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We are proud to present the Fall 2012 issue of Clio’s Scroll, which focuses the politics and power dynamics of three very different periods and locations in European history. With topics ranging from the eunuchs of ancient Mediterranean to the witches of the Holy Roman Empire and the courtiers of the French Sun King, these authors contribute to our understanding of the inner workings of these historical communities.

Each work investigates a topic that required extensive research. The authors worked to surpass superficial understandings of such research, and were chosen for their ability to deliver a unique perspective. We feel that all three pieces delve into themes that have an air of mystery about them and we hope that you enjoy uncovering these ancient stories.

Lastly, we are incredibly grateful for the hard work and feedback of our excellent associate editors, as well as the talented authors and those at Zee Zee Copy for collaborating with us. We would also like to thank Leah Flanagan for all her guidance, and the UC Berkeley History Department for its support.

Sincerely,
The Editors
In 1931, Steven G. Bancroft, a large, six-foot tall college football player, strolled into a small Chinese medical office in San Francisco. There, he told the female doctor that he wanted to “bomb Tokyo out into the middle of the
Margaret Chung, the doctor and practice owner, worked as the only Chinese American female surgeon in San Francisco. Bancroft and Chung had never met prior to that encounter. She still welcomed him, despite being unable to help him achieve the exaggerated goal he had originally proposed. He later became a frequent visitor in her office because they enjoyed each other’s company, even with her busy schedule. Bancroft became so impressed with Chung that he brought along seven other buddies to meet her.

During dinner one night, a while after, one of Bancroft’s buddies named Frank “Red” Fulgham Gill said to Chung, “Gee, you are as understanding as a mother, and we are going to adopt you; but, hell, you are an old maid, and you haven’t got a father for us.” Chung responded wittily, “Well, that makes you a lot of fair-haired bastards, doesn’t it?” And immediately, they expressed enthusiastic support for her answer and said: “We’ll call ourselves your fair-haired bastards from now on, and we’ll spread your fame into every corner of the world!” They soon became the first eight “fair-haired bastards.” Years later, they stuck by that statement and created a “surrogate family” of over fifteen hundred military sons, headed by Chung who played the role as their “mom.” She was known by the American public as “Mom Chung” and was often recognized as a Chinese woman who contributed greatly to the United States’ war effort. Her ties with her American “sons” stemmed not from a biological connection, but from a mutual devotion to each other during a time of war.

1 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Asian American Studies Collection, Ethnic Studies Library, UC Berkeley; Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005), 120.
2 Ibid.
3 After this introduction, the certain words and phrases such as
Margaret Chung’s story fits uniquely within the social and political context of Chinese American women’s World War II experience. Gloria Heyung Chun in *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity* (2000) asserts that Chinese Americans have been active agents in shaping their history; they molded their own identity in response to the constantly changing U.S.-China relationship. Similarly, Sucheng Chan in *Asian Californians: An Interpretive History* (1991) agrees that Chinese Americans and other Asian American groups have been active creators of their own history despite external pressures. However, Judy Yung’s work, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (1995) focuses more on Chinese American women. She contends that the experiences of Chinese American women throughout the twentieth century have been shaped by external developments in China and the United States; they were given greater opportunities during the war, helping them finally “unbound” their feet and their restrictive roles. Xiaojian Zhao’s book *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family and Community 1940-1965* (2002) agrees with Judy Yung, that the war gave Chinese American women more gender and racial equality. All the sources mentioned will provide the historical foundation and social context for this project. The largest body of primary sources comes from the Margaret Chung Papers Collection, which contains parts of Chung’s unpublished autobiography, newspaper clippings, letters of correspondences, and copies of legislative documents.

This project’s argument will agree with a few aforementioned works but will also add onto Gloria Chun’s and Sucheng Chan’s arguments. The main argument...
within this historical conversation is that Margaret Chung’s role as a mother and her achievement in creating a family of fifteen hundred American sons were made possible due to Americans’ need for interracial affiliation and domestic wartime demands. Specifically, the need for both familial networks and participation of women in the war encouraged Margaret Chung to become an active mother figure. The scholarship on Margaret Chung is surprisingly scarce, even though Chung was popular in her time, being well connected with prominent movie actors and filmmakers. Many historians who write about the Chinese American experience during World War II explain the opportunities and better treatment of the Chinese community by mainstream Americans. The only biography of Margaret Chung is *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards* by Judy Tzu-Chun Wu. In Chung’s biography, Wu argues that Chung took on multiple identities to achieve public respectability: she was masculine and feminine, a mother and a father figure, Chinese and American, and Victorian and modern. My paper will not contend with Wu’s argument. Rather, it will emphasize the role of war itself and how it played a bigger role in developing Chung’s relationships than Wu gave credit. The project will attempt to answer several questions: How and why did Chung achieve her status as a mother? How was she able to adopt over a thousand men as her “sons?” What about World War II allowed Chung to gain so much respect among military men and have influence over U.S. legislation? What was the extent of gender and racial barriers working in Chung’s life?

The history of Margaret Chung and her family of adopted sons is important for several reasons. First, her life gives historians one perspective on the opportunities opened to Chinese American women in the early 1940s, a period when the Chinese were seen as allies. It is important to keep in mind that Chung was an exception in many ways.
She lived outside the Chinese community in San Francisco Chinatown and was never fully accepted by the Chinese community. She was the only Chinese American woman who had prominent influence over United States legislation. Chung’s desire to participate in the navy was the inspiration behind the passage of the Women’s Auxiliary Bill in 1942, which officially established a women’s division within the United States Navy. She was an unmarried Chinese woman, the first Chinese American female surgeon in the U.S., and a “mother” to over a thousand American sons. Chung’s life has been scantily documented besides the biography by Judy Tzu-Chun Wu. Her life unearths important information on the relationship between Chinese Americans and white Americans during this period. Chung represented a dual identity – a patriotic American but also a strong Chinese nationalist. There is no doubt that mainstream Americans, including her sons and colleagues, saw her as a cultural link between the two countries. In this, Chung acted, in practice, as a mother in her role as a provider and, more figuratively, in her symbolization of interracial connection in the United States.

Margaret Chung’s role as a mother must be contextualized within the political and the social climate of the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. In 1929 and throughout the 1930s witnessed the most drastic economic recession of the Great Depression. The Chinese community in San Francisco, for the most part, did not suffer to the degree that the rest of the country did, but the community was segregated from the historically more affluent Caucasian-dominated society. This was a consequence of significant economic and social hostility towards the Chinese community in the United States; in particular, San Francisco is notable for its direct employment discrimination of ethnic Chinese in predominantly white areas of the city. Incidentally, this
isolation that facilitated for the Chinese community’s greater self-sufficiency, providing them a greater resistance to the negative economic effects of the national depression. Chung’s established economic position in San Francisco and her popularity among Hollywood clients helped maintain her financial stability throughout the Great Depression. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and American entrance into the Pacific Theater of World War Two, there were modifications of what it meant to be “American.” The war challenged existing racial and gender norms; so did Chung. – By being a mother to white American men, she took on a role that mixed two different races in a family and put her, an ethnically Chinese woman, in charge of these men. Second generation Chinese American women, loyal to the Chinese nationalist cause, but also a proponent of American values of freedom, were eager to participate in the war effort for both China and the United States. Hatred toward the Chinese since they had arrived in the mid-nineteenth century seemed to have dissipated and for the first time, the Chinese were allowed to join American workers in preparations for war. Chinese American women no longer relied solely on the Chinese community for employment and were hired to work at shipyards, airbases, and offices as clerks and typists. They became seen as “Chinese Rosie the Riveters.” Chung found a parallel in Maggie Gee, one of the two Chinese Americans who joined the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), flying planes to airbases and training new pilots.

There were rapid developments within the social context of Chung’s life. Hollywood, Los Angeles in the

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1930s and 1940s flourished with internationally well-known films and actors. The growing Asian population in America, particularly in Hollywood, corresponded to a growing American infatuation with Chinese culture and their perceived exoticism. The new concept, called Orientalism, became a popular theme among filmmakers throughout the thirties and forties, but often depicted negative or exaggerated images of Eastern people. Interestingly, Chinese Americans themselves were very much involved in this representation of the exotic Asian. Before the war, films portraying the Chinese often carried heavy negative stereotypes. With the United States’ entry into WW2, this shifted towards sympathetic themes. The 1942 film *Lady from Chungking* portrayed the Chinese characters as heroes beside their American counterparts in their fight against Japanese aggression. This can be put in stark contrast to *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), a film starring Chinese American actress Anna May Wong, who played the daughter of an evil Chinese mastermind, Fu Manchu. While these films were popular during a period of obsession with Oriental culture, their agendas changed with the political climate from the 1930s to the 1940s. Anti-miscegenation laws going back to the nineteenth century prohibited marriage between Americans and Chinese and the Hays Code of 1935 banned movie scenes that depicted the desire for miscegenation. According to historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, even though Americans did not necessarily seek to marry someone of Chinese descent, there persisted a cultural fantasy about it. Orientalism brought such cultural imaginations to life on screen. Chung was very interested in American popular culture, as demonstrated by her wide circle of celebrity friends and entertainment artists who frequented her home.

She increasingly questioned her identity as an American and Chinese – in the end, Chung chose to marry the two cultures. She held strongly to American values but also chose to associate herself as a representative of China. However, racial and gender barriers still persisted to combat her, despite her international recognition and revealed capabilities in the roles. Chung was politely but consistently denied from joining WAVES in which she helped found and was denied from entry into China to serve as a medical missionary.

To understand Margaret Chung’s place in the larger story of San Francisco during World War II and the relationships she had with her American “sons,” this essay will explain an interpretive history of Chung’s childhood and career. The coming paragraphs of the essay will analyze how Chung became a mother. Specifically, the sections will explain three different reasons in the analysis: Americans need for interracial families during war; wartime demand for familial networks; and increased opportunity for Chinese women in the defense industry. These topics in this essay contribute to both the Chinese American narrative and the narrative of race and gender relations during the Second World War. The paper will attempt to address changing racial barriers during the war in a broader context. Chung’s motherhood for American soldiers was an example of a successful interracial alliance, made possible by wartime needs for international solidarity and material production. Second-generation Chinese Americans as a group strived to become fully assimilated. However, they attempted to find a way to be appear as fully Chinese so their parents would believe their loyalty to China; yet, they also sought to be considered fully American by outside society so they could be treated as equals and have professional careers outside San Francisco Chinatown. The paper will show that the war facilitated Chung’s success in becoming a respected guardian of hundreds of American “sons” and as a representative of both the Chinese and
American society. The paper’s conclusion assesses how war profoundly shaped Chung’s social environment and how Chung contributes to the issues of race and gender during a time of rapid political emergency and change.

