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The Rails that Bind: America's Freedom Trains as Reflections of Efforts to Form Cultural Consensus and Indicators of the Weakness of Cold War Memory

Daniel Speer
William & Mary

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**The Rails that Bind: America's Freedom Trains as Reflections of Efforts to Form Cultural
Consensus and Indicators of the Weakness of Cold War Memory**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from
William & Mary**

by

Daniel R. Speer


Accepted for

(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)


Charles McGovern, Director


Frederick Corney, History


Jay Watkins III, History


Mitchell Brown, Classics

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“Remarks in this space about Eastbay students and the short stay of the Freedom Train in Oakland have been interpreted as deprecating the whole project. Quite the opposite is true.” – *Raymond Lawrence, reporter for the Oakland Tribune, 15 March 1948*

“It was worth it, though it is kind of hard to explain why.” – *Henry N. Fuyat, Jr., Washington, DC, to the Washington Post, 23 January 1949.*

“Liquor wasn’t important? What train were you on?” – *Remark made by crewmember at Freedom Train Crew Reunion, 15 October 2021.*

“I took [People’s Bicentennial Commission protestors] through the train and we came out and sat down for half an hour and they threw their signs away and went home: that was the last we heard from them. A couple were pretty hostile when we started: they wanted to see how the Indians and Negroes were treated. I said we only have 700 linear feet, so we can’t do everyone satisfactorily.” – *Ross Rowland, 1976 train founder, in an interview with the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, 1 December 1976.*

INTRODUCTION

What is a Freedom Train?

Among fans of railroads (railfans), when one refers to “the Freedom Train,” it is almost always in reference to either the 1947-1949 “Freedom Train,” (fig. 1) or to the 1975-1976 “American Freedom Train” (fig. 2). For historians however, “Freedom Train” is both the title for several other real trains and symbolic shorthand used by Black Americans as part of the civil rights struggle, referring to a Negro spiritual about the Great Migration.¹ The principal distinctions between other uses of the term and the two trains examined in this paper are that the primary cargo was documents and material culture instead of people, that these trains toured the entire United States instead of running to specific destinations, and put forth a narrative of US history using patriotic symbols. This third criteria would exclude, for example, the 1947 Friendship Train initiative that collected food donations for Europe with the same anti-communist mission as its contemporary Freedom Train, as well as trains that were billed as

¹ Defender New York Bureau, “Freedom Train Promoters Fail to Tell Dixie Policy,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 September 1947, 1. ProQuest, accessed 20 April 2022.

generic “freedom trains” chartered by the NAACP and advocates for the Equal Rights Amendment to mobilize supporters for rallies.²

The nearly identical names of the trains and similar red, white, and blue paint point to their very similar purposes and originating motives and methods of operation, but belie the remarkable differences in design, some aspects of origin, context, and reception. Even in the photos presented above, the difference is apparent; the 1947-1949 train, powered by a diesel locomotive, featured three cars of documents, a reception car, and quarters for its dedicated archivist and Marine guards. The 1975-1976 train, drawn by three steam locomotives (split geographically) hauled ten cars of Americana, two windowed display cars with a twice-size Liberty Bell, lunar rover, and fire engine, and ten other cars for entertaining VIPs, some crew quarters (most slept in hotels), generators, and flatcars for souvenir wagons and an RV for its Army guards. The 1947 train featured some 200 documents and evocative banners, from a copy of the Magna Carta to the emblem and logbook of the battleship USS *Missouri* that accepted Japan’s surrender, while the 1975 train featured 512 pieces, ranging from a copy of the Declaration of Independence to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s pulpit, Hank Aaron’s bat, Judy Garland’s dress from *The Wizard of Oz* and a model of the Apollo-Soyuz spaceships. Both trains, run by nonprofit foundations set up for the purpose, received corporate sponsorship, with the 1947-1949 train featuring a broad coalition that included Chase Bank, Inland Steel, and Paramount Pictures (among others), while the 1975 train snagged five such sponsorships: Pepsi, General Motors, Prudential Insurance, Kraft Foods, and Atlantic-Richfield Petroleum. The 1947 train originated with an Attorney General, Tom Clark, and the 1975 train with a commodities

² Dorothy R. Scheele, “The 1947 Friendship Food Train to Europe,” ThemeTrains.com, n.d. Accessed 24 April 2022. <http://www.thefriendshiptrain1947.org>; David E. Early, “Last Freedom Train runs in Bay Area,” *Record Searchlight* (Redding, CA), 21 June 2015, A4. ProQuest; “State Digest” *Visalia Times – Delta* (Visalia, CA), 20 January 2015, 7. ProQuest.

broker, Ross Rowland, but both men saw as their objective an uplifting the spirits of the country, both responding to concerns of domestic malaise, but influenced by Cold War events.

ARGUMENT AND STRUCTURES

One wonders why two projects so similar in name, overall purpose, and basic concept took such varied presentations, but also why so much of their design and operation were remarkably similar. This paper argues that the cultural context of the Cold War played a dominant role, with the so-called “consensus” (ca. 1947 – 1963) and “détente” (1963 – 1979) periods orchestrating the differences in the messaging, origins, design and reception to both trains. At the same time, these periods shared cultural features, such as contestation over America’s place in the world and the rise of corporate influence, that led to both trains having similar goals and features. The paper proceeds chronologically, examining the stories of the 1947 train (Chapter 1) and 1975 train (Chapter 2) in turn. The final chapter discusses how the memory of these trains shifted over time, with the goal of articulating why both trains, despite their origins in the Cold War, are rarely remembered as such (if at all, in certain times), and what the changes in the memory of the trains suggest about the public’s memory of the broader Cold War.

The 1947 train’s government and corporate backers strove to mobilize the country by creating a consensus around an active, but limited citizenship that involved maintaining freedoms through daily living, including consumption; divergent public reactions suggest that by and large, this consensus was accepted, but the challenge of desegregation and communist opposition to corporate sponsorship revealed its limits. The 1976 train’s corporate backers sought a celebratory history to make Americans feel good, creating a teleological narrative that ignored disruption and contained challenges by adopting the diversity nationalism of the Bicentennial. In memory, recollections emphasize the patriotism and unity spread by each train,

but in both cases the strength of this recollection varies or is weak, and challenged by alternative narratives reflecting the 1947 train's desegregated viewing and the controversies of the 1975 train's design, curation, and reception in the fractious Bicentennial period. In neither case do memories of the Cold War figure prominently, suggesting the weakness of the teleological "good versus evil" narrative of the war that posits a victory for the United States over the USSR.

METHODOLOGY AND DISCLAIMERS

To determine the influence of culture on the trains, this paper will analyze articles and advertisements relating to the trains published in newspapers. The primary archive was the entire Newspapers.com World Collection, which tended to focus on papers from eastern Pennsylvania, Ohio, and California, but included papers from all 50 states; that is, searches of this archive were not bounded geographically. From ProQuest came results from the mainstream *News York Times*, and *Washington Post*, the Black press's *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, and *Chicago Defender*, and the communist *Daily Worker* and *Daily World*. Supplemental archives included the state-specific databases of the University of Oregon, the University of Utah, and Newsday's database of New York State papers, because Portland is home to one of the 1976 train's locomotives, Utah the visit of Soviet cosmonauts, and the presence of a copycat New York State freedom train. Beyond newspapers, the work also analyzes stories in ProQuest's archive of *Railway Age*, one of the more established (since 1918) trade publications, the Kalmbach Publishing archives of *Trains* magazine, a popular enthusiast publication, and online blogs by the National Archives and 1976 Freedom Train organizers and crew members. Rounding out the collection of primary sources are observations from the most recent 1976 Freedom Train crew reunion in Tampa, Florida, which this author attended thanks to a William & Mary History Department grant from October 15th – 17th, 2021. These notes include single and

group discussions of interview questions about standout memories from their time, as well as overall observations on the content and character of the reunion itself. Names of individual interviewees are anonymized to preserve privacy.

Given that crewmembers will likely read this paper at some point, the author would like to note that this work is not intended as a denigration of the efforts behind either Freedom Train; instead, it is an attempt at contextualizing the motivations and beliefs those individuals expressed at those particular moments, and analyzing how this context shaped the trains. The work does not assign value judgements to concepts, but does note any progressions or evolution in thinking on issues since they were expressed (e.g., it does not treat patriotism as inherently negative, but does note the consequences of certain forms of patriotism at the moment).

Chapter 1: Articulating Consensus, Supporting Business: the 1947 Freedom Train

When the Freedom Train opened its doors to the public for the first time in Philadelphia on September 17th, 1947 (Constitution Day), the Communist Party's *Daily Worker* focused on Vice-Admiral Robert B. Carney's iteration of the thesis that there were two camps in the world, of which one camp's occupants were inherently antagonistic to the American way of life. The *Worker* noted that two demonstrators for conscientious objection were arrested and fined.³ New York's *Herald-Tribune* focused on the speeches of founder Attorney General Tom C. Clark and Senator Edward Martin (R-PA), burying the presence of antiwar pickets between quotes of Martin critiquing totalitarian Russian communism and "'hooded men and vigilantes'" whose persecution would turn bitter Americans from "'Americanism to Communism.'" The *Chicago Defender*, a Black paper, for its part noted the day before that the train, "named after a Negro

³ "Brass Launches Freedom Train," *The Daily Worker*, 15 Sept. 1947, 6. ProQuest.

Spiritual” had not yet set a policy on segregation in the South and had no Black members on its board, but a spokesperson hoped such a policy “would not be necessary.”⁴ Of that Board, no mention appeared in the press coverage that day, but just a few days prior (September 11th), mainstream papers ran exposés asserting that the Communists were planning to smear the train for its backing by members of the National Association of Manufactures.⁵

This portrait of the train’s opening day neatly encapsulates the goals, operation, and contested reactions to the train. The government and corporate sponsors, allied in articulating a cultural consensus around democracy, would use the train as a method of mobilizing the public for containment and support of capitalism, respectively, though the train showed that these motives overlapped. The entities attempted to form this consensus by articulating a new form of citizenship through the example a unifying, triumphalist and somewhat silencing history. This approach of articulating a middle vision meant that when the train had to be, it articulated liberal stances such as desegregation, but only when forced; in other areas it was conservative, but only because it increased consensus and unity.

“CONSENSUS” CULTURE

Culture (assumptions, beliefs, practices) guides the assumptions and thoughts that folks make and gives form and context to their actions and spoken words. Differing responses to perceived cultural pressures reveal the differing groups that exist in a cultural context. Moreover, groups actively shape culture, often arguing that the *status quo* is not satisfactory, and deploying the past or current events to prescribe or guide change. Identifying the aspects of “Cold War” culture is an exercise in analyzing how these groups’ words, actions or beliefs changed in

⁴ New York Bureau, “Freedom Train Promoters Fail to Tell Dixie Policy,” *The Chicago Defender* 13 September 1947, 1. ProQuest, accessed 21 April 2022.

⁵ “Reds Admit Attack on Freedom Train,” *New York Times* 11 September 1947, 23. ProQuest, accessed 21 April 2022.

response to the international system's crystallization into cold war. Both bottom-up and top-down processes for creating culture are at play, and focusing on specific entities allows for a disentangling of how each group responded to, and attempted to shape, the cultural consensus.⁶ Even if there was consensus, different groups constantly contested and further defined the boundaries of that culture.

Most scholars argue that "Cold War culture" was at its most distinctive and pervasive during the latter 1940s through the 1950s. In both truth and with tongue-in-cheek, this era is defined as "the consensus" phase of the Cold War, because attempts to shape cultural attitudes by the government (and apparent acceptance) were the most widespread.⁷ However, this era saw dissent and was far from unified about what constituted proper consensus culture.⁸ As alluded to above, the Cold War added new influences into American life, chiefly the military-industrial complex, nuclear terror, and interventionism.⁹ These new elements, however, were shaped by popular fears emerging from the second World War, and assumed their shape and power through cultural processes that were already under way; in other words, at least in the 1940s the Cold War cannot explain all of the domestic movements and attitudes that emerged during the decade of the long 1950s (1947-1963).¹⁰ The 1947 Freedom Train is no exception to these rules; Stuart J. Little argued that the train attempted to shape consensus through celebrating civil liberties and

⁶ For examples of both approaches, see Gaddis and Odd Arne Westad.

⁷ Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert, "U.S. Culture and the Cold War," in *Rethinking the Cold War*, edited by Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 4; Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, "East is East and West is West? Toward a Comparative Socio-cultural History of the Cold War," in *Across the Blocs: Exploring Comparative Cold War Cultural and Social History*, eds. Patrick Major and Rana Mitter (New York: Taylor and Routledge, 2004); John Fousak, "Introduction," in *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism, and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

⁸ Ronald R. Krebs, "How Dominant Narratives Rise and Fall," *International Organizations* 69, Fall 2015, 817;

Laura McEnaney, "Cold War Mobilization and Domestic Policies: The United States," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* Volume I, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2010)

⁹ Kuznick and Gilbert, "U.S. Culture and the Cold War," 2-4.

¹⁰ Masuda Hajima, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 60.

increasing both political participation and consumer consumption, but still inspired diverse meanings from its message. Richard Fried, in turn, placed the train in a longer context of “American Century Triumphalism” political pageantry that peaked in federal and state-organized celebrations of “I am an American Day” during World War II that would be remembered as the height of pluralistic unity. These pageants were both demonstrative and teachings efforts to defuse societal tensions.¹¹ The Freedom Train’s national-level effort would influence local understandings of the consensus and anti-communism, but because of the train’s limited capacity, its efforts were supplemented by a blitz of Ad Council-produced pamphlets, and the organization of local Rededication [to freedom] Weeks to emphasize the necessity of bringing freedom and democratic values to the home.¹² These fetes varied widely in content, themes, and participants, ranging from pageants on freedom and Women’s Day to anti-bigotry rallies, including labor, Chambers of Commerce, and local governments. These festivities allowed the Foundation to extend its reach from 3.5 million train visitors to 40 million Rededication participants.¹³ In short, the Freedom Train’s tour was part of a tradition of efforts to defuse potential areas of conflict in race, conceptions of democratic participation, and the idea of American democracy by articulating ideal forms of participation and cultural boundaries.

ORIGINS (April 1946 – September 1947)

The train originated in the Justice Department. An aide to Attorney General Tom Clark observed the Nazi war memorabilia stored at the National Archives on his lunch breaks, and conceived a project that would take the documents around the country in a converted railcar

¹¹ Richard Fried, “Precious Freight: The Freedom Train,” in *The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17.

¹² Fried, 32, 38.

¹³ Fried, 41.

contrasted with American documents on the other side, and by extension critique communism.¹⁴ This equation of ideologies reflected an underlying assumption of totalitarianism; as Truman said, “There isn’t any difference in totalitarian states. I don’t care what you call them, Nazi, Communist, or fascist.”¹⁵ The idea won backing from Clark, who was concerned not only about communism, but also about “old world rivalries,” bigotry, and racism; in short, ideologies that threatened to undermine harmony and unity. Truman also gave his seal of approval. Clark took the idea to Congress, where Republicans nixed the plan on financial grounds, then was contacted by a coalition of businessmen led by the Advertising Council, which had been in search of its own effort to shore up faith and unity in America to ensure consumer confidence. The project expanded from one car to seven cars, and an American Heritage Foundation (AHF) was formed to run the train and associated promotional campaign and events such as the aforementioned Rededication Weeks. The Foundation started with the Ad Council and executives from the Motion Picture Association of America, but would grow to include representatives of the National Association of Manufacturers, Henry Luce of Time/Life, steel companies, the Chamber of Commerce, the American Bar Association, and banks, with Chase Bank chairman Winthrop Aldrich as the Foundation’s president and Louis A. Novins of Paramount as Vice-President. Fred Patterson of the Tuskegee Institute was a late addition, as were the heads of the AFL and CIO, who lacked real power; the NAACP would give its endorsement, noting that it was a “ballyhoo,” but that its message of freedom and equality was worth endorsing.¹⁶ Promotional news articles

¹⁴ Stuart J. Little, “The Freedom Train: Citizenship and Postwar Political Culture 1946 - 1949,” *American Studies* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 39 - 40.

¹⁵ Harry S. Truman, quoted in William M. Tuttle Jr. “America’s Children in an Era of War, Hot and Cold,” in Kuznick and Gilbert, *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, 15.

¹⁶ FP, “Millionaires Added to ‘Freedom’ Backers,” *The Gazette and Daily* (York, PA), 16 October 1947, page 2. Newspapers.com. Greg Bradsher, “The Freedom Train and the Contagion of Liberty, 1947-1949,” Rediscovering Black History, US National Archives, 19 September 2017. <https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/2017/09/19/the-freedom-train-and-the-contagion-of-liberty-1947-1949>; Little, “The Freedom Train,” 48.

noted the sponsorship of captains of industry, but highlighted support from the Federal Council of Churches, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Kiwanis, and Jewish War veterans; as Fried put it, the needle of the social compass “generally pointed to Wall Street and Madison Avenue.”¹⁷ The train represented a broad coalition of concerns; above all they sought unity and were concerned about popular morale, but each related the concept of the train (and later, its message) to political concerns that reveal the fragmentary nature of the consensus, but also its boundaries.

DESIGN, OPERATIONS, AND ADVERTISING

The choices of locomotives for the trains illustrate the themes their creators believed would resonate the most in their specific Cold War environment; loyalty and modernism for the 1947 train and competing definitions of unity for 1975. Analyzing the locomotives matters because few to no historians analyze the trains themselves beyond noting their length and type; such omissions ignore that the physical designs of the train were newsworthy items that the train’s organizers could leverage as tangible evidence of the success or truthfulness of the mythologies promoted on the train. The 1947-1949 train was powered by an American Locomotive Company/General Electric PA-1 passenger diesel locomotive that ALCo donated to the AHF.¹⁸ The choice of an Alco-GE diesel is significant; during the war, Alco’s exported US Army locomotives became the technological basis of the Soviets’ postwar diesel fleet.¹⁹ In 1946 GE started producing electric locomotives for export to the USSR; the State Department

¹⁷ “Freedom Train Makes Stop at 300 Large Cities,” *San Bernardino County Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), 27 February 1948, 21. Newspapers.com.

¹⁸ “Giant Locomotive Powers Train,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Pittsburgh, PA), 14 Sept. 1948 (second section), 18, proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/1856850081?accountid=15053; Larry M. Wines, “The 1947-1949 Freedom Train Epilogue Part I: Disposition of the Train’s Equipment,” *The Story of the 1947-1949 Freedom Train*, Accunen Media, n.d. freedomtrain.org/freedom-train-story-09-epilogue-01.htm.

American Locomotive Company was a steam and diesel locomotive manufacturer that provided the shell, frame and engine for the PA-1, while General Electric provided the turbocharger and electrical equipment. The two companies, however, also independently produced other products, such as GE’s electric locomotives.

¹⁹ J. Parker Lamb, “Developments Beyond La Grange,” in *Evolution of the American Diesel Locomotive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 66.

cancelled the order in 1948, and the locomotives would be resold to US railroads, but not before acquiring the nickname “Little Joe” (Stalin), symbolically tying them to the Cold War.²⁰ Thus, in addition to competitive incentives (rival General Motors had its streamlined locomotive leading its technological demonstration “Train of Tomorrow”), the Alco-GE consortium may have seen the Freedom Train as an opportunity to rehabilitate their images after selling locomotives to the USSR, as suggested by frequent references to the locomotive’s patriotic paint scheme in promotional stories.²¹ More broadly, however, Alco’s choice to provide and promote a diesel instead of the steam locomotives that were their best-known product suggests they were influenced by citizens’ and AHF leadership’s perceptions of diesels as more modern, which started with the introduction of diesel passenger trains during the Great Depression in an attempt to boost ridership.²² Newspapers highlighted the locomotive’s reliability, its ventilated cab for the engineer (as opposed to hot steam locomotive cabs), how the locomotive was the result of a lengthy development process (i.e. not haphazard), and also referenced the country’s first commercially successful diesel, which was built by the consortium.²³ This emphasis on technological improvement and worker comfort reflects the American ideation of technological progress as evidence of capitalism’s superiority in competition with the USSR.²⁴ Thus, even in locomotive selection the train reflected the articulation and “heating up” of the Cold War.

²⁰ Jeff Wilson, “Ask Trains: Little Joe Electrics,” *Trains Magazine* 66, no. 1 (January 2005). ProQuest, proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/206636321?accountid=15053.

²¹ “Giant Locomotive Powers Train,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. It should be noted that Alco’s previous attempt at a passenger diesel before the war was marred by poor reliability, so competitive pressures from their rival EMD are probably the primary motive.

²² Jeffery W. Schramm, *Out of Steam: Dieselization and American Railroads* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 17. Schramm describes how the Santa Fe and Baltimore & Ohio railroads upgraded their name passenger trains with diesels as a result of favorable public reaction to new streamliners pioneered by other roads.

²³ “Giant Locomotive Powers Train,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

²⁴ David C. Engerman, “Ideology and Origins of the Cold War” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume I: Origins, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Anne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33.

Beyond physical advertisement, the Foundation's ads also point to articulating a consensus vision of citizenship. One of the Advertising Council ads included in a newspaper's Freedom Train supplement featured a picture of a sea-based atomic bomb test with the caption "Let Someone Else Do It" and the statement:

Sorry, folks, but it's not that easy. It's still a tough, warlike world...and we just can't sit back and forget about atomic bombs. Haven't you noticed that freedom has been going out like a light in country after country on the other side of the world?²⁵

The blurb went on to suggest that for the safety of their children and to promote peace, citizens should actively demonstrate their freedom (e.g. by visiting the train) as a showcase to other "bewildered" countries. The ad ran in March 1948, and the Soviets would not explode their first atomic bomb until August 1949.²⁶ The implication that citizens need to remain heavily involved in the government to avoid ruination, simultaneously building up and weakening the credibility of the institution; if the country is only as strong as its degree of participation and knowledge, what happens when participation fails to meet expectations? The ad's reference to freedom's decline elsewhere likely alluded to the descent of the "Iron Curtain;" as such, the calls for domestic involvement only are intriguing; Truman administration officials originally looked to only "inferentially" indict communism.²⁷ During World War II, the Advertising Council largely coopted the government's victory campaign, believing that if the country lost the war, capitalism as a way of life would cease to exist; thus, they ran their own "Victory Train" of war booty, and led massive bond drives. The Council's ad references both the public's fear of the destruction of the bomb, but also invokes pride in America's sole technical monopoly, and seems to suggest

²⁵ LR Samuels (sponsor), "Freedom is Everyone's Job," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 23 March 1948, 24. Newspapers.com, Accessed 17 January 2022.

²⁶ Radio Free Europe, "The First Soviet Nuclear Blast: Pride Turns to Tragedy 70 Years Later," youtube.com, 29 August 2019, youtube.com/watch?v=J0sPNAM919o.

²⁷ Fried, "Precious Freight," 30.

that citizens should get involved in democracy at home to avoid the need for using the bomb in defense. Thus, the ad linked the formation of a domestic consensus politically with the country's international security.

THE DOCUMENTS

The cars of the Freedom Train were named "Learn," "Think," and "Act" in promotional advertising, but the selection of documents had implicit themes that cut across these categories that indicated the train's purpose of mobilizing citizens to reshape their domestic lives to champion their freedoms (most of the World War II documents were in the third car under the heading "fight for freedom"). These implicit themes in the document selections reflected the goals of each of the Freedom Train's sponsors (political consensus/unity, rights of business/consumer citizenship).

Unity and harmony

From the *Federalist Papers*, the Foundation chose to highlight Federalist No. 5, in which Jay argues that a union of the states is preferable to separate nations sharing the same continent, because the European powers would exploit sectional interests to keep the continent divided.²⁸ In the train's catch-all section was a letter from John Ray to John Trumbull calling for the "Americanization" of the population to protect against "foreign intrigues." The train included several documents (including a 1766 letter) condemning slavery, but no others from the Civil War era aside from a letter from General Lee accepting his college presidency, promoted with a quote stating that each citizen has a duty to restore peace and harmony.²⁹ There were multiple copies of the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th Amendment, and a letter from the colonial

²⁸ John Jay, "Federalist No. 5: The Same Subject Continued: Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence," *The Federalist Papers*.

²⁹ "Full List of Exhibits," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Pittsburgh, PA), 14 September 1948, 20. ProQuest.

period by Henry Laurens denouncing slavery as antithetical to the Declaration, and promotional printings of the document list noted that while the Proclamation was a “military measure,” it reflected a “climax” of “abhorrence” to the institution.³⁰ While not exactly an overt repudiation of the “War of Northern Aggression” narrative argued in the South, the weight of documents condemning slavery suggests more than mere cultural pluralist pandering to Black visitors.

When a southern newspaper discussed the documents on the train, it made an addition to the stock language about moral repugnance seen in Harrisburg, claiming that a letter by Lincoln was on the train, in which the President stated that if he could save the Union without freeing the slaves he would do so.³¹ The fact that the paper felt compelled to make a false or undocumented addition to the train further suggests that the Foundation either took a subtle stance in adopting the dominant Civil War narrative, or reflected the historical biases of its sponsors. Why not make a full stance? For the same reason that the documents on slavery were grouped with a letter from Lee under the heading “Emancipation and Reconciliation,” the train’s creators sought to take a middle ground and articulate a pluralist history that would unify the country. An unrepentant Southerner would see the “military measure” text and Lee’s letter and feel that the train reflected the “Lost Cause” history they treasured (and thus be more supportive of the train’s call to mobilization), while moderate northerners would see the summary of Lee’s letter and be impressed that even a hardcore southerner fighting for slavery was willing to put aside his differences after the war, and thus be more willing to support “unity and harmony.” All of these inclusions, as the repeated instances of documents warning of “foreign intrigue” suggest, were

³⁰ “Emancipation and Reconciliation” in “Freedom Train a Shrine of Documents Sacred to Democracy,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA), 15 November 1947, page 8. The CPUSA did rightly notice that there were no Reconstruction documents on board the train, despite their reflection of equality supposedly at the heart of the Declaration of Independence.

