

Homer Lea and the Peace Makers

By

THOMAS C. KENNEDY*

IT has long been commonplace for students of western civilization to assume that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such "Darwinian" ideas as the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest were broadly, if not ubiquitously, applied to the economic, social, and political activities of both human beings and nation states. Richard Hofstadter and Bernard Semmel, among others, have ably and persuasively argued that Social Darwinism was used in both the United States and Great Britain from about 1880 to 1914 to justify every sort of ruthless enterprise from cutthroat business competition to imperialistic subjection of lesser breeds.¹

One of the more important—and bizarre—manifestations of this phenomenon was the concept of the biological necessity for war as an ultimately beneficent instrument in the struggle for existence among nations and races. Among the most notorious proponents of such a view was the American military writer and adventurer, Homer Lea (1876-1912), characterized by Hofstadter as "the closest American approximation to the German militarist . . . Von Bernhardt."² And while Hofstadter, for one, admitted that the biologically based militarism of Homer Lea and his ilk was not dominant in American thought, it did, he believed, provide "a cosmic foundation that appealed to a

*The author is Professor of History at the University of Arkansas. He would like to thank his colleague, Dr. Shi-shan H. Tsai, for providing both information and counsel during the preparation of this study, and also Dr. Huang Chi-lu, director of the Institute of National History, Republic of China, for his generous assistance. Research for the article was made possible by grants from the Research Reserve Fund at the University of Arkansas and from the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

¹Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (New York, 1955); Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960). This view, of course, was not original with Hofstadter. William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), 1:85, observed, "The phrases *struggle for existence* and *survival of the fittest* carried everything before them in the nineties"; see also 81-96 *passim*.

²Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 190. See also Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism*, rev. ed. (New York, 1959), 450, who calls Lea "the weirdest figure among the American, and probably all, civilian militarists" and compares him to Adolf Hitler; and the *Army-Navy Gazette* (London), 28 Sept. 1912, 919.

The Historian

Darwinized national mentality.”³ Recently, this view has been challenged by scholars who hold that Social Darwinism was never “generally adopted” in Britain and that “the antiimage of Social Darwinism proved a powerful antidote against both imperialist and militarist thought in the United States.”⁴

The purpose of this study is to reexamine the impact of militaristic Social Darwinism on Anglo-American society in the light of the ideological clash between Homer Lea and a group of distinguished peace advocates, including William James, Norman Angell, and David Starr Jordan, who singled out Lea’s work for refutation. Were the peace makers’ attacks on Lea a reflection of their fear that Anglo-American society was, in fact, becoming “Darwinized” and that such a condition made Americans and Britons more susceptible to a militarist message? Or did these optimistic liberal-rationalists see Homer Lea as a convenient target for discrediting the entire body of reactionary militarists who were fighting a rearguard action against the forces of reason and progress?

Homer Lea was one of those individuals who occasionally present themselves, unbidden and uninvited, upon the world historical stage and demand their hour to strut and fret. By rights he had as little chance to become a public figure as Joan of Arc did when she left Domrémy to seek the Dauphin at Chinon. Diminutive, deformed, and deficient in all the physical attributes normally associated with an active life, Lea nonetheless declared himself a military genius cut in the mold of his hero, Napoleon Bonaparte. Then, through dogged persistence and dexterous self-advertisement, he proceeded to become, for some at least, all that he claimed to be.

Born in Denver to a middle-class family of pretentious colonial ancestry and exceedingly modest means, Lea suffered from a serious curvature of the spine which twisted his body and stunted his growth. As a mature adult he was barely five feet tall and weighed ninety to one hundred pounds. His eyesight was also extremely poor, another congenital defect which, no doubt, contributed to recurring headaches so violent that he had to seek refuge in a darkened room until the pain subsided. As he grew older, Lea not only suffered from periodic blindness but also from high blood pressure and chronic Bright’s disease.⁵

³Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 192.

⁴Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978), 11, 79-80; Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia, 1979), 227, 228-42 *passim*.

⁵Material on Homer Lea’s ancestry, early life, and medical problems can be found in box 3, Joshua B. Powers Collection, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California (cited hereafter as Powers Collection). Powers was Lea’s stepson. Scholarly work on Lea is difficult to find, though Frederick L. Chapin, “Homer Lea and the Chinese Revolution”

Homer Lea

For all his physical defects, however, friends and teachers universally attested to Lea's "unusually bright," if somewhat fevered and undisciplined, mind.⁶ After moving to Los Angeles in 1894, he impressed officials in high school and at Occidental College with his mental prowess during "a classical course of study," but upon entering Leland Stanford Junior University in 1897, he began to display that obsessive interest in all things military which became the hallmark of his personality. In 1899, poor health forced Lea to leave Stanford without taking a degree.⁷

After recovering from the illness that had forced him to abandon academic life, Lea, in June 1900, sailed—amidst much ado—from San Francisco to Hong Kong in the service of the Pao huang-hui or Chinese Reform Association, thus embarking upon a public career which still remains a subject of controversy. From the day he planted a hyperbolic story about his coming China venture in the *San Francisco Call*,⁸ Homer Lea proved to be a master of the disparate tasks of widely publicizing his alleged exploits while simultaneously surrounding himself with an aura of mystery. Indeed, he was so successful at this endeavor that it is still very difficult to determine which of the exploits associated with his name have any basis in fact. Documentary evidence does reveal that after returning from China, Lea organized and coordinated the training of Chinese volunteers throughout North America, but the origin of his rank as "Lieutenant General of the Chinese Imperial Reform Army" and the authority for his command of the "Second Division" remain as obscure as the uses to which his "Army" was eventually put.⁹ Likewise, while Lea certainly returned to China in 1911 as Dr. Sun Yat-sen's military advisor, there is no evidence

(A.B. honors thesis, Harvard University, 1950), the only lengthy biography, is an admirable attempt "to separate fact from cleverly contrived fiction" (4). See also Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1962), who provides a brief but incisive, if perhaps overly critical, assessment of Lea's career (72-74, 141n.), and Key Ray Chong, "The Abortive American-Chinese Project for Chinese Revolution, 1908-1911," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (Feb. 1972): 54-70, a solid article based on archival sources.

⁶See Guy W. Wadsworth to D.S. Jordan, 4 June 1897 and 24 Sept. 1898, and typewritten testimonials of other teachers and acquaintances, box 3, Powers Collection.

⁷See statement from T.P. Wood, M.D., 11 May 1899, on the poor state of Lea's health, accompanying a request for leave of absence until September 1899, box 3, Powers Collection.

⁸*San Francisco Call*, 22 April 1900. See also *New York Herald*, 24 June 1900, and Chapin, "Homer Lea," 4, 10-15.

⁹The major source of information about Lea's activities during this period, Carl Glick's *Double Ten: Capt. O'Bannion's Story of the Chinese Revolution* (New York, 1945), is a rousing but completely unreliable perpetuation of the Lea legend.

The Historian

that he deserved any of the praise subsequently heaped on him by admirers who proclaimed him organizer of the Republican victory.¹⁰

Lea's legendary feats so dazzled one observer that he declared they "would not do in a novel" because they "would be accounted untrue to life, impossible." The author of a sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography* spoke of Lea's "uncanny skills in organizing and leading the forces of the Chinese people" and called him one of "the most picturesque personalities of his generation and, perhaps, the most gifted American who ever joined a foreign legion."¹¹ On the other hand, there have always been detractors who denounced Lea as an imposter whose "adventures" were part of a mythology carefully fabricated by Homer and his journalist friends. "General" Lea, says one of these, "played only a minor role" in the Chinese revolutionary movement and probably never "participated in any military action."¹² Such contradictory views on the extent of Homer Lea's involvement in the Chinese revolution or his significance as a military leader are of interest to this essay to the extent that they are part of the Lea mystique. Both those who praised and those who condemned Lea helped to draw attention to him and to the militarist creed he attempted to popularize.¹³

During the decade between his two trips to China, Homer Lea wrote a novel, a yet unproduced play, and five articles¹⁴ as well as the two books on global military strategy upon which rests his literary reputation, such as it is. Both *The Valor of Ignorance* (1909), which ends

¹⁰For example, see *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May 1912; "Who is General Homer Lea?" *Army-Navy Journal*, 2 March 1912, 817; and "General Homer Lea," *Literary Digest*, 16 Nov. 1912, 930-31.

