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In the 19th and early 20th centuries, polar exploration fever gripped several nations. Numerous expeditions searched for the Northwest Passage and aimed to plant the national flags at the poles. The voyages produced spectacular adventure narratives that captivated audiences of its time. These misery-filled stories often express heroic overtones and have drawn the attention of historians, who seek to understand the meaning behind the public's fascination and admiration, and thereby the societies within which these events occurred. However, literature has often ignored the role of human cognition factors in heroic perception formation, leaving heroism in the abstract or as a manifestation of a specific paradigm.

This paper uses social psychology insights into heroism to highlight the perception formation dimension and examines five different expeditions. Briefly investigating the relevant contexts within which the expeditions occurred, the paper focuses on the role of the immediately available expedition narratives and individual explorer characteristics that influenced initial public perceptions.

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# Deconstructing Heroism

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An Essay

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Graduate Certificate in Maritime History

(12,208)

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by

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October 27, 2021

Deconstructing Heroism

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## Introduction

*"There is nothing worth living for but to have one's name inscribed on the Arctic chart."*[1]
*-Alfred Tennyson*

Few history books about the Arctic and Antarctic Regions forgo mentioning polar explorers—daring men who traveled into the hostile unknown for scientific, national, and financial profits. These men shared the stage with other pioneers during an era commonly referred to as the Heroic Age or Golden Age of exploration.[2] In the minds of the public, literature, press, and art constructed the Arctic as an unforgiving environment that isolated individuals physically and mentally, testing the core of human endurance, testing the very mettle of *men*.[3] Their journeys north and southward captured the public's attention during their lifetime, inspired enthralling adventure novels, introspective works of art, theater plays, and commemorative symbols.

The explorer's feats, beliefs, and obsessions served as the early foundations of the arctic region's potential value. The whaling industry and promises of shorter routes to the far east sent many ships into the unknown. When navigability of the western passage remained elusive, scientific inquiries intertwined with national prestige, and aspirations of 'first' and 'furthest' took hold. Countless ships departed from their home ports, intending to be the first to unfurl the national colors at the north and south poles. The professional background of the explorers varied from military officers in service of domestic militaries (primarily the navy) to sailors from the merchant industry and individuals from various academic sectors. With each new journey, the ships' crews, composed of diverse disciplines, sought to contribute to their respective professions. Likewise,

[1] Quoted in Pierre Berton, *The Arctic Grail: The Quest for the North West Passage and the North Pole* (Canada: Random House of Canada Limited, 1988), 627.
[2] From this point on, the use of 'explorers' strictly refers to individuals who ventured into the Arctic and Antarctic regions.
[3] This research focuses specifically on male polar explorers, as many at that time were. However, this does not indicate that women were not prominent figures in stories of polar exploration. Spouses of the explorers and other prominent women within society were involved in the events that transpired.

each expedition improved geographic knowledge and polar survival skills.

The journeys often ended in the loss of life, sometimes the explorers and other members. Ships beset by ice forced the crews to winter, enduring polar darkness, freezing temperatures, diminishing game, but most of all, the uncertainty of the ship's ability to withstand the pressure of the ice—a significant factor in survival. On many occasions, the ships were crushed, which forced the occupants into the elements to trek extraordinary distances to the nearest location for a possibility of rescue. Men succumbed to scurvy, worsening injuries from frostbite, slow starvation, mishaps, or a combination of these factors. Likewise, these men endured and suffered severe psychological duress. Numerous journeys failed to reach intended goals, such as discovering the Northwest passage or reaching the earth's poles.

More recently, a few historians have written critically about polar exploration and polar heroism. In his book, *To the Ends of the Earth: The Truth Behind the Glory of Polar Exploration,* John V. H Dippel challenges the perception of glory by emphasizing inadequate preparations, ruthless ambitions, and poor leadership. In *The Myth of the Explorer*, Beau Riffenburgh addressed the role of the press in sensationalizing the expedition events. A few have reflected on exploration and polar heroism as a manifestation of imperialism or masculinity.[4] Such accounts, through modern perspectives, provide a skewed understanding of heroism as a perception construct. These narratives dilute the complex interaction of sociohistorical factors and heroism's fickle nature as a cognitive construct by assigning causality or ideological manifestation relationships that fall short of comprehensive explanations about heroism. Furthermore, it risks rendering principled judgment

[4] Erika Kathryn Renee Behrisch, "Voices of Silence, Texts of Truth: Imperial Discourse and Cultural Negotiations in Nineteenth-Century British Arctic Exploration Narrative," PhD diss. Queen's University, 2002; Michael Robinson, "Manliness and Exploration: The Discovery of the North Pole," *Osiris* 30, no. 1 (2015): 89-109; Janice Cavell, "Manliness in the Life and Posthumous Reputation of Robert Falcon Scott," *Canadian Journal of History* 45, no. 3 (2010): 537-564; Ingeborg Høvik, "Heroism and Imperialism in the Arctic: Edwin Landseer's Man Proposes – God Disposes," *Nordlit*, no. 23 (2008):183-94; Frederick Ramirez, "Masculine Celebrity: Hero Worship and Myth Creation in the Modern British Empire," MA diss, University of Colorado, 2016.

based on modern ideas instead of objective deconstruction of the past. As a construct, heroism is bestowed onto others based on beliefs about individual traits and motivations within a set of relevant contexts. To begin understanding why polar explorers were seen as heroic and, in some cases, were not, this project will focus on the perception formation, specifically the immediate public views, to demonstrate the role of cognitive factors in heroic perceptions.

The selected polar explorers for this paper span a period of approximately forty years. This timeframe encompasses expeditions that occurred before and after the most sought-after achievements. Personal accounts of the expeditions primarily inform on the events and thoughts of those who kept records. Such works were often published years after the expedition. Individual bias cannot be excluded as a factor. The explorers' accounts also include the recorded perspectives of other crew members to inform on events that occurred during the expedition, but the primary explorer was not there to witness. Given the sequence, it cannot be excluded that personal accounts were also written as a response to public perception, especially if there were elements that attracted controversy after the expedition's conclusion. Furthermore, these primary sources were published years after the expeditions took place, and by then, the initial public opinions were formed.[5] Prominent members of society, financial backers, and professional colleagues were among the people who read these accounts, but it is difficult to conclude that the general public had the financial means or personal desire to acquire the expensive books. Reviews of the accounts were featured in newspapers, but their contribution to the initial public perspectives was negligible. The press headlines captured the public first. With this in mind, this project examines sources that were immediately available to the public as events transpired—primarily the press—as a means to avoid

[5] Of the chosen explorers', Fridtjof Nansen's personal account was published remarkably fast—two months after the return of the *Fram* in 1896.

examining heroism through hindsight and modern interpretations.[6] Numerous authors have directly and indirectly suggested the press's arguably dominant role in constructing perceptions because it was readily accessible to the public and reached a broad audience during the Golden Age.[7] However, it is a stretch to say that it was entirely responsible for the formation. The press's role was dual; it reflected ideas that already existed and simultaneously reinforced them. It is more accurate to consider it as the dominant method of distribution of expedition narratives.

The lost voyage of Sir John Franklin cast a shadow over polar exploration. Shane McCorristine aptly summarizes the impact of the voyage, "The disappearance and search for Franklin's expedition of 1845 stands out as the most famous and politically useful story in this long quest for Northwest Passage, inspiring the detailed mapping of the Arctic in its wake."[8] The expeditions selected for this project occurred after Franklin's disappearance, a mystery that filled the British and American papers, spurred literary works, theatrical pieces, and works of art.[9] The works developed ideas of the polar region in the public's mind and reinforced ideas of heroic behavior. A statue by Matthew Noble commemorating Franklin and his men was erected in 1866 at Waterloo Place—an enduring symbol of commemoration. Examining exploration in British print culture, Janice Cavell notes that despite a diminishing British interest in the Arctic following

[6] Press is a subjective reflection, representing popular views of institutions, but it does little to inform on actual perception of the public. This project accepts the limits of the available evidence and acknowledges the generalizations.

[7] Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographical Discovery* (London: Belhaven Press, 1993), 2-5; David H. Stam and Deirdre Corcoran Stam, "Bending Time: The Function of Periodicals in Nineteenth-Century Polar Naval Expeditions," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 41, no. 4 (2008): 301–30; Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative: Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture, 1818-1860* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 23-40.

[8] Shane McCorristine, *The Spectral Arctic: A History of Dreams & Ghosts in Polar Exploration* (London: University College London, 2018), 19.

[9] Literary and artistic productions included: Jules Verne, *Journey and Adventures of Captain Hatteras*; Edwin Landseer, "Man Proposes, God Dispose"; Frederic Edwin Church, "The Icebergs"; John Everett Millais, "The North-West Passage." Charles Dickens took a keen interest in the search for Franklin. He produced Wilkie Collins's *The Frozen Deep* on stage and wrote about the missing men in his journal Household Words; Charles Dickens, "The Lost Arctic Voyages," *Household Words* 10, (December 1854): 360-364. Other

the conclusion to Franklin's story, "literary extraction and compilation still continued in a seemingly endless cycle."[10] The search for Franklin was a great tragic drama of its time.

Preconceived notions and the press developed the narratives the public would hear first. The immediate story available to the public generally followed the following process of framing: reporting on expedition preparations, departure, journey, and return. The preparation reporting often featured details on funding and support, ship details, aims of the expedition, and commentary by other explorers. As exploration increasingly turned to public funding, explorers could not ignore the power of the press and garnered it for financial assistance. Of note, preparation reporting occasionally mentioned previous expeditions, particularly recently transpired events; this overshadowed and influenced the development of a narrative. The departure reporting was reasonably straightforward; it would repeat the preparation details, announce the departure, and publish a telegram from the explorers if one was available.

The journey itself produced an information void. Telegrams from the explorers or sightings of the expedition by other ships served as the primary official news source. Otherwise, the columns written during months of silence were a mixture of previously reported details, speculation based on stated plans, and the occasional sensational rumor from an unverified source. In the initial months, the columns were often merely a repetition of known facts. As the time and silence wore on and anxiety heightened, speculation became more common. Foreboding rumors flared up reporting before it was again lulled into short blurbs until either a telegram or another rumor emerged. This information void significantly contributed to increased anxiety and anticipation within the public and served as a substantial phase in framing the initial version of events. Telegrams, with fragments of news, arrived many months after the events contained within had

[10] Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 222.

transpired. In this void, individuals who ventured into the unknown were the main protagonists.

The return was a pivotal event; it held power over the final public interpretation. After years of fragmented information, speculation, generally wrapped up into a standard polar tension of "will they succeed/will they return?" the resolution would play out on the front pages of the press. Heroic perceptions either crystalized or disintegrated in the immediate aftermath. Failure to attain stated aims did not deter veneration, but expedition controversy—often centered on individual moral characteristics—could.

**Heroism and History**

History, just like works of fiction, creates its heroes. Without a doubt, a link exists between perceptions of exploration as a whole and the public's view on polar pioneers. Many voyaged into the unknown before the public became enamored with the polar regions, which cultivated and reinforced public imagination about such feats. The press played an enormous role in crystalizing or shattering the heroic image, but it would be a false claim to say the press was single-handedly responsible for inventing heroism. The press reflected societal perceptions and was the primary vessel by which the narrative was distributed. However, the discussion on heroism pertaining to polar expeditions cannot begin without discussing the term itself.

This paper considers heroism a creation of human perception—a social construct. In his article, "What should Historians do With Heroes?", Max Jones proposes that the study of historic icons offers valuable insights into the societies which produced them, highlighting that the focus must be on the reception rather than the representation of the figures.[11] The process of deconstruction requires an operational definition for the term. The Oxford English Dictionary offers a

[11] Max Jones, "What Should Historians do with Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain," *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007), 439.

straightforward modern answer, "a person who is admired by many people for doing something brave or good."[12] It is a simple description with broad applicability, but it leaves the answer oversimplified and with little to gain about the role of society that venerated the individuals. Furthermore, it quickly falls to the criticism that numerous individuals do something tremendous and brave yet never reach public recognition. Historians, who have examined the topic, propose a more functional definition, developed by Geoffrey Cubitt:

> a hero is any man or woman whose existence, whether in his or her own lifetime or later, is endowed by others, not just with high degree of fame and honour, but with special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above the others in public esteem but makes them the objects of some kind of collective emotional investment.[13]

The Cubitt definition narrows inclusivity through the function of time, majority perception, and explicit veneration. However, this definition merely allows a more functional selection of individuals; it is still necessary to understand influential factors that shape human perception towards 'hero' conclusions about a given figure to comprehend the phenomena. A reasonable question immediately stands out about those who rise to acknowledgment by society: why did society choose them above others?

