup>408</sup> Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学. "Nichirenshugi Gairon 日蓮主義概論". In *Nichirenshugi Daikōza* 日蓮主義大講座. Tōkyō: Ateliersha アトリエ社, 1936., in Sato, "Nichiren Thought in Modern Japan: Two Perspectives," 50.

<sup>409</sup> Sato, "Nichiren Thought in Modern Japan: Two Perspectives," 51.

professed belief system, the sort of colloquial ideology that undoubtedly had an influence on all of his interlocutors during his time in Korea, both Japanese and Korean, revealed how the extremist ideology of Shōwa ultra-nationalism was actually taken to be a *fait accompli* in the setting of the colonial city, even one in the middle of Korea's rural heartlands.

Take the example of a trio of poems that Ōhashi Sokujiō wrote after receiving the honor of attending celebrations commemorating the 2,600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan's 'National Foundation' at the imperial palace. This set of poetry, steeped in the excesses of post-Meiji imperial ideology, was drafted to convey Ōhashi's profound devotion to the ideology of the imperial state as well as the equally profound gratitude he felt for having been granted an audience with the emperor himself. His first poem titled 【拜謁】 or 'audience' painted the moment of his imperial audience with the Shōwa emperor in glowing, almost rapturous terms. After exalting the land of "Ōyashima"<sup>410</sup> as a realm with virtue unmatched in all the "four seas" (a term referring to the entire world), Ōhashi describes the person of the emperor using exalted language apposite to the emperor's official post-Meiji position as a 'manifest deity' in the direct genealogical line of the sun goddess Amaterasu-Ōmikami.<sup>411</sup> After noting the "silky" and "beautiful" appearance of the emperor's face, Ōhashi waxes lyrical about how even the very act of looking up at the emperor in reverence felt presumptuous and how his body and soul were overwhelmed with deep emotion akin to being elevated up to heaven.

In his second poem titled 【勅語】 or 'imperial edict', Ōhashi describes the words issued by the emperor in his declaration as "resonating as the voice of a god."<sup>412</sup> With the kami's voice resonating in his heart, the "humble servant" (微臣) Ōhashi pledges his eternal loyalty to the emperor, expressing the wish that his pledge to uphold this sole loyalty would be passed down to posterity. In his last piece, titled 【御宴】 or 'imperial banquet', he recalls the surreal experience of receiving a drink from the emperor at the imperial banquet in a poem rich with symbolism. He recalls

<sup>410</sup> Lit. 'Eight Great Islands.' An ancient name for Japan mentioned in the *Kojiki*.

<sup>411</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae 36 Nyeon*, 94.

<sup>412</sup> Ōhashi, 94.

the "joy" of wishing his lord longevity, likening the experience to a dream or fantasy.<sup>413</sup>

Through his literary contribution, which he delivered to the Cabinet Director of Ceremonies, Ōhashi expressed his subscription to an imperialist ideology that was for the most part a novel phenomenon, having been fashioned only after the Meiji Restoration (read Meiji Revolution) of 1868. Imperial Japan's 1889 Constitution codified this reimagination of the role of the emperor through its Article 3 provision, which emphasized that the emperor was both "sacred and inviolable."<sup>414</sup> Likewise, the Meiji Constitution's first article perpetuated the modern concept of 万世一系 or the belief that the emperor was the descendant of a single bloodline unbroken throughout Japan's history.<sup>415</sup> Recycling ancient terminology relating to the emperor, Meiji Japan envisaged the emperor to be a "Manifest Deity" or a "Visible Deity." Despite possible differences in interpretation, it has been noted that the "Manifest Deity of the Meiji," in contrast to the emperors of the past, "was altogether much closer to 'Almighty God' in the Judeo-Christian tradition" than to the *kami* in the traditional Japanese sense.<sup>416</sup> Along with a certain divinity, the emperor was imbued with an aura of martial power as commander-in-chief, a power codified in Article 11 (a controversial legal factor in debates regarding the emperor's culpability in the Second World War). Such newly invented qualities of the emperor were amplified in Ōhashi's writings.

