

CREATING AN IMPERIAL CITY:

KANSAS CITY IN THE 1920s

A THESIS IN  
History

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MASTER OF ARTS

by  
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CREATING AN IMPERIAL CITY:

KANSAS CITY IN THE 1920s

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a community study of Kansas City in the 1920s as a city working to assume a prominent place within the emerging American market empire. It begins by exploring the role that men and women played in altering the worldview of the city, followed by an analysis of the way in which the topography of the city was altered to reflect the forces of empire. Methodologically it utilizes critical theory.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled "Creating an Imperial City: Kansas City in the 1920s," presented by Kory Paul Gallagher, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that it is worthy of acceptance.

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To my Grandmother -  
I miss her immensely.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1900 the Democratic Party decided to hold its nominating convention in Kansas City, Missouri. An interesting choice considering that the city did not have enough hotel rooms to accommodate all of the conventioners.<sup>1</sup> Local boosters viewed the selection as a sign that Kansas City was an up-and-coming place. But when the party faithful and the national press descended upon the downtown they begged to differ. Rather than toasting Kansas City's amenities; they satirized its wild west, cattle-town origins, lampooned its official tolerance of vice and rowdiness, and cited its escalating crime rates as evidence of urban depravity. Poultney Bigelow of *the Contemporary Review*, a magazine with national circulation, observed that in "Kansas City things are not done by halves. The popular brand of cigars during Convention week was named after a notorious highway robber called Jesse James." Kansas City had more churches and more gambling halls than any other comparably sized city. "We're a

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<sup>1</sup> Poultney Bigelow, "What I Saw at Kansas City," *The Contemporary Review* (Sep. 1900): 442-456.

live town - you bet," one local testified.<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times* lamented: "the town has many characteristics of a mining camp..."<sup>3</sup> Puzzled by New York's reputation for political corruption and immorality and Kansas City's relative anonymity the *Times* piece concluded: "In some respects it's a great advantage to be little, unimportant, and inconspicuous."<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the Kansas City of 1900 was not a place of significance.

But that would change - rapidly. By 1903 the *Times* predicted that Kansas City would overtake St. Louis as the preeminent center of commerce in Missouri.<sup>5</sup> *Outlook*, a magazine with a national circulation, in 1910 published the first of what would be many articles praising the city's Parks and Boulevards system, which beginning in 1900 radically remapped the city and beautified its neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Topics of the Times," *New York Times*, July 3, 1900, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Kansas City's Race with St. Louis for Supremacy," *New York Times*, February 15, 1903, 32.

<sup>6</sup> "Parks as a Commercial Asset," *Outlook* (December 10, 1910): 806-7.

*Architectural Record*, a highbrow magazine written by architects for architects, published a six-page review of the system. The city's residents, it gushed, "have unconsciously come to find ugliness distasteful," their "public and private buildings are improving in taste, the streets are becoming less tawdry..."<sup>7</sup> In 1911, *The World's Work* singled out Kansas City's Board of Public Welfare for its slum clearance program that was gentrifying the city one block at a time.<sup>8</sup>

In many ways, Kansas City's rising national stature paralleled America's rising position in the global community. Around the time that the United States flexed its muscles in challenging Spain, one of the hemisphere's oldest colonial powers, over Cuba, Kansas City flexed its muscles by playing host to the Democratic Party. The nation's military intervention and occupation of Cuba, followed by the noxious Platt Amendment (1901) that severely circumscribed the island's independence, and Kansas City's performance as host,

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<sup>7</sup> George F. Ford, "The Park System of Kansas City, MO.," *The Architectural Record*, December, 1916, 499-504.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Oyen, "The Awakening of the Cities," *The World's Work*, September 1911, 14725.

both received mixed reviews.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. military repression of insurrection in its newly acquired colony of the Philippines (1899-1904) cast an additional pall over the empire's future. Regardless, both the nation and the city were on the move.

As war ravaged Europe from 1914-1917, the world's great powers eagerly awaited Washington's response. The delayed infusion of nearly one million doughboys into the fighting on the western front in early 1918 proved decisive to the allied victory over Germany. Thus, by the end of the Great War the United States, its hemispheric and Pacific empire intact, had emerged as a leading global power. Kansas City, at the same moment, was on the cusp of becoming a leading city within the empire. In 1900, Kansas City was a community of 163,752; by

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<sup>9</sup> Leading up to military intervention in the Cuban rebellion, the rhetoric used positioned the movement as one of independence, akin to the American Revolution. Therefore, it became politically unfeasible for those in favor of an imperialist land grab to make Cuba an American colony. That said, Congress passed the Platt Amendment to the treaty that ended the war giving the United States the right to intervene if Cuba's political system or economy became destabilized or reformed in a way detrimental to American business.

1920 that number had more than doubled to 324,410.<sup>10</sup> Before the United States had entered the Great War the banks of Kansas City were processing almost four billion dollars in transactions; by 1920 banks increased their transactions to \$11,615,142,427.<sup>11</sup> In 1914 the Chamber of Commerce celebrated the addition of forty-one new businesses and an increase in revenue of approximately 1.5 million dollars; by 1920 an increase of production in the distribution sector alone resulted in an additional \$127,000,000 in the local economy.<sup>12</sup> By 1927, Kansas City ranked first nationally in the following: largest livestock exchange building; distribution of

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<sup>10</sup> "Table 15 - Composition of the Population, For Cities of 10,000 or More," *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930* (Population, Volume III, Part I), 1355.

<sup>11</sup> Bank transactions are an inflated measure of economic activity because of a theory in economics called "The Velocity of Money." As a stand-alone statistic they offer little insight. I have added that information for purposes of comparison.

<sup>12</sup> "The Year in Review," *The Kansas Citian*, January 4, 1921, 4-5, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

agricultural implements; winter wheat market; stock and feed cattle; stock hogs; distribution of kaffir corn and milo maize; distribution of lumber; distribution of seeds; hay market. The city also claimed to be first in the nation in connected parks and boulevards, and beautiful residential districts.<sup>13</sup>

### **Internationalizing Local History**

This work explores and analyzes the many connections between the local and the global during the decade that followed the end of the Great War. The city's business community - a source of wealth, local leadership, and global ambition - proved central to the inter-connecting process. During the period, business leaders began to construct a vision of the United States' place within the post-war global order that reflected the emergence of the American market empire. This was more than mere boosterism, though the desire to elevate the city's position in the United States played an

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<sup>13</sup> *Industrial Statistics of Greater Kansas City*, (Kansas City: Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, 1927), 8. LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library. Kansas City, Missouri.

important role. The motivation to increase Kansas City's profile both nationally and internationally sprang from many of the same sources. Kansas City's business leaders imagined a self-identity that emphasized wealth, knowledge, power, and white male privilege. At the local level they hoped to exceed their home state rival, St. Louis, not only in wealth, but in architectural grandeur and cosmopolitan pizzazz. On the international front they imagined themselves among the great commercial and cultural centers across the entire globe. In fact, for Kansas City's business elite, local boosterism and internationalism were inextricably linked.

At the same time a cosmopolitan consumer culture emerged, especially among the city's upper and middle class women. These women, because of the access afforded them by disposable income, helped connect Kansas City to the world by consuming the foreign, both real and imagined. As the city transformed from an outpost of westward expansion to an imperial city it was necessary to create places where the empire and the imperial experience could be celebrated. This resulted in the internationalization of architecture within the city, including residential neighborhoods and shopping centers - what I call domestic places of empire. But the benefits of the imperial city only extended so far. Women, who by 1920 had

gained voting rights within the American market empire, were still largely marginalized in terms of access to political office and business leadership. Although the pushers and shakers who helped build America's modern market empire, envisioned an empire based on dollars and markets rather than battleships and armies, they nonetheless assumed their international market empire would be ordered by a social hierarchy that elevated white men over other groups.

While traditional historiography portrays domestic and international history as distinct and separate, this study emphasizes the interactive and mutually-reinforcing nature of global, local, and regional forces in Kansas City and United States history. It shows on the one hand how international forces influenced the city's urban development - and on the other hand how Kansas Citians' aspirations for world class status shaped their view of the world and America's place in that world. As historian Amy Kaplan explains in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, "domestic and foreign spaces are closer than we think, and that the dynamics of imperial expansion cast them into jarring proximity."<sup>14</sup> Kaplan

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<sup>14</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

argues that historians have "to challenge the traditional understanding of imperialism as a one-way imposition of power in traditional colonies, and to call attention instead to ambiguities and contradictions of imperial relations in the formation of a national culture."<sup>15</sup> Although this study utilizes Kansas City as its example, the internationalism evident in an American every-place like Kansas City of the 1920s points to a national culture of imperialism in the decade of 'isolationism.'

As such, this work has been heavily influenced by the recent "cultural turn" in the history of U.S. foreign relations which highlights the impact of domestic cultural constructions of class, race, and gender; patterns of modern consumerism; and discourses on national identity on the conduct of U.S. foreign relations.<sup>16</sup> Taking a cue from

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See: Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Post-War Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of American Culture*; and Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American*

historian Akira Iriye, I emphasize how the modern process of globalization has accelerated since the nineteenth century not in opposition to nationalism and localism, but in tandem with those forces.<sup>17</sup>

Elite Kansas Citians, like other U.S. citizens, articulated a strong sense of local, urban identity in the early twentieth century and established domestic social hierarchies along class, race, and gender lines. In 1920, the 266,197 native white Kansas Citians, 82.1% of the city, comprised the top of that hierarchy. The 27,320 foreign born white residents, 8.4% of the city, and the 30,719 black residents, 9.5% of the city, represented the bottom rungs of that hierarchy. Relations between the city's African American population and its white population were regulated by the dictates of Jim Crow racial segregation which enforced separate housing, educational, and shopping facilities. Also residing at the bottom of the hierarchy were the city's 2,032

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*Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*  
(New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*  
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

residents of Hispanic descent, less than 1% of the city, but rapidly growing during the 1920s once restrictive immigration legislation closed the golden door to European newcomers.<sup>18</sup> Like their African American counterparts, Kansas City's Mexican population was relegated for the most part to separate residential areas.

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<sup>18</sup> "SDA 3.4 Tables: IPUMS 1920 1% Tables," IPUMS, Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, <http://sda.usa.ipums.org:80/cgi-bin/sdaweb/hsda3>. These statistics were not captured by the 1920 census, rather the Minnesota Population Center, based on a study of 1% of the census records from that year, calculated an estimate of the Hispanic population in Kansas City, and other metropolitan areas. Some of the markers they utilized for determining if a resident was Hispanic were place of birth, Hispanic surname, and marriage to a person with a Hispanic surname. While it is helpful to have an estimate of this population, it must be noted that the methodology for creating that estimate has flaws. Regardless, this indicates that the Hispanic community in Kansas City, Missouri, was small. The Hispanic community in Kansas City, Kansas, just over the stateline from Kansas City, Missouri, was approximetly five times larger.

At the same time elites maintained this hierarchy at home, they imagined themselves as citizens of the world and positioned their class as privileged players within that world. While their internationalism might compel them to debate the leading global political issues of their day, they more often expressed their international consciousness through more subtle means: by memorializing the recently concluded Great War, by purchasing imported oriental rugs with which to adorn their prairie-style homes, by making voluntary contributions to overseas relief projects, by reading fiction taking place in foreign places, by incorporating Spanish architectural themes in important commercial developments, and by admiring the latest fashions of London and Paris. While they were guided by a sense of international goodwill, through these activities the city's elite usually associated things British and European with privilege and status - while discussions of Mexico, China, and Russian often reeked of varying degrees of condescension.

To explore the intersections between Kansas City and international history, I rely on methodologies drawn from critical theory, which historian Frank Costigliola has described as "...what we might otherwise dismiss as 'just words' constitutes language, a system that reflects and creates

meaning. Scholars can discern historical evidence in the assumptions and the logic (rational and emotional) in embassy telegrams, diaries, films, and other texts.”<sup>19</sup> To evaluate the domestic implications of empire I have recovered cultural meanings from local newspapers, periodicals, speeches, letters, diaries, brochures, the material culture of architecture, statuary, and monuments; even the layout of streets, boulevards, and neighborhoods.

### **Reconsidering American Isolationism**

This study yields several important insights into the history of American encounters with the world. Although scholars such as Joan Hoff, Melvyn Leffler, and Victoria DeGrazia have convincingly demonstrated America’s diplomatic and economic engagement with the world during the interwar era, the popular notion that America fell into a deep isolationism following World War I persists. Much of this perception is traceable to the United States Senate’s rejection of President Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Castigliola, “Reading for Meaning: Theory, Language, and Metaphor,” *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 279.

proposal in 1919-20. Frank H. Simonds, an American scholar, in his 1927 book concerning the failures of the Treaty of Versailles wrote that "not only is there no American concern with what is happening beyond the Atlantic, but there is also neither general interest nor considerable curiosity. It is the conviction that America is a world to itself..."<sup>20</sup> But isolationism - the preclusion of international alliances and agreements and the elimination or severe restriction of foreign trade - is more than just a foreign relations strategy. It also represents a state of consciousness that places a higher value on the provincial than the cosmopolitan, on the traditional than the progressive, on the domestic than the foreign. Despite the rejection of the League, American international behaviors during the twenties simply do not meet the definition of isolation. The United States emerged from World War I as the world's largest exporter of goods - sending more than eight billion dollars in goods abroad in 1920 alone (four times higher than exports in 1910).<sup>21</sup> In 1920 and 1921

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<sup>20</sup> Frank H. Simonds, *How Europe Made Peace Without America*. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927), 400.

<sup>21</sup> "Table eE533-550," *Historic Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition Online*.

Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes hosted the foreign ministers of the world's leading naval powers and negotiated an unprecedented multilateral naval arms reduction treaty. In addition to maintaining colonial possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific, the United States government carried out military occupations throughout the decade in Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic - in part to maintain American management of the Panama Canal, one of the world's most important globalizing waterways.

This study provides additional evidence of global consciousness and activism at the local level - in the heart of the American Midwest, a region often identified as the cradle of U.S. isolationism.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Kansas City leaders, and to some extent its working class populations as well, became more aware of and interested in the world during the twenties than they ever had before. Local business avidly pursued foreign trade and investment opportunities, the shopping public nosed out bargain basement prices on exotic imports, the city's elite feted foreign dignitaries and

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<sup>22</sup> Selig Adler, *Uncertain Giant 1921-1941: American Foreign Policy Between the Wars* (New York: Collier MacMillan, 1966).

organized lecture programs on international political conditions and foreign cultures.

### **Reconsidering Empire**

An examination of Kansas City's interwar internationalism also adds new texture to the history of American empire; a history that is complex and disputed. Some historians, such as Robert Kagan, believe that the pursuit of empire is deeply embedded in American history - traceable to the nation's early experience as an outpost of the British Empire, to Thomas Jefferson's vision of America as "an empire of liberty," to the conquest of the west and the enactment of genocide against indigenous populations. Once the West was won, American imperial designs transferred to overseas possessions such as Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. But the conflict that established the United States' overseas empire, the War of 1898, also confused the nature of the empire. The cases in which Washington assumed formal political and military control of other peoples and territories remained relatively few. And following the defeat of the Philippine insurgency, at a cost of more than four thousand American G.I.'s, much of the U.S. press lost its taste for imperial glory. This has led some historians to claim that the United States is not an imperial power. This also helped to

perpetuate the claim that the United States was an isolationist state, rejecting not just entangling alliances, but also colonies, imperial competition, and a leadership role in the global economy.

To some degree both camps are wrong and right. It is correct that the American expansion out of Chesapeake and Plymouth Bays, ending only with the subjugation of all land and peoples to the west, can be defined as nothing short of imperialism. With the conclusion of the War of 1898, for the first time, the United States gained control of overseas holdings, which also constituted an imperial project. Yet, that is where the empire, if looked at in traditional terms, ends. Rather than becoming a direct colony, Cuba, the gem of the Spanish empire, emerged as an independent nation, albeit with elements of U.S. protectorate status. In other cases during the first three decades of the twentieth century - including the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, and Nicaragua - American military interventions and civilian control proved to be relatively short-lived - much in contrast to Belgian, British, French, and German colonialism in the Afro-Asian world.

By the end of the Great War, however, it is clear that the United States was emerging as the leading power in the

world. As traditional European empires faltered, the United States began to create a new form of empire, what Victoria de Grazia has referred to as the "market empire." According to de Grazia, the American market empire was based on a uniquely American view of conflict expressed by Woodrow Wilson, "...the world's first leader to recognize that statecraft could find leverage in the physical needs, psychic discomforts, and situations of social unease being unleashed by the new material civilization of mass consumption."<sup>23</sup> Wilson, along with many American business leaders envisioned exporting American-style chain stores, including Filenes and Woolworths and marketing big brand goods such as Gillette, Ford, and Borden's to industrialized Europe, Canada, and Australia. It also assumed that less developed nations and colonial territories would be assigned a lower status in the global system as low-income producers of raw materials and foodstuffs.<sup>24</sup> Asian rubber put tires on Ford's most popular of

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<sup>23</sup> Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistable Empire: America's Advance Through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>24</sup> William Appleman William, *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament*

global consumer goods, Brazilian coffee perked up the world's most affluent consumers.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the market empire seemed on the surface, at least to American business and political officials, to be no empire at all. The notion of economic expansion came to most Americans as a cultural given - it came in the guise of common sense. In the words of historian William Appleman Williams, the American empire of the early twentieth century evolved simply as "a way of life."<sup>26</sup>

#### **The Broken World of the 1920s & the American Mission**

To many political leaders in the United States, certainly to Wilson and to his Republican successors Warren G. Harding,

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*Along with a Few Thoughts About an Alternative* (Ig Publishing, 2006), 131.

<sup>25</sup> See: Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 11-15; and Richard P. Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 92-932.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover, the American approach to empire was well suited to meet the political, economic, psychological, and cultural needs of the post-war world. The end of the Great War signaled the collapse of traditional balance of power politics and ushered in a new international order, marked not only by the demands of nation states for security, but also by an array of new international social, economic, and cultural needs. At the Versailles Treaty negotiations in 1919, spokespersons for colonized areas, including French Indochina, Japanese occupied Korea, British dominated India, demanded racial equality and self-determination.<sup>27</sup> Transnational women's groups demanded suffrage.<sup>28</sup> Labor leaders and socialists issued renewed calls for social justice.<sup>29</sup> Wilson had raised expectations with his

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<sup>27</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

wartime eloquence on behalf of self-determination, but as Erez Manela has shown Wilson's strong sense of racial paternalism prevented him from considering self-determination for non-white populations in the Afro-Asian world.<sup>30</sup>

Instead, Wilson proposed his League of Nations to help manage the new complexities of the global community. European governments, still enamored of power politics, reluctantly went along, but the United States Senate, wary of sacrificing unilateral prerogatives, rejected the League - leaving open the question of how to bring order out of postwar chaos.

The postwar setting also was transformed by the international vision set forth by the leaders of Russia's recent Bolshevik revolution. Rather than a world made safe for consumerism, Moscow preached the universal notion of a global revolution of the proletariat. The anxiety provoked by the Russian Revolution was elevated by Europe's postwar economic instability: the collapse of manufacturing, the dislocation of refugees, and before widespread hunger that raised the specter of continent-wide unrest. The Russian "threat" was also amplified on the American home front by the presence of ethnic and class divisions and the fear of domestic disunity. Among Kansas City's white elite, fears of class and ethnic

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<sup>30</sup> Manela, 223.

rebellion against the established hierarchical order ran strong. In response, the Wilson administration unleashed the repressive arm of the state. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, in an effort to remove these perceived dangers, appointed a young attorney, J. Edgar Hoover, to lead a unit of the Justice Department charged with hunting subversives. Palmer and Hoover were responsible for the arrest and detainment of suspected communists, anarchists, and other radicals, often without warrants, judicial oversight, or legal representation. Over 6,000 suspected Reds were caught up in "Palmer Raids," and several hundred were illegally deported on Palmer's orders.<sup>31</sup>

Woodrow Wilson recognized that America could not sustain its power through the methods traditionally utilized by empires. He observed that the trade regimen imposed by traditional empires constituted the primary obstacle to their longevity; their difficulty arose because they insisted on forcing "the tastes of the manufacturing country on the

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<sup>31</sup> Melvyn Leffler, *The Spector of Communism: The United States and the Origin of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 15.

country in which markets are being sought.”<sup>32</sup> His answer to sustaining and expanding America’s new found role in the global order was also based in commerce. At a salesmen’s convention, Wilson encouraged his audience to “let your thoughts and imagination run abroad throughout the whole world, and with the inspiration of the thought that you are Americans and are meant to carry liberty and justice and the principles of humanity wherever you go...”<sup>33</sup> After explaining that the scope of the American mission was the ‘whole world,’ he provided them with the key to American success and power: “...go out and sell goods that will make the world more comfortable and more happy, and convert them to the principles of happiness.”<sup>34</sup> Wilsonianism envisioned a world in which security would not be guaranteed by a League of Nations alone. A dependence on the comforts afforded by American consumerism and mass production would also ensure the new global order.

The United States Senate defeated the Treaty of Versailles and American membership in the League of Nations, however, the Rotary Club and Chambers of Commerce embraced

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<sup>32</sup> De Grazia, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

America's sales pitch to the world. The Harding and Coolidge Administrations placed the hard-driving Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, in a position to assist private interests in their conquest of world markets. Hoover, tagged by historian Joan Hoff as a "forgotten progressive," believed in limited government, but he also believed in the need for government cooperation with private interests who spread the American doctrine of free enterprise abroad. His tool of choice was the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (BFDC), which was charged with collecting and disseminating information to American businesses regarding foreign trade, with emphasis on manufacturing needs in foreign countries, and the global commodities market. Under Hoover, this agency was greatly expanded and began to directly encourage domestic concerns to engage in foreign trade.

### **Kansas City: Imperial City**

Numerous scholars have illustrated the ways in which the United States exercised global leadership as the nation expanded its market empire. What scholars have not addressed is the degree to which the market empire affected the nation domestically. Determining the impact of empire, especially an empire not focused on territorial gain, is a difficult

proposition. If the market empire was as pervasive as Williams and de Grazia claim, it would be present in cultural and economic hubs such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The long known cosmopolitan and global nature of these cities, however, might lead one to misinterpret the very nature of those places as evidence of empire. In order to assess the degree to which the American people themselves were considering the foreign and participating in this empire, historians must look beyond the usual suspects.

This type of evaluation requires the examination of an American everyplace, somewhere akin to Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*. A place so commonly American that evidence of imperial leanings could be extrapolated to the whole of the United States. This study requires a look into the "Heart of America," Kansas City, Missouri.

Nestled into the bluffs overlooking the confluence of the Missouri and Kaw (or Kansas) Rivers, Kansas City began as an outpost of internationalism in North America. France, the first European imperial overlords of what would become Missouri, approached colonization with a much different philosophy from that of England or Spain. Instead of creating permanent settlements, and encouraging colonists to migrate, the French created a trade network throughout North America

largely focused on procuring pelts from nearby American Indian.<sup>35</sup> As the meeting point of the two rivers regularly played host to tribes, the French established a trading outpost not at the confluence, but nearby, around present-day Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>36</sup> Following the transfer of Louisiana to the United States in 1803 this changed rapidly.

François Chouteau, whose family's firm had been "King of the Fur Trade" in the Louisiana territory prior to sale to the United States, and remained King following the transfer, established the first settlement that would eventually develop into Kansas City in 1821. The small fur trading outpost and family home that Chouteau established within ten years was surrounded by several small farms, as settlement stretched along the banks of the Missouri River. From his trading post, Chouteau would purchase pelts that were shipped to his family's headquarters in St. Louis. From there, furs were

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<sup>35</sup> Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *Frontiers: A Short History of the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 30.

<sup>36</sup> Darrell Garwood, *Crossroads of America: The Story of Kansas City* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1948), 18-19.

distributed to New York, London, and Paris.<sup>37</sup> Thus, even in its early stages the locality that would become Kansas City was inextricably linked to international trade and the global order.

