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Place, Identity, and Urban Culture: Odesa and New Orleans

Edited by Samuel C. Ramer and Blair A. Ruble



OCCASIONAL PAPER #301

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Washington, D.C.

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The English language spelling of Odessa derives from transliterating the Russian spelling. The spelling of the name in Ukrainian is Odesa. Here and throughout the text effort has been made to use both spellings, as appropriate. For references to the city prior to 1991, the spelling "Odessa" is used. References after 1991 use the spelling "Odesa."

Meditations on Urban Identity: Odessa/Odesa and New Orleans

Samuel C. Ramer, Associate Professor of History, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA

I
The present collection of papers grew out of a panel titled “New Orleans and Odesa: Multicultural Centers That Care Never Quite Forgot,” originally presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) in November 2007.¹ The immediate occasion for such a comparative panel was the fact that the conference was held in New Orleans, so recently damaged by Hurricane Katrina. But the project of comparing the two cities has a longer history. As early as 2003 the panel organizer, Blair Ruble, initiated discussions among scholars in the United States and Ukraine with the goal of holding a scholarly conference comparing the cultures and historical development of the two cities. Plans for this broader conference were put on hold following Katrina, but the convening of the AAASS in New Orleans made a comparative panel involving New Orleans seem only appropriate.

The reasons why comparing both the histories and the urban identities of Odesa and New Orleans might be interesting are readily apparent.² Even the most cursory comparison of the two cities suggests remarkable parallels in their identities and overall historical experience. Both trace their modern foundation to the 18th century (New Orleans to 1718, Odesa to 1794). Both are located on the southern perimeter of their respective countries. Both are ports that grew rapidly in the 19th century, becoming thriving commercial and cultural centers as well as the third- or fourth-largest city in their respective countries. Finally, the central areas of the two cities display striking similarities in their layout and general appearance. Both were initially laid out on a gridlike pattern, and the architecture that dominated their central spaces impressed travelers as distinctly “European.”

The parallels between the two cities can be multiplied almost indefinitely. Because of their

locations and the peculiar nature of their growth, both cities have populations that are unusually diverse in religious, ethnic, and national terms. Almost from the outset New Orleans included a mixture of French, Spanish, Africans (free people of color as well as slaves), and Native Americans; the 19th century brought waves of German, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants.³ Within Odesa one encountered Russians, Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Italians, Turks, Armenians, and a host of other nationalities. Such an extraordinary mixture of ethnic, religious, and national groups remains a defining feature of the identities of both cities.

The composition, performance, and enjoyment of music has occupied an unusually prominent place in the cultural life of each city. Since the beginning of the 20th century, at least, jazz has not simply dominated New Orleans but become the city’s foremost cultural contribution to the world. Odesa is better known for training great classical music performers, but it has its own early jazz tradition (as well as a contemporary jazz festival), and associating the city with music has become almost reflexive. Both cities have histories as important literary centers as well. In addition to nurturing impressive numbers of talented writers, Odesa and New Orleans are cities that are central sites in a host of literary works as well as musical compositions.

New Orleans and Odesa also share the possession of darker legacies. Both partook of the cultures of slavery and serfdom. New Orleans was at the center of the internal slave trade in the United States, serving as the marketplace for slaves brought from the Chesapeake region to be sold for labor in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi.⁴ New Orleans and Odesa were both scenes of significant violence between races or ethnic groups. Most notorious in this regard are the riots and lynchings targeting African Americans as well as Italian immigrants that oc-

curred in New Orleans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries,⁵ on the one hand, and the murderous anti-Jewish pogroms that took place in Odessa in 1871, 1881, and 1905.⁶ Disease was a constant threat to human life in both cities during the 19th century. Yellow fever, cholera, and malaria flourished in New Orleans' semi-tropical climate, while Odessa experienced repeated outbreaks of plague, cholera, typhus, and malaria. Both cities endured military occupations at some point (New Orleans by the Union army during the Civil War, Odessa by Rumanian and German troops during the Second World War). Both cities were rightly renowned for their traditions of political corruption. Finally, in recent times both cities have endured upheavals that tested the fabric of their existence. In New Orleans, the disastrous flooding following Hurricane Katrina brought the very survival of the city into question. In Odesa, the economic depression and political upheaval that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union posed an equivalent if less visibly destructive challenge to most residents throughout the 1990s.

Cataloging comparable traits and developments in this fashion should not obscure the important differences in the larger political cultures of which the two cities have been a part. Odessa, however unique as an urban center, nonetheless functioned within the highly centralized political framework of the Russian Empire, and later the Soviet Union. New Orleans, however idiosyncratic, was part of the freer and more decentralized environment of the French and Spanish empires, and later of the United States. While such differences in this broader political environment are not the focus of the articles in the present collection, they are an important reality that no comparison of the two cities should overlook.

II

With the exception of Blair Ruble's concluding remarks, the papers in the present collection are not in themselves comparative. They are unified, however, by their central concern with the problem of identity, whether that of an entire city or that of individual constituent groups within a city. The very title of Brian Horowitz's paper—"How Jewish Was Odessa?"—is quite explicit in this respect. Professor Horowitz's

paper explores the debates that occurred within the Jewish community of Odessa during the late 19th century over what place Jews and their community should assume in the larger urban culture and the empire as a whole. His immediate subject is the Odessa branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia. This organization embraced the secular vision of Jewish integration advanced by the Haskalah (the "Jewish Enlightenment"). This conception placed particular emphasis on the importance of secular education and the acquisition of the Russian language in enabling Jews to assume significant secular roles in the broader society. This secular, acculturated vision of Jewish identity was one that had enjoyed broad support within the Odessa Jewish community during much of second half of the 19th century. But the pogroms of 1871 and 1881 and the rise of Jewish nationalism and Zionism posed a serious internal challenge to this integrationist vision. Professor Horowitz traces the persistent efforts toward secularization made by the Odessa branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia and argues that the Odessa members' strategy of "small deeds" bore much greater fruit than the existing historiography has generally acknowledged.

In her paper "How Ukrainian Is Odesa? From *Odessa* to *Odesa*" Patricia Herlihy, the doyenne of Western historians of Odessa, examines the problem of that city's overall identity from a quite different perspective. Historically, the culture, language, and general self-identification of much of Odessa have been Russian. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the city suddenly found itself one of the most important urban centers in the newly independent state of Ukraine. What impact, Professor Herlihy asks, should Ukrainian independence have on the older, predominantly Russian cultural patterns in Odesa itself? Should Ukrainian gradually displace Russian as the official and everyday language of the city, but only as the gradual result of the population's free choices? Or should the government of Ukraine take measures to expedite the shift to Ukrainian? As in so many other places, the politics of language become central to the city's overall perception of itself.

Looking beyond language, what impact will Ukrainian independence have on the domi-

nant historical narrative of Odesa's past? As Professor Herlihy's paper illustrates, attempts in 2007 to erect a new statue honoring Catherine the Great, the city's founder, elicited vigorous protests from Cossacks and Ukrainians who regard Catherine chiefly as a ruler who brought serfdom and suffering to their ancestors. Yet no single vision commands universal support within an Odessa population whose various elements nourish quite different notions of their own cultural identity. Such a contested historical memory, like the problem of language in a community where several languages are in potential competition, is hardly unique to Odesa or Ukraine. Professor Herlihy's paper provides a fascinating account of the complexity of this issue as it is actually being discussed and mediated.

In her paper "How American Is New Orleans? What The Founding Era Has to Tell Us," Emily Clark concedes that New Orleans has entered the broader American consciousness as a place that is "different," "other," and in this regard not fully American. However, she argues, this vision of New Orleans as "exceptional," outside the mainstream of the country's political and cultural development from its very origins, is one that cannot be justified by an informed reading of the historical record not only of New Orleans but of the rest of the United States. Professor Clark thus advances a spirited revisionist argument that the very traditions often cited as unique to New Orleans are in fact part and parcel of the experience of most of the country, and thus quintessentially American.

If New Orleans' actual historical experience is in fact closely aligned with that of most of the other American colonies and early states, why have assumptions about its exceptional character become almost axiomatic? Professor Clark offers two answers to this question. First, she argues that the various efforts to achieve a more unified sense of national identity during the early 19th century emphasized the country's British and northern European legacy as normative, thereby relegating Louisiana, like the Southwest, to the periphery of Americans' national experience. Equally important, in her view, has been the way in which generations of New Orleans and Louisiana politicians and entrepreneurs have embraced this "exceptionalist" definition of their communities in an effort to

promote their own economic development, and particularly the tourist trade.

Professor Clark's argument challenges the profound conviction many have that New Orleans itself is a city whose history and overall character are quite exceptional in the context of the United States. Some of the argument here may lie in confusion over just what the term *exceptional* means. (Does it refer only to the dominant atmosphere of a city, or does it encompass its formative experience and essence?) But at another level, Professor Clark reminds us that even our most intuitive beliefs about the sources of our own reality need to be examined in the light of an informed reading of the past: it is all too easy to project our current cultural assumptions on earlier historical eras.

Blair Ruble's concluding essay is both a commentary on the other papers and an extended meditation, on the evidence presented by New Orleans and Odesa, of what it is that distinguishes the concepts of "urban" and "urbane." If one believes, as he does, that New Orleans and Odesa are not simply "urban" but "urbane," what are the dimensions of the two cities' urban life that qualify them as such? The immense diversity of their respective populations has certainly contributed to this urbane atmosphere. But "urbanity," he insists, derives "from the interaction of place and diversity, rather than from diversity alone." What, then, produces this urbanity?

The urbane environment that Dr. Ruble prizes demands that a city provide protected spaces in which diverse elements of its population can meet and interact with one another. In his words, it requires "societal interstices in which folks of many hues can live side by side without devouring one another." In accounting for the urbanity of New Orleans and Odesa, he places particular emphasis on the "moral skepticism and tolerance for the various ambiguities and peccadilloes of life" that he regards as characteristic of both cities. Such moral skepticism and tolerance, he argues, are attitudes that are indispensable to the peaceable workings of a diverse society. In a new century in which the urbanity and toleration that he cherishes are under attack across the globe, Dr. Ruble urges that the older, urbane traditions that he perceives in New Orleans and Odesa should be held up as models for a humane future.

III

In contemplating the essays in the present collection, I have found myself puzzled, time and again, by the following question: What is it about cities such as New Orleans and Odesa that causes both residents and outsiders to regard them as “special”? The word “special” here is not intended to describe some innate developmental quality, the kind of *Sonderweg* (“special path”) Emily Clark denies to New Orleans, but rather the peculiar affection these cities inspire both within their residents and among visitors and outsiders. What are the sources of this “special” status?

Perceptions of what is “special” or what is “ordinary” are of course highly subjective, and we need not expect unanimity in such judgments. But some cities enjoy a greater popular claim on such evaluations than others. Here I take it as a given that throughout much of their histories, both New Orleans and Odesa have inspired this perception of distinctiveness and, more generally, of being enviable places to live. Given the host of negative factors that could be marshaled against such an evaluation, how can we account for it?

Physical beauty, I would argue, is at least the beginning of an answer. Natives and visitors alike base their judgments of any city in part on the visual impression that the city makes. Such an impression derives in part from a city’s natural setting: its topography, its climate, its foliage, and its relationship to adjacent bodies of water (for New Orleans, the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain; for Odesa, the Black Sea). Equally important are the design and color palette of the city’s architecture, coupled with the layout of the streets. All of these factors in combination produce an impression of beauty, or fail to do so.⁷

The very factors that contribute to beauty also condition our sense of the ease with which one can live in a given city. But such ease of living also derives from our sense that a particular urban space is organized on a human scale that fosters movement and human contact. Both New Orleans and Odesa have historic centers that invite residents and visitors alike to walk, to encounter others, to feel a part of the larger urban community. The lush green of their trees and parks, the brightness of their flowers, and the pastels of their buildings all tend to enhance

this kind of contact and exchange. If one adds plentiful access to food and drink, the reasons why both cities have a reputation for being “easy” are readily understandable.⁸

But the beauty and pleasantness implied here only form the stage on which the life of the city takes place. They enhance the quality of that life in the eyes of participants, but they are not the life in itself. To produce this life, cities rely on different combinations of political institutions and traditions, economic activity, cultural productions, and social festivities. Historically, the economies of New Orleans and Odesa alike relied heavily on their identity as ports. But the dynamism of their urban life relied as well on the many commercial activities, cultural offerings, and festivals that were part of the natural rhythm of life. Both cities partook in their own ways of a Mediterranean atmosphere that observers have perceived as distinct from the predominant atmosphere in most of the other great cities of their respective countries.

Almost all commentators remark upon the vital contribution that ethnic, national, and religious diversity has made to the quality of life in New Orleans and Odesa. Given the tensions and violence that so often accompany this diversity, we might ask just what the advantages of such diversity actually are. The first is the extent to which this diversity both allows for and compels an awareness of cultural “others.” Such awareness does not guarantee peaceful relations, as so many cases of ethnic conflict between close neighbors illustrate, but it makes it much more difficult to see these “others” as less than human beings.

Diversity by its very nature also tends to make everyday life more varied, more colorful, less predictable, and therefore more “interesting.” But diversity carries other advantages as well. In a city with multiple ethnic groups and numerous foreigners (as is the case with New Orleans and Odesa), the minority status of any single group may be less palpably felt by its members. To foreign nationals, the presence of varied cultures reduces the degree to which such individuals may be excluded entirely from the city’s life. As one French citizen living in New Orleans said, “I like New Orleans because I never feel myself to be a foreigner here.”

But a distinctive appearance and way of life are not the only factors that make the two

cities seem “special” to residents and visitors. Cities also possess a general ambience that derives not simply from their external appearance or even from their everyday life, but also from their residents’ consciousness of a shared historical space. Except for times of acute and violent confrontation, the conflicts between diverse groups within a city do not prevent them from nourishing a common, mythologized perception of the city’s overall identity. This mythology, which is distinct from yet bound to a combination of the actual existing features of urban life, is indispensable in sustaining a city’s sense of its identity as a place not simply different from others but, in vital ways, preferable to them.

Such a distinctive sense of urban identity, where it exists, tends to enhance its residents’ sense of their own personal identity. The logic here is simple: “My life may be difficult in other ways, but I live in this special place that is enviable in the eyes of others. Yes, this place may have endured tragedy in the past, but it was not a wilderness: important dramas with major repercussions in our own time took place here. This city, in short, is significant, and by extension, I am also significant.” In this fashion, a mythologized sense of history confers an attractive layer of personal identity upon all who happen to live within the city’s bounds.

Such a belief in a given city’s distinctiveness is codified and given its most forceful expression in a variety of literary, artistic, and musical works. Such productions reinforce existing myths of distinctiveness while at the same time giving them new shape and vitality. Blair Ruble’s review of the role that literature and the arts have played in defining and nourishing a sense of urban identity in New Orleans and Odessa speaks directly to this.⁹ Isaac Babel writes his various stories about Odessa and Odessa life. These stories—including their very titles—create an Odessa that is a unique, special place.¹⁰ Babel is quite explicit about Odessa’s special character, the very “aroma of Odessa”:

So I am biased, I admit it. Maybe I’m even extremely biased, but *parole d’honneur*, there is something to this place! And this something can be sensed by a person with mettle who agrees that life is sad, monotonous—this is all very true—but still, *quand même*

et malgré tout, it is exceedingly, exceedingly interesting.¹¹

In the same fashion, Sergei Eisenstein’s film of the *Potemkin* mutiny immortalized Odessa’s “Potemkin steps,” and forever transformed the way that residents as well as outsiders see the steps (and by extension, their history and their city). Tennessee Williams saw a real streetcar headed toward a real neighborhood with the name “Desire.” In writing *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he inadvertently altered forever the image that residents and outsiders alike have not simply of the streetcar, but of New Orleans itself.