Margaret Chung was born on October 2, 1889 to her mother Ah Yane, and to her father Chung Wong. She was the oldest child of seven children. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Guangdong Province, China in the mid-1870s, a decade before the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The Chinese Exclusion Act severely restricted most Chinese immigrants from entering the United States and was a legal response to the extremely hostile American attitudes toward Chinese immigration to the United States at the time. Because Chung’s family had arrived in the country before the exclusion act was in place, legal segregation in schools had not yet established. Her family was unique in their ability to work outside the Chinese community and to attend school with American kids. Ah Yane was brought over to the United States alone and at a very young age to be sold as a mui tsai, or a domestic servant. Many unmarried Chinese girls who arrived in the United States the late nineteenth century were

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8 Ibid., 13.
sent as domestic servants for wealthy Chinese families or to be sold as prostitutes. Chung’s parents both converted to Christianity under the influence of Presbyterian missionaries in San Francisco. Soon after, Presbyterian missionaries were able to secure legal guardianship over the then very young Ah Yane. Ah Yane later formed her own Christian home for Chinese women who had gone through similar dire circumstances. There is less information on Chung Wong, but, in the context of his profession as a fruit and vegetable peddler and attempted small business owner, it can likely be speculated he came to America for economic opportunity. Like Ah Yane, he was a member of the Presbyterian Church, which is where most of his records are found. Because Chung’s parents had a more familial-type relationship with the Presbyterian Church, it is very likely this promoted Chung to pursue similar relationships later in life.

Margaret Chung grew up in Santa Barbara, California in a largely racially mixed community. Her family interacted with both Chinese and white residents on a daily basis. Chung’s parents attended the community church frequently and prompted the importance of women’s education within their family. For most of Chung’s childhood, her family had been predominantly poor. In the early parts of Chung’s autobiography, she describes the numerous jobs she pursued to support the family when her father got rheumatism. Her mother was plagued with tuberculosis for many years and later died from the disease. As a result, for the first twenty-something years of Chung’s life, medical missionaries often acted as guardians when her parents fell ill. According to

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 21.
13 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 1.
Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, it is very plausible that guardianship qualities exhibited by the Presbyterian missionaries, had a role in inspiring Chung to become a medical missionary herself.

In 1911, Chung entered the University of Southern California (USC) College of Physicians and Surgeons. Her race and gender stood in stark contrast to her classmates in the all-white male classes. Although she was excluded from certain classes in medical school, she did participate actively in specializations of medicine, namely, surgery. With the university still predominantly composed of men, Chung often tried to blend in with her classmates by partially cross-dressing. However, this grew more into a defiance against those gender norms themselves. After she graduated from USC, Chung searched for any apprenticeship that would accept her, since it was uncommon for a Chinese woman to seek professional experience in Western medical practice. Initially, Chung strived to become a medical missionary to serve in China’s war of resistance. However, to her disappointment, she was repeatedly rejected from traveling to her ancestral home to serve. Despite this, Chung still managed to play a significant role in supporting the effort from the Home Front.

Chung accepted an apprenticeship at the Dr. Bertha Van Hoosen of the Mary Thompson Hospital in Chicago in the 1920s. Amore racially accepting hospital, Chung was provided extensive experience as a surgical nurse. The leaders of the hospital held more progressive beliefs on women’s medical practice and influenced Chung in her career as a surgeon. Because progressive medical thinkers such as

14 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards, 42-44.
15 Ibid., 49.
16 Ibid., 57-58.
them, believed that science and advanced medical procedures could improve society, leaders at the hospital encouraged the full participation of female physicians to serve and participate in typically more male-dominated positions.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, Chung’s experience at Van Hoosen’s greatly influenced her to transcend gender roles in the surgical field and in her future relationships with her “sons.”

Chung later established her own clinic in Santa Fe, in which she worked as a surgeon for a notably diverse group of patients. With her exceptional skills in surgical procedures, she attracted a diverse clientele of famous entertainers often associated with Hollywood’s developing film industry. With this closer relationship to Hollywood, she took an interest in popular culture and the growing presence of Asia-Americans and Asian-American themes in film; she often fostered professional and personal relationships with her patients.\textsuperscript{18} However, this greater involvement with popular culture also led to strains on her relationships with the Chinese community, and her medical practice often went counter to the less Western medicine-inclined Chinese community.\textsuperscript{19}

When she arrived in San Francisco Chinatown in the 1920s, she found it a challenge to fit in with the close-knit Chinese population there.

Motherhood for Margaret Chung was a unique identity that became an individual endeavor and a nationally recognized quality during the Second World War. Even though Chung already adopted her first eight “sons” in 1931, she only acquired the expansive family and achieved national recognition for her role as a mother during the war. The responsibilities being an American mother during the war was still very home oriented but everyone was encouraged

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 60-61. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 78-79. \\
\textsuperscript{19} Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 1, 4.
\end{flushleft}
to do everything they could for the war effort. According to Keith Ayling, who was a combat pilot in the war and later a writer, stated that mothers and housewives could contribute significantly in the home. Most American mothers during the war period remained in the home to care for the young children and to manage the house while their husband was away. Ayling encourages mothers to contribute to the war effort, even if it means staying at home. He says:

But being at home—call it being home-tied if you wish—does not mean that you cannot work for Uncle Sam. You can, and your work in the national war effort is every bit as important as that of the woman who drives an automobile or spots an airplane. The latter is helping to defend your home, and you are not only keeping it as a home but lending your nimble fingers to something that is useful for someone who is serving in another capacity…You as a housewife may be busy from morning to night, There are meals to get for your husband, meals for the children, washing, mendings, and ironings, and the thousand and one things that a home demands.\(^{20}\)

Ayling describes the common duties of American mothers during the war as characters of domesticity. Many Chinese mothers in the early 1940s were immigrants and were mostly confined to the home as well. Alice Sue Fun, a second-generation daughter who lived in San Francisco, recalled that her mother was very traditional and almost never left the house. During the war, Chinese mothers still contributed to the war effort by fund-raising, creating propaganda campaigns and joining women’s groups organized to aid

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China’s resistance. Mom Chung took on many of those tasks of real mothers but she was also an exception. Her role as a surrogate mother was important because she transcended the role of a mother during that period. Specifically, Chung was a mother who crossed racial barriers to provide personal and military support for her American sons. Playing the part of the Chinese mother, Chung educated her sons on Chinese culture through means of cooking Chinese dishes and urging them to support China in the war. She was also more traditionally American in her emphasis on American-style democracy and Christianity, and was vocal about the role those values played in her life.

The American soldiers who were admitted to be adopted “sons” were assigned to one of three groups which she created: the “Fair-Haired Bastards,” “Kiwis,” and “Golden Dolphins.” When Chung assigned her “children” to one of the groups, she gave them each a number to identify the order of his or her entry. The first and most publicized group consisted of approximately nine hundred pilots who called themselves the “Fair-Haired Bastards.” Then, Chung expanded her family to create the “Kiwis,” who did not necessarily participate in flying missions, but still showed “good bastard material.” The Kiwis included ground-based military personnel, politicians, friends in Hollywood, and the few surrogate daughters that Chung had. In 1943, Chung established the “Golden Dolphins” at the request of a naval lieutenant who discovered her work in the war effort. Her Golden Dolphins were Chung’s exclusive club of American submariners who fought in the Pacific war. Contrary to

22 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 7, 1-4.
popular belief about her, some of sons were older than Chung. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was four years her senior and became a Golden Dolphin #100 in 1942

Margaret Chung was the first and only recognized Chinese woman who claimed to be a mother to over a thousand American military men. Her motherhood was an anomaly in the eyes of Chinese Americans and to the traditional white American families. However, the fact that hundreds of American soldiers desperately wanted to be part of her family legitimimized Chung’s role and title as “Mom.” Entrance to Mom Chung’s bastard clubs were selective, so becoming her “son” was a privilege and required strong honor-oriented characteristics that she valued. Chung made it known that she had preconditions for her bastard clubs; she states:

By “good bastard material,” it means that a man is a licensed pilot, or has been a license pilot, is “square” toward his fellow man, is tolerant, is loyal, definitely contributes something to the progress of aviation, and makes the world a better place because he lives in it! If he fulfills those qualifications, I will stand by-and back-of him a million per cent! There are no dues, no obligations except moral ones, and out of nine hundred Bastards, there isn’t a chiseler in the bunch. They definitely have an unwritten code of honor, they are loyal and tolerant, they do make the world a much better place because they live.

According to Lieutenant Theodore Walker of the naval forces, becoming a “Kiwi” was a personal challenge

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23 Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, May 27, 1945, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 2 Folder 14, 1.
24 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 3, 10-11.
because he felt that he had not demonstrated enough combat experience in the war to deserve to be Chung’s son. He remarks, “Dear Dr. Chung…I have not felt that I have demonstrated any right to participate in that honor. I felt it would be much more seemly to wait until action was taken on my application for a commission in Naval Aviation.”

The fact that soldiers wanted to prove to Chung that they were worthy enough to be in her family demonstrates the value of Mom Chung’s relationship with her sons. Chung’s occupation was surgeon but what Americans recognized was her motherhood. Newspaper articles and other written references to Chung called her “Mom Chung” and introduced her as a “mother” to her American sons and her career as a surgeon became overshadowed in the media. Before the war, her medical practice defined her, by 1945, it was her role as a mother and family of military sons. But what did being a Chinese mother to Americans really mean in the early 1940s? It represented the dramatic shift of political and social norms and allowed interracial families, even if they were not biological, to be an acceptable cultural module.

