"The Crusade Against the Whisker" and the Birth of the Modern Radical Beard

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On December 5, 1894 a New Yorker named William Wahl was awarded $200 by a jury of his peers in a suit against his cousin Herman Wahl. William claimed that Herman tore out his beard by the roots on one side of his face. Rendered unable to regrow his beard, William wore only a mustache. The prosecuting attorney, Max Altmeyer argued that his client had "suffered great damage to his reputation," because he was "compelled to go whiskerless." William claimed that his "magnificent whiskers" gave him an edge in business, but he has since "been reduced to the level of ordinary mortals." He found that the prestige he had once enjoyed as a bill collector for a brewery was torn from him with his beard. The jury was sympathetic to William's plea and awarded him $200. This jury certainly understood the importance and value of a beard to the man who wears it. In nineteenth-century America, long flowing beards were markers of masculinity. From stereotypical forty-niners to Civil War generals, nineteenth-century America is remembered as a wilder and hairier time. Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the most iconic nineteenth-century American, famously grew his beard in order to appeal to voters. But what happened to this hirsute hierarchy?[1]

What William Wahl could not have known was that his case may not have been so successful only a few years later. Shortly after this 1894 dispute, the popularity of beards plummeted. The appeal to masculine dominance that Lincoln used to help his election campaign was no longer effective. In fact, in many cases politicians led the charge against the primacy of the beard. In what may be one of the most dramatic historical shifts in facial hair styles, beards became an oddity increasingly associated with slobs and political radicals. This shift in style was a product of the political climate of 1890's America. Beards are often indicators of social station and affiliation. In the case of William Wahl, his beard earned him a measure of respect in his career. However, Wahl stood at the end of an era. After the 1890s, the American public began to see beards as uncivilized displays of political radicalism.

This paper seeks to investigate the shift in style in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when it again became customary for men to shave their beards. In order to address this topic, the historiographies of facial hair, masculinity, and radical politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States demand attention. The convergence of these three areas of study will provide the basis for this examination into this shift in style, and the social meanings that may have been placed on beards and beardlessness during this period in American history.

The leading beard historian, and author of a good portion of the scholarship on the history of beards, Christopher Oldstone-Moore, claims that facial hair, unlike head hair styles, do not represent passing fashions, but rather "seismic shifts dictated by deeper social forces." If "seismic shifts" underlay all shifts in facial hair style, this research attempts to identify the "deeper social forces" behind the American shift at the end of the nineteenth century. Oldstone-Moore, as well as other scholars, point to the association of beards with radical left-wing politics in the twentieth century, but they refrain from describing the origins the "leftist hair" in detail.

[1] "For His Whiskers, $200—A Jury's Practical Sympathy with William Wahl," *New York Times*, December 6, 1894; Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men: the revealing history of facial hair.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 175-178.

Conceptions of masculinity play an important role in defining the social meanings of beards. [2]

The study of masculinity in nineteenth-century America often focuses on the moral reforms taking place in the period. The shift in moral attitudes was influenced by, and coevolved with, a rising religiosity that is often termed "The Second Great Awakening". Moral restraint, rather than excess, came to define manhood in this period.[3] Many scholarly writings on the subject of masculinity more broadly do not discuss facial hair styles—unless of course that is the theme of the entire work—despite the fact that a beard is a very dramatic outward symbol of masculinity.[4] This research seeks to assert that shifts in facial hair styles can be important indicators of shifts in societal views of abstract ideas such as masculinity. Also, relatively little scholarly work has been produced on how ideas of masculinity changed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, masculine codes of the industrial age vary dramatically from those of the turn of the century. The masculine codes of this era, however, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the political environment in which they existed.

This essay focuses on radical American politics in the era, which is defined by The Peoples' Party, though other radical groups such as the IWW or Industrial Workers of the World were active in this period as well. Also known as the Populist Party or Populism, The Peoples' Party elected William A. Peffer of Kansas to the United States Senate in 1890. In fact, scholarship regarding the People's Party often hails Peffer as the father of the movement, especially in his home state of Kansas.[5] In the 1960s, post-revisionists such as Norman Pollack broke with the revisionist school of the 1950s, which believed Populism to be a conservative movement aimed at recapturing Jeffersonian-Democracy. Post-revisionists point to the radical left-wing ideas of the party as evidence that they were in fact a forward-looking socialistic movement.[6] Despite their differences on the directions of populism, historians agree that populism was a radical and short-lived political movement. Little scholarly work has been done on how Populism, and its iconic leader William Peffer, shaped perceptions of radical politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The shift in popular facial hair style in the late nineteenth century demonstrates larger political attitudes of the time. Third-party radicalism was so disdained by mainstream politics that it drove the facial hair styles of the entire nation, and the legacy of bearded radical leftists endures today.[7] Men advancing radically left-wing agendas or even countercultural movements, such as Che Guevara or John Lennon, often sported beards to demonstrate their nonconformity throughout the twentieth century. The idea of the radical leftist beard of the twentieth-century has only begun to show signs of weakening in the most recent decades. The era of the radical beard defined the social meaning of facial hair for decades, and the legacies can still be seen today. Understanding the cause of this shift leads to a better understanding of its development. The push to conform and to distance oneself from radicalism by shaving has outlasted the knowledge of its origins. However, the goal remains important, and compels millions of men to shave everyday rather than appear radicalized. The refusal to shave, on the other hand, is used a marker of nonconformity and rebelliousness. This essay will first demonstrate the importance of beards to masculine ideals just before the proliferation of shaving that occurred in the 1890's. Then, it will discuss the flashpoint that saw beards disgraced in a matter of a few years. Finally, the research will attempt to identify a cause for this dramatic shift in the radical American political environment of 1890's.