But Chouteau's trading post was just one of two settlements - each connected to transnational trade - that would eventually merge to form Kansas City. In 1822 William Becknell, a Missourian, carved a wagon trail from western Missouri to Santa Fe, the northern most economic hub of the newly liberated Mexican nation. Over the Santa Fe Trail American made goods were exchanged for Mexican gold and mules, both of which would be instrumental to the development of Missouri.<sup>38</sup> Seeing the business opportunity in placing a trading post at one end of the trail, John McCoy established a general store to serve those venturing out. His establishment would blossom into the community of Westport. Chouteau's outpost (which would officially become the Town of Kansas in 1850) and Westport would continue to thrive as separate communities even after the disruption of the fur trade in the 1840's and the decline of the Santa Fe Trail due to the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Hine and Faragher, 66.

expansion of railroad lines.<sup>39</sup> By 1897, when the two communities merged into the City of Kansas City, Missouri, their dusty beginnings as outposts on international borders were a distant memory. But the movement of the border between the United States and its neighbors farther to the west did not halt the growth of the city. It did, however, draw significant attention away from the city, as other cities in the Southwest (Houston, Dallas, Santa Fe, Phoenix, Los Angeles) rose in prominence.

By 1920, Kansas City was the nineteenth largest city, by population, in the United States. Ahead of it on the list were cultural trendsetters like New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Boston and Los Angeles. Also ranking with more residents than Kansas City were communities that failed to capture the nation's cultural imagination, such as Milwaukee, Newark, and Minneapolis.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the decade the nation knew nothing of the Liberty Memorial, Kansas City Jazz or barbeque. By the end of the decade each of these would become important cultural symbols on a national scale. In 1900, Kansas City was

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>40</sup> "Population of the Twenty Largest U.S. Cities, 1900-1925," <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0922422.html>

a rather plain place. People and events that occurred there could occur anywhere in America. Just two decades later, people were "goin' to Kansas City." The city had transformed itself from an everywhere to a somewhere.

Like the city's transition from an outpost of western expansion to a leading imperial city, the first chapter of this study begins with an examination of the city's business community. By way of membership in the Chamber of Commerce the elite white men who guided the city's commercial life paralleled the men of de Grazia's market empire. With a foundation in commerce, fellowship, and charity, the men of the Chamber of Commerce engaged the world with a clear worldview that global leadership had fallen on their nation. At the same time, the Chamber utilized its programming to reinforce the ideas that became the basis of the market empire: a belief in free markets and democracy; the rejection of communism; and the necessity of the global acceptance of Christianity.

In chapter two, I explore the counterparts of the men of the Chamber of Commerce - women of means. As their written words have largely been lost, this portion of the study was constructed by applying critical theory to the media that was local and readily available. Upper and middle class women

during the 1920s continued to explore the world in ways very similar to those of previous generations. Much like the women in Kristin Hoganson's study of consumerism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kansas City women participated in the market empire whenever they shopped for their favorite imported household items - and paid for them with the world's most valued currency: the dollar. But, with the advent of the "New Woman" and passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and the availability of affordable and efficient transportation to a rapidly growing middle class, more women from a much greater diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, expanded their role to include exploring the globe first-hand, and acquiring the foreign policy knowledge necessary to be informed voters.<sup>41</sup>

The third chapter shifts the focus from the people of empire to domestic places of empire. Kansas City achieved national attention in the 1920s when local developer J.C. Nichols designed and built the nation's first planned shopping mall. Built near affluent residences, and featuring ample parking for the age of the automobile, the area also featured

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<sup>41</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 234-238.

Spanish-style architecture and an international potpourri of fountains, gargoyles, and other assorted statuary. In focusing on a shopping center of dubious cultural heritage, we see how Kansas Citians placed other nations in the global hierarchy and how they participated directly in the commercial end of the market empire.

The study concludes by exploring the construction and meaning of the Liberty Memorial, the nation's largest and most expensive memorial to the Great War. The planning for building this monument provides a window onto the community wide discussion that took place concerning America's place in the new global order and the city's place in the expanding market empire. At the same time, the sources, for the first time, point to community-wide support of the imperial project.

Taken in concert, the chapters of this study point to a community which possessed a strong sense of place and purpose within the global community. While the city's elites, especially its male elites, spearheaded the imperial project, it is clear that many Kansas Citians - whether through fund drives for war memorials or attendance of community events at the Country Club Plaza - supported the enterprise. Beyond the Liberty Memorial it is difficult to determine the level of popular international consciousness in the city. African

Americans and Mexicans rarely ventured into the Country Club district, except as closely supervised employees or domestic servants. Nor is it likely that many purchased imported finery. The voices of Kansas City's first and second-generation European immigrants remain largely absent from the documents as well. Yet, to the extent that city leaders carried clout, it can be said that they successfully steered the community as a whole to aspire to "world class" status. They did so not by making grandiose speeches in support of empire, but simply by making empire a way of life.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CITY'S BUSINESSMEN ENVISION A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

In the 1920s President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed that "the chief business of the American people is business." He also could have said that the chief foreign policy tool of the nation was business. The international order was broken following the Great War. The global economy was in shambles. And the methods of maintaining balance of power politics were discredited by four years of unprecedented warfare. While many government leaders applauded the nation's rejection of membership in the League of Nations and Congress' erection of record high tariffs - both often cited as signs of political and economic isolationism - Washington turned to private business to pick up the slack and deepen America's engagement with the world.

Victoria de Grazia, in her monograph *Irresistible Empire*, details how business leaders, largely with government encouragement, but not direction, created and nurtured the American market empire. The first wave of their efforts came through exporting American-style business associations such as the United States-based International Rotary Club which spawned branches in Europe, Asia, and around the world. The male members of the Rotary who met regularly over lunch not

only espoused the ameliorative benefits of market capitalism, but embraced an ethic of community service and global camaraderie. The conclusions she draws about Rotary abroad, however, can be readily applied to domestic organizations with an internationalist view as well. Much like the Rotary Club, the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce provided a venue for fellowship among the business leaders of the community. Both clubs served as "the place to start to alert men of goodwill everywhere that all people were similar in their wants and fears," which occurred at "...the weekly gathering at midday with food and talk."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's starting assumption that all people the world over shared similar wants and fears - echoed by business ideologues across the nation - underpinned the market empire.

Kansas City was uniquely positioned to participate in the American market empire. The city boasted of twelve distinct industrial districts served by thirteen railroad truck lines.<sup>2</sup> In 1926, like most years of the decade, the city's railroads collected more than \$100 million dollars in transportation

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<sup>1</sup> De Grazia, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Industrial Statistics of Kansas City (1929), 9.

fees.<sup>3</sup> In 1928, Kansas City's factory output (more than \$650 million) was largely distributed to the Southwest (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah) a trade territory essentially dominated by the community's business interests.<sup>4</sup> Very little of the city's manufacturing output was utilized as a tool in the international market empire - during the 1920s the city's customs receipts averaged just over \$550,000 yearly.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the modest level of exported manufactured goods, the city's business leaders - especially those who filled the membership roles of the Chamber of Commerce - continuously dreamed and plotted for the expansion of trade with Europe, Mexico, and East Asia.

As the city's manufacturers planned for future foreign trade, its agricultural entrepreneurs were already in the thick of things by the 1920s. In 1927 a pamphlet of economic statistics assembled by the Chamber of Commerce declared that Kansas City was first in the United States in: distribution of agricultural implements; winter wheat market; stock and feed

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 11.

cattle, stock hogs; distribution of Kaffir corn and Milo maize; distribution of lumber; distribution of seeds; and largest hay market.<sup>6</sup> International trade statistics for the 1920s are few and far between, especially for specific communities. But, from 1924-28, the United States exported on average 189,000,000 bushels of wheat each year (22% of the global average).<sup>7</sup> During that same period, Kansas City's market processed on average 83,000,000 bushels. Considering the city's importance within the agricultural sector, it can be surmised that a significant portion of the commodities traded in Kansas City ended up at a foreign port.<sup>8</sup>

While business may have been the Chamber's top priority, that focus was not their only priority. The movers and shakers of Kansas City, the nucleus of the Chamber, kept abreast of events in the rest of the world. They were especially concerned with obstacles to a functioning global economy but

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<sup>6</sup> Industrial Statistics of Greater Kansas City (1927).

<sup>7</sup> Dirks, 210.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the non-descript nature of commodities, coupled with the fact that they changed hands several times as they were transported to the final consumer, makes it difficult to track the city's primary exports.

they also stood ready to assist relief efforts - usually by financial contributions, to post-war relief and humanitarian disasters. To these champions of the international market place, all humans, regardless of geographic location or cultural differences, had the same basic goals: access to consumer goods, a high standard of living, a responsive government in which they could participate in some form, economic freedom, and religious salvation through Jesus Christ. What the world wanted and needed, according to the men of the Chamber, was the Americanization of the globe. Chamber activists may not have intended their notion of service to be paternalistic, but their privileged status in the local and world community belied a strong sense of noblesse oblige.<sup>9</sup>

That unintentional paternalism also informed the way they viewed challenges to the new global order. Communist regimes abroad and radicals at home all received the ire of the Chamber. While they did not engage those elements directly, the Chamber addressed them by applauding efforts to repress communism at home, or by inviting speakers to address the group on the status of communism abroad.

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<sup>9</sup> De Grazia made similar observations of the men of the International Rotary Club.

If the business community was the guiding force behind the American market empire, it was only natural that the men of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce would advance that cause. The basis of which would be the city's economic output.

The city, and the elite white men who owned and operated the majority of its businesses, had made considerable gains over the previous decades. In 1914 the Chamber celebrated the addition of forty-one new businesses and an increase in economic output of \$1,150,000 from the previous year.<sup>10</sup> By 1921 the city would revel in a \$127,000,000 increase just in distribution related profits.<sup>11</sup> The gains were largely built on Kansas City's status as a transportation hub.

Being located in the center of the nation did not naturally make Kansas City an advantageous location for participating in both the national and global economy. The way in which the nation's economy developed, however, made Kansas City one of the nation's most important crossroads. A pamphlet created by the Chamber of Commerce in 1919 explained why: "We

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<sup>10</sup> "Trade Statistics," *The Kansas Citian*, October 1914, 210, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>11</sup> "The Year in Review," 4-5.

hold that it is more important in considering a location for a manufacturing plant, that the location be selected with reference to the market to be served...rather than the sources of supply...for the finished product."<sup>12</sup> The pamphlet claimed that Kansas City was the "...logical location for a manufacturing plant to serve the great West and Southwest territory. Any location further east would not be suitable for supplying the needs of this great territory except at a loss."<sup>13</sup> To indicate the importance of this trade territory, the Chamber indicated that in 1890 the territory's population was 8,090,000. By 1918 it had more than doubled to 16,919,723.<sup>14</sup>

This territory, however, was not the undisputed possession of Kansas City - other cities, notably St. Louis and New Orleans, challenged the city's supremacy in supplying goods to the Southwest. What gave Kansas City the advantage

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<sup>12</sup> "A Brief Outlining the Advantages of Kansas City as a Factory Location" (Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, 1919), 2, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

was its transportation capacity. In 1919 the city could boast of fourteen trunk railroad lines, and 32 additional railroad lines for distribution between the city's twelve industrial districts.<sup>15</sup> In 1926, Kansas City's railroads collected more than \$100,000,000 in fees for transportation. Only Chicago offered more railroad lines. But Kansas City was closest to the most rapidly developing trade territory in the nation, causing even Chicago stalwarts like Montgomery Ward & Co. to "open an immense plant in Kansas City."<sup>16</sup> Other nationally recognized corporations, such as The American Radiator Company, the National Biscuit Company, and Loose-Wiles Biscuit Company, followed them in building plants and distribution centers in Kansas City.<sup>17</sup>

Kansas City's direct interaction with the global economy, while limited at the start of the decade, was growing. In 1880 the city's customs receipts were \$102,751, less than half of the \$227,177 recorded in 1920. The city's participation in international trade picked up significant steam going into the decade with \$614,523 in customs receipts in 1925. While growth

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

was evident, these totals represented far less than 1% of the city's total economic output.<sup>18</sup> That said, these numbers are somewhat misleading. The vast majority of Kansas City's exports consisted of agricultural commodities, which changed ownership several times between farm and port.

Despite the ambitions for a larger stake in international trade, the national economy in which Kansas City's business community existed functioned under contradicting goals. Under Republican leadership throughout the decade, the United States government not only promoted American exports, it also maintained record high tariffs on imported goods via the Fordney-McCumber Tariff. The lack of mutuality naturally hindered the nation's overall trade potential. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover explained those conflicting policies when he remarked that "...there is no practical force in the contention that we cannot have a protective tariff and a growing foreign trade."<sup>19</sup> In the short-term, with other nations unable to compete with American

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<sup>18</sup> Industrial Statistics of Greater Kansas City (Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, 1927), 5, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 177.

production as they recovered from the Great War, he was correct. This lack of reciprocation, however, would spell economic disaster. The affects of these policies would become more apparent as the roaring twenties gave way to the depressed thirties.

To support the business community's efforts both domestically and internationally the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce published a weekly magazine, *The Kansas Citian*, throughout the 1920s. The magazine reported the happenings of the organization, trade statistics, events of note for the business community, and the proceedings of the Chamber's weekly lunch meeting, which usually featured a lecture from an expert on a topic of popular interest. None of the articles include a byline, clearly portraying the content within as the official stance of the Chamber of Commerce specifically, and the Kansas City business community in general. Other than the occasional quote from a member of the Chamber, the only voices that are clearly reflected in the publication are of those of experts who delivered the mealtime lecture. Nonetheless, the material printed within its pages, and the topics addressed at those luncheons, provide a window into the worldview of the men who managed the city's commercial life. During a period popularly remembered for its isolationist leanings, the

businessmen of Kansas City were clearly looking outward for their economic future.

The lure of foreign markets sparked the city's business community's interest in things international. Even as they were calling for avoiding the entangling alliances that caused the Great War, elements of that community sought to increase the penetration of their products in overseas markets. This increased economic activity, though they did not realize it at the time, necessitated an increase in relations with foreign peoples. At the same time, increased contact with foreign markets did little to increase knowledge of, and comfort with, the foreign other. The business elite of Kansas City continued to view the cultures and peoples of markets into which they wanted to expand as less than themselves. This view of the other did not just influence the way in which the business elite viewed potential consumers. In 1920 Kansas City was a community of 324,410, of that only 8.4% were first generation immigrants.<sup>20</sup> Of that 8.4%, the vast majority were from European nations: Germany, 3,958; Russia, 3,848; Italy: 3,318; Ireland, 2,584; England, 1,925; and Sweden, 1,899. The city's first generation immigrant population also included 1,797

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<sup>20</sup> "Table 15," 1355.

Mexicans and 1,577 Canadians.<sup>21</sup> This lack of a significant immigrant population not only allowed the city to contend that it was the most American city, it also limited the business elites' ability to understand and interact with foreign others. Kansas City was perhaps the most ethnically homogenous of all major urbanized American communities.

Yet, interest in foreign markets is reflected repeatedly in articles in *The Kansas Citian*. The January 6, 1920 edition carried the headline "Foreign Trade Opportunity."<sup>22</sup> The article explained that the International Export Company (of Dallas, Texas) and Ochoa & Corey (of El Paso, Texas) sought connections with Kansas City firms seeking to expand overseas. The International Export Company, in particular, expressed interest in Kansas City businesses that were "contemplating extending their lines to Latin America and Mexico and also with concerns already established there."<sup>23</sup>

Especially in the years immediately following the Great

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<sup>21</sup> Industrial Statistics of Greater Kansas City (1927), 8.

<sup>22</sup> "Foreign Trade Opportunity," *The Kansas Citian*, January 6, 1921, 11, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

War interest in trade with Europe increased; this resulted in an increase in the number of articles published that presented to the reader products available for purchase to facilitate foreign trade. An article from 1921 declared that G. Mignolet, the Belgian Consul stationed in Kansas City, had available for purchase or consultation a business directory of Belgium "in regard to industry, commerce, marine and colony issues."<sup>24</sup> The American Book and Printing Company offered a similar "classified business directory of Mexico, which it is placing on sale to those interested in the development of foreign trade."<sup>25</sup> Indicating that some of Kansas City's business elite lacked sufficient knowledge of foreign trade, *The Kansas Citian* published an article discussing a correspondence business course available via Columbia University in "foreign exchange...of interest to men in banks and commercial houses who

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<sup>24</sup> "Business Directory of Belgium," *The Kansas Citian*, October 4, 1921, 743, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>25</sup> "Mexico Business Directory," *The Kansas Citian*, February 8, 1921, 108, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

have to deal with foreign businesses."<sup>26</sup> The piece provided some insight into the topics addressed: "The course includes a clear explanation of foreign exchange rates, the instruments used in foreign commerce, and the prevailing practices followed in financing foreign business."<sup>27</sup> If Kansas City was going to seize its prospective place in the growing American empire, its business leaders would need to be more familiar with the intricacies of overseas commerce.

The clearest indication of the United States' and Kansas City's expanding importance in the global economy can be found in an article titled "World Trade Cruise: To Exhibit American Products in Many Foreign Ports."<sup>28</sup> It reported that the Anderson Overseas Corporation was organizing a world trade cruise that would visit "Cuba, South America, South Africa,

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<sup>26</sup> "Home Study Course in Foreign Exchange," *The Kansas Citian*, November 1, 1921, 822, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "World Trade Cruise: To Exhibit American Products in Many Foreign Ports," *The Kansas Citian*, November 1, 1921, 820, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Australia, thence through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean ports of Spain, France, England, Holland, Sweden, Norway and return to the United States."<sup>29</sup> While in port, local business leaders would have the opportunity to board the ship and view the latest in American industry. In essence, the ship was to serve as a mobile trade convention. Readers were told that several cities had already reserved space and that organizers expected that space on the cruise would sell out. The cost for the cruise "for each person on the trip will be \$10,000 and space will be sold at \$75 per square foot."<sup>30</sup> The article indicated that Kansas City firms had shown considerable interest and that it was important for the city to have a sizeable contingent representing the city on board.<sup>31</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce, as an organization, also became directly involved in facilitating overseas trade. The most basic way of doing so was by disseminating information concerning important foreign trade events and opportunities. On November 29, 1921, *The Kansas Citian* informed readers that "The Third Official Commercial Fair of Brussels will open on

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

April 3, 1922...applications for entry of exhibits at this fair should be sent...at the earliest possible date."<sup>32</sup>

The Chamber's role in foreign trade also consisted of relaying information on behalf of the United States government. During the 1920s, as the federal government was said to be pursuing an isolationist foreign policy it was also expanding the government's role in foreign trade. Herbert Hoover, then serving as Secretary of Commerce, convinced Congress to increase funding for the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (BFDC), increasing the staff of that agency by three thousand.<sup>33</sup> Charged with encouraging participation in foreign (as well as domestic) trade, the BFDC distributed information regarding its services to magazines like *The Kansas Citian* throughout the period.

In 1924 the work of the BFDC began to trickle into Kansas City as readers of the magazine were instructed that the "Department of Commerce of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic

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<sup>32</sup> "Brussels Commercial Fair," *The Kansas Citian*, November 29, 1921, 900, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>33</sup> Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 86.

Commerce maintains in each of its branch offices a Classified Index of Exporters, to whom are sent from time to time reports and data on foreign trade subjects..."<sup>34</sup> The article explained that several businesses in Kansas City were listed in the index "but the possibilities are that a great many manufactures who are interested in this data are not listed."<sup>35</sup> It concluded by encouraging Kansas City businesses to increase the city's exposure by adding their information to the index.

On occasion the information presented in *The Kansas Citian* proved vital for those engaged in foreign trade. The Mexican Revolution, which had begun a decade earlier, had largely run its violent course by 1920, however, political turmoil, labor unrest, and fighting between various revolutionary factions continued to plague the nation.<sup>36</sup> Since Mexico ranked as one of Kansas City's most important trading partners, information on unrest to the south affecting trade

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<sup>34</sup> "Index of Exporters," *The Kansas Citian*, July 22, 1924, 615, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 199-201.

was regularly published in the periodical. At the outset of 1924 it noted that "...the Mexican embassy has notified the United States Department of State that the ports of Vera Cruz, Frontera, Puerto Mexico and Manzanillo have been officially closed, and that goods shipped there will be considered contraband and subject to confiscation, or to a penalty..."<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the events that caused the closing of these ports were not discussed within the pages of *The Kansas Citian*. In fact, the organization refrained from detailed analysis of Mexico's internal politics throughout the decade. Trade data and interpretive essays on Mexico's land reforms that directly impacted United States economic interests nonetheless appeared frequently.

More regularly, the Chamber arranged for experts on foreign trade to visit Kansas City; news of these visits were published in *The Kansas Citian* weeks ahead of time, with a synopsis usually appearing the following week. On September 6, 1921, readers were informed that Carlton Jackson, Attaché to the American Embassy in Mexico City, spoke to interested

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<sup>37</sup> "Mexican Ports Closed," *The Kansas Citian*, January 22, 1924, 102, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

business leaders about foreign trade possibilities with Mexico. At that meeting he "strongly recommended the establishment in the Chamber of Commerce of a cooperative office of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, something that the [Kansas City Chamber's] Industrial Department has had under consideration for some time."<sup>38</sup> Also in 1921, Kansas City was visited by "...T.L. Gaukel, District Manager of the [United States] Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce..." who was available for three days for individual conferences with members concerning foreign trade.<sup>39</sup> Three years later the Chamber brought to the city a foreign trade conference that "proved of exceptional interest to the seventy-five interested representatives of Kansas City firms..."<sup>40</sup> At that conference "The entire day was given over to

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<sup>38</sup> "Conference with Commercial Attache," *The Kansas Citian*, September 6, 1921, 682, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>39</sup> "Foreign Trade Conference," *The Kansas Citian*, November 21, 1921, 881, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>40</sup> "Confer on Foreign Trade Matters: Experts Discuss Ways and Means of Securing Export Business," *The Kansas Citian*, April

the discussion of ways and means of establishing and selling through foreign agents, and present sales prospects in Latin America."<sup>41</sup>

Given the agricultural nature of Kansas City's domestic trade territory, it is not surprising that the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce paid close attention to the status of international agriculture. Of particular concern to the Chamber throughout the 1920s was the International Institute of Agriculture based in Rome. By April, 1921, the Chamber perceived that the United States Congress had failed to appropriate adequate funds for representation at the institute. In order to present the Chamber's position on the matter the club distributed to all members of Congress representing areas within the city's trade territory, and published in *The Kansas Citian*, a letter calling for increased public funding. So as not to be mislabeled as something other than conservative business leaders, the letter began by bowing in the direction of fiscal restraint by the government: "This Chamber realizes the importance of the Government following an

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15, 1924, 363, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

economical policy at this time."<sup>42</sup> The letter nonetheless highlighted the special need for a public investment in agricultural trade: "...the appropriation is very small. The statistics on production, prices and trade of agricultural products is valuable to producers and exporters of this country. The information is perhaps more interesting to the importing European countries."<sup>43</sup> As much as they wanted information about agricultural production in Europe, the Chamber was most interested in having information about American production available to European consumers.

The considerable amount of space in *The Kansas Citian*, and the time commitment of the Chamber of Commerce, devoted to the topic of foreign trade clearly indicates that Kansas City's business leaders were interested in what was occurring overseas. Every year of the 1920s featured at least one, if not more, local conferences on foreign trade. *The Kansas Citian* consistently published articles informing readers on

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<sup>42</sup> "International Institute of Agriculture: Chamber of Commerce Urges U.S. Support," *The Kansas Citian*, April 5, 1921, 343, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the resources available to assist in foreign trade. But this was not the extent of the business community's interest in the post-Great War world. In the years after the peace was settled, much of the world, other than the United States, struggled to overcome the economic and humanitarian dislocations left in the war's wake. The business ideology that underpinned America's overseas market empire emphasized both the moral and practical needs for postwar relief and humanitarian uplift. Before they could be consumers, those in need required help securing food, water, and clothing, and before their governments could cultivate an environment conducive to private investment and trade they needed to be made secure against revolution and civil unrest. In order to acquiesce to the American market empire the world had to be introduced to the softer side of that empire.

In 1920 the Board of Directors of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce adopted a resolution calling on Congress to "authorize the United States Grain Corporation or other suitable agency, to purchase and transport to those countries where famine is imminent and the government of which are unable to provide for the subsistence of their people, food,

supplies, and other necessities of life."<sup>44</sup> They declared that it was necessary for the government to take this action "to avert famine and to promote the resumption of stable economic and political conditions in the countries of Central Europe and in Armenia." The Chamber recommended that the United States government arrange for these relief supplies to be sold on credit and the their distribution be regulated by an agency of the federal government.<sup>45</sup>

The Chamber also provided support to individual members wanting to assist in European relief efforts: "The local Chamber has a contract with the Bureau [of Foreign and Domestic Commerce] that makes all of its [relief] data available to the members."<sup>46</sup> The *Kansas Citian* informed readers that "complete reports concerning any organization and answers

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<sup>44</sup> "European Relief," *The Kansas Citian*, Febuary 10, 1920, 166, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "European Relief: Special Information Available to Members," *The Kansas Citian*, Febuary 15, 1921, 127, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

to general questions concerning conditions abroad in the relief field, which members care to ask, will be forthcoming on request."<sup>47</sup> The information would be of value to members as "money available for charitable purposes is necessarily limited," and the information provided would "...indicate where relief is particularly needed. In fact, readers learned that the Bureau rated the efficiency of relief efforts from country to country and assessed specific needs from region to region. Whereas the need for emergency food relief had faded throughout Europe, the Balkan states and Italy still badly needed assistance with child welfare and sanitation. The Chamber's membership no doubt took heed and directed their own international relief efforts accordingly.

