This article reevaluates the origins of the 1983 American invasion of Grenada, Operation Urgent Fury. Adopting a transnational framework, this article argues that Britain was a major advocate of the invasion. Through intelligence provision, diplomatic pressure, and indirect agents, London linked its interests with the American initiative and played a significant role in bringing Washington to war. The study of American foreign policy through a transnational perspective, as this article suggests, is constructive for a multifaceted historical analysis.

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A n article in the October 26, 1983, London Times reports that Britain refused to participate in the American invasion of Grenada. According to the story, “Whitehall declined because of the fears for the 200 British people, including 40 or 50 tourists, on the island and for Sir Paul Scoon, the Governor-General.” At around the same time, Sir Geoffrey Howe, then Foreign Secretary, responded officially to the American military action. In a cautious speech, he denounced Washington’s lack of consultation but refrained from outright condemnation. As he remarked, “what had happened must not be allowed to weaken the essential fabric of our alliance.” A reading of these news reports easily gives the impression that London had no role in the invasion and knew nothing about the American plan beforehand. The same narrative also remains unchallenged in the existing literature, as scholars often direct their attention to other issues like the justifiability of the invasion or the motives of the Reagan administration. This article challenges that view, arguing that Britain was crucial to the realization of the American invasion.

This article focuses on the role the U.K. played in Operation Urgent Fury, the United States’ 1983 invasion of Grenada. Instead of being a disinterested and unimportant bystander, Britain was active and indeed pivotal in assisting the American initiative. As Washington did not station any personnel in the Caribbean island state from 1981 onwards, intelligence reports from the British Commonwealth nation of Barbados conveyed key information to President Reagan and his Cabinet about the developing situation in Grenada. Through political maneuvering in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), London managed to rally the support of Anglophone Caribbean islands for the U.S. operation. Instructions from the British government also prompted Sir Paul Scoon, the Governor-General of Grenada, to ask openly for American intervention in local politics. A careful assessment of British actions creates a more complete picture of the 1983 war and highlights the importance of using a transnational framework when analyzing American foreign policy. A study of the invasion from this perspective indicates that decisions made in Washington often result from multiple domestic and foreign factors.
This article is divided into five parts. The first part provides an overview of the existing literature. The second part compares the differing interests Washington and London had in Grenada. While the Reagan administration adopted a manichean worldview and feared Soviet and Cuban infiltration into the Caribbean Basin, the Thatcher Cabinet was more interested in preserving the London-led regional order. The third part focuses on Reagan’s policy towards Grenada and the broader Caribbean region before the death of Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister of Grenada, in October of 1983. Despite the lack of American personnel in Grenada, Washington received intelligence materials from British consular staff in Barbados. The arrival of British reports beginning in March 1983 coincided with Reagan’s preparation for direct action on Grenada. The fourth part traces the meetings of OECS before the deployment of troops. With help from London, Washington successfully won support from various Caribbean states, most importantly Jamaica, for the military operation. The fifth part examines the actions and motivations of Sir Paul Scoon, the controversial Governor-General of Grenada during the time of American occupation. Despite perceptions of him as a puppet of Washington, he was a cautious and steadfast defender of British interests in the nation. His long-held suspicion of the leftist New Jewel Movement reflected sentiments shared by both Washington and London, and his eventual invitation to the U.S. reflected the policy of Britain. The article concludes with observations on the value of transnational study of American foreign policy.

This article benefits from recently declassified materials and newer scholarly research. As most of the writings on Grenada were the product of the 1980s and 1990s, the scholarship at that time did not have access to British and American primary sources. This study provides a more complete picture by extracting relevant information from declassified documents available in the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, the National Archives of Britain, and to a lesser extent, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), a series curated by the U.S. State Department’s Office of the Historian. More recent publications, especially Scoon’s memoir and preliminary writings on Britain’s actions during the invasion, are also important sources for this article. Due to the limited scope of the declassified materials, especially on the British side, a cross-reading of autobiographies of Caribbean political leaders at the time offers important insight into their interactions with London prior to the American invasion.