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[2] *Of Beards and Men,* as well as "The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain." *Victorian Studies*, 48, no. 1 (2005): 7-34. And, "Mustaches and Masculine Codes in Early Twentieth-Century America." *Journal of Social History*, 45, no. 1 (2011): 47, are excellent sources essential to this research by Olstone-Moore; Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men*, 1, 235-259.

[3] Richard Stott, *Jolly fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

[4] Patricia Kelleher. "Class and Catholic Irish Masculinity in Antebellum America: Young Men on the Make in Chicago," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 (2009): 7-42. Discusses Irish masculinity in the period without mentioning facial hair styles.

[5] D. Scott Barton, "Party Switching and Kansas Populism," *The Historian* 52, no. 3 (1990): 453-467.

[6] Norman Pollack, *The Populist Mind* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1967): vii-ix.

[7] Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men,* 235-259. Chapter titled "Hair on the Left"

The Popularity of the Masculine "Facial Ornament" and the Right to be Bearded

The history of hair, and facial hair more specifically, is often tied to social changes and/or conflicts in the societies that bore these styles. One misconception that many works in the field address is that the history of shaving is dictated by razor technology. In fact, daily shaving has been occurring for millennia, since the conquests of the beardless Macedonian commander Alexander the Great. Rapid advances in metallurgic technology, likewise, have not been tied to increases in the frequency of shaving. The 1847 invention of the hoe-type razor by William Henson, for example, improved on the straight razor model, yet failed to prevent the increase in the popularity of beards in the 1840s and '50s. Oldstone-Moore contends that there have been four major beard movements in Western civilization since the proliferation of shaving by Alexander the Great.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the fourth of these movements made it the social norm for men in America to wear beards. The beard movement of the industrial age reached all classes of American society, and enjoyed a ubiquity, free of divisive political associations. Instead, beards were universally associated with masculinity and strength. This wider beard movement began in earnest, in the 1840s and continued into the 1890s. The origins of this industrial beard movement can be traced to the proliferation of beards among romantic thinkers in the first few decades of the nineteenth-century, who sought a deeper connection to nature and medieval writers.[8]

Understanding the Romantic origin of the Industrial Beard is crucial to understanding the social meanings of the ubiquitous mid-nineteenth-century beard. Romantic, and later transcendentalist, artists and thinkers allowed their beards to grow as an outward symbol of the power of nature, and the natural origin of man. Romantic philosophy held that man should seek a harmonious and reverent relationship with the natural world around him. Since many men naturally grow beards, shaving seemed antithetical to the romantic concept of nature as an ideal. Thus, Romantics favored allowing nature to take its course rather than the slavish maintenance of regular shaving. As result, romantic artists and writers, such as Victor Hugo and Herman Melville, grew flowing full beards. Romantics also wished to imitate both classical Greek and Roman and medieval writers who also customarily wore beards. In the romantic view of the world, modern society had become corrupt and had lost the imagination and connection to nature of earlier centuries. For these men, growing a beard was a way to reconnect with nature and to emulate the classical and medieval writers whom they admired. As romantic conceptualizations of nature and civilization spread through the United States, so did their custom of wearing full beards. [9]

Transcendentalists, who drew inspiration from romantic thought, often grew beards. Writers such as Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau sported beards to demonstrate their reverence for the natural. In fact, phrenology, a transcendental medical philosophy, encouraged beard growth, and viewed shaving as unnatural and the cause of shorter life spans.[10] These philosophies seized on the idea that men could demonstrate their natural power and potency with a beard by harkening back to virile classical and medieval figures. As the hairy faces of these romantic and transcendentalist authors became easily recognizable by the American public, the facial hair styles they wore gained popularity. This explosion of beardedness coevolved with changing definitions of masculinity in America at this time. Ideas of asserting natural masculinity, popularized by romantic and transcendental thinkers, meshed well with the moral reforms of the era.