Historical reflection on heroes and heroism is not new. Lecturing in 1840, Thomas Carlyle stated, "In all epochs of the world's history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable saviour of his epoch;—the lightning, without which the fuel never would have burnt. The History of the World, I said already, was the Biography of Great Men."[14] Equivalent to the

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[12] *Oxford Dictionary*, "hero," accessed May 5, 2021, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/hero?q=hero.

[13] Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren, *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3; Barbara Korte and Stefanie Lethbridge, eds., *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction since 1800: Case Studies* (Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 3; Jones, "What Should Historians do with Heroes?", 441.

[14] Thomas Carlyle, David R. Sorensen, Brent E. Kinser, and Sara Atwood, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, And the Heroic in History* (New Haven: Yale University, 2013), 30.

big bang of historical events, Carlyle's 'Great Men' taxonomy ranged from divinity to poets, priests, prophets, men of letters, and kings.[15] Carlyle's reflection on heroes highlights a connection between society, heroes, and history. [16]

Reflecting on the historical lament of heroism's vanishing, Daniel J. Boorstin proposed a 'Graphic Revolution' as the source of confusion between fame and greatness. He points to the ability of the press, television, and other mediums to make an individual 'great' overnight, thereby allowing the public to convolute the ideas of fame and greatness into a false production. "We can fabricate fame, we can at will…make a man or woman well known; but we cannot make him great. We can make a celebrity, but we can never make a hero. In a now-almost-forgotten sense, all heroes are self-made."[17] Boorstin's views support *The Myth of the Explorer*, in which Beau Riffenburgh examines the press's role in sensationalizing exploration events. On their own, neither Boorstin nor Riffenburgh entirely explain why societies chose to view explorers of the polar regions as heroic. However, in combination with Carlyle's reflections, important factors do begin to emerge. Acts of greatness, which carry the potential of being regarded as historical, such as geographic discovery at the time, require a wide acceptance—a narrative that needs a vessel.

The narrative factor serves a prominent role in hero-making. Existing literature seeking to define or explain heroes and heroism often references Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell offers an archetypal hero trajectory: separation (departure), initiation,

[15] It must be acknowledged that Carlyle also held antisemitic and racist views. However, his perspective on heroes and their role in society is a useful reflection on perceptions of the time.
[16] John Price examines heroism of the ordinary citizen in *Everyday Heroism: Victorian Constructions of the Heroic Civilian.* Price highlights historians' propensity to focus on well-known individuals such as prominent military figures while leaving the average citizen as a heroic actor in obscurity.
[17] Daniel J. Boorstin, "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event," in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 48.

return.[18] The journey begins with the departure; the central figure of the narrative leaves the comfort of known surroundings by choice or through the pressure of circumstance. During initiation, the "favorite phase of myth-adventure,"[19] the central figure overcomes trials and challenges. Finally, the hero returns to the place of origin "where the boon maybe redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet."[20] Campbell's work examined narratives across cultures and time, concluding that humans use a kind of formula to communicate a hero's narrative. Polar narratives in press coverage directly reflect Campbell's hero trajectory.[21]

**Social Psychology**

Heroes and heroism have been subjects of numerous social psychology studies seeking to form foundational insights into how humans define and perceive heroes. The hero construct is not static and exists in the beholder's eye. Despite the elusive nature of heroism, social psychology offers valuable insights. Researchers Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals conducted a study focused on several aspects related to heroism. Allison and Goethals focused on identifying traits associated with heroes, common perceptions of heroic behavior, and identifying how human beings relate to heroic narratives.[22] Their work offers a hero taxonomy, in which heroic figures are interpreted as 'agents of social influence.'[23] Figure one summarizes the traits, expected heroic behaviors, and the researcher's final taxonomy.

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[18] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato, CA: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008), 23; Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 40-44.
[19] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 81.
[20] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 167.
[21] This project examines the immediate narrative as events unfolded, which is different than narratives in later published primary account that included extensive details on what transpired, or later accounts written by historians which include significantly more details such as personal correspondences and governmental documents. The initial reporting was its own narrative, and it drove heroic perception in the immediate moments.
[22] Allison and Goethals, *Heroes*, 7.
[23] George R. Goethals and Scott T. Allison, "Making Heroes: The Construction of Courage, Competence, and Virtue," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 2012), 224.

| Traits | 'Heroic' behavior | Taxonomy |
|---|---|---|
| Caring, charismatic, inspiring, reliable, resilient, selfless, smart, and strong. | Overcoming obstacles to achievement, moral thought and moral behavior, self-regulation and heroic behavior. | Trending, transitory, transitional, tragic, transposed, transparent, traditional, transfigured, transforming, and transcendent. |

Figure 1: Goethals and Allison, "Making Heroes," 194, 207-209, 223, 224-229.

Goethals and Allison's work illustrates that heroes can serve different purposes, and their veneration by society fluctuates over time. The perceived heroic impact can vary from strong to weak, long-term to short-term, and readily recognizable to subdued.[24] Society can create heroes for a specific purpose, for a brief period, as a response to an event, or for a lifetime. Furthermore, the researchers identified that the death of a great figure, typically interpreted as martyrdom, carries a greater likelihood of influencing people to view the individual as heroic—an aspect historians also acknowledge. However, their study also points out that post-mortem veneration depends on perceptions of morality, "Hence, death cannot salvage the reputation of a moral scoundrel."[25] This demonstrates the interconnectedness of perceived traits and expected behavior and their respective and joint influence on individual perception of a figure as heroic. Goethals and Allison's research informs on factors that drive human perception, but another study provides additional insight into the significance of the context within which a figure demonstrates agency.

Philip Zimbardo, Zeno E. Franco, and Kathy Blau's 2011 study entitled "Heroism: A Conceptual Analysis and Differentiation Between Heroic Action and Altruism" focused on investigating the perception of heroism in different contexts. Zimbardo's team proposed that a heroic act:

1. involves a level of peril or sacrifice that goes well beyond what is expected in other prosocial behaviors,
2. entails a willingness to enter a fraught situation despite clear barriers to entry and obvious paths of exit,
3. across all forms of heroics, the actor must transcend considerable fear to act

[24] Goethals and Allison, "Making Heroes," 224.
[25] Allison and Goethals, *Heroes*, 184.

decisively.[26]

With a specific emphasis on distinguishing heroism from altruism, Zimbardo's taxonomy features twelve categories/situations.

| Risk Type | Heroic Type | Definition/Situation |
|---|---|---|
| Physical Peril | Military and other duty-bound physical risk heroes | Individuals involved in military or emergency response careers that involve repeated exposure to high-risk situations. Heroic acts must exceed the call of duty. |
| | Civil heroes–nonduty bound physical risk heroes | Civilians who attempt to save others from physical harm or death while knowingly putting their own lives at risk. |
| Social Sacrifice | Religious figures | Dedicated, life-long religious service embodying highest principles or breaking new religious/spiritual ground. Often serves as a teacher or public exemplar of service. |
| | Politico-religious figures | Religious leaders who have turned to politics to affect wider change, or politicians who have a deep spiritual belief system that informs political practice. |
| | Martyrs | Religious or political figures who knowingly (sometimes deliberately) put their lives in jeopardy in the service of a cause or to gain attention to injustice. |
| | Political or military leaders | Typically lead a nation or group during a time of difficulty, such as a war or disaster. Serve to unify nation, provide shared vision, and may embody qualities that are seen as necessary for the group's survival. |
| | Adventurer/explorer/discoverer | Individuals who explore unknown geographical areas or use novel and unproven transportation methods. |
| | Scientific (discovery) heroes | Individuals who explore unknown areas of science, use novel and unproven research methods, or discover new scientific information seen as valuable to humanity. |
| | Good Samaritan | Individuals who are first to step in to help others in need. Situation involves considerable disincentives for altruism. May/may not involve immediate physical risk. |
| | Odds beater/underdog | Individuals who overcame handicap or adverse conditions and succeed in spite of such negative circumstances, thereby provide a social, moral model for others. |
| | Bureaucracy heroes | Employees in large organizations in controversial arguments within or between agencies. Typically, involves standing firm on principle despite intense pressures to conform or blindly obey higher authorities. |
| | Whistleblowers | Individuals who are aware of illegal or unethical activities in an organization who report the activity publicly to effect change, without expectation of reward. |

Figure 2: Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo, "Heroism: A Conceptual," 102.

The research team asked participants to classify the different situational contexts as heroic, altruistic, or neither. The study demonstrated that different contextual settings are perceived

[26] Zeno E. Franco, Kathy Blau, and Philip G. Zimbardo, "Heroism: A Conceptual Analysis and Differentiation between Heroic Action and Altruism," *Review of General Psychology* 15, no. 2 (June 2011): 100.

differently by individuals. 43% of the participants marked adventure/explorers/discoverer as neither, followed by 37% of the participants categorizing the context as heroic, and the remaining 20% perceiving the context as altruistic.[27] Despite the results reflecting modern perceptions, the study reaffirms the critical importance of context and its influence on human perception of heroism.

Other inquiries into the phenomenon offer further insights. Research into human perception and relation to heroism acknowledges that heroes can influence human behavior. As proposed by Allison and Goethals in their Heroic Leadership Dynamic (HLD) model, "Hero narratives fulfill important cognitive and emotional needs, such as our need for wisdom, meaning, hope, inspiration, and growth."[28] Whether heroes are temporal or enduring, they serve a purpose that can be individual and collective (societal); a notion that is reflected in Cubbit's definitional elements of "symbolic significance" and "emotional investment" and in Thomas Carlyle's nineteenth-century interpretation of heroes as catalysts for history.[29]

One final research aspect warrants attention. A few concentrated efforts have been made to understand how individuals differentiate between celebrity and heroism. Further investigation is required to develop a comprehensive cognitive model, but research indicates that, when asked to, people do perceive a difference between celebrities and heroes.[30] However, it must be acknowledged that differentiation in day-to-day interaction is not a conscious necessity and that the use of the word 'hero' in daily interpretations is often broad and can include celebrities, family members, friends, and fictional characters.[31] A stranger helping an elderly individual to cross the

[27] Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo, "Heroism: A Conceptual," 108
[28] Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, "Hero Worship: The Elevation of the Human Spirit," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 46 no. 2 (2015): 189.
[29] Cubitt and Warren, *Heroic Reputations*, 3.
[30] Adrian C. North, Victoria Bland, and Nicky Ellis, "Distinguishing Heroes from Celebrities," *The British Journal of Psychology* 96 no. 1 (2005): 39–52.
[31] Goethals and Allison, "Making Heroes," 188, 191-192.

street may readily receive the label the same as a celebrity who donates a large sum to a noble cause. As a phenomenon, heroism remains an elusive concept, but as Joseph Campbell's work identified, it is old and can be found across cultures, making it a prominent fixture in human communication and interpretation of events.

**History and Psychology**

The question of who is a hero reflects the societal perceptions of a given time. Writing about history, Edward Carr stated, "When we attempt to answer the question, What is history?, our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question, what view we take of the society in which we live."[32] Although psychological inquiry is a modern discipline, its insights into the cognitive mechanics of heroic perception formation can be used while remaining sensitive to the historical context to avoid modern interpretation of polar explorers' actions. To this analysis, social psychology offers an investigative framework to identify influential factors.

From modern research, we understand that a historical view must consider the individual characteristics of polar explorers, the contexts within which they occurred, and the associated narratives and the methods by which they reached a broad audience. All three must be considered from the viewpoint of their given time.

[32] Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History* (New York: Random House, 1961), 5.

