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Once More unto the Heights: Race, Class and Conflict in America

By Solon Simmons, Assistant Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, ssimmon5@gmu.edu

According to the myth, in the late summer of 1862, President Lincoln faced a dire challenge. His valiant effort to preserve the union was stymied by the forces of white Southern resistance in Northern Virginia. His strategic position was deteriorating as the European powers began to lose faith in the viability of the Northern cause, and it was broadly whispered that the British were on the verge of recognizing the Confederate States of America, thereby emboldening the separatists and validating in law and customs the divisions that had taken hold on the field of battle. Lincoln needed a



Sunken Road at Fredericksburg. Photo taken on May 2, 1863 during the 2nd Battle of Fredericksburg. Photo: National Park Service.

demonstration of power written in blood and iron that would help him to close the action of the first act of the larger drama of American freedom and open another. After three bloody days along the banks of Antietam Creek, Lincoln proclaimed on September 22 of that fateful year that if rebels did not cease in their efforts to divide the

country, all slaves held in those southern territories would be freed—which is of course just what happened.

As in many of the efforts that marked the progress of the great status reversion that began with this moment of transvaluation in race relations, a moment of tenuous triumph was followed in quick succession with a tragic reversal of fortune born of strategic obtuseness. The tactical stalemate of Antietam was followed by the strategic disaster of the Battle of Fredericksburg. As anyone who has visited that haunting battlefield will know, the centerpiece of the disaster for the forces of freedom came as General Ambrose

Commentary

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Reflections: A Dual Degree Program in Malta

By Jessica Lohmann, S-CAR M.S. Alumna, jslohmann23@gmail.com

network

While it seems like just yesterday, it has been nine months since the eleven students from the inaugural cohort of the dual Master's degree program run jointly by S-CAR and the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC) have stepped foot in a Maltese classroom and seven months since we submitted our theses.

When we first set foot into our classroom in Valletta, Malta, it was apparent that the diversity of our small class was high. We all had different backgrounds, but over the next nine months we became a close-knit family. We came from America, Canada, Japan, and Malta. We studied government, international relations, sociology, psychology, and a plethora of languages. We worked in the private sector, with NGOs, at the Maltese Prime Minister's Office, and the US State Department. Our combined credentials reached far and wide and allowed for an enriching academic experience.

In the nine months since we were last together, our experiences have only continued to grow. Our geographical diversity has widened as we are now spread between the US, Canada, Malta, France, Turkey, and Austria. In seven short months, my classmates have already obtained amazing opportunities that include: working in the Maltese Diplomatic Corps; helping to create a home textile company from the ground up; obtaining an appointment as a US Presidential Management Fellow; gaining mediation certifications; researching topics that



Taken at The Pub in Valletta. (clockwise from front left): Brian Farrell, Michael Sheppard, Natalie Zarb, Stephen Pinkstaff, Tom McGrath, Kyoko Jjo, Jessica Lohmann, Ylenia Caruna, Andre Vella). Photo: Jessica Lohmann.

include the use of social media in the Arab Spring, how religion and stereotypes affect conflict, and refugee issues in Turkey.

Many of us don't see our time in Malta as an end to academia; instead, it aroused new interests that can only be subdued with further research and education. This shouldn't come as much of a surprise given that 11 of us were crazy enough to tackle two Master's degrees in just over a year. Many would like to obtain PhDs, and others are looking to further their understanding of conflict resolution in specific areas such as theology or law.

We have come a long way since we were thrown together with strangers in a foreign land to study conflict resolution. Countless hours spent at cafes writing essays, preparing presentations and debating Galtung, Burton, and Volkan have come and gone. Picking our professors brains over a pint at the pub after the end of another demanding module is no longer our bi-weekly routine.

Equipped with theories, knowledge, and reflective practice we now enter a new and exciting chapter in our lives. We are all on our way to becoming successful conflict resolution practitioners in a number of different fields. I don't know exactly what the future holds for the inaugural Malta class, but if the last nine months are any indication, I can't wait to see what my classmates achieve in the years to come! ■



Taken on Merchant Street in Valletta. In picture (from left to right): Jessica Lohman, Suzan Tugberk, Michael Sheppard, Natalie Zarb, Stephen Pinkstaff. Photo: Mark Goodale.