In the early decades of the nineteenth-century the United States experienced the Second Great Awakening. With church attendance on the rise, new moral reforms—namely the temperance movement—

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[8] Bill Severn, *The long and short of it; five thousand years of fun and fury over hair* (New York: McKay, 1971) and Allan Peterkin, *One thousand mustaches: a cultural history of the Mo* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012) establish this very well; Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men.* 2; Christopher Oldstone-Moore, "The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain" *Victorian Studies*, 48, no. 1 (2005): 9,3,147.

[9] Charles Colbert. "Razors and Brains: Asher B. Durand and the Paradigm of Nature." *Studies in American Renaissance* (1992): 270; Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men*, 151-173.

[10] Ibid., 262.

preached the importance of restraint. The temperance movement and religious revival led to a change in the way that society viewed what it meant to be a man. Masculinity in earlier periods in American history had been tied to violence, heavy drinking, and gambling. Fighting was exceedingly common, and taverns and saloons were the center of male social life. In the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of the changes in American religious views, a "moral revolution" took place. Men in this new period of masculinity were expected to be hardworking and reserved.[11] However, changing ideas of masculinity in the nineteenth century did not change the importance of manliness as such. Men were expected to be morally conscious, yes, but also unquestionably masculine. In this time of incredible gender inequality, asserting one's masculinity meant asserting one's power. Marginalized men, in fact, particularly took advantage of this power relationship to assert their dominance over women.[12] Thus, asserting masculinity was incredibly important to men who were members of lower social classes or ethnic minorities. The masculine symbol of a beard became particularly important for these men—bereft of significant political power—in the domestic sphere. As a result, masculine symbols emerged as powerful political tools, and one of the most obvious outward symbols of masculinity was facial hair. This association between masculinity and the legitimacy of the rule is evident in the incredible popularity of beards among elected political officials in the later decades of the nineteenth-century.

By the 1880s, beards were already a mainstay among politicians, as well as the general public. An article in the May 27, 1888 issue of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* titled "Whiskers in History—A Facial Ornament Now Popular Once Ridiculed" affirms the primacy of the beard in this period, while seeking to trace the historical legacy of the beard movement. The article claims that the nation's founding fathers had "faces so clean that their every thought might be read," and that beards were "unknown to all the officers of the revolutionary army." The article presents this as the prevailing trend until, suddenly, American men "threw away their razors and turned their faces out to nature for covering." It goes on to discuss one of the first judges to take the bench with such an "appendage of hair." There was much uproar about this "unbecoming" choice of style. Many contemporaries believed there would be "no managing a jury."[13] The idea that a bearded judge could not control a jury would have been ridiculous in William Wahl's time. By the time the Wahl case was tried in 1894, bearded judges were likely commonplace. Certainly, a jury that deemed the loss of beard worthy of $200 would not find a beard "unbecoming" of a judge. The article concludes by arguing that the status of facial hair was divorced from politically meaning, and that no one could determine any one's political leanings "from the sign he carries on his face." In fact, "the majority of voters" the article judges "cultivate[d] the beard in some form."

This article demonstrates that by the end of the 1880s, the choice to grow a beard was no longer a cultural or political statement like it had been in the early days of the romantic beard. Beards had taken root in most of American society, and had become symbols of masculinity rather than ideology or political affiliation. As a result, an American beard culture had developed that prized beardedness, and like romantic artists before them, looked back to historical examples of bearded societies.

A *New York Times* editorial that appeared on October 17, 1890 titled "Beard Culture: Tribulations through which the Bare-Faced Man does not Pass" describes this bearded era. The author tells of his decision to grow a beard, and thus enter the world of beard culture. Though he starts by claiming that shaving is "incontestably the most confirmed of all masculine habits," and has "given rise to industry," the author goes on to claim that "denuding his face of its natural covering" was a "tedious and painful sacrifice." The indictment of regular shaving does not stop there. The author claims the practice "gives pleasure to no one, not even [oneself,]" and suggests that the "fifteen minutes of scraping himself before a mirror" should be "devoted to music or literature" rather than being "productive only of a smooth face." This eloquent condemnation of shaving demonstrates the importance of a wider beard culture for the author of the editorial. He also associates

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[11] Stott, *Jolly Fellows,* 282-285.

[12] Kelleher, "Class and Catholic Irish Masculinity," 7-42.

[13] "Whiskers in History," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1888.

beards with learning and saved time, rather than carelessness and a lack of hygiene. Though he did shave after some time, the author argues that he lost something other than his beard, namely a "proudness of heart" that caused him "to look down upon the barber."[14] This beard culture framed against shaving and barbers, is the result of a peak in the popularity in beards that elevated beards to near mythical heights. Beards were seen not only as masculine displays, but a near sacred right of every individual.

