

THE GREAT ITALIAN EDUCATOR: THE MONTESSORI METHOD AND AMERICAN
NATIVISM IN THE 1910s

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to investigate to what extent Protestant nativism impeded the spread of the Montessori Method in the United States. The Montessori Method has experienced waves of popularity in America ever since it was first introduced in 1910. During the first wave of popularity, from 1910-1917, Dr. Maria Montessori, the founder, faced backlash from educators and educational philosophers for her scientific reasoning and her pedagogical and social philosophies. Some Montessori historians believe that these factors were critical in halting the spread of the Montessori Method in America in 1917. An additional theory is that Montessori's personal identity, as an Italian Catholic woman, impeded the reception of her ideas in America. Considering that the time period was characterized by anti-Catholic rhetoric from political organizations as well as newspapers and journals, the theory makes sense.

Research for this project was conducted by examining newspaper publications that covered the Montessori Method, rebuttals of the method published by American educators, and the books and articles written by Montessori advocates. Other primary sources include Catholic publications and Dr. Montessori's own books and writings. Secondary sources, such as autobiographies of Maria Montessori's life and examinations of nativist activity at the beginning of the 20th Century, help paint a picture of the state of America when Dr. Montessori visited in 1913. Overall, these sources indicate that anti-Catholic sentiments played a minor role, if any, in hampering the spread of the Montessori Method.

Maria Montessori's publicist, Samuel S. McClure, crafted a particular public image for Montessori, compatible with themes of social reform, Progressive educational reform, and feminism, which would appeal to most Americans. The creation of this public image is significant as it was a manifestation of the cultural upheaval experienced during the early 20th

century and had lasting implications for Progressive education and the future of the Montessori Method in America. Supporters for the method emphasized the scientific foundation of the method, Dr. Montessori's ideas for social reform through education, and the compatibility of the method with American ideals of individual freedom and responsibility. In the end, other factors such as leading educators' disapproval of different aspects of the method, World War I, and Dr. Montessori's personality led to the decline of the Montessori Method in America at that time.

On August 6, 1915, a curious crowd gazed through the glass panels surrounding the Montessori exhibition classroom at the Panama Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco. Dr. Maria Montessori herself was there, posing for pictures with a class of 35 children. Some of the children were from elite families, others were locals, and all were given lessons by Dr. Montessori's friend and pupil, Helen Parkhurst, as onlookers sat outside the windows.¹ Miss Parkhurst directed the classroom while Dr. Montessori gave speeches throughout the day in the Palace of Education. Dr. Montessori's theories of education had been making waves throughout the United States for the past four years, and her fame culminated in this monumental showcase.² However, this was the last flash of public support for the Montessori Method before the general public turned away from the method and towards other education reformers.

The Montessori Method has experienced three waves of popularity in the United States.³ The first wave lasted from when it first came to the United States in 1911 until 1917. From that point, the newspapers and magazines stopped publishing articles about Dr. Montessori and schools were founded at a slower rate than before. The second wave was from 1956 to around 1979, when Nancy McCormick Rambusch reignited interest in the Montessori Method by giving it an American twist. Montessori schools during that period were mostly private institutions, eventually leading to the third wave of Montessori history from the mid-1990s and into the present, when Montessori advocates started collaborating with school boards to have the Montessori Method adopted by public schools.

¹ Sam Whiting, "Class Act of 1915 fair: 104-year-old remembers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 26, 2015, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/entertainment/article/Class-act-of-the-1915-fair-104-year-old-remembers-6101834.php>.

² Alice Burnett, "Montessori Education Today and Yesterday," *The Elementary School Journal* 63, no. 2 (Nov, 1962): 73.

³ Keith Whitescarver and Jacqueline Cossentino, "Montessori and the Mainstream: A Century of Reform on the Margins," *Teachers College Record* 110, No. 12: 2572.

Historians that study the first wave of the Montessori Method tend to focus on two subjects -- either Dr. Montessori's life or the decline of the method's popularity. Research about the decline of the Montessori Method started in the 1960s during the second wave. At the time, historians wondered why the method failed to take root in America's education system, since it seemed to fit American trends in education at the turn of the 20th Century and especially since Dr. Montessori's science withstood the test of time.⁴ A few theories have taken a prominent place in historical literature on the method. In addition to factors such as anti-feminist thought, global unrest due to World War I, and internal fractures within the Montessori Movement, historians often cite Protestant nativism, anti-minority and anti-foreign sentiment and action, as having prevented the Montessori Method from taking hold in the American classroom.⁵

From the late 1800s well into the 1900s, millions of immigrants flooded into America, with over one million legal immigrants arriving in 1907 alone.⁶ Many American Protestants expressed concern over the great number and quality of these immigrants, as they came from the poorest regions of Europe and their cultures differed widely from the Protestant foundation of American cities. Attracted by the promise of a better future, immigrants from all classes and regions came to the USA and often settled in the cities where they disembarked. Local officials were often unable to keep up with the ever-growing demands for safe and stable housing,

⁴ For examples of the resurging interest in the Montessori Method, see Cynthia Parsons, "Montessori Texts," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, MA), February 13, 1965. Susan Haertel, "On Montessori," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 20, 1965. Joan Beck, "Why Montessori Method Gains," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), March 1, 1966. Joan Beck, "Montessori: An Idea Grows," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 10, 1969. Colman McCarthy, "Montessori and Children's Lib," *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (Washington, D.C.), September 4, 1970.

⁵ Katari Coleman, "The Montessori Method in America: Montessori Schools in New York and Rhode Island from 1910-1940," (Loyola University Chicago, 2011): 16-17. Phyllis Povell, *Montessori Comes to America: the leadership of Maria Montessori and Nancy McCormick Rambusch*, (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, Inc., 2010), 107.

⁶ "U.S. Immigration Trends: 1820-1910," Migration Policy Institute, data visualisation by MPI Data Hub, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends>.

education, and law enforcement that were suddenly required. Not only that, but immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Russia were often Catholic or Jewish, religions held in contempt by many Protestants as being idolatrous, frivolous, or behind the times.⁷ Southern Italian immigrants faced discrimination on two counts because not only were they Catholic but they were also deemed racially inferior to the Anglo-Saxon citizens of America and even to their northern countrymen.⁸ These masses of immigrants sparked a resurgence in nativism, an “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e. ‘un-American’) connections.”⁹

The reading public knew that Dr. Montessori was a Catholic and an Italian. Considering the prominence of nativist movements during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dr. Montessori’s heritage *could have* been a roadblock to her acceptance.¹⁰ In addition to that, historians like Phyllis Povell note that some critics claimed to have spotted Catholic elements in the method, concluding that it was unsuitable for the general public.¹¹ Despite the fact that these points are often cited, historians have not looked in depth at the role of nativism in hindering the spread of the Montessori Method.¹² Therefore, the original question for this thesis was did

⁷ William Burt, D. D. "Why do we Send Missionaries to Roman Catholic Countries?" *Christian Advocate* (1866-1905) 77, no. 46 (Nov 13, 1902): 1815. Dexter A. Hawkins, Esq., "The Roman Catholic Church in New York City, and the Public Money and Public Property of the People," *Christian Advocate* (1866-1905) 55, no. 1 (1880): 1.

⁸ Peter G. Vellon, *A Great Conspiracy Against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early 20th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 5.

⁹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 4.

¹⁰ Katari Coleman, "The Montessori Method in America: Montessori Schools in New York and Rhode Island from 1910-1940," (Loyola University Chicago, 2011): 16-17.

¹¹ Phyllis Povell, *Montessori Comes to America: the leadership of Maria Montessori and Nancy McCormick Rambusch*, (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, Inc., 2010), 107.

¹² For example, see Mary Wills, "Conditions Associated with the Rise and Decline of the Montessori Method of Kindergarten-Nursery Education in the United States from 1911-1921." (Dissertation, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1966) and Phyllis Povell, *Montessori Comes to America: the leadership of Maria Montessori and Nancy McCormick Rambusch*, (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, Inc., 2010) and Robert G. Buckenmeyer, introduction to *The California Lectures of Maria Montessori, 1915: Collected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Robert G. Buckenmeyer (Oxford, England: Clio Press, 1997), xv.

nativism and anti-Catholic contribute to the decline of the Montessori Method in the United States?

A deeper look into the primary literature surrounding Montessori's image in American culture revealed a different picture. Therefore, in contrast to past historians, this thesis proposes that Protestant nativism did not overtly contribute to the decline of the Montessori Method. By examining the press around Maria Montessori's time in the United States, one can see that, even though her ideas were better known in Europe, Americans were attracted to her message. Considering their habitual criticism of public figures, newspapers and magazines would have latched onto any unacceptable component of Maria Montessori's presentation. Although they had plenty to say about the faults in her science or in her followers' semi-religious devotion to Dr. Montessori herself, they did not pose her nationality and religious affiliation as serious obstacles to the use of her method.

The reason for this is that Dr. Montessori's American supporters had crafted her image into the perfect progressive educator, one whom everyone could support. First, her life in Italy gave her a relatable platform for American audiences, as she was not a devout Catholic and had been active in feminist and socially progressive circles. Second, her American publicist, S. S. McClure represented the Montessori method as a system everyone could use, emphasizing the universal appeal of freedom and the Progressive desire to create a better human race. Third, and perhaps most importantly, some Catholic religious orders in America disapproved of the Montessori method. They published their disapproval in their respective magazines, firmly setting Montessori in opposition to the Catholic Church. Montessori's supporters highlighted this confrontation, using it to show that Montessori was not a tool of the Catholic Church and anyone could be a Montessori supporter.