³¹ “Elizabethton H [title cut off],” *Elizabethton Star* (Elizabethton, TN), 1 October 1948, 6. Newspapers.com.

aimed at justifying the formation of domestic unity in the face of a perceived threat from the USSR, and came at the cost of marginalizing the Black narrative.

Modernity and Technology

The 1947 train is typically recalled as the train of documents, while the 1975 successor is recalled as the train of Americana;³² however, the 1947 train still featured odd memorabilia inclusions that pointed to a bland, individualistically patriotic message as stand-ins for other triumphal myths of American history beyond democracy's national potency. In the train's catch-all "American Memorabilia" section, the train included a pension claim from Deborah Gannett, alias Robert Shurtleff, the (now-famous) woman who enlisted in the Continental Army, a model or design for David Bushnell's unsuccessful Revolutionary War submarine, and several documents relating to Ben Franklin's career.³³ Sampson's request was not included with the three documents commemorating women's right to vote, suggesting that their enlistment was not intended as a women's liberationist message, but rather as a demonstration of an extraordinary act of an individual willing to abandon their 'natural role' to fight for freedom; the Foundation expressed anxiety about women looking for a role outside the home ("freedom is everyone's job").³⁴ The inclusion of Bushnell's model and tributes to Franklin suggest allusions to the American myth about the country's technological prowess, reinforced by the fact that the streamlined diesel locomotive pulling the train was billed as a brand-new technological shift. In short, in addition to reinforcing a narrative of democracy triumphant, the train also, as a matter of course, reinforced other myths of American exceptionalism and individualism. This narrative served to build ideological certainty for the US's course of action; the Cold War would

³² Adam Burns, "American Freedom Train (1975-1976)," *American Rails*, revised 2 March 2022. Accessed 24 April 2022. american-rails.com/freedom.html.

³³ "Freedom Train a Shrine of Documents Sacred to Democracy," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 15 November 1947, 8.

³⁴ Little, "Freedom Train," 37.

ultimately become a contest of ideologies, reinforced by citizen and officials' beliefs in America's messianic potential.³⁵

Cold War or Not?

Both Fried and Little argue that the train was only partly motivated by Cold War concerns, and that domestic factors played at least an equal role in the motivations of its sponsors as concerns about foreign "isms."³⁶ The train was not explicitly an anticommunist tool, but sponsors portrayed communism as antithetical to the United States' style of democracy. Fried posits that the train portrayed a more emulative "city on a hill" approach to democracy than an interventionist model. While the train and advertising were geared toward encouraging civic mobilization and the understanding of rights to better support and exercise them, there were still plenty of documents that were both outwardly-facing and that, as presented by the Foundation, left open the possibility of interpretation in favor of an interventionists model such as the containment theory articulated on the basis of Kennan's "Long Telegram" contemporary with the train. In a section titled "Freedom Follows the Flag," the train included letters from Thaddeus Kosciuszko (billed as "'the George Washington of Poland'") and Francisco de Miranda ("'the Father of South American Freedom'"); the former of which expressed Poland's gratitude to the United States, and the latter asked for America's support for freedom in South America, as France did for the colonies.³⁷ While admittedly only two documents of a collection largely focused on domestic rights, these two letters posit that America's democracy is respected globally (in a region behind the Iron Curtain), and that the world would welcome US assistance in maintaining democracy. At the same time, the train took pains to articulate American

³⁵ David C. Engerman, "Ideology and Origins of the Cold War" in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume I: Origins, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Anne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33.

³⁶ Fried, "Precious Freight," 32.

³⁷ "Freedom Train a Shrine of Documents Sacred to Democracy," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 15 November 1947, 8.

exceptionalism not just in freedoms, but also in colonialism, highlighting documents that encouraged democratic education in, and eventually the independence of, the Philippines in response to their service in WWII, the abolition of slavery on Guam after it was ceded to the US, and a letter from Teddy Roosevelt rejecting annexation of Cuba.³⁸

Finally, the train included several documents on the theme of “American-Canadian” and “American-French” friendship (and a document in which the King of Siam offered to send elephants to Lincoln in gratitude for books he received); in some cases, the document extolled the virtues of democracy, but in other cases they were merely letters of thanks or a treaty used as a springboard. These documents, often included in the “American Memorabilia” section of the train (the “Act” car) were possibly aimed at countering isolationism and encouraging a more active stance against communism; a 1947 comic strip (on the same opinions page as a train criticism, but not about the train) suggests that nationalists were worried about isolationism as a communist ploy overtaking campaign politics.³⁹ All of these documents suggest that the train was not solely focused on domestic citizenship, but had at least as a secondary goal (elaborated on in speeches as the Cold War chilled) of rallying the population behind the idea of both maintain democracy to serve as an external reflection and to intervene where necessary.

FREE ENTERPRISE

Little describes the train as reinforcing a consumerist, free-enterprise vision that argued that abundance and choice were new metrics for the health of a country. The train was both educational and ‘sellabatory.’⁴⁰ While there was not a section on the train devoted to “freedom of enterprise,” in cities across the country the newspaper supplements would carry one or two

³⁸ “Freedom Train a Shrine of Documents Sacred to Democracy,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 15 November 1947, 8.

³⁹ Reg Manning, “Gate Crasher,” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* (Lubbock, TX), 18 January 1948, 38. Newspapers.com, accessed 17 January 2022.

⁴⁰ Little, “Freedom Train,” 49.

editorials about how the train was prioritizing individual freedom, and tried to minimize the stigma of big business sponsorship by claiming that labor unions and religious organizations were also “private enterprise” and that the corporations were not sponsor, but merely footing the bill for Clark’s train.⁴¹ In this, the train mirrored civil defense programs, which were essentially designed to shape and control public fear of nuclear weapons to maintain extant levels of consumption and the stability of the system.⁴² While there were no overt denunciations of the New Deal, another editorial argued that Americans “were free to choose between slums and decent housing, between civic vice and civic virtue,” a statement that, assuming the writer had some knowledge of the demography of poverty and housing in the US, contained implicit assumptions about minorities, but also was an implicit suggestion that Americans would not need too much of a helping hand if they had freedom; they could choose to be needy. Hagiographies of commercial development printed in the supplements repeatedly noted the necessity of a national bank and stable financial systems. Labor agitation and wages were glossed over, except to note that the AFL and CIO were part of the AHF; Louis Novins and the Foundation would actively exclude documents, such as the Wagner Act that created the National Labor Relations Board, because of supposed controversy over the legitimacy of the labor provisions.⁴³ In short, the train was, perhaps expectedly, a selling of capitalism (closely associated with innovation) as much as democracy; the unlimited expansion and progress of the former was taken as a given (i.e. no ethics of rationing or conservation).

The Freedom Train, as noted previously, was bankrolled largely by captains of industry and the media. Their efforts with the train were part of a broader context of “bulwarking”

⁴¹ “Freedom of Enterprise,” *Ogden Standard Examiner*, 23 March 1948, 22. Newspapers.com.

⁴² Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁴³ Little, “Freedom Train,” 49.

democracy and the capitalist system: The Illinois Central Railroad, in addition to circulating the AHF's "Good Citizen" publication, distributed its own books on the "facts of the business system" and films on economic subjects.⁴⁴ Corporations framed consumption as an inherently patriotic act; while the train did not feature products (and indeed, there was opposition both from the government and public to "hawkers" selling merchandise near the train), the train's emphasis on individual effort in maintaining freedom, and active citizenship ("don't be a backseat driver" one ad proclaimed), all encouraged the public to pursue a vision of freedom less based on group rights and more based on individual consumption (such as the war bonds on the train).⁴⁵ And of course, local businesses co-opted the slogan "Freedom is everybody's job" in the newspaper supplements, implicitly suggesting that the purchase of farm supplies, for example, was a patriotic responsibility (fig. 3). Thus, businesses articulated an early version of abundance and consumption as part of the train's documents and promotion.⁴⁶

RECEPTION

The Daily Worker

America's population of communists, partially represented by the Communist Party of the USA and its newspaper, the "Daily *Worker*," argued that the train embodied corporate capture of America, glorified the rights presented on the train while arguing they were not applied in the status quo, and argued that the narrative presented had omissions that, if included, would present communism more favorably; in short, they critiqued the train, but only to an extent that would not put them totally at odds with "moderate" thinking, reflecting the operation

⁴⁴ "Men, Money, Materials, and Management: An Outline of the Principles and Practices Which Make the 100-year-old Illinois Central a Successful Enterprise," *Railway Age* 130, no. 7 (12 February 1951), 101 - 113: 106.

⁴⁵ "Hawkers Nuisance on Freedom Train: Tour Backers Warn of Unauthorized Activities in Letter to Governor," *Chattanooga Daily Times* 25 November 1947, 15. Newspapers.com.

⁴⁶ Little, "Freedom Train," 37.

of “consensus” culture and showing its limits. Prior to the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, the Communist Party of America’s leadership received direct recommendations and reprimands on its political positions from Soviet representatives. After the abrogation, however, contacts with Soviet officials declined, and CPA leaders sometimes resorted to ‘Kreminologist’-esque analyses of Party statements and articles to discern the USSR’s desired stance.⁴⁷ The Communist Party’s political actions, therefore, may be considered at least partially responsive to cultural and political factors within the US, but would also reflect what leadership thought the USSR’s desired response was, an important consideration given that the Soviet Union never examined the Freedom Train in an English-language publication for international consumption. Fried notes that the communists critiqued the train for its big-business connections, indicative of the train’s claim to the center; while this conclusion is accurate, it glosses over some of the day-to-day subtleties in the Communists’ coverage. Analyzing the Daily *Worker*’s several articles referencing the Freedom Train (and the mainstream reaction to them) thus provides insights into what the CPA viewed as acceptable commentary on the crystallizing postwar cultural consensus, and what the mainstream press perceived as accepted cultural values.

On September 5th, 1947, the paper criticized what it called labor’s exclusion from participation on the document committee, arguing that business interests prevented the inclusion of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) on the train and pulled quotes from a letter sent by Senator Adolph J. Sabath to Tom Clark as justification:

“One may wonder, however, if the topic is embarrassing, Hartley act which, among other inequities, outlaws the institution of the closed shop, which long antedates the foundation of the republic; or if the

⁴⁷ Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, “Background,” in *The Secret World of American Communism*, eds. Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

imposing list of bankers and corporation lawyers composing the documents committee felt that labor freedom was unimportant.”⁴⁸

The paper followed up on September 16th when Clark agreed to involve “qualified people” from the AFL and CIO in document selection, and noted Clark’s defense that the documents were not fully selected.⁴⁹ The *Worker’s* thread implies an implicit endorsement of at least part of their criticism by the “mainstream” left, but the short length of the follow-up article also suggests a message compromise; instead of continuing to critique Clark for not making further inclusions or moves against the sponsors, the paper tacitly accepted that the unions’ inclusion would solve the issue. Hence, the *Worker* suggests a limitation on the scope of consensus discourse; they perceived that a public audience would not respond as favorably to continued criticism because their interests were nominally represented.

On that same day, the *Worker* published an article that summarized a telegram sent from the head of Philadelphia’s Communist part, denying that there was a Communist plot against the Freedom Train and claiming that local officials had no knowledge of such a plot, concluding that the Communists would continue to fight “for the true meaning of the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation.”⁵⁰ The fact that mainstream newspapers decided to run stories about a potential plot from the outlawed political party may reflect a public anxiety or expectation (that would sell) of increased violence and Communist agitation in general, reflecting the general unease and fear of the postwar environment that prompted the formation of a train. Furthermore, the CPUSA’s decision to metaphorically “wrap itself in the flag” by declaring that it was the true defender of civil rights, and had the true meaning of the founding documents (an exercise in establishing legitimacy) is again expected for a political

⁴⁸ Alden Todd, “Wall Street Hijacks the Freedom Train,” *The Daily Worker*, 5 September 1946, 6. ProQuest.

⁴⁹ “Unions to be Consulted on Freedom Train,” *The Daily Worker*, 16 September 1947, 8. ProQuest.

⁵⁰ “Freedom Train ‘Plot’ Bared as Fraud by Philly CP,” *Daily Worker*, 12 September 1947. ProQuest.

party on the fringe, but the fact that the CPUSA's idealists thought that a patriotic play would win supporters suggests that the public was interested in patriotic, unifying symbols, not in a paradigm shift of revolution. In short, the CPUSA appears to have maintained its overall ideals while moderating its message in the postwar environment.

When the train visited the *Worker's* home city of New York September 24th, the paper encouraged all citizens to visit the train, but argued that the freedoms presented were under attack, as demonstrated by federal loyalty purges and hounding of the AFL and CIO, and reasoned that the Founding Fathers and Andrew Jackson would dislike Clark and Chase National Bank president Winthrop Aldrich because of Jackson's hatred of monopolizing bankers. The *Worker* further linked the train to the trial of the Party's secretary, and used the Founding Fathers' words to argue that the CPUSA had a right to revolution, a new social order where capitalists were not in control.⁵¹ One cannot read too much into an advocacy of revolution as indicative of some public dissatisfaction with calls for unity; a revolution was part of Communist ideology, and the train's running was a platform for the Party to reiterate a standard historical argument reflecting its tendency to sometimes misread the contemporary political moment; indeed, while future articles would continue the criticism of the train's business sponsorship and frequently note the irony of segregation when there were antislavery documents on board, there were no further references to revolution and a softening of tone, suggesting that the Party perceived (and for once, acted upon) a negative reaction to calls for disruption of the consensus.⁵²

On the day of the train's visit, the *Worker* ran an almost normal article, noting the thousands of visitors, the precautions that protected the documents and the origins of the donated

⁵¹ "Freedom Train Passengers," *The Daily Worker*, 24 Sept. 1947. page 7.

⁵² "In the Negro Press: Freedom Train in the South," *Daily Worker*, 25 Sept. 1947, 6.

train cars. Criticism was muted; the author printed a comment from high schoolers noting that Jackson was a good speller in contrast to textbooks that lied about Jackson's illiteracy (the great champion of the common man), and noted the apparent incongruities of General Lee's letter and Dixie playing over the train's speakers (glorifications of the Jim Crow South). The article shared the page with a reprinting of a document arguing for the separation of Church and state in Rhode Island.⁵³ The sidelining of criticism may reflect that the press reacted negatively to Communist critiques of the train, and that the articulated consensus limited criticism of a train that theoretically embodied the true virtues of the country.

Black Activists – The Train and Segregation

The reaction of Black individuals to the train revealed the limits of its appeal to consensus. The 1947 train was nominally apolitical in messaging; its organizers attempted to avoid selecting documents or making statements that favored liberal or conservative outcomes, and, had the Foundation been able to, would have avoided bringing up the issue of segregation altogether.⁵⁴ Initial reactions of the Black community were warm but guarded; Walter White of the NAACP and Lester Granger of the Urban League both endorsed the train's message of freedom against external ideologies, but worried about "'native totalitarianism'" in the South.⁵⁵ It took concerted pressure from these organizations to get the head of the Tuskegee Institute, Fred Douglass Patterson, on the board of trustees.⁵⁶ Black individuals were on the document committee, and both the literature and news media, such as *Pittsburgh Courier* writers and poet Langston Hughes, were skeptical of the train's message when segregation was still very much

⁵³ Arnold Sroog, "Thousands See Freedom Train Documents," *Daily Worker*, 26 September 1947, Page 5.

⁵⁴ Fried, "Precious Freight," 37.

⁵⁵ Walter White, quoted in Stuart J. Little, "Precious Freight: The Freedom Train," 55.

⁵⁶ ANP, "Prexy Named Trustee of 'Freedom Train,'" *Philadelphia Tribune* 25 October 1947, page 5. ProQuest; Little, "Precious Freight: The Freedom Train," 55.

enforced.⁵⁷ Once the Foundation announced its policy of no segregation, the Black press became much more enthusiastic, and praised both the train, its message, and the Southern mayors such as Atlanta's Hartsfield that mandated integrated viewings, though they were still on the watch for subtle segregation.⁵⁸ Cleveland's *Call and Post* would encourage its readers to adopt the train's message of "participation," "pride in our past," and "obligations to maintain our freedoms," and the train's visit became cause to celebrate individual freedoms, integration, while still serving as a reminder of the need for activism in the South.⁵⁹ In short, when the train adapted its message in response to local conditions and to Black activism, its consensus of unity and freedoms largely won over otherwise marginalized Black Americans.

The train would have this most liberal moment unintentionally, but its workings illustrated the government's quest for unity and the influence of the Cold War most strongly. Civil rights groups heard that the Freedom Train was considering releasing a policy mandating desegregation at all stops, and lobbied the American Heritage Foundation, the train's sponsor, to make its policy public.⁶⁰ When Memphis and Birmingham declined to allow their lines to mix before the door to the train, and made a public stance against integration, both cities were bypassed (a bold move). Some scholars credit the adverse publicity with the AHF's decision to make a stand, while others suggest it was the AHF's desire to present America as a "City on a

⁵⁷ "No Negroes on Freedom Train," *Pittsburgh Courier* (City Edition, Pittsburgh, PA), 27 Sept. 1947, 21. ProQuest; Stetson Kennedy, "After Freedom Train...the Usual Cannibalism?" *Pittsburgh Courier* (City Edition, Pittsburgh, PA), 20 Dec. 1947, 4. ProQuest, [proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/202187457?accountid=15053](https://www.proquest.com/docview/202187457?accountid=15053); Lucius Jones, "Arrest 4 Freedom Train Spectators," *Pittsburgh Courier* (City Edition, Pittsburgh, PA), 17 Jan. 1948, 1. ProQuest.

⁵⁸ ANP, "Atlantans Prepare to Greet Freedom Train," *Philadelphia Tribune* 18 November 1947, 16. ProQuest; "NAACP Probes Rumors of Bias on Freedom Train," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 21 October 1947, 1. ProQuest.

⁵⁹ CHL, "Here Comes the Freedom Train," *Cleveland Call and Post* (Cleveland, OH), 28 August 1948, 4B. ProQuest; "Negro, White Legionnaires Guard Train in Nashville," *Cleveland Call and Post*, 24 January 1948, 1B. ProQuest; William C. Kernan, "The Common Defense: Our American Heritage," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 15 March 1949, 4. ProQuest.

⁶⁰ Laurie B. Green, "Night Train, Freedom Train," in *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007): 128 - 129.

Hill again,” a beacon of freedoms.⁶¹ The adverse publicity rationale likely reflects concerns about showing a united front to the Soviets. The other explanation, AHF’s claim of an American “patent on freedom,” fits into the US ideological articulation of itself as a messianic crusader for freedom.⁶² Finally, even racist opposition to the train was grounded in the Cold War; the AHF’s seeming “imposition” of integration was seen as a plot by “Communist Jews.”⁶³ Hence, the 1948-1949 train illustrates the pervasiveness of Cold War thought within both the government and the broader population.

The “Mainstream” Public

The mainstream white press response to the train was largely rapturous. Some children were disappointed by a lack of souvenirs or the wait and duration of the train’s stay, but by and large seem enthusiastic about visiting the train (after all, who does not like a field trip?).⁶⁴ Crowds of people greeted the train in many cities, usually numbered in the thousands, with lines stretching multiple blocks four-abreast.⁶⁵ An editorial delighted in the gala atmosphere of the train’s visit, linking neighborliness between the farmers and college students waiting in line with the polite “personifying” inquiries sprinkled throughout the train’s documents, before concluding that the train and visitors’ attitudes gave folks the “feeling of security in America” that existed before the US was associated with strikes and racial discrimination.⁶⁶ The gala, belief in restoring America to nation of friendly people, and desire to instill pride all supported the creation of a unifying, patriotic pridefulness, a recentering toward positive virtues. The use of

⁶¹ Little, 59; Fried, 38.

⁶² Engerman, “Ideology and Origins of the Cold War,” 25.

⁶³ Henry Hill to Mayor Pleasants, Jr., Quoted in Green, “Night Train, Freedom Train,” 122.

⁶⁴ Willsie E. Brisbin, “Vermont Parade,” *Vermont Standard* (Woodstock, VT), 23 October 1947, 2. Newspapers.com, accessed 19 January 2022.

⁶⁵ Fried, 40; “Thousands Visit Freedom Train on Last Day,” *Washington Post*, 23 January 1949, M8. ProQuest.

⁶⁶ B. H., “By Nature the American is a Friendly Cuss,” *Eugene Daily Emerald*, 6 April 1948, 2. Historic Oregon Newspapers (University of Oregon).

“security” suggests that Americans felt more than confusion at the wave of strikes and dissatisfaction, but rather a fundamental questioning of values, a remarkable fear for a country that arguably won a totalizing, ideologically charged war. Indeed, this confusion seems similar to the questioning that accompanied the loss of the Vietnam War/Watergate and would inspire the second Freedom Train. A letter to the editor of a Chattanooga paper praised the courage of the city’s mayor in accepting the Foundation’s desegregation mandate, praised the cities’ Black residents for turning out, and concluded with “So long, old Freedom Train – take your message of brotherhood, Christianity, and democracy to all the good people of this great country.”⁶⁷ In short, the train’s message of consensus and perceived common values went over very well with its main audience.

Criticism and the Boundaries of Discourse

There was criticism of the train, and not just from the expected source in the form of the Communist Party. A newspaper in Texas claimed that the train’s route was “stupid,” bypassing small towns in West Texas in favor of a more “efficient” routing between San Antonio that “cheated” the public and was inaccessible to West Texans.”⁶⁸ The article’s use of “cheated” and overall level of offense suggests an expectation that the train would visit the greatest number of Americans possible, and a strong desire to see the train and its documents. Similarly, when the Foundation only scheduled Oakland, CA. for a day’s stop and the Mayor’s office suggested a soft prohibition on the visits of high school students because of the train’s limited capacity, a mountain of rage appeared in the letters to the editor; parents thought that children should have the first priority because they were the future leaders of a country under threat from Communism

⁶⁷ Walter David Parks, “The Freedom Train: Writer Calls It a Demonstration of Democracy in Action,” *Chattanooga Daily Times* (Chattanooga, TN), 8 January 1948, 6. Newspapers.com.

⁶⁸ “Freedom Train Routing in Texas Stupid; Public Cheated, Area Given ‘Go-by,’” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* (Lubbock, TX), 18 January 1948, 38. Newspapers.com.

that had gone to war over its superior ideals, and furthermore, excluding children from the train could hamper the national fight against delinquency (one of the factors that motivated Clark to organize a unifying project).⁶⁹ Students argued they should know how history “really happened” and asked for dismissal from school to see the train.⁷⁰ In their response to these letters, the Mayor’s Committee blamed the delay on the master schedule. The bureaucrats implied that the Foundation was ignorant of local demographics resulting in surrounding towns that got an equivalent stay, even so leading off with the statement remarks in the paper “have been interpreted as deprecating the whole project. Quite the opposite is true.”⁷¹ The implication is that in a span of one day (or perhaps a few days) there was either a surge in complaints about the letters, or a perception that there damage control was needed in advance of such criticism. In either case, this response further reflects the massive popular interest and support for the train, but also suggests that for a project that articulated a nationalizing vision of America, there were limits on the criticisms allowed, for fear of critiquing America as a whole. This is particularly reflected in the veiled critique of the Foundation’s planning for population, that was passed off as not criticism by the Mayor’s Committee. Other observations about the train were also framed in this oblique manner:

In its statement of principles, the Foundation says specifically that this is a nonpartisan project. Otherwise we might suspect Attorney General Tom Clark, Freedom Train’s government sponsor engineering a Democratic pass for this Republican stronghold. We have 50,000 Americans out here in Nassau [...] This

⁶⁹ Fried, 30.

⁷⁰ Ann Reilley, Margary Clark, Emily Death Elizabeth Reitz, B.D. Black, Margaret Baker, A.S. Hatch K. Best, Jr., Maxine Allen, “Letters to the Editor: Freedom Train Protests,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA), 14 March 1948, 76. Newspapers.com, accessed 17 January 2022.

⁷¹ Raymond Lawrence, “At Home and Abroad – On Visiting Freedom Train in Oakland,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA), 15 March 1948, 30.

is not meant as carping criticism of the Freedom Train idea. That sort of stuff can be left up to the Commies, who are yammering at it just as you might expect them to.⁷²

That is, only Republicans had the right to critique the train's execution. Fried notes that despite a perceived unity on issues of foreign policy, Democrats and Republicans were still opposed political parties on domestic issues.⁷³ The paper's above comment confirms that these considerations were still in play despite the mobilization for Cold War, but the paper's unwillingness to fully accuse the train of violating its nonpartisan ideal suggests that partisan considerations at least occasionally shunted backward in favor of supporting consensual projects that opposed communism. Speaking of, the paper's statement further suggests that there was already, in mid-1947, an expectation that the communists were inherently antipatriotic. Granted, this assumption had long cultural precedent, extending back at least as far as Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's raids in the 1920s, but there was very little apparent hesitation in reverting to communists as the enemy even after the Grand Alliance of World War II.

