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Honors Theses

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HONORS THESES

LIBERALISM IN CRISIS: EMPIRE, HOBSON, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY 20TH CENTURY BRITISH POLITICS

Stephen Abrams-Downey

John A. Hobson's 1902 work, *Imperialism: A Study*, is perhaps the most famous and influential critique of empire ever produced in Britain. Hobson's thesis is centered on the concepts of capitalist overproduction and oversaving, which he dubbed "the tap-root of imperialism." Domestic consumption will fail to keep pace as industrial economies become increasing efficient at producing goods. At the same time, greater levels of wealth will come into the hands of a relatively small group of financial elites. These wealthy members of society will only be able to spend a small percentage of this capital and will seek an outlet for the remainder. Imperialism, then, came about from the need to create new markets for these surplus industrial goods and to open new investment opportunities for this surplus capital. Imperial expansion had no economic benefits for the nation at large; indeed the costs of war were a serious drain on public finances. Rather, financiers had manipulated government policy to suit their own narrow interests.

In this paper I have sought to outline the intellectual and political context in which Hobson developed this theory. Today, Hobson is widely remembered for his influence on subsequent Marxist thinkers, and later commentators have spoken of a joint Hobson-Lenin Thesis. However, Hobson was, by no means, a Marxist. Unlike Lenin, Hobson did not view imperialism as an inevitable development in the global capitalist system. Instead he saw it as a perversion of liberal economic principles which stifled free trade and limited growth.

So if Hobson rejected Marxist doctrine, what was his intellectual background? Ultimately, Hobson's thought grew out of a British Liberal tradition and, throughout his career, he considered himself a Cobdenite. In this paper I have considered several trends and events which influenced him, such as Victorian Liberal thought on the Empire, the impact of the Boer War, contemporary British views thought on the imperialism, and the development of the so-called New Liberalism in the Edwardian period. Though Hobson's analysis was, indeed, innovative it only developed within the particular circumstances of his intellectual time and place.

CARL SCHMITT AND THE CRITIQUE OF ROMANTICISM: THE MAKING OF A
POLITICAL THINKER.

Brandon Bloch

My thesis is entitled, “Carl Schmitt and the Critique of Romanticism: The Making of a Political Thinker.” It explores the intellectual formation of the twentieth-century political theorist Carl Schmitt, the leading voice of the intellectual right wing of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. The first of Schmitt’s writings to deal with politics is a 1919 critique of early nineteenth-century Romanticism. Yet Schmitt was not a literary scholar and showed little interest in the Romantics before or after this publication. Why did he become concerned with Romanticism amidst the political chaos following the German defeat in the World War? To explore this question, I looked toward both Schmitt’s intellectual trajectory in the years leading up to 1919 and the broader history of Romantic reception in Germany. I found that Romanticism had been interpreted throughout the nineteenth century as an aesthetic movement that opposed the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Schmitt adopted a quite different perspective, however. Before the war Schmitt was drawn to the German Expressionism, heir to the Romantic call to transcend reason through art. Yet his writings of the 1910s question whether modern art is a true overcoming, or merely the product, of rationalism. In my reading, *Political Romanticism* offers the decisive formulation of the latter argument. Romanticism emerges not as the rejection but as the logical extension of Enlightenment rationalism. By this reading, Schmitt’s book criticizes not only the Romantics themselves, but implicitly, the various lines of Romantic reception in Germany. And this, I argue, is Schmitt’s underlying purpose. He attempts to show that German thinkers erroneously turn to Romanticism as a countermovement to Enlightenment rationalism, which alienates the individual subject from reality. Yet Romanticism only perpetuates this dualism by obscuring the true reality produced by the modern period—the antagonistic reality of the “political,” which emerged clearly in Germany following the war. By turning toward political struggle as an opportunity for meaningful action in the world, *Political Romanticism* predicts the major themes of Schmitt’s subsequent political theory.

PLEDGES AND PLATFORMS, REGARDLESS OF CONSEQUENCES: THE WASHINGTON
PEACE CONFERENCE OF 1861

Stephen Childs

My project examines the dialogue of the Washington Peace Conference of 1861 – the United States’ last earnest interstate effort to avert civil war – to discover how the debates, which lasted throughout February, 1861, can shed light on the immediate and long-range causes of a war some portended was an “impending crisis.” While I rely heavily upon the minutes of the debates, I also incorporate newspaper accounts as well as manuscript collections into the text to enrich my explanation of the positions taken by the 132 delegates from twenty-one states attending the Peace Conference. As I researched further, I began to develop a few correlative theses.