¹¹From Lea's obituary in *Harper's Weekly*, 9 Nov. 1912, 5, and Paul Kaufman, "Homer Lea," *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone, 20 vols. (New York, 1943), 11: 69-70. See also William O. Inglis to C.E. Van Loan, 11 Nov. 1912, box 4, Powers Collection.

¹²Daniels, *Politics of Prejudice*, 72-74, 141n., and *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 Nov. 1909.

¹³It is of interest to note that Chinese historians seem to take Lea more seriously than their American counterparts. See Niu Sien-chang, "Two Forgotten American Strategists," *Military Review* 46 (1966): 53-59, and Huang Chi-lu, *Kuo-fu chun-shih ku-wen, Ho Ma-li Chiang Chun* [Dr. Sun Yat-sen's military advisor—General Homer Lea] (Taipei, 1976).

¹⁴Lea's novel *The Vermillion Pencil: A Romance of China* (1908) and his play *The Crimson Spider* supposedly reflect his early experiences in China and are extremely critical of Christian, especially Catholic, missionaries; neither work is recommended. On the other hand, his articles are of interest insofar as they reflect his political, economic, and military views; they are "Can China Fight?" *World Today*, Feb. 1907, 137-46; "How Socialism Failed in China," *Van Norden's Magazine*, Sept.-Oct. 1908, 107-13, 81-85; "The Boycott—China's Mighty Weapon," *ibid.*, July 1909; "The Aeroplane in War," *Harper's Weekly*, 20 and 27 Aug. 1910, 8-9, 11, 26; and "The Legacy of Commodore Perry," *North American Review* 197 (June 1913): 741-60.

Homer Lea

with Japanese investing San Francisco, and *The Day of the Saxon* (1912), which plots the impending collapse of the British Empire, were in the mainstream of what one historian has called the "cataclysmic" school of American writing. Lea was one of those foretellers of doom who chronicled, sometimes with a kind of perverse delight, the imminent ruin of Anglo-American civilization.¹⁵ With exceedingly bold strokes, Lea painted lurid and ominous pictures of declining Anglo-Saxon nations—weakened by complacency, commercialism, pacifism, feminism, democracy, and race mixing—whose survival in the struggle for existence against the rising tides of Nippon, Teuton, and Slav was in grave doubt. Generally crude and pretentious, full of overblown rhetoric and *ad hominem* pronouncements, Lea's writing, nonetheless, was at times compelling, provocative, and not without insight. At the same time, it was curiously anachronistic. Lea's semi-hysterical style harkened back to Carlyle, but his strategic arguments were presented in a geopolitical framework that looked forward to the Haushofer school in Germany.¹⁶

This peculiar combination of positive and negative qualities has, no doubt, contributed to periodic flurries of renewed interest in Lea, as in the months after Pearl Harbor when latter-day Cassandras remembered his prediction that the Japanese, in a bid for Pacific supremacy, would threaten Hawaii and invade the Philippines,¹⁷ or again as in the 1950s and 1960s when cold warriors discovered his prescient warning about the resilient militarism and unrelenting imperialism of the Russian Bear whatever its ideological guise.¹⁸

¹⁵See Frederic Cople Jaher, *Doubters and Dissenters: Cataclysmic Thought in America, 1885-1918* (Glencoe, N.Y., 1964), 5-8, 81-84, and Bannister, *Social Darwinism*, 239.

¹⁶For Haushofer, see Andreas Dorpalen, *The World of General Haushofer: Geopolitics in Action* (New York, 1942). Examples of Lea's geopolitical approach can be found in both *The Valor of Ignorance*, 37-38, 111, 195-203, 225, and *The Day of the Saxon*, 92, 95-6, 119, 158, 178-81. An example of Lea's occasional insight was his prediction in 1909 that the Chinese, Turkish, Austrian, and Russian Empires would soon fall. *Valor*, 118-19.

¹⁷See especially Clare Boothe, "Ever Hear of Homer Lea," *Saturday Evening Post*, 7 and 14 March 1942. This sensational article, full of inaccuracies, was used as a biographical introduction to both *The Valor of Ignorance* and *The Day of the Saxon* when they were reissued by Harper Brothers in 1942. See also *Time*, 29 Dec. 1941, 18-19, and Hanson W. Baldwin, "A War We Can Lose," *New York Times*, 3 Jan. 1942.

¹⁸After warning of the Russian danger in *The Day of the Saxon*, 100-117, Lea at the time of his death was planning a third book tentatively entitled *The Swarming of the Slav*. See Niu Sien-chang, "Two Forgotten American Strategists," 53-59, and Joshua B. Powers, "Another Pearl Harbor?" *Fort Worth Press*, 31 Dec. 1961. In 1955 Hedda Hopper noted in her column that a Hollywood producer wanted to make a film based on Lea's life (with Mickey Rooney playing the lead!). *New York Times*, 26 Aug. 1955, and Joshua B. Powers to Hedda Hopper, 7 Sept. 1955, box 2, Powers Collection.

The Historian

As a thinker, Lea was neither original nor profound. He was a voracious reader with considerable ability to absorb and recall what he had read, but, intellectually, he followed the path of least resistance, taking those ideas which supported his thesis and ignoring all that did not. Thus, many of his philosophical assumptions and sociopolitical theories seem to be cut from whole cloth rather than constructed on any logically consistent foundation. The question of where and from whom Lea drew his arguments is difficult to answer precisely because while nearly all of his ideas were “in the air,” he acknowledged the source of almost none of them. Certainly, he took what he imagined to be scientific Darwinism and linked it to a militarist view of war and struggle as the chief catalysts of historical change. And while Lea accepted Herbert Spencer’s idea that militarism was being gradually dislocated by industrialism, he rejected Spencer’s assertion that this was a “good thing.” Indeed, crass materialism induced by the triumph of industrialization was, for Lea, the gravest threat to Anglo-Saxon race survival. Here Lea was at one with the likes of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Brooks Adams, and he undoubtedly expropriated the latter’s theory of the three-cycled development of nations and races—weakness and dispersion, conquest and concentration, decline and dissipation.¹⁹ Furthermore, Lea, like Adams, stressed both the “ceaseless and pitiless struggle for existence” which weeded the weak from the strong and the dangers inherent in a mob-driven democracy bereft of its “natural” aristocracy.²⁰

In the spirit of the times, Lea was a prolific law giver and every “natural law” he solemnly pronounced was immediately classified as “immutable” in time and “inevitable” in application.²¹ For example, he discovered the “law of expansion and shrinkage” which ordained that all political and racial units must either expand or decline. No stationary status quo was possible; only expansion could ensure survival and progress. And if expansion was the singular method for preserving the nation or the race, war was the sole means by which expansion could be accomplished. “All kingdoms, empires and nations

¹⁹For example, see Lea, *Valor*, 10, 28, 62, and *Saxon*, 187.

²⁰Lea, *Saxon*, 19, 101, and *Valor*, 76. The parallels between the ideas of Lea and Brooks Adams are so frequent and so striking that one must conclude that Adams’s works, especially *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895) and *The New Empire* (1902), had significant intellectual influence on Lea. For an excellent discussion of Brooks Adams’s historical thought, see Timothy P. Donovan, *Henry Adams and Brooks Adams* (Norman, 1961), 69-89, 126-49; on connections between Lea and Adams, see Bannister, *Social Darwinism*, 238-39, and John F. Mallan, “Roosevelt, Brooks Adams and Lea: The Warrior Critique of the Business Civilization,” *American Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1956): 216-37.

²¹Lea, *Valor*, 51-52, 73, 99, *Saxon*, 9-10, 57-58, 149, 205, 211-12, 230, and “Aeroplane in War.” 8.