The idea that the right to grow a beard was a human right would most likely have appealed to William Wahl, or at least his attorney, when seeking compensation for his beard. Just months before the Wahl case, an article titled "Beards, Hair, and Human Rights" appeared in the *New York Times,* the same paper that covered the case, espousing just that. The article explains that "the ancient right of man to have as much hair as nature would let him" is only voidable by the disapproval of the man's wife.[15] This represents an interesting gendered view of a right, in a time when women were denied many rights that men enjoyed. The article even quotes Shakespeare claiming that the inclusion of the phrase "bearded pard" demonstrated the playwright's approval of bearded men.[16] The idea of the human right to grow a beard is an outgrowth of the intense popularity of facial hair in the years leading up to the publication of this article and the Wahl case in 1894 that coopted language America's of founding principles of human rights. Shortly after this point, however, beards quickly fell out of favor in American society, and facial hair as a human right would be challenged.

"Long Beard" Peffer and his Populists

Kansas was the center of radical American politics in the 1890s. As a center of power for the eras most successful third party, the Peoples' Party, Kansas became a hotbed for left-wing radicalism. The Peoples' Party, or the Populists as they were more commonly known, found their political base in the multitude of indebted farmers of the West and South. The collapse of the agricultural boom of the post-Civil War era in the late 1880s angered and impoverished farmers across the states such as Kansas. The agrarian platform of the Populists appealed to these farmers who advocated for monetary reform, and collective ownership of railroads and some land. One of the biggest successes of the Kansas Populists came in the elections of 1890. Kansas elected the first Populist Senator, William Peffer, as well as four Representatives, and challenged the traditional primacy of the Republican Party in the state. More Populists victories came in 1892, in the Federal and State governments.[17] The press of the time viewed this alliance as a radical example of party-switching. A 1891 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article, "Kansas—Craziest of Alliances" claimed that 1890 election of Peffer was a "greater victory than was ever achieved by a new party in any state." The article goes on to question the wisdom of electing "obscure men of no known fitness for political life," to the United States Congress. In fact, popular opinion in states without major Populist followings was certainly anti-Populist. As a result, Kansas became known for its "fanatic" and "crazy" politics in the industrial North.[18]

However, Kansas was not known only for its radical third-party politics. It seems that the men of Kansas also enjoyed the reputation of being bearded. A 1910 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article describes the end of this phenomenon. Titled, "Kansas is Shaving" the article reports that "there is going on a quiet but determined crusade against whiskers" in Kansas. Kansas, the article claims, was known as a "nursery of whiskers," and "impression prevail[ed] over the civilized world that Kansas beats the Boers for beards." Interestingly, the article argues that Kansas did not deserve this reputation, because whiskers were "less conspicuous in Kansas

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[14] "Beard Culture: Tribulations through which the Bare-Faced Man does not Pass," *New York Times*, October 17, 1890.

[15] A.D. Harvey, "Men's Beards and Women's Backsides," *The Historian* Winter (2009): 20-24. Harvey's article provides an interesting look at how women, and women's styles, are related to the development of facial hair style.

[16] "Beards, Hair, and Human Rights," *New York Times*, August 25, 1894.

[17] Barton, "Party Switching," 453-461

[18] "Kansas—Craziest of Alliances," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 6, 1891.

than in other states." "A traveler in Missouri," may have seen "more alfalfa on men's faces in a day than he will see in Kansas in a week," and there may have been "more whiskers in a county of Indiana" than "in all of Kansas." Yet despite the fact that Kansans did not deserve this reputation, the state was "held up to ridicule the year round as being the country where men run to whiskers." In 1910, beards had already fallen out of fashion, and this article argues that the bearded reputation of Kansas was "bad for people," and indicated "poverty…, a contempt for bath tubs…, carelessness…, slovenliness, and other disagreeable things." The article does provide a reason for the idea of a bearded Kansas in the minds of many Americans. "Insurgency in Kansas" it claims, was "no mere matter of politics." Suggesting that Kansas was not only politically radical, but also radical in its facial hair styles. "Populism flaunted whiskers," reports the article, suggesting that Kansas's reputation was a result of the beards "flaunted" by Populist politicians. Furthermore, the article does not shy away from claiming that the "crusade against the whisker is a patriotic movement," and even closes with the statement: "Let plutocracy beware a democracy that shaves."[19] Evidently, Kansas was associated with beards because of its Populist Party politicians who chose to grow long flowing beards. But what caused this association between beards and Populists on the eve of the so-called crusade against the whisker?