The Chamber also demonstrated interest in distressed areas far outside of the world's war zones. In 1920 Mexico was experiencing a significant famine. The following year readers of the magazine found that Louis G. Villalpando, Vice-Consul of the Republic of Mexico, hosted a dinner for Chamber officials in appreciation "for the kindness shown his destitute countrymen by the Charities Bureau of the [Kansas City] Chamber of Commerce operating through the Provident

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Association and the Helping Hand Institute.”<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps no humanitarian crisis received more attention than the famine that struck China during the period. Considering the interest the United States’ held in integrating China and its 300 million or so potential consumers into the market empire, it should not be surprising that humanitarian efforts were directed there. Numerous obstacles stood in the way of China becoming a modern, consumer society at the time. Following the collapse of the Qing (also known as the Ch’ing or Manchu) dynasty in 1912, the country was plagued by political instability, military conflict between competing warlords, and an emerging civil war between nationalists and communists. Local, provincial, and national governments were wracked by rampant corruption and the majority of China’s population barely eked out a living as subsistence farmers.<sup>49</sup> Regardless, American diplomats since the

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<sup>48</sup> “Mexican Government Appreciative,” *The Kansas Citian*, July 12, 1921, 557, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of the Global Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 255.

turn of the century had urged Japan and the Great Powers of Europe to adopt an "Open Door" policy that would eliminate spheres of influence in China and open the country to unfettered free trade development. United States' business leaders and Christian missionaries hoped to transform the ancient land into a model for modernization and democratization. In Kansas City, the Chamber of Commerce organized relief for China; the local Chamber's president served on a national relief committee appointed by President Harding. At the local level, the organization formed a committee that successfully marshaled the city's resources on behalf of the Chinese. One article in the *Kansas Citian* noted that "circular letters have been sent to 100,000 individuals, giving facts in regard to the horrible conditions in a portion of China where thousands of people are starving to death."<sup>50</sup> It continued that "the responses from those who have replied is very gratifying, but the committee desires to urge all who have received this letter to reply with a check to E.M.

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<sup>50</sup> "Request from Washington: Kansas City Helps China Famine-Stricken," *The Kansas Citian*, Mar. 29, 1921, 243, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Clendening, Treasure, care [Kansas City] Chamber of Commerce.”<sup>51</sup> In the end, the drive raised several thousand dollars on China’s behalf.<sup>52</sup>

The obvious concern for the rest of the world further indicated the business community’s desire to engage the world. As might be expected of a predominantly white world power, a pronounced paternalism often colored the Chamber’s humanitarianism – especially in relation to efforts undertaken on behalf of non-white peoples. Indeed, the success of the fund raising campaign for China at least can be partly attributed to America’s longstanding interest in assisting the exotic, “heathen Chinese.” This paternalism for non-white peoples, however, went beyond blind humanitarian efforts. The Chamber made a concerted effort throughout the period to educate their members on conditions outside of Europe partly out of a genuine curiosity about the world at large, and partly to make them more effective agents of the market empire. The most common way of disseminating this information was not through articles in *The Kansas Citian* directly addressing the topic, but through a lecture that occurred

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

every Wednesday at a luncheon. Each week, invited lecturers expounded on overseas politics and culture and reinforced the Chamber's own sense of mission to improve the world via trade and fellowship.

Many of these lectures provided comparison between the United States and foreign others; the less familiar was consistently determined to not measure up. One of those lectures was delivered by Colonel E. Bryson Jones of Kansas City. He was asked to speak to the Chamber's membership of his travels through South America. Jones made no reference to foreign trade, instead focusing more on the beauty of the landscapes and cultures of the continent. He relayed to his audience that when he arrived in Rio De Janeiro it struck him that "no tongue, pen or picture can describe its beauties...the bay would hold all the navies of the world with plenty of room for maneuvering."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps fearing that he had inadvertently challenged the United States' place in the global pecking order by praising a foreign landscape, he went on to discuss

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<sup>53</sup> "South America and Puerto Rico: Colonel E. Bryson Jones and Honorable E. Mont Reilly Address Members," *The Kansas Citian*, July 5, 1921, 533, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

why it was that the United States was superior to South America. He began by contrasting colonial beginnings: "South America has been exhibited for the sole purpose of establishing wealth, whereas the colonization of the United States was more for independence and for a land where free people might establish their homes."<sup>54</sup> Inferring that colonial origins impact topography, Jones continued "there are no beauties in the South America we cannot equal in our own country."<sup>55</sup> He declared that "the Grand Canyon of the Colorado and the Yosemite Valley are equal in their immensity and beauty to anything the party saw on our South American tour."<sup>56</sup>

Often, these lectures illustrated not just the very real increase in American influence globally, but also the nation's understanding of itself as a growing imperial power. As such, the lecturers and their Kansas City audiences regularly affirmed that Americans stood in a civilizational position that enabled them to judge the behavior of others and to prescribe solutions to many of the world's problems.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

A lecture delivered by E.E. Violette, who spent seven months travelling throughout China, is illustrative. Violette focused almost entirely on China's deficiencies, starting with the country's inefficient transportation infrastructure. Without citing China's recent political tumult, or the monopoly privileges extended by Chinese officials to foreign railroad cartels, he assigned most of the responsibility for the traveling inconveniences he experienced to the Chinese government's incompetence and corruption. The "government [of China]," he harangued, "has opposed the building of railroads," and even in cases where officials had raised funds for construction, they failed to authorize the expenditure.<sup>57</sup> While political corruption no doubt infected post-Imperial China, Violette's explanation of corruption smelled of ethnocentrism, "the right-of-ways frequently went through graveyards, which they refused to permit because of their great respect for their dead."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Industrial Condition in China: Education the Only Hope for Chinese People," *The Kansas Citian*, October 18, 1921, 878, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

After providing an assumption informed by stereotype, Violette continued his lecture by asserting that the principal cause of political upheaval in China he declared was traceable to the "... lack of a reasonable head."<sup>59</sup> Violette elaborated on this conclusion by referring back to the Chinese Famine Fund, an effort in which the Chamber had been heavily involved, stating "...an investigation showed one hundred and fifty rice boats were loaded to capacity and were being held for higher prices...during the height of the famine, meats and other articles of food were being shipped continually to Japan."<sup>60</sup> He even claimed that the famine had been exaggerated and that the real cause of all the death found in China arose from "drugs imported from other countries."<sup>61</sup> Modern sources do not support Violette's interpretation of events.<sup>62</sup>

The opinionated tourist concluded his talk by emphasizing

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Mechthild Leutner, "Peasants, Peasant Uprisings and Agrarian Revolution, 1927-1931," *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s: Between Triumph and Disaster*, ed. Mechthild Leutner, et. al (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

China's looming conflict with an increasingly powerful and racially chauvinistic Japan. If China were to hold off Japanese conquest, he posited, it would need most of all to educate its largely illiterate population. Americans, especially Christian missionaries, could play a decisive role in the educational undertaking - helping their Chinese wards to achieve both progress and salvation. Thus, much like the Chamber's own gospel of market economics and Christian fellowship, he preached American know-how could ameliorate conflicts everywhere and unite the world's people under the banner of "peace and prosperity."<sup>63</sup> The Chamber reflected this belief in several of the experts invited to lunch.

William Saunders, Secretary of the American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico, touted many of the same sentiments on another occasion when the luncheon subject turned south of the Rio Grande. His topic that day was economic and political conditions found in Mexico in 1921. Mexico had only recently concluded a landmark revolution that had featured strong anti-Yankee sentiments and land reforms that confiscated American-owned plantations and ranches. Yet, Saunders began his lecture by pointing out the opportunities available to American

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<sup>63</sup> "Industrial Conditions in China," 878.

business in Mexico: "...Mexico merits all the attention the American manufacturer can give it."<sup>64</sup> He proclaimed "...that there is a better feeling today than ever before on the part of Mexico toward the United States..."<sup>65</sup> But beyond dollars and cents, he also sought to enlighten his audience on Mexico's fast evolving post-revolutionary political context. He took special pains to highlight the newly installed president Álvaro Obregón's pragmatic agenda. Downplaying Obregón's reputation as an agrarian and labor firebrand, Saunders emphasized the president's drive to advance law and order and to create an environment conducive for Mexican and North American capital. Most of all, he declared, Obregón sought to make the "country safe for development and to take care of Mexico's financial obligations."<sup>66</sup>

In regard to the unrest found in parts of Mexico at that time, Saunders assured the audience that "there never would be

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<sup>64</sup> "Taxes and Mexican Trade: Kansas City's Opportunity in Mexico Explained," *The Kansas Citian*, February 1, 1921, 91, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

another war in Mexico that will interfere with business...that the little bandit revolutions occurring now and then in Mexico do not disturb business conditions."<sup>67</sup> Saunders ended his lecture by calling attention to the fact that Kansas City was in a prime position to invest further in Mexico in large part because the city's interests in Mexico were already significant; it was Kansas City that had "largely financed the Kansas City, Mexico & Orient Railway that [was] destined to become one of the main trunk lines of Mexico."<sup>68</sup> Thinking even more expansively, he predicted that "little bandits" notwithstanding, Kansas City's financial resources would come to play a crucial role in Mexico's lucrative mining and oil industries and help uplift the benighted neighbor to the south.

While Saunders honed in on prospects for trade, investment, and profits, he also peppered his talks with references to overseas political and social conditions. Saunderson's broad perspective clearly draws into question stereotypes of 1920s Midwestern isolationism. That global vision was echoed once more when a Dr. Spencer (first name not

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

specified) delivered a well-attended lecture that addressed Franco-American relations. Spencer, a Kansas City minister, had recently returned from providing ministry services to the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in Europe and had been particularly taken by expressions of anti-Americanism that he had encountered in France - whose successful repulsion of German attacks had come only with the introduction of American troops to the Western front in 1918. "The French people," explained Dr. Spencer, "hold a hostile attitude toward America for two reasons. The first, the Franc has fallen in value, and secondly the money which had been promised France for the damage done her territory by the Germans has not been promptly paid."<sup>69</sup> Lectures such as Dr. Spencer's provided the members of the Chamber who attended with insights into foreign countries and cultures. Often, they also projected the way the speakers and their audiences, envisioned America's place within the new global order.

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<sup>69</sup> "After War Conditions in Europe: Speaker Tells of His Experience in France and England," *The Kansas Citian*, October 5, 1920, 818, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

In a particularly telling passage, Spencer paid special tribute to American exceptionalism, oddly in reference to the cemeteries erected to honor those who had perished in battle. He informed the audience that one of his primary duties with the AEF was to provide funeral services to fallen soldiers. While performing those duties he found that "American cemeteries are by far the best kept of any of the nations and there are in attendance either American men or women who go to the greatest trouble to give information wanted by visiting Americans."<sup>70</sup> Spencer's essential point was by no means novel. Over and over again those who attended the Chamber's Wednesday lectures heard how other countries, cultures, and economies registered as subpar and dysfunctional when compared to the United States. While they disparaged the ability of other nations and people to uplift themselves, Kansas City's business elite clearly adhered to an ethos that their nation and their city had been chosen by history to establish and spread a progressive, modern imperium.

The only clear challenge, it seemed, to this new American led global order was Bolshevism. Although Russia withdrew from the disaster that had been the Great War, the Bolshevik regime

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

that seized power came armed with a doctrine of global class struggle and revolution. As the foremost danger to the emerging market empire, the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce scheduled several Wednesday lectures with the aim of discerning the status of the Russian government and people.

This concern with international communism was not, however, just some distant threat for the men of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. At times, communists, or at least what the business community assumed were communists, could be found within the city's limits. One of the most prominent examples came in 1911, when the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organized Local No. 61 in Kansas City. After organizing the chapter, the local IWW members took to street corners to bemoan the dangers and hazards of international capitalism, as they had done in dozens of communities previously. And as had occurred in other cities, those advocating the IWW's platform were promptly thrown into jail, creating months of tension between the union and law enforcement. After dozens of IWW members had been imprisoned, including national organizers, the union and city officials were able to reach a compromise: law enforcement officials would allow IWW members to speak from street corners and speakers would avoid declarations of revolution. Although

tensions began to dissipate by 1912, the men of the Chamber realized, especially during the First Red Scare, that their community more than likely played host to real life communists.<sup>71</sup>

William C. Redfield, Former Secretary of Commerce, was the first to speak on the situation in Russia. He began by giving a broad overview of the economic status of Russia, stating that it was a "vast nation, having a wealth of economic resources of metal, grain, petroleum, leather, and an abundant man power."<sup>72</sup> He continued by explaining why those resources were not being correctly managed: "on account of the chaotic conditions now prevailing, production has ceased and the absence of her products from the market is reflected in

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<sup>71</sup> Tom M. McInnis, "Kansas City Free Speech Fight of 1911," *Kansas City, America's Crossroads: Essays from the Missouri Historical Review, 1906-2006*, ed. Diane Mutti-Burke and John Herron (Columbia: State Historical Society of Missouri, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> "Russian and Her Problems: William C. Redfield, Former Secretary of Commerce, Gives Interesting Description," *The Kansas Citian*, May 11, 1920, 423, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

the present high prices.”<sup>73</sup> His observations foreshadowed what would come to be orthodoxy in American Cold War interpretations of Soviet life.<sup>74</sup> Redfield continued his lecture by illustrating to his audience why in his opinion Russia was beneath the United States in the global power hierarchy: “...many of the commodities with the United States has been short of would be plentiful if Russia was controlled by a sane and honorable form of government.”<sup>75</sup> To Redfield, and his audience, the government of Russia was led by mentally unstable men, and by virtue of comparison, in direct opposition to the ‘sane’ government of the United States. The Russian government had in fact deprived the American people of important, affordable, commodities and posed an obstacle to peaceful international economic integration.

Perhaps the most emotional anti-Bolshevik tirade came from Major Homer Slaughter. Stationed at Fort Leavenworth (approximately 40 miles northwest of Kansas City) he delivered his Wednesday luncheon in 1928. Slaughter was attached to the American embassy in Russia in 1918 and was regarded as an

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Lefebver, 17-19.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

expert on the overthrow of the Czar. He provided his audience with "a vivid description of the murder of the Imperial Russian family...with the aid of lantern slides depicting scenes surrounding the attempted escape and later the incarceration and death of Czar Nicholas Romanoff and family..."<sup>76</sup> Slaughter led the Chamber's members through the events of the final days of the Czar's life "which culminated in the death by revolver fire and bayonets of the royal household with their death Chamber a musty putrid cellar surrounded by rancor..."<sup>77</sup> *The Kansas Citian* concluded its report of the lecture by stating "...the speaker revealed how Russia was virtually cut to pieces by intrigues and factional controversies."<sup>78</sup> While colorful and in many ways of dubious accuracy, Slaughter's performance struck a chord with his audience of Midwest entrepreneurs. The United States unquestionably occupied the top rung among international powers, but it nonetheless faced a potentially

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<sup>76</sup> "Death of Russian Royalty," *The Kansas Citian*, March 13, 1928, 215, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

existential threat from the enemies of capitalism who had brutally seized power in Moscow.

As much as the Chamber was concerned with communists in Moscow, they were equally concerned with Bolsheviks in the United States. The fact that communist, anarchists, and other radicals, existed within the heart of the American market empire, generated a crisis of confidence on the homefront. Harry F. Atwood, a lawyer and constitutional scholar from Chicago, spoke to the perceived crisis.

He began by pinning Russia's turmoil on its authoritarian form of government and offered the United States' constitutional system as an antidote. Playing on Christianity's "golden rule," Atwood explained that "...a republic is the golden mean between the tyranny of an autocracy and the chaos of a democracy..."<sup>79</sup> He even went so far as to assert that the signing of the United States Constitution was "...the greatest event in the world's history outside of the birth of Christ," as it was in that document

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<sup>79</sup> "Our Constitution the Antidote for Bolshevism," *The Kansas Citian*, June 22, 1920, 553, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

that the 'golden mean' of government originated.<sup>80</sup> He continued by declaring that Russia's inability to abide by the 'golden mean' was the cause of the country's unrest.<sup>81</sup> While Atwood reinforced many of the themes heard from other lecturers, particularly that the United States could provide a guide to other nations, he also addressed domestic concerns of unrest.

The emerging inter-war Cold War not only played itself out on the international stage, but on the American homefront as well. Atwood addressed the Chamber in 1920 by which time the nation had descended into an era of political repression known as the First Red Scare. Communities throughout the country, encouraged by the Federal government, were taking precautions to prevent sabotage and acts of violence by the fifth column forces presumed to be operating within the nation.<sup>82</sup> This fear most often centered on waves of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe: newcomers whose ethnic and religious identities contrasted most sharply with the nation's Protestant mainstream. Recruited as cheap, unskilled labor, they often became synonymous with unionism

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Nichols, 288.

and syndicalism - working class movements that stood directly in contradiction to the rosy economic scenario painted by market ideologues. The National Origins Acts of 1921 and 1924, which struck out particularly at Eastern and Southern European immigrant groups, were still a few years away. But in the months immediately following the Russian Revolution, the specter of immigrant radicals loomed large. To many, it seemed as if the United States might be swallowed in a wave of immigrants and chaotic change. Atwood reflected this concern with disorder when he stated "That the chaotic conditions prevalent in the country today are not the result of the world war but due to a departure from the basic principles of the constitution and that the remedy...lies in a return to those principles."<sup>83</sup>

Like other believers in the market place, the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce shared the nation's growing paranoia. From 1919-1920 the Attorney General of the United States, A. Mitchell Palmer, ordered a crackdown on suspected anarchists, communists, and radicals, an order that encouraged ethnic profiling of the coarsest nature. Those caught up in the raids (known as the Palmer Raids) were often detained or even out

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<sup>83</sup> "Our Constitution the Antidote for Bolshevism," 553.

right deported, often without judicial review or legal representation. While there were certainly Americans who found Palmer's methods disconcerting, the Chamber's members were not among them. After the Chamber's board of directors sent a telegram to Palmer "urging fearless and relentless enforcement of the laws for the maintenance of order and for the protection of order and property" the Attorney General's reply was printed in the pages in *The Kansas Citian*: "I am in receipt of your telegram...pledging me the support of your organization in my efforts to deal with the activities of anarchists and other lawless radical."<sup>84</sup> Palmer assured the Chamber they he "...exert all the power accorded to me by the present existing Federal laws to break up and stamp out organized effort to attack or change the Government of the United States..."<sup>85</sup>

On the surface, the outburst of xenophobia that accompanied the Red Scare ran contrary to the nation's and Kansas City's much professed internationalism. Yet, proponents

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<sup>84</sup> "Attorney General's Attitude Against Lawless Element," *The Kansas Citian*, Jan. 6, 1920, 35, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

of the market empire did not necessarily distinguish between their domestic and global agendas. The Chamber's advocacy of international markets, fellowship, and service after all assumed that the American way constituted the best way. Wednesday luncheon speaker Conrad Troup, of the *New Haven Register*, perhaps best explained how interwar business leaders succeeded in blurring differences between the inside and the outside. "We welcome foreigners to our shores and do not ask them to forget their native countries," he told his approving audience, "...rather we try to stimulate all the good things that they have..."<sup>86</sup> Yet he insisted that the "one thing that America has a right to insist upon and that is that foreigners coming to this country shall be 100% American. Citizenship is not a matter of nationality but of spirit."<sup>87</sup>

There is little question that the business elite of Kansas City accepted that claim. In 1924, to great fanfare, at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, Kansas City's Mayor

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<sup>86</sup> "Americanism: Members Hear Discussion by New Haven Editor," *The Kansas Citian*, February 24, 1920, 203, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Albert I. Beach declared that he had recently learned something of interest to the group, something that they should "...take pride in being..."<sup>88</sup> Beach had been informed by the Census Bureau that the city was "...literally the most American big city of the United States."<sup>89</sup> He reported to the audience that Kansas City had the highest percentage of domestically born citizens of any large city. He summed up this empirical proof of Americanism by stating that "with every civic and commercial movement projected along strictly American lines, we are proud to herald to the world our patriotic declarations."<sup>90</sup> As Beach's statements indicate, the business elite of Kansas City viewed the city and themselves as representing the embodiment of the American ideal.

But this also illustrates the tedious intellectual dance undertaken by the city's and the nation's business communities throughout the 1920s. The page space given over to products and information available to those pursuing foreign trade

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<sup>88</sup> "The Most American City," *The Kansas Citian*, September 16, 1924, 762, LaBudde Special Collections Department - Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

shows that business leaders maintained considerable interest in foreign markets. The humanitarian efforts of the Chamber illustrate that the members' view of the world was hardly one of dollar and cents alone. At the same time, they had come to believe that the American way of life had universal application. Commerce, cultural exchange, and humanitarian uplift represented the soft powers by which they hoped to build a prosperous new world order, and advance U.S. interests globally. Tariff restrictions, immigration restriction, and repression constituted the hard powers by which they hoped to protect the American dream from external and internal threats. Thus, Kansas City's leading businessmen could take pride that their's was the most American of cities - by way of ethnic make-up - even as they proudly sported badges of international engagement. But they were not the only citizens of the emerging imperial city to juggle their local, national, and global identities. While the city's leading males dined and chatted up the world of commerce each Wednesday, their female counterparts were making their own claims to the privileges of empire.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CITY'S WOMEN ASSERT THEIR PLACE IN THE EMPIRE

Gender roles in inter-war America prescribed that men were the natural imperialists - even in the market empire. Men would carry American products abroad and would organize the associations that would create a global ethic of charity and fellowship. And in the event that empire produced conflict, as had happened in Europe from 1914-1918, by and large it was men who would be killed defending the nation's honor. This is not to say that women did not have a role in the emerging American market empire. Women, as the primary decision-maker in the domestic sphere had already influenced the new empire by the consumption choices they made. In the 1920s, however, the women of Kansas City expanded their role in the emerging world marketplace. Much in the same way that Kansas City's influence increased with the nation's influence in the global community, American women witnessed an increase in their agency within the post-war world. Buoyed by their experience in the factories of armament producers and the successful campaign for the vote in 1919, American women became more involved in the imperial project. Kansas City's women, who belonged to the city's upper class or burgeoning middle class of the 1920s, exemplified that development.

Although a relatively new addition to the historiography of foreign relations, women have had a significant role in the foreign relations of the United States at least since the Civil War. In her path breaking *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*, Kristin Hoganson explores the interaction between the international and the domestic.<sup>1</sup> She argues that American women of means actively participated in the expanding American empire through their consumption of foreign goods and cultures. Plopping down dollars for the purchase of oriental rugs, French apparel, and Japanese silk, a growing number of American women asserted agency within the domestic sphere and simultaneously assumed a privileged position within the international order. In an age of empire, they became the keepers of what Hoganson calls the "consumer's imperium." Although these consumers may not have thought of themselves as internationalists, their purchases - much like those who purchase imported petroleum in today's economy - actively tied the United States to a world order characterized by inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> Kristin Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 17.


While Hoganson ends her study in 1920, American women remained wedded to empire throughout the decade that followed. They were still interested in foreign fashion. They still decorated their houses with oriental rugs. They still prepared French dishes in their homes (or at least what they thought were authentically French). And they remained interested in exploring the foreign by proxy.<sup>2</sup> But women also expanded the ways in which they interacted with the foreign. As much as that generation has been remembered for advocacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution and the development of the "New Woman," historians have neglected to evaluate how this woman was new in her orientation to America's place in the world. Focusing on the women of Kansas City not only helps illustrate the desire of the community to transform itself into an imperial city during the period, but also expands our understanding of how women, especially those of means, helped shape American foreign relations and empire building during the 1920s.

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<sup>2</sup> Hoganson found that by the turn of the century women's travel clubs, in which the women would be told about a foreign place by a man rather than experience it first hand, were very popular in large metropolitan areas.