Homer Lea

... have been born out of the womb of war and the delivery of them has occurred in the pain and labor of battle."²²

As the determining factor in the struggle for existence, war was not, Lea said, a haphazard historical phenomenon; rather, it was a "science" whose laws belonged "to the primitive ordinances of Nature, and governed all forms of life from a single protozoa awash in the sea to the empires of man."²³ Since war was "a part of life" whose place in the national existence was "fixed and predetermined," the obvious role of the thinkers and doers was to ensure that the collective militant spirit of the nation or race was preserved. That, of course, was the rub. For Lea believed that the "militancy" of Anglo-Saxon peoples had been disastrously eroded by factors (ignorance, complacency, subliminal fear) and factions (businessmen, pacifists, feminists, socialists, aliens) that were leading them straight to national disintegration or race suicide.²⁴

Among those developments most obviously pointing to "the hour of desolation" in the Saxon struggle for survival was the calamitous triumph of the practical and material over the spiritual and imaginative. In both America and Great Britain, Lea asserted, priest and soldier had given place to tradesman and bureaucrat. The purity of primitive patriotism was being usurped by the hedonistic "gratification of individual avarice":

When a country makes industrialism the end, it becomes a glutton among nations, vulgar, swinish, arrogant, whose kingdom lasts proportionately no longer than life remains to the swine among men. It is this purposeless gluttony, the outgrowth of natural industry, that is commercialism.²⁵

The false and temporary victory of an effete business class, corpulent with riches and blinded by "larval greed," not only subverted the efforts of the diminished ranks of patriotic militants who vainly called for meaningful preparations for war but also gave respectability to screaming bands of dangerous visionaries: "International Arbitrationists and Disarmamentists who... [were] persistently striving through subservient politicians, through feminism, clericalism, sophism and other such toilers to drag this already deluded Republic into that Brobdingnagian swamp from whose deadly gases there is no escape."²⁶

And, as if these developments were not sufficiently discouraging, the means of Anglo-Saxon survival were further threatened by "racial

²²Lea, *Valor*, 9-10, 12.

²³*Ibid.*, 44, 51-52, 289.

²⁴Lea, *Saxon*, 7, and *Valor*, 75, 80, 205.

²⁵Lea, *Valor*, 26, 28, 62, 66.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 25, 75.

The Historian

disintegration," the mongrelization of the race by an admixture of alien strains. Since "homogeneity of race" was the "primitive basis for all national security" and an "invaluable principle in determining the stability of national institutions," the future looked bleak for an American Republic whose population in the four decades prior to 1900 had risen from one-twelfth to five-twelfths non-Anglo-Saxon. America, Lea warned, was increasingly being given over to "foreigners" who, whether or not they became naturalized citizens, could neither comprehend nor uphold national standards and ideals.²⁷ Thus, the Saxon, who had girded the earth with "the scarlet circle of his power" and manned a "thin, red Saxon line, so thin with his numbers, so red with his blood," had now forsaken "racial fealty" and sunk into a heterogeneous mass. Racial assimilation had led to deterioration, opening the way to the "decadence of militancy," which, as Lea noted at his Newtonian best, "proceeds arithmetically while the population of conquered peoples increases in geometrical ratio."²⁸

In the light of such language, Lea has, with reason, often been characterized as one of the most extreme and virulent of American racists.²⁹ Yet such a view is oversimplified if not misleading. Lea's view did not arise from a racist belief that all peoples competing with the Anglo-Saxon were inferior but from a "scientific" conviction that races like species survived and evolved through a process of gradual purification that was undermined by assimilation.³⁰ Thus, paradoxically, his personal attitudes, especially toward Oriental peoples, were quite tolerant, if not enlightened. At a time when much of the West Coast popular press was beating the drum for Oriental exclusion, Lea actually condemned restrictions against the Chinese, whose qualities he consistently praised, as a "monstrous injustice."³¹ He further noted that if Japan went to war to protect her sons and daughters from American prejudice and maltreatment, the entire world would "regard Japan's position as not only lawful, but justly taken."³² A distinguished Japanese-American historian has gone so far as to call Lea a "prescient" and "essentially . . . detached observer of Japanese-American relations."³³

²⁷*Ibid.*, 116-17, 125-34.

²⁸Lea, *Saxon*, 4-5, 42-43.

²⁹Daniels, *Politics of Prejudice*, 72-73, and Jaher, *Doubters and Dissenters*, 12, 15, 81.

³⁰Lea, *Valor*, 122-23, 131-32, 177-78, and *Saxon*, 36, 101, 128.

³¹Quoted by Chapin, "Homer Lea," 76-77. See also Lea, "Can China Fight?" 145, and "Socialism in China," 108-9.

³²Lea, *Valor*, 177-83. See also Ethel Powers Lea to Dr. Sun Yat-sen, 1 May 1914, box 1, Powers Collection.

³³Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 165-66. Cf. *Asahi Shimbun* (members of the staff), *The Pacific Rivals*, trans. and ed. Peter M. Grilli and Yoshio Murakami (New York, 1972), 61-62.

Homer Lea

Such a view perhaps goes too far in absolving Lea, but while he did deny the possibility of successful racial assimilation, Lea accounted Oriental peoples as capable as any Occidental "race." Indeed, when it came time to prescribe models for the faint possibility of Anglo-Saxon regeneration, Japan stood in the forefront:

The nation [Japan] vanishes. It has been metamorphosed into a soldier. This soldier is the genius of the nation. He has elevated martyrdom to heroism, and heroism to duty. He does not haggle over eternity, but, having found a God in his country, has discovered a sanctuary for his valor.³⁴

Japan's relative poverty, Lea said, was its absolute wealth because commercial concerns were never permitted to override loyalty to nation and race in the struggle for existence. Lea believed that Japan had achieved the military spirit which would permit her to continue to expand and thus overwhelm her racial foes. In looking to their own salvation, America and Britain could do no better than to emulate the virtues which had impelled Japan's meteoric rise among the nations!

True militancy belongs to primitive, homogeneous peoples, wherein political control is restricted to the fewest number of persons, or even to a single individual. National militancy deteriorates in inverse ratio to the increasing complexity of social and political organisms, hence the larger a nation is and the more individualistic its inhabitants become . . . the less capable . . . [it is] to be a conquering power.³⁵

Such rhetorical flourishes tend to hide or overwhelm any practical message, but Lea did hint at the type of program which might save Anglo-Saxons from destruction by their racial enemies. The Anglo-Saxon nations, Lea said, must abandon their inflexible military systems which depended on large navies backed by small home defense armies, consisting mainly of ill-trained militia and volunteers. Since only great land armies could achieve the decisive victory necessary for national or racial survival, Lea called for the introduction of "universal and compulsory military service among the Saxons" in order to create a highly trained, rigidly disciplined, long-service military force. The establishment and control of this force, he continued, must be wrested from the venal grasp of mediocre politicians—the servants of mob-minded democracy—and placed in the hands of patriotic and preceptive military leaders. Thus, to be saved, Anglo-Saxon societies had to be thoroughly and ruthlessly militarized.³⁶

If, however, the Anglo-Saxon nations, with their wealth and their complacency, continued to be "lulled into somnolent security" by imaginary ocean barriers or supposedly invincible fleets, if they

³⁴Lea, *Saxon*, 94.

³⁵Lea, *Valor*, 206-7; see also 65-66.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 41-53 *passim.*, 93-94, and Lea, *Saxon*, 160-70, 220-22, 239.

The Historian

continued to depend upon volunteer armies and outmoded military systems, then through “their indifference and in valor of their ignorance they [would] depart, together with their monuments and constitutions, their vanities and their gods.”³⁷ The British, their empire inundated by a Teutonic tide, would perhaps go the way of the Dutch and become “a jester in the motley of universal peace”; and the “heterogeneous Republic” of America, its western shores firmly in the grip of the all-conquering Nippon, would “disintegrate, and again into the palm of re-established monarchy pay the toll of its vanity and its scorn.”³⁸

Homer Lea had concocted a heady brew, especially in the wake of the war scares and invasion panics which had rippled through both Great Britain and the United States from 1907 to 1909.³⁹ How did the reading public respond to such dire warnings? What was the size and composition of the audience which embraced Lea’s message on the inevitability of war in the struggle for existence? Such questions are, of course, difficult to answer, beyond noting that Lea’s books sold reasonably well⁴⁰ and that his premonitions of disaster were repeated in national journals and public addresses on the West Coast.⁴¹ Lea’s identifiable readers included a small group of personal devotees⁴² as well as those who shared his racial perspectives. One of the latter, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles E. Woodruff, author of *Expansion of Races* (1909), praised Lea for warning “Aryan civilization” of its “obese vulnerability” in “the coming Pacific War.”⁴³ The bulk of the rest were individuals connected with the cult of military preparedness. While critics have justifiably called attention to the anachronistic and contradictory aspects of Lea’s military ideas, it should be noted that much of what he had to say about the ultimate supremacy of the Army over the Navy and the necessity for massive armies of conscripts reflected

³⁷Lea, *Valor*, 7, 37-38, 53, 232-33, 240-41, 278-79, 282, and *Saxon*, 158, 219-20.

