

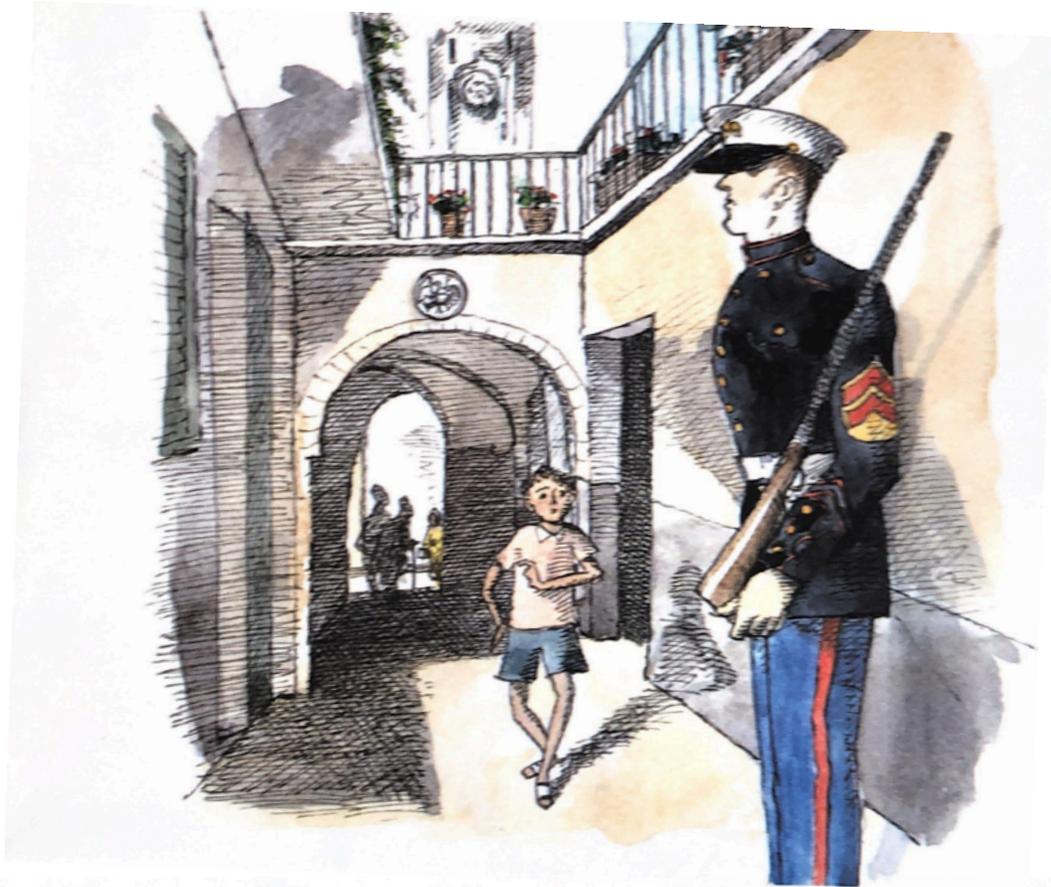


Legation Lions, or off with my head (I)

I am sorry to inform the Department that, although I have exerted myself to the utmost to prevent the presentation of any animals from the Emperor, and to convince his Ministers of the impossibility of accepting a gift of any kind, my exertions have not been attended with success. They replied that it was perfectly out of their power to prevent it, that the present must be made; that a Moorish agent who should thus refuse to convey a present to his master would very justly have his head cut off; and that the refusal of whatever might be offered would be a decided insult.

I resolved to write to the Emperor, but before a letter could be prepared, the sound of drums announced the arrival of the Bashaw's Nephew at the head of a troop of soldiers with an enormous, magnificent Lion & Lioness.

Letter from Consul Thomas Carr to Secretary of State, September 3rd, 1839



1949

U.S. Marines on Rue d'Amérique

IN 1949, THE UNITED STATES INITIATED the Marine Security Guard program for its embassies, legations, and consulates. The first contingent of Marines was sent to Tangier, where they mounted guard – with the Moroccan *Tabor* police of the International Zone – on the pedestrian Rue d'Amérique at the Legation entrance. Resplendent in their “Dress Blue” uniforms, they are remembered by Tangerians who grew up in that period.