Of course, a reimagination of the Japanese people accompanied a reimagination of the role of the emperor, with peasants, who had formerly lived under the diversity of the bakufu-han domain system, living new lives as imperial subjects under the single being of the emperor. Imperial era names replaced the zodiac calendar system as markers of time as well as indicators for an individual's position within time. For example, depending on the incumbent reign name corresponding to their date of birth, people were called

<sup>413</sup> Ōhashi, 95.

<sup>414</sup> 天皇ハ神聖ニシテ侵スヘカラス in the original text.; 大日本帝國憲法 第3條, 1889.

<sup>415</sup> 大日本帝國ハ万世一系ノ天皇之ヲ統治ス in the original text.; 大日本帝國憲法 第1條, 1889.

<sup>416</sup> Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "The Emperor of Japan as Deity (Kami)," *Ethnology* 30, no. 3 (1991), 199.

a "Meiji person," "Taisho person," or "Showa person." A host of symbols, from anthems and imperial rescripts to even chrysanthemum flowers, were appropriated into this new imperial ideology.

With the eventual acceleration of ultra-nationalism and fascism centered on the imperial institution, Japan sought to ideologically link "Japanese-ness" or a Japanese identity with the imperial institution via the propagation of the *Kokutai* (國體) concept. This concept, which can be roughly translated to "national body" or "national essence," found its heyday in the early Shōwa era, during which the entire polity lurched towards ultra-nationalism and war. During this time, the Ministry of Education attempted to create an orthodox definition for *Kokutai* in the form of a treatise drafted by a group of preeminent academics. The resulting document, the 156-page *Kokutai no Hongi* (lit. Fundamentals of our National Polity), lamented the presence of heterodox ideologies in Japan such as socialism, communism, and anarchism while engaging in a racialist view of ideology that emphasized the differences separating the "analytical and intellectual qualities" of Occidental learning from the "intuitive and aesthetic qualities" of Oriental learning.<sup>417</sup>

This Oriental Japanese way was explicitly tied to the person of the emperor. According to *Kokutai no Hongi*, "Our country is established with the emperor, who is a descendant of Amaterasu-Ōmikami, as its center, as our ancestors as well as we ourselves constantly have beheld in the emperor the fountainhead of her life and activities." The text goes on to state that "loyalty means to revere the emperor as (our) pivot and to follow him implicitly. By implicit obedience is meant casting ourselves aside and serving the emperor intently. To walk this Way of loyalty is the sole Way in which we subjects may 'live' and the fountainhead of all energy." Thus, to live in perfect loyalty to the emperor is to live in accordance with the essence of the nation and the "genuine life of the people of a state." By conflating the nation with the personage of the emperor and by pledging an absolute allegiance to a "sole loyalty" to the emperor in his poetry, Ōhashi was acting as a mouthpiece for this modern ideology that had just reached its heyday during the Shōwa era.

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<sup>417</sup>*Kokutai no Hongi* (Fundamentals of our National Polity) (1937), in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, eds. Wm. Theodore De Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 968-969, 975.

Ōhashi was also a mouthpiece for war. Of course, in the authoritarian crescendo of the early Shōwa era, he was far from alone in this advocacy. However, he was nevertheless one of the more rabidly eager advocates for war in Asia and for a 'Final War' against the United States. As part of his participation in a "Greater East Asia Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead," Ōhashi wrote the lyrics to an elegy praising the imperial army's exploits during a "great cataclysm" unseen throughout history. In his elegy, he extolled the war dead by stating that their merit shines brightly in Yasukuni Shrine,<sup>418</sup> where many "gods" are present.<sup>419</sup> In his memoir, Ōhashi notes the start of the "Great East Asia War" as occurring on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941 (immediately after Pearl Harbor). He goes on to repeatedly call the resulting conflict a 聖戰 or "sacred war" throughout his memoirs.

