

# VHHR

2021

VOLUME 25  
25TH ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION

Vulcan  
Historical  
Review





# **Vulcan Historical Review**

**VOLUME 25**

*25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION*

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The editorial staff are honored to present the twenty-fifth edition of the *Vulcan Historical Review*, a testament to the passion and skill cultivated across a quarter-century of student scholarship. The excellence of the *VHR* has been recognized many times in the Gerald R. Nash History Competition sponsored by the Phi Alpha Theta Honors Society. Most recently, the 2020 edition took third place in the category for digital historical journals. The editorial staff for 2021 are proud to be part of this impressive tradition, especially while facing the unique challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although we were unable to gather in person, the limitations imposed by the pandemic have made us ever more grateful for opportunities such as these to connect and collaborate over our passion for historical research.

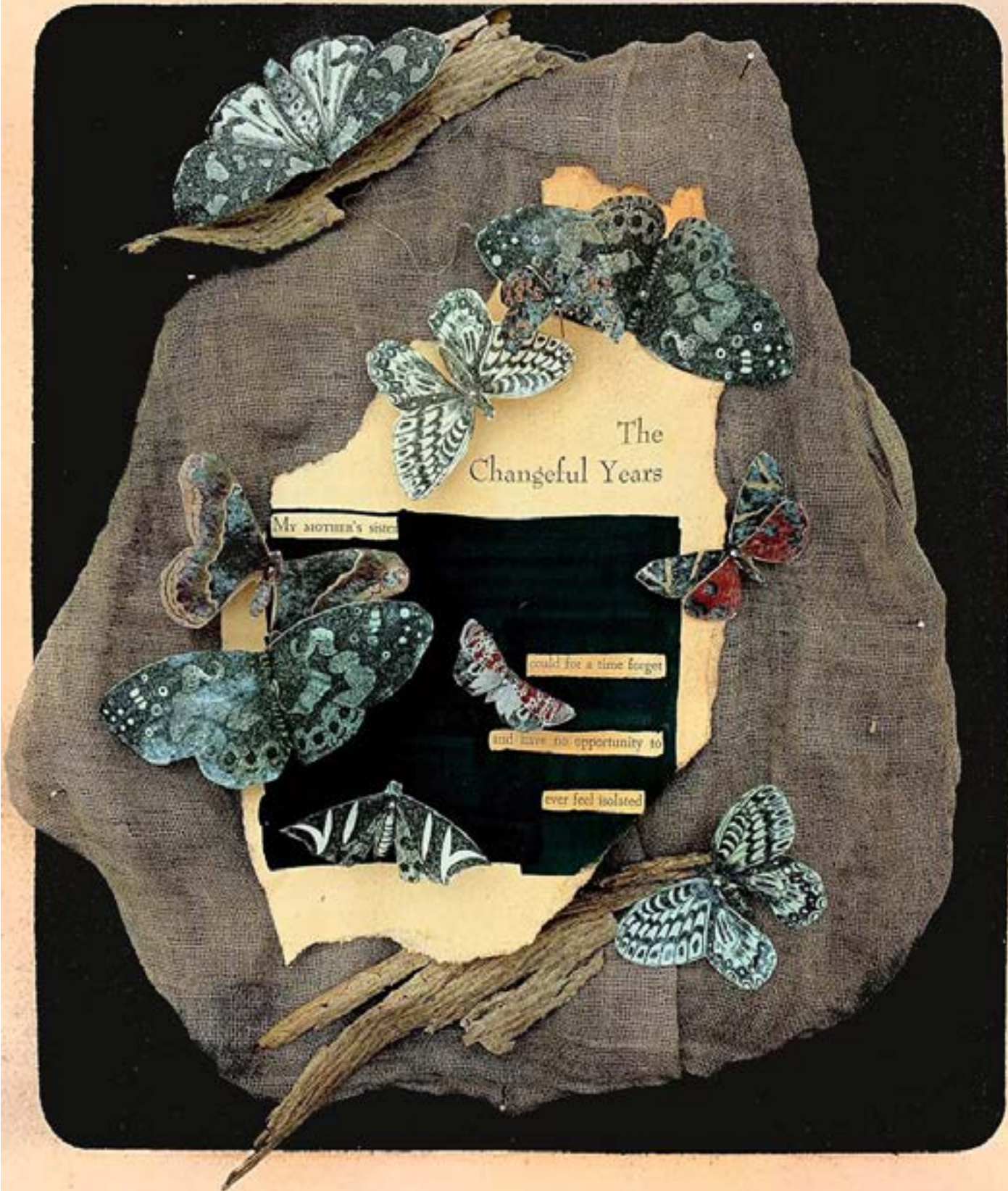
The publication opens with a retrospective essay reflecting on the journal's origins, followed by an exploration of feminism in politics. The next piece, winner of the Glenn A. Feldman Memorial Student Writing Award, is a history of a little-known American military mountaineering unit trained for potential combat in the Soviet Union. We then turn to an investigation into Romanov conspiracy theories and a foray into the historical intersection between food and politics in the early twentieth century. We are proud to include multiple pieces on the historical injustices of racism in the United States, especially as this publication comes just a year after the national uprisings in the wake of George Floyd's death at the hands of a police officer in May 2020. We then turn to the question of British imperial responsibility for a famine in Bengal, a personal reflection on the history of alcoholism as a disease, and then a local history examining cemeteries in Birmingham. The journal concludes with two historiographical essays reflecting on approaches to

the history of the Third Reich and environmental history, respectively. Juxtaposed alongside and woven throughout the scholarship are pieces by student artists and poets, enriching and complementing each historical narrative.

There are many individuals we would like to thank for their support and guidance in bringing this publication to fruition. First and foremost to all faculty and staff in the Department of History at UAB, who have unfailingly supported students' passion for history and their desire to refine their craft. We would be lost without our outstanding faculty advisor, Dr. Andrew Baer, who lends support in all forms and cheers us on while keeping us on course. We also thank our chair, Dr. Jonathan Wiesen, and Melanie Daily, our administrative associate, who plays an integral role in all departmental work, the *VHR* included. Many thanks go to Dr. Douglas Baulos of the Department of Art and Art History, who helped connect us to student artists and to Dr. Alison Chapman, chair of the English Department, who helped us find the talented student writers who contributed their poetry. Thank you as well to Dr. Colin Davis, who spoke with our staff in an interview reflecting on the journal's founding years, and thank you to Tierra Andrews, our incredible graphic designer who brought the publication to life.

Finally, publication of the *VHR* would not be possible without the generous and ongoing support of our donors: Dr. Kecia M. Thomas (Dean of the UAB College of Arts and Sciences) and the Linney Family Endowment. We thank you and our readers for giving UAB undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to join the tradition of twenty-five years of historical scholarship that represents this department and the Chi Omicron Chapter of the Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society.





The  
Changeful Years

My mother's story

could for a time forget

and have no opportunity to

ever feel isolated

## CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE VULCAN HISTORICAL REVIEW

Kendra Bell and Sarah Coley

To the reader:

The job of the historian is both simple and complex: to attempt to provide readers and listeners with a good story, while at the same time accurately describing and interpreting places and events that have shaped the human experience.

*"Letter from the Editors," Vulcan Historical Review, Volume 12, 2008*

In 1997, a small group of students and faculty at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, bonded by their passion for investigating the past, launched what would become the lasting tradition of the *Vulcan Historical Review* (VHR). The VHR is an award-winning, peer-reviewed journal that showcases the historical research of students at UAB. As a student-run publication, it offers both undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity for professional development in academic scholarship as authors, editors, and collaborators. Fueled by ambition and dedication, the publication reflects the personality of its namesake, the Vulcan statue, and the surrounding city of Birmingham, Alabama. Nicknamed the Magic City for its origins as an industrial city fueled by rapid growth, Birmingham is watched over by the Vulcan statue, a symbol of the industrial boom that enticed so many to settle in the city during the late nineteenth century. Named after the Roman god of fire and furnaces, the statue was commissioned in the early twentieth century and dedicated at its current position in 1939. It sits atop Red Mountain, source of the city's iron ore and mineral wealth, as a testament to the ambition and dedication required to dream a city. Like the Vulcan Statue, the VHR is also a symbol of ambition, dedication, and opportunity, even as the city's history reflects complex themes of individual and collective struggle.

Since its first printing in 1997, the journal's focus on professionalism in the selection and editing process has consistently brought it recognition and respect. For the first five volumes, the VHR placed first or second in the annual Gerald D. Nash History Competition sponsored by the Phi Alpha Theta National Honor Society. Last year, the 2020 edition earned third place for digital historical journals in the Nash History Competition. This year, the 2021 edition marks the journal's 25th anniversary, a testament to the History Department's ongoing commitment to the publication and to a quarter-century of student scholarship.

After twenty-five years, Dr. Colin Davis, the former UAB professor who served as the journal's founding faculty advisor, says the legacy of the publication is simply "brilliant." In a recent interview on the occasion of the journal's 25th anniversary, Dr. Davis recalled the "dynamic group of graduate students" that served as the journal's founding editorial staff, including the journal's first executive editor, Dr. Donna Cox Baker, who worked hard to secure funding and launch the publication. As a Phi Alpha Theta Honors Society publication, the journal is required to be run almost entirely by students, so by rules and design it has always been a truly student-run endeavor. At the time of first printing, the History Department at UAB was the only program at a small university to attempt such a departmental publication, demonstrating the ingenuity and drive of the students and faculty who brought it to life. With support from the department chair, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the then School of Behavioral Sciences, Dr. Davis and the students were able to print and publish the



first edition. After that, Dr. Davis recalled, “off it went,” as a “self-fulfilling animal” under the supervision of a dedicated and evolving group of students.

Reprising the success of the first printing with subsequent award-winning editions, the VHR gave the UAB History Department “real credibility,” Dr. Davis recalls, and enabled a then-small university to “lead the field” with something that the Phi Alpha Theta chapters at its sister schools, the University of Alabama and the University of Alabama at Huntsville, did not have. Although he has retired from his position at UAB, Dr. Davis says he has never retired from the historical profession. He continues to do research outside of the university and he continues to publish. His latest work explores the maritime history of fishermen. Unless prevented by pandemic-related travel restrictions, Dr. Davis will soon be conducting research in Norway. Looking back on twenty-five years of scholarship, Dr. Davis says that what most impresses him about the publication are the students, as it is “their enthusiasm and commitment that made it.”

Select volumes of the VHR highlight specific historical themes, while other editions showcase a variety of subjects. The range of topics covered over the years is vast, and includes the intricacies of world wars, biographies of historical figures, debates on historical theory, and investigations into oppression and social reform. Over the years, students have plunged into moments both politically charged and socially significant. The journal’s editors and contributors remain dedicated to employing history to draw meaning from a complex world. An example of a thematic issue comes from the 2011 edition, which drew upon the Reynolds-Finley Historical Library, UAB’s extensive collection of over 13,000 rare books and manuscripts on the history

of health and medicine. The VHR showcased a selection of essays on medical history. The VHR’s 17th volume, published in 2013, spotlighted the 50th anniversary of the civil rights movement in Alabama with an assemblage of student-authored pieces on local history as well as a reflective essay by former UAB professor Dr. Robert G. Corley about his experience of becoming a historian during the Jim Crow era.

Local history remains a central feature of the journal. The Magic City’s long and complex history continues to inspire diverse research. In 2019, the state of Alabama celebrated its bicentennial. Accordingly, the VHR editorial board authored a special article highlighting the state’s many achievements, including its role in the American Industrial Revolution and sending a man to the moon on the Saturn V rocket. The article also addressed some of the many painful and difficult aspects of Alabama history, such as the removal of Native Americans, the establishment of a convict-leasing system, and long-standing racial injustices.

Willingness to confront historical controversy in all its forms is a central commitment of the journal. Student authors writing for the VHR do not shy away from uncomfortable topics in history, instead choosing to examine their meaning. In 2014, Volume 18 evaluated the complexity of the Civil War, especially concerning the historiography of who has counted as a human being throughout American history. In 2017, the VHR published a selection of articles addressing a heated scholarly debate about the historian’s duties and the ethics of responsibility in the context of research methods. The VHR student authors and editors have demonstrated a commitment to placing a critical eye on all moments from the past while

acknowledging historians' responsibility for examining historical injustice in myriad forms.

Printed during the global Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020 and continues into 2021, the 25th anniversary edition of the *Vulcan Historical Review* requires special reflection. This moment asks us to pause, to contemplate what it means to be human, and to reflect on existence not only in our own time, but also at various points in the past. In this edition, authors explore the human condition in both the everyday and the uncommon. They survey historical moments touching daily life, including famine, addiction, war, injustice, death, and their legacy. Without the historian, moments from the past are like portraits hanging on a wall, unable to speak. To impart their story to us, they need voices. In this volume, and in editions to come, authors will continue to draw sources from the vast archives of humanity's past and, through their research and writing, give them voice. After a quarter-century of ambitious and conscientious historical research, the VHR remains dedicated to providing students with the opportunity to investigate these voices and a platform from which they can be heard.



## American Crow

Caroline Myers

## WOMEN IN NEW DEAL POLITICS: OVERCOMING GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND LEAVING LEGACIES

Jessica Lo

For a large proportion of American history, women were widely excluded from the realm of government.<sup>1</sup> Nineteenth-century politics saw men in almost all forms of office; women were not allowed suffrage during this century, and were encouraged to focus on “voluntary and charitable activities” instead.<sup>2</sup> The gender restrictions of society placed them into domestic roles that included taking care of children and maintaining the household. These enforced roles permeated the majority of female history, continuing well into the twentieth century. However, when a large number of able-bodied men were deployed to fight in World War I, many job opportunities appeared for women as urbanization spread throughout the nation.<sup>3</sup> Economic independence and the relaxation of many social norms, such as wearing less restrictive clothing, became more prevalent with the presence of women increasing in society. The suffrage movement was a product of the amalgamation of these new experiences, and it concluded with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which provided white women the right to vote. This would increase the number of women involved in politics, and would eventually lead to the expansion of the roles women held in politics, especially after Jeannette Rankin became the first woman in Congress.<sup>4</sup>

This increase in women’s participation in government was coupled with a negative reception throughout the nation and a desire to prevent further female involvement in politics. Both major political parties sectioned off smaller organizations for women as an attempt to discreetly minimize the impact of women in politics.<sup>5</sup> Many women also maintained traditional beliefs and did not believe that women should be involved in politics. This reception began to shift towards a modern

standpoint as the United States entered the New Deal era, but many would continue to believe that women should be excluded from politics. The role of married women as the domestic caretakers of their families would continue to be a heavily prevalent belief into the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> This idea was enforced by Section 213 of the Economy Act of 1932, which mandated that government departments “fire employees whose spouses also worked for the government” if layoffs were necessary.<sup>7</sup> This would usually result in female employees losing their jobs to men, who were still considered the breadwinners of the family and could gain higher wages as women were thought to be earning wages for shallow purposes rather than to support their families.<sup>8</sup> This section would not be repealed until 1937, well into the New Deal era.<sup>9</sup> Due to these types of unwavering traditional opinions, female politicians during the New Deal continued to experience gender discrimination, despite overcoming the initial trials of being elected to office. However, their work and efforts in office would significantly shape American society during the 1930s and later in the future.

“ The judgement and discrimination faced by female politicians in the 1920s diminished, but still continued, into the New Deal era. ”

The judgement and discrimination faced by female politicians in the 1920s diminished, but still continued, into the New Deal era. During this time, political observers treated female politicians as self-centered “divas elbowing each other out of the spotlight” and painted political conflicts between them as “catfights.”<sup>10</sup> A national poll in 1937 reported that only 31 percent of the sample would vote for a woman for president even if they knew she was well-qualified for the job.<sup>11</sup> Many instances of this discrimination only served to reinforce the view that women did not belong in politics. A specific example of gender discrimination can be found with Frances Perkins, who was appointed as the U.S. Secretary of Labor by Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). She was heavily criticized by the press while dealing with issues such as the ongoing Great Depression and impeachment accusations.<sup>12</sup> “Secretary of Labor was a man’s job!” was a heavily featured tagline whenever she was criticized.<sup>13</sup> This perspective, shared by those who maintained traditional values encouraging women to remain within the home, perpetuated a subdued acknowledgement of the work done by the female politicians who contributed to the programs of the New Deal. Nonetheless, FDR appointed twenty-two women to senior administrative posts, which had previously been predominantly filled by men.<sup>14</sup> With this, women were increasingly given access to significant political discussions and preparations to restore the well-being of the nation that was struggling with the aftermath of the Great Depression. This would result in many significant contributions to the programs that would help revive America during the 1930s and continue to have lasting effects to this day.

Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States, was one of these female politicians with widespread influence and contributions. Her role as First Lady gave her “flexibility and freedom denied even to the president,” allowing her to take a proactive role in politics, which was unlike many of



Eleanor Roosevelt, middle, not wearing a hat, congregating with a group of women in 1932 or 1933. Photographers Harris and Ewing. Library of Congress.

her predecessors.<sup>15</sup> She was never hesitant when advising or questioning her husband, and often encouraged him to address political issues that were not conventional for him to do; this merely serves as one example of how influential she was.<sup>16</sup> She wrote novels such as *It's Up to the Women*, which included her thoughts on “everyday advice” and “fervent appeals to women to lead in the movement for social justice... and to enter politics” as part of her role as an advocator for social reform.<sup>17</sup> Her position as a powerful woman in politics helped increase the novel’s appeal to women across the nation. Her “national syndicated newspaper column,” “My Day,” was also effective in connecting American women to politics.<sup>18</sup> Her initial columns were primarily about her everyday activities, but evolved to include her political opinions and her involvement as the column became more prominent in the nation.<sup>19</sup> In the column for January 22, 1936, she spoke of a lunch she had with female guests that led her to wonder if the lunch was assign “that women are more alive to the government.”<sup>20</sup> The column for February 3, 1936, also encouraged women to go vote as their vote was “a



matter of real importance.”<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt was not only crucial in encouraging the common American woman, but also equally beneficial in helping female politicians. She held many press conferences that gave female politicians a platform to voice their concerns to other women they could not directly contact.<sup>22</sup> Her ability to develop influential platforms that brought awareness to women’s rights assisted Roosevelt in firmly establishing her position as a key figure in increasing women’s roles in politics.

Molly Dewson, another important figure for women’s rights, was one of the female politicians whom Roosevelt was close to and worked with to further women’s roles in politics. Before being appointed in the national government, Dewson was crucial in getting female votes for FDR in both his gubernatorial and presidential campaigns.<sup>23</sup> She was head of the Women’s Division of the Democratic Party, chairwoman of multiple committees, such as the National Democratic Committee, and became the first woman to be part of the Social Security Board in 1937.<sup>24</sup> Her first year of correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt revolved around the importance of recruiting more women into politics, which resulted in jobs being given to over 100 women at the beginning of the New Deal era.<sup>25</sup> With ties to Roosevelt, Dewson was able to maintain a strong influence within government to defend women’s political rights.

Frances Perkins was yet another key figure in female involvement in politics. She set a precedent by being the first woman to be appointed to the U.S. Cabinet as Secretary of Labor. Her role in the U.S. Cabinet allowed her to hire many women to serve in the Labor Department, which provided females the opportunity to drift away from the domestic shell and gain more economic independence.<sup>26</sup> She was a firm supporter of both women’s rights and labor rights for the impoverished. This led to her accomplishing many

progressive goals, such as establishing a minimum wage, developing the Civilian Conservation Corps and Social Security Program, and creating laws to regulate child labor and labor safety.<sup>27</sup> In her article “Social Security and Abroad,” she wrote that the Social Security program would be created “to protect our citizens from the hazards” that may result in “destitution and dependency.”<sup>28</sup> This would be one of many articles she would write that revolved around the issues she planned to address. Many of the programs and laws she helped develop were crucial components of New Deal relief efforts. She did all this while taking care of her daughter and husband, the latter of whom suffered from mental illness.<sup>29</sup>



Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, director of Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration, January 1943. Photographer Gordon Parks. Library of Congress.