Ahmed Benguerch, who lived in the Medina and had to pass by (and under) the Legation on his way home, used to gather his breath, and his courage, and run as fast as possible past the Marines. The Legation, his elders had told him, was a fearsome place, not only guarded by tall Americans with rifles, but also inhabited by *jinns*, the mysterious spirits who are acknowledged but rarely discussed.



1904

The Wind, the Lion, and the Lady

THE 1904 KIDNAPPING OF WEALTHY AMERICAN Ion Perdicaris from his country home outside Tangier by bandit chieftain Raisuli grabbed world attention. U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt thundered “Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead!” and sent battleships and Marines to Tangier. U.S. Consul General Samuel Gummere and Moroccan dignitaries negotiated Perdicaris’ release, and the gleaming white battleships, later christened “The Great White Fleet,” sailed away.

The 1975 film *The Wind and the Lion* recounted the story with well-known stars in key roles, including a woman (!) as Perdicaris. The director had read the contemporary biography of Raisuli by Rosita Forbes, an English journalist, and simply conjoined the stories. The historical excitement of Teddy Roosevelt’s “Big Stick” gunboat diplomacy, bandits on horseback, and mountain hideouts weren’t enough for Hollywood: there had to be a (fictional) “love interest.”



1839

Legation Lions... and horses (II)

I told the commander of the troop that it was perfectly impossible to receive the animals, the laws of my country forbid it. I told him that the President, the head of my government, was in the same predicament as myself, that he has not the power to receive them. Then said he if Congress will not receive them the Emperor desires them to be presented to the people as a present, as a mark of his respect and esteem for the "Sultans of America." I am ordered to deliver them to you, it will cost me my head if I disobey, I shall leave them in the street. The street upon which is the American Consulate is a narrow short cul de sac. Preparations were made for placing a guard at the open end, and turning the Lions loose in the street. I was compelled to open one of my rooms for the reception of the Animals where they now are. The rumor in town is that four or five horses are on their way for the "People of the United States," whether it is true or not I do not know. I hope that I shall have the honor and pleasure of hearing upon this subject from the Department as soon as possible.

Letter from **Consul Thomas Carr** to Secretary of State, September 3rd, 1839



1944

The Legation and the Holocaust

IN JUNE 1940, SPAIN OCCUPIED TANGIER. Like the “Casablanca” depicted in the film, it became a hub for refugees. Renée Reichmann, a Hungarian Jewish refugee, sent thousands of food parcels to occupied Europe, but by early 1944, Hungary’s Jews became the focus of Hitler’s “Final Solution,” and Reichmann’s efforts shifted from relief to rescue. She approached Legation Chargé d’Affaires Rives Childs to intervene with the Spanish, who issued Tangier visas.

In 1945, she wrote to Childs: *“Permit me, before your departure from Tangier, to express my most profound and everlasting gratitude for your extremely noble and generous assistance in the affair of the visas for the large families of Hungarian Jews. Thus 1,200 innocent souls owe their survival to Your Excellency...”*

Rives Childs kept the letter in his pocket for years, and wrote *“I do not know of any work in my whole career which has given me greater personal satisfaction than the efforts made on behalf of these friendless persons.”*