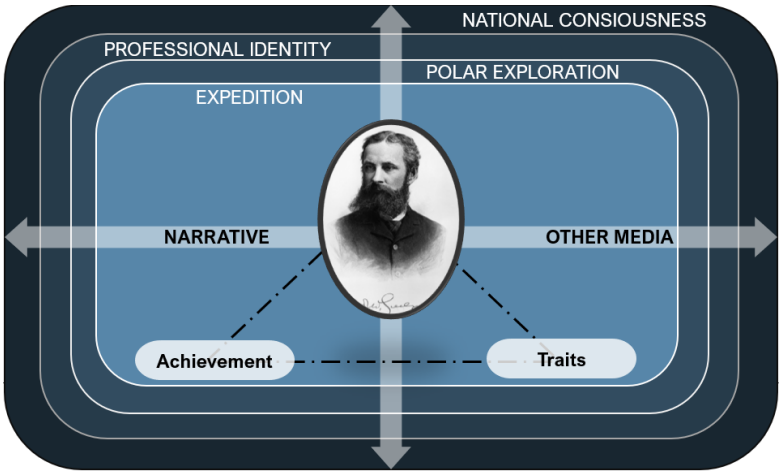

Figure 3

Polar exploration can be understood comparatively to space exploration. The very nature of taking such risk was a heroic act, and much like in polar exploration, the direct scientific benefit was of little concern for the average citizen. It would be just as easy to declare space exploration reckless nationalism when reflecting on the context of the space race from the current age, but it would reveal too little about why these individuals were seen as heroes, what factors contributed to such perceptions, and their relationships.

The various definitions that history and psychology-related literature provide can be applied to the explorers. Against the track record of polar tragedy, the very act of willful entry appeared brave and admirable. Their preparation through the study of previous expeditions reflected intellect. Many belonged to professions that were held in high regard. Their willful entry into the unknown and endurance of the harsh elements suggested resilience and strength. They gambled against peril, but they did so with the best available means and knowledge in their given historical context. The public witnessed these stories with a kind of wonder, as one would observe any historic attempt at a “first,” be it the first flight around the world or Felix Baumgartner's jump from the stratosphere. The difference, of course, is that 150 years ago, extreme sports were less prevalent, and the public did not actively seek to delineate between pioneer, hero, and celebrity.

The role of the press was essential in reinforcing perceptions, and it made explorers celebrities during their time. Their journeys were recounted, telegrams and speeches reprinted, at times word for word. Their return commemorations were reported extensively, and they were solicited for commentary on other polar expeditions. They lectured and were invited to all manner of dinners with prominent individuals and entered into exclusive contracts with the press. They were venerated by prominent societies at home and abroad and presented with medals. The very nature of discovering previously unknown geographic features and having them named after themselves and others on the expedition was a form of fame. Polar explorers were a celebrity of their time, and they could be heroes if their actions reflected societal expectations of the construct.

**Lady Franklin Bay Expedition (1881-1884)**

*"No pen could ever convey to the world an adequate idea of the abject misery and extreme wretchedness to which we were reduced at Cape Sabine."*[33]

*-Adolphus W. Greely, 1886*

Several nations shared the stage of polar exploration; among them were American explorers, eager to make a name for themselves. To the American public, exploration was not a new phenomenon. The nation's territorial expansion in the early 19th century brought opportunities for military and civilians to venture into the unknown.[34] In *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture*, Michael F. Robinson summarizes the national attitude towards exploration as "rites of passage from which flowed the wellspring of the American spirit."[35] The American public followed the disappearance of Franklin with great curiosity, and American desire to join the search efforts followed suit.[36] Much like in Britain, attached to the

[33] Adolphus W. Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service Vol I* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), vi.
[34] Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Artic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Press, 2015), 18-19.
[35] Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible*, 21.
[36] Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible*, 22, 25.

northward gaze was a debate of purpose, wrapped up in scientific utility, national prestige, and domestic affairs.[37] Writing about Elisha Kent Kane, Chauncey Loomis summarizes some of the prevailing views:

> The research in meteorology, magnetism, and hydrography carried out by Arctic expeditions were of little interest to laymen or to politicians, but during the early part of the nineteenth century a romantic image of science had captured the minds of the public—a popularized, idealized vision of science created by non-scientific imaginations and related only remotely to the painstaking processes of actual scientific investigation. To its many enthusiasts it was 'the forefront of civilization;' its beneficent possibilities seemed endless.[38]

Between 1850 and 1873, Elisha Kent, Isaac Hayes, Charles F. Hall ventured north. Many of the expeditions were supported by Henry Grinnell, one of the American Geographical and Statistical Society's founders. Following their footsteps, an American Civil War veteran and then First Lieutenant Adolphus Washington Greely commanded the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition (1881-1884), a national effort part of the first International Polar Year (IPY) collaborative effort among nations.[39]

The Greely expedition makes a fascinating study of the fickle nature of heroic perception. Occurring in the aftermath of Franklin fervor—and amidst the disappearance of the USS *Jeannette* crew, the Greely expedition unfolded along familiar headlines of polar tragedy.[40] Writing about the USS *Jeannette*, A.A. Hoehling reflects on the famous sponsor and broadly on polar

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[37] Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible*, 29.
[38] Chauncey Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores: The Story of Charles Francis Hall* (New York: 1971), 9.
[39] IPY was conceived by Karl Weyprecht. Believing that ventures north should serve a genuine scientific purpose, Weyprecht proposed establishing a ring of stations at the top of the world. The purpose of the stations was to collect various scientific data points simultaneously.
[40] The expedition was sponsored by the owner of the *Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, and commanded by Lieutenant Commander George Washington De Long on a leave of absence from the US Navy. USS *Jeannette* departed in July 1879 with a crew of 33 men. Among the crew was Jerome J. Collins, a meteorologist who worked for Bennett at the *Herald*. The first time the explorers were heard from again was in December 1881. The search and rescue events of the USS *Jeannette* sparked debates about the purpose of arctic expeditions (science v. geographic conquest), and the conflicting interest of the press and government; Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 76-79.

exploration:

> He [James Bennett] was a newspaper man enough to sense the story of more potential than the laconic announcement which would have told the world that his expedition had attained its goal. In such a case, the discoverers would have sailed for home, been accorded tumultuous welcome—and then it would all be quickly forgotten. The account would dwindle […] Here was, perhaps, the story of a lifetime—the struggle against the elements, of man's eternal pygmy tilt against blind, impeccable fate. There was, in the grand scale, symbolism and elements of self-identification in this cruel Arctic saga which should reach to every man and woman, young and old, literate and illiterate.[41]

Hoehling highlights that tragedy made great news stories. However, in addition to positive outcomes for newspaper sales, tragedy is also fertile grounds for heroes; within tragedies, there is a human struggle, which leads to a second implication. The stories' construct is relatable to the audience—man's struggle against fate and/or elements. This reflects Campbell's framework of a hero's journey and Goethals and Allison's conclusions on the human propensity to view underdog stories as heroic.

The aims of the Lady Franklin Bay expedition ran counter to previous geographic exploits. Greely was not a publicly known figure; but was a protégé of the polar explorer, Captain Henry W. Howgate.[42] The written orders from the War Department mirrored the strictly scientific nature of IPY but allowed Greely a latitude of personal judgment.[43] A ship would drop off the Greely party to establish a *permanent* station to collect various scientific data. Resupply missions were

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[41] A. A. Hoehling, *The Jeannette Expedition: An Ill-Fated Journey to the Arctic (*London: Abelard-Schuman, 1969), 148-149.

[42] Howgate originally wanted the government to fund an expedition to establish a northern colony. In his pamphlet he stated, "...the Arctic martyr beckons with a ghostly hand to future glory, and taking up again our keen unrusted weapons, we should never pause until one more star is added to the galaxy which adorns our flag—the mighty planet that is that in silent mystery guards, in those dim and distant regions, in solemn mysteries of the Pole"; Henry W. Howgate, *Polar Colonization and Exploration* (Washington D.C.: Beresford Printer, 1877), 27. His plan did not come to fruition, and at a later time, Howgate was embroiled in an embezzlement scandal and on the run from authorities, which brought negative light onto the Signal Corps; A. L. Todd, *Abandoned; the Story of the Greely Arctic Expedition, 1881-1884* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 66-67, 313.

[43] Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service*, x-xiii. Note: While on the expedition, Greely intended on obtaining a record for the furthest north and search for any signs of the missing men from USS *Jeannette*; Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service*, 239, 312-131; Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 103.

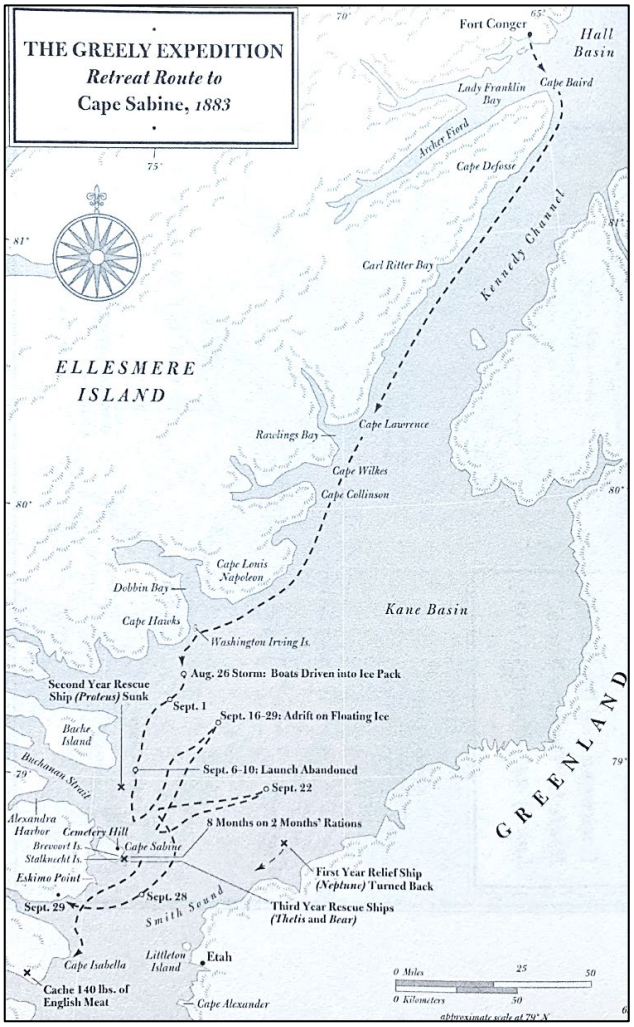
planned for 1882 and 1883, with instructions on what should occur if no vessel reached the station in 1882.[44] The "rigorous focus on science" gave positive overtones to the overall motivations and made Greely's expedition the "antidote" to the press and partially government-sponsored venture of the USS *Jeannette*.[45]

The catastrophic events of 1883 provided vital elements for a heroic tale. It is essential to acknowledge that the majority of Greely's story, to the public, was about a government plan gone wrong, followed by a story of rescue. In 1882, the *Neptune* failed to penetrate Smith Sound. The event generated limited press interest: the Greely party had provisions for two years.[46] However, the 1883 sinking of *Proteus* quickly became a source of public pressure for the government. Lieutenant Ernest Garlington, who led the 1883 mission, saved and cached limited supplies from the sinking vessel before leaving the location to rescue himself and his men. His actions against the orders he received became a source of controversy and led to an official inquiry. The newspapers recounted the *Proteus* details, speculated about Greely's chances of survival, and reported a rumor attributed to the native people that murder had taken place within the expedition ranks.[47] It was yet another brewing polar disaster. The failure of the relief bore ominous omens for the men it was supposed to reach. The disaster contributed to the formation of a heroic context. A governmental effort within a cooperative international context of exploration for a genuine

[44] Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service*, xii-xiii. Note: In case the 1882 mission did not reach the permanent station (Fort Conger), the party was directed to abandone the station by 1 September 1883, and follow the eastern shore of Grinnell Land (Ellesmere Island) to meet the next relief mission enroute or at Littleton Island. The 1883 relief was directed to remain in Smith Sound for as long as it could without becoming beset by ice, cache supplies, and leave men to winter if necessary to then meet Greely; W. B. Hazen, "Instructions No. 72," in *Report of Board of Officers to Consider an Expedition for the Relief of Lieut. Greely and Party* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), 136-137.
[45] Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible*, 90.
[46] "Ice-Bound Colonies," *New York Tribune*, September 27, 1882.
[47] "The Proteus Disaster," *Evening Star*, September 14, 1883; "An Arctic Disaster," *New York Tribune*, September 14, 1883.

scientific purpose left its men stranded to overcome possible starvation in the unforgiving region.

