

*“The World and All That is in It?”:*

The Rhetoric and Representation of the U.S. Neocolonial Project in *National Geographic*, 1898-1920

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Dedicated to Dianne P. Kaloustian, 1928-2004.

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## Abstract

The *National Geographic Society* was established in 1888 in Washington, DC, and for the past 120 years its magazine, *National Geographic*, has reported on “the world and all that is in it,” the theme as described by second *Society* president Alexander Graham Bell. Self-proclaimed as “America’s Eye on the World,” *National Geographic* played a significant role in shaping U.S. awareness of the world outside of the United States by advocating for certain political and economic aims at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Through *National Geographic*, a key cultural text, the specifics of the emerging early twentieth-century identity of the United States with the world can be analyzed. This political and economic project of the United States abroad was not traditionally colonial. Instead, it is better understood as a new incarnation with components from the Monroe Doctrine, European colonialism, and Manifest Destiny. I refer to this new identity as *U.S. neocolonialism* to distinguish its departure from previous policies and attitudes as something distinctively new, and uniquely of the United States.

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is a brief review of the history of the *Society* and its magazine, the editorial principles, its intended perspective and audience. A consideration of the British predecessor, *Royal Geographic Society*, and a review of pertinent colonial theory—the creation of knowledge, exploration, and appropriation of power—further situates *National Geographic*.

Using Barthes’ argument that the written text and the visual text (photography) must be analyzed separately before determining how they work together guides the structure of the proceeding analysis. Chapters Two and Three are case studies of the written text of early twentieth century articles from Cuba and Armenia, respectively. Both are sites of U.S. interest, though Cuba is the site of direct intervention and Armenia the site of the internationalization of the U.S. neocolonial project. Significantly, *National Geographic* employs a similar three-pronged rhetorical structure in each: (1) the dismantlement of each country’s previous rulers under the charge of “mismanagement”; (2) the economic or moral imperative to intervene; and (3) the construction of the *Neocolonial Chimera*—a description of each country’s inhabitants as “not-so-other,” perfect junior partners to work for (and with) the United States. *National Geographic*’s rhetorical structure highlights the features of U.S. neocolonialism by the efforts of the publication to legitimize U.S. involvement abroad through these representations.

Chapter Four—the photography of *National Geographic*—reviews current visual theory and traditional examples colonial photography. A sample of photographs from both the articles on Cuba and Armenia follows. The visual rhetoric and signifiers of these photographs speak to the features of U.S. neocolonialism defined in the written text.

After having determined the role that *National Geographic* played in constructing U.S. awareness, and using the rhetorical components of the text to distinguish the features of U.S. neocolonialism, the analysis concludes with a consideration of the legacy of *National Geographic* and the role of the reader.

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<sup>1</sup> Small versions of each photograph are embedded the analysis in Chapter Four. In the interest of noting the detail of each photograph, I have also included a full-sized version of each photograph in the appendix for reference.

## Preface

Aside from its obvious niche in the waiting rooms of doctor, dentist offices and living room coffee tables, *National Geographic* is a far more pervasive element of U.S. culture than one might think. There is a cable television channel on which magazine reporters and photojournalists of the magazine lead video crews into the wilderness to capture stories for viewers back home. The magazine is available in used book stores, on Ebay, and in the typical suburban garage sale, for it is not the kind of magazine that people read and then throw away. Popular adventure films like *K2* and *Blood Diamond* feature scenes with lead actors portraying daring *National Geographic* reporters. The library of the doomed World War II cruiser—the USS Indianapolis—was stocked with copies of the magazine for sailors to read. But the *National Geographic* also crops up into some quite unexpected cultural situations. As Vincent Buglosi reports in *Helter Skelter*, Charles Manson and his followers at the Spahn Ranch read *National Geographic* articles detailing the North African theater of World War II—strangely enough—in hope of emulating the Nazi General Rommel and his military tactics in the desert. Al Capone was himself a member, and the *National Geographic Society* cancelled his membership upon his imprisonment. My mother (among other adults of the baby-boomer generation) recalls young boys in her elementary school stealing away to the library to learn the topography of the female body through *National Geographic's* photographs of unclothed natives. The *National Geographic* has clearly pervaded many aspects of American life, in both the licit and the illicit.

I have been a member of *National Geographic* for over a decade. As a child, I poured over the glossy pages, admired the photography, ventured into volcanoes, the deep sea, and distant lands through the text of the articles. I would pin up the striking map inserts on my bedroom walls and one day dream of visiting faraway places myself. The maps of my public school classrooms bore the trademark insignia of the *Society* and delineated the nations I was tested on in history and language classes. I even represented my fourth-grade class in the *National Geographic Geography Bee*, which is sponsored by the *Society* to promote geographical education in U.S. schools. A friend of mine recently recalled owning a miniature copy of *National Geographic*, made especially for children's dollhouses, which she dutifully arranged on the coffee table of her dollhouse's formal living room, as if such a simulation of the domestic American household would be incomplete without the presence of the periodical. It seems that everyone has a story or a personal anecdote about how *National Geographic* has touched their lives. I am concerned with exactly *how* this seminal U.S. publication has not only imprinted itself onto the lives of its readers with its textual and visual rhetoric and language. These are the tools *National Geographic* uses to convey a vision of "the world and all that is in it."

## Introduction

The iconic gold outline of the cover of *National Geographic* invites the reader to open the magazine and travel the world through fascinating articles documented with striking photographs from every corner of the globe. The gold outline is a frame that neatly packages the world, a world understood and interpreted by *National Geographic*. Given its wide-reaching cultural prominence, people from all walks of life and persuasions consult and respect this publication as an authoritative source of knowledge; it is a window, a portal, from which Americans look out from to *see* into the world. With over 8.5 million members, and an estimated 50 million monthly readers,<sup>2</sup> I asked myself: what makes *National Geographic* such a compelling cultural product? More importantly, what does the *National Geographic* tell the world and posterity about both the United States and ways in which it related to the rest of the world?

Readers have been “exploring the world” with the *National Geographic* for well over a century. The culturally pervasive, popular, and ubiquitous publication that proclaims itself “America’s Eye on the World” has not been subject to in-depth critical or academic investigation. In this sense it is ironically under-explored. Despite its ubiquity—or perhaps because of it—criticism on the magazine is quite limited. An uninterrupted narrative such as the *National Geographic*, however, that spans the past 120 years, is a crucial primary source on U.S. culture. According to postcolonial scholar Ania Loomba, “the world we live in is only comprehensible to us via its discursive representations” (40). *National Geographic* is one such source, from which the imaginings of the United States can be understood—both of itself, and of its outsiders.

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<sup>2</sup> *National Geographic Fact Sheet*, 2007

As *National Geographic* constructs representations of its Others, it simultaneously imagines itself. Through an analysis of its discursive, textual, and rhetorical representations, these complicated relationships can be more fully understood.<sup>3</sup> One central assumption is that knowledge is socially produced, and *National Geographic* is one such source of socially conceived information.

While there are clearly many authors and photographers who produce both text and photos for the magazine, the overarching author is the *National Geographic Society*. Unlike typical media productions, the *Society* composes both its pictures and its text; editors supervise both the visual and narrative messages produced specifically for the magazine.<sup>4</sup> Although *National Geographic* is composed of thousands of issues and myriad contributors, it must be considered a single text given this editorial production policy. Considering *National Geographic* as a single text is not only useful for the purposes of this analysis; this reading of the text also parallels *National Geographic's* own self-conception. The magazine, as an arm of the *Society*, considers its identity in the singular. The publication is not a collection of voices, but rather, the voice of the *National Geographic Society*. In turn, this *singular* identity is a stance that permits the publication to calibrate itself as America's eye (rather than eyes) on the world.

The *National Geographic* I grew up reading has clearly evolved into something quite distinct from its early years. I turned to *National Geographic* articles from the beginning of the twentieth century in order to see how a popular and influential periodical

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<sup>3</sup> Discursive and Rhetorical practices are two different argumentative phenomena. For the purposes of this essay, discursive representations refer to the instances where the text lays out premises from which it proceeds to conclusions. Rhetorical representations will mark instances where language is used to persuade or influence. These working definitions are parallel with those provided by the OED.

<sup>4</sup> Newspapers generally rely on photo houses and other news agencies for photographs. For example, the *New York Times* might obtain, for a single article, its pictures from a photo house like Corbis or Getty, and its news articles from an agency like AP or Reuters. *National Geographic*, however, produces both discourses.

conceived of the relationship of the United States with the peoples and places outside of its borders. Specifically, I was interested in the attitudes displayed by the magazine toward “the world and all that is in it” through its political, economic, and ethnographic postures. *National Geographic*’s articles indeed provide valuable case studies that exhibit the ideological leanings, aspirations, and unnamed relationship of the United States with the rest of the world.

U.S. colonialism is a phantom term, an unclear description of an undefined historical era, its practice largely undecided and subject to debate. Colonial America, as glossed in the index of the *National Geographic*, covers topics from the pre-Revolutionary war era. With articles like “Between Columbus and Jamestown” (March 1988) and “Thomas Jefferson: Architect of Freedom” (February 1976), it is clear that within the magazine, the concept of colonialism and the United States begins with the discovery of the New World and ends with the independence of the United States. In the authoritative centennial index from 1988, there is no broad subject heading to classify the political, military, or economic behavior of the United States during the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries under a term such as “American colonialism” or “United States colonialist policy.” The absence of a terminology to describe U.S. attitudes and political involvement during this period in the magazine is also symptomatic of a larger cultural lack of understanding on the topic itself. Despite this absence within the periodical, some of the few scholars who have written on *National Geographic* point to colonial moments or trends in the publication.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> These assertions of colonialist tendencies in the publication stem from a variety of methods and considerations. Lutz and Collins point to the colonial eye in the photography of non-Western peoples, Steet uncovers Orientalist tendencies in *National Geographic*’s treatment of the Middle East, and Tuason reveals the strategy of Empire in the *National Geographic*’s turn of the century articles on the Philippines.

When considering this absence, or at best undecided and debatable terminology of U.S. colonialism, Marx's famous opening line of the *Communist Manifesto* comes to mind: "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism" (in Tucker 473). The rhetoric of U.S. power is still haunted by the specter of colonial attitudes and undertakings during the first half of the twentieth century. Like Marx's Communist specter, the specter of colonialism was also everywhere and nowhere at the same time. *National Geographic* neglects to name or classify the behavior of the United States as colonial. Interestingly, it paints a very negative image of colonial Spain, and assiduously avoids the terminology when discussing U.S. involvement in former Spanish colonies. While it subtracts colonial terminology from its discussion of U.S. politics, it does not provide a complimentary set of descriptive terms. This lack of appropriate terminology continues to the present. This paper addresses this deficiency and attempts to provide an understanding of the place of the United States in the long parade of colonial powers and successors to the colonial project. *National Geographic* was a purveyor of representations that bear some significant similarities to European colonialism but ultimately the publication conceives of the United States as a new kind of international power by (strategically) neglecting to link it with explicit colonial terminology the projects of the European colonial powers. While it actively constructs new representations of the emerging world power of the United States, it carefully avoids colonial terminology, and in the end fails to give a name to this era of geographic, economic, political expansion. The nature of this era of U.S. geographic, economic, and political expansion is what I will describe, and name.

To understand the environment of *National Geographic*, the Monroe Doctrine (1823) is a good place to start because it is a defining moment in the internationalization of U.S. power. This new U.S. foreign policy proclaimed that European powers (Russia, France, Britain, and Spain) could no longer interfere with or colonize *new* territories in the Western Hemisphere (the Americas). Any such actions would be considered explicitly hostile by the United States. Aggression toward the United States was then defined as an attack any nation in the Western Hemisphere, and the United States positioned itself to be consulted before any decisions were to be made about other American nations. In an implicit sense, the doctrine divides the world into nations that are consulted in foreign policy matters, their sovereignty, and their future, and others that are not. This positions the United States as a kind of parent nation that minds the other countries in its own hemisphere.

The Monroe Doctrine provided an alternative to the European conceptions of nationalism and colonialism, and allowed the U.S. to be the primary overseer of the affairs in neighboring nations without actually driving the American flag into their soil or annexing territory. Simultaneously, the romantic notion of Manifest Destiny compelled thousands of U.S. (and immigrant) settlers into the Western reaches of the continent, displacing and driving out indigenous populations and foreign rule (specifically, Mexican).<sup>6</sup> Popular mythology communicated by the Manifest Destiny placed God on the side of the ever-increasing droves of American settlers in need of space and resources.

During the nineteenth century, these two trends informed U.S. policy and influenced the formation of the modern state, in both physical and ideological terms.

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, the formal name of Mexico is *Estados Unidos Mexicanos*; United (Mexican) States.

While Manifest Destiny advocated annexation and colonization of new land in the continental United States, the Monroe Doctrine actually discouraged European colonization of the Americas. As the United States expanded beyond the continental states, these two theories slowly became obsolete. With the occupation of Cuba, a new relationship emerged which neither Manifest Destiny nor the Monroe Doctrine adequately describe. During this transitional period, the role of the United States abroad remains unnamed; *National Geographic* provides a unique source for this period. This later incarnation of the Monroe Doctrine, which includes some components of Manifest Destiny, is not defined as a term in the critical lexicon. I contend that it must be first understood, and named, in order to understand the present world of *globalism*, or *internationalism*<sup>7</sup>. As Smith contests, “globalism had its roots at the beginning of the twentieth century rather than towards the end” (4). And *National Geographic* reported prolifically on the state of the world during this very time period: it is a text from which these so-called *roots* may be untangled through an analysis of the rhetoric and discourse present in *National Geographic* articles from sites of U.S. expansionist interest.

This thesis looks back in order to look forward. With these considerations in mind, I seek to uncover the rhetoric and discourse of U.S. neocolonialism<sup>8</sup> as portrayed by the *National Geographic Society* during the time period of 1898-1920 through two case studies on articles about Cuba and Armenia. The term “neocolonial” will be used to differentiate U.S. strategies from those of its more traditionally colonial predecessors. In this context, U.S. neocolonialism is a new manifestation of both U.S. foreign policy and

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<sup>7</sup> Institutions such as NATO, the UN, and the EU are mid to late twentieth century global entities.

<sup>8</sup> American is a problematic word that I must acknowledge as such. “America” refers to the land of the Western hemisphere: North, South, and Central America. For the purposes of this thesis, I will employ the concept “U.S. colonialism” instead of “American colonialism” to respect the reality that America, as such, is a larger territorial identity that encompasses much more than just the United States.

established colonial projects that draws upon attributes and strategies of both, but ultimately results in a distinctive process that is unique to the United States.

The proceeding analysis first establishes the origins and rise of the *National Geographic Society* and its publication, *National Geographic*. Chapter One is a review of the history of the *Society*, the influence of the publication, the link between *National Geographic Society* and its British colonial predecessor, the *Royal Geographic Society*, and theoretical considerations. This thesis is then divided into two case studies that exemplify this new project of the United States. Chapter Two is a case study is on *National Geographic's* articles on Cuba, which is central in locating the function of U.S. direct involvement, under the auspices of the Monroe Doctrine. Since *National Geographic* reported extensively on Cuba until the Communist Revolution, it offers a full chronological spectrum of U.S. attitudes and representations toward the island and will illuminate the evolution of U.S. international policy. Chapter Three is the second case study on Armenia, which is a point of departure. Armenia is the site of the *internationalization* of the Monroe Doctrine (outside of the Western Hemisphere).

Although culturally, economically, politically, and geographically distinct, *National Geographic* applies the rhetorical formula to each locale. Significantly, each set of articles from both Cuba and Armenia reveal *National Geographic's* three-pronged approach to validate (and sell) U.S. neocolonial projects in each country. Briefly, the formula follows: (1) The delegitimization and dethroning of the current rulers; (2) the potential of the land and the economic imperative to intervene; and (3) the potential of the local people as a viable and decent labor pool coupled with the moral imperative to intervene and improve their lives. Within the publication, this formula exhibits

neocolonial desires by the common rhetorical approach. This approach applies almost uniformly to both countries: it is an overarching ideology that exposes the stance of the United States toward the world, and specifically, toward its sites of expansionist interest. With these case studies I will demonstrate the neocolonialist rhetoric of the United States, drawing from both textual and visual discourses, as employed (and imagined) by *National Geographic*.

Since the magazine uses both written articles and photographs to make its case, this paper will analyze both discourses. Chapter Four is a review of current visual culture theory and its implications in *National Geographic*, a clarification of traditionally colonial photography in the publication, and an analysis of the neocolonial photographic techniques as exemplified by the case studies of Cuba and Armenia. According to Barthes, “the analysis must first bear on each separate structure; it is only when the study of each structure has been exhausted that it will be possible to understand the manner in which they complement each other” (Barthes [1977] 16). This theoretical framework guides the structure of the proceeding analysis: first, the written text must be analyzed separately, and then the photos, so as to fully understand each entity before determining how they work together.

While *National Geographic* was busy imagining and constructing representations that would establish and legitimize the emerging U.S. neocolonial effort, Rudyard Kipling’s poem “White Man’s Burden” (1899), calls forth readers in the United States to the colonial project. Significantly, this poem was originally published in the U.S. political publication *McClure’s Magazine*:

Take up the White Man’s burden –  
Send forth the best ye breed –

Go, bind your sons to exile  
 To serve your captives need;  
 To wait, in heavy harness  
 On fluttered folk and wild –  
 Your new-caught sullen peoples  
 Half devil and half child (reproduced in Harlow and Carter 362)

The voice of the British author (and consummately colonial writer) calls forth the United States to take up the colonial mission as well. The poem's simple, almost childlike meter cannot disguise the sense of superiority and entitlement that defines the colonizer; nor can it mask the obvious contempt for the colonized. Sartre argues in the introduction to Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that "privilege is at the heart of every colonial relationship" (xii). From this position of superiority, the colonial dynamic is formed. Kipling's poetic imagery of captivity invokes an almost biblical imperative to minister to the needs of the colonized, despite the difficulties faced by the colonizer. Kipling portrays the colonized, "your new-caught sullen peoples," like the mythical chimera: part malevolent monster, part immature, undisciplined child. Both aspects of the colonial chimera are negative and weak, but the colonized can benefit from instruction: evil and immaturity can be exorcised and developed under appropriate tutelage. Kipling's poem is a call to the people of the United States to "take up the White Man's Burden." The United States responded, but in a manner that diverges from the British model as described by Kipling, and consequently conceives of the colonized in a new light.

The chimera is a mythological creature with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the rear of a serpent.<sup>9</sup> Defined as a hybrid, the chimera embodies distinct natures within a single creature. Kipling's summation of the colonized is negative in both respects; "devil" and "child" are both derogatory when applied to an adult. This fully

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<sup>9</sup> Harry Thurston Peck. *Harpers Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*. New York. Harper and Brothers. 1898.

negative image of the colonized helps cement a hierarchy of difference between the colonizer and the colonized; the former is always superior and the latter forever condemned to his inferiority. Homi Bhabha notes that difference is typically constructed along these lines, through a “binary logic...[such as] Black/White, Self/Other” (5). As *National Geographic* imagines its Others, it retains the hybridity of Kipling’s colonial chimera, but revises the nature of the creature by assigning both negative *and* positive traits. A poststructuralist reading regards the significance of *National Geographic*’s reimagination of Kipling’s chimeric colonial subject: the foreigners depicted in this publication are not “half devil and half child.” The proceeding analysis details *National Geographic*’s production of the *Neocolonial Chimera*, a representation that assigns the colonized to the position of subordinate partners in trade, certainly primitive and backwards (negative), but also productive and intelligent (positive), an Other who is “not-so-other.”

Although this thesis is in many ways interdisciplinary—it requires a good deal of historical, political, and economic contextualizing—the analysis is postcolonial. As scholar Robert Young states, “Postcolonial critique involves the reconsideration of this history, particularly from the perspectives of those who suffered its effects, together with the defining of its contemporary social and cultural impact” (4). The early twentieth century texts of *National Geographic* do not permit for a consideration of the first-hand perspectives of those who suffered in the position of the neocolonized because their voices are not included, but the text does invite an analysis of the representations of the United States’ foreign Others. Because Marxism is so closely linked with many postcolonial struggles (Young 6), I consider it a useful critical perspective. Along with

Marxist readings, I also employ structural, deconstructive, and narratological readings to examine the text at the level of the language and rhetoric through different theoretical lenses. Metonymy, synecdoche, and parataxis illustrate the rhetorical arguments made by *National Geographic*. The section on photography reviews current visual theory, focusing close attention to the theoretical *eye* and ways of seeing. On closer examination, despite the naturalism it affects, *National Geographic* employs a series of sophisticated visual and rhetorical strategies in order to fabricate its image of the foreign, foreigners, and the role of the United States.

Many of the issues raised here, such as power and knowledge, hegemony, lost or missing perspectives, and ideological cartographies, are relevant not only in contemporary English and Postcolonial Studies, but also in other disciplines like Women's Studies, Minority Studies, Communication Studies, and Cultural Studies. The strength of writing on *National Geographic* in an English department is the ability to deploy literary theory and critical readings that look at this topic at the level of the language and rhetoric, which offers a certain kind of analysis that might not be otherwise available. This thesis is also concerned with the production of critical terms, without which historical, political, and cultural understanding is limited, complicated, or altogether impossible. Here the tools of English carve out an examination based closely on the text, and the resultant analysis has the ability to further nuance the complicated relationship between United States and the rest of the world as revealed by *National Geographic*.

*National Geographic Magazine* is a kind of window into the past, through which an uninterrupted American perspective of the last 120 years can be viewed. It records

America's self-imaginings as well as its (imagined) relationship to the rest of the world. The iconic gold framed cover of the *National Geographic Magazine* is itself like a window frame, enticing the reader to open it up and look through. If we look out through this window closely enough, perhaps we might see a reflection of ourselves, a picture of our past, and with these images, a more keenly informed framework for proceeding forward.

Chapter One: The *National Geographic Society* and its Magazine

*“THE WORLD AND ALL THAT IS IN IT is our theme and if we can’t find anything to interest ordinary people in that subject we better shut up shop.”*

--Alexander Graham Bell to Gilbert Grosvenor, 1900  
(quoted in Poole 6)

In the beginning there was but a dream when a group of thirty-three erudite men gathered at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. on January 13, 1888 to discuss the possibility of forming an American geographical society (Bryan 24). The invitees, exclusively male, were scientists, explorers, and prominent business figures; the group also included well-known men from the military as well as other branches of the US government (Poole 26-27). Two weeks later, those same thirty-three men reconvened and agreed that a geographical society must be formed “for the increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge” (quoted in Abramson 36). These words express—perhaps inadequately—the proliferation of information and knowledge that would result from the work of their organization. This group would come to be known as the *National Geographic Society*.

In the beginning there was but a dream for which its founders could never have anticipated the astonishing and enduring success of both the Society and its monthly publication, *National Geographic*. The first issue of the *National Geographic* was released in October 1888, and proceeded to cover the end of the nineteenth century, to span the entire twentieth, and now ventures into the twenty-first. For over 120 years the publication has reported on “the world and all that is in it,” the theme as described by Alexander Graham Bell, the second president of the Society.

The history of the *National Geographic Society* is so complex and remarkable that it has inspired a number of studies.<sup>10</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this essay to completely detail the impressive history of the Society, a brief background of the publication is necessary to situate the text that has become the arm of the “largest scientific educational organization in the world” (Abramson 5). *National Geographic* boasts an impressive readership, both in the United States, and increasingly, abroad. *National Geographic* is a major household name, which signifies its firm presence within American culture. As attested by a historian of the *National Geographic Society*, Edwin C. Buxbaum, “there is no other magazine like [it]...no magazine has so made itself part of the American home as the *National Geographic Magazine*” (Buxbaum 11).

#### *Not-so Humble Beginnings*

On the fateful night of January 27, 1888, when the Society was formally established, Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a prominent Washington businessman, lawyer, and regent of the Smithsonian, was elected its first president. In his inaugural speech, he claimed to be only an amateur geographer, and stated “I possess only the same general interest in the subject of geography that should be felt by every educated man” (quoted in Abramson 35). With this caveat, the Society was off. His words continue to inform the nature of the *Society* and its publication to this day, as a magazine for the everyman.