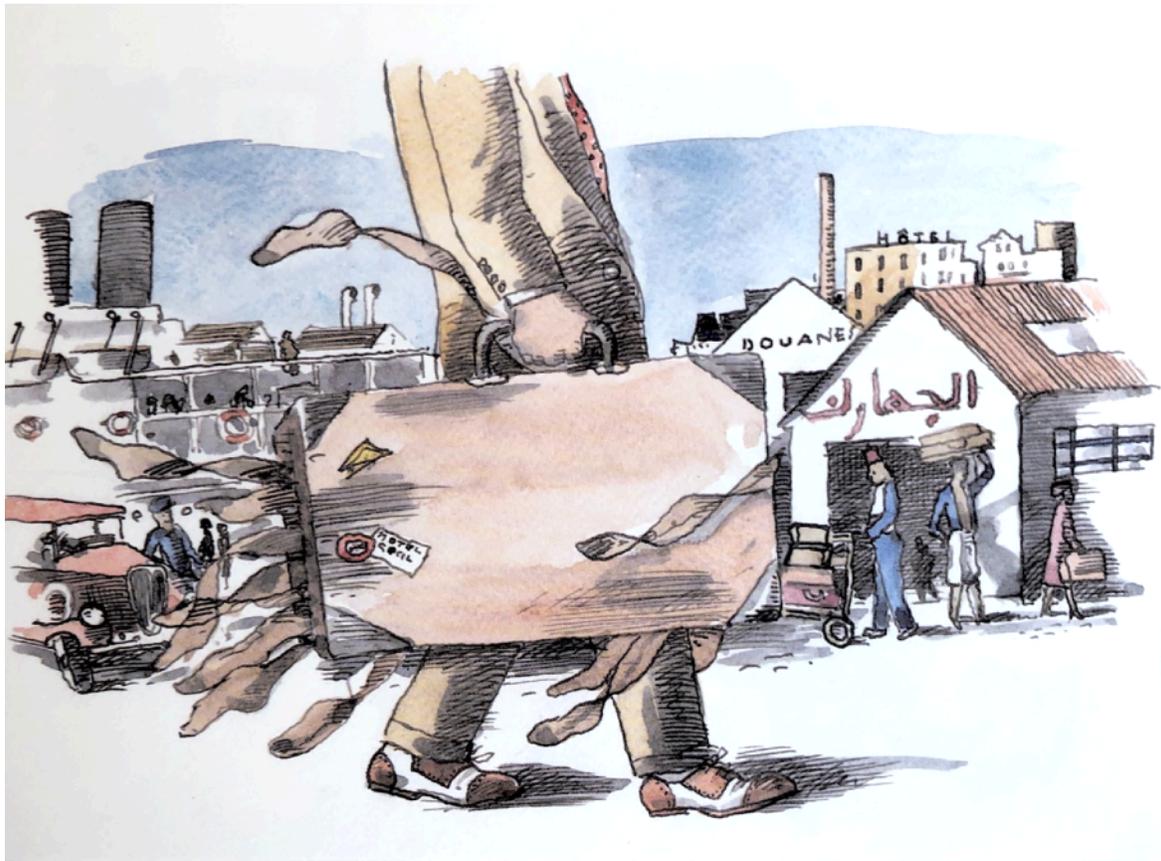


1867

Mark Twain: The completest exile

DURING THE TENURE OF CONSUL JESSE H. McMATH, the passenger ship S.S. *Quaker City* called at Tangier in 1867, part of the first American luxury cruise.