Criticism of the train, however, became much more pointed as one moved further out along the political spectrum. Anne Burrows Hamilton, possible descendent of Alexander and author of *Packaged Thinking for Women*, a political pamphlet arguing that the government was funneling pro-government-expansion and internationalist talking points to women's organizations, wrote an editorial to the New York Times criticizing an early list of the train's documents, claiming it featured a blank 'yellow dog' contract, and an important New Deal document corrected by FDR's Labor Secretary. She expressed displeasure that the train featured the writings of Jefferson, but none of Hamilton, and criticized the train for using the term

⁷² "Give It a L.I. Highball!" *Newsday*, 27 September 1947, 15. ProQuest.

⁷³ Little, 38.

“democracy” instead of “republic.”⁷⁴ As Little and Fried note, Justice Department aides had considered including the Wagner Act (guaranteeing the right to unionize) on the train, but ultimately the nonprofit Foundation leadership (mostly corporate leaders) nixed any documents relating to controversial topics or those “under current legislative consideration” including contemporary labor legislation in the interest of harmony.⁷⁵ Hamilton’s critique suggests observers assumed that what were in fact highly ideological and contested values did comprise a depoliticized common sense consensus, the ideas at play in making up the freedom trains documents were by no means settled nor universally acknowledged as the ‘best’ exemplars of the American system. Thus, even if Americans maintained a triumphant and a rapidly solidifying consensus on external Communist enemies, the highly ideological nature of the conflict guaranteed that any claims to ‘consensus’ would undermine any actual unity. Fried argues that criticism of the train from the right and left confirmed its position in the political middle. While praise from the center about the train’s contents does suggest there is some veracity in this statement, the criticisms that did emerge from the center about the train’s operation, and the way in which such criticism was phrased, does suggest that the Cold War pervaded the domestic sphere readily, in the form of both the consensus about the train’s triumphant, ideological narrative of a beacon and occasional crusader for freedom, the stifling or reframing of dissident opinions that question the purity of that consensus, and that the consensus required periodic rebuilding and renegotiation.

Railfans and the Train: The Interests and Limits

⁷⁴ Anne Burrows Hamilton, “The Freedom Train: List of Documents Criticized and Doubt Expressed as to its Intent,” *New York Times*, 26 June 1947, 22. ProQuest.

⁷⁵ Fried, “Precious Freight,” 34.

One subgroup of the public illustrates that while the train's consensus appeal was appealing to elites, the broader public did not always take notice. In the abstract, railfans are more likely to know about the train than the rest of the population, and though they may largely focus on the technical aspects of the train and/or railroading, their choices of commentary surrounding the train will still indicate the extent of the Cold War's cultural impact in the 1940s.

Surprisingly, given the economic conservatism of its audience often paired with moderate political conservatism, two of the leading railroad industry/railfan trade publications of the time, *Trains* and *Railway Age*, covered the train infrequently. Both publications noted the Association of American Railroads' announcement that the train had a perfect on-time record (or at least not mechanical or dispatching delays, things that would be the railroads' fault).⁷⁶ *Trains* magazine seemed to devote more attention (in column-inches) to the 1947 General Motors Train of Tomorrow, a cross-country diesel-powered train introducing a new design of passenger car created by GM, as well as showcase the abilities of GM's catalog of component parts (such as air conditioners).⁷⁷ *Trains* was and is intended for railroad enthusiasts, not just trade audiences, so their focus on the dome cars of the Train of Tomorrow over the converted equipment of the Freedom Train is at least partially explainable by their preference for newly-designed over quite common cars; however, it is still noteworthy that, unlike other outlets such as newspapers and even comic strips, *Trains* did not feel compelled to devote more coverage to the train and take a unique, railroad-oriented take on promoting freedom. The magazine was not shy about expressing an editorial view; it criticized the chairman of the C&O Railroad, for example, for his

⁷⁶ "Freedom Train has Perfect On-Time Record," *Railway Age* 126, no. 5 (29 January 1949), 39. ProQuest.

⁷⁷ David P. Morgan, "News and Editorial Comment: 'Train of Tomorrow' Schedule," *Trains*, June 1947, 4. Trains.com Unlimited Subscription Back Issue database, accessed 18 January 2022; Jeffery Schramm, "Review of *The Train of Tomorrow* by Ric Morgan," *Technology and Culture* 49, no. 2 (April 2008), 475. JSTOR. Though GM sold components for passenger cars, it was not a car producer, and offered the design royalty-free.

outspokenness on passenger amenities instead of what the magazine felt was the real issue; government taxation and support for rail's competitors.⁷⁸ However, the magazine only subtly commented on political matters; it ran a statement from a railroad chairman, for example, noting that Truman's close win would likely result in more day-trip and coach tickets for the inauguration instead of private cars, subtly suggesting that Dewey was preferred by the monied interests or that Truman was more of a populist candidate.⁷⁹ Thus, the magazine's choice to deemphasize the Freedom Train in favor of the Train of Tomorrow suggests that its attempt to redefine American culture around stoic rights, responsibilities, and freedoms was less interesting than technological innovation and material comfort; civics lost out to marketing.

Railway Age devoted more attention to the train (including a two-page description of its route and the AHF's mission), but its coverage largely focused on leveraging the train for industry causes. An article discussing the back-and-forth on a Congressional antitrust bill, featured an unrelated picture of a visitor to the train examining the Declaration of Independence.⁸⁰ The magazine also included a photo feature at the end of the train's tour noting that the locomotive received a special plaque commemorating its trip before being sold to a new owner and repainted.⁸¹ No mention was made of the locomotive as something worth saving; instead, Alco's desire for profit by reselling the unit was prefaced over commemoration.

The almost gratuitous inclusion of Freedom Train mentions suggests that the train was more important to the magazine than it was for *Trains*, and possibly that it was thus more important for railroad business leaders as well. The choice to include Freedom Train imagery in

⁷⁸ Editors, "Memo to Robert R. Young," *Trains* (February 1948), 2.

⁷⁹ "News and Editorial Comment: Election Changes Plans," *Trains* (January 1949), 10.

⁸⁰ "House Passes Bullwinkle Bill," *Railway Age* 124, no. 21 (22 May 1948), 43. ProQuest.

⁸¹ "Plaque for Freedom Train Locomotive," *Railway Age* 126, no. 18 (30 April 1949), 18. ProQuest; Todd Schannuth, ed. "Freedom Train Locomotive 1776," *The Story of the 1949-1949 Freedom Train*, themetrains.com, n.d. Accessed 27 February 2022. freedomtrain.org/freedom-train-consist-1-pa1-locomotive-1776.htm. The plaque ceremony included the Girl Scouts of Schenectady.

seemingly unrelated articles may be an attempt to link the train's message with the issues railroads had with government. The magazine was usually neither pro-labor nor pro-regulation, so a corporately designed train that focused on abstract freedoms (versus redistributive freedoms) and that could be leveraged to promote a narrative of railroads as well-run enterprises (low accidents, high on-time rates, trusted to handle cargo safely), who, if left to their own devices by government could be much more effective, was worth promoting. The inclusion of the plaque photo is an unusual (for *Railway Age*) focus on the fate of a specific locomotive, likely to play up the railroad industry and big corporations' contributions to the effort; the plaque text notes that the locomotive operated in all forty-eight states and was donated by its parent company.⁸²

Taken together, the fact that the train's anticommunist message was more important to business-focused folks than the more general railfan public represented by *Trains* suggests that the train was a business mobilization as much as a government mobilization, and that the train's version of the ideal public found its greatest appeal among those who were not necessarily in that public, i.e. the heads of the railroads and other corporations who sought to reinforce their status.

CONCLUSION

The escalation of hostilities with the USSR and concerns about domestic unrest following the end of World War II led government leaders to devise a project mobilizing the public in service of a new model of international relations, by articulating a new set of cultural priorities for citizens that would favor unity and political consensus over factional concerns of ethnicity, race, and political persuasion, using a triumphant version of history and idealized concept of participatory democracy as the teaching tool. In an opening generated by political division, businesses would use their support of the train to articulate a vision of democracy focused on

⁸² Todd Schannuth, ed. "Freedom Train Locomotive 1776," *Freedomtrain.org*, Accunen Media, n.d. freedomtrain.org/freedom-train-consist-1-pa1-locomotive-1776.htm. Accessed 27 February 2022,

limited rights and consumer participation in addition to democracy; pro-statist, but decidedly not in favor of extensive government involvement, and minimizing the legitimacy of labor's involvement. The public's largely rapturous reception and criticism of those who critiqued the train showed the broad acceptance of the discourse., but also illustrated its boundaries; the criticisms of the train were not papered over by its message; in time, these concerns would return to the foreground during the 1960s and Vietnam, and an American Freedom Train would attempt to once again shape a consensus to promote unity.

Chapter 2: Conservatives and Corporate Get Their Mojo Back: the 1976 American Freedom Train

On March 14th, 1975, while rolling toward Salt Lake City, the crew of the American Freedom Train received word that senior Freedom Train Foundation executives were flying out to Salt Lake City to open the train's two-day stay there with a few special guests. The participants of the "Handshake in Space," American astronauts Tom Stafford, Vance Brand and Donald Slayton, and Soviet cosmonauts Alexie Leonov, Valerie Kubasov and their wives, would be honored guests in Utah.⁸³ These sort of last-minute changes were not unusual, and the tired crewmembers relied on standard VIP tour protocols to handle the ceremonies, which were attended by extra security and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.⁸⁴ Conservative Democrat Frank E. Moss, one of the train's original supporters and chair of NASA's appropriating committee, the wife of Utah's governor, and the heads of NASA and the Latter Day Saints Church were on hand

⁸³ "Apollo Soyuz Team Visits in Utah," *Sun-Chronicle* (Roy, Utah), 16 October 1975, 4. Newspapers.com; Tim Rivers, interview with Daniel Speer, Tampa, FL, 16 October 2021. HIST 495/496 notes, 9. In author's possession.

⁸⁴ John Persian, interview with Daniel Speer, Tampa, FL, 16 October 2021. HIST 495/496 notes, 22. In author's possession; Tim Rivers, interview with Daniel Speer, Tampa, FL, 16 October 2021. HIST 495/496 notes, 9 In author's possession; Robert H. Woody, "S.L. Hails Spacemen, Train Protest Fails," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 October 1975, 31. Newspapers.com.

when Stafford and Leonov cut the ribbon to open the train.⁸⁵ The cosmonauts toured the train, made remarks pledging to work for peace and freedom, and received Freedom Train medallions and 1-to-87-inch Lionel model train sets of the 1947 Freedom Train to add to their growing gift collection (fig. 4).⁸⁶ Enthusiastically promoted with a multi-page supplement in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the visit received mixed reviews, with some enthusing over the train's high-tech audio and visual displays, others critiquing the conveyor belt used to funnel people through the train and noting the unfavorable ratio of costs born by local governments.⁸⁷ The local chapter of Jeremy Rifkin's People's Bicentennial Committee (PBC) and the American Indian Movement (AIM) both demonstrated against the train. The Committee objected to the power of the train's corporate sponsors, glitzy displays, and expense to local government, while the latter criticized the "hypocrisy" of the train's claim to represent progress. The Indians' protest called out the Constitution's Framers as thieves and enslavers, and criticized the Soviets for attending a Latter-Day Saints organ recital.⁸⁸ The business reporter for the *Salt Lake Tribune* noted the lack of any documents from the Johnson and Nixon presidencies, heralded the progress shown from the 1950s in honoring the spacemen, and pooh-poohed the critics' "forlorn little jeer for America's big corporation."⁸⁹ Salt Lake was not strictly typical of Freedom Train stops, which only rarely drew non-local political figures and celebrities such as the cosmonauts, and singers Johnny Cash and Mike Love, but the reception, focuses, and criticisms were all representative of what the

⁸⁵ Photo, no title, *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake, UT), 17 October 1975, 23. Newspapers.com.

⁸⁶ JC, "Freedom Train in Salt Lake City," *Davis County Clipper* (UT), 24 October 2022, 28. Utah Digital Newspapers, newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6z32t0x/900515.

⁸⁷ "Freedom will Visit Salt Lake: PBC Blasts Train, May Demonstrate Against 'Rip-Off,'" *The Daily Utah Chronicle* (Salt Lake City, 15 October 1975, Newspapers.com, 1 - 2.

⁸⁸ "Indians Protest in S.L.," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 October 1975, 48.

⁸⁹ Robert H. Woody, "S.L. Hails Spacemen, Train Protest Fails," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 October 1975, 31. Newspapers.com.

train engendered as it steamed across a landscape roiled by détente, the fall of Vietnam, protests, and nascent conservatism.

DÉTENTE, AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

While Cold War scholars label the period in the Cold War between the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979) as detente, the term is fraught. At best, détente saw the relaxation of tensions and normalization of relations only within Europe and only on issues of “high politics” such as arms negotiations; characterizing the period as relaxed ignores the escalation of proxy wars in Vietnam, Angola, the Middle East, and elsewhere, and continued creation of spheres of influence.⁹⁰ Bilateral outreach, first under Johnson, then by Nixon/Ford and Kissinger, was motivated in both the USSR and US by a desire to stabilize the international system to better deal with domestic woes of stagnating growth. At least in the realm of politics, however, detente was largely symbolic. Existing areas of unspoken agreement, such as limiting inference in each country’s spheres of influence in Europe, were legitimized in meetings such as the Helsinki Accords, and talk on nuclear armaments failed to fundamentally change the balance of forces.⁹¹ The later 1960s and 1970s did see increased cultural competition and exchange (e.g., the Space Race), and even the appearance of cooperation inspired a backlash among those who viewed the USSR as diametrically opposed to the United States; anti-communism remained a political weapon that constrained change. These

⁹⁰ David Engermann, Response to Presentation of *Rails Laid by the Cold War*, William & Mary European Studies Conference 2021; Marc Trachtenberg, “The Structure of Great-Power Politics, 1963-1975,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010),

⁹¹ Svetlana Savranskaya and William Taubman, “Soviet Foreign Policy, 1962-1975” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume II, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 134 – 157.

nationalistic critiques of collaboration would antagonize the Soviets; combined with the Carter Administration's distrust of détente's failure to show results, collaboration slowly fizzled.⁹²

The tension and breakdown was reflected in exchanges between the Smithsonian and the Soviet space museums; prior to 1972, Soviet and American space technologies were only exhibited in competition to boost nationalism, but after that May's Moscow Summit, curators worked together on a joint Apollo-Soyuz exhibition in 1973 to promote NASA's upcoming joint flight, underwritten by Nixon Administration funds.⁹³ The National Air and Space Museum (NASM) would later orchestrate artifact exchanges with Soviet museums; while these displays were heralded as cooperative, curators continued to subtly narrate American superiority over Soviet achievements.⁹⁴ When NASM attempted to organize a joint exhibition of Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft in Washington in late 1976, the rest of the exhibits in the hall, dedicated to a triumphant and competitive narrative of America's victorious moon race, overwhelmed the Soyuz craft and made it seem inferior in comparison, not coequal. Suspicion and disputes marred the counterpart American display in the USSR.⁹⁵ In short, the geopolitical environment, and domestic contestation of détente were fully reflected even in cultural and historical displays that were designed to reflect collaboration; moreover, the effort at collaboration could not fully erase the previous two decades of cultural competition that had preceded the outreach.

⁹² Olav Njolstad, "The Collapse of Superpower Détente, 1975-1980," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume III, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 135 – 155.

⁹³ Thomas Ellis, "Curating the Space Race, Celebrating Cooperation: Exhibiting Space Technology During 1970s Détente," *European Journal of American Culture* 39, no. 3 (June 2020), 275 - 295; 278.

⁹⁴ Ellis, "Curating the Space Race," 283 - 284.

⁹⁵ Ellis, 286 - 288.

THE BICENTENNIAL AND NIXON

Natasha Zaretsky argues that America's retreat from Vietnam spawned two competing strains of nationalism. One, adopted by Bicentennial planners and embraced by liberal foreign policymakers who questioned containment, was a pluralist nationalism that used "carefully coordinated" difference in ethnicity, race, family, tribe, and locality to show national unity. The other nationalism, emerging from the conservative counterreaction to 1960s activism, argued that the United States needed to redouble its efforts to militarily outrank the USSR (Cold War nationalism).⁹⁶ Both nationalisms responded to a perceived decline in relative American power and unity attributed to the failure of the leading generation to effectively educate (i.e., control) the next generation. Through the lens of the Vietnam POWS' return home, one sees the reemergence of two American publics that began to distrust and condemn each other's views. One public, more politically liberal, included many pundits and commentators (e.g., *The New York Times*) which embraced or accepted the proposed changes in norms of family, sexual activity, and gender. They viewed the disruption and demands of aggressive protests as largely acceptable, as necessary to change the status quo. The other public (Nixon's "Silent Majority") was hostile to the disruption of older hierarchy and order, and the accelerating rate of change in societal values; they gravitated to Nixon and Reagan's weaponized patriotism, positive polarization, moralization/oppositional brand, and their growing anger was largely overlooked by pundits.⁹⁷

Like its 1947 inspiration, the 1975 train was a mobilization project aimed at creating unity and restoring patriotism and faith in America. Billed as educational, and while following

⁹⁶ Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and Fear of National Decline, 1968 – 1980*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 144.

⁹⁷ Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 7 - 8, 107, 110, 114- 115, 117.

the culturally pluralist model of the Bicentennial, it downplayed conflict and challenge within the US while emphasizing tropes from American mythology, including individualism and technological superiority. The train's purpose partly reflected the nationalist ideals of its founder, commodities broker Ross Rowland, but the corporate seed money shaped the train's celebratory narrative and emphasized a consumption ethos. In short, the train reflected both public and nationalisms, but its ultimate goal of unification resulted in historical silences and public relations that reflected more closely the rising conservative backlash against the 1960s and to détente.

ORIGINS (1969 - 1974)

The origin story of the train suggests that the train was intended from the start to serve as a mobilization project with significant omissions of history in its nationalist message. A shift in the project's leadership and political circumstances likely compelled the adoption of a more moderate, but still largely laudatory train with significant silences. For much of the narration surrounding the train's origins, this chapter will be in conversation with a 2014 Boston University doctoral dissertation by Virginia Myhaver, who utilized records of the train's founders' meetings with Smithsonian officials to argue that the train asserted a teleological narrative of American history to support new conceptions of the role of government and corporations in politics (i.e., to help entrench neoliberalism). I argue that this teleology, while domestically focused, was shaped by Cold War thinking. The train's design toward conveying this narrative modeled changes in the Cold War environment since the running of the 1947-1949 Freedom Train.

Arthur Stivaletta

Though the Freedom Train website makes no mention of him, the name Arthur Stivaletta is one of the two individuals listed on the charter establishing the Freedom Train Foundation in Massachusetts in 1972.⁹⁸ A contractor who inherited his business from his father, previously Stivaletta achieved a degree of notoriety organizing the “Wake Up America” rally in Massachusetts, dropping pamphlets on anti-Vietnam protestors and organizing a counter-rally featuring the war hawk and comedian Bob Hope, himself a product of World War II.⁹⁹ Commodities broker Ross Rowland and Stivaletta would meet up sometime in 1969, after the broker’s very successful organization of a “Golden Spike Express” commemorating the 100th anniversary of the completion of the first Transcontinental Railroad. Ross claimed that the inspiration for the Freedom Train came from a conversation with John Wayne on the Golden Spike train, and Bob Hope’s early sign-on helped generate a Country Music Association endorsement and later promotional songs by Porter Wagoner, Dolly Parton, and Johnny Cash.¹⁰⁰ Though Ross claims that he did not connect closely with the Nixon White House until after his meeting with Pepsi Chairmen Donald Kendall, Myhaver argues that Stivaletta’s connections through his activism facilitated Rowland’s early access to Nixon Administration aides and Smithsonian officials to barter for artifacts.¹⁰¹ Myhaver’s account is the more convincing version, given that the person who later would select many of the train’s documents, Ruth Packard, helped organize Nixon’s 1968 inaugural celebration, and volunteered for Nixon. One Foundation staff member even recollected that the train started with funds from Nixon’s

⁹⁸ Arthur Stivaletta and Hugh J. Crossland, “American Freedom Train Foundation Charter,” 16 October 1972. Todd Schannuth collection.

⁹⁹ “What People Are Saying,” *Kokomo Tribute* (Kokomo, IN), 5 May 1970, 4; UPI, “Patriotic Rally Led by Bob Hope,” *Weirton Daily Times* (Weirton, WV), 27 April 1970, 9. Newspapers.com; Virginia Myhaver, “The American Freedom Train, a Journey Forward into the Past,” in “The ‘New American Revolution:’ Cultural Politics, New Federalism, and the 1976 Bicentennial,” (Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 2014), 145.

¹⁰⁰ Myhaver, “The American Freedom Train, a Journey Forward into the Past,” 148, 150.

¹⁰¹ Myhaver, 158.

campaign organization CREEP (Committee to Reelect the President).¹⁰² Rowland and Stivaletta worked together until late 1974, when Stivaletta largely disappeared from newspaper records and from Foundation materials.¹⁰³ Myhaver suggests that though Rowland viewed himself as a patriot, he likely did not share Stivaletta's more extreme political beliefs. Given Rowland's later history of contesting corporate control and stubbornness over vision in his effort to create a "21st Century Limited" (Chapter 3) and later disputes with the Foundation's board, it is likely that Stivaletta was forced out over personality conflicts as much as disagreements over the messaging of the train; most of the surviving articles discussing Stivaletta's involvement were from his native Massachusetts.¹⁰⁴ All of this information is to suggest that the Freedom Train was always conceived as a nationalistic project that would have adhered closely to Nixon's politics, but that the project was moderated and reoriented to accommodate or silence perspectives with the addition of corporate sponsors.

THE TRAIN AND CORPORATE AMERICA'S AGENDA

President Johnson initiated Bicentennial planning in 1966 under the auspices of the federal American Revolution Bicentennial Commission; however, Nixon replaced the commission in 1973 after the body failed to balance the influence of non-commercialism and private commerce. The ARBC had also endorsed a centralized exposition in Philadelphia despite an environmentally conscious, activist and localist public that supported more decentralized

¹⁰²Douglas Kalajian, "She Stoked the Freedom Train with a Nation's Best Memories," *Palm Beach Post* (Palm Beach, FL), 4 July 1999, n.p. Reprinted on *American Freedom Train: Ruthie's Memories*, Donna Packard, accessed 25 April 2022, lachances.com/Dukkony/Freedomtrain.htm; Tim Rivers, interview with Daniel Speer, 16 October 2021, Tampa, FL. HIST 495/496 notes, 25.

¹⁰³UPI Telephoto, "Freedom Train... [photo feature]," *Daily Reporter* (Dover, OH), 4 March 1975, 13. Newspapers.com.; UPI, "Bicentennial Train to Start Tour of Country in April, Its Originator Says," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 4 March 1975, 4B. Newspapers.com; Myhaver, 163.

¹⁰⁴"Freedom Train due in Boston on Tour of US," *Boston Globe*, 20 April 1975, 59. ProQuest; "Freedom Train Founder Returns to Lowell," *The Lowell Sun* (Lowell, MA), 10 April 1975, 6. Newspapers.com.

government/programs.¹⁰⁵ In its place, Congress established the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), which emphasized free enterprise both historical and contemporary as quintessentially American, while using its funding and royalties to support localized celebrations.¹⁰⁶ In 1969, the combination of ARBC's nascent planning and uncertain membership because of Nixon's incoming administration appointments convinced Rowland, Stivaletta, and attorney Hugh Crossland to seek private funding for the train.¹⁰⁷ Rowland spent two years pitching the train either thirty-five or forty-four times (dates and numbers vary between his personal recollection and the freedomtrain.org website timeline) without success, relying on his own wealth and the backing of friends to keep his nascent Freedom Train Foundation going.¹⁰⁸ ARBA's courting of business participation in early 1974 would convince corporations, previously hesitant to release funds because of the exposition's expense, to expand their role dramatically in funding non-controversial events to rehabilitate their images and extend private influence into both history/cultural narratives and government more broadly.¹⁰⁹

Businesses large and small, initially nervous about consumer cynicism and looking to the ARBC for guidance, defaulted to branding all products as Bicentennial-related (e.g. an "Uncle Sam-wich"), with the message that "nothing could be more American than buying and selling,

¹⁰⁵ Tammy S. Gordon, *The Spirit of 1976: Commerce, Community, and the Politics of Commemoration* (Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 39. jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk696.

The Franklin Mint, sensing opportunity, for example, lobbied President Nixon that the US Mint should not have a sole monopoly on patriotic coin sales, suggesting a pro-business mood in politics.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon, *The Spirit of 1976*, 91.

¹⁰⁷ Myhaver, "Freedom Train," 149.

¹⁰⁸ Ross Rowland, "Christmas 1973 – The Birth of the AFT," *Trainorders.com*, 28 December 2021. Accessed 23 April 2022. trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,5388937; Todd Schannuth, ed., Spring, 1973, "Timeline for the 1975 – 1976 Bicentennial Freedom Train," freedomtrain.org, Accunen Media, accessed 20 April 2022. freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-timeline.htm; freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-consist-2101-reading-tl.htm. A peek at the networks Rowland relied on appears in the story of the naming of one of the train's locomotives; Rowland's brother, also a floor trader, convinced a Chicago trader friend to lend the Foundation \$100,000 in 1973. In return, the trader, Gene Cashman, asked Rowland and Co. to name the locomotive after his brother, deceased cancer victim George S. Cashman.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon, 54.

[which] awakened and energized the nostalgia market.”¹¹⁰ Tour companies, for example, marketed sites such as Alexandria, VA’s Christ Church as national shrines to past glory, with no greater educational goal than pride and wonder.¹¹¹ Companies segmented the nostalgia market (e.g., marketing Black history, but only to Black Americans for whom it would feel good) and promoted histories that centered on throwing off economic oppression (and government regulation) by styling themselves as “the new revolutionaries.”¹¹² This was accomplished by centering consumption as a central act of citizenship, a role where “a citizen did not have to give up individual lifestyle preferences.”¹¹³ Retail success among high-income families and global buyers would deprioritize concerns about cynical students, African-Americans, and urbanites.¹¹⁴ For the Bicentennial as a whole, then, companies sought to recenter consumption as a central value of democracy (In opposition to New Left criticism) via exerting a greater impact on American culture.