The most prominent of Kansas Populists in the 1890s was William Peffer. Peffer was born in 1831, in rural Pennsylvania, and became an advocate of temperance and abolition as a youth. Eventually, in 1870, he settled in Kansas and worked as an editor and lawyer.[20] In 1881 Peffer became the editor of *Kansas Farmer*—the most widely read publication specifically for farmers—which was eventually named the official paper of the Farmers' Alliance in Kansas. In March 1890, the Farmers' Alliance joined with the Knights of Labor in order to create the People's Party. The party was founded in order to address the issues of the laboring classes of society, and advocated collective ownership of transportation and banks as a means of achieving a truer democracy. Peffer was elected to the US Senate in 1890, and became the first Populist senator.[21] Peffer's importance to the formation of the Populist movement is well known. After his election, Peffer quickly became one of the most famous senators, and was the subject of numerous articles, cartoons, and interviews. He was so heavily associated with the third party movement that before the term "populism" was adopted in late 1891, it was more commonly referred to as "Pefferism." Populist politicians were in turn known as "Pefferites" or Peffercrats." Once "Populist" saw mainstream use, "Pefferism" came to mean outcries against poor social and economic conditions, and was used as such for a number of years after the incorporation of the Populists into the Democratic Party.[22] "Pefferism," after its divorce from Populism more broadly, could be seen as a catch all for radical leftist thought. However, Peffer became notorious for more than just revolutionary politics.

Other than the shock of a successful third party in a traditionally two-party system, Peffer quickly became famous for his beard. Peffer's whiskers reached to his waist, and were the focus of much attention from the American press. Dr. Peter Argersinger, one of Peffer's most influential biographers argues in his *Populism and politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* that Peffer's appearance lent itself naturally to caricature, and became a more consistent symbol for the People's Party than the donkey or the elephant for Democrats or Republicans respectively. Moreover, Argersinger claims that Peffer's nickname of "Whiskers" was an "appellation so compelling that Peffer is known even to historians solely as the possessor of his beard."[23] Political cartoons were exceedingly popular in this time, and were utilized by both supporters and opponents of the People's Party.[24] Peffer was a favorite of the two leading political magazines of the time, *Puck* and *The Judge*.

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[19] "Kansas is Shaving," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1910.

[20]Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2014), 1-2.

[21]Barton, "Party Switching," 456-458.

[22] Argersinger, *Populism and politics*, 104-105.
[23] *Ibid*., 105.
[24] Worth Robert Miller, *Populist Cartoons: An Illustrated History of the Third-Party Movement of the 1890's* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2011) is a great resource for People's Party Political Cartoons.

These magazines were controlled by Democrats and Republicans respectively, and though they could agree on little else, both fiercely opposed the Populists. In fact, Peffer appears in these magazines over 60 times during his term in the senate and is more often than not depicted with a "grossly exaggerated beard."[25] Mention of Peffer's name in the press is almost always accompanied with mention of his beard. "Peffer of the long beard," "Long Beard Peffer," and "Peffer Longbeard" were monikers for the senator often used in the press.[26] The September 24, 1893 *Los Angeles Times* article discussed in the last section concerning beards of the US senate focuses mainly on the "well-bearded face" of Peffer. The article argues that Peffer had "the longest whiskers in the senate," and that they gave "a sort dignity to his features."[27] Nor was Peffer unaware of these depictions, in reference to a bible verse in which King David told his men to "tarry at Jericho…until their beards had grown long," Peffer claimed on the senate floor that "if the newspaper and magazine caricatures are to be taken in evidence, I have been at Jericho some time."[28]

In fact, in an attempt to win compensation for his client's beard, William Wahl's attorney, Max Altmeyer, compared Wahl to "the great Senator Peffer." "Who of us all would ever have heard of the distinguished Kansas statesmen, Senator Peffer but for his whiskers?" Altmeyer asked the jury. "Would you? Would I? No, gentlemen, we would not." Altmeyer argued it was Peffer's "fine growth of whiskers" that made him a "national figure." Peffer's pictures were "published throughout the length and breadth of the land" Altmeyer claimed, because he had "the finest beard in either house of Congress."[29] If William Wahl was awarded $200 for his beard because it gave him prestige in the same manner as William Peffer, then what happened to the national fascination with beards that gave these men notoriety?

With the upcoming presidential election of 1896, some Populists favored a fusion ticket with the Democrats.[30] A young smooth-faced Democratic congressman from Nebraska named William Jennings Bryant came out in support of free silver. One of the planks of the 1892 People's Party platforms (known as the Omaha Platform and held up as the quintessential manifesto of Populism) was the free and unlimited coinage of silver. Silver had been legal US currency until it was demonetized in 1873, causing severe deflation. The People's Party wanted a return to silver with the previous ratio of sixteen ounces of silver to every ounce of gold. This plank of the Omaha Platform appealed especially to poor indebted farmers, the backbone of the People's Party, who saw the values of their debts increase with deflation. This caused a split in the People's Party because some Populists were willing to join the Democrats if it meant the promise of silver, while some "true populists" wished to implement the entirety of the Omaha Platform."[31] Peffer claims that "with the advent of the silver question, the leading ideas of the Populist creed were obscured by the silver glare, and they were allowed to drop out of sight."[32] Peffer was an outspoken opponent of the fusion ticket claiming a "true Populist" would hold to the other principles of the People's Party such as government ownership of railroads and a graduated income tax not just currency reform. "Principle before policy," avowed Peffer believing the "poisonous political drug" of fusion would spell an end for an independent People's Party and its radical left-wing platform. When it was time to set the date for the People's Party National Convention, the pro-fusion populists favored a convention after the Democratic National Convention, in order to support the Democratic nominee. Even though Peffer claimed 75% of Populists favored an early convention, the Populists chose to hold their convention after the Democratic convention. The Populists nominated Bryan, leaving Peffer with few political

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[25] Roger A. Fischer, "Rustic Rasputin: William A. Peffer in Color Cartoon Art, 1891-1899," *Kansas History* 11, no. 4 (1988): 222-239.