Let us turn, then, to these papers that Brian Horowitz, Patricia Herlihy, Emily Clark, and Blair Ruble have crafted with such care. Given the complexity of the problems these authors address and the richness of their insights, one can only imagine what a full-blown conference on Odessa and New Orleans might yield!

ENDNOTES

1. The original panel included a paper by Marline Otte of Tulane University on the unprecedented role volunteers have played in rebuilding New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. Professor Otte preferred not to include her paper in the present collection on the grounds that it did not fit well into the collection’s predominantly comparative framework. Emily Clark, a specialist on 17th- and 18th-century Louisiana, also of Tulane University, graciously agreed to write an article on New Orleans that would parallel the contributions on Odessa made by Patricia Herlihy and Brian Horowitz.
2. In writing the present introduction, I have relied heavily on the following works: Patricia Herlihy, *Odessa: A History, 1794–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); essays by Patricia Herlihy (“Odessa Memories”) and Oleg Gubar and Alexander Rozenboim (“Daily Life in Odessa”) in Nicolas V. Iljine, ed., *Odessa Memories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985); Frederick W. Skinner, “Trends in Planning Practices: The Building of Odessa, 1794–1917,”

- in Michael F. Hamm, ed., *The City in Russian History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), 139–159; Frederick W. Skinner, “Odessa and the Problem of Urban Modernization,” in Michael F. Hamm, ed., *The City in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 209–248; Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule* (Iași, Romania: Oxford, England; Portland, OR: Center for Romanian Studies, 1998); Roshanna P. Sylvester, *Tales of Old Odessa: Crime and Civility in a City of Thieves* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Maurice Friedberg, *How Things Were Done in Odessa: Cultural and Intellectual Pursuits in a Soviet City* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991). My impressions of Odessa, which I have never visited, also derive from conversations I have had with the many natives of Odessa who have been close friends in New Orleans for three decades. I am grateful to Todd Michney for his many substantive as well as bibliographical suggestions concerning the history of New Orleans. My thoughts on life in New Orleans obviously owe something to the almost four decades that I have lived in the city.
3. On the complex issue of African and Creole identity in New Orleans, see the various essays in Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).
 4. See Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
 5. On civic violence in New Orleans, see James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); James G. Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre: The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); and William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).
 6. On pogroms, both in Odessa and more broadly, see John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), particularly Robert Weinberg, “The Pogrom of 1905 in Odessa: A Case Study,” 248–289; Stephen M. Berk, *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope: Russian Jewry and the Pogroms of 1881–1882* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); and Irwin Michael Aronson, *Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991).
 7. For Odessa, see in particular Patricia Herlihy, “Commerce and Architecture in Odessa in Late Imperial Russia,” in William Craft Brumfield, Boris V. Anan’ich, and Yuri A. Petrov, eds., *Commerce in Russian Urban Culture, 1861–1914* (Washington, DC, and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center and Johns Hopkins University Presses, 2001), 180–194. The literature on New Orleans architecture is too extensive to cite in the present article. For a fascinating analysis of one area of the city, see S. Frederick Starr, *Southern Comfort: The Garden District of New Orleans*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).
 8. Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 2nd ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003); Craig E. Colton, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); and Richard Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics before the Storm* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006).
 9. For recent works in this vein about New Orleans, see Barbara Eckstein, *Sustaining New Orleans: Literature, Local Memory, and the Fate of a City* (London: Routledge, 2005);

Richard S. Kennedy, ed., *Literary New Orleans in the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Richard S. Kennedy, *Literary New Orleans: Essays and Meditations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); S. Frederick Starr, *New Orleans Unmasked: Being a Wagwit's Sketches of a Singular American City* (New Orleans: Editions Dedeaux, 1985); and Andrei Codrescu, *New*

Orleans, Mon Amour: Twenty Years of Writings from the City (Algonquin, 2006).
10. See, for example, "Odessa," "The Aroma of Odessa," and "How Things Were Done In Odessa," in *The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel*, Nathalie Babel, ed., Peter Constantine, trans., Cynthia Ozick, intro. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 71–75, 76–78, 146–154.
11. *Ibid.*, 73.

How Jewish was Odessa?

The Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment as an Innovative Agent of an Alternative Jewish Politics.

Brian Horowitz, Director of German and Slavic Studies, Professor of Russian and Chair of Jewish Studies, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA¹

In the reform period during the reign of Alexander II, Jewish institutional life in Odessa pivoted around the local branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia.² The incumbent view of the branch is that it was unsuccessful because it met resistance from Orthodox Jewry and the government. Initiatives in education, cultural activities, and philanthropy in the 1860s and 70s rested on hopes that there was support for change in Jewish, but of equal importance, Russian society. These hopes were not realized.

However, the situation changed in the 1880s and in the following two decades. Although scholarship on turn-of-the-century Odessa during this period has concentrated on the rise of nationalism, in particular Zionism, in fact the philanthropic and educational activity in the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment should hold our attention.³ The Odessa branch was quick to respond to change and capable increasing resources to aid a community in need. Efforts in philanthropy and educational reform centered upon new ideas of civic participation that, while not uncommon in late tsarist Russia, brought effective results.

A study of the Odessa branch of the Society shows that by seeking gradual improvement in real lives, the branch members provided a model for Jewish philanthropists in St. Petersburg and other centers.⁴ In the 1890s, the St. Petersburg center of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment followed Odessa's lead, increasing expenditures on education.⁵ Furthermore, the success of the Odessa leadership was confirmed when in the first decade of the twentieth century the older members of the society were able to repel an attack from young Zionists and nationalists by

convincingly arguing in favor of a compromise between integration and Jewish identity.

By looking at the Odessa branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment from 1867–1903, one can gain new perspectives on the centrality of Odessa as an engine of change in Jewish life during and after the 1880s. The branch's activity in organizing members and resources for improving the lives of the city's Jews can ultimately be construed as an alternative politics. The branch's members did not contact the government as an intercessor (*shtadlan*), who by the 1880s was perceived as ineffectual and even collaborationist, or seek separatism either in Zionism or another nationalist ideology, which was viewed as hopelessly unrealistic for a small minority in a huge empire. Furthermore, the branch's bourgeois leaders rejected Bundist socialism and radicalism of all kinds. Instead, by fostering pragmatic action the branch was able to offer leadership that provided at one and the same time a path to integration (as much as that was possible) and some of the benefits of the new nationalist political orientation, such as reliance on independent Jewish effort alone.

* * *

The Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment was established in St. Petersburg in 1863 by the country's wealthiest Jews, who devoted themselves to philanthropy, giving direct aid to individuals, especially Jewish university students.⁶ Located far from the Pale of Settlement and the heart of Jewish life, the Petersburg grandees wanted to gain a foothold in the south. Therefore, in 1867 the leadership granted the request of a group of Odessa intellectuals to

become part of the society. The St. Petersburg leaders even offered the branch one-eighth of the society's total budget for their use. Although established by members of the elite, principally Abraham Brodsky and Odessa's rabbi, Shimon Aryeh Shwabacher, the branch soon came under the control of young intellectuals, who were imbued with the spirit of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) and had more spare time than the wealthy Shtadlonim (Jewish intercessors with the government) to spend on concrete civic initiatives.

Ideologically the Haskalah still dominated the Jewish landscape in Russia in the 1860s, with its program of the full integration of Jews into Russian society, the dissemination of secular knowledge in modern schools, and Jewish political emancipation. Although traditional Jews viewed the Haskalah as dangerous to the unity of the Jewish people, the *maskilim* (advocates of the Haskalah) believed that only by reforming the Jewish community's structure and changing its goals could Jews improve their lot in Russia. Thus, the *maskilim* criticized the irrationality and injustice of religious authorities, but these modernizers were still proud of the achievements of the Jewish people and wanted to contribute to the health of the community in the present.⁷

The intellectuals in control of the Society in Odessa adopted the radical position of advocating full-scale Russification. Lev Pinsker, Emanuel Soloveichik, I. Tarnovsky, and Reuven Kulisher, for example, supported the publication of a Russian translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Tanach), explaining, "As long as we do not use Russian to teach our children religion, as long as Jews are forced to turn to foreign languages to study everything that concerns their religion and customs—as is the case now—the *Russification* of the Jews will be merely a pretty phrase without any fundamental content." (emphasis in the original)⁸ The intellectuals' desire to disseminate a Russian version of the Hebrew Bible among Russia's Jews was motivated by the view that such translations had contributed to the political success of Western European Jews who were able to speak the language of the country in which they lived.

The intellectuals undoubtedly believed that the translation would promote more than Russification—perhaps also a relaxation in the practice of the religious rituals, which they

claimed contributed to the separation of Jews from their neighbors. In Germany, after all, linguistic assimilation had spurred religious reform and encouraged Jews to modify their own rites and even imitate some Christian practices.⁹ In fact, the Odessa Jewish community had already installed a "reform" synagogue, and had hired a German-educated rabbi to lead the congregation.¹⁰

Arranging for the sale of an existing translation or gaining permission for a new translation was no simple matter. Lev Mandel'shtam, the head of the imperial government's Jewish school program, had published a Russian translation of the Tanach in Germany in 1862, but government religious censors had banned its importation and sale.¹¹ The Holy Synod argued that until a Russian Orthodox translation appeared, it could not allow the publication of a "Jewish" translation, suspecting that the Jews might use it to convert Russians to Judaism.¹² Apparently, fear of *Judaizers*, however remote in reality, was real and alive among the state's religious authorities.¹³

Although Mandel'shtam's translation was published in Russia in 1872, the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment could not recoup its outlay with sales.¹⁴ This financial failure did not necessarily reflect a lack of interest in learning the Russian language, since the use of Russian among Jews was on the rise. However, it seemed to show that Russian Jews made a distinction between religious and secular texts. When the younger generation studied Russian, it apparently preferred texts devoted to economics, politics, mathematics, and natural history.

The members of the Odessa branch also desired to do something about the lack of opportunities for young people to gain a secular education. The branch's members faced a situation in which there were only two options, the traditional heder, which was unacceptable to the *maskilim*, and the secular government schools for Jews created in the early 1840s, which were unpopular and even considered by some to have the goal of converting Jews to Christianity. Borrowing ideas from progressive Russian educators, the branch's members tried to promote an alternative, taking up vocational and literacy schools for both children and adults.¹⁵ However, because the branch's leaders could

not get government permission to create permanent schools, they decided to open courses “wherever and whenever they were needed.”¹⁶ In time, however, the government discovered this evasion of the law and demanded compliance; the courses were closed.¹⁷ In 1870, branch members suggested reforming heder (traditional religious schools) to make them places where students could acquire both religious and secular knowledge. Soon enough, however, the leaders discovered that the heder could not easily be transformed. Parents who sent their sons to a heder did not, in most cases, want to send them to a school. This fact contradicted one of the cardinal beliefs of the intellectuals that once parents understood what a school could offer, they would turn their backs on the heder.¹⁸

On May 27, 1871, a major pogrom took place in Odessa. Steven Zipperstein summarized the result: “Within four days, 6 people were killed and 21 wounded, and 863 houses and 552 businesses were damaged or destroyed. Not a single street or square in the Jewish neighborhoods was left untouched, according to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, and thousands were rendered homeless. The damages came to 1.5 million rubles, twice as much as would be caused by Odessa’s 1881 pogrom.”¹⁹

As a result of the pogrom, the Odessa branch decided to close. In a letter of May 7, 1872, to the St. Petersburg board, Soloveichik asked permission to liquidate the branch and transfer the remaining funds to the local chapter of the Society for the Promotion of Crafts and Practical Knowledge in Odessa, an organization devoted to training Jews in handicrafts that was known in Russian as Trud.

Invited to St. Petersburg for an “emergency meeting,” Emanuel Soloveichik informed the St. Petersburg board that the Odessa branch would agree to continue its work, but only on the condition that they be allowed to “strive for the improvement of elementary education received by the poor.” “But for this,” he argued, “[the branch] would have to be better funded and made less dependent on the fluctuations in the annual contributions [provided] by the small number of members in Odessa.”²⁰ Since Petersburg was unwilling to make such a financial commitment, the Odessa branch temporarily closed.

Although the members had not achieved a great deal, one may consider the establish-

ment of the branch itself as its greatest success. Odessa’s intelligentsia fashioned an institution to help the Jewish community to modernize. But this capacity was only of potential benefit, rather than of use in the present.²¹ The great hopes to transform Jewry through education had led nowhere. Certainly it did not help that the branch had an inadequate budget (less than 1,500 rubles annually). Nonetheless, one should not view it as a marginal institution.²² In fact, the branch enlisted the help of the Brodsky and Poliakov families, the wealthiest Jews of the city, who helped cover the chronic budget deficits. Moreover, in its ideology and activities, the branch was probably representative of popular attitudes. In the 1860s, Jews in the city understood the need for change, education, and even Russification, but they were guarded, unsure of the government’s intentions and fearful of mass assimilation.

* * *

In 1878, Menashe Morgulis, an intellectual and civic leader, proposed reopening the branch, explaining that in Odessa one could find many poor students who needed help paying for tuition, books, clothes, and food. Describing how he had started a fund to aid these students and had collected money from 120 individuals, Morgulis announced his intention to revitalize the branch on the basis of this core group of donors. While the St. Petersburg board agreed to renew the branch’s membership in the society, it no longer felt obligated to share resources because the branch was “occupying itself with philanthropy” rather than engaging in activities that “would aid all of Russia’s Jews.”²³

Morgulis had become convinced of the effectiveness of “small deeds” that improved the lives of concrete individuals. In the mid-1870s, he became the director of Trud. With Morgulis’s help, Trud revitalized a defunct trade school in Odessa, where Jewish boys and girls also received instruction in general subjects.²⁴ Around 300 students were enrolled. It seems paradoxical that Morgulis, previously a vocal critic of philanthropy, now became its advocate, and the St. Petersburg board, previously in favor of philanthropy, now became a critic. However, in the decade since the Odessa branch had closed, many things had changed.

As a result of the “May Laws,” streams of immigrants had begun to arrive from those areas where decrees had forced Jewish families out of the countryside.²⁵ Odessa’s famed economic opportunities attracted the newcomers, who soon overwhelmed the city’s ability to provide social services for them. One journalist, for example, described a situation in which the number of students who sought entrance to schools far exceeded capacity. The result was that “hundreds of children walk the streets without any possibility of becoming literate.”²⁶

The branch acted quickly to meet the increased need for basic services. In the early 1880s, when the St. Petersburg center fell into stagnation, the branch leaders began to facilitate elementary education and provide financial aid directly to students and their families.²⁷ Odessa’s leaders reacted better to the situation in the 1880s than their counterparts in St. Petersburg because psychologically the pogroms of 1881–82 had a less debilitating effect on them; they had already recovered from paralysis after 1871.