Although white women were the main benefactors of the rights provided by the Nineteenth Amendment and the primary figures of female involvement in politics, there were women of color that were also influential in politics. A notable woman in politics was Mary McLeod Bethune, director of

Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration and FDR’s “special advisor on minority affairs.”<sup>30</sup> She was influential in Eleanor Roosevelt’s decision to fight for racial equality, and she was successful in getting more Black youth involved with the New Deal.<sup>31</sup> Her influence and connections to the White House played an important role in fighting for racial equality decades before the ratification of the Civil Rights Act.

## “ Eleanor Roosevelt and fellow female politicians believed in the importance of hiring women into governmental positions. ”

Women of different natures and positions in government during the New Deal accomplished many goals that have resulted in lasting effects on American society. Eleanor Roosevelt and fellow female politicians believed in the importance of hiring women into governmental positions. Significant figures include Frances Perkins and Molly Dewson, with both hiring numerous women to serve under their leadership. Eleanor Roosevelt's ability to display her personal political opinions without being belittled or curtailed by men helped encourage American women to speak up about their political opinions. This widespread interaction with the nation, alongside Roosevelt's "willingness to listen," resulted in "a weekly avalanche of mail from women across the United States" that included a wide range of topics "from labor to foreign policy, concerns that were far beyond the domestic sphere."<sup>32</sup> Encouraging women to speak up also led to developments in women joining extremist organizations because they did not support how liberal the New Deal was.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, women were increasingly voicing their political views without male influence or other restrictions. Women also benefited economically in areas besides politics. Eleanor Roosevelt only allowed women to cover her press conferences, which created a demand "to hire women reporters for the first time."<sup>34</sup> This opened the field of journalism, a field previously dominated by men, to women and provided them another potential source of employment.

Women in New Deal politics also made large contributions to relief efforts as they made sure that "programs of the New Deal met the needs of women as well as men."<sup>35</sup> This can be seen in Frances Perkins' large involvement in the development of many programs such as the Social Security Program and Fair Labor Standards Act, which are still important to this day.

Increasing female involvement in politics is not limited to the 1930s. As of 2020, there were 126 women serving in Congress, including many women of color, a drastic increase compared to the eight women that served in Congress in the 1930s.<sup>36</sup> Another major development that occurred in 2020 was the election of Kamala Harris as Vice President of the U.S., the first female and person of color to do so. Both modern developments of women setting more precedents in government were the delayed results of what Eleanor Roosevelt and New Deal female politicians had desired would occur in the decades that followed their time in office. Although these results would not happen for almost a century, women participating in politics would finally become a common occurrence by the twenty-first century.

The female leaders of the New Deal era were highly determined to overcome the challenges of being outnumbered in a male-dominated government and set forth many programs that would benefit the nation and help it recover after the Great Depression. By building connections with one another and with the women all over the U.S., female politicians of the New Deal were able to further improve women's roles in politics in the 1930s and have lasting effects on politics in modern society.

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## FROM A COLD LOCATION TO A COLD WAR: THE 8147TH ARMY UNIT'S MOUNTAINEERING INSTRUCTORS

Kallee Knox

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In June 1953, Thomas Paul Knox received word that he would be leaving his position as a military policeman in Korea to become an acting military policeman in Honshu, Japan, instead. Shortly after arriving in Honshu, Knox was selected to become one of the first members of a newly developed school named the 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School. This new unit was a descendant of the 10th Mountain Division, which had specialized in mountaineering warfare during World War II. Colonel Hazel Link, an active member of the 10th Mountain Division who had served as a tank commander under General George S. Patton, was the Commandant of the new school. Because of his excellent background in mountaineering and warfare, he knew that the United States military would need a special group of men with the same skills and abilities he was once taught. Link would say about his students, "When they arrive, they will be afraid of the mountain and won't want to take the training," but once students completed their mountaineering training, he told them, "We won't be able to keep you off of it."<sup>1</sup> Knox became one of the first students at the Mountain Training School, alongside Fred Lodien, who had also served as a military policeman in the Korean War. Knox and Lodien did not serve beside each other in Korea, but quickly became close friends through the 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School. Robert Thomson was also one of the few men selected for the 8147th Army Unit, and, after extensive and intense training, all three men became part of the very first group of instructors for the 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School. Together, they impacted the future of mountaineering warfare for all branches of the United States military.

The tension between the United States and the Union of

Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) became a growing issue following the end of the Korean War. The United States had clear reasons to believe that China, who had formed a wartime alliance with the United States in 1942, might now side with the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong, a Chinese communist activist and leader, was leading a revolution within China and had a negative approach towards President Truman and his administration. The United States was focused on containing the territorial expansion of the Soviet Union in Europe, but the state of affairs in Asia caused President Truman and his administration to "seek a more realistic and pragmatic policy" with the Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> The intent of this policy was to prevent hostilities among countries like China, who supported modern-day North Korea, both during and following the Korean War. The United States had already placed troops in many of the prefectures of Japan to act as a deterrent to the spread of communism. With the growing tension from the Soviet Union, in addition to its uncertain relationship with both China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), the United States needed to maintain a positive relationship with Japan. The United States desperately needed an active presence within the Asian continent to increase its sphere of democratic influence.

Many members of the U.S. military, who were already stationed in various parts of Japan, could sense an upcoming war with the Soviet Union. Arthur Thomas was stationed in Honshu, Japan, and was an editor for the Honshu Pioneer, one of the first government-issued newspapers. He frequently interviewed American soldiers who were stationed in Japan and often released claims from U.S. soldiers who believed

a war could break out and knew that trouble was ahead.<sup>3</sup> Similarly to the soldiers in Honshu, many U.S. forces stationed in Hokkaido, Japan, were planning for a potential war with the Soviet Union. Hokkaido is eight hundred and sixty-three miles from Honshu, but both islands played significant roles in the hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union. Hokkaido itself is very close to the Soviet Union. To put the distance between Hokkaido and Russia in perspective, in 2017, a twenty-eight-mile bridge was proposed that would connect the Russian island of Sakhalin to the northern area of Hokkaido. Because of its proximity to Russia, the United States heavily occupied Hokkaido following the end of the Korean War. The U.S. occupational forces were concerned about tensions with the Soviet Union and were even more concerned with “the future of an island where they did not accept any Soviet forces.”<sup>4</sup> The idea behind this claim was that the United States’ presence would stop the Soviet Union from invading Japan, despite being so close geographically. Additionally, both Honshu and Hokkaido played significant roles in the development of the 8147th Army Unit’s Mountain Training School, as these areas became heavily populated with U.S. military personnel, among them Thomas P. Knox, Fred Lodien, and Robert Thomson, following the end of the Korean War and the unfortunate beginning of a new type of war.

Colonel Hazel Link’s background in mountaineering and winter warfare during World War II taught him the importance of and need for men who were skilled in these areas, which is why he developed the 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School. Knox, Lodien, and Thomson were three of Colonel Link’s first picks to join the school and learn the skills necessary to become mountaineering experts. Knox and Lodien shared common interests and quickly became close friends during their training. Knox was born and raised on his family farm in Sardis, Alabama—a little town with one



Members of the 8147th Army Unit team practicing and teaching rescue operations in case of any medical emergencies. Thomas Knox pictured on the far left. Photo courtesy of Fred Lodien.

small schoolhouse for the limited number of children who lived in the area. An important aspect of Sardis is that it has no mountains, just a few hills. Fred Lodien, who grew up in Scandia, Minnesota, shared this trait with Knox. When the two met, they quickly realized that neither man had any training or background in mountaineering. Fred Lodien recalls how some of the most important aspects of their training included learning how to properly rappel, which is where one controls their descent off a vertical drop or a rockface. The first half of their training took place at the Mountain Climbing School within Camp Weir, located in Honshu. Lodien said that the initial training included rappelling down the walls of empty swimming pools and jumping out of treetops onto fixed lines.<sup>5</sup> After successful training in the Mountain Climbing School, the group of men traveled to the Winter Warfare School, located in Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan. This became the perfect location for winter warfare training due to its geographic location and climate. When Hokkaido was first settled, the harsh winters forced neighbors to work together to combat the extreme weather in order to survive.<sup>6</sup>



Hokkaido's towering mountains and extreme winters created the perfect winter warfare preparation site. The men of the 8147th Army Unit knew that although they had learned so much at Camp Weir, their mountaineering and winter warfare training was anything but over.

Robert Thomson, who was born and raised in Utah, had experienced cold weather before, but recalled that it was absolutely nothing compared to what he experienced in the mountains of Hokkaido. Their training camps were placed in the mountains to provide the most realistic and intense scenarios. Thomson said that when measuring the snow at the Winter Warfare School, he would make sure to measure the snow in feet instead of inches, as the snow always totaled more than twelve inches.<sup>7</sup> Here, the training of the 8147th Army Unit included tactical skiing, wartime preparation within the mountains, and creating spots for their tents so that they would be able to sleep in the mountains at night. After learning the basics of winter warfare, the men would leave every Monday morning to go into the mountain's training fields, train throughout the week, and then return to the base camp on Friday night. While in the field, the men would learn about the difference between rappelling the face of a mountain during the winter compared to the summer. Completing the Winter Warfare School became a career achievement, as the harsh winters prepared the 8147th Army Unit for various types of mountaineering expeditions. With the Cold War on the horizon, and the men training so close to the Soviet Union, Robert Thomson recalls frequently seeing Soviet aircraft from the mountains of Hokkaido. While Knox, Lodien, and Thomson were training specifically to become instructors, it can be inferred that Colonel Link wanted to revive and replenish both the individual men and the entire units skilled in mountaineering and winter warfare, in case the United States became engaged in combat with the Soviet Union.

Eastern Europe is still known to this day for its unbearably harsh winters, and, as history tells us, battling within Russia's borders during the winter is extremely tough and often impossible. Some of the most notable warfare operations in history were lost within Russia. The 1812 French invasion of Russia led to Napoleon Bonaparte's downfall, as the French Emperor could not overcome the harsh winter weather.

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Russian strategies to prevent the French from securing any goods or victories, combined with the geographic features unique to Russia, decimated French troops. Like Napoleon, Adolf Hitler also attempted to conquer Russia during the Second World War. Russian geographic topography and extreme cold resulted in failure for the German dictator, which ultimately ruined his plans for worldwide domination. The United States could sense war, and, if the Soviet Union pushed the U.S. too far, they were determined to have men trained to do battle in the harsh climate and mountainous terrain of Eastern Europe.

After completing their strenuous training, the men became 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School instructors. They

would travel between Honshu and Hokkaido as they trained the men within their unit and those either outside the unit or within another military branch. The unit ranged from ninety to one hundred men at any one time—extremely small compared to a regular Army unit. Colonel Link knew the importance of this group of men and their training abilities, so when it came time to gather supplies or select food for the mess hall, he ordered Joe Adcock, the mess-hall sergeant, to choose only the best food for such a great group of men.<sup>8</sup> While most members of the 8147th Army Unit originated from all over the continental United States, the Unit Medical Officer's home was only twenty miles from Thomas P. Knox's childhood home. Dr. Dodson Curry, the acting medical doctor for the small unit, was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. Curry was trained in mountaineering and winter warfare, in case the team had a medical emergency during their four-week training periods or during any future team missions. He spent most of his time with the unit at the Mountain Training School in Camp Weir. Recalling his time with the unit, Dr. Curry continuously emphasized that the 8147th Army Unit was "elite" and specialized, meaning that not many military servicemen existed with the job of training others in the area of mountaineering and winter warfare.<sup>9</sup> Even though the 8147th Army Unit was small compared to most, its purpose and objectives clearly benefited the United States as growing tensions with the Soviet Union increased.

Thomas P. Knox, Fred Lodien, and Robert Thomson were often split between the school at Camp Weir and the other location in Hokkaido, so that each man could train their own group. As trainers, they were often called mountaineering specialists. At this time in his Army career, Knox was a Private First Class. He was instructed to teach absolutely any soul who came to the mountain training school, as the United States desperately needed soldiers trained in this field. This meant that Knox, a Private, was able to give orders and teach

anyone in the military, and he frequently trained military officers who were ranked as Majors.<sup>10</sup> The instructors trained men from the other military branches such as the Marines or the Navy, as well as women within the forces.

Steve Coulson, stationed in Japan after the Korean War ceasefire and a member of the 187th Regimental Combat Team, had seen an open slot within his company to attend the Mountain Training School and excitedly signed up for the spot. Coulson arrived at Camp Weir for the first four-week course and remembered the exhilarating environment. When recalling the training period, Coulson stated, "ground training came first. We learned about pitons [metal spikes that are driven into the mountainside for support], knot tying, and then hiked eight miles up the mountain where we learned how to save our legs."<sup>11</sup> Coulson stated that the initial training lasted about a week. Then he was ready to learn how to free-base rock climb, which meant that he was taught how to use only his hands to climb the slope. Following this training, Coulson and his small group were taught how to rappel down the mountainside using a two-hundred-and twenty-foot rope. In order to successfully learn this skill, the men would hike about seven miles up the mountain, then rappel down to the base camp. The ropes would be looped into a half, meaning that the men would only rappel about one hundred feet down at a time, while driving pitons into the mountainside for stability. It was crucial for any student at the Mountain Training School to learn these skills during the day, but Coulson also remembers night climbing and training to find survival resources during the night. He had rappelled out of helicopters numerous times while serving in the Army but stated that it was "nothing like rappelling down a mountain."<sup>12</sup> The extensive training these men endured at Camp Weir served a purpose: in order to have skilled mountaineering service members, it was vital to go through every aspect and scenario possible. Because there was little demand for mountaineering troops prior to

the end of the Korean War, there were very few servicemen who had these skills. With the possibility of fighting in Eastern Europe, the skills became desperately needed. Men like Steve Coulson learned lifelong skills that might not be necessary for a routine day job, but if needed, his skills would have proven to be very useful on an Eastern warfront, had the men ever needed to endure the brutal weather or topography.



Members of the 8147th Army Unit team learning tactical warfare as they carried their weapons at the Winter Warfare School located in Hokkaido, Japan. Photo courtesy of Fred Lodien.

Training men to be skilled in mountaineering and winter warfare was extremely important; however, the unit had few medical professionals trained in these tactics. This led the 8147th Army Unit to include specialized women in the program. The women who required mountaineering training were almost always nurses within the different military branches. While these nurses were skilled in general healthcare, they also needed to learn how to treat the wounded in extreme winter weather, as well as how to get to an individual on the mountain in case of any injuries. While most of the women who arrived at the Winter Warfare School could not begin to build a campsite, let alone a fire, they were

soon taught the important skills needed to survive in the mountains. When training at the Winter Warfare School, the instructors taught their female trainees basic survival skills, such as how to kill, clean, and cook various wild animals. *Stars and Stripes*, the official newspaper of the U.S. armed forces, interviewed some of the nurses who trained under Knox, Lodien, and Thomson. These nurses recalled that “most of the training period is spent in the field where they learn to build improvised shelters, trap food, build fires and even cook.”<sup>13</sup> The nurses’ training also helped them understand how to act and get to other U.S. soldiers if these soldiers ever encountered problems while fighting in the mountains. The *Stars and Stripes* reporter referred to the training at the Winter Warfare School as “the toughest school in Japan” due to the difficult and specialized four-week course.<sup>14</sup> Without discrediting the hard work needed to complete the mountaineering school at Camp Weir, the Winter Warfare School was easily one of the most specific and desired training programs for the United States service-people, as the likelihood of a warfront in Eastern Europe seemed inevitable. By training nurses in mountaineering and winter warfare tactics, the United States was preparing servicemen and servicewomen for all possibilities and areas of cold-weather warfare, where they would be adequately trained to save the lives of wounded soldiers while surviving extreme environmental conditions.

The 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School is one of many military histories that has not been adequately explored. Men like Thomas P. Knox, Robert Thomson, and Dr. Dodson Curry went on to perform recovery missions while still in the service. Knox, Thomson, and Curry recovered the remains of Navy servicemen whose small airplane crashed into the Japanese Alps. Their preparation and time spent as instructors and medical staff at the Winter Warfare School in Hokkaido trained them for this mission, and all three men

were able to give the servicemen's families some closure. Knox then went on a separate recovery mission to a small island in the Mariana Island chain, called Agrihan. Robert Thomson was also part of this recovery mission, where a small team of men were ordered to rappel into the crater of a semiactive volcano and recover the remains of servicemen whose plane had crashed there while they were conducting search and rescue for a missing hurricane hunter plane. The team successfully recovered what they could from the crash and completed their mission without any injuries, despite rappelling into a semi-active volcano. The skills of the men of the 8147th Army Unit proved that they were prepared for more than winter warfare as they completed two recovery missions after their time as trainers.

Thankfully, the Cold War did not include any physical



Members of the 8147th Army Unit assemble for a group photo that was taken in the early 1950s at the Mountain Training School located within Camp Weir in Honshu, Japan. First row, seated: Colonel Hazel Link, fourth from the left; Fred Lodien, seventh from the left. Fourth row, standing: Thomas Knox, far right (only head and neck visible). Photo courtesy of author.

battles within the mountainous areas of Eastern Europe, but the servicemen of the United States were prepared in case

physical war broke out. Nothing but positive remarks have been made about the instructors of the 8147th Army Unit. Steve Coulson stated that, while at the Mountain Training School in Honshu, "the instructors were hardcore and dedicated. They did a great job."<sup>15</sup> Coulson is not the only man to have high remarks for the 8147th Army Unit's instructors. Those interviewed by the *Stars and Stripes* reporter also

“ Without discrediting the hard work needed to complete the mountaineering school at Camp Weir, the Winter Warfare School was easily one of the most specific and desired training programs for the United States service-people, as the likelihood of a warfront in Eastern Europe seemed inevitable.

asserted that “the instructors were serious about their work and didn't fool around; they were conscientious and take an individual interest in their students, important since the student's life is often in danger.”<sup>16</sup> The small group of men that made up the 8147th Army Unit Mountain Training School dedicated a large portion of their careers to teaching others the specialized skills of both mountaineering and winter warfare. While most of the servicemen and women who learned these survival and tactical skills were not able to go on specific mountaineering missions, the United States had men readily prepared in these skills that could be useful in a variety of different situations. After being honorably discharged, Thomas P. Knox left the army as a Sergeant and returned home to Sardis, Alabama. Thomas Paul Knox

passed away in January 2002, and Fred Lodien passed away in February 2019. Dr. Dodson Curry passed away in July 2018, five years after Thomas A. Knox had reached out to him for an interview. Robert Thomson, one of the longest-living members of the unit, passed away in early 2020. The legacy left behind by each member of the 8147th Army Unit will not be forgotten, as their contributions to the United States prove their significance, dedication, and bravery. While the

United States and Colonel Hazel Link may have been training servicemen and women with the intent of possible war within the mountains and during the winters of Eastern Europe, the 8147th Army Unit instead created specialized members from all walks of life who would be able to skillfully show their craft as mountaineering and winter warfare experts.

## ENDNOTES

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## **Crisis**

Diane Tucker

## LEGEND OVER TRUTH: THE MYSTERY OF GRAND DUCHESS ANASTASIA ROMANOV

Haley Wells

On July 29, 2007,<sup>1</sup> a shallow grave in Russia's Koptyaki Forest, just outside the city of Yekaterinburg, was unearthed. Inside the grave were forty-four charred bone and teeth fragments—the possible remains of Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov and her little brother Alexei, and, perhaps, the answer to one of the twentieth century's most notorious cold cases.<sup>2</sup> Dubbed “one of the last century's most momentous events,”<sup>3</sup> the disappearance of the Russian royal family in 1918 and the many conspiracy theories about their fate have captured public imagination for decades and have been the inspiration for many intrigue-filled movies, books, and television shows. More specifically, the unknown fate of the Grand Duchess Anastasia and the conspiracy theories surrounding her fate have made her one of the most well-known royal women in modern history and the star of many dramatic fairy tales, told and retold throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As one of Russia's—and the world's—most popular conspiracy theories of the last century, the effect Anastasia's legend has had on modern society, culture, and pop culture makes it very important to understand and examine.