³⁸Lea, *Saxon*, 11, 149, 205, and *Valor*, 306-7.

³⁹For British invasion scares, see I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War* (London, 1966), 64-161, and Samuel V. Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968), 15-53. The difficulties between the United States and Japan and the subsequent war scare of 1907 are thoroughly discussed by Raymond A. Estus, *Theodore Roosevelt and Japan* (Seattle, 1966), and Thomas A. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crisis* (Stanford, 1935).

⁴⁰In her introduction to the 1942 editions of each book, Clare Boothe notes that *The Valor of Ignorance* sold 18,000 copies before 1922 and that *The Day of the Saxon* had sold 7,000 by 1933. Boothe, “The Valor of Homer Lea,” in *Valor*, 23, 30.

⁴¹See Lea, “Aeroplane in War” and “Legacy of Commodore Perry,” *passim*. See also a report of Lea’s speech in San Diego, “An Eloquent Note of Warning,” *Army-Navy Journal*, 31 Dec. 1910, 501-2.

⁴²For example, see Robert J. Belford to Homer Lea, 17 Nov. 1909, box 3, Powers Collection.

⁴³Woodruff to Lea, 10 April 1910, box 2, Powers Collection.

Homer Lea

the views of many influential military thinkers, especially in Great Britain.⁴⁴

Hudson Maxim, one of the inventors of smokeless powder (his brother Hiram invented the Maxim Gun), thought Congress ought to award Lea a gold medal and allocate \$100,000 for the distribution of *The Valor of Ignorance* which was “the strongest and best thing that has yet appeared to stem the tide of our great American egoistic obsession.”⁴⁵ California congressman James MacLachlan cited Lea’s “unequaled” study of the defenseless West Coast in pleading with his Congressional colleagues to improve America’s slouching defense posture against the “yellow peril.”⁴⁶ The editor of the *Army-Navy Journal*, Major George H. Shelton, wrote to thank Lea for his attempts to educate politicians on military matters and promised, through his *Journal*, “to make the Army know you at least.” There was even an aspiring playwright who wished to use Lea’s work as the basis for a stage production which might “wake up our country” while achieving the patriotic, and financial, success which had accrued to the highly popular British invasion drama, *An Englishman’s Home*.⁴⁷ Several American generals were also much taken with *The Valor of Ignorance*, including former chief-of-staff, Adna R. Chaffee, who, with Major-General J.P. Story, wrote an introduction to the book, and incumbent chief-of-staff, Leonard Wood, who recommended it to J. St. Loe Strachey, influential editor of the *Spectator* (London).⁴⁸ The commander of the Philippine Division, Major General W.P. Duvall, made so bold as to personally recommend Lea’s book to former president Roosevelt. But T.R., who had probably met Lea in 1905 and certainly agreed with many of his sentiments, told the British general, Sir Ian Hamilton, that Lea had ruined a good case “by hysterical overemphasis and exaggeration.”⁴⁹ Whether or not Homer

⁴⁴For criticism, see especially Daniels, *Politics of Prejudice*, 73-74, 141n. The best discussion of Britain’s “thinking army” after the Boer War is Nicholas d’Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy* (London, 1973), 141-51.

⁴⁵Hudson Maxim to Homer Lea, 7 Jan. 1910, box 1, Powers Collection. See also Maxim, *Defenseless America* (New York, 1915), 33-34, 63-64, 68, 228-29, and Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 191.

⁴⁶For Rep. McLachlan’s resolution and speech, see *Congressional Record* 45, part 6 (19 May 1910), 6651-60; for references to “General” Lea, 6658-59. This speech was reprinted as “Is the United States Prepared to Repel Invasion?”; copy in box 5, Powers Collection.

⁴⁷Major George H. Shelton to Lea, 18 Oct. 1910, box 1, and C.J. Crane to C.B. Boothe, 27 Mar. 1910, box 2, both in Powers Collection.

⁴⁸Leonard Wood to Strachey, 15 Dec. 1909, 5/24/1/12, Strachey Papers, House of Lords Record Office, London. The *Spectator* did not review *The Valor of Ignorance*.

⁴⁹W.P. Duvall to T. Roosevelt (copy), 2 Nov. 1910, box 3, Powers Collection, and Roosevelt to Ian Hamilton, 28 Dec. 1910, 3370 Roosevelt Mss., in *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting E. Morison, 8 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), 7:194. Chapin,

The Historian

Lea was aware of Roosevelt's views, he characteristically believed that certain persons in high places had hatched some sort of plot to suppress the sale and distribution of his work in the United States.⁵⁰

In Great Britain, however, Lea had absolutely no grounds for a similar complaint since a number of influential persons gave his books their enthusiastic endorsement. Certainly, the sale of Lea's work and the reputation of its author were considerably enhanced by the advocacy of Field Marshall Lord Frederick Sleigh Roberts, hero of the Boer War and former commander in chief of the British Army. As president of the National Service League (NSL), an organization dedicated to the establishment of compulsory military service for home defense, Lord Roberts was struck by the similarity between Lea's description of American unpreparedness and his own estimate of the situation in the British Empire. Indeed, Roberts was so impressed with *The Valor of Ignorance* ("a delightful book") that he not only enlisted the impressive propaganda machinery of the NSL to promote it⁵¹ but also sent complimentary copies of it to some important people. One of these, Sir Dighton Probyn, Keeper of the Privy Purse and a close friend of King Edward VII, was suitably impressed and promised "to urge His Majesty to read it"; another, former prime minister Arthur Balfour, suggested to Lord Esher, a powerful member of the Committee of Imperial Defense (CID), that a CID subcommittee be set up to look into the questions Lea had raised in the book.⁵² There was also response from the outposts of Anglo-Saxondom. An Australian M.P., Sir Richard Austin, praised Lea's work as "the most weighty exposition" of the Japanese threat and a clarion call for white people to "band together in the Pacific . . . and curb Japanese ambitions." Norman Angell later reported to an

"Homer Lea", 77-78, claims that Lea, in the company of Chinese reform leader K'ang Yu-wei, interviewed President Roosevelt concerning Chinese exclusion on June 24, 1905; T.R.'s log for both June 23 and 24 refers to meetings on Chinese exclusion, Morison, ed., *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 4:1377, but the *New York Tribune* makes no mention of Lea and K'ang as White House visitors.

⁵⁰W.W. Allen to C.B. Boothe, 31 Mar. 1910, 1/2/53, Charles B. Boothe Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California (cited hereafter as Boothe Papers), and Lea to Lord Roberts, 15 Apr. 1910, 7101-23-47-73, Roberts Papers, National Army Museum, London (cited hereafter as Roberts Papers).

⁵¹Roberts to Lea, 5 Mar. 1910, 7101-23-125-1, Roberts Papers. The NSL's journal, *The Nation in Arms*, published a series of reports on *The Valor of Ignorance*, encouraging members to read it "with all the earnestness it merits." *Nation in Arms*, n.s. 46 (Feb. 1910): 94-95; (Apr. 1910): 177-78; and (June 1910): 261-62.