First, without Republican support for the guarantees sought by border-state denizens – namely application of the old Missouri Compromise line to the New Mexico Territory – a compromise could not be brokered. Second, given the tenor of border-state secessionists and that the Deep South had already seceded by February 1, 1861, Republicans had little to gain politically by granting concessions to more moderate “Unionists” – no matter how innocuous these concessions would prove in reality (in nearly thirteen years, slaveholders brought no more than thirty slaves into the New Mexico territory) – and acted rationally and according to their political self-interest by refusing to compromise. Moreover, border-state Unionists at the Peace Conference tended to overstress their states’ intentions to flee the Union in the absence of concessions. While they made plain that any attempt to coerce the Deep South back into the Union would push their states to secede – a warning Republicans failed to heed – Unionists like William C. Rives hoped to garner popular support from among a disunified border-state voting bloc as well as Northern moderates for their inchoate “Unionist” political party by obtaining concessions and brokering peace. To accomplish these ends, Unionists exaggerated reports of conditional unionism in the border-states. Finally, the lack of unity among border-state voters prevented their obtaining guarantees, for as John Tyler, an astute observer of political power relationships, understood, only by seceding prior to Lincoln’s March 4 inauguration and presenting the president with “an array of power” could Virginia and her sister border-states compelled Republicans to negotiate on an equal footing.

MYTH AND OBSESSION: AN ANALYSIS OF POSTWAR CRITICISM
OF *ANTIGONE*, *LES MOUCHES* AND *JEANNE AVEC NOUS* IN FRANCE

Clare Foran

My thesis constitutes a comparative analysis of wartime and postwar criticism of three French plays initially staged between 1940 and 1944 during the German Occupation of France at the time of the Second World War. The plays I have focused my analysis on are *Antigone* by Jean Anouilh, *Les Mouches* by Jean-Paul Sartre and *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel.

In comparing the way in which French critics responded to these three plays both during and after the Occupation, I have found that critics writing in the postwar period emphatically stressed that these plays had been seen as a call to resist the German authorities at the time of their premiere. Yet in making this claim, French critics overlook the fact that none of the plays were described as having been an allegory for resistance in the clandestine *resistant* press during the war. Further contradicting the idea upheld by postwar critics that the plays were uniformly seen as *pro-resistance* during the occupation, members of the pro-German, or collaborationist, press expressed admiration for each of the plays, in turn. In claiming that the plays were written and interpreted in support of resistance during the Occupation, postwar critics also fail to mention that each play was staged during the Occupation only after having first been approved by both the German and Vichy censor.

In all, my thesis indicates a tendency among French critics writing in the postwar period to overlook certain realities about the reception of the plays *Antigone*, *Les Mouches* and *Jeanne Avec Nous* in occupied Paris. This was done to create a narrative of universal, heroic French Resistance. Thus my thesis provides three instances of myth making among the French in the postwar era whereby the French attempted to come to terms with the shame of collaboration by retrospectively building up the idea that a majority of the French had resisted the German authorities. Thus my research demonstrates the intensity of the French national obsession with the memory of the Occupation in the period following the Liberation and continuing until the mid-1970s.

REVOLUTION'S CRITIC: GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, &
AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRATIC REVOLT

David Frankenfeld

Not all revolutions are created equal. The complex relationship between the American and French Revolutions has long posed a significant historical problem. The aftermaths of 1776 and 1789 have often been conflated as

two intimately related events, even as their starker differences have been underemphasized. How were the two reconciled by the people who actually lived through both? From the American perspective, the question has long been studied with special focus on gauging the reactions of such forefront founding titans as Jefferson, Washington, and Hamilton. However, the American with perhaps the most informed and direct perspective may have been their far lesser known colleague, Gouverneur Morris.

From analyzing the extensive collections of correspondence and diary entries left by Morris— particularly those penned while serving as the American minister plenipotentiary in Paris during the height of the French Revolution between 1789 and 1793—a fresh look at his overall intellectual trajectory reveals also an abiding historical truth. Simultaneously a fervent patriot of the American Revolution and a forceful critic of the French revolt, Morris's immediate proximity to the action of the latter allowed him to bear witness to the potential downside and excesses of democratic revolution. Unlike his American compatriots, safely cocooned across the Atlantic and uncritically lauding the new ideals of *Liberté, égalité, et fraternité*, Gouverneur Morris was constantly forced to grapple with the ambiguities that the actual revolution entailed, most memorably its penchant for political violence, which would eventually culminate in the Terror.

While Morris's message of caution did not reach the greater American public, there is evidence that he had substantial influence with American political elites, most importantly President George Washington. However, if his final impact on American foreign policy remains uncertain or ambiguous, it is clear that Morris provided trenchant, at times prophetic, insight on the course of revolutions and the ongoing struggle between old regimes and the rising democratic tide.