Montessori's Life and Method

Maria Montessori was born in Chiaraville, a small town in northern Italy, during a time of revolution and ideological upheaval. She was born in 1870, the same year that the king of Sardinia, Victor Emmanuel, completed the unification of Italy by annexing the Papal States, removing the Vatican's civil power. The people of Italy were inspired by the liberal movement *Risorgimento*, a literary organization that advocated self-determination and the creation of a distinct Italian national identity, and focused their energy on creating a civil Italian nationalist identity distinct from their Catholic heritage. While a constitutional monarchy was instated, political liberals dominated the intellectual culture, advocating universal suffrage, government regulation of commerce, and non-sectarian education. They were especially present among academia and other intellectual elites.¹³ One survey conducted among intellectual professionals in 1895 found that two thirds of them were in favor of socialism and three fourths of that majority expressed "complete support."¹⁴ Socialism was the keyword of the times, and Freemasons were among the major advocates for political and social change. Originally a secret society for British stonemasons, Freemasons during the 19th Century became a secular-humanist political organization for middle class men that advocated the adoption of naturalism, the concept that nothing exists on a supernatural plane, and the dissolution of organized religion -- in particular, the Catholic Church. Their members pervaded the army, public administration, and parliament, promoting societal reform based on humanist and rationalist-based principles rather than religious or moral duty. Italy's movement towards social equity paralleled Western

¹³ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 20. Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 36. While every historian of the Montessori Method writes their own brief biography of Montessori's life, actual historical biographies are few and far between. The two most prevalent sources are Rita Kramer's *Maria Montessori: A Biography* (1976) and E. M. Standing's *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (1998). Standing's biography is more sensationalist than Kramer's, though he spends more time on the actual structure and practice of the method. Kramer's biography is more suited for historical analysis as she places the Montessori Movement within a historical perspective.

¹⁴ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 36.

society's efforts to displace the traditional supernatural hierarchy with a natural world order. After Industrialization, progressive movements developed to advocate for the rights of workers, farmers, and small business owners. Concepts such as equal rights to education, safe working conditions, and just wages gained traction not only in Italy but in America and other western countries.

This was the world that Maria Montessori grew up in. She was an only child, and her parents, while Catholic, did not have strong religious beliefs. Her father got a job in Rome while Montessori was still young, so she received her middle school and high school education in the city. Montessori chose to enroll in technical schools with the boys instead of liberal arts schools like most girls. She studied science from the age of thirteen until she graduated from the equivalent of high school in 1890. She enrolled in the School of Medicine at the University of Rome, which was almost exclusively attended by men. Even while Montessori attended classes, her father had to walk her to school because women were not allowed on the streets unaccompanied. Even though she found the experience terrifying, she also had to attend dissections alone at night because men and women were not allowed to view naked bodies together.¹⁵

Maria Montessori graduated from the University of Rome in 1896, the third woman in its history to have earned a medical degree.¹⁶ She entered a workforce with far too many doctors and too few hospitals. The sons of the upper class had retained a disdain for work and being a doctor or lawyer was one of the few occupations that they could hold without feeling degraded. However, this meant that many became doctors and there weren't enough hospitals to employ them all. Montessori, on the other hand, was offered a job immediately after graduating. She had

¹⁵ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 40.

¹⁶ Povell, *Montessori Comes to America*, 30.

distinguished herself during her time at the university by being one of the few students to actually attend all of her lectures, and her thesis on paranoia and delusions of persecution scored 105 out of 110 points -- the *highest* average score among her classmates was 100. She accepted a job at San Giovanni hospital, the University's hospital, and set up a private practice.¹⁷

During school and for a time afterward, Maria Montessori embraced the socially progressive message many of her professors, now colleagues, imparted. A significant number of Montessori's professors held progressive views. For example Guido Baccelli, the founder of the hospital where Montessori worked, was both a progressive and a Freemason.¹⁸ After graduation, Dr. Montessori contributed to a newspaper edited by Giuseppe Sergi, a supporter of Italian unification and an early socialist.

Montessori carried her professors' banner forward in her own way. She was the Italian representative to the International Women's conference in Berlin in 1896, and advocated for women's and laborers' rights. The Italian and European media fell in love with her feminine manners, intellectual prowess, and sense of humor.¹⁹ She subverted public expectations of what a feminist would look like, as one reporter indicated that she had been expecting to find Montessori a bony, stern, bespectacled woman, dressed in a masculine fashion.²⁰ The German media called her "an adorable vision," and after one Berliner begged an Italian journalist for a picture of her, the journalist published Montessori's portrait in the newspaper, wishing "all our readers to see the portrait of this distinguished lady." All of this attention however only frustrated Montessori. She exclaimed, "I will make it all forgotten! My face will not appear in the

¹⁷ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 50.

¹⁸ Renato Foschi, "Science and Culture Around the Montessori's First 'Children's Houses' in Rome (1907-1915)," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol 44, No. 3 (Summer 2008): 239.

¹⁹ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 53.

²⁰ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 52.

newspapers any more and no one will dare to sing of my so-called charms again! I shall do serious work!,” and she reinvested herself in her role as a doctor.²¹

One component of social reform that Dr. Montessori embraced was the treatment of mentally and physically handicapped children. At that time, people of all ages with mental deficiencies of any type were housed together in asylums, along with the deaf, blind, and mute. In the fall of 1896, Montessori was a surgical assistant at Santo Spirito hospital, San Giovanni hospital, and two other hospitals in addition to running her own practice.²² While she worked at the asylum, in charge of the wellbeing of the children with physical and mental disabilities, she became convinced that intellectual disabilities were an effect of poor education and could be alleviated through improving instructional methods. Montessori went back to school and studied psychology and anthropology to better understand children’s minds and the social situations that might cause disabilities.

While Maria Montessori worked at the asylum, she discovered French educators, Jean Itard and Eduoard Seguin, who had developed methods of educating handicapped children using sense training over half a century before. Montessori’s own experience with the children convinced her that these children were not incapable of learning. So she asked why weren’t they being taught? Montessori posed this question to two thousand other teachers at the Pedagogical Conference in Turin in 1898, where she obtained support from Italy’s upper-class ladies to start building schools and removing children from mental asylums. Using Itard and Seguin’s methods, she created a system based on sense-training and exercising daily life skills to help prepare such pupils for life within a larger community. Through training the senses, Dr. Montessori, Itard, and

²¹ Bolton King and Thomas Okey, *Italy Today* (London, 1901): 133. As found in Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 56.

²² Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 56.

Seguin believed that children would be more prepared to encounter the real world and evaluate it according to its basic elements. The children learned how to dress themselves, to take baths, and to serve meals. They also learned how to discriminate between rough and smooth, hard and soft, and big and small. By starting at the most basic levels of understanding, these educators sought to eradicate differences in early childhood experiences and start all children on the same level of preparation for abstract learning, like reading, writing, and arithmetic. Dr. Montessori believed that this training would help alleviate the burden that those with disabilities often placed on the community or the government.²³ She tested different educative materials and behavioral treatments with the children in the asylum until her patients outperformed normal-functioning children on state tests. However, instead of celebrating her success, Montessori realized the real challenge lay ahead. As she put it, “Whilst every one was admiring my idiots I was searching for the reason which could keep back the healthy and happy children of the ordinary schools on so low a plane that they could be equaled in tests of intelligence by my unfortunate pupils.”²⁴

Following the success of her students, Dr. Montessori gave a series of lectures at the Pedagogic School at the University of Rome. Her lectures focused on the anthropological and social circumstances of her students, and she argued that their deficiencies had been caused by both abject poverty and racial inferiority. Dr. Montessori’s conclusions walked a middle ground between other anthropological experts in Italy, such as criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, who attempted to prove that criminality was inherited, and anthropologist Léonce Manouvrier, who believed the environment had greater effect on character development than inherited traits.²⁵ Anticipating modern debates on the effect of nature versus nurture on the

²³ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 77.

²⁴ Edwin M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (New York: Penguin Group, 1998), 30.

²⁵ Foschi, “Science and Culture...,” 242.

formation of personality and culture, Dr. Montessori believed that education held the answer for those impaired by genetic or social setbacks, and could help these children overcome their handicaps and join society as productive, upstanding citizens.²⁶

News of Dr. Montessori's success spread through the newspapers and magazines of Italy. The owner of tenement housing complexes in the San Lorenzo slums, Eduardo Talamo, reached out to Montessori with an interesting proposition. The working-class families that inhabited his complexes had to leave their children in the apartments while they worked in the factories all day. Older children attended school, but children under the age of five or six were left roaming the streets and hallways, causing mischief and destroying the property. Talamo decided to start a nursery in the complex and thought Dr. Montessori, Italy's resident expert on child development and education, was the perfect person to oversee the project.²⁷

Ignoring derision from her peers in medicine, Dr. Montessori accepted the less glamorous job teaching preschoolers in the slums of San Lorenzo. By the end of the year, the unruly children who had been defacing the hallways of their homes transformed into respectful, self-controlled children who taught their parents to read and conducted classroom activities on their own.²⁸ Dr. Montessori's system took sensory training a step further than Itard or Seguin. She created a kind of school that had never been seen before in Italy, Europe, or most parts of America. In direct opposition to the rote memorization and desk work of traditional schools, children in Dr. Montessori's classroom chose their own materials and could use them for as long as they pleased. They had free range of the classroom, and the furniture and all the objects in the classroom were child-sized. The teachers, or "directresses," as Montessori called them, were

²⁶ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 99-100.

²⁷ Foschi, "Science and Culture...", 245.

²⁸ This is a condensed telling of Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 113-132.

assigned an observatory and guiding role.²⁹ Their chief responsibility was to ensure the children were meeting all of their physical and psychological milestones at an appropriate pace. When a child was ready for another concept or skill, the director showed them how to use the relevant material and then stepped back to allow the child to develop. Dr. Montessori combined the ideals of freedom and self-determination in an environment that promoted self-education, and her expectations for the children's progress was based on medical principles, like measurable skills in agility or fine motor control, rather than the subjective evaluation of the instructor.

Italians, "keen on the scent of anything that promised relief" from the poverty and educational desert that was early 20th Century Italy, discovered Maria Montessori's school in 1908, and she became an instant star.³⁰ Propelled by her previous notoriety and her school's potential to bring about urban reform, Montessori once again found herself in the limelight. She received support from significant and diverse persons, such as the Queen of Italy, the mayor of Rome, Ernesto Nathan, then Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Orient of Italy, and the baron Leopoldo Franchetti and his American wife, Alice Franchetti. Both an order of Franciscan sisters and a socialist, anarchist Jewish society, *Societa Umanitaria*, adopted and promoted her method in 1910 after Dr. Montessori sought to spread her schools beyond the housing complexes.³¹

The international community discovered Dr. Montessori's schools soon after, propelling her schools and method into the global market. Travelers to Italy discovered her schools through public events and newspaper articles, and they also found her instructional method fascinating

²⁹ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 122. Maria Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company: 1914), 78.