⁵²Sir D. Probyn to Roberts, Dec. 1909, 7101-23-53-279, and Arthur Balfour to Roberts, 17 Dec. 1909, 7101-23-8-30, Roberts Papers; and Balfour to Reggy [Esher], 4 Feb. 1910, Add Mss. 49719, Balfour Papers, British Library, London. See also Roberts to Lord Grenfell, 28 Nov. 1909, 7101-23-122-11-83, and Roberts to Robert Blatchford, 14 Dec. 1909, 7101-23-122-11-84, Roberts Papers.

Homer Lea

American friend that *The Day of the Saxon* had become "something of a vogue among our Jingoës." This view was confirmed by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a bellwether of Tory opinion, which announced that Lea's book should be read "by all who cultivate an unprejudiced view of the vital conflict we must soon endure."⁵³

In addition to his British following, Lea, oddly enough, seems to have been most popular among the very "races" whose warlike predilections he sought to expose. Both of his books were translated into Japanese and *The Valor of Ignorance* ran to twenty-four editions, supposedly having considerable influence on Japanese military and civilian thinking about America and Britain.⁵⁴ In Germany, Count Ernst Reventlow published a popular translation of *The Day of the Saxon*, sprinklings from which some imaginative commentators have seen in *Mein Kampf*.⁵⁵

Thus it can be established that Homer Lea's works sold widely and at least reasonably well throughout the English-speaking world as well as in foreign translation, although the sale of approximately twenty-five thousand books preaching the inevitability of war from biological principles is scarcely conclusive evidence of the widespread acceptance of militaristic Social Darwinism. A more persuasive argument might be made that the influence of Homer Lea could best be ascertained not from the sale of his books but from the volume of the response which opponents made to them. To be sure, Lea's books were disdainfully attacked as badly written, illogical, and without "intrinsic interest or merit whatever" by members of the liberal-progressive press in both Britain and the United States,⁵⁶ but some of the leading peace advocates in the Anglo-American community were not so quick to dismiss Lea's message. Indeed, three of these, William James, Norman Angell, and David Starr Jordan, made Homer Lea the focus of extensive and sophisticated efforts to refute what they characterized as a concerted militarist propaganda campaign.

⁵³Sir Richard Austin to Lea, 3 Feb. and 8 May 1911, box 1, Powers Collection; Norman Angell to David Starr Jordan (copy), 25 Feb. 1913, Norman Angell Papers, Ball State University Library, Muncie, Indiana (cited hereafter as Angell Papers); and H.F. Prevost Battersby, "Wars and Warnings," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 June 1912.

⁵⁴*The Valor of Ignorance* was translated into Japanese by Koki H. Ike, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Japanese secretary, with earnings earmarked for Dr. Sun's revolutionary activities. See Sun Yat-sen to "General" Lea, 7 Nov. 1910, box 1; K.H. Ike to Dr. Takana, 20 Dec. 1910, box 3; Ike to Lea, 10 Nov. 1911, box 1; and Yasotaro Morri to Lea, 20 June 1912, box 1, all in Powers Collection.

⁵⁵*Des Britische reiches schicksalstunde: namwort eines angelsachsen* (Berlin, 1913). For references to Hitler, see Jaher, *Doubters and Dissenters*, 82, and Vagts, *History of Militarism*, 455.

⁵⁶See *Philadelphia Press*, 22 Nov. 1909; *Chicago Post*, 10 Dec. 1909; and *Westminster Gazette*, 17 Aug. 1912.

The Historian

William James was the first important “pacifist”⁵⁷ to address himself to Homer Lea’s brand of militarism. Lea’s biographer has claimed that James wrote “The Moral Equivalent of War” specifically to combat Lea’s assertions of the biological necessity for war,⁵⁸ but this is impossible since the first version of James’s essay was presented to an Assembly of Stanford University in February 1906, well before Homer Lea had published any of his militarist theories. However, when James rewrote the essay late in 1909 for submission to *McClure’s Magazine*, he did include Lea as one of two “apologists for war” with whom he contested.⁵⁹ It is not clear if this was because he considered “General Homer Lea” an especially dangerous influence or because the recently published *Valor of Ignorance* was such a convenient target.

In any case, James identified Lea as typical of those militarist authors who take “a highly mystical view” of war, regarding it “as a biological and sociological necessity, uncontrolled by ordinary psychological checks and motives . . . in short, a permanent human obligation.”⁶⁰ But rather than make a *prima facie* dismissal of Lea and his type as perverse barbarians, James gave them credit for incisively grasping the fact that war had indeed provided human history with its most romantic, most dynamic, and even most virtuous periods. James went so far as to accept the possibility that if humanity were deprived of war, with its self-sacrifice, its devotion to duty, its sense of honor, its “manliness,” the earth might become a mere “cattleyard of a planet . . . a world of clerks and teachers, of co-education and zo-ophily, of ‘consumer’s leagues’ and ‘associated charities’, of industrialism unlimited and feminism unabashed”—in short, a world without the uplifting, almost sacred, process which prevented men from becoming so much inert “human blubber.”⁶¹

The problem with antimilitarists who attempted to combat Lea’s arguments, James said, was that they refused to consider “the aesthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents.” Peace advocates tended to

⁵⁷James used this term to describe himself in “The Moral Equivalent of War,” *Memories and Studies* (New York, 1924), 275. Recently Martin Ceadel, in *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, 1980), 3, has reintroduced this term to describe those who, while not absolute pacifists, assume “that war, though sometimes necessary, is always an irrational and inhumane way to solve disputes, and that its prevention should always be an over-riding political priority.” This is a fairly accurate description of the attitude of James as well as Norman Angell and David Starr Jordan in the period before 1914.

⁵⁸Chapin, “Homer Lea”, 2.

⁵⁹Gay Wilson Allen, *William James: A Biography* (New York, 1967), 451, 470. The other militarist writer was a German, Dr. S.R. Steinmetz; the essay was first published by *McClure’s Magazine* in August 1910.

⁶⁰James, “Moral Equivalent of War,” 277.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 276, 285-86.

Homer Lea

emphasize the bestial horror or wasteful expense of war, but such points made little impression upon militarists of Lea's type, who readily admitted to the atrocious brutality of war but insisted that the price was worth the rewards of accumulated virtue and biological progress. In James's view, what the peace party needed was not materialistic or sentimental arguments, but a willingness to meet militarists on their own ground by creating a "moral equivalent of war" which would incorporate all the solid virtues that war evoked but would use them to accomplish positive, constructive, and humane goals. James suggested "a conscription of the whole youthful population" to struggle "in the universal human warfare against nature." Such a procedure would improve both the physical and moral health of the community while preserving the "manly virtues which the military party is so afraid of seeing disappear in peace."⁶²

James's biographer calls "The Moral Equivalent of War" the "most famous and influential" piece he ever wrote, noting that several million copies of it were eventually printed.⁶³ Obviously the distribution of Lea's books pales beside such a figure, but Norman Angell, another peace advocate who attacked Homer Lea's militarist views, was even more widely read than William James.

Angell's *Great Illusion*, which took the literary world by storm late in 1910, is probably the most successful "pacifist" polemic ever written. Over two million copies—preaching the lesson that wars were economically irrational because neither victor nor vanquished could escape their ravages—were sold between 1910 and 1913, and millions more, in over twenty languages, thereafter.⁶⁴ In all the pre-1914 editions of his book, Angell dealt at some length with Homer Lea's *Valor of Ignorance*, not only because it was "the best voiced" version of the view that the nation which neglected its militancy was "meddling with the universal law" and "regressing in its struggle for survival" but also because Lea's "principles if not his language are those which characterize . . . similar literature in England, France, Germany, and the continent of Europe generally." Angell did not attempt to combat Lea's military ideas as such but rather the principles upon which those ideas were based. These, Angell said, revealed a "grave misconception" in Lea's interpretation of the laws of evolution.⁶⁵

Angell's advantage in assailing such principles was a lucid, logical style which contrasted sharply, and for the most part favorably, with

⁶²*Ibid.*, 281-85, 289-91.

⁶³Allen, *William James*, xi. The essay was published and widely distributed by the Association for International Conciliation (Leaflet no. 27).

⁶⁴The best brief discussion of Angell's career prior to the Great War is Howard Weinroth, "Norman Angell and *The Great Illusion*: An Episode in Pre-1914 Pacifism," *Historical Journal* 17 (1974): 551-74.