Rowland’s objective of mobilizing the public and creating a unified, more patriotic consensus using historic and cultural artifacts as sites of glorification, not reflection, fit well with these corporate goals. Likely because of the scale of the project and the uncertainty regarding ARBA’s position on corporate involvement, however, it would take a sponsor with additional motivations and connections beyond Stivaletta’s ties to the Nixon Administration to get cash. Such an angel appeared when Rowland was introduced first to Alan Pottasch (Sr. Vice-President), then to Donald Kendall, the President of PepsiCo and one of Nixon’s biggest business supporters. Kendall used his leverage to arrange for Nixon to meet one of his distributors who

¹¹⁰ Gordon, 54; Gail Bronson, “The Spirit of (19)76: Is It a Bicentennial or Buy-Centennial?” *Wall Street Journal*, 15 April 1975, 1. ProQuest.

¹¹¹ Gordon, 57

¹¹² Gordon, 59, 47.

¹¹³ Ibid, 65.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 64.

argued for the deposition of Chilean president Salvador Allende to avoid nationalization. Kendall used Nixon to facilitate the deal with Soviet Premier Brezhnev that granted Pepsi's monopoly in the country, which in turn established a bartering relationship with the USSR that would include the "Pepsi Navy" deal where the Soviets traded naval vessels for money to buy Pepsi syrup."¹¹⁵

In short, Kendall was no stranger to using government in service of corporate interest. Moreover, Kendall's willingness to use his close relationship with Nixon to argue for Allende's overthrow suggests that he believed, similar to early Cold War businessmen, that businesses had a vested interest in promoting capitalism in the face of perceived ideological threats such as communism, not only because they had a vested interest in maintain the system their livelihoods depended on, but because it was part of what they believed the proper culture was; as Charles McGovern puts it, advertisers defined being American as the ritual of buying goods, whose plentifulness was the measure of social equality, not inegalitarianism.¹¹⁶ Hence, Kendall, as an individual uniquely integrated into the Cold War and government, was well-positioned to leverage the Freedom Train to rebuild a consensus around consumption-based citizenship being challenged by the civil rights movement and New Left. After Rowland's pitch to him, Kendall apparently walked Ross to his office and pitched the train to Nixon, emphasizing the mobility (i.e., national scope) and celebratory air of the project. Ross also noted that Kendall arranged for Ross to make a second pitch at General Motors to the company's senior leadership, and quoted

¹¹⁵ Michael C. Jensen, "Kendall: Blunt and Politically Minded," *New York Times* 25 July 1976, 82. [nytimes.com/1976/07/25/archives/kendall-blunt-and-politically-minded.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1976/07/25/archives/kendall-blunt-and-politically-minded.html); Laurence Stern, "Anti-Allende Campaign, U.S. Visit of Chilean May be Linked," *Washington Post*, 28 November 1975, A4. ProQuest, accessed 29 November 2021.

¹¹⁶ Bert Spector, "Business Responsibilities in a Divided World': The Cold War Roots of the Corporate Social Responsibility Movement," *Enterprise & Society* 9, no. 2 (June 2008), 325. JSTOR. [jstor.org/stable/23701370](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23701370); Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 96.

Kendall as saying that Ross's previous audience there was a "lightweight."¹¹⁷ The implication that GM's Vice President of Public Relations lacked the authority for an endorsement seems unlikely; more likely, the exec sided with the 44 previous rejections in thinking that, given the anti-corporate political mood in the country, sponsoring a patriotic project would inspire more backlash than it was worth. Ross's recollection thus suggests that Kendall supported the train as a way to uplift a country angry with businesses for inflation-driven price increases and environmental problems. The fireman for one of the train's locomotives (a person who likely remained connected with Ross, the engineer for half of the trips) explicitly suggested that Kendall recognized the country was in a post-Watergate "sour mood" and caught the spirit of the train as a revitalizing project. Future sponsor Prudential's ad for the train presented it as opportunity for rediscovery heritage and reaffirming faith in America.¹¹⁸ The train appealed to Pepsi, and Pepsi was the first sponsor, because the train embodied a retroactive, restorative project that would reify the prominence and acceptability of the power of large businesses in American culture.

Though Rowland rebuked PBC critiques that the train was a profit-making device and teleological, the five initial corporate sponsors (Pepsi, Atlantic-Richfield, General Motors, Kraft, and Prudential Insurance) assuredly shaped the overall message of the exhibits. Freedom Train staff recollected that Pepsi was stocked for all VIPs, a memo ordered employees to hide their Coke when Kendall visited the train in Harrisburg, and that the lighter blue on the outside of the train was mandated (i.e. it could not be darker) and named Pepsi blue.¹¹⁹ Wes Camp, a

¹¹⁷ Ross Rowland, "Christmas 1973 – The Birth of the AFT," Trainorders.com, 28 December 2021. Accessed 23 April 2022. trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,5388937.

¹¹⁸ Wes Camp, quoted by Arlen L. Sheldrake, "The 4449 Pepsi Connection," *4449.com*, Friends of SP 4449, 20 September 2020. Accessed 25 April 2022. 4449.com/history/The4449PepsiConnection.html; "See the American Freedom Train," *The Minneapolis Star*, 25 August 1975, 14. ProQuest.

¹¹⁹ S.R. Bush, "AFT Confidential No. 51- New York City," Trainorders.com, 26 July 2021, accessed 25 April 2022, <https://www.trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,5299265>; Bushtgh, "AFT Confidential – A Loss in the

locomotive engineer and an early backer of the project, left because the character of the history presented was no longer challenging after the corporate sponsors stepped on board.¹²⁰ According to diehard fans and the train's website compiler, Atlantic Richfield (ARCO) sought to keep its contribution secret because a public donation after the recent oil crisis, and resultant profits, would create negative publicity.¹²¹ However, the documentary record does not line up with this narrative; stories from 1974 and early 1975 frequently mention ARCO as one of the million-dollar sponsors of the train, and their name was in a federal government release.¹²² The fan interpretation is disputed by Myhaver, who suggests in a footnote that the removal from top billing was a result of ARCO demanding too much in the way of royalties or rights over the train, but still agreed to give a donation.¹²³ Wes Camp suggested that ARCO gave a straight money donation as opposed to corporate time or resources, and an article cited by Myhaver quotes ARCO as saying that they wanted to remain a major contributor but did not want to put time or money into promoting the train. Only as the train entered late 1975 was the "anonymity line" inserted into stories, including by Ross in interviews.¹²⁴ Reporting in 1976 almost always lists only four sponsors. Finally, Myhaver notes that correspondence shows an "Editorial Board" that included Kendall and train president Foust had extensive control over the final narrative of documents selected; in short, the sponsors had a strong say in the train's final form. In line with

Family," Trainorders.com, 1 August 2021, accessed 25 April 2022, <https://www.trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,5299265>.

¹²⁰ Carter Van Waes, "Freedom Train Develops Rumbles," *The News* (Frederick, Maryland), 12 April 1975, pg. 24. Newspapers.com, accessed 27 March 2022.

¹²¹ Phillip Post, interview with Daniel Speer, 23 October 2020, n.p.; Todd Schannuth, "Re: A Question and a Persistent Myth," email to Daniel Speer, 28 October 2020.

¹²² See, for example: "Puff Weakens," *Daily Messenger* (Canandaigua, New York), 25 July 1975, 4. Newspapers.com, accessed 27 March 2022; Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Notice to the Press," 13 December 1974. National Archives GRF-0428. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/7337321>.

¹²³ Myhaver, "Freedom Train: A Journey Forward into the Past," footnote 268, page 161.

¹²⁴ Tom Groenfeldt, "Broker Propels His Dream into a Freedom Train," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (Sarasota, FL), 1 December 1976, 3B. Google News, news.google.com/newspapers?id=fnMjAAAAIABAJ&sjid=P2cEAAAAIABAJ&pg=6744%2C73057.

the objectives of other corporations, the train's nationalistic, nostalgic tone and Americana-based collection was thus at least partly the result of corporate desire.¹²⁵

DESIGN OF THE TRAIN

Car Names, Train Name

The 1975-1976 train featured over 512 items, organized into ten cars: The Beginning (changed from Revolutionary), Exploration and Expansion (formerly Adventurous), Growth of the Nation (Builders), Origins (Diverse), Innovations (Innovators), Human Resources (Versatile), Sports (Sports-Loving), Performing Arts (Imaginative), Fine Arts (Creative), and Conflict & Resolution (Tenacious).¹²⁶ The change in car names from adjective descriptions of Americans to descriptive nouns made the themes seem more distant, like passive collections. This change from the 1947-1949 train, whose use of verbs ("Learn," "Think," "Act") was intended to make viewers feel invested in the experience obtaining and maintaining abstract freedoms, suggests that viewing the 1975-1976 train offered an experience that favored attributes and characterization over philosophy and action. This represents an implicit rebuke to the preceding era of activism in the 1960s and early 1970s, by suggesting that one should best participate in democracy through observation instead of reflection and action which might lead to disunity. This propagation reflected the changing notion of citizenship, in part advocated by the train's corporate sponsors, that placed cultural participation through individualized consumption of goods at the same emphasis as more limited participation in politics because of the benefit of elites over mass publics.¹²⁷ Thus, the car themes are another implicit indication of

¹²⁵ Myhaver, 199 - 201.

¹²⁶ "American Freedom Train, a Moving Monument to American History" brochure, The American Freedom Train Foundation, 1975, p. 3. John Marsh Files at the Ford Museum, PDF, fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0067/1563256.pdf.

¹²⁷ McGovern, *Sold American*, 6.

Rowland's desire for an idealized conception of postwar unity, not the dissenting ideas championed in the intervening years.¹²⁸ The design of the train's exhibits themselves reflected this motive; instead of having a sawtooth aisle that allowed folks to step off to the side and read descriptions of the items on display, visitors to the 1976 train slipped through the 850 feet of display cars on a conveyor belt ride of 15 minutes (lengthened after vociferous protest to 22 minutes), and presented with a jumbled kaleidoscope of artifacts, sound clips, videos, and "talking heads" that some liked, but bothered a great many others (fig. 5-9).¹²⁹ Foundation spokespeople (and later, the Freedom Train website) responded to requests to browse saying that the train was not a museum and never intended as such; instead, it was supposed to inspire Americans with a general impression that, as the Foundation's second president said, "'We are a nation of individual contributors, all of whom have come together to make this land,'" and to learn more after the fact.¹³⁰ In practice, of course, one cannot measure whether viewers went and relearned history, but Rowland claimed victory after talking with kids exiting the train and asking if they understood what their forefathers sacrificed to build the country. At least some Americans felt satisfied by ogling standout objects like size-22 basketball shoes or linking the train to their own lived experience (one girl commented that she saw medals just like the ones her father, an active sailor, wore).¹³¹ The expressed goal of creating an impression made it easier to create goodwill toward America, not a critical understanding of its history. At the same time,

¹²⁸ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 461.

¹²⁹ Alan P. Naumann, "Letter to the Editor," the *Minneapolis Star* 8 September 1975, 6; G.C. Youland, "Letter to the Editor," *The Minneapolis Star*, 8 September 1975, 6; Washington Post Service, "Freedom Train Ride May be Ripoff," *San Antonio Express* (San Antonio, TX), 30 March 1975, 18.

¹³⁰ Tim Rivers interview with Daniel Speer, 16 October 2021, Tampa, FL. HIST 495/496 notes, 17; Todd Schannuth, ed. "Designing the American Freedom Train," *freedomtrain.org*, Accunen Media, n.d., freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-design.htm, accessed 25 April 2022; Petr Spurney, quoted in Bill Felber, "Freedom Train Experience and Catalyst, not a Museum," *Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan KS), 25 March 1976, 1.

¹³¹ Ross Rowland, "Re: OT: The Freedom Train and National Unity," Railway Preservation News discussion forum, 22 August 2004, rypn.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=43517, accessed 25 April 2022; "Freedom Train," *Anderson Herald* (Anderson, Indiana), 19 June 1975, Page 2.

this blurring led viewers the train in a highly atomized fashion, often recalling items that stuck in their memories because of their curio status or connection to their individual, disparate identities, possibly united at the end of the train by common experiences of conflicts and their resolution.

ARTIFACTS, BY CAR

Space constraints dictate that this paper can only focus on four of the ten cars the train carried; the ones selected reflected either eras of history that were strongly contested, a controversial thematic organization, or (in the case of Performing Arts) were representative of the mythologies utilized in the other cars.

The Beginning

Car One: Beginnings was not the only car with documents from the National Archives, but it seems to be the only car in which those documents were the starring artifacts, emblematic of the 1975 train's decision that material culture was more reflective of Americans over 200 years of history than documents. The display started with a replica printshop containing a copy of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, representations of the Bill of Rights/Constitution, Declaration, and Articles of Confederation, a Rembrandt painting of George Washington, assorted muskets and other Revolutionary War arms, and a replica 13-star flag.¹³² This portrayal of the founding of the country suggested that ideals of rights and freedoms were at America's core, and that these abstract principles, spread by the work of media and Founding Fathers (white men), were what inspired an uprising that was won mostly by American force of arms (the only non-American weapons in the display are British, French and Hessian muskets, likely referencing the surprise attack on Trenton). The car's emphasis is neatly encapsulated in the closing sentences of its

¹³² American Freedom Train Foundation, "American Freedom Train Commemorative Program," style A. 1975, Delaware State University collection. William & Mary Interlibrary Loan, October 2020.

program page: “high ideals paid for with human lives;” violence is the foundation of freedom.¹³³ This narrative is a continuation of 1947’s narrative in that it emphasized both the sanctity and centrality of abstract ideals of representation and individual rights in the founding of the country, and the necessity of force of arms to protect them (as opposed to, say, a history of fleeing religious persecution/utopianism or emphasizing the difference in ideals between Founding Fathers and others who fought in the Revolution). While the suggestion that rights are at America’s core, and a focus on the military side of the Revolution might seem “common,” it is precisely that commonality that is remarkable; the early 1970s had seen a continuation of the 1960’s questioning of the existing *status quo* via the antiwar movement, and the train’s portrayal of violence to ensure freedom ran counter to antiwar and New Left-inspired foreign policy scholars who argued against containment and the necessity of military force.¹³⁴ In short, the train’s emphasis on the materials of war in at least coequal proportion to the words that inspired that war in the teleology, laid out a narrative under which the violent defense of freedom (i.e. containment) was necessary.

Expanding the Silence

In early programs, Car 2, Exploration and Expansion, featured its artifacts ungrouped, but the final program split the artifacts into categories: Native American, Pioneer, and Space Exploration. The Native American artifacts became much more specifically identified by the final program: instead of just listing “Indian Artifacts” from Harvard’s Peabody Institute for example, the later program notes that the artifacts include a whistle, lacrosse sticks, and a headdress.¹³⁵ This improvement does at least partially reflect the last-minute, rushed nature of

¹³³ American Freedom Train Foundation, “American Freedom Train Commemorative Program,” style D, 1976, 9. Todd Schannuth collection, emailed to author.

¹³⁴ Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 144 - 145.

¹³⁵ Freedom Train Commemorative Program D, 32; Program A, 15.

the train's initial design; however, the choice to emphasize the artifact lenders initially, rather than the items themselves, speaks to the purpose of the paper program, and perhaps the train itself, focused on external credentials and giving credit/promotion than reminding folks of what they saw or missed. The "Pioneer" artifacts included the Gadsden and Louisiana Purchases, a journal of the Lewis & Clark expedition, baking and gold pans, ship's implements, a train ticket, and controversial Arctic explorer Robert F. Peary's Congressional medal. The promotional film characterizes the display as an image of an innate desire to push the frontiers of knowledge and sustain the country's growth, whether in wagon trains or space.¹³⁶ The language of the program (e.g., "realize the potential" of the land) resembles the language of Manifest Destiny that argued America had a right or mandate to expand by dint of its democracy, character, or force of arms.

The relationship of Native Americans to this push is not immediately clear; the program describes them as "living their ancient lifestyles in quiet dignity."¹³⁷ This statement seems to imply that the group was unaffected by this expansion, despite their inclusion in the car; there are a few Indian weapons, but no American weapons, or mentions of how tribes contested this westward expansion; the train completely ignored the genocide involved in settler occupation of the continent. Instead, the process is depicted as mostly one of negotiation with other Great Powers (there is only one treaty between a tribe and Congress in the car). Though artifacts such as fishhooks, pipes, and baskets were probably more likely to survive archeologically than other items, the choice to focus on these artifacts commonly associated with Native American life (and include a headdress) seems somewhat stereotyped. The result is a car that, while partially representing Native Americans, ignored the history that inspired the contemporary protests of the

¹³⁶ Avon Productions, *All Aboard America*, American Freedom Train Foundation (1975; Bailey's Crossroads, VA: Periscope Films, 28 November 2019), YouTube, 17:23. [youtube.com/watch?v=tQ0A6p_waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=19&t=1043s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ0A6p_waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=19&t=1043s).

¹³⁷ American Freedom Train Program D (1976), 13.

train; a child with limited prior knowledge of US history would not understand why the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied Wounded Knee in 1973. This placement of an emphasis on growth and technological progress (with the inclusion of the space exploration section) posits that expansions were justified, or possible preordained, and suppressed Native American history at a time when activists sought greater context and reshaping of that narrative.

Car Eight: Performing Arts

The Performing Arts car contained the expected representatives of the industry players, such as a movie camera, RCA microphone and cosmetics set; however, most of the car was given over to artifacts representing specific films. Cecille B. DeMille artifacts and his MGM (nationalist) products were in the plurality, including his seminal 1956 *The Ten Commandments*; British-born Alfred Hitchcock had two artifacts, and multiple films about boxing, including a set of gloves worn by James Earl Jones in the *Great White Hope*, were represented. Also featured were Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh's costumes from *Gone with the Wind*, a dress from *The Wizard of Oz*, two records (one by the Supremes and *White Christmas*), conservative comedian Bob Hope's golf club, and props from several westerns. As a collection, the artifacts emphasize films that focus on individual heroes, or on films that sought to reconcile, paper over, or reshape historical conflicts such as the Civil War. Moreover, most of these artifacts seem to have been selected solely on their popular appeal, as reflected in box office, or because of household name recognition. In short, the car is designed to showcase movies and themes emblematic of America, with individual struggles, feel-good, climax-and-resolution stories, and products that brought unity without challenge. Consumer preference implied legitimacy.

Car Ten: Conflict and Resolution

The last car of the train profiled four “great leaders” in American history: Presidents Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy, Gerald Ford, and Dr. Martin Luther King. In the documentary, the narrator announces that the past nine cars built the fabric of America, and that this car represented the moments when that fabric was tested, but out of which the nation emerged “stronger and wiser” than before.¹³⁸ There is a lot to unpack in just the concept of the car, before even discussing individual leaders; the focus on Presidents and King as singular individuals, not heads of movements, continued the “great men of history” focus that disempowered the young, women, people of color, and community-based advocacy. The car’s focus on crises, while not necessarily bad history (the Annales school, after, focuses on “problem history”), suggested that only moments of crisis and the actions of leaders mattered, which did not exactly incentivize participatory democracy. Finally, of course, suggesting that all of the conflicts in the car had a resolution ignored that even the events with definite periodization, such as FDR’s Second World War and the Great Depression, raised fundamental questions about the country that were still hotly debated (e.g. the welfare state, which one letter-writer saw metaphorically in the train’s rapid conveyor-belt presentation), to say nothing of racism.¹³⁹ This portrayal, while comforting, suggested that these problems were solved, implicitly suggesting that those who continued to argue they were unsolved were at best exaggerating their claims. If there were still problems, the solutions lay before the troubled years not cataloged on the train; as Nixon biographer Rick Perlstein notes, movies from this period such as the *Exorcist* implicitly

¹³⁸ Avon Productions, *All Aboard America*, 20:30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ0A6p_waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=19&t=1036s.

¹³⁹ Marilyn Larson, “Assembly-line Symbolism of Freedom Train,” *Minneapolis Star*, 8 September 1975, 6A. Newspapers.com.

suggested that the solution to children who parents did not understand lay before 1962, before the arrival of détente and the emergence of political upheaval.¹⁴⁰

Why 1962? The answer lies with the portrayal of Kennedy: he is represented by a rocking chair, a Pulitzer and markup for his *Profiles in Courage*, a painting, a cigar box from Khrushchev, a draft of his famous inaugural (“ask not what your country can do for you”), and a bust.¹⁴¹ The program emphasizes a “strong stand over an armed Cuba”, the tragedy of assassination and grief of the nation.¹⁴² The mythologizing of America often included language that portrayed America as a nation of innocence and purity, reflecting its youthfulness, divine endorsement, and democracy.¹⁴³ For many baby boomers, the assassination of the young, charismatic president represented their first “loss of innocence” and feeling that America was no longer perfect; how could there be Camelot, if King Arthur was slain without cause? For both producers and consumers of culture, then, 1962 and 1963 were watershed years between an idealized time of unity and abundance, and the disruption, fear, and uncertainty of the later 60s and 70s (notice how most of the performing arts artifacts, with the exception of Redford’s suit from *Sting*, are from the 1930s through 1950s). Thus, the train trafficked in the cultural perception of Kennedy’s death as a watershed to provide a rallying point; Kennedy, American martyr, believed in the country and saved it from annihilation, more Americans should live by his example. This whole narrative, of course, neglects that the missile crisis was arguably propagated by the presence of American intermediate-range missiles in Turkey, and the Kennedy’s fascination with using spy plots to get rid of Castro.

¹⁴⁰ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 156.

¹⁴¹ Freedom Train Program D, 1976, 35.

¹⁴² Program D, 28.

¹⁴³ Perlstein, “Preface,” *The Invisible Bridge*, xx (20).

On a replica pulpit, the train placed vestments and a Bible donated by Coretta Scott King. In the program, King's "quiet spirituality" and "humanitarian quest for brotherhood" are emphasized; in short, the section of the "I Have a Dream" speech that children watch in grade school today, with a dash more religiosity. The program described King's assassination as a "senseless act" that "more clearly defines his humanitarian quest toward peace and racial equality."¹⁴⁴ The version of King presented is quite tame, ignoring his anti-Vietnam activism, anti-capitalist critique, the condemnation of white moderates in the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and the materialism and militarism of his "giant triplets," among many other efforts, that led the FBI to trail him, a revelation that shocked the nation early in Nixon's presidency.¹⁴⁵ These omissions, and the use of "quiet," whitewash King's message into something not radical or challenging the system of power fundamentally, instead suggesting that the goals King sought were less ambitious and within the confines of the system. Thus, he fits into the American exceptionalism narrative, as a reformer on the inside, not a challenger questioning the authenticity of the government and corporations' commitments to the rights of the Constitution.¹⁴⁶ Finally, calling King's assassination senseless, while seemingly sympathetic, masked the racial animus behind the killing.

One crewmember, when asked about the train's portrayal, claimed that this narrative was remarkably progressive for its time.¹⁴⁷ There is an element of truth to this assertion; antagonism over forced busing and affirmative action found expression in letters threatening Hank Aaron to not break Babe Ruth's record, and many Congresspeople opposed efforts to establish a national

¹⁴⁴ Program D, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Perlstein, 331.

¹⁴⁶ Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Tim Rivers, interview with Daniel Speer, 16 October 2021, Tampa, FL. HIST 495/496 notes, 17.

holiday for MLK.¹⁴⁸ However, while the lionization of King as peace advocate was progressive by these standards, that did not mean that this portrayal could not be weaponized against the goals of civil rights. As Theoharis argues, politicians from Reagan onward used King's language and the portrayal of the peaceful nonradical to silence calls for further reform, and to claim the moral high ground by arguing that a new generation of young activists did not follow King's supposed example by using disruptive protests.¹⁴⁹ Hence, the train's focus on King's peacefulness laid the groundwork for future calls to unity based on a mythologized memory.

Lincoln, the great "common man" who rose to the call to lead the nation, tragically felled by an assassin's bullet (a replica of Ford's Theatre is the setting for an empty chair), is represented by Illinois law books, a campaign ribbon, and the original Emancipation Proclamation.¹⁵⁰ The 1947 train featured two separate Proclamations and several "contextual" documents, that gingerly suggested that the document was purely a military measure. The 1976 train focused on Lincoln the man, with the Emancipation Proclamation as his key achievement, a product of the general milieu of American history, not any sort of struggle or even really relating to the Civil War, thus further depoliticizing the sixteenth President.

FDR, in photo form, sat behind microphones representing his "Fireside Chats," on a desk covered with his cane, cigar tray (personifying traits), the 1940 Selective Service Act, a handwritten statement on "'Excess Profit,'" a chart relating to the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, a memo from Churchill, the Joint Declarations of the United Nations, his message declaring war on December 8th, 1941, and the appointment of Eisenhower as Supreme Commander, Europe.¹⁵¹ While New Deal documents are present, again, their fundamental

¹⁴⁸ Perlstein, 229; Theoharis, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Theoharis, 22-23.

¹⁵⁰ American Freedom Train Program D, 28, 35.