S-CAR Students Tackle Independent Research

By Brydin Banning, S-CAR Director of Undergraduate Student Services, bbanning@gmu.edu

When you say "research" to most undergraduate students studying the social sciences, they usually react in one of two ways: 1) They assume research is limited to hard science, with experiments being conducted in laboratories with elaborate machinery and/or white mice and therefore doesn't concern them, or 2) they understand the concept of research in these fields but grimace with fear. However, S-CAR's undergraduate program boasts three women who shatter these stereotypes. Catherine Dines, Krystal Thomas, and Gabriella Porcaro have all voluntarily developed research projects related to their coursework in the Conflict Analysis and Resolution major and have each received funding to support their research through the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program (URSP), sponsored by the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research (OSCAR).

Catherine Dines, a senior from the Buffalo, NY metropolitan area, discovered a gap in the services provided by the United States for deaf refugees in comparison to the EU programs for this population. She learned about the situation while studying abroad at Oxford her junior year. From her experience working for nonprofits, she understands the importance of statistical data and its impact on funding and, therefore, developed a proposal, with the help of her mentor Dr. Patricia Maulden, to conduct research to fill the knowledge gap on deaf refugees.

Award Announcement!



The School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution is proud to announce that Craig M. Zelizer, PhD Alumnus from the class of 2004, is the recipient of a George Mason University Distinguished Alumni Award. Dr. Zelizer is Associate Director of the Conflict Resolution M.A. Program in the Department of Government at Georgetown University. His areas of expertise include working with youth from violent conflict regions, civil society development and capacity building

in transitional societies, program evaluation and design, working on conflict sensitivity and mainstreaming across development sectors, the connection between trauma and conflict, and arts and peacebuilding.

Dr. Zelizer was a cofounder and is a senior partner in the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to building peace through innovation and practice. In addition to his work with ACT, he has worked for several international organizations including the International Research and Exchanges Board and the U.S. Institute of Peace, and received a number of fellowships and awards, including serving as a Fulbright Junior Scholar in Hungary for two years and a National Security Education Program Fellow in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is the cofounder of the Peace and Collaborative Development Network, a leading online platform connecting more than 23,000 organizations and professionals around the world. He received a BA from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and an MA in sociology from Central European University.

Junior Krystal Thomas draws from her personal experiences growing up as one of the few minorities in Charles Town, WV as she explores interpersonal conflict that occurs when an individual feels disconnected with societal expectations for his or her identity group. Krystal, who is working with Dr. Leslie Dwyer, is interviewing black women about their experiences with race and identity with the hopes of expanding the social perception of what it means to be a black woman today.

Gabriella Porcaro is using her role on campus as a Resident Advisor to develop her research regarding nonviolent communication on college campuses. A junior from Warwick, RI, Gabriella initially became interested in preventing violence in high school and has furthered her knowledge about the subject through coursework on multiculturalism and identities. After Arthur Romano, her professor for CONF 330: Community, Group, and Organizational Conflict Analysis and Resolution, saw her interest in the topic, he suggested applying for the URSP to conduct research to create a training program on preventative nonviolent communication.

All three students have experienced challenges in conducting their research, from narrowing the scope of the project to securing buy-in from participants to just being able to communicate with their subjects. Their journeys, however, have been overwhelmingly positive. When asked what advice they would give students considering research projects, their resounding collective response was, "Go for it!" With the support of their faculty members and the community of scholars created by the URSP, Catherine, Krystal, and Gabriella all presented at the Third Annual Undergraduate Research Conference on Thursday, April 19 on the Fairfax campus, and they plan to continue their research. We look forward to these three women continuing the tradition of scholarly inquiry at S-CAR while proving that research isn't such a scary prospect after all. ■

Book Announcement!