⁶⁵Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion* (New York, 1913), 161, 213-14, 223-24.

The Historian

Lea's semi-hysterical bombast. Angell was especially effective in grinding away at the validity and consistency of Lea's arguments. For example, though Lea insisted that humanity exhibited an "unchanging tendency toward warfare," he admitted that most of the inhabitants of the United States and Great Britain were losing their "warlike qualities" on account of excessive engagement in "protoplasmic gourmandizing and retching" (commercial activities). To prevent these commercialized states from being overrun by their still-militant neighbors, Lea prescribed universal military conscription. In other words, conscription would help restore the fading Anglo-Saxon warrior mentality while simultaneously discouraging the aggressive designs of other races. Angell disagreed:

One cannot have it both ways. If long-continued peace is enervating, it is mere self-stultification to plead for conscription on that ground that it will still further prolong that enervating condition. . . . If conscription really does prolong peace and increase our aptitude for the arts of peace, then conscription itself is but a factor in man's temperamental drift away from war, in the change of his nature towards peace.⁶⁶

Angell concluded that while the subject of war and peace was one of utmost gravity, it was difficult to remain serious when one imagined Lea emigrating to some "manly" Latin American republic where he could

prove to each military dictator in turn that, in converting the country to a shambles, far from committing a foul crime for which dictators should be, and are, held in execration by civilized men . . . they are, on the contrary, but obeying one of God's commands in tune with all the immutable laws of the universe.

Man was not becoming more peaceful because he was "degenerate or swinish or gluttonous," Angell argued, but because he was directed by "the real 'primordial law'" to earn a living, and "his nature in consequence develops those qualities which the bulk of his interests and capacities demand and favor."⁶⁷

If readers were at all convinced by Angell's arguments—and the growth of the Norman Angell movement would seem to indicate that many were, in the short run at least⁶⁸—then Homer Lea's reputation could only have suffered from Angell's disparaging assaults. One of

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 213, 219. In *The Valor of Ignorance*, 88, Lea does, in fact, argue that "it has only been due to the formation of permanent military forces that intervals of peace have been lengthened."

⁶⁷Angell, *Great Illusion*, 223-24, 220.

⁶⁸See Weinroth, "Norman Angell," 560-61. The *Times* (London), 15 Feb. 1912, noted, "few writers have stimulated reflection upon International Politics more than Mr. Norman Angell."

Homer Lea

Angell's leading American supporters and popularizers, however, believed that merely by mentioning Lea's name, Angell was giving the "little General" far more respect and publicity than he deserved. In 1912 David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University and one of the leading lights of the World Peace Foundation, told Angell that "French friends" had criticized *The Great Illusion* "as containing too much quotation from people whose folly is hardly worth remembering." Specifically, Jordan thought that Angell should make clear that Homer Lea was neither a general nor even a soldier but only an ambitious "college sophomore" (this was over a decade after Lea left Stanford) who had done little except drill "Chinese schoolboys and waiters" in Los Angeles.⁶⁹

Angell, though he addressed Jordan as "Mon cher Maitre" and thanked him for the note on Lea, paid little attention to his friend's admonition. In each succeeding pre-1914 edition of *The Great Illusion*, "General" Homer Lea continued to hold a prominent, if uncomplimentary, place, while Jordan vainly persisted in hounding Angell to excise "the myth of General Lea" from the pages of his book.⁷⁰ Two conclusions may be drawn from this curious exchange: first, Homer Lea was so convenient a target that Angell simply did not take the trouble to remove or replace him; second, Lea had become something of an obsession for David Starr Jordan. Indeed, material in the Jordan Papers indicates that he pursued Homer Lea's reputation, even during Lea's last illness and after his death, in an extremely persistent and abusive fashion.

Perhaps Jordan was so apprehensive about Homer Lea because he considered the development of Lea's militarist mentality something of a personal failure. After all, Lea had been exposed to Jordan's influence during the early years of the latter's tenure as president of Stanford. Also, Jordan may have been particularly aware of Lea's aggressive stance because, in those days, he was himself a fairly recent convert to serious peace advocacy. Clare Boothe, in her introduction to the 1942 editions of Lea's books, makes much of the "tiny cripple's" ideological clashes with the "big eminent doctor," but there is no real evidence of a serious confrontation.⁷¹ In any case, Jordan certainly knew Lea and even saw him on occasion after he left college, meeting him accidentally in Japan in 1900 and quite purposefully some years later at a dinner Lea gave in Los Angeles. Furthermore, when Lea was plotting in 1908, futilely as it turned out, to secure a high diplomatic post in China, he mentioned

⁶⁹David Starr Jordan to Ralph Lane (Angell), 26 Apr. 1912, Angell Papers.

⁷⁰Norman Angell to D.S. Jordan (copy), 25 Feb. 1913, and Jordan to Angell, 18 Jan. and 11 Mar. 1913, 5 May 1914, all in Angell Papers.

⁷¹Boothe, "The Valor of Homer Lea," in *Valor*, 11-12.

The Historian

Jordan as a possible supporter.⁷² After *The Valor of Ignorance* was published, Lea sent President Jordan a complimentary copy. Jordan responded by telling his old student that though the book was “cleverly written” he wished Homer would read Angell’s “‘*The Optical Illusion of Europe*’ [sic], a little book which takes exactly the opposite point of view of your own,” in hopes that he could be made to see the light thereby. In his own unpublished review of *The Valor of Ignorance*, Jordan called the book “an eloquent statement of the international philosophy of fifty years ago . . . a clear and honest . . . version of the ideas from which civilization is freeing itself.”⁷³

This initial reaction seems mild enough, but in the months that followed, Jordan’s attitude became increasingly hostile as Lea began to garner something of a national reputation among the apostles of preparedness and as West Coast yellow journals began to use his works to prove the need for hostility to the Japanese government and the exclusion of Japanese immigrants. During this same period, Jordan began to play a larger and larger role in the peace movement as one of the dominant figures in the World Peace Foundation (founded in 1910), as a leading proponent of Norman Angellism, and as the author of books like *The Human Harvest* (1907), *The Blood of the Nation* (1912), and *War and Waste* (1913). These popular works were an eclectic mixture of Angell’s economic theories, democratic idealism, pedagogical innovation, and especially, “reform” Social Darwinism, emphasizing survival and evolutionary progress through human cooperation. Jordan, who had a considerable academic reputation as a biologist, believed that war—at least since the invention of “villainous gunpower”—was as likely to eliminate the best bred and most fit as the weakling or “the clown” and was therefore the very antithesis of true “Darwinian natural selection.” As he put it, war, a process of “military selection,” tended to preserve the physically and morally less fit and, thus, the “warlike nation of to-day is the decadent nation of tomorrow.”⁷⁴

⁷²David Starr Jordan, *The Days of a Man*, 2 vols. (New York, 1922), 2: 32-34, and Homer Lea to Charles B. Boothe, 21 September 1908, B1/3/27, Boothe Papers. Jordan’s biography has been written by Edward McNall Burns (Stanford, 1953), and there is considerable material on his ideas and activities in both C. Roland Marchand, *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1898-1918* (Princeton, 1972), and David S. Patterson, *Toward a Warless World: The Travail of the American Peace Movement, 1887-1914* (Bloomington, 1976).

⁷³Jordan to Lea, 7 Dec. 1909 and 31 Jan. 1910, box 1, Powers Collection. Jordan’s unpublished essay on *The Valor of Ignorance* can be found in box 69, David Starr Jordan Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California (cited hereafter as Jordan Papers).

⁷⁴*The Blood of the Nation* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1912), 62-63; see also 21, 25, 55-71 *passim*. For analysis of Jordan’s ideas and his role in the peace movement at this time, see Marchand, *American Peace Movement*, 79-110, and Patterson, *Warless World*, 191-236 *passim*.