³⁰ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 134.

³¹ Foschi, "Science and Culture...", 247; Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 135. One notable member of *Societa Umanitaria* was the young Benito Mussolini.

and saw its potential for positive change in the education sector.³² The British ambassador to Italy even established a Montessori preschool in his home for the children of British citizens. Dr. Jenny B. Merrill, an editor for *The Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*, was the first American to write on the Montessori Method in 1910, but the American public did not take notice until a travel-writer, Josephine Tozier, wrote a profile on Dr. Montessori's school for *McClure's Magazine* in 1911. This article, titled "An Educational Wonder-worker: The methods of Maria Montessori," ignited Americans' interest.

Parents and teachers swamped *McClure's Magazine's* mailbox with letters asking for more information on the method that taught four-year olds how to read.³³ Teachers and curious young women flocked to Dr. Montessori's schools, begging her to teach them her method.³⁴ With the help of the Franciscan sisters, Dr. Montessori started an international Montessori training school at the sisters' convent in Rome to formalize the training process for new teachers and to accommodate the dozens of Americans who came to study with her.³⁵ One of her first students, Anne George, started American's first Montessori school in Tarrytown, NY, in 1913, under the patronage of the president of the National Bank of New York.³⁶ Montessori societies arose to control Montessori's public image in American media, one of which was started by Alexander Graham Bell and his wife, Mabel Bell.³⁷ Convinced of the marketability of the Montessori Method, the owner of *McClure's Magazine*, Samuel Sidney McClure, persuaded Maria Montessori to come to America under his patronage. In the winter of 1913, Montessori

³² Josephine Tozier, "An Educational Wonder-worker: The methods of Maria Montessori," *McClure's Magazine* 37, no 1 (May, 1911):19.

³³ Gerald L. Gutek and Patricia A Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America: S. S. McClure, Maria Montessori and the Campaign to Publicize Montessori Education*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016), 110.

³⁴ "In Brief," *The Independent ...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts (1848-1921)* 74, no. 3365 (May 29, 1913): 1177.

³⁵ Foschi, "Science and Culture...," 247.

³⁶ Coleman, "The Montessori Method in America," 23.

³⁷ Coleman, "The Montessori Method in America," 37-38.

disembarked in South Brooklyn and newspapers announced the arrival of “the woman who studies children,” “of wonderfully attractive personality,” who had created an educational system which would change the world forever.³⁸ After giving a lecture at the Masonic Temple in Washington D.C. and being received formally at the home of Alexander Graham Bell, Maria Montessori headed to New York, where she gave one of the most famous lectures of her lifetime at Carnegie Hall.³⁹

Media Representations of Maria Montessori

Ralph E. Diffendorfer was one of the many journalists who attended Dr. Montessori’s lecture at Carnegie Hall. He was one of the dozens of journalists that would be responsible for creating Montessori’s public image. They all chose their favorite aspect of the doctor to relay to their audiences, whether that was the science behind her method, her feminist history, or the intellectual elite that supported her. Diffendorfer remarked that Carnegie Hall had rarely seen a more diverse or well-educated audience. “There were Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic clergymen and adherents, German, French, Italian and American educators, college and university professors and students, men and women of the arts and sciences, and from the great world of business, but more than all others, the teachers from the public and private elementary schools.”⁴⁰ Diffendorfer gave a brief history of Dr. Montessori before turning to the content of her lecture. He noted in particular Montessori’s seventeen years of education and research that

³⁸ *The New York Herald*, (December 11, 1913). As found in Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 187, 192.

³⁹ “Entertain Dr. Montessori: Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell’s Reception Attended,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY) December 7, 1913.

⁴⁰ Ralph E. Diffendorfer, “The Lady of ‘The House of Childhood’: Madame Montessori’s First American Lecture,” *The Christian Advocate*, V. 88 (Dec 18, 1913): 1747.

led to the creation of her method, her feminist activities, and message of freedom she preached for children in classrooms around the globe.⁴¹

Diffendorfer could recognize a reforming spirit by experience. He was a member of the Missionary Education Movement, a Protestant missionary society, and he wrote the article for the *Christian Advocate*, “the parent paper and official organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church.”⁴² It had 30,000 subscribers, 150,000 readers, and had published articles like “Why Do We Send Missionaries to Roman Catholic Countries?” and “Mrs. Walker - A Catholic,” which claimed Catholics shunned those who strayed from the Catholic faith.⁴³ Although writing for an anti-Catholic publication, Diffendorfer made no mention of Dr. Montessori’s religion and, in contrast with typical journalists, did not discuss Montessori’s nationality as her defining feature. He brought up Italy only to point out that she had received her degrees and set up her schools there. Instead, Diffendorfer praised her, saying she was “the only woman who has worked out and inaugurated an original educational system.”⁴⁴ Diffendorfer was not the first or the last journalist to pass over the hot-button topics that Montessori’s nationality and faith might have presented to the American public.

The media’s representation of Maria Montessori was studied in detail by historian Paul Willcott in 1960, during the second Montessori Wave, in his article “The Initial American Reception of the Montessori Method.” He ascertained that the keywords associated with Dr. Montessori were science, libertarianism, and feminism, in addition to “gross sentimentality and moral absolutism.”⁴⁵ Given this, Willcott concluded that the media’s representation of

⁴¹ Diffendorfer, "The Lady of 'The House of Childhood'," 1747.

⁴² *The Christian Advocate*, V. 89 (Jan 15, 1914): 97.

⁴³ "Mrs. Walker a Catholic." *Christian Advocate* (1866-1905) 79, no. 38 (Sep 22, 1904): 1535.

⁴⁴ Diffendorfer, "The Lady of 'The House of Childhood'," 1747.

⁴⁵ Willcott, "The Initial American Reception of the Montessori Method," 151.

Montessori guaranteed her success in America. Americans were in the middle of the Progressive era, and newspapers both followed and guided the interests of the public. By embracing social reform, increased government regulation, and “muckraking,” or investigative journalism, the members of the Progressive reform movements sought to improve conditions for workers, farmers, small business owners and more following the Industrial Revolution.⁴⁶ S. S. McClure, the same man in charge of Montessori’s presence in America, had started the muckraking tradition, publishing articles like “The Standard Oil Company” (which uncovered the corruption in the oil industry) and “What is a Lynching?”⁴⁷

The Progressive sentiment also applied to the welfare of children. Starting in the 1790s, advocates for child welfare, called “child savers,” started creating orphanages and foster care systems to help children who were subjected to abuse or extreme poverty. These institutions were private, for the most part, and funded by a wide variety of people, including philanthropists, upper-class women, and penologists, sociologists that work with prison inmates. Following the Civil War, child savers turned to the government to answer the crises that faced Industrial-age children. During this period, government legislation passed more laws to protect children, such as removing children from alms-houses, raising the age for consensual sex, and defining and criminalizing statutory rape.⁴⁸

The best-known reform that started in the Progressive era was the fight to end child labor. Children from lower-income families had been working in factories and home-based businesses

⁴⁶ Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1983), 4.

⁴⁷ Robert Thacker, Introduction to *The Autobiography of S. S. McClure*, v-xvii (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), vii.

⁴⁸ Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 156.

for years to help contribute to their family's income.⁴⁹ However, when the children's working conditions in factories and mines were revealed in the press, many were horrified. Newspapers printed pages of exposés showcasing the physical and mental harm child laborers suffered, including deafness, mangled limbs, and high risk of death from unsafe work environments. While several factors contributed to interest in banning child labor, an important one was the ideal that "all children, regardless of class, deserved a protected childhood, one devoted to play and education."⁵⁰ As such, education became a focal point for some progressives, who saw it as the solution for the poor upbringing children received in the cities, which had them wandering the streets, stealing, and vandalizing property. By sending the children to school, urban reformers would also prevent the children from entering the downward spiral of crime and violence.

Following close behind child welfare reform came educational reform. The American educational tradition was characterized by the little red schoolhouse, with one room, one teacher, and children of all ages. Corporal punishment as discipline was common, and the instructional method was rote memorization and recitation.⁵¹ However, Americans had been developing their own variety of education since the Colonial times. According to Marvin Lazerson, a distinguished historian of education, the spirit of individualism pervaded American society, and parents raised their children in relative freedom. Some European visitors to the States complained that American children were "unruly and spoiled."⁵² Interested in the apparent difference between American and European children, the American populace turned to

⁴⁹ Low-income families would often take in handicraft work from shops, and mothers and their children would make hats, dip matchsticks, make candles, etc. to add to their family income.

⁵⁰ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 181.

⁵¹ John Rury, *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 125.

⁵² Marvin Lazerson, "Early Childhood Education: The Historical Antecedents of Early Childhood Education," *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 71, no 2. (1972): 35.

publications on child-rearing for information. After much debate, some came to espouse the idea that the child was unique and different from the adult and ought to be raised compassionately. This was in stark contrast with the attitudes of the past, which saw children as small defective adults.⁵³ Inspired by scientific advances in psychology and the introduction of Darwinism in the later part of the nineteenth century, parents and doctors undertook the Child Study Movement, which gathered data on the physical and cognitive development of children from infancy onward.⁵⁴ This crusade focused on the developmental differences between adults and children, and established childhood as a distinct period of a person's life. Educators and parents set out to discover the best method of educating and raising children to create the best future for America and the world. Using the same principles as the Progressive movement, philosophers, educators, and doctors tried to figure out what kind of method could be based on science, call to the child's spirit, and somehow incorporate the freedom America was known for into daily practice.