Edited by Christopher R. Mitchell and Landon E. Hancock including contributions from Yves-Renee Jennings, Wallace Warfield, Catalina Rojas, Mery Rodriguez, and Irakli Kakabadze.



Local Peacebuilding and National Peace

Interaction Between Grassroots and Elite Processes

Edited by Christopher R. Mitchell and Landon E. Hancock

initiatives

Global Problematique Symposium

By Bardia Mehrabian, S-CAR M.S. Student, bmehrabi@gmu.edu

EVENTS

With an elective titled *Global Governance and Complex Problem-Solving in the Post-9/11 World*, one would be crazy not to sign up for it as a Master's student at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Of course, after receiving the syllabus from Dr. Dennis Sandole, the course instructor, and seeing a 15-20 book reading list, one might need to be slightly unhinged (like myself) to actually take it. That said, Dr. Dennis Sandole makes a compelling case as to why he created this S-CAR course. It was a course born out of events that took place in the last decade, and an article from the July 9, 2008 issue of *The Economist*. Sandole made the case that the current infrastructure for "global management" is incapable of handling the problems of the 21st century. These new century problems - dubbed the Global Problematique

cause to the global community.

This is what led a few peers and me to form a Global Problematique Working Group within S-CAR with the explicit objective of addressing systemic global problems.

As a group, we organized and held a symposium on April 12, 2012 to introduce the DC academic and professional community to Global Problematique as a beginning for dialogue on the subject and to cultivate interest. The symposium consisted of a panel of speakers who discussed the current status of the Global Problematique and current actions in place to address it. This was followed by roundtable discussions, including panel speakers, network professionals, academics, and others, to allow for a collective thinking process on the Global Problematique.

The event generated excitement among panelists and attendees to engage in further discussion on this issue. Interestingly, the panelists themselves, each with a great deal of experience in their respective fields, had the opportunity to meet with each other, and realized that they are engaged in projects with similar objectives, despite the differences in their backgrounds and disciplines. This shed light on how little professionals mingle with one another across different fields, which may hinder comprehensive and innovative strategies to address major global problems. The symposium demonstrated that even a small group of dedicated students can elicit change, simply by bringing the right people together.

I can safely say that the Global Problematique Symposium did achieve this objective, and as such, it was a success! ■



From Left to Right: Dr. Dennis Sandole, Jorge Roldan, Dr. Sekou Toure, Donya Maria Twyman, and Emira Woods. Photo: S-CAR.

- include global warming, pandemics, deforestation, poverty, overpopulation, WMD proliferation, resource scarcity, terrorism, and many global systemic problems not confined by borders or sector. Twentieth century Westphalian institutions and discourse are rendered obsolete in handling these complex, interconnected, cross-border problems. Unilateralism need not apply.

And yet, from the first decade of our century until now, the United States continues to engage in a unilateralist foreign policy in tackling these issues, which has proven to be woefully inefficient. A decade of war has caused an entire generation of global youth to become traumatized by war, a severe global financial downturn, and interest and resources to be squandered on "threats" that are miniscule compared to what severe climate change and food insecurity can

S-CAR Community Events

[Why Social Groups Split: A Hamas-Fatah Case Study](#)

Arlington Campus, Founders 118,
04/26/2012

[Center for Peacemaking Practice Lunch Discussion: Creating a Community of Practice](#)

Arlington Campus, Truland 555, 05/03/2012

<http://scar.gmu.edu/events-roster>

By Jay Filipi, S-CAR M.S. Student, jfilipi@gmu.edu

On April 2, 2012, former President Bill Clinton stated that the "tragedy" of the killing of Trayvon Martin should cause a re-thinking of the 'Stand Your Ground' law.¹ On the other side, the NRA, whose 2005 lobbying campaign got the law passed, initially supports the law in its current state, stating that it is "still a good law".² Proponents of the stand your ground law suggest that its repeal would begin a slippery slope to the end of gun rights.³ Clearly, the killing of Trayvon Martin has exposed a perennial American conflict around the second amendment:

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

On the right in America, this issue is about security and liberty. Owning a gun provides protection that the state is unable to provide against criminals. Citizens owning guns also reduces the state's monopoly over the means of violence - and the means of defending liberty. This is an understandable position if you hold the premise that all criminals own guns, or if you remember the asymmetric violence the state is able to produce.