[26] "Political Gleanings and Gossip," *New York Times*, November 5, 1894; "Senator Long Beard Peffer's Plea for a Re-election," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 9, 1896; "Kansas—Craziest of Alliances"

[27] "Senatorial Silver: Not Dollars, but in Torsos of Statesmen," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1893.

[28] William A. Peffer, *Populism, Its Rise and Fall*, ed. Peter H. Argersinger (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 92.

[29] "For His Whiskers, $200"

[30] Barton, "Party Switching," 463-464.

[31] Peffer, *Populism*, 72-90.

[32] *Ibid*., 185.

allies. One anti-fusion Populist, Marion Butler of North Carolina, who also happened to sport a fine beard, lamented "they stole our platform and tried to steal our party." The 1896 combined ticket eventually failed. Bryan and his "DemoPopulists" were defeated and Peffer's prediction came true. After 1896 the People's Party began to fade from political prominence, and was subsumed within the Democratic Party.[33]

In the months leading up to the 1896 election, representations of Peffer in the press became far more negative. With these negative descriptions of Peffer came attacks on his character, the most common of which were attacks on his beardedness or the hygiene of his beard. In February of 1896, a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article describes Peffer's beard as "thin," "sparse," and "a starved vagrant thing." Later, it includes an interview from "Sockless" Jerry Simson, a pro-fusion Populist about how Peffer is in the senate for only personal monetary gain. The article goes on to accuse Peffer of nepotism.[34] Moreover, Simpson argued that there was "no need for an independent party" and applied to for a position on the Democratic National Congressional Committee.[35] A June 1896 *Los Angeles Times* article describes Peffer as "the man of long beard and short of brains," before claiming that his political strategy was counterintuitive.[36] A 1899 Chicago Daily Tribune article titled, "The Kansas Pop and His Beard," explains a maximum barber rate bill proposed by Kansas Populists, and sarcastically refers to the "sacred beard of Peffer." The article places barbers as the natural enemy of the Populists, who never trimmed their beards.[37] These depictions of Peffer stand in contrast to the power of William Wahl's claim that Peffer is famous for his great beard. Consequently, beardedness became conflated with Peffer and his political stance. No doubt the disgrace of Peffer politically led to the disgrace of his beard.

Peffer, and other devoted populists, were truly radical in their political beliefs. They held to all of the planks of the Omaha Platform so staunchly because they believed that it was the basis for monumental government reform. Peffer, in a series of essays titled *The Rise and Fall of Populism* published in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1899, describes some early Populist meetings at his lodgings in the Washington. They believed they were at the "skirmish line" at "the beginning of a great and powerful organization." Clearly, these men saw themselves as revolutionaries, fighting against the interests of big business and the "commercial mastodons" of monopolies.[38] Populists believed that once the "producers," agricultural and industrial labor, recognized their shared interest they would band together against the corruption of the two main political parties. The economic ideals espoused in the Omaha Platform, such as government ownership of railroads and telegraphs were coupled with social ideas that were also radically left-wing. Peffer himself was an ardent supporter of women's suffrage, which was in line with the general attitudes of the Populists. Peffer also held a radical view of race during the early 1890s claiming on more than one occasion that Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party recognized no racial differences. He claimed the South should take a similar view, because "the interests of the oppressed transcended race." He beleived the issue of race was used by the powers that be to divide the working class, and keep their focus off their exploitation. This view of race and racism is a recurring theme in communist and socialist thought. After the fall of Populism, Peffer remained staunchly anti-Democrat. Peffer's biographer Peter Argersinger in his introduction as well as his footnotes to Peffer's *Populism, its Rise and Fall*, claims that Peffer overemphasizes the differences between Democrats and Populists while "failing to mention" the differences between Populists and Republicans. He instead, Argersinger argues, chose to paint the Republican Party as "an appropriate destination for discontented Populists." Peffer refused to rejoin the Republican Party for a few years, and when he finally did, he claimed to the be "an insurgent" in the ranks of the GOP.[39] Peffer

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[33] Peffer, *Populism*, 158, 73, 148-151; Argersinger, 244-245. Bryan ran as the Democratic Party candidate in 1900 and 1908. He served as Secretary of War from 1913-15 under President Woodrow Wilson.
[34] "Peffer the Populist," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 18, 1896.