**America’s Desire for Interracial Affiliation**

War has the power to alter societal norms and rigid social attitudes almost overnight. In the case of the Second World War, the United States became political allies with China after the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. On an international level, the nation forged a mutual bond of assistance to each other. Margaret Chung and her military sons did like-wise. The American public requested Chung to speak at colleges and local organizations in California on Japanese aggression and supporting China.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the Chinese population

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25 Lieutenant Theodore Walker, November 24, 1942, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 5 Folder 14.
seemed more appealing and approachable to mainstream Americans. The general response was also to become domestic allies with the Chinese community at large at the expense of the Japanese community. Life Magazine produced an article that pointed out “better physical traits” in a Chinese individual versus those of a Japanese person. Second generation Chinese women responded to lowered racial barriers by taking jobs outside their immediate ethnic community. American defense industries employed approximately 8,300 Chinese immigrant women and American-born Chinese women by the end of 1941 and some worked alongside white employees. Second generation Chinese American women, like Chung, fully understood American values and aspired to achieve the American dream. By 1941, Margaret Chung was already a well-known surgeon in San Francisco but she had predominantly white clients. Chung was approachable to mainstream Americans because, as an American-born Chinese woman, she specialized in the Western medical specialization of surgery. She worked hard to encourage white Americans to gain interracial sympathies for China’s war. The President of the College of the Pacific in Stockton, California, had heard about Chung’s work in the Red Cross and was very impressed by her earlier presentations on China. In a letter, he told her that he hoped in the near future, she could address his students because he believed that no one made a more valuable contribution to human life than her.

Throughout the war, military men sought Chung because she was racially different but culturally more assimilated. Because the U.S.-China alliance had politically

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27 Ibid., 103.
28 Tully Knoles, College of the Pacific, May 29, 1942, Margaret Chung Papers, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1.
sealed a formal racial tie between United States and China, Americans on the community level felt the need to forge interracial connections on a professional and personal level. American organizations of all government levels across the country invited Chung to inform the American public on China’s situation; similarly, Chung’s adopted sons asked for her help and guidance. Following Japan’s initial attack of China in 1931, Steven G. Bancroft, who later became “bastard #1,” first approached Chung in her medical office in Sacramento. Although it is still not clear why he came to her specifically, one reason may be that he believed she could help him to join China’s fight against the Japanese. He and his colleagues saw an opportunity to serve in China’s war against Japan in 1931 during the economic recession. Chung’s office was privately owned and stood outside of the Chinese community, making her more approachable to non-Chinese people. As already a “celebrity” surgeon in Los Angeles, she had started developing a clientele in San Francisco. It is speculated that Bancroft had heard, through his local network, about Chung. Her original seven “sons” connected with their friends and told about their Mom. Word spread about Chung through military connections between American men and she created a family that expanded across the United States. The war required many to travel across the country to the San Francisco Bay Area and by joining one of Mom Chung’s clubs, her sons were able to make lasting familial relationships with people from different places.

Chung was not any sort of a political official who could grant the seven boys military positions in the Chinese army. She was useful, because she immediately provided them what they needed – a second home and necessities that were hard to come by during the depression, and Chung’s family offered them. She also represented a cultural bridge to people like Bancroft because as a person of Chinese descent born in America, she had loyalty to the United States. Chung
knew that as a Chinese American, her position was vital in maintaining interracial solidarity. The American public enjoyed her presence in promotional events and her sons needed her throughout their service.

The Americans’ desire for Chung’s public appearances for China’s support and her role as a mother to fifteen hundred sons by 1945 can be explained by the developing interest in the Western notion of Orientalism. The entertainment industry propelled by Hollywood was particularly interested in the image of the “exotic” Asian. The theme emerged as the body of knowledge and attitudes by Westerners in the twentieth century that depicted negative images of the Eastern world. Even though the Chinese population in the United States was regarded more favorably in the 1930s and 1940s, they could not escape their more outlandish image in American popular culture. In Figure 2, the artist’s depicted Chung with distinctly narrow eyes and wearing a very traditional Chinese dress. This reveals the complexities of Chung’s identity that rested on her more exotic perceptions.

The political alliance of U.S. and China called for frequent diplomatic interactions between leaders of both countries. In several letters of correspondence to Chung,

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government officials requested Chung to help welcome Madame Chiang Kai Shek in preparation for China’s first lady’s tour of the U.S. in 1942.\(^{30}\) Chiang’s welcome events showed Chung’s prestigious status, and that wartime relations between leaders of China and the United States required Chinese American representatives like Chung. There is a parallel between her role as an orator on a professional level and her role as a mother on a personal level. Soldiers encouraged each other to join Chung’s surrogate family for one of the many reasons that Chung was a Chinese and American woman. She provided a unique persona that was both foreign and familiar to her surrogate family.

Margaret Chung’s public advocacy of American democracy and freedom made her seem fully American; yet, she also emphasized her Chinese-ness in public. For example, she decorated her office with pieces of traditional Chinese art and furniture to give it an Asian flair. Chung also made speeches at colleges, fundraiser events, and community organizations, where she reminded her audience that everyone should work toward the goal of racial solidarity between China and the United States.\(^{31}\) The American public valued her interracial and international efforts and applauded the Chinese in response. The *Mercury Herald* in the March 1938 issue featured an article about Chung making a speech about China’s war effort, “the Chinese are temperamentally a peaceful race and may be compared with the United States in seeking to be peaceful rather than aggressive.”\(^{32}\) In the January 1941 issue of *Stockton Daily*, the writer of the article featured a picture of Chung and regarded her as

\(^{30}\) Various letters, Margaret Chung Papers Collection, Box 1 Folder 7, 20.

\(^{31}\) Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 7, 1.

\(^{32}\) *Mercury Herald*, March 1938.
“a citizen of the world.” \textsuperscript{33} Though all of her speeches were given in English, she was closely associated and tied to the identity of China. The writer of the \textit{Mercury Herald} based the personality of the Chinese off of Chung’s immediate presentation. Just as her American audience sought her for political encouragement, her sons asked to be a part of Mom Chung’s family for interracial solidarity. Therefore, the war provided her both a public forum to make political statements and the means to be a successful mother to her bastard sons.

\textbf{The Americans’ Need for a Mother and a Family}

The war relocated Americans, causing distance and the resulting desire for surrogate family life. American soldiers needed a Mom Chung because they needed a family and a mother while they were away from their real family and real mothers. Chung’s home became a place for all types of social gatherings. Her sons stayed over when they needed Mom Chung to cook them food or to nurse them back to health.

Her sons trusted her care. In Chung’s autobiography, she recalled Captain Joseph “Joe” Chase’s situation. Joe was Chung’s beloved “Jo-Jo” and her No. 3 bastard son. He contracted malaria in Haiti, and despite other doctors’ claims that he won’t have a chance to live, he said, “Well, I’m going out to see Mom, she will fix me up,” and flew back to San Francisco to see Mom Chung. According to Chung:

I would find him standing over my bed at three or four o’clock in the morning and hear him plaintively say, ‘Mommie, I’m hungry.’ So I would get up and heat some thick vegetable soup which all the boys liked, broil him a couple of filet mignons which I kept the readiness for him, fry him some mashed potato patties, fix him a couple of

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Stockton Daily}, January 1941.
vegetables, or fry some rice with ham and green onions and eggs. Then we would sit up and talk until about seven in the morning. I would tuck him into bed again, and I would go off to the hospital and start work.\textsuperscript{34}

If one did not know who was speaking, one would think Chung was really Joe Chase’s mother. Chung’s willingness to cook for her son in the middle of the night was reciprocated by her son’s desire for her attention and care. On a Christmas Eve away from Chung, Joe and two other Chung’s sons named Steve and Ham were trimming their Christmas tree when all three of them started to feel homesick for Chung and cried so hard that they each had to dry their faces with bath towels.\textsuperscript{35}

Chung never planned to be “Mom Chung” before the war. Surgery was her “first love” and she had always been fascinated with surgical operations since it emerged as a new form of specialized medical practice during the 1910s and 1920s.\textsuperscript{36} However, the original seven American sons made her realize that she needed adopted sons as much as they needed a surrogate mother. For most of her childhood

\textsuperscript{34} Margaret Chung Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 3, 14.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Box 1 Folder 1, 8.
and young adult years, she strove to make ends meet for her family of six younger siblings and a very ill mother. Because her father suddenly died in a car crash while she was still an unpaid intern in Chicago, she struggled to provide for her younger siblings, who were still in Southern California.\(^{37}\) Her financial strife continued when she sought to establish a medical practice in San Francisco. Chung realized that for as long as she could remember, she has been financially unstable and under significant stress. In a way, her American “sons” opened up a joyful part of her that she didn’t remember she had. Reflecting on her relationship with her original “bastard sons,” Chung declared that:

> They were and still are the most glorious specimens of real American manhood, and having them around was more fun and happiness than I had known existed! It opened up a brand new world for me, taught me to laugh (don’t forget that up to this time I had been too busy in a struggle for a mere existence to laugh or to have fun). Here were seven All-American football heroes, with a hilarious sense of living, and from this sprang the famous Bastard’s Club, which is now recognized by the United States Government as the finest organization of active aviators in America. Known the world over as the Phi Beta Kappa of Aviation!\(^{38}\)

Chung praised her adopted sons for their free spirit and honorable work in the service. She considered her sons “heroes” because they achieved national recognition for their contribution to the nation and because they inspired her to play a larger role in society than she expected. Chung believed


\(^{38}\) Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Box 1 Folder 3, 3.
that her goal was to serve as a medical missionary in China, but it ended after her application was rejected three times.\textsuperscript{39} She had “religious calling through the science of healing,” but motherhood proved to be a greater fulfillment.\textsuperscript{40} Chung truly believed that aviation was the most righteous component of warfare. Her aerial sons who bravely served in the war helped her achieve her goal as a mother of a large family. She expressed proudly why she was so passionate on raising the fair-haired bastards: “Perhaps this is because they fly so far into the heavens they are not ‘earth-bound.’ Flying in the clean stratosphere, darting in and out of fleecy clouds into the blue of the sky, they get a different perspective on life—they see and realize how pettiness and meanness have no place in their firmament.”\textsuperscript{41}

Her words may have referred to the racial openness and social freedom her “fair-haired bastards club” embodied. She interprets the aviators who are physically removed from the society below them in a figurative sense, implying that her fliers were able to overlook racial differences and petty attitudes of racism.