Early Childhood Education had been influenced by German immigrants, who brought the concept of "kindergartens" to the United States before the Civil War.⁵⁵ The founder of the kindergarten, Friedrich Froebel, a German idealist, noticed that young children seemed to learn more from play than they did from actual education. As a reflection of his own "absolutism and religious mysticism," he created an instructional method that looked more like play than work and also emphasized the spiritual nature of childhood.⁵⁶ The kindergarten became part of American public school systems in the 1870s, when school districts started funding and incorporating some private kindergartens.⁵⁷ Americans at the time loved the free and easy style

⁵³ Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, translated by Robert Baldick, (London, Great Britain: Jonathan Cape, 1962), 133.

⁵⁴ Povell, *Montessori Comes to America*, 90; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 189.

⁵⁵ Povell, *Montessori Comes to America*, 90.

⁵⁶ Lazerson, "Early Childhood Education," 36-37; 43.

⁵⁷ Lazerson, "Early Childhood Education," 41.

of Froebel's kindergarten, and those who worried about inhumane and unsafe conditions in the city approved of this method of keeping children off the streets and within the influence of American doctrine.

Over time educators found that Froebel refused to allow any alterations to his method. By the 1890s, discouraged by the restrictive behavior of the kindergarten founder, American educators started looking for other instructional styles. Social philosopher John Dewey came onto the scene during this pedagogical conflict. He advocated for schools that embraced the spirit of democracy and could impart democratic values in students -- values like tolerance, fair play, and social collaboration.⁵⁸ One way to help young children develop these skills was to include household activities and preparation for social life in the school curriculum. He removed the religious component of Froebel's kindergarten and created a philosophical system "in accord with the scientific temper of the day."⁵⁹

Because the Progressive trends of the day, many Americans were ready for alternative methods of education that were based on science, freedom, and attention to the spirit of childhood. When Maria Montessori's method came to America in 1910, she seemed to be everything they had been looking for. Since she was a doctor and also had studied psychology and anthropology, her followers and many journalists deemed her a scientific authority on the matter of child development. The fact that children were permitted to roam freely in the classroom, rearranging furniture, and choosing their own activities inspired Progressive Americans, who believed such freedom was the path to a better human race. The Montessori Method also seemed to appeal to children. Those who observed in Montessori's schools noted the happy faces of working children and the comfort with which the children talked to adults.

⁵⁸ Rury, *Education and Social Change*, 128.

⁵⁹ Lazerson, "Early Childhood Education," 43.

Visitors to classrooms noted "Whenever we entered a class-room, [we] distinctly felt that a new and sweeter spirit pervaded the place, and that the children were, in an indescribable way, set free."⁶⁰ One visitor, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a children's author, compared the working children to "little Yogis" who "emerge from [their work] sweeter, more obedient, calmed, and gentler as from a tranquilizing prayer."⁶¹

When Maria Montessori's message arrived in America, the media stood ready to either adore or criticize her. Her authority as a scientist was the most easily admired by the American press and readership. Dr. Montessori's supporters consistently mentioned her degrees and experience in their articles and commendations of the method. The first popular article written about Montessori by Josephine Tozier opened by describing the work of Doctors Jean Itard and Eduoard Seguin, placing Dr. Montessori in the company of other esteemed medical practitioners and educators. Dr. Montessori's supporters were proud of her achievements in the medical field. Ellen Yale Stevens, the principal of Brooklyn Heights Seminary and eventual director of the Montessori Department at *McClure's Magazine*, suggested that Dr. Montessori's discoveries ought to have been in a scientific journal rather than a popular magazine. Margaret Naumburg read Dr. Montessori's book *The Montessori Method* before she met the doctor, and she mirrored the journalist from Italy, saying that when she prepared to meet Dr. Montessori, she was expecting to meet a "hard, efficient scientist," because of the serious tone of the book.⁶²

Critics and sympathizers alike scrutinized the Montessori Method and Dr. Montessori herself as a scientist and the scientific nature of her work. Dr. Montessori's opponents also used scientific analysis to evaluate her method, continuing the association between Montessori and

⁶⁰ George, "The First Montessori School in America," 178.

⁶¹ Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *A Montessori Mother* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1912), 46.

⁶² Margaret Naumburg, "Current Events Pictorially Treated." *Outlook* (1893-1924) (Dec 13, 1913): 799.

science. From the beginning of her public career in Italy, she had been criticized for a “naive belief” that science could identify criminals, that education could prevent crime, or that women who became prostitutes were products of their environment. Critics grumbled that she had spent too much time studying and not enough time in the real world.⁶³ In his first evaluation of Montessori’s method and the precursor to his critical report later on, William Heard Kilpatrick, the “Million Dollar Professor” of education from Teachers College, believed that Dr. Montessori did the world a favor by melding science and education together.⁶⁴ He later went on to say that “few in the history of education have been capable of breaking so completely with the surrounding school tradition as has this Italian physician. To set aside tradition for science is no common achievement. That the innovator is a woman will seem to some all the more remarkable.”⁶⁵ However, he took issue with Montessori’s sense-theory, that developing individual senses via mechanical training adequately prepared the senses for use in real life. As Kilpatrick explained in his book, *The Montessori System Examined*, 1910’s scientific literature on child development agreed that the senses needed to develop within the context of real world application. Mechanical and formal training, like fitting cylinders into holes, was “practically valueless.”⁶⁶ Most other educators, like John Dewey and Arnold Gesell, professor of child hygiene at Yale, agreed that Montessori’s theories on childhood development and education were out of date, continuing the discussion of the method within the context of science and scientific validity.⁶⁷

⁶³ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 82.

⁶⁴ Donald D. Chipman and Carl B. McDonald, “The Historical Contributions of William Heard Kilpatrick,” *Journal of Thought* 15, no. 1 (1980): 71. William H. Kilpatrick, “Montessori and Froebel,” *Kindergarten Review* 23 (April, 1913): 491.

⁶⁵ William Heard Kilpatrick, *The Montessori System Examined*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 5.

⁶⁶ Kilpatrick, *The Montessori System Examined*, 51.

⁶⁷ For example, Anna E. Logan, “Montessori and Froebel” *Kindergarten Review* 23, No 9 (May, 1913): 553-561. Earl Barnes, “Comparison of Froebelian and Montessorian Methods and Principles,” *Kindergarten Review*, 23

On the other hand, Montessori did provide one new element to the classroom that Americans appreciated: freedom. The frontispiece of a *Current Opinion* article said that Dr. Montessori had made “libertarian education” a hot topic in America.⁶⁸ Reporters gave Montessori the title of “libertarian” to reflect that she removed as many rules from the classroom as possible and introduced the concept of indirect control of the classroom. This was appealing to some Americans who believed that traditional forms of education were “too cut-and-dried, too authoritarian.”⁶⁹ A *Current Literature* article reiterated that the basic concept of the Montessori system was “the liberation of the personality of the child.”⁷⁰ Even Helen Keller, the famous author and political activist, and the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor’s Degree, said during an interview with Dr. Montessori that she knew that the method was founded on liberty and agreed “that the spontaneity of the child and the giving of liberty to the child... must become fundamental principles of education.”⁷¹ What set Dr. Montessori apart from other pedagogical philosophers and activists was that although freedom in the classroom had been a hot topic for progressive educators since the kindergarten was founded, no one had made a practical method of education in which freedom was a functional component. By many people’s standards, Maria Montessori was the first.

Dr. Montessori brought these ideals to life by “abolishing the most evident and material form of slavery afflicting the child within the school: the desk.”⁷² Desks at that time were nailed to the floor to prevent children from overturning them, moving them, or moving around in them

(April, 1913), 487-90. Henry W. Holmes, "Promising Points in the Montessori System," *Kindergarten Review*, 23 (April, 1913), 481-86.

⁶⁸ “What Americans think of Montessori’s Educational Crusade,” *Current Opinion*, 56, (02, 1914): 127.

⁶⁹ “Religion and Ethics,” *Current Literature*, OL. LII., (03, 1912): 5.

⁷⁰ “Religion and Ethics:”: 4.

⁷¹ “Four Talked for Two.” *New - York Tribune*, (Dec 10, 1913): 6.

⁷² Maria Montessori, *The California Lectures of Maria Montessori, 1915: Collected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Robert G. Buckenmeyer (Oxford, England: Clio Press, 1997), 363.

while seated. Montessori agreed with other educators and commentators that the stationary desk was outdated. John Dewey had said that desks were like children's swaddling clothes, "which are a bad thing for the baby, cramping and interfering with bodily functions...It is no wonder that pupils who have to sit in this way for several hours a day break out in bursts of immoderate noise and fooling as soon as restraining influences are removed."⁷³ An anonymous author from *The New Republic*, the key organ of Progressive thought in the 1910s, wrote that teachers needed to more fully embrace the teaching of John Dewey and Mme. Montessori, instead of paying lip service to them while continuing the same old methods of sticking children in desks and ladling information into them.⁷⁴ Removing the desk was one method of introducing freedom into the classroom in a practical manner. She instead used child-sized tables and chairs that could be rearranged at the children's will, reflecting real life practice and giving children more control of their environment.

Perhaps the most radical component of freedom Dr. Montessori introduced was the removal of rewards and punishments. According to her observations, children were not greatly affected by their teachers' attempts to reward good behavior through badges and pins, and did seem to care when they were punished with time outs.⁷⁵ Therefore, Dr. Montessori removed those traditional forms of discipline, and she found that the children followed the social norms that the other children established in the classroom. By using the teachers as role models and teaching the norms of polite society (such as how to interrupt or how to wait quietly), Montessori could control the behavior of the children in a natural and painless manner.⁷⁶

⁷³ John Dewey, *The Middle Works, 1899-1924, Vol. 8: 1915*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale: Souther Illinois University Press, 1979), 296.

⁷⁴ "What Might Be in Education," *The New Republic* 1, no. 9 (January 2, 1915): 28.

⁷⁵ Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, translated by Anne E. George (USA: Readaclassic.com, 2010), 112.

⁷⁶ Alma L. Binzel, "Early Education: The Kindergarten; the House of Childhood; the Exceptional Home," *Kindergarten Review* 24 (January, 1914), 274.