**AN AMERICAN WAR?**

As the last “hot war” with clear Cold War elements, the American invasion of Grenada has received considerable scholarly attention. While these studies have provided a solid foundation for understanding the invasion, most have been written from the American perspective with little regard to other actors. Although accounts vary, existing works assume that other nations played only minor roles vis-à-vis that of the United States. Most of the scholarship portrays other stakeholders like Britain and various Caribbean states as
either too powerless to speak, or willing to object to Reagan's plan. This study outlines the complexity of the preparation process and emphasizes the activeness of Britain in that process.

Some researchers link the Grenada operation to the Beirut bombing days before. They argue that after a suicide attack in the Lebanese capital killed 241 U.S. peacekeepers, Reagan started a new war to divert public attention away from the powerful image of policy failure in the Middle East. By shifting the attention of journalists and the public from Beirut to Grenada, the president turned a total foreign policy disaster into a bright victory; he highlighted the success in the Caribbean and the broader struggle against communism. Others even describe the conflict as an easy victory designed to boost his re-election campaign. In an eye-catching article titled “Grenada as Theatre,” Eldon Kenworthy argues that the Grenada operation was Reagan's “sole foreign policy success” by 1984. The President, seeking a bright and presentable foreign policy achievement, utilized the anticipated popularity gain from the invasion for the upcoming election. From this perspective, Operation Urgent Fury had vital political value for President Reagan.

Another perspective focuses on the relationship between the Grenadian war and Reagan's Central American foreign policy. This school of thought highlights the regional implications of the Grenada operation, especially for Central America. With the radicalization and communist turn of Nicaragua and El Salvador, Washington could use Grenada as a warning to the region and a deterrent to Cuban and Soviet infiltration. Scholars holding this view also suggest that the war was important to proving American commitment in the area. Considering the size and military strength of Grenada, Washington expected to gain an easy and complete victory at minimal political and military cost. According to this view, Reagan aimed to fight a prompt and relatively cheap war in Grenada so as to demonstrate his anti-communist credentials and commitment to the world.

Although this article does not challenge these two major views, it seeks to broaden the existing literature by highlighting British involvement in the war. Instead of being a wholly American operation, the invasion of Grenada was also the product of considerable effort by the U.K. government. This article emphasizes the understudied role of Britain in the conflict. Although Britain did not participate directly in the military operation, British support was crucial to the American victory. British intelligence from Barbados and the actions of both the London-led OECS and the Anglophile Scoon were essential to victory in the American war.

**ANGLO-AMERICAN DIVERGENCE**

It is important to account for the different set of interests and preferences in Washington and London before examining British actions before the operation. The extensively-studied Cold War context for the war explains the American intervention, but not British involvement. Washington, especially during the first four years of the Reagan administration, held a clear anti-communist stance. From the U.S. perspective, countering Moscow’s assertiveness was already a sound reason to start a war. British concerns were more nuanced. London, whether led by the Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan or his Conservative successor Margaret Thatcher, cared more about regional stability than about communist expansion. The security of Anglophile states like Jamaica and Barbados was a key consideration in British foreign policy. However, this was never a sufficiently strong motive to convince London to fight with its own hand. These differing interests also explain why the U.S. eventually deployed troops to Grenada while Britain took a more backstage role.

Reagan's anti-communist position between 1981 and 1984 was widely evident. In his famous March 8, 1983, speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, he described the
Soviet Union as the “evil empire” and called for a massive military buildup to counter the threat of Moscow.10 As political scientist Michael Turner writes, Reagan believed that “the Soviet Union [sought] world domination and therefore must be resisted on all fronts.”11 Reagan’s understanding of the political development of Grenada reflected this central tenet. “The Soviet-Cuban militarization of Grenada,” as he described it in a March 23rd national address, “can only be seen as power projection into the region.”12 Reagan regarded Bishop as a puppet of Moscow and found it necessary to pressure Grenada to leave the Soviet orbit and resist Cuban influence. U.S. anxiety over the possible loss of the Caribbean island state to communists was a major factor leading to American military intervention.