¹⁵¹ Program D, 35.

altering of the status quo toward a federalized welfare state, and the addition of full employment as a government responsibility, is ignored; instead, the emphasis on microphones and fireside chats portrays the policies merely as tools to solve a national confidence problem in the extant system, an easy resolution of conflict based on personal charisma. The balance of the documents, however, focus on World War II, and seem to emphasize strong executive leadership in the conflict, with the exception, perhaps, of the United Nations founding principles (perhaps symbolizing resolution of the conflict and a commitment to avoid appeasement). There are no direct artifacts relating to conflicts post-WWII, and no artifacts from soldiers after the Civil War.¹⁵² The portrayal of the Great Depression as a crisis of confidence was not necessarily inaccurate, but favors the unity and stability of the executive over pointing up conservative principles of nonintervention, reflecting that even a commodities broker backed by major corporations faced limits in the form of the non-partisan commitment of the train.¹⁵³

Finally, Ford's seemingly *de facto* inclusion (with just a picture and his Bible featured) belied his role as a symbol in the train's goal of promoting unity. The program devoted four lines what Ford represented: an example of how national "anguish" could "doubtlessly" become "strength" so long as Americans had "the will and desire to live in dignity."¹⁵⁴ This statement was the closest that the train itself (not its officers, who occasionally mentioned Watergate as a source of malaise) came to directly commenting on a matter of recent politics. Perlstein argues that Ford sought to pardon Nixon to move the country past Watergate toward reconciliation, to restore the country's innocence and unity.¹⁵⁵ The conflict of Constitutional crisis had a resolution

¹⁵² Program D. The rear cover features what appears to be a display car window featuring Union and Confederate mannequins in front to their respective flags,

¹⁵³ John Steele Gordon, *An Empire of Wealth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

¹⁵⁴ Program D, 26.

¹⁵⁵ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 282 - 283.

that was never in doubt (“doubtlessly”) which reflected the strength of American institutions.

“Live in dignity” is a wonderfully vague statement, but the inclusion of desire and will suggests the meaning that as long as individuals were willing to avoid acrimony and sniping (in short, to unify) America’s strength could be restored. The phrase thus is a somewhat tortured support for Ford’s pardon of Nixon, and the consequent hoped-for moving on to new topics.

RECEPTION

Did the public buy what Rowland, business leaders, and political figures were selling? In other words, what does the broader public and specific groups’ reactions to the choices in messaging, design, and origins tell historians about the acceptance or necessity of the status quo, and what alternate cultural perspectives were articulated?

Black Americans and the Train: Aspirations Dashed and Commercialized

The Black reaction to the train illustrates that the Foundation’s attempt at creating unity through diversity nationalism, itself a reflection of the priorities of the train’s creators, had limits in its appeal. As already seen in Car 10, MLK’s message challenging capitalism and militarism was muted, placed in a context of other great men who seem distant idols and perhaps preordained to solve their respective conflicts. The Foundation made extensive efforts to appeal to the Black public, running unsigned stock articles in several newspapers about how the train spanned two hundred years of history and highlighting Black contributions to that history. Crispus Attucks, a Black sailor billed by 19th century abolitionists and the train as the first casualty of the Revolution (at the Boston Massacre) is displayed “amid other patriot leaders;” athletes from football players to Joe Louis had film or physical representations in the Sports car, poet Phyllis Wheatley, Marcus Garvey, and Frederick Douglass are mentioned, but it is unclear where they are in the train (they do not show up as represented by artifacts, but could have been

represented by a display or photo).¹⁵⁶ Finally, the article tries to claim Matthew Henson, the first American to raise a flag at the North Pole, was represented by Congress's medal to expedition leader Robert F. Peary. Finally, of course, was the Emancipation Proclamation and the aforementioned King exhibit, which Freedom Train President Jon A. Foust called "moving."¹⁵⁷ Earlier articles included these details and pointed out that Coretta Scott King, Roy Wilkins (NAACP director) and Hank Aaron were on the train's advisory board.¹⁵⁸ In short, the Foundation made several inclusions of Black individuals, and made sure that the Black public knew about their efforts. The inclusions reflect a narrative of diversity nationalism, trying to portray Black Americans' as present in the same greatness narrative, from independence through conflict, and making unique contributions.¹⁵⁹ But there was no overview of Black history.

In the context of the aforementioned hostility to Hank Aaron and MLK, this portrayal was somewhat progressive. However, the rest of the train still glossed over slavery (the Origins car featured artifacts from African cultures, with nothing on the Middle Passage, equating Black American's arrival as coequal with voluntary European immigration). More importantly, this culturally pluralistic portrayal of the Bicentennial was not what many Black individuals called for. The Bicentennial was a hoped-for opportunity to encourage reckoning with the country's history, promote the striving in Black American history as representative of the country's founding ideals, and attempt to leverage this reckoning and celebration to call attention to "the

¹⁵⁶ Program D.

¹⁵⁷ "Freedom Train Spans 200 Years of History," *New Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), 15 November 1975, page A6. ProQuest, accessed 22 April 2022; "King Pulpit is Featured," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 18 December 1975, A3. ProQuest; Elaine Welles, "25-Car Freedom Train to Feature Exhibit on Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 29 March 1975, 4. ProQuest.

¹⁵⁸ "King Bible, Robe included in Freedom Train Exhibit," *Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), 29 March 1975, page 15. ProQuest.

¹⁵⁹ Natasha Zaretsky, *No Way Home*, 152.

pressing problem of the black community, the unfinished business of democracy.”¹⁶⁰ In Washington, DC, for example community advocates hoped that the Bicentennial would bring reinvestment in Black communities hurt by the April 1968 riots, but instead white developers leveraged the fragility of home rule to build a convention center at the expense of the Black community.¹⁶¹ This hope for the Bicentennial explains why, at least in the record available online, there are few serious engagements (and even fewer enthusiastic endorsements) in the Black press with the Freedom Train outside of the articles that the Foundation sent.¹⁶² Many editorials and letters to the editor debated whether African-Americans should participate in the overall Bicentennial, focusing on if it was appropriate to celebrate a history that partially obfuscated their contributions and celebrated America at a time when there were still protests against inequality.¹⁶³ There were some, however, who critiqued the train in both socioeconomic terms and in language similar to that used for the 1947-1949 train. A Ukrainian-born civil rights activist described the train as the “P.T. Barnum Special” and decried its commercialization.¹⁶⁴ A syndicated column by Ken Cockrel noted that in a parallel to America’s beginning, FBI agents were hunting activists on the Pine Ridge Reservation, then opined:

It’s enough to make you want to go on down to the Freedom Train and restore your faith in the flag and Constitution of this might land. (Is that train here yet?) But then to whisk through the cars laden with

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin Quarles, “The Bicentennial Faces the Black Experience,” *The Black Collegian* 6, no. 2 (November 1975), 20; Quarles, “Black Americans and the Bicentennial,” *Negro History Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (1 May 1975). ProQuest, 387.

¹⁶¹ Lauren Pearlman, “The Bicentennial and the Battle Over DC’s Downtown Redevelopment During the 1970s,” *Journal of Planning History* 19, no. 4 (2020), 207 - 227. Sage Journals, , 207 - 208.

¹⁶² Jack Saunders, “Jack Saunders Says: The Mail Bag,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 22 March 1975, page 4. ProQuest.

¹⁶³ Joseph H. Jackson, Vernon E. Jordan Jr., and Lerone Bennet Jr., “Should Blacks Celebrate the Bicentennial?”

Ebony, August 1975: 35 - 42, Google Books,

books.google.com/books?id=znUlZTIWfrEC&pg=PA37&dq=%22bicentennial%22&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjVkJb2sL3sAhVbmHIEHekICXQQ6AEwAHoECAAQAg#v=onepage&q=%22bicentennial%22&f=false

¹⁶⁴ Harry Golden, “U.S. Freedom Train,” *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), 3 May 1976, 6. ProQuest, proquest-com.proxy.wm.edu/docview/493970553?accountid=15053

“replicas” of the nation’s noble totems would only serve to remind us that “replicas” are a poor substitute for social and economic justice.¹⁶⁵

Cockrel’s critique, part of a broader editorialization on the failures of government, encapsulates why Black Americans looking for the Bicentennial to become a moment of reckoning were dissatisfied with the train. Billed as a restorative, inclusive, feel-good project, the train instead left Black Americans feeling as if their story was not told; they saw it reduced to a commercialized representation that failed to point the way toward continuing, necessary social change.

The longest stop for the train was Detroit, Michigan. The millionth person to visit the train, 68-year-old Mrs. Rebecca Robinson, received a television set, an afternoon with baseball player Hank Aaron, and a ride on the train after her three-hour wait. In her interview with the *Detroit Free Press*, Mrs. Robinson noted that the three things that ran through her mind while she toured the train were “George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr.” But her favorite heroine, the abolitionist, women’s right’s activist, and Underground Railroad conductor Sojourner Truth, was not on board the train.¹⁶⁶ Robinson’s visit to the train encapsulates this section; the train pandered to Black visitors with famous representations and quasi-meaningful inclusions, but ultimately left visitors with an image of commercialization (the television) and disappointment that the train’s history was not more activist or focused on a specific intersectional Black experience. It would not be until 1977, with the airing of Alex Haley’s *Roots* on TV, that white viewers saw a detailed look at Black history.¹⁶⁷

Religion

¹⁶⁵ Ken Cockrel, “Cockrel’s Comment,” *Michigan Chronicle* (Detroit, MI), 5 July 1975, 7. ProQuest.

¹⁶⁶ Peter C. Gavrillovich, “Train Guest is One in a Million,” *Detroit Free Press*, 2 July 1975, 3. ProQuest.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew F. Delmont, *Making Roots: A Nation Captivated* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016).

In the 1950s, an alliance between businessmen seeking ways to counteract negative public perceptions surrounding corporations and preachers seeking larger audiences resulted in the propagation of a revised form of Christianity that linked capitalism and democracy in a “Prosperity Gospel.”¹⁶⁸ The 1960s saw not only the political left, but also Christian and Jewish intellectuals such as Reinhold Niebuhr argue that modernist culture could offer lessons on beliefs. This articulation, however, sparked a backlash that would culminate with a more conservative interpretation that emphasized America’s lost “innocence” in both religion and the Cold War, and offered prescriptions on how to address the perceived sins of the country.¹⁶⁹

The Archbishop of New York, Terrance Cardinal Cooke, was one of the train’s advisory council members, in a likely nod to the combination of political and spiritual influence that the Cardinal exercised. An antique copy of the Book of Mormon is supposedly the only artifact added to the train enroute, when it was gifted by the LDS Church during the train’s 1975 stop in Salt Lake City.¹⁷⁰ In the “Origins” car, the train featured ‘bulto’ statues (wood carvings) of Catholic saints from San Antonio, a copy of the Robert Aiken Bible (first bible printed in the US) and a Joan of Arc savings bond in the Human Resources car, and Dr. King’s pulpit and President Ford’s Bible in the Conflict and Resolution car.¹⁷¹ The Performing Arts car featured a helmet from the 1935 DeMille movie *Crusades*, and two artifacts from DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* reinforced the connection of religion and American art.¹⁷² Religion, in short, is only moderately emphasized for the display, but does feature throughout the train. Moreover,

¹⁶⁸ Kevin M. Kruse, “Part I: Creation” in *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 7 – 8.

¹⁶⁹ Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁷⁰ “Freedom will Visit Salt Lake: PBC Blasts Train, May Demonstrate Against ‘Rip-Off,’” *The Daily Utah Chronicle* (Salt Lake City, 15 October 1975, Newspapers.com, 17 April, page 1, 2

¹⁷¹ Freedom Train Program A, 1975, 16.

¹⁷² Freedom Train Program D, 1976, 34.

while some items such as the pulpit or bulto figures were stand-ins for a specific person or national origin, they were supplemented by pictures or audio clips, i.e. they were not the sole representations of King or that culture (though King's "quiet spirituality" is emphasized).¹⁷³ Only the Aiken Bible and first edition of the Book of Mormon (Exploration and Expansion car) are standalone representations. The train's contended that religion (really Christianity) suffused the history of the United States and was perhaps an implicit influence on all parts of life (Catholic Native American Jim Thorpe, was one of the athletes highlighted in the Sports car). Yet religion is not acknowledged as a dominant influence, nor are any of the documents in "The Beginning" explicitly related to religion or to a colony that was founded on the basis of religious freedom or by a religious group. This narrative suggests an attempt at finding the median viewpoint on Christianity, reflecting that the 1970s were a time of flux in Cold War ideology; the modernist interpretation of Christianity had gained strength amid uncertainty about the US's "moral path" and the conservative counter in both religion and politics was not yet dominant, but gaining strength.¹⁷⁴ The feeling of the era is encapsulated best in a "letter to the editor" of the Minneapolis Star; the reader, writing in response to a letter from a pastor a few days prior, argued that the Freedom Train was a "state train" and should thus follow the Establishment Clause, took offense at the implication that Christianity was necessary for the survival of the nation, and concluded that people should instead accept "the religion of reality."¹⁷⁵ Firstly, the writer's assumption that the Freedom Train was an institution of "state" despite being funded privately, suggests either an acceptance of businesses' increased ties with government operations, or at least confusion of the train's origins. Regardless, the writer's invocation of the

¹⁷³ Program D, 26.

¹⁷⁴ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 326.

¹⁷⁵ Robert H. Nienkirk, "Editorial Opinion: State (not church) Freedom Train," *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), 13 September 1975, 8A. Newspapers.com World Collection.

“Establishment Clause” and appeal to a “religion of reality” in response to the priest suggests a split public, some of whom continued to hold Niebuhr’s more modernist views of Christianity’s influence and the state of the country. The train’s straddling is a contrast with the 1947-1949 train, which ran a few years before Profit Gospel preachers would get a champion in the White House in Dwight Eisenhower; that train emphasized Freedom of Religion as a core freedom alongside speech, reflecting the implicit nexus between the train’s corporate sponsors and certain Christian preachers that emerged after the New Deal; capitalists promoted a movement to justify their economic power. The lack of religiosity suggests that the “innocence” myth in both religion and Cold War policy lost its power; the nexus between corporations and religion was apparently gone, but was really just in hiding. After Carter used the religious language of a crusade to justify human rights as a policy focus, Reagan would appropriate the lingo to relink laissez-faire regulations and religion under the “shining city on a hill” label, crusading for both democracy and capitalism.

Second Section on Railfans: This Time They Take Note

As discussed in Chapter 1, those folks interested in trains (railfans) deserve a short examination of the train independent of the rest of the “mainstream” public; in the abstract, railfans were more likely to know about the train, and though they may largely focus on the technical aspects of the train and/or railroading, their choice of topics surrounding the train (and the Bicentennial) will still indicate whether the Cold War had any effect on their commentary. On balance, railfans and the railroad industry wholeheartedly endorsed the train’s patriotic nationalism, suggesting that at least this public perceived a decline in American vigor that needed addressing.

During 1947-1949, *Railway Age* ran more coverage on that Freedom Train than *Trains* magazine; for 1975, those shares reversed. *Trains* in 1947 balanced between being an enthusiast publication focusing on just the trains themselves and serving as a trade magazine covering more arcane topics. After the railroads' transition from steam to diesel locomotives and a string of railroad mergers and bankruptcies in the 1950s and 1960s, the magazine catered mostly to enthusiasts worried about further changes in the industry and nostalgic for the past. Thus grew a difference between *Trains* and *Railway Age*; into at least into the 1980s the latter magazine addressed more industrial news and a trade publication audience. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that given the nature of the 1975-1976 train *Railway Age* had very sparse coverage; they ran only one full article (1 page) about the train, several ads for Freedom Train paintings, and a photo of the locomotive visiting a diesel locomotive plant during a new technology showcase.¹⁷⁶

In the one-page article, the editors explicitly highlighted that railroaders usually disliked anything that posited a nostalgic, steam train-focused image of railroading because of its connotation that railroading belonged more in the past than the present. However, in an exception to the rule, railroads would “bless,” the Freedom Train’s operation and cooperate with it because of the publicity it would bring. The article closed with the full five-sponsor list and an appeal for donations.¹⁷⁷ The magazine’s blanket assertion is not entirely accurate; some railroad companies had sponsored steam excursions in the 1950s and 1960s (one of the 1976 train’s locomotives survived the scrapper’s torch because of such a program). However, the AFT was the first train in several years to cross most of the country under steam, requiring the cooperation of at least twenty companies (i.e., a noteworthy acquiescence). This endorsement of nostalgia

¹⁷⁶ “New Literature: Bicentennial Print,” *Railway Age* 177, no. 12 (4 July 1976). ProQuest.

¹⁷⁷ “Viewpoint: Steaming up for the Bicentennial,” *Railway Age* 175, no. 23 (9 December 1974). ProQuest.

suggests that railroads perceived the Bicentennial and the Freedom Train would be principally rearward-looking events

Trains' coverage fully bought into the Bicentennial spirit; The magazine organized a photo shoot of six of the many specially painted Bicentennial locomotives. In its July 4th issue, which had the Freedom Train on the cover, the magazine implicitly berated regulatory agencies and lauded individual initiative or courage, and referenced a number of American cultural tropes: exceptionalism and technological innovation (referencing Sputnik and Vietnam as jarring for this desire), and the belief in “bootstraps” democracy and economy (riding a limited express train was a reward for hard work).¹⁷⁸ On the Freedom Train itself, the Bicentennial issue compared the 1976 train to the railroads’ “essential” transportation efforts for the Centennial, and with the 1947 train, noting that while the 1976 train was “more plebian” and carried “curios,” the people-drawing steam locomotives were nostalgic reminders of what “powered America to greatness.”¹⁷⁹ The magazine also ran a tribute to the crew, and celebrated the AFT as a symbol of freedom of mobility, closing with “America lives! Freedom Train-a-coming!”¹⁸⁰ As with the 1947 train in *Railway Age*, the 1976 train was used to elevate the railroads; unlike 1947, the efforts tied railroading as an industry to American historical mythology, and sought to punch up the railroading stories in that mythology (Casey Jones, transportation for the Centennial). These efforts suggest attempts at reeducation (for those who maybe had heard the legends as children) and restoration of pride (for those who did know). The implication is that while America was confronting setbacks at odds with its self-image, and perhaps at-risk of losing its uniqueness, all that was needed to revive pride in the country was an examination of representations of past

¹⁷⁸ David P. Morgan, “America: The Land that Rail Made Possible: The Train,” *Trains* (July 1976), 38.

¹⁷⁹ Morgan, “America: The Land that Rail Made Possible: The terrors of Distance, Terrain, and the Elements,” *Trains* (July 1976), 32.

¹⁸⁰ David P. Morgan, “Freedom Train a-Coming!” *Trains* (July 1976), 51.

accomplishments (plebian curios), not new ideas or a new direction. This prescription, while not explicitly conservative, seems more cathartic than revolutionary. One might expect this more conservative vision from an enthusiast publication that inherently catered to nostalgia, and that had a history of economic conservatism. However, the endorsement of the Freedom Train by *Railway Age* suggests that this prescription of a less contemplative, more reflective and reactive vision of American culture was sought after by railroads as well, particularly as the industry had endured over ten years of negative financial and operational headlines, and was worried about the prospect of nationalization with the 1976 startup of federally owned freight railroad Conrail.

Criticism

Seemingly mundane concerns and quibbles with the train reflect expectations that pointed to the coming resurgence in ideological mobilization both in foreign and domestic policy. In the mainstream press, articles about the train bypassing a town (a recurrent critique in 1947) were far outnumbered by complaints about the display itself; folks complained that the conveyor belt was too fast, that the audio features did not add much or work well, and that the artifacts were kitschy. The overall effect was to blur the exhibits into a kaleidoscope, leaving most folks either disoriented or a vague impression of the train, supplemented with perhaps a few standout artifacts.¹⁸¹ As a result, several editorials questioned whether the train was worth the admission price and wait, aping the critiques of the train as a “rip-off,” “carnival” and “commercial exploitation” that dominated more niche left-wing publications.¹⁸² Finally, after the train’s final run, *The Washington Post* broke a story, reprinted in at least fifty papers nationwide, that several

¹⁸¹ Washington Post Service, “Freedom Train Ride May be Ripoff,” *San Antonio Express* (San Antonio, TX), 30 March 1975, 18; Paul Gapp, “The Freedom Train ‘a Wretched Failure,’” *Chicago Tribune*, 2 August 1975, W8. ProQuest.

¹⁸² No title, *Alton Democrat* (Alton, IL), 17 September 1975, page 2. Newspapers.com; Jerry Dickinson, “Editorial View: A Display of Americana,” *Ames Daily Tribune* (Ames, IA), 18 September 1975, 4. Newspapers.com; Marti Vogel, “As American as Apple Pie: Freedom Train, Souvenirs Natural Duo,” *Charleston Daily Mail* (Charleston, WV), 23 June 1976, 3. Newspapers.com.

Smithsonian artifacts and private items were damaged because of temperature-control issues onboard the train.¹⁸³

All of these critiques suggest that viewers expected a museum, or to be impressed by either the narratives presented or the artifacts themselves. In other words, visitors sought education. Apparent desires for education and information also likely motivated the several articles that complained about long wait times or insufficient opportunities for children to see the train (an appeal noted in the train's TV spots), and the implicit assumption that the documents were being cared for.¹⁸⁴ While a number of articles heralding the 1976 train's arrival mention the 1947 train, most mentions did not describe the predecessor's contents in detail; thus, this expectation of education grew out of a contemporary assumption. The desire for education suggests that folks expected the Bicentennial to challenge, or provoke and then soothe, their faith in the country. Even if they were dissatisfied with the train's presentation, this assumption suggests that individuals sought some sort of consensus, rallying point, or explanation for the recent history they had lived; the Foundation's choices in design did not engender the desired feelings.

In addition to the public disillusionment, the train's visits were protested in multiple cities by both the American Indian Movement and by the People's Bicentennial Commission, with the former arguing that the train was an attempt at whitewashing the conquest of the West and struggles of Native Americans, while the latter critiqued the commercialism, design, and corporate sponsorship. However, there was backlash to the PBC's backlash; one editorial decried how the PBC was against "voluntary" contributions by businesses, as opposed to "coercive"

¹⁸³ Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, "Freedom Train Documents Damaged," *Washington Post*, 9 March 1977, D11. ProQuest.

¹⁸⁴ Avon Productions, prod. "American Freedom Train Commercials 1," Youtube.com, accessed 23 April 2022. [youtube.com/watch?v=A9T0AjrZI&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=8&t=55s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9T0AjrZI&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=8&t=55s).

funding from taxation, and all but called the PBC communists.¹⁸⁵ This reaction suggests that, at least indirectly, the train antagonized opposition to the New Left on the basis of a perceived consensus that resurgent capitalism was patriotic. When the PBC protested the train in Salt Lake, one angry visitor sputtered that he would have them arrested for disrupting the event.¹⁸⁶

Response

The organizers of the 1947 train shared a similar goal to the 1975 train; both sought to erect celebratory visions of America and partially paper over divisions.¹⁸⁷ The organizers of the 1947 train, however, when confronted with dissent and the divisions they attempted to paper over (surrounding segregated viewing) agreed to take a stand at the behest of corporate leaders and the Justice Department.¹⁸⁸ In 1975, however, when confronted with criticism of either the display design and artifacts or protests by Native American activists, the Foundation's public response was to deflect criticism or to argue that the train accommodated their criticisms. Foundation President Petr Spurney, for example, pushed back against PBC protests by asking what the group was for, and asserting that the train was for free enterprise, but not selling a view.¹⁸⁹ After the train's run, Ross asserted that that PBC protestors expected a conservative project and gave up protesting after seeing the train.¹⁹⁰ Only rarely was there substantial change, such as the transition from sound wands to speakers and the slowing of the conveyor belt.¹⁹¹ This attitude reflects a number of factors; the train relied on admissions to break even, resulting in a

¹⁸⁵ "PCB Reveals Much," *Panama City News-Herald* (Panama City, FL), 1 November 1975, 4, Newspapers.com.

¹⁸⁶ Ron Varela, "PBC Pamphleteers Meet the Train," *Daily Utah Chronicle* (Salt Lake City, UT), 17 October 1975, 1. Newspapers.com, accessed 27 March 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Little, "Freedom Train: Citizenship and Postwar Culture," 39.

¹⁸⁸ Little, 59.

¹⁸⁹ Bob Beckert, "Freedom Train: Big Business or Bicentennial Hit?" *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, 25 September 1975, 13. Newspapers.com.

¹⁹⁰ Tom Groenfeldt, "Broker Propels His Dream into a Freedom Train," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (Sarasota, FL), 1 December 1976, 3B. Google News.

¹⁹¹ "Walkway Slowed, Sound System Switched on Train," *Sunday Gazette-Mail* (Charleston, WV), 20 June 1976, 87. Newspapers.com.

need, unlike the 1947 train, to respond to negative optics and constantly sell the product. However, the decision to attempt to reframe or deflect criticism instead of address it, particularly in the Native American case, also partly reflects the more celebratory, nationalistic goal of the train; these strategies allowed the Foundation to avoid making major changes and thus compromise the image of the train as mainstream by making the claims against it seem silly or as part of an “other.” Finally, the train could also rely on a growing conservative public attracted by the train’s unifying patriotism to condemn demonstrators for their disruption or as communists, presaging Reagan’s mobilization of nationalism to ignite a second phase of escalated tensions with the USSR.

CONCLUSION

From its origins as the project of two wealthy individuals who sought to revivify patriotism, to its shaping by corporate interests, the train’s celebratory nature resulted in a mobilizing project that sought to generate pride through a unified, nostalgic history. This nationalism, however, was both pluralistic and conservative, reflecting the efforts of curators to respond to and accept the challenges of the 1960s and the questions about America’s place in the world raised by Vietnam. The train’s answer to these questions pointed toward a conservative, teleological vision of history that would soon support the rise of a public and president who believed in a nationalistic vision of America as a city upon a hill. The train also illustrates that there were two publics, and did not succeed in unifying them; one rejected the train’s commercialism, centralized narrative of history, and argument for unity, while the other found comfort in the celebratory narrative and would seek its institutionalization. In short, the train reflects the cultural pressures of détente, and suggests that seemingly domestic movements such as the corporate push to recenter consumption were linked to nationalist quests for unity.