Among its earliest (and most ardent) supporters was Alexander Graham Bell, a modern renaissance man most commonly known for inventing the telephone. This invention not only revolutionized daily life, it also permitted communication over long

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<sup>10</sup> The most notable of these histories of the *National Geographic Society* are Robert M. Poole’s *Explorer’s House*, Howard S. Abramson’s *National Geographic Society: Behind America’s Lens on the World*, and C. D. B. Bryan’s *The National Geographic Society: 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*.

distances in a swift and efficient manner. The rise of global power and trade networks over the course of the twentieth century would not have been possible without this technology, which was coincidentally developed by one of the most influential members of the *Society*. Bell was also the son-in-law of first Society president Hubbard, and assumed the presidency in 1897 upon his death. The telephone was not Bell's only genius, and he assumed full responsibility for the early success of the *Society*.

The *Society's* leaders have embodied a dynastic tradition, ever since Bell's daughter Elsie married Gilbert Grosvenor, a young graduate of Amherst College whom Bell hired to take on editorial duties at the fledgling publication. This proved to be a fortuitous placement, for both the *Society* and its magazine flourished under young Grosvenor. Grosvenor would also come to serve as *Society* president, as would his son, Melville Grosvenor, and later, Melville's son "Gil" Grosvenor. The Grosvenor family has stood steadfastly at the helm of the *National Geographic Society* for over a century.

Gilbert Grosvenor maintained close personal relationships with members of the government; indeed, President Taft was his second cousin (and frequent contributor to the magazine) and Theodore Roosevelt a close friend. Grosvenor also sought out support from financiers and industrialists, who have regularly sat on the *Society's* Board of Trustees (Lutz and Collins 34-35). The upper management of the *National Geographic Society* has always occupied high positions in all realms of society: private industry, academic, governmental, and military. Many of the early articles were in fact penned by U.S. diplomats, consular offices, and government officials (Poole 64). Contributions also came from U.S. Presidents, as well as literary giants such as Joseph Conrad and Donn Byrne (Buxbaum 56). The authoritative tone of the *National Geographic Society's*

publication is buttressed with the pieces penned by influential and powerful men, many of whom were also active behind the scenes of the publication. As *Society* historian Robert Poole affirms, there was indeed a “coziness between the journal and official Washington” (64).

The founding of the *National Geographic* came about in the right place, at the right time. Americans were, more than ever before, interested in learning more about the world outside of the United States. It was America’s burgeoning involvement abroad that sparked this fascination:

[T]he new possessions our country acquired were lively topics of interest and discussion everywhere. The Philippines, the island of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other Latin American countries and customs were subjects everyone wanted to know about. The Magazine grew by leaps and bounds. (Buxbaum 22)

Apart from new possessions, the Spanish-American War had increased America’s role as an international political player and brought geography into the forefront of the national consciousness (Pauly 521). As the old adage from Ambrose Bierce goes, “War is God’s way of teaching Americans geography,”<sup>11</sup> so then was *National Geographic* the informative messenger of that news, and it rose to supply the rapidly escalating demand for geographical knowledge. As newspapers reported the technical facts of military and political involvement in these regions to American readers, the National Geographic Society put that information in context—through ethnographic studies, photography, discussion of resources, and cultural reports, among other topics. Alexander Graham Bell had already attested that “geography” was not limited to the study of maps, space, or topography. Instead, he established that the theme must be “the world and all that is in it”. With this definition, the National Geographic Society was free to explore,

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<sup>11</sup> I am indebted to Sunil Agnani for suggesting this adage in relation to the passage.

essentially, anything in the world, and report back on it through the publication. As a title, *National Geographic* is perhaps a misnomer: the “national” and the “geographic” are only but two of the topics covered from an endless array of possibilities that encompass the entire world.

*Making the National Geographic Magazine into a National Icon*

The forefathers of the publication mulled over the issue of membership: how was the publication to be disseminated? They eventually decided against the newsstand sale of the magazine and instead sought that interested parties become “members” through the organization itself. To this day, subscribers to the magazine are not simply consumers but rather members. It has also retained a tax-free, non-profit status throughout its history. In this respect, it differs greatly from other U.S. publications that are bound to a specific market. The *National Geographic Society’s* publication occupies a liminal position between a highly scientific publication and a mass-market magazine, which renders it slave to neither (Lutz and Collins 25). Instead, *National Geographic* invented itself instead as a kind of everyman’s scholarly publication, unlike competitors such as *Harper’s* or *The Atlantic*. The magazine projected authority not only through rhetoric and image, but by mimicking the distribution of a scholarly periodical.

Membership in the Society was coveted and thusly carried with it distinctiveness. As a mid-1960’s slogan urged, “Mention *National Geographic*—it identifies you” (quoted in Steet 3). By democratizing information and keeping the doors to the “club” open, the *Society* cultivates two levels of involvement. First, the patrician explorer, who

is able to travel abroad of his own means and learn about foreign places first-hand, is not completely dependant on the publication for his knowledge of the world. However, if he chooses to be a member, he is also able to travel with the support of the *Society*, to find like-minded men to share in his adventures, and to publish. The second kind of member is the average reader: the armchair explorer, who would otherwise be confined to his domestic environment if not for the journeys in *National Geographic* he undertakes. Despite his membership, the armchair explorer is not part of the patrician Americans working for *National Geographic* who travel abroad, report, and in consultation with the editorial staff, choose the destinations and topical foci for the armchair explorer's vicarious voyages. Between its ties to official Washington and its patrician contributors and financiers, *National Geographic* cultivates public opinion for the imagined "everyman." In this way, membership contributed to the panache and authority of the publication.

In favor of a perspective that the "every" reader could enjoy and learn from, the highly technical text of the early issues was done away with under Grosvenor's watch (Bryan 42). Grosvenor invigorated the publication with a vision of editorial fairness and excitement. He dismissed perspectives that he deemed unfair or biased from the Magazine, saying "the *Geographic* has always dealt in facts, not bias, rumor, or prejudice" (quoted in Abramson 63). He championed the first-person report as the best perspective for the articles of the magazine, harking back to the enduring success of first-person travel accounts by Herodotus and Darwin (Bryan 42). Literary aspirations aside, Grosvenor employed the first-person eye-witness format to lend a sense of objectivity and accuracy to the publication. The reporter is a witness, for he must *see* these places,

peoples, and customs with his own eye. On the other hand, a first-person eye-witness account—eye being the operative word—implies subjectivity because each person sees differently, and the magazine published mainly first-person accounts from intrepid patrician men. *National Geographic* went so far as to declare itself “America’s Eye on the World,” a pronouncement that itself asserts a position of power and wide-reaching influence.

A set of seven editorial principles laid out by Grosvenor in a March 1915 issue cast the intended perspective of the *National Geographic*:

- (1) The first principle is absolute accuracy. Nothing must be printed which is not strictly according to fact...
- (2) Abundance of beautiful, instructive, and artistic illustrations.
- (3) Everything printed in the Magazine must have permanent value.
- (4) All personalities and notes of trivial character are avoided.
- (5) Nothing of a partisan or controversial nature is printed.
- (6) Only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided.
- (7) The contents of each number is planned with a view of being timely...  
(quoted in Bryan 90)

These editorial aims inform the direction of *National Geographic* and were communicated to its readers as a kind of assurance that the objectivity and evenhandedness are top priorities.

The first editorial aim is fair enough; as a scientific and educational journal, objectivity and truthfulness of fact are of the utmost importance. This claim is taken seriously by readers, as evidenced by its extensive educational use, both in personal libraries and in schools. The second aim is informed by the overwhelming success due to the introduction of photography into the magazine, which helped membership soar: in 1905, the Society boasted only 3,400 members, but after a well-received photo essay on Tibet, that number rose to 11,000 by the end of the year (Abramson 63). Lutz and

Collins note that the *Society's* own marketing surveys reveal that 53% of subscribers indeed read only the pictures and the captions (76). The quality and quantity of photography certainly garners a following, evidences visual “truth,” and enhances the overall appearance of the magazine (photography will be developed in Chapter Four). The third aim—the issue of permanent value—is certainly acknowledged by its readers. Unlike the fleeting relevance of a daily newspaper, the *NGM* is the most bound-magazine in the United States; historian Buxbaum proclaims: “People preserve it!” (13). In aggregate, it is a genuine *encyclopedia* of geographic knowledge for the reader to consult for research or personal curiosity: “of travel, of foreign customs and dress, of strange and exotic people, manners and things different from the humdrum of our daily lives” (Buxbaum 12). While *National Geographic* is a staple of both private and public libraries, it is not an *academic* encyclopedia. Readers may consider it an authoritative text, but it is indeed subject to opinion, influence, and the interest of its readership. It is better understood as a descriptive tool than an objective encyclopedia.

Editorial aims four, five, and six are the most problematic, and as I will contest, the most contradictory (and thusly illuminating) in the *National Geographic*. The fourth aim is intended to stifle unfair bias that Grosvenor so adamantly sought to keep out of the pages of the publication. Avoiding controversy and partisanship—aim five—results in a hegemonic American perspective that *generally* reports the status quo, rather than rising to challenge it. Robert M. Poole, a former *National Geographic* employee, notes that the publication often stumbled when addressing the troubling and horrific events in the twentieth century due to its prevailing editorial aims (116). Frank omission of events like the Holocaust, by virtue of its absence in the publication, reveals the *Society's* desire to

present a neutral—if not flattering—worldview to its readers. Aim six—the admonition not to print anything of an unkindly nature about a foreign land or people—is an open-ended statement is subject to the working editorial definition of what is “unkindly.” And aim seven is an administrative issue. Reporting current issues to readers is a function of satisfying the demand of its readership and remaining timely.

These seven editorial aims were devised by Grosvenor, approved by the *National Geographic Society*, and communicated to the readers of the publication. They provide a relevant point of departure by which to analyze rhetoric and representations of the magazine. Lutz and Collins argue that these positive editorial aims are meant to reflect an identity Americans want to perceive of themselves: like the editorial aims of the publication that reports the world, Americans too are rational, fair, and benevolent (46). To the modern reader, many of these early twentieth century representations seem quite unfair and derogatory, certainly not in keeping with the spirit of the editorial aims. However, this disconnect might be better attributed to the status quo. If, for example, a typical description of an Indonesian in this era were “lazy,” the publication does not actually violate its own principles because it maintains (but perpetuates) the norm.

Above all, the single most important editorial principle: “Be there” (Grosvenor [1988] 91) is problematized by the inherent biases and perspective (conscious or unconscious) of the *National Geographic Society*. At the very least, first-hand reportage certainly lends itself to the subjective experience and opinion of the reporter in the field. On paper these principles certainly do encourage objectivity; however, the ideology of the newly emerging power of the United States is visible through the publication’s rhetoric, representations, and discursive arguments.

In *National Geographic*, the *Society* is the author, and the text cannot be considered outside of its author. Barthes discusses the unnecessary analytical consideration of a novel's author in "The Death of the Author," arguing that "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" ([1977] 143). Barthes theory, while useful in other textual considerations, does not apply here. It is not an intentional fallacy to consider the role of the author in *National Geographic's* articles; rather, it is completely necessary. The "subject" of *National Geographic*—the *Society* itself—is never obfuscated by the text it produces. Instead, the identity of the *Society* (the author) is visible because of its guiding editorial principles, which indeed exert a strong, cohesive narrative voice that resonates from issue to issue, from year to year.

And with this presence of the author within the text may the beliefs, ideological leanings, and the intentions of the *Society* be examined. Ideology is not a simple persuasion or allegiance. Instead, Loomba describes ideology as "refer[ing] to not only political ideas, but also to mental frameworks, beliefs, concepts, and ways of expressing our relationship to the world" (25). *National Geographic*, "America's eye on the world," records *and* creates those very frameworks, beliefs, and modes of relation which make ideology visible in the pages of the publication. Louis Althusser, a Marxist, further nuances this definition: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). Ideology is then, an abstraction that codes for how individuals are to relate to the world under the terms of that specific ideology. *National Geographic* imagines those ideological terms; its publication embodies them;

and its readers are ultimately offered an ideological schema through which to relate to the material world.

*National Geographic and Colonialism*

In December 1918, *National Geographic* devoted an entire issue to “The Races of Europe” in an effort to ethnographically categorize the most populous continent at the time. Edwin Grosvenor, Gilbert Grosvenor’s erudite father, penned the whole issue. Under the section “Why Europe’s Races are Progressive,” (443), Edwin champions the global expansion of the Europeans:

They have partitioned and subdued to themselves nearly the whole of Africa. With the exception of China and Japan, they control all Asia and all the islands of all the seas. During the last twenty-five centuries, from them as a focus they have radiated the art and science and thought of the world. How has this stupendous result been brought about? What potent causes have produced such practical monopoly of universal leadership?

“Nothing of a partisan or controversial nature is printed,” editorial aim five, seems to be ignored here. According to Grosvenor, Europeans not only assert influence geographically; they are also responsible for the dissemination of knowledge and aesthetics. Grosvenor does not directly answer the questions he poses but clearly favors the Europeans and the “stupendous result” of global European control. The issue goes on to nuance the characteristics of the races of Europe and to sharpen the perceived racial divide between Caucasian and Mongolian, or in modern terms, West v. East. Of the Caucasian Grosvenor notes the presence of “horizontal eyes” and “intellectual superiority” (447). This dichotomy of appearance and intellectual capacity, as confirmed by Grosvenor, is a key ideological assumption of the neocolonial project. The firmly

imbedded notion of the superiority of the West comes as no surprise given the reach of colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1930, colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6% of the land surface of the globe (Loomba xiii). As a worldwide phenomenon, colonialism implicated an incredibly vast portion of the world's land and peoples. By this definition, Bell's overarching theme of the publication—"the world and all that is in it,"— would necessarily imply a study of a colonial world.

*National Geographic's* reporters are a modern incarnation of historical conquistadors and ambitious explorers. Mary Louise Pratt describes the gaze of the Western explorer: "he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (7).<sup>12</sup> Pratt's imperial gaze, a private pause in thought, is the first step in establishing colonial order. The eyes of the explorer conceive of the landscape and the peoples contained within that land, which results in very real consequences. Kipling's colonial chimera, "half devil and half child" is one such example of the colonial imagination that renders the colonized as potentially malevolent, probably threatening, and certainly weak and infantile. Spurr adds that "the gaze is also the active instrument of construction, order, and arrangement" (15). These possessive, hierarchical visions of the world are then translated into the magazine in a variety of forms.

As a structural component of this U.S. publication, the objectifying gaze of non-Western cultures is also practical. As Smith argues in his study *American Empire*, interest in geography as a discipline was invigorated and taken very seriously by the ruling classes of the United States during the 1890s. At the heart of their interest in geography, Smith posits, was an economic dilemma. The rapidly industrializing

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<sup>12</sup> Pratt actually refers to the European male protagonist of anti-conquest literature in her text, but her terminology is applicable to American colonial endeavors as well.

economy of the late nineteenth century United States led to an overaccumulation of capital and increasingly fewer opportunities for domestic reinvestment (Smith 15). In other words, intrepid entrepreneurs at the end of this century began to turn their gazes outside of the national borders in search of new markets abroad. Coincidentally, or maybe not so, *National Geographic* arose during this same time period, supplying the very information on world cultures, topographies, and resources so critical to the investors of America's ruling classes. Articles like "Oil Treasure of Mexico" (November 1908), "Course of the Retail Coal Trade" (November 1902), "Soldiers of the Soil: Our Food Crops Must Be Greatly Increased" (March 1917), "Fisheries of Japan" (September 1904), "Lumbering in Manchuria" (March 1904), and "Commercial Prize of the Orient" (September 1905) are but a few of the myriad articles that inform and direct American foreign trade interests. In a materialist reading, the economic condition of late nineteenth century America "produced" the need to manufacture, as Memmi would argue, both colonialists at home and the colonized abroad (56). As such, *National Geographic* can be considered a key supplier of not only information about territory and resources, but also of essential cultural representations and attitudes that complement (and encourage) an emerging economic identity.

*National Geographic* not only provides vital information for colonial endeavors, but also the appropriate attitudes for the colonizer to don. As Lutz and Collins insist, "putting articles on the United States side by side with articles on the non-Western world often helped depict progress and cultural evolution" (26). The structure of the *National Geographic* not only displays valued systems of cultural difference but also invites the objectifying, scientific gaze so closely associated with colonialism. The parataxis of the

publication—placing things side by side—sets an intellectual tone for the reader. Take, for example, the December 1920 issue. It begins with an article on the sport of falconry. Next comes an article on America’s birds of prey. Following these two naturalistic studies are two articles on foreign cultures: Haiti and Siberia. Given that “we arrive at understanding by the way the narrative arranges the material to suggest a particular view or conclusion” (Meier 142), by placing these disparate studies side by side, a certain reading is suggested. The reader engages with the cultural articles in the same way he does the scientific, zoological studies: both the birds of Prey and the Haitians, or Siberians, are interesting *objects*. This captious, possessive gaze, as encouraged through the parataxis of *National Geographic* articles, lends itself to Cesaire’s equation of the colonial enterprise: “colonialization = ‘thingification’” (42). In this equation, objectification is always the end result of a colonial enterprise.

### *Colonial Roots*

At the time of *National Geographic*’s inception, the United States was relatively new to colonial enterprise. The British were not. The late nineteenth-century framers of the *National Geographic* emulated the British model of clubs and associations (Abramson 32). Gardiner Greene Hubbard, the *National Geographic Society*’s first president, extolled the ingenuity of the British predecessor, the *Royal Geographic Society* of London, stating that its founding marked “a landmark in the history of discovery” (quoted in Grosvenor [1988] 87). The publication of the *Royal Geographic Society* never took off in the way that its American corollary did. The *Royal Geographic Society* was,

however, a decidedly colonial enterprise. David Livingstone, a Scottish explorer and infamous colonizer in Africa describes his adventures in the preface to his *The Zambesi and its Tributaries*:

Our Government have supported the proposal of the Royal Geographical Society made by my friend Sir Roderick Murchison, and have united with that body to aid me in another attempt to open Africa to civilizing influences. (Blaikie Ch. XVIII)

His travels across Africa in particular, for the purposes of “open[ing] Africa to civilizing influences” resulted in his induction as a member in 1857 and he was later awarded the *Royal Geographical Society’s* Patron’s Gold Medal. Livingstone was not only involved in the “civilizing project”, but also of exploration, for the *Royal Geographical Society* and the British Crown also encouraged “discovery” of new lands. For his efforts, Livingstone wrote: “The Royal Geographic Society...have awarded twenty-five guineas for the discovery of the lake. It is from the Queen” (Blaikie Ch. VI).

*The Royal Geographic Society*, the predecessor of the *National Geographic Society*, funded explorers abroad (with the help of the British Crown) to acculturate indigenous peoples to the European paradigm, as well as to appropriate land and resources for the benefit of England. The British model of colonialism was marked by a willingness to serve, as Parliament often declared, as the “the trusteeship of the weaker races” (Spurr 114). The concept of “trusteeship” implies a power-relation of dominant and subjected peoples. Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” exemplifies this imperative of the trusteeship. It is a burden because it is simultaneously a difficult undertaking and vital moral task of the “stronger races.” For these reasons, the United States too should “send forth the best” colonial administrators possible, as proclaimed in the opening lines of the poem.

*The Fruits of Colonial Labors*

Despite its patrician origins, the Magazine sought an egalitarian membership from its earliest days. Through a yearly membership subscription, all interested parties could contribute to the work being done by the Society and follow its progress through the pages of the publication. As Ishbel Ross wrote in 1938, “the janitor, plumber, and loneliest lighthouse keeper [can] share with kings and scientists the fun of sending an expedition to Peru or an explorer to the North Pole” (quoted in Bryan 36). This quote refers to two important firsts for the Society, not only as a purveyor of information but also as a cutting-edge creator of knowledge. In 1911 The *Society* sponsored a young archeologist by the name of Hiram Bingham of Yale University to return to Machu Picchu, Peru, to continue his research on the lost Incan city. Bingham’s grant of \$10,000 would be the first given by the Society in the name of archeological research (Bryan 148). Bingham did not in fact, “discover” Machu Picchu. Instead, he paid an indigenous guide fifty cents to take him to the site already well-known by the locals (Bryan 144). Discovery is then, defined by its relationship to the West, and the *National Geographic* devoted an entire issue to Bingham’s work in April 1913.<sup>13</sup>

Ross’s quote also mentions Robert E. Peary’s “discovery” of the North Pole, which was accomplished in 1909 with financial support from the Society (the first grant ever given by the organization). Peary sent a telegram to President Taft, declaring

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of the West, here, refers to the industrialized world of the United States and Western Europe. Although Machu Picchu may have been known to Peruvians, it was unknown to the US and Europe, and in effect, did not “exist” until the National Geographic proclaimed it did, by publishing the work and visual testimony (the photographs) of the American scholar Hiram Bingham.

“HAVE HONOR TO PLACE NORTH POLE AT YOUR DISPOSAL” (Bryan 65).

The *National Geographic Society* later awarded Peary the Hubbard Medal (named after its first President Gardner Greene Hubbard) and published extensively on his achievement.

With such efforts, knowledge was not only constructed by the men funded by the *National Geographic Society*, it was also appropriated and, in effect, possessed by the United States. Foucault argues in *Truth and Judicial Forms* that “knowledge is an event that falls under the category of activity” (13). It is not absolute; knowledge is always “the historical and circumstantial result” (Foucault 13) of various endeavors and modes of transmission. The implication of Peary’s telegram message to Taft couldn’t be clearer. This appropriation of knowledge and ownership was, in turn, passed along to the reader through the celebratory articles proclaiming victory in the name of the furtherance of knowledge and exploration. Much like David Livingstone of the *Royal Geographic Society*, the *National Geographic Society* also funded explorers to “discover” lost cities, reach remote lands, and scale new heights in the name of science, progress, and America. By 2007, the *National Geographic Society* had funded 8,000 research and exploration undertakings on every continent (National Geographic Fact Sheet 2007). These projects are summarized and recorded with eye-catching photographs in the pages of the magazine. Mary Louise Pratt affirms that such scientific expeditions enliven public interest and are, importantly, “the most powerful ideational and ideological apparatuses through which...citizenries related themselves to other parts of the world” (23).

Exploration and discovery imply a relationship of possession, which was how readers are instructed, through the pages of the magazine, to relate to the rest of the

world. These endeavors—along with the information and achievements gleaned from them—were directly encouraged, funded, and publicized by the *National Geographic Society* and its magazine. *National Geographic* teaches the inherently possessive relationship of exploration and discovery to its readers. The *Society's* turn-of-the-century efforts to “link its fortunes” with fearless adventurers led the *Society* to become “the authority on matters of science and exploration” (Poole 86). This authority, as Edward Said argues, ought not be considered omnipotent, or outside the scope of influencing factors:

There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed. (Said 19-20)

In an exciting era of discovery, the *National Geographic* positioned itself with innovators in these fields so as to become an authority. The carefully crafted associations with explorers allowed the publication to become a trusted source of knowledge. With a position of authority comes the power to create meaningful judgments about “the world and all that is in it.” By 1949, Grosvenor declared *National Geographic* a “household institution” (quoted in Bryan 261), an unparalleled presence in U.S. homes, and by extension, U.S. consciousness.