THE BOMB AS BABEL: AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION IN EARLY ATOMIC CULTURE

Jared B. Fries

Americans insisted on perceiving their early atomic world through a religious and moral exceptionalist perspective. This thesis explores the role of religious opinions in an era of uncertainty with the introduction of atomic weapons. Catholic and Protestant nuclear-dissenters generally damned the inherent targeting of noncombatants, violating a tradition of just-war theory. Other anti-bomb rhetoric interpreted this new weaponry as further proof of the imminent Biblical Apocalypse because of political ambiguity and the

irrational fear of being attacked. The religious community advocated with the small contingency for world governance and international control of atomic energy, yet their efforts proved futile. Some in the religious community, however, were divided in their opinions, emphasized by the Gallup Poll's statistic that 85% of Americans agreed with President Truman's use of atomic weapons. Religious supporters argued for the nuclear benefits in three main areas: first, atomic bombs tip the balance towards the righteous Americans who are fighting against evil enemies. Second, humankind is reminded of their humility since the bomb is powerful, and, third, even before the strong rise of anti-Communism, atomic capabilities represented a call of religiosity. Embracing the infinite power of the bomb enabled Americans in the early atomic age to succeed where the Tower of Babel failed, as the only thing more powerful than the bomb was the firm belief in God. Whether supportive or critical of atomic weapons, the American religious community's attempt to define morality and increase religiosity in this existential age were thus rational acts as Americans coped with the newfound power, glory, and destruction of the bomb.

RECONSTRUCTING A PAST OR A NATION?: THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION AND THE SOWETO UPRISING

Aaron Ross

My thesis explores the influence of contemporary political exigencies on the formulation of historical narrative by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), specifically in its inquiry into the Soweto uprising of 1976. The crucial finding is that the TRC, established to help shed light upon the dark shadows of South Africa's apartheid past, afforded cursory treatment to the Soweto uprising, arguably the seminal moment in the antiapartheid liberation struggle *and* one of its most controversial episodes.

This failure to engage in an intensive historical inquiry into the Soweto uprising is best understood as a reflection of the TRC's self-conception as a nation-building instrument rather than a mere truth commission. A painstaking investigation of all sides of the Soweto uprising would have threatened to reopen old wounds that had, in the aftermath of the uprising, bitterly divided various constituencies. They had since been largely papered over by the ANC's concerted efforts to recast the uprising as a triumphant tale of the rebirth of South Africa.

Rather than risk disturbing this "founding myth" of the new South Africa,

the commission instead embraced key aspects of the Soweto mythology, positioning itself quite squarely in this instance as a nation-building, as opposed to truth-producing, enterprise.

Having witnessed the still-deplorable conditions in much of Soweto and increasing disenchantment with the current government's perceived inefficiency and corruption, I warn in my conclusion that the ruling African National Congress can no longer expect to rely so heavily on founding myths, like that of the Soweto uprising, to ensure domestic tranquility. The TRC's decision not to grapple with the legacy of the Soweto uprising at the time might have been the right one, but perhaps now, with many of the underlying conditions behind the Soweto uprising (poverty, lack of government services, economic inequality) still plaguing township life, it might be time for a more honest reckoning with that legacy.

BRITAIN'S PROPENSITY FOR PEACE: AN ANALYSIS OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY
AND THE INTERNATIONAL HAGUE PEACE CONFERENCES OF 1899 AND 1907

Christopher Shook

My thesis *Britain's Propensity for Peace: An Analysis of British Foreign Policy and the International Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907* was written as an attempt to incorporate the often disregarded international peace movement into the greater narrative of the origins of the First World War. The build-up to war is typically seen as a linear set of diplomatic, economic and military events that created tensions among the Great Powers that could only be settled by armed conflict. The common perception of the inevitability of the First World War is simplistic as it ignores the earnest attempts of the Great Powers to establish universal peace through international law and armament reduction. The Hague Peace Conferences, whose story has been largely unwritten, counter the proposed inevitability of the outbreak of the First World War. Proposed in 1898 by Tsar Nicholas II, they marked the first global attempts to create a universal peace, inter-governmental institutions, and humanitarian laws. Although the establishment of universal peace was a lofty ambition that ultimately failed, the First Hague Conference in 1899 laid down principles that form the foundation of modern humanitarian law and established the first International Court of Arbitration to prevent the outbreak of conflicts, while the Second Hague Conference of 1907 served as foundation for liberal internationalist institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations.

My project discusses the incorporation of the principles of the peace movement into Britain's foreign policy between 1899 and 1909 as an attempt to concurrently involve Britain politically with the European continent and divert funds from the Royal Navy to social reforms. In order to analyse Britain's role at the Hague Conferences I spent six weeks going through hundreds of governmental documents, legal documents, conference transcripts, private papers, leaflets, letters and dossiers at the National Archives of the United Kingdom.

