

**American Press Coverage of the Assassination of  
Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov, 1905**

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**ABSTRACT****American Press Coverage of the Assassination of  
Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov, 1905**

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On February 17, 1905, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov, uncle of the reigning Tsar Nicholas II and the former Governor General of Moscow, was assassinated on the grounds of the Kremlin. His murder occurred at a time when revolutionary violence, which was sporadic in the years preceding 1905, quickly began to intensify in the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday massacre of January 22, 1905. What often gets overlooked in analyses of the turbulent 1905 Revolution is Sergei, and this thesis seeks to return the spotlight to him and uncover how the American press reported on his death in the context of the burgeoning revolution. As such, my thesis fits into a new wave of scholarship that considers the 1905 Revolution as a transnational phenomenon. American newspapers, which fortunately had access to foreign correspondents stationed in Russia who were no longer impeded by Russian censorship laws by this time, broke the news of the assassination the day following the bombing – but what did they write about it? Better yet, to what extent did they grasp that the assassination of the Grand Duke was part of a larger revolutionary phenomenon, if at all? This thesis examines news reports printed by five American newspapers about the assassination and its aftermath over a period of three months – from the day after the bomb exploded to the day after the assassin was executed – and finds that the press recognized from the outset that the bombing was not an isolated incident, but part of a planned revolutionary campaign against the autocracy. Moreover, an analysis of news reports about Sergei’s assassination demonstrates how quickly his story was supplanted by other news stories about revolutionary violence.

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### **A Note on Spelling and Dates**

The sources utilized in this thesis seek to depict life in the Russian Empire for an American audience and, therefore, transliterate Russian names and places in various ways. When directly quoting my sources, I do not alter the spelling used in the original materials. However, when not directly quoting from primary sources, I transliterate Russian names and places according to the Library of Congress system. Thus, Sergius becomes Sergei, Kaleieff becomes Kaliaev, Czar becomes Tsar, etc. The names of the Tsars have also been given their anglicised forms.

Prior to 1918, Russia used the Julian Calendar, which in the twentieth century was 13 days behind the Gregorian Calendar used in the West. Given that my primary sources are taken from American newspapers, all dates conform to the latter.

## Introduction: A Growing Interest in Russian Affairs

On February 17, 1905, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov, brother of the late Russian Emperor Alexander III and uncle to the reigning Tsar Nicholas II, was assassinated in Moscow. He was leaving the Kremlin when Ivan Platonovich Kaliaev, a member of the Combat Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR), threw a bomb at the Grand Duke's carriage. The assassination had been carefully planned, and the target intentionally selected. Sergei was despised by many not only because of his staunch opposition to political reform, but also because of events during his tenure as Governor General of Moscow, which involved him expelling approximately 20,000 Jews from the city in 1891, and mismanaging the tsar's coronation ceremony in 1896, which resulted in the deaths of 1,429 people who attended the event.<sup>1</sup> The sound of the explosion was reportedly heard across the city and beyond the Moskva River, but the news of Sergei's death also traveled across oceans and was read about throughout the world, including in the United States. How American newspapers reported on Sergei's death is the subject of this thesis, and the pages that follow demonstrate how a notable moment in the struggle against tsarist autocracy helped to forge the Russian revolution as a transnational event.

The Grand Duke's assassination was not an isolated instance of political violence in Russia. In fact, assassination and terrorism had become commonplace since 1866, when the first unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Tsar Alexander II. Radicalism in the tsar's empire took shape in the 1870s and 1880s under the direction of a revolutionary group known as *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will), which is considered the "first modern terrorist organization in the world."<sup>2</sup> The members of People's Will succeeded in assassinating Alexander II in 1881, but

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Greenberg, *The Jews in Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976) 11-15;

<sup>2</sup> Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia: 1894-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

the organization was ultimately stamped out by government authorities in the years following his death. It is estimated that fewer than 100 people died from terrorist attacks between 1860 and 1900, but the realization among revolutionaries that violence could be used to destabilize and even paralyze the tsarist regime endured, and fueled an explosion of terrorism in the early twentieth century, especially during the first Russian Revolution (1905-1907).<sup>3</sup>

Terrorism and political violence in Russia had never gone unnoticed in the West. Michael Hughes' article "British Opinion and Russian Terrorism in the 1880s," for instance, investigates how the British press perceived the acts of revolutionaries from the 1860s to the late 1880s. He finds that there seemed to be consensus in Britain that terrorism in Russia grew as a result of authoritarianism, which rendered the use of violence by the revolutionaries acceptable. This attitude was shaped by numerous reports that spoke of pogroms and anti-Semitism more generally, as well as by sympathetic materials published by Russian revolutionaries who sought refuge from tsarist authorities in Britain.<sup>4</sup> Famed anarchist Petr Kropotkin and Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii, who was an equally well-known revolutionary in international circles in this era, most notably, wrote books and articles to justify the revolutionary movement, and Stepniak-Kravchinskii in particular "defended terrorism as a necessary means of bringing about change in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15-20. According to Manfred Hildemeier, the Socialist Revolutionary Party's Combat Organization sought to fulfill three objectives through terrorism: to intimidate the autocratic regime, to garner support from the masses, and to disorganize the authorities to force them into granting concessions. See Hildemeier, "The Terrorist Strategies of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in Russia, 1900-1914," in *Social Protest, Violence, and Terror in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe*, eds. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 82-83.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Hughes, "British Opinion and Russian Terrorism in the 1880s," *European History Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (April 2011), 261-265.



Russia.”<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to note that many Britons were critical of Russia even before they had access to foreign news or the writings of Russian revolutionaries.

As early as 1808, French novelist Sophie Cottin’s *Elizabeth, or the Exiles of Siberia* became a sensation in Britain as it depicted the struggles of exile in the faraway Russian land. Cottin had never been to Siberia and relied upon “crude stereotypes” to create her work; nevertheless, the novel negatively affected British opinion of Russia and Tsarism.<sup>6</sup> British criticism of the tsarist regime was amplified further in the 1830s by Polish émigrés who fled their homeland under threat of deportation to Siberia. Once in Britain, these agitators wrote books and newspaper articles that denounced autocratic rule and equated Polish rebellion with heroism.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, these literary works, like those written by revolutionary exiles in the 1870s, not only helped to shape Western responses to political violence that occurred in Russia, but established Siberia as a “romantic topos on which...Russian revolutionaries confronted their autocratic gaolers and performed heroic feats of derring-do and self-sacrifice in the name of freedom.”<sup>8</sup> The theme of self-sacrifice and heroism endured even after People’s Will’s successful attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II, when the British press reported on the murder plot, and the ensuing arrest, trial and execution of the assassins. That two women, Gessia Gelfman and Sofia Perovskaia, were directly involved in the assassination engendered “substantial admiration for the role women played in the Russian revolutionary movement,” and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 266. For more on Stepniak Kravchinskii’s writings, see Peter Scotto, “The Terrorist as Novelist: Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinsky,” in *Just Assassins: The Culture of Terrorism in Russia*, eds. Anthony Anemone and Nina Khrushcheva (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 97-126.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Phillips, “‘A Nihilist Kurort’: Siberian Exile in the Victorian Imagination, c. 1830-1890,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 97, no. 3 (July 2019), 475; 476-478.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 478-481.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 499.

reinforced romanticized tropes that had been established in the years preceding the assassination.<sup>9</sup>

By the early twentieth century, the American public too had a strange fascination with the Russian monarchy. In *Alexis in America: A Russian Grand Duke's Tour, 1871-1872*, Lee Farrow explores the intersection of Russian and American societies during Grand Duke Alexis Aleksandrovich Romanov's tour of the United States in the 1870s.<sup>10</sup> As a younger son of reigning Tsar Alexander II, Alexis was a celebrity who represented a wealthy European monarchy. His visit was filled with festivities and tours, but Alexis was a divisive figure. He represented a political system that was at odds with American republicanism. Nevertheless, his stay in the United States "stimulated a growing interest in Russia and news about Russia" that would only continue to develop among Americans.<sup>11</sup> Enthusiasm for Russia grew so much that, in March 1881, news of Tsar Alexander II's assassination by revolutionaries made the front pages of big city newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and even railway town dailies like the *Omaha Evening Bee*.<sup>12</sup> Reaction to his death varied, with some

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<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Marsh, "The Times (1881) and the Russian Women Terrorists," *Scottish Slavonic Review* 21 (Autumn, 1993), 55. Marsh also explains that eventually, and in keeping with the established attitudes about women at that time, the *Times* diminished Perovskaia's role in the assassination and within People's Will to that of concubine to fellow terrorist, Andrei Zheliabov. For more on Russian female terrorism, see Anke Hilbrenner, "The Perovskaya Paradox or the Scandal of Female Terrorism in Late Imperial Russia," (*Pipss.org*) *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 17: *Women in Arms: From the Russian Empire to Soviet States* (2016). URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/pipss/4169>.

<sup>10</sup> Lee A. Farrow, *Alexis in America: A Russian Grand Duke's Tour, 1871-1872* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>12</sup> David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire': The Crusade for a 'Free Russia' Since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12. Foglesong does not specify which news outlets publicized this information on their front pages, but there were several. See "Czar Slain," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 14, 1881), 1; "The Czar Assassinated," *The New York Times* (March 14, 1881), 1; "The Czar Assassinated," *The Omaha Evening Bee* (March 14, 1881), 1; "A Czaro-ful Nation," *The Omaha Evening Bee* (March 14, 1881), 1.

newspaper editors condemning the revolutionaries and others arguing that the tsar's death was justified.<sup>13</sup>

This divergence of opinion among those who wrote about this story is particularly intriguing because it demonstrates how Americans were trying to make sense of the sociopolitical changes that were occurring in Russia at the time. It is important to note that no American news correspondents resided in Russia in the 1880s, and reliable information was not easy to come by.<sup>14</sup> However, a number of Americans who visited Russia at that time recorded what they saw there, and published books about their travels once they returned home. Historian Alison Rowley finds in her work on 'dark' tourism that these visitors documented their visits to shrines dedicated to the late Tsar Alexander II, and to museums that showcased items that were "tied to the assassination," such as his damaged carriage and bloodstained scabbard.<sup>15</sup> What became apparent throughout their accounts was the astonishing destructive power of dynamite, which had been quickly adopted by revolutionaries to commit acts of political violence, including the assassination of Alexander II. Explosives became part of the Russian revolutionary's arsenal, and these concealable weapons, which so horrified many members of the public, not only proved to be successful in the tsar's assassination, but also demonstrated their ability to "remake the physical and political landscape of an empire."<sup>16</sup>

Support for the Russian revolutionary movement in the United States oscillated between feelings of hope and disillusionment.<sup>17</sup> George Kennan's bestselling *Siberia and the Exile*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>14</sup> Alison Rowley, "Dark Tourism and the Death of Russian Emperor Alexander II, 1881-1891," *The Historian* 79, no.2 (2017), 235.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>17</sup> Victoria Zhuravleva, "American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution: 1905 from the Other Side of the Atlantic," *Journal of Russian American Studies* 3 no.1 (May 2019), 67.

*System*, published in 1891, exposed the tsarist prison system to the point where “it became a metaphor for unjust state-sponsored terror and violence.”<sup>18</sup> He wrote and lectured extensively to denounce the tsarist regime and defend the revolutionaries, whom he romanticized.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, Kennan characterized the Russian revolutionary movement as one that sought to emulate America’s own path to independence. In that narrative, Free Russia’s destiny had become intertwined with that of the United States, and Kennan and his associates from the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom went to great lengths to create and exaggerate similarities between the revolutionaries and their ostensible American equals who fought against slavery and worked on the frontier.<sup>20</sup> To say that all Americans became supportive of radical and violent reform would be misleading, but historian Choi Chatterjee notes that the Western press often justified Russian revolutionary violence because its intended outcome was to undermine an autocratic and abusive regime.<sup>21</sup> In spite of this, enthusiasm for radical reform in Russia waned by the mid-1890s. Notably in 1894, when Tsar Alexander III died after a brief illness, the American press spoke favorably of the late tsar, and the Russian regime enjoyed a sudden boost in support, if only temporarily.<sup>22</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century, the American-Russian relationship became strained, something which fueled a renewal of American criticism of tsarist Russia. In 1900, Russia’s invasion of Manchuria demonstrated its disregard for the United States’ Open Door Policy in

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<sup>18</sup> Choi Chatterjee, “Imperial Incarcerations: Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Vinayak Savarkar, and the Original Sins of Modernity,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter, 2015), 869. For Kennan’s original work, see George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* (New York: Century Co., 1891).

<sup>19</sup> Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865–1924*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 177; cited in Alison Rowley, “Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity: A Case Study of Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia,” *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth Century Russia and the Soviet-Union*, ed. Melanie Ilić (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 8. According to Rowley, Kennan delivered over 800 lectures.

<sup>20</sup> Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil Empire,’* 16-27.

<sup>21</sup> Chatterjee, “Imperial Incarcerations,” 866.

<sup>22</sup> Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil Empire,’* 27.

China, and received considerable negative attention in the American press.<sup>23</sup> In addition, news of the Kishinev Pogrom in 1903, when hundreds of Jews were killed or wounded by their Christian neighbors, generated public outrage throughout the United States.<sup>24</sup> Many Americans mobilized to support the victims of Kishinev by collecting funds for relief, by hosting public demonstrations to urge the United States government to denounce the Russian regime, and by signing a petition destined for St. Petersburg that criticized the tsar's neglect of his Jewish subjects.<sup>25</sup> Russian authorities suppressed any news of the incident locally and even removed two foreign correspondents working for *The Times* who reported on the subject.

Contrarily, American newspapers covered extensively the events that occurred in Kishinev by printing eyewitness accounts of the horrors that took place there, and even published reports that accused the tsar's regime outright "of complicity in the pogroms."<sup>26</sup> Popular daily newspapers, such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, went as far as to print cartoons that depicted "American aid to the innocent victims [of Kishinev] as part of the spread of enlightened civilization."<sup>27</sup> These reports, cartoons, and public demonstrations demonizing Russia not only illustrate how popular Russian news had become in the United States, but also how "Russia had come to be an important foil for the definition of American identity."<sup>28</sup> By 1903, it seemed as

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<sup>23</sup> See Victoria Zhuravleva, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Russia and the American 'Mission for Freedom' at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *East European Jewish Affairs* 40, no. 1 (April, 2010), 43-60. The Open Door Policy was intended to ensure that all countries had equal access to trade and investment opportunities in China. For more, see Michael Patrick Cullinane and Alex Goodall, *The Open Door Era: United States Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Monty Noam Penkower, "The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903: A Turning Point in Jewish History," *Modern Judaism* 24, no. 3 (2004), 187-188. See also Philip Ernest Schoenberg, "The American Reaction to the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (March, 1974), 262-283; and Foglesong, 28-33.

<sup>25</sup> Schoenberg, "The American Reaction to the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903," 263-266, 268-271, 275-282. Tsar Nicholas II refused to accept the petition.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; Zhuravleva, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Russia," 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 30. Cartoon found in *Philadelphia Inquirer* (May 16, 1903).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

though the tsarist regime was the antithesis of freedom and modernization, and Americans became even more invested in the revolutionary struggle for liberation in Russia.

In the few years that followed, Americans welcomed to their shores Russian revolutionaries and public figures, such as noted revolutionary Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia and writer Maksim Gorkii, both of whom embarked on speaking tours across the United States and gave rousing lectures that only increased antagonism against Russia. Breshkovskaia, in particular, became a celebrity and used the limelight to serve as a mouthpiece for the SR Party she represented. She cleverly cultivated her image as the *babushka*, or grandmother, of the revolution to the American public to dissociate it from the political violence that was once again on the upswing in Russia. In her speeches, she was careful not to share her support for political violence with her audience, choosing instead to speak about promoting civil rights and freedoms, elevating the peasantry, and establishing a democratic government.<sup>29</sup> Breshkovskaia raised thousands of dollars to help fund revolutionary efforts, which unbeknownst to Americans included procuring weapons. More importantly, she was able to mislead the American press, which was “content to repeat [her] version of her life as one of self-sacrifice [...], embellished with clichés about the harshness of Siberian prisons and the lawless nature of the Russian autocracy.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, manipulation of the revolutionary narrative was crucial in swaying American public opinion against the tsar’s regime before violence erupted in 1905.

This was the backdrop to the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei – an incident that not only brought an act of revolutionary violence into the spotlight at the time, but also led to an

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<sup>29</sup> Rowley, “Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity,” 9; Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution,” 73.

<sup>30</sup> Chatterjee, “Imperial Incarcerations,” 856-857.

outpouring of scholarly studies of the SR Combat Organization in recent decades.<sup>31</sup> The most significant of these is historian Anna Geifman's ambitious work to "demystify and deromanticize the Russian revolutionary movement" in *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917*.<sup>32</sup> Geifman's study alters the discussion about revolutionary terror, which "had become an all-pervasive phenomenon, affecting every layer of society," because memoirists and historians had previously overlooked the "lower depths" of the revolutionary movement.<sup>33</sup> These 'lower depths' that she refers to were not occupied by the anti-governmental freedom fighters who hitherto had received such intense focus, but by "a wide variety of shady individuals, adventurers, opportunists, as well as common criminals, hooligans, and the riffraff of Russian society."<sup>34</sup> Curiously, Geifman's study does not discuss the role newspapers played in reinforcing the belief that violence at this time was only committed by selfless revolutionaries, and this idea of focusing on violence as a phenomenon of the Russian revolutionary movement is worth exploring on a smaller scale as well. For instance, Vladimir Alexandrov's recent biography of Boris Savinkov, one of the leaders of the SR Party's Combat Organization, provides significant details about Revolutionary Russia's history by retracing the steps of one well-known terrorist through his radicalization, his role in terrorist plots against the autocratic regime, and even his opposition to the Bolshevik Party. Alexandrov's exploration into Savinkov's life and revolutionary career directs us to his role in the murder of Grand Duke

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<sup>31</sup> One study by Maureen Perrie not only discusses the Combat Organization, but the SR party's use of other tactics against the autocracy, namely political agitation and education of the masses, see Maureen Perrie, "Political and Economic Terror in the Tactics of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party before 1914," in *Social Protest, Violence, and Terror*, 63-79. For an overview of the SR Combat Organization, see Hildemeier, "The Terrorist Strategies of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in Russia, 1900-1914," in *ibid*; See also Marc Sageman, *Turning to Political Violence: The Emergence of Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 263-315; and Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*. For a study on women's involvement in SR terror, see Amy Knight, "Female Terrorists in the Russian Revolutionary Party," *Russian Review* 38, no. 2 (April 1979), 139-159.