*National Geographic and Cartographies of Colonialism*

*Mapping the Land*

An integral component of any quest of discovery—or even a colonial project—is an accurate knowledge of the lay of the land (and the people contained within it). This is perhaps most obviously demonstrated in the opening words of Caesar’s *First Book of the Gallic War*.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the word “colonialism” is etymologically Latin (from *colonia*), meaning ‘farm’ or ‘settlement’ (Loomba 1). As Caesar describes:

All Gaul is divided into three parts: one of which the Belgae inhabit; another the Aquitann; the third, (those) who in (the) language of themselves are called Celtae, in ours, Gauls. All these differ between themselves in language, institutions, (and) laws. The river Garonne divides the Gauls from the Aquitani, the Marne and Seine from the Belgae. (Caesar 1-2)

In this account, Caesar narratively maps both the landscape and the peoples of Gaul. The three regions, and the rivers that divide the different ethnic groups from one another, are not only important in a military sense, but also in terms of the *colonia*, for conquered peoples of the Roman Empire were to be administered by Roman citizens who settled in the newly conquered lands (Loomba 1). The landscape also comes to define the people living within it, and vice versa. As argued by scholar Radhika Mohanram: “the visual aspect of the landscape results in the construction of its meaning; this construction in turn elevates the landscape to the status of symbol, giving rise to a wealth of emotion in the subject, all of which are mediated through the body” (17-18). In Cesar’s description, the river Garonne carves distinction right into the landscape: the differences between the various ethnic groups are fortified by the river separating them, and their distinct manners and customs will then come to define their territories. The narrative strategy of the articles in *National Geographic* is often not unlike Caesar’s own style. The landscape

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<sup>14</sup> In this text, Caesar narrates the war carried into Gaul.

described is not simply physical; it is also social and the social body is inextricably linked to the lay of the land.

Colonialism and cartography are intimately entwined (Dutta 1). Mapping serves to demystify and familiarize space, both crucial precursors for the colonial imagination, surveillance, and intervention, respectively. This information is conveyed in both the pages of the publication as well as the map inserts provided with many issues. Currently, the *National Geographic Society* is the largest purveyor of maps and globes in the world (Abramson 5), which seems almost natural given the global prominence (perhaps—dominance) of the United States. Interestingly enough, the first map supplement in the publication was “The Theatre of Military Operations in Luzon” [Philippines], a new colonial intervention for the United States (Bryan 244). By 1945, the Society had authored 53,000 maps of locations spanning the entire globe. During this time period, the maps of the *National Geographic* were consulted by everyone from average Americans—who would chart the progress of U.S. military operations—as well as military officials, and even President Roosevelt himself, who contacted the *Society* two weeks after Pearl Harbor to obtain maps of the Pacific (Bryan 245-246). The US Air Force awarded the National Geographic Society with the Citation of Honor for supplying the maps necessary to win the war, extolling “its ability to meet the emergency requirements of its country...in accomplishing a global mission” (quoted in Bryan 252). Not only were maps consulted for strategic intervention, but the annals of the *National Geographic Society* were also opened in 1941 for military men to consult the articles and photographs of the magazine, along with thousands of unpublished documents for strategic intelligence (National Geographic Fact Sheet 2007).

Seemingly objective enough, each and every map is an interpretative text. In order to understand a map, the reader must consult the legend so as to distinguish the scale and the symbols used to represent whatever the map “maps”. The map, both the actual cartographic product as well as the “narrative cartography” of the article text contain information of the U.S. strategy abroad. The impulse to map extends not only into the land, but also onto the people living in it as a means of control.

### *Mapping the Other*

The “*National Geographic*[’s] relentless drive to essentialize the relationship between people and place” (Steet 8) is the subject of the following case studies. The urge to map informs the representations employed of both place and people. Geography in *National Geographic*’s is not only the study of maps, it is also “the study of the other fellow” (quoted in Bryan 121) as acknowledged, and more importantly, defined, by *Society* president Grosvenor in 1922.

This study of the *other fellow* lies within the scope of *National Geographic*’s theme. In Benedict Anderson’s study *Imagined Communities*, he argues that such conceptions of the “other fellow,” of different groups or communities, arose with the advent of “print-capitalism,” or the publication of texts in a local vernacular during the Industrial Revolution. These circumstances allowed for nationalism to flourish; for people to relate to each other by way of shared similarity and difference. He believes that “communities are not to be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). Although representations may be presented as monolithic

or Real, they are actually imaginative (descriptive rather than absolute portrayals), conceived by certain authorities for certain ends. *National Geographic* participates in this phenomenon. In the case studies from Cuba and Armenia, the Other is not described as the colonized “half devil, half child” of Kipling. *National Geographic* constructs another Other that is “not-so-other,” a Neocolonial Chimera that embodies two distinct natures that complement their intended position in the political, economic, and social imagination of the United States.

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American readers view (and have viewed) the world from the vantage point of the United States, one the world’s most powerful nations (Lutz and Collins 7). The history of the *Society*, its editorial and ideological foundations, its legacy of British colonialism, and the urge to map inform the following case studies on Cuba and Armenia. Close analysis of the carefully worded and rhetorically stylized text of each case study reinforces *National Geographic’s* position as an influential purveyor of knowledge, ideology, and socio-political, and economic attitudes.

Chapter Two: *National Geographic* and Cuba, 1898-1920

The oppression of the Cuban people, the misgovernment of that beautiful island, and the continued failure of Spain to restore any kind of order—all compelled the United States to interfere. (Taft 429)

So declared U.S. secretary of war, William Howard Taft, author of *National Geographic's* July 1907 “Some Recent Instances of National Altruism” of Cuba’s long-reigning Spanish colonial government. Strangely, the Spanish-American war had been over for eight years when he wrote of “Recent Instances of National Altruism”, but the legacy of the conflict persisted long after. Through the vehicle of *National Geographic*, Taft justifies continuing U.S. economic and political domination of the island. The explosion of the Maine catalyzed the war and the destruction of Spanish colonial rule; the magazine sought to characterize and legitimize the post-war arrangement, in which colonial relationships are at once denounced and recreated. Under this arrangement, Cuba is not to be ruled like a colony, but managed like a business interest from Washington (coincidentally, also the location of the headquarters of *National Geographic*).

U.S. interference did not end with the Treaty of Paris,<sup>15</sup> and Taft’s article at once justifies the war, and advocates for continued U.S. involvement. Much unlike newspaper reportage, this article is highly editorialized (and penned by a high-ranking government official and future U.S. President, no less). The rhetoric of this statement boils down to three (indisputable) points: the people *and* the land were both mismanaged, and Spain

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<sup>15</sup> The Treaty of Paris was signed in December 1898. Spain granted independence to the Cubans, and ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States. The United States paid \$20 million for possession of the Philippines as well. Victory in the Spanish-American war brought the United States into the forefront of the world political arena, and also gave them valuable new possessions and territories (but these were not called colonies).

was an incapable and ineffective ruler. For these reasons, the United States intervened, but note the diction. The United States did not invade; it benevolently *interfered* on behalf of a troubled people and a misgoverned land. Importantly, there are echoes of the Monroe doctrine in Taft's logic. The fact of imperial rule is not wrong. He does not call for the liberation of colonized peoples. Rather, Taft cites the "mismanagement" of the island as a cause for inference. The reader, and the Cuban national, is left to wonder: does Taft seek to liberate the Cuban people from foreign rule, or to better "manage" them? Is oppression the fact of colonial rule, or is it the effect of "mismanaged" colonial rule? Does the U.S. seek to disestablish colonialism, or to perfect it?

As related by *National Geographic*, interference in Cuba was a transformative process that granted order to a poorly mismanaged people and place. "The continued failure of Spain to restore any kind of order" at once dismantles Spanish authority and asserts U.S. supremacy. Rationally, this leaves two alternatives: Cuban national independence, or the replacement of Spanish with U.S. hegemony. According to *National Geographic*, Taft prefers the latter and in careful prose avoids the former solution. In the logic of these *National Geographic* articles, the previous rulers must first be vilified and then discredited.

Another article, written by the prominent United States Geological Survey member Robert T. Hill, May 1898's "Cuba" (published during at the beginning of the four month Spanish-American War) unabashedly criticizes Spanish colonial mismanagement:

The American who undertakes to investigate the history of the Spanish government in Cuba inevitably finds the details too revolting to be described. Greed, injustice, bribery, and cruelty have been practiced with

such frequency that volumes could be filled with all their horrible details.  
(240)

Strongly worded and peppered with pejorative adjectives, this statement berates the Spanish for actions that are “too revolting” to specify. The author then goes on to describe those actions—that’s strange. This two-fold effort—first vilification, then the dismantlement of authority—dethrones the Spanish from their rule of the island on both moral and political grounds. Hill delegitimizes Spanish rule, but does not provide the alternative to colonial rule.

Taft picks up where Hill left off, and advertises the United States as the natural alternative without mentioning the third path of Cuban independence. While the Spanish are greedy, cruel, and chaotic rulers, Taft paints a very different picture of the Americans:

There never has been on the part of any country a greater exhibition of pure altruism than that exhibited by the United States from the beginning of the Spanish War down to the present day, toward the peoples who were immediately affected. (Taft 429)

The greatest exhibition *ever* of “pure altruism” of the United States toward Cuba stands in marked opposition to the Spanish rule. Taft’s heavy-handed prose distinguishes the United States as not only a caring and compassionate benefactor, but also as selflessly involved for the sake of regional and humanitarian stability. Importantly, the United States is not fighting for abstractions like independence or systems of taxation and representation; rather, its “interference” is on behalf of Cubans. Rhetorically, U.S. interference is an act of benevolence which creates relationship of the dependence of Cuban peoples on U.S. power.

*National Geographic’s* mission here is twofold. At once, while the *Society* imagines Cuba’s previous rulers, it is simultaneously imagining its own role in the

colonial schema. As Albert Memmi argues, “the manner in which a colonizer wants to see himself plays a considerable role in the emergence of his final portrait” (55). In this case, *National Geographic* depicts the U.S. role, one already established by an invasion, as one of benevolent dependence. The second question is answered here—Cuban independence is not the goal of the invasion, but rather a replacement of mismanagement with a proper, perfected neocolonial government.

Later articles reiterate this benevolent dependence on the United States, naturalizing readers to the fact of U.S. neocolonial rule. As *National Geographic* proclaimed in October 1906’s “Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles,” “the intervention was undertaken *solely in order to protect* Cubans from molestation from outside while they were recovering from the wounds and ravages of war, and to assist them in putting their new house in order” (538, emphasis mine).<sup>16</sup> “Putting their new house in order” involved much more than simply placing Cubans in charge of their own government. Specifically, it was an effort to rearrange their natural resources and labor, the metaphorical “furniture” of the new “house.” The magazine again argues for the necessity of U.S. interference in Cuba, and again gives an answer to the question of what will replace colonial rule.

The United States assisted by way of direct military and civil intervention until May 1903, when the United States relinquished “control” of Cuba. The Platt Amendment, however, ensured that the United States would still be involved in the affairs of the island. Article III of the Platt Amendment reads:

That the government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the

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<sup>16</sup> *National Geographic* is the author here. No individual author is cited.

maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, *property*, and individual liberty. (Bevans 1116-1117, emphasis mine)

And Taft interprets the Platt Amendment for *National Geographic's* readers:

The United States was given the right to intervene at any time in order to maintain in Cuba a government of law and order. We thus secured the right to act in support of the government which we had paid out so much money and so much blood to establish. (Taft 432)

Although Taft uses the passive here, (the US *was given* the right”) the Platt Amendment was quite *actively* negotiated by U.S. Congressional members and passed as a federal law, and then incorporated into the Cuban constitution (despite strong resistance from Cuban framers). But, the United States *secured* the right to intervene if the government it helped to establish does not adequately protect “life, property, and individual liberty.” Significantly, Taft employs the language of investment—in both dollars and life blood—to emphasize that the United States invested in a certain kind of government, and wants a return on its “deal”. Additionally, Taft elides the Platt Amendment’s “independence”, “life, property and individual liberty” and replaces them with “law and order”. Where the Platt Amendment discusses Cuban “consent”, Taft replaces this with a “right to act” purchased by blood and money. *National Geographic*, in its popularization of U.S. interference in Cuba, actually radicalizes the colonial engagement well beyond the writ of law. The magazine does not offer moderate political decisions, but advocates an even more radical engagement.

In effect, *National Geographic* does not argue for Cuban independence, but rather for a different kind of management: out with the old Spanish colonial model and in with another form of government in which the United States will be a collaborative partner. Taft clearly does not argue for Cuban independence (in fact he avoids the term) but he

remains wary of using a word such as colonialism to classify the new relationship of the United States with Cuba. The first Article of the Platt Amendment does not “in any manner authorize or permit any foreign power or powers to obtain by *colonization* or for military or naval purposes or otherwise, lodgment in or control over any portion of said island” (Bevans 1116). In turn, Taft emphasizes that the United States remain vitally involved in the island’s affairs, but not as an explicit colonial power. The answer to what would replace vilified Spanish colonial rule emerged over these years, but spawned another set of questions. The United States would remain engaged with Cuba, in an arrangement not to be called “colonial”, but with many of its features. In this debate, *National Geographic* advocated for a more radical approach, for one closer to colonial rule than to Cuban independence. The only matter remaining was to name this new relationship of political and economic dependence and military domination. The Platt Amendment legislated the rhetoric of the encounter by striking the term “colonial,” but conveniently failed to provide another title.

Further readings in *National Geographic* help to clarify this unnamed relationship. In October 1906’s “Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles,” *National Geographic* published a speech given by Taft at the opening of the University of Habana. Given Taft’s prominence in the articles on Cuba in *National Geographic*, it appears that the magazine becomes, at times, a forum for the voice of the United States government to reach the average American reader (and demonstrates the “coziness” of the publication with official Washington). Taft urges the young students at the University of Habana to take up an interest in “the prosperity of this beautiful island” (568). He also seeks to clarify the position of Cuba in relation to the United States:

[I] assure you in the name of President Roosevelt and the American people that we are here only to help you on, with our arm under your arm, lifting up you again on the path of wonderful progress you have traveled. I am confident that we will be able again to point with pride to the fact that the United States is not an exploiting nation, but only has such deep sympathy with the progress of popular government as to be willing to expend its blood and treasure in making the spread of such government in the world successful. (567)

This speech reads like a manifesto, a commitment by the United States to help any such nations of the world that seek “wonderful progress” and “popular government.” The image of the Cuban people being lifted up upon the arms of the Americans implies that the Cubans are weaker, and reiterates a relationship of dependence between the two nations. This image echoes the colonial “White Man’s Burden” by implying that the United States occupies a superior position from which it can direct and influence Cuban interests and actions. Taft’s preoccupied insistence that the United States is not an “exploiting nation” reflects the preoccupation of the Platt Amendment with the term “colonial.” Taft defines this unnamed relationship in negative terms—by saying what it is not—yet uses metaphors and figures of speech to imply what it is. Taft comes off sounding a bit paranoid that the Americans might be perceived as something other than purely altruistic. Ironically enough, Taft’s assurance of non-exploitation is footnoted at the end of the article with the following: “Of the \$120,000,000 of United States money invested in Cuba, probably one-half is in sugar and tobacco, one-fourth in railroads and street railways, and the balance in real estate, mortgages mines, commercial interests, and fruit culture” (568). Although placed in a footnote, U.S. economic interests clearly coincide with the political condition of the Cuban people. In Taft’s rhetoric the reader sees the features of this emerging, unnamed relationship: economic productivity and financial management are key features. The classic colonial preoccupation with flags,

forts and flotillas is replaced by a catalogue of economic assets: farms, finances, and fruit.

By first vilifying and discrediting previous Spanish rule, the United States positions itself as the obvious choice for leadership in Cuba. Yet, *National Geographic* advertises a radical involvement of the United States in Cuba, one that is more traditionally colonial than the recommendations of the Platt Amendment, but still neglects to name this new relationship. The United States has much at stake in the island—both politically and economically—but does not seek a traditional colonial takeover. Instead, the early twentieth century articles on Cuba published by *National Geographic* imagine a new dynamic that moves beyond the strict colonizer/colonized relationship.

#### *Towards a Rhetoric of Subtraction*

Interestingly, after the last shots were fired in 1899, a rhetorical struggle took place over the future of Cuba. In a game like law, the terms which a government uses have real, material consequences in the lives of citizens and subjects. *National Geographic* was crucially involved in this rhetorical struggle. The first phase, discrediting Spanish rule, attached permanent, negative connotations to certain terms like “colonial”, “imperialism” and “exploitation.” In the second, post-war phase these terms could not be employed. They were struck from the lexicon. What followed was a “language-game,” an effort to speak about a relationship while avoiding problematic terms.<sup>17</sup> In the interim there is a deliberately, carefully unnamed political arrangement.

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<sup>17</sup> Wittgenstein, the twentieth century philosopher, argues that words should not be distilled down to their single meaning but instead should be considered as “language-games.” In the *Philosophical Investigations*,

The Platt agreement employs the terms “independence” and “liberty”, which suggests an end to colonial-like rule. *National Geographic*, through Taft, advocates a more radical, neocolonial approach, and in turn elides these terms from its description. This is a kind of rhetoric of lexical subtraction where the definition of United-States/Cuban relations emerges in negative-space. It is defined slowly by what it is not. What, precisely, the political relationship between the two nations *is* remains dark and unclear, something strange and unnamed. In a political world where words have material consequences, this is a precarious situation. The solution offered by *National Geographic* can be summed up as follows: it succeeds in avoiding the terminology of colonialism; it fails to generate a name, or a lexicon of terms which give Americans or Cubans some notion, however abstract, of their roles in this brave new world. This thesis takes up this challenge, and supplies a name to the new relationship between the United States and its client nations. There’s a need for a name.

### *Mapping the Land*

Henry Gannett summarizes Cuba’s social and agricultural demographics in the February 1909 “The Conditions of Cuba as Revealed by the Census.” It highlights a rapidly increasing population and describes the skills of the labor force in depth (200-202). Interestingly enough, the article is immediately followed by a *National Geographic* editorial, “A Wasteful Nation” that reveals a deep anxiety that the United States will run

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he writes “We should, instead, travel with the word's uses through "a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing" (66). To “travel” the meaning of these words and unnamed relationships is the effort of this analysis. From *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Wittgenstein,” available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/>.

out of its natural resources (namely, mineral, energy, and agricultural output) in the near future due to ever-increasing domestic consumption. The parataxis of these two articles in the same issue provides both the problem and its solution: the United States has burgeoning demand for limited natural resources and Cuba, a country in its own backyard, is awash with precious resources.

*National Geographic* employs census figures to acquaint its readers with Cuba. Although the island is located less than a hundred miles away from the shore of Florida, Cuba is a world apart. Nearly every article contains a map of the island detailing topographical, racial, infrastructural (namely, railways and roads)<sup>18</sup>, or climatic information. Census information is useful to readers back in the United States. It categorizes the island into distinct zones. This intelligence affords a more informed perspective on the physical place. Having access to census information allows visitors to efficiently focus on their areas of interest, whether for tourist or economic aims. The potential of the landscape is emphasized again and again. Perhaps Austin presents the most compelling (and exciting) numerical argument in January 1900's "Our New Possessions and the Interest They are Exciting," that "only about two million of the thirty five million acres composing the island have ever been under cultivation" (32). Gannett adds to this statistic by supplying information on the available labor pool: "By distributing the wage-earners among certain great groups of avocations, one gets an idea of the relative importance of the industries which they represent. Thus, farming, fishing,

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<sup>18</sup> *National Geographic* published an entire article on Cuban railway transportation: Albert G. Robinson's March 1902 "Cuban Railways" depicts the availability and progress of infrastructure and provides a map. Colonial interest in railway infrastructure is perhaps best exemplified by the British colonization of India. According to Harlow and Carter, the British invested over a million pounds on the construction of railways in India during the mid-nineteenth century in order to facilitate (and hasten) the movement of both goods and people (222-223). Simanti Dutta's study of colonial India, *Imperial Mappings*, argues that the railways served to "remap the space of power and possibilities" (43). Railway infrastructure is integral in the successful economic development of a new territory.

and mining, collectively, employed 48.5 percent, or nearly one-half of the wage-earners” (Gannett 202). *National Geographic* supplies information the availability of both land and labor to interested (and potentially interested) readers in the United States.

*National Geographic* exhibits deep interest not only in the available resources but also in the potential of the Cuban landscape. Hill, a member of the United States Geological Survey, argues that “In area, in natural resources, and in number and character of its inhabitants, in position as regards to the proximity of American and Mexican seaboards, strategically Cuba is by far the most important of the great Antilles” (Hill 194). In “Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles,” *National Geographic* reiterates that Cuba is “by far the richest in natural resources of all the scores of islands and islets...[of] the West Indies” (535). The publication also stresses Cuba’s trove of natural resources.

With a turn of the page, the article continues to extol the bounty of the land:

The greater part of the island consists of broad, rolling plains or gently undulating hills, interspersed with stream-drained valleys, and already proved to be susceptible to a high degree of cultivation. The soil in the main, and except in the most marshy and most mountainous regions, is rich and easily cultivatable...certain selections of the land that are not particularly suitable for arable purposes are nevertheless admirably adapted for grazing uses, and the more elevated tracts, if in some localities unfitted for either cultivation or grazing, are still rich in mineral wealth, so that it may be said with truth that practically the whole island is overflowing with natural riches. (536)

*National Geographic* envisions the entire island as open and suitable for cultivation, perfect for agriculture, husbandry, or mining. From sea to sea, the island of Cuba is like a veritable treasure chest, “overflowing” with untapped and copious resources. The language of this passage aestheticizes the landscape. It is not described as hostile or dark; on the contrary, it is open, gentle, easy to contend with, and above all, rich. In short, the land of Cuba is ideal.

The treasure trope is carried through the publication by Showalter's July 1920 "Cuba—The Sugar Mill of the Antilles." Due to its agricultural production and wealth; "Cuba is the world's El Dorado of 1920" (2). El Dorado as an affinity is an interesting choice here, for El Dorado is a fictional, impenetrable city. Linking Cuba with El Dorado—the place of which men have dreamed of and sought after for so long—conjures the mythic, awe-inspiring, and fabled riches of El Dorado as an actual reality to explore and exploit in Cuba. Showalter declares that "the rivers of sugar flowing out and the streams of gold flowing in are transforming the island that Christopher Columbus pronounced the fairest land he had ever seen" (2). The natural wealth of the island is convertible to real gold, or financial gain. In a following passage, the geography of Cuba is also recounted with dazzling language: "one approaches the island through *sapphire* seas," and "the low country is *begemmed* with valleys where innumerable avenues of *royal* palms wave their *crowns* of spreading fronts and lend enchantment to the landscape" (5, emphasis mine). Treasure becomes descriptive of the rich natural beauty of the land and entices: it beckons the reader forth.

While these two articles, "Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles" and "Cuba—The Sugar Mill of the Antilles" were published 14 years apart, they both display an urge to classify the bounty and favorable conditions afforded by the landscape as a rare cache of priceless riches. Moreover, the titles only differ by a noun. In the first, Cuba is the "Pearl" of the Antilles, the pure, untarnished, treasure of the region. In the second, Cuba is the "Sugar Mill," or the economic powerhouse of the Antilles. Both titles are metonymic examples of "form for concept" (Radden and Panther 24).<sup>19</sup> Metonymy is

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<sup>19</sup> An example of metonymic Form for Concept: "*dollar* for money". The actual dollar bill comes to stand for the larger concept of money (Radden and Panther 24).

defined as “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity...provides access to another conceptual identity” (Raddden and Panther 21). It is the transition from “Pearl” to “Sugar Mill” that is particularly telling. In the first, Cuba is a Pearl, a form that “provides access” to notions of inherent richness and uniqueness. In the second, Cuba is a Sugar Mill, which conjures up very different connotations: agricultural strength, economic capacity and regional distinction. By 1920, sugar production is clearly the treasure that defines the island. Cuba’s reining title as “The Sugar Mill of the Antilles” ascertains the island’s great economic significance. Metonymic titles are particularly salient for readers because they prescribe very concise and focused associations.

Interestingly, this metonymic replacement of the island and its people with pearls and sugar is rhetorically significant. Remember that the Platt Amendment sought to prevent “against foreign power or powers (obtaining) by *colonization* or for military or naval purposes or otherwise, lodgment in or control over any portion of said island.” While landing military forces and curtailing personal liberties were features of colonialism, building railways and exploiting resources are features of Taft’s “progress.” In these articles, a new lexicon of neocolonialism emerges. By confusing nations and resources, terms like “exploitation” are absolved of their negative connotations. To exploit a people is colonial; to exploit a resource is modern, neocolonial. The Platt Amendment’s “control over any portion of said island” is avoided, but purchase, ownership, and “development” of the same territory is not. The same colonial relationships are slowly redefined, and renamed with a new lexicon. Operating on the principle of metonymy, a new economic metaphor replenishes the lexicon where the rhetoric of subtraction had left vacancies. The United States begins to imagine itself as

an economic, not a political, over-lord: a landlord, not an empire. *National Geographic* advertises this economic domination.