In 1884, the branch’s expenditures on education more than quadrupled, to 21 percent of the budget. They grew another 10 percent in the following year before topping off at 51 percent in 1889. This permitted subsidies for five schools in 1887, and seven in 1888. Unfortunately, the budget did not completely meet the ever-expanding needs of Odessa’s Jewish poor; the branch’s budget for 1890 was only 10,000 rubles. Nevertheless, the shift in priorities is revealing.²⁸

The members of the branch also decided to help provide vocational training for adults, thereby remedying their lack of employment skills. By 1893, Odessa’s Jewish civic elite had organized four schools devoted to training craft workers of both genders and paid the salary of a seamstress who taught a class at all the schools.²⁹

The branch’s leaders took particular pride in the elementary school in Peresyp, the poorest section of the city. In 1889 there were 125 students attending this school, 90 percent of them enrolled free of charge. The school offered a three-year course of study, the equivalent of the two-year curriculum at a Russian gymnasium, with courses in French, German, arithmetic, and history.³⁰ In addition, it had a craft studio,

and provided additional instruction in woodwork and agriculture. Since one of the goals was to create fluent speakers of Russian, instruction in the language included singing, which was supposed to help students perfect their pronunciation. Several hours a week were devoted to physical education, an entirely new phenomenon. The price of running the school was high, 9,974 rubles per year, but costs were offset by a generous donation from G. E. Veinshtein, a rich engineer-industrialist.³¹

Menashe Morgulis’s singular role as the Odessa branch’s inspiration can be understood as reflecting changes that had brought intellectuals to dominate institutional life in the city. As a result of the abrogation of the *kahals* (community self-government) in 1844, the government had become dependent on local Jewish representatives for advice regarding the collection and distribution of taxes and the organization of communal institutions.³² Although the government turned to the wealthy notables, their numbers were limited, and they were often too busy to serve. Therefore, the Jewish intelligentsia was enlisted. Mikhail Polishchuk, the author of a fine book on Jewish institutions in Odessa, describes the intelligentsia’s growing political influence in the second half of the 19th century:

In Odessa the *maskilim* already shared power in the communal organizations and participated in the city administration with the Russian elite. Their field of activity constantly grew: in 1860, they composed fully half of one committee that served as a mediator between the [Jewish] communal and local [Russian] administration. In 1870, B. Bertenson was elected to the position of official for Jewish affairs in the City Duma. In 1873, E. Soloveichk was elected as a member of the City Administration (*gorodskaiia uprava*), where Jewish questions were addressed. In 1874, ten *maskilim*, among them seven doctors..., two inspectors and a single scholar were elected to the council of representatives of the Jewish community, i.e., “the Council of One Hundred.” In 1879, three *maskilim* [Jewish autodidacts] and eight members of the [Jewish] intelligentsia were invited to a meeting on the question of the so-called Jewish taxes, and served in

the advisory councils of the orphanage and Talmud Torah school.³³

Since Jewish intellectuals already had experience in running the city's Jewish institutions, they could effectively expand their reach in the 1880s. Moreover, in contrast to the 1860s, when the maskilim took pains to draw the attention of the public to their activities in order to gain legitimacy as community leaders, by the end of the 1870s the intellectuals already enjoyed considerable authority. Moreover, in contrast to earlier times, when they pursued projects that appeared marginal, they were now entirely mainstream, easily taking leadership positions and devoting themselves to building institutions quietly and effectively.

What was especially unique in Odessa was the branch's positive relationship with the city's heder. Instead of the usual antagonism, there was cooperation. When there were calls to close heder in Odessa as a health measure in the mid-1880s, the branch agreed to regulate them, thus defusing the government's demands.³⁴ Furthermore, in 1886 OPE leaders approached local officials with a petition for a "softening of measures against *melameds*," the heder teachers.³⁵ In fact, the branch engaged two of its members to collect information about the city's 80 heder and their 3,000 students. Finally, when the government closed the heder in the early 1890s, the branch's leaders opened two schools to meet the needs of the displaced students.³⁶

According to Morgulis, the branch was supplying more than just the needs of the city, but those of the whole southwestern region as well, since many of the students came from nearby areas. He maintained that these schools "serve the interests of all Russian Jewry," because educators from all across Russia came to Odessa to get acquainted with the latest methods in vocational education.³⁷

The population's need for modern education continued to hold the branch's attention. In particular, vocational training was viewed as an essential service, given the socio-economic profile of the immigrants. Nonetheless, the goal was still to integrate Jews by modifying their behavior, educating them in modern schools, and inculcating a secular way of life. Despite a spate of conversions to Russian Orthodoxy during the 1880s, primarily for

opportunistic reasons, little thought was given to the dangers of integration, to the idea that a weakened Jewish identity might contribute to a breakdown in the Jewish collective and ultimately lead to mass assimilation. The primary difference with the 1860s, however, was in the attitude toward the government. Now, in the 1890s, the branch did not expect help from that quarter, conceiving instead ways to bypass it in order to achieve the goal of aiding the city's and, indeed, the region's Jewish population.

* * *

The vitality of the Odessa branch can be seen in its strong activity in the late 1890s and the early years of the 20th century. In 1902, there were 1,241 paid members. The budget was 31,258 rubles, and the work was divided among five committees: the Historical-Literary Committee, the Adult Education Committee, the Committee to Help Poor Students at the University of New Russia, the Finance Committee, and the School Pedagogical Committee.³⁸ The branch provided subsidies to 36 different schools and to 705 students.³⁹

Although the branch was more successful than it had ever been in terms of schools subsidized, teachers who had received pedagogical training, and students served, in the late 1890s the pro-integrationist ideology came under attack by the younger generation. In 1900, trying to stave off a civil war within the branch, Morgulis and another leader, Jacob Saker, agreed to a series of meetings to air differences.⁴⁰ Although the two groups met for more than a year, by 1902 open struggle was breaking out at the branch meetings over the curriculum of modern Jewish schools.⁴¹

Challenging the ideology of integration, the "nationalists" (as they described themselves), whose leaders included Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginzburg), Ben Ami (Mordechai Rabinovich), Meir Dizengoff, Yehoshua Ravnitzky, and Simon Dubnov, launched an attack on the branch's leadership ostensibly on account of the number of hours of Jewish and secular subjects taught in schools subsidized by the branch. The nationalists wanted a school that inspired national values, one with more hours of Hebrew and fewer of Russian; anything less would

amount to yielding to assimilation. Their petition read:

It is even more unnatural to recognize a school that teaches its pupils in the spirit of another nationality. Alienated from their native group and artificially assimilated to the foreign environment that has dominated their education, pupils of such schools suffer a moral dichotomy. Later they make up that morally undefined element in society, which everywhere turns out deracinated and unstable.⁴²

According to the nationalists, the proper school should propagate a strong Jewish identity. The school must not be occupied with vocational training or instruction in Russian, but should teach courses in Hebrew, Torah, and Jewish history, since these subjects instill national feeling. In addition, the school could do this best when these subjects were presented not merely as bare facts, but integrated into life, “linking the Jewish present with its past.”⁴³ The nationalists were adamant that at least 12 of 30 hours in the week should be devoted to Jewish subjects and that Hebrew should serve as the primary focus of the curriculum, so as to spur an interest in the “customs, way of life, and literary creativity of the Jewish people.”⁴⁴

Responding to the nationalists, the branch’s leadership justified the decision to limit Jewish courses by claiming a responsibility to ensure that Jewish children could make a living in difficult times. Specifically, Morgulis explained that the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment provided funds to three professional schools for girls, which offered two or three hours of Jewish studies, and five boys’ schools with five hours of Jewish content weekly. Vocational training took up the vast majority of class time. Justifying the allocation of time, Morgulis claimed that “from a pragmatic point of view the board maintains that a Jewish elementary school must give its pupils instruments for the difficult struggle of survival, and from this viewpoint, we do not find it possible to diminish the teaching of such subjects as Russian grammar, writing, mathematics, and so on.”⁴⁵

This pro-integrationist program was meant address the difficulties of Jewish life in post-1882 Russia. The leaders were convinced that the road

to survival of the individual Jew lay through economic well-being facilitated by having a secular education and vocational skills. Prosperity, it was felt, inoculated Jews against conversion to Christianity.⁴⁶ Weighing the risks of losing Jews to assimilation caused by a lack of knowledge about Jewish culture or losing them because of economic deprivation, the branch leaders believed that poverty was the greater danger.

The actual vote in Odessa went against the nationalists.⁴⁷ The result showed that the majority of members of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment in Odessa in 1902 favored integration. But the vote was not the last word. The battled raged on in the city for more than a decade.⁴⁸

* * *

It is worth drawing attention to the absence of a specific Jewish content in the kind of philanthropy that was practiced and which became vilified in Zionist historiography as “assimilationist,” and its representatives as “assimilators.” It is easy to see how the branch’s attempts to improve people’s lives paralleled activities pursued by Russian social activists of the period generally: the creation and expansion of elementary schooling, job training for adults, and the establishment of institutions to help alleviate poverty. At the same time, I maintain that this philanthropy actually provided the experience for and the ideological basis of Jewish self-administration that flowered in Odessa and was later adopted, paradoxically, by Zionists in Eretz Israel. About Morgulis’s activities in the 1880s, Eli Lederhandler has written:

The answer Morgulis offered was not auto-emancipation in the Zionist sense of the term which [Leon] Pinsker was to use four years later. But his solution was something closely akin to auto-emancipation, which he identified as a restoration of coordinated leadership on a national level, a rebuilding of political community. Only this—not temporary local philanthropy nor even civic equality—had any hope of actually changing the circumstances of Russian-Jewish life.⁴⁹

I agree with Lederhandler, who correctly noted that positive expectations were awakened

by social activism that started in the 1860s and flourished in the 1880s. This activism verged on, but did not fully become, pressure politics. Nonetheless, it helped foster civil society, develop a new Jewish leadership, and, most of all, allow Jews to dream of controlling their own fate rather than merely responding to new crises. In this sense, the Odessa branch's activity had a strong Jewish dimension, helping to energize the Jewish community and providing a plan for its social recovery.

Although leaders such as Menashe Morgulis may have been cold to political Zionism and Jewish nationalism, in their activities they concretely improved the lives of many Jews, dealing with them not merely as the underprivileged, but as Jews with specific problems attributable to their Jewish status. It is easy to see that this social activism and institution building actually paved the way for post-enlightenment Jewish politics. In its activity the branch may not fit the paradigm of Jewish Odessa, since it was neither Zionist nor "assimilationist," not purely cosmopolitan, and certainly not hostile to Jewish identity. The branch's politics of the possible through self-reliance and creative solutions was viewed, as I mentioned, as a model for an effective alternative to religious piety, political radicalism, *Shtadlanut*-style intercession, and the unrealistic promises of Jewish nationalism. For these reasons, the local branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment made Odessa a dynamic center of Jewish institutional life in the Russian Empire.⁵⁰

ENDNOTES

1. I want to thank Steven Zipperstein for his suggestions and advice and Blair Ruble and Sam Ramer for inviting me to participate in this group of essays.
2. In his book, *The Jews of Odessa* (1985) and in several articles, Steven Zipperstein and John Klier have studied the significance of Odessa's Jewish institutional life in its early period, during the 1860s and 70s; Steven J. Zipperstein, *Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985) and "Transforming the Heder: Masklic Politics in Imperial Russia," *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London: Peter Halban, 1988), 87–110; John Klier, "The Jewish Den' and the Literary Mice, 1869–71," *Russian History* 1 (1983): 31–49 and "Krug gintsburgov i politika shtadlanuta v imperatorskoi Rossii," *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta v Moskve* 3(10) (1995): 38–56.
3. I. Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844–1917*, Jerusalem: Posner and Sons, 1981, 69. D. Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 123, 135–126; A. Orbach, *New Voices of Russian Jewry: A Study of the Russian-Jewish Press of Odessa in the Era of the Great Reforms, 1860–1871*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980, 99–100.
4. See my book, *Jewish Philanthropy and Community and Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2008).
5. "The Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, and the Evolution of the St. Petersburg Russian-Jewish Intelligentsia, 1893–1905" *Jews and the State: Dangerous Alliances and the Perils of Privilege, Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 19, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (2004): 195–205.
6. E. Cherikover, *Istoriia Obshchestva dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezdhu evreiami v Rossii* (History of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia), St. Petersburg, 1913, 41; see also my monograph, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).
7. Mordechai Zalkin, *A New Dawn: The Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire, Social Aspects* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2000).
8. Cherikover, *Istoriia Obshchestva* (History of the Society), 67.
9. See Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford, England, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Steven Zipperstein notes that the leaders in St. Petersburg tried to discourage the Odessa group from publishing religious works in Russian translation. S. Zipperstein, "Transforming the Heder," 96.
10. Zipperstein, *Jews of Odessa*, 38.

11. Leon Mandel'shtam, *Zakon ili Piatiknizhie Moiseevo*. Bukval'nyi perevod L. I. Mandel'shtama, kandidata peterburgskogo universiteta. V pol'zu russkikh evreev (The Law or the Five Books of Moses. A Literal Translation by L. I. Mandel'shtam, Graduate of Petersburg University), Berlin 5622 (1862 g.). The second edition appeared in Russia in 1872. For more about Lev Mandel'shtam, see S. M. Ginzburg, "Iz zapisok pervogo evreia-studenta v Rossii" (Among the Notes of the First Jewish Student in Russia), *Perezhitoe: sbornik posviashchennyi obshchestvennoi i kul'turnoi istorii evreev v Rossii* (Experience: A Volume Dedicated to the Social and Cultural History of the Jews in Russia) (4 vols. St. Petersburg, 1908-1913), 1: 1-50.
12. See I. Chastovich, *Istoriia perevoda Biblii na russkom iazyke* (The History of Bible Translations in Russian), (St. Petersburg, 1873), 5-15. Ilya Trotskii argues that Orthodox rabbis raised a "sharp protest" against the project, "seeing in the translation of the Bible a blasphemous infringement on the holy Jewish Torah." "Samodeiatel'nosti i samopomoshch'" (Autonomy and Self-Help) in *Kniga o russkom evreistve ot 1860-kh godov do revoliutsii 1917 g.* (The Book About Russian Jewry from 1860 to the Revolutions of 1917) (New York: Soiuz russkikh evreev, 1960), 473.
13. Iulii Gessen, *Istoriia evreiskogo naroda* (The History of the Jewish People), 2 vols. (Leningrad: Author, 1925-26), 2:77.
14. "Protokoly OPE," 19 May 1874, list 89, Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) St. Petersburg, 1532-1-11. The society also wanted to publish an advertisement offering a subscription to its Bible translation, but was still denied permission by a censor who considered such an advertisement "religious propaganda."
15. Zipperstein, "Transforming the Heder," 102-03.
16. Protocol 6 July 1869: list 21, Russian State Historical Archives (RGIA) St. Petersburg, 1532-1-10. Steven Zipperstein has written very perceptively about the educational initiatives of the OPE in the 1860s and early 1870s. See "Transforming the Heder," 98-106.
17. Zipperstein shows that the government's repression of the Sunday School movement influenced its attitude toward the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment's school reform and also frightened the notables in St. Petersburg. See "Transforming the Heder," 103.
18. In May 1870, the branch created a special committee headed by the editors of the Odessa Jewish newspaper *Den'*, Ilya Orshansky and Menashe Morgulis, to study the heder question. Orshansky and Morgulis solicited information from all the heders in the city, and the results were published in *Den'* (Day). See issues 41-42 (1870): 664-666, 679-680.
19. Zipperstein, *Jews of Odessa*, 114.
20. July 1872: list 24, Russian State Historical Archives (RGIA) St. Petersburg, 1532-1-11: "These provisions could be attained in part through the fulfillment of the third resolution of the charter of the Odessa branch, in which the society provided for the branch's use no less than one-eighth of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment's entire funds, reaching at present 6,000 rubles, which include the dues of the members of the Odessa branch."
21. Zipperstein, "Transforming the Heder," 103. Zipperstein notes that in their efforts to provide Jews a secular education, the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment was stopped not only by pressures from Orthodox Jewry, but also by a suspicious government, that kept a close watch for anything that "seemed vaguely contentious, let alone seditious."
22. Protocols of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment for 1869-1871, list 38, Russian State Historical Archives (RGIA) St. Petersburg, 1532-1-10.
23. Protocols of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment, 1876-1878, list 91, Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) St. Petersburg, 1532-1-12.
24. Menashe Morgulis, "O professional'nom obrazovanii evreev v Odesse" (On the Professional Education of Jews in Odessa), in *Sbornik v pol'zu nahal'nykh evreiskikh shkol* (A Volume to Aid Jewish Elementary Schools) (St. Petersburg, Russia, 1896), 389-390.