Against the backdrop of failure, governmental inquiry into the disaster, and new rescue plans, Greely and his men became central characters in a struggle against all odds. The *Proteus* inquiry garnered significant public attention and produced numerous news columns.[48] Who was to blame for the peril Greely was left to face? As for Greely and his men, the newspapers could only speculate. The stipulated retreat outlined in official orders would put the Greely party in a dire situation due to the limited cache of supplies and no one to meet them. Remaining at Fort Conger could provide better conditions for survival, but which choice the party made remained unknown to the public and the government.[49]




The lack of information from the expedition allowed the public to interpret the events as a heroic underdog survival—an element that plays a prominent role in human perception of heroism.[50] All that was left to complete Campbell's heroic trajectory was the return.

[48] "The News This Morning," *New York Tribune*, January 4, 1884; "Proteus Disaster," *Phillipsburg Herald*, November 1, 1883; "For The Relief of Greely," *New York Tribune*, January 25, 1884; "Greely Relief Bill," *Evening Star*, January 22, 1884; "Short Session," *National Republican*, January 31, 1884; "Proceedings of Congress," *Yorkville Enquirer*, February 21, 1884; "The Greely Relief Expedition: Report of Lt. Garlington," *Evening Star*, October 18, 1883; Todd, Abandoned, 107-110, 146-147, 150-152.

[49] War Department, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for Year 1883 Vol I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 19-12.

[50] Allison and Goethals, *Heroes*, 126-130.

The surviving men were heroic for a brief moment. On June 22, 1884, the government's efforts paid off; *Thetis* and *Bear* rescued seven men.[51] The news reached the public on July 17, 1884. Newspapers across the nation reported on the expedition's achievements and the recovery of the survivors.[52] "It is a tale of heroism unparalleled," stated the *Harpers Weekly*.[53] Generals who had given interviews described Greely as a determined and "gallant officer."[54] The heroic narrative was nearing its completion. Greely's men survived the unimaginable and set the record for the highest north after it had remained in the hands of the English for three centuries. While the men received a hero's welcome at Portsmouth, discourse about the relief blunders continued to appear in newspapers, reinforcing the underdog narrative. However, on August 12, 1884, a *New York Times* story, reprinted by other papers, cast a shadow on the moral character of the rescued men. Reports of cannibalism implicated the government in a cover-up, allegations of split-loyalty factions, and Private Charles B. Henry's execution made the headlines, and the underdog narrative gave way to a moral judgment debate.[55] All surviving members and government officials denied implications of cannibalism, but the controversy lingered as details of dissent among the expedition members continued to make it into newspaper reports.

Figure 4: Buddy Levy, *Labyrinth of Ice* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2019).

The story of Greely and his men, in its historical timeframe, was heroic until depravity

[51] One of the survivors, Sergeant William A. Ellis, succumbed to injuries from frost bite during the return trip, reducing the total survivors to six of the original twenty-five.
[52] "Postscript," *Evening Star*, July 17, 1884; "The Arctic Heroes: How They Were Snatched from the Jaws of Death," *National Republican*, July 19, 1884, "Greely Greeted," *Wichita Daily Eagle*, August 3, 1884; "Starving on Cape Sabine," *New York Times*, July 19, 1884.
[53] "Greely's Far North," *Harper's Weekly* 28, August 9, 1884.
[54] "The Arctic Horror," *Evening Star*, July 17, 1884.
[55] "The Victims of a Blunder," *New York Times*, August 14, 1884; "Horrible, If True," *Evening Star*, August 12, 1884; "The Tragedy at Camp Sabine," *Evening Star*, August 14, 1884; "Eaten by His Companions," *Evening Star*, August 14, 1884; "Lieut. Greely's Version of Arctic Horror," *Wichita Daily Eagle*, August 17, 1884; "Frozen Arctic Facts," *the Evening Critic*, September 2, 1884; "Greely's Disastrous Expedition," *Evening Star*, September 2, 1884; Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 106-108.

came to light. Allegations of mutiny and cannibalism were not uncommon, so much that *Harper's Weekly* was eager to praise the survivors:

> It is most fortunate for this purpose that in the latest story of Arctic exploration there are no episodes of human weakness and cowardice to break the force of its showing of human strength and courage. [...] Pitiable squabbles, mutinies, dissension, scandals, have come to light as of today to show us that man at his best is but a poor creature. We ought all to be thankful for that no such pettiness have come to light to belittle the heroism of the latest at Arctic explorer, and that there is nothing to indicate that any such have been concealed to be brought to light thereafter.[56]

It is important to note that the newspapers were filled with the aftermath of *Jeannette* only a few months earlier. The press had focused on the reverence the dead received and on the inquiry by a sub-committee of the House of the Committee on Naval Affairs into charges against the expedition commander, who was among the dead.[57] Once the conduct of Greely's men came under scrutiny, the simplistic heroic tale of survival, preserved in the government's failures, became more complex. It reflects Allison and Goethals' discussion on the fragility of the underdog narrative and the significant role moral character plays in heroic perceptions. For Greely and his men, the moral weight of the allegations overshadowed their ordeal. To the public that could not fathom the slow starvation the survivors endured, the implications about humanity itself were too horrific, and to the government that sent them, it meant institutional discredit. It was easier to support Greely's decision to order the execution of Private Henry—order and discipline, necessary for survival. The nation had only recently experienced a war. Explaining how men could be reduced to cannibalism would only put the government in an unfavorable light; after all, the relief failures left the men to overcome.

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[56] "Back From the Frozen Seas," *Harper's Weekly* 28, August 16, 1884, 529. Note: This specific segment was published on 16 August 1884, four days after the sensational *New York Times* article with allegations of cannibalism. It is assumed the article was written and set up for printing before the sensational *New York Times* article released.
[57] "In Memory of De Long and His Men," *New York Tribune*, February 3, 1884; "Collins vs. De Long," *National Republican*, April 7, 1884.

### *Fram* Expedition (1893-1896)

*"Arctic exploration is sufficiently credited with rashness and danger in its legitimate and sanctioned methods, without bearing the burden of Dr. Nansen's illogical scheme of self-destruction."*[58]

*-Adolphus W. Greely, 1890*

Despite the tragic events of many expeditions, each venture north provided valuable knowledge for the explorers that followed. The news of the *USSJeannett*e's fate first arrived in 1881, a few months after the Greely expedition had departed. In 1884, as the inquiry into the *Jeannette* was unfolding and Greely survivors were found, the relics from the *Jeannette* appeared on the Greenland coast.[59] Their appearance halfway around the world sparked a theory about ocean currents and skepticism about the objects' authenticity. Already a veteran of the polar region after crossing Greenland with a small team, Fridtjof Nansen conceived a plan based on Henrik Mohn's idea of a transpolar current, supported by the reappearance of the relics.[60] Receiving criticism from veterans of polar exploration, Nansen later wrote in his personal account, "Greely, Nares, etc., etc., are certainly right in saying that this is nothing new. I relied here simply on the sad experiences of earlier expeditions."[61] Beyond the theory of polar currents, previous expeditions also influenced Nansen's decision to construct a ship that could withstand ice pressure to provide his crew with suitable shelter as they drifted across the polar waters.[62] Nansen's goal did not differ from his contemporaries; he sought to attain the elusive North Pole, but his means made him stand out, and his contemporaries' critical reactions to his bold plan added to the prevailing notions about the dangers of the Arctic.

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[58] Greely quoted in Berton, *The Arctic Grail*, 489.
[59] "Finding of Jeannette Relics," *Evening Star,* August 15, 1884; "The Jeannette Relics," *Evening Star*, August 16, 1884.
[60] Fridtjof Nansen and Otto Neumann Sverdrup, *Farthest North* (New York: Harper, 1897), 12-53; "Proceedings of Foreign Societies," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 12, no. 3 (1890): 173-80.
[61] Nansen and Sverdrup, *Farthest North, 59.*
[62] Nansen and Sverdrup, *Farthest North, 59-60.*

Nansen's expedition is a straightforward story of pioneering, a novel idea staked on an unproven theory. His intention to have his ship purposefully nipped and controlled by the currents was supported by the Norwegian government and generated interest in American and Britain. The daring plan, of course, produced debate, prompting discourse about the utility of polar exploration, the risk that Nansen was accepting, and whether the relics that were found were actually from De Long's ship.[63] Nansen's departure made the papers, especially in Britain, where his telegram was printed on the day of the departure. Speculation about his venture began immediately:

> That was an interpreted little party which left Norway last week to solve the problem the North Pole. The question is, will Dr. Nansen and his fellow explorers ever return to tell the tale? The frame is provisioned for five years, and, if the British authorities on Arctic exploration are to be accepted, Dr. Nansen and his twelve men will need all their provisions, if, indeed, there can survive long enough to consume them.… But if, after all, Dr. Nansen should prove to be in the right, his achievement will be one of the first magnitude.[64]

Already venerated as a hero for his novel crossing of Greenland with a smaller team, the papers reflected the context for the *Fram*, prophesizing glory if Nansen's plan could withstand the many dangers associated with polar exploration.

Unlike the sensational journeys that occurred since Franklin's disappearance, the *Fram* expedition unfolded benignly. Nansen's route took him east through the Kara Sea, with planned stops along the way, which allowed telegrams to be sent to report on the expedition's progress.[65] Eventually, the *Fram* "disappeared into the unknown North and has said good-bye to civilization,"

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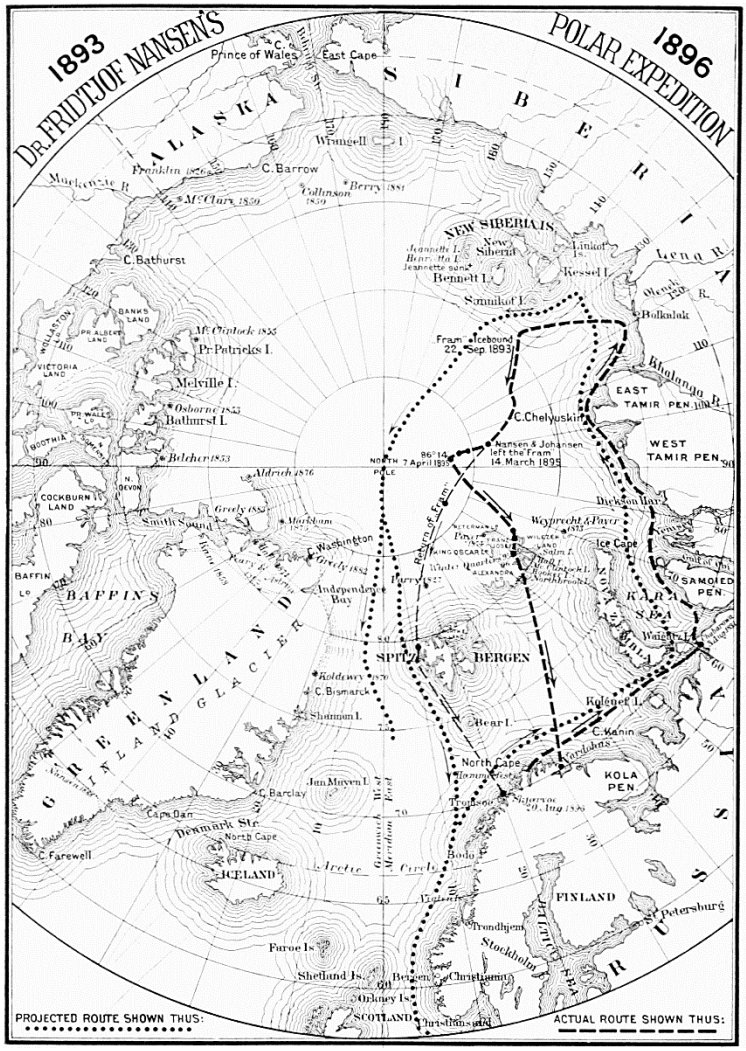
[63] Leopold McClintock, George Nares, E. Inglefield, Allen Young, Captain Wiggins, Captain Wharton, Fridtjof Nansen, George H. Richards, and Joseph D. Hooker, "How Can the North Polar Region Be Crossed? Discussion," *The Geographical Journal* 1, no. 1 (1893): 22-32; "Nansen's Polar Project," *New York Times*, March 9, 1890; "The North Pole Mystery. Plans Of A Norwegian Explorer," *New York Times*, July 26, 1890; "Dr. Nansen's Expedition," *Graphic*, November 19, 1892.