To a significant extent, middle and upper class Kansas City women during the 1920s interacted with the world much like Gilded Age women of New York, Chicago, and Omaha in Kristin Hoganson's study. They looked forward to the delivery of the *Kansas City Star*, the city's largest circulating daily newspaper and their primary local source for what was popular in fashion, furniture, decorating, and appliances. The Sunday edition, following the end of the Great War, was stuffed with a periodical, the *Kansas City Star Magazine*, which appears to have been aimed at a primarily female readership - an indication of this can be found in the advertisements within the pages of the magazine. Several editions of the periodical featured pitches for Northern Bath Tissue, several brands of perfumes, Kotex hygiene pads, baker's chocolate, and milk, all products that fell within the domestic sphere. Many times its articles looked beyond the nation's borders for guidance on fashion trends and style, indicating a degree of international consciousness among the city's women of means.

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Good Cook wants  
to make a Really  
Good Cake —  
She Uses*



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Figure 1. Baker's Chocolate Advertisement. From the *Kansas City Star Magazine*, March 29, 1925.

A 1925 edition of the *Kansas City Star Magazine* carried an article titled "Fine Fabrics Bring Simple Lines As Paris Uses New Materials."<sup>3</sup> Readers learned that leading Parisian designers embraced straight lines that "lack ornamentation" and that the nineteenth century cape had made a comeback.<sup>4</sup> All of the designers discussed appear to be French. In case any readers doubted the credentials of the designers, the author summed up the looks shown that day, adding that "...one might as well accept this type of dress for the coming season, as every mentor of style has stamped it with approval."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Fine Fabrics Bring Simple Lines As Paris Uses New Materials," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, February 1, 1925, 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



Figure 2. Fashion Drawings. From *Kansas City Star Magazine*, February 1, 1925.

In an August edition of the *Kansas City Star* daily from the same year, an article titled "What Paris is Showing" also lavished praise on French designers.<sup>6</sup> "The Paris opening now occupy the Fashion's spotlight [sic], thousands of buyers are rushing from collection to collection, choosing, guessing, exclaiming and despairing as they view the richness and variety of the gowns, hats, coats, wraps, shoes, and

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<sup>6</sup> "What Paris is Showing," *Kansas City Star*, August 9, 1925, 10.

fabrics.”<sup>7</sup> The author approvingly noted that “the French lead the world. Other nations send out salesman, but the world still rushes to Paris to buy.”<sup>8</sup> Literally dozen of examples of this type of interaction with the foreign exist in the pages of the *Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Star Magazine*. As Hoganson observed of Gilded Age women who adorned themselves in the latest European garb, these women “strove to demonstrate their affiliation with European aristocrats and other wealthy women from across the Western and westernizing world...” and assert “...their class, racial, national, and civilizational standing with an eye on far wider contexts.”<sup>9</sup> Discussions of French fashions in a run-of-the-mill Midwestern daily newspaper is indicative of the community’s upper and middle class women’s “sense of entitlement [which] had global dimensions.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>9</sup> Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium*, 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 11.

The same can be found in regard to women's toiletries.<sup>11</sup> In one magazine advertisement, men shopping for their significant others were asked: "Sir, do you seek for the loveliest girl a gift of distinction - a gift of gifts?"<sup>12</sup> As no man would want to purchase less than the loveliest, the advertisement continues, "it is a perplexing problem. But Kerkoff has solved it by sending from Paris his Djer-Kiss toiletries which come to you in these exquisite satin-lined gift boxes."<sup>13</sup> In addition to its extravagant wrapping, the perfume came with considerable cosmopolitan panache: "these are the very toiletries you would see today on the Avenue des Champs-Elysees."<sup>14</sup> As if the distinction of this particular type of perfume's availability in the most fashionable shopping district of Paris was not enough to motivate men to purchase Djer-Kiss, the advertisement made a connection

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<sup>11</sup> This is an area that was not addressed by Hoganson but is a glaring example of Kansas City women interacting with the foreign during the 1920s.

<sup>12</sup> "Advertisement," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, December, 13, 1925, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.

between foreign superiority and domestic superiority, "...in America you will find these sets at smart shops everywhere..."<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, an accompanying illustration placed the product firmly within the geography of empire. On one side of the page a seemingly American, and very stylish, couple is pictured, with the woman discovering that she has been given the product. On the opposite side a French couple is pictured. Not a contemporary French couple - members of a declining civilization that had been rescued by the expanding American empire - but a couple pictured in pre-modern dress. The visual harkens back to the apex of the French empire and aristocracy, much like the American couple is shown in contemporary dress, from a period of growing American power. The firm that designed the advertisement was tapping into women of means identification with European aristocracy, a tradition from the previous decades that continued into the 1920s.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Figure 3. Djer-Kiss Advertisement. From *Kansas City Star Magazine*, December, 13, 1925.

A nearly full-page advertisement for the T.L. Douglas Company in the summer of 1925 announced the coming "...big August sale of Oriental Rugs," and featured descriptions and prices of dozens of "authentic" imported rugs.<sup>16</sup> A competitor, Duff and Repp and Company, placed a similar sales pitch in the newspaper the same year, but identified each rug's country of origin. "Why not an Oriental rug- Chinese or Persian?" the ad

<sup>16</sup> "Advertisement," *Kansas City Star*, August 9, 1925, 7.

asked.<sup>17</sup> As the elite men of the Chamber of Commerce indulged their curiosity and carried out their paternalistic duties by engaging in China relief efforts, their spouses, mothers, and sisters acquired knowledge of Asian commodities, made their purchases, and placed their little piece of the market empire on display in their living rooms. In fact, Kansas City housewives, like their counterparts across the country, decorated their living rooms with an Orientalist flair because Europeans did so. By joining the ranks of European decorators, they also joined the ranks of Europe's imperial powers.<sup>18</sup>

**WHY NOT AN ORIENTAL RUG—CHINESE or PERSIAN?**  
**OUR ENTIRE STOCK OF THESE RUGS REDUCED!**  
**OTHER SUGGESTIONS**  
 Hooked Rugs—Braided Rugs—Throw Rugs—Carpet Sweepers  
 —Vacuum Sweepers—Axminster, Wilton, Velvet Rugs (large room sizes).

**Bedding and Linen Department**  
 Very fine heavy fleecy Cotton Blanket (single) \$13.50 value for, each . . . . . **\$9.00**  
 Very fine down filled Comfortable, \$27.50 value for. . . **\$21.95**  
 All lambs' wool filled silk Comfortable 1-3 off marked price  
 Madeira Napkins at, per 1/2 dozen. . . **\$3.60, \$4, \$6, \$6, \$7.50**  
 2-pc. Fine Linen Towel Set (consists of 1 large and 1 guest towel) for **\$2.00**  
 4-pc. Fine Linen Towel Set (consists of 2 large and 2 guest towels) for **\$4.00**  
 6-pc. Fine Linen Towel Set (consists of 3 large and 3 guest towels) for **\$6.00**

**BATH TOWELS (WHITE WITH COLORED BORDERS)**  
 2-pc. Sets, per set . . . . . **\$1.25, \$1.50, \$4.00**  
 4-pc. Sets, per set . . . . . **\$2.45**  
 6-pc. Sets, per set . . . . . **\$5.40 to \$7.00**

**Bedspreads**  
 Fine Muslin Bedspreads—embroidered and embroidered. Colors: Rose, Blue, Pink, Orchid and Gold. Full size, \$16.50 value, for . . . . . **\$14.25**  
 Pieced Colonial Quilts, for single or twin bed, \$18.00, for each. . . . . **\$12.75**  
 Pieced Colonial Quilts for full size bed, \$20, for each . . . . . **\$14.95**  
 Other Spreads, either white or colored, at low prices. As well as Pattern Linen Tablecloths and Napkins—Linen Towels—Very Fine Turkish Towels. Other Towels of all qualities.



**Duff & Repp**  
 FURNITURE CO.

Figure 4. Duff and Repp Advertisement. From *Kansas City Star*, December 13, 1925.

<sup>17</sup> "Advertisement," *Kansas City Star*, December 13, 1925, 4

<sup>18</sup> Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 9.

These two advertisements are a representation of what can be found in almost every Sunday edition of the *Kansas City Star* throughout the 1920s. While new companies appear in the periodical, and older ones fade away, Duff and Repp and the T.L. Douglass Co. were stable businesses that offered Oriental rugs throughout the period. Much in the way that the publishing of fashion news following the trends of France shows an interest in the foreign, the relatively stable Oriental rug market, and the demand necessary to sustain it, indicated a desire by women to incorporate foreign furnishings into the domestic sphere.

Much like their Gilded Age and Progressive era predecessors, Kansas City women in the post-war era also demonstrated an immense interest in foreign travel, often by joining local travel clubs. More often than not, they did not actually take overseas trips. As full time housewives and mothers they might be accused of neglecting their spouse and children if they stepped out of the domestic sphere for an extended period of time. Instead they occasionally took an evening off from their family duties to attend lectures delivered by men of the world who transported them by words

and lantern slides to sophisticated Europe, the exotic Orient, or to the dark continent of Africa.<sup>19</sup> What is plainly evident is that the women of Kansas City retained an armchair interest in the foreign well into the 1920s.

Kansas City's women of empire also indulged their taste for the international by reading fiction. The August 9, 1925 edition of the *Kansas City Star Magazine* provides a window into the way in which Kansas Citians imagined the foreign 'other' of the past. The article, "*The Last of the Abencerrages: A Tale of Old Granada from the French of Chateaubriand*," the reader is introduced to the last of the Abencerrages tribe (a Muslim tribe of northern Africa), who returns to Spain twenty-five years after the Reconquista of 1492 to experience first hand his family's former territorial holdings.<sup>20</sup> According to the byline, this story was derived not from Muslim or African sources, but rather from French. It was translated from the original French by W.R. Howell, a history teacher at Kansas City's only high school that served the

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<sup>19</sup> Hoganson, 160.

<sup>20</sup> "The Last of the Abencerrages." *Kansas City Star Magazine*, August 9, 1925, 10-14.

African American community, Lincoln High School.<sup>21</sup> Clearly this story was translated specifically for the benefit of a Kansas City audience.

In the process of visiting his former ancestral lands, the traveler falls in love with the daughter of a Spanish noble. In the quest to earn her affection, the protagonist has a crisis of faith: "He walked until he came to the doorway of an ancient mosque, which had been converted into a Christian church. His heart overflowing with sadness as he entered that temple which had once been a place of worship for the god of his fatherland..."<sup>22</sup> His thought process was explored, noting that "his spirit was divided between the memories which that old edifice, erected to the Moorish religion, awoke within him, and the sentiments which the Christian religion roused in his heart."<sup>23</sup> The hero's crisis was ultimately resolved through conversion, "...it was done; the Abenecerrage was conquered; he would renounce the errors of his religion, for he had already

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<sup>21</sup> Charles E. Coulter, *Take Up the Black Man's Burden: Kansas City's African American Communities, 1865-1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 87.

<sup>22</sup> "Last of the Abencerrages," 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

struggled too long."<sup>24</sup> Saved from his 'otherness,' the Abenecerrage garnered the nobleman's approval, and therefore, his love's hand in marriage.

Howell's translation of this tale is unique in that while his voice is not directly present in what was published, the act of selecting and translating this French myth was one of agency. Howell, an African American resident of Kansas City, translated a story that tells of cultures coming into and resolving conflict. Because of the focus on religion, most readers likely focused on the faith portion of those cultures. Undoubtedly, the "Last of the Abenecerrages" represented something more to Howell. As an African American in a Jim Crow city, he espoused an internationalist vision - one that he shared with a largely female audience - that contrasted with the more ethnocentric vision advanced by white members of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Howell's global imaginary was not far removed from that of W.E.B. Du Bois who famously wrote "...the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."<sup>25</sup> Although the evidence in Kansas City is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Nobles Classis, 1903), 3.

fragmentary, Howell's essay suggests that as was the case among writers in 1920s Harlem, the experience of Black soldiers in the Great War, the migration north to acquire manufacturing jobs, and the growing assertiveness of Civil Rights leaders and organizers had influenced African American opinion in Kansas City.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, by the end of the war, it became difficult for African Americans in Kansas City to conform to the Jim Crow ways of old.<sup>27</sup> African American community groups submitted petitions to the city's school district to improve the facilities of the schools that served them. Their first petition, in 1925, met with little success. By the end of the decade, however, a new Lincoln High School was under construction.<sup>28</sup> In translating this myth, Howell used a foreign setting as an allegory for the struggles of Kansas City's black community. Not only does its inclusion in the pages of the *Kansas City Star Magazine* illustrate middle and upper class women's exposure to the foreign, it also asserts a claim

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<sup>26</sup> Coulter, 52-56.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: PLUME, 1991), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Coulter, 184.

to inclusion within the market empire for the city's African Americans. The image presented by Howell, however, differed from many contained in the pages of the periodical. For Howell and most likely many other black Kansas Citians the empire should foment greater racial equality as well as profits.

That Christian conversion could make an inter-ethnic marriage acceptable to an affluent white readership is not particularly surprising. As the previous chapter showed, religion constituted a central pillar to the market ideology espoused by Kansas City's male business elite during the 1920s. What is unique about this story, however, is that this allegory for the righteousness of Christianity, aimed at the women of Kansas City, is through a foreign lens. The fact that the editors of the magazine assumed that this particular reflection on religion and love would resonate with their audience indicates that Kansas City women were intellectually comfortable with engaging the foreign and their faith's place in the emerging empire.

A similar story set within a foreign setting can be found in an article titled "*The Wedding Ring*" by J. Bennett Nolan, a

popular writer of fiction and non-fiction during the period.<sup>29</sup>

The narrative follows a recently married French couple who migrate to French Indochina to earn the means necessary to cover the cost of their wedding and a special wedding ring. The reader is led to assume that the husband has accepted a lucrative position with the colonial government, but that the post will impose considerable physical and psychological hardship on the man and his spouse. On arrival in the French colony the wife jokes with her husband that when the conditions of their station result in her finger shrinking to the point that her rings falls off, she will leave him and return to Avignon. The story details the deprivations caused by the oppressive work and climate, resulting in an increasingly tense household. Along the way the reader is presented with descriptions of the Indochinese that categorizes them firmly as the foreign 'other' - such as describing their appearance in exotic terms. In the end, the husband succumbs to the stresses of his position and the environment and kills himself and his wife in a fit of rage. Upon collecting their belongings a colonial official discovers

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<sup>29</sup> J. Bennett Nolan, "The Wedding Ring," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, July 13, 1926, 5-7.

that the week prior to her murder the wife had the ring re-sized to fit her shrunken finger.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 5. An Ominous Illustration. The main characters of "The Wedding Ring" encounter difficulties extending the French Empire. From *Kansas City Star Magazine*, July 13, 1926.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

One of the more striking aspects of "The Wedding Ring" is that while it takes place in a foreign setting and features foreign characters, there is no reason to believe that the story did not take place in contemporary times. Thus the question arises: why did the *Star's* editorial board choose to reprint a narrative set in colonial, French Indochina rather than commission a story located in the equally harsh colonial environment found in the United States occupied Philippines? Had the editors intended to merely entertain, or to show the difficulties presented by imperialism to domestic happiness, a more familiar foreign place, a holding of the United States, would be more appropriate. This work of fiction projects implicit cultural assumptions: the expanding American market empire was simply not dangerous for Americans, unlike the more traditional French empire.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Paul A. Kramer, in *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (2006) illustrates that the experience for American empire-builders in the Philippines was just as difficult as that of their French counterparts. Yet, public discourse of the difficulties of that colonial project were few and far between, especially after the initial occupation of the islands.

Keeping more in step with the exploration of the foreign by previous generations, the women of Kansas City were introduced to foreign places in a contemporary, non-fiction medium as well - the travelogue. Seldom an issue of the *Kansas City Star* magazine appeared that did not contain a travelogue of some place beyond the United States. A July 11, 1926 article titled "*Berne and the Bears of Berne*" explains how the former capital of Switzerland became renown for a zoo-like exhibit featuring live bears.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the oddity of the bears, the author also educates readers about the country as a whole: its transportation system, the status of the nation's three ethnic groups, and its relationships with its neighbors. Another travel piece illustrated to Kansas City's women why a trip to the medieval structures of England and Scotland would make for an enlightening vacation. In discussing one specific tourist site, the author wrote that "...Dickens has written of Rievaulx. Turner has painted it. The

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<sup>32</sup> Mattie Lee Peak, "*Berne and the Bears of Berne*," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, July 11, 1926, 12

terrace near the abbey would inspire any artist."<sup>33</sup> Still another piece titled "*With Horse and Hound in the Fox Hunting*" guided the reader through the required steps and etiquette necessary for a successful, traditional English hunting excursion.<sup>34</sup> By introducing the reader to various foreign places, travelogues helped acquaint readers with the world at large, elevated the reader's status as a knowledgeable international actor, and prepared readers to play a more effective role in the growing American market empire - the reader, upon completing the article, was a more-worldly imperialist.<sup>35</sup>

Travelogues were nothing new. As early as the 1750's, the print revolution spread to include travelogues, bringing the

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<sup>33</sup> "English Architecture Amid Medieval Settings: Fraught With History and Tradition Are the Remains of Other Eras," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, Aug 9, 1925, 2.

<sup>34</sup> "With Horse and Hound in the Fox Hunting," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, December 13, 1925, 8.

<sup>35</sup> These three examples fit well with Hoganson's findings; they each introduce the generally female audience to a foreign place.

foreign and exotic to the hearth.<sup>36</sup> Also not unusual, numerous travelogues produced from the 1750's to 1900 were written by women. But the vast majority of those female authors, much like their male counterparts, sprang from a still tiny slice of the population that possessed the leisure time and finances necessary to undertake international travel prior to the age of mass transportation. Most wrote from a privileged, learned position as naturalists, explorers, missionaries, or published writers. In addition, according to language scholar Mary Louise Pratt, women travel writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, unlike many of those who put pen to paper in the age of mass tourism, "were and wrote as feminists."<sup>37</sup> Especially in the early period of the popularity of travelogues, "women's access to travel writing seemed even more restricted than their access to travel itself."<sup>38</sup> This began to change during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and sped up considerably in the post-war years, with improved transportation, rising middle class incomes, and a maturing tourist infrastructure of hotels and

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<sup>36</sup> Pratt, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Pratt, 168.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

travel lodges. These developments increased the number of Americans travelling abroad. Whereas approximately 125,000 Americans set out for Europe in 1900, the number of trans-Atlantic travelers in 1927 had more than doubled to an estimated 300,000.<sup>39</sup>

This rise in foreign travel resulted in an increase in published travelogues, including those written by women. As opposed to the travelogues of previous generations, those of the 1920s, inspired by mass tourism, were aimed at a wider middle class audience. While exact statistics are not available, the proliferation of female-authored travel accounts, such as those by Anita Brenner and Emma Lindsey Squier, indicate a spike in the number of women going abroad.<sup>40</sup>

The way in which travel to France evolved following the Great War is illustrative of these new trends. Prior to World War I, American women who travelled to France, Paris in particular, ranked among the nation's most wealthy. With considerable financial resources in hand, these women converged on Paris looking to have a cultural experience. Among New England's upper crust, a young women's voyage to

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<sup>39</sup> Levenstein, 128 and Merrill, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Merrill, 75-76, 84-85.

Paris was considered a right of passage; an essential element of genteel education and perhaps a means to marriage within a titled European family. They and their elder companions typically attended the opera, commissioned paintings, befriended artists, and lavished large sums on their favorites. The climax of their adventures could be found in the fashion-houses of Paris in which they would undergo a grueling and stressful journey in search of the latest in French fashion. Following the war, these women continued to interact with France in much the same way as prior to the conflict.<sup>41</sup> But suddenly their less wealthy countrywomen joined them.

Prior to 1914 there were several barriers to non-elite women travelling to France. First, as Hoganson indicates, many would have suffered social stigma for stepping outside of the domestic sphere to experience the world firsthand; hence the rise of women's travel clubs.<sup>42</sup> Second, especially for those without means, overseas travel was very expensive. This abruptly changed in the 1920s, following the imposition of severe restrictions on immigration to the United States. A

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<sup>41</sup> Levenstein, 234-238.

<sup>42</sup> Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 204-206.

significant decline in immigrants left the steerage section of steamships empty. In response shipping companies converted steerage to "Tourist Third Class" by significantly improving the quality of accommodations. As a result, by 1927, approximately 40% of the more than 300,000 Americans who travelled to Europe slept in this new cabin class.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to being middle class, these new travelers came from previously underrepresented regions of the United States. As the cultural historian of American travel Harvey Levenstein has observed: "The eastern seaboard had set the tone for previous travelers. Now, young people from other regions, particularly the Midwest, came to the fore..."<sup>44</sup> In addition, these middle class adventurers differed from their predecessors in regard to what they did once they arrived. According to Levenstein: "For the new middle class, culture was merely one of a number of things that one casually consumed...High culture therefore played an ever-diminishing role in their visits to Europe, particularly in France, where it received stiff competition from "having fun."<sup>45</sup> This new

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 235-236.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 246.

consumer culture no longer confined female tourists to the opera house and symphony halls, but encouraged many to frequent public restaurants, imbibe at a Parisian bar, or even take in the eroticized spectacle at the Folies Bergère. As such, printed material for those sojourning in France changed with the time. One example, *Paris is a Women's Town*, written by two women, contained a five hundred page review of shopping, eighty pages devoted to accommodations, with an additional twelve pages devoted to the type of men one might encounter along the way.<sup>46</sup> High culture, the primary concern of upper class female travelers, was downgraded to a mere twenty-two pages, a portion of which discussed culinary schools.<sup>47</sup>

The *Kansas City Star* (both the daily and the magazine) reflected these changes in who was traveling abroad during the decade. In the article concerning medieval structures in England, female readers were now told of foreign places in such a way as to encourage them to visit. In this travelogue, the author specifically encouraged the artistic among the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

reading public to visit these locations.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the article concerning fox hunting in England similarly encouraged female readers, admonishing that: "Ladies are taking to the sport more and more every year. Gone for the most part are the sidesaddles. Instead one sees dainty figures in soldier-like breeches and riding boots. Many are among the first in at the 'kill."<sup>49</sup> As travel accounts illustrate, American women who wanted to have the foreign experience of the fox hunt could. In the era of the new women, well heeled American women could not only gain entrance to a previous male domain, as powerful agents of the market empire they could even join their British cousins - still the world's foremost colonial masters - in one of the most aristocratic of rituals.

Women writers often served as mentors to their readership on all things global. In an article titled "*The Strange Way That A French Town Was Named*" the author, Mattie Lee Peak, relates the story of the naming of a small town in Brittany.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "English Architecture...", 2.

<sup>49</sup> "With Horse and Hound...", 8.

<sup>50</sup> Mattie Lee Peak, "The Strange Way That A French Town Was Named: Of the Legend of St. Jean du Doigt There Are Many Versions," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, March 29, 1925, 12.

Peak found that the popular explanation for the town's name was likely derived from a myth related to the remains of a saint. She offered this cultural insight: "The American is wise to remember: First, that the Celtic mind feeds on legend, manufacturing it where it does not already exist..."second, that these legends are too closely interwoven with genuine religion to deserve delicate treatment. The traveler who goes to scoff at the faith of the Bretons will find little to appeal to him in their country."<sup>51</sup> Peak, of course, encouraged the open-minded traveler to take the plunge and visit the villages of Brittany.

The rhetoric mistaken for cultural insight presented in this article is representative of many of the travelogues of the 1920s. Local mythology is depicted as a cultural defect regardless of the country or continent, or how 'developed' the society might be. What is striking, however, is that the author of this article was female.<sup>52</sup> While it was in many ways

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mattie Lee Peak appears to have been a resident of Kansas City, Missouri, at least at some point in her life. In the Society section of the Kansas City Journal of January 2, 1898, mention is made of Peak.

typically didactic, it was intended for a female audience in order to engage women more fully with the foreign 'other.' Peak is a women, traveling abroad alone (or at least without mentioning any companions) sending back to Kansas City, for the consumption of other women, tales of the "silly" myths that escaped the middle ages and were still revered in contemporary times. The American market empire was expanding with the assistance of female as well as male tourists and travel writers who relied on the power of the dollar to consume, digest, and interpret the outside world.