25. The Temporary Laws of the Third of May 1882 were essentially an edict that imposed severe restrictions on the kinds of jobs Jews could hold and pursue and where they could live. These regulations were temporary, never having been deliberated by the tsar's own senate.
26. "Koresspondentsiia, Odessa" (A News Report, Odessa), *Nedel'naia Khronika Voskhoda* (The Weekly Chronicle of Voskhod) 48 (1887): 1289.
27. "St. Petersburg," *Nedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* (The Weekly Chronicle of Voskhod) 3 (1887): 58.
28. D-v. (pseudonym unknown), "Iubilei 'Prosveshcheniia': O dvadtsadiletnei deiatel'nosti Odesskogo otdeleniia obshchestva rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii (1867–1892)" (Enlightenment's Anniversary: On the Twentieth Year of the Work of the Odessa Branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia), *Voskhod* 7 (1893): 22.
29. Morgulis, "O professional'nom obrazovanii evreev v Odesse" (About the Professional Education of the Jews in Odessa), 397–399.
30. Surprisingly, the pedagogical experts believed that knowledge of European languages would be indispensable to the future artisans and workers of Odessa. See *Spravochnaia kniga po voprosam obrazovaniia evreev: posobie dlia uchitelei i uchitel'nits evreiskikh shkol i deiatelei po narodnomu obrazovaniiu* (The Handbook of Questions concerning Jewish Education: A Resource for Teachers of Jewish Schools and Activists in Folk Education) (St. Petersburg, 1901), 27–46.
31. Peter Shaw, *The Odessa Jewish Community, 1855–1900: An Institutional History* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1988), 219.
32. See Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 132.
33. Mikhail Polishchuk, *Evrei Odessy i Novorossi: Sotsial'no-politicheskaia istoriia evreev Odessy i drugikh gorodov Novorossii, 1881–1904* (The Jews of Odessa and New Russia: The Social and Political History of the Jews of Odessa and the Other Cities of New Russia, 1881–1904) (Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2002), 21. The Council of the Hundred was a kind of local assembly that existed in Odessa during the 1870s. The distinction between *maskilim* and members of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia pivoted on whether an individual had an education in modern schools or had studied exclusively in Jewish traditional institutions: *heders*, *betei midrash*, and *yeshivot*.
34. "St. Petersburg," *Voskhod* 7 (1893): 21–23.
35. *Ibid.*, 22.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Morgulis, "O professional'nom obrazovanii evreev v Odesse" (About the Professional Education of the Jews of Odessa), 400.
38. *Otchet o deiatel'nosti komiteta odesskogo otdeleniia Obshchestva dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii za 1901 g.* (Report on the Activity of the Board of the Odessa Branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia for 1901) (Odessa, Russia: Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia, 1902), 1–5.
39. *Ibid.*, 12.
40. Simon Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni, materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni: vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (The Book of Life: Materials for a History of My Time, Memoirs and Ruminations), 3 vols. (Vilna, Lithuania, 1930–37); reprint in a single volume, Jerusalem & Moscow: Gesharim, 2004), 234.
41. *Ibid.*, 252–253.
42. "O natsional'nom vospitanii (zapiska, predstavleniia v komitet odesskogo otdeleniia obshchestva rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami)" (On National Education [A Report Presented to the Odessa Branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews]), *Ezhenedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* (The Weekly Chronicle of Voskhod) 1 (January 6, 1902): 12.
43. *Ibid.*, 15.
44. *Ibid.*
45. "Mnenie komiteta odesskogo otdeleniia Obshchestva rasprostraneniia

- prosveshcheniia o evreiskoi narodnoi shkole” (The Viewpoint of the Board of the Odessa Branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment about the Jewish Folk School), *Ezhenedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* (The Weekly Chronicle of Voskhod) 16 (April 19, 1902): 6.
46. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
47. “Po povodu vybora v obshchstve prosveshcheniia” (On the Question of Elections in the Enlightenment Society), *Budushchnost* (The Future) 2 (January 11, 1902): 22.
48. See Brian Horowitz, “Partial Victory from Defeat: 1905, Jewish Liberals, and the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia,” in Ezra Mendelsohn and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews: A Turning Point?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 117–141.
49. Eli Lederhandler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 153.
50. Steven Zipperstein makes this same point in his book, *Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity* (Seattle & Washington: University of Washington Press, 1999), 48–57.

How Ukrainian Is Odesa?

From *Odessa* to *Odesa*

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There's Something about Catherine

In 1900, the city authorities of Odessa erected an impressive monument to Catherine II, who was surrounded on the base by her four principal administrators. When the Bolsheviks took over the city, they pulled down the monument with the help of a tractor and in 1920 put in its place a monument to Karl Marx. In 1977 Marx gave way to a Soviet realist rendition of the 1905 *Battleship Potemkin* mutineers. In the summer of 2007, the *Potemkin* monument was removed to another site in the city. On August 29, 2007, a new 35-foot monument to Catherine II and her servitors was placed on the spot where the original statue had stood more than a hundred years earlier.¹

This latest occasion of substitution stirred up quite a bit of fuss. In July 2007, a month before the installation, protestors knocked down a fence at the site and erected an Orthodox cross. Authorities removed the cross, but hundreds of Cossacks from various parts of Ukraine gathered days later, only to clash with the police.

When the new statue of Catherine was erected, the terrible heat wave reportedly kept people off the streets, although one Cossack vowed that a half-million Cossacks would see to it that the empress came down. The city vowed in turn that it would post a 24-hour guard at the site while the statue awaited unveiling.² Those inclined to favor their connection to the Russian, but not Soviet, past claim that they wish to honor Catherine, the founder of their city.³ They also argue that they are attempting to restore the historic center of Odesa in order to get support from UNESCO.

Some Ukrainian patriots find it reprehensible to celebrate the empress, who was, as one Ukrainian wrote, "Russia's ruling bloodthirsty she-wolf (in the words of Taras Shevchenko) who ordered the destruction of the Zaporozhian

Sich and turned the Ukrainian peasants into serfs."⁴ Professor Yuri Shapoval deplored "the unveiling of a monument to a German woman in Odesa, who hated Ukraine, regarding it as a source of freethinking and a threat to her cherished *alles ist in Ordnung* system in the Russian empire."⁵ Some Ukrainian groups petitioned the Security Services of Ukraine not to unveil the monument, which, in their opinion, "is planned to be a permanent trigger of interethnic hostility to provoke chaos and anarchy in the country and first of all in Odesa."⁶

The Russian point of view on Catherine was expressed by Vladimir Yelenin, who asked, "Why did ridiculous yet malevolent Cossacks who descended on the seaport of Odessa in the fall of 2007 protest against the restoration of a monument to Catherine II? If it were not for the empress of Russia, they would have come not to Odessa but the Turkish town of Khadzhibei. There is a strong doubt that the Turks would have allowed them to enter."⁷ This remark not too subtly asserts that Cossacks did not conquer the area from the Turks, but Russian generals did.

After two months of postponements, the unveiling, on October 27, revealed a statue no longer named for Catherine II but titled *The Monument to the Founders of the City*. Fashioned in Kyiv, it again depicts Catherine standing in the midst of the same foursome of conqueror/administrators. Shouting and scuffles ensued after the unveiling.⁸ While the Odesa Cossacks approved of the statue, Ukrainian Cossacks and members of the nationalist organizations Svoboda, the Ukrainian People's Party, and Our Ukraine shouted "Shame!" One Ukrainian Cossack likened the erecting of this statue in Odesa to placing one of Hitler in Babyi Yar.⁹ This tug of war is an example of the sensitivity

engendered when claims are made on the symbols and meanings of Odesa's past, all of which are intended to shape the memory of Odessits.

THE RESONANT VOICE OF THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Even more contested, in some respects, are the demands made on Odessits to shape the city's future identity, which involve not only memory but also language. Mute metal and stone can speak volumes, to be sure, but the politics of language, it can be argued, have an even louder resonance.

Only two years ago, the region of Odesa and others in eastern and southern Ukraine talked of secession out of fear of dominance by Ukrainian-speakers from the west. The debate over language was one of the most heated during the 2004 Orange Revolution. Official Russian reaction to a Ukrainian state resolution in 2000 titled "On Additional Measures to Expand the Use of Ukrainian as the State Language" was to protest. Russia's foreign minister denounced the "de-Russification of Ukraine" and predicted that such policies "directed against the preservation and development of the Russian language and culture" went against the Ukrainian Constitution's guarantee of the "free development, use, and protection of the Russian language."¹⁰

Ukrainian language policies and those of other states in the Near Abroad contributed to then-President Vladimir Putin's declaration of 2007 as "The Year of the Russian Language." Russia organized a conference on that topic in Moscow in May 2007, and others were held in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic states. That Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, gave the keynote speech, and Vice Premier Dmitry Medvedev was chairman of the organizing committee, indicates the weight Putin gave the issue.¹¹

Putin called for the creation of a "National Russian Language Institute," explaining in his 2007 State of the Nation address that "looking after the Russian language and expanding the influence of Russian culture are crucial social and political issues."¹² At the Moscow conference, it was reported that more than 30 percent of Ukraine is Russian-speaking. On the other hand, a reporter proclaimed that the "Russian language is in retreat in Ukraine," continuing

that "16 years after shrugging off Moscow's rule, Ukraine is reclaiming a language that—like scores of other local languages across the former USSR—the Soviet leadership once disdained as inferior to Russian. Today Ukrainian has emerged from second-class status, slipping quietly into the chambers of governmental and popular culture. This marks more than a cultural change: it could doom any hopes Russia may have of restoring its traditional political influence over this country of 47 million."¹³ Another reporter noted, "Little by little, the Ukrainian language is being used by the majority of the population as a first language. This is particularly true of the young generation, for whom it has become fashionable to use Ukrainian."¹⁴

Pop culture, especially music (including hip-hop and rap) with Ukrainian lyrics, has given the language a hip reputation. One indication of the appeal of Ukrainian to the young is the fact that the latest Harry Potter book was published in Ukrainian before it came out in Russian. A survey of 808 Ukrainians aged 14 to 49 in the Ukrainian regions of Lviv, Kyiv, Odesa, and Kharkiv showed that only 11 percent were opposed to dubbing more movies in Ukrainian. It is significant that the people polled were relatively young and that Sony and Disney produced the movies under discussion, which included *Pirates of the Caribbean III* and *Ratatouille*.¹⁵ On the other hand, Ukrainian legislation has prohibited the distribution of films dubbed into Russian, even if they have Ukrainian-language subtitles. Only films made originally in a foreign language that have received subtitles in Ukrainian will be accepted. Film exhibitors claim that such legislation will reduce the number of foreign films shown in Ukrainian theatres from 200, the number imported in 2007, to only 30 in 2008.¹⁶

Fashionable or not, it is practical to speak Ukrainian. More than 80 percent of the schools in Ukraine have changed the language of instruction from Russian to Ukrainian.¹⁷ Because more universities are now also using Ukrainian as the language of instruction, parents are eager to have their children study it in school.¹⁸

In 2005, Hennadii Udoenko, a member of the Ukrainian parliament who chaired its Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities, and International Relations made

a speech at the fourteenth “Ukraine Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow in Ukraine and in the World” conference assessing the state of the Ukrainian language and the need for its adoption by the citizens of Ukraine. Udovenko observed, “For 300 years the Ukrainian language was methodically and cruelly debased by imperial and communist dictates and regulations.... Having gained an independent Ukraine, we have acquired the historical right to have a rebirth of a native language, and bestow it to an equal, deserving nation, one which gave to the world such geniuses as Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka, and Ivan Franko.” Indeed, Udovenko argued that the state would not survive without the establishment of the Ukrainian language: “Without language there is no nation, and without a nation there is no state or government. These are the ABCs. Language has a central unifying role in the process of the formation of an ethnicity, nation, and state.”¹⁹

Udovenko is not historically correct in his depiction of Soviet language policy. Both Lenin and Stalin favored minorities being taught in their native language in school, with Russian to be taught as a second language.²⁰ Between 1936 and 1937 in Ukraine, 83 percent of pupils in general schools were studying in the Ukrainian language, a proportion that was similar to the proportion of Ukrainians in the population. In the 1950s and ’60s, however, one-sided bilingualism was introduced: Ukrainians had to learn Russian, but Russians in Ukraine did not have to learn Ukrainian.²¹ Ultimately, however, it is true that the Soviets expected Ukrainian (considered to be an inferior language) to fade away.

According to Anna Fournier, Russians in Ukraine (including Odesa) are resisting Ukrainian language laws, despite the fact that, as ethnic Russians, they are guaranteed the right to be educated in Russian (but in private schools). They are resisting because they have been put into an *ethnic* category, Fournier argues, in a country with common intermarriage between Ukrainians and Russians. Russians prefer to be classified with Ukrainian Russophones. In that way, they will not be considered an ethnic minority. According to a Russian source, Russians are only the second-largest cohort of the population in Odesa. Meanwhile, the number of Ukrainians is increasing. In 1989 they

constituted 49 percent of the city’s population, but by 2001, a decade after independence, the figure had risen to 62 percent. Russians, who were 39 percent of the population in 1989, have been reduced to 29 percent.²² To Russians in Odesa, it seems anomalous to be considered a protected “ethnic minority,” a designation that has the effect of increasing their discontent with the language laws.

THE CONFOUNDING EFFECT OF “LANGUAGE OF CONVENIENCE”

The increase in the number of Ukrainians is probably due to the fact that many Ukrainian Russophones declare Ukrainian to be their maternal tongue (*ridna mova*) “in the sense that it is the language of their indigenous cultural and ethnic heritage, which is essentially non-Russian.”²³ In other words, they appear to be using the Soviet practice of allowing people to declare Ukrainian their “mother tongue” whether they are fluent in the language or not. Mother tongue was understood as the language of their nationality and not as the language of use. For example, “the last Soviet census, conducted in 1989, [showed that] Ukrainians comprised 72 percent of the population of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, with 12 percent of those claiming Russian as a mother tongue. Had the Soviet Union used the category of ‘language of use’ instead...and presumed that language was a proxy of nationality...then the proportion of Ukrainians would have dropped to half of the population. Several surveys conducted in the 1990s have shown that Russian is used as the main home language by about half of Ukrainian citizens.”²⁴

Taras Kuzio agrees: “Based on ‘language of convenience’ [that is, everyday use] Ukrainianophones and Russophones were seen as roughly equal.”²⁵ And Odesa would probably be counted among the cities where the use of Russian is more prevalent than the national average.²⁶ Two Odesa scholars, using four factors—economic, geographic, linguistic, and religious—to determine language use in three regions of Ukraine, concluded that historically these factors have resulted in Odesa’s population’s favoring the use of Russian.²⁷

If ethnic Ukrainians who use Russian as their everyday language and ethnic Russians were lumped together into one Russophone

group, and if all of them continued to retain Russian as their spoken language, then the Russian language would remain the dominant language and might, in time, cause the use of Ukrainian to die out, at least in Odesa. In short, in the thinking of some Ukrainian builders of national identity, either one must Ukrainianize ethnic Ukrainians or they will be Russified as they were under the tsarist and Soviet regimes. The question is, however, Are ethnic Ukrainians resisting being singled out by ethnicity and forced to be educated in Ukrainian only, even though they speak Russian at home and perhaps even publicly?