Conspiracy theories are important because of their political, cultural, and societal impact; because of their influence on pop culture; and because of how they affect people's emotional and mental states—both positively and negatively. *New York Times* writer David Brooks states that they have become, “the most effective community bonding mechanisms of the 21st century. For those awash in anxiety and alienation, who feel that everything is spinning out of control, conspiracy theories are extremely effective emotional tools...For those who feel powerless, they provide agency...they provide liberation.”<sup>4</sup> People often seek out conspiracy



Russian Imperial family, circa 1913. By manhhai, licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC 2.0.

theories and fellow conspiracy theorists when their lives are chaotic and uncertain.<sup>5</sup> As Brooks states, belief in these theories creates a sense of being in control and gives the theorists an exclusive community within which they can rely on and support each other. This makes conspiracy theories very effective coping mechanisms for those who are suffering emotionally, mentally, and even physically.<sup>6</sup>

The conspiracy theory that Anastasia Romanov survived the execution of her entire family speaks to how much the desire—even the need—to believe in something influences what people actually end up believing. While those who believed in the legend of Anastasia could be dismissed as gullible, their faith in a conspiracy theory so fantastical should be examined at a deeper level. Why did they believe Anastasia had survived despite all evidence to the contrary? Why did they want to believe? What emotional solace did this

conspiracy theory provide? Lenin and the Bolsheviks laid the groundwork, while Russian émigrés, women claiming to be Anastasia, and the media created and propagated the legend we know today, all for a variety of different reasons. Because this growing legend, the desire to believe that legend, and a legitimate government coverup obscured the facts, the truth of Anastasia's fate was uncertain for decades; today, however, new discoveries and DNA evidence have conclusively proven that she was murdered along with the rest of her family on July 17, 1918.<sup>7</sup>

Although the groundwork for Anastasia's demise was laid from the moment her father, Tsar Nicholas II, ascended to the Russian throne, World War I was the catalyst that brought everything to a head. When the war started in August 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. Russia entered WWI as an ally of Britain and France, and together they fought against Germany and her allies. But the Russian army was not equipped to fight a war of such magnitude, and the people of Russia were less than enthusiastic about entering another conflict (having fought a war with Japan just ten years prior). The political situation in Russia was already unstable, and war only made everything worse. Historian Mark Steinberg states, "As the war dragged on, it exacerbated most of the problems in Russian life. The economy strained to keep up in a war that mobilized an unprecedented amount of human and material resources. Shortages of all sorts became epidemic...and prices soared...Carnage at the front and economic hardship in the rear helped revive and intensify civic protest."<sup>8</sup> In February 1917, these protests broke out into open revolution. All across Russia, calls rang out for Nicholas to abdicate the throne and for a new government—a government of the people—to be created. On March 2, 1917<sup>9</sup>, in what he claimed was an effort to stop the streets of Petrograd and other hotbed cities from turning into a bloodbath, Nicholas abdicated his throne. He placed power in the hands of his brother, Mikhail,

who also abdicated, placing power in the hands of the Provisional Duma Committee, soon to be the new Provisional Government.<sup>10</sup>

By abdicating, Nicholas placed himself and his family in danger. As symbols of autocracy and the old regime, the people of Russia deeply hated them, and by March 1917, many Russians wanted "Nicholas the Bloody" and his family to be killed. To soothe the agitated feelings of the Russian people and to protect the imperial family, Nicholas and his family were placed under house arrest at their palace in Tsarskoe Selo in March 1917.<sup>11</sup> They remained there until August 1917, when they were moved to Tobolsk, Russia.<sup>12</sup> Gleb Botkin, a friend of the imperial family who traveled with them to Tobolsk, described the town as "a truly God-forsaken place, 250 miles away from the nearest railroad."<sup>13</sup> This was exactly why the imperial family was sent there—the Provisional Government hoped to keep them away from danger by completely isolating them.

Then, in October 1917, radical Bolsheviks toppled the Provisional Government and rose to power. In early 1918, these new leaders demanded that the Tsar and his family be relocated to Yekaterinburg, Russia—a city burning with Bolshevik fervor, dubbed the capital of the "Red Urals."<sup>14</sup> At this time, the Bolsheviks were claiming that they wished the imperial family no harm. Lenin, cognizant of how the Bolshevik rise to power paralleled the events of the French Revolution, was very vocal about how the actions of the Bolsheviks would not mirror the actions of Marat, Robespierre, and the Jacobins. He stated that the "terror which the French revolutionaries used to guillotine unarmed people we do not use, and I hope, will not use."<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the Bolsheviks claimed that they were planning to put Nicholas on trial for his crimes against the people of Russia and were already collecting evidence to use against him as of April 17, 1918.<sup>16</sup>

So, the Bolsheviks' motives in sending the Tsar and his family to Yekaterinburg—a city full of people who wanted them dead—are suspect. It is possible that they were hoping the Ural Regional Soviets would murder Nicholas, thus taking his blood off their hands and allowing them to retain their image as benevolent revolutionaries. Whatever their motives, by May 24, 1918, the entire imperial family was housed at the Ipatiev House in Yekaterinburg.<sup>17</sup> They would live here for less than two months.

On July 17, 1918, the imperial family and their four servants were awoken and led down to the basement of the Ipatiev House where they were all murdered.<sup>18</sup> According to the family's head executioner, Yakov Yurovsky, the executioners first shot each person at chest-level. The Tsar was killed immediately, but the Grand Duchesses, the Empress, Alexei, and one maid were still alive. They were then stabbed with bayonets, shot in the head, and clubbed with rifle butts to finish them off, all of which took about twenty minutes.<sup>19</sup> Following the execution, Yurovsky claimed that the bodies were loaded into a truck and transported out to the nearby Koptiyaki forest, where they were disposed of.<sup>20</sup>

Just a few days after the execution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks made an announcement: they claimed that they had executed the Tsar, but that the rest of his family was still alive. The leaflet announcing Nicholas's murder stated, "The Ural Regional [Executive] Committee resolved to shoot Nicholas Romanov, and this was carried out on the sixteenth of July. Nicholas Romanov's wife and son are in a secure place."<sup>21</sup> However, the leaflet did not mention where the Grand Duchesses were or if they were alive—which led to intense speculation about their fate. Later, the official Bolshevik party line became that the Empress and all her children were being cared for and hidden at an unnamed location.<sup>22</sup> They implied that keeping the family hidden and surrounded by a veil of

secrecy was for their protection, but those who knew how hated the imperial family had been began to assume they were dead.

When the anti-Bolshevik forces captured Yekaterinburg just days after the murders<sup>23</sup>, they investigated the fate of the family.<sup>24</sup> They found blood and bullet marks in the basement of the Ipatiev House, but no bodies. They then went out to the Koptiyaki Forest. There, in a small clearing, they found objects belonging to the imperial family and their servants: family jewels, small icons, charred clothing and corsets, the corpse of Anastasia's dog, and more.<sup>25</sup> Based on this evidence, they assumed the imperial family had been murdered; however, they had no bodies to prove this assumption.

Although Lenin and most of the Bolsheviks never directly propagated any conspiracy theories about Anastasia or the other imperial family members, their insistence that the Empress and imperial children were still alive and in hiding created the perfect environment for theories to spring up. Some, like Nicholas Sokolov, who investigated the disappearance of the family, were sure that the entire family had been murdered, based on the minimal but ominous evidence they had.<sup>26</sup> Yet even as Sokolov began to build a case arguing that the entire family had been killed, many of the family's relatives and those loyal to them hoped against hope that they were still alive—thus feeding the conspiracy theories. Wild rumors began to spring up all across Russia and Europe, originating from a plethora of different sources. Because the Bolsheviks kept the supposed whereabouts of the Empress and her children a complete secret, people began to speculate that they were hidden in the Vatican, a remote Russian monastery, or even with relatives of Rasputin.<sup>27</sup> Some of these stories were even propagated by Bolsheviks<sup>28</sup>—perhaps as a way of adding credibility to the claim that the family was still alive, or perhaps because



they simply could not resist adding to the rumors. In the end, without any bodies to prove that the family had died or living humans to prove they were alive, no conspiracy theory—however wild—was impossible, which made them both persistent and popular.

It has often been stated that the Bolsheviks concealed the execution of the Empress and her children because they knew “how the world would view...the slaughter of the empress and her innocent children.”<sup>29</sup> Although this statement has some merit, it is only partially true.

Yurovsky and his cohorts did hide the bodies to prevent the anti-Bolshevik White Army from

finding them and using them for propaganda purposes. White Army propaganda “drew heavily

on the horrors of the Red Terror...It depicted the Bolshevik movement as bloodthirsty, antireligious, and destructive.”<sup>30</sup> If the White Army had found the mutilated corpses of the imperial family, they would certainly have used them to create gruesome, fear-mongering propaganda vilifying the Bolsheviks. Yurovsky even stated, “I worried very much about disposing of the corpses properly...Otherwise, all the corpses would wind up in the hands of the White Guards [the White Army]. It is easy to imagine how they would have exploited the situation.”<sup>31</sup> Although this propaganda would not have been particularly impactful in Russia—the majority of the Russian people were beyond caring about the fate of their former Tsar or his despised family—it would certainly have had a significant impact in other European countries, particularly Britain and Germany. If the corpses were revealed, the Bolshevik mask of benevolence and fairness to their former oppressors—the image that Lenin had endlessly promoted—would be stripped away. Britain and France were already heavily invested in seeing the Bolsheviks defeated, even funding the anti-Bolshevik forces, because they hoped that

the White Army would defeat the Bolsheviks and bring Russia back into the war as their ally.<sup>32</sup> Learning about the brutal murders of the imperial family would cause public outrage amongst the people of Europe and give Britain and France another reason to see the Bolsheviks defeated: to prevent another bloody, Reign of Terror-style regime.

More concerning for Lenin was how the news of the imperial family’s death, if leaked, could affect his relationship with Germany. In March 1918, Lenin had signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk<sup>33</sup>, ending war with Germany and even creating a tenuous alliance. The Germans hoped that internal strife would keep Russia out of WWI permanently, so they encouraged this alliance and funded many of Lenin’s and the Bolsheviks’ activities. But Kaiser Wilhelm II, cousin to Empress Alexandra, was worried about her disappearance. Several times after July 1918, he asked Lenin’s ambassador to Berlin, Adolph Joffe, about the fate of Empress Alexandra.<sup>34</sup> Both Joffe and Lenin refused to give him a straightforward answer. If the Kaiser had learned that his cousin and her children were dead, it could have ended Russia’s peace with Germany and launched them into another war. Even if Lenin had not directly ordered the murders (to this day, it is unclear whether he ordered the execution, or if the local Bolsheviks acted independently<sup>35</sup>), the responsibility for them would still fall on his head. Although this situation was not as perilous after Germany and the Kaiser were defeated in November 1918, the Russian Civil War dragged on for four more years, and Lenin’s power remained relatively tenuous. Any revelation about the imperial family and their fate could negatively affect the outcome of the Civil War and upset the delicate balance of power. So, for the sake of winning the Russian Civil War and creating the Russia he desired, Lenin had to conceal the murders and remain silent.

Russian émigrés—people who had fled Russia to escape



the turmoil—created and propagated the conspiracy theories because of their societal and emotional states following their displacement from Russia. Formerly members of Russia’s Tsarist and Provisional Governments, the White Army, and the intelligentsia, these émigrés had lived comfortable and privileged lives before the Revolution. Now, as displaced refugees living in Paris, Berlin, London, and even China, their lives were much less comfortable and secure. Author Greg King states, “Former tsarist generals drove taxicabs, once-proud countesses served as maids, elegant courtiers waited tables in crowded cafes, and dispossessed princesses acted as tutors.”<sup>36</sup> This change in their economic circumstances, compounded by being displaced and stateless, caused an identity crisis amongst many of the émigrés. This situation was exacerbated when, in 1921, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (the precursor to the USSR) “issued a decree that resulted in the mass denaturalization of former citizens of Imperial Russia.”<sup>37</sup> This meant that millions of Russian émigrés were left without legal protection, representation, or legitimate travel documents. Their home and identity as citizens of Russia had been taken from them, throwing their lives into turmoil and creating emotionally-distressed people who would gladly turn to conspiracy theories for comfort, stability, and an explanation for why these things were happening to them.

Furthermore, most of these émigrés were monarchists who could not accept that the old world order had ended, causing them to cling to conspiracy theories about the survival of the imperial family members. Referring to the Russian émigrés, authors Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan state, “The émigré community continued dressing their children in prerevolutionary uniforms and teaching them to sing ‘God Save the Tsar.’ They clung desperately to the (old) Russian way of life and wanted to keep it enshrined for the next generation.”<sup>38</sup> All they could think of was the past. One

émigré, Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, stated, “This past was like a dusty diamond, which we held to the light in the hope of seeing the sun rays playing through it. We spoke of the past, we looked to it.”<sup>39</sup> This obsession with the past kept conspiracy theories about the imperial family at the forefront of their minds. Additionally, despite their denaturalization, many of these émigrés still dreamed about returning to Russia after the political regime had changed. To admit that the Tsar and his entire family had died would be to admit that the past was truly gone and that they, most likely, would never be able to return to their homeland. So, despite the growing body of circumstantial evidence that pointed to the demise of the entire family, they clung to the hope that at least one family member had been saved, in the expectation that a surviving Romanov—or Romanovs—would restore the old political regime. This obsession with the past, clinging to hope despite all evidence that the entire family had perished, and their fragile emotional states led the émigrés to craft wild conspiracy theories about the survival of the Empress and her children.

“ Creating and believing in conspiracy theories about the imperial family helped émigrés feel as if they had reclaimed their autonomy and former identities, while simultaneously terminating the power the Soviets had over them. ”

The creation, belief in, and propagation of these theories benefited the émigrés for a number of reasons. First, these theories were a way for them to cope with their denaturalization and refugee status. Convincing themselves that at least one Romanov had survived and would someday bring back Imperial Russia allowed them to accept their displaced status—because, they reasoned, it would only be temporary. Second, belief in these theories allowed them to reclaim a sense of having power and being in control. Now, the Soviets made the decisions they had once made, leaving these formerly influential people completely powerless. Creating and believing in conspiracy theories about the imperial family helped émigrés feel as if they had reclaimed their autonomy and former identities, while simultaneously terminating the power the Soviets had over them. In short, it was a way for them to fight back against their “oppressors.” Finally, the conspiracy theories gave the émigrés a community and a support system. They became part of the glue that bound émigré communities together, helped them create a home away from home, and provided a sense of emotional stability that made the émigrés feel less alone in the world.

Additionally, it was not a stretch for the émigrés to believe in these theories because they had a history of believing outlandish conspiracy theories. As they had started to lose their political and social predominance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (due to industrialization, a population boom, and an unhappy peasant population), they had turned to bizarre conspiracy theories—such as the global cabal theory, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—to justify the direction their lives were taking. Although the theories about the Elders of Zion were no more than a pack of fantastical lies, many prominent Russians, including Tsar Nicholas,<sup>40</sup> saw the theories as entirely true and the explanation for why everything was changing. The Russian elite had

wholeheartedly believed in ridiculous theories when it was merely convenient to do so; it is easy to see how they would turn to similar theories when their lives were falling apart and they desperately needed something to believe in.

Claimants—people who came forward claiming to be a surviving imperial family member—also propagated the conspiracy theories and built on them as a way to legitimize their claims. Since 1918, over 200 people have come forward claiming to be Alexei or one of the four Grand Duchesses, demonstrating both the popularity of the Romanov conspiracy theories and the continual allure of Romanov claimants.<sup>41</sup> Several women claiming to be Anastasia surfaced before 1920, but each of these women, in turn, was proven to be a fraud.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, even before they were unmasked, none of these women were particularly compelling, although some did get their hour of fame in the media.

The conspiracy theories did not shift from speculating about the fate of the Empress and any of her children to centering solely on Anastasia until October 1921.<sup>43</sup> This shift was caused by a woman called Fraulein Ubekannt (“Miss Unknown” in German<sup>44</sup>), who came forward claiming to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia. Committed at the Daldorf Hospital in Berlin for attempting to commit suicide the previous year, her claim soon attracted the attention of many.

Although she was not the first Anastasia claimant (and would not be the last), Miss Ubekannt—soon to be known as Anna Anderson—was certainly the most compelling and charismatic, for several reasons. The first was that she came forward the same year the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic denaturalized millions of Russian émigrés, rendering them stateless. So, although the émigrés had always been vulnerable to the charms of conspiracy theories about the imperial family, her claim found them at a particularly weak moment. Whereas many émigrés might have been unwilling

to believe her at a different time—especially as her story and “proof” that she was Anastasia were particularly weak when she first came forward—their extreme emotional vulnerability made them much more likely to believe her.

This desperate desire to believe helped to conceal many of the problems with Anderson’s claim. First, she refused to converse in any language but German, and her understanding of Russian was clearly elementary at best. Moreover, she knew no English or French—languages Anastasia had known. This aspect of her claim was particularly confusing because Anastasia had been fluent in Russian, but not in German—unlike Anderson who spoke German very well.

Although Anderson tried to explain her inability to speak Russian by saying it was a result of her trauma, her puzzling linguistic abilities should have made the émigrés suspicious. But because they wanted to believe her, they ignored all the signs that her story was false. Even when her “memories” about the imperial family were obviously incorrect—as they often were—or when she could only “remember” aspects of her past life after someone told her the correct answer, many tearfully hailed her as the Grand Duchess Anastasia. Moreover, their reasons for believing in her were often ridiculous: one man stated that he knew Anderson was Anastasia because she knew how to operate a samovar<sup>45</sup> (a Russian urn used to make tea)—as if only a Romanov could understand how a samovar worked.

Despite the many hints that her claim was false, there were also many things that made Anderson’s claim believable. First, she shared a physical resemblance to Anastasia that the other Anastasia claimants did not. She had hallux valgus, a genetic foot deformity that Anastasia had also suffered from.<sup>46</sup> She also had piercing gray eyes—eyes that many of her supporters said reminded them of Nicholas II’s eyes. In addition, several physicians examined her and found that

her body showed evidence of a severe attack—perhaps a Bolshevik one. She had suffered skull damage, although the damage was much more minimal than later legends made it out to be. She had also suffered “some heavy blow or blows to her face”<sup>47</sup> that had fractured both her upper and lower jawbones and knocked out many of her teeth. Greg King states, “Blows of considerable force would have been necessary to fracture both jaws”<sup>48</sup>—such as blows from a Bolshevik rifle butt. On her upper stomach, the doctors found an area of discoloration that some of the doctors suggested could be powder burns—something she would have sustained had she been shot at close range. Her most interesting injury, however, was a scar on her right foot. King calls this scar “a transpiercing wound, the clear result of some object having been driven through the foot.”<sup>49</sup> Lore about Anderson later claimed that this scar was the result of her being stabbed with a bayonet. This combination of injuries made Anderson’s claim seem more probable, especially after she claimed she had sustained them during the execution and while she was trying to escape.

Another intriguing aspect of Anderson’s claim was her total disinterest in conclusively proving her identity. Although the legal battle to prove her identity was the longest in *German history*—lasting thirteen years—she did not personally pursue her claim in the courts, nor did she even start the legal process. In fact, she completely refused to attend the trial. Her case was instead initiated by two German lawyers, who did so at the suggestion of Anderson’s lawyer, Edward Fallows, and the Mendelssohn Bank in Berlin. In 1906, Tsar Nicholas had deposited two million rubles— “approximately \$20 million in 2010 figures”<sup>50</sup>—into the bank. By 1933, the entire imperial family was presumed to be dead, requiring the bank to give the money to seven collateral Romanov heirs—unless a supposed child of the Tsar disputed it. So the Mendelssohn Bank, hoping to avoid having to pay out

any of the money, contacted Edward Fallows and suggested “that he protest any payments based on his client’s claimed identity.”<sup>51</sup> Fallows could not do anything because he was an American, but he contacted two German lawyers who started the legal process. This was the beginning of the thirteen-year legal battle to prove Anderson’s identity—a process she apparently had no interest in. When asked why she refused to go to court, Anderson declared, “I know perfectly well who I am. I don’t need to prove it in any court of law.”<sup>52</sup> Her apparent disinterest in definitively proving her claim gave her “an aura of authenticity.”<sup>53</sup> In the end, the courts ruled against Anderson. They stated that the burden of proof rested with her and her lawyers, and that she had failed to definitively prove she was Anastasia. Had she agreed to show up in court and make a concerted effort to prove her claim, the courts might have ruled in her favor. Unlike the other claimants, who clearly came forward hoping to get a vast payout, Anderson’s disinterest in proving herself—and claiming her money—made even those skeptical about her claims reconsider her.