A letter from Federic Calvin “Cal” Sumner proves that Chung also established close relationships with younger sons-to-be. To Cal, Chung was some sort of confidante. He writes, “Mom, I really love you, but not just for the swell time you showed me in San Francisco. I love you for yourself Mom. I feel so darn at ease around you. I can talk free and say what I want to say. See Mom you are swell.”\textsuperscript{42} Cal was a

\textsuperscript{39} Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, \textit{Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards}, 49.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Box 1 Folder 3, 11.
\textsuperscript{42} Federic Calvin “Cal” Sumner, September 20, 1943, Margaret
younger member of her family because at the time he wrote to Chung, he was barely old enough to be drafted. He told Chung “I wanted to get into the Navy Air Corps… I want to become one of your “sons” more than I have ever wanted anything in the world…” Becoming one of Chung’s “sons” was a highly desired goal for some Americans like Cal. His desire to become a “bastard” is relevant to his eagerness to join the Navy Air Corps. It reflects the common attitude of American men about drafting for World War II. A teenager named Albert Seeman, who had worked as a cleanup boy and various other jobs in the defense industry, noted that all the men wanted to fight in the war and everyone worked for the war effort. Also, Chung was an active mom during the war. Her “sons” wrote to her with detailed accounts of their experiences in the Pacific war. For example, no. 2 Captain John H. Hamilton writes in a letter to Chung: “One of the motors of his ship caught a fire and spun the clipper around so rapidly that it was out of control and he had to land the clipper in a very rough sea, the waves at times being two stories high… In landing the plane on such a rough sea the hull was damaged and began filling with water…” The significance of this description is that her sons openly expressed their military experiences to her, possibly because she understood the difficulties of war since she worked for the Red Cross and participated actively in the war effort. The war was popular among mainstream American men, who wanted to contribute to fighting the Japanese and the Germans. Their participation in one of Chung’s groups was an additional factor to their contributions to the war. Because Chung made certain qualifications for admission into her Chung Papers, Box 5, Folder 11.

43 Ibid.

44 Al Seeman, interview by author, San Leandro, California, March 13, 2014.

45 Captain John H. Hamilton, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 2 Folder 4, 3.
bastard clubs, membership was considered legitimate and prestigious. In the spring of 1943, Lieutenant George Brown phoned Chung and begged her to adopt the submariners as her children, who later became the Golden Dolphins. He said to her, “...no one takes care of us. We are like stepchildren or orphans, and we won’t be very much trouble...” Chung’s kinship network was nationally recognized and highly desired for its solidarity and connectedness during a time of war.

Chung’s kinship networks reached all parts of the country. Many of her “fair-haired bastards,” “Golden Dolphins,” and “Kiwis” traveled from all parts of the United States to San Francisco, as it was the prime port location for shipment of war materials, training and send-off center, and a temporary home base for soldiers fighting in the Pacific war. Because most soldiers fighting in the Pacific were often stationed far away from their homes throughout the war period, they would often stay in the Bay Area for training and other reasons. Most soldiers came from different places and backgrounds in America, making it difficult to talk about one’s family. According to a veteran from San Francisco, “In the service we hardly talked about the family; we didn’t talk about our mothers. It didn’t make any sense to talk about it because we were all from different places. They wouldn’t get to meet my family and I would not get to meet theirs.” Because most soldiers could not relate to each other’s families, Mom Chung was the parent that many could talk about to each other. In an article published in *The Boston Daily Globe*, the author Sigrid Arne displays the exciting occurrence when two soldiers who had not known each other

46  Lieutenant George Brown, 1943, Box 1 Folder 4, Margaret Chung Papers.
48  Interview with a veteran, April 9, 2014.
previously immediately became comrades because they knew Chung:

“Just before Hong Kong fell, two hurried tight-lipped American flyers settled next to each other at a bar. They said brusque “Hellos.” Then one grinned at the tiny jade Buddha tie-pie on the other.
“Got one, too,” he said. He dug his forefinger inside his collar, pulled out a gold chain and on it hung a jade brother to the first Buddha.
“How’s Mom?” they both exclaimed.49

In the search for Chung’s entire familial network of bastard sons in scholarly sources and in the Margaret Chung Papers Collection, there was very little if any discussion on the racial diversity within her male-dominated family. Throughout Mom Chung’s professional career as a surgeon and as a mother, her sons and close friends were mostly Caucasian males. There is a lack of reference to Latino or African American sons. If Chung had minority sons, there is little remaining correspondence with Mom Chung. The economic boom with the increase in defense jobs in the Bay Area attracted many blacks from the South to the Bay Area. Consequently, the small population of 5,000 blacks prior to the war expanded to approximately 32,000 by 1945.50 Despite the increase in black population during the war years, segregation of black men in the armed forces may have caused their absence in Mom Chung’s family. A

San Francisco veteran recalled that he came into contact with very few black soldiers over the course of the war. It was popularly believed that African American soldiers were cowards in combat and lacked the skills. The veteran recalled, “So, they were assigned to be truck drivers, because that’s the least they could do to help the war effort.”

Because many African American men were resigned to only domestic work for the war effort and held jobs like truck driving and delivery services, very few were promoted to be airmen or submariners. In Chung’s preliminary qualifications for “good bastard material,” men had to be pilots or some sort of active contributor to the progress of aviation. This is significant because their lack of service in the air force or naval force would fall short of the membership requirements to enter her Bastards Club. Because African Americans were often denied combat service in the air force and the navy, or were accepted but were segregated, they were most likely not included in white military circles and were not “good bastard material.”

Margaret Chung’s relationship with the Chinese community was complex. Judy Wu claims that Chung’s relationship with the residents in Chinatown was generally distant. Chung explains in her autobiography that there was a mutual lack of communication between her and the Chinese immigrant population. As a second-generation Chinese American, Chung did not have complete mastery of the Cantonese language to communicate comfortably with the Chinese residents, discouraging her from integrating into

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51 Interview with a veteran, April 9, 2014. In actuality a sizeable population of African Americans participate in active service. A group of African Americans did become aviators in a segregated unit. For example, the Tuskegee Airmen of 1941 became the first squadron to use combat aircraft.

52 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Box 1 Folder 3, 10-11.
Bessie Jeong, a Chinese American woman and a defense worker in her twenties who knew Chung, was asked whether she and Chung were good friends. Jeong exclaimed that Chung and her were very different and did not hesitate to separate herself from Chung’s unconventional behavior. In spite of the tensions between Chung and the Chinatown community, some Chinese American soldiers respected her and wanted to be part of her family. She had far fewer Chinese sons than white American sons, but Chung still played the role of a mother figure to some Chinese soldiers. One Chinese American naval soldier named Edison C.F. Liu wrote to Chung and addressed her as “Mom” before he was even admitted as her son. His informal letter to her said:

The other day when I was reading an old copy of Readers' Digest I was enchanted by a vivid description about a Chinese lady Doctor who is doing brilliant work in United States. However, it didn’t impress very much on my mind because it sounds a little bit unreal to me. Recently I have the honor to stay with a fine American naval officer who told me just the same account of “Mom” as it was described in the Readers’ Digest. I feel extremely proud about you after I have heard your No. 508 story and feel imperative that I have to write something to the much respected “Mom” to pay my highest respect although I haven’t

53 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder1, 3.
54 Bessie Jeong, Oral History, Interviewed by Suellen Cheng and Munson Kwok, December 17, 1981 and October 17, 1982, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, Department of Special Collections, University Oral History Project, University of California, Los Angeles.
the honor to see “Mom” in person. Liu was one of the few Chinese individuals who accepted Chung’s role as a mother figure. In the letter, he first discovered Chung for the work she has done for the country, especially because she was also Chinese. He had joined the navy and then he politely requested to be recruited into Chung’s family. The fact that Edison heard about Chung through another naval officer shows that her family of bastard sons is well connected during the war years.

**A Call for Women to the Navy**

As the United States approached war, individuals at the national and local level began to consider how to utilize all civilian resources to win the war, including women and minority populations. Gender and racial norms in the United States were questioned after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Chinese American scholars, Judy Yung and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, agree that Chinese women were able to enter the American workforce in greater numbers during wartime. Judy Yung argues that because United States government wanted to strengthen U.S.-China ties, American defense industries hired Chinese American women to produce materials for the war. There was a threefold increase of Chinese women working with wages, from approximately 2,800 to 8,300. However, Chung’s legislative influenced proved that the war played a bigger role in giving opportunities to Chinese American women.

Chung’s narrative reveals that the war not only gave work to these women, but particularly, it gave Chung political influence. She inspired the creation of the Women’s Reserve Bill that later created the Women’s Naval Reserve

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55 Edison C. F. Liu, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 4 Folder 37, 3.
in 1942. Chung had politician sons who were Kiwis to introduce the bill in Congress. She played the role of a mother throughout the process of lobbying for the bill. In a phone call, Chung requested her beloved son #447 Minnesota Congressman Melvin Maas if he would introduce a bill to create the Women’s Naval Reserve. With enthusiasm, Maas transmitted her letter to the Navy Department and introduced the bill to the U.S. legislature. Maas and Captain McQuiston, “beloved son #465” offered their services as her sons. Chung had no experience on the legislative process, so she consulted McQuiston in her autobiography:

I knew nothing of laws, bills, and asked him [McQuiston] what was necessary to provide such a Bill. He said, “Well, Mom, you will have to get a Bill drafted, and have it brought before Congress for discussion and passage.” I asked, “How are such things arranged?” Capt. McQuiston then said, “Do you know anyone in Congress who can introduce a Bill for you?” I answered, “Well, I have a son… Congressman Melvin Maas, of Minnesota, who is a Colonel in the Marine Air Corps, and my 447th son. He is on the House Committee of Naval Affairs, and I am sure he would be happy to introduce a Bill for me.”

The bill, known as the House of Representatives Bill 6807, passed within less than half an hour’s hearing. The short amount of time spent to pass the bill signified the pressing need for women in the war effort. It is also significant because Chung was able to use her connections as

57 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards*, 158.
58 Margaret Chung, Autobiography, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 1 Folder 2, 3-4.
a mother to achieve legislative influence. It is precisely the urgency of wartime that allowed Chung to transcend racial and gender barriers. The need to include women in the navy strengthened Chung’s family and proved to be important in increasing women’s work outside the home.