<sup>32</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

Sergei, and details how he and his terrorist cell stalked the Grand Duke for weeks before they assassinated him. His retelling of the assassination provides useful insight into the inner workings of such a notorious terrorist group but, despite the fact that Sergei's assassination caused a sensation across the Western world, only a single chapter of Alexandrov's 576-page tome was dedicated to the event.<sup>35</sup>

In these earlier works, Sergei's death is given minimal attention as events such as the Bloody Sunday massacre and the Potemkin mutiny are much more memorable and form the basic structure for analyses of the 1905 Revolution. However, there has been increased interest in Sergei of late, with historian George Gilbert's recent study on the establishment of a martyr cult in Sergei's name by the Russian autocracy, and Anke Hilbrenner's analysis of the formation and coexistence of diverging 'emotional communities' in the aftermath of the Grand Duke's murder.<sup>36</sup> I intend to build on these studies that return the spotlight to Sergei by addressing whether the intense focus that had been levied on Russian affairs by the American press in the first years of the twentieth century continued through his assassination. Moreover, and in keeping with Geifman's work on demystifying revolutionary terror, I aim to examine American interest in political violence and how Americans perceived the violent acts of revolutionaries. Thus, considering the escalation of political violence in Russia in 1905, it is worth investigating to what extent Americans grasped that the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich was part of a larger revolutionary phenomenon, if at all. I argue that the very way in which the American press reported on Grand Duke Sergei's assassination answers that question, and my

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<sup>35</sup> Vladimir E. Alexandrov, *To Break Russia's Chains: Boris Savinkov and his War Against the Tsar and the Bolsheviks* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2021), 86-111.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert, "The Martyr Cult of Sergei Aleksandrovich," 265-283; Anke Hilbrenner, "Of Heroes and Villains – The Making of Terrorist Victims as Historical Perpetrators in Pre-Revolutionary Russia," in *Victimhood and Acknowledgement: The Other Side of Terrorism*, ed. Petra Terhoeven (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 19-38.



analysis shows that the extensive coverage of Sergei's death, career and influence dissipated rapidly as new stories of labour strikes, promises of political reform, and especially revolutionary violence enthralled reporters.

In order to investigate the ways in which the American press reported on Sergei's death, I will rely on newspaper articles from five different dailies, namely the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. These newspapers were selected to assess whether the news emanating from Russia was consistent across different parts of the United States, and if not, see how it differed. Admittedly, this study is selective rather than comprehensive, and my analysis of five newspapers is not representative of all of the ways in which Americans reported on, or reacted to, the Grand Duke's assassination. However, it does provide a comparison between the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which were two of the most prominent dailies at the time, and smaller papers that still reported on political violence occurring in the Russian Empire. This study is divided into three chapters that demonstrate how coverage of the assassination evolved as new information came to light. Chapter one examines American reporting concerning Sergei's death on the morning of February 18, the day following his assassination. Chapter two then explores how the story of Sergei's murder developed over the next week as it competed with other narratives about the revolution unfolding at the same time. Finally, chapter three investigates how American interest in Sergei's murder diminished after his funeral, when anticipation of new terror attacks grew, and ultimately ceased once his assassin was executed.

## Chapter 1: A Bombing, and A Breaking News Story

*“Nihilism Raises its Dreadful Head Again in Russia”*<sup>37</sup>

This headline from the Saturday morning issue of the *Wichita Daily Eagle* the day after Grand Duke Sergei’s assassination evokes memories of the duel between the revolutionaries and the autocracy from the 1860s-1880s. While it oversimplifies the conflict, the headline demonstrates how familiar a topic political violence in Russia had become in the United States and that some Americans had already formulated their opinions about the situation unfolding there. News of the Bloody Sunday massacre, and of what was assumed to be a failed assassination attempt on the Royal family at the Blessing of the Neva ceremony in St. Petersburg, both of which occurred only weeks before the Grand Duke’s death, would certainly have alerted the American press to the rapid escalation of violence between the Russian state and the revolutionaries seeking to overturn it.<sup>38</sup> In light of this, it is worth exploring whether or not American newspapers recognized the significance of Sergei’s death to the revolutionary struggle on the day the story broke on February 18, 1905. I argue that the American press considered Sergei’s murder as an act of retributive justice for his cruelty towards different strata of Russian society, and that the very way in which his assassination was discussed demonstrates how US newspapers considered it as but a segment of a larger, ongoing crisis.

The assassination of Grand Duke Sergei was front page news in the United States on February 18, 1905. Each of the five newspapers considered in this study published articles about

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<sup>37</sup> “Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 18, 1905), 1.

<sup>38</sup> “Czar Unharmed by Hail of Grape,” *The Washington Post* (January 20, 1905), 1; “Papers Tell Little,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (January 21, 1905), 8; “Officer Tells How Czar was Fired On,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (January 21, 1905), 2; “Grape Fired at Czar from Crack Battery,” *The New York Times* (January 20, 1905), 1; “Front Page 4 – No Title,” *The New York Times* (January 26, 1905), 1; “Accident Nearly Costs Czar His Life,” *The Los Angeles Times* (January 20, 1905), 1

Sergei's death the day after he was killed. The *New York Times* provided the most coverage; it printed a total of 12 articles. The *Washington Post* ran five, the *Wichita Daily Eagle* three, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* two, and the *Los Angeles Times* only a single article. It is important to note that spatial limitations and formatting were likely a factor in determining the number of articles that were published per newspaper, as those published in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* were densely packed with snippets of information from news stories that other newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* produced in full. In addition, there is considerable overlap in what the newspapers reported about the assassination because they relied primarily upon information transmitted via telegraph by foreign correspondents posted in Russia, where censorship restrictions had been lifted for all foreign press agencies in 1904.<sup>39</sup> The *Associated Press* provided the majority of this information to newspaper companies through its subscription service, while correspondents from the *New York Herald Company* and the *London Times Cable Company* also satisfied the desire for news emanating from Russia. Despite this, editorial decisions at home still dictated which details of the bombing were given the most attention for their respective audiences.

Unsurprisingly, many of the articles about the assassination sought to explain, above all else, how Sergei had been killed, and to identify who was responsible for his death. Telegraphed messages established "the great open triangle within the Kremlin, bounded by the arsenal, treasury, and courts of justice" as the scene of the crime, where, at 3 p.m., a man dressed in workman's clothing lobbed a bomb into the Grand Duke's carriage and killed him instantly.<sup>40</sup> The reports also indicated that the authorities were able to capture the bomb-thrower, whose

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<sup>39</sup> Oliver Gramling, *AP – The Story of News* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1969), 170-174.

<sup>40</sup> "Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin," 1; "Terrorist Bomb Kills Grand Duke," *The Washington Post* (February 18, 1905), 1; "Another Account of Crime," *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905), 1.

identity had yet to be established, and to determine his membership in the Socialist Revolutionary Party.<sup>41</sup> The assassin, who was identified later as Ivan Kaliaev, was not simply a supporter of the SR party, but a member of its infamous Combat Organization, a separate terrorist unit “whose members conceived of themselves as ‘the true bearers of Russia’s revolutionary cross’, and not only committed terrorist acts, but also revered terror as a sacred thing.”<sup>42</sup> Kaliaev’s membership in the Combat Organization was not lost on these reporters, who designated it as the foremost adversary of the tsarist regime and thus established the attack as one that was politically motivated.

Reporters connected Sergei’s death to the revolutionary movement by linking it to earlier acts of political violence committed by the Combat Organization against other government functionaries. The names of Nikolai Bobrikov, Governor General of Finland, Eliel Soisalon-Soininen, Procurator General of Finland, as well as sometime Minister of the Interior Dmitrii Sipiagin were listed in reports as previous victims of SR terrorism.<sup>43</sup> However, none of their deaths was as talked about as that of former Minister of the Interior Viacheslav Konstantinovich von Plehve. Von Plehve was targeted by the Combat Organization for his heavy-handed measures intended to “maintain public order by suppression of all popular demonstrations or violence” across the empire.<sup>44</sup> Von Plehve was blamed for having instigated the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, and was perceived as “the nation’s number one policeman, [and] the executioner of strikes.”<sup>45</sup> He was assassinated on July 28, 1904 by Egor Sazonov, a university

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 48-49; Knight, “Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party,” 147.

<sup>43</sup> “Czar Prostrated,” *The Washington Post* (February 18, 1905), 1; “The Czar Prostrated,” *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905), 1; “Another Account of Crime,” 1.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Gutwein, “Russian ‘Official’ Anti-Semitism Reconsidered: Socio-Economic Aspects of Tsarist Jewish Policy, 1881-1905,” *International Review of Social History* 39, no.2 (August 1994), 201.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur William Thompson, and Robert A. Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade: America and the Russian Revolution of 1905* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 22.

student and SR terrorist who lobbed an explosive into the minister's carriage. Foreign correspondents from the *Associated Press*, the *London Times Cable Company* and the *New York Herald Company* used references to von Plehve's death to convey the continuity in the Combat Organization's campaign against the autocracy. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wichita Daily Eagle* noted that numerous threats to Sergei's life had been made before the attack, and that precautions had been taken to ensure his safety. Despite this, "all the resources of the gendarmerie, secret police, and soldiers proved unavailing against an attack almost exactly duplicating the procedure that caused the death of Minister of the Interior Von Plehve last July."<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* stated that Sergei's death had been "decreed by the Terrorist Organization... [and] as in the case of Von Plehve, the assassin's work was complete."<sup>47</sup> Reporters recognized that the similarities between both assassinations were not simply a coincidence, but indicative of a planned campaign.

In his recent book on Boris Savinkov, one of the three leaders of the Combat Organization, Vladimir Alexandrov notes that the leaders of the SR Party became "emboldened by the attack on von Plehve, and convinced that Russia was on the verge of a revolution and that more assassinations would help fuel the fire."<sup>48</sup> He also reveals that, in December 1904, the leaders planned to assassinate the governors general of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev for their complicity in applying the government's harsh measures against its people.<sup>49</sup> By the time of his death in 1905, Sergei had already resigned from his post as Governor General of Moscow, and why the revolutionaries had gone ahead with his assassination when he no longer exercised

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<sup>46</sup> "Terrorist Bomb Kills Grand Duke," 1; "Another Account of Crime," 1; "Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin," 1.

<sup>47</sup> "Uncle of Czar and Most Hated Man in Russia Meets Frightful Death in Moscow." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 18, 1905), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Alexandrov, *To Break Russia's Chains*, 86. The two other leaders of the SR Combat Organization were Evno Azef and Maximilian Shveitser.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

the powers of that position puzzled reporters and editors alike.<sup>50</sup> Reporters documented how opinions differed in Russia with regard to the “political effect” of the assassination, with some speculating that the death of a member of the royal family would elicit a reactionary response from the autocratic regime (and lead to more violence), and others maintaining that liberal reforms were inevitable.<sup>51</sup>

Opinions about the political effectiveness of the assassination differed beyond Russia’s borders as well. Some American newspapers questioned how the tsar could even entertain the idea of instituting political reforms after the Grand Duke’s murder. One editor for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* argued that the bombing was “no less a blunder than a crime” committed by the revolutionaries.<sup>52</sup> He recalled the deaths of von Plehve and Bobrikov, the two most notable victims of the Combat Organization, to discuss the utility of political violence, and in what contexts it may have been justifiable. In comparing the deaths of the Grand Duke and von Plehve, the editorial explains that:

Von Plehve, as Minister of the Interior, was the perfect embodiment of the autocratic principle, and he exercised the immense, the practically unlimited powers of his office, with a masterful force and ruthless severity, which naturally provoked the widest and deepest resentment. He was a most extraordinarily efficient instrument of the despotism which he served, and there was place for a belief and even room for an argument that *his removal would operate to ameliorate conditions which had become intolerable*.<sup>53</sup>

Von Plehve’s death was perceived as justifiable because he, as Minister of the Interior, was an instrument of autocratic law and order, which had so effectively stymied political reforms. His elimination by the Combat Organization demonstrated that violence could be used as leverage to

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<sup>50</sup> According to historian Christopher Warwick, Sergei’s resignation from the post of Governor General of Moscow made him an even more vulnerable target because he no longer had control of the city in which he lived to impede the members of the Combat Organization. See Christopher Warwick, *The Life and Death of Ella Grand Duchess of Russia: A Romanov Tragedy* (Albert Bridge Books, 2014), 238.

<sup>51</sup> “Czar Prostrated,” 1.

<sup>52</sup> “Assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 18, 1905), 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

secure concessions, though the same could not be said about Sergei's murder.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned above, the Grand Duke's resignation from the post of Governor General of Moscow was a significant detail for the American press because he no longer possessed the powers extended to him by that office when he was killed, and therefore "was not discharging any functions in connection with the hateful system of which by birth he was a part."<sup>55</sup> At the time of his death, Sergei was no different from other members of the imperial family, and as a result, the American press sought to bring to light why he, in particular, had been murdered.

Unsurprisingly, the Grand Duke had a poor reputation at the time he was targeted by the Combat Organization, and the American press considered his infamy as one of the main reasons he was assassinated. According to Christopher Warwick, Sergei "was hated by Moscow students and had made more enemies than friends among the intelligentsia, the merchants, and the middle class."<sup>56</sup> Throughout his career in Moscow, Sergei "represented the most uncompromising face of autocratic rule and had never wavered in advocating the severest measures in dealing with any form of dissent."<sup>57</sup> In 1891, he expelled thousands of Jews from Moscow, and in 1896 he showed indifference to the victims who were trampled at Emperor Nicholas II's coronation ceremony at Khodynka Field, an event that he helped organize.<sup>58</sup> In the United States, some headlines referred to him as "the most hated man in Russia," and as "Russia's evil genius."<sup>59</sup>

American newspapers tried to explain why Sergei had been targeted by the assassins by calling attention to his career as Governor General of Moscow. In papers like the *Los Angeles*

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<sup>54</sup> Zhuravleva, "American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution," 86.

<sup>55</sup> "Assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius, 8."

<sup>56</sup> Warwick, *The Life and Death of Ella*, 217.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert, "The Martyr Cult of Sergei Alexandrovich," 267-268.

<sup>59</sup> "Uncle of Czar and Most Hated Man in Russia Meets Frightful Death in Moscow;" "Russia's Evil Genius," *The Washington Post* (February 18, 1905), 1.

*Times* and the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, terse details of Sergei's cruelty were pasted into larger stories about his assassination. More specifically, Sergei's harsh treatment of students was a topic of interest for both papers, with the former calling to mind how many were wounded, killed, or exiled for participating in student riots in 1903, and the latter even speculating that "the assassination of Grand Duke Sergius was probably the result of some plot of the Russian students."<sup>60</sup> Contrarily, dailies such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* referred to Sergei as the "most reactionary of the grand dukes" and an "uncompromising opponent of any reform," and dedicated whole articles to scrutinizing his character to better understand the motives of the Combat Organization.<sup>61</sup> The *New York Times*, in particular, printed a scathing critique of Sergei in their article aptly named "Slain Grand Duke was the Czar's Evil Genius," which described him as "ennuyé, selfish, vicious, and cruel."<sup>62</sup> The article discussed some of the most unpopular decisions he made as Governor General, such as his "relentless persecution of the Jews and an equally rigorous campaign against the students," his opposition to "reforms for which the Russian people begged" of the emperor, and his profligacy.<sup>63</sup>

Curiously, the *New York Times* printed a separate article that recognized how Sergei, who vehemently opposed reform, inspired von Plehve's administration and ordered General Dmitrii Trepov to put down the uprising in St. Petersburg (which resulted in the Bloody Sunday massacre), and yet advocated that he should not be perceived as "hard or cruel at heart."<sup>64</sup> By reproducing "extracts from semi-official letters" mailed from St. Petersburg before the

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<sup>60</sup> "Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin," 1; "Grand Duke Sergius is Blown to Pieces," 1. It must be noted that the five newspapers used in this study considered students as active participants in the revolutionary movement. Each report noted that students were present at the scene of the Grand Duke's assassination, and almost immediately after the bomb exploded they were seen handing out revolutionary pamphlets, which upset several bystanders.

<sup>61</sup> "Russia's Evil Genius," 1; "Sergius Doomed Weeks Ago," *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905), 2.

<sup>62</sup> "Slain Duke was the Czar's Evil Genius," *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905), 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> "Sergius Doomed Weeks Ago," 2.



assassination, the dispatch from the *Associated Press*' Paris bureau sought to reveal Sergei's supposed true intentions in upholding autocratic principles.<sup>65</sup> An excerpt from one reprinted letter explained that Sergei

is thoroughly good and benevolent. He fully believes that the repression of reforms will save Russia from terrible convulsions and assure the people a happy outcome. The best proof that Sergius is not a bloody man is his horror of warfare. He opposed the Japanese war until warfare began, and if peace had been realized it would certainly have been owing to Sergius's powerful influence.<sup>66</sup>

The source of the letter is unknown, though its inclusion in the *New York Times* suggests that the daily intended to provide as unbiased an account of the assassination as possible. This take on Sergei as a benevolent figure was an anomaly in American coverage of his murder, though, and it humanized him to an extent that we will not see duplicated by any other newspaper considered here. It is difficult to ascertain how the *Associated Press* obtained these letters, or what purpose they served. However, that the dispatch came from Paris is intriguing because, from 1904-1906, the Russian government paid the French press a total of two and a half million francs to dissuade various editors and periodicals from criticizing the empire.<sup>67</sup> Whether or not this report was influenced by Russian state propaganda disseminated in France falls outside the scope of this study, but it is nonetheless worth mentioning because it is an outlier in American press coverage that was far more critical of Sergei, who in this case was the victim of revolutionary terror and yet garnered no sympathy.

In her work on the formation of emotional communities in Russia in the aftermath of Sergei's death, historian Anke Hilbrenner finds that while there were some who mourned his

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. The reference is to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05).

<sup>67</sup> James William Long, "Russian Manipulation of the French Press, 1904-1906," *Slavic Review* 31, no.2 (June 1972), 353; Wladimir Berelowitch, "La Révolution de 1905 dans l'Opinion Républicaine Française," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 48, no. 2-3 (2007), 380.

passing, there were far more who welcomed the news.<sup>68</sup> With the exception of a few who felt sympathy for Sergei's widow, the beloved Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna, there was a marked lack of compassion for the murdered Grand Duke; instead, his death was marked by a growing sense of relief among those whom he detested, which included "not only revolutionaries, non-Russian minorities, or the urban poor, but also the non-aristocratic elites."<sup>69</sup> The response to Sergei's death was similar in the United States, and the stance exhibited toward him by the American press resembled the way in which his death was received by a significant portion of the Russian public, which believed that his culpability in causing hardship and in hindering reforms justified his murder.<sup>70</sup> However, many Americans sympathized with the Grand Duchess, who rushed to the scene of the crime soon after the explosion. Correspondents reported incorrectly that she cried hysterically at the sight of her late husband's disfigured body, or that she had fainted as her carriage approached the wreckage, when in fact she remained composed as she oversaw the retrieval of her husband's remains.<sup>71</sup> The Combat Organization's decision to murder Sergei with a bomb "removed all dignity from death" because his body was so deformed that it could no longer be embalmed before its entombment.<sup>72</sup> American newspapers similarly denied Sergei the same dignity in death by printing graphic and gruesome descriptions of his damaged body on the front page the very next morning.

Unquestionably, the most striking details of the Grand Duke's murder that made it to print concerned the destructive power of the bomb that was thrown at him. Reports noted that "every window of the lofty façade of the Palace of Justice was shattered, and bits of iron were

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<sup>68</sup> Hilbrenner, "Of Heroes and Villains," 29.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>71</sup> "Another Account of Crime," 1; "Terrorist Bomb Slays Sergius," 1; "Terrorist Bomb Kills Grand Duke," 1; "Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin," 1; Warwick, *The Life and Death of Ella*, 244.