Anderson’s claim also received an air of plausibility because of the support of those who believed in her. Gleb Botkin was one of Anderson’s most ardent defenders. In an article published in 1930, he stated, “To me there is no mystery attached to the case of Madame Tchaikowsky [another name Anderson used]. I not merely believe her to be Anastasia—I know that she is. The guest of Miss Jennings [a woman Anderson stayed with for a time] is the youngest daughter of the late Emperor Nicholas II, and the only survivor of the Ekaterinburg massacre.”<sup>54</sup> He also described the first time he saw Anderson: “From the first moment that I saw Madame Tchaikowsky, I knew her to be Anastasia. There could be not the slightest doubt about it.”<sup>55</sup> Many others also championed Anderson’s cause. The endorsement of these people—people who had been close to Anastasia and the imperial family, people who seemed credible and discerning—

made Anderson’s story seem more legitimate. Much like a celebrity endorsement today, they made her claim seem more plausible to the general population and the media.



Left, Grand Duchess Anastasia. Right, profile photograph of Anna Anderson. By Royal Opera House Covent Garden. Licensed under public domain.

In the end, the intrigue and charm surrounding Anderson’s claim boiled down to three things. One, her claim could be neither conclusively proved nor disproved. Two, people wanted so desperately to believe in her that they would do so, despite any evidence that pointed to her being an imposter. And three, the media propagated her claim more than it propagated the story of any other claimant. The relationship between Anderson and the media was symbiotic: she gave them a wealth of material to adapt into romantic stories, and they turned her into a living legend.

More than anyone or anything else, the media created the Anastasia legend. Since the announcement in 1918 about the execution of Nicholas II, the media has been popularizing rumors and conspiracy theories about the fate of the imperial family. In fact, the October 23, 1921 issue of *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, a popular German magazine, seems to have been the inspiration for Anderson’s claim, as it contained an article

speculating about the fate of Anastasia.<sup>56</sup> After Anderson came forward, the media popularized both her personality and her claim. Stories about Anderson—more conspiracy theories about the fate of Anastasia—were published in newspapers, magazines, and books all across the world. This served to make Anderson the most famous Anastasia claimant.

Then, starting in 1928, Anderson’s story—and, by extension, the growing Anastasia legend—was adapted for the stage and screen. A 1928 silent film called *Clothes Make the Woman* began the Anastasia fairy-tale. It told the story of Anastasia being saved by a sympathetic Bolshevik, then escaping to America and becoming a famous movie star. The movie ended with the Bolshevik and Anastasia getting married.<sup>57</sup> This romantic tale appealed not just to Russian émigrés and those who believed Anderson’s claim, but also to people who wanted to believe in something hopeful. After “a decade of tragedies that marked the passing of the old world order”<sup>58</sup>, people wanted to believe in something happy and hopeful—and these glamorous, romantic tales suited the more glamorous, carefree atmosphere of the Roaring Twenties. The subsequent media that retold and romanticized Anastasia’s story turned the conspiracy theories about her away from their political implications and towards what Anastasia meant

“ The subsequent media that retold and romanticized Anastasia’s story turned the conspiracy theories about her away from their political implications and towards what Anastasia meant as a symbol to people everywhere. ”

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Many more movies and plays followed *Clothes Make the Woman*, including the 1956 movie *Anastasia* (starring Ingrid Bergman) and the beloved 1997 animated film *Anastasia*. Each of these movies and plays expanded on the legend of Anastasia and turned her into the fairy-tale princess we know today. It was a calculated move: the movies and plays about Anastasia capitalized on the “Disney princess culture” that was becoming popular, thanks to movies like *Snow White* (released in 1937), *Cinderella* (released in 1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (released in 1959)<sup>59</sup>. They turned Anastasia from a symbol of hope for anyone who wanted to believe that the world was not as dark and brutal as it seemed into a modern fairy-tale princess. And she also became a symbol of endless possibilities.

Yet amidst all the books and movies and ever-growing Anastasia legends, the question remained: would the world ever definitively know what had happened to the Grand Duchess? Was she truly Anna Anderson, or had she died on the night of July 17, 1918? And, if she had died, where was her body?

One mystery was solved when Anna Anderson died in 1984. Postmortem DNA testing done on her hair and her bowel tissue (from a surgery Anderson had undergone in 1979) definitively proved that she was not Anastasia. Instead, she was Franziska Schanzkowska<sup>60</sup>, a Kashubian woman from Germany (now modern Poland). Even after her true identity was revealed, many who had believed in her claimed that the DNA results were wrong, and that the testing and subsequent identification were part of some conspiracy to discredit her. Still, this revelation did nothing to explain what had happened to the true Anastasia.

Then, in 1991, two Russian men unveiled a massive find. Using clues embedded in an account Yakov Yurovsky



had written about the Romanov family execution and the subsequent burial of their bodies, Geli Ryabov, a Russian writer and movie director, and Alexander Avdonin, a geologist, had uncovered a burial site (in the Koptyaki Forest) in 1979. This grave contained nine skeletons. Although Yurovsky and the other executioners had placed several containers of sulfuric acid in the grave and shattered them before covering the grave up, Ryabov stated that “the corpses survived simply because the acid didn’t remain on them long enough...Therefore, the soft tissues were destroyed but the bones remained intact.”<sup>61</sup> This meant that there was more than enough material to do sufficient DNA tests. Ryabov and Avdonin had concealed their find for over a decade because they feared that revealing such a massive Soviet secret could result in their deaths.<sup>62</sup> Only after the Soviet regime ended in 1991 did they bring the corpses forward and allow them to be tested.

Dr. Peter Gill of the British Home Office’s Forensic Science Service Laboratory initially identified the corpses, but his team’s work was subsequently verified by other scientists and forensic laboratories around the world. The DNA tests revealed that the corpses were the remains of Tsar Nicholas, his wife Alexandra, three of the Grand Duchesses, and their four servants. However, Alexei and one Grand Duchess were missing.

The identity of the missing Grand Duchess quickly became controversial. During the Reno Forensic Science Convention in 2000, Dr. Sergey Nikitin presented evidence, including facial recognition test results, that pointed to Corpse #6 from the grave being Anastasia. While the age and height of the corpse left it unclear as to whether she was Marie (Anastasia’s sister) or Anastasia, the skull was not a match for Marie’s features, and it was a perfect match for Anastasia’s.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, facial recognition technology was still in its

infancy—especially when being run against photos from pre-1918—so this was a highly controversial and widely disputed conclusion.

Rather than bring closure and conclude the decades-old mystery, this find actually created more fuel for the conspiracy theories. Although the world now had proof that the Tsar and most of his family had died on July 17, 1918, this was a fact that had been somewhat accepted for decades—especially in scholarly communities. Finding the corpses was a groundbreaking discovery, and their identification was “a defining moment for forensic DNA testing,”<sup>64</sup> but, for most people, it was little more than proof of what they had already accepted.

However, the absence of one daughter fueled the conspiracy theories anew. In his account, Yurovsky had stated that it took much longer than expected to kill the Grand Duchesses. When they were shot at chest-level, the bullets kept bouncing off them. Then, when the Bolsheviks tried to stab them with bayonets, the blades could not pierce their torsos. In his account of the execution, Yurovsky stated, “The daughters had diamond armor [sewn] into their under bodices [corsets].”<sup>65</sup> He found these jewel-lined corsets when he was undressing the women for burial. He stated, “I found a corset which had something tightly sewn [in it]. I ripped it and found precious stones.”<sup>66</sup>—eighteen pounds of precious stones in total.<sup>67</sup> This revelation spawned lore that Anastasia’s jewel-lined corset had acted like a quasi-bulletproof vest, protecting her from the assault (a piece of lore that is popular to this day). Yurovsky stated that Anastasia had been murdered—he even described undressing and burying her—but that did not stop many from believing that Anastasia had survived. Yurovsky might have lied, and conspiracy theorists came up with many reasons why he would. Ultimately, without a body to prove that Anastasia had, in fact, died, the conspiracy

theories persisted.

Additionally, controversies about the DNA identification of the corpses began almost as soon the corpses were identified. Dr. Alec Knight, a senior researcher at Stanford University, “argued that the amplification of such a relatively large fragment (~1200 bp) from a degraded sample such as those from the Ekaterinburg mass grave was not possible and that the results obtained from Gill et al. were most likely contamination from modern DNA.”<sup>68</sup> His claim contained a valid criticism. Even those who believed that the identification was accurate admitted that getting such a clear, definitive result from such old, degraded DNA was unusual and remarkable. One scientist attributed the outstanding identification to the climate in which the bodies had been buried for decades, stating, “It is very likely that the extremely cold climate in Yekaterinburg, where the ground is typically frozen from September until April, provided an ideal environment to preserve the remains.”<sup>69</sup> Knight acknowledged that such an environment would preserve DNA exceptionally well, but pointed out that the temperature in Yekaterinburg can reach 100 degrees Fahrenheit in July and August<sup>70</sup>—which is certainly not an optimal temperature for preserving DNA. Dr. Knight’s claims created even more doubt and made some question if the remains of any of the imperial family members had actually been found.

In 2007, the searchers found a grave about seventy meters away from the first that contained forty-four charred bone and teeth fragments, along with several bullet fragments and pottery shards.<sup>71</sup> This time, Dr. Michael Coble and forensic anthropologist Anthony Falsetti were called in to examine the remains. By examining pelvis fragments from the remains, Falsetti was able to determine that the remains were from one male and one female. The male was between ten and thirteen years old, and the female was between eighteen and

twenty-three years old.

The mystery was finally laid to rest when Michael Coble produced DNA testing results for the bone fragments. The testing confirmed that Nicholas II and Alexandra were the parents, and that the remains came from siblings—Alexei and either Marie or Anastasia. In the report summarizing his results, Coble stated, “We found that the DNA evidence is 4.36 trillion times more likely if sample 147 is a daughter of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra, and over 80 trillion times more likely if sample 146.1 is a son of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra than if these samples were from two unrelated individuals.”<sup>72</sup> Several other labs, including the Department of Genomics and Laboratory of Evolutionary Genomics from the Vavilov Institute of General Genetics, Russian Academy of Science, confirmed Coble’s findings. In their paper summarizing the authentication of Coble’s findings, the scientists at this institute stated,

Likelihood estimations show that it is >108 or even 109 times more likely that newly found remains and remains from the first grave belong to the Romanov’s children than to random individuals unrelated to the Romanov family. Taken together, our genotyping data establish beyond reasonable doubt that the remains of the last Russian Emperor, Nicholas II Romanov, his wife Empress Alexandra, their 4 daughters (Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia) and their son (Crown Prince Alexei) have been identified. Thus, none of the Nicholas II Romanov family members survived the massacre.<sup>73</sup>

After ninety years, the mystery of Anastasia Romanov had been solved.

As the evidence presented here has proven, the theory that Anastasia somehow survived the execution on July 17, 1918 is completely fallacious. In the wake of the situation

that Lenin and the Bolsheviks created by concealing the murders, Russian émigrés and others created and propagated conspiracy theories about Anastasia for many political and emotional reasons. The media further dramatized and popularized these conspiracy theories. However, despite the attractiveness of the Anastasia legend, DNA evidence has proven conclusively that Anastasia, along with the rest of her immediate family, died on July 17, 1918. As Michael Coble stated in a paper he wrote about the identification of the last two Romanov children, "It's time to put this controversy to rest."<sup>74</sup>

Although the effect of Anastasia's legend on politics and history is considerable, her power as a symbol is incalculable. As a symbol of the old-world order, she first gave hope to multitudes of Russian émigrés and provided a stabilizing point for them to cling to. As a symbol of hope and "good" triumphing over "evil," she brought light to a world wracked with darkness and tragedy. In the post-WWI years, she became a symbol of better times to come. As a fairytale princess, she took her place in modern pop culture and in legend, becoming an inspiration for an entire generation of young women. Today, though few people know the truth of her story, almost everyone knows her name. Her persona and the tale created by the media connect with people for many different reasons. For some, her tale is about discovering who you are, but also defining who you want to be. For others, it is a story of hope and optimism in the face of darkness and evil. And for others, it is a story of family. In death, Anastasia has much more power than she ever had in life; the princess murdered before she had even lived two decades has become immortal.

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## HUNGRY AMERICA AND THE AFRICAN SOLUTION: HOW HIPPOPOTAMI NEARLY FED AMERICA

Tyler Dennis

Over the past few decades, an iconic slogan has become part of the American lexicon: “Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner.”<sup>1</sup> The slogan aimed to encourage Americans everywhere to buy beef products—indeed, beef and meat in general have been an important part of the American diet since the country’s inception. Although in today’s society a quick stroll to the local grocery store unveils a plethora of carnivorous options, having a surplus of meat was not always a privilege that Americans experienced. In the early twentieth century, the United States experienced a population boom, while livestock experienced threatening new diseases. The increase of both Americans and infected livestock created a meat shortage and a steep rise in the price of beef. Concerned about what had come to be known as the “Meat Question,”<sup>2</sup> Senator Robert Broussard collaborated with conservationist Frederick Burnham and Army Captain Fritz Duquesne to solve the problem. Unprecedented times called for an unprecedented solution, leading the trio to determine that bringing African hippopotami to America’s swamplands could alleviate national hunger. These men hoped that bringing the African hippopotamus to the American landscape would solve the issues of an ever-growing and prosperous nation by ensuring food security for generations to come.

The imbalance between an exponentially growing population and an effort to feed the people culminated in the early twentieth century and became known as the “Meat Question.”<sup>3</sup> As families went to the store, they faced the reality that meat had become more expensive. The American Economist noted that throughout a single lifetime, meat prices had nearly tripled: “In 1860 meat was 10 cents per pound,” while “[i]n 1910 meat was 25 cents per pound.”<sup>4</sup> While the price

of meat steadily increased across the decades, Americans remained attached to a red meat diet. No matter the price of meat, households learned to make the most of the products that they bought. In 1910, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a book that informed families how to get the most nutrition from the meat that they purchased. Dr. C.F. Langworthy and Dr. Caroline Hunt provided both economic and nutritional information for the American public. They wrote, “This means that if the raw meat costs 20 cents per pound the cooked would represent an increase of 4 cents a pound on the original cost; but this increase would, of course, be lessened if all the drippings and gravy are utilized.”<sup>5</sup> While four cents may not amount to much even by the early 1900’s standards, that amount can be saved for each meal in which meat is served. Dr. Langworthy and Dr. Hunt continued to explain how public institutions could reap even larger savings by adjusting how meat is prepared and following their methods. With the prices of beef and other meats on the rise, the American public began to search for answers.

As the country became restless dealing with the ‘Meat Question,’ American households looked to their foreign counterparts as the reason for both the shortage and the rising price of meat. In the early twentieth century, the United States was seen as a safe haven for individuals from around the world. The increase in population also brought with it an increase in tension on local supply chains. Journalist Jon Mooallem discussed the sentiment of the time in “American Hippopotamus,” mentioning that “[b]eef prices had soared as rangeland had been ruined by overgrazing, and a crippled industry struggled to satisfy America’s explosively growing cities, an unceasing wave of immigrants, and a surging demand for meat abroad.”<sup>6</sup> Although immigration had

escalated, a larger population may not have been the sole reason for a meat shortage. Based on the census of 1910, the United States reported a total population size of 91,972,266.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Department of Homeland Security records indicated that 1,041,570 individuals had “obtained lawful permanent resident status.”<sup>8</sup> Compared to a country that already had over 90 million residents, an additional million immigrants is still a significant increase. However, as immigrants were dispersed across the country, this alone would not have created a strain on the meat market.

Alongside an ever-increasing population, the twentieth century also saw a surge in animal diseases. Several diseases specifically infected livestock, which included cattle across the nation. Two of the main diseases that plagued the cattle community were anthrax (referred to as splenic fever) and Texas fever.<sup>9</sup> These two diseases alone were enough to have an impact on the farming community. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) explained that cattle are infected with anthrax when they breathe in spores and can pass it “when people breathe in spores, eat food or drink water that is contaminated with spores, or get spores in a cut or scrape in the skin.”<sup>10</sup>

Simultaneously, Texas fever (believed to have been spread by ticks<sup>11</sup>) began to run rampant and the infected cows became malnourished, which resulted in their death. Just as Texas fever began to kill cattle,<sup>12</sup> legislators regulated the transportation of cattle, before the entire beef supply was demolished.

In 1910, the USDA completed a report on the widespread issue of splenic and Texas fever. In the “Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Animal Industry,” the department explained that any animal who had contracted either disease should not be transported out of the state it resided in. The USDA continued,



Senator Robert Foligny Broussard in 1914. Photographers Harris & Ewing. Library of Congress.

During the continuance of this quarantine no cattle of that portion of Fulton County east of Spring River, or that portion of Sharp County north of Strawberry River, shall be moved or allowed to move, except as provided as for immediate slaughter, to any point in the United States not in the State of Arkansas which is located in an area not quarantined for splenic, southern, or Texas fever.<sup>13</sup>

“ The senator from Louisiana sought to personally reconcile the meat shortage in America, and his grand idea was to import the hippopotamus from Africa to the Louisiana swamps to serve as a new source of meat for the American people. ”

The USDA recommended that animals remain in their home counties until they were cleared by an inspector, without infection for six months, and with permission from an inspector from the state that the animals were being shipped to. While these measures were necessary to ensure safety for consumers, the new regulations further strained the meat supply. The culmination of a growing population and booming cities, alongside the deaths and transportation restrictions of cattle, together created the meat shortage in the United States.

Everyone from consumers and farmers to politicians frantically searched for an answer to the ‘Meat Question.’ Across the nation, individuals understood that rationing meat could not be sustained forever. In an attempt to quell their restless constituents, government officials pursued a resolution to the meat shortage. The one to take the lead on the issue was Senator Robert Foligny Broussard. The senator from Louisiana sought to personally reconcile the meat shortage in America, and his grand idea was to import the hippopotamus from Africa to the Louisiana swamps to serve as a new source of meat for the American people. He

organized a group of men to conduct research to determine if the project was feasible and presented their findings to the House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture. One of Senator Broussard’s key witnesses was Mr. W. N. Irwin from the Bureau of Plant Industry in the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Irwin determined that the hippopotamus had the potential to thrive in the swamps of Louisiana and could be used as a beef substitute. When the committee asked about his research, Mr. Irwin responded, “I am told that they will eat anything that cattle will eat, and many things that the cattle cannot get to—the water plants... I thought they would be useful in the Florida and Louisiana streams, to clear them out.”<sup>14</sup> Irwin also explained to the committee how quickly the hippopotamus grows, already weighing nearly two tons in infancy. The report boded well for Senator Broussard as he sought to fix both the meat shortage as well as the water hyacinth infestation in his state.

Louisiana was plagued by the hyacinth, a water plant that blocked waterways and fishing areas. In *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and its People from Hernando De Soto to Hurricane Katrina*, author Christopher Morris recounts how the water hyacinth took over Louisiana’s water routes. He explains, the “South American water hyacinth was introduced into Louisiana in the 1880s as an ornamental plant but spread into the wild. It actually impeded erosion by firming upriver and coastal banks. However, it also crowded out native plant and animal species, and clogged waterways and plantation ditches.”<sup>15</sup> The rapidly expansive water hyacinth further impacted Louisiana’s economy by slowing down water travel and blocking waterways used for farming. With the introduction of hippopotami to the Louisiana swamp to eat the water hyacinth, Senator Broussard’s legislation would provide meat as well as clear out the water hyacinth and propel the Senator to fame.