According to Wu, Chung knew that the U.S.’s battles in the Pacific War required a strong navy. Therefore, she was eager to enter the naval force and serve both China and her home country.\(^\text{59}\) In a letter written by Maas to Chung on April 16, 1942, he praises her, “I am very proud to be the instrument in carrying out your brainchild as the legal sponsor of the Women’s Naval Auxiliary.”\(^\text{60}\) In the Senate, Chung convinced the state of Indiana’s Congressman Raymond Willis, also called “Kiwi #120”, to introduce the Women’s Reserve Bill in the Senate meetings. In addition, Chung reached out to her Golden Dolphin #98, Senator Albert “Happy” Chandler, to help facilitate the negotiations for the bill in the Senate. These correspondences speak out about Chung’s vast family of sons who were not in the military. These sons, such as McQuiston, Willis, and Chandler were dedicated sons in the Kiwi club. Her American sons and U.S. congressmen looked past her Chinese ancestry and her gender because they felt that women’s participation in the military was more important.

However, the majority of men in government believed that it was essential that women be able to contribute to the war effort. The war opened up so many more opportunities for white and Chinese American women alike, even though their employment was only temporary. In Section 508 of the statute, it claims that “the authority conferred by this Act for appointments and enlistments in the Women’s

\(^{59}\) Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards*, 155.

\(^{60}\) Melvin J. Maas to Margaret Chung, April 16, 1942, Margaret Chung Papers, Box 3 Folder 12.
Reserve shall be effective during the present war and for six months thereafter, or until such earlier time as the Congress by concurrent resolution or the President by proclamation may designate.”

Although the law permitted women to work in the Navy only in wartime, they were still given opportunities outside the home. In Chung’s case, she was given the opportunity to call upon her sons for legislative change. The WAVES bill’s success confirmed Chung’s strong relationships with her sons but she was still unable to join the Women’s Naval Reserve. She asked Maas to write to the Navy Department to admit her as a member in the Naval Reserve; however, her request for membership for WAVES was dismissed three times.

Chung may have been discriminated against in her application because she was Chinese, it is still true that she had the support of her sons for the passage of the law.

The war era, 1941-1945, showed significant changes in social attitudes, economic opportunities, and political decisions between the Allied countries. Margaret Chung rose from a skilled surgeon to a more popular and more loving mom that Americans had ever seen. Chung’s fame as a doctor first developed with the help of her celebrity patients. However, she was even more respected and sought after because the war deprived American soldiers of a strong mother figure and family during a period when their real families were often far away. Mom Chung was not only a surrogate mother to her sons, but she came to represent something bigger than herself. She became a symbol of interracial-ness and affiliation between allies. When one

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61 U.S. Congress, Senate and the House of Representatives, United States Statutes at Large, Volume 56, PublicLaw 689, Sec. 508, 730-731.

62 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards, 164-165.
recognized the Buddha charm to another who also knew Mom, they immediately became close friends, adopted brothers even. Mom Chung provided motherly care for the soldiers and encouraged brotherly care between them. The 1940s was a period of racial and gender permeation. Women crossed professional spheres and worked in the defense industries. They were allowed to work by law because war demanded men at the battlefronts. Chung defied racial and gender norms early on because she went to medical school and obtained a degree to practice surgery. While motherhood has always been a female occupation, Chung took up the task in masculine ways. Chung defined motherhood as a blessing and developed her kinship networks to fulfill her need for familial connection and for the progression of American society. World War II made her a nationally known figure and bolstered her achievements as a mother.

After the war ended, American soldiers returned to their original homes and resumed civilian life with their real families. Chung continued to maintain contact with her family of sons and followed the nation’s political developments. She also continued to open her home for weekly parties but because her fraternal network no longer needed to remain in the San Francisco Bay Area for war anymore, the formerly well-attended parties became occasional military reunions instead. Chung continued her correspondences with her sons despite her declining health, but her role as a mother was no longer as active as it was in wartime. After the war, her American sons still addressed her as Mom and a group of them saved up some money to buy Chung a nice house, which included a bar and other luxury accommodations. In spite of these caring gestures, Chung’s

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63 Ibid., 188.
64 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards, 187.
name slowly drifted out of public discourse. Newspapers and the media did not seem to contain articles on her narrative afterward. Her role as a mother had come to hold more symbolic significance than physical importance, since her sons did not need to remain at her home.

It appears that 1941-1945 played the most important part in her life because she took on a new identity that was unheard of but became crucial during a time of the Second World War. First of all, Margaret Chung fulfilled the interracial link between the mainstream American public and the Chinese community during a period in which political alliances and domestic kinships intertwined. More importantly, her military sons valued her for her racial identity as a Chinese woman who could connect to Americans. Second, war drove many people to leave their homes and loved ones, resulting in a familial void that Chung warmly filled. Third, the war allowed Chung to play a crucial role in the creation of the United States’ naval force because with the help of Chung’s Kiwi sons, she was able to co-found the Women’s Naval Reserve. As a mother, she was able to draw on the expertise of her children who had strong political power and personal love for their Mom. The war provided her the support and assistance to surpass racial expectations for a Chinese woman. Because World War II heavily utilized airborne combat, Chung firmly valued the honor and skills of

Figure 5. Margaret Chung poses at home on July 29, 1952. Taken from Judy Wu’s book Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards but the original photograph was taken by Sergeant Higgins, 8th Army and belongs to the U.S. Army.
her fair-haired bastard sons. In 1959, Chung passed away at
the age of seventy. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Golden
Dolphin #100, was one of her pallbearers at the funeral. Her
military sons respected her role as a mother even after she
had left. They saw her as a strong and intelligent mother,
friend, and servicewoman. Mom Chung left a long legacy of
uniqueness because she was undaunted by social limitations.
Although she was not allowed to achieve her dream
occupation as a medical missionary in China, she chose to
become an even greater figure that was necessary during the
war: a Chinese American mother to fifteen hundred bastard
sons.
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Secondary


Doctor Margaret “Mom Chung.” West Adams Heritage


Shoulders en Vogue: The Crisis in Elite Femininity, 1930-1939

By Laura Hsu

Confident. Resolute. Powerful. These are the characteristics which shoulder pads usually draw to mind. A photo spread in Vogue’s August 1988 issue is case in point (see Figure 1). Clad in a three-piece suit lined with conspicuously wide shoulder pads, a determined-looking brunette struts in front of a group of sauntering businessmen. The men may be at leisure, but she means business. She is the leader of the pack, and she rules the masculine world of business. As Vogue’s editorial suggests, by the 1980s exaggerated shoulder pads became synonymous with professional power. Such an understanding of shoulder pads has followed us into modern day, but it is only part of the story. For contrary to common knowledge, the exaggerated shoulder pads trend did not first debut during the 1980s, but during the Great Depression, half a century earlier. This essay examines the rise and fall of the exaggerated shoulders trend from 1930 to 1939 in American Vogue magazine, a magazine popularly viewed as an elite fashion bible. In particular, this essay seeks to understand the ideal feminine figure during the Great Depression, a period when economic crisis threatened to undermine American gender roles. It finds that Vogue teetered between masculine and feminine language in its description of the exaggerated shoulders trend, signifying Vogue’s complicated acceptance and denial of the Great Depression. Ultimately, however,

shoulder pads prevailed because of their ability to accentuate the ideal feminine figure of the decade.

Fashion changed at breakneck speeds during the Great Depression. What proved to be popular one month could be easily discarded the next. “Shoulder interest” first piqued in January of 1930. The next month, Vogue elaborated on the trend, suggesting that a “graceful effect” could be achieved by “wide shoulder yoke[s].” By March, the suggestion had become an imperative: “shoulders must be draped, widened, beautified.”

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68 “Shouldering the Mode,” Vogue, March 15, 1930, 84.

Despite this early enthusiasm for the trend, the trend had run its course by the spring of 1932, with Vogue proclaiming “the wooden soldiers have disappeared.” By November of 1933, shoulders were declaratively “done with” and by January of the following year, Vogue began urging women to follow a completely new trend. “Let your shoulders droop down, down!” they momentarily declared. Yet, the exaggerated shoulders trend had not truly disappeared. Two years later in 1936, exaggerated shoulders reemerged. This time, however, their revival was brief. After just one year, the trend again disappeared, “withering, dying, being pruned away as much as dead wood.” The sartorially tumultuous decade ended on a neutral note: “shoulders are strong, but not bombastic.” Exaggerated shoulder pads came a full-circle-and-a-half during the thirties, and unsurprisingly, too, for Vogue has often cycled through trends with the same ruthlessness. Reflecting on the 1920s flapper styles, Vogue detachedly recalled, “They may seem ugly to us now, but it was pure genius then that grasped the right thing for the right moment.” With its rapid-fire unpredictability, the 1930s

69 “Vogue Goes to the Collections,” Vogue, October 1, 1931, 41.
70 “The Spring Scene in New York,” Vogue, March 1, 1932, 42.
71 “Midseason Exhibition,” Vogue, November 15, 1933, 37.
73 “You’ll Want to Look…,” Vogue, February 1, 1936, 41.
76 “Collection Fever—Spring 1936 Attack,” Vogue, April 1, 1936,
Sex and the (China) City

exaggerated shoulders trend exemplified this sentiment writ large.

Throughout these tumultuous times, however, one thing remained constant. As early as 1931, Vogue began hinting at the new ideal body shape of the decade. “We have ceased to be afraid of feminine curves,” the magazine announced. Yet there was always one caveat preventing women from completely embracing their feminine curves. Later that year, Vogue elaborated on what the ideal figure looked like: “The feminine figure is the point, this season. It’s not smart to be flat; neither is it lovely to be square. Your hips may be rounded, ever so slightly, but your waist must curve in.”

The caveat was the waist. “Because women still like to be slender, their clothes may provide curves in abundance—but certain curves only.”

In 1932, the magazine declared that “the world has been made safe for femininity.” Notably, however, the magazine’s conception of femininity was not supposed to be womanly, but girlish (see Figure 2). This archetypal girlish figure would remain en vogue for the remainder of the decade.

Figure 2: Illustration from Vogue’s April 1931 issue. Note the girlish figures of the women, emphasizing slender waists above all.

157.


79  “Vogue Predicts,” Vogue, August 1, 1931, 23.