POLITICAL STORM IN THE CARIBBEAN

Despite their differing motivations, the U.S. and Britain had both begun to pay attention to Grenada in 1979, when the leftist New Jewel Movement (NJM), led by Maurice Bishop, instigated a revolution and toppled the post-independence government. Under President Jimmy Carter, the U.S. was not worried about the possible leftist turn of Grenada and tried to avoid open confrontation. Following the advice of the Barbadian Foreign Minister, the Carter administration neither supported nor opposed the Bishop regime.15 Carter also attempted to engage with Grenada through dialogue and by providing modest aid.16 At the same time, Washington devoted more resources to monitoring the political development of the country. According to recently declassified materials available in FRUS, the CIA personnel in Barbados were responsible for monitoring Grenada beginning in 1979.17 Britain paid a similar degree of attention to the former British colony. The Callaghan government, although displeased by the NJM, refrained from direct action so as to avoid embroilment in the local politics of Grenada. The security of Anglophone Barbados, the British Cabinet agreed, was a key consideration in Britain’s Caribbean policy.18 Thus, prior to Reagan’s ascent to the presidency in 1981, both the U.S. and Britain were close observers of, but not assertive players in, Grenada.

The clear Leninist ideology of the NJM and its close ties to Cuba soon raised concerns in the Reagan White House.19 Beginning in January 1981, Washington applied more traditional Cold War containment policies to Grenada. In February, President Reagan withdrew Sally Shelton-Colby, the last ambassador to Grenada appointed by President Carter, from the country. Thereafter, the U.S. had no formal representative to Grenada until 1984. Furthermore, Reagan adopted a multilateral framework for his foreign policy. In early 1982, he called for more studies on the possibility of engagement with allies to counter the Soviet threat.20 The Caribbean Basin Initiative, proposed in 1982, was Reagan’s version of the Marshall Plan for Caribbean states and excluded only Grenada from financial assistance and loans. The U.S. accompanied economic pressure with a direct military threat to the island state. In 1982 alone, the U.S. staged three major military exercises in the Caribbean that included rehearsals of “procedures for the removal of an unfriendly island government and the temporary occupation of state territory.”21 The mutual suspicion between Reagan and Bishop continued to grow and soon became a key factor prompting the president’s famous Strategic Defense Initiative.
In the March 23, 1983, address that announced the start of research on SDI, Reagan described the construction of an international airport in Grenada as a plot of military build-up and infiltration by Moscow. Criticizing the Cuban and Soviet “financing and backing” behind the project, the president described the Caribbean state as an outpost of communism in the Caribbean. That the new Grenadian airport was designed solely for civilian purposes failed to ease Reagan’s mounting antagonism toward the NJM regime. The heavily-worded criticism soon led to a hostile response from Bishop’s government, marking a further deterioration of relations. Days later, Jeane Kirkpatrick, the fiery U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), described Grenada as a sign of the global “left-wing revolutionary movements” that threatened world peace in a speech to the UN. It is highly likely that the President’s criticism of the new airport in Grenada reflected Washington’s heightened concerns, as the geographical proximity and strategic value of the island made the political stance of Grenada non-negotiable, and military operation to recapture the island inevitable. By the end of the first half of 1983, American hostility towards Grenada had become decisive.

In the months before the invasion, the U.S. relied on information provided by Britain to formulate its Grenada policy. The U.S. never had any foreign service staff stationed in Grenada; all ambassadors to the small island state had resided in Barbados, another island nation 162 miles away. Cooperation with Britain was thus consistent with Reagan’s new Grenada policy. Britain, unlike the U.S., maintained a High Commissioner (a British ambassador to a Commonwealth country) to the island continuously after its independence in 1974. At the same time, London probably found the American presence in the Caribbean region to be beneficial to its interests in the surrounding islands. According to the online catalog of the British National Archives, the first intelligence report from Barbados arrived in Washington exactly a week after Reagan’s March 23rd speech. A likely explanation would be that Reagan decided to seek London’s help in order to prepare a military operation in Grenada. When the president criticized the construction of the airport, he probably simultaneously requested British intelligence sharing. While Washington lacked firsthand intelligence on Grenada, beginning in March 1983, information from London filled the information gap and influenced American policy.