Fertile abundance of resources further identifies the land of Cuba for *National Geographic's* readers and the publication affirms that the United States benefits from Cuba's riches. Massive importation of goods from the tropics of Cuba amounts to over \$250,000,000 a year (Austin 33). Overwhelming financial statistics further legitimize Cuba's economic significance. Austin sums up the trade-relationship of Cuba with the United States: "that in return [for the tropical goods], we shall furnish them the increased supply of foodstuffs and manufactures which their increased earnings will lead them to demand" (Austin 33). This relationship, although not described as colonial by any of the *National Geographic* authors, mirrors the British colonial model of importing raw goods from its colonies and then exporting manufactured goods back to the colonial market (Young 23). Unlike the British, however, the United States did not seek to forcibly take over the island and install American systems at every level of community, political, and economic life.

The very fruitful and mutually beneficial association between the two countries justifies the U.S. intervention in the struggle for Cuban independence from Spain. As Taft declares, "We expended in the Cuban war upwards of \$300,000,000 and we never have invited from Cuba the return of a single cent" (Taft 430). Although this seems like an altruistic gesture, reports of the enormous economic gains of the United States as a result of its wartime "investment" point to economic benefit, if not driving motivation. *National Geographic* does not seek to imprint the American way in every aspect of Cuban life. Evidence of trade and technological progress is sufficient. Showalter

acquaints the reader with the changing landscape of urban Cuba: “Havana Province is prosperous, looks half American” (21). Although the countryside does not look “half American, comforting indicators of U.S. intervention are still to be found:

In the plains of native life, the only thing that sounds or looks homelike to a Washingtonian is the whistle of a locomotive and an occasional box-car, bearing the name of a railroad in the States, which came across the Florida straits on the Key West Havana ferry, loaded with flour, and will carry a load of sugar back to the Middle West. (19)

Rural Cuba is an unfamiliar landscape, completely foreign to an urban American visitor. Cutting across the countryside, however, are the railroads that carry goods from the United States to trade for sugar in Cuba. Amid the wide, rolling plains, the reassuring sights and sounds of technological progress and U.S. trade presence echo across the open land. Each whistle of the train validates the fact that trade circulates healthily between the two countries. Showalter inscribes the presence of the United States into the land of Cuba by the signifiers of trade, thereby familiarizing and legitimizing an otherwise foreign land.

### *Mapping the People*

According to scholar David Spurr:

Colonial intervention thus responds to a threefold calling: that of nature, which calls for the wise use of resources; that of humanity, which calls for universal betterment, and that of the colonized, who call for protection for their own ignorance and violence (34)

*National Geographic's* articles on Cuba conform to this structure of colonial intervention. In the previous section, *National Geographic's* efforts to understand the landscape (both physical and social) through census, as well as the descriptions of bountiful landscape of

great economic potential were detailed thoroughly by the publication. This is the call of “nature,” first of the threefold calling. *National Geographic* also reports on U.S. efforts to sanitize the streets of Cuba and to improve literacy, which illustrate the call for “universal betterment.” The last calling, the so-called “call of the colonized” is where the U.S. strategy strays from the typical model of colonial intervention. *National Geographic* does not depict the Cubans as ignorant or violent colonized people. Instead, the articles generally speak highly of the Cubans, who are classified as different, sure, but not so different that any real obstacles bar development. For all of the rhetorical protests of the Platt Amendment and from Taft, the United States strangely resembles the colonial Spain which it fought to discredit.

### *The Call of Humanity*

During the years of direct U.S. intervention on the island, the *National Geographic* narrates the steps taken to improve the condition of the Cubans. The two areas most emphasized are the improvements in sanitation and literacy.

In the *Society's* March 1902 “American Progress in Habana,” the disease and unhygienic conditions (tropical yellow fever in particular) that long plagued the island of Cuba are now things of the past because

The wise, conscientious, and persistent measures which for three years United States officers have been enforcing throughout Habana, despite the opposition and dislike of the Cubans, have delivered the city of its old foes—filth and filth diseases. (97)

The *Society* claims that poor hygiene was behind the “filth and filth diseases of Cuba.”

The army, with its corps of both soldiers and engineers, sought to deliver Cuba from its

primitiveness, despite the (unfounded) “opposition” from the Cubans. Proudly, the article states that “every house in the city had been cleaned from top to bottom at least once under the supervision of American officers (99). The streets were also cleaned with both disinfectant and deodorizer (106). This massive undertaking to “deliver” the city from its vice, dirt, and disease resulted in a new Habana that was safe, clean, and inviting.

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At first the Cubans preferred to live in their “filth,” which is to say, they preferred their primitive savagery: “the Cubans have not liked the process which has made them cleaner and healthier” (108). The article concedes, however, that they begin “to take pride in improvements to their capital” (108). Initially reticent, the Cubans can be taught to value progress, and even to take pride in these improvements to their material condition. By emphasizing the success of transformative actions, *National Geographic* testifies that the island is safe for visiting, but also that the inhabitants are receptive (after a bit of gentle chiding) to U.S. guidance. In contrast to Spanish colonial rule, *National Geographic* advertises that American Cuba is well-managed.

Dismal literacy rates on the island are also addressed by the U.S. intervention and the new Cuban government is encouraged to remedy the problem. Under the tutelage of the United States, Cubans begin to learn to read and write. As attested by Gannett in “The Conditions in Cuba as Revealed by the Census,” “the public-school system, organized under the first intervention in Cuba, is producing excellent results...of the native whites 58.6 percent could read, and of the colored, 45 percent were similarly educated” (202). The racial divide is acknowledged, but both sectors are attended to. In Showalter’s July 1920 “Cuba—The Sugar Mill of the Antilles,” he praises the Cubans for

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<sup>20</sup> The article includes many “before-and-after” pictures of filthy and clean Habana. Photographic evidence bolsters the claim that great changes can be successfully enacted and received on the island.

understanding that they need to learn English to thrive economically (21). Of note, Showalter uses an economic argument here for the betterment of the Cubans. The old colonial arguments of cultural and racial superiority are obsolete; they are features of the mismanagement which the war sought to replace. Where political coercion is disavowed, economic imperatives replace it. The terminology of economics again fills the gaps left by the rhetoric of subtraction. Showalter recounts a visit to a Cuban school of English instruction, and commends both the skill of the Cuban teacher and her pupils:

The teacher was a born instructor. ‘Now I sing and laugh with joy. What do you say of me when I do that?’ she queried. ‘You are happy,’ responded the chorus of youngsters, their voices as much ‘in step’ as a West Point cadet company. (21)

Significantly, this is the *only* dialogue by Cubans recorded in any of the articles from this period by *National Geographic*. Voice (though not individually attributed) is given to the teacher and her pupils because they seek to become excellent English speakers.

Showalter also emphasizes the orderliness of instruction and the military-like discipline performed by the clever and eager students.

With respect to both hygienic and educational improvements implemented by the United States during the intervention, the Cubans are depicted as better off, and receptive to instruction. While these passages do stress the importance of such changes in living conditions for the betterment of humanity, they also showcase the willingness of the Cubans to learn from the United States and to adopt these changes into their own lives. It is not necessary for the Cubans to work for the United States; instead, the Cubans can learn to work *with* the Americans.

*The Call, not of the Colonized, but of the Neocolonial Chimera*

*National Geographic's* articles on Cuba certainly address the first two callings of Spurr's model of colonial intervention: the call of nature, and the wise utilization of bountiful riches of the island, as well as the call of humanity, or the betterment of living conditions, namely sanitation and literacy. The third calling—that of the colonized—is where *National Geographic's* representations depart from the classic model of colonial intervention. *National Geographic* does not seek to represent the Cubans as people who must be saved from their “ignorance or violence.” Instead, the publication situates the Cubans as a liminal group, suspended somewhere below the status of the colonizer but certainly above the overt primitiveness and savagery of the colonized—a new Cuban chimera. In contrast to Kipling's description of the colonized, “half devil, half child,” *National Geographic's* descriptions of Cuba read “half ethnography, half résumé”. They illustrate the backwardness and inferiority of the island and its people, but also their ability to learn, and their potential as junior partners in a financial enterprise. U.S. “management” has this strange feature which distinguishes it from its classically colonial antecedents.

*National Geographic's* Cuban articles, with the exception of the unnamed schoolteacher in Showalter's “Cuba—The Sugar Mill of the Antilles”, do not represent individuals. Instead, the publication relies on an ethnographic, homogenizing tone to speak of the Cuban people. Albert Memmi argues that this is the typical colonial posture assumed by authoritative colonizers toward the colonized. The depersonalization of the colonized is: “the mark of the plural. The colonized is never considered in an individual manner. He is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity” (85). “The mark of

the plural” refers to the subject in the plural: they, the Cubans, the natives, etc. By using this grammatical and rhetorical technique, *National Geographic* imagines a uniform group in order to control the image of the Cuban people that the reader receives (Bal 118).

The mark of the plural is ubiquitous in these articles. For instance, “*The Cubans* are very intelligent and quick to learn, and are now also ambitious to learn” (Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles, 538). According to Memmi, such claims of character “can be suspected of an individual, or even many of a group, but not a whole people” (80-81). Sweeping generalizations such as “the Cubans are very intelligent” (538) add another layer to the representation designed by the publication. Due to the trade interests of the United States with Cuba, it is necessary to emphasize that the Cubans are intelligent, for this trait makes them attractive to work with.

Rhetorically, the iconic “they” includes the entire population of the island. Yet, several of these articles discuss the racial differences of the Cubans. For example, in May 1898’s Cuba, Hill writes that “Cuba and Porto Rico are the only two tropical islands where the white race has become thoroughly acclimated, and Cuba alone contains ten times more whites of Spanish stock than the British Indies contain white of English stock” (227). Hill gives preference to the large white population Cuba in comparison to other regional entities by stating that the white “race” has been able to thoroughly adapt to the conditions and to thrive. His point familiarizes a foreign population to the readers as a group who, are too, racially white. In another article, Showalter argues for the primitiveness of certain segments of the Cuban population: “black and mulatto population appears content to live in thatch-roofed shacks” (Showalter 19). Such efforts

to racially divide the island—whites, mulattos, and blacks—is not, however, included in the iconic “they.” Social divisions are neutralized and homogenized by the “mark of the plural.” Even though “racial” (or cultural) differences may exist, the outstanding message is that “the Cubans are intelligent” (Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles, 538). Showalter does not argue for the intelligence of the blacks or the mulattos; on the contrary, he wants to signify their backwardness, but the rhetoric delivers generalized characteristics to the reader, ironically at the expense of the racial prejudice in the text.

Armed with the rhetorical and grammatical markers of the plural, *National Geographic* is able to represent the entire Cuban people on an authoritative, wide-reaching scale. In Wilcox’s July 1908 “Among the Mahogany Forests of Cuba,” the local population is described:

The natives of this region are a mixed race, rather dark in color and with a probable mixture of negro blood. They live in miserable houses without windows or other protection from insects and weather. They are excellent woodsmen, handling the axe and the machete with great skill. They think nothing of walking ten or fifteen miles on the most trifling errand. (491)

The logic of this passage is partitioned into two sections. The first two sentences are negative; the natives are dark and live in squalid domiciles. The next two sentences contradict these descriptions. Even though they are “excellent woodsmen,” skillful with tools, for some reason they live in “miserable houses.” They are obviously not lazy, either, as they are willing to fulfill their quotidian duties despite geographical constraints. Wilcox’s description is confusing to the reader, if taken line by line. The logic of the passage, however, suggests that while some aspects of the natives’ life are primitive, they *simultaneously* display surprising qualities of industry and energy. In Wilcox’s following passage, a similar logic unfolds:

From lack of care and cleanliness, the teeth of these people decay and fall out before middle age, and their monotonous diet causes suffering from digestive troubles. Like all Cubans, they are very fond of pets, and it is no uncommon thing to see all the ordinary animals of the barnyard—goats, pigs, turkeys, chickens, etc.—wandering at will inside their houses...Naked children sprawl about the floor and many dogs, in a state of extreme emaciation from continued starvation, howl at every passer-by and add to the general misery...In such hovels, abounding in filth and squalor, one meets with evidences of genuine hospitality in marked contrast to their surroundings. The stranger is invited to enter, offered the best chair, and coffee is prepared at once. (Wilcox 491)

In the first two sentences, the natives are represented as stricken with disease, living in homes more like barnyards. “Naked children” and wild dogs signify extreme poverty, misery, primitiveness. These descriptions are then negated by recounting the charming hospitality of the natives. The visiting stranger is received with the highest dignity, and offered refreshment as a token of graciousness. Even the poorest are still able to offer something pleasant to a visitor. The logic of this passage also incorporates the low and the high; the primitive and the civilized coexist within the social body of the native Cuban population. While the natives may be diseased and confined to filthy hovels, they are also generous, respectful, and cognizant of appropriate social behavior. Hospitality as a virtue is an inherent characteristic that is easily exploited (and enjoyed) by U.S. visitors and colonizers alike. Specifically, the “stranger” who is invited in and offered the “best chair,” and then waited upon, becomes a metaphor for the accommodating and welcoming nature of the Cuban people.

Such representations of the Cubans seem inevitable given Wilcox’s thesis: he argues that both the island and the natives are suitable for U.S. interests. He himself purchased a timber tract in the Bay of Cochinos, located on the south coast of Cuba, and moved to the area for eighteen months to supervise logging (483). He and his family

enjoyed a pleasant stay: “in all that time we were not molested by the natives, and no case of illness occurred in any member of the household” (483). His story is a parable of favorable trade relations that the United States may enjoy with Cuba, and offers a personal field example that familiarizes both the natives and the land, and provides testimony that yes, it can be done.

Again, the economy provides a solution to the problem of colonial terminology. The Platt agreement guarantees against foreign powers obtaining “control over any portion of said island.” Wilcox’s purchase of an entire forest, however, is unproblematic. By rephrasing control in economic terms, *National Geographic* valorizes possession and control while avoided the poisoned terminology of colonialism.

Representations of natives render the Cubans not-so-other by integrating traits from two normally separate categories. Like the colonizer, the Cubans are well-mannered and generous, like the colonized, the Cubans are unhealthy and unclean. *National Geographic*’s Cubans are just “not-so-other.” As articulated by Hill,

They have developed into a gentle, industrious, and normally peaceable race...while these people may not possess our local customs and habits, they have strong traits of civilized character, including honesty, family attachment, hospitality, politeness of address, and a respect for the golden rule. (229)

*They*, the Cubans, are not at odds with the vision of the United States for the island. They are neither vicious nor lazy. On the contrary, they are quite suited for labor and possess strong work-ethic that would make doing business with them a pleasure instead of a struggle. The Cubans are not like the colonized of Kipling’s imagination; instead, they are better defined as the Neocolonial Chimera, a people elevated above the negativity associated with the colonized into a new space where their hybrid traits make them useful

collaborative partners, not-so-other as would seem at first glance. Their description in *National Geographic* inhabits this liminal space between racial ethnography and résumé, somewhere between eager employees and degraded colonials. The Cuban is inherently, collectively chimeric, embodying qualities of each.

*The Call of the Future*

We are a wealthy and powerful nation; Cuba is a young republic, still weak, who owes to us her birth, whose whole future, whose very life, must depend on our attitude toward her. I ask that we help her as she struggles upward along the painful and difficult road of self-governing independence. I ask this aid for her because she is weak, because she needs it, because we have already aided her. (Roosevelt quoted in Taft 431)

Secretary of War Taft quotes President Roosevelt's speech to Congress to legitimize the on-going role of the United States in the affairs of Cuba. For Roosevelt, and for Taft, Cuba is a country that is weak, but not too weak, struggling but not failing, needy but not so disadvantaged. According to postcolonial scholar Mohanram, "There is a metonymic link between bodies, landscape, and nation, in that they are all contiguous...they function to temporarily replace one another" (5). Given the metonymic link between bodies, landscape, and nation, all aspects of Cuba—its people, its natural resources, and its government—must be hoisted up, guided and strengthened by the intervention of the United States.

*National Geographic's* best efforts to portray the United States as entirely altruistic cannot fully disguise its neocolonial motives. Although these articles do address the wise utilization of resources and the betterment of humanity, the construction

of the Neocolonial Chimera, that reads “half-ethnography, half- résumé” (instead of Kipling’s “half devil and half child”) signifies a point of departure from the model of European colonialism. Instead, this new vision of U.S. neocolonialism, as proposed by *National Geographic*, does not seek full integration of the Cuban populace, but rather a mutually beneficial economic relationship, where the Cubans are deemed “not-so-other” so as to be incorporated as subordinate partners in trade. This is the call of the future: these features of the rhetoric of subtraction, the economic benefits, the willingness of the Cubans to accommodate U.S. interests, and the Cubans as “not-so-other” comprise the strategies of U.S. neocolonialism. And so, *National Geographic* provides satisfying reports of the island’s progress and potential as well as pleasing representations of the Cuban people for the readers back in the United States while carefully shunning colonial terminology. By refusing to name the behavior of the United States, *National Geographic* effectively imagines its role as a benevolent, but supervisory partner in the project of progress.

### Chapter Three: *National Geographic*, Armenia, and the Armenians, 1909-1919

“Lord Bryce’s Report on the Armenian Atrocities[:] An  
Appalling Catalogue of Outrage and Massacre”

On October 16, 1916, this indicting headline ran on the second page of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* in the midst of what would later come to be widely recognized as the Armenian Genocide.<sup>21</sup> What followed was a vast 20,000 word summary on the findings of former British Ambassador to the United States, Lord Bryce, who had been investigating the situation of the Armenians under Ottoman control during World War I. The *New York Times* informed the reader that this was but a small report of the mounting evidence of extermination found by Lord Bryce: his complete findings would shortly thereafter be published by the British government in a 600 page exposé. Lord Bryce commended the Americans for their invaluable contribution—through personal correspondence and eye-witness accounts of massacre—to his grisly findings. As reported by the *Times*: “American missionary organizations have long maintained close relationships with Armenia. And it is to the Americans...that [Lord Bryce] is most deeply indebted for the material in which this ghastly report is based” (X2).

News of Armenian suffering was not new to U.S. readers. The *New York Times*, along with other large newspapers around the United States (especially Boston, where a large Armenian immigrant population settled), had been publishing first-hand accounts and testimony since 1895 (Balakian 66). Furthermore, U.S. presence in Armenia was not *new news*.<sup>22</sup> During the late nineteenth century, U.S. missionaries systematically infiltrated Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire. Armenians appealed to U.S. missionary societies (protestant organizations from New England in particular), for they

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<sup>21</sup> The Armenian Genocide has been recognized by 22 countries (including Germany, Russia, Australia, and Argentina, but not the federal United States or Israel), and 40 of the U.S. states. In 2006, France criminalized the denial of the Armenian genocide. As of this writing, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed a bill in recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Such official recognition is an aim of many Armenian diasporan organizations because Turkey continues to deny the Armenian genocide.

<sup>22</sup> The term “Armenia” might be a bit confusing here, for there was no formal Armenian state at that time. When I refer to Armenia, I refer to the land in which the Armenian peoples inhabited under Ottoman or Russian jurisdiction, as does the scholarship on this topic.

were an “ancient” people of the Near East with a growing diasporan presence in the United States, as well as the first Christian community in the world. Although other European and Catholic missionaries also worked in the area, U.S. missionaries most firmly established their presence in the region through the extensive construction of infrastructure: schools, hospitals, and churches (Balakian 23). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Armenia was a site of U.S. interest, attended by missionaries armed with a moral imperative.

Wide-spread extermination of the Armenians began in the spring of 1915, when they were “rounded up, arrested, and either shot outright or put on deportation marches” (Balakian 175). However, more localized bouts of extermination dated back to the 1890s. The massacres of 1894, 1896, and 1909 themselves claimed 200,000 Armenian lives (Dadrian xviii). An estimated one million Armenians were killed by the Ottomans during World War I, in what Lord Bryce declared an Ottoman effort to render “an Armenia without the Armenians” (Bryce X2). The reasons for the Armenian genocide are complex, but contemporary scholarship points to the failing Ottoman Empire’s desire for a homogenous populace. The ideological goal of ethnic homogeneity explains the persecution of non-Turkish ethnic groups (Greeks, Kurds, Assyrians, and the Armenians). Although the plight of the Armenians was widely covered in American newspapers, no real U.S. military intervention was ever accomplished. During World War I, the Ottoman Empire was part of the Central Powers and sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary. They fought against the allied Triple Entente—Britain, Russia, France, and later, the United States (in 1917). Aide societies and missionaries continued to support refugees and survivors in the Ottoman Empire and its environs, but no formal U.S. governmental

involvement came about until President Wilson's diplomatic intervention with the Fourteen Points.

Before any action on behalf of the United States government, *National Geographic's* reporters were present in the Caucasus. The publication's reporting on the situation of the Armenians during 1909-1919 amounts to six articles. This is a high percentage of coverage specifically on Armenia and the Armenians during that ten year time period. Neighboring Iran (then called Persia), for example, was covered in only three articles during this same time period. After 1919, the publication fell silent on Armenia until 1973, with its article "The Proud Armenians" and in March 2004, with an article simply titled "Armenia", which highlights the challenges confronted in its transitional period from an ex-Soviet Bloc country to a capitalist, democratic model. A deconstructive reading recognizes this silence, this gap, as especially relevant. The period of the Armenian genocide was the era in which the *National Geographic* was by far the most vocal on the topic of the Armenians in the long history of the publication. Coverage peaks at times when Armenia is open to the United States and *National Geographic* piques public interest through its articles and photographs.

Unlike the newspaper coverage of the Armenians during this period, *National Geographic* does not merely report on the political dynamic, or the torments faced by the Armenians. Instead, the articles provide context: historical, cultural, political, and pictorial. A review of the landscape and the resources is also noted in each article, to both greater and lesser extents. *National Geographic* as a publication functions much in this way. While current events and happenings are certainly detailed, the country or people(s) in question are situated in a larger framework. As with its coverage of Cuba,

the problem of foreign oppression is juxtaposed with an exposition on the potential of the land and its people. Again, the magazine is a strange hybrid of ethnography and résumé.

Through its coverage of Armenia, *National Geographic* advocates for the internationalization of the Monroe Doctrine. The United States' much advertised "isolationism" was not national, but hemispheric because it retained the right, described in that doctrine, to intervene in nations like Colombia, Panama or Cuba. As it emerged from the World War I as a world power, the scope of the Monroe doctrine expanded accordingly. Likewise, in its articles on Armenia, *National Geographic* advocates intervention in a distant land. Significantly, it models this intervention, rhetorically, on the same pattern it employed for Cuba.

### *Mapping the Land*

#### *Situating Armenia*

Armenia, although referred to as a nation, was not a nation-state during this time period in which *National Geographic* wrote about it. Armenia, however, is the word that refers to the land where Armenians live, which reifies the abstract concept:

Armenia is a word that has widely different connotations for different peoples. To us Americans it means a vague territory somewhere in Asia Minor; to the makers of modern maps it means nothing—there is no such place. (Jenkins 329)

At the very beginning of the October 1915's "Armenia and the Armenians," Jenkins situates the concept of Armenia in terms of America: it is a stateless entity of which Americans have only a hazy idea, of which cartographers cannot draw onto a map of the world because it lacks autonomous, recognized borders. It is a place that does not quite

exist because it is not recognized by the international community as a sovereign body. Armenia is itself a possibility, a potential. Although it is not technically a country, the region has been perpetually a site of conflict: Armenia “has been tramped over” by a myriad of invading groups “successively fighting for its possession” (Edwin Grosvenor 469). The land of Armenia actually stands in for the people. The two terms are nearly equivalent. This metonymic link between the landscape and the tragedy of the people, according to Mohanram, builds associations on several levels: “the reference to the landscape makes the reader/viewer think of the nation; the nation, in turn, links it to its people” (5-6) which helps to construct a concrete entity out of an abstract idea.