In March 2007, a weeklong campaign for the use of Russian was mounted in Odesa. There were motor rallies, meetings, and the collection of 170,500 signatures in support of the Russian language.²⁸ As one indignant Russophone declared at the time, “I am against children studying Pushkin as a foreign writer and poet; I am against the Russian language being doled out on television; and I am against movies in the theaters being translated into Ukrainian.”²⁹ Odesa, however, did not go as far as other cities, such as Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kryvyi Rih, Luhansk, Mykolayiv, Sevastopol, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Yalta, which legalized Russian as a state language.³⁰ Odesa’s municipal regulations merely state that the working languages of the city council are Ukrainian and Russian.³¹

A professor friend of nearly 30 years who teaches at Odesa State University wrote to me, “A country should have one State language. I am an ethnic Ukrainian; I had Ukrainian language and Ukrainian literature every single day of my school. I love the language. I am permanently reading contemporary Ukrainian authors; I don’t resist its implementation. I simply believe that the language policy is desperately wrong, which is connected with an inferiority complex, the complex of the younger brother, who pesters our present elite. As to me, knowing the language, I, like all of the East, South and much of the Center, have never spoken it. And so naturally, I feel much more comfortable speaking, reporting at various meetings and conferences in Russian. I think that it would have been much wiser to give time for adjustment, not to push. You know that pushing always causes problems and this particular case in no exception.”

Another native Odessit, a journalist, observed to me, “The language problem is rather the subject of political manipulations than interpersonal relationships. One thing is clear, the more they force the so-called State language on us, the more it is going to be mocked and humiliated. I think it a nasty tendency, especially in the city that boasts its tolerance. Let the languages coexist, forget about revenge or getting even, and the attitude of Odessits toward Ukrainian will become less harsh. Let’s not confuse the artificially cultivated enmity with the real neighborly relations.”

Another friend, an ethnic Russian who is a translator living in Odesa, noted that various kiosks were distributing bumper stickers with the message “I Speak Russian,” and that there were heated discussions on Internet forums.³² She continued, “I have always spoken Russian as my native tongue and never experienced any oppression concerning my way of self-expression. As for the Ukrainian language, there is definitely a historic injustice done to the language and the people. All of a sudden, people got divided by an issue, which in reality has little to do with their everyday life. I still claim that the Russian language dominates in everyday use in Odesa and nobody is trying to violently change this. Any efforts to promote Ukrainian are met as a personal insult by many and there seems to be a strong opposition and bitter feelings.” She went on to say that her sympathies were with Ukrainian-speakers, but her democratic instincts allied her with Russian-speakers as a minority, even though in Odesa they are not a minority. She concluded, “I do not know how to feel—for Ukrainian-speakers or for us Russian-speakers. See what confusion? All of this is to say the situation is really a mess.”

This dual self-identification or sympathy is expressed by Natasha Yermakova, a specialist in the history of the Ukrainian theater and a teacher who was born in Kyiv of Russian parents, who asserts, “I received Russian culture by blood, and I inevitably chose Ukrainian culture while growing up.”³³ It seems that Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians are willing to speak or learn Ukrainian. But they feel that they should be able to make the choice and not have it legislated, an approach they consider divisive.

One direct method for spreading the use of Ukrainian is to expose Ukrainian citizens to

the language via the media. In 2006, President Yushchenko signed a law stipulating that 75 percent of radio and television broadcasts had to be in Ukrainian. The Eastern Party of the Regions responded immediately by threatening to conduct a referendum on making Russian a second state language on a par with Ukrainian.³⁴

Hennadii Udovenko expressed the Ukrainian viewpoint in 2005 on television programs. He lamented the “unending flow of Russian-language serials with the standard content, made with Ukrainian subtitles. But Ukrainians are not deaf! It is annoying and unpleasant how the Russian-speaking environment continues to plant itself.”³⁵

Other measures to foster the Ukrainian language in Ukraine’s youth include Ukrainian-language versions of Windows Vista and Office System 2007 that Microsoft has introduced at the same price as the Russian versions.³⁶

Teaching young children Ukrainian in school, along with popularizing the language through music, film, TV, and computer software, will help ensure that Ukrainians of the future know Ukrainian. These measures are less likely to arouse ire and irk elderly Russophones who find that it is too late to learn to speak Ukrainian fluently and correctly even though they can easily read and understand the language. As the scholar Yaroslav Hrytsak affirms, integration of eastern and western Ukraine is possible if leaders capitalize on similarities rather than on differences, and if they avoid hot topics such as the status of the Russian language.³⁷

CONCLUSION

Most experts on language politics in Ukraine, such as Laada Bilaniuk, agree that more than 90 percent of the population understands both Ukrainian and Russian, but “speaking one or the other at any given time can attach social and political meanings to the act of speech.”³⁸ Instead of choosing one of the languages to suit a given occasion or the other person, Bilaniuk suggest that “each speaker [use] whatever language she or he prefers (Ukrainian or Russian) regardless of the language the others are speaking, or if they wish, they can switch back and forth.”³⁹ Certainly, this would be the ideal situation. It would show acceptance of ethnic and linguistic hybridity, thus defusing tensions.

Historically the most diverse, apolitical, and tolerant of Russian imperial cities, Odesa should be the first to embrace such a model.⁴⁰ My local Odesa respondents, whether Jewish, Ukrainian, or Russian, are willing to read both languages, and most of them speak both. Perhaps such flexibility might be possible as long as provocative gestures were avoided, at least nothing beyond the traditional teasing and joking that are so much part of the city’s tradition, culminating each April 1 in the Iumorina festival.

Instead of classifying Odessits as ethnic Russians or Ukrainians, the state could facilitate—but not mandate—Russophones’ and Ukrainophones’ acquisition of each other’s mother tongue, if only as a second language. It appears that Odessits do not base their friendships on language affinity. While geography and language use have a strong correlation with Ukrainian political positions, they are not exclusive markers of Ukrainian identity, any more than ethnicity. As one Odessit put it, “I am Ukrainian; I speak Russian, but I am Ukrainian.”⁴¹ Opinion surveys reveal that matters such as NATO membership and the strengthening or weakening of the status of the Russian language are not among the top 20 issues of importance to Ukrainians.⁴²

On the matter of politics, Odessits should speak for themselves in whichever language they choose, and not have their language define how others perceive their views or gauge their loyalty as Ukrainian citizens. Odesa has always had a strong sense of its unique cosmopolitan history, priding itself on loose but real ties with the center. Rulers have often regarded it as an enfant terrible among cities, but nations, like families, should always have room for one slightly eccentric member.⁴³

ENDNOTES

1. The four administrators, all associated with the establishment of Odesa, were Grigorii Potemkin, Prince Platon Zubov, Jose De Ribas, and Franz De Voland. The original statue disappeared until after World War II, when parts of Catherine and the four gentlemen were found; they are now displayed in the sculpture garden outside Odesa’s literary museum.
2. Ron Popeski, “Catherine the Great Sparks Cossack Ire,” Reuters Press, August 29,

- 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/inDepthNews/>. Cossacks suggested a compromise: abandon the Catherine monument and complete a church in honor of Saint Catherine on the site. Oleg Gubar, a well-known Odesa journalist, said, “Cossacks swore allegiance to Catherine the Great, Polish kings, and Turkish sultans. This was simply the nature of their work. Today these people are being manipulated. It is, quite frankly, no more than a tragic, uncivilized joke.”
3. The mayor of Odesa, Eduard Gurvits, is in favor of the monument because it recalls the pre-Soviet past. He noted that he had removed 148 Soviet monuments, 104 of which were of Lenin, and had changed the Soviet names of 179 streets. Piotr Smolar, “Homo Ukrainus: An Emerging Species,” *Le Monde*, September 28, 2007. <http://iedg.blogspot.com/2007/09/homo-ukrainus-espce-en-voie.html> .
 4. *The Day Weekly Digest* (Kyiv, Ukraine), October 30, 2007, <http://www.day.kiev.ua/190492/>.
 5. *Ibid.* It was stated in the same article that 600 Cossacks were among the first 1,000 settlers of Odesa, so they too can be considered founders of the city.
 6. *Ukrayinska Pravda*, October 28, 2007, “Catherine II Sees Fights in Odessa,” <http://pda.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/>.
 7. Vladimir Yelenin, “Catherine the Great Is More Valuable to Ukraine than Zaporizhian Cossacks,” *The Ukrainian Times*, February 5, 2008.
 8. A translator in Odesa sent me this report by e-mail on November 5, 2007: “As for the opening the monument to Catherine II, I was there in that crowd and can tell how it was: jolly, noisy, quarrelsome, altogether quite normal for such an event. Some women managed to start a fight in a corner of the square, others laughed, the music was very loud and rhythmic, some danced, lots of pictures were taken, it was quite a show. After all that, there were fireworks and the Philharmonic orchestra played under the open sky for an hour. In terms of legal actions there were no steps taken. The tension is still there and will be there for years to come as the experience of other countries tell us.”
 9. “Scuffles Reported in South Ukraine over Controversial Monument,” BBC Monitoring, report by Ukrainian channel UT1 on October 27, 2007, <http://www.industrywatch.com/pages/iw2/print/>; Unian, “Monument to Russian Empress Yekaterina II to Be Unveiled in Odessa,” September 9, 2007, <http://www.unian.net/news/print/>
 10. Anna Fournier, “Mapping Identities: Russian Resistance to Linguistic Ukrainization in Central and Eastern Ukraine,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 3 2002: 422.
 11. ITAR-TASS, Moscow, May 28, 2007, “Russian Language Important for Enrichment of People World Over Says Foreign Ministry.” <http://ru-entranslator.livejournal.com/58823.html> .
 12. Mara D. Bellaby, “Russian Language in Retreat in Ukraine,” Associated Press, May 1, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/01/AR2007050101036.html>
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Smolar, “Homo Ukrainus.”
 15. Unian, “Only 11% of Ukrainians Opposed to More Films Dubbed in Ukrainian,” February 5, 2008, <http://www.unian.net>.
 16. Tom Birchenough, “Ukraine on Language Lockdown: Country Demands That Films Have Ukrainian Dub,” *Variety*, February 22, 2008, http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1117981323&categoryid=2523,22. *Variety* reported that Anton Pugach, an exhibitor with Multiplex Holding, was trying to gather 100,000 signatures against the legislation to present to President Viktor Yushchenko. Exhibitors claimed, however, that such a stringent law would only encourage the sale of pirated Russian-language DVDs.
 17. During the 1935–36 academic year, 83 percent of students in Ukraine were studying in Ukrainian. See Harold R. Weinstein, “Language and Education in Soviet Ukraine,” *Slavonic Year-Book, American Series*, 1 (1941): 142. But in 1933, as many as 88.5 percent of Ukrainian

- children were enrolled in Ukrainian schools. See Laada Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues: Language, Politics, and Cultural Contestation in Ukraine* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 82.
18. Belaby, "Russian Language."
 19. Hennadii Udovenko, "Movna Politika Ukraïni na Suchasnomu Etazh" [The Language Policy of Ukraine at Its Current State], *Ukraïnoznavstvo* 4 (2005) : 24–30.
 20. See Weinstein, "Language and Education," 124–148. See also Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* vol. 53, no. 2 (1994): 414–452; Maxim Waldstein, "Russifying Estonia? Iurii Lotman and the Politics of Language and Culture in Soviet Estonia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 3 (2007): 561–596; George Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923–1934* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues*, 80–81. *Contested Tongues* is the most useful book on the subject of language politics in contemporary Ukraine.
 21. Waldstein, "Russifying Estonia?" 578.
 22. ITAR-TASS, July 4, 2007. I do not know if the classifications are based on self-identification, but they must refer to ethnicity, since the majority of Odessits are Russophone. "Many Ukrainian citizens (as many as 56.1 percent of the adult population of Ukraine, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology) are thought to prefer interacting in Russian in the *public sphere*, regardless of their ethnicity and whether or not they are bilingual" (Fournier, "Mapping Identities," 422).
 23. Fournier, "Mapping Identities," 422.
 24. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel (eds.), *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 104–105.
 25. Taras Kuzio, "Census: Ukraine, More Ukrainian," *Russia and Eurasia Revue* 2, no. 3 (2003).
 26. The 1989 Soviet census showed that 12 percent of the population of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic claimed to be Russian, whereas the same census showed 39 percent of the population of Odessa to be Russian.
 27. Oleg Zoteev and Rostislav Zoteev, "Osobennosti funktsionirovaniia russkogo iazyka v polietnicheskikh regionakh Ukrainy," [The Peculiarities of the Use of the Russian Language in Multiethnic Regions of Ukraine], January 9, 2008, <http://www.edrus.org/content/view/7121/69/>.
 28. "Odessa vseгда govorila po russki," [Odessa has always spoken Russian] April 4, 2007, <http://forum.odessitka.net/index.php?showtopic=636>.
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. ITAR-TASS, "Action to Protect Russian Language Launched in Ukraine Odessa," March 3, 2007, <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID>.
 31. "Reglament Odesskogo gorodskogo soveta v sozyva." [Rules for the Odessa City Council] *Rasdel I. Stat'ia* 2, no. 2 (June 27, 2006), <http://www.odessa.ua/acts/council/5712/>.
 32. For examples of such discussions, see <http://forum.pravda.com.ua/en>. Purportedly, the "I Speak Russian" campaign is led by Valery Kaurov, head of the Odesa-based Union of the Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine. This organization pitched tents around Odesa where its members could collect signatures in support of giving Russian a protected status as a regional language. According to Kaurov, "With all the linguistic, religious, cultural differences, parts of the country can only coexist within a federally regulated polity." Paul Abelsky, "Building Its Own Destiny: Ukraine Seeks a Place between Russia and Europe," *Russia Profile*, May 30, 2007, <http://www.russiaprofile.org>.
 33. Smolar, "Homo Ukrainus."
 34. Smolar, "Homo Ukrainus." Just before the September 2007 elections, the Party of Regions (PRU), led by Viktor Yanukovich, announced a campaign to organize a referendum asking Ukrainians whether Russian should be a second official language. But even some members of the PRU feel that the language issue

- is “too divisive.” Pavel Korduban, “Party of Regions Challenges President with Referendum Plan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 12, 2007, <http://eurasiandaily.org/article>.
35. Udovenko, “Language Policy.” “By 1937 when Stalin decided that some of Ukraine was over-Ukrainianized, he said more attention should be given to Russian popular literature, music, radio and cinema.” Weinstein, “Language and Education,” 145.
 36. “Microsoft Puts on Sale Ukrainian-Language Windows Vista and Office System 2007,” Ukrainian News Agency, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 22, 2007. <http://www.lucorg.com/luc/news.php?id=2478>.
 37. Abelsky, “Building Its Own Destiny.” An article by Elena Yatsenko, “The Russian Language as the Geopolitical Potential of the Russian World,” June 19, 2007, www.Eurasianhome.org, is an example of a provocative exhortation for Russophones in the Near Abroad to retain Russian so that they can leave their “diasporas,” return to Russia, and become more quickly reintegrated into Russia.
 38. Laada Bilaniuk, “Language Politics in Ukrainian Popular Culture” [Event summary], Kennan Institute, April 16, 2007, www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. Founded by a German empress of Russia, designed by a Netherlander and a Spanish-Irish Neapolitan, governed successively by two French administrators, suffused with Italian opera, Odesa was a city of foreign settlers, especially Greeks, in its early years, and eventually hosted a large population of Jews. The current conductor of its philharmonic orchestra is Hobart Earle, an American.
 41. Abel Polese, *Where Marx Meets Ekaterina (the Great): The Dichotomy between National and Plural Identities in Odessa*, paper presented at the convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York, April 2007.
 42. Mykola Riabchuk, “Ukraine Torn between Russia, the West: A Commentary,” *Edmonton Journal*, August 8, 2007.
 43. As a Red Sox fan, I am tempted to say that in some respects Odesa is like Manny Ramirez, the talented but individualistic outfielder whose antics are explained by a shrug and the phrase, “Manny is just being Manny.” Odesa is just being Odesa.