81  “What Happened: At the Paris Openings,” Vogue, April 1, 1932, 37.
Vogue considered this girlish figure so important that it repeatedly exhorted its readers to take whatever means necessary to achieve the slim, ideal figure. “Take exercise, take massage, but do not flatten, harden, or break your line,” Vogue instructed, “An unbroken feminine line is the beautiful thing in this mode.”82 One season later, Vogue reiterated its instruction. “Vogue has been talking about this new feature of your anatomy—the waist—so long, that your ribs ought to be properly thinned down. If you haven’t yet found the natural curve of your waist, you will have to keep on with exercise and massage,” the magazine bluntly admonished.83 Readers were not to admire the girlish ideal from afar but to live it in reality, and fashion would help them attain this goal. Forecasting trends within the coming spring season, Vogue suggested, “they are frankly charmers, using every wile to accent our femininity.” If garments proved inadequate, hairstyles and accessories could also serve as supplements. “Curls, bangs, bonnets, childish round collars, capes, delicate colours, laces, flowers—we are adopting them all.”84 The ideal feminine figure found its match in ideal feminine styles. Like an optical illusion, fashion could help a woman reaffirm her femininity by making her appear girlish.

That Vogue became so fixated on girlishness and femininity during the Great Depression comes at no surprise. After all, the Great Depression sent gender roles into a tumult. With unemployment peaking at almost 25% at one point, the American family underwent a series of confusing changes.85 Father could no longer monopolize, or even ensure, his position as breadwinner and mother, many times,

82 “The Judgment of Paris,” 44.
took on the responsibility by necessity. Victorian ideals shattered. If domesticity embodied one of the four cardinal virtues of true womanhood, then many Depression-era women could not be true women. As historian Winifred D. Wandersee Bolin has noted, “in the decade between 1930 and 1940, the number of married women in the labor force increased by nearly 50 percent.” Indeed, the number of women workers not only increased absolutely but also proportionally. To make matters worse, the Depression hit traditionally “masculine” industries harder than industries opened to women. The Depression thus produced a topsy-turvy gender realm, leading Robert S. McElvaine to conclude, “the Depression itself placed women in a relatively better position for obtaining work—poorly paid, of course—than men.” Women not only entered the workforce in large numbers, but also had an easier time finding jobs. The domestic “true woman” was under attack.

Of course, many of Vogue’s upper and middle class readers did not have to enter the work force. Various sources estimate Vogue’s national circulation in 1930 to be less than 140,000. Clearly, the magazine did not cater to the masses. In 1933, during the midst of the economic downturn, the magazine even lightheartedly declared that its readers’ only

89 Ibid., 183.
“new occupation” consisted of leisure. Nevertheless, even if the Depression did not pinch Vogue’s middle and upper class readers as directly as it pinched women of lower socioeconomic classes, Vogue did acknowledge that a “world crisis” was underway. Moreover, even if the world crisis did not hit middle and upper class women directly, it still undermined their femininity in another way. In 1930, Vogue complained of “that overdone economy that is so undermining to feminine morale.” Interesting here is Vogue’s word choice. Economic downturn was not disparaging to female morale but to feminine morale. The problem lay in the fact that the Depression impaired elite women’s ability to purchase consumer goods. Unable to keep up with trends changing at breakneck speeds—trends which sought to reassert femininity in a period when economic downturn threatened the nation’s gender roles—women lost a valuable toehold on femininity. Thus, while the Depression stripped lower class women of their femininity by forcing them outside into the workforce, it also stripped middle and upper class women of their femininity by obstructing their ability to consume.

In many ways, fashion’s unpredictability appeared to mirror the economic instability of the period. While fashion wavered from extreme-to-extreme between years and even months, the country’s economic state also fluctuated unexpectedly. That shoulder pads could fall from the zenith of fashion to the nadir of unpopularity in just one year’s time resembled the way in which the unemployment rate rose by almost eight percentage points between 1931 and 1932. Consequently, in either fashion or economics, Vogue

91  “Leisure—Our New Occupation,” Vogue, May 1, 1933, 44.
November’s “Practising Thrift in the French Way”\textsuperscript{96} and “Colour with Economy,”\textsuperscript{97} Vogue provided yearlong advice for financially-concerned women. At other times, however, the magazine ignored that a depression was even underway. It pretended that women would simply keep consuming as they had for years prior, even if they voiced economic concerns. In one particularly critical article, Vogue “looked around for a badly dressed woman” to substantiate this claim. It found its victim in Mrs. E, a clueless, but harmless, woman. When Mrs. E admitted that clothes depressed her “because you can’t dress well without a lot of money,” Vogue retorted, “but you do wear clothes.”\textsuperscript{98} Here, Vogue confounded the need to wear clothes with the need to purchase new clothes. Vogue failed to recognize that Mrs. E, like many women, might simply have chosen to “make do” with older garments rather than purchase a completely new wardrobe every season. Even when the magazine admitted that a problem lay at hand, it delusively underestimated the extent of the problem. In 1935, it purported to offer financially-sound shopping advice to its readers. “We kept our heads through the new collections,” the magazine claimed, “the highest price for any single one of these garments is about seventy-five dollars.”\textsuperscript{99} While seventy-five dollars may have been an unjustifiable expense during the Great Depression, it does not even come close to the absurdity of Vogue’s other advice. In 1930, Vogue “prepared five budgets, costing from twelve hundred to twelve thousand dollars” for its readers to follow. The problem? Vogue clearly had not kept its head. The median

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{96} “Practising Thrift in the French Way,” Vogue, November 10, 1930, 68.
\item \textsuperscript{97} “Colour with Economy,” Vogue, November 10, 1930, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{98} “Smart Fashion for Limited Incomes,” Vogue, September 15, 1930, 97, 110.
\item \textsuperscript{99} “Vogue’s Spring Wardrobe in Shops from Coast to Coast,” Vogue, March 1, 1935, 75.
\end{itemize}
family income for a family of four in 1939 was $1,374. With economic crisis threatening archetypes of both masculinity and femininity, shoulder pads posed a perplexing problem. By widening women’s shoulders, shoulder pads appeared to masculinize the female figure, their effect all the more pronounced during a decade when feminine, girlish figures proved ideal. Consequently, Vogue struggled to characterize shoulder pads. Like in its coverage of the economic downturn, Vogue oscillated between acceptance and denial. At times, it described the exaggerated shoulders trend as fully compatible with femininity. Describing the new popularity of suits in its March 1930 issue, Vogue claimed that “the suit of mannish material is as tailored as it is possible to be in the present feminine mode, but even this type should be softer than the old-fashioned tailormade.” Later in the article, Vogue reiterated this claim more forcefully: “THE WOOL SUIT, this season, has forsaken its masculine tailored ways and presents a frankly feminine appeal.” One month later, Vogue changed course. Masculinity now became a selling point for suits. Under an illustration of two impossibly svelte ladies in suits, Vogue wrote, “Suit no. 5276—Masculine tailoring and padded shoulders distinguish this double-breasted suit.” The fashion tides were clearly changing. “Suits, this season, have undergone drastic changes.” Now, Vogue deemed suits both “feminized by the dressmaker’s touch”

102 Ibid., 69.
and those “more severe in tailoring” acceptable.\textsuperscript{103} The shift towards masculinity was almost complete by April of 1931. Characterizing “the year’s pet themes,” Vogue advocated “double-breasted, fitted lines, and wide lapels… [in] a coat both mannish and casual.”\textsuperscript{104}

Yet, the fashion tides did not settle there. By the middle of the decade, Vogue began to backtrack, its fashion police working overtime to outlaw masculinity. “Certainly, it’s your womanly duty to take the manly edge off your tailored suit by wearing a frothy necked blouse,” Vogue commanded its readers in February of 1936. Interestingly, as concerned as it was with femininity, Vogue did not wholly outlaw shoulder pads at this point in time. Women could still choose a tailored suit as long as it was “TAILORED WITH RESERVATIONS.” Indeed, even “bolero suit[s]” with “conquistador shoulders” remained on the table. One inviolable offense existed, however. Suits must “never [be] so relentlessly mannish as to confuse you with your brother.”\textsuperscript{105}

Masculinity entered and disappeared from the discourse on Depression-era fashion as quickly as styles fell in and out of favor. At times, masculinity appeared harmless and even compatible with femininity. At other times, masculinity appeared to be the enemy, necessitating elimination to protect femininity.

Although Vogue never reached an agreement over how to describe shoulder pads, it did find ways to justify them. Indeed, the debut of a potentially masculinizing fashion during a period undergoing a crisis in femininity certainly required justification. Vogue answered the call by suggesting that shoulder pads could actually accentuate one’s femininity. If the ideal feminine figure at the time was

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\textsuperscript{103} “Spring 1930 and the Suit,” \textit{Vogue}, April 12, 1930, 118.
\textsuperscript{104} “The Economy Racket in New Spring Coats,” \textit{Vogue}, April 1, 1931, 82.
\textsuperscript{105} “You’ll Want to Look…,” 41.
\end{flushright}
girlish with a slim waist and hips “narrower than ever,” then shoulder pads still achieved a net increase in femininity, even if they temporarily masculinized the shoulders.106 “Stressing one part of our body and effacing all the others is one of the surest formulas of enchantment,” Vogue explained in the spring of 1933. By effacing the shoulders, women could charmingly stress the slimness of their waists (see Figure 3). “BOLD-SHOULDERED AND WASP WAISTED,” the magazine announced in February of 1936, “the shoulders roll and shirr and fold and jut into aggression. Inevitably, they jerk the eye downwards to a waspish waist.”107 Even more advantageously, shoulder pads could achieve this effect in a successful yet subtle manner. “The regions just above and below the waist-line are full of interest and serve both to stress, by contrast, the slimness of the waist and to distract your attention from this point.”108 Thus, even if Elsa Schiaparelli’s popular “‘970’ [coat] in wooden-soldier silhouette” had “wide shoulders,” it still maintained a “slim waist.”109 In addition, shoulder pads could also accentuate other “feminine” features besides the waist. They could “provide charming settings for delicate heads”110 as well as “get the effect of a… slender neck.”111 If the rhetoric of shoulder pads posed a problem, the actual effect of shoulder pads did not.