The message of freedom was taken up by various advocacy groups, and women were becoming more vocal than ever about advocating for their own freedom. First Wave Feminism, the women's rights champions of the 19th and 20th Centuries, was operating in full force. The feminist movements in the US at that time had three primary interests and goals: "service and social action," women's rights, such as equal opportunity in education and the workforce, and freedom from "oppressive social structures and conventions."⁷⁷ The two primary forces of action were either opposition to patriarchal structures or philanthropy and charity work. As feminist researcher Nonie Harris writes in "Radical Activism and Accidental Philanthropy," a 2008 article for the *Women's Studies International Forum*, the women of the latter group took on childcare policies as a project, along with mothers' and children's rights.⁷⁸ This is where Maria Montessori's work became of special interest to them. Not only was she a woman operating in a largely male profession, but she also advocated for mothers' and children's rights along with workers' rights. When asked by American reporters if she was a suffragist, Montessori replied in the affirmative, and she also said that mothers and women should be allowed to work because "anything that tends to broaden the mother is of advantage to the child."⁷⁹ Her personal beliefs and social philosophy aligned with US feminist beliefs.

Indeed, to some Americans, Maria Montessori and her method seemed to spring right from the feminist imagination. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a noted feminist author, liked Dr. Montessori's form of education and social philosophy so much that she included it in her utopian novel *Herland*. As Nonie Harris mentioned, Gilman argued that women should be able to work

⁷⁷ Nonie Harris, "Radical Activism and Accidental Philanthropy: The Impact of First Wave Feminist Activism on the Later Construction of Child Care Policies in Australia and the United States of America," *Women's Studies International Forum* 31, no. 1 (2008): 47.

⁷⁸ Harris, "Radical Activism and Accidental Philanthropy:" 47.

⁷⁹ Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 190.

alongside men for their own benefit, and childcare should be handled by multi-family communities, similar to the tenement housing schools that Dr. Montessori had started in Italy.⁸⁰ In *Herland*, this ideal is brought to life in commune-style education systems, where children learn directly from their environment with guidance from teachers who are specially trained to observe the development of each child and to present educational materials according to individual needs. As a result of an education system based on respect and a lack of competition and conflict, there is no war in Herland and the women there live in harmony.⁸¹ This utopia was the imagined conclusion of Montessori's form of education, as Montessori had said in 1896 that "we will have no need for judges or jurors when there are no criminals, no delinquents," as a result of education that focuses on eradicating the influence of poverty and social class.⁸² Charlotte Perkins Gilman even included a shout-out to Dr. Montessori by having the leading male character, Van, who is exploring Herland's education system, remember his childhood and "the "material" devised by Signora Montessori' which were embedded into his conscious."⁸³

Maria Montessori was the perfect celebrity for McClure's consumer base -- she was the woman of the future and the woman the world needed. Not only was she a doctor, but a female doctor and an educator who had created something no man ever had. As one of her followers said, "Where in the world can you find such a combination of genius with inheritance, training, and experience?"⁸⁴ While the newspapers could not avoid the fact that Montessori was an Italian national and she was most likely Catholic, these facts were kept from being relevant by the

⁸⁰ Harris, "Radical Activism and Accidental Philanthropy," 48.

⁸¹ Daniel Klaehn, "The Montessori Method and the Educational Utopia of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*," *Tracks*, 1 no. 1: 19.

⁸² Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*, 81.

⁸³ Daniel Klaehn, "The Montessori Method and the Educational Utopia of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*," *Tracks*, 1 no. 1: 21.

⁸⁴ Ellen Yale Stevens, "The Montessori Method and the American Kindergarten," *McClure's Magazine* XL, no. 1 (Nov, 1912): 80.

careful wording of the articles produced by *McClure's Magazine*, the first magazine in America to take up Montessori's cause.

Montessori's press agent, S. S. McClure of *McClure's Magazine*, was a powerful ally for the Montessori Method. The American public knew him as the father of muckraking. McClure's expertise in journalism was such that he knew what to emphasize to attract an American audience. He started his journalists on writing about matters of national interest, such as Oil Trusts, railroad rebates, and municipal governments. His goal for *McClure's* was to conduct "such studies as in time would arouse public opinion," articles that would elicit "an immediate response from the press, and undoubtedly [have] a strong influence on the public mind."⁸⁵ McClure believed that the Montessori Method fit that standard, as he stated that he only published articles on the method in order "to satisfy the interest of the public in the great movements and problems of the modern world."⁸⁶

McClure's Magazine circulated over 400,000 copies, and McClure had an eye for the best stories. When he selected the story on Montessori's schools, other members of his magazine doubted the method would generate much public interest. However, McClure persisted and the reward was worth the effort. His headquarters were swamped with letters from parents, educators, psychologists and doctors to the extent that McClure set aside a few pages in each magazine as a Montessori Department, to "serve as a central bureau of information" on the Montessori Movement's progress in America and Europe and to "provide an open forum for discussion and an opportunity for frank and full expression of opinion."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cather, *The Autobiography of S. S. McClure*, 243.

⁸⁶ "The Montessori Movement in America: A New McClure Department Conducted by Ellen Yale Stevens," 21.

⁸⁷ "The Montessori Movement in America: A New McClure Department Conducted by Ellen Yale Stevens," *McClure's Magazine*, 40 (Feb, 1913): 22.

The first article in *McClure's Magazine* established the framework for the discussion of the Montessori Method that continues today. Josephine Tozier wrote a sixteen-page profile on the Montessori Method for McClure in 1911. She gave a full history of Maria Montessori's life and method and possibly started the rumor that Montessori was the first woman to earn a medical degree in Italy. The article never mentioned Catholicism and the only reference to an Italian nature to the method only went so far as to say that Italian is a phonetic language and therefore easy to learn. Other articles about the Montessori Method in *McClure's* continued the theme as much as possible. The universal appeal of the method was offered as a defining feature, even though it grew out of the "foul quarter of the mediaeval Ghetto."⁸⁸ Tozier's follow-up article, "The Montessori Schools in Rome," said that Montessori schools had already been adopted by Swiss public schools, two schools had opened in Paris, and plans were being made for schools from England to Mexico, Korea to Honolulu.⁸⁹ The editors slipped in notes about a school opening in America already, under the authority of Anne George, one of Montessori's first American pupils, and a manufacturing company for making Montessori supplies that would open in the Flatiron Building in New York City the following month.

Anticipating the coming debates, Anne George was the first of McClure's contributors to answer the question of whether or not American children could profit from an Italian method of education. She addressed it first by setting up the contrast between the school she directed in New York and the tenement schools in Italy, saying that her school was in a beautiful private residence and her students had been "nurtured from their birth" making them naturally more dependent on adults and each other than the street children of Italy. "But," she quickly adds, "these differences are only on the surface...All children have essentially the same minds, the

⁸⁸ Josephine Tozier, "The Montessori Schools in Rome," *McClure's Magazine*, 38, no. 2 (Dec., 1911): 132.

⁸⁹ Tozier, "The Montessori Schools in Rome:" 123.

same hearts, the same natures.”⁹⁰ In order to resolve concerns over the transmutability of the method across different cultures, George reinforced the narrative that the method was adaptable to every culture. She wrote that the method could be used by Americans as well as Italians, since the Montessori Method “according to its very genius” does not suppress the American spirit, “but causes it to flower.”⁹¹

Anticipating whatever problems Americans might have with Dr. Montessori, *McClure's Magazine* and the American ambassadors of the method circumvented the nationalist and religious issues by omitting them. McClure emphasized the ways the Montessori related to Americans, in particular her scientific credentials, her feminist stance, and the libertarian aspects of the method. The fact that she was Italian was not as impressive as the fact that she was a woman. The fact that she was Catholic was not as relevant as the fact that she was a doctor. Since *McClure's* was the first magazine to publish anything on the Montessori Method, it set the standard for the discussion of the Montessori Method for Americans. Other newspapers and magazines, for the most part, ignored Montessori's religion and nationality and evaluated her method according to what it proposed to offer to the American education system. However, since they emphasized her scientific authority and her emphasis on freedom, Montessori became susceptible to attacks on those point. This is why Kilpatrick's review of the method sparked the decline of the Montessori Method in the United States.

William Heard Kilpatrick was a professor at Teachers College, at the start of his career and already an influential figure in the world of education in 1911. He was a member of the first generation of experts to be educated to teach teachers. Americans had started questioning who was teaching in their schools and what made them qualified to do their job. Teachers College and

⁹⁰ George, “The First Montessori School in America:” 178.

⁹¹ George, “The First Montessori School in America:” 187.

the Progressive Educators Association were created, along with a long line of other normal colleges, to meet these needs, and along with John Dewey, Kilpatrick was in a position to influence the development of standards for American pedagogy.⁹² When he published a preliminary review of the Montessori Method in 1913, declaring that it was unscientific, did not foster a social spirit, and left out crucial playtime, other leaders in the world of education followed suit.⁹³ They also declared the Montessori was behind the times and not worth paying attention to. Even Dr. Jenny Merrill, the first American to write an article on the Montessori Method in an education journal, wrote that Dr. Montessori was operating at a level that American educators were trying to recover from, setting Montessori in the past and America in the future.⁹⁴

Maria Montessori, Catholics, and Nativism

Maria Montessori's relationship with the Catholic Church was characterized by misunderstandings and hidden alliances. She was raised in a Catholic culture but her close company with Freemasons, socialists, and communists, all condemned by the Catholic Church, suggested that she did not adhere to her faith.⁹⁵ After Montessori developed her method, she had to navigate a precarious social scene in her native Italy, where the Catholic Church held sway with the public and Freemasons and socialists controlled the political realms. Suspended between two major powers, Montessori kept her religious ideas to herself, although she accepted assistance from anyone.

⁹² "Normal school" is the name for a school that trains teachers. Pedagogy is the study of the practice of education.

⁹³ Kilpatrick, "Montessori and Froebel:" 492-493. Whitescarver and Cossentino, "Montessori and the Mainstream:" 2572.

⁹⁴ Merrill, "A New Method in Infant Education: Manual Work in the 'Case dei Barnbini'," *The Kindergarten Primary Magazine*, 23 no. 5 (Jan, 1910): 211.