Throughout his political career, Senator Broussard was known for advocating new and occasionally quirky ideas. Historian Ann Wakefield's observations of the senator in what became known as "The Broussard Papers" illuminated unique aspects of Robert's life.<sup>16</sup> In "The Broussard Papers," Wakefield mentioned that while he grew up in rural Iberia Parish, Louisiana, Senator Broussard's family was able to send him to school at Georgetown, and he later studied law at Tulane University.<sup>17</sup> Once he graduated, he became ensconced in politics. Broussard quickly rose through the ranks, and by 1896 he was elected to the United States House of Representatives and then to the U.S. Senate in 1912.<sup>18</sup>

Backed by Senator Broussard, the 'Hippo Bill'<sup>19</sup> took the country by storm. In 1910, newspapers across the country rapidly spread the story of importing hippopotami to feed America. One such newspaper, The New York Tribune, reported on the story. It stated, "He proposes first that Congress shall appropriate \$250,000 to transport numerous species of wild animals from African jungles to the dense undergrowths and bayous of Louisiana, where these ferocious beasts may be tamed and domesticated, and their delicious flesh used to check the monopoly of the Beef Trust and reduce the cost of living."<sup>20</sup> Newspapers from all over the country reported on the story, each wanting exclusives and important updates on the ambitious project.<sup>21</sup> Senator Broussard seemed to have the American public on his side, however, he still needed congressional approval. His hope lay in former President Theodore Roosevelt, and two influential individuals of the twentieth century, Frederick Burnham and Fritz Duquesne.

One of the men that supported and brought national attention to the Hippo Bill was Frederick Russell Burnham. Often cited as the inspiration and model for the Boy Scouts, Burnham was revered as a world traveler and military scout.

Author Steve Kemper recounted tales from Burnham's life in *A Splendid Savage: The Restless Life of Frederick Russell Burnham*: from a young age he learned to make it on his own, working as a mail carrier for Western Union.<sup>22</sup> While he traveled across the southwest, he learned from older scouts how to survive in rugged terrain.<sup>23</sup> His training during these years equipped him for the life he would live, as his adventurous spirit soon led him to Africa. In Africa Burnham was recruited by the British government as a soldier and a spy, then once relieved from service he was hired by a London firm to scout new mining locations.<sup>24</sup> Explaining the hardships that Burnham faced during his travels, Kemper explained, "They killed a hippo for meat and used its grease on the pack ropes. They felt lucky not to lose a man or an animal to the hippos and crocodiles."<sup>25</sup> Throughout his time in Africa, Burnham learned to survive and adapt to the new landscape. Burnham would continue to travel between Africa and the United States, a career that would introduce him to fellow adventurer Theodore Roosevelt who, at the time, was police commissioner of New York City.<sup>26</sup> The two men immediately bonded over their shared interests in adventure and conservation, and Burnham continued his life in the private sector, traveling across Africa, Alaska, and Mexico searching for new mining sites.

Similar to many others in the early twentieth century, Burnham understood that the meat shortage was a significant problem and had independently investigated the possibility of introducing foreign wildlife to America. Kemper explains, "He began looking into the possibility in early 1905, corresponding with the world's foremost supplier of animals to zoos and circuses, a German named Carl Hagenbeck."<sup>27</sup> Burnham knew that a major setback to bringing foreign wildlife to America would be the transportation process. In fact, it was because of Burnham's efforts and work with hippopotami that Senator Broussard introduced him to the Hippo Bill, where he became

a key asset. Reporting to the Agricultural Committee on a similar project in that had been attempted in Alaska, Burnham explained,

The reindeer that were introduced into Alaska are all right. Mr. Jackson brought in the first herd. They had a good many difficulties and a good many things to learn about them. ... But as the result of the combination of the Lapps with some scientific study of the subject, I think it is conceded by the Alaskans themselves that the importation of reindeer is now a success.<sup>28</sup>

Burnham advocated that if exotic animals like reindeer could be introduced into new areas, then other animals, including the hippopotamus, could be successful as well. Now, with a senator who understood the government process and an individual who understood how to ship and inculcate exotic animals into America's heartland, the case for the Hippo Bill began to take shape. Senator Broussard wanted to ensure that the Hippo Bill had the best chance to become ratified, so he sought out another individual who understood both the African landscape and the mighty hippopotamus.

The third influential individual recruited for the Hippo Bill was Fritz Joubert Duquesne. While some aspects of Duquesne's life as a renowned spy seem to be exaggerated or even fabricated, what is clear was his admiration for wildlife. In *A Magnificent Lie: Fritz Joubert Duquesne - A Voice From The Grave*, author Paula Hewitt takes a unique look at the hunter, soldier, and spy. Born in South Africa, Duquesne grew up hunting with his father and fell in love with nature at an early age. By the time he was old enough, his family sent him to school in England, only for him to return by the time the Second Boer War began.<sup>29</sup> Despite his education in England, when the war began between the Boers and the British, Duquesne sided with his South African homeland. Because Duquesne grew up hunting in the South African landscape,

he knew the area well, and he was soon utilized as a scout for the Boers. While Duquesne was fighting for the Boers, he received word that a man named Frederick Burnham had orders to kill him.<sup>30</sup> Although Duquesne never faced Burnham in battle, the war still took its toll. Most of Duquesne's family had been killed, raped, or imprisoned, causing him to have a deep seething hatred for the British empire that lasted for the rest of his life.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of the war, Duquesne made it to America where he spent a brief stint as a journalist.<sup>32</sup> His writings often revolved around his time in Africa: the wildlife, the hunting, and the gorgeous landscape. The articles he wrote caught on and took the country by storm and added to America's infatuation with the African continent. Duquesne's writings entertained everyone across the nation, including President Roosevelt.<sup>33</sup> Before the end of President Roosevelt's term in office, he had planned a hunting trip to Africa and hired Duquesne as a guide.<sup>34</sup> Once the hunting party returned to America, they made national headlines with tales of the former President's endeavors on his African safari.<sup>35</sup> These stories caught the attention of Senator Broussard, not only because of the President's adventures, but also because of the guide who took him.

Senator Broussard soon approached Duquesne to evaluate Louisiana's landscape to determine if the hippopotamus could live in the swamps and to discuss his findings before a committee.<sup>36</sup> In 1910, Duquesne testified alongside Frederick Burnham, the same man that had orders to kill him only a few years before. In his opening remarks, Duquesne stated, "We have the hyacinth down there, but it does not grow over the country like it grows here. ... The hippopotamus will eat all water plants, all the aquatic plants."<sup>37</sup> He continued, "The Boers were in the habit of going down to the river and killing a hippo and bringing it in and dividing it among the different



families in the district. It is pretty hard to get rid of four and a half tons of meat.”<sup>38</sup> When Fritz Duquesne stood before the committee, he gave real-world applications of bringing hippopotami to the United States. Duquesne explained how the hippopotamus could solve both the growing hyacinth problem in Louisiana and be a viable meat alternative to feed Americans.

Broussard, Burnham, and Duquesne had done their best to demonstrate to the United States government why the hippopotamus was the best solution to the meat shortage. After years of researching, collaborating, and documenting their findings, the decision now lay in the hands of the committee members and the government. On March 21, 1910, HR 23261, the ‘Hippo Bill,’ was introduced to the House of Representatives, and that is where the bill also died.<sup>39</sup> The vote in the House killed the bill, which did not move forward to the United States Senate.



An adult and baby hippopotamus at the National Zoo, Washington, D.C., early 1900s. National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress.

While Senator Broussard understood the political reasons for HR 23261’s failure, Burnham and Duquesne had their

own opinions. Burnham, who was in direct contact with former President Roosevelt, believed that animosity between members of the committee and President Roosevelt led to the bill’s downfall. Members of Congress saw this bill and others similar to it as a tax-funded hunting trip for President Roosevelt and his friends. Steve Kemper explains Burnham’s reasoning, “In 1906 two California congressmen introduced bills to put it into action, but the idea was attacked as an attempt to use federal funds to set up a hunting reserve for Roosevelt’s wealthy friends.”<sup>40</sup> Congress likely saw the Hippo Bill as a way to reallocate funds from other programs in order for politicians to have their own safari in America’s backyard.

“ Congress likely saw the Hippo Bill as a way to reallocate funds from other programs in order for politicians to have their own safari in America’s backyard.”

While Burnham took a more cynical view of the Hippo Bill’s downfall, Duquesne pointed towards a larger financial issue. In his statement before the committee, Duquesne expounded on the price for bringing hippopotami to America, and mentioning Mr. Hagenbeck’s estimate, he stated that “He sells them to circuses, and charges \$8,000 a piece for them.”<sup>41</sup> The American taxpayer would have been further burdened with the exorbitant price of shipping and maintaining the animals. The high cost of importing animals to America may have played a larger role in the downfall of the Hippo Bill than historians previously believed. Less than four years after the bill was brought before Congress, the first World War

began on the European continent. Although the United States remained partially neutral when the war began, the allocated funds towards the importation and upkeep of hippopotami would have created a strain on the war efforts. Whatever the reason may be, the committee decided that America was not ready for “Lake Cow Bacon,”<sup>42</sup> or the other benefits of bringing the wild hippopotamus to America.

The beginning of the twentieth century brought new challenges to the American people. Despite an influx in immigration, diseases, and financial hardships, the American people were quick to seek a solution. The hard times also gave rise to unique and ambitious individuals. The trio of Senator Robert Broussard, Frederick Burnham, and Fritz Duquesne seized an opportunity to elevate the life of the American people. As a response to the combination of population growth and diseases that impacted the meat supply, the idea to import foreign animals seemed to be a logical solution. Introducing hippopotami into the American swamps would not only mitigate the encroachment of hyacinths but would also be a supplement for a lack of beef. Whether the Hippo Bill was rejected for political reasons, financial issues in anticipation of the Great War, or a combination of the two, the dream of bringing hippopotami to America died with the three men who proposed the bill. Although 1910 may not have been the right time to import exotic animals to America, the Hippo Bill is a prime example of ambitious ingenuity. As the United States, and the world as a whole, continue to experience an ever-growing population and the challenges of feeding each individual, perhaps the mighty hippopotamus still has a chance at feeding America in future endeavors. As the challenges of population growth, livestock disease, and invasive species will never go away, so the challenge of feeding the population will forever remain. Looking at how previous generations responded to food shortages gives us a valuable historical perspective as we learn and adapt to feed the future.

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**Yasuke: The  
African Samurai**

Alan Atkins



## BRAIN AND BRAWN: INDIRECT AND DIRECT ACTIVISM IN RESPONSE TO RACIAL TERROR IN THE LATE 1800S

Jaylah K. Cosby

The summer following the United States' victory in World War I was characterized by a resurgence of racial violence. African American soldiers, motivated by their fight for freedom across the seas, resisted the oppressive conditions for black people in America and the fact that "because of their military service, black veterans were seen as a particular threat to Jim Crow and racial subordination."<sup>1</sup> During the Red Summer of 1919, many white Americans resorted to mob violence and lynching to reinforce the black person's subordinate role in society. In the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)'s *Crisis Magazine*, activist W.E.B. Du Bois urged black people to use both "brain and brawn" against the forces of racism. He wrote, "But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land."<sup>2</sup> Black veterans responded by creating "ad hoc self-defense organizations to try to keep white folks from terrorizing their communities."<sup>3</sup> However, the practice of using "brawn" was a form of more direct activism used by black people well before the summer of 1919. During the late 1800s black people resisted racial violence, intervened in acts of racial terror, and even made plans for retaliation. To fully understand the black response to racial terror, both direct and indirect forms of activism should be examined during this time in areas across the country, specifically in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Jefferson County during the late 1800s was marked by a boom in the iron industry. Companies like the Coke Company, Tennessee Coal, and Pratt Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company processed iron and other materials while also boosting

other industries.<sup>4</sup> Before African Americans migrated to the American Northeast, Midwest, and West during the Great Migration, they began to move from rural areas to more urban and industrial cities in the South.<sup>5</sup> As opportunities to work in steel companies grew, black people from rural Alabama moved to Jefferson County in hopes of finding work and gaining financial freedom. However, continuing to oppress black people and keep them in an inferior position, Alabama and other southern states passed bills known as Black Codes that harshly regulated the lives of black people. The racial dynamics during this time were such that white people, specifically white men, held ultimate power. Some white people chose to punish black people by lynching them for the ultimate crime of "challenging the supremacy of the white race."<sup>6</sup>

The conversations surrounding the efforts of black people to put an end to lynching often involved the indirect form of activism, or "the brain," as Du Bois would call it. The Anti-Lynching Movement was formed and run in large part by African American women. Activists like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Burnett Talbert, and Juanita Jackson Mitchell were named the Anti-Lynching Crusaders for their efforts.<sup>7</sup> Wells-Barnett, who was active in the 1890s, along with the other crusaders, described racial terror in the South in her book *Southern Horrors*. Talbert, who was active during the 1910s, was considered "the best-known Colored Woman in the United States" for her organization of the Niagara Movement, a pre-cursor to the NAACP.<sup>8</sup> She used her influence and connections to raise \$10,000 as the chair of the NAACP's Anti-Lynching Committee.<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, who was active during the 1930s, focused on youth involvement in the anti-lynching movement by organizing the youth campaign



for anti-lynching legislation. After her urging, the National Broadcasting Company broadcasted fifteen minutes of anti-lynching news over the radio.<sup>10</sup> In Tuskegee, Alabama, Monroe Work, a sociologist and the founder of the Tuskegee Institute's Department of Records and Research, published the *Negro Year Book*, a summation of lynching in the state and around the country. The publication was regarded as the "most quoted and undisputed sources on this form of racial violence."<sup>11</sup> Wells-Barnett also recorded lynchings in *The Red Record*<sup>12</sup> and in her newspapers, *Free Speech and Headlight*. In partnership with the NAACP (as one of the organization's founders), she took to investigative journalism to account accurately for the deaths of black men and women by a white mob when in some cases, their deaths were inaccurately labeled as accidents or suicides.<sup>13</sup> For example, the death of Will McBride in Adamsville, Alabama, would have gone unnoticed had it not been for the NAACP's full report of his lynching in 1923.<sup>14</sup>

Some activists such as Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington supported the women of the Anti-Lynching movement and also urged black people to gain political and financial freedom in response to racial violence; other activists, like John Edward Bruce, thought another approach would be more effective.<sup>15</sup> Bruce advocated for physical involvement, declaring, "The man who does not fight for the protection of his wife and children, and fellow brother is a coward."<sup>16</sup> Frederick Douglass argued that getting involved or intervening when a white mob went on a rampage was unwise. Regardless of the danger, though, black people throughout the nation still chose this path, and it resulted in the saved lives of some individuals.

Tom Collins was a man accused of assaulting a prominent farmer's wife in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1886.<sup>17</sup> An insert in *The Richmond Item* reported that Collins was tracked down

in the woods by bloodhounds, and "the pursuers returned from the chases...and decline to say anything about the matter, which is taken as conclusive evidence that the n\*\*\*\* has been lynched."<sup>18</sup> However, in the *Birmingham Iron Age*, it was reported that Collins was "quickly brought back to the city by armed n\*\*\*\*s."<sup>19</sup> Lynching not only prompted black people to intervene, but in some cases, it spurred plans to retaliate. In the days leading up to the lynching of Lewis Houston in Birmingham, Alabama in 1883, black citizens in the community "were gathered on the streets discussing the lynching, some of them making threats [that] were overheard...No disturbance occurred, but from the way the n\*\*\*\*s talk the matter is not yet ended."<sup>20</sup> In the same city, a few years later, the lynching of James Thomas "excited the n\*\*\*\* population greatly, and the refusal of the local magistrate to hold an inquest unless directed by the coroner to do so added to their excitement. About one hundred n\*\*\*\*s, it is said, then began to arm themselves and to make threats of violence."<sup>21</sup>

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Retaliation did not occur only in Alabama's Jefferson County. As an aggressive response to a lynching that occurred in Cleveland, Mississippi earlier in the day, a group of armed

black people rode on horseback into town and “exchanged gunfire with a group of white men.”<sup>22</sup> A group of armed black community members in Decatur, Illinois occupied the city’s business district in 1894 to prevent a mob from lynching a black man accused of rape.<sup>23</sup> In 1899 in McIntosh County, Georgia, a black worker suspected of rape was held in the local jail. He was to be transported by the police to another jail in Savannah, Georgia. However, the black community believed he would be lynched on the way, so they armed themselves and surrounded the facility to prevent him from being transported.<sup>24</sup> These acts of direct activism proved that there was power in numbers. They occurred all over the United States, and Jefferson County was no exception.

Douglass and Bruce would argue that one form of activism held more merit than the other, but Du Bois impressed upon black people to “marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn”<sup>25</sup> to fight racism. Both styles helped to eliminate racial terror and violence. Community organizations saved the lives of terror victims, and lynching publications helped inform the general public about racial terror and spur the creation of anti-lynching legislation.<sup>26</sup> Each approach’s success, though, lay in its collective nature. Utilizing brain and brawn only works when communities come together. As Ella Baker, godmother of the Civil Rights Movement, said, “The major job was getting people to understand that they had something within their power that they could use, and it could only be used if they understood what was happening and how group action could counter violence.”<sup>27</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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## HERITAGE, HATRED, AND THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG

Geortez Williams



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Throughout history, mankind has flown flags to show commitment and solidarity for their leaders and country. Flags are used to represent what is present and very much alive. Over time, flags change and their meanings evolve. They are used to lead men into battle, to drape the coffins of the dead, but most of all to show that an idea or nation still lives on. Recently, flags have become the center of attention for social movements. What some see as a piece of fabric reflecting the dominance of the majority, others see as a symbol of heritage and patriotism. Debates over flags occur across the world, but there seems to be no other flag that is more heavily debated than the Confederate battle flag. In the 150-year existence of the Confederate battle flag, it has been the face of injustice and suffering on a grand scale. What started as just a battle flag for the Confederacy during the Civil War has ended up outlasting both the war and the new nation. What should be viewed as a blemish and insult to the American people is often seen as the beloved relic of a

defeated nation whose ideas still live on. Historical research reveals that the Confederate battle flag represents a threat to American principles as a symbol of slavery, treason, and white supremacy.

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Slavery and its implications are a reverberating scar on American history that still impact the lives of African Americans today. Slavery under the American regime transformed out of class systems into an institution defined by color. Southerners became more deeply entrenched in their views as time progressed, and northern states began to reject the system of slavery. The Civil War marks the culmination of a dispute that persisted for decades and if there is one thing that defined the Confederate agenda, it was the continuation of slavery. Although the defenders of the Confederate flag continue to claim that the main interest of the Confederacy was to protect states' rights, research reveals that states' rights in this context meant protecting the institution of slavery. In the case of the state of Mississippi, the first few lines of their declaration of secession made it clear that their cause was influenced directly by slavery: “In the momentous step which our State has taken of dissolving its connection with the government of which we so long formed a part, it is

but just that we should declare the prominent reasons which have induced our course. Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Mississippi’s cause was not an anomaly. While both Georgia and South Carolina took a lengthier route in declaring their causes for secession, they both made it clear that “the South with great unanimity declared her purpose to resist the principle of prohibition to the last extremity.”<sup>2</sup> Prohibition in this context referred to the outlawing of slavery.