107 Ibid.
109 “Vogue Goes to the Collections,” 42.
110 “Shouldering the Mode,” 84.
111 “Vogue Predicts,” 23.
In 1984, Vogue columnist Kathleen Beckett suggested that women wear suits with exaggerated shoulders to “help men focus on [women’s] mental prowess, not their physical attributes.”\footnote{112}{Kathleen Beckett, “The Menswear Phenomenon,” 
\textit{Vogue}, August 1, 1984, 156.} She went on to state that “the overscaled \textit{sic} proportion and authoritative lines of men’s clothes \textit{in women’s fashion} give the wearer a look of dash and swagger, power and assurance.”\footnote{113}{Ibid., 164.} Ten years later, Vogue’s famous editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour, declared, “when a woman has to do something important, or when she wants to be heard, she puts on a suit.”\footnote{114}{Anna Wintour, “Letter from the Editor: If the Suit Fits,” 
\textit{Vogue}, August 1, 1997, 60.} Clearly, women in the 1930s and women in the 1980s wore exaggerated shoulder pads in the women’s jackets to emphasize their slim waists.

Figure 3: Illustration from Vogue’s August 1935 issue. The exaggerated shoulder pads in the women’s jackets emphasize their slim waists.
pads for very different reasons. While women in the 1980s wore shoulder pads to masculinize their image to fit into the masculine world of business, women in the 1930s wore shoulder pads to feminize their image. In either decade, shoulder pads gained symbolic meaning depending on the circumstances of the times. Although the Great Depression did not directly affect Vogue’s elite readers, Vogue’s readers nevertheless experienced a crisis in femininity when the economic downturn impaired their ability to consume. Shoulder pads thus needed to be associated with femininity in order to prevail. In contrast, after third wave feminism and the sexual revolution, shoulder pads could adopt a more masculine symbolism in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the two decades also shared similarities. In 1983, Vogue provided a few “tricks” to use when dealing with the exaggerated shoulders trend. “They have to do with polish and added femininity,” the magazine explained. The tricks consisted of adding “decidedly non-masculine things: wonderful gloves with color and a sense of decoration, polished high-heeled pumps, a soft scarf” to balance out the outfit. For better or worse, Vogue’s continuing concern with feminizing shoulder pads—or any other “masculine” fashion in that matter—illustrates the continuity of Victorian ideals in contemporary America. Contemporary America has progressed far, but contemporary America still has long ways to go. Journalist Georgina Howell thus appears quite right in her evaluation of fashion. Fashion is not simply “the luxury many think it is” but a “barometer” of our times as well as a barometer of the history that precedes us.

115 “Vogue’s Last Word on Fashion in this Issue,” Vogue, July 1, 1983, 244.
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Esquire: The Masculine Face of the Great Depression

By Wesley Forrest Garfield

In the first issue of *Esquire* magazine, editor Arnold Gingrich wrote, “*Esquire* aims to become the common denominator of masculine interests – to be all things men.”¹ *Esquire* magazine was first published in October 1933. The United States was deep in the Great Depression under newly inaugurated president, Franklin D. Roosevelt. The magazine cost fifty cents, and positioned itself as the wealthy man’s guide to manhood. Yet *Esquire* revealed contradicting notions of masculine identity. The duality of manhood manifested through anxieties generated by the changing economic and social landscape. As New Deal programs failed to restore economic stability, *Esquire’s* posture of pessimism toward recovery suggested hope was waning after the election. This essay will explore how the first two issues from October 1933 and January 1934 attempted to define masculinity. Though the magazine aimed to present the values of idealized manhood, many articles contradicted the archetype in their depictions of reality. Moreover, it began to present the subtle dichotomies and anxieties that had emerged from the all-encompassing Depression. The 1933 and 1934 issues of *Esquire* specifically explored masculinity through the lenses of the Prohibition’s revocation, the Great Depression, and man’s perception of the power of women.

*Esquire* masculinity was dependent on sophistication and knowledge, and alcohol was a means by which to attain high male status. The repeal of prohibition occurred on December 5th, 1933, coming between *Esquire’s* first and second issues. This notably altered article content, illustrations, and advertisements. The January 1934

¹ Arnold Gingrich, “As For General Content,” Esquire Vol. 1: No. 1 (October, 1933), 4.
edition reflected the repeal of prohibition and exuberance over the promise of legal intoxication during hard times. Its cover illustration boasted a cartoon *Esquire* man in a tuxedo standing next to an oversized glass of champagne. The cover, along with many of the issue’s articles and advertisements, celebrated the welcomed change in law. The image of the tuxedo and champagne glass also communicated that alcohol was a mainstay of upper-class life. Following Prohibition’s repeal, the alcohol industry scrambled to find new customers through advertising. Therefore, allowing *Esquire* to be selective in the types of alcohol advertisements promoted to its audience. A full-page Johnny Walker scotch whiskey advertisement appeared on the third page of the January issue. It exclaimed, “Welcome one old friend…many old friends will come trooping back…Price? One can comfortably afford to pay. Availability? Immediately.” Scotch whiskey was a wealthy man’s drink, and its price played an important role in the advertisement. *Esquire* wished to move beyond the “swallowing of booze, booze, booze. No matter what the label said,” which had become a new norm, instead emphasizing the consumption of expensive alcohol labels. The ad mirrored the magazine’s ideology while also appealing to reality. Many would have reveled in the ability to legally buy their “old friend” Johnny Walker once more. Recommending such a high class and expensive whiskey was part of *Esquire*’s attempt to tie masculinity to the consumption of quality alcohol.

The magazine additionally reflected a societal fear of uncultured male youth, who maintained ambivalence

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4 Frederick Van Ryn, “There’s no Repealing Tastes,” *Esquire* Vol. 1: No. 2 (January, 1934), 47.
to status associations related to finer alcohol. Despite the economic pains of the Depression, *Esquire* assumed the role of educating the unrefined men. The article, “There’s no Repealing Tastes: The boys will blink at many a wine card, but gin will always be a lonely girl’s best friend,”

positioned a stern masculine identity against frivolous feminine alcoholic tastes. *Esquire* pitied American men who had never tasted luxury, a sentiment clear in the following, “He never tasted even a single drop of honest to good Beuve Cliquot, virginal Benedictine or staunch Burgundy since the Year of Our Lord Andrew Volstead 1920.”

The jab mocked both the legislation of Prohibition, as well as bolstered the magazine’s inclination toward fine wine and European tastes. Knowledge of refined liquors enhanced the virtue of *Esquire*’s idealized man, one who elected to indulge in luxury in the face of economic hardship. Another article went so far as to state, “A careful study of history across the ages reveals the astounding fact that the ‘wet’ nations or races always were the pioneers.”

Alcohol was therefore necessary for the future of the nation; further suggesting that Prohibition prompted economic failure. *Esquire* championed alcohol as an extension of masculinity. This phenomena reflected the evolution of American popular opinion, from supporting Prohibition, to using alcohol as a force to overcome the Great Depression through tax revenue and employment opportunities.

*Esquire* paradoxically juxtaposed the Depression with a masculine high-class ideal. As the Depression penetrated all levels of American society and culture, *Esquire*’s content revealed that its target, wealthy audience also felt the socio-economic downturn. It mocked financial institutions and

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5 Ibid., 47.
7 Ibid.
human failures in an illustration with the following caption: “Me? I was a financial expert.”\textsuperscript{8} In the image, two homeless men are talking on a park bench. This picture suggested that the Depression was profound, yet the “expert” was a fool and a large part of the problem. The magazine used the Depression as a way to belittle those who had failed in the United States, making its readers feel manlier as a result. The failure of old wealth and business was further emphasized in an illustration in which a rich, overweight fencer had stabbed his sword in the belly of his opponent. The victor’s butler stated, “Smith, you always go too far.”\textsuperscript{9} The tongue-in-cheek cartoon was a comic attack at the nation’s ruthless business practices. Winning was insufficient, as the opponent had to be trampled and degraded. While \textit{Esquire} valued successful men, its illustrations also revealed distrust of old society. The magazine contradicted its emphasis on a return to past refinement by critiquing the very same man’s business practices.

The convoluted message was continued as aspects of the magazine paralleled the language of hope projected in FDR’s New Deal and “fireside chats.” An article titled “The New Leisure” stated, “We have a very long way to go in dealing with this question [proper leisure] because there are parts of our country and other countries in which the standard of living is still far below what it should be…but never the less it should be our object to raise it by all means in our power and certainly remove any obstacles, government or other, which may stand in the way of it being raised.”\textsuperscript{10} The article revealed the noble responsibility of helping others,

\textsuperscript{8} John Groth, “Me? I was a financial expert,” \textit{Esquire} Vol. 1: No. 1 (October, 1933), 72.
a moral duty that contradicted its previous condescension toward victims of the stagnant economy.

While pseudo-socialist ideas were present, the magazine’s second issue in 1934, propelled feelings of hopelessness, and a more pessimistic attitude towards recovery. As the Depression deepened, the initial hope sown by the New Deal began to decay. In the magazine’s first issue, money and happiness were not directly associated. *Esquire* placed its confidence in other aspects of society, such as love and fashion. This was illustrated by an image of a burlesque girl in the changing room, with the caption claiming, “I know he’s a millionaire but, money isn’t everything.”11 As the other performers fawned over the girl’s flowers from her admirer, the image revealed a deeper hope to find happiness through true love - not money. The economic woes of the Depression had not fully consumed society, as romantic notions of love continued to reign superior. In direct contrast, *Esquire*’s following January issue contained an image of a high society man and woman at a dinner party with the caption, “Well, why shouldn’t I marry for money, tell me that.”12 Unlike the noble, romantic burlesque worker of the previous issue, the high society woman sought only money. Money provided escape from the Depression, and thus became the ultimate goal. The January issue’s illustration, a mere three months later, reflected high society’s fear of losing status as the economy rapidly degenerated.

*Esquire* proposed thrift purchasing in order to maintain appearances and increase consumer spending. *Esquire* defined thrift as buying a single quality item to maintain the appearance of being wealthy. The magazine

11 Anonymous, “I know he’s a millionaire but, money isn’t everything,” Esquire Vol. 1: No. 1 (October, 1933), 94.
especially dealt with the necessity of thrift purchases to uphold one’s respect and manhood. A fashion editorial “At Least Look As If You Had A Little Money,” stated, “The lack of ready cash may be betrayed, upon occasion, by your features, but shouldn’t, under any circumstances, be indicated by your dress.”\(^{13}\) Regardless of the economic realities of the time, clothing remained a determinant of society and wealth. The magazine reinforced a focus on consumerism through occasional splurge purchases that could be reused on various occasions. Another fashion editorial titled “A Town Turnout with a Strong Eastern Accent” stated, “Wherever you may wear it, an outfit for town use could do much worse than suggest that you frequent the more genteel selections of the big metropolis.”\(^{14}\) The magazine’s editors realized the publication needed to reflect the realities of its audience in order to stay relevant, but it continued to rely on its pretense of sophistication in reproducing a refined male society. Thrift allowed men to maintain their pride, without necessitating the purchase of an entire wardrobe. The magazine attempted to reconcile these dichotomies by presenting thrift as a tool for keeping appearances on a limited budget.