The *Kansas City Star* reinforced women's newfound role in exploring the world. "*My Adventures in Entering the Forbidden City*," a series of widely published articles by Alexandra David-Neel, a world famous explorer representative of the more common feminist travelogue writers of the previous generations, related her efforts to reach the capitol of Tibet.<sup>53</sup> David-Neel, a Frenchwoman, claimed to be the first woman to enter Lhasa, as the city had traditionally prohibited women from entering its gates. Although accompanied by men, all of the members of her party were either Tibetan or

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<sup>53</sup> Alexandra David-Neels, "My Adventures in Entering the Forbidden City," *Kansas City Star*, August 9, 1925, 13.

Chinese. Aside from braving high mountains and unpleasant weather, at one point in the series, David-Neel also encounters hostile natives. While collecting samples for the Botanical Society of France, the author and her two assistants, came across three men they mistake for thieves. Later they are identified as hunters on an unsuccessful hunt. In anticipation of an attack that night David-Neel and her party erected defenses and kept watch.

At one point in the story the author rhapsodizes that "seldom have I spent such a delightful night as that one, when, at each minute, we expected an attack. But it was not the prospect of that event which gave charm to my vigil."<sup>54</sup> Waiting for the attack, she found the time to appreciate the culture of her hosts: "Seated at the entrance of his tent, a bowl of tea near him, Tsering sang ballads of years old of the land of Kham, marking the cadence by striking with a small rod on a Tibetan cauldron in which we cooked over during camp fire."<sup>55</sup> As entranced as she was, the moment did not escape a paternalistic interpretation, "the songs extol the primeval forests whence arise shining peaks clad of rustic

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

knights. Robbers they are like those whose presence in our neighborhood compelled us to watch, like the watchman himself, who - I know it - has played his part in more than one hot encounter..."<sup>56</sup> David-Neels expanded her judgments to all inhabitants of the countryside, commenting that "...like the three others who are now acting as sentinels, like all in that land of primitive braves who do not conceive of any field in which to show their prowess than the trails followed by the rich caravans."<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of the fact that David-Neels escaped danger in this particular moment - while also analyzing Tibet's people through a Eurocentric lens - she was still undertaking an intensive (and dangerous) voyage, traditionally pursued by men rather than women. And yet, for all of the women in Kansas City with access to the daily periodical, here was a woman undertaking something spectacular. Although this may not have encouraged Kansas City's women to trek off to Tibet, it did provide yet another image of women subduing the foreign.

This expansion of female agency into the realm of direct contact with the foreign, in foreign places, did not occur in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

a vacuum. Women becoming more interested in the foreign, and the meaning of America's expanding empire, was a by-product of a slow shift in the meaning of womanhood. The women of the previous generation, by the 1920s would ascribe to what was called "True Womanhood," which held that women were to hold onto their traditional roles and focus on being good mothers and wives. The decade, for a number of cultural reasons, introduced a rival term, the "New Woman." The stereotype of the New Woman was of "a 'good dresser' and a 'pal' to men. She expected, in brief, to have marriage, children, and a career, too. She expected, in brief, to have it all."<sup>58</sup> This is not to say that these labels for female behavior entering the popular lexicon in the decade represented a firm divide between two groups of women.

Women of the previous decade, particularly those with means who had pursued higher education, expanded women's roles within the republic by participating in a number of movements: prohibition, settlement houses, women's suffrage, and other

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<sup>58</sup> Dorothy M Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s*, (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 23.

progressive causes.<sup>59</sup> In fact, women worldwide began building international non-governmental organizations to pursue women's suffrage and end the exploitation of women and children, beginning in the 1880s.<sup>60</sup> At the same time that middle and upper class women expanded their public roles through domestic and international reform movements, working class women during the Great War asserted a new level of agency by going to work in factories. "True Womanhood" and the "New Woman," while helpful descriptive terms, are also problematic. One bleeds into the other, with examples of new women existing during the heyday of the true woman, true woman can also be readily found during the apex of the new women. Likewise, the new definition of womanhood hardly became universal, and has popularly been remembered primarily in the advent of the flapper. As such, the "New Woman" of the 1920s is not remarkable because she ventured beyond the domestic to experience the foreign. Rather, the fact that so many women during the period explored

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<sup>59</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967 ), 122-123.

<sup>60</sup> Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

the globe makes the decade markedly different from the previous.

The women of the 1920's differed in their interpretation of the foreign in some significant ways from the women of the decades prior. Kristin Hoganson's research illustrates how the act of bringing the foreign into the home was a statement of cultural supremacy and global hierarchy. One prime example was the 'cosey corner,' in which a middle class woman would decorate a portion of their home, often including constructing platforms, to resemble their interpretation of a Middle Eastern design palette - invoking images of the harem. The harem, a place of sexual oppression, thus became a tourist attraction within their homes. The ability to travel there at will provided them a privileged place within the empire.<sup>61</sup> One example from the *Kansas City Star Magazine* clearly turned the previous generations image of the harem on its head, illustrating that not all portrayals of the foreign published for women were accurate or thoughtful.

In the March 29, 1925 edition the women of Kansas City discovered a travelogue titled "*Living in a Harem Isn't so Bad: In Many Ways it is Better than the City Flat. But Turkish*

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<sup>61</sup> Hoganson, 53.

*Women are Vaguely Discontented.*"<sup>62</sup> Written by Marguerite E. Harrison, a geographer and part time spy, the author proclaims, "a harem is in many ways an admirable institution."<sup>63</sup> The author explains to a companion that she has been in a few harems, and for the most part, there was only one wife to be found within. Harrison proclaims that she would "rather live in a harem than in a small sized Harlem flat." Harrison provides the reader with the details of her first visit to a harem: the women who live in the harem are happy because they do "absolutely nothing," no domestic work whatsoever; their clothing is all store bought; and that she could find no harem in existence with more than one wife - the Great War having destroyed both the Ottoman Empire and polygamy.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Marguerite E. Harrison, "Living in a Harem Isn't So Bad: In Many Ways It Is Better Than the City Flat. But Turkish Women are Vaguely Discontented," *The Kansas City Star Magazine*, March 29 1925, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5.



Figure 6. Life in a Harem. From *The Kansas City Star Magazine*, March 29 1925.

In this article the women of Kansas City found one of the primary foreign fascinations of the previous generation reversed. The harem, the place of polygamy, where women were seen as submissive to an oppressive male, had transformed into a fairytale. Perhaps Harrison's vision of the harem was more

reflective of perceived developments in the United States than actual developments in Turkey - the only difference between the woman dwelling in Harrison's harem, and the definition of the "New Woman," was the lack of a profession. Yet, Harrison's article was neither an accurate description of a harem, nor a realistic reflection of life for the "New Woman." What her article does illustrate is her privileged place within the market empire and the values she, and those women of her class, shared with the men of the Chamber of Commerce. Harrison, like the men of the Chamber, firmly believed that all people and cultures were not that different, and essentially held the same goals: the comforts of consumerism. When the women of the harem were introduced to take-out food and ready-wear clothes they were also rescued from their oppression.

Examples of this type of flighty characterization of the foreign were uncommon. More often, Kansas City's women found legitimate discussions of America's place in the new global order within the pages of the *Star*. While "True Womanhood" and "New Woman" more complexly bled in and out of each other than intellectuals at the time portrayed, women of the decade did differ from those of the previous generation in some very fundamental ways. In 1919, with adoption of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment

of the United States Constitution, women gained the right to vote. This right widened the content periodicals presented for female audiences. "With victory in the suffrage movement, the new woman seemed to face a new day - equal, at least at the polling place, and free to turn to new issues. The magazines of the decade were filled with attempts to cut through the variety, to predict her course and the implications for American society, and to sort out just *who* this new woman was."<sup>65</sup> Based on analysis of the *Kansas City Star Magazine* and the *Kansas City Star* daily, the women of that city were not only exposed to foreign places, but also had access to a steady flow of information concerning the United States' diplomatic relations with other nations and peoples. As voters, women began to take an acute popular interest in the nation's traditional international relations, beyond the narrow issues of interest to the previous generation.

An article from the magazine that illustrates this, titled "*Herriot 'Sells' France on his Ideas: A Practical Man of Affairs is the Premier Despite His Academic Achievements,*" introduced the women of Kansas City to professor turned

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<sup>65</sup> Brown, 29.

politician, Edouard Herriot.<sup>66</sup> Although the primary focus of this work is biographical, it gives the reader insight into how France, under the leadership of Prime Minister Herriot, would interact with the rest of the international community. "Above all he wants to sell the world the idea that the France he knows and loves and represents is a most pacific nation - and he has already gone far toward dispelling the belief in French militarism and imperialism."<sup>67</sup> The message in this article was simple: the French were a friendly people with a friendly government who could be trusted by the American voter. Additionally, and perhaps most important for woman exploring their new role within the emerging American empire, the French empire offered no real challenge to American hegemony.

The *Kansas City Star Magazine* often featured pages of photographed scenes from around the world. These tended to be whimsical in nature. On numerous occasions, nonetheless, the

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<sup>66</sup> Clark K. Streit, "Harriot 'Sells' France on His Ideas: A Practical Man of Affairs is the Premier Despite his Academic Achievements," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, February 1, 1925, 5-7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

paper's editors also used pictorials to address weighty issues in international relations. One such collage displayed five unrelated photos of skiers, a man playing golf, and a bust of Woodrow Wilson. But one peculiar photo featured men hard at work in a German factory, accompanied by the caption: "A Mill Grinds On: The Krupp works in Germany has been found to be continuing the manufacture of arms in defiance of the allies."<sup>68</sup> Perhaps this photo of Germany breaking the requirements of the Treaty of Versailles was placed between other photos showing humanity at its most escapist so as not to worry the women who perused the pages of the magazine. Regardless of whatever photos accompanied the Krupp works photo, the fact that it was printed at all indicates that the *Star's* publishers felt compelled to keep its women readers informed of political as well as cultural developments in the world arena. Clearly, women should be encouraged to engage in the serious affairs of national security and empire.

Another article discussing traditional foreign relations

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<sup>68</sup> "Far and Near With the Camera," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, February 25, 1925, 4.

explained that conditions in Mexico had recently stabilized.<sup>69</sup> Edward Hungerford, the author, attributed the political and social calming to the ascendancy of the new president of the country, Plutarco Elias Calles. Hungerford gave his readers a portrait of the man: "there is nothing of swank nor of swagger in him, yet he manages to keep his heels pretty well planted on the ground. And when he speaks to you his face suddenly brightens. You realize that is a fine face. The face of a man come to the forty-seventh year of his life through much poverty and adversity in his beginning years, and solidly creating character all the while."<sup>70</sup>

Although he wrote glowingly of Calles, he offered his readers a note of caution that certainly resonated with Kansas City readers in the post Red Scare era. "For this is a labor government in Mexico. Make no mistake as to that. Even though it is careful to explain that it is neither a bolshevist nor a soviet affair..."<sup>71</sup> Whether he meant to calm his own concerns or those of his readers, he fell back on the Chamber of Commerce

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<sup>69</sup> Edward Hungerford, "Our Neighbor Mexico is Mending Her Ways at Last," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, March 29, 1925, 1-3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

formula whereby developments outside the forty-eight states could nevertheless be equated with America's historical experience. In this case, the head of Mexico's emerging political machine seemed a throw-back to the Great Emancipator: "the opportunity that today awaits Calles is truly Lincolnian in its scope - nothing less. The miseries of a people, long years oppressed, await his helping hand. Lincoln had the slaves; Calles has the peons. There is not, in reality, much difference between the two; save that in Mexico the oppressed peoples come to some 50 per cent of total population of the land."<sup>72</sup>

Like a Chamber of Commerce luncheon lecture, the article dodged specifics. It demurred from in-depth analysis of Calles's emerging one-party political machine and his preference for reformist rhetoric juxtaposed by relatively conservative policies. The journalistic soft soap might have catered to the female audience, perhaps assumed to be ill-prepared or ill-suited for rough and tumble Mexican political realities. By the same token, the dearth of political detail was not that different from the standard fare served at Chamber of Commerce meetings every Wednesday in downtown

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Kansas City. That said, the fact that women were addressed in such a profoundly new way about the internal stability of Mexico is significant. Here is yet another instance of women being engaged in the imperial project in a new and meaningful way.

As Hungerford's and the other articles discussed indicate, it is clear that the middle and upper class women in Kansas City, like their male counterparts, were hardly living in an isolationist milieu. The fact that this is a very small sample of the material published in Kansas City for consumption by women concerning the foreign, with much of it written by women, shows an expanding interest in the rest of the world. Additionally, their new role as voters expanded their internationalism beyond consumption of products and culture to the more traditional male concern of international relations.

Jennette Edwards, a local poet, published in the magazine in the 1920s a poem that addressed the place of the American woman in the world:

*"The world has need of intellect and wit  
To lead its pilgrims to the proper shrine,  
To weave its woe into a true design,  
And I should lend my hands to pattern it  
By beauty that would be fair requisite  
For pain. Great deeds the world has to assign*

*In distant lands whose glory would be mine;  
Yet I wait here, and to frail bonds submit.  
I am a priestess who presides at tea;  
I am a vestal with hearth fires to tend;  
And all my days will vanish endlessly  
With meals to cook and garments I should mend;  
Yes, far from here fine laurels I'd be winning;  
But who would keep this world a-spinning!"<sup>73</sup>*

Although the women of Kansas City, by the 1920s could see that the world had deeds to assign, and that they were capable of glory, their domestic world would only keep "a-spinning" with them at the helm. The women of Kansas City, unlike some of the authors they were reading, might not pick up and explore a harem. They were, at the very least, engaged with the world in a more intellectually stimulating way than women of the previous decades - and full participants in the expanding American market empire.

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<sup>73</sup> Jennette Edwards, "This Little World," *Kansas City Star Magazine*, March 29, 1925, 2.

## CHAPTER 4

### J.C. NICHOLS, THE PLAZA, AND EMPIRE

Growing numbers of men and women in inter-war Kansas City were clearly interested in their place in the emerging American market empire. But cities do not consist of people alone - a group of people without homes, sidewalks, roads, shops, parks is just a group of people. A city requires the physical space and built environment of a metropolis. Great cities, such as what Kansas City was attempting to become in the 1920s, require beautiful homes, ample sidewalks, wide tree-lined roads, shops where any product made can be purchased, and perhaps relaxing green oases in the middle of it all. Much of that had been accomplished by the 1920s in Kansas City as a result of the City Beautiful movement, which established the Parks and Boulevards system around the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> If the city truly aspired to world-class status, it would require built spaces that carried an international flair, and perhaps an old world patina. Into that void stepped

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<sup>1</sup> *A Legacy of Design: An Historical Survey of the Kansas City, Missouri, Parks and Boulevards System, 1893-1940*, ed. Janice Lee, et al. (Kansas City: Kansas City Center for Design Education and Research, 1995), v-vi.

Kansas City's most successful developer, and most well known internationalist, Jesse Clyde (J.C.) Nichols.



Figure 7. Jesse Clyde (J.C.) Nichols. From *The Kansas City Star*, August 19, 1947.

Nichols became famous for his ability to develop neighborhoods that retained their value. Just after the turn of the century, when he began his career, the city had

experienced twenty years of shifting population. The popular residential places for the well-to-do moved away from the original point of settlement at the Missouri River and downtown commercial hub, just blocks to the south of the river. As they moved to the south and east, the neighborhoods they left behind experienced immense transition, culminating in significantly reduced property values. Nichols primary goal was to end interurban migration. He planned a number of Kansas City's suburbs, within and outside of the city limits. But his legacy is built primarily on the Country Club District, approximately thirty to forty city blocks, consisting of a housing development called Brookside, and America's first shopping mall, the Country Club Plaza. More than one hundred years later the Country Club District still ranks as one of the most desired neighborhoods in the metropolitan area. While the men and women of the city with means would lay their heads within the confines of Brookside, the Plaza was the district's big draw. The Plaza was designed to attract shoppers from all over the city. It featured ample parking and popular shops, all within a built environment that recalled Spanish architecture. Under Nichols' direction, in the time period it was built, it became more than a shopping mall. The Plaza was a place for Kansas Citians to experience first hand their

city's place within the American market empire and to negotiate the meaning and place of foreign peoples within the new global order.

Nichols' internationalism had been integral to his own identity formation, even as a young man. During his senior year at Olathe High School (Olathe, Kansas) in 1897-1898, a war with Spain loomed on the horizon. While luminary jingoists such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge clamored for a "splendid little war," a significant minority of the U.S. population instead called for arbitration of the conflict. Just a decade earlier, Americans had joined like-minded citizens from other nations in advocating the creation of international arbitration institutions at the Hague and Geneva to address the emerging conflicts of an incredibly interconnected world.<sup>2</sup> As the valedictorian of his class, in the fateful year of 1898, Nichols' speech echoed the arbitrationists' themes. He began by pointing to the cost of war in human life by stating that "annually four millions of

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<sup>2</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 15-18.

men are called from peaceful avocations to learn the trade of mutual slaughter. Indeed, the enormity of the expense of armed peace is incomprehensible.”<sup>3</sup> He informed his audience of the cost in wealth of warfare and standing armies: “In every other trend of human affairs, expense is barrier to progress. For the support of this established tribunal alone, wealth is poured out like water.”<sup>4</sup> In conclusion he offered a solution to the issue of warfare and wasted wealth: “When this grand reformation shall attain its realization, when government shall determine all differences by arbitration and international congresses, when nations shall universally disarm and better employ the billions yearly lavished upon the war system, then will the dissolved human family be reunited in perpetual peace.”<sup>5</sup> Of course, the story of the sinking of the *Maine* in Havana Harbor and Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders” is well known.<sup>6</sup> When the United States went to war against Spain in the spring of 1898, instead of enlisting as so many other

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<sup>3</sup> J.C. Nichols, *Is Peace a Dream: Valedictory Speech*, 1897.

<http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/PUBLICATIONS/JCN/JCNPdf/JCN001.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 16.

men did, Nichols attended the University of Kansas.

After graduating at the top of his class at Kansas, Nichols was offered the opportunity to attend Harvard University as a post-graduate for a year. Influenced by a professor of economics at Harvard, he returned to Olathe and launched his first business venture. In his memoir he recalled that "during that year in Harvard I found myself becoming interested in colonization of new areas in the United States and Mexico. After I finished Harvard in 1903 I wasted almost a year in Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico and Arizona, trying to interest men with money to finance me in buying up large tracts of land for colonization."<sup>7</sup> After the failure to find investors for his colonization project, Nichols began what would be his life's work, the development of the Country Club District.

Nichols impact on Kansas City is as significant today as it was in the 1920s. Especially prior to the year 1900, Kansas City's neighborhoods tended to be integrated ethnically but segregated along class lines. Beginning around the turn of the century, however, in large part in response to a developing

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<sup>7</sup> J.C. Nichols, *Memoir*, 11.

public mass transit system, the city began to reflect geographic separation by race and class. Railcar lines expanded further south and east, out of the city center and away from the established residences and neighborhoods, leaving behind blight and slums.<sup>8</sup> Setting out to construct subdivisions that would remain vibrant, Nichols developed a specific vision for building lasting communities. First, each individual subdivision would have a strict architectural style, such as Tudor-style houses, built for a specific economic class. Although Nichols did occasionally build communities for the working classes, he overwhelmingly specialized in designing more expensive homes for those with means.<sup>9</sup>

His second best practice was to make each neighborhood as unique as possible within that set style palette. He firmly believed that the best way to achieve that would be to form

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<sup>8</sup> Sherry Lamb Schirmer, "Setting Boundaries: The Emergence of Jim Crow, 1900-1920," *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> J.C. Nichols. *City Planning*, 1923,  
<http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/PUBLICATIONS/JCN/JCNPDF/JCN012.pdf>

neighborhoods around their topography rather than altering nature to fit human needs. Prior to Nichols' development of the Country Club district, all streets in Kansas City ran in generally straight lines, regardless of topography, with numbered streets (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.) running East to West and named streets (Main, Broadway, Oak, etc.) running North and South. Rather than conforming to the grid system, Nichols chose to bend streets and sidewalks around hills and old growth trees in order to maintain a park like atmosphere. According to the *Kansas City Star*, Nichols had discovered that "birds and flowers, trees and shrubs, pleasing street vistas, the things which arouse 'sentiment' have high value; that men and women will pay money for mere beauty of nature; that homes and grounds and streets may be so treated and harmoniously blended that the sight of them creates an invitational feeling."<sup>10</sup>

As much as Nichols' practices seem to be quintessentially American, they were directly inspired by travels he made to Europe prior to platting the Country Club District.

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<sup>10</sup> *Kansas City Star*, February 1923. Country Club Plaza Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

Reflecting on a 1902 trip to England, France, and Germany, he made while attending the University of Kansas, Nichols stated that "this three months' trip made a lasting impression on me...I was struck most forcibly with the imposing plans, and permanent character of the cities and the buildings, and I believe it was then that the spark was struck that ultimately brought the Country Club District into being."<sup>11</sup> Although creating a residential district that appeared to be organic in its development is a rather American concept, Nichols was attempting to re-create the stability of neighborhoods he observed in Europe.

Foreign inspiration permeates throughout many of Nichols projects, and this is especially true of the Country Club Plaza. Attempting to decipher where inspiration for the Plaza came from, however, produced convoluted results at best. The most common local explanation as to why Spanish architecture is reflected in the Plaza is that Nichols was inspired by a trip he made to Spain and several other countries while on tour in Europe in 1922 just prior to beginning construction. In 1950 the *Kansas City Star* observed that "the Country Club Plaza came in the 1920s as the crowning achievement of a

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<sup>11</sup> Nichols, *Memoir*, 10-11

planned city built by J.C. Nichols. The plaza was designed soon after Mr. and Mrs. Nichols returned from Spain, hence the choice of Spanish architecture."<sup>12</sup>

This explanation was echoed seventeen years later by Nichols's son Miller at the dedication of the last major section of the Plaza to be completed, the Giralda Tower (1967). In his dedication remarks, Miller Nichols stated that "it was [his] father's visit to Seville nearly a half-century ago that inspired the use of Spanish architecture on the Country Club Plaza."<sup>13</sup> This explanation of inspiration is repeated again in the official biography of J.C. Nichols published in 1994: "The seeds for the idea of the Country Club Plaza had been planted during Nichols' European trips."<sup>14</sup> It

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<sup>12</sup> *Kansas City Star*, February 28, 1950. Country Club Plaza Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>13</sup> *The Seville Light and the Giralda Tower* (1967), 2, Western Historical Manuscripts, J.C. Nichols Company Collection, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Pearson and Brad Pearson, *The J.C. Nichols Chronicle: The Authorized Story of the Man, His Company, and His Legacy, 1880-1994* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 91.

explained that "before construction got under way in October 1922 on the first plaza building, J.C. and Jessie [his wife] had visited Italy to study hillside villas, Spain for architectural style, France for the uniform building heights of Paris, Germany for streets planned in relation to building density and the most efficient traffic movement, and England for its thoroughly planned 'new' towns."<sup>15</sup> As much as this explanation continues to hold sway, it appears to be something of a myth.



Figure 8. Giralda Tower. Though completed in 1967, this tower was a part of the original plan for the Country Club Plaza. Photograph taken July 27, 2011.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Figure 9. Country Club Plaza, Balcony Building. The balcony is not visible from the south side, pictured here. Much of the Plaza has been unchanged from the original design. July 27, 2011.

The first inconsistency in these explanations is the timing of the trip. The exact dates of the trip have not been recorded. In a 1922 speech, however, J.C. Nichols spoke of his recent trip to Europe. His choice of language alludes to the trip lasting at least two months, if not longer. "The Americans who travel in Europe for a few months cannot come back with any adequate appreciation of European affairs," he lectured.<sup>16</sup> Second, the activities he reports to have witnessed indicate that they would have occurred in the spring at the earliest. "The people in all countries on the continent are very busy agriculturally. You would see whole families working in the fields from sunrise to long after sundown," he reported.<sup>17</sup> Even if Nichols left Kansas City, Missouri on the first of March 1922, spent two months travelling, and returned on the first of May, it would have been nearly impossible for this trip to be the direct inspiration for the Plaza. As Nichols was not an architect, under the timeline presented in this interpretation of his remarks, he would have only had two

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<sup>16</sup> J.C. Nichols, *European Trip*, 1922.

<http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/PUBLICATIONS/JCN/JCNPdf/JCN011.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

months to convey his image of the Plaza to the artists who created the initial drawings of the shopping center. One drawing, depicting five detailed blocks of Spanish influenced architecture, including four towers, was first published in the June 1922 issue of the *Country Club District Bulletin*. While it is not impossible that architectural drawings could have been created in that short of a time period, it is unlikely.