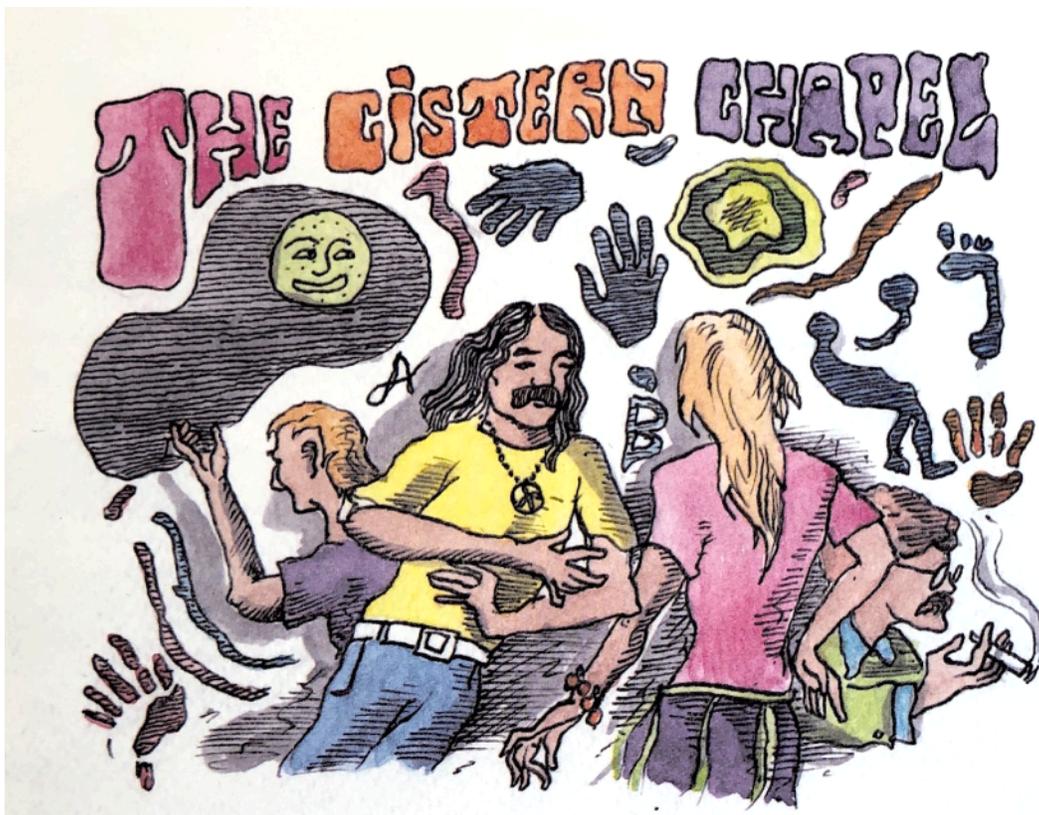
Passenger Mark Twain wrote in *The Innocents Abroad*: “His is the only American family in Tangier. There are many foreign consuls in this place, but much visiting is not indulged in... Tangier is full of interest for one day, but after that it is a weary prison. The Consul General has been here five years, and has got enough of it to do him for a century, and is going home shortly... It is the completest exile that I can conceive of. I would seriously recommend to the government of the United States that when a man commits a crime so heinous that the law provides no adequate punishment for it, they make him Consul General to Tangier.”



1952

Nylon Sid, the modern American pirate

VETERAN OF WORLD WAR II, Sidney Paley came to Tangier to manufacture nylons. But his exports soon included items smuggled from the freewheeling International Zone to a Europe hungry for goods of all kinds. With undertones of Mafia connections, “Nylon Sid” was arrested for taking his illicit trade one step further: piracy, after a Dutch ship was hijacked off the Moroccan coast. Arrested in 1952, he was tried at the Consular Court at the Legation. Found guilty but with a reduced sentence after appeal, his case was covered worldwide, including by *Time* and *Life* magazines. After his trial, he confided to a journalist that he had definitively sworn off piracy, and would henceforth limit himself to his old occupation – smuggling.



1970s

Peace Corps disco in the “Cistern Chapel”

PRESIDENT KENNEDY’S PROGRAM of young American volunteers in development came to Morocco in 1963, and the Legation served as the Peace Corps training center in the 1970s. Amateur welders, plasterers, and painters readied the buildings for the task of teaching, housing, and feeding volunteers and staff, and the Legation took on a campus atmosphere. When the volunteers learned of an empty water cistern built under the kitchen, they had an idea.

Forty years later, one of them recalled: *“One of the PC staff – a pretty good artist – did some murals, and then one night we got a little crazy with the paint and started putting our hands and feet and other body parts in paint and decorating the walls. We did have some very enjoyable and not too wild parties in our own private disco, and we could make as much noise as we wanted and not bother anyone. I had no idea the paints we used would hold up under water all these years...”*

They named it “the Cistern Chapel,” and the frescoes are still visible.