[64] "__" *Inverness Courier*, June 27, 1893.

[65] "Nansen's Polar Expedition," *London Daily News*, September 6, 1893; "The Nansen North Pole Expedition," *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 16, 1893.

and newspapers could only speculate on the outcome.[66] Various individuals weighed in on the risk Nansen had taken and where the *Fram* could be at the moment.[67] In the information void, the papers could only continue to mention Nansen in relation to other polar-related news throughout 1894, but in 1895 the mood became more anxious. As time wore on, reports of possible sightings made the papers, which heightened the anticipation and reinforced a narrative of man against nature, seeking to do what at that time seemed an elusive goal, promising tragedy. Polar veterans weighed in as figures of authority on the topic.[68] The *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic* published an article written by Greely, stating that the *Fram* was most certainly doomed, but members could potentially survive with such a man as Nansen.[69] As before, the public could only read what the papers




[66] "Dr. Nansen's North Pole Expedition," *Graphic*, October 14, 1893.
[67] "The Nansen Expedition," *Globe*, December 30, 1893.
[68] "Will Nansen Come Back: Lieut. David L. Brainard's Views as to His Chances of Success," *New York Times*, March 03, 1895; "Nansen's Perilous Trip," *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic*, September 29, 1895; "Doubts as to Nansen's Success, " *New York Times*, February 16, 1896; "He Doubts Nansen's Success: A Norwegian Antarctic Explorer Talks About the Drift Theory, " *New York Times*, March 14, 1896.
[69] A.W. Greely, "Will Dr. Nansen Return?", *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic*, March 22, 1896. In the United States, Greely, was an ardent critic of Nansen. Prior to Nansen's departure, Greely wrote, "It strikes me as almost incredible that the plan here advanced by Dr. Nansen should receive encouragement or support. It seems to me to be based on fallacious ideas as to physical condition within the polar regions, and to foreshadow, if attempted, barren results,

reported, and to them, the story was one of a daring pioneer, who disappeared into the unknown.

Nansen simply had to return. The columns written as the expedition set off had already stated that if Nansen returned and proved his theory correct, he would significantly advance knowledge of the polar region. In addition to heightening the suspense by engaging in speculation, opinion interviews, and re-recounting previous arctic tragedies, the papers also focused on Nansen as an individual. Lacking official news in April 1896, the *New York Times* published a column on Nansen's character. The article traced Nansen's familial heritage to a prominent Norwegian navigator, leaving the reader with the following characterization, "a clear case of hereditary character, going back to two centuries and a half!"[70] On 14 August 1896, the papers announced Nansen's return. His 13 August telegram was republished, with the essential details: Nansen's leaving of the *Fram*, his failure to reach the pole, attainment of the new highest north record, and the expected arrival of the *Fram* within the next few days.[71] The announcement to the public completed Nansen's heroic journey.

Figure 5: A. W. Greely, "Scientific Results of the Norwegian Polar Expedition, 1893-1896," *Popular Science Monthly* 57, August 1900.

Despite Nansen's failure to reach the north pole, his hero status was reconfirmed. Unlike Greely and his men, who had been rescued from the jaws of death, only to find the reports of cannibalism cast shadows over their moral character, Nansen's character remained intact, and the expeditions 'achievements' allowed for the public to reaffirm his heroic status.[72] As Nansen re-

apart from the suffering and death among its members. Dr. Nansen, so far as I know, has had no Arctic service; his crossing of Greenland, however difficult, is no more polar work than the scaling of mount St Elias. It is doubtful of any hydrographer that would treat seriously history of Paul currents, or if any Arctic traveler would endorse the whole scheme"; A.W. Greely, "Will Dr. Nansen Succeed?", *the Forum* 11, March-August 1891. Later, Greely would praise Nansen's achievement after the scientific results were analyzed. However, he did think it was unacceptable that Nansen had abandoned the *Fram* to attain the North Pole; Fridtjof Nansen, *Farthest North Vol I*, (London: Harpers & Brothers Publishers, 1898), 52. Greely's criticism did not gain public traction.

[70] "Dr. Nansen's Pedigree," *New York Times*, April 04, 1896.

[71] "Return of Dr. Nansen: Failure to Reach the Pole," *London Evening Standard*, August 14, 1896.

[72] Nansen failed to reach the North Pole, which was his primary intention, but his journey proved the polar current theory, his ship remained intact, he set a new record for furthest north, and his crew survived.

joined civilization, the newspapers focused on the chance discovery of Nansen by another expedition, the safe arrival of the *Fram* a week later, and the honors bestowed. "Accorded a reception which partook completely of a national character, all classes of the population from the King downward uniting to pay honour to the gallant explorer and his men," reported the *Evening Star*.[73] With the triumphant return of the expedition, and no morally questionable revelations, Nansen's story, even without the pole, was cause for celebration and veneration.[74] In a speech during his reception at Christiania, the papers reported that "while engaged in his work of exploration, he had always regarded himself as the heralds of Norwegian science."[75] By November of 1896, Nansen finished his personal account of the *Fram*'s journey.

During his time, Nansen stood for a nation. Writing on the history of Norway, T. K. Derry writes of Nansen: "the undisputed national hero of modern Norway, was a born leader of men; a sportsman, athlete, and artist; and a dedicated scientist. …the patriotic desire to vie with the Swedes was always one of Nansen's motives."[76] Before his departure, Nansen was an advocate for Norwegian sovereignty. Writing to the *Times* in 1893, the explorer expressed his views:

> But when the Norwegians and Swedes were united in 1814 they had nothing in common as regards history or nationality—as little in common as Norwegians have with Englishmen or Dutchman or Germans not to mention Danes; I might say even less, for we have had more in common, historically with these nations than with the Swedes, with whom we have had nothing to do except now and then a war.[77]

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[73] "Dr. Nansen's Return," *Evening Star*, August 14, 1896; "Met Nansen by Chance," *New York Times* (1857-1922), August 15, 1896; "Map of Nansen's Route," *Sun*, August 17, 1896; "Nansen's Homecoming," *Globe*, September 10, 1896.

[74] Riffenburgh's research points out that in the Anglo-American press, veneration of Nansen was subdued. Other expeditions made the news due to the typical struggles that often-made sensational stories. This reaffirms that polar exploration heroism was made by fragmented details, and the aspect of misery could play a significant role in framing of the narrative; Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 142-143.

[75] "Nansen's Homecoming," *Globe*, September 10, 1896.

[76] T. K. Derry, *A History of Modern Norway 1814-1972* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 231-232.

[77] Fridtjof Nansen, "The Relations Between Sweden and Norway," *Times*, January 2, 1893. Note: at a later time Nansen would speak on the achievement of Roald Amundsen, communicating his deep belief about Norwegians' predisposition for success. He was quoted in Britain's *the Times*, "Development of the national characteristic qualities allows a nation to attain its highest achievements. Our people's model mode of life and the country's natural conditions give Norwegians advantages in Polar exploration over other countries and explain the great results we have

Besides proving that man could adapt to the environment through scientific knowledge, his exploration effort also stood for a people who connected their identity to the north and were in the process of distinguishing themselves from their political union neighbors.[78] In later years, Nansen's image, built on polar fame, served Norwegian independence, which occurred in 1905.[79] Max Jones closely examines Nansen's path towards heroism, stating that to view it strictly from the nationalistic perspective is convenient for the national narrative but fails to explain Nansen's transnational hero status.[80] His investigation into the methods by which the *Fram* narrative traveled reconfirm the social psychology perspectives. A hero's tale needs a vehicle fulfilled in the immediate moments by newspapers, followed by personal accounts, lecture tours, and veneration by various institutions and societies. A collective societal response to the narrative reconfirmed Nansen as a hero.

Nansen's story followed Campbell's trajectory in a straightforward manner. He overcame the harsh environment through his wisdom and personal strength. He returned home to stand for some as an example of national character and to stand among polar explorers as a pioneer and scientist who benefited from immediate results—namely, proving the current theory. With little to criticize, in its given contexts, the publics' reaction was expectedly positive—Nansen was a pioneer and a hero. Many explorers sought his advice, and the *Fram* sailed again, to a different polar end, the South Pole, to achieve a different record under Roald Amundsen.

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accomplished. Therefore we must continue these explorations. We should not do what others can do better, but concentrate our faculties on doing what we can do better than others"; "Dr. Nansen on Polar Exploration," *Times*, March 15, 1912.

[78] John McCannon, *A History of the Arctic: Nature, Exploration and Exploitation* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 160-161; Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer*, 34, 113-114, 140; Max Jones, "Exploration, Celebrity, and the Making of a Transnational Hero: Fridtjof Nansen and the *Fram* Expedition," *The Journal of Modern History* 93, no. 1 (2021): 71, 77-78.

[79] Derry, *A History of Modern Norway*, 160, 165.

[80] Jones, "Exploration, Celebrity, and the Making of a Transnational Hero," 70-71.

**Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-*1918*)[81]**

*"[It is] imperative that the Survey shall not allow other of its members to take any risks out of the ordinary to rescue Stefansson, whose life, to put it quite pointedly, is not worth it."*[82]

*-W. H. Boyd and O.E. LeRoy, 1914*

The Canadian arctic region has long been a critical aspect of Canada's sovereignty. Although the English handed the territory over to the Canadian domain, traders and explorers from other countries continued to venture into the territories Canada understood to be within its borders, producing governmental anxiety over possible territorial disputes.[83] The Dominion Government had taken various measures to establish physical control, which necessitated accurate mapping. Within this national context, the Canadian Arctic Expedition appears on the pages of arctic history.[84] "Peary's attainment of the North Pole in 1909 … enabled the world to give attention to problems unrelated to polar discovery and afforded men an opportunity to realize not only that a million square miles in the Arctic still remained marked on the maps as 'unexplored territory,'" reflected Captain Robert Bartlett in his account.[85] However, the government did not actively conceive the expedition; instead, during a precise moment in history, the government's interests aligned with that of an explorer, who was short on funds for an arctic enterprise.[86]

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[81] The expedition was originally planned to conclude in 1916 but was subsequently extended due to Stefansson's adjustments to circumstances.

[82]Quoted in Richard J. Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 78. Note: W.H. Boyd and O.E. LeRoy were members of the Geological Survey, influential in the expedition's formation and organization into two entities. They did not take part in the actual expedition; Stuart E. Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1918* (Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2011), 333.

[83] Shelagh D. Grant, *Polar Imperative: a History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America Vancouver* (Vancouver, Canada: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 156, 159-161, 165-169, 176-178, 194-220.

[84] Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition,* 5-11; Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, 5-7, 63-64.

[85] Robert Bartlett and Ralph T. Hale, *The Last Voyage of The Karluk* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1916), 6.

[86] Vilhjalmur Stefansson was born to Icelandic parents, who immigrated to the Canadian Dominion. After his birth the family subsequently moved to the United States, where Stefansson completed his education and resided majority of his life. His first expedition was sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History. He'd conceived an idea for a second expedition immediately after his return; however, the funds promised by the same museum, National Geographic Society of New York, and Harvard Travelers Club were not enough for his plan. In search for more

The expedition's complex organization produced friction among the members, which later became a source of controversy. Placed under Vilhjalmur Stefansson's command, the expedition was composed of a Northern and a Southern party. The nature of the expedition was scientific, with the explorative element to complete the geographic picture of the dominion's territory.[87] The orders from the Department of the Navy explicitly outlined the tasks for each party; however, due to the vast scope of the scientific work, numerous departments within the Canadian government were involved, which complicated communication channels, reporting, and interests.[88]

The fanfare of man's venture into the Arctic was not new, but it could still sell a story. Stefansson, a young ethnologist, was known for his theory about 'Blonde Eskimos' after his expedition with Dr. Rudolph Anderson, 1908-1912, conducted for the American Museum of Natural History.[89] As Stefansson was getting ready to depart, newspapers reported on the expedition's scattered available facts, intended purpose, and the farewell grandeur accorded to the

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funding, through personal contacts, Stefansson approached the Canadian Government at a time when it was concerned with foreign nations discovering territory within the dominion. The government agreed to sponsor the entire expedition, stipulating that the other institutions had to withdraw their support, that Stefansson would accept British citizenship, and the expedition would sail under the British flag; Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition,* 13-14; "From Gilbert H. Grosvenor Director National Geographic Society Washington D.C.," February 11, 1913, Mss-98, Box 4, Vilhjalmur Stefansson Papers, Rauner Special Collections Library Repository, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire; "From ? To Stefansson," February 12, 1913, Mss-98, Box 4; "Certified copy of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council," February 22, 1913, Mss-98, Box 4; "Order in Council Authorizing Expedition," February 22, 1913, Mss-98, Box 4.