⁹⁵ Pope Leo XIII, "On Freemasonry and Naturalism" in *The Popes against Modern Errors: 16 Papal Documents*, ed. Anthony J. Mioni, Jr., (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc.: 1999), 60.

In 1910, the Franciscan Missionary sisters took Montessori under their wing. In addition to providing a space for her schools, the sisters started Montessori on her way back to the Catholic faith. They provided a foundation for her to expand her ideas on the moral responsibilities of educators and the moral capabilities of children. Also under their patronage, Montessori started her first international training center. However, the alliance lasted only five years. A priest from the Italian branch of the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, condemned the Montessori Method as lacking discipline and ignoring human nature by refusing to reward good behavior. When the sisters' advising priest read Dr. Montessori's books for himself, he also concluded that her works were "scientifically inadequate and, moreover, harmful to the people of faith."⁹⁶ The convent school closed in 1915, the year of Montessori's last visit to the United States, and Montessori mourned that "the only public sign of public love and open approval of the Church" was gone.⁹⁷ The priest and the nuns kept their disapproval of Montessori quiet so Montessori's growing faith would not be shaken, but if they were quiet, so was she. Montessori made no public affirmation of her faith until the 1920s -- long enough for many Catholics in America to believe that she was a heretic.⁹⁸

As with the Italian Jesuits, Dr. Montessori's books ruined American Jesuits' impression of her. Her first book in particular was controversial. *Pedagogical Anthropology* was a compilation of lectures on anthropology that Montessori had given at the Pedagogic School at the University of Rome in 1904, and was first published in Italian in 1910. It did not become available to English speakers until 1913, a year after her second book, *The Montessori Method*,

⁹⁶ A. Gemelli, 1912, Letter to Mary of the Redemption. Generalate of Archive of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Rome. As found in Foschi, "Science and Culture...," 249.

⁹⁷ Maria Montessori, 1915, Letter to Mary of the Redemption. Generalate of Archive of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Rome. As found in Foschi, "Science and Culture...," 250.

⁹⁸ Foschi, "Science and Culture...," 252.

had sold out and been reprinted six times. However, Montessori did not alter her previous work to reflect her recent discoveries or position on child development and pedagogical theory. Where the first-published *Montessori Method* advocated self-determination, the second-published *Pedagogical Anthropology* declared that people's fate and future were determined by their physical make-up, a concept called biological determinism. Back in 1904, Dr. Montessori had adopted the position of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who is widely considered the father of modern criminology and an advocate of biological determinism.⁹⁹ Lombroso proposed in 1876 that criminals were evolutionary throwbacks to cavemen and that criminals could be identified by biological features, such as protruding jawlines, small heads, and flat noses.¹⁰⁰ He proposed that criminality could be studied and examined outside of the realm of law and public hygiene, establishing the field of criminology, the study of crime and criminals. As a student of anthropology, Maria Montessori came into contact with his theories, and she perpetuated them in her early work and in *Pedagogical Anthropology*, writing "[a] defective physical development tells that the psychic personality must also have its defects (especially in regard to the intelligence)."¹⁰¹ By not providing a disclaimer to *Pedagogical Anthropology* or an explanation of the development of her method, Montessori set herself at odds with the Catholic Church, among others, who believed that every person has the capacity to be good or evil, regardless of physical appearance.

The Jesuits of New York were among the first to respond to *Pedagogical Anthropology*. The Jesuit order had been influential in founding Catholic universities, schools, and seminaries

⁹⁹ Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 2.

¹⁰⁰ Gibson, *Born to Crime*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Maria Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, translated by Frederic Taber Cooper, (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1913), 355. Fr. Tierney, "The Basis of a New Pedagogy:" 130.

in America since they arrived from Europe in the early 1800s. Their American journal, aptly named *America*, had been in print since the 1890s, and shortly after *Pedagogical Anthropology* was available, the priests published a few articles about Dr. Montessori's method and book.¹⁰² The tone of the 1913 article, "The Basis of a New Pedagogy," starts positively. The author, Father R. H. Tierney, calls Dr. Montessori "an earnest woman of high purpose, great zeal and astounding activity."¹⁰³ However, he soon expresses confusion over Montessori's apparent regression in thought, as the discrepancy between her first and second books was too marked to ignore. Fr. Tierney points out that Dr. Montessori had no training in ethical philosophy, the field she had wandered into with her claims that morality was determined by physical prowess, and that she should not have ventured outside of her realm of expertise. In end, he expressed regret that someone as generous and kind-hearted as Dr. Montessori, in all other respects the best that a female educator and scientist could be, had been taken in by Lombroso's theories.¹⁰⁴

The Paulists, an American missionary society from New York, were even less sympathetic. In a short review of the book in their journal *Catholic World*, an anonymous author reminded the reader that the Paulists already disapproved of the amount of freedom permitted in the Montessori classroom, and now they added to Dr. Montessori's list of faults her support of Lombroso's theory on the criminal type.¹⁰⁵ Leaving nothing to speculation, the author states he was "astonished" that Dr. Montessori had espoused this philosophy of determinism after her previous book had put her in the opposite position of believing everyone person could become

¹⁰² Martin P. Harney, *The Jesuits in History: the Society of Jesus through four centuries*, (New York: The America Press, 1914), 403.

¹⁰³ Fr. R. H. Tierney, S.J., "The Basis of a New Pedagogy," *America*, Vol. X, No. 6 (November 15, 1913): 130.

¹⁰⁴ Tierney, "The Basis of a New Pedagogy:" 130.

¹⁰⁵ I could not find the preceding article that this author mentioned.

better through education.¹⁰⁶ In the end, the author hopes that “Maria Montessori [would] find few followers in these United States.”¹⁰⁷

The *Baltimore Catholic Review* came to a different conclusion. The *Review* was the official newspaper for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the nation’s first Catholic archdiocese, which included many counties in Maryland in addition to Washington D.C. The author published the article shortly after she came to the United States in December of 1913, and he took a more forgiving view of Dr. Montessori’s findings. The author mentioned the discrepancy between her observations of human behavior from *The Montessori Method* and her philosophical declarations in *Pedagogical Anthropology*, but called it a “Happy Absence of Logic.”¹⁰⁸ The author copied the sentiments from Fr. Tierney’s article, saying that Dr. Montessori was ambitious, capable and energetic but that her admiration of Lombroso and adoption of the theory of the criminal type was regrettable and false. However, the author hoped that her methods would be adopted in many schools, as “[t]hey would be admirable for the baby-pupil and most welcome to nervous, high-strung teachers.”¹⁰⁹

If Dr. Montessori’s only failing had been her science, Catholic intellectuals might have left it at that. But their problems with her did not end with her apparent alliance with Lombroso. In *Pedagogical Anthropology*, Dr. Montessori also wrote that sacrifice and the pursuit of virtue stifled the personality, preventing people from becoming whole and complete, resulting in an inferior human being.¹¹⁰ She believed that the pursuit of individual happiness was better for

¹⁰⁶ "Pedagogical Anthropology," *Catholic World*, V. 99 (May 1914): 253. This article is an example of the confusion the public felt at the apparent regression of Montessori’s theories. They were not aware that *Pedagogical Anthropology* was Dr. Montessori’s first book, not her second.

¹⁰⁷ "Pedagogical Anthropology:" 254.

¹⁰⁸ “The New School in Pedagogy,” *Baltimore Catholic Review*, (Dec 13, 1913): 5.

¹⁰⁹ “The New School in Pedagogy,” 5. This phrase is almost word-for-word the same as a phrase Fr. Tierney uses in “The Basis of a New Pedagogy.”

¹¹⁰ I believe this theory was Dr. Montessori’s own opinion, not Lombroso’s. Maria Montessori, *Pedagogical Anthropology*, 92.

society at large because it permitted people to expand on their own desires and to share themselves more fully with others. This Fr. Tierney could not ignore and asked that God remove all such persons from the Earth and leave only those “inferior persons” who pursued virtue over happiness.¹¹¹ He compared Dr. Montessori’s evaluation on the nobility of virtue and pursuit of happiness to Modernism, the name given to compilation of progressive ideals and beliefs, condemned as a heresy by Pope Pius X just five years earlier.¹¹²

The Jesuits tied Dr. Montessori to heresy more than once. Fr. Thomas Coakley said in 1916 that the heresy of the age was Gnosticism, which claimed that only the educated and intelligent could be saved, thereby barring the ignorant entry to Heaven. Coakley gave examples from modern society, pointing to the excess number of books, schools, and educational methods that were being created, bought, and obeyed with no regard to the object’s actual quality. But, he wrote in a wry tone, the people must be saved, “even in spite of themselves,” and since education imparts knowledge, then parents must force their children into school as soon as possible – “Hence our Kindergartens and our Montessori Houses of Childhood.”¹¹³ In fact, after 1916, Dr. Montessori’s name and method became a punchline in *America*, as the Jesuits mocked the present generation for their lack of self-control or self-awareness, saying they must have gone to a Montessori school since, in the Jesuits’ view, Montessori schools did not help their students develop character or willpower.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Fr. Tierney, “The Basis of a New Pedagogy,” 131.

¹¹² Fr. Tierney, “The Basis of a New Pedagogy,” 132. In his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, Pope Pius X identified the beliefs of those he called Modernists. He said that Modernism is the belief that nothing exists outside of human reason and that all religious experiences have explanations rooted in science. The Modernist view of the world invalidated all religions, including Catholicism. As such, Modernists also advocated for examining religious texts as historical texts, called for the separation of Church and State, and believed that religious organizations ought to change their dogmas and doctrines to fit the times. For more, please see Pope St. Pius X, “On Modernism,” in *The Popes against Modern Errors*, ed. Anthony J Mioni, Jr. (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1999).

¹¹³ Thomas F. Coakley, D. D., “Education: Salvation by Knowledge,” *America* 12, no 5 (November 14, 1914): 129.