Adding to the possibility that it was not the 1922 European trip that inspired the Plaza are Nichols' remarks upon returning. In a 1922 speech in which he reflected on his travels, he recounted that he travelled to eleven countries even though he only specifically discussed four. If researchers are to believe that this trip inspired the design of the crown jewel of Nichols' life work, then it would be reasonable to expect some mention of at least travelling to Spain. Instead, Nichols remained silent on the topic of Spain or its architecture.<sup>18</sup>

The strongest evidence that Spain did not rank as the primary inspiration for the Plaza's architectural style is that Nichols mused on occasion that the blueprint came from

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

elsewhere. When reflecting on his previous trips associated with his business plan to colonize uninhabited parts of the southwest United States and Mexico, Nichols pondered "sometimes I wonder if seed for the love of Spanish and Mexican architecture was not sewn in my heart during that year."<sup>19</sup> Nichols' use of the word "wonder" in that sentence is telling; he is incapable of pinpointing where the inspiration for Spanish and Mexican architecture emanated.

He was unable to clearly define the cultural origins of the Plaza because the shopping mall was in fact inspired by a lifetime of international and domestic experiences. When he committed the grand entryway of his life's work to appear to be a Spanish colonial town center, he did so without a clear idea of what he was replicating. Aspects of the Plaza are taken directly from Spain, such as the Giralda Tower, which is a miniaturized version of a tower in Seville. That tower, while "Spanish" in origin, is actually Moorish in design.<sup>20</sup> Some parts of the Plaza are taken directly from Mexico, such

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<sup>19</sup> Nichols, *Memoir*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> *The Seville Light and the Giralda Tower*, 2.

as the 5,000 hand painted tiles that adorn the Time Tower.<sup>21</sup>  
And some things are not even remotely Spanish or Mexican, such  
as the several pieces of priceless Italian sculpture that  
reside in the Plaza's many courtyards and nooks.



Figure 10. Time Tower. Photograph taken July 27, 2011.

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<sup>21</sup> *Kansas City Star*, August 31, 1947. Country Club Plaza  
Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections  
Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

While the primary documents are inconclusive as to why the Plaza is "Spanish," there are some theoretical explanations. International relations historians influenced by the cultural turn tend to think of culture as fluid, an on-going process of discourse and symbolic representation - rather than a static structural phenomenon. This is especially true in borderlands studies where the interaction between two or more cultures in a confined geographical space comes under scrutiny.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the US-Mexico border it can be difficult to determine where one set of cultural identities ends and the other begins, regardless of what political boundaries indicate. This stems from the daily negotiation of culture between these two peoples. What is distinctly American can be adopted and changed by various groups and individuals on the Mexican side and made their own, and vice versa. The same can be said of the relationship between Spanish and Mexican culture. As a former colonial holding of Spain,

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<sup>22</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, "Considering Borders," *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Mexican culture is a combination of several influences: Iberian, an array of indigenous peoples, a smattering of African-Mexicans, and of course, a large mixed or mestizo population. To determine what in Mexican culture is Mexican and what is Spanish is nearly impossible. This theoretical framework helps to explain why a model of a clearly Moorish building would be considered Spanish in the United States. But the cultural hybridization found in borderlands regions is not necessarily anchored in geography. Borderlands influence infiltrates ethnic restaurants, travel writing, and museums. It is arguable that any space in which cultures meet and cross-fertilize can be considered to be a type of borderland.<sup>23</sup> Symbolically speaking, the Plaza district - shaped by J.C. Nichols' real and imagined international experiences, served as a borderland. And the output of that borderland, an amalgamation of foreign cultures, commodified into a shopping experience, forced Kansas Citians to also negotiate how they interacted with the world.

At first, many Kansas City residents refused to participate. When the *Kansas City Star* initially reported on the development of the Plaza in early 1925, it made no mention

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

of the district's Mexicaness and only casually noted its Spanish influences by reference to its color palette which it described as "Spanish red".<sup>24</sup> It was not until the J.C. Nichols Company hosted an open house for their new offices on the Plaza in 1926 that the *Star* acknowledge its Iberian architecture, but even then the paper downplayed the foreignness: "...entrance is from Ward parkway into a first floor lobby true to the Spanish influence that characterizes the Country Club plaza district as a whole, but here handled with restraint in keeping with an American business office."<sup>25</sup> It is telling that the piece specified that the Spanish theme had not been employed with so much rigor as to detract from the proper business-like operations of "an American business office." In delineating between what on the Plaza was Spanish and what was American, the *Kansas City Star* was careful to separate the two cultures into spheres: the artistic or

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<sup>24</sup> *Kansas City Star*, January 14, 1925. Country Club Plaza Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>25</sup> *Kansas City Star*, March 14, 1926. Country Club Plaza Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

Spanish on one hand, and the commercial or American on the other.



Figure 11. Original Office of the J.C. Nichols Company.

Photograph taken July 27, 2011.

This is indicative of a hierarchy of cultures at work in Kansas City during the period. The hierarchy was influenced by the formal relationships the United States maintained with

foreign peoples. Although the hierarchy remained so fluid that it is difficult to state with any precision what culture fell where on the list at what time, three observations are worth noting: first, the United States always ranked as the premier society and nation; second, people of color - from Latin America to Asia to Africa - occupied the lowest rung on the ladder; third, even those relegated to lowly status had a place within the market empire.

Importantly, the international hierarchy mirrored Kansas City's own social, racial, and cultural hierarchies in the twenties. As with many of the nation's urban centers, the demand for labor during the Great War had accelerated a migration of African American workers from the agricultural south in search of defense related jobs. Unlike black migrants to Chicago or other northern industrial cities, those who settled in Kansas City encountered a system of Jim Crow racial segregation that mandated separate public facilities for whites and blacks by local ordinance. In Kansas City, the diaspora concentrated in neighborhoods such as Church Hill, Belvidere Hollow, and the Vine Street Corridor, where residents often occupied substandard housing stock, children

attended racially segregated schools, and incomes remained abysmally low.<sup>26</sup> Although the city's African American neighborhoods existed within just a few miles of Nichols' Country Club Plaza, they lived an ocean away in terms of cultural and economic status. Indeed, Nichols' stylish residential homes came complete with restrictive covenants that barred sale to African Americans and Jews.<sup>27</sup>

There is no small irony in the fact that as Nichols' white customers downplayed the Hispanic ambiance that pervaded the Plaza as the metropolitan area's Mexican-American population remained confined largely to low income neighborhoods in the meat-packing districts and railroad hubs of Kansas City, Kansas. The first Mexican migrants to the city date to the first decade of the twentieth century when the railroads needed cheap labor to replace low-wage Chinese and Japanese workers who had been barred entry to the United States in the 1880s and early 1900s by anti-Asian exclusionary immigration legislation and Executive Order. The number of

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<sup>26</sup> Schirmer, 32-38.

<sup>27</sup> William Worley, *J.C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City: Innovations in Planned Residential Districts* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 148-153.

Mexicans living in the state of Kansas stood at 13,770 by 1920 - with the largest numbers concentrated in Kansas City, Kansas - employed by the Santa Fe railroad and the Armour and Swift meatpacking companies.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1920s, the severe restrictions imposed on European immigration due to the National Origins Acts of 1921 and 1924 did not apply to hemispheric migrants. Thus, the city, like much of the American Southwest, experienced an additional bump in Mexican-American population during the decade. Like their African American counterparts across the state line in Missouri, Kansas City, Kansas's Mexican-Americans often felt the sting of white racism. There is little evidence that newcomers were welcomed in the chic retail establishments that popped up on the Plaza or that Mexican Americans could afford to purchase homes in the lily-white neighborhoods that surrounded the shopping center. While Mexican immigrants experienced different receptions from community to community across the Southwest during the twenties, Kansas City, Kansas's officials went so far as to require that Mexican

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<sup>28</sup> "Mexican Immigrants," *Kansas State Historical Society Website*, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/mexican-immigrants/12087>.

children also attend segregated schools. During the depression thirties, moreover, the state of Kansas encouraged the railroads to fire their Mexican workers and deport them, regardless of how long they had dwelled in the United States - the Mexican population in the state plummeted to approximately 2,500.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of their status within the market empire, ethnic minorities played an important, if unrecognized role, in the United States' expanding global role. They also were instrumental in Kansas City's increased role within the market empire. The African American community that took shape at the nationally renowned intersection of Eighteenth street and Vine nourished a rich tradition in musical creativity and developed its own genre of syncopated and improvised Kansas City jazz - a blend of African, Caribbean, North American, and European influences. They were assisted by the city's Democratic political machine, led by the famously corrupt "Boss" Tom Pendergast, whose defiance of the nation's prohibition laws and tolerance of gambling and prostitution, buttressed the

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Cleary, "The Education of Mexican-Americans in Kansas City, Kansas, 1916-1951 (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2002).

Eighteenth and Vine entertainment district and attracted artists from around the Midwest and beyond. Despite the rigors of Jim Crow, Pendergast extended suffrage to the city's black population who rewarded him with their loyalty most election days.<sup>30</sup> Kansas Citians who hailed from south of the Rio Grande brought not only their strong work ethic but their own cultural baggage: a dynamic sense of national identity and ethnic pride nourished by the country's recent revolution, close-knit extended families, and of course their own cuisine and musical traditions.<sup>31</sup> For the most part, the elites who charted the city's course throughout the 1920s overlooked how ethnic and racial minorities contributed to the city's cultural mosaic. As Nichols imagined an internationally aware cosmopolitan Kansas City, he neglected ethnic minorities' place in the city. Largely, this occurred by excluding them from his real estate developments.

Nichols nonetheless encouraged his white, privileged clients to bask in things international. The Country Club District, under his direction published a monthly newsletter

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<sup>30</sup> Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Cleary, 8-11

for residents, *the Country Club District Bulletin*, which often addressed the art of consuming the foreign. This was certainly the case when it came to the purchase of top-of-the-line oriental rugs in Nichols' shopping area.<sup>32</sup> Given the different styles and wide-range of quality amongst producers, participating in the rug portion of the imperial creation of domesticity required an informed base of knowledge. And that base of knowledge, if you were a resident of the Country Club District, would be provided free of charge.

In January, 1920, after receiving numerous requests from Country Club District residents who wrote to the newsletter and expressed anxiety over their rug purchases, the *Country Club District Bulletin* published two articles by a local rug dealer indicating where residents could go to purchase a rug, and dished out advice to savvy consumers: "Caucasian rugs differ from Tourkoman [sic] (described in a previous issue of *The Bulletin*) chiefly in being dyed in other colors than blood red, in omitting the apron ends and in being more crowded, elaborate and pretentious in geometric, linear patterns."<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>32</sup> Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Clarence E. Shepard, *How to Know Caucasian Rugs*. *Country Club District Bulletin*. Jan. 15, 1920, Western Historical

expert found that "the Caucasian weavers are the Oriental rug cartoonists, using wooden men, animals and trees. They run much to Noah's Ark designs, Mt. Ararat being on the southern border of this country."<sup>34</sup>.

It is worth noting that as the expert transmitted his knowledge to would-be consumers, he also assigned a hierarchy of cultural values to the commodity. In describing the rug makers of the Caucasus as "cartoonist" he has degraded the quality and importance of that region's cultural artifacts and artisans. His tone leaves no doubt that a rug from the Caucasus did not deserve a prominent place near the American imperial hearth. Its presence would in fact diminish the status of its upper and middle class white buyer and transgress both international and local cultural hierarchies.

Traditional scholars, and especially scholars not focused on international relations, have so readily adopted the isolationist interpretation of the 1920s that many cultural clues of internationalism, such as rug ownership and

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Manuscripts, J.C. Nichols Company Collection, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

architecture, have been incompletely examined.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that the Plaza has been unexamined by historians. Local historians tend to point to the Plaza as the lasting artifact of the city's unstoppable spread south of downtown.<sup>36</sup> Urban and planning historians view the Plaza as the very first shopping mall, as it was specifically designed to cater to the nation's emerging automobile culture.<sup>37</sup> These existing interpretations of the Plaza, however, relegate the most culturally important aspect of the site to the novel. By creating a shopping district influenced by the foreign, developer J.C. Nichols provided a space for Kansas Citians to not only reflect and manifest, but also to negotiate their understanding of America's position within the international hierarchy. Nichols and his affluent clientele predictably placed the United States atop the international hierarchy.

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<sup>35</sup> Hoganson, for instance, ends her study just as American begins to descend into perceived isolationism.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, "All the Worlds a Mall: Reflections on the Social and Economic Consequences of the American Shopping Center," *The American Historical Review* (Vol. 101, No. 4, Oct. 1996), 1111-1121.

<sup>37</sup> Worley, 254-255.

Public discourse regarding the Plaza and its Mexican influences is perhaps the best indication of how the site served as a place of cultural negotiation between the domestic and foreign. Nichols himself indicated the possibility that he was inspired by travels through Mexico rather than Spain. But that interpretation has remained excluded from local lore, and was conspicuously absent from public commentary during the 1920s. The word Mexican is not publically used to describe any aspect of the Plaza, architecture or adornment, until 1936.<sup>38</sup> Diplomatic and cultural relations between the United States and Mexico, and the United States and Spain, offers an explanation.

From 1910-1920 Mexico experienced a violent revolution, which on occasion flooded over the border into the United States and ended in the expropriation of millions of acres of American-owned property.<sup>39</sup> By 1923 the situation in Mexico

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<sup>38</sup> *Kansas City Star*, June 28, 1936. Country Club Plaza Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>39</sup> The exact dates of the Mexican Revolution are more fluid than the range given indicates. However, most historians agree

seemed to have settled enough that the United States government recognized Álvaro Obregón as the legitimate president of Mexico. Due to the level of violence and instability caused by the revolution, however, Americans and their government remained uneasy about Mexico.<sup>40</sup> As historian Dennis Merrill indicates in his study of tourism south of the border, in the 1920s Americans began to reengage Mexico, but the number of tourists was still small in comparison to other nations and heavily concentrated in border towns such as Tijuana where prohibition era Yankees could quench their thirst.<sup>41</sup>

As for America's relationship with Spain, it was significantly different. Following the Spanish-American War, relations between the former combatants underwent a steady

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that the bulk of the revolution occurred between 1910-1920, even though the conflict was not completely settled by 1920.

<sup>40</sup> Dirk W. Raat, *Mexico and the United States: Ambivalent Vistas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 122-125.

<sup>41</sup> Dennis Merrill, "Lone Eagles and Revolutionaries: The US-Mexican Rapprochement of the 1920s," *Negotiating Paradise: Tourism and Empire in Twentieth Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

decline. By the 1920s, however, the two nations approached each other amicably once again as they began to view the other as less of a threat to their respective hegemonic ambitions.<sup>42</sup> When Kansas Citians, particularly through the *Kansas City Star*, discussed the ethnic influences on the Plaza in the 1920s, they neglected the Mexican and emphasized the Spanish. Things Mexican represented instability and violence; things Spanish were perceived as not merely non-threatening, but exotic and romantic.

By the mid-1930's the Mexican influences on the Plaza received a modest degree of public recognition. The willingness of Kansas Citians to acknowledge the district's Latino heritage coincided with a full-fledged rapprochement in U.S.-Mexican relations. With the world's second global war fast-approaching, Washington courted Mexico City's cooperation with naval defense and access to Mexican strategic materials. At the same time, American tourists ventured south of the bar-studded border towns to gaze upon the country's ancient ruins

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<sup>42</sup> James W. Cortada, *Two Nations Over Time: Spain and the United States, 1776-1977* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1978), 167.

and modern, mural art.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the singular Spanish influence on the Plaza became diluted in public discourse, as the Spanish Civil War became a national concern. On July 17, 1936, General Francisco Franco, at the head of a fascist coalition, launched a coup against the Republican government. Although America's Roman Catholic hierarchy lobbied heavily against U.S. intervention, many Americans sympathized with the Republican cause.<sup>44</sup>

This rising relationship with Mexico and declining relationship with Spain found expression in two public events held at the Plaza in the 1930s. These events indicate that the hierarchy of nations in the worldview of the city's residents was in action, with America still at the top. In 1936 (less than two weeks after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War), and again in 1938, the Country Club Plaza was transformed from an up-scale shopping district into a "fiesta." According to the *Kansas City Star*: "The Country Club Plaza will be enlivened July 7 and 8 with the color, music, laughter and gaiety of a Spanish street fair when the Plaza Merchants Association presents its first annual Plaza fiesta. The

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<sup>43</sup> Raat, *Mexico and the United States*, 141-147.

<sup>44</sup> Cortada, *Two Nations Over Time*, 186-191.

district will be turned into a Spanish market place."<sup>45</sup> It featured "banners and Mexican holiday decorations" and the shops were "decorated in keeping with the fiesta spirit and many of the merchants and clerks are to be dressed in Spanish costumes."<sup>46</sup> By 1936 the term Mexican was no longer taboo in discussion of Plaza architecture and ambience. Indeed, the blurring of differences between Spanish markets and Mexican deserts betrayed a borderlands vision of cultural blending. It also reflected cultural assumptions that made both cultures and their colonial past available to North American consumers compliments of the market empire.

A *Kansas City Star* article of June 28, 1936 indicated that visitors to the Plaza could partake in five hours of varied entertainment, some which actually seemed to be Mexican or Spanish in nature. An article of the next day, however, highlighted the big draw of the night: "Senor Oliver Messmer, also in Spanish costume, did a tap dance to the tune of 'Goofus.'<sup>47</sup> Set to music similar in nature to Rag Time, *Goofus* is a quintessentially American song. It contains no reference,

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<sup>45</sup> *Kansas City Star*, June 28, 1936.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> *Kansas City Star*, June 28, 1936.

overt, covert, or in passing, to Spanish or Mexican cultural themes. Furthermore, the lyrics profess a subtle American provincialism, with a celebration of musical ignorance and "corn-fed notes."<sup>48</sup>

While the estimated crowd of 5,000 who attended the 1936 fiesta was large, the crowd that attended the 1938 fiesta was four times larger; with even more well known entertainment acts. "With preparations in readiness, eighty entertainers in twenty acts mark time to enter into the Country Club plaza Tuesday and Wednesday nights [to celebrate] the season close to every Mexican's heart, the fiesta," reported the *Kansas City Star*.<sup>49</sup> With the employees of the Plaza merchants donning "sombros and serapes," fiesta goers were treated to a four and half hour show titled "Fiesta Follies."<sup>50</sup> The entertainment appears to have been loosely themed around "events in a

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<sup>48</sup> *Goofus* (1950), <http://www.lyricsdownload.com/phil-harris-goofus-lyrics.html>

<sup>49</sup> *Kansas City Star*. July 10, 1938. Country Club Plaza Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections Department, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Mexican night club during the fiesta season.”<sup>51</sup> There is a noticeable difference between the 1936 and the 1938 fiestas that indicate that relations with Spain had deteriorated further in the two years between the events. Spain and things interpreted as being Spanish, other than the architecture, yielded more space to cultural expressions perceived as Mexican in the public discourse of the fiesta. In 1936 the headline entertainment was a man in “Spanish” costume performing an American song. In 1938, however, the headliner was at least casually inspired by Mexico: Lois Swaney’s rendition of *Rio Rita* from the musical of that name.<sup>52</sup>

*Rio Rita* appeared on Broadway in 1927 in the midst of a swarm of undistinguished romantic comedy musicals. Throughout the 1920s the artistic teams that wrote musicals, in an effort to break their productions from the pack, began setting their stories in exotic locations. However, as much as the themes and locations of these musicals took audiences beyond the boundaries of the United States, they also tended to reinforce the cultural norms of America rather than that of the setting. For instance, *Rio Rita*, rather than featuring aspects of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Kansas City Star*. July 10, 1938.

Mexican culture (as the musical takes place in the borderlands of Texas and Mexico), such as Mexican or Mexican inspired music, takes its inspiration directly from American musical traditions.<sup>53</sup> Ethan Mordden has observed that the writers of *Rio Rita* turned "the first big love duet spot into a fox trot with a pseudo-western clopping bass."<sup>54</sup> Thus *Rio Rita* serves to further elaborate the international hierarchy at work in the Plaza. But the primary importance of the inclusion of *Rio Rita* is that it indicates the rising "Mexican" cultural heritage of the Country Club Plaza.

The comparison between the cultural language used to describe the Plaza in the 1920s and the 1930's illustrates the degree to which the Plaza immediately served as a domestic place of empire; a built-environment where an international hierarchy was imagined, built, negotiated, and ultimately rearranged by the inhabitants of Kansas City. A far cry from isolationists, Kansas Citians who lived near, shopped at, or partied at the Country Club Plaza registered as affluent

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<sup>53</sup> Ethan Mordden, *Make Believe: The Broadway Musical in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

participants in America's emerging international market empire.

The extent to which the city's residents actually engaged the world - and its cast of others - nonetheless remained restricted. The language scholar Mary Louis Pratt has used the term "cultural contact zone" to explain power relationships that form when two or more disparate cultures encounter one another. The Plaza constituted more of a cultural theater than a cultural contact zone, a theater in which Midwestern consumers acted as directors. The supposedly Spanish inspired buildings of the Plaza were erected, and continue to stand, without Spanish or Mexican agency.

Because it was erected as a way to interact with a foreign culture, while at the same time severed from the culture represented, the Plaza is something less than a contact zone. The interaction available to a visitor of the Plaza is similar to that available at a museum, except that the artifacts are dubious and lack the educational aspect necessary to place them in cultural context. Shoppers who purchased their goods at the Plaza could walk away from the romanticism of the development and comfortably travel back into their own culture. As a brochure for the Plaza from the 1980's states: "Everyone who comes to the Plaza finds what

they want here...and they take it with them when they go.”<sup>55</sup> It described a day at the plaza as “...an afternoon stroll through story book atmosphere, a freshet of fashion, a browse of boutiques, a leisurely lunch in the sunshine, a night-lively adventure, an art tour; a teeming Persian market of unforgettable perceptions and interludes.”<sup>56</sup> But it was more than just a place, it was also “...an attitude, too...a holiday mood in any season, an air of excitement and anticipated pleasures that transports you to a more graceful era.”<sup>57</sup> And it was instant, “you’ll sense it the moment you enter the Plaza, because it runs strong, indeed.”<sup>58</sup>

Interactions with a foreign culture, or at least perceived interactions, are in fact the purpose behind the shopping center. It begs Kansas Citians, and tourists, to visit another land, and another time, and consume. As much as it is designed to give visitors the sense of having visited

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<sup>55</sup> *The Plaza: An American Original* (Kansas City: J.C. Nichols Company, 1970), 13, Western Historical Manuscripts, J.C. Nichols Company Collection, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

some place vastly different from Kansas City, that experience has been extracted from the culture that would give the experience actual meaning. Rather than a contact zone where cultures engage in exchange, the Plaza served as a manufactured contact zone where the affluent re-imagined and consumed the other in socially prescribed rituals. The Plaza gave its many visitors feelings of international cosmopolitanism and encouraged physical participation in the American market empire - both in terms of understanding America's place at the top of the international hierarchy while also enjoying the power of consumption afforded to those who occupied the center of the empire. It simultaneously reinforced the racial and ethnic hierarchy that ordered American urban life in the early twentieth century.

Rather than isolating themselves from the world, Kansas Citians in the 1920s, especially elite Kansas Citians, sought to impose their own cultural order on all things foreign. These relationships tended to be imperial in nature, designed to celebrate America's market empire and to allow Americans of means to indulge in the privileges of global consumption. Nor was the Country Club Plaza a unique cultural artifact. Historian Phoebe Kropp studies a problematic commodification of Spanish missions, Mexican markets, and American Indian

reservations as tourist destinations in interwar California.<sup>59</sup> The commodification of Spanish and Mexican culture by way of shopping centers may not seem to be a true cultural exchange, however, there is a perception held by the visitors of these places that they at least resemble authenticity.