[87] "Department of the Naval Service, Canada – Ottawa," May 29, 1913, Mss-98, Box 4; "Arctic Exploration and the New Stefansson Expedition," *Scientific American Supplement*, May 3, 1913, Mss-198, Box 1, Folder 1, Robert Peary Papers, Rauner Special Collections Library Repository, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire; "Explorers' Practical Aims: Hope to Establish Trade Routes and Discover Copper Deposits," *New York Times*, June 18, 1913.

[88] Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1918,* 9-11; Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, 75-78; "Department of the Naval Service, Canada – Ottawa," May 29, 1913, Mss-98, Box 4.

[89] "Stefansson's Polar Trip Is for Canada," *New York Times*, February 15, 1913. Note: the claims about 'Blonde Eskimos' were a source of criticism for Stefansson from the very moment of their appearance in the press. In his autobiography, *Discovery*, Stefansson wrote, "The heaviest blow against me was struck by the greatest of northern historians and most famous of European polar explorers, Fridtjof Nansen, whose opinion of my alleged report, cabled to New York, was indicated by his suggestion that the United States must have produced another Dr. Cook. … Another equally famous Norwegian explorer … Roald Amundsen"; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 136.

men.[90] No stranger to newspapers, Stefansson secured contracts with several prominent papers and exclusive publishing rights, an aspect that caused an internal dispute among the men before the expeditions' departure.[91] Writing for the *New York Times* on the departure, Stefansson tried to set his efforts apart:

> This expedition differs in a fortunate way from others that have sailed north, for while no money has been squandered in equipment, no department of the expedition has been stinted by the Canadian government and money which it seemed desirable to spend to attain the end in view….We shall cross no bridges till we come to them, and we'll do each day the things that seem wise in the light of the events of that day. It is impossible for us to say therefore just where we are going or how far, or to tell when we shall return or how.[92]

The excitement for the public began a few months later; ships in the area had not sighted the *Karluk* since October, and speculation arose due to the harsh seasonal conditions and a severe storm.[93]

A familiar polar type of tragedy began to take shape, which had produced heroes before. "Stefansson's Ship Lost in Arctic Ice," announced the *New York Tribune* on the front page December 9, 1913, summarizing events about the expedition and reprinting Stefansson's message about his separation from the nipped vessel.[94] Organized initially as two separate parties, the vanishing of the *Karluk* created an additional story. The three stories occurring in parallel were: the Southern Party under Dr. Anderson, the plight of the *Karluk* under Captain Bartlett, and the (new) Northern Party under Stefansson. Long lines of communication delivered fragmented bits of news, often reaching official channels many months after being written. Speculations about the *Karluk* continued in the absence of official news until Captain Bartlett reached Nome, Alaska, on

[90] "To Explore Region Unknown on Map," *Evening Star*, June 27, 1913.
[91] Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson and the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1918*, 15, 20-24, 102; Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, 60-61, 72.
[92] Vilhjalmur Stefansson, "Stefansson's Ship Sails for Arctic," *New York Times*, June 18, 1913.
[93] "Believe Stefansson and Arctic Ship Lost," *Sun*, November 18, 1913; "Expedition Probably Safe," *Daily News* (Canada), November 19, 1913.
[94] "Stefansson's Ship Lost in Arctic Ice," *New York Tribune*, December 9, 1913; "Karluk Adrift Explorer Ashore," *Daily News* (Canada), December 9, 1913.

May 24, 1914; the newspapers announced the ship's ordeal six days later.[95] *New York Times* and *Times Dispatch* featured the story on the front page, beside the columns that focused on the sinking of the *Empress* liner, which reinforced, albite subconsciously, the plight narrative.[96] The ship's rescue played out in the press, with Captain Bartlett emerging as a hero; the ordeal on Wrangel Island further reinforced public perceptions about the Arctic, and thereby a heroic narrative.[97] Stefansson's story unfolded in parallel to the *Karluk* and fluctuated between announcements of his plans and long communication voids that kindled speculations of his death.[98] Perhaps, the least eventful story in the newspapers was that of the Southern Party. Dr. Anderson's return and completion of work made only a brief appearance in the news columns.

What was published and what was happening behind the scenes were two different stories. An article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, authored by someone reportedly close to the Southern Party, accosted Stefansson's character, claiming that the entire expedition was a money-making venture for publishing deals.[99] However, Stefansson was acquiring territory for the Dominion in 1916, and the government was preoccupied with the war in its second year on the European continent, a Shell

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[95] "Hear The Karluk Left Stefansson: Ottawa Alive with Rumors That His Shipmates Abandoned Him While Explorer Was Hunting, " *New York Times*, December 12, 1913; "Not Alarmed For Karluk: Even in Crush Those Aboard Could Escape, Stefansson Told Friends," *New York Times*, December 23, 1913; "Arctic Ship Crushed in the Ice and Sinks," *Evening Star*, May 30, 1914; "Karluk Crushed in Northern Ice," *New Westminster News* (Canada), May 30, 1914; "Cutter Bear to Go for Karluk's Men: Arctic's Pathfinder Will Be Sent to Wrangel Island for The Marooned Scientists," *New York Times*, May 31, 1914.

[96] "Karluk is Sunk in Arctic Ice," *New York Times*, May 30, 1914; "Stefansson's Ship Crushed in Ice and Sunk," *Times Dispatch*, May 30, 1914.

[97] "Eight are Saved of Karluk's Men," *New York Times*, September 14, 1914; "Dojen Arctic Explorers Perished, Bear at Home," *Lancaster News*, September 15, 1914; "Capt Bartlett Would Go Back to Arctics: Skipper of the Ill Fated Karluk is Guest at the City Club," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 28, 1914; "Canadian Arctic expedition," *Morning Post*, November 21, 1914; "Captain Bartlett's Story of The Karluk's Last Voyage," *New York Times,* November 19, 1916.

[98] "Air Expedition to Seek Stefansson," *Daily News* (Canada), January 25, 1915; "3 Vessels on Look Out for Stefansson, " *Nome Daily Nugget,* August 16, 1915; "No Trace Found of Northern Explorer," *Fort George Herald*, September 10, 1915; "Stefansson Safe, Finds a New Land," *Evening Star*, September 17, 1915; "Search for Land Seen by Peary, Stefansson Plan," *New York Times*, November 25, 1916; "Explorer is Safe Report," *Washington Herald*, December 27, 1917; "First Authentic Report from Stefansson," *Cordova Daily*, February 5, 1918.

[99] Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, 121.

Committee corruption scandal, and other geopolitical affairs.[100] The negative characterization did not materialize into a public scandal. Stefansson continued for another two years, disappearing into the unknown and re-emerging with discoveries.[101] Although the frequency diminished, Stefansson's name and achievements continued to appear in the papers throughout World War I (WWI), often crowded by news of the war and off the front pages. His return in 1918, from the void of "Frozen Wastes of the Arctic," made the news.[102] A behind-the-scenes look reveals the extensive communication between the Department of the Navy and Stefansson about expedition expenditure, investigations into shipwrecks, Stefansson's lecture tour, and compilation of expedition-related reports.[103] The service appeared to be increasingly annoyed with Stefansson's behavior, but the public saw a different story. Stefansson had ventured into the unknown, and one of his ships suffered a typical polar tragedy. In novel ways, he managed to live off the land and discover new territory. Three years later, Stefansson's account, *The Friendly Arctic* (1921), opened the door to the internal disputes of the expedition. He levied charges of mutiny and insubordination against Dr. Anderson, prompting him to respond, which he did through the newspapers.[104]

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[100] Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, 120. Note: The Naval Service attempted to recall Stefansson in 1916, an effort that failed. Literature speculates that Stefansson had received word of the service's desire to recall him, but possibly used the lack of written orders as a way to ignore the wishes of the service and proceeded with a new plan; Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, 123-125.

[101] "Several Islands Added to Dominion by V. Stefansson," *Victoria Daily Times*, January 15, 1918.

[102] "Returns from Frozen Wastes of the Arctic," *Daily Colonist*, September 18, 1918; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, "Long Journey Over Ice," *New York Times*, September 18, 1915; "Stefansson Returns: Reaches Vancouver After Five-Year Stay in The Arctic," *New York Times*, September 17, 1918; "Sure Explorer Would Win Goal: McConnell, Stefansson's Secretary, Never Lost Hope in The Darkest Hour," *New York Times*, September 18, 1915.

[103] "Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats to Stefansson," May 5, 1914, "Stefansson to Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats," August 12, 1916, Mss-98, Box 4; "Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats to Stefansson," April 3, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats to Stefansson," June 29, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Stefansson to Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats," July 26, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats to Stefansson," September 13, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Stefansson to Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats," September 19, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Stefansson to Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats," September 23, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats to Stefansson," October 3, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Stefansson to Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats," November 13, 1918, Mss-98, Box 4; "Stefansson to Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats," January7, 1919, Mss-98, Box 4; "Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats to Stefansson," October 16, 1919, Mss-98, Box 4.

[104] Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson*, 339-353; "Associate Explorer Assails Stefansson: Charges Extravagance In Arctic Expedition--Demands For A Canadian Government Inquiry," *New York Times*, January 14, 1922; "Says

However, the government quickly silenced the critics.[105] To the newspaper, this was a story to tell, to the Canadian Government that supported the expedition, which turned out to cost nearly seven times the expected amount, along with the American societies which revered Stefansson, this was a potential for embarrassment.

So, what to make of Stefansson as a hero? To a modern view, he fits a description of a daring pioneer who understood the power of publicity; but in the early twentieth century, arctic explorers were still seen as heroic. Only a few years earlier, Robert E. Peary claimed to have reached the North Pole, Amundsen and Scott raced for the South Pole, Shackleton attempted to cross the Antarctic continent, and Richard Byrd would fly over the North Pole in 1926. Each explorer sought out innovations to gain an advantage in the harsh climate. Stefansson did not differ from his contemporaries; he ambitiously pursued his aims through novel means, but unlike his contemporaries, Stefansson advanced a different view of the arctic to dispel the widely accepted harshness. His journey met Campbell's framework, and the public, who only knew the details from the press, formed their view from the available fragments. In the moment of his return, personal journals of all members, nor the correspondences of the government, who stood to be potentially embarrassed from their loss of control over Stefansson's ventures, were unavailable to challenge the prevailing view. Furthermore, the feud with Anderson came into the public sphere three years after the expedition. By then, in the public's mind, Stefansson had crystallized his image through lecture tours, publicity, and the sheer energy he had brought to his follow-on ventures in the Arctic.

**Terra Nova Expedition (1910-1912)**

Stefansson Trip Cost Canada $500,000: Much Of This Was Lumped Under 'War Expenditures,' Professor O'Neill Declares," *New York Times*, January 19, 1922; Frank P. Sibley, "Still Fighting Those Quarrels That Heated The Frozen North," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 29, 1922; "Defends Explorer from Accusations," *Evening Star*, January 18, 1922; "Stefansson Declares He'd Welcome Inquiry," *New York Times*, January 15, 1922.

[105] Jenness, *Stefansson, Dr. Anderson*, 348.

*"We are weak, writing is difficult, but for my own sake I do not regret this journey, which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with a greater fortitude as ever in the past period."*[106]

*-Robert Falcon Scott, 1912*

The fate of Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his party is perhaps one of the more commonly known arctic tragedies. Historians have closely scrutinized the events of Scott's fated expedition to examine his leadership, to condemn or exonerate, and to provide commentary on polar exploration. As a Naval Officer, Scott was a product of strict adherence to orders culture, "Conformity, obedience, centralisation, abstract reasoning, unthinking bravery, chivalric idealism, unswerving duty in the narrowest sense …were the battle cries of the navy Scott joined."[107] He began his career as a cadet in 1881, and twenty years later, took part in his first polar expedition. Overall, his appearance on the pages of polar history occurs in the final decades of the Golden Age.