As the war progressed, he began to take up a variety of roles as a local leader in the home front and subsequently continued to write wartime propaganda in conjunction with those new tasks. Amongst his various pursuits, Ōhashi encouraged the buying of bonds for the war effort, even composing the lyrics to what he titled a "song for the encouragement of national defense bonds." In this song, Ōhashi sings of his wish that these war bonds would become "bullets that destroy the great enemies of Great Britain and the United States."<sup>420</sup> Of course, one can argue that such eager support could be seen as a *fait accompli* for any imperial subject, especially a Japanese one whose loyalties and personal wealth depended on Japan's ultimate victory in the war. To a certain extent, this would have been true. But it is also important to remember that Ōhashi was not forced to write effusive literary praises of the war and Japan's participation in it. Rather, all of these actions were very much voluntary. Ōhashi remains notable even amongst his fellow imperial subjects in Iri in the volume of writings he produced in support of the war against China, Great Britain, and the United States. One can say that Ōhashi, as a low-level functionary of empire, essentially took on the role of enforcing colonial order and discipline, both physical and ideological, through the various positions entrusted to him by colonial

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<sup>418</sup> Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社 is a Shinto shrine located in Chiyoda-ku in Tokyo infamous for its continuing commemoration of convicted war criminals.

<sup>419</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae* 36 *Nyeon*, 96.

<sup>420</sup> Ōhashi, 98.

authorities (who no doubt entrusted him with these roles in light of his regional reputation as a leading member of colonial Iri) and via his profuse production of writings that propagandistically toed the state's line.

Ōhashi's extreme ideological devotion and voluntarism vis-à-vis state orthodoxy is evident in another episode that took place before the war. As a director in the neighborhood council of 日出町 in Iri, Ōhashi wrote an open letter bitterly excoriating the council representative Furukawa Chiyokichi 古川千代吉, who occupied the head position in the council and who was ten years Ōhashi's senior, for invoking a general meeting of the council at a high-end restaurant during a period of national mourning following the death of the Taishō emperor. Ōhashi lambasted Furukawa for not observing enough "self-control" during the aftermath of an emperor's death, reminding him that the proper role of an imperial subject was to exercise caution in choosing meetings and to practice self-restraint during meetings that could not be otherwise avoided. He took particular umbrage with the fact that the meeting was to be held in a place conducive to the serving of food, reminding Furukawa that the regulation of one's diet after the emperor's death should be a "duty" for any "citizen of Great Japan".<sup>421</sup> After criticizing Furukawa's mind in this matter as "deplorable", he goes on to state that for a neighborhood with the exemplary reputation of 日出町, this incident constituted a "matter of eternal regret". Ōhashi went as far as making sure that this letter was published over three days in the *Gunsan Ilbo* newspaper. Furukawa sought to assuage the furor by sending Ōhashi a written apology and by hosting a reconciliatory banquet, but the resulting fallout caused Ōhashi and his followers to form a separate *machi* in the form of 常盤台町, a testament to the severity of the schism caused by Ōhashi's criticism.<sup>422</sup> Part of this vituperation was fueled by Ōhashi's more personal grudges against what Ōhashi perceived to be Furukawa's mismanagement of the neighborhood council (Ōhashi credited his own efforts and proposals as the de-facto accountant for the neighborhood council as the reason for the council's successful financial situation). However, Ōhashi couched his public criticism in terms that pointed out Furukawa's lack of moral discipline

<sup>421</sup> Ōhashi, 183-184.

<sup>422</sup> Ōhashi, 185.

according to the dictates of the imperial order, the same order that needed to be especially reinforced in the setting of a colonial city like Iri.