<sup>72</sup> Hilbrenner, "Of Heroes and Villains," 25.

imbedded deeply in the walls of the [Kremlin] arsenal, a hundred yards away.”<sup>73</sup> Reporters also described the damage done to Sergei’s body, with some papers dedicating whole sections to illustrate the extent of his mutilation.<sup>74</sup> As previously mentioned, editorial decisions dictated which bits of information made it to print, though there seemed to be consensus that ghastly details would not be left off the page. The most common description read:

On the snow lay fragments of the body of Grand Duke Sergius mingled with the wreck of the carriage. The Grand Duke’s head had been torn from his body and reduced to a shapeless pulp, and the trunk and limbs were frightfully mangled. A finger bearing a rich seal was found several yards away. Only a few fragments of cloth indicated that the body had once been clothed.

This passage, taken from the *New York Times*, was nearly identical to ones printed in the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, all of which did not shy away from adding that “the crimson tint and the smell of blood were everywhere.”<sup>75</sup> While the *Philadelphia Inquirer* did not copy word for word the grisly details, it did mention how Sergei’s “head was blown off, actually being separated from his body.”<sup>76</sup>

According to historian Alison Rowley, this fascination with the physical effects of bombing was not unusual. In her study on ‘dark’ tourism in the Russian empire in the 1880s, Rowley observes how American and British visitors who attended museums and commemoration sites dedicated to the assassination of Russian Emperor Alexander II were impressed by the destructive power of dynamite.<sup>77</sup> These visitors, who inspected Alexander II’s damaged carriage once it had been put on display, recorded in their diaries “in vivid detail the

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<sup>73</sup> “Another Account of Crime,” 1; “Terrorist Bomb Kills Grand Duke,” 1; “Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin,” 1

<sup>74</sup> The *Washington Post* labeled their section dedicated to Sergei’s mutilation as “In a Hail of Iron,” while the *Wichita Daily Eagle* labeled theirs “Fragments of the Body.” The *Los Angeles Times* did not use in-text subheadings.

<sup>75</sup> “Terrorist Bomb Kills Grand Duke, 1;” “Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin, 1;” “Grand Duke Sergius is Blown to Pieces,” *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905) 1.”

<sup>76</sup> “Uncle of Czar and Most Hated Man in Russia Meets Frightful Death in Moscow,” 1.

<sup>77</sup> Rowley, “Dark Tourism,” 244.

devastation that they saw.”<sup>78</sup> Being able to inspect, and sometimes touch, a relic from the assassination, and to write about it, offered these visitors the opportunity to “recreate the moment” the bomb was thrown at the Emperor and altered the political landscape of the time.<sup>79</sup> While the foreign correspondents who reported on Sergei’s death could not inspect the devastation wrought by the bomb in the same way as the visitors from twenty-five years prior could, they still used words to describe the revolutionary terror that they witnessed. Their prose offered the American public the only alternative available to witnessing the explosion firsthand and conceivably provided an indication of the violence that was to come.

That von Plehve’s death, and those of other government functionaries, was raised in both reports and editorials to discuss Sergei’s demonstrates to what degree assassinations were perceived as episodic, and as part of a larger and evolving phenomenon. In her study on America’s “phenomenology” of the Russian revolution of 1905, historian Victoria Zhuravleva explores the shift in American sentiment towards the revolution as violence escalated. Through her analysis of press cartoons and reports, she finds that while most Americans initially and indirectly condoned violence “as a means of speeding up political modernization in countries as backward as Russia,” they grew less supportive of it as it increased in frequency and decreased in political effectiveness.<sup>80</sup> The shift in support occurred after von Plehve’s murder, but became palpable after Sergei’s, when some Americans began to compare SR terrorists to the ‘nihilists’ who had embraced terror as a means of political action in the 1870s.<sup>81</sup> Press coverage from the day the news of the assassination broke reflects Zhuravleva’s findings, with four out of five

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>80</sup> Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution,” 85.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 88. For a comprehensive study of nihilism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Christopher Ely, *Underground Petersburg: Radical Populism, Urban Space, and the Tactics of Subversion in Reform-Era Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

newspapers characterizing the event as either a tragedy or a crime.<sup>82</sup> As revolutionaries became more radical and embraced violence to an extent that exceeded the “permissible limits in making a revolution,” American support for the revolution turned to disillusionment.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, the American press was seemingly fascinated by the fact that revolutionaries sought reform through violence. As part of their extensive coverage of Sergei’s death, the *New York Times* printed an article named “the Assassination Record,” which noted six other assassinations (attempted or successful) on government functionaries in the twelve months that preceded Sergei’s murder.<sup>84</sup> The forecast for the empire’s future was equally discouraging as one high ranking official declared in an interview that he expected only one outcome – “bombs.”<sup>85</sup> Other reports published by the *New York Times* fueled a growing concern that revolutionaries would become even more violent. Spliced into front page coverage of Sergei’s assassination was an interview with an anonymous, high ranking Liberal party official, who declared that the Grand Duke’s death was “good for the triumph of [liberal] ideas” and was “approved by all of Russia.”<sup>86</sup> The anonymous Liberal official also explained how, only days before the bombing, authorities thwarted a revolutionary plot by arresting several people and seizing hundreds of their weapons, which had been acquired to arm the masses in preparation for an uprising. Despite this setback, the official maintained that the “government’s measures of repression...are of little efficiency and will not stop the advance.”<sup>87</sup> The interview, which portended an armed revolutionary uprising, showcases how there was reason to believe that the

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<sup>82</sup> Zhuravleva notes in her study that the *New York Times* refers to Sergei’s assassination as an ‘awful crime’ in reports printed between February 20-23, but this is also true of its reporting on February 18. Reports from the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Washington Post* also decry Sergei’s death, leaving the *Los Angeles Times* as the only outlier that sympathized with the revolutionaries.

<sup>83</sup> Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution,” 85.

<sup>84</sup> “The Assassination Record,” *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905), 2.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> “Terrorist Bomb Slays Sergius,” *The New York Times* (February 18, 1905), 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

assassination was complementary to a greater plan that had been delayed by police, and undoubtedly did little to convince American readers that political reforms could be achieved peacefully.

In fact, there were some in the United States who expected the tsar to acquiesce to the demands of the revolutionaries because of the violent tactics they employed, and believed that their methods were justified. In an editorial piece for the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, M. M. Murdock wrote about the desperation with which the tsar's subjects were fighting for their freedom, and questioned whether any ruler in Nicholas II's place could prevent them from obtaining it. He wondered how Sergei's death could be considered "any more a crime than the shooting down of laboring people in the streets of St. Petersburg who sought, unarmed, to present a petition to their ruler," and suggested that referring to his killers as anarchists misconstrued the purpose of assassination.<sup>88</sup> Murdock perceived the violent actions of the revolutionaries as justifiable, and the deaths of autocrats as expected because violence had become what Laura Engelstein terms a "weapon of the weak."<sup>89</sup> The deplorable conditions that ordinary Russians endured as a result of tsarist policies, which they rebelled against, cast the people as the "real victim" in a revolution where participants sought to gain moral superiority.<sup>90</sup> Murdock's endorsement of terrorism in light of the brutality exhibited by the autocratic regime at the Bloody Sunday massacre suggests that some Americans expected some form of reprisal. His defense of revolutionary violence is also emblematic of the shift in public opinion that occurred in late nineteenth century Russia, where "state violence had been discredited, while violence against the state was accepted by

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<sup>88</sup> M. M. Murdock, "Pity for Poor Old Russia," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 18, 1905), 4.

<sup>89</sup> Laura Engelstein, "Weapon of the Weak (Apologies to James Scott): Violence in Russian History," *Kritikia: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no.3 (Summer 2003), 680.

<sup>90</sup> Hilbrenner, "Of Heroes and Villains," 21; Engelstein, "Weapon of the Weak," 685.

large segments of society as a positive moral statement.”<sup>91</sup> Murdock’s position also demonstrates how effectively American activists who supported the revolutionary movement, such as members of the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom, stirred anti-tsarist sentiment at home with the help of travelling revolutionary speakers like Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia.<sup>92</sup> By casting the tsarist regime as the antithesis of freedom, these activists “popularized an image of Russian revolutionaries as patriotic liberals rather than violent anarchists.”<sup>93</sup>

The characterization of Russian revolutionaries as liberal freedom fighters, rather than as terrorists, was not uncommon in the United States in early 1905. Zhuravleva finds that assassinations were “heartily welcomed by the inhabitants of the New York East Side who harbored radical ideas, by the Socialist-leaning periodicals created with the participation of Russian-Jewish immigrants, and by the American radicals in general.”<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, this sympathy for terrorism extended further westward from New York and was printed on the front page of a *Los Angeles Times* report that contained an exclusive dispatch, which sensationalized Sergei’s assassination and created a mythologized image of the revolutionaries and of the Combat Organization more generally:

The Death League has kept the faith, and the body of the Grand Duke Sergius, uncle of the czar, the most hated tyrant of all the autocrats, lies dismembered in his palace at Moscow...When the assassin was arrested, he only said ‘I did it, and did it well’. Of such as he, men with no thought of saving their own lives, while carrying out horrible missions in freedom’s name, is the Death League composed. Unrestrained by even the fear of death, they are human wolves, but moving onward in the sacred name of freedom.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Engelstein, “Weapon of the Weak,” 687.

<sup>92</sup> Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil’ Empire*, 26-33; Rowley, “Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity,” 9-10.

<sup>93</sup> Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil’ Empire*, 26.

<sup>94</sup> Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution,” 87.

<sup>95</sup> “Grand Duke Sergius is Blown to Pieces,” *The Los Angeles Times* (February 18, 1905), 1.

This excerpt is noteworthy because it provides a partisan perspective of the terrorists and of the Grand Duke, whom the correspondent also referred to as the “hated Jew-baiter,” and demonstrates how, even as the victim, Sergei had a secondary role in a larger revolutionary narrative where terrorism played a significant part.<sup>96</sup> The short report did not state explicitly how Sergei’s death would bring about freedom, or even what was meant by the term ‘freedom’, though it did suggest that Sergei was simply one of many more victims, and that the revolutionaries would continue to commit acts of violence in their standoff against the autocracy. The elimination of Sergei and of other ‘reactionary’ officials was expected to bring about change under autocratic rule, and his death supposedly brought the revolutionaries one step closer to achieving that end.

However, it is worth noting that this romanticized portrayal of the terrorists mislabeled the Combat Organization’s relationship with the larger Socialist Revolutionary Party of which it was a part, and misconstrued its rationale for committing assassinations on government targets. Historian Anna Geifman explains in her study on Russian revolutionary violence that members of the Combat Organization had no interest in SR politics or “socialist dogma,” and quickly deviated from the party’s stated objectives for political violence.<sup>97</sup> The SR party’s theoreticians believed that terror was to be used as a means to agitate and radicalize the masses, to complement the revolutionary movement, and to debilitate the government. In practice, members of the Combat Organization acted almost completely independently from the party, “had little interest in their leadership’s primary justification of terror as part of the all-out class struggle of the toiling masses,” and instead sought retribution against government officials of their

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 49.



choosing.<sup>98</sup> Regardless of its repudiation of SR political objectives, the Combat Organization's success in eliminating their high-profile target resulted in a surge in funding, in aspiring members, and in prestige.<sup>99</sup> Their assassination of Sergei proved that their murder of von Plehve "had not been an accident," as they had demonstrated the effectiveness of their technique on two separate occasions, and certainly would have left an impression on the American press, which anticipated further attacks.

Indeed, accompanying the news of Sergei's assassination were warnings of a much larger revolutionary endeavour. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted that "thousands of bombs are reported to have been imported through Finland [and that] only those living in Russia with all the recent events visible in their minds can realize the seriousness of the impression made."<sup>100</sup> In addition, reports that explained how Sergei was a "marked man," and how his death had been announced in an SR Party proclamation only weeks before the assassination, also revealed that his death was one of a "series of political executions" planned by the SR party.<sup>101</sup> The next targets had already been identified as Governor General of St. Petersburg Dmitrii Trepov, Minister of the Interior Aleksandr Bulygin, and the Russian Emperor Nicholas II himself. After their successful murder of Sergei, it seemed as though it was only a matter of time before another plot would come to fruition, and the possibility of yet another assassination, or even an armed uprising, enthralled journalists as the revolutionary movement pushed on.

To conclude, the murder of Grand Duke Sergei was initially perceived as a sign of what was to come for autocrats in Russia if conditions did not improve. Foreign reporters and editors alike recognized from the outset that his death was part of a planned campaign that had been set

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>100</sup> "Uncle of Czar and Most Hated Man in Russia Meets Frightful Death in Moscow," 1.

<sup>101</sup> "Marked for Death," *The Washington Post* (February 18, 1905), 1; "Grand Duke Sergius Dies by Bomb," 2.

in motion by the Socialist Revolutionary Party's notorious Combat Organization, which employed the same strategy when they murdered former Minister of the Interior Viacheslav von Plehve in July 1904. Reporters took stock of the Grand Duke's career to speculate why he was targeted by the Combat Organization, and in so doing they offered different perspectives on the use and justifiability of political violence. Some considered violence as a necessary tool of the Russian people to free themselves from autocratic control, while others considered the assassination of a member of the royal family as a step too far. In spite of the debate on the justification for the use of violence, there seemed to be a consensus that its intensification was inevitable.

## Chapter 2: Contradictory Themes in an Escalating Conflict

*“Death is in the Air, and No One Knows Where the Next Blow May Fall”*<sup>102</sup>

The focus of American press coverage concerning Grand Duke Sergei’s assassination already began to shift as early as the day after it was announced on February 18, 1905. Despite how newspapers reported that his murder did not come as a surprise to the Russian population or to those who had been following Russia’s current events, Sergei’s death was a significant incident in the revolutionary conflict that received notable attention in the press. On the day the story broke, most reports sought to explain how Sergei had been killed, who had killed him and why, as well as what effect his death might have on the emperor and his government. Throughout the week that followed, though, most news coverage about Sergei was allocated to describing preparations for his funeral and burial during a political crisis whose participants had already threatened to commit more acts of violence. Unsurprisingly, more attention was given by reporters to the burgeoning revolutionary movement that seemingly spread overnight from Russian cities to the empire’s periphery, where some regions were reportedly embroiled in a “reign of terror,” and from factories to universities, where students and professors supported demands for reform.<sup>103</sup> I argue that the interpretation of Sergei’s assassination over the week that followed his murder became tangled into, and even subsumed and overshadowed by, other narratives about the revolution unfolding at the same time such as the possible terrorist plot against other members of the royal family, the presumed escalation of political violence, and even the spread of revolutionary sentiment more broadly.

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<sup>102</sup> “Era of Terrorism,” *The Washington Post* (February 19, 1905), 1; “Imperial Family’s Peril,” *The New York Times* (February 19, 1905), 1.

<sup>103</sup> “Mob Law in Baku,” *The Washington Post* (February 25, 1905), 1.

The shift in attention from Sergei's murder to other instances of political violence was already noticeable on February 19, 1905. On the front page of the *Washington Post* the headline reads "Era of terrorism" in bold typeface, with multiple subtitles below it announcing that the "life of czar's mother is reported threatened," that there had been another "two political murders," and that the "council of the Empire had been summoned to consider the situation."<sup>104</sup> These snippets of information are devoid of any mention of Sergei's assassination, and instead focus on the pervasiveness of violence in revolutionary Russia more generally. Similarly, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* shows on its own front page from the same day four images – a panoramic view of Moscow's Kremlin District, the Chudov Monastery where Sergei's body was lying in state, and portraits of Sergei's brothers Grand Dukes Aleksei Aleksandrovich and Vladimir Aleksandrovich – accompanied by a headline that announces that the "Czar [called] on [the] council of Empire to aid him."<sup>105</sup> The photos seem disconnected from one another, and appear to have only a slight connection to Sergei's murder. The inclusion of photos of the Kremlin and of the Chudov Monastery in the spread establish the scene of Sergei's assassination and of his temporary resting place, but the addition of portraits of two of Sergei's three living brothers is unusual.

Crucially, the editor of the *Inquirer* includes beneath the photos a brief description of the collage to help elucidate its *raison d'être* on the front page of the daily.

Moscow, the ancient capital of Russia, and the scene of the assassination of the Czar's uncle [Sergei], is a city of many 'quarters'. A view of the district in which is situated the Kremlin, a congregation of palaces and churches, is given above. The religious house or convent of the Kremlin [the Chudov Monastery] is also shown. Here rest all that remains

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<sup>104</sup> "Era of Terrorism," 1.

<sup>105</sup> "Czar Calls on Council of Empire to aid him," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 19, 1905), 1.

of Grand Duke Sergius. Grand Dukes Alexis and Vladimir, uncles of the Czar, it is said, are slated for slaughter by Terrorists.<sup>106</sup>

The statement regarding the imminent assassinations of Grand Dukes Aleksei and Vladimir by the SR Combat Organization is jarring, though it illustrates how quickly the narrative of Sergei's murder became intertwined with new assumptions about the revolutionary movement. As we have seen in chapter one, the story of Sergei's assassination was not considered an isolated event, but rather was seen as part of a larger plan set in motion by revolutionaries. In this instance, Sergei's assassination functions as a sort of literary device to establish continuity in the Russian revolutionary saga that captivated the American press as it unfolded. The news coverage of the assassination over the next seven days expanded upon this premise, and in so doing relegated Sergei to a secondary role in the larger narrative about political violence in revolutionary Russia.

Historian John Maxwell Hamilton's discussion about the challenges of foreign news-gathering in *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* offers some insight as to why the story of Sergei's murder was so quickly replaced as the focal point of the discussion about the revolutionary movement.<sup>107</sup> Foreign news-gathering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was expensive, and reports were difficult to verify because editors "[had] little intimate knowledge of what [was] happening" abroad.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, foreign news needed to be contextualized "for an audience with a limited appetite for foreign affairs, which [made] the high cost of foreign correspondence particularly vulnerable to cost cutting."<sup>109</sup> Given that Sergei's murder had been front page news on February 18, it was likely considered

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> John Maxwell Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

reasonable from editorial and commercial perspectives to continue building the developing story of the incendiary revolutionary movement around its most recent high-profile victim. However, commercial news organizations could not depend on Sergei's notoriety alone to entice readers to purchase the latest daily newspapers when his death had already become 'old news'. Instead, newspaper editors seemingly relied on Sergei's victimhood to convey to American readers how the safety of the other members of the royal family could not be guaranteed, and that further acts of targeted violence against them were possible, and perhaps even inevitable, in a context where they were expected to attend a state funeral for their deceased relative.

In fact, these conjectures were promulgated on the front pages of the *Washington Post* on February 20, 1905. The article, aptly named "In Fear of Death," explains how the other grand dukes feared to venture beyond the walls of their palaces in the aftermath of Grand Duke Sergei's assassination.<sup>110</sup> Part of the report also discusses the logistical quagmire of Sergei's funeral which, on the one hand, needed to be held in Moscow as the Romanov mausoleum in St. Petersburg was being renovated and, on the other, posed a significant risk to the safety of all royal family members who would attend. Given that the Combat Organization had a proven method of slaying their targets with bombs, there was consensus that "no precautions [could] furnish an absolute guarantee of immunity against an act of terrorism... [and that] a single bomb might wipe out the dynasty."<sup>111</sup> As a result, and in defiance of "ancient custom" that required the royal family to follow the casket of the deceased on foot, the tsar decided not to travel to Moscow to attend his uncle's funeral.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> "In Fear of Death," *The Washington Post* (February 20, 1905), 1.