In the Country Club Plaza we find an amalgamation of cultures, without clear delineation between what is what, except that the clear purpose is to consume with abandon. Yet, by providing this foreign inspired built environment, J.C. Nichols challenged his neighbors to evaluate their relationship with the world, especially Spain and Mexico. Just as Kansas City businessmen shopped for foreign markets and envisioned a American-led world order during the twenties, middle and upper class Kansas City home-owners and consumers possessed an abiding curiosity about the outside world and America's place in it. Yet, as business leaders and government officials at the time remained oblivious to their contradictory goals of international market creation and domestic market protection, so too Plaza goers made light of

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<sup>59</sup> Phoebe Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2006).

their Spanish and Hispanic possessions and consumed imports in the name of America's cultural superiority. Their cultural hierarchy, after all, also reflected the city's fragmentation along racial, ethnic, and class lines. Kansas Citians, like many other Americans, may have thought and behaved as chauvinistic unilateralists, but isolationists they were not. Instead they increasingly blurred the local and the global, commodified and consumed the foreign other, and positioned their city to assume its rightful place in an American-led post-war world order.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE LIBERTY MEMORIAL AS IMPERIAL PROJECT

On November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1918 the City Council of Kansas City, Missouri authorized the creation of a committee to organize a memorial to those residents who gave their lives in the Great War. They created a committee of one hundred to be led by local businessman Robert A. Long from whom the idea for the memorial originated. Over the following six years the committee spearheaded the successful effort to plan, raise funds for, and erect the Liberty Memorial, the largest and most expensive monument in the United States to the Great War. This monument represented what was to be a solemn anchor to a new art and culture district in the city. Consisting of a tower, exhibition space, meeting space for veterans groups, and a carved wall with scenes commemorating the sacrifices of soldiers and their families. But from the moment Long gathered his closest friends and associates to pitch the idea of the monument, it was clear that it represented more than a war monument.

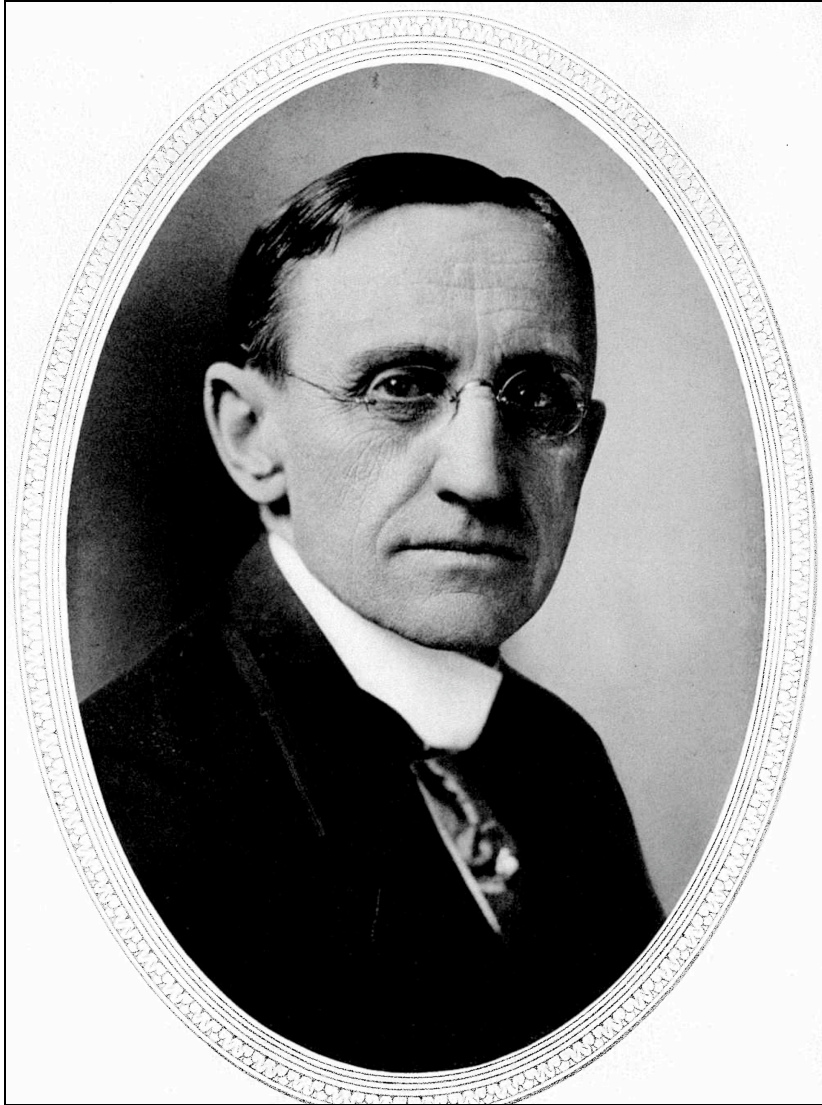


Figure 12. Robert A. Long. From *Kansas City and its One Hundred Foremost Men* (Kansas City: 1924).

The group of businessmen who led the effort to erect the Liberty Memorial included many of the very same men who filled the membership roles of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce

and sought to grow the city's export profits, fund international relief missions, and elevate their community to world-class status. Many of their spouses and daughters were the high-octane consumers who patronized the city's bustling import shops. Many made their homes in J.C. Nichols's residences that sat astride the idiosyncratic internationalism of the Country Club shopping mall. As they approached the memorial project, they infused it with the same blend of international and local boosterism that characterized their weekly Wednesday luncheons. Partly a monument to war, the memorial also would serve as a local place of empire. It would draw the attention and admiration of the entire nation and the world. Most of all it would attest to Kansas City's prominent place in America's rapidly expanding market empire.

The Liberty Memorial's architectural grandeur - accented by its 300 foot tall tower, making it the highest point in the city - certainly stood as testimony to the courage and patriotism of the city's warriors. But as a monument to the future, it embodied the businessmen's vision of a new American-led postwar world order - an order at odds both with traditional power politics and certainly antithetical to isolationism. The Liberty Memorial symbolized the city elite's dreams of peace based on economic liberty,

voluntarism, international fellowship, and market empire. It announced to Kansas Citians and visitors alike that the United States had arrived as a world power - indeed, one of the earth's greatest powers. At the same time, it affirmed that Kansas City occupied a premier place in the imperial hierarchy.



Figure 13. Liberty Memorial. Photograph taken July 27, 2011.

A monument served the city's purpose well as memorials do much more than memorialize. Emily Rosenberg, in her 2003 monograph on Pearl Harbor in popular memory, *A Date Which Will Live*, examines the importance of war monuments: She argues that popular, collective memory seeks not to recover some authentic version of the past, but to represent history in heroic form in order to reinforce social hierarchies, national identities, and community values. Like culture itself, memory is fluid in nature, always subject to contestation and change.<sup>1</sup> The Liberty Memorial provided the men and women of the city with "...representative images of individuals who became heroic through their innocence and sacrifice."<sup>2</sup> As a place for residents of the city to work through the meaning of the past, define the present, and trumpet America's future greatness, the memorial would have much to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

Kansas City suffered significantly in the Great War; losing 440 men and one woman.<sup>3</sup> With President Woodrow Wilson in the Oval Office, the United States had asserted itself over the peace process following the war. Although the treaty that ended the conflict came far short of the world Wilson imagined, he did help create an international body, the League of Nations, which provided structure to the mediation of global conflict without violence. Ironically, Wilson's leadership on the world scene did not translate into successful leadership at home. The United States Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles of which the proposed league was a part. Wilsonianism would endure and find expression through commercial internationalism. With a partial abdication of global leadership, Americans, exhausted from their efforts, looked for meaning to the war. The men and women of Kansas City were able to provide meaning to the war by constructing a site in which they could remember the fallen in an idealized form. Kansas City quickly became the epicenter of war remembrance and meaning, raising its stature as an imperial

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<sup>3</sup> Leland Rucker, "A Monument at 60," *The Kansas City Star*, November 1, 1981, Liberty Memorial Vertical File, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri.

city - a place in which the American empire could be domestically experienced, celebrated, and defined.

Just a few days following the signing of the armistice that ended the Great War, Long called a meeting of twenty of Kansas City's most influential and wealthy citizens. In attendance were residents like Jesse Clyde (J.C.) Nichols and William T. Kemper, president of the Commerce Trust Company, the city's largest bank.<sup>4</sup> The most important name in the room was William Volker, a German immigrant who created a successful home furnishings business (local lore claims that Volker invented the venetian blind).<sup>5</sup> Volker was the city's most generous philanthropist, having distributed all but \$1 million of his large fortune to various causes.<sup>6</sup> No women attended this meeting and the men who did overwhelmingly

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<sup>4</sup> W.P. Tracy, *Kansas City and its One Hundred Foremost Men* (Kansas City: 1924).

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous, the Story of William Volker* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1951), 37-41.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Coleman, "William Volker: Businessman and Philanthropist," *Missouri Valley Special Collections: Biography*, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri.

represented the private sector interests of the city. As was evident with many of the outward projections of American power during this age of Republican ascendancy, the memorial project received no government financing but relied on the volunteeristic spirit of the city's business elite.

Long knew that in order to bring his vision to fruition he would need not just the movers and shakers of the city, but also their pocketbooks. At the meeting he unveiled his plan: "We should construct for those veterans, who fought for liberty and the honor of our country, a monument that will reach into the skies and remain an everlasting tribute to their spirit of courage, honor, patriotism, and sacrifice."<sup>7</sup> The idea that private resources would be put toward public places was nothing new to Kansas City. Some of the city's famous parks and boulevard system had been built with private money.<sup>8</sup> Previous private-public ventures, however, had been

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<sup>7</sup> *Liberty Memorial Rededication Program*, (Kansas City: People to People and the Liberty Memorial Association, 1961), 18, Liberty Memorial Vertical File, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>8</sup> *A Legacy of Design: An Historical Survey of the Kansas City, Missouri, Parks and Boulevards System, 1893-1940* (Kansas City:

far more modest in scope and had often depended on the backing of either a single, prominent individual or small groups of wealthy donors. Long realized it would take some convincing to convert the assembled me to his vision, especially after his next sentence: "To do this, we should raise two or three million dollars."<sup>9</sup>

The men in the room soon recovered from their shock and acquiesced to Long's sales pitch. On receiving official acceptance of their plan from the city council, the twenty men who first heard the plan formed the nucleus of the committee tasked with creating the monument. That committee was expanded to one hundred with the addition of civic leaders like John F. Downing, president of the New England National Bank and member of the board of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, and Ulrich Epperson, president of the U.S. Epperson Underwriting Company. In transitioning from a group of Kansas City's wealthiest citizens meeting privately to a recognized organization, the effort was expanded to include women on the directing committee, including Grace Van Valkenburgh , a

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Kansas City Center for Design Education and Research, 1995), 97-99.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg. 18

socialite and wife of a circuit court judge, and Erni Stulz Berkowitz, wife of the president of the Tension Envelope Company and mother of a future mayor of the city.<sup>10</sup>

The next step taken by the managing committee was creating an advisory committee of one hundred and fifty, which was more representative of the larger Kansas City community. Men such as J.B. Reynolds, president of the Kansas City Life Insurance Company and John Taylor, founder of the John Taylor Dry Goods Company were asked to serve.<sup>11</sup> But the committee also included women, and not just the wives of the well connected or wealthy. Katherine Richardson, a doctor, Harriet Kirby, a lawyer and Republican activist, and Mrs. J.T. Bird, president of the Emery Bird Thayer Dry Goods Company, all served on the advisory committee.<sup>12</sup> While women were included in this imperial project and the vision of the American empire it created, minorities, were excluded. Not a single black citizen of the city was extended membership. African Americans

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<sup>10</sup> *Who's Who in Kansas City: Biographical Sketches of Men and Women of Achievement*, Ed. Sara Baldwin (Kansas City: Veterans of Foreign Wars, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

nonetheless proved to be generous donors during the subsequent fund-raising drive. With all of the necessary personnel in place, the newly christened "Liberty Memorial Association," as the organization came to be called, set about determining exactly what sort of monument would be constructed. In an effort to make the process as reflective of the city as possible, the Association held a series of community forums to discuss possible designs. Invitations to the meetings were distributed by the association to the city's public and private schools; fifty thousand school aged children then delivered them to their parents.<sup>13</sup>

An array of proposals came forth in public forums and in letters sent to the association. J.P. Sommerville, a Kansas City resident, recommended constructing a monument featuring a building, with covered walks, and a bathhouse. Henry F. Burt, manager of the War Camp Community Service, suggested that the association build a community hall, that would host sporting events such as boxing, wrestling, and fencing. The Kansas City chapter of "The Daughters of a Confederate Veteran" [sic] envisioned constructing a hall to be utilized by historical societies, featuring an archive. Several people suggested the

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<sup>13</sup> *Liberty Memorial Rededication Program*, 1.

committee copy monuments found in other cities, such as the Pittsburgh's Soldier's Memorial or Indianapolis' Sailor's Memorial. J. Frank Smith, of Kansas City, imagined building a highway and dedicating it to soldiers and sailors. Harriet Howe, also a Kansas City resident, proposed building a "massive stone building." Mrs. S.J. Hubbell, also a Kansas City resident, suggested a memorial on a much smaller scale when she recommended constructing a drinking fountain. Charles Lathrop Polk, of Washington, D.C., contacted the committee to provide the opinion that regardless of the form of the memorial, he believed trees should be incorporated. There was one suggestion of building an "Armoury" and one of building an "Armory."<sup>14</sup>

One of the most popular plans presented to the committee came from William B. Henderson, a member of the managing committee and chairman of a large insurance company which carried his name. He distributed a pamphlet to the committee members in which he called for the creation of a university. It began by addressing the aims of those who wanted to build a

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<sup>14</sup> *Liberty Memorial Association Board of Directors Minutes*, Jan. 16, 1919, Liberty Memorial Archive at the National World War I Monument, Kansas City, Missouri.

more traditional monument, "someone has suggested that we build a memorial so commanding and beautiful that future generations, a century or more hence, will say, 'A great people lives there.'"<sup>15</sup> Henderson, however, opposed building a monument that would function to memorialize past effort alone. He instead envisioned a living memorial, which would become central to the life of Kansas City: "I am impressed with the importance of seeing to it that a great people does live here. If we accomplish that much, we need not concern ourselves about the opinion of posterity. If we develop a great people here, future generations will be sure to know of it - in spite of our concern, rather than because of it."<sup>16</sup> He also addressed the other memorial proposals, "another suggestion has been made that one feature of our memorial be forty-eight pillars, 'the pillars of the Republic,' designed and built to endure through the ages, so that when our Republic has crumbled to

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<sup>15</sup> William Henderson, *A University for the Kansas City Memorial to our Soldiers Who Offered Their Lives in the Cause of Democracy* (Kansas City: 1919), Liberty Memorial Collection, SHSMO Research Center-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

pieces, the pillars will still stand."<sup>17</sup> But this suggestion did not meet Henderson's goal of a lasting institution, "My ambition does not lead me in that direction. I would rather build the Republic so that when all the pyramids, triumphal arches, monuments, and towers on earth have crumpled to dust, the Republic will have endured, and continue to be an agency of service and an inspiration to the world."<sup>18</sup>

Henderson envisioned an ever-lasting republic. By lacing his rhetoric with illusions to the wonders of the Ancient world - pyramids, triumphal arches, monuments, and towers - Henderson placed the United States in the same rank of world powers as those crumbled empires. Unlike the remnants left by the Egyptians and the Romans, however, the newest of global empires would bequeath a vibrant place of republican learning to future generations.

Henderson embraced America's post-war global responsibilities and sounded the trumpet of empire, "Of all the speakers who have entertained us, not one has referred to the painful conditions of the world." With the World War just ended, it was clear that the United States was expected to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

lead the peace process, but that at the same time, Henderson warned, "Our institutions are on trial." Regardless of political affiliation, he insisted, all Americans recognize that the world's future, and the nation's place in it, was in doubt: "Even those of us who have not agreed with our President in detail must admit that he is struggling to the limit of human endurance to save this world from anarchy, and to preserve our democracy and our freedom."<sup>19</sup> Given Woodrow Wilson's difficulties in that effort, and the rejection of the treaty which would occur later in the year, Henderson was proposing utilizing the memorial effort to do something more than just memorialize.

This is not to say that Henderson was opposed to a monument. In fact, he supported a monument being constructed "unless that is to be the alpha and omega. If that is to be the extent to which we are to memorialize them, it seems to me, our sense of justice is dull, our vision is narrow indeed, and we have learned as little as we have suffered because of the war."<sup>20</sup> Again, summoning the lessons of empires past, Henderson wrote, "We should bear in mind that the greatest art

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

production of the Greeks and Romans were developed during the worst periods of governmental and social decay. Art alone never saved any people. If art alone could produce character or good citizenship, Rome would have been able to endure."<sup>21</sup> The lecture on the history of empires went on, "And, by the way, do the Pyramids reflect as much of character in those who designed and dedicated them...Like the productions of the Greeks and Romans, they were built by a people who could not or did not save themselves."<sup>22</sup> In the Liberty Memorial, Henderson saw a path to preserving and expanding the American empire.

For Henderson, function outranked form:

"...there should be a Liberty Memorial Institute, the wholesome influence of which would saturate our domestic life, our public school system, our colleges and universities, our municipal and state governments, and shed the ray of its light upon our national and international relationship, our industrial system, our economic conditions, and serve to make better Americans of both domestic and foreign-born citizens. In brief, let us crystallize and scientifically apply our Americanism."<sup>23</sup>

Simply put, what Henderson proposed was an institution that in many ways would be a departure from the manner in which war dead had previously been memorialized. Somewhat akin to the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

business vision advanced by President Wilson and the local Chamber of Commerce, he placed his faith on the creation of new institutions that would "scientifically apply our Americanism" to all aspects of the American life and the new world order being developed at the peace negotiations taking place in France. Kansas City, as the home of a unique institution dedicated to international education, would take its place among the nation's great imperial cities.

After months of discussion, on April 3, 1919 the association distributed a ballot to all 250 members of the organization's committees that listed six possible choices for the memorial.<sup>24</sup> The possibilities represented a combining and organizing of the hundreds of suggestions the committee had received. The first option on the ballot was "A Monument (which may include shaft, arch or statuary group)."<sup>25</sup> The second proposed "A Monument plus a building, not for utilitarian purposes, but to house trophies of war with other

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<sup>24</sup> Sarajane Sandusky Aber, "An Architectural History of the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri 1918-1935" (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City), 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 143

matters closely related thereto."<sup>26</sup> Option three called for "A Monumental building without shaft, not for utilitarian purposes, but to house trophies of war, with other matters closely related thereto."<sup>27</sup> The fourth choice consisted of "A Memorial building with shaft or other monumental feature, for utilitarian purposes, and which may include the idea of an auditorium, orchestra hall, art gallery, public forum, or community house, with opportunity for sculpture and painting and may be a repository for war trophies and records."<sup>28</sup> Option five presented "A Memorial university, plus a monument."<sup>29</sup> And the final option envisioned "A Memorial university without monument."<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, the voters decided that a memorial with shaft, but not for utilitarian purposes best expressed the city's remembrance of their war dead. Henderson's efforts on behalf of a Liberty Memorial Institute were not in vain; it

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

received the second highest vote total.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, although the proposal was excluded from the immediate plans of the association, it ultimately made it into the final, though unrealized vision, of the monument.

After the balloting, the committee created a general plan not just for the Liberty Memorial, but also for the area surrounding the structure. In consultation with city planners, the committee members decided that the monument would be placed on the edge of a plateau across from the city's primary transportation hub, Union Station. This plateau then, as it does today, flows north and connects to Penn Valley Park, one of the gems of the city's parks and boulevard system. This location not only meant that the first thing visitors to the city would encounter once they disembarked their trains at Union Station was the memorial, but also that significant space would remain available to the association for growth.<sup>32</sup> Henderson may have been the first to view the memorial project as the anchor of a larger art and cultural district, but other influential Kansas Citians adopted this idea as well. The

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<sup>31</sup> *Liberty Memorial Association Board of Directors Minutes*, 343.

<sup>32</sup> Aber, 9.

Liberty Memorial Association specified in their official plans that the structure would serve as a "gateway to a group of monumental buildings for an art, literary and musical center to be erected later by private generosity."<sup>33</sup> Due to the following decade's Great Depression, the development efforts of others (especially J.C. Nichols), and large tracts of donated land elsewhere in the city, that arts and culture district was eventually established approximately two miles to the southeast of the Liberty Memorial.<sup>34</sup>

Assuming that the city's government would not be forthcoming with funds, the managing committee determined that the most civically responsible way to fund the memorial was through private donations.<sup>35</sup> While the business elite who

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Whitnell Harris, "The Development of the Educational and Cultural Center in Kansas City's Brush Creek Valley" (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1988), 14.

<sup>35</sup> This is the most likely explanation for why Henderson's proposal was incorporated into the long-term vision of the memorial area but not the short-term plans. The leadership of the association was clearly conscious of wanting the effort to

constituted the managing committee would donate significant sums, raising more than two million dollars would require large-scale buy-in. In order for the memorial to be successful, wide swaths of the city's middle and working class population would have to donate and convince their friends and neighbors to do likewise. During the early twentieth century several of Kansas City's largest nonprofit organizations organized a yearly Allied Charity Campaign in which all of the funds collected would be distributed equally between the participating charities. The managing committee, many of whom already participated in the allied charity drive through their association with other organizations, determined that the best strategy would be to team with the annual drive and exert their significant influence to make it the largest in the city's history.<sup>36</sup>

The participating parties agreed that ten percent of the total raised would be distributed to the charities with ninety percent going to the construction of the monument. Unlike

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be financially significant enough to project the rising influence of the community but also not so large as to be unfulfilled.

<sup>36</sup> Aber, 8.

previous annual drives which might extend well beyond their deadline, the allied charity drive of 1919 finished early. With every geographic section of the city, and every demographic group participating, including significant contributions from children, the drive reached its goal in just ten days. In the end they raised more than two million dollars from 83,000 Kansas Citians, approximately a third of the city's population.<sup>37</sup> As this illustrates, the city of Kansas City, from the upper to working class, black and white, male and female, young and old, supported the memorial.

This is not to say that contributors were consistently gracious. John Barber White, President of the Missouri Lumber and Mining Company, stands out as a particularly grumpy supporter. As one of Kansas City's wealthiest residents, White gave generously to the campaign, in his name as well as his wife's, and he initially took pride in giving. "...I think you gave as much as anybody among the women or maybe more," he reported to his spouse. "I wrote a check for Five Hundred Dollars and wrote on it 'in the name of Mrs. J.B. White.' I found out this morning," he elaborated, "that nobody on our

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<sup>37</sup> Rucker, "A Monument at 60," 1

street gave as much..."<sup>38</sup> That said, the campaign's organizers expected significant support from the city's well-to-do residents. White relayed to his wife that Mrs. Hemmingway, one of their close friends, had "...said the women told her a good many people thought they were expected to give too much and were grumbling about it, saying they were being asked to pay too much and were apparently expected to pay too much when they were not told what others were giving."<sup>39</sup>

But White took exception to the whole experience once leaders of the effort, after he had already given what he thought to be an appropriate amount, paid him a visit: "I think that I have given to [sic] much myself, compared with what others are doing."<sup>40</sup> He compared his giving to others of similar wealth, noting that "...I found out that Mr. Pickering gave Two Thousand Dollars, for himself and his father and their man Barham." But what truly annoyed White was a visit from the city's top philanthropist, William Volker, and one of

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<sup>38</sup> John Barber White to his Wife, November 17, 1920, John Barber White Collection, SHSMO Research Center-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

his associates: "...I told them I supposed they had come in to see if I had given enough, but they said they had just come in to make a friendly call and were not going to ask anything about what I had given."<sup>41</sup> Regardless, White felt compelled to justify his contribution level, "...I told them I know that Mr. Volker has given, as I saw it in the paper and noticed that he had given over Sixteen Thousand Dollars."<sup>42</sup>

Although White's visitors claimed to be paying a friendly visit to him, by the end of their encounter he felt compelled to provide the association with an additional \$5,000. Records of how people felt about being asked to contribute to the effort are hard to come by. By this one example it is clear that the city's elite did not consider failure to be a viable option and they proved willing to apply whatever pressure necessary to secure the required funding. The pressure applied to White is an additional indicator that the Liberty Memorial project registered in the Kansas City imagination as much more than a war memorial. It ranked as a project so important to the city and the empire that no one merited a free pass from the funding drive, especially if they possessed considerable

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

means.