¹¹⁴ See Paul Blakely, S. J., “Education: Learning to Don’t,” *America* 14, no. 24 (March 25, 1916): 573-574; “Dr. Flexner’s ‘Modern School,’” *America* 15, no. 1 (April 15, 1916): 15; “Note and Comment,” *America* 15, no. 3 (April

The fact that the Jesuits, Paulists, or other Catholic officials took issue with Maria Montessori and Cesare Lombroso, two Italian nationals, surprised no one. All Italians were under probation after the Italian nation had confiscated the Papal States from the Catholic Church. In retaliation against their reduced worldly power, the Church as a whole experienced a revival in Catholic practices between 1861 and 1929.¹¹⁵ Catholics across the globe founded new Catholic schools, hospitals, and fraternities and increased their devotional and fasting practices, and adopted “a distinctive neo-Thomistic philosophy” in order to reassert their loyalty to Rome and re-establish religion as superior to government or political ideology.¹¹⁶

However, Italians failed, according to Irish and German American Catholic standards, in two key areas of this renewal. The first was that Italians loved their home country. Since their nation had been the one at fault in reducing the pope’s temporal power, any expression of loyalty to the Italian state was seen as a slight against the pope. In addition to this, the Italian immigrants’ form of worship was distinctly different from Irish and German forms, prompting some to ask if the Italians were even Catholic. The superstitious appearance of Italian Catholicism, with their “home altars, Mediterranean penitential rites, [and] mourning rituals,” threatened the reputation American Catholics had been building for the past few decades -- a reputation as a respectable and logical religion, compatible with American values.¹¹⁷

Garnering American approval would prove difficult for Catholics, whether or not they achieved middle class respectability. The Protestants of America were no more fond of Catholics

29, 1916): 72; "Indications of the 'Silly Season,'" *America* 15, no. 15 (July 22, 1916): 356; "Cultivating Their Individuality," *America* 15, no. 26 (October 7, 1916): 618; Joyce Kilmer, "Literature: Suppose Dickens Returned!," *America* 16 (Oct 21, 1916): 41; M. J. Riordan, "The Game of Raising Boys," *America* 16, no. 24 (March 24, 1917): 567.

¹¹⁵ Peter R. D’Agostino, “Utterly Faithless Specimens:’ Italians in the Catholic Church in America,” in *Anti-Italianism: Essays on Prejudice*, ed. William J. Connell and Fred Gardaphé (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 34.

¹¹⁶ D’Agostino, “Utterly Faithless Specimens,” 35

¹¹⁷ D’Agostino, “Utterly Faithless Specimens,” 36; 39.

than their predecessors had been in England or Germany. Their suspicion lay in the undemocratic nature of Catholic religious hierarchy and the fact that Catholics did not and do not believe in religious freedom.¹¹⁸ Religious organizations, like the Methodist Episcopal Church, and individuals in the private sector published magazines and newspapers warning Americans of the danger Catholics posed to American society. Newspapers like *The Menace* and *The Christian Advocate* warned that Catholics were conspiring to raise an army in the United States, that Catholic orphanages and convents kidnapped women and girls, and that Catholic immigrants specifically were trying to take Americans' jobs.¹¹⁹

Anti-Catholic organizations suspected Jesuits in particular since their cultural significance as educators and intellectual guides put them in a position to control Catholic thought. Some believed that the Jesuits used their influence over Catholics to infiltrate the public press, police force and judicial system. Newspapers popped up around the country to spread this propaganda. According to historian Justin Nordstrom, *The Menace* was one of "the most successful and far-reaching anti-Catholic text[s] of the time."¹²⁰ Although the data on *The Menace's* circulation does not reach back to 1910, in 1915, the magazine circulated over a million magazines and set the standard for other publications as to how to address the Catholic issue.¹²¹ This magazine, read by millions across the United States, affirmed the danger of the Jesuits, saying "If asked to name the strongest resource and the greatest power of Rome in

¹¹⁸ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 6. Hawkins, "The Roman Catholic Church in New York City, and the Public Money and Public Property of the People:" 8.

¹¹⁹ See "The Missing Girls," *The Menace*. (Aurora, Mo.), 10 Jan. 1914. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*: 4.

¹²⁰ Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep*, 80.

¹²¹ Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep : Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 56. "Freedom of the Press Sustained," *Yellow Jacket*, June 20, 1913: 1. As found in Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep*, 70.

America today, we should unhesitatingly declare it to be its Jesuitical hold upon the public press.”¹²²

The spirit of anti-Catholicism surrounded the Montessori Movement but in utterly surprising ways. Margaret Naumburg, an American psychologist and credited with founding art therapy, had studied with both John Dewey and Maria Montessori, so when she wrote an article on the Montessori Method for *Outlook* magazine, she wrote as an expert on the topic of pedagogy. After waxing sentimental over the “beautiful indomitable girl” who defied all men and all odds to achieve her dreams, Naumburg juxtaposed the Italian state’s approval of the method with the Jesuits’ disapproval. Naumburg claimed this constituted the “unofficial censure of the Catholic Church” as a whole.¹²³ She then described the very situation which Americans worst feared: the Jesuits controlled the populace by blocking the founding of Montessori schools in Ireland. The Jesuits of Ireland had consulted their superiors “through their close-linked chain of connections with Rome, had been advised to prevent the founding of any Montessori schools, and obeyed orders.”¹²⁴ This “close-linked chain” had been the subject of much debate at *The Menace*, which argued that Catholic immigrants were connecting that same chain from Rome to America via Catholic-elected representatives and public officials.¹²⁵

The Jesuits could not let this accusation slide. In response, Fr. M. J. O’Connor took Naumburg to task for painting Maria Montessori as the victim of Jesuit oppression. He accused Naumburg of purposefully phrasing her article in such a way that Americans would label the Catholic Church an antagonist, as so many anti-Catholic journalists had done before her. Fr. O’Connor laments that “there is scarcely a ripple that appears in the vast sea of human effort

¹²² *The Menace* (Aurora, Missouri), Dec. 23, 1911: 1.

¹²³ Margaret Naumburg, “Maria Montessori: Friend of Children.” *Outlook* (Dec 13, 1913): 790; 794.

¹²⁴ Naumburg, “Maria Montessori: Friend of Children,” 794

¹²⁵ “Need of Immigration Bill,” *The Menace*, Dec. 27, 1913: 4.

which does not bring from some one the cry: the Jesuits!"¹²⁶ But the damage was already done. Other secular newspapers knew that Montessori was not favored by the Jesuits. In an evaluation of public opinion of the Montessori Method, one author wrote that "Roman Catholics are as yet somewhat chary of indorsing [sic] a system so 'free' and so untraditional as hers...and [pronounce] her something of a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde."¹²⁷ He then cited all of the organizations that did approve of the method, including the New York agnostic paper, *The Truth Seeker*, Protestant publications, *The Christian Work and Evangelist* of New York, the *New York Times*, and Socialists and Single-Taxers.

Dr. Montessori kept her affiliation to the Catholic faith so private that her own followers did not associate her method with her religion. In a scathing letter to Mr. Bailey Willis, another Montessori advocate, Mabel Bell, the co-founder of the Montessori Education Association, wrote that the Montessori Method must be scientific and fluid, and "[i]t is just the doctrine of the Catholic Church which would have silenced Galileo and all other seekers after the truth" to require a practice to be rigid and unchanging.¹²⁸ Mrs. Bell clearly did not connect the Catholic Church to the practice of the spirit of the Montessori Movement. In that letter she suggested that Catholics would not comprehend the scientific nature of the method and would not appreciate the tendency of scientific principles to fluctuate to match new findings. The Montessori Method was a method for everyone, according to Mrs. Bell, except perhaps Catholics.

Even if she was not a devout Catholic and could so curry favor with Americans, Maria Montessori could not hide her Italian identity. The suitability of the method for American children was called into question, as some people speculated that the method might be too Italian

¹²⁶ M. J. O'Connor, S.J. "Madame Montessori," *America* 10, no. 12 (December 27, 1913): 271.

¹²⁷ "What Americans think of Montessori's Educational Crusade," *Current Opinion*, 56, (02, 1914): 128.

¹²⁸ Correspondence from Mrs. Mabel Bell to Mr. Willis, September 15, 1915, Alexander Graham Bell Family Papers, 0330M, Box 65, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

for American children. Race theory had overtaken the the Western world, including the United States, as people sought to categorize and explain the differences between human ethnicities on a scientific level.¹²⁹ Darwinism played a significant role in crafting people’s perceptions of their race within society, as social darwinism, the idea that interpersonal competition exists on every level of society, was applied to race relations.

If there was nativist pushback against the Montessori Method, it might have been in the area of race. Although John Higham argues in *Strangers in the Land* that Protestant nativism was hushed during the first decades of the 20th Century because America was experiencing an “age of confidence,” there are gaps in his argument. Higham was correct in pointing out that no major political organizations were active during the 1900s and 1910s, as the American Protective Association, the Know-Nothings, and the second-wave of the KKK, all anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic organizations, either predated Montessori’s arrival in the US or did not develop until after the 1920s. All of these institutions missed the first Montessori wave by almost ten years, according to some people’s calculations.¹³⁰ However, there was pushback from other areas of America. Anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant publications like *The Menace* and the *Yellow Jacket* “emanated from distant rural locales and small towns” which had few to no Catholics or immigrants.¹³¹

In relation to immigrants, as the 1920s approached, anti-immigrant rhetoric focused on the quality of individual that entered the United States. The newest arrivals appeared to be the worst that Europe had to offer, as they tended to be from the poor, illiterate working class.¹³²

¹²⁹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 134.

¹³⁰ Jean Anne Vance Keough wrote in her 1973 dissertation “American Writings on Maria Montessori: An Inquiry into Changes in the Reception and Interpretations Given to Writings on Maria Montessori and Montessori Educational Ideas 1910-1915 and 1958-1970” that the Montessori Method was out of vogue by 1915.

¹³¹ Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep*, 58.

¹³² Coleman, "The Montessori Method in America," 15.