<sup>111</sup> Governor General of St. Petersburg Dmitri Trepov quoted in "In Fear of Death," 1.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.; "Terrified Grand Dukes Fear to Quit Palaces," *The New York Times* (February 20, 1905), 1; "Fear Keeps Czar Prisoner Within his Palace Walls," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 20, 1905), 1; Gilbert, "The Martyr Cult of Sergei Aleksandrovich," 273. The *Times* even reported that the tsar refused to allow foreign dignitaries to

The *New York Times* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* also ran the same report as the *Post*, albeit with different headlines on their respective front pages, and the newspapers were equally fixated on the trepidation of the “terrified” grand dukes who “[would] not risk attending Sergius’ funeral.”<sup>113</sup> Interestingly, details about the fear that had taken hold of the grand dukes and of the emperor, and the minutiae of Sergei’s burial preparations, fill only half of the articles of each of the respective newspapers that reported the story. The remaining halves are dedicated to other affairs that had come to light regarding the revolutionary movement. The *Inquirer*, the *Post*, and the *Times* printed almost identical information, with only the latter including additional details about other assassinations of political figures, riots, and skirmishes with police in the empire’s southern region.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, much attention is given to the worsening strike situations in St. Petersburg, where several factory owners responded to their employees’ grievances by initiating a lockout, and in Moscow, where several railways were “completely tied up” by strikers.<sup>115</sup> Despite all of the excitement that was spreading quickly across the empire, and the expectation and concern from the Russian public that there would be more “terrorist crimes,” the autocratic regime appeared unable to respond to the crisis, and certainly did not rush to grant concessions to the revolutionaries to appease them.<sup>116</sup> The Russian government’s impotence created uncertainty for the days ahead, and it is in this context that the story of Sergei’s death became less significant in American news coverage of Russian affairs. Articles directly related to Sergei not only decreased in frequency, but also were moved from the front page and replaced with other major stories concerning the ongoing revolution.

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attend the funeral as he could not guarantee their safety. See, “Foreign Princes Unwelcome,” *The New York Times* (February 22, 1905), 1.

<sup>113</sup> “Terrified Grand Dukes Fear to Quit Palaces,” 1; “Fear Keeps Czar Prisoner Within his Palace Walls,” 1.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*; “Terrified Grand Dukes Fear to Quit Palaces,” 1; “Fear Keeps Czar Prisoner Within his Palace Walls,” 1. The article did not identify specific regions in the southern portion of the empire where violence was intensifying, and merely referred to the area as ‘Southern Russia’.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*; “Fear Keeps Czar Prisoner Within his Palace Walls,” 1; “In Fear of Death,” 1.

Before analyzing these other news stories in detail, it is worth briefly discussing what factors render an event newsworthy, and how editors determine which stories become front page news. Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge's cornerstone research on news factors in foreign news reporting posits that "events become news" if they exhibit specific qualities that demand an audience's attention.<sup>117</sup> Of the twelve factors listed in their research, Galtung and Ruge establish that foreign events that make reference to elite people, to elite nations, and to something negative have a higher probability of becoming news than do others.<sup>118</sup> The assassination of Grand Duke Sergei satisfied these conditions as he once held the prestigious post of Governor General of Moscow, was a member of the imperial family of the Russian Empire, and was the victim of a terrorist bombing. That these news factors were simultaneously in play helps to explain why the story of the assassination made headlines when reporters first learned of it, but not why it was so quickly supplanted by other events over the next few days. Galtung and Ruge's work prompted other scholars to build upon their findings on the uses and influences of news factors, which continue to be adapted as new studies materialize.<sup>119</sup> One recent study by Boukes, Jones, and Vliegthart "demonstrates that not all news factors contribute equally to the prominence of stories," and that 'conflict' (confrontation and/or controversy) and 'eliteness' (involving

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<sup>117</sup> Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News," *Journal of Peace Research* 2, no. 1 (1965), 70.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. The twelve news factors provided by Galtung and Ruge are as follows: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative. For more detail on these taxonomies as defined by Galtung and Ruge, see 64-72.

<sup>119</sup> For instance, for a discussion on differing theoretical perspectives related to news factors, see Joachim Friedrich Staab, "The Role of News Factors in News Selection: A Theoretical Reconsideration," *European Journal of Communication* 5, no. 4 (1990), 423-443; and Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple, "Why do News Values Matter? Towards a New Methodological Framework for Analysing News Discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and More," *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 2 (2014), 135-158.



individuals, institutions or nations of elite status) most affect a news story's length and position within a newspaper.<sup>120</sup>

These same factors help to explain the sudden editorial shift in interest away from Sergei's assassination to other, and seemingly more pressing, news stories about the revolution. The characteristics of Sergei's story changed quickly from those of a violent murder of a member of the royal family to depictions of a royal requiem and funeral. In addition, newspaper editors did not treat the story of Sergei's murder in isolation from the revolutionary conflict, but rather considered it as a part of the conflict's escalation. Sergei's victimhood, and the way in which he was murdered, epitomized the violent nature of the confrontation between the revolutionaries and the autocrats and thus provided the necessary ingredients for a headline news story. On February 18, headlines from all five newspapers considered in this study feature both news factors (eliteness and conflict), which clearly establish that Grand Duke Sergei had been "blown to pieces" by a "terrorist bomb" thrown by a "creature of the revolution."<sup>121</sup> These descriptions of Sergei's assassination emphasize how the bombing was a deliberate act performed by a revolutionary. The perception of the bombing as being a consequence of the revolution is significant, as it suggests that the story of Sergei's assassination was not meant to receive sustained in-depth coverage as would the greater conflict between the autocrats and the revolutionaries.

According to Zillich et al., "the phase of escalation of international conflicts receives by far the highest journalistic attention," and though their research focuses on German print and

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<sup>120</sup> Mark Boukes, Natalie P Jones, and Rens Vliegenhart, "Newsworthiness and Story Prominence: How the Presence of News Factors Relates to Upfront Position and Length of News Stories," *Journalism* 23, no. 1 (2022), 111.

<sup>121</sup> "Grand Duke Sergius is Blown to Pieces," 1; "Terrorist Bomb Slays Sergius," 1; "Grand Duke Sergius is Killed by Bomb Thrown by Assassin," 1.

broadcast news, the same could be said about American press coverage of the revolutionary conflict in 1905.<sup>122</sup> All of the newspapers considered in this study provided coverage of political mobilization of workers and students and their demands for reform, and of assassination attempts against Governor General Trepov and the royal family in the lead-up to the Bloody Sunday massacre, a month before Sergei's assassination.<sup>123</sup> Neither the Bloody Sunday massacre nor the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei ushered in a new phase of de-escalation of the revolution, which journalists remained fixated upon for the next breaking news story.<sup>124</sup> Unsurprisingly, news reports about funeral arrangements and requiems are neither representative of further acts of revolutionary violence nor of political decisiveness, and ultimately satisfy different journalistic criteria.

Indeed, the dwindling coverage of Sergei's murder by the press suggests that the news values attributed to his story had transformed from those of 'eliteness' and 'conflict' to 'eliteness' and 'continuity'.<sup>125</sup> In their assessment of Galtung and Ruge's proposed news factor of 'continuity' in foreign reporting, Harcup and O'Neill acknowledge that "once an event has become headline news it remains in the media spotlight for some time – even if its amplitude has

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<sup>122</sup> Arne F. Zillich et al., "Proactive Crisis Communication? News Coverage of International Conflicts in German Print and Broadcasting Media," *Media, War and Conflict* 4, no. 3 (2011), 263.

<sup>123</sup> For reports about the assassination attempt made on the royal family at the Blessing of the Neva ceremony in January 1905, see "Czar Unharmed by Hail of Grape," 1; "Papers Tell Little," 8; "Officer Tells How Czar was Fired On," 2; "Grape Fired at Czar from Crack Battery," 1; "Front Page 4 – No Title," 1; "Accident Nearly Costs Czar His Life," 1. For reports on the assassination attempt made on Gov. Gen. Trepov, see "Shots Miss Trepoff," *The Washington Post* (January 16, 1905), 1; "Student Fired at General Trepoff," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (January 16, 1905), 1; "Three Shots at Trepoff," *The New York Times* (January 16, 1905), 1; "Attempt to Kill Trepoff at Moscow," *The Los Angeles Times* (January 16, 1905), 4. For reports on political mobilization related to Bloody Sunday, see "Moscow Workers Join in Uprising," *The Washington Post* (January 24, 1905), 1; "Tomorrow May be an Epoch in the History of Russia," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (January 21, 1905), 1; "Moscow Joins in the Tactics that Have Been Adopted by Men of St. Petersburg," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (January 24, 1905), 1; "Moscow Mob Dispersed," *The New York Times* (January 26, 1905), 1; "Emperor Seeks Safety In Flight," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (January 24, 1905), 1; "Moscow Now Danger Point," *The Los Angeles Times* (January 24, 1905), 1.

<sup>124</sup> Zillich et al., "Proactive Crisis Communication?," 255. The Authors identify the escalation phase as that which consists of the most live reports, breaking news stories, and special broadcasts.

<sup>125</sup> Boukes, Jones, and Vliegenhart, "Newsworthiness and Story Prominence," 100.

been greatly reduced – because it has become familiar and easier to interpret.”<sup>126</sup> Simply put, ‘continuity’ necessitates further in-depth analysis of a story that has already been in the news and that is familiar to audiences.<sup>127</sup> This editorial shift toward continuity coverage of Sergei’s assassination demonstrates that the American press was aware of the fact that the bombing was not an isolated incident, and preferred to focus on news stories that contributed to the narrative that the revolutionary conflict was still in its escalatory phase. As a result, and in the days that followed the breaking news story of Sergei’s death, reports offered whatever information about the murder that became available, however, articles that included details relating only to the assassination, and which failed to address other aspects of the revolution, were never again given the same prominence that the initial account of the bombing had received.

For instance, major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ran on February 20 identical articles that announced the date of Sergei’s funeral, and neither periodical printed this story on the first page of their publications.<sup>128</sup> The *Times*’ “Funeral to be on Thursday” and the *Post*’s “Funeral set for Thursday,” which are printed on the second and third pages of their respective newspapers, do little to entice those who do not already know about Sergei’s death to follow-up on the story. The announcement of a funeral date for a deceased member of the royal family likely appeared less significant to editors, and did not justify a slot on the front page, while tension continued to build between the revolutionaries and the autocrats in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. Moreover, the reports themselves ostensibly reflect on the fleeting nature of the story of Sergei’s death, while they also recognize that the

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<sup>126</sup> Tony Harcup, and Deirdre O’Neill, “What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited,” *Journalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001), 263. Despite their preferred category of ‘follow-up’ in lieu of ‘continuity’, Harcup and O’Neill agree that the latest developments of stories that were previously in the news are themselves newsworthy.

<sup>127</sup> Boukes, Jones, and Vliegenhart, “Newsworthiness and Story Prominence,” 102.

<sup>128</sup> “Funeral to be on Thursday,” *The New York Times* (February 20, 1905), 2; “Funeral Set for Thursday,” *The Washington Post* (February 20, 1905), 3.

event could not be ignored given the extent of corporal and material damage that was done by the bombing. The first lines of the article reveal that

a thin layer of snow to-day has dimmed the bloodstains in the Senate Square. The windows in the palace of justice have been reglazed and other hasty efforts have been made to obliterate traces of Friday's tragedy. Evidence, however, is being found in most unexpected places. Soldiers this afternoon discovered many pieces of the carriage in which Grand Duke Sergius was riding when he met his death, and fragments of flesh were found on the top of the twelve foot parapet of the arsenal among the Napoleonic guns.<sup>129</sup>

The passage illustrates how the crime scene at the Kremlin was being redressed not only by the elements or by the authorities, but also by the passage of time. The very permanence of death made it so that any new information about Sergei, or his assassination more broadly, would constitute a follow-up story because his had already reached its end, and his assassin was already in police custody. Much like the soldiers who discovered bits of Sergei's carriage and flesh days after the bombing, journalists could only offer additional fragments of information to deepen their readers' understanding of the attack, of those involved, and of its consequences. This is the case in both "Funeral to be on Thursday" and "Funeral Set for Thursday," which provide limited updates on the public viewings of Sergei's coffin at the Chudov Monastery, the declining health of Sergei's coachman, Andrei Rudinkin, and the identity of the bomber, who "remains persistently silent."<sup>130</sup>

The prominence of Sergei-centric reports thus varies depending on how the editors relate the story to other information about the revolution. The *Times* and the *Post* printed their announcements of Sergei's funeral date separately from other news stories about the revolution, which shifted the follow-up story away from the front pages that instead examined the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

trepidation of the royal family following the bombing.<sup>131</sup> The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Los Angeles Times*, which also printed the article about the funeral announcement, opted instead to entwine the various stories from their revolutionary press coverage into single, collated articles. The former incorporated the information at the very end of their report on page nine (continued from page one), while the latter included the information at the end of the article on the front page as part of a severe critique of the autocracy.<sup>132</sup> Admittedly, the decision made by the *Inquirer* and the *Los Angeles Times* to aggregate multiple news stories about the revolution into single articles could have been the result of spatial constraints that neither the *Times* nor the *Post* faced. However, that neither newspaper referred to Sergei or his funeral date in their subheadings, and favored drawing attention to his assassin, whose “identity remains a mystery,” or to the crime scene, where the “bomb’s work [is] still apparent,” suggests that the Grand Duke was no longer considered a figure that could generate sustained interest in the Russian Revolution, and could not compete with new information about instances of political violence.<sup>133</sup>

This can also be seen in the headline from the same *Los Angeles Times*’ publication from February 20, which does not in any way refer to the Grand Duke or his funeral, and instead turns its attention towards the Kingdom of Poland, then part of the Russian Empire. The headline paints a grim picture of a city embroiled in conflict with “two thousand dead in Warsaw streets” at the hands of the “Russian troops [who] acted like wild beasts.”<sup>134</sup> Despite the fact that the violent confrontation they are referring to took place weeks before during a public demonstration at the end of January, 1905, the exclusive dispatch from Berlin focuses on this story because “a manufacturer who has just returned from Warsaw says the condition of that city is even worse

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<sup>131</sup> “In Fear of Death,” 1; “Terrified Grand Dukes Fear to Quit Palaces,” 1.

<sup>132</sup> “Fear Keeps Czar Prisoner Within his Palace Walls,” 9; “Two Thousand Dead in Warsaw Streets,” *The Los Angeles Times* (February 20, 1905), 1.

<sup>133</sup> “Two Thousand Dead in Warsaw Streets,” 1.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

than reported.”<sup>135</sup> The report suggests that earlier estimates of three to four hundred deaths are incorrect, and that violence is much more intense and widespread than previously believed now that “the flame of revolution is spreading to all classes of the population.”<sup>136</sup> Contrary to the estimates printed by the *Los Angeles Times*, historian Robert Blobaum finds in his research on Russian Poland during the revolution that only 65 people lost their lives during the strike in Warsaw from January 27-30, 1905.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, the manufacturer’s account of events in Warsaw provided the *Los Angeles Times* an opportunity to widen the scope of American press coverage of political violence in the Russian Empire, and to publicize different facets of the growing conflict, in ways that Sergei’s assassination could not.

To complement their coverage of sociopolitical turmoil in the Russian Empire that progressively overshadowed the story of Sergei’s murder, the American press also announced the mobilization of university students against the autocratic regime. Indeed, at a meeting held on February 20 directors, professors, and students of St. Petersburg University agreed to participate in a general strike and to close the university until September 1905.<sup>138</sup> The news of Russian university students joining the revolutionary struggle was undoubtedly considered significant, as it was publicized by the *Inquirer*, the *Daily Eagle*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* on February 21, but was ultimately ignored by the *Post*.<sup>139</sup> Their articles describe the “spirit of revolution that had complete possession” of the approximately 3000 students and staff

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Robert Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904-1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 76.

<sup>138</sup> Susan K. Morrissey, *Heralds of Revolution: Russian Students and the Mythologies of Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101. Morrissey finds that the final vote count in favour of a semester strike was 2378, compared to 66 votes against.

<sup>139</sup> “Czar Decides to Call Popular Assembly, Students Demand Reform,” *The Philadelphia, Enquirer* (February 21, 1905), 1; “Spirit of Revolt,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 21, 1905), 11; “Spirit of Revolt Animates Scholars,” *The Los Angeles Times* (February 21, 1905), 4; “Students Shout for Liberty,” *The New York Times* (February 21, 1905), 1.

who attended the two separate meetings that took place, and disseminated the three resolutions that were passed by those in attendance.<sup>140</sup> The students demanded “a constituent assembly on the basis of universal suffrage and under conditions of freedom of speech, of the press, and of association and the freedom of laborers to strike,” as well as amnesty for political and religious offenders, and regional autonomy for those who are not of Russian nationality.<sup>141</sup> The correspondents note how the essence of the revolution permeated the air at the university, where students sang *La Marseillaise* and hoisted a red flag on which was written “Hail to the constituent assembly.”<sup>142</sup> The reports also indicate that some students glorified the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei while they convened in small breakout rooms away from the auditorium, where the principal meetings were held. This was the only instance where Sergei was mentioned in the articles, which used the subject of his death to convey to readers that some students condoned assassination, despite the fact that “few are extremists.”<sup>143</sup> The trivial addition of Sergei to the text is but another example of how he and his assassination were viewed by the American press as having lesser importance than the revolution, which remained uninterrupted.

This is not to say, though, that Grand Duke Sergei’s death was neither a newsworthy story, nor given any attention at all once the remnants of the bombing at the Kremlin were

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<sup>140</sup> “Spirit of Revolt, 11; “Spirit of Revolt Animates Scholars,” 4. The number of people in attendance varies between reports. The *Daily Eagle* states that 3000 people attended the meeting, while the *Inquirer* and the *LA Times* state that the number was closer to 4000. Historian Susan K. Morrissey estimates that the real number is just over 3000, see *Heralds of Revolution*, 101.

<sup>141</sup> “Czar Decides to Call Popular Assembly, Students Demand Reform,” 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. *La Marseillaise* is the national anthem of France that became a popular revolutionary song in Russia that was sung by revolutionaries in 1905 and 1917, see Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), 355. The newspapers note how the students compared their experience to that of the French during the French Revolution (1789-1799), and they, too, drew some parallels between both cases. According to Denise Eeckaute, it was common at the time for Western newspapers to draw parallels between the Russian Revolution of 1905 and other revolutions that preceded it, such as the American, the French, and the more widespread revolutions of 1848. See Denise Eeckaute, “1905 – Dans La Presse Française et Anglaise (étude comparée)” in *1905: la Première Révolution Russe*, ed. François-Xavier Coquin and Céline Gervais-Francelle (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1986), 455-456.