Accounts vary as to who received the intelligence reports on the American side. David Montgomery, the Deputy High Commissioner in Barbados, both communicated with and provided a selection of intelligence reports to U.S. foreign service staff in Barbados. The information provided by Montgomery was pivotal for the U.S. to follow the immediate political developments in Grenada. It was also very likely that all information provided to American personnel was to some degree framed and censored by the British side so as to create a narrative consistent with London’s interests. The British cable between Grenada and Barbados, as later incidents showed, was highly efficient and effective. For example, Washington knew of the arrest of Bishop within twelve hours. The fast delivery of messages from Grenada to Barbados and then to the U.S. was crucial for the Reagan administration to analyze the situation and respond accordingly. London’s framing of local events is an important but often missed factor leading to the war.

Most of the scholarship on Grenada casts the death of Bishop on October 19, 1983, as the precipitating cause of Operation Urgent Fury. Although a plethora of work has studied the subsequent developments extensively, very few of them understand the war as a product of interactions between multiple actors. Apart from the American desire to eliminate the communist outpost of Grenada, Britain also wanted the downfall of the NJM regime so as to protect its regional allies. Both Washington and London intended to defeat or at least contain Russian and Cuban influences in Grenada. The U.S. linked Bishop to leftist Central American regimes like Nicaragua and El Salvador. Amid the rise of leftist guerrillas like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador that threatened existing pro-American dictatorships, Reagan hoped to warn these groups against further collaboration with the Soviets or the Cubans. Britain, in contrast, emphasized the security of major pro-British Caribbean states like Jamaica and Barbados. This convergence of interests led to covert collaboration. With no local messengers in St. George, Grenada’s capital, Washington greatly relied on London for information on the political and social development of the island, especially after March of 1983 when Reagan explicitly identified Grenada as a threat to regional stability. The semi-institutionalized channel between the British Deputy High Commissioner and American foreign policy staff likely led to the final decision to invade Grenada. As latter developments proved, Britain played a major role in persuading the U.S. to fight in Grenada after the death of Maurice Bishop.

THE INVISIBLE HAND

Britain had a special interest in supporting Anglophile leaders in Caribbean states, especially Jamaica and Barbados. Being the largest and wealthiest states in the Anglophone Caribbean, the two countries received the most attention from London. In 1980, Britain intentionally delayed the provision of aid to Jamaica so that Edward Seaga, the leader of the conservative Jamaica Labour Party, would defeat the pro-Cuban and leftist Michael Manley and his People’s National Party in the general election and become the next Prime Minister. Seaga and other Anglophile leaders played a prominent role in justifying the American invasion of Grenada through diplomatic and military support. Britain, aiming to maintain its influence in the region and protect its close allies from the communist predation, was active in realizing the operation.
Britain hoped to maintain its long-established links with the Caribbean after the independence of various island states in the 1960s and 1970s. In June 1981, various independent states and dependencies in the Caribbean established the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) to push for regional integration and independence from British control.35 Despite the OECS's claim of autonomy, London's presence was still largely palpable in every sense, as the 1980 Jamaican election showed. Whitehall still viewed any attempt to transform the London-led regional order as a direct challenge to and intrusion into British territories. Since Grenada “had wished to take a revolutionary role in the Caribbean of its own accord,” the island state was an usurper of the British order in the region and thus an enemy of London.36 Maurice Bishop, the leader of the NJM, also showed clear Anglophobic sentiment. He refused to engage in dialogue with Thatcher and clashed with Jamaica and Barbados, two of the most pro-British countries in the Caribbean.37 Despite the deep animosity felt on both sides, London was reluctant to send troops abroad. After the tragic and humiliating Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, Britain had refrained from direct military intervention in another sovereign state to avoid diplomatic denunciation from the Third World.38 Still, London had strong reasons to support Reagan’s initiative to topple the NJM government. The opportunity to avoid direct military action was an important reason for London to support American action in Grenada.