With funding in hand, the next consideration for the committee was who should be selected as the architect for the project. It was decided that a general outline for how the committee envisioned the memorial would be distributed to architects in order to hold a competition without stifling creativity. Any firm located in Kansas City could submit a proposal. Only pre-selected non-Kansas City firms could participate. In the end the committee selected a design proposed by Harold Van Buren Magonigle from New York City. His submission featured a base one hundred feet high with a two-hundred foot tower. The tower "culminated in a bowl supported by the wings of angels," each one representing the themes set out by committee chair Robert Long for the memorial: courage, honor, patriotism, and sacrifice.<sup>43</sup> The main tower would be juxtaposed by a building on each side, one a meeting space for veterans, the other an exhibition hall. With the architect in place, the Association next unveiled their plans to the world. If Kansas City was to use the Liberty Memorial to stake its

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<sup>43</sup> Henry J. Haskell, "A Notable Memorial," *The Council Table*, Liberty Memorial Collection, SHSMO Research Center-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri, 489

claim as a leading imperial city the monument would have to be well received. Furthermore, Americans would have to realize that the undertaking was, as the daily newspaper the *Kansas Citian* stated, the "...Biggest Project of Any City."<sup>44</sup>

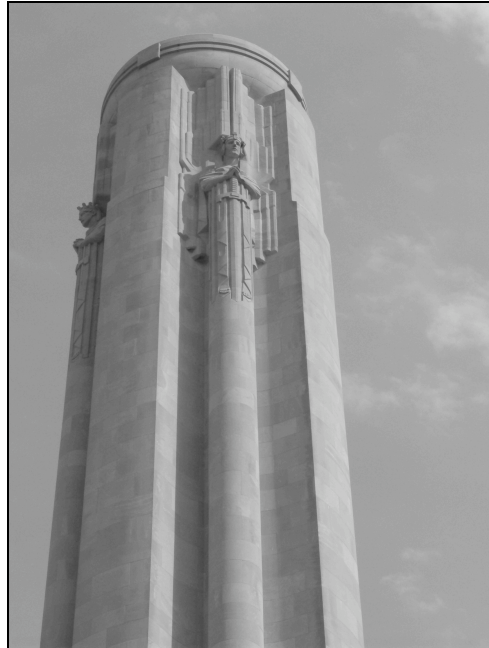


Figure 14. Liberty Memorial Shaft. The top of the shaft features a bowl, with four winged angels. Photograph taken July 27, 2011.

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<sup>44</sup> J.E. McPherson, "The Liberty Memorial: Kansas City Plans Biggest Project of Any City," *The Kansas Citian*, August 30, 1921, Liberty Memorial Vertical File, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri.

Professional architects employed by the Association to act as jurors in the selection process were the first to enter the national discussion of the quality and meaning of the memorial. W.R.B. Wilcox, a past president of the American Institute of Architects gushed: "There never has been anything undertaken in America of such a nature as this Liberty Memorial. The day will come when architects will come from all over the United States to study the memorial. Kansas City will be known for its Liberty Memorial..."<sup>45</sup> Thomas R. Kimball, another past president of the American Institute of Architects remarked that: "No greater single conception is to be found in the world today."<sup>46</sup>

Kimball took special delight in the monument's imperial grandeur and political meaning. In discussing how nothing similar to the Liberty Memorial could be found, he echoed William Henderson's evocation of ancient empires: "One must seek it in the ruins of an ancient Rome, a relic from the time when the appeal of splendid monuments was better understood and oftener used as an element in control of governments and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

peoples."<sup>47</sup> To Kimball, an out-of-towner and not at all a Kansas City booster, the Liberty Memorial aligned the American experience in the Great War, and Kansas City, in an imperial future linked to empires of the past.

The language of empire in fact found material expression in the monument itself. Magonigle's architectural design incorporated Roman, Greek, and Egyptian themes. Between the shaft and the buildings, were placed two sphinxes, with their heads bowed in respect to the deceased. Even the dedication ceremony for the memorial played to the theme by featuring twenty local high school girls dressed as vestal virgins.<sup>48</sup> They did not sing, nor dance, nor pray. Their purpose that day was to link an imperial project to other imperial cultures, as well as to further include women in this imperial project. These young girls, like many of the women involved, acted in a prescribed way, exhibiting little if any agency.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "Liberty Memorial Rededication Program," 14.



Figure 15. Liberty Memorial Sphinx. One of two sphinxes featured at the memorial, with its head bowed to the fallen. Photograph taken July 27, 2011.

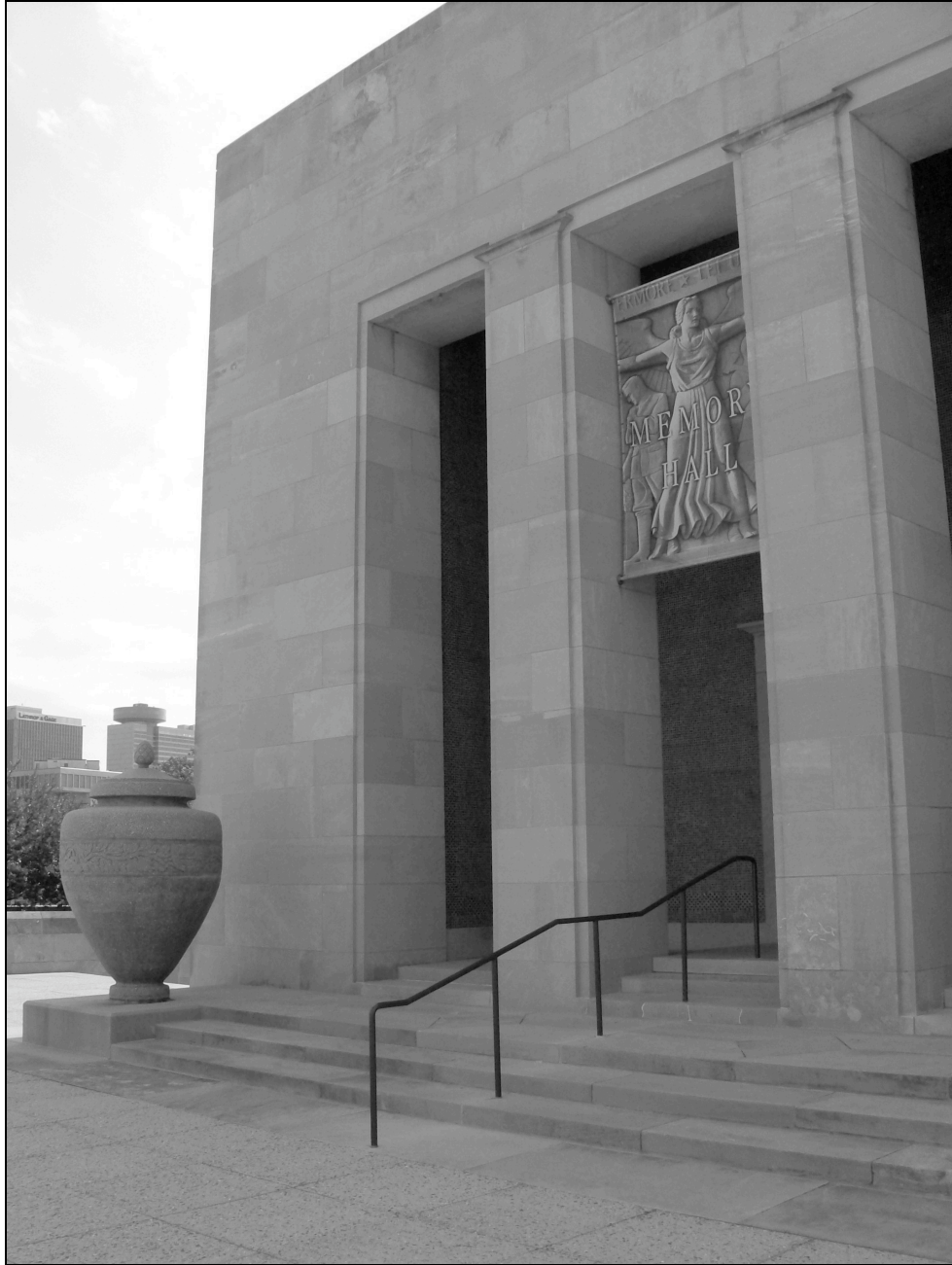


Figure 16. Liberty Memorial, Memorial Hall. Memorial Hall and Exhibition Hall both feature two ancient inspired vessels outside their entrance.

*The Midwest Bookman*, a monthly literature journal, described the dedication of the site of the memorial as: "A significant event will be the dedication of Kansas City's \$2,000,000 Liberty Memorial to her war dead. The design of this great monument is unique, and will be looked to by the nation as a thing of profound appeal, and appropriate to the inspiration of service and sacrifice."<sup>49</sup> R.A. Long, the mastermind behind the project, seconded many of these thoughts: "From its inception it was intended that this Memorial should represent on the part of all our people, regardless of class or creed, a living expression for all time of the gratitude of a grateful people to those who offered their lives and their all in defense of liberty and our country."<sup>50</sup> After invoking the fallen, Long moved to the larger meaning of the memorial: "characterized by eminent authorities as destined to be one of the great memorials of the world, it

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<sup>49</sup> Homer Dye, "Kansas City and the American Legion" *The Midwest Bookman*, Oct. 1921, Liberty Memorial Vertical File, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>50</sup> "Liberty Memorial Rededication Program," pg. 19

is a monument not to war, but to Peace."<sup>51</sup>

And the city's stature was indeed rising, in no small part because of the massive undertaking that was the Liberty Memorial. When the Association set the date for the groundbreaking of the site, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921, they invited an international who's who of Great War dignitaries, including the Allied High Command of Lieutenant General Baron Jacques of Belgium, General Armando Diaz of Italy, Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France, General John J. Pershing of the United States, and Admiral Lord David Beatty of Great Britain. Their gathering at the cornerstone laying ceremony represented the only time all of these men met together following the end of the war. President Warren G. Harding as well as Vice President Calvin Coolidge also attended the ceremony.<sup>52</sup>

The association invited the commander of every American Legion Department as well, only to find out that the Legion's national convention was scheduled for the same time period. At the request of the ceremony's coordinators, the Legionaries

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> "The Great Liberty Memorial Friese," November 10, 1935, Liberty Memorial Vertical File, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri.

decided to transfer their annual convention to Kansas City so that their members could attend. When it became clear that thousands of non-residents would be visiting for the ceremony, the city marshaled all available resources. *The Midwest Bookman* announced: "Rooms in the homes of Kansas City citizens will be the main dependence for providing accommodations for the 100,000 visitors who are expected at the convention."<sup>53</sup> The city's residents were "...making it a point of pride and Missouri hospitality to co-operate with the Legion committee to see that all are provided for."<sup>54</sup> Hospitality even included low to no cost accommodations, with "...citizens are responding generously to a campaign conducted by the Legion to obtain 50,000 rooms."<sup>55</sup> Even though Kansas City did not have the infrastructure necessary to host such a large gathering, the inconveniences associated with moving the convention to Kansas City were insignificant compared to the ceremonies that occurred at the memorial site.

When it came time to dedicate the actual memorial in 1926, the ceremony was once again attended by a large

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<sup>53</sup> Dye, "Kansas City and the American Legion," 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

gathering of dignitaries. Calvin Coolidge, then serving as president, as well as the living members of the Allied High Command attended the dedication. Once again American Legion department commanders were invited and attended. And like the cornerstone laying ceremony, the governors of all forty-eight states were issued invitations; in the end twenty-eight state chief executives attended.

The Governor of Texas, Alvin M. Owsley, like many of his colleagues acknowledged the international importance of the site, the ceremony, and the city in his gracious reply: "I thank you for the honor of your invitation and sincerely trust that my personal affairs will permit me to be present. I know something of the importance of this occasion and fully appreciate the magnificent sacrifice that has been made by the people of Kansas City to give the nation her most beautiful soldiers memorial."<sup>56</sup> A.G. Sorlie, the Governor of North Dakota echoed these sentiments when he replied that "It is highly fitting that memorials should be erected in honor of the soldiers who took part in the Great World War, and it is well

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<sup>56</sup> Governor Owsley to Mayor Beach, February 3, 1926, Albert Beach Papers, SHSMO Research Center-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri.

that great centers like Kansas City should show their appreciation of the services of their soldiers during that most trying period."<sup>57</sup>

The remarks of the two Governors illustrate how the memorial - like any site of remembrance - could be infused with multiple, overlapping meanings. Clearly, Governor Owsley believed that Kansas City was undertaking the monumental task for the benefit and glory of the nation as a whole.<sup>58</sup> Governor Sorlie, in contrast, highlighted the site's significance as an expression of local gratitude.<sup>59</sup> In fact the Great War - the first modern, world war - had already demonstrated how technology had collapsed geographic distances and blurred lines between the global, the national, and the local.

William Henderson, the outspoken advocate of a memorial complete with a post-war university, had grasped the new global reality when he argued that the memorial would inevitably speak to shared memories that extended well beyond

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<sup>57</sup> Governor Sorlie to Mayor Beach, February 1, 1926, Albert Beach Papers, SHSMO Research Center-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

the city's limits: "It should not be confined to soldiers of Kansas City. Our boys fought in divisions and companies which were made up of soldiers from all parts of our trade territory; they have formed friendships with boys from other sections which will endure for life."<sup>60</sup> As compelling an argument as this was, Henderson provided an additional and perhaps more important motivation. "And, too, Kansas City does not belong alone to the people who happen to reside here; she belongs also to people throughout our trade territory - who have contributed to its growth and developments."<sup>61</sup> Kansas City was far too important a cultural gem and too important to the nation's post-war imperial project to be kept just to those who resided within its borders.

Another leading voice within the organization, Frank A. Sebree, a lawyer and secretary of the association's board, disagreed. Largely in response to Henderson, Sebree wrote to the association that "I am strongly convinced that this is a home institution. It is here it is to be located, here it is to be seen towering above all its surroundings, and from here its beneficent and incomparable influence is to go out for the

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<sup>60</sup> Henderson, "A University for the Kansas City Memorial," 14.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 18.

centuries to come over the face of the earth."<sup>62</sup> Although he challenged Henderson's expansive notion of the city's geographic reach he embraced Henderson's enthusiasm for the project's grand, historic importance. But for Sebree, the project marked Kansas City's entry into the new global order that was being constructed at Versailles as much as it represented a new place for the city within the American empire. He imagined that "It will carry with it the name, the association, the thought of Kansas City. Other places all over the country will have like movements and demands, and we should not impose upon them, nor expect from them any material assistance for this Memorial."<sup>63</sup> It is "...of Kansas City to the perpetuation of the memory of the great deeds of American Citizenship for making secure the liberty and happiness of the World."<sup>64</sup>

In the end, Henderson's suggestion was voted down by the committee of one hundred. But they did expand the roster of those memorialized by the monument to include Jackson County, of which Kansas City was the seat. Kansas City reluctantly

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<sup>62</sup> Liberty Memorial Association Board of Directors, 124.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

shared the glory of its new monument with its closest neighbors, but only when objections to a lack of inclusion could no longer be ignored. Had the Liberty Memorial simply been a war monument, it could have been expanded beyond the metropolitan area. Memorials, however, are charged with unstated cultural meaning - Kansas City's monument was no different. Thus, it would remain the domain of the city and the county it dominated. It was too important to the city's imperial ambitions to share.

Since the Spanish-American War, the United States had possessed an overseas empire; when Woodrow Wilson led the nation to war, the United States rose to world power; and in the immediate post-war years - as Kansas City's business elite planned and built the Liberty Memorial - America sought to erect a new kind of global market empire. The Liberty Memorial, the nation's largest monument to those who died in the Great War, was not built to remember America's dead. It was built to remember Kansas City's dead, and to flex the city's power and wealth within the expanding American empire.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Kansas City's businessmen were the primary movers and shakers of the city throughout the 1920s. As expected, they were also the force behind the city's vision of itself as an important imperial city. William Volker, R.A. Long, and J.C. Nichols are names that resonate in the city's history and appear in the pages of this study over and over again. Their worldview, their vision of Kansas City's foremost place in the global order, largely informed the perspective of the city as a whole.

The basis of that vision was commerce. They, along with the nation's leaders, firmly believed that American power and hegemony could only be sustained by finding a new method of imperialism. The market empire was predicated on the idea that fulfilling the world's desire for the comforts afforded by consumer goods provided the key to spreading the United States' influence - consumerism became the watchword of the decade. But it was hardly an empire of commerce alone. A rhetorical commitment to representative government, a rejection of communism, international charity, and Christianity all came together to form a kinder, gentler approach to running the world. This bold vision, seasoned at

times by a strong sense of paternalism, resulted in the city engaging the global community as an premier imperial city. As the citizens of the nation on the top of the global hierarchy, clearly these Americans thought they knew the path out of the wilderness of the post-war world.

This is not to say that women and those without means did not also participate in the imperial project - they did. Women of means continued to engage the world in much the same way that the generations before them had, consuming the foreign in a variety of products. But as the period introduced women's suffrage and the development of the "New Woman," Kansas City's women expanded the way in which they interacted with the foreign, often meeting it first hand rather than by proxy, as had been done in the decades prior. They imbibed a worldview that closely resembled that of their male counterparts in the business community. At the same time that they demonstrated a genuine curiosity regarding other peoples and nations, yet cast aspersions on those cultures that did not measure up to the American example. Most of all, they used their economic privilege to enjoy the fruits of empire.

The sources do not clearly communicate how those without means, or the city's black population felt about the imperial project. What is known is that to some degree those whose

voices were not recorded participated in the transformation of the city. More than 80,000 Kansas Citians contributed funds to construction of the Liberty Memorial. The vast majority of those were residents forgotten by history, black and white, male and female. A similar gap exists in the historian's understanding of how the metropolitan area's Latino residents viewed the imperial project, the Country Club Plaza specifically. When recent immigrants, then client of Kansas City's Americanizing organizations, were invited to sing at the Plaza's faux fiestas, did they wonder what the city's gringos were doing in a fake village? Unfortunately, the sources do not exist to answer that question. What is clear from the source is that Kansas City was place undergoing change in the 1920s.

But it was not just the worldview of the residents that changed; the city's built environment was altered as well. As J.C. Nichols was building the Country Club Plaza, and R.A. Long was imagining the Liberty Memorial, they probably did not conceive of those projects as domestic places of empire. But that is what they became. Both the shopping mall and the monument became places where the city's residents could congregate and negotiate the meaning of 'self' and 'other' and the purposes of the American market empire. Commemorating the

lives of those who died in the Great War, and buying an oriental rug, conjured vastly different emotions. But as symbols of empire they fulfilled similar functions by allowing citizens at the local level to experience the global and to participate in the empire first hand.

The efforts of the Chamber of Commerce, the reviews of the internal politics of Mexico, the construction of a pseudo-Spanish town (or was it Mexican?) in the middle of the city, and the community wide drive to raise funds for a war memorial, all served as cogs in the unfolding of the American market empire - an empire whose full extent would not be realized until after the world repeated the folly of the Great War with a second world war.

By the end of World War II, the Wilsonian vision of the world would largely be realized: the British and French empires, rocked by military confrontation and anti-colonial nationalist movements, disintegrated; the League of Nations, destroyed by the advance of Fascism, would be replaced by a somewhat less ambitious international forum, rechristened the United Nations; and the means to transform the entirety of the globe into a consumer-oriented, privately managed market, would be found in the loans and forced reforms of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. While the post-

World War II world was never completely homogenized in the image of American popular culture, it came close. Undoubtedly, the men and women of 1920s Kansas City would take pride in the fact that the advance bastion of today's American consumerism, McDonald's, can be found in London, Paris, Tokyo, and Beijing.

As much as Kansas Citians in the 1920s saw communism as a possible challenge to the march of the American market empire, it became a real challenge following the Second World War. In something of a replay of the Great War, the Soviet Union was knocked out of the fighting early, leaving France and England to fend off Germany and Italy. Unlike the Great War, the Germans broke their non-aggression pact with Russia, launching an invasion that proved to be the undoing of the Third Reich. As Russian soldiers beat back the invaders, following them to the gates of Berlin, they forcibly imposed communism upon the nation-states of Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Thus began decades of conflict and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union over the hearts and minds of those who survived the war on the European continent and those freed from the yoke of colonialism. Armed with

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<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57-60.

central planning and nationalist rhetoric, the Russians challenged American global hegemony, turning the institutions Wilson had imagined as places of compromise into chambers of gridlock. Fears of communism abroad, just like in the 1920s, sparked fears of communism at home. Once again the institutions of government were arrayed against communists (some real and many imagined), anarchists, and other radicals. The paranoia culminated in the nightmare of McCarthyism that crippled dissent and came close to snuffing out democratic discourse altogether.<sup>2</sup> And while Senator Joseph McCarthy ultimately faded from the headlines, massive defense spending and the intrusive power of the National Security State endured in some measure - which stand as contemporary legacies of America's drive for empire in the inter-war era.

Another legacy of the interwar period, exemplified by Kansas City in the 1920s, was the reliance on 'soft' power as a tool of foreign relations - specifically the globalization of market capitalism and consumer culture. Ironically, as time marched away from the decade, it was not communism that provided the central challenge to the American market empire.

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<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 48.

The United States government increased military spending to fight what they imagined as a unified communist threat to the empire both in Europe and the post-colonial world. Little did they realize that a unified communist threat did not exist, nor were the communist movements in the post-colonial world devout in their economic outlook. Increased military spending, coupled with Americans' own insatiable desire for consumer goods, resulted in massive debts, both public and private, weakening the nation's command of the global market. America's 'soft' power attempts to impose popular culture on the rest of the world, theoretically resulting in increased consumption of all things American, instead spawned imitators rather than followers. The impact of these forces is as of yet unknown. But it is clear that the American market empire, as of 2011, is straining under its own weight.

Kansas City has faced challenges as well. In 1948 the United States Supreme Court declared J.C. Nichols restrictive covenants, which prevented the sale of homes within his developments to ethnic minorities, unconstitutional. This turned the hierarchy that existed within the imperial city on its head. The ruling also launched an extensive period of white flight in Kansas City, resulting in a significant population shift out of the city to the suburbs. Often, major

employers followed their workers to suburbs.<sup>3</sup> As the Kansas City metropolitan area became more integrated within the global economy, Kansas City the city began to decline. The domestic hierarchy, already challenged by the lifting of restrictions to geography within the city, was pushed to the brink throughout the 1960s - Kansas City's black residents simply were not going to abide by the order created in the 1920s. The Civil Rights Movement made serious gains throughout the sixties, and although a set back for the movement, the riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., served the city's white elites with notice that things were changing.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, as the city's domestic order fell apart, Nichols' Country Club Plaza remained a vibrant reminder of the dynamism of the decades prior. Even today, the Plaza is the premier attraction within the city, for tourists and residents alike. And it continues to fill the same role illustrated in this study - shoppers can still pull into one of the Plaza's

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<sup>3</sup> Schirmer, 143-157.

<sup>4</sup> Joel P. Rhodes, *It Finally Happened Here: the 1968 Riot in Kansas City, Missouri* (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1996).

many parking spaces, and exhibit international agency by consuming. The Liberty Memorial, on the other hand, has largely become a lost relic of another period. Throughout the nineteen eighties and nineties, interest in the memorial dwindled, and the park surrounding it transformed from sacred site of memory to host of anti-social behavior. In the late 1990s the city undertook efforts to return the Liberty Memorial to its former glory, with a multi-million dollar renovation.<sup>5</sup> Much like the monument, Kansas City outside of the Plaza, is attempting a rebirth, with what could be the beginning of a full-fledged downtown renaissance. Time will only tell whether the American market empire, and Kansas City, get their stride back.

The role that cities like Kansas City have played, and will play, in the development of the American empire is ignored. Historians tend to view history in a binary mode: there is foreign relations history, and there is domestic American history, and the two have little to do with each other. What this study illustrates is that the beginning of America's post-war foreign policy, the internationalism of the supposedly isolationist twenties, was inextricably linked to

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<sup>5</sup> Rucker, 1.

what was happening in the nation's cities. Foreign policy was not the cause behind developments in the cities. Nor were developments in the cities the motivating factor in foreign policy. Rather, the macro reflected developments in the micro, and vice versa. Historians of international relations history must begin to explore developments within cities and regions in order to more completely comprehend the relationships between nation-states.

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Kory Paul Gallagher was born on September 21, 1980, in Salinas, California. Shortly thereafter his family moved to Stockton, California, where he attended public schools, including Amos Alonzo Stagg Senior High School. Following graduation he was employed at PacWest Telecomm, Inc., where he worked for several years. Following the economic downturn of 2001, Gallagher decided to attend college.

Prior to transferring to the University of Missouri-Kansas City, he attended San Joaquin Delta Community College in Stockton, California and State Fair Community College in Sedalia, Missouri. At the University of Missouri-Kansas City he majored in history, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2006. Following graduation, Gallagher continued at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, pursuing a Master of Arts degree in history and a Master of Public Administration in Nonprofit Management. He is on track to receive both degrees in the summer semester of 2011.

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