CHAPTER 3: THE MEMORY OF MOBILIZATION PROJECTS

Freedom Train Memory, Cold War Memory

As noted at the start of the paper, the 1976 Freedom Train was not immune to the pressures of the Cold War that strongly influenced the 1947 train, but outside of the historic field, few remember either train as influenced by anything other than a general domestic mood or immediate political events such as Watergate.¹⁹² This final chapter examines the evolution of both trains in the public's memory with two objectives. First, it interrogates how the memory of the trains has evolved over time because of the political environment, and second, if the content of these recollections includes elements of the Cold War influences discussed in the previous two chapters. These inclusions and omissions, in turn contribute to historians' knowledge about the operation of the Cold War on memory, and the shape and extent of a specifically "Cold War" memory.

Recollection of the 1947 train was not sustained following its conclusion in 1949; politicians and the American Heritage Foundation would utilize its example to propose other Cold War projects, but the public and press would not regain interest until 25 years after the train's run and the surge in nostalgia occasioned by the Bicentennial, suggesting that the public recalled the early Cold War and the train as an instrument of unity and consensus (i.e. it was not questioned, just part of the paradigm). After briefly fading from recollection in the 1980s, the memory of the train splits in the present moment; archivists and a more liberal public would rediscover the train as an instrument in civil rights, but less influenced by the Cold War, while another public continued to react to the train as simply patriotic.

¹⁹² Tim Rivers, Greg Nixon, interviews with Daniel Speer, 16 October 2021, Tampa, FL.

The memory of the 1976 train follows a similar pattern; through his successive projects and frequent public appearances, founder and former commodities trader Ross Rowland pushes the memory of the train as a unifying, uncontroversial project with broad appeal. The train is catalyst for a return to consensus, or at least ‘normalcy,’ in a teleological narrative that resembles that conservative teleology for the Cold War. Among railfans and those few members of the public who are knowledgeable about the train, this unifying memory also holds, but the recollections of the train’s crew, for whom the Freedom Train was a significant part of their identity, suggest that the train’s effect on memory is more contrived. Rowland’s persistent efforts at reinforcing a teleological memory suggest fragments of an alternative memory of the train that recalls more of the train’s faults, linked to the issues of the Bicentennial more broadly that hinted at dissatisfaction with the Cold War more generally, and the teleological narrative of the Cold War as a “good war” in particular.¹⁹³

PART I: UNDERSTANDING MEMORY AND THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS SECTION

Analyzing memory requires a differing conception of what is considered truth. In the previous two sections, the paper focused on analyzing the inclusions and omissions in the documented narrative to identify a ‘true’ relationship between the trains and the Cold War. With memory, the truth is not what actually happened, but what different groups and individuals recall as having happened; the historian’s goal is not to debunk the omissions and inclusions in the narrative they see and hear, but to analyze why these differences exist. Memories are not fixed repositories of a narrative; they shift in emphasis, outcome, and inclusion based on the change over time in the life experiences of the individual.¹⁹⁴ Ultimately, the goal of this section is to

¹⁹³ Jon Weiner, *How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey Across America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 231.

¹⁹⁴ Devin O. Pendas, “Testimony,” in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, ed. Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (New York: Routledge, 2009); John R. Gillis,

answer the query, “Who wants who to remember what at a particular time, why is that the case, and what are they arguing against?”¹⁹⁵

While memory studies are well-established, there have been remarkably few works focused explicitly on the memory of the Cold War, in part because of the difficulty of understanding, both as scholars and as a public, whether the era was actually a war.¹⁹⁶ Unlike in some other countries, in the United States there are some sites of memory (*lieux de memory*) that are associated specifically with the Cold War, such as the ICBM silos and bunker to shelter Congress from nuclear attack repurposed as tourism sites, and chunks of the Berlin Wall in museums, libraries, and casino bathrooms.¹⁹⁷ In Denmark, these sites became the focus of political fighting over which side was right and wrong in Denmark’s 1949 decision to join NATO and thus engage in the Cold War. Their memorials, however, present the conflict as victimless and thus, heroic.¹⁹⁸ In the United States, political conservatives attempted to articulate a narrative that the United States won a contest of good and evil, which liberals did not articulate a strong counternarrative toward. Jon Wiener of UC Irvine argues that this narrative failed to find widespread public acceptance, not because of a lack of contestation and actual conflict, sites, or victims, but because the commemorative recollection of good’s ultimate triumph over evil does not satisfactorily explain McCarthy, Vietnam, and public dissatisfaction with the Iran-Contra deal; it does not soothe.¹⁹⁹

“Memory and Identity, the History of a Relationship,” in *The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, “Introduction (Special Issue on ‘Memory and Counter-Memory’),” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 1 - 6.

¹⁹⁵ Frederick Corney, discussion with Daniel Speer, 28 September 2020; John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity.”

¹⁹⁶ Rosanna Farbøl, “Commemoration of a Cold War, the Politics of History and Heritage at Cold War Memory Sites in Denmark,” *Cold War History* 15, no. 4 (November 2015), 471-490: 473.

¹⁹⁷ Pierre Nora, “Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (April 1989), 7 - 24; Weiner, *How We Forgot the Cold War*, 7.

¹⁹⁸ Farbøl, “Commemoration of a Cold War,” 475 - 476.

¹⁹⁹ Wiener, *How We Forgot the Cold War*, 233.

Analysis of the memory of the trains is complicated by the fact that while there were attempts at establishing Freedom Train memory sites, until recently they have not seen much success, nor have they been integral to the narrative of the train. The 1947 train lacks even a limited collection of sites; the only physical remnant of the train are the plaques that adorned the side of the locomotive, on display at the Casey Jones Museum in Mississippi.²⁰⁰ That said, recollections in the media and mentions of the train, are suggestive of the public's associations for the trains, and thus their Cold War memory.

PART II: BURIED AND REVIVIFIED: THE 1947 TRAIN

Elite interest in the memory of the 1947 train was not enough to sustain public interest or recollection, as the train largely faded from popular conversation and recollection in favor of much older connotations of the term, except among those who sought legitimacy from the train. Prior to the Bicentennial, however, recollections of the train surged, driven not only by the train's 25th anniversary and the 1975 train's looking for a source of legitimacy in the recollected mobilization purpose, but also perhaps an element of nostalgia. This shift in memory suggests that at least some individuals, when America was perceived to be "on the ropes" and the Soviet Union appeared ascendant, the train as a Cold War memory was a source of comfort, not critique, of the status quo. After the Cold War's end, memory of the 1947 train briefly receded, but saw an explosion in both number and diversity of recollection, with a slew of accounts of the train's roll in civil rights that serve the construction of a Black history, and some more simply patriotic memories that serve the interest of unity. In both instances, the Cold War is the context

²⁰⁰ Todd Schannuth, ed. "Freedom Train Locomotive 1776," The Story of the 1949-1949 Freedom Train, *themetrains.com*, Accunen Media, n.d. Accessed 27 February 2022. freedomtrain.org/freedom-train-consist-1-pa1-locomotive-1776.htm

that shapes the power of the train, but does not fit into a Cold War narrative; in short, the memory of the train in other narratives is more powerful than a Cold War-specific memory.

Post-Conclusion (1950s-1960s)

The 1947-1949 train made a strong impact on political elites; to them, the train was a highly successful example of mobilization on behalf of state interests that deserved emulation. In Canada, the Prime Minister suggested a “freedom train” be included as part of Canadian centenary festivities in 1967, showcasing charters establishing religious freedom.²⁰¹ A bill was introduced in the US House calling for the government to purchase the train from the Heritage Foundation and run it an additional two years, but successive sessions failed to appropriate funding.²⁰² A Senator proposed developing an atomic locomotive to pull a series of cars around the United States showcasing the work of the “Atoms for Peace” program.²⁰³ New York State and Kentucky both organized their own freedom trains that emulated the original train in both style and document selection, adding local additions such as their state constitutions.²⁰⁴ During the Korean War, the US Army of Occupation ran a freedom train through South Korea, a traveling home for a play about Americans selflessly supporting local residents in the face of tyranny.²⁰⁵ The Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, which had taken out an ad in *Railway Age* parroting the “Freedom Isn’t Free!” mantra, utilized two passenger cars in a 1955 “freedom train

²⁰¹ Bill Bantley, “Drury to Head Centenary Council,” *The Toronto Gazette*, 13 May 1961. ProQuest. It is worth noting that Canada did follow through and ran a Centennial exhibition train very similar in concept to Rowland’s Freedom Train. archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/centennial/centennial-train.aspx

²⁰² NNPA, “Continued Operation of Freedom Train Sought,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 February 1949, page 6. ProQuest; Fried, “Precious Freight,” 44.

²⁰³ “Senator Would Authorize Atomic-Powered locomotive,” *Railway Age* 139, no. 18 (31 October 1955) 16, proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/886809950?accountid=15053.

²⁰⁴ “Freedom Train Documents Show End of Slavery in 1799,” *Kingston Daily Freeman* (Kingston, NY), 9 August 1949, page 11; Fried, 42 - 43.

²⁰⁵ “Korea’s Freedom Train: A Mobile Education Unit Preaches the Virtues of Democracy,” *Sphere* (London, UK) 195, no. 2540 (9 October 1948). ProQuest.

of education,” featuring replicas of classrooms across history sponsored by the Henry Ford Museum and Encyclopedia America.²⁰⁶

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, these government officials’ and private corporations’ efforts, particularly in the Canadian case, suggest that congressional politicians took note of the large attendance and mostly laudatory media response and sought to replicate the degree of mobilization achieved. Richard Fried argues that the Freedom Train became the standard against which all future efforts at civic mobilization, not just the Heritage Foundation, came to be judged.²⁰⁷ US military planners, in articulating a strategy to manage the terror of the atomic bomb and build resolve for the Cold War, created a similar mobilization in the civil defense program to normalize and control the fear of atomic bombing, and the necessity of a counterterror state.²⁰⁸ Hence, the adoption of the “freedom train” name and concept for education and atoms for peace, both outgrowths of US efforts to mobilize in the Cold War (think the growth of STEM after Sputnik), suggests that elites remembered the 1947 train as an effective vehicle for promoting changes in US political ideology.²⁰⁹

For the rest of the public, the reaction and immediate recollection of the train was more mixed and transitory, with limited efforts made at recollecting or maintaining an active memory of the train. The train’s effort involved a concerted mobilization of the press and media, with even national satirists jumping on the mobilization action (fig. 10). As early as 1947, however, students in Oregon commented that they were glad that their favorite satirical comic strip, Lil’ Abner, had stopped moralizing on the Constitution; they preferred that the strip not have a

²⁰⁶ “...Two Chesapeake and Ohio Car [...]” Briefly, *Railway Age* 139, no. 14 (3 October 1955), 14. ProQuest.

²⁰⁷ Fried, 49.

²⁰⁸ Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8; Masco, *Theater of Operations*.

²⁰⁹ “Atoms for Peace,” The Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, n.d. Accessed 22 April 2022. eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/atoms-peace.

‘message,’ even if the commentary on the document was occasionally witty.²¹⁰ By 1951, “freedom train” returned to the media as shorthand for the escape and hijacking of a Czech passenger train into West Germany by its crew.²¹¹ None of the articles reference the American train that concluded just two years earlier. The transitory nature of the Freedom Train is illustrated by the Black recollection of the term prior to and after its run. While the author was unable to locate a systemic study of the term’s usage, common knowledge holds that the term predates the 1947-1949 train and was associated with Harriet Tubman’s Underground Railroad. This is also borne out by an editorial promotion in a Paducah newspaper:

[...] we wonder how many of us do not know why this train has been sent all over the country with its precious documents. There are some. A friend tells us that the colored man who mowed her lawn asked if the Freedom Train did not mean something in connection with freeing the slaves. This good woman took the time to tell the man the real meaning of the Freedom Train and the precious freight it is carrying to the forty-eight states. He ‘got’ it, and was deeply grateful.²¹²

There is a lot to unpack from this anecdote. First, the Black individual’s reaction suggests that there was a public memory associating the term with emancipation prior to the train. Memory scholars often discuss how minority groups will develop counter-memories in opposition to a dominant group’s recollection of events. The “whitesplaining” (indicated by the paternalistic tone and outcome of the story) suggests that the 1947-49 train was occasionally weaponized as an “anti-memory,” or an attempt by whites to replace the Black counter-memory of emancipation with a bland, unchallenging freighting of meaning to the term “Freedom Train” instead of a wholly separate recollection. Moreover, the article suggests that while some individuals,

²¹⁰ “Literary Note,” *Eugene Daily Emerald* (Eugene, OR), 16 September 1947, 2. Historical Oregon Newspapers.

²¹¹ Drew Pearson, “Drew Pearson Says...Canadians Ban Some ‘Freedom Train’ Czechs, Who Could Aid Allied Cause,” *The Express* (Lock Haven, PA), 15 October 1951, 4. Newspapers.com.

²¹² Edwin J. Paxton, “Add Your Own Comment,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (Paducah, Kentucky), 22 July 1948, 1. Newspapers.com World Collection, accessed 19 January 2022.

particularly those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, might attempt to maintain a memory of the train because of some of specific documents it carried (recall that the Canadian proposal involved religious freedom), most folks were just as likely to not remember the train, at least at this particular stage in their lives.

Following the publication of a 1954 biography of Harriet Tubman under the freedom train name, the term appeared to be used predominately in a civil rights context from the 1950s through the 1990s, and occasionally into the present; numerous articles use the term as a totem for the civil rights struggle.²¹³ The term also referred to actual trains chartered by activists from the 1960s through the 1990s to both travel to rallies and to commemorate the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr.²¹⁴ Thus, while elites sought to capitalize on the memory of the Heritage Foundation's Freedom Train, the term quickly slipped back into more generic usage or was reassociated with other struggles than Cold War mobilization, suggesting that the Cold War consensus articulated by the train was more fragile than supposed if the reappropriation of the term for disruption was uncontested.

Freedom Shrines

The only counterpoint to the generalized memory of the Freedom Train was indirect and also very transitory; at best, a modest revival of the memory of the 1947 train among the public and local politicians and businesses, spurred by nostalgia and a quest for legitimacy. Starting in the 1950s and continuing into the present, the American Heritage Foundation and its successor, the Exchange Club, sponsored a nationwide dedication of "Freedom Shrines" featuring printouts of nineteen documents that traveled on the train, plus locally selected documents such as the

²¹³ "Dorothy Sterling, 95, Children's Author, Dies," *New York Times*, 5 December 2008, 25. ProQuest,

²¹⁴ David E. Early, "Last Freedom Train Runs in Bay Area," *Record Searchlight* (San Francisco, CA), 21 Jan. 2015, A4. ProQuest.

Mayflower Compact (both states sampled), the Thirteenth Amendment (both), the Instrument of Japanese Surrender (Missouri) and Woodrow Wilson's first inaugural address (Maryland). One shrine was dedicated at a mall, and the other at a junior high school, joining over 4,000 (and in 2001 40,000) shrines placed in airports, government buildings, and schools. Speakers emphasized both a continuing struggle for freedom and defined freedom as bringing out the best in individuals.²¹⁵ As implied above, National Exchange Club sponsorships of Freedom Shrines continued across decades, but the train is only sometimes mentioned in previous years.²¹⁶ While the number of shrines dedicated in 1975 and 1976 relative to previous years is unavailable, the Club's continued mentioning of the train (and the press's publication of the mentions) suggests that they were reaching back to the train as a source of legitimacy. These dedications and brief mentions of the train have continued into the present, still sponsored by local businesses; in short, while the Shrines maintained a memory of the train, and suggest some degree of familiarity, the simplicity of the recollections suggest that they, at best, were reminders of what the train was, and not the impact that it had culturally (e.g., desegregation).

The Bicentennial

This forgetfulness started to change during the Bicentennial, as one might expect from the force of nostalgia and paeaning for unity. Among crewmembers of the 1976 Freedom Train, few claimed to know about the 1947 train before they joined the train.²¹⁷ In press coverage of the

²¹⁵ "Exchange Club Presents Shrine," *Daily Standard* (Sikeston, Missouri), 22 February 1975, 21. Newspapers.com, accessed 18 December 2021; "Freedom Shrine Dedicated at Mall," *News* (Fredrick, MD), 12 July 1975, 21. Newspapers.com, accessed 18 December 2021;

²¹⁶ "Center Will be Given Historical Documents," *San Bernardino County Sun* (San Bernardino, California), 18 July 1967, 13. Newspapers.com World Collection, accessed 21 December 2021; "Election Collection to be Displayed by Bank," *The Morning Herald* (Uniontown, Pennsylvania), 19 October 1970. Newspapers.com World Collection; "Freedom Shrine Given to State," *Santa Fe New Mexican* (Santa Fe, New Mexico), 9 April 1964, 9. Newspapers.com World Collection; "Janelle's Address Features Exchange Club's Freedom Shrine Gift to Bishop Guertin High," *Nashua Telegram* (Nashua, New Hampshire), 15 November 1964, 10. Newspapers.com World Collection.

²¹⁷ Greg Nixon, interview with Daniel Speer, 17 October 2021, Tampa, Florida, HIST 495/496 notes, 23.

1976 train, the original train appears semi-frequently; one article mentions that Rowland was inspired by the 1947 train, and others discuss how the 1947 train was the “forerunner” and occasionally “inspiration” of the 1976 train, but most stories focus instead of Rowland’s love of trains and country.²¹⁸ 1974 saw a rash of recollections of the original Freedom Train, not because of Rowland’s Preamble Express (site-scouting train) then touring the country, but because twenty-five years had passed since the Freedom Train first ran. These recollections appeared both in the “On this day” columns of newspapers, and in reader-drafted questions asking about the fate of the train.²¹⁹ The surge implies that among those who had seen the train, it became more prominent over time, suggesting an evolution of the train in recollection from annoying or merely cool to patriotic and reassuring, particularly in the post-Vietnam era. When, in 1977, *The Washington Post* broke a story (reprinted in what seems like a hundred newspapers across the US) that several Smithsonian and National Archives documents were damaged on the 1976 train, Petr Spurney used the 1947 train as a deflection, noting that the original train used ice blocks on the car roofs to maintain temperature.²²⁰ This denigration was in line with other articles, which contrasted the two projects by noting that the 1976 train was designed to avoid the capacity constraints of the old train (670 people an hour) by using the moving walkway, or just contrasting the timelessness of freedoms with the innovation in exhibit technology.²²¹ The 1947 train was thus made to appear inferior technologically, an interesting attempt at changing the balance in public memory to set up a more favorable reception for the 1976 train, which was

²¹⁸ “Freedom Train in Hagerstown Next Week,” *News* (Frederick, MD), 17 September 1976, 40. Newspapers.com World Collection, accessed 17 December 2021.

²¹⁹ Roxy Silviak, “Another Train, 29 Years Ago,” *Cumberland News* (Cumberland, MD), 30 June 1976, 16, Newspapers.com; “Train Article by Maury Darst is Published,” *Galveston Daily News* (Galveston, TX), 26 June 1974, 7. Newspapers.com.

²²⁰ Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, “Freedom Train Documents Damaged,” *Daily Journal* (Fergus Falls, MN), 9 March 1977, 4. ProQuest.

²²¹ “Mannequins ‘Talk’ Voices ‘Walk’ Aboard Freedom Train,” *Santa Ana Register*, (Santa Ana, California), 12 December 1975, 27. Newspapers.com World Collection.

already facing headwinds in public opinion because of headlines about financing and Rowland's likely unhappiness that he had been unable to obtain more significant artifacts.

Mid-2000s to the Present

While the 1947 train has also been cast as merely a patriotic project by the railfan community, it is to a lesser extent than the 1976 train, and non-railfan publics have reshaped the memory of the train to make civil rights a central focus. This reshaping reflects the recent work of both historians and other scholars to deconstruct the myth, abetted by the 1976 train, that civil rights was and is a time-limited struggle that was largely "won" in the 1960s.

Railfans: A Microcosm of the Change Across Time

Railfans' lack of recollections reflect the nature of the hobby and the upheaval occurring in the industry, in addition to the broader public's lack of concern. All else being equal, one might expect railfans to occasionally mention the 1947 Freedom Train before the Bicentennial; even without the patriotism, it was still a nationwide special train, a difference from the norm. Railfans also tend to be politically conservative (co-opting the industry's stance against regulation), so its unifying message would hold a strong appeal. At least in *Trains* magazine, one of the more widely circulated enthusiast publications, there were no mentions of "Freedom Train" until the 1975-1976 train started touring. In *Railway Age*, a magazine that catered more to industry professionals, photos of the train appeared in articles promoting rail's safety record and letters about freight car handling, but only through 1948.²²² The press may not necessarily reflect all of the railfan public's memory; one individual built a model of the train over 23 years (1976-1999), suggesting that interest in the train could persist outside of press recollection.²²³ That said,

²²² "Stretching Cars, Good Shipping and Good Railroading Must Supplement Car-Building," *Railway Age* 124, no. 20 (15 May 1948), 166. ProQuest.

²²³ John Wesner, "1947-1949 Freedom Train," *Model Railroader Magazine* 66, no. 8 (August 1999), 43. ProQuest.

the lack of press articles about the trains after 1951 (when *RA* reported on Congress's effort to buy the train) may reflect the state of the hobby. Starting in the 1950s, railroads began to retire their steam locomotives in favor of diesels similar to the one that pulled the Freedom Train, a large change in how railroads looked and operated. In the 1960s, moreover, increased competition from highways and trucks resulted in several corporate mergers, the abandonment/bankruptcy of some fan-favorite lines, and financial hardship for the industry. All these shocks preoccupied railfans, who would nostalgically seek out steam locomotives and nervously ponder the industry's future viability.²²⁴ The 1947-1949 Freedom Train, as a very forward-looking project technologically, did not fit the preoccupation with the past that would over time become the nostalgia that predominates today. It would not be until the 1970s, when railroads began retiring first-generation diesels and cab units like the original Freedom Train's locomotive *en masse*, that nostalgia for that era would rival the steam era. Recollection of the train in the present among railfans, however, still lags behind its 1975 counterpart; while several websites largely repeat the same information about the train's consist and intent of shoring up Americans' respect for civil liberties, the train is the subject of far fewer mentions in *Trains*, and was mentioned only briefly in an issue of the nostalgic *Classic Trains*.²²⁵ Models of the locomotive proliferated more recently in larger quantities than its 1976 counterpart, but this likely is the result of the 1947 train being easier to reproduce accurately with just one locomotive and seven cars than 26 cars and three locomotives. The recollections remain generally patriotic in tone, with until recently limited mention of the issue of desegregation.²²⁶ This vague memory

²²⁴ Greg McDonnell, "Seventies Synchronicity," *Trains* 65, no. 3 (March 2005), 28 - 31. ProQuest.

²²⁵ Fred Klein, "The Freedom Train, 1949-1949," *Trainweb.com*, updated 2016. Accessed 25 April 2022. trainweb.org/fredatsf/free47.htm; "The Freedom Trains Come to Pittsburgh," *Brookline Connection*, n.d., brooklineconnection.com/history/Facts/FreedomTrain.html; "Ask Trains," *Trains* 64, no. 12 (December 2004), 84.

²²⁶ Ron (CAPPilot), "1947 Freedom Train and 1976 American Freedom Train – They Were Not the Same!" *O Gauge Railroading Online Forum*, OGR Publishing, 14 February 2021. ogrforum.ogaugerr.com/topic/1947-freedom-train-and-1976-american-freedom-train-they-were-not-the-same. Accessed 25 April 2022.

of the train is likely a function of the modernity influence and distance from the events; by the time patriotic interest became paired with nostalgia for cab units, the train was supplanted by the far flashier (for railfans) 1976 train. Thus, railfans' lack of recollection suggests a lack of force of a promoted nostalgia for consensus and rightness of the US's Cold War policies.

Outside of the railfan community, the 2000s saw a surge in recollections about the 1947 train, with most of these presentations focusing less on 'patriotism' and more on civil rights. This surge in recollections reflects the modern foregrounding of struggles for equality in politics, but do link the train to the Cold War explicitly as a mobilization project or responding to domestic pressures, some more than others. This split suggests that the memory of the train as an instrument of Cold War consensus, promulgated by Freedom Shrine creators and public officials, holds less force than the train's role in other memory narratives, revealing the lack of interest in a positive Cold War memory.

Recent recollections seem largely aimed at liberal, politically inclined individuals casually interested in contemporary politics-adjacent history. A *Washington Post* piece, in response to a reader inquiry, details the origins of the train at the Department of Justice, and describes the creators as responding to a perceived multitude of threats, not just communism, but discrimination and juvenile delinquency as well. The paper depicts the train's ideal depiction of democracy as running up against segregation, but bypasses the deliberation that the Foundation had over stopping, and also links the train's ad campaign to the debate over DC's lack of representation.²²⁷

²²⁷ John White, "Civil Rights in Conflict: The 'Birmingham Plan' and the Freedom Train, 1947," *Alabama Review* 52, no 2. ProQuest, proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/civil-rights-conflict-birmingham-plan-freedom/docview/211765346/se-2?accountid=15053; John Kelly, "How to Keep America Great? In 1947, Millions Board the Freedom Train," *Washington Post*, 11 May 2019. washingtonpost.com/local/how-to-keep-america-great-in-1947-millions-boarded-the-freedom-train/2019/05/11/b7080fd0-733e-11e9-9f06-5fc2ee80027a_story.html.