Before his final journey, Scott was already a known figure. After the return of the *Discovery Expedition* in 1904, Sir Clements Markham described him as a "'bold and skillful navigator, the ideal director of a scientific staff, the organizer of measures securing the health and good spirits of his people and the beloved commander of the chosen band of explorers who were ready to face hardships and dangers to secure his approval.'"[108] The extensive historical reflection on Scott as a polar figure offers an in-depth look behind the curtains and the massive efforts Markham went to ensure the crew of the *Discovery* had a proper welcome.[109] This comprehensive view into the mechanisms of heroic creation supports that heroes can be invented for a purpose, that the narrative is supported by public veneration, such as the welcome accorded, the dinners

[106] Robert Falcon Scott*, Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition*, ed. Max Jones (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2005), 422.
[107] David Crane, *Scott of the Antarctica* (New York: Random House, 2005), 29
[108] "Back from the Antarctica," *Graphic*, September 17, 1904; Stephanie Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 194.
[109] Crane, *Scott of the Antarctica*, 270, 275-282.

held in honor of, the lectures that follow, and the eventual publishing of personal accounts. The significant factor that must be recognized is that few would ever know the details, as Crane aptly summarizes:

> One could read the near-thousand pages of *The Voyage of The Discovery* and never know that there had been any tensions in the wardroom…that Barne had nearly lost them half a dozen of men, or Armitage had spent the last year sulking in his tent. It plainly suited Scott's purpose to project an image of contented unity to the Admiralty and to the public, and yet the real point is that there would not have been a single man on the ship…who would have wanted it told differently or not closed ranks around the "myth" perpetuated in his expedition history.[110]

The pattern of heroic invention remained the same, even towards the end of the Golden Age. In the shadows of his established heroism, Scott's final tragedy, unmarred by depravity, wrote itself with the help of prominent figures in British society.

Scott, already famous, shouldered a national burden. The expedition began against the backdrop of Ernest Shackleton's failed attempt to reach the South Pole and a surprise revelation that the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen, had changed his arctic plans and was heading south. As the expedition departed, the *Sheffield Telegraph* unintentionally foreshadowed the tragic end, "If he fails, failure will not be due to any lack of precaution to ensure success in his formidable duel between human science, courage, and resources on the one side, and the 'vis inertiae' of Nature in her most enigmatic mood on the other."[111] The papers followed the ship's progress to New Zealand, reported on Shackleton's expedition results, and briefly mentioned the efforts of a Japanese explorer also heading south. Roald Amundsen's change in plans only registered briefly in a few papers in October 1910 but would soon play a key role in framing the narrative. The public received official news in March 1911; a telegram from Scott's expedition was republished

[110] Crane, *Scott of the Antarctica*, 286.
[111] "Southward Ho!", *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, June 02, 1910.

detailing the difficulties met proceeding south, including its encounter of the *Fram* and Amundsen's winter camp.[112] Despite the expedition's design being chiefly scientific, as reported in the early stages of Scott's fundraising and preparations, the context that was taking shape in the papers reflected competitive undertones. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* detailed the meeting between the expeditions' members and characterized the *Terra Nova*'s mood as "one of friendly competition."[113] The rivalry framing reflected the public perception of the nation's pride at stake.

Scott's tragic end is an ideal example of heroic status crystallized in death. As 1911 ended, the race to the South Pole held the public in suspense. Scott's ship, *Terra Nova*, which returned to New Zealand in June 1911, sailed again to pick up the expedition members as planned. For the next few months, the information void was filled with rehashing of previously known details, with particular attention paid to the rivalry for the title. News of Amundsen's achievement arrived in March 1912. The *Times* sought to diminish Amundsen's achievement and character, "He had no intention of carrying out scientific investigations; he was unhampered with the heavy equipment required for this purpose; he had nothing to think of but his dogs, his sledges, his provisions, and clothing." [114] The article's framing sought to build Scott's effort as the more legitimate and valiant one. In April 1912, (old) official news came with the ship's return without Scott—he chose to remain another year.[115] Columns were dedicated to illustrating the dangers of the ice and the hazards the ship overcame, consistently reinforcing the image of the harsh environment in which two nations competed. With no other news from Scott, the papers could only speculate if he had reached the Pole since the ship's departure. The *Terra Nova*'s next departure was publicized in the

[112] "Terra Nova's Peril," *Irish Independent*, March 28, 1911; "Antarctic Exploration," *Westminster Gazette*, March 28, 1911; "Race to the South Pole," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, March 28, 1911; "Captain Scott's Expedition," *Daily Telegraph & Courier*, March 28, 1911; "In Race for Pole," *Evening Star*, March 28, 1911.
[113] "Explorers Meet," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, April 1, 1911.
[114] "Captain Amundsen's Achievement," *Times*, March 9, 1912.
[115] "News of Captain Scott," *Evening Mail*, April 1, 1912; "Voyage of the Terra Nova," *Evening Mail*, April 5, 1912.

last months of 1912, with a focus on the stores and the ship's upkeep. After months of silence, the tragedy became known on February 10, 1913; Captain Scott and four men perished on their return from the South Pole, which they reached on January 17, 1912, only to find a Norwegian flag planted December 14, 1911. The newspapers immediately lionized their man:

> A terrible fate, which has not its equal in the history of polar exploration since the death of Sir John Franklin, has overtaken Captain Scott and his gallant band of explorers in the Antarctic wilderness. The party and their famous leader have perished. The poignancy of the tragedies increased by the fact that Captain Scott had won the laurels, and set foot on the South Pole last January soon after Amundsen….He had, as he admitted afterwards, 'stolen a march' on Scott by letting it be thought that he was going to the Arctic.[116]

Columns included the King's telegram, other explorers' comments on the tragedy, and most importantly, Scott's last solemn but proud message to the public.

Despite the tragic failure, heroism persists. Literature has deeply reflected on British society's tremendous response to the disaster. Stephanie Barczewski closely examined Scotts' place in the British national context and the immediate search for answers. In her book, *Heroic Failure and the British*, Barczewski contextualizes the societal response as national anxiety over the empire's decline. The author states that "Briton's needed Scott's heroism not to show them that their empire was benevolent, just and moral, but rather to reassure them that their empire, and their nation, were just as strong and powerful as they had been decades earlier."[117] This specific example of creating 'heroic failure' affirms Allison and Goethals' assertion that heroes "fulfill important physical, emotional, and existential needs and that the mental construction and shaping of heroes occurs in the service of satisfying these needs."[118] Moreover, it supports the propensity of individuals to accept figures as heroes if they perish in pursuit of great goals. Scott embodied the national character in a race with other nations for the last Pole. In addition to the demise itself,

[116] "Antarctic Disaster," *Northern Whig*, February 11, 1913.
[117] Stephanie Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 219.
[118] Goethals and Allison, "Making Heroes," 209.

it is essential to note that the language—the narrative—that surrounded the event played an incredible role in framing this death as heroic. No scandalous controversy came to light from Scott's journals, and his leadership would not be debated until decades after the fact.[119] The controversy of Amundsen's change in plans served a reinforcing role in elevating Scott and framed Scott as the underdog.[120] Scott's stoic final message to the public assuaged the national fears and provided all with an explanation for the failure—but most importantly, on the individual level, it was inspiring. His letter was a direct artifact of his character—a display of bravery often seen in works of fiction that communicate an unwritten moral code—a heroic way to face death.

Furthermore, public veneration quickly transcended the press columns into physical acts. Scott's return did not end with an announcement in the papers or slowly fade into the obscurity of public memory; instead, the society collectively grieved. The national service held on February 14, 1913, at St. Paul Cathedral is aptly summarized by a *Star* report, "The Memorial Service at Saint Paul was a true national tribute to the heroic dead…. That noble assembly of the British people in the national cathedral—King, Prime Minister, Navy, Army, and the democracy. There never was a more spontaneous requiem than this."[121] On the day of the service, schools read the story about Captain Scott to children, and funds were created for donations for a commemorative statue.[122] Scott's end turned into what Cubitt described as "objects of some kind of collective

[119] Barczewski points out that in the search for answer to the failure, Edgar Evans's behavior gained some attention in the press. Specifically, the press focused on his breakdown and the affect it may have had on the rest of the party on their return journey; Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British, 214-215.* However compared to scandals where mutiny and cannibalism were central to a moral debate this is less controversial issue. When taking Allison and Goethals' work into consideration, the role of this specific aspect is further minimized; Evan's behavior was a reflection of his individual character, not Scotts'. Scott's moral character remained entirely intact in the immediate years after the tragedy.

[120] Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British*, 207.

[121] Quoted in Max Jones, "'Our King upon his knees': the public commemoration of Captain Scott's last Antarctic expedition," in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, ed. Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 109.

[122] Jones, "'Our King upon his knees,'" 106-108, 113.

emotional investment," which went on to endure time.[123] This societal response reaffirms Allison and Goethals's work on the influence of heroes and what they do for individuals and society. The British public accepted Scott as an individual model for heroic behavior.

**Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-1917)**

*"After the conquest of the South Pole by Amundsen, who, by a narrow margin of days only, was in advance of the British Expedition under Scott, there remained but one great main object of the Antarctic journeyings—the crossing of the South Polar continent from sea to sea."*[124]

*-Ernest Shackleton, 1920*

The *Endurance* sailed at the end of the Golden Age. Shackleton's motivation for his expedition was wrapped up in scientific pursuit, but it candidly reflected a desire to be the first to attain the last remaining goal, the crossing of the continent. He hinted at his plan to return to Antarctica in fall 1913 and made the final announcement via a letter to the *Times* on December 29, 1913.[125] On December 30 and 31st, the *Times* ran extensive columns detailing the expedition's plans for the crossing and the scientific aims. A section was dedicated to the question of value:

> The question has frequently been raised, especially since the terrible tragedies of the Scott and Mawson expeditions—is it worth it? Is geographical exploration really worth the risk of so much money, time, and valuable human lives? Of course, if it were only a question of precision glory it would be scarcely justified. But surely the conquest of the air and the conquest of the sea, which cost many lives in the early days of navigation, were both worth it. I may mention an important result which has followed the establishment by Dr. Mawsen of a wireless and meteorological station at Maquarie Island, midway between Antarctica on the land, and New Zealand and Australia on the other.[126]

In a different column, in February 1914, Shackleton weighed in on Mawson's efforts and the importance of his work. The arguments for yet another journey, of course, served Shackleton, but curiously, in his appraisal for Mawson, Shackleton recognized the dilemma of delayed

[123] Cubitt and Warren, *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, 3.
[124] Ernest Shackleton, *South* (New York, 1920), 1.
[125] "The South Pole," *Times*, December 29, 1913; "Sir E. Shackleton's Plans," *Times*, December 30, 1913.
[126] "The Antarctic," *Times*, December 31, 1913.

communication, "Dr. Mawson quite rightly did not wish to entrust the history of the journey to wireless telegraphy, as an incomplete story would have given rise to all sorts of misleading conjectures."[127] The information gap and the fragmented nature of reporting was a significant contributor to first perceptions.

With the poles attained, the utility of yet another expedition had to be explained. "Enough life and money has been spent on this sterile quest. The Pole has already been discovered. What is the use of another expedition?" wrote Winston Churchill, then the First Lord of the Admiralty to Shackleton, who had requested assistance.[128] This fundamental argument over utility was not a new phenomenon in British society.[129] The debate persisted in authority circles, as it did in the public sphere. The *Times* featured articles on geography as an essential discipline for the empire, Geographic Society's support for the expedition, and Earl Curzon's letter to Shackleton, in which he stated that crossing the continent was a task for an Englishman.[130] The *Globe* curiously interpreted Shackleton's purposes entirely as scientific:

> The best wishes of the nation will go with Sir Ernest Shackleton and his comrades, none the less hearty and sincere because their expedition is purely scientific in its objects. The Pole has been discovered: the race has been won: there is no longer any rivalry for the honour of being the first to reach it. So many books have been written—not the least

[127] "Mawson Expedition," *Times*, February 26, 1914. Note: Douglas Mawson led the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (1911-1914), aimed to explore areas around the Antarctic, with an emphasis on a variety of scientific work. As during many other expeditions, several members of the expedition perished. As Shackleton was getting ready to depart, Mawson's story played out in the papers; Douglas Mawson, *The Home of the Blizzard*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 5-7.