Aware of the United States’ special relationship with Britain, Reagan paid close attention to Jamaica and Barbados. In April 1982, the President chose the two countries for his first foreign trip outside Canada and Mexico. After meeting the Prime Minister of Barbados on April 8th, he made a speech on the threat of Soviet and Cuban penetration in Grenada and hinted at further cooperation to tackle the problem.39 This unprecedented degree of attention to the two traditionally insignificant states reflected a common feature of Washington and London’s Caribbean policy. Apart from influencing multilateral platforms like the OECS, both states complemented each other’s foreign policy and gradually developed a common front against Grenada. Shared strategic interest made them pursue a similar approach to the region. While Britain wanted to borrow American power projection to defend its influence in the Caribbean, America utilized the relationship between Britain and the two countries to realize its policy agenda. It was unsurprising that Tom Adams, the Prime Minister of Barbados and an Anglophile, was highly supportive of American military action.40 Edward Seaga, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, shared a similar stance and was highly critical of Grenada.41 By utilizing these existing networks, the U.S. established close ties with major pro-British Caribbean states and built the foundation for its invasion.

The de facto Anglo-American alliance on Caribbean policy was also evident in the two nations’ activities with the OECS.
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instructions from “the second man at the British Embassy,” referring to David Montgomery, the British Deputy High Commissioner to Barbados.\(^5\) Montgomery, as Charles said, collaborated with Ambassador Bish in lobbying the members of the OECS.\(^5\) Early in the morning of October 22\(^{nd}\), Reagan decided to deploy troops to Grenada after a brief discussion with McFarlane and Secretary of State George Shultz.\(^5\) The operation to defend both American and British interests finally came to fruition as the first batch of U.S. forces arrived in the island state on the 23\(^{rd}\).

Although Reagan’s announcement of the invasion on October 25, 1983, came as a surprise to many, the military operation was indeed the product of years of preparation. Despite the lack of a British military presence in Grenada, British influence in the war was remarkable in many ways. In the final stage of invasion, the lobbying effort by British diplomatic staff in Barbados put pressure on the OECS member states and eventually helped to pass the motion to aid Operation Urgent Fury. London played a covert but integral role.

THE QUEEN’S REPRESENTATIVE
The position of Sir Paul Scoon, the Governor-General of Grenada, and his impact on bringing in American troops is critical to understanding the different interests of Britain and the U.S. Serving as the representative of London in Grenada, the Governor-General prioritized the security and order of Grenada; anti-communism was not his concern. He was an active and loyal defender of British interests. After the death of Bishop, he tried to regain control of Grenada and form an interim government. Although Jamaica and Barbados both encouraged him to invite the American military in to topple the unstable NJM government, he refrained from taking any direct action until he received the endorsement of British officials.\(^5\) The subtle position of the Governor-General not only indicated the predominant British presence in the region, but also underlined the different interests of London and Washington.

Scoon was a key player in Grenada after October 19, 1983. Appointed by London in 1979, he wielded almost no power during the period of the NJM rule.\(^5\) His political insignificance changed after the death of Bishop. Without a legitimate head of state, Grenada was in political chaos. The Governor-General, serving as the representative of the Queen, engaged in dialogue with local politicians and other Commonwealth states in an attempt to form an interim government. It was remarkable that he did not view the NJM as the communist enemy like Reagan did; instead, he met with General Hudson Austin, the leader of the Revolutionary Military Council formed after the death of Bishop.\(^5\) In the October 21\(^{st}\) meeting, he urged Austin to restore order and stability as soon as possible.\(^5\) Without any ideological burden, Scoon was willing to give the general some time to bring Grenada back to normalcy. Since he was more interested in maintaining law and order, he was more tolerant than Reagan. Between the 19\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\), he also had regular conversations in person with John Kelly, the British permanent representative to Grenada, and by phone with Sir Shridath Ramphal, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.\(^5\) In contrast, his first meeting with an American official was on the 24\(^{th}\), two days after Reagan decided to deploy troops.\(^5\) The arrangement reflected considerable British attention and maneuvering in Grenada. If the Governor-General had prioritized American interests, he would have invited the American military in on October 19\(^{th}\), the day of Bishop’s death. However, he had shown the willingness to mediate the local political conflict and communicate with London. Also important was that he remained silent on the possible American military plan, despite the approval given by the OECS on the 21\(^{st}\). A likely explanation is that he shared the British view on military operations after the disaster of the Suez Canal Crisis. In many ways, his stance was consistent with his position as the leader of the former British colony, although only a ceremonial one.