Through my research I developed an alternative chronology of the origins of the First World War. During the 19th century, Britain was often believed to be categorically opposed to international law, but in fact Great Britain came to embrace international law as the best means to cement the balance of power. Britain used the First Hague Conference to end its period of isolationism as it demonstrated Britain's willingness to involve itself with continental politics and alliances. The British delegation provided the impetus for the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which still convenes at The Hague in the form of the International Court of Justice. At the Second Conference, the British government opportunistically viewed the proceedings as an opportunity to establish arms limitations to divert funds from the Royal Navy to finance promised social reforms. Great Britain's readiness to reduce the capacity of the Royal Navy counters the narrative of the origins of the Great War. I also assessed the change in domestic perception of peace in Great Britain. While the First Hague Conference had been largely ignored, by the Second Conference growing pacifist movements had incited widespread public interest.

The Hague Conferences failed to introduce binding arms limitations upon the Great Powers and prevent the outbreak of war, but they nonetheless demonstrated the need to establish an effective inter-governmental institution to maintain global peace. In an increasingly multi-polar world, the need for effective international institutions and laws has greatly increased and the Hague Conferences serve as a reminder of the perils should countries not cooperate.

ALLIES WHO DISAGREED: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 'ALLIANCE' BETWEEN
PENNSYLVANIA AND VIRGINIA DELEGATES TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL
CONVENTION OF 1787

Jake Singer

In the eleven days before the Constitutional Convention of 1787 began in Philadelphia, delegates from Pennsylvania and Virginia met and devised the “Virginia Plan,” a series of proposals for the government that would be created to replace the Articles of Confederation. Referring to this period, Richard Beeman (a history professor at the University of Pennsylvania) wrote in his book *Plain, Honest Men*, “The eleven-day period between May 14 and May 25 formed a bond not only between the delegations of the country’s two most powerful and populous states but, equally important, among some of the most active and intellectually gifted delegates who would participate in the Convention.”

My research focused on analyzing this claim: was there actually a bond between these delegations, or was the cooperation between them more limited, or even non-existent, than Professor Beeman let on? I examined the major delegates’ philosophies and statements during the debates of the Convention regarding four major topics: the national legislature, the presidency, slavery and a bill of rights. The analysis of the national legislature, or Congress, included an examination of the questions of compromising on proportional representation, the method of selection of Congressmen, and whether Congress would have the power to negate state laws. The discussion of the executive included the issues of whether to create a unitary or plural executive, how to elect this “president,” whether to include term lengths or limits on the president, and whether he would have the power to veto laws.

Ultimately, I concluded that there was no such bond between the Pennsylvania and Virginia delegations at the Constitutional Convention. While a few delegates did ally with one another on issues, there was no spirit of cooperation between all, or even most, of these delegates, especially as George Mason and Edmund Randolph of Virginia became increasingly frustrated with the direction of the Convention to the point that they chose not to sign the document.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF A LATE MEDIEVAL SEIGNEURY:
LOUIS II DE LA TRÉMOILLE AND THE *CHÂTELLENIE* OF THOUARS

Eric Smith

My project sought to explore the economic and political development of a noble estate in Western France during the late 15th century. Given the catastrophes that France and the rest of Europe faced in the 14th and early 15th centuries- plague, sustained warfare, famine- I wanted to understand

how many communities were able to effect significant economic recovery by the end of the 15th century. I was also very interested in the social and political dimensions of this late medieval crisis and of the subsequent revival—for example, the massive mortality of the 14th and 15th centuries made labor a relatively scarce commodity, giving peasants and vassals increased leverage for negotiation. As a result, many 14th and 15th century lords saw their economic and political prerogatives challenged and their revenues significantly decreased.

To understand the mechanisms that produced these economic and political developments, I chose to study one particular region: the *châtellenie* of Thouars. This choice of region offered several unique advantages. First, there are unusually detailed economic records for the *châtellenie* from the 15th century that are held at the Archives Nationales in Paris. Second, Thouars went through dramatic political changes in the second half of the 15th century. Studying the Thouarsais economy in changing political contexts therefore allowed me to better understand the relationship between and relative importance of endogenous economic growth and conscious administrative reform.

After compiling the data from 15th century account books I concluded that endogenous economic growth was clearly an important factor, although political developments played a more important role in defining the course of economic development in Thouars in the second half of the 15th century. Lax seigneurial management from 1462 to the early 1480s while Thouars was part of the royal domain corresponded to a period of economic stagnation on most fronts. However, in the mid 1480s Louis II de la Trémoille inherited this estate, and quickly set about enacting administrative reforms that ushered in rapid economic development. More broadly, while Thouars clearly presents a unique case, some of the general insights and especially the particular mechanisms of administrative reform employed by La Trémoille and his agents can help us better understand economic revival in the latter part of the 15th century.