Liberals tend to argue that the constitutional amendment is, indeed, sacred, however there are limitations to this. First, increasing the number of guns and gun owners sets off a spiral of escalating conflict. They may also point to statistics on gun use in cases of domestic violence,⁴ or psychological studies that show carrying a gun makes you believe others are also carrying.⁵ Largely, the liberal argument looks at particular cases and seeks to reform existing laws with arguments based on the ambiguity of the amendment in order to protect innocents.

Whether the goal is to enhance or limit the second amendment, they are both aimed at protection of self and other, as a means to promote liberty in America. Unfortunately, both tactics fail to assess the reason why Americans resort to violence when feeling insecure or threatened. Gun violence is a symptom of a larger social process of alienation. Therefore, emphasis on gun laws is a misdirection when it comes to the promotion of liberty and security, as it is impossible to "combat alienation with alienated forms."⁶ Guns and gun laws are neither the problem nor the solution, rather it is mistrust of an alienated and marginalized 'Other' (a process that sometimes manifests as racism), and the solution is solidarity with the other, and building an American community that is whole.

Let us take a moment to reflect on something. Trayvon Martin is dead. We cannot change this, however with solidarity we can prevent this from happening again. ■



Ideals that helped to inspire the Second Amendment in part are symbolized by the minutemen. Photo: Aldaron, Flickr.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Jake Tapper (April 2, 2012). "President Clinton Hopes Trayvon Martin Case Leads to Reappraisal of 'Stand Your Ground' Laws." ABC News. <http://ow.ly/an2Df>
- ² Amanda J. Crawford (March 30, 2012). "Trayvon Killing Stalls Stand Your Ground Laws." BloombergBusinessWeek. <http://ow.ly/an4la>
- ³ A. Trullinger (March 30, 2012). "Who Does the 'Stand Your Ground' Law Really Protect?" Opposing Views. <http://ow.ly/an40w>
- ⁴ "Facts on Firearms and Domestic Violence." Violence Policy Center. <http://ow.ly/an4m5>
- ⁵ Malcolm Ritter (March 20, 2012). "Holding a gun may make you think others are, too." MSNBC. <http://ow.ly/an4vg>
- ⁶ See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*. (New York: Zone Books, 1999): 122

Selected S-CAR Media Appearances

When diplomatic opportunities were dismissed
Michael Shank, S-CAR Ph.D. Candidate, US Vice President, Institute for Economics and Peace
Financial Times, 04/11/2012

Building Bridges Between Two Communities
Marc Gopin, James H. Laue Professor of World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, Director, Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University
National Iranian American Council (NIAC), 04/05/2012

Science of unintended consequences
Dr. Dennis Sandole, Professor of Conflict Resolution and International Relations
Financial Times, 03/13/2012

<http://scar.gmu.edu/media>

press

Edi Jurkovic, S-CAR M.S. Student

By Catherine Ammen, S-CAR M.S. Alumna, Knowledge Management Associate, cammen@gmu.edu



Edi Jurkovic Photo: E. Jurkovic

Edi Jurkovic, an S-CAR Master's student and John Burton Librarian, brings a new perspective to his classes after spending his career serving in the military in former Yugoslavia, the Army of the Republic of Srpska, and finally in the Armed Forces of Bosnia Herzegovina - when the armies merged after the

war. Edi grew up in Bosnia, but has lived and traveled all over the Balkans and much of Europe during his military tenure. Due to his previous experience and background in conflict situations, Edi is interested in understanding conflict and how to prevent it.

Edi is particularly interested in improving civilian-military cooperation. He has trained

civilians, senior military staff, as well as young officers who will be deployed in peacekeeping missions all over the world. One of the difficulties Jurkovic has found in his work is that civilians are reluctant to work with the military, but he believes it is necessary to find common ground on ways to cooperate, such that neither group loses their integrity, or compromises the goal of the military missions.