[128] Quoted in Stephanie Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies: Scott, Shackleton and the Changing Face of Heroism* (London: Continuum Books, 2007), 88.

[129] In his book, *The Gates of Hell*, Andrew Lambert offers an overview of the debate on the governments support for polar exploration immediately after the disappearance of Franklin and the ensuing search efforts. He further highlights the role of prominent individuals in the Admiralty, who were ardent supporters of ventures to the pole. The financial costs, and human lives, against the countless tragedies were hard to justify; Andrew Lambert, *The Gates of Hell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 188-192, 204-205, 215-216, 226, 260-272. Furthermore, the scientific knowledge would often take years to be digested by the respective disciplines, a benefit that was hard to perceive, and was certainly not immediate, instead accumulative overtime. Even the eventual discovery of the NWP by Roald Amundsen, would prove to be less than fruitful, as the navigability of the route, to this day remains largely dependent on the environmental conditions. Currently the eastern passage seems to me more probable than the NWP.

[130] "Geography and the Empire," *Times*, May 21, 1912; "Spurts in Exploration." *Times*, May 19, 1914; "The Polar Expedition," *Times*, January 2, 1914.

> excellent by Sir Ernest himself —on the conditions of Polar travel that there is little new to be said.[131]

Numerous columns filled the papers on the preparations and the scientific aims to answer the criticism ahead of time; however, despite the *Globe's* interpretation, a rivalry formed in the columns of the *Times*. As Shackleton's departure approached, another Austrian expedition was being planned for the region. It briefly made the papers, with Shackleton showing a will to cooperate only in certain scientific respects, but nothing further.[132]

Against the recent tragedy of Scott, and the prevailing perceptions of Amundsen's duplicity, this was an opportunity for a national victory. The columns were already formulating a narrative, filling the public minds with expectations—this was, at that time, perhaps the final feat. After all, the British could only claim geographic features and a series of tragedies in the polar history. The titles for the poles belonged, respectively, to an American and a Norwegian. The NWP was another Norwegian feat. The eastern passage belonged to Nils Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld.[133] The empire had stirred many nations into polar pursuits but failed to attain any of the goals themselves.

Like many before it, Shackleton's expedition failed to attain its aims but was an incredible feat of survival. However, unlike the tragedies before it, the heroic perception was subdued. The anxiety over the situation in Europe featured alongside Shackleton's preparations. The Imperial Trans-Antarctic expedition sailed on August 1, 1914, the day Germany declared war on the Russian Empire. His departure was a muted affair, but still reported on by the papers, the King had

[131] "Southward, Ho!", *Globe*, December 29, 1913.
[132] "Rivalry In Exploration," *Times*, 28 Feb. 1914; "Sir Ernest Shackleton and Dr. Koenig," *Times*, 4 Mar. 1914; "Antarctic Rivalry," *Times*, 12 Mar. 1914.
[133] Nils Nordenskiöld was of Finnish-Swedish descent and discovered the Northern Sea Route during his expedition in 1878-1879.

to adjust his plans but met with the expedition leader nonetheless; Queen Alexandria wished the explorer well.[134] In many papers, the columns were swallowed up by reports from battles around the European continent. Shackleton wrote the Admiralty offering his services to the nation but was instructed to proceed with the expedition, which was reported on, albeit in lesser frequency.[135] The papers focused primarily on the European crisis; Shackleton's progress was relegated to shorter columns. On November 9, 1914, a column in *Leeds Mercury* wrote, "The war has carried the sound of its guns all round the world, and perhaps the only ones who are sure of escaping from the echoes are Sir Ernest Shackleton and his men."[136] The column was focused on the war rather than an attempt to pass judgment against Shackleton, but this unintentional sentiment would return.

Shackleton's journey was overtaken by the great war, a more heroic setting than a struggle in Antarctica. 1914 ended with brief reporting on the expedition's delay as a result of a strike at the Sydney docks, with an additional delay at the beginning of 1915 due to ice. The announcement of the final departure made an appearance in February 1915, followed by a typical silence in communication from the expedition to the world. Vilhjalmur Stefansson's reappearance from the Arctic silence jolted the *Daily Mirror* to reflect on the current mood, "Most of us had forgotten Stefansson, had forgotten almost that such a thing as Polar exploration ever thrilled or interested the world. The brief message from the Canadian Arctic Expedition brought us back to recognition of the other times and other moods."[137] Indeed, after its departure, nothing was officially heard from the expedition during 1915. The pattern of repeating known facts and speculations surrounding the expedition's fate was exceptionally subdued—the war produced heroes at an

[134] "The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition," *Globe*, August 1, 1914; "Farewell to Explorers," *Daily Mirror*, August 1, 1914.
[135] "War not to Interfere with the Expedition," *Manchester Courier*, August 6, 1914; "Explorer Offers His Ship," *Sheerness Times Guardian*, August 8, 1914; "A Patriotic Offer," *Marylebone Mercury*, August 8, 1914.
[136] "A World-Wide War," *Leeds Mercury*, November 9, 1914.
[137] "The Men Who Don't Know," *Daily Mirror*, September 20, 1915.

accelerated pace. During the spring of 1916, official news came from one of Shackleton's ships, the *Aurora* was nipped, and some of the Ross Sea Party crew became separated, requiring a relief effort.[138] From Shackleton and his party, the world remained in the dark. Talk of relief efforts peppered the columns, Shackleton's father expressed a calm attitude towards the situation.[139] Like many before him, the journey began to morph into a story of survival. On June 1, 1916, the *Times* reported on the government's action towards outfitting a relief expedition. The same day, the *Globe* broke the news of Shackleton's survival and on the status of the expedition, "There are now two parties awaiting relief on either side of the Antarctic Continent, the 22 men left by Shackleton…and a shore party of 10 men stranded on the Ross Barrier."[140] The following day, the country learned of the ordeal from an official telegram republished by the *Times* on page 7, under the headline of "750 Mile Journey to Get Help."[141] The story had entered its final stage; all that remained was the rescue of the men.

The final chapter unfolded in the papers alongside war reports. A review of the various papers reveals that the columns were often short and away from the front pages. September 1916, the remaining 22 men were rescued, but the grand accomplishment did not receive the same attention as Scott's tragic death. Seven of the ten men of the stranded Ross Sea Party were rescued on 10 January 1917.[142] Shackleton's return to Britain occurred on May 30, 1917, almost 13 months after the announcement of his survival. His arrival earned only a brief mention on the back

[138] "Shackleton's Plight," *Times*, 25 Mar. 1916; "Shackleton's Plight," *Times*, 27 Mar. 1916; "Shackleton: Grave Outlook," *Globe*, March 25, 1916; "Aurora's Homecoming," *Times*, April 4, 1916; "Shackleton Expedition," *Times*, May 9, 1916; "Relief Ship to go After Shackleton," *Washington Times*, March 25, 1916; "Anxiety for the Endurance," *Daily News*, April 15, 1916.
[139] "Dr. Shackleton's View," *Westminster Gazette*, March 25, 1916.
[140] "Shackleton's Escape," *Globe*, June 1, 1916.
[141] "Sir E. Shackleton's Story," *Times*, June 2, 1916.
[142] "Shackleton's Ross Sea Party," *Evening Mail*, February 7, 1917.

pages.[143]

The context within which Shackleton's journey occurred overshadowed the achievement. Shackleton should have been welcomed with fanfare if the previous polar journeys served as a broadly applicable model. However, he did not receive even a fraction of his colleague's veneration three years previously. Barczewski, who has extensively examined the changing nature of heroism for both explorers, attributed this difference to the context—namely, the war and the difficulty of viewing an Antarctic venture as a noble quest against such backdrop.[144] Shackleton's return coincided with the Battle of Jutland, resulting in the press's shift in focus.[145] For example, on June 5, 1916, *Evening Mail* printed the King's message to Shackleton—a short column at the bottom of the front page, crowded by headlines such as "Great Naval Battle," "Verdun Battle Line Extended," "Attacks on Ypres Salient," and "The Turkish Success in Asia Minor."[146] In September, when he rescued the 22 men left on Elephant Island, the Battle of the Somme was in its third month. As Zimbardo's research has shown, men dying on the battlefield is a context that is perceived far more heroic, and this was most certainly the case during Shackleton's return. As the *Daily Mirror* reflected in 1915, society had left behind the excitement of polar exploration. Another factor that Barczewski highlights in her historiography is Shackleton's background. Born in Ireland and a supporter of the union, Shackleton could not be wholly embraced by the Irish nor the British due to the Anglo-Irish War 1916-1920.[147] To venerate Shackleton at the national level was politically problematic for both sides. The subdued reaction to Shackleton underscores Allison

[143] "Sir E. Shackleton's Return to England," *Times*, May 30, 1917; "Sir E. Shackleton's Return to England," *Evening Mail*, May 30, 1917; "Home from the Antarctica," *Daily News* (London), May 30, 1917.
[144] Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, 132-137.
[145] Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, 132.
[146] "The King's Message to Sir. E. Shackleton," *Evening Mail*, June 5, 1916.
[147] Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, 179-182.

and Goethals's research on the role of individual characteristics. During his departure, Shackleton was held in high regard from his previous expeditions, and despite the incredible accomplishment of saving his men, his image suffered in the public's eye—from all levels of society, brave men went to war, but he had chosen to go to the end of the world.[148] The contexts within which his return occurred cast shadows on his moral character.

**Conclusion:**

It is neither fair to say that heroism in polar exploration was entirely a myth nor condemn it solely as a mechanism of imperialism. Exploration was the zeitgeist of the time, and to view it through modern perspectives edges the analysis towards presentism. It distorts understanding of the heroic construct, ideas that drove it, individual and organizational agency, and the target society. Motivations for exploration varied between the explorers themselves and those who supported them. Explorers possessed agency in pursuit of personal and professional ambitions. Private enterprises and academic societies chased their own goals. Governments that outfitted the expeditions or explicitly chose not to did so in alignment with their interests. The polar regions were a stage for opportunities, often the goals of these actors aligned, and they entered into mutually beneficial partnerships.

Edward Carr stated, "History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he's writing."[149] Thereby, a well-rounded comprehension requires us to view influential factors and their interactions from the target society's point of view. The public acceptance in the form of admiration informs on the prevalent beliefs, specifically the traits and behaviors that reflected heroic ideals. Society venerated the men who dared, whether it was the national pride of winning a "first," scientific discovery or the

[148] Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, 132-137.
[149] Carr, *What is History*, 27.

extraordinary capacity of human endurance. Likewise, the public could quickly find it difficult to accept explorers as heroes if their journey cast a shadow over individual morals. At the center of inquiry is a human cognitive factor. It does not single-handedly explain why a selected individual was elevated, but it plays a vital role in the heroic construct as a collective response. The immediately available storyline, its narrative structure, and the contexts within which the expedition occurred interacted and contributed to perceptions.

This narrow inquiry into the cognitive factor is but one part of a greater puzzle. Further investigation is necessary to identify how the polar regions came to be perceived as they were, the prominent individuals behind the explorers who championed the cause in various circles of influence, the role of the arts, and the culture and influence of various professions involved. Likewise, it must be acknowledged that heroism does not remain static; it evolves with time as a reflection and as a perception. Explorers who survived went on to have lengthy careers related to the north and beyond. Their reputations continued to evolve, which affected perceptions and mirrored societal changes. Over time, the individuals chosen for this project have either faded into obscurity, resisted the wear of the decades, albeit not without historians' reassessment, or have been resurrected and lauded decades after.

As a literary genre, polar voyages continue to attract readers today. Authors reach into the obscurity of history for the stories that have yet to be told. Despite the evolution of thought on heroism and the benefit of historical hindsight, these individuals' often tragic endurance of extreme circumstances to survive remains a central factor in making the audience reflect on their capacity to withstand the same.

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Figure 6: Edwin Henry Landseer, "Man Proposes, God Disposes," Oil on Canvas, 1864, (Royal Holloway, University of London).