Homer Lea

Jordan conceived of his role in the peace movement as one of a small group of elite educators able to mold and guide public opinion, "to lead men to think, to undo the poisoned teachings of centuries" and by rational, scientific argument to reveal the idiocy and awfulness of war.⁷⁵ Clearly the demolition of militarist ideas like those of Homer Lea was an essential part of Jordan's self-conceived mission. In *War and Waste* (1912), for example, Jordan, while careful not to give Lea any undue publicity by mentioning his name, spoke directly to the salient points in Lea's writing. The association of military might with national or "racial" greatness, the insistence on conscription as a catch-all remedy for military and social ills, and the assumption of Japan's aggressive designs in the Pacific were each in turn "scientifically" dismantled and dismissed.⁷⁶ Most important of all, however, was Jordan's assertion, in the face of Lea's insistence on the inevitability of war, that despite any signs to the contrary, "we shall never see another war among the great nations of Europe." There would be no war, he said, because the evil spirit of militarism had been "slain by science . . . [and] by democracy."⁷⁷

Such indirect assaults on Lea's "malignant" ideas sufficed so long as "General" Lea remained a kind of West Coast character, generally recognized by responsible, rational men as having about as much right to his exalted rank as vintage San Franciscan Joshua Abraham Norton had had to call himself "Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico."⁷⁸ But late in 1911, when the Chinese revolutionary struggle against the Manchus met with unanticipated success, Homer Lea suddenly burst into prominence as the military advisor of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, aiding the revolutionary leader in negotiations with European governments and accompanying him to China, the only Occidental in Sun's entourage. Immediately, the American press was filled with sensational stories of "General" Lea's magnificent adventures, past and present, as well as predictions of the key role he would play in the Chinese Republic proclaimed by Dr. Sun and his associates on 1 January 1912.⁷⁹ The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, asserted that Lea was "acclaimed the creator of a new republic, a maker of history and a conquering hero who made good his boyhood dream It was General Lea who mapped out the revolutionary campaign and carried it to its

⁷⁵Jordan to the editor of *War and Peace* 1 (December 1913): 63-64, quoted in Patterson, *Warless World*, 196. See also Marchand, *American Peace Movement*, 105-10.

⁷⁶David Starr Jordan, *War and Waste* (Garden City, N.Y., 1913), 59-69, 136-51, 206-10, 235. See also *idem*, *Blood of the Nation*, 71-72.

⁷⁷*War and Waste*, 44, 173, 272-73, 290.

⁷⁸See *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 Nov. 1909. For "Emperor" Norton, see Doris Muscatine, *Old San Francisco* (New York, 1948), 174-78.

⁷⁹For example, *New York Times*, 21 Nov. 1911, and *New York Sun*, 18 Feb. 1912.

The Historian

successful conclusion.”⁸⁰ Military journals were even more extravagant devotees of the newly acclaimed “General,” reminding their readers that Lea’s forecasts of imminent military catastrophe had had little impact on American public or legislative opinion. The *Army-Navy Journal* concluded ominously,

Perhaps it will require a great war in the Pacific to class him among those prophets not without honor except in their own country . . . It is not too much to say that had the Chinese taken the advice given them by Lea with the same self-sufficient air as has marked the American reception of his warnings, there would be no Chinese republic today.⁸¹

At this point, Dr. Jordan seems to have decided that in order to stifle such nonsense and to fulfill his obligations to the peace movement, he would have to launch a new, wide-ranging attack on Homer Lea, indicting not only his principles but his character and veracity as well. Unfortunately, Lea was in no position to defend himself, having returned from China in May 1912 after suffering a stroke which left him paralyzed on one side and without full use of his mental faculties.⁸² Jordan nonetheless pressed on. In September he wrote to the editor of the *Army-Navy Register* upbraiding that journal’s uncritical acceptance of both Lea’s ideas and his alleged military accomplishments. When the *Register* responded with an editorial accusing Jordan and the World Peace Foundation of pursuing a personal animus against Lea, Jordan answered that he had “no desire to discredit Mr. Homer Lea except in so far as he has discredited himself” by actions such as placing false information in *Who’s Who* and allowing the Japanese edition of *The Valor of Ignorance* to be published “with a sensational and inflammatory title, and with untruthful statements concerning . . . its author’s rank as a military authority.”⁸³

Even after Homer Lea succumbed in November 1912 to the host of physical ills which had assailed him, Jordan did not relent in his anti-Lea campaign. In fact, it was probably the obituaries for the “little General”—which added still another layer of sensationalism to the Lea legend—that convinced Dr. Jordan to amass sufficient evidence to lay the myth of Homer Lea to rest once and for all. In life, said one eulogy, “General” Lea had been a “pathetically wasted form lying in the cripple chair on the California beach”; in death, he became “absolutely unique, without a fellow in history.” Another named Lea as “one of that

⁸⁰*Los Angeles Times*, 8 May 1912.

⁸¹“Who is General Homer Lea?” *Army-Navy Journal*, 2 Mar. 1912, 817.

⁸²See “Dr. Urbanek’s Medical Report,” 6 Apr. 1912, box 4, Powers Collection; also *Army-Navy Journal*, 6 Apr. 1912.

⁸³Jordan to J.E. Jenks (of the *Army-Navy Register*), 2 and 21 Sept. 1912, box 69, Jordan Papers, and editorials of 24 Aug. and 14 Sept. 1912, *Army-Navy Register*.

Homer Lea

company of restless souls on whom the conventions of hum-drum prosaic, posted-ledger life was intolerably irksome He and his like enact a wonderful drama Other days and other times, these men were called the 'Lion-Heart' and 'the Bold'."⁸⁴ Perhaps the most fulsome tribute predicted that "future generations of Chinese will cherish the memory of this little American hunchback as next in importance to that of Dr. Sun himself, for he not only contributed to the revolution the work of an extraordinary military genius, but did it for sheer love of service to a righteous cause."⁸⁵

In light of such panegyrics, Dr. Jordan dispatched inquiries to persons of his acquaintance who had observed Homer Lea at various stages of his bizarre career. The most significant response came from Ng Poon Chew (Wu P'ang-chou), highly respected editor of the influential Chinese-language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* (China-West Daily), who, to Jordan's satisfaction, completely exploded the myth of Lea's military career. Noting that he was a friend of Lea's family, Wu admitted that Lea had indeed convinced leaders of the Pao-huang hui to send him to China in 1900 as a military advisor. The only result of that venture, however, was that Lea managed to spend all the money he had been given and had to beg for more for passage home—without accomplishing anything at all.

Lea was never a general in the reform army and there was no such army, he never commanded a Chinese regiment, he never saw a Chinese soldier in China. All the titles he wore were created by himself. He had a scheme long before he associated himself with the Chinese reform leaders, and that was to get himself into public print . . . so that . . . a market might be acquired for the sale of his writings

The Chinese revolutionaries in China have never heard of "General Homer Lea." He was a schemer pure and simple. The Chinese here in San Francisco regretted very much that they parted with their money in sending Lea to China in 1900.⁸⁶

Jordan, with Wu's permission, immediately published this damaging testimony, adding, or persuading a friendly journalist to add, another small touch:

⁸⁴*Infantry Journal* 9 (Nov./Dec. 1912), 403; Charles E. Van Loan, "General Homer Lea," *Harper's Weekly*, 4 Jan. 1913; and *Detroit Tribune*, 4 Nov. 1912.

⁸⁵"General Homer Lea," *Literary Digest*, 16 Nov. 1912, 930-931. Jordan's friend and sometime collaborator Benjamin Krehbiel pointed out this article to him; Krehbiel to Jordan, n.d. [Nov.-Dec. 1912], box 69, Jordan Papers.

⁸⁶Jordan to Ng Poon Chew (Wu P'ang-chou), 5 Dec. 1912, and Wu to Jordan, 6 Dec. 1912, box 69, Jordan Papers. There is also a copy of Wu's letter of December 6 in the Norman Angell Papers. For Wu's career, see *Who's Who in America*, vol. 10, 1918-1919 (Chicago, 1918), 515.