Ōhashi thus assumed the zealous role of enforcer of proper behavior according to the dictates of imperial ideology. Perhaps this could be seen as an extension of the fact that his main occupation was that of a religious leader and head monk of Yeongguksa Temple. This is seen also in his various writings pointing out what he perceived to be various social ills in Iri, or in his resolution for imperial subjects which he published following the coronation of the Taishō emperor. His example proves that proponents of the ideology of the post-Meiji imperial state and their religious allies in State Shinto, nationalistic Buddhist denominations, and in Ōhashi's own Nichiren Buddhist sect, actively took up the role of enforcing ideological discipline in far-flung colonial settings (even while the ideological line itself was undergoing change and radicalization in the *naichi*).

Ōhashi's other organizational activities also reflected this zealous proselytization of the values of the imperial state. He uses the exact words 國是 (lit. national policy / ideology) to describe his central aim in forming the "Iri Youth Association," stating that the goal was the "fostering of morally proper youth (it seems that he was initially aiming to mobilize Japanese youth living in Iri) according to the dictates of national policy / ideology."<sup>423</sup> Through this endeavor, Ōhashi was serving as the direct agent for imperial policy vis-à-vis the propagation of imperial ideology in Japan's colonies. Meiji-era Japan pushed for the development and utilization of an empire-wide Seinendan (lit. youth association) network that focused on disciplining and nationalizing youth throughout the empire. As Chatani Sayaka puts it in her study of Seinendan in another Japanese colony, Taiwan, the "prewar Japanese national-imperial ideology extolled agrarianism, lauded youth as pillars of the nation, and held up the soldier's fit, strong body as the masculine ideal," ideals that eerily echo Ōhashi's call for the raising of "wholesome" and patriotic youth in provincial Iri.<sup>424</sup> The rural bias of these values meant that Japanese Seinendan

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<sup>423</sup> Ōhashi, 49.

<sup>424</sup> Sayaka Chatani, "Between 'Rural Youth' and Empire: Social and Emotional Dynamics of Youth Mobilization in the Countryside of Colonial Taiwan under

differed from the European patriotic youth organizations it was originally modeled on in that the former emphasized building a 'patriotic' consciousness amongst youth in mostly rural and village areas. This meant that provincial areas in Korea and Taiwan were high priority targets especially during the early colonial period. By the late 1910s, the Seinendan had already reached a peak of 18,000 groups, which effectively meant that they were present in almost every village in the empire, a situation which continued to World War II.<sup>425</sup> Chatani points out that this policy allowed state officials to "achieve their goals of improving success rates on the conscription examination, modernizing agricultural methods, and spreading the ideologies of agrarianism and an emperor-centered nationalism".<sup>426</sup> These goals were echoed in Ōhashi Sokuji's own youth association in provincial Korea. Like the other imperial policies outlined above, the push to form youth organizations in Japan's East Asian empire would not have been possible without the voluntarism of Japanese settlers and local/regional administrators like Ōhashi Sokuji.

### Ōhashi Sokuji and Subaltern Koreans

Perhaps as revealing as his written advocacy of imperial ideology was Ōhashi's interactions with native Koreans. For example, a common goal of many Seinendan-like operations was the promotion of the Japanese language, and Ōhashi embraced this goal eagerly. In relation to his goals in interacting with the native Korean population, he mentions the "enlightenment" of Koreans as a personal goal. Of course, this could mean a religious enlightenment of Koreans through the doctrine of Nichiren Buddhism (he received similar instructions to work for the enlightenment of the "native people" of Korea during his initial scholarship ceremony to study in Korea). However, given his dual devotion to Buddhism and Imperial Japan, as well as the inseparability of his devotion to nationalist ideology with his own religious beliefs, it is reasonable to assume that by "enlightenment," Ōhashi was also implying the conversion of the Korean native population into loyal subjects of the Japanese empire. This tacit goal to "Japanize" the population would explain

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Japan's Total War." *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 2 (2017), 375; Ōhashi, 49.

<sup>425</sup> Chatani, "Between 'Rural Youth' and Empire", 377.