The *New Yorker's* retelling is more incisive, noting that the train's organizers were not exactly ideal champions of liberty (one had run on a segregationist platform), and the document selection was painfully pruned to avoid controversy. The train was linked more closely to national politics; its running and the national change in mood is lightly implied to have influenced Truman's reelection, and the bypassing of Memphis is impugned to have inspired the formation of the Dixiecrat party. The article contextualizes the train in growing civil rights activism and suggests that the cascade of domestic and foreign crises inspired the Justice Department to push for a train that would provide an element of certainty.²²⁸ In short, the article remembers the train as a product of Cold War pressure, but in at least coequal proportion to domestic and pure political (reelection) concerns.

A middle-school-level short novel uses the train's arrival as the catalyst for a working-class white Atlanta boy's realization of the injustices of segregation; the boy reads the Langston Hughes poem after a white mob threatens an affluent Black family, and understands the "true meaning of the Freedom Pledge" after the combination of visiting the train and defending the Black family from a mob instigated by a mill owner (race used to protect class stratification). The protagonist's brother is one of the train's marines; the experience traveling on the train and working with Black marines and train crewmen converts him to a civil rights advocate.²²⁹ This fictionalization of the train's visit is perhaps a better example of present values being read into the past, but it does represent a shaping of the memory of the train as less of a catalyst in and of itself, but effective at touching off or crystallizing extant conflicts (for example, the main character's parents are illiterate, so they understand the Declaration when their son reads it to

²²⁸ Ted Widmer, "Culture Desk: Remembering the Freedom Train," *New Yorker*, 26 November 2017, n.p. [.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/remembering-the-freedom-train](http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/remembering-the-freedom-train).

²²⁹ Evelyn Coleman, *Freedom Train* (New York: Margaret K. Elderberry Books, 2008), 130, 137.

them). The train, and by extension the Cold War that is not mentioned at all in the book, and its influence is felt only indirectly in the tense domestic atmosphere; in short, the Cold War unity espoused by the train was not as good a memory as its effects on civil rights.

The National Archives, with its large collection of documents and photos (befitting the quasi-governmental nature of the project) is the entity most active in shaping the memory of the train. The Archives partnered with Google to release a mobile-accessible collection of materials about the train. This collection gives much of its weight to the physical construction and maintenance of the exhibits, with photos of the cars under renovation and brief descriptions of the work of the train's archivist and curator. The corporate push to promote the train is glossed over, and the paragraph on the train's funding displays a photo of a public donation stand, a deemphasis of the corporate financial contribution. The documents included are discussions of security and caretaking requirements, and photos of the Marines, train, and desegregated lines/viewings. The memory presented is not even really that of a mobilization, since the train is characterized as inspiring "awareness" of heritage. The choice to use fewer activist descriptors of those who planned and originated train paints the train as merely a traveling showcase, not an active shaper of both narrative and memory surrounding American history. This memory of the train reflects the assumptions of "traditional" Cold War memory, in that the government is the principal actor, and the actions are characterized as having no broader impact or purpose beyond a vanilla objective. At least on Archives products that are not the views of a specific researcher, the Archives is probably self-interested in not critiquing or fully examining the intent and actions of the government it is a part of; however, this memory of the trains suggests that the government does not want to portray itself as actively shaping thoughts and opinions

domestically, reflecting the popular assumption that US government ought to intervene only to protect, not create opinion.

However, the Archives also ran two (much more scholarly) blogs about the train's origin and operation, including one focused specifically on the Foundation's stance on desegregation and the joy the train created when it enforced its ban by bypassing Memphis and Birmingham. Said blog did note that Truman linked the train, in a speech, to his anti-communist aid efforts for Europe, and suggested that the train's mobilization contributed to altered opinions about civil rights, but increased the othering patriotism that would culminate in McCarthyism. The train and government are credited, by taking a stand on segregation, with serving as an even more powerful educational lesson on freedom than anticipated.²³⁰ This article is a clear break from most memories of the train; when placed in the specific context of the "rediscovering Black history" series, the train becomes an active agent of change not only of policy, but also both for civil rights and anticommunist hysteria, and an active participant in the domestic Cold War.

Despite the Archives' efforts, as the *Washington Post* and *New Yorker* articles show, the memory of the train is far more fragmented; moreover, there is still room for simply patriotic recollections of the train that emphasize the fete aspects of the train, such as the sanctity of the viewing experience and properness of respect accorded the Marines (not dissimilar from Richard Fried's focus on the train discussed in Chapter 1).²³¹ In sum, in the present, there are multiple, diverging narratives of the Freedom Train, some of which recall it as a Cold War product, and others which are merely attracted to its patriotism.

²³⁰ Greg Bradsher, "The Freedom Train and the Contagion of Liberty, 1947-1949," Rediscovering Black History Blog, *The National Archives*, 19 September 2017. <https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/2017/09/19/the-freedom-train-and-the-contagion-of-liberty-1947-1949/>

²³¹ Gerry Souter and Janet Souter, "Freedom Train," *American Legion*, 17 June 2020, n.p., accessed 25 April 2022. legion.org/magazine/249282/freedom-train.

PART III: THE MEMORY OF A MEMORY-SHAPING PROJECT: THE 1976 TRAIN

The 1976 train, with its claim to presenting *the* history of the United States, was very much an effort to shape public conceptions of America's past. The project itself, however, generated a memory that has shifted in emphasis over time, and varied by groups. The 1975 train perhaps has a more sustained memory than the 1947 project due to both closeness in time and the presence (i.e., symbolism) of steam locomotives; among the general public the train is now slightly less-well known than its forebearer, if only because of recent media publications, but interest in the 1975 train is growing, perhaps because of nostalgia among those who saw the train as kids and are now middle-aged. Among the railfans and general public who recollect the train, it symbolizes unity and patriotism in the face of national malaise. This narrative, and the cultural significance of the train's cargo and operation, are avidly promoted by train founder Ross Rowland. The recollections of the crew, fluctuating level of interest in recollection, and Rowland's defensive (at times) tone) all suggest that this unifying, teleological memory, similar to and in scope abetting the conservative teleology of Reagan's rise, is not universal, remaining at odds with folks' lived experience of the Bicentennial and Cold War.

Reunions and The Crew's Recollections

Every two years since 1978, barring extreme weather or virus, a member of the 1976 train's crew hosts a reunion in a city once visited by the train. These reunions have changed over time; where once crewmembers would go on late-night bar-hopping after touring area attractions, now there is usually a single daily activity such as riding a water taxi or streetcar, followed by dinner and/or a nightcap at a hotel.²³² Though Ross Rowland occasionally attends

²³² Todd Schannuth, "American Freedom Train Reunion, September 16 – 18, 2016, Portland, OR," *The Story of the 1975 – 1976 American Freedom Train*, Accunen Media, n.d., freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-reunion-2016-portland-or.htm; Schannuth, "American Freedom Train Reunion, 1998," *The Story of the 1975 – 1976*

large or significant reunions (often with a presentation for another project), they are largely driven by former operations employees (i.e., a “bottom-up” ritual). Crewmembers review each others’ scrapbooks, catch up over the course of a long weekend, and swap memorabilia; in the past, many attendees exchanged extensive holdings of newspaper clippings, medallions, shirts, or other train memorabilia (these collections are now downsized). Crewmembers’ recollections suggested that the Freedom Train staff connect as a sort of extended family, and the reunions seemed to fit this format of reconnection and reminiscence, rather than a rededication.

That said, in addition to the occasional presentations at the end-of-weekend banquet, the group has one consistent ritual; rewatching the 1976 30-minute docu-promotion “All Aboard America.” As noted in Chapter 2, this video discussed Ross’s interest in the train, the basic design and thematic philosophies, and portrayed a selection of peoples’ reactions to the train’s early tour. The viewing, at the end of the weekend on October 17th, 2021, elicited a few tears from the twenty-five or so audience members, and all sang along to the Dolly Parton song “All Aboard America” that forms the soundtrack; reunion host Judy Richman stated that it was an honor and privilege to be a part of the miraculous occurrence. Warren Motts, a military museum founder, noted that he would do the work over again with no hesitation. Two or three crewmembers were moved by the presence of all those who stood trackside waving flags or otherwise showing patriotism – “that’s America,” they claimed. These (non-universal) reactions to the ritual suggest that there is a group memory of the train as embodying diverse individual efforts to overcome logistical obstacles and speaking to Americans’ sense of patriotism - in short, a triumphal narrative.

American Freedom Train, Accunen Media, n.d. freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-reunion-1998-sacramento-ca.htm.

Memory scholars do not validate or reject this narrative's factuality or accuracy; instead, they seek to identify which contextual influences and external motivations might give this narrative staying power and sustain its call for commemoration. Cold War stories as well as 'traditional'/conservative recitations of American history included in pre-social history textbooks, foreground similar triumphal arcs of 'good' beating 'evil,' usually because of individuals' heroic leadership such as Kennedy and Daniel Boone.²³³ Adopting the "All Aboard America" narrative, even with attendance drop-offs post-July 4th, avoided a cognitive dissonance with these tropes. This narrative tied the crew to a broader pattern in American history (everyone wants to feel as if they contributed to bettering the country). The ultimate success of the train in this narrative also justifies the extraordinary amount of time, effort, and heartaches that accompanied the daily operation of the train; without a successful outcome, these efforts would seem a waste, a futile embrace of nationalism, as critics of the Vietnam War argued in that case and as Bicentennial critics argued.

The ritual, however, does not constitute the sole memory of the train. In their recollections at the reunion venue, individual crewmembers focused on the daily struggles and successes of operating a high-tech museum (or circus), which were not necessarily connected to the teleological patriotic memory. This elevation of daily living, often separate from context (some still focused on patriotism, with the train as a salve for Watergate), suggests that people largely think of the Cold War as specific episodes of direct competition, and not as a "living, breathing, everyday" struggle - a war, not a siege. Remembering the train as apolitical suggests that perhaps the perception of relaxed tensions with the USSR, and the reduction in direct

²³³ Bruce J. Schulman, "Out of the Streets and Into the Classroom? The New Left and Counterculture in US History Textbooks," *Journal of American History*, 1 March 1999, 1527 – 1534.

conflict, may have focused folks' attentions inward and delinked domestic events from a Cold War context, except insofar as they led into the 1980s "second Cold War."

Folks signed on with for reasons similar to a traditional job, not for a mobilization project. Some joined the train because it was an opportunity to work on a steam locomotive, several joined because it seemed like a cool thing to do post-high school or college, or to meet new people. Some folks viewed their employment as an extension of earlier work for Ross on his Golden Spike Limited or other excursions, and one interviewee mentioned that several of the 300 or so employees over the two-year run were related to or also employed by the train's sponsors at Pepsi and GM. One of the crewmembers signed on with the train after serving in the Marine detachment; they loved history in general, so the train was a good fit for them.²³⁴

Individuals largely the experienced the train as any other job. One site security individual, when asked about best and worst days, simply said that every day was the best day because of the surprises they brought. When asked about political figures, one noted that none really stood out; local politicians were cranked through at the same time each day, and crewmembers were too busy working to take notice. Mike Love of the Beach Boys gave a benefit concert for the train, and was a standout figure for some; for others, it was Mamie Eisenhower, who rode the train from Gettysburg to Harrisburg.

Universal among the crew, however, was a feeling of pride in what they accomplished and an enjoyment of the experience, often accompanied by a sense that the train's patriotic message and reflective history was a good thing to show the public. At a reunion for the train, such proud recollection is not surprising; those who did not enjoy their time were less likely to attend or see the train as a significant part of their identity. That said, the fact that most of the

²³⁴ Sandra Grecianao. Tim Rivers, Max Widner, Grace Plover, John Dales, Kara Frasier, Sarah Wyne, group interview with Daniel Speer, 16 October 2021, Tampa, FL, HIST 495/496 notes, 3 – 9, 11, in author's possession.

interviewees added the justificatory note speaks to, if not a conscious effort to shape memory, at least a desire to portray the train, a significant part of their lives, in a satisfactory light.

The train veterans did not encounter this phase of the Cold War as a daily experience; the interviewer had prepared a question about their views of the *détente* policy, and frequently had to explain what *détente* was. Even if the “high politics” of the era did not apply to the train, people’s reactions to events still reflected the influence of the war. When asked about the Soviet cosmonauts’ visit to the train in Salt Lake City for example, folks remembered that the cosmonauts were the nicest guys, or tangentially that the “handshake in space” spread goodwill both ways, and that it was a shame that the collaboration broke down.²³⁵ A few folks noted that the train started in difficult times for the country, referring to Watergate and Vietnam.

One individual recalled that police cleared out protestors near the display site, but associated the protest with a speech by Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley and not with the train. Another noted that their parents never understood what the train was and why their daughter joined, instead telling neighbors that they had joined the circus. The former anecdote suggests that despite the economic dissatisfaction and minority protests that surrounded the Bicentennial, the train was somehow immune to this criticism (except when directly threatened with bombing by AIM). The latter story suggests that in terms of memory, among the crew there was somewhat of a sense of “one understood what the train was about, or they did not.”²³⁶

As noted above, a lot of the crew brought memorabilia to swap with each other, or in a few cases, to clean out their houses. From the two crewmembers (who met on the train and would get married) who adopted me for the weekend, I received a small cachet or memorabilia,

²³⁵ Warren Motts, Greg Nixon, interviews with Daniel Speer, 17 October 2021. Tampa, FL, HIST 495/496 notes, 6 – 8, 23, in author’s possession.

²³⁶ See the Rowland quote at the start of this paper.

including the medallion analyzed at length in the conclusion (featuring the train on one side and astronauts on the other), a souvenir edition of a Columbus paper dedicated to the train, the July 4th edition of *The Washington Post*, a local profile of the husband in his train role, a copy of *Life* from July 4th, 1976, Bicentennial train postcards, and a cutout of the *Washington Post* article on document damage. The combination of articles is somewhat eclectic; the inclusion of non-Freedom Train pieces definitely suggests a general sense of patriotism, but the inclusion of the damaged documents is intriguing because of its contrast in tone. The implication is, perhaps, that folks' memories of the train could be replaced or supplemented by outside sources.

Undoubtably, this sampling of recollections suffers from selection biases; because of the pandemic, only those individuals who felt safe enough to travel (or could travel, in the case of one crewmember from Canada) were present, and many were perennial visitors who tried to attend most of the reunions. Moreover, the crew has grown steadily "younger" as the train ages; many of the individuals who would have been mid-life professionals at the start of the train have died, biasing the recollection toward more spontaneous or youthful participation that may have been less explicitly motivated by patriotism or a consideration of the Cold War.²³⁷ Similarly, most of the folks at the reunion worked security or concessions, on the locomotive, or in other frontline positions, and the crew's stories generally suggested a degree of distance between the operations staff and those who planned and/or financed the train. That said, as the above analysis suggests, the sample still has value, because the recollections still reflect period influences, even if attenuated. There is also value in this limitation; it serves as a constraint on making too many inferences of motive and intent from the documented record.

²³⁷ "John H. DeMinnis, 77, restored Freedom Train," *Baltimore Sun* [Baltimore], 13 November 1996, 6B. ProQuest.

2002: A 9/11 Odyssey

After their stints on the Freedom Train, the steam locomotives resurrected for the event found work pulling railfan excursions.²³⁸ Southern Pacific 4449, the locomotive that pulled the train across much of the west and south (and the locomotive most strongly associated in peoples' memories with the train) was repainted into its SP paint in 1981 through 2000, and in special excursion livery from then until 2002.²³⁹ In March of 2002, the locomotive was repainted into its Freedom Train livery, and "Let's Roll" added to an auxiliary tender, for the "Return to Freedom" excursion honoring victims of 9/11.²⁴⁰ The excursion billing seems retroactive, as the locomotive's painting was announced after the excursion was sold out.²⁴¹ Individual railfan and rail-media reactions to the repaint were quite strong. One rider (recalling the trip in 2011) hypothesized that the train's northward passage was a surprise, but that on the return trip people were expecting the train, with one person holding a giant American flag (to which the rider rendered a salute).²⁴² Other photographers (in 2016 and 2020) recalled "scores" of people trackside waving flags, and hoping for another trip to "put the country together again."²⁴³ In a children's toy train video serial episode, the child narrator describes how the train honors the victims of 9/11, then adds "I wish it would stay that way forever." This is followed by a song describing how the train taught folks what it meant to be an American, and made folks "feel

²³⁸ Jim Boyd, "Stayin' Alive! (Steam, that is)," *Trains*, March 2005, 57 – 67.

²³⁹ "History," *4449.com*, Friends of SP 4449, n.d., 4449.com/history.html.

²⁴⁰ "Excursions: Bend, March 23 – 24, 2002," *4449.com*, Friends of SP 4449, 4449.com/excursions/02returntofreedom/index.html.

²⁴¹ Martin E. Hansen, "The Freedom Train Returns," *Steam Central*, n.p., 26 March 2002, steamcentral.com/archive/arch02q1.shtml.

²⁴² Burlington John, "re: AFT 4449, ... March 24, 2002," *Trainorders.com*, 11 March 2011, trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,2425804. Accessed 25 April 2022.

²⁴³ Masterphotos and Asheldrake, "SP 4449 on American Freedom Train 2.0," *Trainorders.com*, 22 July 2020, trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,5069795, Accessed 25 April 2022; Fitz, "My 20 Years, Continued," *Trainboard.com*, 2 September 2016, trainboard.com/highball/index.php?threads/my-20-years-with-4449-in-oregon.97912/, accessed 25 April 2022.

proud and true.”²⁴⁴ Though *Trains* did not run a story, the other major enthusiast publication, *Railfan and Railroad*, made the train’s excursion its cover story.²⁴⁵

The flag stories are perhaps apocryphal; videos of the trip on YouTube show limited evidence of these spontaneous demonstrations.²⁴⁶ Their inclusion in the recollection suggests that the railfans constructed a memory of the 2001 excursion reminiscent of the common narrative of the 1976 train; an opportunity for individuals to show their dedication and patriotism. The repeated longing for unity and for the train to remain in AFT colors suggest that from a contemporary viewpoint, the 1976 train was a healing point for the country, and could do so again in the wake of the cataclysm of 9/11. The recollection’s evolution is also interesting, from one flag in 2011, to many flags in 2016 and 2020. While the speakers could have observed different displays, the change over time might also suggest that the riders’ memories changed as distance from the event increased and the train and event became symbols of unity and patriotism seemingly lost in the present political climate. The children’s TV segment statement suggests that following 9/11, railfans saw the Freedom Train as a project of reaffirmation of faith in the country and a mobilizing symbol, which is more potent than the likely impact of the train.

The associations used with the AFT paint suggest that the locomotive is a symbol of accessible patriotism, representing a moment where individuals and companies did something extraordinary to show commitment to a national ideal. In sum, the return of the locomotive to

²⁴⁴ Jeffery McComas, performer. *American Freedom Train – I Love Toy Trains 12* (2003; Michigan City: TM Books and Videos, 2008) YouTube, youtube.com/watch?v=bt8RlkX8zVY.

²⁴⁵ Todd Schannuth, “The American Freedom Train in Railfan & Railroad Magazine,” *freedomtrain.org*, Accunen Media, n.d. freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-m-magazine-railfan-march-2002.htm, Accessed 25 April 2022.

²⁴⁶ Shores Railfan, “SP 4449 Portland to Bend March 23/24, 2002: Part 1,” YouTube, 16 March 2013, youtube.com/watch?v=E7P8Qf0553U&fbclid=IwAR0UVtU9MvBOTiG6yVqSWrfeDd2Sj2Z80zQmSkrV-7T777jd_rlnaiQxP_Y. Accessed 25 April 2022.

Freedom Train paint created a synthetic memory of the train as a patriotic source of mobilization not only in the past, but with present applications.

Museum Displays and Attempts

In 1998, former crewmember Larry Wines organized an effort to preserve the memory of both Freedom Trains, though artifact collection largely centered on saving the last car containing displays from the train and memorabilia from the B&O Railway Museum.²⁴⁷ The project collected the panels and car, and planned to send travelling exhibits around the US, but could not maintain revenue, and ceded its nonprofit status in the early 2000s. The research and text for displays appear to have been repurposed into the present-day Freedom Trains website, which is linked to a broader “theme trains” website featuring the New York State Freedom Train and the Canadian Discovery Train that utilized the AFT cars, among other efforts.²⁴⁸

Other museums have hosted Freedom Train exhibits; the Rosenbach Museum, a museum of the written word (rare books and decorative arts) curated an exhibition featuring some of the pieces from the 1947 train, contrasting the train’s intent of unity and inspiration with the debates it inspired over the limits of freedom in the US (segregation); a museum in Oswego County, New York, hosted an exhibit on both trains for the second time, and the National Railroad Museum published a July 2020 blog on both trains, mentioning segregation, but largely focusing on the technical operations, the mission of the 1947 train and Ross’s efforts to create the 1975 train.²⁴⁹ These displays seem to suggest that there is an interest in the present narrative of the

²⁴⁷Todd Schannuth, ed. “The Story of the Museum of America’s Freedom Trains,” *The Story of America’s Freedom Trains*, Accunen Media, n.d., freedomtrain.org/maft-story.htm.

²⁴⁸themetrains.com/main.html.

²⁴⁹Ian Padron and Justin Lambrecht, “Rolling Along in the Red, White, and Blue: Patriotic Paints Schemes,” *National Railroad Museum*, National Railroad Museum, 4 July 2019. nationalrrmuseum.org/blog/patriotic-paint-schemes/, accessed 25 April 2022; Justin Lambrecht, “Freedom Trains of the United States,” *National Railroad Museum*, National Railroad Museum, 3 July 2019, nationalrrmuseum.org/blog/freedom-trains-of-the-united-states/, accessed 25 April 2022; “Past Exhibition: Freedom Train 1947-1949,” *The Rosenbach*, Rosenbach Museum of the Written Word, 1 July 2016, rosenbach.org/visit/exhibitions/freedom-train-1947-1949/; “American Freedom Train Exhibit on

Freedom Trains; in the case of 1947, an important project that brought up questions about freedom, and in the case of 1975, one man's idea that successfully brought the Bicentennial to the people. The failure of a permanent Freedom Train museum could suggest that while there was interest in remembering the trains in times where pressure to induce patriotism was strong (9/11 and the Middle East Wars), or on July 4th, but that the current memory narrative of at least the 1975 train was not sufficiently linked to any era or cause. The Freedom Train's status as a mobile, impermanent social space may inhibit the creation of a permanent memory. Perhaps that is why, then, Ross Rowland chose to donate his collection of Freedom Train materials to the photographer he contracted for his own efforts, Warren Motts. Motts is the founder of a museum in suburban Columbus that specializes in honoring military service/memorabilia, and patriotism generally; the museum boasts of the largest collection of 9/11 artifacts outside of the Freedom Park in New York. Thus, the seasonality of recollection and ability of the 1976 train to sustain interest only when linked to a patriotic or military context suggests that, on its own, the train is not associated with a Cold War memory, or with a period or event that would draw Cold War tourism and recollection such as the Greenbrier Bunker or even Nixon's Presidential Library.²⁵⁰

That said, the Freedom Train website (freedomtrains.org) that incorporated elements from the planned museum text is routinely used by railfans and the press as a source of information about both trains. The site's memory of the 1976 train is largely hagiographic; the operational financial difficulties that the train experienced prior to the Detroit stop are glossed over, as are most critiques of the train's moving walkways and design. Any struggles of the train are used to illustrate the courage of Rowland's effort and the dedication of the crew. The site

Display," *Oswego County Today*, DOT Publishing, 11 July 2014, oswegocountytoday.com/community/american-freedom-train-exhibit-on-display/. Accessed 25 April 2022.

²⁵⁰ Wiener, "How we Forgot the Cold War," 231.

links a letter of President Nixon endorsing the train, but talks very little about the artifact selection process, and only alludes in a subpage to the interpersonal relationships between Ruthie Packard, Donald Kendall, and Richard Nixon that likely enabled access to the National Archives. The website does, however, make one interesting statement: on the page describing the train's stop in Salt Lake City, the author briefly notes that the Apollo-Soyuz cosmonauts visited the train, and: "were given Lionel HO models of the train -- the smaller diesel sets with only 4 cars. Hey, it was the cold war."²⁵¹ This line seems like a throwaway joke, but suggests a memory that the train operated in a larger political context. There are two alternative meanings of this statement; it could suggest that the decision to provide the smaller trainsets was a result of the slow collapse of détente cultural exchanges and the gradually less cooperative political environment that started around the Bicentennial. Or, the statement could reflect a memory that despite détente's rhetoric and relaxation, there was still a sense of competition, if not outright hostility, at this point (the hostility would emerge later, closer to Reagan's election). In any case, this line suggests that, at least when there was a perceived direct connection to the USSR or international politics (which also were domestic politics) the train participated in the Cold War, and the Foundation chose to make an (albeit small) statement on how valuable détente was. In short, the failed attempts at building museums to the train reflect the difficulty of selling triumphal, teleological memories influenced by the Cold War and its dissent, without linking the memory to a stronger narrative.

²⁵¹ Todd Schannuth, "The American Freedom Train in Salt Lake City, October 15 – 18, 1975," *The Story of the 1975-1976 American Freedom Train*, Accunen Media, n.d., freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-city-036-salt-lake-city-ut.htm.