How American Is New Orleans?

What the Founding Era Has to Tell Us

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In the first few days after Hurricane Katrina, a woman at the New Orleans Convention Center, desperate for food, water, and rescue, cried out, “We are American!” Reflecting on this scene, Michael Ignatieff commented, “Having been abandoned, the people in the convention center were reduced to reminding their fellow citizens, through the medium of television, that they were not refugees in a foreign country.”¹

I would submit that at the heart of the national response to Katrina was a belief that the people of New Orleans *do* occupy a foreign country. Brian Williams of NBC, the only national news anchor in the city during and immediately after Katrina, recently recalled his first visit to the city, some years ago. As his plane rolled to a stop on the runway, the pilot came over the PA system “and welcomed his passengers to New Orleans by noting that they’d just left the United States.”²

That people from airline pilots to Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff can so easily manage to place New Orleans beyond the pale of American national consciousness is proof of an enduring, historically constructed definition of New Orleans as “other,” an island of exotic, erotic Creole something-or-other that is essentially foreign to what is “American.” The response to Katrina, I suggest, is at least partly rooted in an opposition of New Orleans and American identities and histories—an opposition that is not only false, but that arguably proved fatal to more than a thousand citizens whose voter registration cards made poor lifeboats.

Katrina sparked an immediate outpouring of meditations on the place of New Orleans in the national imagination. Cultural critics, politicians, and not a few historians rushed into print to decry the tragedy, limn its causes, and deliver jeremiads exhorting Americans to rush to the rescue of the quirky, culturally rich city that lay

dying in the fetid aftermath of nature’s floodwaters and human neglect. Those post-storm essays shared a focus on the city in the here and now, ringing (or blaming?) the changes on its poverty, its racial makeup, its scandal-ridden politics, its pleasure-seeking ambiance, and its redemptive cultural richness. The post-Katrina eulogies tapped into pre-Katrina conceptions of a lovable but tragically flawed city that had written itself out of the American mainstream by clinging to a constellation of habits born of a colorful history not shared by the rest of the country. New Orleans is different now because it was different in some hazily conceived “then.”³

New Orleanians themselves, aided and abetted by the tourism industry, have been complicit in creating the impression that their city derives its distinctive character from a distinctive past. And historians, seduced by the siren call of American exceptionalism, evoke New Orleans as the domestic other against which a national community of otherwise diverse origins shares a sense of itself as the unique expression of a revolutionary Anglo-Protestant experiment in liberty and equality.⁴ This conception of the outlier status of New Orleans in the American historical narrative rests, I propose, on flawed foundations. In key particulars, New Orleans shares the past that shaped America, especially the formative colonial and early national years regarded as the point of origin for national character and consciousness. In the late 1760s, a colonial council opened its proceedings with these words:

Gentlemen: the first and most interesting point to be examined, is the step taken by all the planters and merchants in concert, who being threatened with slavery, and laboring under grievances which have been enumerated...⁵

Such rhetoric is exactly what we would expect on the eve of the American Revolution, when the Sons of Liberty evoked the metaphor of slavery to condemn the reassertion of imperial interests in the wake of the Seven Years' War. We would expect, as well, the ringing rhetoric of natural rights with its hot-button terms—liberty, virtue, despotism. And this colonial assembly fell right in line:

Without population there can be no commerce, and without commerce no population. In proportion to the extent of both, is the solidity of thrones; both are fed by liberty and competition, which are the nursing mothers of the State, of which the spirit of monopoly is the tyrant and step-mother. Without liberty, there are but few virtues. Despotism breeds pusillanimity and deepens the abyss of vices.... Where is the liberty of our planters, our merchants and our other inhabitants? Protection and benevolence have given way to despotism.⁶

Students of American history should find nothing special about this tirade. Such declamations poured out of the 13 British colonies in the 1760s and early 1770s, charting the growing self-consciousness of a colonial interest at odds with its imperial parent, all couched in a rhetoric of republicanism distinguished by its opposition of slavery to liberty and its indictment of despotism and tyranny, and buttressed by the enumeration of grievances dictated by John Locke's definition of justifiable revolution.⁷

These passages of colonial protest rhetoric are obviously a setup, given the subject of the present essay. They are not to be found in the archives of any of the British mainland colonies. Indeed, they were not originally set down in English. They are drawn from a 1768 petition composed in New Orleans by French-speaking members of the Louisiana Superior Council. The signatories were protesting the newly instituted Spanish administration in the colony—specifically, the imposition of a set of trade regulations and the prospect of Spain's efficient enforcement of its policies following a long period of—dare I borrow the term from British colonial historians?—Salutary Neglect by the late French regime. They, like the creole elites of the 13 British colonies that became

the United States, negotiated the tension between European imperium and their own social and economic interests in a language of rights indebted equally to the political thought of Europe and the pervasive reality of slavery that endowed that ideology with the potent charge that gave it life. In 1768, elite white New Orleanians, Virginians, and Bostonians all chafed under what they perceived to be the yoke of imperial tyranny and protested their figurative enslavement in a shared rhetoric, if not a shared tongue.

This episode of protest makes ideological brothers of colonial New Orleanians and Anglo-American revolutionaries. If Americans claim resistance to the Stamp Act in the 1760s as a defining moment in the birth of a nation and a central element of its identity, it is for the general principles advanced, not the specific target of resistance. That the protest was directed against Britain does not define the moment. Rather, the nature of the conflict between colony and empire and the ideology deployed in the crisis do. New Orleans protested a different imperial master, but it launched a spasm of colonial resistance embedded in the language of rights just as the 13 British colonies did. The different national sovereignties of Louisiana and the 13 colonies have been allowed to obscure shared elements of their histories that lie at the heart of American identity. This habit of thought, paradoxically, has the effect of imaginatively undoing the Declaration of Independence, yoking America eternally to Britain rather than to the history of its own hemisphere.

Superficial readings of the cultural differences between New Orleans and the former British colonies have long lain at the center of the historical blindness that obscures episodes such as the Louisiana Rebellion of 1768. A visiting Philadelphian, John Watson, was shocked to find in 1805 that "Sabbaths are not observed—all stores are open in the forenoon, and at night there are balls and sometimes plays, &c."⁸ As if profaning the Sabbath in this way were not enough, the elements of worship Watson witnessed during Holy Week at St. Louis Cathedral underlined the differences between the sober Protestantism of Philadelphia and the theatricality and clamor of New Orleans Catholicism. "On Thursday, all the Catholics visit the several churches to kiss

the feet of Jesus.... Mothers bring their infants; some cry and occasion other disturbances, some are seen counting their beads with much attention and remain long on their knees, some are running over their *ave marias*.”⁹

Watson, like many subsequent visitors to New Orleans, was quick to identify religion as a point of divergence between New Orleans and the rest of the United States, fixing especially on Catholicism’s role in forming the city’s festive culture. Mardi Gras, the day of carnival abandon that precedes Ash Wednesday and Lent’s season of austerity, is only the most obvious example offered of the way the Catholic community that has dominated New Orleans’s religious landscape since the 18th century has shaped the city’s culture. Catholicism’s *laissez-faire* attitude toward alcohol, gambling, and dancing is credited—or blamed—for the city’s year-round pleasure culture.

It would be foolish to claim that the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism are more imaginary than real. Nineteenth-century Protestantism, which supported temperance and Sabbatarianism and condemned gaming and frivolous amusements, did impose a different code of behavior on its adherents than that of Catholicism. The Latin Mass, with the mystery of Eucharistic transubstantiation at its center, bore little resemblance to the Protestant order of service dominated by Scripture and sermon. But to focus on behavioral codes and liturgical practices is to miss some important commonalities among the Catholics of New Orleans and the Protestants of the former British colonies.

Most obviously, religion was socially and culturally central to both groups. When John Watson entered St. Louis Cathedral during Holy Week, he found it teeming with worshippers. The landscape of early-19th-century New Orleans was sacralized, with a cathedral dominating its principal public space and a sprawling convent occupying a prominent position on the banks of the Mississippi River. At the turn of the 19th century, Protestant America was marked by the renewed religious vigor of the Second Great Awakening, while New Orleans was energized by the missionary impulse of a popular Catholic revival that culminated in the spectacular devotional movement at Lourdes in France. That 19th-century Protestants and Catholics regarded one another as godless does not illuminate the

character of America; that they shared a vital attachment to religion at the same formative moment in the nation’s history does.

There is yet another way that religion reveals a link between New Orleans and the rest of America. The Bishop Controversy erupted in the 1760s when mainland British colonists broke out in a lather at the very thought of a bishop being imposed on the American Anglican church. Elite vestries in Virginia and elsewhere had no intention of relinquishing their *de facto* authority to appoint the pastors of their churches and otherwise oversee local church affairs. In 1805, the Catholic equivalent of the vestry in New Orleans was infuriated when Bishop John Carroll of the United States attempted to impose a pastor on them. They called the populace to St. Louis Cathedral to consider the proper response. “All the Catholics of this parish arose as one and in a body, asserting that as things had come to such a pass they would make use of the privilege that the freedom of the American government permits them and would appoint a pastor of their own choice.” If anything, the New Orleans *coup d’église* took American notions of democratic expression and authority in the religious realm to new heights.¹⁰

Are the similarities I have rehearsed here enough to condemn the exceptionalism of New Orleans to the dust heap of history? What about other ethnic and cultural differences between New Orleanians and “Americans”? Especially in connection with the signal influence of African Americans on the culture of New Orleans, surely we can draw a line that sets the Crescent City apart? I do not think we can. The distinction rests on the presumption of a fixed and hegemonic English culture for the 13 British mainland colonies, presumably upheld and promulgated by an ethnically English majority. But in the first 75 years of the 18th century, this is how the 585,800 immigrants to the mainland colonies could be classified, by ethnic origin:¹¹

278,400 Africans	48%
84,500 Germans	14%
66,100 Northern Irish	11%
44,100 English	8%
42,500 Southern Irish	7%

35,300 Scots	6%
29,000 Welsh	5%
5,900 Other	1%

Even if all the immigrants from the British Isles are grouped together, they remain outnumbered by Africans. In the plantation colonies, enslaved people constituted a large majority of the population: 60 percent in South Carolina, for example. Some 2,600 enslaved people in New York City (14 percent of the population) and 1,500 in Philadelphia (7 percent) ensured a significant African contribution to the vibrant urban milieu of the colonial Northeast.¹² On the eve of the American Revolution, one-fifth of the inhabitants of the British mainland colonies were enslaved people of African descent. The cultural legacies of Africa were arguably as pervasive and influential in Revolutionary America as those of the English, Scots, and Irish. And if one takes population as an indication of influence, African Americans were no more significant in Louisiana, where enslaved people constituted roughly half of the inhabitants, than they were in the British plantation colonies.¹³

Those more familiar with the details of New Orleans's racial past often make a case that the number of people of African descent in the city is not what distinguished it historically, but rather the free status of so many of them. According to this line of thinking, the large community of free people of color in New Orleans created a space for cultural, intellectual, and political creativity that was unmatched elsewhere in North America. For example, free woman of color Henriette Delille founded an order of nuns for women of African descent in antebellum New Orleans.¹⁴ And the radicalism of Louisiana's 1868 state constitution, which insisted that "all citizens of the state should enjoy 'the same civil, political and public rights and privileges,'" has been attributed to the political legacy of the large and vibrant free black community that flourished in New Orleans before the Civil War.¹⁵ Statistics and individual historical actors alike vitiate this argument. Free blacks made up 19 percent of the population of New Orleans in 1805, but Philadelphia, where they constituted 16 percent of the population, was not far behind. Nor were Philadelphia's free people of color

without prominence as cultural and political agents. Free black Richard Allen established the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in Philadelphia in 1816.¹⁶ Inventor and abolitionist James Forten, the free descendant of an enslaved African, anticipated Louisiana's postbellum radicals when he reminded his fellow Philadelphians in 1813 that among the city's free men of color were people "of reputation and property, as good citizens as men can be."¹⁷

New Orleans historical exceptionalists' last line of defense is the French and Spanish ancestry of its colonial population. Historians have been fairly unanimous in rendering the judgment that "Americans" and Francophone New Orleanians were engaged in chronic culture wars before the Civil War, laying the foundation for the alienation of the Crescent City today.

Language, law, sexuality, and fashion, among other cultural markers, are supposed to have divided Anglo-Americans from New Orleanians long after the Louisiana Purchase made them official compatriots in 1803. But Americans of clear English descent living in the former 13 colonies were not always reliable standard-bearers for English identity and culture in post-Revolutionary America. In post-Revolutionary Pennsylvania, people "broke suddenly loose from the simplicity of quaker manners, dress and fashion, affecting the vanity, and nonsense ... of french parade," according to a visiting Virginia congressman in 1783.¹⁸

At least one Philadelphian betrayed his English roots by moving beyond the superficial transformation effected by Paris fashion. Born to an established Quaker family, Jacob Cowperthwait shed just about every recognizable marker of the culture of his forefathers after moving to New Orleans in 1785. Cowperthwait arrived just as the restrictive policies and attitudes that had governed Spanish colonial trade with Anglo-Americans were beginning to loosen, and he made his fortune on building commissions for the Spanish Crown. And, ignoring a 1776 Quaker ban, he became a slave trader. In 1787, the Quaker slave trader appeared before the ecclesiastical tribunal in New Orleans to petition for permission to marry a young Anglophone Catholic woman from Spanish West Florida. Cowperthwait swore be-

fore the church notary that he was a Catholic, baptized in the parish of Philadelphia. When he became mortally ill in 1793, he dictated his last will and testament—in French—describing his Quaker origins in Philadelphia in one paragraph and stipulating that he be buried according to the rites of the Catholic Church in New Orleans in another.¹⁹ Cowperthwait's birthright was his Anglo-American identity, and he never rejected that. But he was also a Francophone, Catholic New Orleanian.

Cowperthwait and many others like him hardly constituted the leading edge of an Anglo-American cultural invasion of the Mississippi Valley. Instead, they reveal the porous nature of both the real and the imagined boundaries of national identity in the post-Revolutionary era and give us some idea of how elastic the imagined community of the young American republic was. The careful ideological and legal circumscription of American nationality that began with the three-fifths clause of the Constitution and the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 was in its infancy, and there was still room for pluralisms of various kinds. Men such as Jacob Cowperthwait may not have been aware of the Louisiana Rebellion of 1768 or the *coup d'église* of 1805, but they shared with New Orleanians the experience of having been colonists in North America shaped by the diverse cultural milieu and political dynamic of the Atlantic world. During the very decades when American identity was forged and our national origin myth fabricated, this common ground united Americans across fissures that only later were enlisted to construct mutual exclusivity between New Orleanian and American.

I know—because I have advanced this argument less formally many times since Katrina—that many will be unconvinced by the evidence I have offered. It does not address, head on, the most obvious difference between New Orleans and the rest of America: the Crescent City's naughtiness. But even here, history betrays the trope.