<sup>426</sup> Chatani, "Between 'Rural Youth' and Empire", 377.

his initial passion to provide Japanese language study classes to Koreans, who were noted to have responded eagerly to these classes (an instinctive response of a subaltern population now having to adjust to a new social order dominated by an ethnic ruling class of Japanese). During the latter stages of Japan's colonial experiment, the focus on 'enlightening' Koreans via the Japanese language became an obsessive impulse by the imperial state as it moved to 'create imperial subjects' in Korea via the policy of ethno-cultural censorship and erasure. 'Creating imperial subjects' was a coercive process in which Japanese became the sole language of the education system, Korean-language newspapers were suppressed and eventually eradicated, and Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names. Whether he realized it at the time or not, Ōhashi was yet again situated to assist a very important priority of the state via his academic voluntarism.

This virtuous partnership is also seen in Ōhashi's embrace of the *naisen ittai* (內鮮一體) concept. For example, while describing his new role as the village head or representative of a newly-formed 常盤台町 village, Ōhashi considered embodying *naisen ittai* as a guiding principle in ideal village administration. *Naisen ittai*, known in Korea as the infamous ideology of *naeseon ilche* (내선일체), posited a special historical and present union existing between the *naichi* (Japan) and *Chōsen* (Korea). This newly-invented ethnic compatibility and companionship were described in terms that were not replicated anywhere else in the empire, with the special relationship between Japan and Korea portrayed as a bond reaching the levels of somatic unity (hence the use of the term *ittai* or "single body or entity"). Propaganda images from the colonial period idealized this special union by depicting Japan and Korea as partners in a three-legged race or as a Korean girl and Japanese boy dressed in Korean and Japanese attire respectively. In the spirit of this propagandistic union with Korea, Ōhashi did seem intent on placing Koreans within the crosshairs of his colonial activism, particularly with regards to education. As a result, although ethnic-Japanese make up the vast majority of the people mentioned in Ōhashi's memoir, Koreans do appear in the peripheries, usually as beneficiaries of Ōhashi's various activities in Iri.

Of course, this false union still implied a supremacy of the ethnic-Japanese colonists over the subaltern colonized class of

ethnic-Koreans. As seen above, the process of 'creating imperial subjects' (the so-called *Kōminka* policy) meant a 'Japanization' of Koreans and not vice-versa. Despite its egalitarian veneer, this was a fundamentally unequal relationship in which the culture, language, and ethnic identity of Koreans were fundamentally threatened by a program of revisionism, coercion, and erasure.

Societies within Korea also reflected a disparity in power relations. In the colonial city of Iri, Koreans took up the roles of tenant farmers and constituted an urban underclass, while the Japanese assumed the position of the landowning class, the main beneficiaries of colonial policy, and the dominant ethnic ruling class in society. The colonial policy already outlined in this paper of land transfer from Koreans to Japanese and the formation of a regional system of exploitation in Iri caused widespread immiseration amongst Koreans in the colonial city. A *Joseon Ilbo* article from 1924 noted that Iri was a city meant not for Koreans but for the dominant Japanese.<sup>427</sup> It details impoverished Korean village women as having to engage in an expanding sex trade. It further describes hordes of Korean laborers who were reduced to a life of wandering due to low pay and lack of work, the article noting that these laborers were not originally urban workers but were farmers who could now not make a living in the rural countryside. Having engaged in the speculative buying of land and in the practice of contractual tenant farming as we have seen, Ōhashi Sokujō should not have had a leg to stand on when talking about making a positive impact vis-à-vis the native Korean population of colonial Iri. However, one discovers while reading his writings that Ōhashi confidently believed that his treatment of and relationships with Koreans were essentially good, and that he had benevolently contributed to the betterment of Koreans through his colonial activism. Being apparently blind to the fact that his very presence in Iri and his pecuniary success in this colonial space (he makes some exaggerated claims regarding his personal wealth and the fact that he had procured a mansion in central Iri that previously had the reputation of resembling a "palace in Keijō" or Seoul)<sup>428</sup> were predicated on the eradication of Korean sovereignty and the displacement of native populations, Ōhashi remained astonishingly confident in his belief that his presence (and by

<sup>427</sup> [戰慄할 人肉市場, 農村婦女의 悲慘한 最后], *Joseon Ilbo*, October 23, 1924.