While *Esquire* adapted to reflect the cultural shifts of the Depression, the magazine continued to propagate the unaffected and idealized man, an adventurer that laughed in the face of danger. Even as Depression-related content increased, *Esquire* largely communicated the ideals of manliness and heroism through nostalgic notions of courage and adventure that were absent in contemporary culture. The magazine worked to uplift society through fantasies of adventure. *Esquire* encouraged virility by including innovative modern devices such as airplanes and


sports cars.\textsuperscript{15} They inspired courage by featuring articles
of adventurous pirates fighting for a lost cause, and men
dueling to maintain their honor.\textsuperscript{16} The October 1933 cover
was emblematic of the magazine’s narrative of heroism:
a red seaplane in the middle of a lake, with its two pilots
conversing with passing country folk in a nearby canoe.
The pilots were of a noticeably different breed than their
counterparts: finely dressed with well-groomed moustaches,
speaking down to those in suspenders and flannel.\textsuperscript{17} The
two pilots appeared proud and courageous in comparison
to the two local and plain-clothed folk. This image of the
sophisticated adventurer epitomized what \textit{Esquire} sought to
communicate to its readers. The pilots maintained complete
control over their lives, paragons of sophisticated masculine
identity.

This uninhibited high-class man was further
perpetuated by full-page Cadillac advertisements featured
in both issues. Cadillac presented the idea that man’s place
was in a lavish office or sailing a yacht, as described in the
first issue: “Impressions mean so much…A good portion of
America’s business leaders are never seen riding in anything
other than Cadillac cars…Pictured here, out of an artist’s
imagination, is a fine American business office. Sumptuous
and inviting.”\textsuperscript{18} The magazine propelled advertising fantasies
that embodied the significance of class and wealth for young
men. The Cadillac advertisement suggested that failing
to maintain a strong outward appearance could ruin both

\textsuperscript{15} Alexis de Sakhnoffsky, “The Illusion of Speed,” \textit{Esquire} Vol. 1:
No. 2 (January, 1934), 72-75.
\textsuperscript{16} Edward M. Barrows, “You Ready Gentlemen?,” \textit{Esquire} Vol. 1:
No. 2 (January, 1934), 65.
\textsuperscript{17} “Esquire: The Magazine for Men,” \textit{Esquire} Vol. 1: No. 1
(October, 1933), Front Cover.
\textsuperscript{18} Cadillac Motor Company, “Impressions mean so much…,”
\textit{Esquire} Vol. 1: No. 1 (October, 1933), 5.
business and romantic relationships. Thusly promoting *Esquire’s* core motive: to encourage men to uphold some semblance of their previously lavish lifestyles that had been affected by the Depression. The second edition included a similar ad by Cadillac that used an image of recreational sailing. Cadillac was not a car for the masses, rather for a select group of society. The ad claimed, “Not everyone, of course, is permitted to know the deep seated pleasure this depicts- for only a few are privileged to enjoy this most satisfying of recreation. But it is a significant fact that, among those who do know the joy and pleasure of a fair wind, there is a decided preference for Cadillac automobiles.”

High-class advertisements encouraged sumptuous fantasies for the magazine’s audience, linking manhood with expensive hobbies and cars. While Cadillac advertisements encouraged the purchase of luxury commodities to solidify one’s masculinity, the magazine also captured a nostalgic image of man who was rustic and dominant over women. These stories could appeal to a wider audience than advertisements for luxury items. Articles such as “Break Em Gentle: A cowboy artist and story teller points out that the bad ones, both bronks and women, can be gentled” presented a very different depiction of man than the Cadillac driver. A rough cowboy-type character had supreme power over of his surroundings. He was able to tame horses, and even women. This rough cowboy asserted dominance in the face of women’s growing power. An illustration titled, “How d’ya spell polygamy?” featured a white sailor on a tropical island surrounded by

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20 Dan Muller, “Break Em’ Gentle,” Esquire Vol. 1: No. 1 (October, 1933), 54.
numerous topless native women. The caption revealed the pseudo-playboy mentality that subtly pervaded the magazine. As a comical cartoon, the illustration highlighted the sexual benefits that came with masculinity and taking control. A dominant male could explore a new sexual freedom, and escape from the bleak Depression world.

While wealth and high-class values dominated *Esquire*, it also attempted to define masculinity by showcasing male attributes that were independent of wealth. One article, “Hair Raising Adventures: The mustache as an index to character, as evidenced by the evolution of Old Hank to Henry,” stated, “Whether one raises a mustache or stands on the side-lines and observes others thus engaged, there inevitably comes a time when one realizes mustaches have a psychological effect upon their owners.”22 According to *Esquire*, the mustache was a symbol of dominance and respect that every man could achieve. It was a cure-all to one’s anxiety: a source of power that commanded respect. The article further stated, “His mustache caught and held the attention of those who beheld it. A perfect understanding seemed to exist between it and Hank.”23 Mustache personification gave an authority through which a man could seize control over his life. Although economic recovery may be beyond one’s grasp, every man could control their face and personal presence. The mustache was a feature of *Esquire’s* ideal man, a fact that further strengthened the magazine’s emphasis on appearance.

Further, the magazine linked manliness with notions of mastery in order to fight the socio-economic woes of the Depression. Articles emphasized man as the conqueror of spaces beyond woman’s reach, such as engineering and mechanical feats. The article, “The Illusion of Speed: A very

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23 Ibid.
graphic demonstration of principles of design through which are, or seem, fast,” described man as the ultimate engineer and creator. It portrayed a self-reliant young racer who tinkered with his machines to maximize his performance. The article included the designer’s highly stylized sketches of racecars, boats and planes. Free from the social anxieties and economic pains of the Depression, the young man was solely concerned with questions of speed and aerodynamics. The article described the man “As an engineer, amateur racing driver and speed lover.” Racing was a profession almost exclusively dominated by the old European aristocracy, yet the magazine emphasized the promise that came with building one’s unique skill set. This was emblematic of the ideological dichotomy of masculinity that the magazine propagated. In part, manhood relied on using the traditions of old wealth, yet masculinity could be self-made through grasping control of one’s future. The “amateur racing driver” who sought to stimulate his mind indicated that one’s manhood could become an extension of their self-ownership.

*Esquire* largely defined manliness in relation to broader societal associations. While men dominated the outside business world, women controlled their husbands in private. *Esquire* magazine questioned the growing power of women in the domestic sphere. The idea of a wife’s hidden domination penetrated the articles of *Esquire*, in which men acted out of fear of their wives. The office offered men their only escape and solace. This predicament was evident in the article, “What A Married Man Should Know: About doing the marketing and getting his own breakfast and ducking all trouble in general.” It said, “there are two types of men: those who are scared of their wives and those who lie about

24 Sakhnoffsky, “The Illusion of Speed,” Esquire, 73.
25 Ibid., 72
it,” further stating “while there’s still time, take my advice and get your breakfast in a lunchroom.”

Men often felt inadequate during the Depression, due to their inability to support their families. They were subjected to their guilt and the disappointment of their wives. Further, men were incapable of cooking without the reprimand of their wives, a caricature of traditional gender roles. The article explained, “First of all, if you try to cook that breakfast yourself, you’ll find out that in frying a couple of eggs, it isn’t luck which keeps the eggs from running up a married woman sleeve… its skill and necromancy combined, and you’re no magician.”

Women’s place was the home because she had mastered it. To avoid the feelings of emasculation, the author suggested buying breakfast and fleeing to the world of capitalism and business where men reigned dominant.

The magazine’s discussion of male fashion further acknowledged woman’s domination at home. The editorial “For Those Who Go For Any Color So Long As It’s Blue” wrote, “If you are convinced, or your wife has convinced you, that your taste in colors is not to be trusted, sticking to plain blue is the most reliable way to get the world from proving it on you.”

This advice clearly outlined a wife’s power over her husband in choosing his clothing. The editorial jabbed at the reader’s pride, proposing that fashion was a female prerogative. Men feared the growing female influence in society as higher education attendance rates exploded, and more women entered the work force. Coupled with men loosing their jobs and being unable to provide for their families, men worked to maintain a hold on their masculinity in controlled environments.

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27 Ibid.
opportunities for manhood could be found in high-class society.

The Depression plunged the nation into cultural flux, but it did not quell the high-class, cultured message that *Esquire* was determined to communicate to its audience. Contemporary society influenced *Esquire*’s multifaceted definition of man, yet did not dictate the magazine’s terms of manhood. The editor stated, “Esquire aims to be, among other things, a fashion guide for men. But it never intends to become, by an possible stretch of imagination, a primer for fops.”29 The magazine presented man as a well-dressed adventurer, successful despite woman’s control at home. It limited female power to the domestic space, and invited men to seize control in every other way. Even newly legalized alcohol consumption was analyzed through a “high class” lens. The magazine advised sophistication with frugality, remaining relevant to the public but supportive of *Esquire*’s core values. As masculinity was brought into question by the Depression, *Esquire* tried to reassert virile values through its articles and illustrations. Man was expected to exude luxury and power, yet his identity was constantly reshaped by the deep-seated anxieties prevalent in society. *Esquire* aimed to be the wealthy man’s magazine, but it was unable to extricate itself fully from the insecurities reaped by the Depression. A false projection of wealth and power could not ultimately cover up man’s underlying anxieties that resulted from the profound socio-economics effects of the Great Depression.

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Spencer Wayne Smith is a fourth year undergraduate majoring in History and minoring in Chinese language. His concentration is in East Asian history, specifically early-imperial Chinese society and politics. After finishing up his senior thesis reappraising notions concerning revenge, law and society in Qin and Han China, he plans to complete an undergraduate research project on early Chinese material culture and further his Chinese language studies while spending a year at Tsinghua university before (hopefully) applying to an early Chinese history graduate studies program.