Scoon’s support of American action came on October 23\(^{rd}\) after a discussion with British officials. Before that date, the Governor-General was critical of the possible American military operation on the grounds of inviolability of sovereignty, consistent with the post-Suez Canal Crisis British position. In his memoir, he criticized the October 21\(^{st}\) OECS decision to support the American initiative as the product of active lobbying by pro-U.S. state leaders like Adams of Barbados and Seaga of Jamaica.\(^5\) His disapproval of the American plan soon disappeared after an October 23\(^{rd}\) meeting with David Montgomery, the British Deputy High Commissioner to Barbados and two accompanying junior American foreign service staff. His change of mind during the meeting was of utmost importance:

In a calm, reassuring voice, Montgomery suggested that, in these circumstances, I should perhaps give urgent consideration to the role I would be expected to assume if a military operation were to be mounted against the Revolutionary Military Council, adding that clearly my views on military action as an option to restore my country to normality, would be crucial to any decision on that score. The awesome significance of these disturbing words caused me to ponder for some time before commenting that while military intervention into one’s territory was not the sort of thing I would normally advocate, the current, potentially explosive situation in Grenada was such that it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that only the presence of friendly, foreign troops could rescue Grenadians from the abyss into which they had fallen and bring stability and law and order back into our daily lives. Therefore, if a military operation to achieve that were to be undertaken by our sister states – if necessary with assistance from the United States, I would give such an initiative my fullest support [italics added].\(^5\)
The exchange between Montgomery and Scoon on October 23rd provides ample proof of British lobbying for the American operation. As articulated in the Governor-General’s account, London clearly wanted to change its decades-long practice of non-intervention in another sovereign state’s affairs and instead create a favorable environment for the upcoming American invasion of Grenada. His invitation to the American troops, sent to Adams, was a direct result of Montgomery’s persuasion. Furthermore, the reason he cited according to its objective of protecting Anglophone states in the Caribbean. As its interaction with the Governor-General showed, communist influence was never a major concern for Britain. Nor was London’s role in the invasion that of a silent and passive bystander. While maintaining close contact with Scoon via various channels, Britain also formulated action plans for its representative in Grenada. London’s invisible hand in Operation Urgent Fury, if seen from the Governor-General’s perspective, was not that invisible.

“Hence, Operation Urgent Fury not only served Reagan’s pledge of a global crusade against communism, but also London’s interests in maintaining the wellbeing of the Anglophone Caribbean states.”

CONCLUSION
The headline of The New York Times on October 26, 1983, read: “1,900 U.S. Troops, with Caribbean Allies, Invade Grenada and Fight Leftist Units; Moscow Protests; British are Critical.” While observers at the time debated the legality of and rationales for President Reagan’s abrupt military deployment, the response from London received less attention. Major newspaper reports only emphasized the centrality of Washington and viewed the conflict as a classic Cold War battle. With a majority of the media concentrating on the details of the American action or on the local and regional impacts, scholars and journalists have oversimplified or even overlooked the complexity of the war. Although most commentators acknowledge the role of London in the operation, there is no systematic study of British participation. This article highlights a key aspect of Operation Urgent Fury and provides an overview of London’s assertiveness in the Caribbean region.

This study enriches the existing literature in two ways. First, it provides an alternative angle for understanding the 1983 invasion of Grenada. Instead of a U.S.-anti-communist operation, it was indeed a military action that served both the White House and Whitehall. Britain, although having a different set of goals and preferences, supported the American initiative through intelligence sharing, multilateral lobbying, and direct instructions. The invasion not only served the American interest of evicting communists from Grenada, but also the British interest in protecting regional security and stability. Second, this article adopts a different approach to analyzing American foreign policy. Beyond the mainstream U.S.-centric perspective, this study utilizes a multilateral framework and considers the actions and behaviors of foreign actors. As the case of Grenada shows, a multifaceted approach often provides a fuller picture of the decision-making process and better explains the different objectives of different stakeholders.
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Endnotes


[45] Ibid.
[46] Lewis, “Revisiting the Grenada Invasion”, 94.
[50] Ibid, 181.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, 134-5.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.