Italy added to the problem by classifying their own southern citizens as racially inferior to the northerners. Giuseppe Sergi, one of Dr. Montessori's former employers, published *The Mediterranean Race* pushing this narrative, and the Americans bought it. In 1905, even before Montessori came to the United States, the "the U.S. commissioner-general of immigration revised the government's classification of Italians" and created a clear distinction between the northern and southern Italians.¹³³ The resurgence of nativist feelings almost ruined the Panama Pacific International Exhibition because the American Congress was debating a new piece of legislation that would require immigrants "to pass an English literacy test as a condition of entry to the United States."¹³⁴ International delegates to the Exhibition threatened to boycott the event, but in the end, the bill was not passed.

Commentators on the Montessori Method gave evidence to the thought of the times by discussing the Montessori Method from the perspective of race theory. Members from both sides of the argument drew comparisons between Italians and Americans based on what were deemed innate national personality traits and behaviors. Some believed that "the Italians excel in minute, analytic work" and that "imagination is not the predominant quality of the Italian mind, and never has been."¹³⁵ Americans, on the other hand, they said, "[differ] widely from the Italian" in regards to temperament. Ellen Yale Stevens, the kindergarten expert, said that American children were less responsive to their senses, were less docile, and had more initiative than Italian children. However, that did not stop her or other Montessori supporters from advocating for the method, as she believed that "from Italy, which has given the world one Renaissance, that of art, comes the Renaissance of education, with a rediscovery and unification of principles already

¹³³ Vellon, *A Great Conspiracy Against Our Race*, 17.

¹³⁴ Robert G. Buckenmeyer, Introduction to *The California Lectures of Maria Montessori, 1915: Collected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Robert G. Buckenmeyer (Oxford, England: Clio Press, 1997), x.

¹³⁵ O'Shea, "The Montessori Method of Teaching," 393; George, "The First Montessori School in America," 187.

formulated, combined with new theories, methods, and material adapted to democratic society as it is conceived of at the present time."¹³⁶

While espousing race theory, the Montessori advocates simultaneously ameliorated the issue. They reminded their readers that all human beings belong to the same race. Even though the trend at the time was to separate races out by their nationality, most people still accepted the concept that all human beings had emanated from the same ancestors -- those in fundamentalist Christian camps especially had to espouse this idea as it is the Biblical version of the origins of humanity. Following that line of thought, the idea then was that the differences between "races" were the products of environment, not heredity alone.¹³⁷ And if that is true, then Anne George was safe in saying that all children were the same. The success of the method with her pupils, who were decidedly Anglo-Saxon and wealthy, was proof enough for her that whatever Montessori provided for the Italians could be applied in some way to Americans and the human race at large. Other newspapers, like the *New-York Tribune*, carried the same message, saying that Montessori's work would develop a "more courageous, more capable" race of human being.¹³⁸ Americans in particular were proud of the race they were crafting out of the myriad of immigrants from all over the world.¹³⁹ Therefore, it was of particular interest to Americans when Montessori said that she was proud of Americans and their attention to children. The *New-York Tribune* boasted that Montessori had said "[t]he interest of Americans in children was a token of a great race and bespoke a great future for us."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Stevens, "The Montessori Method and the American Kindergarten," 81; 82.

¹³⁷ Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep*, 136.

¹³⁸ "Montessori Race Future is Bright," *New-York Tribune*, (Dec 09, 1913): 5.

¹³⁹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 133.

¹⁴⁰ "Dr. Montessori Likes Our Schools," *New-York Tribune*, (Dec 15, 1913): 7.

Maria Montessori and her followers avoided the race issue through their presentation of Montessori herself and the nature of the discussion around her method. Those who supported Montessori did not believe that her method was restricted to use by Italians alone. Montessori's American advocates used the media to show that the Montessori Method was being adopted all over the globe. Those with experience in education, like Anne George and Ellen Yale Stevens, used their credentials to convince their readers that children around the world were not so different from each other, and that, in the end, the human race is all one body. If the people of America took issue with the method based on the nationality of its founder, it was not published in any major newspapers. Individuals could make their own assumptions, but Montessori's supporters did their best to ensure that Americans would welcome the method as warmly as any European could.

Conclusion: The Decline of the Montessori Method

In stark contrast with the adoration of the public at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exhibition, “none of the many educational conferences which were held at PPIE made any reference to [Dr. Montessori]” and contemporary American educators likewise seem to have ignored her return.¹⁴¹ Only two years after Montessori had visited the United States for the first time and everyone from the president's daughter to educational philosophers to priests had commented on her method, Maria Montessori was an outsider. Explanations for why she should have been excluded generated immediately. Her own friends and family believed it was in part due to her religion and her nationality.¹⁴² Because her own followers propagated this message, the theory made its way into the literature about Montessori even though it was speculation.

¹⁴¹ Buckenmeyer, Introduction to *The California Lectures of Maria Montessori, 1915*, xi.

¹⁴² Buckenmeyer, Introduction to *The California Lectures of Maria Montessori, 1915*, xv.

They may have been right in a sense. It could be that American educators did not want Montessori to join their ranks because of her ethnic heritage, but if they did, it was not expressed in their writings on her. Indeed, for a Progressive educator to expressly deny admission to a woman based on her femininity or an Italian-national based on her country of origin would have been in opposition to their own dogmas of freedom and self-determination. Additionally, Maria Montessori did not fit the American view of an undesirable Italian. She was well-educated and well-bred. Montessori's media advocates propagated an image of Maria Montessori that was acceptable to Americans by focusing on themes that were already present in American media: science, liberty, and feminism. This is not to say nobody believed that Montessori's method was too Italian or too Catholic for their children. Therefore, "overtly" is included in the thesis statement to allow for individual opinions on the Montessori Method. However, public distaste for the method was not focused on her nationality or her religion but on her scientific credentials and how freedom was incorporated in the classroom.

The more likely theories for the decline of the Montessori Method are that the leading educators of America did not accept her into their ranks, that World War I distracted the public from alternative education, and that Maria Montessori prevented a self-sustaining Montessori entity from developing in the United States. The most well-accepted theory of the decline of the Montessori Method is that the educators of America did not accept her theories on child development and sense training. Since Dr. Montessori's claim to authority lay in her scientific background, she was vulnerable to attacks on her scientific method and conclusions. Kilpatrick's criticism and his adamant support for American educator John Dewey's philosophy encouraged many to turn away from Dr. Montessori and invest their energies in their own forms of

kindergartens.¹⁴³ This is the argument I heard from my teachers during my training as a Montessori primary teacher, when my trainers described how and why the Montessori Method faded away after the first wave of popularity in America. Kilpatrick's review solidified American educators' doubt about the legitimacy of the Montessori method, and hence it did not get into the history books.

World War I also hampered the spread of the Montessori Method because Montessori's American supporters had difficulty keeping legitimate Montessori associations afloat. In a special committee meeting of the Montessori Education Association (MEA), Mabel Bell wrote that "The war has changed everything."¹⁴⁴ In 1916, the National Montessori Promotion fund collected less than \$5,000, not nearly enough to continue publishing books, holding public events, and supporting several Montessori schools.¹⁴⁵

The distance between the founder and her American followers compounded the issue. Maria Montessori refused to emigrate to the United States. Although the reason why was never clear to her followers, this posed a serious problem in relation to training new teachers. Montessori's emphasized in her book on Montessori education "that without her direct supervision training was not to occur and was duly not sanctioned by her."¹⁴⁶ This attitude pervaded Americans' perception of her and her method. It disheartened those advocates who sought to spread her method throughout America but were barred from starting training centers.

¹⁴³ Donald D. Chipman and Carl B. McDonald, "The Historical Contributions of William Heard Kilpatrick," *Journal of Thought* 15, no. 1 (1980): 71.

¹⁴⁴ Special Committee of the MEA, undated, Alexander Graham Bell Family Papers, 0330M, Box 65, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁴⁵ Correspondence to Maria Montessori, Feb. 3 1917, Alexander Graham Bell Family Papers, 0330M, Box 65, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁴⁶ Coleman, "The Montessori Method in America," 39.

In addition to that, other educators asserted that the Montessori Method without trained teachers would be very dangerous. Arnold Gesell and his wife, Beatrice Chandler Gesell, wrote in the conclusion to their book *The Normal Child and Primary Education* that the fulfillment of the Montessori Method in America "needs skillful personalities more than it needs didactic apparatus," which was being manufactured in the US and many teachers and parents were using without training. This, the Gesells warned, was "insidiously dangerous."¹⁴⁷ According to both Montessori and the Gesells, the teacher must be carefully trained to notice when children were under-stimulated and overstimulated in order to prevent exhaustion. Untrained teachers would not be able to tell when children were ready for the next lesson or when they had worked for too long. They risked burning out the youth. The necessity of trained teachers was a given, but the followers of the method were unable to meet those demands. Those who needed Montessori's training could not get it without going to Italy, which entered World War I in 1915, and those who practiced without official training were condemned by the educational community. With logistic barriers and the disapproval of the educative officials of the United States, schools all around the US closed, including the one run by the Bell family.

The Montessori Method came to America at what seemed to be the opportune moment. Progressive Americans were searching for a method of education that would be pain-free for the child and inculcate American values of liberty and equality. The Montessori Method promised exactly that. The founder of the method was an innovator and social justice advocate -- Progressives could respect that. She was a woman. The mothers, daughters, and feminists of America took courage and inspiration from her. However, despite all of that, Maria Montessori

¹⁴⁷ Arnold and Beatrice Chandler Gesell, *The Normal Child and Primary Education* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1912), 340.

became a byword for change for change's sake and was lost to the public's eye.¹⁴⁸ In the end, Maria Montessori did not care. She had said she would do real work, and even if America forgot about her, she had plenty to do in Italy, Spain, England, and India. The traumatized orphans of World War I needed care, and Montessori had the system that could help them. While America moved on, she also "went serenely on...caring little for worldly recognition or financial gain."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ W. A. Baldwin, "The Conflicting Pedagogy of Madame Montessori," *The Journal of Education*, 77, no. 6 (Feb. 6, 1913): 149.

¹⁴⁹ Florence Elizabeth Ward, *The Montessori Method and the American School* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1913), xi.

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