<sup>428</sup> Ōhashi, *Joseon Jujae* 36 *Nyeon*, 84.

extension Japan's presence) in Korea was a positive influence for the larger Korean population.

Reality, of course, was very different. Despite the veneer of Korean-Japanese harmony, attitudes regarding the colonizer class amongst subaltern Koreans never truly reflected an internalization of *naisen ittai* propaganda. This is demonstrated by the fact that no sooner had Japan lost the war than the native Koreans began to rebel against their colonial overlords of three-decades. Almost overnight, after the so-called "Jewel Voice Broadcast" was heard throughout the city, Koreans went from docility to open hostility and the 160th Division of the Imperial Japanese Army (the so-called 護鮮 Gosen Division) in Iri went from being an occupying force to a besieged one, with officers losing their swords to vengeful bands of Korean youths and soldiers of the IJA hiding in private houses.<sup>429</sup> Koreans were so bitterly passionate in their revenge that Ōhashi claims that the few thousand Japanese residents in Iri felt like they were "in enemy territory." Koreans took over institutional power in ways that they previously could not in the colonial city; for example, Koreans expelled the Japanese school administration of Iri Public Agriculture School in favor of a Korean one (ousting a Japanese army division from the campus in the process).<sup>430</sup>

Ōhashi took particular umbrage with the actions of vengeful Koreans, at one point calling them "the Korean slaves" (鮮奴).<sup>431</sup> Over his protests, the entire Japanese settler population in Korea, including Ōhashi, was soon forced back to Japan, ending three decades of Japanese domination in Korea and in the colonial city of Iri. By the time of his forced repatriation, Ōhashi had desperately attempted to salvage the pecuniary benefits he had reaped during the half of his life he spent in Iri, employing such tactics as stashing cash in a hidden cave underneath his desk and using flour to conceal money as hard tack in order to avoid confiscation by the United States army on the return trip to Japan.<sup>432</sup> Even during his final moments glimpsing Korea, with his ship sailing from Busan Harbor, Ōhashi lamented the manner of the repatriation, stating that Japanese were treated like prisoners despite "us not having

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<sup>429</sup> Ōhashi, 105.

<sup>430</sup> Ōhashi, 107.

<sup>431</sup> Ōhashi, 116.

<sup>432</sup> Ōhashi, 107, 114.

committed any crimes."<sup>433</sup> Thus, a first-wave settler exited Korea in the same manner in which he came, without any remorse or regret.

Ōhashi's interactions with Iri's subaltern Koreans offers a glimpse into the attitudes of Japanese settlers towards the larger colonial project pursued by Japan. Like many colonists in an age of new imperialism, Ōhashi apparently held the belief that his organizational activities were ultimately beneficial to the native population. He also subscribed to the ideal of *naisen ittai*, which posited the existence of a virtuous union between Japanese and Koreans. Finally, as a religious man, Ōhashi describes his mission as one to 'enlighten' the native Koreans living in Iksan, implying that the colonial project that brought him to Iri was justified in its delivery of religious benefits to Koreans (a belief that has parallels with the West's use of Christianity to justify imperial projects which often involved committing profoundly disturbing and un-Christian atrocities across the globe). In reality, despite his rhetoric of religious benevolence, Ōhashi was a ruthlessly calculating businessman in the guise of a religious leader, being aggressively involved in moneylending, informal loan clubs, and land-owning (real-estate) enterprises. In all his enterprises, he showed a fundamental disregard for the welfare of the native Koreans, who were immiserated by the very same colonial order that Ōhashi had contributed to building, both in the name of the empire and of his own personal ambitions. By the time he was expropriated and repatriated to Japan following Korean liberation after the Second World War, he claimed to have amassed in Iri a staggering fortune in fixed property. He lamented the passing of his great wealth with the waning of national fortune in the war, but did not forget to do so while reciting a verse from the Lotus Sūtra, Nichiren Buddhism's foundational text.<sup>434</sup>