[35] Peffer, *Populism*, 12.
[36] "Peffer Wants Repudiation," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1896.

[37] "The Kansas Pop and His Beard," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 19, 1899.

[38] Peffer, *Populism*, 184, 196.
[39] Ibid., 45, 22.

was not alone in this revolutionary spirit. Other members of the People's Party, especially the faction that refused to support the fusion ticket and remained loyal to the independent Populist Party. However, with Peffer and his Populists politically shamed, his most prominent visual feature quickly fell out of favor as well.

The End of a Harrier Era and the "Manly Devotee"

The September 30, 1906 issue of the *New York Tribune* ran an article titled, "Does a Man Look Better Bearded or Clean Shaven?" The article debates the issue of wearing a beard, which was prohibited by certain corporations at the time. It goes on to provide a barber's and "woman's perspective" on the matter, and leaves the question unanswered. The article is a product of its time, because just a few years earlier beardedness was not up for debate. It comes in the middle of a flashpoint in the history of facial hair styles. As noted in the article, large American corporations began to create regulations that required their employees to shave regularly. What makes this article so interesting is that there is no clear consensus. While possible reasons for the corporate beard prohibitions are given, a man described as "a manly devotee of the curling tongs" as well as a "tonsorial artists" are given ample space to argue against the "rank insult" of prohibiting facial hair. Thus, the picture presented by the article is one of an American society that is split on the matter of beards. Although the author believes that the "trend of civilization is in favor of a smooth face", testimonials from men who "pshaw" at the corporations attempt to force their "harry staff" to shave are included. The article concludes in favor of shaving by claiming that "a face that frightens and inspires distrust" should be "remodeled."[40] This demonstrates the end of the harrier era that William Wahl enjoyed. Rather than associating beards with power and masculinity, the article associates facial hair with "crookedness." This represents the beginning of a dramatic shift in the social meaning of beards.

This shift in the meanings placed on beards is most evident in the facial hair styles chosen by politicians. In 1893, a *Los Angeles Times* article reported that there were "few faces among our statesmen… which were shaven every morning." It goes on to claim that there were "as many different styles of beard and hair in Congress" as there were members.[41] This depiction of a senatorial cornucopia of beards fits perfectly with the trends described in the previous section. However, just fifteen years after the publication of that article, another *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Statesmen Are Smooth Shaven" appeared on October 27, 1908. The article explains that six of the seven men running for president that year had "smooth-shaven countenances." The seventh, one William Howard Taft, wore only a mustache. While the gift of hindsight tells us that Taft's presidential bid was victorious, the importance of the candidates' beardlessness is clear. These statesmen no longer believed that beards would appeal to their constituencies. Furthermore, the article explains that a publication of 103 pictures of congressmen showed that only ten sported beards. The article goes on to prophetically claim that "the era of bearded politics… is past."[42] In the ninety-six years since the Taft presidency, not a single one of America's eighteen presidents sported any sort of facial hair while in office. Evidently, the conception of masculinity of earlier periods that held the beard as a symbol of legitimacy of rule, no longer held sway. The diverse beards of the senate of 1893 were shorn by the by the time of this 1908 article. The turn of statesmen, and Americans more generally, to the razor had important implications for the rest of the western word at the time. American styles, for both facial hair and clothing, spread across the globe in the years to come.

As the American beard increasingly became an oddity, the daily shave took over the wider western world that had previously been under the spell of the Victorian beard movement.[43] A special correspondence in the *New York Times* titled, "Beards Must Go, Is Dictum in Paris" demonstrates the importance in the American influence in the case of the French shift in style. The article claims that "manly beauty of the American type" recently became the "only kind in favor among the feminine element of Paris" in the spring of 1912. "The day

[40] "Does a Man Look Better Bearded or Clean Shaven?" *New York Tribune*, September 30, 1906

[41] "Senatorial Silver: Not Dollars, but in Torsos of Statesmen," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1893.
[42] "Statesmen Are Smooth Shaven," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1908.

[43] Oldstone-Moore, "The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain," 7-34.

of beards and moustaches is now over," claims the report, "neither beard nor moustache can be tolerated any longer." The report goes on to say that "hair on the lips or chin should only be worn by men unfortunate enough to have ugly mouths or bad teeth." Such rapid change is noteworthy, and likely points to a very specific social meaning behind the drive to shave. The article claims that the "change of ideals" is "of course due to the influence of the American invasion of Paris." As a result, "capillary growth" was quickly becoming as rare in Paris as it was in America at the time, "since the fashion of shaving clean" grew "among Frenchmen every day."[44] Evidently, there were those who viewed this trend among Parisians to shave their moustaches and beards was an American import. Since the author of the article was a correspondent for an American newspaper, it is possible that American origin of the decision of Parisian men to go beardless is overemphasized. Nevertheless, the importance of American facial hair styles to the wider western world is represented here. The American style, by the time this article was written in 1912, was so firmly defined as beardless that the author referred to a shaven face as "manly beauty of the American type." If the French shift to beardless at the turn of the century was influenced by American style, then the question of what exactly drove the American turn to the razor remains to be explained.