<sup>143</sup> “Spirit of Revolt,” 11.

cleared. As mentioned earlier, continuity coverage of a story that has previously been in the news provides relevant information that deepens an audience's understanding of an event, and "also acts to justify the attention an event attracted in the first place."<sup>144</sup> Follow-up coverage of the assassination from the days that followed the bombing provided little more than context to a story whose readers all but knew its conclusion, though additional details about Sergei's assassin, Ivan Kaliaev, may have sustained and perhaps even generated further interest in it, if only for a short time. The uncertainty of the assassin's identity, and the press' desire to unmask him, is a significant theme that resurfaces several times in the week following the assassination. The mystery surrounding Kaliaev, though, engendered a splintering of narratives that diverted further attention away from the Grand Duke.

For instance, on February 19, in an article describing the memorial service for Sergei at the Chudov monastery, information about Kaliaev's identity stands out from the rest. The report describes the lavish decorations placed on and around the Grand Duke's casket, "which is adorned with silver eagles, [and] is half covered by a Grand Ducal pall of gold embroidery with borders of ermine," and portrays Moscow in a gloomy light as church bells tolled, priests chanted prayers, and "detachments of soldiers [maintained] a continuous guard outside the monastery."<sup>145</sup> The authorities shared with reporters snippets of information regarding the Grand Duke's travel plans before he was murdered, as well as some details about the aftermath of the bombing when "the air was absolutely filled with a red haze, blood being spattered to a distance of 300 feet."<sup>146</sup> The information seemingly tied up the loose ends of the story that were unclear the day before, though one glaring question remained unanswered: who was the assassin? The

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<sup>144</sup> Harcup, and O'Neill, "What is News?," 263.

<sup>145</sup> "Remains Lie in State," *The New York Times* (February 19, 1905), 2; "Services for Sergius," *The Washington Post* (February 19, 1905), 3.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*



article briefly mentions that previous dispatches sent from Russia, which identified him as a workman, were likely incorrect “as it is evident that he belongs to a higher class.”<sup>147</sup> Indeed, that Kaliaev was arrested at the scene of the bombing “dressed as a peasant... [whose] papers were all forged” demonstrates that he deliberately disguised himself to accomplish his mission, and that his identity would remain a mystery until a police investigation was concluded.<sup>148</sup>

By refocusing their attention on Kaliaev, the American press, by extension, prolonged Sergei’s relevance in news coverage about the revolution because they contributed simultaneously additional details to both the story of his death and to the narrative about the conflict’s violent escalation. On February 20, two days after the announcement of Sergei’s burial, a report was published with a chilling warning made by the assassin, who declared that “before his victim was laid under earth other victims would be found.”<sup>149</sup> Kaliaev offered no additional details regarding his statement, “maintains an attitude of profound indifference” when questioned by authorities, and informed them that “all [their] efforts [to obtain more information] would have no result.”<sup>150</sup> The press seemed both fascinated by, and frustrated with, Kaliaev as they still did not know his true identity, and because he was unwilling to provide any information regarding the SR Combat Organization’s plans to assassinate other targets. His claim that more people would be killed before Sergei’s funeral came only a day after reports from February 21 revealed the existence and distribution of a manifesto “announcing that other executions will

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. According to a dispatch received from the Associated Press and printed by the *LA Times*, Kaliaev’s undergarments were of good quality and fashionably made, which made it unlikely that he was a workman. In addition, it was reported that Kaliaev “strongly objected to donning prison attire, and for a long time refused to take off his warm undershirt for fear of catching cold.” See “Czar ‘Midst Martial Law,” *The Los Angeles Times* (February 21, 1905), 2.

<sup>149</sup> “Others Doomed to Death,” *The New York Times* (February 22, 1905), 1; “More Will Perish Says Assassin,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 22, 1905), 6; “Assassin Warns Police,” *The Washington Post* (February 22, 1905), 3; “Assassin is Indifferent,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 22, 1905), 7; “Dire Prophecy of Terrorists,” *The Los Angeles Times* (February 22, 1905), 5.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

follow that of Grand Duke Sergius.”<sup>151</sup> While reports from February 18 claimed that Governor General Trepov, Grand Duke Vladimir, Minister of the Interior Aleksandr Bulygin, and even the Tsar were selected as the Combat Organization’s next targets, articles printed three days later speculated that Grand Duke Aleksei would be the next to die.<sup>152</sup> Given the unpredictability of the situation, and Kaliaev’s boldness in predicting another attack, it appears that the press expected the assassin to know the identity of the next target but was left frustrated by his “profound indifference.”<sup>153</sup> No new victims were found before Sergei’s funeral despite Kaliaev’s warning, though it is unsurprising that his threat diverted the press’ attention further away from the Grand Duke.<sup>154</sup>

We have hitherto seen how American press coverage about Sergei’s assassination transformed in the few days that succeeded his murder. News reports that initially focused on the Grand Duke’s temperament and career, the possible motive of the revolutionaries, and even the scene of the bombing itself, inevitably gave way to speculation about looming attacks and revelations about the extent of participation and violence in the revolutionary conflict. However, it is worth mentioning how observers in the United States were not simply receiving this information about the circumstances surrounding Sergei’s assassination without reacting to it. In fact, there was some news coverage of local responses to the assassination, highlighting its transnational scope, which is worth discussing. For example, on Feb 19, the *Washington Post* reported that Reverend Alexander Hotovitzky, a pastor at the Russian Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in New York, condemned the murder of Grand Duke Sergei at a requiem mass held for

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<sup>151</sup> “Marked for Murder,” *The Washington Post* (February 21, 1905), 3.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. “Grand Duke Alexis Next?” *The New York Times* (February 21, 1905), 2.

<sup>153</sup> “Others Doomed to Death,” 1; “More Will Perish Says Assassin,” 6; “Assassin Warns Police,” 3; “Assassin is Indifferent,” 7; “Dire Prophecy of Terrorists,” 5.

<sup>154</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 56. The Combat Organization was unsuccessful from February to December 1905 despite actively attempting to assassinate Grand Duke Vladimir Romanov, as well as Governor General of Kiev, Nikolai Kleigels, and governor of Nizhnii Novgorod, Baron Pavel-Simon Unterberger.

the deceased.<sup>155</sup> In his sermon, Hotovitzky bemoaned the fact that “the act of the assassin would not bring about a betterment of conditions” in Russia, and asserted that the revolutionary uprising “was not of the Russian people, but of anarchists who wished to destroy the government.”<sup>156</sup>

Contrarily, American anarchists perceived the assassination as a victory for the revolutionaries, and celebrated the death of Grand Duke Sergei in New York on two separate occasions. The first occurred at the Murray Hill Lyceum on February 19, where 1500 people reportedly attended a rally where speeches were given to revere the actions of Sergei’s assassin and the Combat Organization more generally.<sup>157</sup> At the event, the ensemble of orators, which included exiled revolutionaries and local professionals, shared “grotesque jests and grim stories of war” in tsarist Russia, and commended the heroism of the revolutionaries “who arose out of the darkness to do a great deed.”<sup>158</sup> The second celebration took place two days later at an unnamed hall, where Johann Most, “the country’s leading anarchist spokesman” who had been active in the United States since the 1880s, gave a speech to the crowd of approximately 1200.<sup>159</sup> Most, who was expected to be accompanied to the rally by the famed American anarchist Emma Goldman (who ultimately did not attend), was welcomed with a standing ovation from the crowd, which “packed the hall to its doors.”<sup>160</sup> During his speech, Most praised the revolutionaries who dealt “a master stroke for the cause” by killing Sergei, the perceived “power

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<sup>155</sup> “Priest Defends Russia,” *The Washington Post* (February 19, 1905), 3.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> “Cheer the Assassins,” *The New York Times* (February 20, 1905), 2.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* The report identified the speakers as: “Dr. Solotaroff, an anarchist; M. Mynchefskey, a fiery orator; Maurice Katz, a mild-mannered editor; Dr. C. Tschitowsky, a Social Revolutionist from Zurich; and Simon Pollock, a lawyer.”

<sup>159</sup> Bill Lynskey, “I Shall Speak in Philadelphia: Emma Goldman and the Free Speech League,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 133, no. 2 (April, 2009). 174; “Sergius Not The Last, Herr Most Tells Reds,” *The New York Times* (February 23, 1905), 2; For a brief synopsis of Johann Most’s career, see Dan Colson, “Propaganda and the Deed: Anarchism, Violence, and the Representational Impulse,” *American Studies* 55, no. 4 / 56, no.1 (2017), 168, and the accompanying note.

<sup>160</sup> “Sergius Not The Last, Herr Most Tells Reds,” 2.

behind the throne,” and assured the crowd that the Grand Duke would not be the last victim.<sup>161</sup> According to the report, the attendees, who were members of an unnamed anarchist society, donated several hundred dollars to the Russian revolutionary movement.<sup>162</sup>

News of the Grand Duke’s death also caused a stir when some Americans took issue with President Theodore Roosevelt’s message of condolence to Emperor Nicholas II. More specifically, news reports from February 20 through February 22 reveal that the president’s message to the tsar was criticized for not representing how Americans actually felt about the assassination. Several reports provided details of one particular event, where, in the House of Representatives, New York Representative (Dem) Robert Baker pointed out Roosevelt’s hypocrisy in lamenting the death of one man without officially condemning “the massacre perpetrated by the Russian government on January 22, when thousands of unarmed men, women, and children were butchered in cold blood.”<sup>163</sup>

According to reports, as representatives debated key points of a naval appropriation bill, Baker raised the topic of Sergei’s assassination several times so as to “[condemn] the action of President Roosevelt in sending a message of condolence to Russia expressing that the government and American people viewed the [assassination] with abhorrence.”<sup>164</sup> *The New York Times*’ “Stir in the House Over Sergius” documents the surprising exchange between Baker and his colleagues on the subject of Sergei’s assassination, and notes that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans endorsed his critique of the President.<sup>165</sup> In fact, a Republican representative for Ohio, Charles Grosvenor, asserted that Roosevelt’s message of condolence to the tsar was

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Baker quoted in “Baker Set Going,” *The Washington Post* (February 21, 1905), 1. Baker is referring to the Bloody Sunday massacre.

<sup>164</sup> “Sensation in the House,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 21, 1905), 1.

<sup>165</sup> “Stir in the House Over Sergius,” *The New York Times* (February 20, 1905), 2.

customary in such circumstances, and singled out Baker as the only one in the House who disagreed with the President's actions.<sup>166</sup>

While the topic of Sergei's assassination was the cause for a testy exchange between Baker and his colleagues, it is important to note that its introduction into the House was not in and of itself the reason that the press considered the squabble a newsworthy story. Rather, in examining similar reports printed by the *Wichita Daily Eagle* and the *Washington Post*, whose coverage of the story made it to their respective front pages the day after the *Times* had printed the story on its second page, it appears as though it was the unexpected "sensation" that it caused in the House that made the story worth reporting.<sup>167</sup> Both headlines (including subheadings) fail to mention Sergei altogether, with the *Daily Eagle* fixating upon Baker's "startling resolution [that] alleges that Americans do not agree with the President," and the *Post* emphasizing Grosvenor's "little joke" that resulted in Baker becoming so angry with his peers that he taunted them to expel him from the House.<sup>168</sup> Interestingly, the *Post* ran on the same day two articles about the excitement at Congress. One of them, printed on the fourth page, is part of a summative report on Congress that mentions the uproar that followed Baker's condemnation of Roosevelt without providing a detailed account of the event.<sup>169</sup> The headline report, however, describes in greater detail the "pandemonium" that broke out in the House, where Baker attempted to read aloud his resolution over the "roar" of laughter coming from the far side of the Republican compartment, and subsequently shouted at his colleagues in a fit of rage.<sup>170</sup> That the *Post* described the event as a "scene [that] had not been enacted in comic cast in the history of the House" explains why the newspaper dedicated an entire article to explain how the situation

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> "Sensation in the House," 1.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.; "Baker Set Going," 1.

<sup>169</sup> "Congress Condensed," *The Washington Post* (February 21, 1905), 4; "Baker Set Going," 1.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

devolved, and also highlights how the press coverage of the event was less about Sergei's assassination than it was about documenting such an unexpected exchange between American policy-makers.<sup>171</sup>

However, that the American press was more concerned about an argument that took place in the House of Representatives than about the substance of Baker's resolution is not to say that his criticism of the President was not shared by others. In fact, the *New Yorker's* declaration that "the President has not and does not voice the real sentiments of the people of the United States" is consistent with the various ways in which some Americans showed support for the Russian Revolution even after the assassination. In a report printed on February 22, the *New York Times* noted another instance where Theodore Roosevelt's actions were criticized by his supporters.<sup>172</sup> At a dinner of the National Roosevelt League of New York, Herman C. Kudlich, a former Magistrate for the city of New York and a "friend and confidant of President Roosevelt," explained to those in attendance how he empathized with the Russian people.<sup>173</sup> Kudlich perceived the tsar's subjects as "a people who have sought for years to attain to a freedom equal in every respect to our freedom," and exclaimed that he would also "take [his] chance under similar circumstances, in handling a bomb, and throwing that bomb at the right moment."<sup>174</sup> Kudlich delivered his statement through constant interruptions of shouts or applause, which exhibits the schism between American supporters and opponents of political violence during the revolution, though his attitude towards the justifiability of violence was not at all unique at the time.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> "President's Message to Czar Denounced," *The New York Times* (February 22, 11905), 3.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Herman C. Kudlich quoted in "President's Message to Czar Denounced," 3.

Certainly, several editorials printed on February 18 considered the legitimacy of the use of violence in the aftermath of Grand Duke Sergei's murder, and opinions varied between them. In the week following the assassination, the press was able to capture again some of the ways in which Americans expressed their support or disdain for the revolutionaries by printing editorial pieces about Sergei's assassination and the public demonstrations that took place in New York in its aftermath. For instance, the editor of the *Daily Eagle*, M. M. Murdock, wrote on two separate occasions about his support for the Russian people in their quest for constitutional government and justified their use of violence. In his editorial from February 21, he echoes Baker's frustration over the "dispatches of condolence to the Czar from all the governments of the world" when they learned of Sergei's assassination – especially in light of the Bloody Sunday massacre that occurred only weeks before – and implies that his assassination was not surprising given that "conditions in Russia are appalling."<sup>175</sup> Despite Murdock's assertion that "assassination of rulers is a terrible thing," he maintains that "the men who are doing the killing seem to have [sic] the sympathy of the civilized world."<sup>176</sup> Three days later, on February 24, the editor clarified his position on assassination by specifying how "the fact that a majority of the people [...] do not censure the act which caused the Grand Duke Sergius to lose his life, cannot be taken as evidence that the people are coming to favor political assassinations."<sup>177</sup> Despite his explanation, Murdock seemingly believed that his words were representative of a prevailing view that the "trusty revolver and dynamite bomb is all that is left to the Russian masses [...] who] regard the killing of Sergius as war rather than assassination."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> M. M. Murdock, "War Transferred To Russia," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 21, 1905), 4; Zhuravleva, "American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution," 74. According to Zhuravleva, an overwhelming majority of the American press harshly condemned the Bloody Sunday Massacre.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> M. M. Murdock, "People Do Not Favor Assassination," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 24, 1905), 4.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

The timing of Murdock's second editorial piece is intriguing as there were no new developments to report about the revolution around that time that would have necessitated a clarification of his support for the use of violence as a political tactic. In fact, the editorial was printed on the same day as details of Sergei's funeral were publicized, and in it Murdock alluded only to a rumor that Sergei had undergone a change of heart and "was about to advise the Czar to give his people larger liberty" before Kaliaev hurled a bomb at him.<sup>179</sup> However, it is possible that the editor for the *Daily Eagle* was responding to an editorial article printed only days before in the *New York Times*. On February 21, the *Times* published a rather critical meditation on the use of political violence not only in Russia, but elsewhere as well.

"Assassins and Heroes" challenges the argument that political violence could be used as a vector for change, and criticizes those, like Murdock, who believed that assassination was justifiable in certain contexts.<sup>180</sup> The unnamed author of the editorial used their platform to denounce "the Russians of the east side [of New York] who applauded the slaying of Sergius" at the rally at the Murray Hill Lyceum.<sup>181</sup> The editorial, which was printed two days after the event, condemns the recklessness of the speakers who justified assassination as a legitimate political strategy, and asserts that all of the anarchists – whom the author assumes are foreigners – in attendance at the rally "are altogether out of harmony with the public opinion of the country whose hospitality they are abusing."<sup>182</sup> Although the editor wrote their critique in response to an occasion that celebrated the violent actions of the Combat Organization, the article ostensibly has more to do with castigating supporters of assassination than it has to do with discussing the

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> "Assassins and Heroes," *The New York Times* (February 21, 1905), 6.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. On the ways in which anarchists were depicted in US newspapers, see Krzysztof Wasilewski, "The Image of Immigrants as Anarchists in the American Press, 1886-1888," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 23.2 (Fall 2017): 371-386.



specifics of Sergei's murder or the dynamics of the Russian revolution. In fact, the editor disregards Sergei by affirming that "every liberal-minded man abhors the character of the Grand Duke Sergius [... whose] influence upon the Czar and upon Russia appears to have been altogether evil," and instead chides the Combat Organization's American supporters for failing to recognize that there is "no stopping place" once you begin to justify assassination.<sup>183</sup>

While the newspaper articles considered here showcase American engagement with the news of Sergei's assassination, it is clear that the majority of the discussions that were had were about the use and justifiability of violence in the revolutionary conflict rather than about the slain Grand Duke. The same can be said about the press coverage during the week following the day the story made headlines. The bombing may initially have generated news about the impact of Sergei's death on the autocratic regime – or even upon conditions in Russia more generally – on February 18, but a story about an assassination that occurred within an escalating conflict inevitably was overshadowed by new information about the threat and spread of violence, as well as the increase in political mobilization. The American press lowered the news value attributed to the story of Sergei's assassination, and in so doing modified the ways in which they presented it within the newspaper. Reports exclusively about Sergei consisted largely of follow-up stories and were no longer printed on the front page, which instead accentuated the possibility of increased violence, both in Russia and abroad. This trend inevitably continued as time went on.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter 3: Anticipating Terror

*“I am a Prisoner of War, not a Criminal”*<sup>184</sup>

These words were spoken by Ivan Kaliaev during the sentencing hearing on April 18, 1905, when he was condemned to death for Grand Duke Sergei’s murder. He was executed slightly over a month later, on May 23, 1905. His statement encapsulated in one sentence the complexities of the conflict between the revolutionaries and the autocrats, but Kaliaev’s death ultimately signified the end of American press coverage concerning the assassination. It first ceased abruptly, approximately one week after the bombing, because American newspapers, in keeping with the trends that were discussed in chapter two, elected to focus on stories that contributed to the narrative that the revolution was still in its escalatory phase, and to provide only continuity coverage of Sergei’s death. Dedicated coverage of the assassination only resumed when the assassin’s trial and sentencing took place, though it was limited and ceased quickly once Kaliaev faced the gallows. Thus, examining the reports about Sergei’s funeral and Kaliaev’s sentencing, and comparing them to other news stories about the revolution printed between both events, reveals that the American press had already moved on from their high profile victim and his killer because their stories could no longer add to the ever-changing narrative of the revolutionary conflict and its transnational resonances.