Travelers to antebellum New Orleans commented frequently on the city's moral decadence, and many seem to have located its epicenter among the city's free women of color. Elegant and beautiful, they supposedly seduced Euro-American men away from the virtuous republican marriages that were deemed the bedrock

of American political and social stability.²⁰ New Orleans could never be a real American city because it did not share Anglo-America's Puritan legacy of sexual continence. The guidebooks to New Orleans make an unabashed link between the temptresses of the Quadroon Balls and the contemporary lasciviousness of Bourbon Street. The message: New Orleans has always been the place where Americans come to be naughty, a place to escape the normative sexual puritanism of the rest of the country, the frontier safety valve for Americans bound by a different history of sexuality.

The difficulty with blaming New Orleans decadence on the city's quadroon temptresses is that there are virtually no traces of these women's existence outside the pages of travel narratives, novels, and plays. When quadroon women make an appearance in the archives of New Orleans, they usually do so as brides of free men of color, standing before the altar at St. Louis Cathedral surrounded by crowds of celebratory family and friends. They reappear at the baptisms of their children, and eventually as mothers of brides and grooms in subsequent generations. The quadroons of New Orleans typically inhabited a world of marriage and motherhood, not some Gulf Coast version of the Seraglio.²¹

Thanks to historians of early American sexuality, we now know that even if New Orleans was not a unique, no-holds-barred sexual playground, there were plenty of other places where colonial and early national Americans could be "naughty"—even if one defines naughtiness as engaging in interracial sex outside marriage. Clare Lyons's new book, *Sex among the Rabble*, for example, reveals 18th-century Philadelphia to have been a seething cauldron of nonmarital sexual activity. "Members of all classes and both races," she writes, "frequented taverns, bawdyhouses, and 'negro' houses for sexual adventure."²²

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If New Orleans was really more like the rest of America than different from it when the United States was young, why do the Crescent City's exceptionalism and difference have such traction in the national narrative and the national consciousness now?

My answer is twofold. First, casting New Orleans as “other” served a crucial purpose in the process of American nation making in the 19th century. The United States faced a unique hurdle in that process. Polyglot and culturally diverse in the colonial, Revolutionary, and post-Revolutionary eras, it remained so in the early national and antebellum eras, when first the Louisiana Purchase and then the Irish and German immigration of the 1840s and ’50s further weakened the nation’s cultural and political coherence. Yet this kind of instability is precisely what theorist Fredrik Barth suggests results in the definition of ethnic—and, by extension, national—identities. “Categorical ethnic distinctions,” Barth writes, “do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained *despite* changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories.”²³

New Orleans was not significantly different from other American cities in its history, its sex culture, or its cosmopolitan, polyglot, multiracial population. But Americans elsewhere could take comfort by projecting exceptionalism onto the Crescent City, in effect suppressing the centrifugal force of all the contradictory crosscurrents of American identity by containing them in one place. And they could get away with it because an accident of imperial control erected an imaginary boundary between the experience and histories of New Orleanians and, say, Philadelphians.

New Orleans and New Orleanians were assigned exceptionality, but they could have rejected it. Instead, for different reasons at different times, the city has accepted its role as the internal “other.” In the recent past, the city has not only accepted that role, it has cultivated it and built its economy around it. The rich musical tradition created by Americans of African descent, a distinctive regional cuisine, a semitropical landscape, 18th-century architecture—none of these things are unique to New Orleans, even if the way they come together in the city is. We New Orleanians are complicit in our own vulnerability, allowing the rest of America to cut itself off from its vibrant, multicultural roots so that we can make an undisputed claim to what is really a shared American legacy. And we have done such a good job that

the rest of America has managed to forget that this rich legacy, and New Orleans, are not beyond the boundaries of American identity, but at its heart.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael Ignatieff, “The Broken Contract,” *The New York Times Magazine*, September 25, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/25/magazine/25wwln.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=the%20broken%20contract&st=cse&oref=slogin. Accessed January 18, 2008.
2. Dave Walker, “Blood Brother,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 6, 2006.
3. See, for example, Tom Piazza, *Why New Orleans Matters*, 1st ed. (New York: ReganBooks, 2005).
4. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Caryn Cossàe Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation’s Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).
5. Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, vol. 3 (New Orleans: James A. Gresham, 1879), 196–197.
6. *Ibid.*
7. John Locke’s prescription appears in *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), Chapter XIX: Of the Dissolution of Government, Sec. 225.: “Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient laws, and all the slips of human frailty, will be born by the people without mutiny or murmur. But if a long train of abuses, prevarications and artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the people, and they cannot but feel what they lie under, and see whither they are going; it is not to be wondered, that they should then rouse themselves, and endeavor to put the rule into such hands

- which may secure to them the ends for which government was at first erected . . .”
8. John Watson, “Notitia of Incidents at New Orleans, 1804–5,” *The American Pioneer* 2, no. 5 (May 1843): 232.
 9. *Ibid.*, 230.
 10. On the Bishop Controversy, see Frederick V. Mills Sr., *Bishops by Ballot: An Eighteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and “Casa Calvo to Caballero, March 30, 1805” in Stanley Faye, ed., “The Schism of 1805 in New Orleans,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (January 1939):105.
 11. Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717–1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 2. The United Kingdom became a political reality with the Act of Union of 1707, which joined the kingdoms of Scotland and England. The Act of Union of 1800 brought Northern and Southern Ireland officially under the aegis of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
 12. The population of New York City in 1760 stood at 18,000; see Selma Berrol, *The Empire City: New York and Its People, 1624–1996* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 12. Philadelphia’s population was 23,000; see United States Geological Survey, *Modeling Expansion in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area: A Cellular Automata Approach* (January 2008), http://mcmcweb.er.usgs.gov/de_river_basin/phil/phil_data.html.
 13. Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 278.
 14. Mary Bernard Deggs, Virginia Meacham Gould, and Charles E. Nolan, *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
 15. Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 42; Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism*.
 16. Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 152.
 17. Julie Winch, “The Making and Meaning of James Forten’s *Letters from a Man of Color*,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2007): 136.
 18. Arthur Lee to James Warren, March 12, 1783, in Paul H. Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789* (Washington, DC, 1993), 20:12, quoted in Kate Haulman, “Fashions and the Culture Wars of Revolutionary Philadelphia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 62, no. 4 (2005): 625.
 19. Jacob Cowperthwait, Last Will and Testament, *Acts of Pedro Pedesclaux* 17, 503–504, June 17, 1793. New Orleans Notarial Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana.
 20. See, for example, Karl Bernard, *Travels through North America, During the Years 1825 and 1826* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, sold in New York by G. & C. Carvill, 1828), 62; Harriet Martineau, *Society in America: In Two Volumes*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Saunders & Otley, 1837), 116; Frederick Law Olmsted and Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States: Based Upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author*, 1st ed. (New York: Modern Library, 1984), 236; Watson, “Notitia of Incidents,” 236.
 21. Emily Clark, “Atlantic Alliances: Marriage among People of African Descent in New Orleans, 1759–1830” (unpublished paper presented at a workshop at the Center for North-American Studies, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales: Louisiana and the Atlantic World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, Paris, November 9–10, 2007).
 22. Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006), 193. Lyons reports (377) that in Philadelphia, fully 5 percent of the bastardy cases brought before the city’s Guardians of the Poor in the 1790s were cross-racial cases of black women

seeking child support from white fathers, and they were often successful: men were found culpable and forced to shoulder responsibility for acting on their illicit lust. But by the 1820s, black women were being cast as evil seductresses who led unwitting white men away. By the 1820s only 1.5 percent of bastardy cases brought before the Guardians of the Poor were pressed

by black women seeking child support from white fathers and only two black women succeeded in getting child support payments from white fathers between 1822 and 1825.

23. Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), 9.

New Orleans and Odesa: The Spaces in Between as a Source of Urbane Diversity

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What makes a city one ethnicity or another? Is it merely the presence of a dominant ethnic group? Is there something about how people relate to one another? How does one identity assert itself in communities predicated on commercial and cultural exchange? As Samuel Ramer posits at the outset of this collection, New Orleans and Odesa—two strange and wondrous products of 18th-century empire building—suggest some answers to these questions. They do so precisely because they are especially urbane cities in which nationalists have lost out many times over rather than carry the day.

What makes cities not only “urban” but “urbane”? How does a city nurture a sense of style that facilitates the accommodation of difference, creating something of value in the process? Diversity in and of itself is often seen as an answer. Bring enough people of difference together to bump up against one another, and accommodation somehow will take place. Unfortunately, difference can create conflict as well as acceptance. After all, according to some reckonings, the Detroit metropolitan area is home to the widest range of ethnic groups of any American city at the outset of the 21st century. But whatever its virtues, contemporary Detroit does not evoke the adjective “urbane.”

Barcelona philosopher and urban thinker Pep Subirós has observed that mere heterogeneity does not produce a “civic” and “urbane” urban community.¹ For Subirós, a city must simultaneously accept both difference and shared points of reference for a genuinely civic identity and urbane culture to emerge. Local legends, memories, and tellings of history must go beyond binary understandings of society to embrace pluralism in order for *civitas* to reign. Civic identity must somehow embrace a variety of urban groups and individuals; city residents must relate to one another in a shared public

manner that transcends individual needs and perceptions if “urban” is to become “urbane.” As manifested in the experiences of New Orleans and Odesa, urbanity emerges from the interaction of place and diversity, rather than from diversity alone.

CRACKS IN THE NATIONAL SIDEWALK

Novelist and storyteller Walker Percy made a similar point in a somewhat folksier style. In trying to explain why he found the small town of Covington, Louisiana, such a congenial place to live and to write, Percy described the town as a “pleasant nonplace” that “occupies a kind of interstice in the South. It falls between places.”² Writing in 1980, Percy continued, “Here is one place in the South where a writer can live as happily as a bug in a crack in the sidewalk, where he can mosey out now and then and sniff the air just to make sure this is not just any crack in any sidewalk.”³

By seeing himself—and other writers—as happy bugs thriving in society’s interstices, Percy was returning to an observation he had made about New Orleans a dozen years previously. In explaining his love for the “Big Easy,” Percy described the space carved out in New York by “millions of souls” as “a horrid thing, a howling vacuum.”⁴ Mobile, Alabama, he continued, “has no interstices. It is older than New Orleans. It has wrought iron, better azaleas, an older Mardi Gras. It appears easygoing and has had no riots. Yet it suffers from the spiritual damps, Alabama anoxia. Twenty-four hours in Mobile and you have the feeling a plastic bag is tied around your head and you’re breathing your own air. Mobile’s public space is continuous with the private space of its front parlors. So where New York is a vacuum, Mobile is a pressure cooker.”⁵

For Percy, New Orleans was a perfect mix, a place that “is both intimately related to the South, and yet in a real sense cut adrift not only from the South but from the rest of Louisiana, somewhat like Mont-St. Michel awash at high tide.”⁶ His beloved New Orleans represented a marriage “of George Babbitt and Marianne.”⁷

Percy, like Subirós, is talking around some of the essential ingredients for the commodious blending of difference that lies at the heart of an elegant city style that is sometimes called “urbanity.” A community must not only be diverse, but must become a protected public meeting place in which people of difference come and go and interact with one another. George Babbitt and Marianne must not only stare across crowded cityscapes at one another; they must connect.

But if they are to do so, urban space (both literal and figurative) must be both shared and protected. There must be a place for people both to remain different and to interact. Mere size is not, in and of itself, a critical factor in creating urbanity as defined here. Percy’s Covington, Louisiana, was as tiny as it was urbane. Large or small, a genuinely urbane community must furnish protection while allowing people—not just writers—to “sniff the air.” Urbane diversity thrives on societal interstices in which folks of many hues can live side by side without devouring one another.

NURTURING NEUTRAL GROUND

Why, an intelligent reader must be asking by now, are “urbanity” and “urbane” important? Isn’t “urban” sufficient? Once again, we are reminded of New Orleans, a city where a boulevard median is not just a physical barrier but a metaphysical “neutral ground.”

The polished elegance of manner suggested by notions of “urbanity” and “urbane” are essential for explaining how and why some communities nurture a creative blending of difference while others do not. Riots and rough edges aside, New Orleans long exhibited—alas, prior to Katrina—an urbanity missing in Mobile. But riots and rough edges may not be an aside at all. Perhaps, seeming unpleasantness stands at the heart of the matter of urbane urban diversity. The fact that New Orleans’ public space is in its streets rather than its front parlors necessarily meant that groups that vary accord-

ing to income, race, confession, ethnicity, and any other manner of human self-invention have been forced to find ways of interacting with one another.

Writing a century before Percy, a future chronicler of all things Japanese, Lafcadio Hearn, found himself perfecting his observational and literary skills in New Orleans. Immediately taken with the city, Hearn noted, “If this be not the cosmopolitan city of the world, it is certainly the cosmopolitan city of the Americas. While standing in the bar-room of the St. Charles Hotel recently, where the auction sales of real estate are held, a friend pointed out to me foreigners from almost all parts of the world.”⁸

Historians could well dispute Hearn on his facts—New York and Chicago were arguably even more cosmopolitan than New Orleans at the time (1877). No matter, the key to Hearn’s observation lies elsewhere. Auction sales of real estate were not handled by a cold counting-house or exchange; nor were they limited to some native elite as they might have been in the great cities to the north. Hearn offers his observations about seeing “Herzegovinians, Cubans, Spanish-Americans, Italians, Englishmen, old-country French and Creole French, Portuguese, Greeks from the Levant, Russians, Canadians, Brazilians”—and about his Southern friends who conduct their business dealings in French, Portuguese, Spanish and Modern Greek—while describing a visit to a hotel bar. Here is Walker Percy’s congenial crack in the sidewalk, a classic “space in between.”

Being itself somehow neither one place nor another—a city caught between the American South and the Latin Caribbean, between Protestant and Catholic, between American and European, between African and European—pre-Katrina New Orleans bred just the sort of fortuitous “cracks in the sidewalk” of urban homogeneity that encourage folks of different sorts to “mosey out now and then and sniff the air” together. The city, as S. Frederick Starr has observed, inverts New England traditions that form one of the cornerstones of American thought. “Louisiana represents the heart over the intellect,” Starr tells us, “spontaneity over calculation, instinct over reason, music over the word, forgiveness over judgment, impermanence over permanence, and community over

the isolated and alienated individual.”⁹ There was always an opportunity for a Percy-style mosey or a Hearn-like trip to the bar.

These special qualities of the city prior to Katrina help to explain the powerful images of loss and grief following the destruction of the storm. New Orleanians lost their homes, their families, their jobs, their neighborhoods—and a special sense of life that is hard, if not impossible, to recreate elsewhere. Katrina inundated the city’s physical and metaphysical neutral ground.

But hope can be found within the tragedy of Katrina. If the city and its residents were largely abandoned by government, a spirit of volunteerism intervened to foster progress. This commitment to the community and to rebuilding is in part a result of the city’s special qualities discussed by Walker Percy and others. While we can all remain cynical about the nature of corporate “volunteerism” in this process, at least corporations have been present.

NATIONALISM VERSUS URBANE DIVERSITY

The government has been largely absent following Katrina, both the dysfunctional local government and the more purposeful federal government. Where is the federal government? Why is it absent? Not through neglect. The fact of the matter is that rebuilding New Orleans does not fit into the ideological vision of the government of the United States, an ideological vision that views all governmental action as suspect.

But the forces driving federal neglect go deeper. As Emily Clark argues in her contribution, both New Orleanians and other Americans chose to present the city as the internal “other.” Everything that New Orleans represents—its ease of diversity and of social networking, for example, its very urbanity—has been portrayed as antithetical to the underlying vision of the good society held by those dominating the United States government at present, and in the past. No American political leader has been as clear minded in speech as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was when she once stunningly declared that there is “no such thing as society.”¹⁰ But many American political leaders believe she was right, and everything about New Orleans throughout its history has

demonstrated that this position is misguided and incomplete at best.

