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Social Banditry

In Manuel G. Gonzales' *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, he mentions social banditry in reference to the rise in numbers of bandits amidst Mexicans living in South West America. In this, he brings up the point that the number of Mexican bandits to the population of Mexicans is severely high, and many of which come from wealthy and high status families. So many of these bandits did not need to become bandits out of need or desire for wealth or status, as they already owned this through their family. So it brings attention, especially to historians, that there is something bigger going on in the picture of society.

A term originally coined by Eric Hobsbawm, social banditry is a stage in an evolution within society. He describes it as something that has come out of social agitation, in an era in which the people involved have very little venue in literature or speech to conquer the concept of expressing their explicit political feelings and disgust with the status quo. He describes social banditry as “a universal and virtually unchanging phenomenon, [and] is little than endemic peasant protest against oppression and poverty” (Hobsbawm 1959). He goes on to explain that it is a way of crying out for justice upon the current status quo. This makes sense to what we have read in chapters one and two of the course text, in which the South West is colonized and taken over by Anglo-Americans, French, English and Spanish settlers and explorers. The forceful rule of Anglo-Americans, etc. took its effect in early South West America in the polarization of races,

especially in regards to treatment by the law, financial gains and favors and the disrespect for customs and culture.

This whole concept becomes a bit more serious when taken into account that this is not just a few people who gathered together some other bandits and retaliated against the rich and/or powerful. By Hobsbawm's words, "it becomes epidemic rather than endemic when a peasant society which knows of no better means of self-defense is in a condition of abnormal tension and disruption" in reference to violence and raiding, as well as other activities that consist within banditry (Primitive Rebels, 1959). Especially in the 1800's, these people were often seen by the common folk as being heroes and rebels against the status quo. These people were performing feats that many of those within their general group, often racial or financial, wanted to do but would not for the consequences.

"Social banditry has next to no organization or ideology" (Primitive Rebels, 1959) a point that brings up the worry of whether all bandits involved are within the same mindset of justice for the common folk. This is a troubling concept of political consequence, as the romanticizing of unlawful deeds for the sake of social justice makes the general assumption that the ends entirely justify the means. But the idea that one is above the law and above moral conviction (be that religious or otherwise) is a bizarre concept until you take into account that the romanticizing of social banditry through the ends of social justice is a recurring concept in today's society. It has happened in the past, but because society often does not reflect on the past and historians have often overlooked such things as social banditry, history repeats itself.

In modern society, we see the repeat of history in a way that is not easy to parallel with what was seen in the 1800's. Be it the mafia or the more primitive unorganized banditry seen in the early 1800's, it is difficult to find a perfect parallel in current modern society. However, there

are some modern social movements that meet up with the common idea of the social bandit, the hero of the common folk. One of the more popular movements is Black Lives Matter, a movement in which some have taken to violent terms, and others have simply stuck to lawful justice, rather than a lawlessness for the sake of justice. This movement takes on various levels, which both serves the multicultural system that we have in the United States, but also gives is a chaotic and disorganized feel. There is a centralized theme to the movement, as its main sponsors have given their two cents and their goals, as well as organized protests and rallies to raise awareness, but others have taken this movement to other levels, using its name and organization with their own slightly different ideals and perceptions of justice.

Out of our modern technological culture has risen a different kind of social banditry altogether, out of a disorganized group known only as Anonymous. Being as the group has no centralized ruling party or consensus of what they do, thus running by anarchy, Anonymous is easily joined or relinquished by any persons, and is often used as a name in cases of criminal law to captivate emotions of the local government and/or its people. Most commonly noted examples are the harassment of political officials, government branches and popular companies, in which persons unauthorized by the authorities take names, personal data, legal documents, and post them to forums and places of popular appeal for readers and internet browsing civilians to see and continue the rampant reposting of the information so that those in question may be harassed or even harmed. This has led to incidences of celebrities being assigned brand new social security numbers, companies fighting lawsuits for the release of personal information of clients that was not due to their purposeful act or ignorance to the data's sensitivity, and the slandering of individuals for the sake of some social justice. Lesser known instances are uses of the group name when individuals are involved in the sale of personal information gained through hacking,

or other criminal activity involving alleged hacking or stealing of computer system information. The group holds itself as a pristine movement of social justice, taking down any person who seems to raise too high or anger too many people, but this is as the bandits of the 1800's, where any person could be involved and any person can try to justify any length of means.

The most popular near-parallel is Isis and its influence on people on either side of perception of Isis. Its general organization has a more evolved feel than social banditry, resembling more of the mafia, though its goals are very different. It uses a pre-established group as its basis, though its goals are still very different from that group (Islam), and gains in support, despite spreading so much fear to people, especially to Anglo-Westerners and Europeans. For those who support the movement, it has become a glorified and powerful group to those who go to it, many of whom seek to follow religious ideals or for glory against the system. It pulls in various groups of people, some ethnically bound to the goals, some religiously, and some barely at all. The results of beheadings and other paramount incidences that are portrayed to the Western world for fear and anger towards a group of wrong doing, is a sense of pride and support from people who are in some way connected to the group, even if only by the ideals of Sharia law because they feel that these acts are right and just.

Social banditry is a cause of some form that has very little to no organization. It has spanned the course of time and remains so long as there is some form of social injustice. Whatever side we are on differs the way we perceive that social banditry, and the ending winners of the overall war will be the deciders of what side of history gets told more popularly, until some historians decide to flip the coin and tell the tale of another side. Still, we will keep evolving so long as we continue to educate the next generation so that they can literately give

their political opinions and bring up social problems to the forefront of justice, not just at home but abroad, and not just for themselves but for others as well.

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