The Historian

Both Shakespeare and Bacon speak of the inordinate vanity of those misfortunates known as hunchbacks, and whether or not vanity is characteristic of the class, the late Homer Lea made himself ridiculous with his extravagant claims and love of praise. The American people love heroes and soldiers of fortune and Lea foisted himself off on the admiring public as both.⁸⁷

Having completed his exposé, Jordan had the satisfaction of knowing (as he told Thomas J. O'Brien, American ambassador to Italy) that "I have done my best to try to lead our people to understand the vicious nature of the talk about the danger of invasion from a great Oriental Army . . . In this regard Leonard Wood has been about as bad as the imaginary general Homer Lea."⁸⁸

Whether or not Dr. Jordan was entirely successful in debunking the Lea legend, his assassination of Lea's character was challenged by at least one person close to Homer, his widow Ethel Powers Lea. In response to Jordan, Mrs. Lea noted that while she would not ordinarily trouble to reply to critics, when a man of Jordan's standing went out of his way "to make so uncalled for and cowardly an attack on General Lea . . . I feel that it would be unjust to my husband's memory to allow this to go by without protest." The chief source for Jordan's calumny, Ng Poon Chew, was, Ethel Lea said, "a Manchu employee and sympathizer, bitterly opposed to the Reform movement and thus an enemy to General Lea" and to the Chinese Republic. In contrast, Homer Lea's long service to China had been recognized by revolutionary leaders who had given his portrait a "prominent" place in the new Republican "Hall of Fame" in Peking and his long connection with the revolutionary movement could be documented by numerous letters and official papers.⁸⁹ Had Jordan contacted the first

⁸⁷Ng Poon Chew (Wu P'ang-chou) to Jordan, 9 Dec. 1912, box 69, Jordan Papers. Jordan published Wu's letter, with his own introduction in, among others, the *New York Evening Post*, 19 Dec. 1912; the quotation is from a newspaper clipping on "'General' Homer Lea" in 1/11/103, Boothe Papers.

⁸⁸Thomas J. O'Brien to Jordan, 7 Feb. 1913, and Jordan to O'Brien, 26 Feb. 1913, box 69, Jordan Papers. Jordan would perhaps have been even more upset had he known that six weeks before Lea died, General Wood had attempted to enlist "General" Lea in "a campaign of education" in support of increased military spending; see Leonard Wood to Homer Lea, 14 Sept. 1912, box 2, Powers Collection.

⁸⁹Though Wu did serve as an advisor to the Manchu consul general in San Francisco from 1906 to 1911, Ethel Lea's characterization of him as a Manchu sympathiser and opponent of the reformers was surely inaccurate, given both the editorial stance of his newspaper and the fact that he continued to act as an advisor to the Republic, becoming vice-consul in 1913. Wu was also instrumental in obtaining the release of Dr. Sun Yat-sen when American immigration authorities detained him in 1904. See Liu Po-chi, *Mei-kuo hua-chiao-shih* [History of the overseas Chinese in the United States] (Taipei, 1976), 431, and Huang San-te, *Hung-meng ke-ming shih* [The revolutionary history of the Hung

Homer Lea

president of the Republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, said Mrs. Lea, he would have discovered the esteem in which Homer Lea was held by Chinese leaders. "However", she concluded, "I suppose that you decided that the information desired could not be obtained from him."⁹⁰

Jordan's reply was somewhat halting, as if he found it distasteful to joust with the widow of his fallen foe. Though he did express regret at not writing to Dr. Sun, Jordan retracted nothing and even concluded with a veiled barb, expressing satisfaction at learning from Mrs. Lea that Homer did not approve of being addressed as "General"—which, of course, was obviously not the case. In his memoirs, published ten years after Lea's death, Jordan was somewhat kinder to him. Amidst an exposition of Lea's literary shortcomings and his "obsession for militarism and war," Jordan stated that he was "a youth of extraordinary parts—ready memory . . . vivid imagination, imperturbable coolness" and admitted to having had a "kindly feeling" for him.⁹¹

Whatever sentiments David Starr Jordan ultimately expressed about Homer Lea, the fact remains that he had gone beyond his fellow peace makers in attacking the "little General." Not satisfied with justifiably clothing Lea in the robes of militarist extremism, Jordan had depicted him as dishonest and unscrupulous as well. While Jordan's assaults on Lea had some basis in truth and were undoubtedly motivated by an earnest desire to spread the gospel of peace, at least part of his seemingly excessive reaction may be laid to his resentment toward an upstart schoolboy who had refused to accept the lessons of his erstwhile mentor.

Still, if David Starr Jordan had personal reasons for assailing Lea, this does not answer the question of why Lea should have been so ubiquitous a quarry for peace advocates. One explanation for these assaults would seem to confirm Robert Bannister's thesis of the "myth of a social Darwinism," i.e., just as social reformers inaccurately attributed opposition to their views to the widespread influence of those who would transfer the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest into all social and economic relationships, so too did the peace makers imply—perhaps because they believed it themselves—that militarist

League] (Los Angeles, 1936), 3-7. Finally, there is no evidence to support the statement that Lea's portrait appeared in a place of honor in Peking; and, in fact, Lea had neither friends nor influence in the old capital. The above information was provided by Dr. Shih-shan H. Tsai.

⁹⁰Ethel Lea to Jordan, 31 Dec. 1912 and 14 Jan. 1913, box 69, Jordan Papers. Regarding Sun Yat-sen's reactions to Lea's death, see Sun to Mrs. Lea, 14 Nov. 1912, box 1, Powers Collection, and Chapin, "Homer Lea," 111-12, who reproduces a letter from the *China Press*, 6 Nov. 1912, in which Sun gives Lea high praise for his military knowledge and his efforts on behalf of the revolution.

⁹¹Jordan to Ethel Lea (copy), 22 Jan. 1913, box 69, Jordan Papers; and Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 2: 32-34.

The Historian

ideas like those of Homer Lea were in danger of being widely accepted and adopted. Such, in their view, was the only means by which militarism, which had been gradually giving way to civilizing influences, could triumph and return control to the forces of reaction.⁹²

But it seems to me there is another explanation which may be more to the point. Like so many who had embraced the optimistic assumptions of nineteenth-century liberalism, these peace makers profoundly misunderstood the nature of the society in which they lived. They truly believed that revelations about the wastefulness and irrationality of war would eventually cause war to be rejected and replaced by International Arbitration or some other reasonable alternative. In advancing this view, they found it simple enough to confound the bombastic rhetoric and pseudoscientific pronouncements of a convenient whipping boy like Homer Lea. But such exercises in ideological “overkill” did not prepare peace makers for a confrontation, in later years, with former colleagues in the peace movement. Homer Lea could be attacked for his irrationality or his misinterpretation of Darwinian theory, but how did Angell and Jordan deal with the likes of Gilbert Murray, Theodore Marburg, or Nicholas Murray Butler when such demonstrably rational men chose war over peace?

Finally, there is the question of whether the militaristic views of writers like Homer Lea did, in fact, appeal to a “Darwinized mentality.” The answer would seem to be largely negative. Lea’s ideas did, as Norman Angell remarked, have “something of vogue among our [British] Jingoos,”⁹³ and among a smaller and less influential group in America, but Lea was largely preaching to the converted; few new recruits answered his call to do battle for the survival of the fittest. Lea’s lack of broad appeal, however, does not necessarily mean that the Anglo-American mentality was not “Darwinized” to some degree. After all, each of the peace makers referred to in this essay addressed the public with arguments explicitly grounded in an interpretation of the social implications of Darwinian theory. The mentality of educated readers may have been sufficiently Darwinized to recognize the basis for Homer Lea’s arguments, but few were persuaded to take these arguments seriously. As a romantic hero and prophet of doom, Homer Lea had a brief spectacular flurry (which is periodically revived, just as briefly, in the wake of some real or threatened disaster);⁹⁴ as an intellectual mentor to millions, or even thousands, “General” Lea, like the militaristic Social Darwinism he espoused, is yet to have his day.

⁹²See Bannister, *Social Darwinism*, 9-11, 225-28, 238-39.

⁹³Angell to Jordan (copy), 25 Feb. 1913, Angell Papers.

⁹⁴For the most recent, but typically sensational—and inaccurate—revival, see Robert Roman, “SOF Superstar vs. Dragon Throne: The Draw Who Roused the Giant,” *Soldier of Fortune* 4/11 (Nov. 1979): 66-70.