As testified by Williams in August 1919’s “Between Massacres in Van,” the human landscape has been demolished but the physical landscape remains intact: “Tragedy is depicted in each ruined home, but the background is one of striking charm” (Williams 181). William’s description is central in understanding *National Geographic’s* stance toward Armenia. Arguments on Armenia spring forth from the mismanagement of the land: first, these articles extol the available (and abundant) resources, and then dethrone the Ottoman rulers for their inability to effectively utilize the resources available to them.

### *The Lay of the Land*

In February 1909’s “The Mountaineers of the Euphrates,” Ellsworth Huntington describes the scenic and awe-inspiring nature of the Armenian landscape:

The southern part of the Armenian plateau...furnishes an admirable example of the influence exerted upon man by inhospitable mountains

among which lie fertile plains. The plateau is highly diversified. Above its uneven surface rise lofty ranges of limestone mountains and scores of great volcanoes...so recently extinct that hot springs still abound in the craters and elsewhere...magnificent canyons have been cut by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and their tributaries, while broad basin-shaped depressions are floored with smooth, fertile plains. (Huntington 143)

A place of sweeping high peaks and plentiful plateaus, Huntington first praises the mark of human “influence” upon even the most inhospitable features of the Armenian landscape. This land has it all: majestic mountains, fertile plains, and ample river access. According to Spurr, painting the landscape with flourishing adjectives and positive descriptions is a discursive strategy in colonial literature. He writes that “aesthetic judgment intervenes as a mediating and transforming power in the interpretation of cultures” (Spurr 54). In this case, the land comes to stand for not only beauty and potential, but also demonstrates the ability of the Armenians to manipulate their surroundings.

While Huntington clarifies the landscape as a site of potential, Jenkins further elucidates the abundance to be found in these fertile plains in October 1915’s “Armenia and the Armenians”:

This country of Asia Minor is a fine grazing land and excellent agricultural region. It is so fertile that two melons are said to be a camel’s load, and it produces grapes, wheat, Indian corn, barley, oats, cotton, rice, tobacco, and sugar; all the vegetables that we know in America, quinces, apricots, nectarines, peaches, apples, pears, and plums. The Armenians export silk and cotton, hides and leather, wine, dried fruits, raisins, tobacco, drugs, and dyestuffs. (Jenkins 330)

This passage is tantalizing in its colorful inventory of agricultural riches and fruitful production. Speaking in hyperbole, the overflowing cornucopia contrasts quite starkly with the otherwise tragic, war-torn circumstances also described in the article. Jenkins then emphasizes that the crops produced in Armenia are just like those in the United

States, which familiarizes the passage and makes it relevant for the U.S. reader.

Significantly, Jenkins discusses the natural resources of Armenia *before* he does the Armenians. He then goes on to report on other natural resources: “In minerals too, the country is rich. Coal, silver, copper, iron, and other minerals lie beneath the surface” (Jenkins 330). That the reporter notices, and stresses the fertility and economic potential of the land is not uncommon in colonial writing. As a tendency, the colonial eye values “landscapes...in terms of a capitalist future and of their potential for producing a marketable surplus” (Pratt 61). The description of the landscape serves to catalogue relevant data and extols the landscape for both its physical attributes and its productive capacity.

### *The Delegitimization of the Ottoman Rulers*

*National Geographic* provides tempting accounts of the Armenian landscape to its readers, which sparks an imperative, or at the very least, a strong interest in the land. Rhetorically, the publication first establishes the potential of the land, and then ties the incapacity of Ottoman rulers to the landscape on the grounds of resource mismanagement. In Cuba, *National Geographic* discredits Spanish colonial rule largely by mismanagement of the people. Hill marks Cuba’s previous Spanish with “Greed, injustice, bribery, and cruelty” (240), noting that these attributes have rendered the Spanish inefficient and unworthy rulers of the island. *National Geographic* employs the same rhetorical argument of “mismanagement” to discredit the Ottoman rulers of the Armenians, but locates the “mismanagement” of the Ottomans directly in the land.

Hall takes up the task of discrediting Ottoman rule in July 1918's "Under the Heel of the Turk: A Land with a Glorious Past, a Present of Abused Opportunities and a Future of Golden Possibilities." Much of the land of the Armenians lies fallow under the Ottomans:

This was the richest land of the world, the granary of the ancients, yet in spite of all that has been, it today lies largely in waste, the desert sands have encroached upon the fertile fields, while the clogged canals have turned other portions into swamps. (Hall 60)

The Middle East is the legendary site of the Fertile Crescent (the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers), where sedentary food production was first developed. Under modern (mis)management of this region, sand overcomes otherwise arable land, and swamps mire irrigation systems. For this reason, Hall argues that "The Turk is able to dream great dreams, but amazingly unable to bring those visions to reality" (Hall 64). Under the Ottomans, the land of the Armenians "is all a tale of splendid possibilities but of neglected and undeveloped resources" (Hall 65). For Hall, the Ottomans are unable to bring their dreams and plans for development (literally) to fruition, which is unconscionable.

Hall wonders how this region has remained undeveloped for so long:

How has it been possible for these riches to have remained undeveloped at the very door of Europe? It does seem impossible, but the true answer is given in this sentence from one of the missionary reports: "There are hopeful indications of various other minerals at other places also: *but the Turks have always discouraged attempts at developments.*" (Hall 67, italics in original).

For some reason, this land has not been subject to European colonial expansion (in an economic or political sense), and any efforts to develop the land are immediately (and unwisely) quelled by the Ottoman rulers. Armenia is a site ripe and ready for colonial

intervention, and Hall assures the reader that fortunately, no such intervention has already been undertaken. The rest of this passage goes on to relate the inability to effectively utilize the petroleum deposits, water power, and commercial advantages afforded to the Ottoman rulers by the land, which furthers the list of complaints.

Refusal to develop the land and resources is paramount to abdication of power.

Hall goes on:

Letting imagination dwell upon the resources provided by nature and capabilities of the people, one can form a vision of the country's future if one only great change can be brought about...before all bars of judgment, because of his incapacity, his inefficiency, and his atrocities, the Turk has forfeited every right to rule (Hall 68)

One cannot help but remember editorial aim five, "Nothing of a partisan or controversial nature is printed." Here *National Geographic* presents an emerging partisan theory of political legitimacy in a publication that previously forswore "controversy." Unlike the Spanish rulers of Cuba, the Ottomans are charged with "mismanagement" for their incapacity and inefficiency to appropriately develop, manage, or exploit the natural resources at hand. Ottoman atrocities suffered by the Armenians are a tertiary concern, which is ironic given that the genocidal crisis was the material reality when these articles were penned. In Cuba, the Spanish barbarism and greed are the most compelling crimes of "mismanagement." In Armenia, however, the Ottomans, whose cruelties against the Armenians were well-documented in both U.S. newspapers and *National Geographic* alike, are arraigned with charges of mismanagement due to their inability to cultivate an otherwise ideal landscape of natural resources and agriculture.

Why focus on Ottoman mismanagement of the land, instead of the atrocities committed against the Armenians? The Armenian genocide seems an obvious (and easy)

criticism to lay upon the Ottomans for “mismanagement.” In *National Geographic*, however, the Armenian people are also inextricably linked to the land. Rhetorically, they are a topographical feature, a resource in much the same way that the abundant cornucopia of wealth described by Jenkins are. Take, for example, Chater’s description of the ten-thousand Armenian refugees in November 1919’s “Through the Land of Stalking Death”:

Here famine conditions had obtained for six months, and as elsewhere, the Turkish troops had left the place as bare as a picked bone. There was no flour, no seed, not an agricultural tool—nothing but Destitution, whose bony hand had laid blight everywhere. (Chater 405)

The misfortune of the Armenians is linked to the land. The Ottoman troops pillaged the fields, but it is the force of “Destitution” that “laid blight everywhere.” This language dehumanizes the “Turkish troops” and attributes their actions to a personified abstraction: “Destitution.” The indicated absence of the agricultural implements subverts the presence of actual suffering. Since those objects are missing from the land, the Armenians suffer. Chater even personifies the famine—and names it “Destitution”—whose bony hand becomes the persistent agent of misery the Armenians must contend with, as powerful as a force of nature. The Turkish troops, however, are not “Destitution,” but they have inflicted it. This passage speaks to the epic suffering that can be aroused by Armenia’s oppressors and it is of the nature of the Armenians to endure their oppressors, a natural process and characteristic of the people. It speaks to their resilience. Like the hospitality of the Cubans, the Armenians are accustomed to destructive forces, and now await a force that will restore productivity and growth to blighted fields and famine stricken bodies.

At the end of the article, Hall prescribes a solution to the problem of the Ottoman Empire, under which Armenia is subsumed:

With the good government the country, which has long been an unsanitary plague spot, a constant health menace to Europe, will be cleaned up; adequate schools will be provided; courts of justice will replace those of injustice; proper means of transportation will be constructed; industries will spring up and the resources of the mountain and plain will contribute their share to the support of the world. (Hall 69)

It seems that preexisting missionary involvement in Armenia is not enough. Hall assumes a radical position (just as *National Geographic* takes in Cuba) by advocating for a different government that can provide infrastructural transformations that will restore the Ottoman territory (and Armenia) from its “unsanitary” condition to a healthy, thriving entity. The last clause argues that industry will “spring up” under a “good government,” and this region will finally be able to contribute its resources to the rest of the world. A new government is in order, but *National Geographic* fails to name who will take the place of the Ottomans. This new government, however, is one that will clear the country of its clogged and backward institutions and infrastructure. *National Geographic* adopts the same tone toward Cuba by demonstrating that U.S. intervention cleared the streets of age-old debris and filth, thus restoring health to the Cuban populace and readying the streets for the visitors from the United States. In Cuba, *National Geographic* exhibits the success of intervention; here in Armenia, it advocates the need for one.

### *Mapping the People*

*The Call of Humanity, Part I: A “Weathered” People*

*National Geographic* depicts the Armenian land as a mismanaged resource and uses this to delegitimize Ottoman rule. Since the Armenians are tied to the land, *National Geographic* employs rhetoric to naturalize the “sufferings” of the Armenians, which provides further compelling evidence against Ottoman control of the land. In William’s August 1919 “Between Massacres in Van”, he likens the Armenians to a pitiful flock of sheep. He describes their homes as inhabitable “hovels where the people *herd*” (182, *italics mine*). Williams then describes the task of the Governor of Van, who remains unnamed, as “*husbanding* [to] this pitiful group of Armenians until victory shall come” (183, *emphasis mine*). The image of the sheep, coupled with the repetition of the on-going slaughter of the genocide (as related in other passages in the article), suggests the logical conclusion that the Armenians are not a group of human beings, but rather a flock of livestock, currently posed for extermination, but always blind and dependant, at either the tyranny or benevolence of a master.

This dehumanizing tone informs the historical summaries of the Armenians set forth by *National Geographic*. These are best characterized by a lexicon of natural processes and disaster that, oddly enough, describe socio-historical events. Jenkins notes Armenia’s lack of sovereignty, and credits its liminal status to the unfortunate events experienced by the Armenians throughout history.

Its limits have become utterly fluid; the waves of conquering Persians and Byzantines, Arabs and Romans, Russians and Turks have flowed and ebbed on its shores until all lines are obliterated. (Jenkins 329)

The Armenians have been at the mercy of its conquering peoples for their entire history. Here the diction shapes an image of natural process: the waves of intruders crash into and

pull at the Armenians as organically as a geologic process, negating any possibility of independence. Later, Jenkins describes the rise of Islam with a similar lexicon:

With the seventh century there arose a power in the East more fatal to Armenia than any of her ancient enemies—the religion of Islam. Like *wildfire*, the religion of Mohammed spread from Mecca to Gibraltar; but when it reached the Armenian people it found a substance it could not consume; the Armenians could not be converted to Islam, although their kingdom could be *burned to ashes* and their people enslaved. (Jenkins 346, emphasis mine)

The expansion of a religion is a socio-political process, but here the spread of Islam is like wildfire: terrifyingly swift, unstoppable, and dangerous. This language elevates the historical circumstance to the mythic; the lexicon lends an air of awe to the sheer power of the invading agents. In both of these examples, the Armenians are depicted as a people at the mercy of the “elements,” beyond their control and powerless to stop the impending disasters. A political or religious invasion is no different than a tidal wave or wild fire.

When describing the current circumstances of the Armenians, the same lexicon of natural process and disaster applies. Armenians cannot reckon with their hostile neighbors, who are portrayed in the text with properties of all-powerful nature. During the instability of World War I, the author remarks that “the Kurds *sweep* down from the mountains and seize his [the Armenian’s] home for their winter shelter” (Jenkins 354), much like a hawk descends from the sky to capture its prey. This imagery positions the Armenians as victim, as prey for its predators. Like the sheep imagery from William’s “Between Massacres in Van,” Jenkins too equates the Armenians with animalistic prey for hungry and predatory neighboring nations. As animals or natural forces, Armenia and

its enemies are not even described in human terms. The tone of inferiority assumed by *National Geographic* is inescapable. Jenkins also reports that:

When they were thus suffering persecution, a traveling American missionary asked them, “Don’t you wish you were still under Turkey?” And the reply came, “Yes; for Russia lops off our branches, but Turkey digs us up by the roots. (Jenkins 357)

Deracination is to pull up the roots, which has a racial connotation that links to genocide. In Jenkin’s anecdote, the Armenians (note the plural) even describe *themselves* as a natural phenomenon: a people as a tree, an unwilling object of the whims of external and destructive forces. As Spurr contends, the representations of death, disease, and destruction are a “rhetorical strategy of negation...where Western writing conceives of the Other as absence...or death” (92) which functions to clear the slate for the colonial imagination.

In July 1918’s “Under the Heel of the Turk”, Hall also employs this naturalizing lexicon to describe the situation of the Armenians. They are defined as a people who are always the victims of circumstance beyond their control, never the aggressor but eternally the sufferer of history:

Throughout all the succeeding centuries they have remained steadfast against *wave after wave* of persecution, until this last *storm* of hate and fanaticism has *swept* the greater part from their homes and has destroyed at least a million—two-thirds of the entire people. (Hall 59, italics mine)

These words yoke the Armenians to a conditional history—a history that renders them powerless—and are forever condemned, in the sense of the narrative, to shoulder the burden of external circumstances. In a figurative sense, “wave after wave” fashions an image of the Armenian people as a rickety, waterlogged raft awash in an unforgiving, tumultuous sea, who must contend with the “natural” disasters that befall them and hang

onto their group identity for dear life. Their misery is the product of the “waves” of persecution that engulf them—the constant threat that one day they may be entirely swept out to sea. Further, the Armenian genocide is described as a “storm of hate”. A storm is a natural phenomenon. In a storm there is no agent, save a God or Gods to whom the sufferers can attribute their distress. This “storm of hate” has swept almost a million Armenians to their deaths in a language that effectively veils the culprit and his methods. Suffice to say a storm nearly swept the Armenians off the face of this earth, which amplifies the power of the Ottomans over the Armenians.

In *National Geographic*, the Armenians are likened to a group of people in a sea of hostility, at times nearly overcome by the waves of persecution, almost drowned, subject to the whims (and winds) of powers that pull and toss them from all directions during their history: the Persians from the East, the Arabs from the South, the Russians from the North, and of course, the Western waves of Romans, Byzantines, and the devastating tsunami of Ottoman persecution that swept two-thirds of its population “out to sea” and to their deaths. This rhetorical strategy naturalizes suffering caused by very real political and social relationships and affixes both the history and current distress of the Armenians to their natural environment. By locating the suffering of the Armenians in the land—and depicting the aggressors as natural forces that the Armenians must “weather”—the magazine bolsters the imperative to establish “good government.”

Stuart Hall contends that the “naturalization of difference” marks the people described as “beyond history, permanent and fixed” (245). And so *National Geographic* naturalizes the suffering of the Armenian people as a phenomenon associated with the land. Whether their sovereignty and culture are eroded by competing foreign powers,

slashed and burned by the Islamic religion, preyed upon by Kurds swooping out of the mountains, battered in the storm of hate and nearly drowned by the Ottomans, the history of the Armenians is recounted in the lexicon of natural process and disaster. Stuart Hall adds that “naturalization is therefore a representational strategy designed to *fix* ‘difference’, and thus to *secure it forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable slide of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological closure” (245, italics in original). In *National Geographic*, this strategy does indeed fasten, and secure the identity of the Armenians to the land in which they inhabit. If the Armenians are forever a people whose fortune is inextricably linked to the land, then Ottoman mismanagement of the “land” becomes ever more urgent.

*The Call of Humanity, Part II: Missionaries and the United States Respond*

Since a “good government” is in order to effectively administer to the land that the Ottomans for so long mismanaged, *National Geographic* also provides evidence that the Armenians can be in fact be managed by outside powers. Each article from this period details how impressively the Armenians adapt to missionary instruction. Jenkins reports the story of a U.S. missionary who “took up this hard and disgusting life” in an Armenian village in order to educate them, “to be industrious and honest, to grow vegetables and make clothes, to scrub their houses and say their prayers” (343). First and foremost, the Armenians can learn to be industrious, but also hygienic and religiously sound. Jenkins praises the work of the missionary for bringing civilization to the countryside. Chater, in “The Land of Stalking Death” also relates the good work being done by missionaries in refuge populations. The American Committee, for example,

trades bread to starving Armenian workers in exchange for labor at their weaving factory, where “wool [is made] into excellent fabric” (404) and at the Committee’s orphanage:

One also sees the Committee’s splendid work among the Armenian orphans, of whom there are some 4,000 at Tiflis. These, housed in donated residences and unused school buildings, attend class daily, cultivate vegetable gardens, and even carry on into playtime their people’s tradition of industry. (Chater 404)

These displaced people, “were but refugees, these serious eyed workers” (409) nursed back to health and restored to their former “industrious ways” by the American Committee. These orphans, although witness to unspeakable death and destruction, are nursed back to health through education, and most importantly, industry. Led by the Americans, this process is successful.

Like in Cuba, these articles do not explicitly state that the United States should intervene, but show by example that U.S. missionaries are able to enact real and lasting change. *National Geographic* insinuates but does not explicitly state that the United States should take up the cause of “good government” in Armenia. The suggestion is not so subtle, however, in Chater’s “In the Land of Stalking Death”:

“*Bread, Bread, Bread!*”

That low, moaning monotone, rising and falling like the sound of waves which search the arid shore, only to fall weakly back on themselves, pursued us through the streets and far out into the fields. And we left starvation’s host gazing tragically after us, as men regard some passing *vessel* which skirts the barren island where they are marooned to death. (Chater 407, emphasis mine)

Chater drives away in his car from a starving group of Armenian refugees in this passage. Haunted by their chanting for bread—persistent and regular as a tidal rhythm—the Armenians are again inscribed within natural history. He muses that his retreating vehicle, for the Armenians, must be like shipwrecked sailors watching a would-be rescue

ship recede into the horizon. In the next town, however, Chater and the doctor he travels with stop to unload some flour from the car. Children swarm around the car, “attracted by the American flag which it flew” (407). By captaining his vessel within a sea of devastation and death, Chater positions the United States as Armenia’s only hope.

He mentions that when American relief workers or missionaries are in town, word travels fast. For instance:

There arose a cry, coming from thousands of starved lips—a cry which was not a cheer, not a welcome nor Godspeed, but the last prayer of a dying people. It was addressed through us to that far-off land of generous hearts; and under the twilight, with Ararat gleaming overhead, it rang endlessly through the death-smitten town: ‘*America, America, America.*’ (420)

Poetic license aside, the implication of this chanting is obvious. While Ararat, the legendary mountain of the Armenian people looks over its people, it is the intervention of the United States that the Armenians really need. Chater ends the article heavy-handedly, after so long detailing the suffering of the Armenian people: “God bless America!...for America, with God’s help, will do it!” (420). In other words, God bless America so that America, in turn, may save to the Armenians. As the only possible intermediary up for the task, the United States must enter and tend to the devastated wake of starvation and poverty brought about by the epic storm of genocide. Jenkins confirms the pivotal role America has already played in Armenia: “the greatest work done among them [foreign missionaries] has been done by the Americans, whose schools and hospitals...might almost be called the makers of modern Armenia” (Jenkins 360). By doing so, Chater affirms that the United States must be the one to shoulder the responsibility for saving the Armenian people—both from themselves and their neighbors. The starving Armenians

chant “*Bread, Bread, Bread*” and “*America, America, America,*” in solemn repetition, and this resonates with *National Geographic’s* readers as a moral imperative to intervene.

*The Construction of the Neocolonial Chimera*

*National Geographic*, in its call for intervention, must also represent the Armenians in familiar and unthreatening terms. In Jenkin’s October 1915 article “Armenia and the Armenians,” he positions the word Armenia as such:

To nearly two millions of Russian, Persian, and Turkish subjects it [the word Armenia] is a word filled with emotion, one that sends the hand to the heart and calls up both pride and sorrow. (Jenkins 329)

Jenkins acknowledges that to the Armenians, who are subsumed under Russian, Persian, and Ottoman rule, the word means much more. He describes the Armenian as literally clutching his heart, overcome by both pride and sorrow. Such an emotional response that overcomes the Armenians—according to the author—is better understood by analyzing the construction of the Armenians in *National Geographic*.

The construction of the “emotional Armenian” can be considered an active example of orientalism. The term and theory, set forth by scholar Edward Said in his seminal text *Orientalism*, describe the socially produced hegemonic relationship of Europe (and America) with the East, or the Orient. Said posits that the West constructed “the East” in order to imagine itself; that is, through the creations of sets of binary oppositions, identities were assigned and positions of power (and weakness) fortified. Each binary opposition is composed of a positive and negative term, respectively. In Said’s *Orientalism*, binary oppositions like order/chaos, human/inferior, familiar/strange, strong/weak, rational/emotional, and civilized/barbaric characterize the ways in which

many Western texts—texts in the broadest sense of the word—imagine and construct both themselves and the Orient. As Said proclaims: “A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant” (57). This process can be thought of an ideological cartography, where an imaginary border divides the world into two distinct spheres, each with its own set of superior and inferior traits: borders do not only apply in geography. Orientalism also lays out oppositions at the level of race. Although a border drawn into the sand or across the spectrum of skin color may be imaginary, its divisiveness results in very real repercussions. This characteristic of borders leads literary scholar Paul Fussell to declare: “borders are not only absurd, but also sinister” (33). Borders are imaginary lines devised to survey, contain—and ultimately control—land, resources, and people. Said’s work is indeed central in any discussion of colonialism and ideologically pertinent to this case study. However, *National Geographic’s* portrayal of the Armenians, like the Cubans, moves beyond the West v. East opposition and positions the Armenians somewhere between the two: a people “not-so-other.”

Orientalism in Western literature and other writings lays a foundation for the power dynamic of the colonizer/colonized to take root. In the Introduction to Kipling’s *Kim*, Said argues that the imagery in the novel renders an India suitable for the colonial process. Kipling’s representations of India “conceive of Indian society as devoid of elements hostile to the perpetuation of British rule” (Said in Kipling 28). For British and other European readers these kinds of texts not only illuminated daily life in faraway colonial locations, but also legitimized and reinforced the viability of intervention. Naturally, fiction does not exist outside the totalizing process of colonialism. In “The

Subject and Power,” Foucault describes how human beings are made into subjects. Foucault argues that through certain “dividing practices,” the subject “is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectifies him.” (326). It also permits power relations to take root. During the early twentieth century, *National Geographic* serves as an active authority and contributor to this process.

The construction of an identity for a people is part of this ideological process. For the U.S. readers back at home—with only a vague notion of what Armenians even were—the writers of the *National Geographic* seek to provide an identity. Words such as “suffering” and “tragic” are assigned to the Armenians. This diction signifies an identity of weakness and victimization. For this reason, the reporters of the *National Geographic* link them to the Jews, a preexisting stereotype available for readers to associate this new group of people with. In Jenkin’s “Armenia and the Armenians,” there is a whole section entitled “Resemblance to the Jew”.