The Southerners believed that President-elect Abraham Lincoln posed a threat to their way of life and that neither he nor the Republican party represented their views. They rejected Lincoln and instead chose a man that they felt shared the same interests as them. The man who they felt would best suit the Confederacy was a slave owner from Mississippi, Jefferson Davis. Historian John Coski said of Davis, “In his farewell speech to the U.S. Senate, Davis blamed *the crisis* on the Republican Party’s refusal ‘to recognize our domestic institutions [an acknowledged euphemism for slavery] which pre-existed the formation of the Union or property which was guarded by the Constitution.’”<sup>3</sup> Even with such clear evidence, many defenders of the Confederate battle flag still argue that the common soldier had no interest in prolonging slavery. While it was true that most soldiers did not own slaves, the intentions for which they were fighting was inherently clear. A Confederate veteran named Ed Baxter had this to say in 1889: “In a word, the South determined to fight for her property rights in slaves; and in order to do so, it was necessary for her to resist the change which the Abolitionists proposed to make under the Constitution of the United States as construed by them... Upon this issue the South went to war...”<sup>4</sup>

The cause of the Confederacy lived on after the war. Future generations indoctrinated their youth on the Southern way

of life and how the North had attempted to destroy it. In 1904, the United Daughters of the Confederacy “published a ‘catechism’ for children. ... Consistent with the evolving Confederate orthodoxy, the catechism emphasized that the North, not the South, started the ‘War between the States’ by disregarding southern rights. ‘What were these rights?’ asked the catechism. ‘The right to regulate their own affairs and to hold slaves as property’ was the answer.”<sup>5</sup> Only in recent years have flag defenders begun to deny the Confederacy’s cause for war and the flag’s connection to slavery. Trying to separate the flag from slavery is like trying to separate the Nazi flag from the Holocaust. The swastika in itself was seen as a peaceful symbol for hundreds of years, but when placed in a white circle on a red background, the connection becomes apparent. It no longer represents peace, but rather Nazi Germany and the crimes committed against the Jewish people. The same goes for the St. Andrews Cross. In its purest form it represents martyrdom and Christianity, but when colored blue, decorated with stars and placed on a red background, it then represents the Confederacy and commitment to slavery and white supremacy.

While slavery was the foundation of the Confederacy, white supremacy was the ideological cornerstone. Since the Civil War, the Confederate flag has been used by hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan as they terrorized African Americans and other minorities. A group that was known for its secrecy and late-night terroristic attacks, the Ku Klux Klan had no problem being seen in public with the Confederate flag. Coski explains, “One hundred years to the day after Lee’s surrender, Time magazine carried a feature article on Ku Klux Klan violence and a photograph of Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton of Tuscaloosa, with his favorite totem: a Confederate battle flag.”<sup>6</sup> Many have tried to disassociate the flag from the Klan, but every effort to do so has been in vain due to the actions of white southerners which mirrored those of the Klan. The most



compelling of these were acts of open defiance to integration in the late 1950s:

Southern history becomes murky during this period because Klansmen and non-Klansmen who were angry at the federal government's integration efforts displayed Confederate symbols to show their defiance to integration. One commentator explained, 'Within the context of the Civil Rights Movement and Southern defiance, the raising of the battle flag was a deliberate, overt expression of segregationists' resentment.'<sup>7</sup>

Those who were covered with white cloaks and those who stood in ordinary apparel found that the Confederate battle flag expressed their ideals better than any garment or group affiliation.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, protests swept across the South to end segregation. Those protests were met with opposition from white citizens on every level who were armed with Confederate flags and hateful words. Schoolyards and public streets became battlegrounds as white supremacists carrying Confederate flags clashed with nonviolent protesters: "After the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on May 7, 1954, outlawing public school segregation, Confederate battle flags began appearing more frequently throughout Georgia and the South. This time, display of the emblem was openly acknowledged as support for segregation and opposition to the *Brown* decision."<sup>8</sup> The point that they were making was clear, and no other emblem portrayed that point better than the Confederate battle flag.

A number of college campuses across the South found their way onto the international stage during this time. Both the University of Alabama and the University of Mississippi made the bold and vile stands against integration. At the University of Alabama, a mob estimated in between five hundred and twelve hundred gathered to protest the admission of a black

student named Autherine Lucy and "marched behind a group of students carrying a Confederate flag from campus to a flagpole in downtown Tuscaloosa, singing 'Dixie' and 'Keep Bama white' and 'To hell with Autherine.'"<sup>9</sup> The University of Mississippi students acted in the same manner when news that a black student named James Meredith was admitted: "Rioting resulted in two deaths and the prolonged presence of federalized National Guard troops on campus. For the two years that Meredith remained on campus, he was escorted from class to class by armed guards."<sup>10</sup> The students were making a bold statement and clearly they relied on the flag to make their intentions clear. They wanted to ensure that their schools remained segregated, just as their neighborhoods and churches had been for generations.

“ Defenders of the flag argue that the flag represents chivalry, honor, and tradition, but the only tradition that seems to be apparent is the oppression of African Americans. ”

Allowing African American students to mingle with their white peers and receive the same quality of education defeated the Confederate theory that the white race was superior, and that the negro was inferior and incapable of learning. Integration was an extension of Reconstruction and a reminder that the Confederacy had indeed lost the war. Again, white southerners felt that the northern aggressors were meddling in their affairs. Defenders of the flag argue that the flag represents chivalry, honor, and tradition, but



General Robert E. Lee. By Marion Doss, licensed under Creative Commons BY-SA 2.0.

the only tradition that seems to be apparent is the oppression of African Americans. Surely there is no honor in terrorizing children and denying them the right to an education.

Defenders of the flag, both then and now, often turn to Christian doctrine to justify their actions. To them, segregation was not only the patriotic thing

to do, it was the proper religious thing to do. For that reason, the flag is not only the symbol of a nation but also a holy relic. Citizens of the Confederacy felt as if they were being persecuted for their beliefs and their ways of life. For this reason, many Confederate symbols were wrapped in religious significance: "For example, the Second National Flag of the Confederacy or 'Stainless Banner,' is an entirely white flag with the exception of a canton including the battle emblem. In 1863, the Savannah Morning News stated that the flag's white field underscored that 'we are fighting to maintain the Heaven ordained supremacy of the white man over the inferior colored race.'"<sup>11</sup> This idea, that the Confederate cause and its symbols were aligned with Christian doctrine, did not die in the nineteenth century. Similar actions and rhetoric were present in Arkansas in 1959 when more schools began to integrate, and "protesters carried Confederate flags and signs that proclaimed 'STOP the Race Mixing March of the Anti-Christ' and 'Race Mixing is Communism.'"<sup>12</sup> In this case the Confederate flag was seen as being Christ-like and patriotic, while at the same time oppressing people and denying them

equal status.

While Southern states actually left the Union to protect the institution of slavery, the public, political, and official offense to the Union was the offense of treason. Citizens in the South had turned their backs on the federal government and attempted to form their own nation. The United States Constitution outlines treason as, "Treason against the United States shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort."<sup>13</sup> The Confederate states committed the grave offense of treason when they fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina. It was then made clear that the Confederacy had no intention to rejoin the Union or call for peaceful negotiations.

Defenders of the flag often rally and cry out that the flag represents love for heritage and country, but historical research reveals that neither are valid points. The very heritage that they celebrate was even denounced by Robert E. Lee. After the war, and during the later years of his life, Lee took notable stands against Confederate memorabilia. While he was the president of Washington College, Lee did not allow the Confederate flag to fly on the campus. When asked about erecting Confederate monuments, Lee stated, "I think it wiser moreover not to keep open the sores of war, but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife and to commit to oblivion the feelings it engendered."<sup>14</sup> Even at his funeral there was not a Confederate flag in sight nor did Confederate veterans wear their uniforms. Lee's daughter had this to say: "His Confederate uniform would have been 'treason' perhaps!"<sup>15</sup>

Claiming that the flag represents love for their country also poses a problem. The Confederacy no longer exists, and the Confederate flag does not represent the United States. Confederate soldiers and citizens made it clear that they wanted nothing to do with the Union and even went so far as

to denounce its history. Southerners stopped celebrating the Fourth of July from the beginning of the Civil War until World War I. Just as the first shots were fired in South Carolina, they also took the first steps in outlawing the celebration of Independence Day: A five-member committee chosen for the task recommended that 'the usual celebration of the day ... by public procession, solemn oration, and political banquet ought to be omitted on the present occasion.' The Fourth was too closely associated when the now disavowed Union. And besides, at a time when soldiers from South Carolina and the other southern states had already begun to face off with northern foes, it did not seem appropriate to hold the customary public revelry. The association as a whole concurred with the committee's recommendation and resolved to bypass the usual festivities, holding only a brief business meeting on the evening of the Fourth.<sup>16</sup> The Confederacy made it clear on every front that they were a separate nation that was not subject to U.S. law, customs or traditions.

If secession and war were not enough to commit treason, surely the promotion of the Confederate flag in government buildings across the south after the war would be seen as such. Beginning in the mid 1950s, it became clear that segregation and the Jim Crow era were about to come to an end. Once again, southerners felt as if their way of life was being threatened. Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* began to dismantle the old regime that mirrored slavery and its oppressive ideology. Klan members worked during the night to terrorize Black citizens, while government officials labored in plain sight to show their opposition to new laws and rulings. Not only was the Confederate flag raised on capitol buildings, state flags were also altered so that they would feature the Confederate flag: "In February 1956, Georgia's General Assembly passed and Governor Marvin Martin Griffin signed into law a bill to create a new Georgia state flag, which replaced the

scarlet, white and scarlet bars on the right two-thirds of the flag with the Confederate battle emblem."<sup>17</sup> Replacing the



Confederate flag in Columbia, South Carolina. By jasonpink, licensed under Creative Commons BY 2.0.

flag meant that all schools had to purchase the new flag with the Confederate emblem, which posed new problems for students and faculty of those schools. While Georgia legislator Denmark Groover claimed that the new flag "would have deep meaning in the heart of every Georgia child," the *Atlanta Daily World* argued that "it's obviously unfair to require any Negro school to fly the battle flag of the Confederacy nor its students to repeat its pledge or salute it."<sup>18</sup> This was not only an insult to African Americans, but also to the United States. Pledging to the Confederate flag meant celebrating a country that had waged war against and killed thousands of U.S. soldiers.

Alabama officials took bold steps to display the flag and show allegiance to the Confederacy. At the center of these actions was the infamous Governor George C. Wallace: "The most conspicuous and controversial of Wallace's many Confederate flag gestures was to fly it on the dome of the state capitol building. Soon after Wallace took office, Alabamians and citizens of other states noticed that the

Confederate flag flew below the state flag on the capitol dome and that the U.S. flag was conspicuously missing.”<sup>19</sup> Wallace’s actions sent a message that was in many ways parallel to secession: only the state of Alabama and the Confederacy were being recognized. Wallace also took his support of the Confederate flag with him outside of the state of Alabama. In 1964, while campaigning for president, the battle flag was painted on his plane and was seen on the front license plates of the state patrol vehicles that escorted him. His public support for the flag won him approval from citizens across the South who viewed the Confederate ideology as more important to the nation than the Constitution and its amendments.

In all of its ugliness, the evidence is overwhelming that the Confederate battle flag not only represents slavery, white supremacy, and treason, it also promotes them. It is hard to imagine how a country could allow allegiance to a flag that represents a threat to its very existence. While it is clear that the flag was used by terrorist groups such as the Klan and far right citizens whose actions mirrored the Klan, those groups are still often seen as Americans who simply want to preserve

nationalism. The debate over the flag is wrapped in hypocrisy and white privilege. Since Reconstruction, flag defenders have been protected and granted immunity even though they advocate for a cause that led to secession. Their immunity was not due to their citizenship, but the color of their skin and their beliefs. Men such as Nat Turner and Malcom X who took far less violent steps and caused less damage, were marked as traitors and anti-American. Even men such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who peacefully protested under the U.S. flag, were under the watch of the federal government and labeled as troublemakers. In the past ten years protests have sparked on both sides, with white nationalist flag defenders being categorized as peaceful and often given police protection, while groups such as Black Lives Matter are seen as destructive and divisive. Progress has been made as several states have made steps to remove the Confederate emblem from their state flags. However, there has yet to be an effort on the federal level to outlaw the flag. The progress that has been made was in some ways hindered by the remarks made and beliefs promoted by the previous presidential administration.

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## ***Stealing Anatomy of a Lynching from the Jackson County Library***

Mary Elizabeth Chambliss

Parched and pink, Sarah Anne stood on the crackly carpet of the Jackson County History section, staring at a familiar title on a worn green binding. Daddy always told her to believe what was in a book over what people said.

She wasn't a baby. Momma left her alone in the Werthers care of the library every day.

Miss Campbell's only homework assignment for the summer had been to research something about your family history and come prepared to present on it. Sarah Anne had thought that'd be easy. Gran had a big calendar with birds and fruit and cats printed on it with a big X on the day next October when they could claim 125 years of Jackson County history.

She wasn't a baby. She got to sit in the pews for the sermons instead of leaving with the little kids for Sunday School.

The stick figure on the front of this one made her queasy. The last copy had been newer, red and black and a little bit shiny, a little dimple next to Claude Neal's name always catching the light when she opened her closet door. She'd picked it up because she'd heard that word on the news. That word made Momma leave the dish towel balled up on the counter after drying her hands instead of tucking it perfect on the stove handle like Sarah Anne had to.

She wasn't a baby. She knew how to check it out the right way.

But Momma and Gran knew the name of every great-great whoever and what they did, who they married, and how they baked their biscuits. And if there were no books, then there'd be nothing else in Jackson County history but that.





## Justice For Breonna Taylor

Alan Atkins

## STATE-SANCTIONED SILENCE: A LOOK INTO THE REPRESSION OF BLACK VOICES

Kameryn Thigpen

In modern America, social, economic, and political systems repress the bodies and voices of Black Americans. This suppression by the American administration is not only physical but is also a systematic and intentional act to keep Black people as second-class citizens. This has impacted Black Americans for generations, from the days of slavery into the current Black Lives Matter movement. The justification of this repression derives from a deep fear of Blackness. When a Black American makes an outward and blatant expression of justice, white backlash attempts to silence them. When a Black American demands authority for the world to see and hear their humanity or when a Black American demands to end the oppression of their bodies and voices, white America sees them as ‘stepping out of place’ and breaking the status quo that maintains white supremacy. Black autonomy threatens the power dynamic of a white nation-state, which leads those in power to restore control over Black Americans by revoking their liberties as American citizens, by force and through violence.

The act of lynching was one tactic used to enforce Black repression. White Americans commonly used this method in the latter half of the nineteenth century, during the era of Reconstruction. After slavery, Black Americans attempted to establish themselves as citizens and actively take part in American life. However, many people, especially in the South, perceived this as a threat to white supremacy. White supremacists that dominated many parts of public life immediately met newly emancipated Black Americans with racial violence, and the most common form of that violence was the act of lynching. Lynchings were public and meant to serve as an example, a warning, and a threat for other Black people who dared to pursue, or ever aspire to achieve, the

“Black autonomy threatens the power dynamic of a white nation-state, which leads those in power to restore control over Black Americans by revoking their liberties as American citizens, by force and through violence.”

‘American Dream.’

In the scope of American history, the city of Birmingham, Alabama served as a catalyst for attaining civil rights, liberties, and equality in the face of injustice. During the 1960s, America and the world beyond saw Birmingham as the center of racial segregation.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even in the face of this blunt expression of social injustice, the thirst for change from protestors who wanted to change the Birmingham community did not waver. This notion of fighting back against injustice did not just begin in Birmingham. This city witnessed many brave men and women challenging white supremacy, particularly in moments of racial violence manifested as lynching. Meant to instill fear in Black Americans defending their right to citizenship as Americans after the end of slavery, lynching was rampant in the South as a tool for intimidation.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization which historically fought against lynching and continues to fight legislation that hinders Black Americans to this day, estimates that between

the years of 1882 and 1968, at least 3,446 victims of lynching were Black.<sup>2</sup> Although these numbers are an estimate, the world will never truly know how many Black people died at the hands of white supremacists, since many victims went undocumented, their lives and their stories lost and forgotten. In Birmingham, community members have gathered to address this cruelty with an initiative to bring these victims and their lived experiences to light. The mission of the Jefferson County Memorial Project is to bring a voice to the forgotten victims of lynching in Birmingham, Alabama. These people, part of the Birmingham community, were unjustly taken from their homes and their families and hung at the hands of white supremacy, and they deserve to have their names remembered and their stories finally told.

One of these victims in Jefferson County was Lewis Houston.<sup>3</sup> On the night of November 23rd, 1883, a mob of white men hung Lewis Houston based on allegations of assault.<sup>4</sup> A white widow had accused Houston of assault, sparking a public rage and Houston's arrest. This was not an uncommon occurrence during this era, since after the war white Americans often justified the lynching of Black men based on accusations of a moral implication, suggesting that the mere possibility of sexual assault against white women was an incredibly heinous crime worthy of extrajudicial action. This urge to 'protect' white womanhood from Black men fueled racist depictions of Black people. Many white Americans perceived them, especially Black men, as sexually aggressive, and this narrative allowed for a criminal scapegoat that needed little to no evidence to support a 'guilty' verdict in the eyes of the public. This led to many false accusations of rape and sexual assault from white women, for which lynching served as the primary punishment for Black men.

After jailing Houston and awaiting trial for the accusations

laid against him, a mob of 150 white men confronted him at the jailhouse. They broke him out of his cell, assaulted him, and then dragged him to Linn Park, a public park in the heart of Birmingham named after the Confederate naval officer Charles Linn.<sup>5</sup> The mob attempted to coerce Houston into confessing to these false accusations, however, he stood firm, pleading his innocence with his last words being, "Jesus, take me home."<sup>6</sup> After the hanging, there was no dismemberment of his body and the mob then left the scene. Leaving Houston's body in the park was a way to set an example for racial terror to serve as a response to both emancipation and to Black Americans stepping into daily life; it was also a startling and grave warning to all Black Americans living in Birmingham. Community members would later bury Lewis Houston in Birmingham's Oak Hill cemetery, but this did not erase the injustice that occurred.

After the lynching, the case surrounding Houston and the circumstances around his death were further explored in the courtroom, resulting in the white men that characterized the mob being at the center of the trial.<sup>7</sup> Although there was much evidence against Houston, the allegations and evidence proved to be false. A trial-by-jury tried the mob of men connected to the case, and it seemed as though the judge would find them guilty for their actions. The presiding judge, Judge Spratt, responded to the lynching by saying it was "an act of grave lawlessness [that] had been committed, and it [is] the duty of the jury to investigate the matter thoroughly, and, if possible, bring those implicated to justice."<sup>8</sup> This appeared to people in the community as an effort to bring some sort of justice to the brutal murder of Lewis Houston, but despite Judge Spratt's statement, the mob faced no legal repercussions for the crime.<sup>9</sup> The justice system had failed, awarding no form of justice or remorse for this act of racial violence, either to Houston's family or to other members of the Black community. However, this was a



common occurrence during this period, as many white mobs across the country who committed this violence did not face any consequences for their self-determined vigilante-style of extrajudicial violence. As a result, the law perpetually encouraged the lynching of Black Americans in the United States.

Local media outlets publicized heavily the lynching of Lewis Houston and its aftermath. It served as a public spectacle and a vehicle for discussing race relations between Black and white communities of Birmingham. A reporter from the Birmingham-based newspaper, *Birmingham Iron Age*, documented the event, noting that discussions took place in both white and Black spaces.<sup>10</sup> White citizens, along with some Black people, typically believed lynching was an appropriate response to Houston's alleged assault. On the other hand, many Black people in the community felt that Houston was innocent and a victim of racial terror.<sup>11</sup> The rift between these public attitudes shows the dichotomous mindset of Black people in coping with racial violence at this time and highlights how Black Americans perceived each other while evaluating their role as 'Black people,' a category separate from 'people,' with the determiner of race, in a white world.

While Lewis Houston's lynching was an incident of racial terror, much of the event's significance lies in what happened after the lynching. The act of lynching had been a tactic used to terrorize Black people nationwide for a long time but became especially prevalent after Reconstruction. While these lynchings occurred more and more frequently, there was also growing opposition to lynching. Many individual activists and nationwide organizations mobilized against lynching and the terror of Black people across the country, with this activism also visible in the wake of Houston's lynching. Newspaper reports reveal that on the Sunday

following the lynching, there were Black people protesting the event and defending Houston's innocence.<sup>12</sup> According to the *Birmingham Iron Age*, some Black protestors sought to hang the jailer responsible for housing Houston, who had failed to keep the white mob at bay.<sup>13</sup> This was an attempt at some form of accountability for Houston's death. In the outrage of Houston's death, there were even rumors of burning the house of the white woman that accused Houston,<sup>14</sup> and some members of the community even advocated to have her hanged as well for the false accusation. Community members also blamed the authorities for not preventing Houston's murder and for allowing racial violence to transpire with no repercussions.



A group of African American people marching near the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. to protest the lynching of four African Americans in Georgia. Associated Press. Library of Congress.