New Orleans, Clark continues, “was not significantly different from other American cities in its history, its sex culture, or its cosmopolitan, polyglot, multiracial population.” The assignment of exceptionality to the city fit the needs of New Orleanians and other Americans, until it didn’t. In fact, New Orleanians “have done such a good job that the rest of American has managed to forget that this rich legacy, and New Orleans, are not beyond the boundaries of American identity, but at its heart.” The narrative of difference proved useful to advocates of a national American narrative that sought to deny difference in favor of unity, as well as to advocates of New Orleans’ exceptionalism—from Creoles wishing to keep the boorish Yankees at bay, to the public relations offices at bureaus of tourism who wanted an exotic product to sell. Both the city and the country have been impoverished materially and spiritually by this artificial divide.

New Orleans is hardly the only city in the world in such circumstances—even though the roster of similar cities and towns is unfortunately limited. To name one, Odesa, in present-day Ukraine, has long been home to an extravagant urbane diversity.

Despite its very Old World location on the site of the ancient worlds surrounding the Black Sea, Odesa is a young city—considerably younger than New Orleans. Founded by imperial decree on May 27, 1794, Odesa became an American-style frontier town of long and straight avenues offering broad vistas; of rampant, not-always-licit land speculation; of cosmopolitan freedom; and of a forgiving attitude toward sins of all natures. As Mark Twain noted in the 1860s, “Look up the street or down the street, this way or that way, we saw only America.”¹¹

Odesa was from the very beginning not only a place in between, but a town—to borrow from New Orleans—where *les bons temps* most definitely *ont roulé*. Like New Orleans, Odesa was a product of imperial dreams and delusions cast down on the far edge of empire.

Empress Catherine II, “the Great” (who ruled from 1762 to 1796), devoted much of her reign to trying to extend Russia’s reach to envelop the Black Sea and secure Constantinople. So dedicated was she to this objective that

the gardens of her lavish palace outside St. Petersburg contained a re-creation of the Black Sea in symbolic miniature.¹² Her soldiers secured the Crimea in 1783, and additional lands along the Black Sea littoral over the course of 1787–91. Catherine called the new territories in the southwestern corner of her empire Novorossia (“New Russia”).

Two free-spirited foreign adventurers—a Naples-born soldier of fortune of Spanish and Irish stock named Joseph de Ribas and a Dutch military engineer named Franz de Voland—proposed building a garrison city at the site of the Ottoman fortress of *Teni-Dunai* at *Khadzhibei*. On May 27, 1794, Catherine approved de Ribas and de Voland’s proposal for a new town and port between the Danube and Dnieper river deltas. Their settlement was quickly named *Odessa*, perhaps as a consequence of an imperial utterance emitted, fittingly, during a court ball.¹³

Imperial ballroom chatter and decrees aside, de Ribas and de Voland needed people with which to populate their “American” new town. Foreigners rushed in, as did traders large and small, respected and dissolute. More important, one of Catherine’s last decrees, issued only after her death, proclaimed the entire province of Novorossia an amnesty zone for runaway serfs. About three thousand Russian and Ukrainian serfs immediately rushed to the area around *Odessa* during the last years of the 18th century so that they could live in freedom.¹⁴ An air of religious tolerance took hold, with Christian and Muslim former Turkish subjects joining with Christian and Jewish Russian subjects to create a “crack in the sidewalk” of southeastern Europe. Just three years after *Odesa*’s founding, a third of the city’s residents lived without appropriate legal documentation.¹⁵

Catherine’s son, the Emperor Paul I (1796–1801), eagerly set out to dismantle much of what his mother had achieved, including *Odessa*. Paul dismissed de Ribas and de Voland, allowing the city to languish until he was assassinated a few years later. In 1803, Catherine’s grandson Tsar Alexander I (1801–25) named a 36-year-old Frenchman who had fled the revolution in his own country—the duc de Richelieu, a great-nephew of the famed cardinal—to preside over the increasingly rambunctious frontier town in the far southwestern reaches of his empire.¹⁶

Over the course of the next 11 years, Richelieu secured *Odessa*’s fate as a place in between. Russian and Ukrainian peasants, Cossacks from *Chernihiv* and *Poltava*, Jews from the overcrowded “pale” of settlements, Ottoman Christians (Bulgarians, Gagauzy, Moldavians, Serbs, Greeks, and Armenians), Gypsies, Catholic Germans, Swiss Protestants, Mennonites, Hungarians, Poles, Italians, Islamic *Nogai* Turks, and all other manner of people converged on the boomtown port at the edge of so many different worlds.¹⁷ Richelieu eventually returned to France, where he became prime minister for the restored Bourbon monarchy, leaving behind what he himself called “the best pearl in the Russian crown” on the shores of the Black Sea.¹⁸ *Odessa* would remain a raucous, wide-open, and randy patch of earth—becoming the port through which the grain riches of Ukraine and Russia’s vast Black Earth steppe would pass to reach the outside world.

Like Catherine’s son Paul, contemporary Ukrainian nationalists are troubled by the realities of *Odesa*. As Patricia Herlihy demonstrates in her contribution to the present volume, the city’s founding legends are affronts to a Ukrainian state-building enterprise that by definition seeks to undo the realities that Catherine wrought. Battles over language serve as surrogates for deeper divisions between worldviews that embrace or reject diversity. As with New Orleans, the rejection of *Odesa* by many national politicians is ideological. *Odesa* represents an alternative future with space for all sorts of folks not dedicated to the project of creating a Ukrainian state. No wonder, as Herlihy recounts, hundreds of Ukrainian Cossacks found a returned Catherine to be more offensive than a monument to Bolshevik heroes.

FINDING CHARM IN A HORRIBLE TOWN

Famed *Odessa* author Isaac Babel put it this way in 1916: “*Odesa* is a horrible town. It’s common knowledge.... And yet I feel that there are quite a few good things one can say about this important town, the most charming city of the Russian Empire. If you think about it, it is a town in which you can live free and easy.”¹⁹ A place in between where, to pursue Walker Percy’s metaphor, residents can seek the protec-

tion of the crack in the sidewalk while moseying out from time to time to meet people unlike themselves. Doing so, however, required street smarts and a lesson or two in the School of Hard Knocks, as we learned from Brian Horowitz in his essay in the present volume.

More significantly for our purposes, Horowitz describes the struggle between nationalists and integrationists within the Odessa Jewish community of a century ago. These battles share some of the underlying tensions found in Clark's New Orleans and Herlihy's 21st-century Odesa. In all three cases, battles between two groups get played out on a number of fronts, including, but not limited to, the nature of philanthropic activities in the community and the nature of education, especially language education.

In the end, after considerable conflict, Horowitz's Jewish integrationists won out on a number of issues. Their victory is important for Odesa's continuing ability to function as a "crack in the sidewalk," a place of diversity under the umbrella of a compelling local vision (if not ideology). While Horowitz doesn't even attempt to draw causal arrows between these outcomes and the local Odesa environment, it is fair to note that nationalists won similar battles elsewhere at this time in Jewish communities under even less pressure than was being exerted in Odesa.

Like New Orleans, Odesa had become a cosmopolitan city, and more; it remained a place where different people could "sniff the air" together. Like New Orleans, Odesa was a place of communal violence as well as embrace, with anti-Jewish pogroms every bit as fierce as anti-African race riots an ocean away.²⁰ Like New Orleans, Odesa had become a town in which a large minority population—of African heritage in New Orleans and of Jewish heritage in Odesa—defined much of the tenor of the town. (A third of Odessa's population claimed Yiddish as its native language a century after the city's founding).²¹

As in New Orleans, an undertone of illicit enterprise bound diverse populations together in Odesa, with eyes cast askance at various purveyors of stricter moral codes who would periodically descend to rectify moral incertitude. Like New Orleans, Odesa had become a town of music: a lover of grand Italian opera, home to

a world-acclaimed school of classical violin, and host to wildly popular vaudeville halls. Both cities share jazz in a manner of fashion, with many popular Jewish jazzmen in the United States—such as Ted Louis, Arte Shaw, and Vernon Duke—and Soviet jazz icon Leonid Utesov having ties of one sort or another to Odesa's version of Storyville, the (in)famous Jewish district of Moldovanka.²² Both were cities that gloried in the carnivalesque; both are the sorts of towns that, in the words of Vladimir Jabotinsky, "create their own type of people."²³

URBANITY AS A VERB, NOT A NOUN

Odesa's characters populate the pages of writers who drew on the city for inspiration. If New Orleans has inspired such writers as Sherwood Anderson, George Washington Cable, Truman Capote, Kate Chopin, Zora Neale Hurston, Walker Percy, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and Anne Rice, Odesa provided the raw material for the likes of Sholem Aleichem, Isaac Babel, Ivan Bunin, Aleksandr Kuprin, Yuri Olesha, Valentine Katayev, and the incomparable Soviet satirists Il'ya Il'f (Il'ya Fainzilberg) and Yevgeny Petrov (Valentine Katayev's younger brother Yevgeny). Il'f and Petrov's legendary con man Ostap Bender personifies the contradictions so important for creating urbane diversity out of in-between urban spaces and places. Bender in particular reveals how sweet the smell of his hometown's often noxious atmosphere can be—and how indispensable local contradictions can become to the creation of urbane diversity—when residents "mosey out now and then and sniff the air."

The loveable rascal and con man Bender came to symbolize the fast and loose entrepreneurs unleashed by Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) of the 1920s. Lenin took "one step back" toward capitalism by relegalizing small trade, after having taken "two steps forward" during the Bolshevik Revolution. Small-scale merchants who seemed to believe in the adage "Buyer beware!" flooded Russian cities. Il'f and Petrov, drawing on characters from their native Odesa, invented the prototypical "NEPman" in the form of Bender—a figment of their imaginations that was quickly absorbed into Soviet lore, even shaping the work of the American filmmaker Mel Brooks. Bender would have

made the perfect partner for Max Bialystock in Brooks's *The Producers*.

Il'f and Petrov place their adorable scamp at the heart of their two most famous romps across NEP Russia, the novel *The Twelve Chairs*, which appeared in 1928, and *The Little Golden Calf*, which followed in 1931. Bender's pursuit of comically obtained wealth took him to the far corners of the Soviet Union. But no matter where he tried his latest con, Bender was very much a product of Odesa. This becomes obvious in the hyperbolic description of his own lineage toward the close of *The Twelve Chairs*.

Bender finds himself on a riverboat floating down the Volga past the Chuvash city of Cheboksary after having spent hundreds of pages in an unsuccessful search for a missing chair (1 from a set of 12) that has hidden within it the jewels of a deceased lady of means. Explaining that no one will miss him when he is dead, Bender conjures up his gravestone:

Here lies the unknown central-heating engineer and conqueror, Ostap-Suleiman-Bertha-Maria Bender Bey, whose father was a Turkish citizen who died without leaving his son, Ostap-Suleiman, a cent. The deceased's mother was a countess of independent means.²⁴

Such a ridiculous lineage does not seem quite as silly within the context of Odesa, a city that was in reality a "crack in the sidewalk" between all of the worlds implied by the names Ostap, Suleiman, Bertha, Maria, Bender, and Bey. As Il'f and Petrov knew well, one could encounter deceased countesses of independent means on the streets of Odesa as well.

New Orleans and Odesa have remained rarities throughout much of their histories. They are towns infused with moral skepticism and tolerance for the various ambiguities and pécadilloes of life—generators of unique urban cultures that embrace diversity. They do this with style and panache; they are simultaneously "urban" and "urbane."

The special achievements of both New Orleans and Odesa often have been besieged, given their status as cities standing in opposition to much of the modern world. Lurking behind each facade is the threat of

homogenization of that which is heterogeneous in an effort to "save" it for modernity. New Orleans and Odesa remain places in between in full rebellion against the world around them. One considerable lesson of New Orleans and Odesa, alas, may prove to be the incompatibility of the up-to-date with the urbanely tolerant.

We can see that these great cities are under threat right now. In all of the discussions about how to rebuild New Orleans, much of the debate has been about everything but urbanity and even tolerance. Odesa now finds itself in a state that is busy creating itself, demanding accommodation of a new national project that, as is the case with all nation-building exercises, is inimical to the quirky rebellion against homogeneity the city has stood for throughout its history. This profound rejection of homogeneity stands as close to the heart of the challenges discussed by Patricia Herlihy as language, ethnicity, or religion.

Perhaps the primary struggle is over language, and, as in the Jewish community discussed by Brian Horowitz, Odesa's urbanity is under challenge by those who wish to impose order from the outside in the name of nation building. Is language choice dictated from above? Or is it, as Laada Bilaniuk suggests, something that becomes a choice within the context of a specific situation?²⁵ Is language to be a "noun," an unchangeable object? Or a more fluid "verb" that can alter itself over time and place and circumstance? Odesa, as Herlihy knows better than anyone, has always been a "verb," an action—not a "noun," an object. The same can be said of New Orleans, at least prior to Katrina, as is apparent in Clark's account of the city. Given the difficult recent histories of both cities, one has to ask whether the same observations will be made about both cities in the 21st century. Might the final paragraph in the next edition of this collection be that both cities have become more representative of their countries than not?

THE INTERSTICES OF A POLITE WORLD

Perhaps the writers of both cities provide the answer to that question. If so, one need not despair about either New Orleans or Odesa being domesticated anytime soon.

John Kennedy Toole's bilious, larger-than-life hero (a figment of New Orleans imagination every bit as memorable as Ostap Bender) Ignatius P. Riley flies into one of his recurring expansive rages as he encounters what would now be recognized, some four decades later, as "gentrification." As Ignatius approaches a preciously renovated 18th-century townhouse, Toole takes us yet again into his creation's tortured soul:

The hand of the professional decorator had exorcized whatever ghosts of the French bourgeoisie might still haunt the thick brick walls of the building. The exterior was painted canary yellow; the gas jets in the reproduction brass lanterns mounted on either side of the carriageway flickered softly, their amber flames rippling in reflection on the black enamel of the gate and shutters. On the flagstone paving beneath both lanterns there were old plantation pots in which Spanish daggers grew and extended their sharply pointed stilettos.

Ignatius stood before the building regarding it with extreme distaste. His blue and yellow eyes denounced the resplendent facade. His nose rebelled against the very noticeable odor of fresh enamel.²⁶

Ostap Bender and Ignatius P. Riley live in the interstices of a polite world, moseying out now and again to breathe a profound humanity into their hometowns. Like Walker Percy's cracks in the sidewalks, the spaces in between that they inhabit provide the opportunity for brilliance. Real-life New Orleans and Odesa have long revealed the potential for social genius reflected in the imaginary Bender and Riley. They have urged us to look beyond the orderly, the conventionally beautiful, and the well kept for urbane openings to tolerance.


The histories, literature, music, and cultures of New Orleans and Odesa have demonstrated that cities can achieve the lofty goals enumerated by Barcelona's Pep Subirós. Cities are capable of simultaneously accepting difference and creating shared points of reference. As Samuel Ramer, Patricia Herlihy, Brian Horowitz, and Emily Clark demonstrate, local legends, memories, and tellings of history can go beyond opposing understandings of society

to embrace pluralism. New Orleans and Odesa have offered an alternative vision for a 21st-century overwhelmed by division, hatred, conflict, and gated communities. One hopes that these cities both will be able to find ways of continuing to bring that vision to reality as they face unimaginable challenges in the years ahead.

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