This verse recital in his own preface to the memoir is illustrative of a larger point. Ōhashi Sokujō was the quintessential example of an ideal colonist in an age of new imperialism, armed with endless personal ambition for mammon and a guiding ideology rooted in religious and nationalistic idealism. In him, one sees the paradoxical shadow of the 'white man's burden' being cast by an ethnically-Japanese Nichiren Buddhist man living in a small city in rural Korea. Much has already been explored in the field of history

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<sup>433</sup> Ōhashi, 122.

<sup>434</sup> Ōhashi, 11.

about the character of the ideal European colonist in North America, Africa, and Asia, with his insufferably hypocritical pursuit of both God and worldly treasure, but surprisingly little has been said about how the sole Asian imperial power existing during this time was able to propagate many of the same racialist (in the form of Japanese ethnic supremacy instead of white supremacy), ideological (in the form of such fascist ideologies as State Shinto and ultra-nationalistic strains of Buddhism), and opportunistic values (in the form of unequal capitalism and market logic reflecting the segregation of upper-tier colonizers and the lower-tier colonized).

### Conclusion

Colonial Iri (modern-day Iksan) constituted a unique space in modern Korean history that was born through the conducive combination of colonial policies and ambitious colonial settlers. First, regarding colonial policies vis-à-vis Iksan, a set of policy initiatives were put into place to maximize the utility of the fertile Jeonbuk Plain as a breadbasket for Japan's bloc empire. Such a policy was implemented by a trio of policy initiatives to liberalize immigration policy and encourage migration, build a network of infrastructure for transportation, and modernize agricultural infrastructure and technologies in the colonial city of Iri. These initiatives created a regional system of exploitation, in which a new ethnic ruling class benefited from colonial policies designed to maximize the utility and production of a specific region.

The colonial project to exploit Iksan and to build a colonial city in the form of Iri could not have been effectuated without the initiative of ambitious Japanese settler migrants. As seen through the memoirs of Ōhashi Sokujō, the first wave colonists of Iri were reliant on networks of their ethnic compatriots in order to transition into life in a colonial setting. Through Ōhashi's own transition to migrant life in Korea, one can identify treaty port cities, organized religion (i.e. those belief systems that adhered to state ideology), the Imperial Japanese Army, an academic system built to effectuate empire, a peninsular rail network, and human connections amongst fellow Japanese as institutions that served to make the transition to settler life easier for aspiring colonists in colonial Korea. As evidenced by Ōhashi's business dealings in Iri, the early Japanese settlers of agriculturally rich areas like the Jeonbuk Plain were economically reliant on Korean tenant farmers,

land speculation, and private financial associations similar to the Korean informal institution known as *gye* to finance their endeavors in a nascent urban setting. With the steady growth of Iri's city population and resulting urban maturation, more organized financial institutions such as banks and, as seen in Ōhashi's own Iri Mujin Company, Mujin companies backed by the legal system of the Government General of Korea began to replace the informal finance networks that were relied upon by the pioneering generation of Japanese settlers in the colonial city. In addition to new financial institutions, a new civic culture emerged in which prominent settlers like Ōhashi Sokujō were empowered to thrive within a myriad of organizational roles. Like Ōhashi, advocates of imperial ideology and their allies in such nationalistic religious groups as Nichiren Buddhism actively policed colonists' ideological adherence to imperial orthodoxy in such farflung colonial settings as rural, provincial Korea (zealously reifying an ideological line that was subject to change and increasing radicalization in the *naichi* itself). Regarding subaltern Koreans, settlers like Ōhashi often proselytized the empire's new assimilatory ideal of *naisen ittai* while also endorsing the ideology of new imperialism, which attempted to portray the exploitation of colonized people as projects to effectuate their beneficial "enlightenment" within a new colonial order. Ultimately, in their economic, civic, and religious lives, colonial settlers like Ōhashi Sokujō served as facilitators of the priorities of the empire, embodying a productive union between colonial policies and colonial settlers in creating such new urban spaces as the colonial city of Iri.