Despite the fact that Sergei’s funeral took place five days after the bombing, and thus fell within the week where the assassination received the most attention from the American press, news about it was printed by only two of the five newspapers considered in this study – the

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<sup>184</sup> Ivan Kaliaev quoted in “Sentence Sergius’s Assassin,” *The Los Angeles Times* (April 19, 1905), 5; “Kaleieff Sentenced,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (April 19, 1905), 1; “Assassin of Sergius Sentenced to Death,” *The New York Times* (April 19, 1905), 5;

*Wichita Daily Eagle* and the *Washington Post*. The marked absence of coverage of Sergei's funeral in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* is indicative of a larger trend in reporting from these newspapers, which seemingly lost interest in the story of Sergei's assassination before details of his burial even reached the United States via telegraph on the night of February 23. Indeed, the *Los Angeles Times*' last report on the assassination appeared on February 22, when Kaliaev prophesized the deaths of more victims before the day of Sergei's funeral, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* printed their last article of the week on February 23, when they announced that some (unspecified) grand dukes departed St. Petersburg "against the advice of the police" for Moscow to attend the funeral.<sup>185</sup> While the *New York Times* continued to print articles about the Russian revolution, it largely ignored the topic of Sergei's assassination, and opted instead to discuss the socio-political conditions that engendered the "Russian Crisis," which included Grand Duke Sergei's decision in 1891 to expel 400 Jewish families living in Moscow.<sup>186</sup> There was only one exception to this trend, when the *Times* printed on February 26 a brief snippet of information about the police investigation into the assassination, which they determined was "a plot of considerable proportions," and about the "many arrests and interrogations of persons believed to know something of [it]."<sup>187</sup>

The articles about the funeral that were printed by the *Daily Eagle* and the *Post* deviate considerably from stories that hitherto constituted the bulk of reporting about the revolution. In

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<sup>185</sup> "Dire Prophecy of Terrorists," 5; "Grand Dukes to Attend Funeral," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 23, 1905), 9. *The Wichita Daily Eagle* printed the same information about the Grand Dukes travelling to Moscow, see "Escaped by Narrow Pass," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 23, 1905), 1. The *LA Times* also reported on the Grand Dukes who attended the funeral, but identified Grand Duke Aleksei as one of them who made the trip to Moscow by train while traveling in a special train car, after he had been driven to the station in an unmarked coach; see "Dukes Dare the Terrorists," *The Los Angeles Times* (February 23, 1905), 5.

<sup>186</sup> "The Russian Crisis," *The New York Times* (February 27, 1905), 6; "Russia on New Road, Ex-Minister Says," *The New York Times* (February 25, 1905), 9; "How Moscow was 'Purified'," *The New York Times* (February 25, 1905), 8. According to Louis Greenberg, approximately 20 000 Jews were expelled from Moscow. See Greenberg, *The Jews in Russia*, 11-15.

<sup>187</sup> "Moscow Police Baffled," *The New York Times* (February 26, 1905), 2.

lieu of stories that describe public uprisings and widespread violence, they depict the “solemn ceremony” that took place at the Chudov Monastery on the morning of February 23.<sup>188</sup> Both newspapers published verbatim the same information regarding the rite of the blessing of Sergei’s remains, which was held before the funeral service was moved to the adjoining Andreevski Church, and some other details about the members of Sergei’s family who were in attendance.<sup>189</sup> Despite the relative shortness of the articles, which take up half the space of a single full-length column in each of their respective newspapers, considerable attention is given to Sergei’s widow, Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna, as she endured the ceremony alongside some of her relatives.

That the Grand Duchess was “the center of all eyes” is not surprising given that she was well-liked by Russian society for her philanthropy and her reputation for kindness, and that she had unwillingly inherited the role of the “mourning wife” after the bombing.<sup>190</sup> According to Anke Hilbrenner, this role can be understood as that of the “innocent sufferer,” out of whose terror and despair formed an emotional community of mourners that sympathized not only with her, but with the rest of the royal family as well.<sup>191</sup> The emotional community that supported Elizaveta and her family stood in contrast to another for those “who met the authorities with reserve or criticism,” and who “felt a certain satisfaction” because of Sergei’s murder.<sup>192</sup> To say that these emotional communities transcended the borders of the Russian empire through foreign press coverage would be misleading, though it is worth noting how American news coverage of Sergei’s murder could have elicited reactions similar to those that were shared by members who

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<sup>188</sup> “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (February 24, 1905), 8; “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Washington Post* (February 24, 1905), 3.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, 8. Hilbrenner, “Of Heroes and Villains,” 27.

<sup>191</sup> Hilbrenner, “Of Heroes and Villains,” 27.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

belonged to either of these communities, particularly among Russians living abroad. Some articles about the assassination sympathized with Kaliaev's actions given the conditions in which the tsar's subjects lived, while others considered the murder as a needless action – and one with no discernable goal but to leverage suffering to secure concessions.<sup>193</sup> The funeral coverage falls in the latter category because it focuses on the suffering of the Grand Duchess, “who lent the unpopular Grand Duke a human touch,” as both the *Daily Eagle* and the *Post* note that she “almost broke down” during the ceremony and needed to be supported by Grand Duke Konstantin.<sup>194</sup> Her vulnerability throughout such a “touching ordeal,” and her “disrespect to the courtly rules [by] bawling in public,” added a human dynamic to a narrative about ongoing conflict that hitherto was largely devoid of it.<sup>195</sup>

However, while both articles convey the sense of melancholy one would expect from a funeral, they do so in a way that reifies Sergei's role as a victim of the revolutionary conflict. In other words, news coverage about the funeral not only focuses on the ceremony, on Sergei's grieving widow and family, or on the grandeur of a state funeral more generally, but also accentuates the omnipresence of violence that not only resulted in his murder, but which also continued to threaten the royal family and other government functionaries. For instance, both newspapers set the scene outside of the monastery as one that featured large crowds, and with a “considerable display of troops in the streets” undoubtedly posted there to maintain order and establish the state's presence.<sup>196</sup> The *Daily Eagle* describes the scene inside the monastery as a “pathetic” one, where Sergei's “mangled body lay in state dressed in full uniform, but a veil of

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<sup>193</sup> “Grand Duke Sergius is Blown to Pieces,” 1; “Pity for Poor Old Russia,” 4; “President's Message to Czar Denounced,” 3; “Assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius,” 8.

<sup>194</sup> Hilbrenner, “Of Heroes and Villains,” 27; “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, 8. Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov was Sergei's cousin.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*; “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Washington Post* (February 24, 1905), 3.

<sup>196</sup> “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, 8; “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Washington Post*, 3.

fine lace was disposed over the remains of [his] mutilated face.”<sup>197</sup> The description of Sergei’s body is jarring given the sombre tone of the rest of the article, but serves as a reminder of how Kaliaev, and the Combat Organization more broadly, “removed all dignity from [his] death.”<sup>198</sup> Despite the fact that great care was taken in the display of the Grand Duke’s remains, which were “presented in such a way as to hide the full extent of his injuries,” the mutilation of his body prevented its embalmment and apparently caused great pain to his grieving family.<sup>199</sup>

In lieu of describing the corpse, the funeral coverage printed by the *Washington Post* includes an excerpt from the speech delivered at the ceremony by the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church, and even a separate article about the requiem mass held for the tsar and his family in St. Petersburg. It is printed beneath a large subheading that reads “Metropolitan arraigns people,” and demonstrates how the “the whole society of Russia” was being blamed for Sergei’s “premature” death.<sup>200</sup> The Metropolitan, Bishop Antonii, not only rebuked the tsar’s subjects, but also spoke favourably of Sergei by declaring that his memory “is that of a great martyr.”<sup>201</sup> Sergei’s recognition as a martyr is odd given the negative reputation that he derived from his tenure as Governor General of Moscow. However, historian George Gilbert asserts that supporters of the autocracy deliberately manufactured this benevolent image of Sergei “as a suffering martyr slain by terrorists, and an altruist who had cared for the people during a lifetime of public service,” in an attempt to “affirm bonds of loyalty between people and regime.”<sup>202</sup> Why the editor of the *Washington Post* decided to include this particular passage as part of the funeral coverage is unclear but, in doing so, they not only popularized first and foremost the memory of

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Hilbrenner, “Of Heroes and Villains,” 25.

<sup>199</sup> Gilbert, “The Martyr Cult of Grand Duke Sergei,” 273; Hilbrenner, “Of Heroes and Villains,” 25.

<sup>200</sup> “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Washington Post*, 3.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Gilbert, “The Martyr Cult of Grand Duke Sergei,” 267.

Sergei as a victim of revolutionary violence, but also showcased how the autocracy did the same thing to express how they were being targeted by revolutionaries during their ongoing conflict.<sup>203</sup>

Admittedly, one would be hard pressed to attempt to dissociate Sergei's victimization from the revolution. Even before the successful assassination attempt led to an outpouring of media coverage that pointed the blame at the SR Party, his targeting by the Combat Organization was well-known by the public and the Grand Duke himself.<sup>204</sup> In an attempt to protect his family in the weeks before he met Kaliaev's bomb, Sergei took precautionary measures by moving them "under cover of darkness" to the Nikolaevski Palace within the Kremlin, and preferred to travel alone when necessary.<sup>205</sup> Two days before Kaliaev hit his mark on February 17, he and Boris Savinkov, the terrorist cell's leader, had attempted to assassinate Sergei as he returned from the theatre. Kaliaev stayed his hand when he realized that Sergei, who was expected to be traveling alone, was accompanied by his wife, niece, and nephew. The press at first was unaware of this first, failed assassination attempt, and of the fact that Kaliaev had help in both instances, but was responsive to the second, successful attempt. This is not uncommon, as Lynn Ellen Patyk explains in her work on Savinkov that "the failure of terrorism is as invisible as terrorism is visible."<sup>206</sup> Terror plots that do not come to fruition are not known to the public and, therefore, do not generate any publicity. However, when acts of terror are successful or 'visible', they are disruptive and extraordinary, and "[inspire] horror and fascination."<sup>207</sup> Given that the initial

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>204</sup> "Sergius Doomed Weeks Ago," 2; "Ominous Times for Russian Grand Dukes," *The Los Angeles Times* (December 29, 1904), 2; "Be Scene of Blood," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (December 29, 1904), 7; "Danger of Terrorism," *The New York Times* (December 29, 1904), 5; "Zemstvos Adjourn as Rebuke to Czar," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (December 29, 1904), 4. There were also hoax reports about the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei in January, 1905, see "Bulletins from Russia," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (January 27, 1905), 10.

<sup>205</sup> Warwick, *The Life and Death of Ella*, 239.

<sup>206</sup> Lynn Ellen Patyk, "On Disappointment in Terrorism, War, and Revolution: Boris Savinkov's *What Didn't Happen* and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*," *The Russian Review* 77, no. 1 (2018), 31.

<sup>207</sup> Walter Laqueur, "The Futility of Terrorism," *Harper's Magazine* (March, 1976), 103.

report of Sergei's murder made the front pages of American newspapers, it is not surprising that the continuity coverage of his assassination, which highlights the corporal damage caused by the explosion and even the perceived culpability of the Russian people writ large in causing his death, made such explicit allusions to political violence the impetus for the turbulent revolution. However, the second half of the *Washington Post* article about the funeral, which describes the requiem that took place near St. Petersburg at Tsar Nicholas II's palace, demonstrates not only that the threat of violence against the royal family was taken seriously by the authorities, but also how the American press seemingly had expected to publicize news about some kind of "untoward incident" caused by revolutionaries unwelcome at the ceremony.<sup>208</sup>

The requiem mass held at Tsarskoe Selo, the residence of the imperial family just outside of St. Petersburg, was attended both by Sergei's kin and foreign ambassadors. The article printed by the *Post* does not provide any detail about the celebration itself, nor about which ambassadors were in attendance, but rather uses the majority of the allotted space in the column to exhibit why the royal family was unable to travel to Moscow to attend the funeral in person. The report mentions an "alleged necessity" for the royal family to remain inside the imperial residence for safety reasons, to which the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna apparently responded that "she is not afraid; that the sands of her life have almost run out, and that if assassins want her life they may have it."<sup>209</sup> The Dowager Empress had reportedly been confined to the palace since January 22, when the Bloody Sunday massacre resulted in the deaths of approximately 150 peaceful protestors at the hands of government forces, and the inclusion of this detail suggests that the press supposed the political upheaval that was unfolding in Russia

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<sup>208</sup> "Funeral of Sergius," *The Washington Post*, 3.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*



was in part a product of this tragedy.<sup>210</sup> There was general satisfaction expressed that “the extreme Radicals respected the day of grief of the imperial family. The police precautions, both here [in St. Petersburg] and in Moscow, though extensive, apparently were not needed.”<sup>211</sup> While the measures taken to protect the royal family may not have been needed on the day of Sergei’s funeral, there was, in the weeks that followed the ceremony, evidence of ongoing terrorist activity that continued to jeopardize their safety, and about which the American press continued to write.

With the passing of Sergei’s funeral, the subject of his assassination was all but ignored in the news, though the topic of terrorism remained prevalent. On March 1, 1905, American newspapers printed two separate reports about political violence that, in tandem, give the impression that the revolutionaries’ efforts to overcome the regime were beginning to intensify. The first story, printed verbatim by the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, is but a brief announcement of no more than fifty words that revealed the existence and discovery of a “secret store of bombs, dynamite, and revolvers” in a Moscow suburb.<sup>212</sup> The article did not provide any additional details about the cache, though it did give a brief update about Kaliaev, whose identity had still not been confirmed by authorities, and who purportedly traveled from Paris to Moscow to murder Sergei.<sup>213</sup> It is possible that the press referred to Kaliaev in their report about the discovery of the arsenal because it was assumed that he worked out of that location, but in his analysis of the terrorist plot against Grand Duke Sergei,

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<sup>210</sup> Alexei Anisin, “The Russian Bloody Sunday Massacre of 1905: A Discursive Account of Nonviolent Transformation,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 2, no. 4 (2014), 646.

<sup>211</sup> “Funeral of Sergius,” *The Washington Post*, 3.

<sup>212</sup> “Heroism of Vladimir’s Wife” *The New York Times* (March 1, 1905), 2; “Situation in Poland Bad,” *The Los Angeles Times* (March 1, 1905), 5; “Secret Store of Bombs,” *The Washington Post* (March 1, 1905), 3.

<sup>213</sup> The report was, in fact, correct about Kaliaev’s travels from Paris to Moscow for the mission. According to Vladimir Alexandrov, Kaliaev traveled with his co-conspirators: Dora Brilliant – the bomb maker, Boris Moiseenko – an operative who conducted surveillance, and Boris Savinkov – the team’s leader and coordinator. See Alexandrov, *To Break Russia’s Chains*, 88-91.

Alexandrov notes that the terrorist cell that killed the Grand Duke actually operated temporarily in a hotel near the Kremlin, where their target had sought refuge.<sup>214</sup>

Nevertheless, the newspapers' revelation of the authorities' seizure of weapons and explosives was complemented by their publication of a second article that singles out Sergei's brother, Grand Duke Vladimir Aleksandrovich, as the terrorists' next target. The report, printed by all five newspapers, indicates that Vladimir, who was Commander of the St. Petersburg military district, had become a "complete wreck" in the weeks following Bloody Sunday because he "has not only been showered with threats and warnings, but has twice received from abroad formal letters signed by different groups informing him of his sentence to death and of the assignment of men to execute it."<sup>215</sup> Vladimir's wife, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, reportedly refused to leave his side whenever he left the safety of Tsarskoe Selo once she learned that the terrorists did not want to harm her, and was praised by the press for her bravery in shielding her husband from revolutionaries' bombs.

While considerable attention is given to the impending terror attack that had been anticipated for several weeks, the article also notes the "increasing boldness" of the terrorists, who reportedly displayed their contempt for the authorities in two ways.<sup>216</sup> First, they mocked the "utter impotency of the police" by posting notices across St. Petersburg in which they claimed responsibility for Sergei's death.<sup>217</sup> The press remarked that the posters were of good quality and were "neatly printed, a thing unknown in the days of Interior Minister Von Plehve,

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> "Impotency of the Police," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (March 1, 1905), 1; "Talk of Big Uprising," *The Washington Post* (March 1, 1905), 3; "Grand Duke Vladimir a Complete Wreck," *The Los Angeles Times* (March 1, 1905), 5; "Terrorists Show Vladimir Mercy," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 1, 1905), 2; "Heroism of Vladimir's Wife,"

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

when similar notices were always run off on copying machines.”<sup>218</sup> Such an observation not only demonstrates that reporters recognized how von Plehve’s assassination benefitted the revolutionaries in their protracted conflict against the autocracy, but also indicates that the Combat Organization was perceived as having achieved a greater degree of professionalization and had become a formidable adversary of the tsarist regime after taking decisive action against the strong-handed Minister of the Interior. Simply put, the Combat Organization, whose popularity and infamy increased significantly after Sergei’s assassination, was not believed to be a reactive, inexperienced group of combatants, but an organized entity that operated according to its own priorities.<sup>219</sup>

This perception lends itself well to the second way in which the terrorists showed contempt for the authorities, which involved them reportedly sending a letter to Grand Duke Vladimir to inform him that his “sentence [to death] was temporarily suspended... to give the autocracy a breathing spell and await the result of the assassination of Grand Duke Sergius.”<sup>220</sup> That the terrorists behaved with such audacity towards the autocratic regime demonstrates that there was room to believe that they had the upper hand in the conflict, and this attitude was bolstered by the fact that the press gave no indication that the authorities were even prepared to take decisive action against them. Interestingly, Geifman’s work on violence during the first Russian Revolution reveals that the terrorists, in fact, were unable to carry out the majority of the schemes that they planned after their successful attempt on Sergei’s life because they were “under constant police surveillance.”<sup>221</sup> Likewise, historian Fredric Scott Zuckerman’s important

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 55-56.

<sup>220</sup> “Impotency of the Police,” 1; “Talk of Big Uprising,” 3; “Grand Duke Vladimir a Complete Wreck,” 5; “Terrorists Show Vladimir Mercy,” 2; “Heroism of Vladimir’s Wife,” 2.

<sup>221</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 56.

work on the *Okhrana*, the tsarist secret police, explains that the agency was aware of the arrival in St. Petersburg of several Combat Organization fighters who were planning a large scale attack on Grand Duke Vladimir and other state officials, and that the agency spared no expense in attempting to apprehend them.<sup>222</sup> Evidently, there is no way that the press could have known about the *Okhrana*'s surveillance operations nor about their use of secret agents to gather intelligence, and it is unclear whether the story of the letter sent to Vladimir was legitimate, but the newspapers' coverage of the struggle between the terrorists and the autocracy at that time legitimized the notion that another terror attack was imminent.<sup>223</sup>

The American press' fascination with revolutionary terror, and more specifically with the targeting of the royal family and state officials, saturated their coverage of the revolution from Sergei's assassination to Kaliaev's hearing. Besides the news coverage of the Russo-Japanese War, which was given consistent, dedicated attention even while news of political violence captivated American newspapers, the majority of the reports about Russia discussed the revolutionary conflict, and brought terror to the center of the conversation. The appeal of revolutionary violence in the United States likely coincided with the American belief that Russia's freedom depended on the removal of the tsarist regime, which was perceived as being responsible for creating "obstructions to global economic integration and liberalization."<sup>224</sup> While the specific number of articles about political violence printed by the newspapers analyzed

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<sup>222</sup> Fredric Scott Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police in Russian Society, 1880-1917* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 151. The *Okhrana* is the abbreviated name of the Special Section, a unit within the police department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*MVD*), whose headquarters were located in a row of homes along the Fontanka River embankment in St. Petersburg.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-38. Double agents were widespread throughout the revolutionary movement in the fin de siècle era. Even Evno Azef, the leader of the Combat Organization, worked for the *Okhrana* as a double agent while he plotted assassinations against notable government officials, including von Plehve and Grand Duke Sergei. For a synopsis of Azef's career, see Nurit Schleifman, *Undercover Agents in the Russian Revolutionary Movement: The SR Party, 1902-1914* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988) ix-xi.