Edi was a teenager during the Yugoslav Wars, and could not understand how the war could become so violent in such a short period of time, and how parties could become so polarized almost overnight. He wants to better understand the process behind this kind of polarization, especially as related to what he refers to as the 'artificial' changing of history by conflict parties.

Edi can often be found in the John Burton library between classes, piecing together computers, and sharing his delicious home-made meals with colleagues. He met his wife Melissa on a ski trip in the Balkans, and the happy couple were married last November in Virginia where they currently reside. Included in the wedding for guests were cookbooks of their favorite recipes. As Edi has demonstrated in the library, the love of food brings people together. ■

Alex Cromwell, S-CAR M.S. Student

By Yasmina Mrabet, S-CAR Newsletter Editor, ymrabet@gmu.edu

Alex Cromwell is a graduating Master's student at S-CAR, as well as Director of Operations at the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution (CRDC). Alex grew up in a church focused on bringing peace to the world, a background that sparked his interest in conflict resolution. As an undergrad, he studied psychology, with plans of becoming a counselor. It was while applying to graduate programs in this area that he discovered a degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution was possible. He immediately shifted gears, and with a strong interest in international conflict, especially in the Middle East region, he began his studies at S-CAR.

Alex has particularly enjoyed his work with CRDC, where he has had the chance to work on the overseas classes that it runs. "I had the opportunity to travel to Israel and Palestine with 30 other students in January of this year," Alex said, "and it changed my life." From his time at S-CAR, Alex has gained insight into the complexity that multiple narratives and layers bring to each conflict. He has also developed an understanding of the nuances that are involved in long-term peacebuilding efforts, particularly when dealing with polarized societies.

When he graduates, Alex plans to continue



Alex Cromwell. Photo: A. Cromwell.

working with CRDC, and he looks forward to taking on new projects and responsibilities. Alex is also a musician and enjoys working with youth - he hopes to incorporate music and youth empowerment into his work in the conflict resolution field. ■

Once More unto the Heights: Race, Class and Conflict in America

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Burnside sent one brigade after another of foolhardy veterans up the slopes of a steep and impossibly fortified hill called Marye's Heights. On the surrounding property of what is now the residence of the President of Mary Washington University, thousands of union soldiers would fall in that field like ripe crops before a thresher. The general cause was good, but the specific plan was a desperate failure. Marye's Heights should now be seen as an axial moment in the cause of global solidarity and ethnoracial reconciliation, but it should also be recognized as the strategic blunder it was. I see it as the master metaphor for understanding the vicissitudes of racial conflict in America.

Now I would like to shift the conversation from the distant past to the onrushing present. This spring I had the luxury of checking out of the American news cycle for a couple of weeks while teaching in Malta about identity and conflict. I took the opportunity to detoxify from the vitriol that characterizes our public sphere, with greater salience in election years. Coming back into the conversation I was shocked to find how escalated the debate about the death of Trayvon Martin had become in my absence. As in many similar incidents in the aftermath of the "Reagan revolution" of neo-conservative principles, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and other important African American

leaders were charging up the hill with fierce urgency to demonstrate just how unjust our system remains with respect to race subordination. It is not difficult to see how one of the fruits of the civil rights struggle is a criminal justice system that lionizes cruelty in pursuit of abstract security. The language I heard was hot and visceral and it was difficult not to be swept along in its wake. After several weeks of mostly calm reflection, augmented by several exhibits of what might understandably be labeled white backlash (John Derbyshire's "The Talk: Nonblack version" stands out here), I now feel the moment is ripe to provide a theoretical perspective on this most

recent episode of racial conflict that helps to explain what we are doing when we talk about race in America. It is important that we begin asking ourselves why it is that we always talk past one another while at the same time sacrificing the efforts of good people in a struggle for racial justice that is poorly grounded in a plausible discursive strategy.