PUBLIC PRESSURE AND PRESENT-DAY ELITE MEMORY SHAPING

In a trend that media observers first cataloged during the Bicentennial, railfans continually complain that modern railroad locomotive paint schemes are too bland and uniform. As part of the Bicentennial, railroads across the country painted locomotives in red-white-and-blue paint to score favorable publicity points. At the time, these locomotives were received mostly positively by the trade press (and presumably railfans), though some critiqued the uninspired design and sameness of much of the paintwork.²⁵² After a hiatus in the 1980s, the 1990s saw locomotives painted for the 1991 Kuwait War, and railroads began introducing commemorative paint schemes at a fairly rapid clip (fig. 11).²⁵³ At present, all but one of the US/Canadian Class I (i.e. largest) railroad companies have locomotives painted for the armed forces, veterans/service members (fig. 12), first responders, or all of the above (the one road without such a unit is majority controlled by Berkshire Hathaway). Moreover, in the past four years, calls on social media for the railroads to bring back Bicentennial paint for the sesquicentennial, and general interest in “patriotic” paint, have increased dramatically, including an independent effort to restore a locomotive to its Bicentennial appearance²⁵⁴ Given that a plurality of (though not all) railfans have politically and culturally conservative upbringings, these calls may stem from a perceived decline in respect for ‘traditional’ institutions such as the armed forces and police. Without archival support, one cannot judge if railroad leadership is motivated by the same feelings, or simply by a desire to attract ex-military employees and ‘virtue

²⁵² Herbert H. Harwood, “Turntable...a page of Opinion: Bicentennial Blues (And Reds and Whites),” *Trains* 36, no. 4 (February 1976), 66.

²⁵³ “No. 3593 – Desert Victory,” *Heritage Fleet*, Union Pacific, n.d., up.com/heritage/fleet/commemorative/desert-victory/index.htm. Accessed 25 April 2022.

²⁵⁴ BNSF Corporate Communications, “AT&SF Bicentennial Locomotive Requiem,” *Railway Age*, Railway Age, 19 April 2022. railwayage.com/mechanical/locomotives/atsf-bicentennial-locomotive-requiem/?RAchannel=home.

signal’ for political and public consumption.²⁵⁵ However, the uptick in the repainting in the later 2010s suggests that the timing coincides with the increase in conservative anxiety and activism symbolized by the election of Donald Trump, particularly the 2019 addition of a unit commemorating law enforcement that sports the “Thin Blue Line” flag, and a perceived need to increase the veneration of veterans or servicemembers.²⁵⁶ It is also worth noting that while the three Desert Storm locomotives were repainted within five years of the war’s end, as of this writing, only one railroad will be removing its commemorative reskins.²⁵⁷

In this environment, it is therefore not surprising that the simply patriotic memory of the 1975-1976 train is receiving a lot of play. The *Washington Post* “local color” follow-up piece on the 1976 train (companion to the earlier 1947 article) regurgitates Rowland’s story that John Wayne inspired the train, and while it did discuss the conveyor belt and a previously unknown stumble calling one set of artifacts “wetback disguises,” they are largely glossed over, and the two quotes in the article emphasize how the train was a middle-of-the-road county-fair-meets science drome display that received an enthusiastic and largely glassy-eyed reception.²⁵⁸ Offerings by the two dominant manufacturers of O gauge trains (baby-boomer marketed) for both the 1947 and 1976 trains have increased since the early 2000s.²⁵⁹ Fond reminisces of the trains or of Bicentennial locomotives more generally, along with comments about how “this

²⁵⁵ “Boldy-painted Norfolk Southern Locomotive Honors Veterans Everywhere,” *nscorp.com*, Norfolk Southern Corporation, 6 November 2012, nscorp.com/content/nscorp/en/news/boldly-painted-norfolk-southern-locomotive-honors-military-veterans-everywhere.html.

²⁵⁶ Andrew Corselli, “Port Harbor Locomotives Honor First Responders, Vets,” *Railway Age*, Railway Age, 5 June 2020, railwayage.com/freight/short-lines-regionals/port-harbor-locomotives-honor-first-responders-vets/.

²⁵⁷ Allen R. Miller, “The MRL will be Taking the Wraps off 4404 and 4407 sometime in April,” Montana Rail Link Railfans, Facebook, 6 March 2022, [facebook.com/groups/MontanaRailLink/posts/3122507884670952/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/MontanaRailLink/posts/3122507884670952/).

²⁵⁸ John Kelly, “In 1976, an Artifact-Filled Choo-Choo Chugged Around the US,” *Washington Post*, 25 May 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/in-1975-and-76-an-artifact-filled-choo-choo-chugged-around-the-us/2019/05/25/321ecd3c-7e6e-11e9-a5b3-34f3edf1351e_story.html train/2019/05/11/b7080fd0-733e-11e9-9f06-5fc2ee80027a_story.html.

²⁵⁹ “Product Search: AFT,” *MTHTrains.com*, MTH Electric Trains LLC, mthtrains.com/product-search/AFT?page_ak=0.1&page=1, accessed 25 April 2022.

could not happen today” for both political and logistical reasons, abound. Thus, at least for those with an average knowledge of both trains, their successful operations are viewed nostalgically not as defining a consensus or creating a counternarrative for history, nor as products of their time, but rather as merely an event that was somehow both an exception to a rule of apathy or negativity about patriotism, and somehow ahistorical, isolated from history.

Ross Rowland is perhaps the most ardent propagator of the narrative of the train as a patriotic, unifying project. His persistence likely reflects not only his vested interest in maintaining his brand as a successful rail-related event creator, but also genuine belief that the train and Bicentennial helped lift a national malaise. In interviews with preservation organizations, Rowland frequently touts the anecdote that he talked to children exiting the train at many sites and was convinced that the train had effectively inspired them with a sense of what their ancestors had gone through to build a country.²⁶⁰ In almost every online post Rowland makes concerning the train, or in interviews, he emphasizes that the train’s success resulted from the “512 ORIGINAL artifacts” it carried, implying there was something for everyone to see.²⁶¹ Rowland’s repeated emphases suggest a response to a perceived critique of the train. The veracity of Rowland’s counter-memory statement depends on how one defines “originality.” As noted in the Freedom Train program, several items, such as the Old North Church lantern symbolizing Revere’s ride, the Golden Spike commemorating the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, the Davis Cup (tennis trophy), and a Franklin stove, were replicas or reproductions of their counterparts.²⁶² However, the vast majority of the displays were the

²⁶⁰ Ross Rowland, interview with the T1 Steam Locomotive Trust, *Quarterly Update*, the T1 Trust, 6 December 2020, prrt1steamlocomotivetrust.org/fall-2020/.

²⁶¹ Ross Rowland, “Christmas Eve 1973- The Birth of the AFT,” *trainorders.com*, trainorders.com, posted 21 December 2021. trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,5388937.

²⁶² Program D, 15, 16.

preserved items, including George Washington's copy of the Constitution, a Rembrandt painting, a totem pole, and the Gadsden purchase (i.e., a fairly impressive array).²⁶³ If one defines originality in this manner, Ross's statement seems aimed at a superficial comparison drawn by some in the public and academics; that while the 1947 train's documents were all genuine, the 1976 train's items were mostly reproductions.²⁶⁴

However, the frequency of Rowland's restatements suggests that there is an additional aspect of the train's memory he is attempting to defend or propagate. If one defines "original artifacts" as *culturally or historically significant* artifacts, Ross's statement seems squarely aimed at one of the most persistent press-published critiques of the train, that it was too kitschy and not historical enough. Particularly if one was aware of both trains (e.g., a history fan, railfan, or someone who saw the train as a child in 1947 and took their kids to see the Bicentennial version), the 1976 train's collection, though much larger, might seem less powerful than the 1947 train (Judy Garland's dress and a basketball show would seem much less impressive than the Bill of Rights). A cheapening of the train's historical significance and content, in turn, might suggest that the 1975 train was less patriotic or inspiring, and kitschier and more commercial; in short, the train reflected a Bicentennial that was less about genuine reflection, and more about nostalgia and the selling of knick-knacks. This denigration would, in turn undermine Rowland's brand by making the Freedom Train something less than an unqualified success, thus implying that folks were not refreshed ideologically and reconvicted of the superiority of American values (and making the Reagan revolution and Reagan's ideologically-promoted foreign policy seem more top-down than bottom-up).

²⁶³ Program D, 15.

²⁶⁴ Ken Cockrel, "Cockrel's Comment," *Michigan Chronicle* (Detroit, MI), 5 July 1975, page 7. ProQuest

Rowland's brand is not only tied to the success of the Freedom Train, but suggests that he would be more likely to affirm the more conservative teleological Cold War narrative. After successfully running several mainline steam locomotive excursions and forming a failed venture to create a modern coal-powered locomotive in response to high oil prices, he proposed a \$400-million-dollar "21st Century Express" of forty-eight cars that would showcase past technological innovations while allowing its seven corporate sponsors to promote pavilions of their own products, running from 1996 to 1999. The project foundered on accusations of financial mismanagement and clashes between Rowland and a business partner over control of marketing, despite securing Chrysler and McDonald's as sponsors.²⁶⁵ From 2007 to approximately 2017, Rowland pitched for a "Yellow Ribbon Express" that would tour the country under steam with corporate backing to raise money for the Wounded Warrior Project from admissions. As usual, Rowland recalled his Freedom Train efforts, equating the need to mobilize the country after Vietnam and Watergate with the need to support troops volunteering after the "unjust" and "unprovoked," terrorist attacks of 9/11. Simultaneously, Rowland implied that there was already a wellspring of support for said troops that merely needed to be expressed through the train.²⁶⁶ Notably, Rowland called for President Bush to follow Nixon's example and endorse the train to help secure sponsors; this paragraph was removed by 2009.²⁶⁷ The effort did not gain major

²⁶⁵ Andrea Adelson, "A Rolling Vision of the Future: Promotional Train Tour," *New York Times*, 18 February 1993, D4. ProQuest; Diana G. Lassitter, "Crash of the 21st Century Limited," *Central Penn Business Review* 8, no. 3 (8 February 1995), 3. njbiz.com/crash-of-the-21st-century-limited/; Karl Zimmerman, "Ross Rowland Rides Again," *Trains* 53, no. 2 (February 1993), 26-28. ProQuest.

²⁶⁶ Ross Rowland, "From the Founder and Chairman," *Yellow Ribbon Express*, American Freedom Train Foundation, n.d. web.archive.org/web/20111008044400/http://www.yellowribbonexpress.com/about.htm, the Wayback Machine, Accessed 8 October 2011; Ross Rowland, interview with Nick Ozorak, *The Roundhouse*, Episode 12, The Roundhouse, 11 April 2015. Accessed January 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200919161915/https://theroundhousepodcast.com/2015/04/11/ross-rowland/>.

²⁶⁷ Jim Redden, "Train Enthusiasts Plan Second National Tour for SP 4449," *Bee* (Portland OR,) Pamplin Media, 5 May 2017. pamplinmedia.com/sb/75-features/356772-235879-train-enthusiasts-plan-second-national-tour-for-sp-4449. Accessed 25 April 2022.

traction, judging by an attempted publicity bump in 2017, before being archived in 2019 as Rowland shifted to his latest venture, seeking support to create Freedom Train 2.0 for the semisesquicentennial.²⁶⁸

One can make the case, as some railfans have implied, that these myriad projects are all ploys to secure funding to restore Rowland's personal steam locomotive and give him the opportunity to run it on a mainline railroad.²⁶⁹ Excepting the ACE 3000 project and Greenbrier Express (both of which involved special trains, but not tours), all of Rowland's proposals, including the AFT, follow a similar formula: corporate sponsorship to shortcut fundraising, a nominal cause for touring, historic artifacts in display cars (with high-tech features), steam locomotion, and somewhat grandiose expectations of design and collection. The inclusion of steam power (oftentimes multiple locomotives) in all these projects suggests that this motivation at least partially motivates the plethora of proposals. However, Rowland's choice of causes, railroad safety (1979), revitalizing coal (1980s), technological and corporate promotion (1990s) and supporting veterans (2000s), all appear to have similar commemorative, conservative and/or capitalist bents to them.

Rowland's Yellow Ribbon Express prospectus, moreover, further points to his intent mobilizing memory. He says that his Freedom Train proposal responded to the negative media coverage and national mood focused on Watergate and the Bicentennial and perception that ARBA was unlikely to create a "proper celebration," but reiterates that John Wayne gave the original impetus for the train. He also claims (in contradiction to *Washington Post* coverage) that

²⁶⁸ Justin Franz, "Ross Rowland Revives American Freedom Train Name for Proposed Veterans' Tour," *Trains Newswire*, Kalmbach Publishing, 9 June 2017. trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/09-ross-rowland-revives-american-freedom-train-name-for-proposed-veterans-tour/; Ross Rowland, "Re: AFT 2.0," *Railway Preservation News Blog*, Railway Preservation Society, 7 August 2019.

rypn.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=43619&sid=1f462c3d4d06306ef07f4410a9f48a7b&start=15.

²⁶⁹ Crusader5619, "Re: Yellow Ribbon Express: Official Announcement," *Trainorders.com*, Trainorders.com 26 February 2015, trainorders.com/discussion/read.php?10,3674873. Accessed 25 April 2022.

all of the artifacts were returned undamaged.²⁷⁰ These motives are not dissimilar from those the Freedom Train Foundation promoted in 1975 of reaffirming faith in the country and serving as a focal point for local celebrations, but are more explicitly linked to politics than the Foundation's apolitical billing implied.²⁷¹ Though a period profile of Rowland suggests that history as portrayed by the train did not omit shortcomings, it did describe the displays as celebratory.²⁷² Rowland's subtle shifting of the origins of the train to maintain a patriotic origin while also framing the train as more of a restorative project that succeeded in its goals further demonstrates his effort to shape the memory of the 1975 train as more than simply patriotic, and more than the most significant railroading event in the country's history since the 1950s.

CONCLUSION

The fall, reemergence, and diversification of the narratives surrounding both Freedom Trains largely supports Wiener's argument that the only fully articulated narrative of the Cold War, the teleological conservative story of the good Americans' victory over the evil USSR, struggles to find adherents because it is at odds with the popular recollections of the era. Politicians and corporations' references to the 1947 train via copycat and extended mobilization efforts fell on uncaring ears, suggesting that while the (white) public had responded rapturously to the train, they did not seek a prolonged recollection of its message of consensus, unity, and American pride; railfans' apparent lack of interest is telling. Recollections of both trains have risen since the early 2000s, but the Cold War is mentioned in passing, if at all, and the dominant

²⁷⁰ Ross Rowland, "Yellow Ribbon Express: Executive Summary," *Yellow Ribbon Express*, American Freedom Train Foundation, n.d., accessed 9 May 2008. The Wayback Machine, [web.archive.org/web/20080509122544/http://www.yellowribbonexpress.com/about.htm](http://www.yellowribbonexpress.com/about.htm); Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, "Freedom Train Documents Damaged," *The Washington Post*, 9 March 1977, page D11. ProQuest.

²⁷¹ Petr Spurney, quoted in "Mandel to Welcome Freedom Train," *Cumberland Evening Times* (Cumberland, MD), 24 June 1976, 13. Newspapers.com World Collection, accessed 16 January 2022.

²⁷² Tom Groenfeldt, "Broker Propels His Dream into a Freedom Train," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (Sarasota, FL), 1 December 1976, 3B. Google News.

force of these recollection are either generic nostalgia for unity or highlighting the breaks in consensus engendered by the 1947 train on desegregation. All that said, however, Wiener's conclusion may need reassessing, particularly as the country approaches the semisesquicentennial. If Rowland's "Freedom Train 2.0" gains traction, it may suggest that the narrative of the train as unifying project (and the Cold War teleological narrative) is gaining acceptance, and that memories of a Cold War one may well become the basis for new political arguments in 2026.

Final Thought: The Medallion



Among the many souvenirs issued by the 1976 train (and of a few gifted to the author) this medallion stands out. This bronze medal commissioned by Freedom Train Foundation in 1976 was sold separately (along with rarer gold and silver versions and smaller coin-sized bronze/silver medallions sold at the train).²⁷³ On one side, the medallion features the Daylight locomotive that pulled the train in the West and South, and a decorative amount of stars (eight), while the reverse side features a minuteman and astronaut grasping a shared flagpole with the 13-star flag on one side and the modern flag on the other. What links these two disparate cultural icons, aside from both being on the Freedom Train (in separate cars)? Usually, the Minuteman

²⁷³ Todd Schannuth, ed., "American Freedom Train Medallions by Medallie Art Company," *The Story of the 1975-1976 American Freedom Train*, Accuen Media, n.d., freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-m-medals-by-medallie-art-company.htm.

was synonymous with the Revolution and its struggle against tyranny, and the astronauts were the “front line” in the space race with the USSR, which was a proxy for technological and ideological competition. The apparent temporal continuity suggested by the figures’ arrangement, therefore, might suggest a parallel between the Revolutionary War and Cold War as ideological struggles with global consequences. This connection with the Cold War is more subtle than its predecessor; Truman linked the Freedom Train to aid for Europe and Cold War spheres in a speech, and despite Attorney General Clark’s profession that the train was not an attack on communism, other politicians and newspapers saw it as such, and several of the documents suggest a subtle critique. The coupling of the Cold War and modern cultural icons to the Revolution, however, is much stronger than any included artifacts seen in 1947 (the only tropes referenced were the rights documents, and Founders). Undoubtedly, much of the impetus for this connection is a result of the fact that it was the Bicentennial; modern reenacting would get its start during the event because of the obsession with 18th century clothing and military folks, if not necessarily accurate lifeways. That said, the fact that there was a perceived need to link the train and astronaut program back to the Revolution (i.e., to have a nostalgic/celebratory Bicentennial) suggests a craving for legitimacy; that the unconstrained technological innovation and geopolitical competition championed by the country and endorsed by the train was rooted in founding values. The medallion, in short, nicely encapsulates the thesis; showing that while the 1947 and 1975 train shared similar goals and sponsors, their different phases of the Cold War resulted in projects that incorporated different groups and themes are part of their consensus-building articulations, and which solicited differing levels of public buy-in and expressions of interest (there are much fewer 1947 Freedom Train memorabilia items).

Appendix: Figures and Images

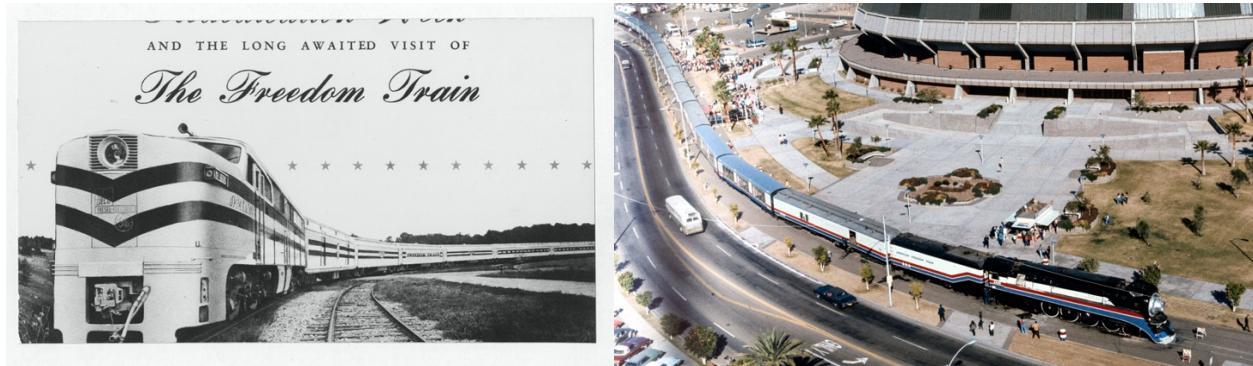


Figure 1 (left): A lithograph of the 1947-1949 Freedom Train published near the end of its tour, showing the brand-new diesel locomotive and its seven cars. Image courtesy of the National Archive and Record Administration. Figure 2 (right): The 22-car 1975-1976 American Freedom Train, with one of its two steam locomotives, stretched out for display at the Arizona State University campus in Tempe, AZ, in January 1976. Country star Johnny Cash would give a benefit concert for the train, which would cross paths with the Bicentennial Wagon Train here. Photograph by SR Bush, courtesy of Todd Schannuth collection.²⁷⁴

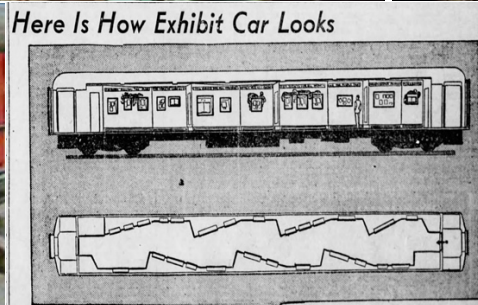


Figure 3: One of many advertisements taken out by Pittsburgh's local businesses in the promotional supplement, suggesting that the purchase of machinery was the intent of the AHF's "Freedom us Everybody's Job!"

²⁷⁴ catalog.archives.gov/id/12167255; <https://www.freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-timeline.htm>



Figure 4: Soviet cosmonauts receive Lionel train sets. Photo by Bob Skillman, Todd Schannuth collection.



Figures 5-9: Displays from cars 1, 2 and 4, as seen in the docu-promotion “All Aboard America,” and promotional sketch of Car 10 by train designer Barry Howard (bottom left). Contrasted with a diagram of a 1947 train car (bottom right).²⁷⁵

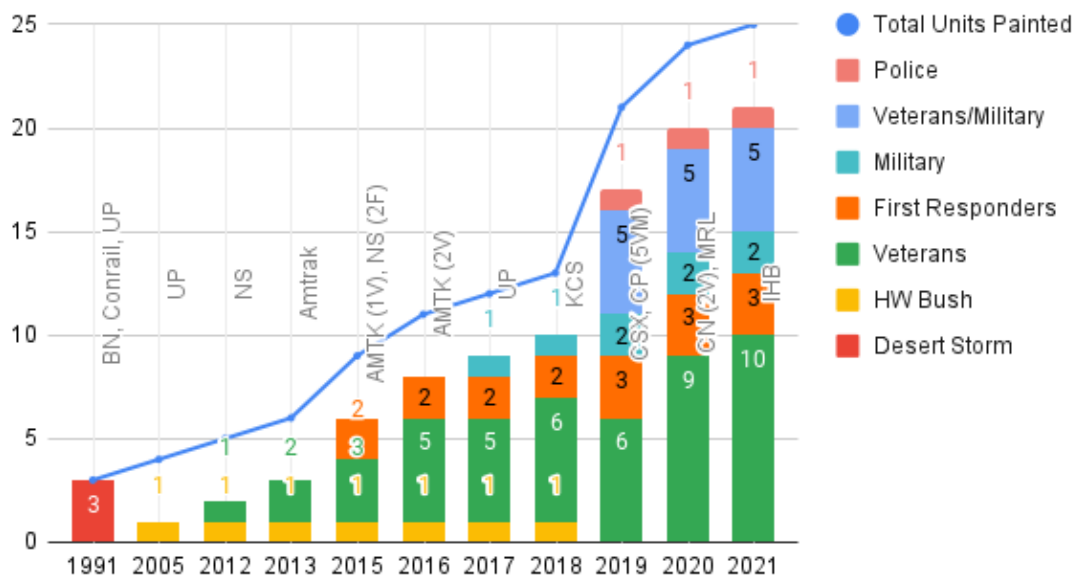
²⁷⁵ Avon Productions, *All Aboard America*, American Freedom Train Foundation (1975; Bailey’s Crossroads, VA: Periscope Films, 28 November 2019), YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=tQ0A6p_waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=20&t=1034s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ0A6p_waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=20&t=1034s); “See How Exhibit Car Looks,” the San Bernardino Sun (San Bernardino, CA), 27 February 1948, page 21. Newspapers.com World Collection, accessed 20 April 2022; Barry Howard, artist, “Designing the American Freedom Train,” Freedomtrain.org, accessed 20 April 2022. freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-design.htm.



Figure 10: A sample comic from the *Eugene Emerald* in 1947 illustrating the all-out mobilization of the press that provoked a level of mild pushback from Oregon university students.

Figure 11: Chart of the increase in commemorative locomotives. Parentheses and number indicate the quantity each unit painted by a particular railroad. Where a railroad does not have a count following it, that railroad was responsible for all other units painted that year. For example: CSX, CP (5V/M) indicates that CSX painted one military unit, one first responders unit, and 1 police unit, while CP painted 5 locomotives honoring both military and veterans. Dates and quantities derived from cited sources.²⁷⁶

Veterans and Similar Commemorative Locomotives by Year



²⁷⁶ “Canadian Pacific Honours Canadian, U.S. Military with Special Locomotives,” Canadian Pacific Railway, 12 November 2019. cpr.ca/en/media/canadian-pacific-honours-canadian-us-military-with-special-locomotives/; “CN to Release Veterans Tribute Locomotives,” Railfan & Railroad, 12 November 2020. railfan.com/cn-to-release-veterans-tribute-units/; William C. Vantuono, “IHB GP38 3800: Reborn, Rededicated,” Railway Age, 3 June 2021. railwayage.com/mechanical/locomotives/ihb-gp38-3800-reborn-rededicated/. Three railroads, UP, KCS, and MRL, also introduced locomotives honoring essential workers or railroad employees in 2019 and 2020. This listing also does not include smaller shortlines or leasing/industrial companies, such as those found here: dieselshop.us/HonorMilitary.HTML, and here: trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/digest-aberdeen-carolina-western-savage-combine-on-locomotive-rebuilds.



Figure 12: Indiana Harbor Belt Veterans

Locomotive. Photo by author, 22 August 2021.

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[waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=19&t=1043s](https://youtube.com/watch?v=tQ0A6p_-waM&list=PLUVjVVluryrhMuU36Z9rvUDfwfBsy3f6_&index=19&t=1043s).

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