In general type they come closer to the Jews than to any other people, sharing with them the strongly marked features, prominent nose, and near-set eyes, as well as some gestures we think of as characteristically Jewish. Like the Jew, the Armenian has been oppressed and persecuted, and has developed a strength of nationality, a love for his own people, and a persistence of type rarely seen elsewhere. Like the Jew, he has learned to bend, not break, before the oppressor, and to succeed by artifice when opposed by force. How else had he survived? Like the Jew, he has developed strong business instincts, and like he has a talent for language, a power of concentration, and unusual artistic gifts. Both Jews and Armenians are very clever actors. (Jenkins 334-335)

The Armenians are racially, behaviorally, historically, and culturally likened to the Jews. The Jews are also a liminal people, with whom the U.S. readers would have been culturally acquainted. Like the Jews, the Armenians too exist somewhere between the superior and inferior. Jenkins repeats the phrase “Like the Jew” over and over in this

section, drawing upon the reader's familiarity and potential prejudice alike, like a chorus to a song, a refrain that through repetition the reader learns the intended association.

"Like the Jew", the Armenians are "helpless victims" in "Armenia's tragic life", as added by another reporter in the section on the Armenians in "The Races of Europe"

(Grosvenor, Edwin 471). According to narratologist Mieke Bal, "in the course of the narrative the relevant characteristics are repeated so often...that they emerge more and more clearly. Repetition is thus an important principle of the construction of an image of a character" (Bal 125). The Jews have historically been a successful minority and the repetition serves to position the Armenians in a similar social standing. The characterization of tragedy and sorrow (from the genocide in particular) that mark the Armenians, like the Jews, is sadly prophetic in hindsight.

Although likened to the Jews, the Armenians differ in one important respect that is highlighted in all the articles from this period: they are the world's first Christians. In Hall's "Under the Heel of the Turk", they are "a religious, freedom-loving people", and in Jenkin's, a "devotedly Trinitarian" (334) people. Jenkins continues:

The music and ceremonies are naturally very primitive, dating back to the time when the courtyards of the church were the dramatic centers of the parishes and moral and spiritual lessons are taught through simple drama...Armenians love their church devotedly, and say that although they may get more instruction from a Protestant sermon, their own services seem to them warmer, touching their emotions. (334)

Jenkins observes—with an ethnographic air—that Armenian Christianity is primitive and mystical given its ancient roots. He also argues that the Protestant religion (brought over to Armenia by U.S. missionaries), is much more beneficial in terms of actual instruction, but the Armenians still cling *emotionally* to their own church and religious customs. This is an example of the binary opposition rational/emotional at work in the construction of

the Armenian, but the author's emphasis of Christianity serves to familiarize the reader with the Armenians through a common (but not equal) religious identification. These efforts also disfavor non-Western varieties of Christianity. Hybridity advertised the Cubans as junior partners in economic tasks. Here religious hybridity (Christian but primitively so) advertises the Armenians as junior partners in U.S. religious enterprise.

Like the Jews, but Christian, the physical appearance of the Armenians is also determined to be "not-so-other." The physique of the Armenians is variable, and discussed at length in many of the articles. Although described as dark and swarthy, with prominent facial features "like the Jew" (Jenkins 334), Grosvenor argues that "one finds endless variety of form and feature" (471) among the mainly "eastern, swarthy, heavy-haired, black-eyed" masses (Jenkins 334). In fact, it is not uncommon to see "an Armenian woman with the...madonna like beauty of the Italian; or an Armenian man tall, lithe, and handsome" (Grosvenor 471). Jenkins also adds that there are even a few "fair-haired and blue-eyed Armenians" (335). This leads both authors to question whether they could really be like the Jews or the Middle Easterners that they so resemble. Grosvenor notes that racially they are of the Indo-European branch, and Jenkins says that they "are judged to be not Semitic, but Aryan" (337). This racial distinction is obviously important to both authors. Although Armenians appear largely Eastern and exotic, they are more racially akin to the West and not as unfamiliar as would seem.

Largely discussed in the plural "Armenians," each author inventories the relevant traits and characteristics that they deem to identify the Armenians. According to Grosvenor, "their intelligence, industry, and thrift" have always rendered them superior to their rulers (469). He extols the precociousness of Armenian students, stating that they

“excel in mathematics” (469). Jenkins devotes an entire section to “Armenians as Students,” emphasizing that Armenians “average high in their studies” (337).

Industrious. Suffering. Like the Jew. Christian. Swarthy. Receptive. Passive. These constructions are quite simply put. “Stereotyping involves a reducing of images and ideas to simple and manageable form; rather than a simple ignorance or lack of ‘real’ knowledge, it is a method of processing information” (Loomba 59-60). The associations that these stereotypes draw out may be, yes, a “method of processing information,” but the intention behind this strategy in the pages of *National Geographic* is clear. Complexities, irregularities, and contradictions do not make it to the final print. Instead, a generalizing tone irons out the rugged terrain of Armenian land and identity into a flat, potential market, and smoothes the rough edges of the Armenian populace into a non-threatening labor pool whose success is tied to the good governance of their land.

The sad, tragic Armenian (who also happens to be industrious, patient, and very clever at math) in the pages of *National Geographic* would probably make the famous Armenian-American writer William Saroyan laugh out loud. The colorful spectrum of characters in his stories work against the stereotype of the tragic Armenian. “Most Armenians, like most other people...are terrible bores, crooks, connivers, conspirators, cheats, liars, opportunists, and all-around sons of bitches. I have them in my own family” (Saroyan in Baxter 7). Saroyan’s universalizing argument, or any other counterpoint, was not available to readers of the *National Geographic*, and so, the characterization of Armenian identity as monolithic, fixed, and natural remained unchallenged. Grosvenor concludes that “In general, whatever faults the Armenian has can be traced to his long

subjection and his environment” (Grosvenor, Edwin 471), which again, reinforces the identity of the passive *victim* and the need for better management.

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The text characterizes the Armenians in ways that are familiarizing, non-threatening, and useful. They are familiar because they are Christians (albeit of an inferior sect); non-threatening because they are not entirely Eastern (and are in fact of the Aryan race); and useful because they are industrious by nature and respond readily to manual labor and the instruction of missionaries. These textual classifications orientate the American reader with representations of the Armenians that depict them tragic victims, but also as a viable and willing labor pool in need of guidance and support. Perhaps best phrased by Jenkins: as subjects under the Ottoman Empire the Armenians are “harmless and useful” (353). Again, the identity of the Armenians reads “half ethnography, half résumé.”

Colonialism comes from the Latin *colere*, to cultivate or design (Steet 47). In much the same way, *National Geographic* cultivates its readers by designing America’s Others; it organizes its ideology with pertinent rhetorical strategies that reinforce both the place of United States and Armenia in the world. At the same time, it implicates its readers in the position of the colonizer, but the Armenians exist in a liminal position somewhere in-between the binary logic of colonizer/colonized.

Chapter 4: Photography in *National Geographic*

Aim.

Focus.

(Smile).

Shoot.

This ritual of photography, practiced and recited by amateurs and professionals alike, entails the posture and lexicon of the hunt, the capture. First the photographer spots his subject. He stops, steadies himself, and raises his camera to his eye. He *aims*, looks through his viewfinder, and adjusts the lens to bring the subject into *focus*, framing the subject as he desires and sees fit. If the subject is human, the photographer might suggest that he or she *smile* for the camera. At the right moment, when all of the elements come together as desired by the photographer, he *shoots*: Click. The subject is caught, its image forever imprinted in shades of black and white on the photographer's roll of film. Given this lexicon, it is not surprising then that for Barthes, "photography transforms subject into object" (Barthes 13): the subject becomes a *thing* to be caught on film. When the foreign subject comes under the scrutiny of the Western photographer's lens, this relationship of the hunt, the capture, and objectification becomes especially pronounced.

*National Geographic* and photography are metonymically linked. One can hardly imagine one without the other. The publication is powerful for both its textual and visual discourses, but perhaps it is the photography that should be recognized as most influential, for it creates compelling visual drama that has drawn readers for generations. The photograph can inspire epic awe. For Barthes, the power and mystery of

photography lies in seeing through the very same eyes that “saw” the figure photographed. *Camera Lucida* begins with a personal anecdote, the sense of amazement when viewing a photograph of Napoleon: “I am looking at the eyes that looked at the Emperor” (3). Photography affords a sense of the transcendental, but it also lends an air of authenticity and authority to the publication because “every photograph is a certificate of presence” (Barthes [1981] 87). Coupled with the first-person narrative of *National Geographic*, the photographs buttress the legitimacy of the views expressed in the articles. The photographs are so popular and informative in and of themselves, that according to Lutz and Collins, 53% of *National Geographic* members read only the photos and the accompanying captions (76).

The year 1888 marked the entrance of the *National Geographic Magazine* and the world’s first mass-market camera, Eastman Kodak’s “The Kodak,” onto the U.S. cultural scene. Was this just another serendipitous coincidence in the history of the publication? With the entrance of *The Kodak*, the average American had unprecedented ability to document his own life. He did not, however, necessarily have the means to undertake distant journeys, as cost-effective mass transportation was not available until after World War II. The photographic narratives supplied in publications such as *National Geographic* began to “democratize all experiences by translating them into images” (Sontag 7). The universalizing of human experience through the camera’s lens reveals not just curiosity about the outside world, but also a desire to homogenize, or at the very least, make compatible seemingly divergent landscapes and distinct manners of life.

To travel is to fulfill a natural, human desire to participate in history (Berger 15) and photography allowed early twentieth century Americans to “journey” abroad without

leaving the comfort of their homes. *National Geographic* rose to fill this escalating demand. In 1905, *National Geographic's* membership jumped from 3,662 the previous year to nearly twelve thousand members, largely due to a gripping photo essay on Lhasa, Tibet, a location previously closed off from Western contact (Bryan 95). The reader could vicariously participate in history by reading the magazine, immersing himself in the stories and visual narratives from places he would likely never visit. Grosvenor took heed of the members' enthusiastic reactions to photography; by 1908 more than half of the pages in each issue were to be devoted exclusively to photographs (Bryan 121). *National Geographic's* reputation of excellence in photography continued to attract new members. A mere five years after the decision to allot half of each issue to photographs, membership reached over 170,000. This is more than a ten-fold increase in five years, a testament to the U.S. readers' demand for exciting images from faraway lands.

In our era of ubiquitous media, it may be difficult to imagine that people were *hungry* for images. Readers of early *National Geographic* did not, however, have many alternative sources of knowledge to turn to. The beginning of the twentieth century was the era of radio rather than television, of paintings or engravings rather than photographs; of newspapers instead of the Internet. During this time, travel writing—both textual and visual—shaped public notions of foreign places and peoples to a much greater extent than it does today. While modern readers may gloss over photos in a newspaper or magazine, in the early history of the publication, *National Geographic* was able to confront readers with, at times, the first photographic images of a people or place ever disseminated to Western readers. In short, *National Geographic* contributed to fundamental notions of the *signified* by emphasizing various elements in its photography.

As a technology, photography was still in its infancy when *National Geographic* decided to make it a central component of its publication, so the *Society* began to explore and expand the technical field. The publication became a forum for ambitious photographers, many of whom invented new techniques, to display their growing prowess and skill.<sup>23</sup> A *National Geographic* writer carried the camera with him into the field, an externalization of his wealth, his social position, and access to a realm of knowledge and power outside the means of most. A camera in hand became a “signifier of Western superiority” because it allowed the photographer to observe foreign lands and peoples from the privileged position of the colonizer (Hayes in Hight and Sampson 173).

The photographs in *National Geographic* can be considered part of an enormous photo album of the world, collected and published in the single on-going text of the *National Geographic*. What readers see is not simple. What exactly *National Geographic* chooses to see, document, and publish, is even more complicated. Walter Benjamin argues that the invention of photography opened public consciousness to new possibilities and potentialities: “the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis unconscious impulses” (237). In other words, the camera allows seemingly everyday realities to be seen in new ways, which in turn permits a reevaluation of the world.

As photography was deemed by the administration just as important as lively written accounts, it was decided that “while a picture tells a story, it also tells it beautifully” (Buxbaum 23). This line sums up the *Society’s* editorial approach in selecting viable photographs: each photo ought to be simultaneously instructive and

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<sup>23</sup> Techniques such as color photography, night photography, animal photography, aerial and underwater photography were refined by the *Society’s* photographers (Abramson 131-144).

aesthetically pleasing. According to Lutz and Collins,<sup>24</sup> the photography in *National Geographic* is “more expressive and multi-dimensional than news photography, yet it performs an educational function by transmitting information about people and places” (62). Again, *National Geographic*’s photography seems to occupy a space somewhere between mass media and high art, just as it classifies itself a kind of liminal publication, a (paradoxical) “everyman’s scholarly” magazine. Self-positioning somewhere between two established realms allows the *Society* to pick and choose elements without being confined to the rules of a specific discipline, patenting, as it was, a new kind of photographic vision.

The *Society*’s photographic editors advocated a redefinition of historical significance. While a historical event is to be captured on film, certainly, the contextualization of the place and the people, with a focus on the daily life, is just as important, if not more so (Lutz and Collins 59). As argued by Lutz and Collins, *National Geographic* photographs draw readers’ attention by pointing out difference, but ultimately advocate that underneath the spectacle of curious garb and skin color, “we are all more or less the same” (61). This position is problematic. Yes, it does seem to propose a positive outlook on the world and its myriad inhabitants. On the other hand, such a vision might neutralize cultural markers that are *very* significant with respect to an individual people’s self-identity and agency, markers that may delineate fundamental differences in customs and world-views. I suspect that this philosophy about human universality was a key qualifier in the relentless pursuit of a global world, or a world

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<sup>24</sup> Lutz and Collin’s *Reading National Geographic* is a fascinating study and analysis on photography in the publication.

defined by interdependence and shared trade interests that would gain momentum after World War II and take off by the 1970's.<sup>25</sup>

The *National Geographic's* photographic themes of timelessness and common human values present a thesis of “enduring humanity,” a popular ideological direction in the publication (but not confined solely to *National Geographic*) after the post-World War II period (Lutz and Collins 60). Remember *National Geographic's* second editorial aim, “[the] abundance of beautiful, instructive, and artistic illustrations.” This internal, defining aim of the *Society's* photo editors promotes such a unified, optimistic and ultimately aesthetically pleasing presentation of mankind.

*The Family of Man* Exhibition (1955) exemplifies the ideological bent of *National Geographic's* photography. In the words of exhibition curator Edward Steichen in the introduction to *The Family of Man*: “It was conceived as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world” (3). As an exhibition, “*The Family of Man* has been created in a passionate spirit of devoted love and faith in man” (Steichen 3). The exhibition is truly an impressive collection of photographs from around the world that stress common quotidian existence. Most photographs are beautiful and life-affirming—an embracing couple, a happy family, children at play; some are triumphant—the birth of

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<sup>25</sup> This brings us to the present struggle between McWorld and Jihad, as discussed by anthropologist Benjamín Barber. McWorld, a term coined by Barber, describes the process of global integration and universal markets carried forth by Western industrialized nations, while Jihad (taken loosely from Islam), resists such cultural and economic homogenization. McWorld is interpreted by some cultures as a form of cultural imperialism: Western consumption habits and tastes advocated above local ones. This epic struggle between two competing world-views explains much of the current political instability today. The attack on the World Trade Center, for example, sends a symbolic message that cultural and economic hegemony is not appreciated by all people in the world and is in fact, seriously resisted. In other words, while McWorld may be valued by many powerful entities, it is not adhered to by all (see Kottak 418-419). Representations by media outlets like *National Geographic* helped to form public opinion of “human universality.” Such representations lay the necessary groundwork for the advent and perpetuation of McWorld. This is not to say that *National Geographic* represented humans-as-universal on purpose but rather that such an ideological posture was an important historical circumstance (perhaps, precursor) to the rise of the modern McWorld, or at the very least, the modern global world.

a baby, an orchestra performing in an ornate opera house, a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly; and only a few are tragic—Jews marching into the Warsaw ghetto in 1939, Korean women protesting behind barbed wire. A thesis of “devoted love and faith in man” necessarily orientates the tone of the exhibition toward the life-affirming photographs of mankind rather than the tragic moments of *inhumanity* captured on film. As is true with *National Geographic*, the intended message of *The Family of Man* is also that “we are all more or less the same.” According to Susan Sontag, photography “tells one what there is; [photographs] make an inventory” (Sontag 22). *The Family of Man* and the positive images of humanity in *National Geographic* function rhetorically by way of synecdoche: the optimistic aspect of mankind comes to stand for the whole.

Analyses of *National Geographic* and *The Family of Man*—which have been



Photos 1 and 2

criticized for their positive bias—have neglected the fact that photographs of foreign landscapes and foreign Others in both “exhibitions” often discursively suggest the *potential* of a land or people.

The following two photographs from *The Family of Man* (58-59) illustrate this concept.<sup>26</sup>

They are simple enough: two photos placed side-by-side of two different large, extended families in their domiciles. The family on the left (Photograph 1) is from some unnamed

<sup>26</sup> I have provided small versions of each photograph within the text to facilitate reading. Full-sized photographs, from which the details and captions are easier to see, are provided in the [List of Photographs](#) section, pp. 128-142.

location in Africa; the family on the right (Photograph 2) is from the United States. As one reads from left to right, the parataxis of these two photos suggests a movement toward progress, from nature toward civilization.

The photograph of the African family (Photograph 1) on the left is an extreme representation of the Other as defined by its environment. They stand in a never-ending and barren desert; the sky offers them not even a cloud to protect them from the relentless sun. Their environment looks incredibly difficult to live in. Directly in back of them is a pile of dried grass. Perhaps it is a dwelling, but a transitory and insecure one at best. The members of the family are covered with sparse clothing, the women's bare breasts on display for the camera. Some of the family look at the camera quizzically, others more amiably; the young boy in front ignores the photographer and his camera, preferring to chew on a piece of dried grass. They have obviously been arranged to pose for the picture. The adult male at the center, surrounded by other young women with children, might imply polygamy in the absence of other adult men, which is certainly a non-traditional and taboo social organization (in modern terms). The framing of the photo suggests that this family is isolated, subject only to the harsh, arid surroundings, reliant only on each other and forever subject to the ambivalence of their inhospitable environment. The babies are naked in this photo, suggesting that they are raw materials, blank slates for the colonial imagination to ascribe identities. As affirmed by Pratt, the "creation of a speechless, denuded, biological body" is a discursive tool that contributed to the design of "[a] deracinated, dispossessed, disposable workforce European colonialists so ruthlessly and tirelessly fought to create in their footholds abroad" (53). Although this photo may not have been taken by a colonizer, it certainly emphasizes the

Africans' nakedness (and powerlessness), environmental isolation, and the dispossessed nature of the "objects" photographed.

While the facing picture maintains the subject of "family," its similarities to the African family end there. The American family (Picture 2) is fully clothed in gender-specific dress—the three adult women wear aprons. They all smile, each in their own individual way, and look directly at the camera. They stand on a floral carpet in what appears to be a living room. They are in front of a mantel, and gathered around a stove, the heating center of the home. The photograph includes a ceiling, an upper limit, the roof as protection from the elements and the outside world. Seated on the ground or chairs are the weakest members of the family: the children, uncoupled young woman, and the old women. Standing over them are the adults, specifically, a majority of robust male adults. Most importantly, above this entire family hang three framed portraits of distinguished elderly forefathers (and one foremother), dressed in nineteenth century outfits. From the foreground to background is inscribed a hierarchy of generational progress. The American family is defined by this relationship to these cultured people of the past; above the shoulders of the African family there is only empty sky. The history of the American family hangs on the wall of the house, stable and inescapable and benevolently wise. The American family lives in the both the physical and metaphorical house of civilization, where history of mankind and the legacy of ancestors help each generation to build up its foundations and to improve its surroundings, to grow (as evidenced by the home's technology—the interior steel stove and the mid-twentieth century specific decoration).

These two photographs placed next to each other present a binary opposition between “primitive” and “civilized”. The Africans are a “primitive” people stuck with the harshness of nature and defined by it; the civilized reside within the safety of walls, within stable fortifications built by man. They enjoy the protection garnered through human progress, always able to consult the knowledge of its generations past for information on how to proceed into the future. These two photographs represent the extremes of human representation: the primitive Other, defined by Nature, and the modern Westerner, epitomized by his civilization. According to Stuart Hall, the opposition Nature/Culture is indeed racially determined:

Among whites, ‘Culture’ was opposed to ‘Nature.’ Amongst blacks, it was assumed, ‘Culture’ coincided with ‘Nature.’ Whereas whites developed ‘Culture’ to subdue and overcome ‘Nature,’ for blacks, ‘Culture’ and ‘Nature’ were interchangeable. (244)

This system of essentializing racial representation is still present in the *Family of Man* exhibition, despite its best efforts to argue that people around the world are “just like us.”

In *National Geographic*, representations of Others in the photographs taken at sites of US colonial or expansionist interest lie somewhere between the primitive and civilized, between the colonized and the colonizers (between the primitive African family and the civilized American one of the *Family of Man*). In other words, signifiers from both extremes unite in the representations of the local peoples and their land. This is the Neocolonial Chimera in its full splendor, an Other adorned with familiar elements, a photograph invested in signifiers that work together to at once reinforce notions of difference and also to invite the viewer to come closer and perhaps in a limited way, identify with the subject caught on film as “not-so-other”.

The “point” (or the “message” of the photograph) is shaped by various entities. According to Barthes in *Image/Music/Text*, “the press photograph is a message,” that is manipulated by various entities, from its point of emission to its point of dissemination to the public (15). *National Geographic* exerts influence in both spheres: it selects which pictures to include and then creates a visual and textual narrative in the article published. The intended message of an article is then, particularly significant in a publication such as *National Geographic*, which molds the “message” of the press photographs from its inception to its consumption.

### Colonial Photography

The Neocolonial Chimera of the written text is not visually represented in every photograph of foreigners by *National Geographic*.<sup>27</sup> In places where a colonial order had already been established by another Western European power, *National Geographic* did not challenge or re-imagine the colonized and certainly did not seek to “universalize” the essence or experience of foreigners. Instead, a close examination of its visual representations points to a maintenance and perpetuation of the status quo. After all, *National Geographic* (and the United States in general) did not want to step on any Western European toes.

Two articles from January 1920 and October 1922 exemplify this tendency especially well. In the first, Melvin A. Hall’s “By Motor Through the East Coast and Batak Highlands of Sumatra,” the author journeys into the Dutch colonized island. The article is banal in its inescapable colonial attitude: an in-depth survey of the island’s

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<sup>27</sup> See the analyses of the textual (written) Neocolonial Chimera in Cuba (pp. 55-60) and in Armenia (pp. 80-86).

natural resources (namely, valuable teak wood), an evaluation of its peoples, “most of which is not available for labor” (71), a point that the author laments, a deep fascination with and sexualization of the indigenous women, and praise for the industrious, cultured Dutch colonizers. Photograph 3 is an unflattering shot of a native Sumatran woman, surrounded by domestic animals—dogs and chickens feed off the hay strewn about the dirt floor. Hall’s tone toward his subject could not be clearer than the first line of his caption: “Every dwelling in Sumatra is its own barnyard” (78). The rest of the caption goes on to criticize the construction of the “primitive” dwelling. According to



**Photo 3**

Barthes, “the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least on other structure, namely the text-title, caption, or article-accompanying every press photograph” (16). The caption informs the reader’s “reading” of the photograph. In *National Geographic*, the captions are extremely suggestive and often offer information outside of the photograph that “colors” the reading of the photo. Judgment passes over the photograph by the tone of the caption, directing a particular reading, orientating the stance the reader should assume toward the photographed object. “Barnyard” does not suggest the reader relate to the Sumatran woman as a fellow human being, but rather that he perceive her like an animal, or perhaps at best, a useful piece of livestock. The caption secures the overall message of the photograph. For Stuart Hall, the overarching photographic message relies on these “two discourses—the discourse of the written language and the discourse of the photograph—[that] are required to produce

and ‘fix’ the meaning” (228). So too does *National Geographic* fix meaning by presenting mutually reinforcing arguments in both the text and the photographs.