<sup>224</sup> Foglesong, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire,"* 31.

in this study varies, it is clear that there was a proclivity for stories of this kind. For instance, some attention was given to von Plehve's assassin, Egor Sazonov, whose written statement for the court after his arrest in July 1904 was printed verbatim by all newspapers but the *Los Angeles Times* on March 19.<sup>225</sup> The statement, which occupies at least a full page in most of the newspapers, provides useful insight into the assassin's radicalization, the SR Party's relationship with terrorism, and his justification of von Plehve's murder. Sazonov maintains that his act was a response to the Minister of the Interior's cruelty towards Russian citizens, protestors, and revolutionaries, for his inaction during the Kishinev pogrom, and for his suppression of the free press.<sup>226</sup> More importantly, the assassin specifies that the tsarist regime's persecution of peaceful "Russian Socialists" is what caused the revolutionaries' descent into violence, and his perspective on the use of terror aligns with that of the *Daily Eagle's* editor, M. M. Murdock, who regards assassination as "the only kind of war that the Russian people can wage."<sup>227</sup> Sazonov's statement not only provided American newspapers a terrorist's perspective of the ongoing crisis, but also offered a glimpse into the motivations of other revolutionaries who resorted to violence to force the authorities to institute political reforms.<sup>228</sup>

Unsurprisingly, even more attention was given to current terrorist activities. The *New York Times* printed on two separate occasions articles about the arrests of assassins who sought to gain entry to Tsarskoe Selo. The first, printed on March 3, explains that "an investigation is on

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<sup>225</sup> "Story of Assassin," *The Washington Post* (March 19, 1905), 7; "Sasoneff Justifies the Killing of Von Plehve," *The New York Times* (March 19, 1905), 1; "Slayer Tells Why He Killed Plehve," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 19, 1905), 4; "Sasoneff Explains," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (March 19, 1905), 13.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*; Murdock, "People do Not Favor Assassination," 4.

<sup>228</sup> According to terrorism expert Marc Sageman, Sazonov had a letter smuggled to his comrades in the Combat Organization after his initial hearing in November 1904 to apologize for inadequately expressing the SR Party's views on terror. The statement printed in American newspapers is a larger version of a short explanation he was able to give in March 1905, at his trial, when he was able to explain his reasons for killing von Plehve. See Sageman, *Turning to Political Violence*, 288.

foot” after a man, who claimed to be the nephew of Aleksander Fok, the Lieutenant General of the Imperial Russian Army, was apprehended at the palace.<sup>229</sup> The police, “who since the assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius have redoubled the ordinary precautions for the protection of the imperial family,” arrested the suspect, who had in his possession fraudulent identity papers and a loaded revolver, before he was able to hit his target.<sup>230</sup> The second article, printed on April 6, describes a similar scenario, where a suspect “disguised as a Colonel of Cossacks,” and in possession of two concealed bombs, sought a meeting with the tsar but was seized by the authorities before he could reach him.<sup>231</sup> Despite the fact that these reports demonstrate the authorities’ ability to thwart terrorist plots, they also illustrate the determination and boldness of the revolutionaries.

Although the two articles about the assassination attempts at Tsarskoe Selo were printed exclusively by the *New York Times*, the remaining newspapers also disseminated news of revolutionary bravado. Indeed, a telegraphed message from St. Petersburg shared with the American press a story about a controversial picture that was printed in *Neva*, a widely-circulated Russian illustrated weekly. The illustration, which consists of a real photograph that was “skilfully” altered by students employed by the publisher, depicts the “royal family in the background of which are shadowy outlines of the Emperor, the late Grand Duke Sergius, the Grand Duke Alexis, the Dowager Empress, the heir to the throne [Aleksei Nikolaevich], and practically all living members of the Romanoff family lying dead in their coffins.”<sup>232</sup> The work was done so carefully that the coffins were “discernible with great difficulty,” and even fooled

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<sup>229</sup> “Arrest at Tsarskoe Selo,” *The New York Times* (March 3, 1905), 1.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> “Had Bombs for the Czar,” *The New York Times* (April 6, 1905), 1.

<sup>232</sup> “Seen in Shadowy Outline,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (April 16, 1905), 1; “Work of Russian Students,” *The Washington Post* (April 16, 1905), 11; “Pictured Czar in Coffin,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (April 16, 1905), 7; “Pictured Czar in Coffin,” *The New York Times* (April 16, 1905), 4.

the editors at the *Neva* prior to publishing.<sup>233</sup> The *New York Times* characterized the photograph as an “unpleasant joke,” while *the Philadelphia Inquirer* deemed it to be a “gruesome” depiction of the royal family.<sup>234</sup> Regardless, such an overt and subversive act by students against the royal family is representative of the rejection of tsarist paternalism that had begun to spread since Bloody Sunday.<sup>235</sup> The growing dissent from tsarism is in and of itself a complex phenomenon that may have been spurred on by the Combat Organization’s successful assassinations of key government officials, which “[contributed] to the destruction of the moral underpinnings of law and order upon which both the population and government [relied],” but is worth noting because the publication of such a provocative illustration was further evidence of the precarious situation that the tsarist regime faced, and which the press continued to monitor.<sup>236</sup>

Despite the numerous stories concerning revolutionary activity that had shifted the press’ focus away from Sergei, none was as significant as the explosion that occurred at the Hotel Bristol in St. Petersburg on March 11, 1905. Initial reports explain that a bomb exploded in a hotel room occupied by “a man with an English passport and giving the name of Alfred Henry McCullough.”<sup>237</sup> There was “not the slightest doubt” at the time that the explosion was linked to revolutionary terrorism, as the articles specify that the bomb that exploded “was of the same power as those which killed the late Minister of Interior von Plehve and Grand Duke Sergius.”<sup>238</sup> It is unclear if the connection between this explosion and those that claimed the lives of the Combat Organization’s previous victims was made by the police or the *Associated Press*, which

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> “Pictured Czar in Coffin,” *The New York Times*, 4; “Pictured Czar in Coffin,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7.

<sup>235</sup> Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police*, 144-145.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>237</sup> “Bomb Explodes, Kills its Owner,” *The New York Times* (March 12, 1905), 5; “Killed By His Own Bomb,” *The Washington Post* (March 12, 1905), 3; “Victim of Bomb was a Terrorist,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 12, 1905), 4.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

also conducted its own independent investigation of the explosion, but this observation shows how bombing had become synonymous with revolutionary activity, which left no reason to doubt the explosion's link to SR terrorism. The following day, the *Washington Post* was the only newspaper of the five to print a follow-up story, which revealed that the police investigation of the explosion discovered that the suspect had been "watching for members of the imperial family and minister of state" in preparation for a terror attack.<sup>239</sup>

Impressively, the police investigation was correct. The bomb that exploded at the hotel detonated three days earlier than its maker, Maximilian Shveitser, intended.<sup>240</sup> A significant terrorist operation was planned for March 14, when Grand Duke Vladimir, St. Petersburg Governor General Trepov, and Minister of the Interior Bulygin were to attend a commemoration ceremony for the late Tsar Alexander II at the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral. The assassination had been organized in Paris in November 1904, in other words at the same time as that of Grand Duke Sergei, and Shveitser was selected to lead the largest contingent of Combat Organization terrorists headed to St. Petersburg.<sup>241</sup> In the days before this planned attack, Shveitser, who was sleep deprived, mishandled the detonators as he inserted them into the explosives, which ignited.<sup>242</sup> The premature explosion of the bombs surprised the authorities, including *Okhrana* agents, whose investigations of Combat Organization activities since the arrival in St. Petersburg of several of its members were non-resultant.<sup>243</sup> The terrorists' bad luck worsened only weeks later when the secret police, acting on information given by a Combat Organization informant

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<sup>239</sup> "Dead Terrorist Unknown," *The Washington Post* (March 13, 1905), 3.

<sup>240</sup> Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police*, 151. Shveitser also made the bomb used in the assassination of Minister of Interior von Plehve in 1904. See, Sageman, *Turning to Political Violence*, 277-279.

<sup>241</sup> Sageman, *Turning to Political Violence*, 287-288. Evno Azef, the director of the Combat Organization, decided that Shveitser would lead the group in St. Petersburg, that Savinkov would lead the small band in Moscow to kill Grand Duke Sergei, and that Mikhail Borishansky would recruit a local group in Kiev to assassinate Governor General Kleigels.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>243</sup> Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police*, 151.



named Nikolai Tatarov, was able to track down and arrest twenty of the group's fighters who were involved in the plot against Grand Duke Vladimir, Trepov, and Bulygin.<sup>244</sup>

The press appreciated the importance of an arrest of that size, and printed details about the event on April 19 alongside their coverage of Kaliaev's sentencing to death by the court, but there was no way for these American outlets to recognize just how significant a blow this was to the Combat Organization's terror operation.<sup>245</sup> Savinkov, who left Moscow after the successful assassination of Grand Duke Sergei, conceded in his memoirs that the arrests of Shveitser's operatives marked the end of the Combat Organization's success, "strength and... significance."<sup>246</sup> With that said, while the threat against Grand Duke Vladimir and the rest of the royal family was significantly reduced with the weakening of the SR Party's foremost terror group, there were smaller SR combat detachments that continued to target government officials in other, localized regions of the empire.<sup>247</sup> Despite this, American press speculation concerning a possible terror attack on the royal family diminished in the days after the announcement of the arrest of the Hotel Bristol plotters and as news of Kaliaev's hearing surfaced.<sup>248</sup>

Before discussing how the American press reported on Kaliaev's court appearance, it is important to note that revolutionary activity was not the only topic discussed in the news after

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid. Dora Brilliant, the bomb maker for Grand Duke Sergei's assassination, was the only terrorist of the Hotel Bristol plotters able to escape the authorities. According to Anna Geifman, Tatarov continued to provide the *Okhrana* with insider information, which stifled Combat Organization combatants as they attempted to plan further attacks. See Geifman, "Aspects of Early Twentieth-Century Russia Terrorism: Socialist Revolutionary Combat Organization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no.2 (1992), 36.

<sup>245</sup> "Details Leaking Out," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (April 19, 1905), 8; "Sentenced to Death," *The Washington Post* (April 19, 1905), 3; "Assassin of Sergius Sentenced to Death," 5.

<sup>246</sup> Boris Savinkov, *Vospominaniia terrorista*, 129 found in Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 56.

<sup>247</sup> Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 58-59.

<sup>248</sup> The only exception to this trend was coverage of a plot to kill the tsar. The *Washington Post* reported on April 23, 1905 that terrorists had infiltrated the ranks of the Imperial Guard, which was charged with protecting the royal family. Significant quantities of dynamite were reportedly discovered at Tsarskoe Selo. Though it is unknown if these terrorists belonged to the Combat Organization, to SR combat detachments, or to another terrorist organization not linked to the SR Party. See, "Plot to Kill Czar," *The Washington Post* (April 23, 1905), 8.

Sergei's funeral, despite it being the subject of such intense focus. On March 3, 1905, American newspapers, which hitherto had printed next to no new information about any government reforms since Sergei's murder, finally received word from St. Petersburg that the tsar was taking action in the face of growing revolutionary pressure. The reports, printed the following day, announced that the tsar had accepted the principle of popular participation, which would allow his subjects to petition him about the laws that they abided by.<sup>249</sup> According to historian Orlando Figes, the creation of what came to be known as the Bulygin Duma "was a tactical manoeuvre, its sole purpose to buy time."<sup>250</sup> The tsar had no intention of relinquishing his authority, and proposed this participatory framework of governance as a temporary measure while Bulygin "[drew] up proposals for a national assembly" that would maintain the tsar's supremacy.<sup>251</sup>

News outlets recognized that this imperial rescript would neither bring about drastic political change nor satisfy the demands of the revolutionaries in the short term, and even alluded to that in their reports. The *Wichita Daily Eagle* and *Washington Post*, which transcribe in their articles only the Rescript signed by Nicholas II, preface how the Bulygin Duma was the tsar's attempt to call on the country "to rally 'round the throne in defense of the empire from its internal enemies."<sup>252</sup> Similarly, the *New York Times* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which discuss the significance of the Rescript and publish excerpts from it alongside quotations from an announcement made by an Official Messenger, specify that the tsar's promise "involves no change in the regime of autocracy, and it means neither a constitution nor a national

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<sup>249</sup> "Czar Promises an Assembly to Russian People," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 04, 1905), 1, 15; "Czar Concedes Elective Bodies," *The New York Times* (March 04, 1905), 1; "Czar Appeals to Nation," *The Washington Post* (March 04, 1905), 5; "Rally Around Throne," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (March 04, 1905), 10.

<sup>250</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 186.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> "Rally Around Throne," 10; "Czar Appeals to Nation," 5.

assembly.”<sup>253</sup> The *New York Times* was the only newspaper to revisit the subject of the Rescript two days later, on March 6, when it detailed how the tsar ultimately took the decision to sign the document.

With surprisingly accurate intuition, the article discusses how the Rescript was a variation of a previous attempt to reform the political system in the empire. In December 1904, Tsar Nicholas II had considered the creation of representative institutions under the guidance of the liberal-minded Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, who succeeded von Plehve as Minister of the Interior after his assassination.<sup>254</sup> However, prior to its announcement on December 25, the tsar reneged on his support for institutional reform and had it struck from the imperial edict, which led Sviatopolk-Mirsky to resign from his post.<sup>255</sup> The *New York Times*’ “History of the Rescript” puts to paper the analysis of the foreign correspondent from the *Associated Press*, who revisits this debate about political reform between liberal and conservative voices at the Russian court. According to the correspondent, the history of the Rescript

sheds a curious and illuminating light upon the struggles for ascendancy between the forces of reaction and of liberalism, which are raging about the Emperor, again compelling one to draw a parallel with the French Revolution and impressing the truth of Prince Bismarck’s famous remark that everything King Louis XVI did to preserve his throne came a day too late. Substantially the decision to permit representatives of the people to participate in a consultative capacity in consideration of projected reforms and preparation of laws had been taken by the Emperor [in December 1904] on the advice of Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, and had been actually incorporated in Clause III of the December Manifesto. [...] At the last minute, yielding to the pressure of the reactionaries led by Grand Duke Sergius [...] it was stricken [sic] out, and Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, under the sunshine of whose inspiration the hopes of the whole nation burst into bloom, stepped down. Had Emperor Nicolas then clung to his original resolution many painful

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<sup>253</sup> “Czar Promises an Assembly to Russian People,” 1, 15; “Czar Concedes Elective Bodies,” 1.

<sup>254</sup> Frank Weislo, “The First Russian Revolution, 1890-1914,” in *A Companion to the Russian Revolution*, ed. Daniel Orlovsky (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2020), 22.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

events since the first of the year, including the assassination of his uncle [Grand Duke Sergei], might have been avoided.<sup>256</sup>

This passage not only demonstrates the correspondent's impressive understanding of the political situation unfolding in Russia, but also reveals how they perceived the Rescript as a conciliatory measure instituted too late to have any meaningful impact on the ongoing revolution. More importantly, the correspondent's invocation of Sergei's murder as a result of the autocracy's unwillingness to yield to demands for reform not only coincides with claims made previously in the press about Sergei's assassination that identified him as the true power behind the tsar, but also positions his death squarely within, rather than outside of, the revolutionary narrative. While there are some minor inaccuracies in their retelling of events, such as the misidentification of Grand Duke Sergei instead of Sergei Vitte as the leader of the conservative opposition, the correspondent recognizes how the tsar's reluctance to relinquish some of his authority contributed to the intensification of revolutionary sentiment.<sup>257</sup> With the announcement of the Bulygin Duma, which fell short of the revolutionaries' demands for an effective constitutional government, there was still uncertainty that peace had been achieved. However, reports about revolutionary activity that were printed after the signing of the Rescript, which were discussed above, assured the press that it had not.

Although the topic of Grand Duke Sergei's death had been raised in reports about revolutionary activity even after his funeral, it was never the main focus of journalistic attention until the story of Kaliaev's trial and execution made it to print. As we have seen, the news of the

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<sup>256</sup> "History of the Rescript," *The New York Times* (March 6, 1905), 2.

<sup>257</sup> Weislo, "The First Russian Revolution," 22. The report on the history of the Rescript also fails to link the tsar's approval of the creation of the Bulygin Duma to Russia's declining financial situation. According to George E. Snow, Tsar Nicholas II met with Eduard Noetzlin, a representative of the Russian syndicate of French banks, who advised him that measures would need to be taken to improve French public opinion of Russia to secure a loan from France. See George E. Snow, "The Peterhof Conference and the Creation of the Bulygin Duma," *Russian History* 2, no. 2 (1975), 149-162.

altered picture of the royal family published in the *Neva* identified Sergei as one of several among the dead, and the description of the bombing at the Hotel Bristol compared the explosive force of the bomb to that which was thrown at Sergei on the day of his assassination. Unsurprisingly, there was little more to say about Sergei's assassination given that the press had already covered the bombing, considered the motivations of the Combat Organization in targeting him, and discussed his controversial career as Governor General of Moscow. Kaliaev's trial offered the press one last opportunity to revisit the story of Sergei's murder and in spite of this only scant attention was given to it.

The initial report about Kaliaev's sentencing was printed on April 19, 1905. Given that the public was not admitted to the trial, there seemed to be little information available about the event. With the exception of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which altogether ignored this event as well as Kaliaev's eventual execution, the newspapers transcribed some of the assassin's statements, and also revealed that he had been sentenced to death.<sup>258</sup> Predictably, Kaliaev seized his opportunity when addressing the tribunal to justify the revolutionaries' use of terror in their conflict with the state.<sup>259</sup> During his arraignment, he declared that "I am not a criminal, and you are not my judges. I am your prisoner. We have a civil war: I am a prisoner of war, not a criminal."<sup>260</sup> By characterizing the revolutionary conflict as a civil war, Kaliaev considered the use of violence "as a necessary and intrinsically moral rejoinder: a means to punish the [state], and to assert [the revolutionaries'] own human dignity and political sovereignty."<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> "Kaleieff Sentenced," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (April 19, 1905), 1; "Assassin of Sergius Sentenced to Death," 5; "Sentence Sergius's Assassin," 5; "Sentenced to Death," 3.

<sup>259</sup> Susan K. Morrissey, "The 'Apparel of Innocence': Toward a Moral Economy of Terrorism in Late Imperial Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 84 (September 2012), 621-625.

<sup>260</sup> "Kaleieff Sentenced," 1; "Assassin of Sergius Sentenced to Death," 5; "Sentence Sergius's Assassin," 5; "Sentenced to Death," 3.