## Appendix



Figure 1: Early Colonial Iri (1916), Iri Train Station, Old Iri Station, the Honam, Gunsan, and Jeolla Lines, newly relocated institutions such as a county hall and post office, a rice mill, Japanese farm-estates, and a basic outline of the modern city are all visible.

Source: Government-General of Korea (朝鮮總督府). "Iri (裡里) 1:10,000 Scale." Map. Land Survey Bureau (陸地測量部), September 30, 1917 (map made in 1916).

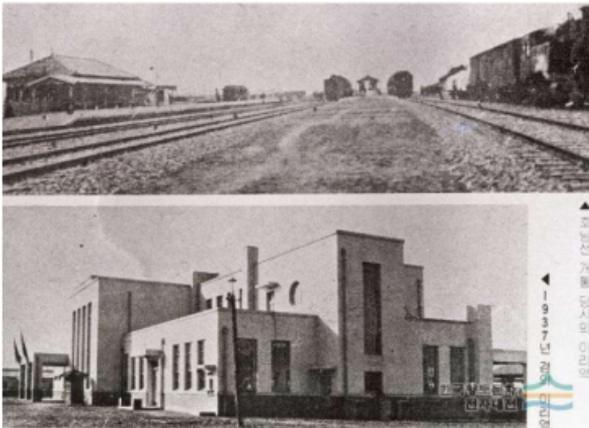


Figure 2: Iri Train Station (top: Iri Station during the opening of the Honam Line in 1912; bottom: Iri Station in c. 1937). Source: Korail (한국철도공사)

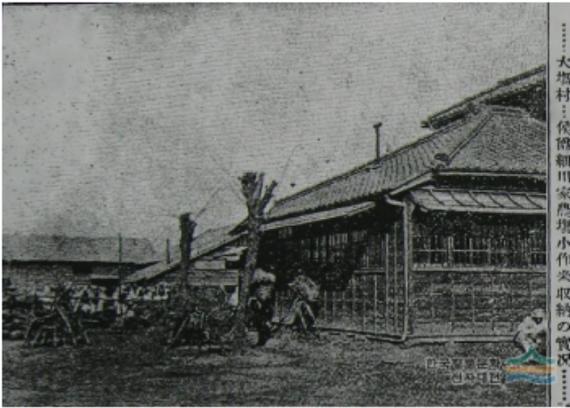


Figure 2: Tenant farmers paying rent in rice at Marquess Hosokawa Moritatsu's (細川護立) farm-estate in Iri. Source: Buddhist monk Jonggeol of Dongguksa Temple



Figure 3: Iri and surrounding fields, as seen from Iri Jinja (Shinto Shrine). Source: *Beautiful Scenes and Famous Place of Riri, Chosen: 麗里景観*. n.d. Photograph. Buddhist monk Jonggeol of Dongguksa Temple.



Figure 4: Students from Iri Agricultural School visiting Dae-a-ri (大雅里) Dam, cited to have been Korea's oldest modern dam. Source: Buddhist monk Jonggeol of Dongguksa Temple.



Figure 7: Ōhashi Sokujō (大橋即淨). Painting by 中熊文雄  
Source: Ōhashi Sokujō, *Joseon Jujae* 36 *Nyeon*, pg. 14.



Figure 5: Visiting the old headquarters of the Ik'ok Irrigation Association (present-day headquarters of the Iksan Culture and Tourism Foundation). Photograph taken during my field research in Iksan and Jeonju in North Jeolla Province.



Figure 6: Yeongguksa Temple (1921)  
Source: Ōhashi Sokujō 大橋即淨, *Joseon jujae 36 nyeon*, [36 Years in Joseon], Original title: 駐鮮三十六ヶ年, 1954, Translated by Yang Eun-yong 양은용,

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