To extend the analogy, the way we talk about race is to send another brigade up Marye's Heights where we should instead fight on other ground. As difficult as it is to accept, the forces of reaction (even members of this host who fail to see themselves in this light) occupy the discursive high ground. Desperate as it is to long run civil society, to attempt to take the remaining entrenchments of racial intolerance by direct assault will be extraordinarily costly. The twilight struggle against racial intolerance and eurosupremacy will continue in this world even as we leave it, but if we are to leave it well, it will be because we also paid close attention to seemingly old fashioned ideas.

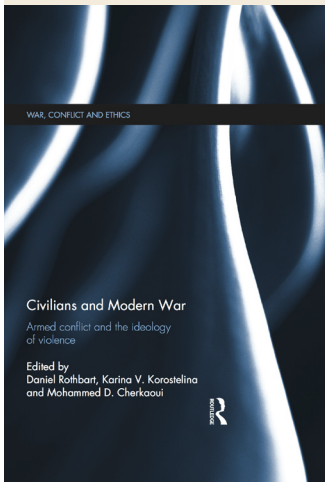
Progressives often struggle as part of what are called new social movements which focus on the abuses of power that orbit issues of identity. They are fighting the last war. The new energy is in the area of the old social movements and the revolutions, which took as their objects unequal opportunity structures and oppressive state systems as their respective objects. Respect for women, the LGBTQ, people of color and the disabled has developed at a shocking pace over my relatively short lifetime, but at the same time we have seen an erosion of the moral economy—which is the reason that I am lucky enough to be writing to you today—around the world. Members of the birth cohorts that follow mine will find it more difficult to get a quality education and a good job than I did, and only the most successful of them can ever look forward to the kinds of savings that will lead to an end of life lived with the dignity of independent means. As we have admirably focused on dividing the middle class pie more equitably, cynical forces have made sure to capitalize on the opportunity to shrink the middle of the pie. President Lyndon Johnson famously quipped after he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that he had lost the South for a generation. What he did not anticipate was that those southerners would be clever enough (as they always have been) to ensure that he had buried the American Left for the next three. Having lost the resource of the more cunning Southern mind in the arena of politics, the Democratic Party has yet to realize how tragic its lack of strategic generalship has become.

My argument in brief is that the big fight for racial justice (and for other forms of ascriptive equality) in the twenty-first century will be won, if it is to be won, on the plains of rhetoric equality—economic equality conceived in universalistic and de-racialized language—through an anti-exploitation framing, not an anti-supremacy framing. Convincing demoralized and desperate white folk that they are subtle bigots in the era after Obama will simply be too difficult, and as long as the unwitting heirs of the white South can meet the forces of progress on a ground of their choosing, i.e.

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Book Announcement!

Edited by Daniel Rothbart, Karina V. Korostelina and Mohammed D. Cherkaoui including contributions from Neta Oren, Richard Rubenstein, Susan Hirsch, Andrea Bartoli, and Tetsushi Ogata.



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in debates about culture that employ the tropes of diversity and inclusion, they can gleefully anticipate a stalemate at the mythical Rappahannock River that has characterized our conversation since about 1978.

My advice (which I realize is provocative) to those who would transform the bitter conflict around race in America to adopt an older idiom that disentangles the rhetoric of race and class—to de-Katrina our debate if you will—thereby building an emboldened coalition of progressive forces that can carry a majority sufficiently large to enable legislation to pass the Senate. Senators Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and John Cornyn of Texas and their allies have fortified the high ground of our national conversation with metaphorical cannons of freedom talk behind the stone wall of neoliberal ideology. An appeal to cultural tolerance, though helpful in many cases, will not be sufficient to reconquer the perennial Virginia of the American imaginary. Culture war is the wrong ground on which to fight. The beloved community will only arise through another round of the American version of class politics—one that clings fiercely to the imagery of free enterprise, equal opportunity (not equal outcomes) and fair competition. The great status reversion begun in the 1860s has not taken its final course toward the end of history, but the question before us is, do we have the courage not to try once again to take the hill? ■



UNIVERSITY 3351 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 4D3, Arlington, VA 22201

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