The reason for this shaving crusade that began in America and quickly spread to the rest of the western world has received little scholarly attention. Oldstone-Moore argues that shift is due to corporate regulation. He claims "a smooth face" represented "energy and disciplined reliability," as well as "honesty and sociability." Thus, appearing younger and appealing to conformity drove many men to shave in this new corporate America.[45] Though the corporate prohibition of beards was mentioned in the "Does a Man Look Better Bearded or Clean Shaven?" article discussed earlier, it is not framed as the cause of a turn to shaving but rather the result. The article argues that important reformers, muckrakers, and statesmen "thrust forward clean jowls for the inspection of their admiring fellow citizens."[46] This trend was already well-established before large New York-based corporations imposed regulations against bearded employees. If this is the case, then the regulations could not possibly be the cause of the shift in style. It is more likely that the corporate prohibitions were a response to changing definitions of what it meant to be bearded. If beards in earlier periods were associated with patriarchal dominance in both politics and the home, then shaving in this new period was associated with conformity. While conformity is a natural goal for large companies with numerous employees, these associations were merely seized upon by corporations that recognized the importance of these ideas. The true origin of the social meaning placed on shaving cannot be fully understood without an examination of what it meant to be bearded at the beginning of this new smooth-faced era.

Once the "crusade against the whisker" had taken its course, beards became exceedingly rare in America. Those who still chose to sport a beard were often subject to criticism, and many men chose to wear just a mustache. Moustaches in the early twentieth century, however, came loaded with social meaning. While in the nineteenth century moustaches had been symbols military aggression, the twentieth century saw moustaches gain a reputation of willful individualism.[47] Moustaches adorned the faces of villains and rogues in the popular imagination of many Americans. Some even believe that New York governor Thomas Dewey may have lost the 1948 presidential election because of his moustache.[48] The full beard was not seen in any great numbers in the western world until the middle decades of the twentieth century, and when it did return, it bought with it social meanings that were stronger and often more negative than those attached to the moustache at this time. At mid-century, left-wing radicals who wished to signal their non-conformity to the world sported beards. The

[44] "Beards Must Go," *New York Times*, April 7, 1912.

[45] Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men,* 213, 234.

[46] "Does a Man Look Better Bearded or Clean Shaven?"

[47] Peterkin, *One Thousand Mustaches*, 42-43.

[48] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, "Mustaches and Masculine Codes in Early Twentieth-Century America." *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 1 (2011): 47. as well as Peterkin, 86. both make this claim.

political environment of the 1890s that led to the crusade, explains the revolutionary reputation of beards that lasted for decades.

Conclusion

Beardedness in the 1890s was defined by the most prominent beard of the time, that which adorned the face of Kansas senator William A. Peffer. Peffer was raised in the bearded decades of the nineteenth century, and was acquainted with the social meanings placed on whiskers at the time. Asserting masculinity and patriarchal dominance could be accomplished by sporting perhaps the most recognizable outward symbol of masculinity, a beard. Peffer's beard may have added to the legitimacy of his political rule in the minds of Kansas voters, but it most certainly catapulted him to national recognition after his election to the United States Senate in 1890. Peffer and "Pefferism" quickly became associated with radical leftist political causes. After his ideological split with the Populists over fusion in the 1896 presidential election, Peffer was left with few political allies. Depictions of the long bearded senator became increasingly negative. At the same time as Peffer's loss of public esteem, beards lost favor in public opinion as well. The crusade against the whisker quickly spread from American statesmen to the rest of the Western world. In the new era of twentieth-century facial hair styles, moustaches were symbols of willful independence, and beards were unheard of. By the outbreak of the First World War, most of the world was once again shaving daily. When beards did appear they adorned the faces of left-wing revolutionaries, such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. In fact, Cuban revolutionaries were referred to as *los barbudas*, or "the bearded one's," by their political opposition. An image of the defiant, bearded Che Guevara is said to be one of the most recreated photographs in history, and is often used to signal a spirit of leftist revolution.[49] These bearded radicals were unknowingly advocating "Pefferist" politics while adopting his trademark bearded affect. The politically charged environment of 1890s America in effect drove the facial hair styles of the entirety of the western world for more than a century. American politicians today remain almost entirely beardless. They shave themselves everyday day in an unconscious effort to avoid appearing like a "Pefferist." This demonstrates the inextricable nature of masculinity, facial hair, and politics. The 1890s in particular, were a moment of great change in these areas, and American notions of masculinity and the meaning of facial hair from this era have legacies in today's society.

[49] Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men*, 47-49.