As a response to the lynching that many saw as an injustice and a domestic terrorist attack on the Black community of Jefferson County, the Black community of Birmingham mobilized in protest.<sup>15</sup> They wanted to rise and fight the plague of attacks on Black bodies that continuously suppressed Black freedoms. There was already a large

movement against lynching that was becoming more prevalent towards the turn of the century. Many individual activists and nationwide organizations mobilized against white supremacy as a whole in order to allow for Black Americans to have an opportunity to enjoy citizenship. With this goal in mind, protestors took to the streets. Their mission was to advocate against the lynchings being used to terrorize their Black communities. This act of mobilizing around social issues in the form of protest has always served as one of the most important tools in social justice. In fact, the act of protesting has been a vehicle for advocacy against oppression in the Black community for generations, from the days of enslavement to the Civil Rights Movement, and even now with the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Leaders' responses to this form of advocacy signify the depth of modern suppression of Black voices. When Black voices called out to stop vehicles of oppression, local leaders called forth the military to silence them by force. Governor O'Neill authorized the military after hearing rumors of Black people gathering in the streets. According to the *Birmingham Iron Age*, the rumors came from Mayor Lane, who later sent a written order to Captain S.S. Thompson of Birmingham Rifles and R.J. Lowe from Birmingham Artillery to stifle any threat of violence.<sup>16</sup> The officers came to Birmingham around 11:00AM to make sure that no civil disobedience occurred, arriving with loaded weapons on horseback. The primary motive behind the use of military engagement was to maintain and preserve peace and order in Birmingham. These men patrolled the streets for the entire night without any action from the protestors.<sup>17</sup> This fact reiterates the notion of overaggressive tactics used by administrative bodies to control Black citizens and preserve racial supremacy. The mayor was more concerned about Black Americans expressing their human rights than the actual racial terror that was occurring at the hands of white supremacy. This also reiterates the notion that

'law and order' must be used to control Black Americans, a principle valued even today, that is currently being challenged by advocacy groups such as the NAACP and Black Lives Matter.

“ Although this is a single event in Birmingham during the 1800s, it serves as one of the many examples of how the government oppresses Black voices on a local, state, and a national level in order to achieve a false sense of law and order and maintain a system of racial hierarchy within American society. ”

The interaction between Black protestors and the state military paints a picture of the government's aggressive anxiety to repress Black voices that speak out against injustice. Although this is a single event in Birmingham during the 1800s, it serves as one of the many examples of how the government oppresses Black voices on a local, state, and a national level in order to achieve a false sense of law and order and maintain a system of racial hierarchy within American society. This system includes this state-sanctioned violence against a Black man, Lewis Houston, who was falsely accused of a crime. The white mob faced no repercussions, and as result, the oppressed Black-state was under the control of their white counterparts. This example is just one of many parts of a larger system of state repression



of Black bodies and Black voices by a white society.

The suppression and denial of Black expressions of humanity is not a new reality. Society and societal institutions have ingrained it into the American psyche for centuries, and it is apparent all the way from the military engagement in Birmingham after Lewis Houston's murder to the military engagement in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 in the wake of the shooting of Mike Brown.<sup>18</sup> It includes the murder of Black activist leaders such as Fred Hampton and the criminalization of Black leaders such as Angela Davis and Huey P. Newton, along with the negative portrayals of Black activism.<sup>19</sup>

Black suppression exists in the false narratives of Black Americans within the educational system, excluding them from American history. It is the government-run infiltration of Black organizations with programs such as COINTELPRO to disrupt the Black Panther Party; it is the exile and the revoking of American citizenship, as seen in the treatment of Assata Shakur.<sup>20</sup> This restraint of expression of Black liberation and freedom derives from a foundation that is rooted in white supremacy, and this continues to affect Black expression today. The criminal justice system, for example, plays a heavy role in this system of restraint with racial disparities in sentencing, solitary confinement, and recidivism.

These processes stem from a fear of Black expression and the critique of a system that has oppressed them for centuries through mechanisms like engaging the military on defenseless Black protestors. This fear of Blackness leads to the attitude that Black people should be controlled and kept from achieving the same liberties as white American citizens.

There is a mandate by the American government to suppress the Black voices that speak out against injustice and white supremacy. The lynching of Lewis Houston highlights a broader issue that continues to this day and has manifested itself in many complex systems of racism such as education,

housing, healthcare, and environmental justice. It was an absolute act of domestic terrorism by white supremacists in which governing leaders met the community with aggressive militarization when they demanded answers for this injustice. The use of the military as a tool for state-mandated repression of Black bodies and the power of Black voices to maintain social order was not just limited to 1883 but can be found in every Black social movement for justice.<sup>21</sup> This event is just one of many examples of the Black people's struggle to make their voices heard in America.

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## GRAVE MARKERS TIED TO BIRMINGHAM'S PAST: AN OVERVIEW OF CEMETERIES IN THE MAGIC CITY

Sarah Coley

**B**irmingham, Alabama is a post-Civil War town rich in history. While the city proudly displays such historical landmarks as the 4th Avenue Black Business District and the 16th Street Baptist Church, its equally important but decidedly less famous history is often walked or driven past. Birmingham's quiet history lies buried in its graveyards—somber, quiet places that are often upstaged by less remote reminders of the past. Although they may be often overshadowed by modern urban development, these cemeteries nevertheless have important and profound stories to tell us about Birmingham's past. From the city's economic and industrial elite to its first cemeteries for Black residents, each one tells its own story, and each grave marker narrates a moment in Birmingham's history from an often-overlooked perspective. Here follows a survey of Birmingham's four main public cemeteries—Oak Hill, Shadowlawn, Elmwood, and Greenwood—as well as an investigation into the lives of some of the historical figures who rest within them. Personal interviews, visitations to each cemetery site, cemetery records and archives reveal that Birmingham's cemeteries hold important information about who was valued by society at various points in the city's past, and how that value has been reflected in the memorializing and laying to rest of its citizens.

Oak Hill Cemetery was originally intended as a burial ground for Birmingham's elite. This cemetery is the final resting place for prominent individuals involved in Birmingham's founding: Sylvester Steele, Thomas Peters, James Ware, William Nabers, William Mudd, and Alburto Martin. City planner and developer Henry Caldwell, who owned the Elyton Land Company and sold the first <sup>2</sup>1.5 acres to build the cemetery, is also entombed here.<sup>1</sup> In addition to Caldwell, graves for

“ Although they may be often overshadowed by modern urban development, these cemeteries nevertheless have important and profound stories to tell us about Birmingham's past. ”

Birmingham's foremost industrial developers and business owners—Henry DeBardeleben, Edward Tutwiler, and James Sloss—are also located here. Edward Tutwiler was a railroad and mining engineer and developer, Henry DeBardeleben inherited Red Mountain Iron and Coal Company,<sup>2</sup> and James Sloss founded Birmingham's Sloss Furnaces, now a National Historic Landmark and Industrial Museum. These men were crucial to the construction of Birmingham, which was completed after the Civil War to make the city a southern hub for iron production. Caldwell provided the land, Sloss built the iron furnaces, and DeBardeleben's and Tutwiler's businesses provided the coal, iron ore, and limestone required to make iron, as well the rail lines to transport it.

Oak Hill has several other persons of interest residing within it. Kate Duncan Smith, the woman who pioneered the School for Appalachian Children, and Richard Powell McAnnally, the first male child born in Birmingham, are two less elite but still notable persons buried there. Idyl King Sorsby, designer of the flag of Birmingham, has a tomb there, as does Philip Mock, who survived the sinking of the R.M.S. Titanic. Louise Wooster, the famous madam who “saved Birmingham,”<sup>3</sup> has



Mausoleum at Oak Hill Cemetery. Photo by author.

one of the most recognizable graves in Oak Hill. Many of the workers who labored at Sloss are also buried in this cemetery, which also contains a small collection of Freemason and veteran graves.

Some of Birmingham's less prominent citizens are also buried in Oak Hill. In the late 1800s, a small section of the cemetery was partitioned off from the rest. Nicknamed "Potter's Field," this plot section was designated as burial ground for indigent workers until approximately 1890. Standing at the front gate and facing the caretaker's house,

"Potter's Field" is visible in the back left of the cemetery. Prior to the creation of "Potter's Field," Birmingham's less affluent citizens had been buried under what is now the Birmingham Botanical Gardens and the Birmingham City Zoo. Oak Hill is also the final resting place for many of Birmingham's miners and farm workers, who are buried in a plot owned by the Italian Benevolence Society.<sup>4</sup> As it was originally intended for Birmingham's white elite, Oak Hill followed a segregationist policy of white-only burials. Desegregated, or "mixed burials," only occurred in Oak Hill after desegregation was not only codified into federal law, but also finally enforced. Arthur Brown, a prominent Black surgeon, was the first Black man to be buried there, followed by Civil Rights Leader Fred Shuttlesworth.

The cemetery's architecture displays wealth and luxury in both the materials selected and the design features utilized. The caretaker's building is the main building on site and exhibits the Tudor Revival style of architecture. Oak Hill has no fewer than three large mausoleums, all of which are intricately detailed. Headstones and markers within the cemetery display the best materials available for gravestones and reflect a high degree of professional craftsmanship. None of the monuments, gravestones, markers, or headstones in Oak Hill are handmade or homemade, and even the oldest markers, although significantly worn, show signs of highly skilled craftsmanship.

In contrast to the well-kept grounds of Oak Hill, Shadowlawn Cemetery has been in a perpetual state of financial hardship since its construction in 1889. As a result, its grounds are less well maintained and its cemetery records more disorganized. Cemetery records, which keep a record of burial rosters and plot assignments, are missing from Shadowlawn, and current caretakers believe that they were either never generated or simply misplaced and forgotten over time.<sup>5</sup> John Lanier,



a representative of the Shadow Lawn Memorial Gardens Maintenance and Perpetual Care Society, helps with the daily upkeep of Shadowlawn and works to restore the hillside cemetery to honor those who rest there. Mr. Lanier explains to guests who visit that he feels a personal responsibility to Shadowlawn as his family has a plot there. Even though many of the paper records have been lost to time, Mr. Lanier works extensively to provide information to the public about the cemetery's history.<sup>6</sup>



Shadowlawn Cemetery. Photo by author.

Unlike Oak Hill's acreage, which came from the Elyton Land Company holdings, the land upon which Shadowlawn sits was

originally privately owned by an individual: William Mims, a Confederate soldier. Those familiar with Shadowlawn believe that it is possible that Mims was actually Major William J. Mims, member of the 43rd Alabama Infantry Regiment and an officer in Moody's Battalion.<sup>7</sup> The 43rd Regiment faced some of the worst conditions and participated in some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. Civil War records recount that the 43rd survived the winter in Cumberland Gap, fought at Chickamauga, lost the majority of their men at Saylor's [Sailors] Creek, and were on the battlefield at Appomattox when General Lee surrendered.<sup>8</sup> During the course of the war, Major Mims commanded both Black and white soldiers who fought and died together. Those familiar with Shadowlawn believe that Major Mims's wartime experiences likely influenced the direction his life would take after the war.

Upon his return to Alabama in 1865, and perhaps reflecting on his experiences as the commanding officer of both Black and white soldiers, Mims realized that former slaves and soldiers who lived in Alabama had nowhere they could be properly buried. In 1889, he deeded part of the land he owned for \$1. To ensure that his wishes were followed, the sale deed specifically designated the land as a "colored" burial ground. Shadowlawn thus became Birmingham's first cemetery dedicated for the burial of Black people.<sup>9</sup> The particulars of the deed allocated an original thirty acres of land for Shadowlawn with an additional ten acres to be annexed later. Although Mims is believed to be buried in Oak Hill or Elmwood rather than in Shadowlawn, several other families and individuals integral to the development of Birmingham are buried in in the cemetery he helped found.

One such family, the Shortridges, funded several of the Children's Marches during the Civil Rights Movement, and repeatedly bonded Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. out of jail.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Shortridge was a World War II veteran, held a degree in finance, and owned at least two businesses. Birmingham



historians believe that both of Mr. Shortridge's businesses were located in Birmingham's 4th Avenue Black Business District. In addition to the Shortridges, other notable Shadowlawn residents include Lucinda Robey, a former NAACP board member and high school principal, and Adolphus Theodore Shields—better known in life as D.T. Shields, grandfather of Michelle Robinson, better known as the former First Lady Michelle Obama.<sup>11</sup>

While those familiar with Shadowlawn and its history know that the cemetery played a central role in Birmingham history, the non-profit tasked with its upkeep has only received a small grant from the city of Birmingham and the city has never fully subsidized the cemetery's care. Much of the cemetery is overgrown, and several of the markers are broken—many of those markers read 'gone but not forgotten.' Intent on not allowing them to be forgotten, the Shadowlawn Memorial Gardens Maintenance and Perpetual Care Society recognizes the importance of Shadowlawn and works hard to secure funding and remembrance from the greater Birmingham community, both of which are needed to rehabilitate and maintain the cemetery. Currently, the non-profit relies solely on volunteer donations and labor to care for the cemetery; they are always seeking assistance and appreciate anyone from the community who volunteers.<sup>12</sup>

“ Three of the four victims of the 1963 bombing attack on the 16th Street Baptist Church rest in Greenwood Cemetery—Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, and Addie Mae Collins. ”

Along with Shadowlawn, Greenwood Cemetery has also struggled with incomplete records and neglect, caused by a fire<sup>13</sup> and by the bankruptcy of the cemetery's primary caretaker, Poole Funeral Home, in 1986.<sup>14</sup> Even without detailed records, those familiar with Greenwood know of Poole Funeral Home's complicated history with the cemetery. Prior to 1986, Poole Funeral Home owned acreage in the cemetery and served as its primary caretaker.<sup>15</sup> Records from Poole date from 1936 even though many grave markers date to the earlier 1900s,<sup>16</sup> and several legal complaints pertaining to grave recycling and neglect were brought against the business. Most of the complaints brought against Poole Funeral Home were settled, and the others were withdrawn.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, after all the litigation settled, Poole Funeral Home was bankrupt, and Greenwood was neglected. The graves and the people entombed at Greenwood remained without any caretakers to tend their final resting place until the city of Birmingham assumed responsibility for the cemetery's maintenance in 1990.

Three of the four victims of the 1963 bombing attack on the 16th Street Baptist Church rest in Greenwood Cemetery—Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, and Addie Mae Collins. As a result of Greenwood's circumstances, Sarah Collins Rudolph wanted to relocate her sister, Addie Mae, to a different cemetery. Sarah Collins Rudolph was the fifth little girl trapped in the 16th Street Baptist Church during the bombing attack, which she survived. When Rudolph had her sister's casket exhumed, she received devastating news. Examination of the casket revealed that instead of fourteen-year-old Addie Mae's body, the casket held a stranger's body wearing dentures.<sup>18</sup> Rudolph was shocked and began the search for her sister's remains but discovered that the records that could have helped her locate Addie Mae were destroyed by the cemetery's fire. Rudolph was ultimately unable to locate Addie Mae's remains for nineteen years. In 2017, *ABC 33/40* stepped

in to assist Rudolph with her investigation. Through the use of ground sensing equipment, Randy Fields and Mike Mattingly from Advanced Radar Technologies located a child sized casket on the other side of Addie Mae's original tombstone. Rather than being buried in front of her grave marker, Addie Mae had been laid to rest behind it, alongside her friend, Cynthia Wesley.<sup>19</sup> Upon learning of the location of her sister's remains, Rudolph decided to leave Addie Mae at peace next to Cynthia in Greenwood.



Monument to the four little girls killed in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, Greenwood Cemetery. Photo by author.

In addition to the three girls who were murdered in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, Greenwood is also the final resting place for several veterans. The veterans are located towards the back edge of the cemetery. Most of their graves are arranged in rows and their grave markers mirror those found in Arlington National Cemetery—stark white markers with a dark engraved cross centered at the top, the service members' names, rank, and the name of the conflict they served in flank a small, paved ceremonial promenade. Although Shadowlawn and Oak Hill have similar veteran markers randomly placed throughout their grounds, Greenwood is the only cemetery to have a formally arranged promenade. The promenade has a 21-step entrance flagged by stones. There are eight poles in total on each side of the promenade entrance which traditionally should fly flags. Similarly, wreaths should be placed on certain tombstones but those are also missing. Although Greenwood is unique among Birmingham's public cemeteries in displaying a formal promenade, it lacks the full traditional regalia.

About ten miles away, on the west side of Birmingham, the eternal residents of Elmwood Cemetery enjoy regularly manicured, well-kept grounds; Elmwood is also the final resting place for several notable individuals. One of the most famous is William Paul Bryant Sr., best known in the state of Alabama as Paul 'Bear' Bryant, recognized for his 25-year tenure as the head football coach at the University of Alabama. While Bryant left his mark as a cultural icon, another Elmwood resident played an iconic role in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1970, seven years after the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, Army Corporal Bill Henry Terry Jr. sacrificed his life in Vietnam; to save his fellow soldiers, he dove on a grenade, bodily absorbing the impact and projectiles from the blast.<sup>20</sup> After his body was flown back home to Birmingham, his widow and mother sought a burial plot for him in Elmwood Cemetery. Elmwood, however, refused to sell them a plot. A

representative from the cemetery told them that only white families purchased plots from Elmwood, with contracts specifically stipulating the “prohibition of Negro burials.”<sup>21</sup> With Corporal Terry’s primary choice of burial denied him, his family buried him in Shadowlawn instead, yet they also resisted this discriminatory practice. Terry’s widow and mother reached out to their white pastor, Father Farrell, for help. In retaliation, the KKK targeted the Terry family with acts of terror and vandalism.

After many marches, petitions, offers of plot donations from families who owned Elmwood plots, and a ruling from 11th Federal Circuit Court Judge Seybourn Lynne, Corporal Terry’s family was finally allowed to legally move his remains from Shadowlawn to Elmwood. Following a long procession from Shadowlawn to Elmwood, Corporal Terry’s brothers in arms, family, and friends laid him to rest in Elmwood with full military honors. The Terry family’s fight to end discriminatory burial practices opened a pathway for others. Thirty-seven years later, in 2007, this time without a fight and without having to endure acts of violence, another family moved their loved ones remains from Shadowlawn to Elmwood. Denise McNair, one of the four victims of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, who had been buried in Shadowlawn, was moved in a quiet family ceremony to Elmwood, where she currently rests.

The architecture of each cemetery reflects the social and economic inequalities at the time of its founding, imparting important information about who is buried within and how those individuals were viewed by the society of their time. In addition to sometimes sharing or housing relocated residents, Greenwood and Shadowlawn share similar tomb architecture. Both contain artisanal tombstones or markers, and several instances of homemade or handmade styles of markers. The latter are made of cement, cement and tile, wood, or

wood and cardboard. While it is clear that the handmade or homemade grave markers were made with love and attention to detail, the handmade architectural style is a significant and notable deviation from the tomb architecture of Oak Hill and Elmwood. In both Oak Hill and Elmwood there is a predominance of luxury headstone or tombstone material and an emphasis on professional craftsmanship. This deviation reflects the social and economic gaps at the time and is also evidence of historically discriminatory burial practices.

Cemeteries reflect social reality at the time of their construction, and even though the history they reflect has long since passed, there is still much to learn from the lives of the individuals buried within them. Careful examination of each public cemetery in Birmingham imparts a unique understanding of their respective histories. For much of Birmingham’s history, Black and white residents were unable to share burial grounds, and it was not until the construction of Shadowlawn that Birmingham’s Black residents were given a space dedicated specifically for the memorializing and laying to rest of their citizens. In the architecture, grounds, and upkeep of each cemetery is revealed the socially determined nature of how a city cares for its deceased. Understanding this history, and the lives of those who eternally rest within these cemeteries, thus provides a rich perspective that complements the many other historical markers in Birmingham. A survey of these cemeteries takes the viewer on a journey through memorable, painful, inspiring, and challenging moments in the history of the ‘Magic City.’