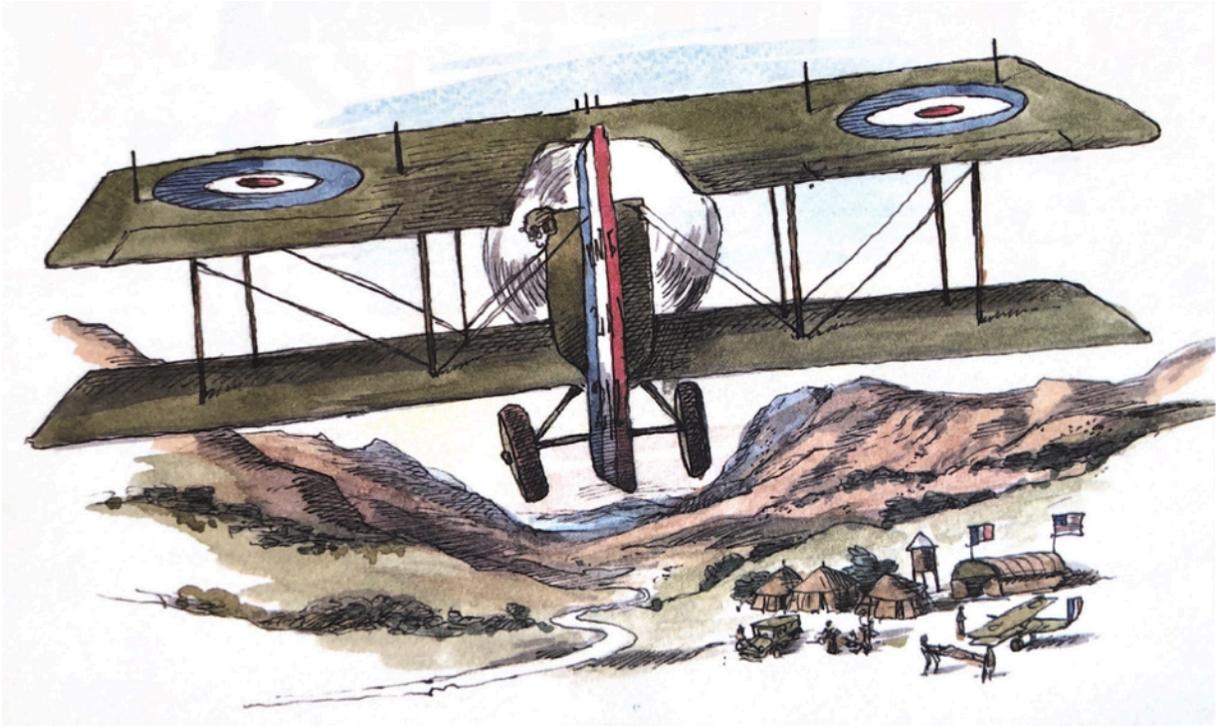


1950s onwards

The uses of literacy: women tell stories

SINCE MOROCCO REGAINED ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1956, the Legation has undergone many transformations, from diplomatic to cultural and educational. For years, hundreds of women from Tangier's medina have learned to read and write in Arabic, but also French and English. Sometimes their motivation was simple: "I want to read road signs," or "I can help my children with their homework."

Fatima Gharbaoui learned to paint, and with proceeds from the sales of her scenes of village life, she installed electricity and running water in her home. Another woman's story of her first time outside the medina, spending the day roadside waiting in vain for a royal drive-by by King Hassan II, was published in a collection of "True Stories from the Mediterranean." The older women – one signed up for literacy classes in her eighties! – fondly remember "international Tangier," when they chatted with Spanish neighbors on the rooftops, or kept watch over children from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian families.



1925

Americans in the Rif: L'Escadrille Chérifienne

THE THIRD RIF WAR, 1921-26. Berber tribes rise against Spanish colonizers, and later against the French Protectorate. To gain sympathy, France proudly paraded its special recruits: the American pilots of the Lafayette Escadrille, of World War I fame, now back to fly for France in Morocco.

Wrote William Dean: *“To avoid upsetting the isolationist government of President Coolidge, these American mercenary aviators were to technically be in the service of the Sultan (or Chérif) of Morocco. The unit was called the Escadrille Chérifienne... also referred to as the Escadrille Américaine.”* Pro-Riffian sentiment (“the American Friends of the Rif”), editorials against the war and against involvement by Americans, led the Legation to warn that U.S. law prohibited the “Enlistment of American Citizens for Military Service in Morocco.” In the end, U.S. government concerns about violations of neutrality and hostile public opinion brought the chapter of the Escadrille Chérifienne to a close after only six weeks of combat operations.