<sup>261</sup> Morrissey, "The 'Apparel of Innocence'," 617.

The assassin's justification for the use of violence deliberately blamed the autocratic regime for its role in inflaming the revolutionary movement and, by extension, did not give any indication that the revolutionaries would relent against it until the tsar relinquished his absolute power over the empire. In fact, when asked by a judge if he would repeat the crime of assassination if released, Kaliaev responded "without doubt I would repeat it if ordered to do so by the Revolutionary Committee, to which I am attached."<sup>262</sup> Once Kaliaev had been sentenced to death, he did not petition the tsar for clemency, nor did he allow his mother to do so on his behalf. Rather, he welcomed the verdict and, knowing that the authorities would not publicly execute him, shouted at them to "execute your judgement as openly as I acted, before the eyes of all."<sup>263</sup> According to historian Susan K. Morrissey, Kaliaev's goal in demanding a public execution was "to evoke a rhetorical contrast between the transparent, open, fearless, and thereby legitimate act of revolutionary justice and the dark, hidden, fearful, and thereby illegitimate violence of the state."<sup>264</sup> His martyrdom not only demonstrated his commitment to the movement, but also necessitated retribution, as state violence engendered further revolutionary violence.<sup>265</sup>

Given Kaliaev's defiance to the state, and his lack of remorse for the murder of Grand Duke Sergei, it is possible that the American press considered this story about the hearing, which forecast the possibility of further acts of political violence, as one that required dissemination because it propelled the revolutionary narrative. Despite their exclusion from the courtroom, reporters still were able to transmit to their readers fragments of what they heard about Kaliaev's

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<sup>262</sup> "Kaleieff Sentenced," 1; "Assassin of Sergius Sentenced to Death," 5; "Sentence Sergius's Assassin," 5; "Sentenced to Death," 3.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Morrissey, "The 'Apparel of Innocence'," 624.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 624-625.

performance, which not only highlighted his “personal resistance, dignity, and moral fortitude,” but also played up “binary politics of enmity – the virtuous Kaliaev versus the degenerate Sergei, [or] the people versus the enemies of the people.”<sup>266</sup> Their decision to publicize such revolutionary propaganda without witnessing it firsthand demonstrates the press’ tendency, in the weeks that followed the bombing, to select and diffuse news stories that fostered a sense of uncertainty for the days ahead in the midst of conflict. With the exception of the news coverage of Sergei’s funeral, which was written about by only two newspapers, the majority of journalistic attention about the Russian Revolution was directed at stories about political violence, which bolstered the notion that the struggle had yet to reach its boiling point.

The story of Kaliaev’s execution, printed on May 24, 1905, also met this condition.<sup>267</sup> While Kaliaev’s hanging constitutes an act of state violence in lieu of revolutionary violence, it is but another example of the ends to which both sides were willing to go to overcome the other. The report provides a brief announcement that seemingly bookends the episode of Sergei’s assassination, and explains how the assassin was “glad to die” for his murder of the Grand Duke.<sup>268</sup> Kaliaev’s stated willingness to die was intended to correct a rumour that he had asked the tsar for a pardon; this story circulated widely in the Russian press the week before his death but was ignored by all newspapers assessed in this study with the exception of the *New York Times*.<sup>269</sup> In fact, there were several news stories about Kaliaev that were popular in Russia but

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Some reports incorrectly transmitted news emanating from the *Associated Press*’ London bureau of Kaliaev’s death five before he was actually executed, see “Sergius’ Slayer Put to Death,” *The Washington Post* (May 18, 1905), 3; and “Sergius’s Slayer Executed,” *The New York Times* (May 18, 1905), 4. Only the *New York Times* would correct this error by printing the correct report of the assassin’s death on May 24.

<sup>268</sup> “Kalieff on the Scaffold,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (May 24, 1905), 1; “Kalieff Glad to Die,” *The New York Times* (May 24, 1905), 4. The *Los Angeles Times* printed the news of Kaliaev’s execution in a single sentence, hidden within a large report about revolutionary violence in the Caucasus, see “Governor of Baku Victim,” *The Los Angeles Times* (May 25, 1905), 4.

<sup>269</sup> “Rejects Kaleieff’s Appeal,” *The New York Times* (May 14, 1905), 4.

were altogether ignored by the American press. One notable example, unsurprisingly promulgated by the SR propagandists through revolutionary pamphlets, revealed to the public that Kaliaev spared Sergei's life during the first, aborted assassination attempt because he did not want to kill the Grand Duchess Elizaveta or the children accompanying them in their carriage.<sup>270</sup> The pamphlets also included letters written by Kaliaev to his mother and comrades that contributed to his image as a just assassin.<sup>271</sup>

The American press' disinterest in such stories is not surprising. Tobie Mathew observes in his work on revolutionary postcards in Imperial Russia that Russian images of terrorism preferred to "personify terrorism, making the viewer identify first and foremost with the attacker, who through their single-minded devotion and great personal sacrifice could provide a point of inspiration and ideological orientation for the masses."<sup>272</sup> Mathew notes that images of terror in Western Europe deviated considerably from those in Russia because they preferred to portray "dramatic renderings of the revolutionary attacks," which often emphasized the devastation wrought by bombs.<sup>273</sup> The same predilection for documenting the outcome of violence can be seen in American news coverage of Sergei's assassination, which not only discussed in great detail the mutilation of Sergei's body by the force of the explosion, but also speculated the reasons why such a violent death had been meted out to him.

Likewise, the press' interest in Kaliaev did not stem from a genuine desire to know more about him or his motivations to commit acts of terror, but only from his membership in the SR

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<sup>270</sup> Morrissey, "The 'Apparel of Innocence,'" 622-623.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 623. The notion of Kaliaev as a "just" assassin was explored by French philosopher Albert Camus, who in 1949 wrote a play about him that explores the moral complexities of terrorism. See Albert Camus, *Les Justes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949).

<sup>272</sup> Tobie Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades: Revolutionary Postcards in Imperial Russia* (London: Four Corners Books, 2018), 370.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.



Combat Organization, which had already assassinated several high-level targets before Sergei and purportedly was looking to build upon its recent success. Continuity coverage of the bombing that focused mainly on Kaliaev sought to add further drama to an already sensational story of revolutionary murder. Reports showed the press' fascination with his use of a disguise and his anonymity, as well as his prediction that others would die before Sergei's funeral. This tendency in American press coverage to favour stories that describe acts of political violence also resulted in their omission of the story about the surprising meeting, and subsequent twenty-five minute conversation, between Grand Duchess Elizaveta and Kaliaev at a Moscow police station on February 20, 1905.<sup>274</sup> One version of the story, which circulated widely in Russian newspapers, details how the assassin was brought to tears when Elizaveta forgave him for his murder of Sergei and handed him an icon.<sup>275</sup> The other version, recounted by Kaliaev to correct the official version that he "considered a public defamation of his character," explains how the assassin accepted the icon from the Grand Duchess as a gift for sparing her life, and as a sign of repentance for the crimes of her deceased husband.<sup>276</sup> Regardless of the veracity of either story, it is evident that the decision to devote any journalistic attention to Kaliaev, or to Sergei's assassination more broadly, ultimately depended on whether or not that coverage alluded to ongoing political violence, or the threat thereof.

Our analysis of news stories in this chapter demonstrates that, despite the lapse of time between the bombing that killed the Grand Duke and Kaliaev's execution, the revolutionary conflict consistently remained the focal point for American journalistic attention. On the day following the bombing, breaking news coverage explained the details of the murder and

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<sup>274</sup> Warwick, *The Life and Death of Ella*, 241-242.

<sup>275</sup> Hilbrenner, "Of Heroes and Villains," 35.

<sup>276</sup> Morrissey, "The 'Apparel of Innocence'," 623.

speculated about the motivating factors that resulted in the targeting of Sergei, but situated the murder explicitly within a narrative of revolutionary crisis in the Russian Empire. During the week that succeeded the bombing, American news outlets struggled to relate their continuity coverage of Sergei's assassination, which largely discussed memorials and funeral arrangements, to new stories about the revolutionary movement, which seemed unrelenting in its aim to overpower the autocracy. The news coverage from Sergei's funeral to Kaliaev's execution was engrossed by revolutionary terror, failed attempts or otherwise, and, with the exception of dedicated coverage of Sergei's funeral, often referred to both men only in reports about other instances of political violence.

The story of Elizaveta and Kaliaev's meeting, which not only met the journalistic criteria for continuity coverage but exceeded it, is but one example of the American press' fixation on stories that propel the turbulent revolutionary narrative.<sup>277</sup> The meeting between the Grand Duchess, who was at once a member of the royal family and the widow of the infamous Grand Duke, and Kaliaev, who was a member of the notorious Combat Organization, possessed qualities that satisfied both news factors of 'conflict' (confrontation and/or controversy) and 'eliteness' (involving individuals, institutions or nations of elite status).<sup>278</sup> Nevertheless, the event failed to entice American newspaper editors, who elected not to print anything about it, because it likely did not meet the intended purpose of their news coverage of the assassination, and of the revolution more broadly. According to Joachim Friedrich Staab, news factors, despite their usefulness, are not the key determinants in whether or not an event becomes news as news

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<sup>277</sup> There were other stories that went unreported, which could have given a more nuanced retelling of events that occurred during the saga of Sergei's assassination. According to Christopher Warwick, and contrary to the negative press that Sergei and the autocracy had received in American press coverage, Grand Duchess Elizaveta requested to have the gates of the Kremlin opened to the public during the funeral so that mourners could pay their respects to Sergei. In addition, on the day of the funeral, the Grand Duchess arranged to have meals served to the poor. See Warwick, *The Life and Death of Ella*, 245.

<sup>278</sup> Boukes, Jones, and Vliegenhart, "Newsworthiness and Story Prominence," 111.

selection is an inherently biased process.<sup>279</sup> Rather, events become news if journalists “instrumentalize news factors in order to stress certain events and subjects.”<sup>280</sup>

Given that American observers considered the revolution as something that Russian society “needed for its political renewal and progress,” it is predictable that stories about violence, like that of Sergei’s murder or of other assassination attempts, or about the spread of revolutionary sentiment, which plausibly could lead to more violence, received the most attention from the press.<sup>281</sup> Likewise, American interest in the revolutionary struggle could not be satisfied by stories about individuals, such as the Grand Duchess and Kaliaev, whose meetings would not alter the outcome of the conflict, and were therefore overlooked by the press. While political violence committed by both the revolutionaries and the autocratic regime was a highly debated and controversial topic in the United States, stories about the use of violence were emblematic of both the former’s desire for change and the latter’s repudiation of it. More importantly for American readers, those stories opened up a window into the revolutionary struggle to a degree that perhaps nonviolent stories could not.

By the end of May, 1905, both perpetrator and victim of the bombing at the Kremlin on February 17, 1905 had been killed, and their story could no longer offer any new or relevant information about the revolutionary conflict. News reports published between Sergei’s funeral and Kaliaev’s execution demonstrate that journalistic focus had shifted away from the Grand Duke’s murder due to the anticipation of further terror attacks. However, interest in Sergei’s assassination had already declined considerably even before the Grand Duke’s funeral, which also received only little attention from two of the five newspapers considered here, namely the

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<sup>279</sup> Staab, “The Role of News Factors in News Selection,” 427-428.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>281</sup> Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution,” 67.

*Wichita Daily Eagle* and the *Washington Post*. Coverage of Kaliaev's sentencing hearing and execution was equally underwhelming, with the former receiving slightly more attention because it forecasted possible revolutionary reprisals, and the latter earning little more than a concise remark about the assassin's time of death. The analysis of these reports demonstrates how significant a subject political violence had become in American press coverage. Violence epitomized the ongoing revolutionary struggle, which remained the main focus of American observers. Unfortunately, this notion that revolutionary violence was simply a form of retributive justice against specific political targets would fade in the months ahead as the magnitude of violence increased to astonishing levels.

### **Conclusion: Going Shore-to-Shore**

Why does it matter what the American press reported concerning events during the 1905 Russian revolution, and in particular about the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei? First, it mattered because news coverage of events occurring in Russia, which had already shown in the years preceding the revolution that Americans were invested in the political fortunes of the Russian Empire, was capable of converting that interest not only into American financial aid for various revolutionary organizations, but also American political mobilization against the tsarist regime. Second, it mattered because news reports specifically about the 1905 Revolution, which more often than not discussed instances of political violence, generated support for, or criticism of, the revolutionary movement that was manifested in different and observable ways in the United States. Lastly, the events described in these reports had a direct impact on the United States in the years after 1905. The government crackdown after the revolution led hundreds of revolutionaries and sympathizers to leave the Russian empire and settle abroad. In the United States, these exiles helped to establish anarchist groups across the country, and they brought the tactics of violence with them.

The 1905 Revolution should be seen as a transnational event instead of one confined only to Russia's geographic landmass. Before the revolution began, Americans had already been paying attention to events unfolding in the Tsar's empire. American curiosity about the Russian revolutionary movement was peaked in the 1890s by George Kennan's writings on, and presentations about, the harshness of the tsarist prison system, and interest was nurtured further by Russian revolutionaries who travelled to the United States to give rousing lectures that denounced the tsar. These travelling revolutionaries, who first arrived in the United States in

1890 to capitalize on the growing support for the revolutionary cause, and who continued to do so even in 1905, simultaneously contributed both to the growth of anti-tsarist sentiment and revolutionary support in the country, but did not accomplish this task alone.<sup>282</sup> In fact, discontent with the tsarist regime was exacerbated by American press coverage of, for instance, Russia's geopolitical manoeuvres like its invasion of Manchuria, which violated the United States' Open Door Policy in China. Moreover, American press coverage of violent events such as the Kishinev Pogrom in 1903, and the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1905, not only deepened anti-tsarist sentiment, but also inaugurated separate initiatives that saw Americans mobilize to support Russians affected by the harshness of tsarism.<sup>283</sup> Many Americans were outraged by what happened in Kishinev, and not only collected funds to aid the victims, but also signed a petition destined for St. Petersburg that criticized the tsar. This assumption that American leaders could pressure tsarist officials if they were sufficiently moved to do so endured even after the commencement of the revolutionary conflict, when Americans sent petitions calling for the release of celebrity revolutionary Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia to the Russian Ambassador stationed in Washington after her arrest by state authorities in 1907.<sup>284</sup>

Set against the backdrop of a burgeoning revolution in the Russian Empire, this project sought to examine American press coverage of the assassination in 1905 of a particularly notorious Grand Duke – Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov. In particular, this thesis set out to answer whether or not the American press regarded the assassination of the Grand Duke as part of a larger revolutionary phenomenon. By examining how newspapers in the United States

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<sup>282</sup> Jane E. Good, "America and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1888-1905." *The Russian Review* 41, no. 3 (July 1982), 271.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 286. Good specifies that celebrity revolutionary Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia was unable to collect funds for the SR Party during her speaking tour until news of the Bloody Sunday massacre made it to print in American newspapers.

<sup>284</sup> Rowley, "Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity," 10.

reported on the murder and the events that succeeded it, which not only included stories about labour strikes and an expanding student movement, but also rumours of further terrorist attacks against the royal family and government functionaries, we were able to ascertain their perception that the assassination was part of a larger revolutionary initiative against the tsarist regime. As a result, we were then able to contextualize the frequency and depth of American press coverage of the assassination within the broader discussion of revolutionary crisis.

Reports printed about Sergei's assassination over a period of three months, from the day after the bombing to the day after the execution of his assassin, indicate that the American press was cognizant of the fact that the event was directly linked to the revolutionary movement. Breaking news reports about Sergei's murder specified that his assassin, Ivan Kaliaev, was a member of the Combat Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. After linking the assassination to a politically-affiliated terrorist organization, American newspapers forecast a violent escalation of hostilities between the revolutionaries and the tsarist regime, and seemingly pivoted away from Sergei's death to prepare for new stories about the conflict. This shift in editorial focus resulted in a sudden and perceivable decrease in news coverage concerning Sergei's assassination in the week that followed the bombing, as news coverage favoured stories that discussed the threat of possible assassinations against members of the royal family rather than those that described royal requiems and funeral planning.

Interestingly, this press coverage also captured American manifestations of support for, or opposition to, the broader revolutionary movement. Editorial pieces considered the justifiability of assassination as a weapon wielded in the context of oppressive tsarist policies, while news reports documented celebratory public rallies held by unnamed anarchist societies in

New York City, where funds were also collected in support of the revolutionary effort against the autocracy. Disputes about the revolutionary conflict also were present in the House of Representatives, where American policymakers argued about President Roosevelt's decision to send a message of condolence to the tsar about Sergei after he had remained silent about the Bloody Sunday massacre. These diverse responses to news about Russian affairs from members belonging to disparate social circles demonstrates, at minimum, a level of familiarity and engagement with the topic that cannot be ignored in discussions about American-Russian relations during the revolutionary era, and may encourage further research. Moreover, that some American news editors, politicians, and citizens defended the revolutionaries' use of terror demonstrates to what degree anti-tsarist sentiment, which was promulgated by Russian revolutionaries on speaking tours, had taken hold in the United States.

An examination of American news reports printed a full week after the bombing revealed a marked interest in stories about political violence, which, although present in initial coverage of Sergei's assassination, was most apparent in news coverage of the revolution after Sergei's funeral had taken place. By then the number of articles dedicated to Sergei's assassination had already decreased significantly, but only because his story was no longer relevant to the ongoing revolution. The American press' indifference towards stories linked to the assassination but devoid of violence, which were still controversial and prominent in Russia, shows that preference was given to stories about political violence, revolutionary or otherwise. This fascination with violence may have been motivated by the fact that conflict between a notorious terror organization and an unpopular autocratic regime made for newsworthy stories, and is not indicative of general support for revolutionary terror. Interestingly, Americans would bear witness to Russian revolutionary violence in their own country only a few years after they



considered its legitimacy in a different land, and “came to fear the episodes of terrorism that were associated with anarchists, and the labour movement more generally, in the years leading up to the First World War.”<sup>285</sup>

Americans were no strangers to home-grown anarchist violence, but the arrival of Russian anarchists who fled their government’s crackdown on revolutionary activities at the end of the 1905 Revolution contributed to the intensification of violence in the US labour movement. On October 1, 1910, for example, the *Los Angeles Times* building was bombed as part of an ongoing labour dispute between the newspaper and the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers.<sup>286</sup> The explosion resulted in the deaths of 20 people, and the perpetrators, one of whom was a Polish émigré from Russia, were convicted for their crime. This was not the only documented instance of crimes connected to Russian anarchists, though. On August 20, 1915, three men, two of whom were born and radicalized in Odessa, robbed at gun point the Boyle Heights branch of the Home Savings Bank in Los Angeles, and obtained more than \$2000 from the heist.<sup>287</sup> These examples of violent crimes, where Russian anarchist involvement has been proven, exemplify the spillover of the Russian revolution onto the American labour movement. More importantly, they demonstrate that by the start of the First World War the Russian revolution really had become a transnational event – only this time, these travelling revolutionaries, who had previously gone from shore-to-shore to spread their ideas about Russian radicalism during their speaking tours, now brought violence with them when they came to the United States.

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<sup>285</sup> Alison Rowley, “An Ephemeral Look at Anarchist Life in the United States.” (unpublished paper), 7.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-12.

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