An entire page is devoted to this picture, and out of the six pictures in the article focusing entirely on native women, it is the only one where her breasts are covered. The author’s obvious fascination with native women speaks to the colonial tendency to sexualize their photographic representations (Hayes in Hight and Sampson 185). The camera lens itself can be considered a phallic device, jutting out into the scene and taking possession where entrance may not have been granted.<sup>28</sup> As scholar Berger summarizes, the gaze of the traveler has a sexual dimension, called “scopophilia,” or “loving by looking” (24). By way of hyper-feminizing and sexualizing the native women, the photographer here objectifies her in typical Orientalist fashion, for there is an “almost uniform association between the Orient and sex” in the colonial mind (Said 188). The Sumatran woman depicted in this photograph is framed to epitomize certain colonial conceptions of the colonized: primitive, hyper-feminine, dirty, and surrounded by animals (nature). Significantly, a young woman of reproductive age is photographed in this “barnyard,” which indicates the desire to produce resources. If she is colonized, her children become colonial subjects as well, labor resources for a colonial enterprise.

Another world away, British Royal Navy officer Frank J. Magee reports on the conflict between the Belgian forces and a German “enemy flotilla” on Lake Tanganyika, Africa in October 1922’s “Transporting a Navy through the Jungles of Africa in War Time.” Here “War Time” refers to fallout of World War I, the extension of the conflict from the battlefields of Europe to the European colonial power structure in Africa. This

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<sup>28</sup> The camera as a phallic symbol comes from a discussion with renee hoogland in the U of M Department of English on November 17, 2007.

article is especially telling of U.S. sympathies to the European colonial project in Africa; although written by a British military man, the content was indeed approved and published by the U.S. *National Geographic*. Magee chronicles the military reinforcement dispatched with emergency supplies and manpower by the British military to aide the Belgians, guiding the reader through the “heart of darkness, Africa” as it were. It is certainly no existential quest article, but like recent scholarly reinterpretations of Marlow in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Magee’s depictions of indigenous peoples certainly reveal racist and colonial attitudes.<sup>29</sup> The battle against the Germans is triumphant, and while the text (both written and visual) relates the triumph of the Allies over Axis, it also teaches the appropriate colonial stance that the Western reader take toward the African.

Three photographs in particular emphasize the author’s inherent colonial



Photo 4

perspective. Photograph 4 (343) is captioned “native boys bringing in bucks for dinner.” First, the subjects are not boys: the one facing the camera is clearly an older man, but the author destabilizes their legitimacy by using the word “boy” to infantilize them. They both carry the gazelle (not “bucks”) on their backs, and the man facing the camera looks tired, bent over with the weight of his capture. Only

skirts cover their modesty. This photograph would otherwise be a mere photographic

<sup>29</sup> Chinua Achebe argues that Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* has long been taught as an existential quest novel because European racist attitudes were so banally accepted, if unconsciously. Achebe declares: “Conrad was a bloody racist” (Conrad xlix). In much the same way, this *National Geographic* article was most likely read as a triumphant story of British and Belgian forces over the Germans in Africa. However, the plot entails many *colonial* interactions that are recorded prominently in the article, both visual and textual. These may have been more opaque to the average reader at the time, but the emphasis on racial inferiority is inescapable.

curiosity of African bush-men carrying their kills if not for the caption, which calibrates a nefarious reading not otherwise visible in the photograph:

The ordinary diet of the native consists of a manioc or cassava flour made into a paste, and a meat stew concocted of everything, from ants and grasshoppers up to man. Indeed “food that once talked” is a special delicacy, though indulged in but secretly and rarely nowadays. (343)

It seems like the author tried his best to relay pertinent ethnographic information concerning the typical diet of the indigenous, but could not help himself from delivering a caveat on cannibalism, although there is no indication in the photograph that would suggest it. This is a very good example of how the caption informs the reading the photograph. In light of their cannibalism, although “indulged in but secretly and rarely nowadays,” the natives seem much more dangerous and Other than the first glimpse might suggest. Unfounded claims of native cannibalism reveal an anxiety that the natives may one day turn on the colonizer (Loomba 73). For that reason, the natives depicted look very weak, although the anxiety of the Western colonizer still informs a reading of the photo. After reading of their savagery in the caption, it is hard not to see them as dangerous and threatening, although their poses are arranged to the contrary. The reader notices that there is no weapon in the picture, but there are two dead gazelle. Might these cannibals be capable of catching their prey with their bare hands, they might ask themselves upon reflection. Here, the author effectively “others” the indigenous as so savage they are almost non-human.

The page following this picture is a laughably narcissistic self-portrait of the author, armed to the teeth, smiling broadly at the camera, holding a huge gun in his right hand and the hand of a native child *in* his left (Maggee 345). Photograph 5 depicts strong structural rhetoric. With his right hand, he props the gun against the ground, dominating



Photo 5

and territorial in his stance (the phallic dimension of domination with the gun cannot be ignored). The native child looks up to him, but he does not look to the child; instead, he holds the child's entire hand in his palm. The short stature of the native child accentuates the very real (and insurmountable) distance between the European colonizer and the lowliness of the colonized. This does not suggest cooperation, but rather forceful guidance. In terms of the composition elements, between the gun and the native is the European colonizer. The colonizer is the focus of the photo, smiling, armed with ammunition, as if happy to take on the White Man's Burden. Kipling's words spring to mind: "send forth the best ye breed—go bind your sons to exile / to serve your captives need." He mediates the colonial relationship with military might. The native child looking up at the colonizer also indicates the instructive relationship of colonialism. The native looks to the European for guidance, and education. While the photographer gazes at the two (the gaze is understood to be invasive in this context), the European officer happily confronts the photographer's gaze; the native does not, or cannot, return it.

The picture on the next page of this article (Photograph 6) demonstrates that the savage native can indeed learn to serve the colonizer's interests but will always occupy a subservient position in the colonial hierarchy. "Josephine breakfasting with an officer" (346) is absurdly colonial in its rhetoric. Officer Maggee takes his breakfast with the pet chimpanzee (whom he has also deigned to give a name, and a Western one at that—

Josephine), while the unnamed indigenous man serves him tea, the native man's eyes forever fixed on his task by permanency of the photograph. The Officer dines with fine china, a kind of testament that civilized niceties can still be observed in the deepest reaches of Africa. Most importantly, the native can be instructed to use these accouterments of culture in order to serve the colonizer. The caption



**Photo 6**

goes on to anthropomorphize “Josephine’s” child-like behavior. He privileges an animal over the natives: the primate is somehow less primitive than the native in this strange colonial logic. Importantly, Josephine the chimpanzee wears western clothing, which makes absurd and ridicules the appearance of the African serving tea. According to the caption, Josephine learned to eat with a spoon. If even the chimpanzee can learn, so too can the native peoples.

These photographic analyses are but a few of the myriad examples of the perpetuation of the colonial order in *National Geographic*. They are isolated in their radical alterity, confined to inferior racial and social position within the colonial hierarchy. These photographs are not, however, revolutionary in the least. According to Sontag, “photographs *cannot create* a moral position, but they can reinforce one—and can help build a nascent one” (17, emphasis mine). In other words, the colonial pictures in these articles do not *challenge* any preconceived notions held by the readers—they build upon ones that are already in place. Sontag continues, “what determines the

possibility of being affected morally by photographs is the existence of a relevant political consciousness” (19). Readers would not have been outraged by the colonial discourses and “White Man’s Burden” projects depicted in these case studies; instead, they might even embrace them. These photographs, from Sumatra to interior of Africa, are united by their common representations of the indigenous. Although the specifics of the environment may change from place to place—jungle in Sumatra, savanna in Africa—the colonial order is embedded visually into the landscape, suggesting that this is the “natural” way of life (remember that *National Geographic* enjoys great, nearly unquestionable authority).

So, the indigenous women preside over pathetic “barnhouses,” covert cannibals in Africa hunt with their bare hands, native African children look to the Europeans for guidance, and most importantly, the indigenous can be taught to attend to the needs and desires of the colonizer. Sontag also argues that photography “helps people to take possession of space in which they are insecure” (9). The *National Geographic* writer in a colonial land, ruled by an established colonial government, relies on photography to situate himself in the colonial context. Each click of the camera perpetually reinforces his superior position within the colonial binary opposition. The camera becomes a tool of “military” domination (like the trigger of the gun, the photographer shoots the picture), and the photograph is the undeniable evidence of his control. Maybe this is why for Barthes, “the photographer’s organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger” (15).

“Imag(in)ing” the Neo-Colonial Chimera

While some examples of *National Geographic* photography illustrate classically colonial relationships, many articles in the publication seek to imag(in)e a new kind of Other. This effort is central in locating the function and attitudes of the U.S. neocolonial project. “Imag(in)e”<sup>30</sup> is a pun, that as a critical term acknowledges the two spheres of compositional work in photography: the ideological (the “imagining”) and the visual (the image). Specifically, in the articles that report on lands or peoples of U.S. neocolonial interest, the Others are photographed (both imagined and imaged) to be not-so-other. This emergent posture toward a people reveals an impulse not only to conceive of Others as not so different, but also defines the appropriate parameters by which to do so.

The iconic gold frame, the window through which readers view the world through *National Geographic* becomes central in the discussion of photography in these two case studies. The gold is a gilded frame that encases the appetizing picturesque of the images and peoples contained within. Specifically through this framing, the otherwise unfamiliar and unknown world becomes palatable because it is contained within the reoccurring framework and authoritative (and trusted) gaze of *National Geographic* itself.

Now let us return to *National Geographic*’s post-WWII theme of timelessness and the eternal goodness and essential oneness of mankind. *National Geographic* was not quite to that point, yet. The Neocolonial Chimera represents an intermediate step, between the colonial photographic discourse as evidenced in the photographs studied from Sumatra and Africa, and the everlasting, “sameness in oneness” vision of mankind

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<sup>30</sup> The pun is taken from the title to Hight and Sampson’s study on colonial photography: *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*.

exemplified by *The Family of Man* and the face of *National Geographic*, “The Afghan Girl” (1985).<sup>31</sup> Early twentieth century photography from sites of U.S. neocolonial interest draw on visual rhetoric that employs discourses from both extremes—the colonized savage and the universal “everyman”—in order to accommodate this new Other into the emerging political and economic vision of the United States.

### *National Geographic Photography in Cuba*

Although the specifics of U.S. intervention in Armenia and Cuba differ, like the rhetoric employed to validate and legitimize the imperative to intervene so too do the photographic representations at each site in *National Geographic* share similar resonances and strategies. In Cuba, a direct military intervention occurred and lasting political presence was established with the Platt Amendment. In Armenia, U.S. missionaries engaged with the local population and offered relief work in exchange for labor. Despite the differing natures (and degrees) of U.S. intervention in each region, both sets of photographs display an urge to assimilate the local populations into a model for development that emphasizes the plausibility of success.

Photographs 7 and 8 are before-and-after photographs of a Cuban street from March 1902’s “American Progress in Habana.” Photograph 7 is the “before” shot of the

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<sup>31</sup> The modern reader cannot think of *National Geographic* without conjuring the image of “The Afghan Girl”, now known as Sharbat Gula. Photographed by Steve McCurry, the image of the young Afghan girl’s direct gaze, with the haunting green eyes, became a world-wide icon and one of the symbols of the *Society*. *National Geographic* adopted her face as the “face” of the publication—the face of a young girl whose life was caught in political turmoil and economic hardship. By the 1980’s, this universalizing photographic tendency was so entrenched in the publication that this picture rose to unparalleled global (and artistic) prominence. In 2004, photographer’s successful efforts to identify the Afghan girl as refugee Sharbat Gula garnered world-wide media attention, documentary study, and various articles detailing her life over the past 20 years.

street in a state of disrepair. Hay is strewn about the street, and in the foreground there are two large potholes. People do not walk through the street but rather on the elevated sidewalks. A dark man in a hat stands on the far left and further in the background and others stand impassively in doorframes. It is certainly not a bustling, busy street and looks like it hasn't been well maintained. As the caption suggests, this street is



**Photo 7**

representative of all streets in Cuba “Before the United States occupation” (104). With the turn of a page, the reader is confronted with another image of that very same street, a mere year after the United States occupation. The street is now impeccably clean, and has been cleared of all

stray debris. A young boy stands in the front right corner, dressed in a suit. It is as if the improvement of the street also betters the people living in it, as evidenced by the young boy wearing a suit on a street who twelve months ago would have been out of place.

A “before-and-after” photographic essay on a typical Cuban street before and



**Photo 8**

after the U.S. intervention suggests that the intervention cleaned up the country and not only improved the health and aesthetic of the neighborhoods, but also improved the lives of the inhabitants. Clean, orderly streets are more conducive to activity. As Sontag argues,

“pictures get taken not only to show what should be admired but to reveal what needs to be confronted, deplored—and fixed up (63). Photograph 7, the “before” picture is direct

confrontation with a Cuban street that needs to be fixed up. Photograph 8 is the evidence that the street was indeed fixed up, and the transformation was successful. This series symbolically stands for the entire U.S. intervention. Before the intervention, Cuba was in disrepair and poorly maintained. After the intervention, the streets were cleared, cleaned, and open for a better way of life. In effect, the United States paved the way for self-legitimization by such photographic representations (quite literally here with the streets). Once the landscape had been cleared (and tamed) for development, *National Geographic* turns its gaze to the peoples of the island. This before-and-after series does not describe (visually) the arduous process of transformation, nor does it address Cuban resistance. Instead, it glosses over any native conflict, and only offers the end result: the young boy in a suit on an orderly street.

Production of sugar cane is one of the topics that *National Geographic* paid the most attention in the text of the articles. Agricultural workers are always depicted against



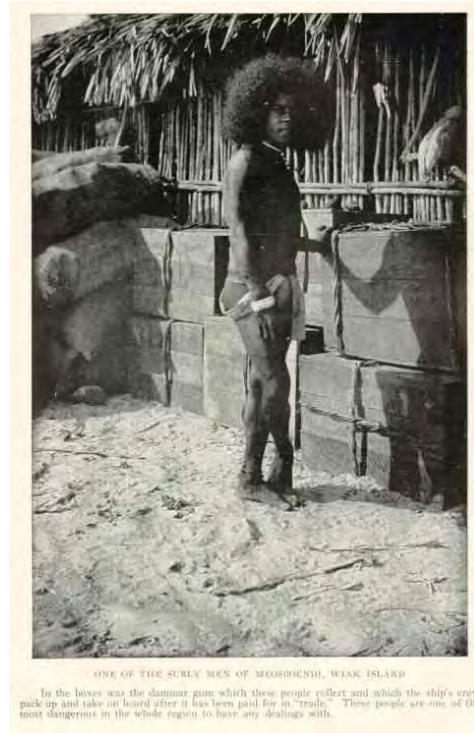
**Photo 9**

the backdrop of the crops they attend to. Photograph 9 from October 1906's "Cuba—The Pearl of the Antilles," is titled "Cutting and Stripping Cane" (550). The shot focuses on the workers stripping down the tall stalks of sugar cane.

The foreground is littered with the felled stalks, and the wagon full of cane on the left is brimming over with the bounty of the harvest. The caption emphasizes the centrality of sugar cane production for the United States: "Cuba sent the United States \$60,000,000

worth of sugar cane” (550), a staggering figure. Photographs of agricultural workers in the fields commodify both the agricultural output as well as the laborers. Art historian Kristin Thompson notes that “the very process of formally positioning laborers against the photographic backdrop of cane...rendered the laborers commodities” (77). Workers in the sugar cane fields become subsumed under the commodifying rhetoric of the image and are subject to the gaze of the photographer, who possesses (and objectifies) both the cane and the workers with the click of the camera. This is but one photographic example of Cuban agricultural workers being distilled down from human beings to laborers ready to take to the fields.

Photograph 10 is not a shot of an agricultural laborer, busy tending to the crops in the field, but rather an indigenous Cuban dressed in native garb. This shot comes from Wilcox’s July 1908 “The Mahogany Forests of Cuba,” an article that emphasizes both the economic potential of the region as well as the accommodating native population. The man is of African descent and stands nearly naked next to a stack of crates. Although the caption claims that this man is representative of these people “[who] are one of the most dangerous in the whole region to have any dealings with” (Wilcox 484), the photograph suggests otherwise. Although his physical appearance evokes the exotic and wild, he is posed in such a way that he looks gentle. His posture contradicts the caption, and the



**Photo 10**

visual stance carries a far more salient message. He stands with his arm outstretched, leaning against the crates. His leg is crossed in front of the other, and his other hand hangs down at his side. For all intents and purposes, the native looks relaxed, comfortable, and most importantly, non-threatening.

His posture echoes the stance of an ancient Greek statue, recorded forever in the marble, immutable and unchanging in his demeanor. With his gaze directed toward the camera, his arm rested against the crates, and his legs crossed casually: this native looks quite picturesque. The native must be depicted in this manner because

Photography itself became central in the perpetuation and maintenance of this disciplined image; it served as a form of discipline. The very process of representing and deeming parts of the landscape and inhabitant as picturesque marked their incorporation into a disciplinary society. (Thompson 17)

The native's gentle stance informs the disciplinary rhetoric of this image. Not only is the native non-threatening, he is also (despite his cultural difference) incorporated into the structure of commerce on the island. He is not photographed, for example, in front of his home, working, or eating dinner with his family. Instead, his hand gently rests upon the crates of raw materials to be exported, a sign of his acceptance and obedience. While Wilcox calls his subject a "surly man" (484) in the caption, his posture and visible connection to commerce imply his resignation from his former primitive life and acceptance of a new life based on modern trade and commerce. This picture is powerful because "representation itself is a kind of cartography that relies on mental maps of relationships and correspondences, signs evoking signifiers" (Hall 19). In this sense, the effort to render the indigenous as an Other who is not so other is an attempt to forge a

new kind of Cuban who is different looking, yes, but still a willing participant in a new economic structure.

### *National Geographic Photography in Armenia*

An analysis of the text of the articles on Armenia from the period 1909-1919 revealed a deep effort on the part of the publication to maintain some stereotypical attributes of the “Other” by way of naturalizing the history their suffering, but also to point out the useful characteristics that one finds in the Armenian populace. Like the proverbial elephant in the middle of the room, neither the text nor the photographs dwell heavily upon clear evidence of massacre and human destruction; they largely focus instead on possibility and the potential for progress of both Armenia and the Armenians. While history books and newspaper articles emphasize the visual evidence of catastrophe, *National Geographic* seeks to record the quotidian existence of the Armenians. It is worth noting that none of the articles include grim photographic evidence of the slain in the massacres. This was not part of the vision of Armenians that *National Geographic* wished to emphasize to its readers back home.

Take Photograph 11, “An Armenian Woman, A Mountain Dweller, carrying a great load of firewood down the rough mountain side” in Jenkin’s October 1915 “Armenia and the Armenians” (335). This is the first photograph in



**Photo 11**

the article that confronts the reader. She is dressed a skirt over a pair of pants, a headscarf is wrapped around her head. She is both modest and practically dressed for hard work, her darkened and weathered face testament to a long life spent laboring outdoors. A large pile of firewood is carried upon her back, and she bends over to shoulder the load. Despite the size of her burden, she carries it without even a frown, and she is strong. She is certainly *not* depicted like the scarcely-clad Sumatran woman, presiding over her “barnhouse.” Literally bent over, the Armenian is weighted down by the abundance of firewood (this stands for the plethora of natural resources that were so carefully described in the opening pages of the article); the photograph *proves* the availability of raw materials in the region. She looks quizzically at the camera, a smile even teases at the corners of her lips. It is as if the photographer caught her on her trek back to her home, and she paused, just for a moment, to smile for the camera, before heading on her way. Her feet are firmly planted on the ground, her posture aligns her load of firewood with the trees in the background, making her appear like a tree trunk to the load of her branches. This structure supports the textual claims of the inextricable tie between the Armenians and the land. She is of course, a steadfast worker, but also a literal embodiment of the landscape, and a resource within it. She is as much of a resource in this picture as the firewood upon her back.

If it weren't already apparent by the staging of the photograph itself, the caption certainly leaves no room for doubt: “The Armenians are the workers of the Near East” (335). This relationship between the caption and image further cements the intended message of the photograph. The caption also places the Armenians in a hierarchy of labor: “they have, in sharp contrast to their Asiatic neighbors, great capacity for work”

(335). This is another point where the “text” dismantles the binary opposition West/East in order to place the Armenians somewhere in between the two, whilst maintaining that each term of the binary opposition still holds its valued position.

Photograph 11 is a testament to the useful labor of the Armenians, and the material wealth of their land. Keep in mind that this photograph was taken during the Armenian genocide, a period of terrible political and economic instability (at the very least). The photographs do not record the shortages in the marketplaces, or of the difficulties faced in addressing the day-to-day tasks of living. Sontag elaborates: “the disconcerting ease with which photographs can be taken, the inevitable even when inadvertent authority of the camera’s results, suggest a very tenuous relation to knowing” (Sontag 115). Jenkins is aware of the difficulties faced by the Armenians; he details their history of suffering at length. He sees past the current circumstances, however, in order to fulfill a vision of potential—both of the land and its people—and furnishes the opening of the article with a photograph of a strong Armenian woman literally weighed down with the abundance of the land.

In this same article, Jenkin’s orientates the reader with the Armenian, saying that he is much “like the Jew,” an Other who, in early twentieth century American life, was more incorporated into mainstream society than various other marginalized groups, such as African-Americans or Native-Americans. Photograph 12, “An Armenian Family of Van” (339) reinforces this not-so-Other classification. The subjects are posed for the camera, in the style of the family portrait. They are not named, and the relationships between subjects are not further defined. They appear well-off and prosperous, albeit dark and strangely attired. The caption is a verbatim description from the article of

common Armenian physical characteristics, and it even directs the reader to the original



Photo 12

portion of the text in order to get more information on the picture. This is an example of the text informing a photograph; the reverse is also present (and more common) in *National Geographic*. The reader is told which specific

association to draw, and the caption directs the reader back to the passage in the article that supports this purported resemblance.

Somehow this photograph is supposed to evidence the resemblance to the Jews; there are no signifiers that would suggest a link, other than the physical stereotypes, the “prominent nose, and near-set eyes” (339) that the picture supposedly shows. Given the historical circumstance, this family from Van presents a highly idealized photographic representation. During the spring of 1915, the city of Van, in fact, had been sacked by the Ottomans; 55,000 were killed. The “villages filled with corpses and the rivers choked with dead bodies” (Balakian 207) is certainly not the visual report given in Jenkin’s October 1915 account. Pictures 11 and 12 by Jenkins reveal a willingness to look behind the historical realities in order to present an essentializing viewpoint of the land and the people that would be absent in other venues such as newspapers. A deconstructive reading notes the importance of these absences. Favoring idealized representations of

how the Armenian *is*, and how He *lives*, over actual historical conditions suggests a strong need on the part of *National Geographic* to *see* the Armenians in this capacity.

Chater's November 1919 "The Land of Stalking Death" is hardly a photographic tour-de-force through the ruined countryside and battered survivor population, as the title might suggest. Instead, the pictures chosen serve as a testament to both the good work of the American missionaries and the industrious capacity of the Armenian people.

Refugees and survivors are not depicted in their misery, but rather as willing workers under the tutelage of various American charity organizations. Photograph 13 is but one of the many examples of such endeavors photographed in these *National Geographic* articles. Photograph 13, "Armenian children weaving rugs in the American Committee Shops at Erivan [Yerevan]," (413)

shows an orderly, clean, secure artisan setting. Many young Armenian girls sit neatly arranged on benches, weaving away at looms, working together peacefully and efficiently. They are dressed uniformly in fresh white dresses, their long dark hair is plaited and



**Photo 13**

neatly pulled into braids draping down their backs. The braids here are significant, for the braids signify their work and their anonymous identity as weavers for the American Committee. If they are aware of the camera, they do not turn away from their work to pose for the author. Their attention on their work is unwavering. Four older women of

the American Committee supervise the young girls, but each one of them looks at the camera. As supervisors (and Americans), they have the privilege to do so. In the left front corner, an unnamed girl smiles for the camera, almost welcoming, or condoning the photographer's gaze. The angle of the photograph marks an upward trajectory; the eye moves up and to the right into an orderly and industrious future.

The caption acknowledges that the child-workers "have lost all else," and it is the responsibility (the "Burden") of the American Committee to teach them "honest labor [which] does more to engender self-respect than does lavish, but misguided charity" (413). Here Chater argues that relief-work is equivalent to hard-work, and the Americans provide this opportunity, this salvation to the Armenian refugees. Obedience in labor, industry, and the presence of U.S. supervision of Armenian workers compose this photo's message. It is a testament not only to the good work being done in Armenia by the Americans, but also that the Armenians are a proficient labor force, receptive to instruction and guidance. So too does this photograph instruct and guide the reader's expectations of the Armenians. The article also provides additional photos of Armenian refugees and orphans carding wool (396) and sawing lumber for the construction of a new building (415).

Ironically, the Armenians are conceived of by their oppressors and *National Geographic* in much the same way: for the Ottomans, they are a mass to exterminate and for the Americas, a mass to use for labor. There are surprisingly few photographs of the Armenian genocide. The grim photographic evidence of atrocity, published in newspapers, and later historical accounts of the genocide, are not available in *National Geographic*. This was not the reality that *National Geographic* wished to present to its

readers, and such photos would certainly not be aligned with the *Society's* photographic editorial aims. These photos have hitherto demonstrated the diligence, industrial capacity, and receptiveness of the Armenians to the Americans. The smiling, welcoming faces captured on film seem to be an open invitation for continued, if not heightened intervention.

If that weren't enough, the Armenians are even willing to fly the American flag. In Huntington's February 1909 "The Mountaineers of the Euphrates," the author undertakes a river journey down the Euphrates River with the help of some friendly locals. He details the assembly of a raft made of sheep hides, capturing the process of its construction on film, and on the following page, shows its successful completion.



**Photo 14**

Photograph 14 "A Completed Raft of Inflated Sheepskins" (Huntington 149), is a straightforward shot of five men aboard the sheepskin raft, paddling off the riverbank. There is a tripod in the center of the raft, and behind it sits Huntington's American companion, who is located between four other Armenians.

A fez covers the head of the Armenian man flying the American flag on the raft. He does not look at the camera; instead, his head is bent downwards, as if respectfully acknowledging the American flag blowing in the breeze above him. His gesture is symbolic, and informs the overall message of the photograph. As if solemnly bowed in prayer, or in this case, reverence, the Armenian submits to America, as signified by the

Stars and Stripes. The presence of the flag is a symbol of domination, and the fact that it is being supported by the Armenian in this photograph is much more than mere symbolism. Persuasively argued with a simple pose, this photograph shows that Armenians accommodate American visitors, and they support American efforts by guiding them into unfamiliar territory. The water here is calm—not even a wave disturbs the transport of *National Geographic* reporters. Symbolically, the journey of *National Geographic* reporters is assisted by the very people they explore.

To review the photographs of Armenia: A physically strong woman, literally overburdened with the abundance of firewood, a prosperous, well-dressed (but strangely attired) family, young women weaving rugs for the American missionaries, and Armenians guiding a *National Geographic* writer, flying the American flag from their vessel. These pictures feature smiling, industrious workers, eager to assist, which is precisely the point. In order to render the Armenians not-so-other, not-so-Asiatic (Jenkins claims Asians to be inferior and lazy in the text), the photographic discourse must complement the text. Often, the visual and textual discourses work together in mutually reinforcing ways. The captions direct the reader to the descriptive passages in the text that “add depth” to the photograph; in other instances, the photograph bolsters the author’s claims in the article. It is important to note that while the text and the photography are two separate narratives, they are both manufactured by *National Geographic* to reinforce each other: the text illuminates and enlarges the narrative of the photograph and the photograph ‘proves’ the text.

The visual discourse manufactures ready subjects for U.S. guidance, and proficient workers for manual tasks, because *National Geographic* chooses to focus on

the potential of Armenia and the Armenians, rather than to fully address the pressing social and political catastrophe that was unfolding as these were being published. Sontag explains: “the camera is a kind of passport that annihilates moral boundaries and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from any responsibility toward the people photographed” (42). *National Geographic* chooses what it wants to see, communicates, and sells that vision to its readership. Pictures of the massacres and subsequent social unrest and famine would definitely not satisfy the photographic editorial aim of telling beautiful stories, just as such depictions would not encourage business interests. Certainly, *National Geographic* recorded in a blasé and non-urgent manner the issue of the massacres of the sufferings inflicted, but ultimately preferred a series of representations that coincided with and coded for American economic aspirations in the region.

\* \* \*

Photography is central in *National Geographic*. A photograph is much more obvious than a textual message that requires sustained attention to understand the argument. A photograph delivers its message quickly. The message of a photograph is salient in its aesthetic appeal, and easy to recall from memory. The photographs in the articles of *National Geographic* highlight the textual arguments made in the article. The text then comes to buttress the broad messages delivered in the photographs by filling in and enhancing those visual arguments with textual support. The textual and the visual discourses work together in mutually reinforcing ways. If the reader decides to read only the photographs and the captions, he will still get the overall message of the article. If the

reader decides to read both text and photos, the photographs will legitimize and authorize the claims made in the text.

Interestingly, *National Geographic's* photographic style at sites of U.S. neocolonial interest (as evidenced by the case studies of Cuba and Armenia) exists somewhere between the universalizing, positive vision of mankind as exemplified by *The Family of Man* Exhibition and *The Afghan Girl*, and traditionally colonial photography. Just as the written text provides a rhetorical structure that legitimizes U.S. intervention abroad (while failing to explicitly name the process) so too must the photography move beyond traditional colonial visual discourses. The visual result of neocolonial ideology in the publication are the photographic representations of the Neocolonial Chimera, Others who are “not so other.” While U.S. neocolonial attitudes are not entirely colonial (in the traditionally European way), they certainly do not envision mankind as “essentially the same,” but rather, “same enough” for the viability of a new kind of U.S. neocolonial enterprise.

Reading the photographs of *National Geographic* reveals much about the ways in which not only the *National Geographic Society* and its photographers viewed the world, but also the readers. For an image or an article to be successful, it must align itself with the readers' expectations or desires (Steet 127). And so photographers wield cameras to take possession of the places they visit (Sontag 65). A revision of the old adage that favors the power of the written word over the sword (or military domination) in light of *National Geographic's* neocolonizing impulse and representation of foreign sites as places and peoples ripe for the U.S. cultural and economic life (but mostly economic) might be revised: “the camera *and* the pen are mightier.”

## Conclusion

The *National Geographic Society* is more than an institutional curiosity and *National Geographic* is more than a cultural text. *National Geographic* has been writing about “the world and all that is in it” since 1888 and for 120 years the magazine has occupied a seminal position in U.S. life. While other competitors have gone out of business or quietly slipped into obscurity, *National Geographic* has maintained its position of prominence in the United States, and recently, the entire world. The reader of early twentieth century *National Geographic* articles traveled the world with the guidance of the *Society*. I sought to clarify the nature of those travels. According to literary scholar Paul Fussell, the reader of travel literature undertakes not one, but three tours: (1) Abroad; (2) Into the Author’s Brain; and (3) Into his own brain (204).

As readers of *National Geographic*, we have gone abroad with *National Geographic* through these two cases studies on Cuba and Armenia. We have seen how *National Geographic*, in both locations, dismantles each site’s previous rulers on the grounds of mismanagement (of the land and the people). *National Geographic* carefully avoids colonial terminology to classify the emerging relationship of the United States as a global power. Terms like “(mis)management” identify the function of the textual rhetoric, and the lexicon of economic terms in the articles demonstrates the imperative to intervene, but in a capacity as economic parent to subordinate nations, who occupy a status as junior partners in trade. This rhetoric cautiously defines the United States not as a colonial empire, but rather as a benevolently instructive parent nation. We have encountered the Neocolonial Chimera, a new representation of each respective foreign

populace (Cubans and Armenians alike are defined by their hybridism) but positioned as “not-so-other” so as to be successfully incorporated into the U.S. neocolonial project. These features of U.S. neocolonialism are imagined, legitimized, and championed by *National Geographic*.

We have gone into the collective “brain” of the *National Geographic Society*—the overarching author—through consideration of the textual and visual rhetoric in these articles. The history of the institution, from its earliest days and pivotal founders, provided context for the case studies and acknowledged the *Society* as authoritative and highly powerful, capable of effectively influencing and delivering salient opinions to its readers. We have seen how powerful military and political figures speak through the publication (particularly in the Cuban case study), who often suggest radical political prescriptions for the United States. The photography, framed with *National Geographic’s* “golden frame,” aestheticizes the world so that a photograph not only tells a story in support of the textual claims, but also “tells it beautifully.”

We have seen the nature of the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world, as exemplified and meticulously imagined by *National Geographic*. A poststructural reading points out the urge to redefine the binary of colonizer/colonized binary by *National Geographic*, a movement that helped to identify a new kind of U.S. power. These articles on Cuba and Armenia articulate this new self-imagining, for as Spurr argues, “The writer is the original and ultimate colonizer, conquering the space of consciousness with the exclusionary and divisive structures of representation” (93). During the early twentieth century, *National Geographic* provided compelling rhetorical and discursive arguments necessary for the legitimization of a new political and

economic project for the United States. The *National Geographic Society* is, in this sense, one of the United States' early twentieth century (neo)colonizers.

What then of the audience, of traveling “into the brain” of the reader? In 1984, *Society* president Gil Grosvenor declared that the average member was 43, had 2.2 children, earned \$25,000 a year, was professionally employed, and enjoyed the outdoors (quoted in Abramson 250). *National Geographic* not only imagines its outsiders, but also its own members. I am not *National Geographic's* average reader, but the magazine still speaks to me. I always learn something new when I leaf through a copy, and I enjoy it.

And now we travel into my brain, the brain of the reader, the *critic*. I sought to defamiliarize *National Geographic*, that ubiquitous household institution and powerful national body as well, in order to look at it with fresh eyes, critically, as if it were the first time. I wanted to understand it from an unbiased perspective by using the tools of English and Rhetoric to hone an analysis based closely on the text. I have tried to maintain balance when writing on this topic, as I did not wish to disparage *National Geographic* (I still like the magazine), but rather to reconsider its influence on U.S. consciousness. In addition, I wanted to articulate the academic and social value of looking critically at products of mass-culture, of which *National Geographic* is the epitome. As a critic, I must acknowledge that this analysis of U.S. neocolonialism, drawn from the rhetorical, representative, and discursive practices of the magazine, would probably not have been possible fifty years ago. Most likely it would not have been possible at the time the articles were published. The tools I employed: materialist, poststructural, narratological, deconstructive, and postcolonial readings largely stem from contemporary scholarship and modern considerations. As an early twentieth century

reader, I probably would not have had access to these critical or analytical tools to evaluate the rhetoric of the magazine as prescriptive for a new sort of emerging power of the United States. These analyses of U.S. neocolonialism and the Neocolonial Chimera do indeed become more apparent, more visible in hindsight. In light of the implications of this thesis, however, one inescapable fact remains: the seemingly innocent practice of reading is now complicated.

Until this point, I have largely declined to use the word “bias.” Although *National Geographic* positioned itself (and sells itself) as an unquestionable authority and purely objective magazine, it simply is not. Perhaps its bias is unintended, but the publication is biased nonetheless. It is subject to the perspective of the *Society*, which colors and distorts its proposed objectivity; it is subject to the demand of its members. The sustained and overwhelmingly positive reception of the periodical—over more than a century—signifies the success of the editors in constructing a world that U.S. readers wanted to believe in, and live in. At the beginning of the twentieth century, that world was one of growing U.S. international power in a new form of colonialism that emphasized benevolent economic engagement with the world outside of the United States. In these case studies, *National Geographic* did not confront its readers with arguments that would have troubled them, or threaten their position in the world. In fact, the publication sought to fortify the power of the United States, Americans, and to expand it. This was obviously received well, or at the very least, not overtly objected to, as evidenced by the continued readership and growing membership each year during this time period 1898-1920 (Buxbaum 21).

The reader of *National Geographic* is not just a reader; s/he is also a citizen (and in the early twentieth century, presumably a citizen of the United States). How innocent then, can the reader possibly be? Since each individual reader simultaneously embodies this dual identity (reader *and* citizen), the innocent pleasure of reading—cultural texts in particular—also entails a measure of *civic* responsibility. By reading *National Geographic*, the reader becomes implicated in the institution—as a member s/he purchases the magazine and financially supports the work of the *Society*. Even the most passive of readers still receives the rhetoric, representations, and discourses as imagined by *National Geographic* about the rest of the world. As we have seen, even a single *National Geographic* photograph is capable of delivering strong and salient messages. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the reader received arguments from the magazine that validated the legitimacy of the U.S. neocolonial project. The reader is also a citizen of a democratic society, and thus her/his conceptions of the “world and all that is in it” influences her/his behavior as a voter, investor, tourist, and even neighbor. This fact certainly implicates *National Geographic* in the political, economic, and cultural life of the United States, and its relationships abroad.

In our modern era, *National Geographic* is only a single media source of the myriad that bombard us on a daily basis. The insights gleaned from this analysis indicate that media productions play powerful roles in shaping public opinion and legitimizing certain political positions at the expense of others. It is up to the reader to fully engage with the text as an active and critical thinker, a kind of reader-citizen. When *National Geographic*, or any other publication or cultural text claim that they deliver totalizing, authoritative information, it is the aesthetic, civic, and moral responsibility of the reader

to interact with the text and ask herself/himself what kinds of messages are being delivered. What kind of world is s/he to believe in? It is then up to the reader to ask: is this *truly* “the world and all that is in it?”

### Afterword

As I imagine to be true of any large research project, the final presentation addresses but a few of the many questions that arose during the investigative process. I hope to expand this project as a graduate student in the coming years. One topic that initially interested me was the emergence of the indigenous voice in the pages of *National Geographic*. Although it proved to be out of the scope of this project, I would like to use a narratological framework and theory to trace this textual feature and showcase its development in the publication. I am also interested in the emergence of portraiture, the visual complement to the individual voice of the indigenous peoples that begins to enter into the publication in the 1950s. Another interesting path for an expansion of this project would be to analyze how *National Geographic* imagined the United States itself, and to contrast this with articles on foreign countries. As a casual monthly reader of the magazine, I've noticed a recent tendency to juxtapose the modern and the traditional in articles of nations outside of the United States and Western Europe (i.e. a Geisha in Japan talking on a cell phone, an Argentine gaucho on horseback typing into a laptop). Analyzing how these signs come together and what the image or article suggests, would shed light on how (and why) *National Geographic* imagines global modernity as a hybrid of the past and the present. This last year of research has certainly helped me to develop my literary and theoretical interests, and has laid the foundation for future study. I am grateful for this opportunity.

Photograph Appendix

*The Family of Man*



Photograph 1: "Bechuanaland" (the African Family)  
by Nat Farbman from *The Family of Life*

*The Family of Man*



Photograph 2: "U.S.A." (the American Family)  
By Nina Leen, in *The Family of Man*

*The Family of Man*



Photographs 1 and 2, placed side by side as in *The Family of Man* exhibition

*Colonial Photography in National Geographic*



EVERY DWELLING IN SUMATRA IS ITS OWN BARNYARD

Contrary to the custom, the floor of this porch is made of whole bamboo poles rather than the split pieces. The floors of most of the houses sag in the middle. The roofs are of thatch, made of the leaves of the atap palm.

Photograph 3: The Sumatran Woman

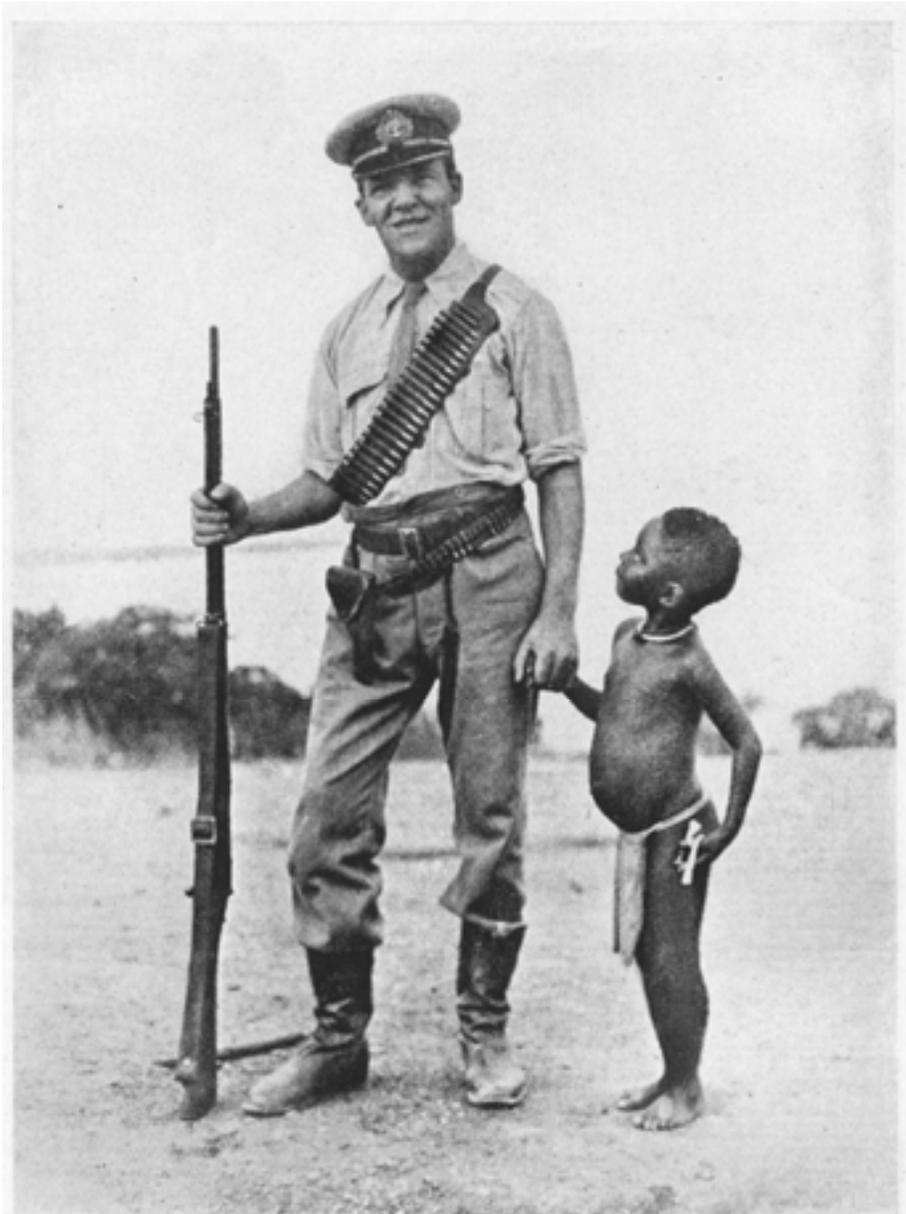
*Colonial Photography in National Geographic*

NATIVE BOYS BRINGING IN BUCKS FOR DINNER

It is a simple matter to step out into the teeming jungles or prairies of Africa and obtain an unlimited supply of game for food. The ordinary diet of the native consists of a manioc or cassava flour made into a paste, and a meat stew concocted of everything, from ants and grasshoppers up to man. Indeed, "food that once talked" is a special delicacy, though indulged in but secretly and rarely nowadays.

Photograph 4

*Colonial Photography in National Geographic*



THE AUTHOR WITH THE EXPEDITION'S MASCOT

When this African pickaninny grows up, he will be decorated with large raised scars on his back and chest to show to what tribe he belongs.

Photograph 5

*Colonial Photography in National Geographic*



JOSEPHINE BREAKFASTING WITH AN OFFICER

This baby chimpanzee was the pet of the expedition. She was quite tame, and romped with the camp's chickens, dogs, goats, and a kitten. She liked to eat with a spoon and cried like a baby if left alone.

Photograph 6

*National Geographic Photography in Cuba*



No. 7. A Street in Habana Before United States Occupation

Photograph 7

*National Geographic Photography in Cuba*



No. 8. The Same Street After Twelve Months of United States Occupation

Photograph 8

*National Geographic Photography in Cuba*



Photograph 9

*National Geographic Photography in Cuba*



ONE OF THE SURLY MEN OF MUGIBOCHI, WIAK ISLAND

In the boxes was the clamour gum which these people collect and which the ship's crew pack up and take on board after it has been paid for in "trade." These people are one of the most dangerous in the whole region to have any dealings with.

Photograph 10

*National Geographic Photography in Armenia*

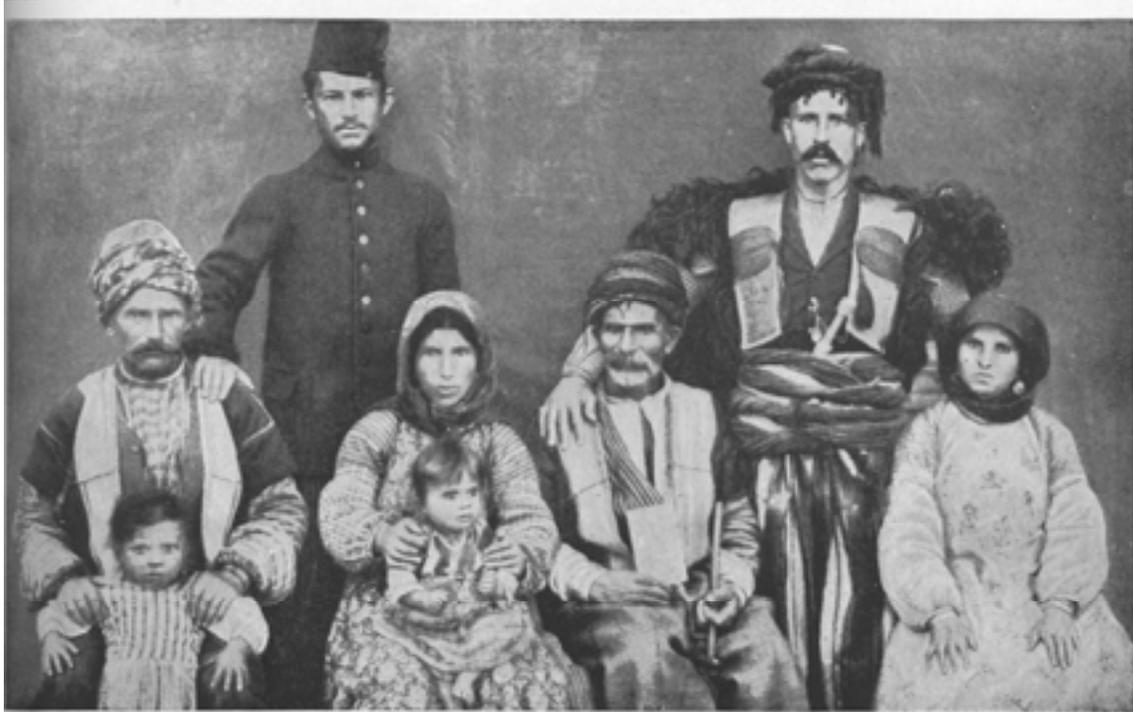


Photo by Stephen Van R. Trowbridge

AN ARMENIAN WOMAN, A MOUNTAIN DWELLER, CARRYING A GREAT LOAD OF  
FIREWOOD DOWN THE ROUGH MOUNTAIN SIDE

The Armenians are the workers of the Near East. Added to a business ability superior to that of the peoples around them, they have, in sharp contrast to their Asiatic neighbors, great capacity for work and well-directed frugality.

Photograph 11

*National Geographic Photography in Armenia*

AN ARMENIAN FAMILY OF VAN

"Their appearance is definitely eastern; swarthy, heavy-haired, black-eyed, with aquiline features, they look more Oriental than Turk, Slav, or Greek. In general type they come closer to the Jews than to any other people, sharing with them the strongly marked features, prominent nose, and near-set eyes, as well as some gestures we think of as characteristically Jewish" (see text, page 334).

Photograph 12

*National Geographic Photography in Armenia*



Photograph by Melville Chater

ARMENIAN CHILDREN WEAVING RUGS IN THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE SHOPS AT  
ERIVAN

One aim of relief-work is to find some way of saving the self-respect of those who have lost all else, and honest labor does more to engender self-respect than does lavish, but misguided, charity.

Photograph 13

*National Geographic Photography in Armenia*



Photo by Ellsworth Huntington

A COMPLETED RAFT OF INFLATED SHEEPSKINS

Photograph 14

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