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## Quota

Shannon Mary Bradt

*After Our Blood Can Save Them*  
*by Jordan Eagles*

I'm sweating gas-station coffee  
and estradiol metabolites  
cause our 5 PM poetry  
workshop catchesme yawning at four

and this glass-walled  
campus art gallery  
is a greenhouse in the  
leveling beams of  
sundown's skinned kneecap.

I lean and peek  
at the placard beside Eagles' print  
which offers  
*...materials: screen-printed blood of a  
transgender service member...*

Rusty pinpricks,  
long-since oxidized,  
arranged in a matrix  
à la comic-panel  
halftone,

coagulate into  
a G.I. clutching his scalp  
like Rodin's *Thinker*  
if emptyheaded  
or mad,

still brandishing his bayonet,  
its blade lopped short  
by a careless margin,

as though it's immaterial  
who gets gutted.

I pass my finger over the crook  
of my elbow,  
now tattooed with  
a lotus flower,  
its aubergine petals  
obscuring the  
ruins of another war  
we'd rather forget.

Would you bare  
your forearm  
and ball your fist  
without asking why  
America needs  
all this blood?



## GENOCIDE OR DISASTER: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE BRITISH EMPIRE'S ROLE WITHIN THE GREAT BENGAL FAMINE OF 1770

Kendra Bell

Though people commonly think of famine as an unfortunate natural event, the Great Bengal Famine of 1770, which resulted in the deaths of over ten million people, suggests the likelihood that British imperialism and commerce contributed to the devastation. The people of Bengal and the greater region of the lower Gangetic Plain had experienced absent or delayed monsoons before, which often triggered famines and associated difficulties. However, there is an important debate about whether the severity of the famine in 1770 was purely a natural disaster or resulted directly from British involvement in the region. What was the role of the British Empire in the Great Famine, and how did the policies of the East India Company, among other entities, affect this natural disaster from an economic perspective? With a deeper understanding of the subject and its affiliated factors, historical evidence suggests that the people of Bengal may have been the victims of an imperial genocide.

Derived from ancient Greek and Latin, the term 'genocide' refers specifically to the killing of a particular race or tribe of people. The United Nations attributes an intent to destroy the affected group of people as one of the most important aspects when charging the crime of genocide.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the Bengal famine, British imperialists were made aware of the severity and dangers to the people of Bengal as a result of their economic exploitation of the region, yet these humanitarian concerns did not influence British involvement. Once made aware of the suffering brought on by colonization, their ongoing pursuit of economic interests reveals that British imperialists' inhumane business practices cannot be separated from contempt, and therefore may be considered an intent to cause harm to the people of Bengal. The determination of intent to commit genocide is the most

difficult aspect to consider in crimes against humanity. The aim of this research is to investigate how the policies of the British Empire, and specifically the East India Company's economic maneuvers and their subsequent effects on the colonized population, affected the outcome of the Great Famine of Bengal in 1769. This investigation analyzes the policies in place prior to British involvement, as well as Britain's response to the Bengal famine and its interpretation of its own responsibility in the aftermath, to examine whether the event constitutes a genocide.

“ The East India Company continued to refer to the taxes as ‘tributes,’ as though the purpose for this taxation remained consistent with the arrangement prior to British colonization. However, the money was no longer contributed to the safety-fund in preparation for a natural disaster; rather, it became the Company's profit.

Prior to British colonization of Bengal, the Mughal Empire controlled the region.<sup>2</sup> Under Mughal rule, authorities required the peasant class to pay a percentage of their cash harvests as a tribute to develop a treasury and to prepare for natural

disasters, such as famine, in the region.<sup>3</sup> In 1765, after Britain took control of the region, the East India Company gained jurisdiction over the revenue and, under the Treaty of Allahabad, acquired the explicit right to collect taxes in Bengal. Simultaneously, Robert Clive, Governor of Bengal at the time, allowed the Company to collect taxes from the Northern Circars, a territory annexed by the British along the western coast of the Bay of Bengal.<sup>4</sup> The East India Company continued to refer to the taxes as 'tributes,' as though the purpose for this taxation remained consistent with the arrangement prior to British colonization. However, the money was no longer contributed to the safety-fund in preparation for a natural disaster; rather, it became the Company's profit. To secure this monetary gain without a significant amount of opposition, the Company acquired tax rights in the Bengal emperor's name. This contrasted with Parliament's Stamp Act, which had caused major conflict in Britain's relationship with the American colonies during its installation in the same year.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the use of policy implementation in the terms described is a method that would only be useful to an entity with little to no regard for the consequences of their actions. In other words, it is likely that the Company took precautionary measures, such as avoiding the involvement of Parliament, the only real authority able to hold the Company accountable to any measurable degree, because any consequences for the duplicitous aspects of its business model would have completely derailed the Company.

Major John Scott recounted the transactional nature that characterized these so-called tributes between 1768 and 1769. In his account, he declared that there was a provision for the establishment of a mint in the Treaty of Allahabad. This mint more closely resembled a reminting or re-valuing of currency that occurred without the knowledge of all involved parties. It held all taxes collected on behalf of the



View of the City of Bombay, Robert Sayer, after I. van Ryne, colored etching, 1754. Ships Van Wieke Collection, Rijksmuseum.

emperor—the revenue source for the Company's involvement in Bengal—yet the value of the taxes changed en route from their initial collection to their arrival at the Company mint. The taxes collected from Bengal and Bahar traveled west along the Ganges River to Allahabad, where the East India Company held authority, and this is where the so-called mint took place.<sup>5</sup> Scott's account continues to explain that Company representatives in Bengal sent "twenty-six lakhs [or 260,000] of sicca rupees [equivalent to sterling or British pounds]" annually to the emperor as tributes, or payment for allowing the collection of taxes directly from the Bengal population. While both transactions were in transit, however, an individual or group of people re-coined the rupees<sup>6</sup> into viziery [a lower-valued type of rupee], in an effort to pocket the price differences in currency values.<sup>7</sup> Company representatives and the emperor received the payment in the lower-valued

currency, resulting in a considerable increase in profit for whoever conducted the coinage.<sup>8</sup> It is worth mentioning that the source of this information was an individual with questionable motives. Also known as 'Pawkey,' or the historical 'pawky' meaning 'trick,' Scott's reputation was drenched in deceit because of his notorious reputation as a gambler and the shady circumstances in which he received large financial sums from unknown sources.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Company faced few repercussions for its interference in the economic systems of Bengal, due to Parliament's lack of involvement. In the case of the Allahabad mint, the Governor and Council of the Company, as well as the entire British government, denied any involvement and stated their intentions to identify a culprit. They identified several officers in the Company and the subsequent investigation threatened the Company's integrity. Parliament's main culprit was the Commander-in-Chief, General Richard Smith.<sup>10</sup> It is not certain if Smith was the only party responsible for the mint and the loss of rupees. What is certain, however, is that no actions were taken to repair the damage to Bengal's economy. Although Parliament and the Company addressed the issue, neither authority made any reparation to a noteworthy extent. This lack of accountability reveals a pattern of complicity that was continuous throughout the East India Company's duration of influence in the region.

Imperial efforts in Bengal served as an important asset to the Company because of the abundance of natural resources within the region, including coal and material for silk production, as well as a strategic geographical positioning in world trade. However, transforming the exports of Bengal into silver bullions, a more reliable and valuable representation of wealth (since they did not lose value like traditional currencies), proved impractical. So the Company made the decision to considerably increase the

range of goods extracted from Bengal, specifically in the textile industry. The Bengal Council, a British legislative body created to enact imperial interests in the area, presented this fact, in conjunction with the diwani<sup>11</sup> acquired, to the Company's Board of Directors as a means to reframe this level of engagement with Bengal as a steady stream of revenue for England rather than a simple system of trade. As a result, during the months prior to the famine, the Company commissioned thirty-three ships for the purpose of trade.<sup>12</sup>

This information illuminates the nature of British involvement from the moment it began. The use of so many ships and efforts to gain an abundance of exportable materials reflects the degree of economic prosperity that was accomplished by the exploitation of the Bengal region. Similarly, these economic arrangements required a large section of the local population to contribute their labor to ensure that the projected yield of materials actually took place. The Company's imperialist interests and the pressure to fulfill the trade demands forced the population to undertake tasks such as harvesting and planting indigo, silk, and other commercial goods to satiate the Company's commercial goals, rather than to maintain supplies that would supplement their own lives, including personal crops. This practice would considerably heighten the effects of the oncoming famine.

In the later months of 1769, the probability of famine had already become a realization for those living in the Bengal region. The lack of monsoons was not uncommon, and the local community had historically taken measures to ensure that the population, economy, and governing body could comfortably endure the harshness of famine, for a time. However, the influence and actions of the Company had depleted the resources that would have ordinarily been used to supplement the needs of the people. Correspondence between Company representatives in Bengal and officers

in England reveals that the Company was well aware of the growing concern of famine at the time. One such correspondence is that between Richard Becher, Esq., and Harry Verelst, to the Company's Select Committee in September 1769. To contextualize the nature of this correspondence, Becher was a member of the Board of Trade and the Bengal Council, whom the Company later dismissed for signing an infamous letter in protest of its actions, and Verelst was the governor of Bengal at the time.<sup>13</sup> In this letter, Becher relates the severity of the need for rainfall and describes the intensity of the consequences the land and people would face if no rainfall transpired. What is most striking about the nature of this correspondence in relation to the argument about the imperial intentions of the Company are his recurring mentions of the potential hazards of famine: "...fatal consequences, ... a scene of misery and distress, ... [and a] dreadful calamity," alongside his simultaneous emphasis on the potential reduction of revenues for the Company.<sup>14</sup> Becher's declaration about Bengal's economic decline and the proposed solutions to amend it summarizes the Company's response to the situation in Bengal.

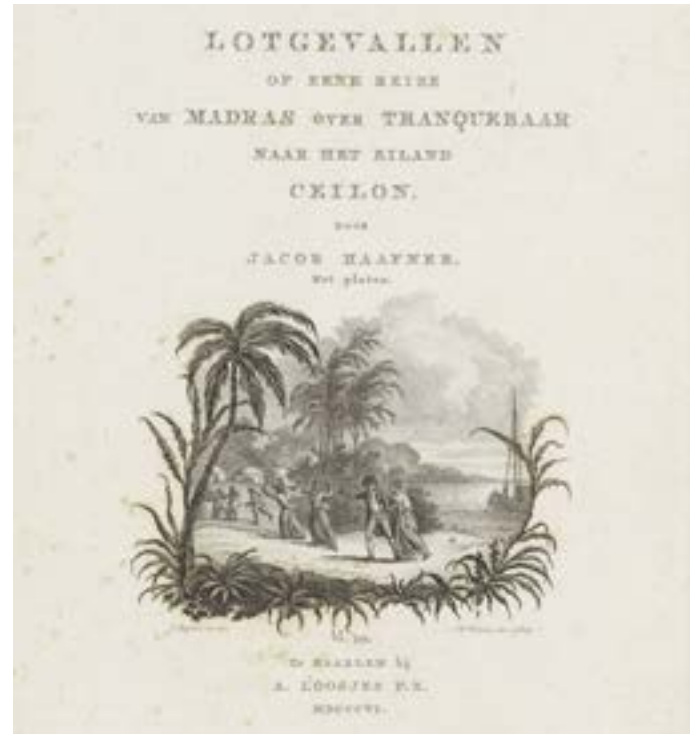
Besides the obvious effects of famine, additional problems arose. Bombay and Madras, two other major British settlements in India, were unable to produce significant streams of revenue through agricultural resources and taxation. Therefore, these settlements needed support from the Bengali [British] Government so that they could maintain a large military presence in the region and secure economic interests.<sup>15</sup> The Company required Bengal to pay this support in cash, rather than resources, because there was considerable concern that Bengal could not consistently produce resources with substantive quality and quantity to account for a steady stream of economic support. Simultaneously, for any debts that existed in Bengal, policy required the Company to pay the interest out of the

revenues collected from Bengal. Therefore, the situation confronted British imperialists with a major moral dilemma. To accomplish those tasks without increasing the likelihood of the Bengal population being wiped out by famine was nearly impossible. The Company was fully capable of implementing proper measures to support the well-being of Bengal and prevent the extent of suffering, but the solution chosen instead was to maintain arrangements through which "private fortunes of their servants [the Court of Directors] can be remitted to England" and to affirm the practice of foreign trade for the benefit of the Company.<sup>16</sup> The Company continued this approach even as the severity of the famine grew, and Bengal's suffering became unavoidable at every turn.

In 1770, William Harwood, a man later questioned alongside Warren Hastings by Parliament's House of Commons in relation to crimes and misdemeanors during the Bengal occupation, wrote a letter to Richard Becher describing the terrible conditions, poverty, starvation, plundering, and vagrancy caused by the famine—all of which grew exponentially worse as the Company continued to conduct trade in Bengali resources.<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of the Company, however, the conditions being presented to them (a result of their interference) were a manifestation of the "decline of commerce," for which a form of mercantilism centered on "immediate gain" was the only possible resolution.<sup>18</sup> Representative of this ideological shift away from empathetic or ethical concerns was the vast rise in revenue generated by the trade of Bengali assets. In fact, in order to increase the amount of monetary gain from the exports of Bengali silk—a lower-quality silk compared to other regions—the Company funded programs to teach silk-weavers in Bengal a new technique, amidst the struggles of famine.<sup>19</sup> This influx of silk production required the Company to expand in order to accommodate the burgeoning output. In 1771,

the East India Company opened the Bengal Warehouse in Bishopsgate for the purpose of holding materials such as calicoes, muslins, and raw silk.<sup>20</sup> This re-affirms that the aims of the Company were individual and corporate profits, and it is difficult to find actions that reflect the opposite.

The famine lasted until 1773 and reportedly killed ten million people—making up as much as a third of the total population in some areas. The region was unable to recover fully before being struck by another famine in 1783. After this, five more famines struck Bengal before the 1950s. Bengal felt the effects of the 1770 famine long after the fact, with the greatest impact to the revenue of the Company occurring in the three years immediately following the famine. However, within seven years of the disaster, Bengal was able to reach a new record in cultivation, likely to produce food security similar to what was in place prior to British involvement, though it was gradually declining in the production of materials for British trade.<sup>21</sup> By being forced to occupy spaces dedicated to the cultivation of trade materials that provided no measurable value of sustenance, the people of Bengal could not dedicate the time and resources necessary to repair the damaged state of their agricultural system. On the other hand, if the people of Bengal were not forced to accommodate their life practices to satiating British economic interests, food security necessary for the region may not have been jeopardized. There was a strong likelihood that survivors in Bengal would ally with the first viable opposition to Britain because of the conditions and struggles they endured, which they attributed to the East India Company.<sup>22</sup> Even Verelst, a man with significant Company interests in mind, indicated that the Company had played a part in the destruction of Bengal, specifically in respect to the rise in poverty levels. His suggestion proposed that should the Company continue to intervene by political means rather than commercial, the probability of affecting



Europeans on a coast of a Southeast Asian country, Reinier Vinkeles (I), after Jacob Godfried Haafner, etching and engraving, 1806. Rijksmuseum.

another area similarly to Bengal would diminish.<sup>18</sup> Yet this acknowledgment of the role of the Company in the deaths of ten million people or more seemed to hold little to no weight when reviewing the evidence surrounding the situation. In some respects, the famine itself was responsible for a number of the problems Bengal faced; however, it is probable that the number of deaths would have dramatically decreased without the policies enacted by the East India Company.

The issue that remains is to determine the relative responsibility of the British Empire, in concert with the East India Company, for the parts they played in the millions of deaths. Are there examples of accountability, and in what ways did the Company experience hardships caused by their ethical transgressions? A man by the name of William Bolts, who had severed ties with the East India Company



while learning the intricacies of mercantilism, criticized the Company before even knowing the full effects of the famine.<sup>23</sup> In 1772, he accused the Company of being unable to establish a permanent system of food security for the region. Further, he directed his concerns to two major points: one, that the actions of the East India Company would cause the loss of political control over the region. Second, that the Company had actively exploited Bengal, and the wealth made from its resources before that exploitation could have been used to aid the nation during the famine (and also prior to support prevention efforts).<sup>24</sup> One reason Verelst acknowledged the actions of the Company and their effects on Bengal was because of his concern that critics such as Bolts would condemn the Company later on (which they did). The statements of both Bolts and Verelst demonstrate that it was well within the capacity of the Company and the British administration to recognize the wrongdoings that transpired and to mitigate the destructive effects of their economic exploitation. However, these entities did little more than acknowledge their actions.

In the eyes of the Company, the economic venture that was Bengal is visible in the many installments of policies, warehouses, and labor systems designed to ensure ample acquisition of revenue, with no intention of extending aid or halting trading practices to protect the region during times of hardship. Not long after the famine, the Company faced exposure of the corruption and negligence it perpetrated in India. At this time, the British government considered removing the Board of Directors and instating their own advisors. Parliament intended to restrict the Company's independence, which had allowed them to pursue an exclusively capitalist and exploitative agenda. In the fifteen years following the famine, the Company's stockholder share prices plummeted to half their original value.<sup>25</sup> In some respects, the Company's economic suffering reflects the

seriousness of their ethical transgressions in the eyes of the general public and the British Crown. However, the Crown took little action, in a legislative sense, against the Company, revealing its complicity in the famine and, ultimately, genocide in Bengal.

“ Even though the East India Company and the British imperial state were well-informed about the threat of famine in Bengal, authorities took no measures to protect the population. ”

The British Empire had an undeniable hand in the disasters that struck the people of Bengal. Based on supporting evidence, key individuals in the revenue and trade sectors of the East India Company knew and openly discussed the degree of despair that was felt in Bengal during the oncoming famine. These discussions reveal an acknowledgment that humanity was being disregarded. These individuals were aware of the troubling conditions forced onto Bengal, and yet they actively participated in the establishment of trade practices that directly worsened those troubling conditions. One of the most staggering statistics that illuminates the damage Britain caused comes from a study conducted in 1878, in the *Journal of the Statistical Society*. This study documented “thirty-one serious famines in the 120 years of British rule against only seventeen recorded famines in the entire previous two millennia.”<sup>26</sup> Because of the selfidentification of officials in the British Empire and, more specifically, the East India Company, of their roles in the deaths of approximately ten million people in Bengal, there

is a case for their complicity in genocide. British officials exhibited informed consent when allowing and inducing large-scale suffering for the people of Bengal. Further, their acknowledgment of the effects of their actions, weighed against both the well-being of Bengal and the potential for economic gain, reveals that there is a large degree of British responsibility for such blatant ethical neglect of human life. However, because the intent for this suffering was not outright disdain for the Bengali people specifically, it is difficult to attribute to the event the act of genocide.

At the very least, the Bengal Famine of 1770 was an atrocity crime by the East India Company and British Empire. The United Nations defines atrocity crimes as “large-scale events that, if prevented, will avoid significant loss of human life, as well as physical, psychosocial, and psychological damages and trauma.”<sup>27</sup> Based on this understanding, the negligence of British imperialists to actively prevent the famine despite being made aware of the severity of its effects constitutes the systemic and intentional nature of this crime against humanity.<sup>28</sup> Extending this crime to include the ramifications of committing genocide, however, is difficult, since there was no absolute act of targeting the people of Bengal for any reason other than they happened to exist in the region of resources beneficial to the Company. Though there is likely evidence to suggest that racist sentiments played a part in how the Company responded to the onset of the famine, it would be difficult to meet the requirements set by international law for the determination of acts of genocide because these people were not targeted directly for their identities as Bengalis.

Disregard for humanity is not a new sentiment regarding business conducted by the East India Company or the British Empire, but it reveals another facet of how human exploitation was institutionalized by a major world power. Additionally,

the perspective of the victims in imperial histories are rarely discussed. The East India Company’s involvement in Bengal reflected intentional policies that inhibited the population from accessing the resources and means they needed to survive an intense famine. Even though the East India Company and the British imperial state were well-informed about the threat of famine in Bengal, authorities took no measures to protect the population. Rather, the Company acted to increase economic opportunities for itself within the region, privileging corporate profit over human life, which resulted in the deaths of ten million people and the theft of humanity.

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## ALCOHOLISM AS A DISEASE: A PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL REFLECTION

Brian Sunderman

Alcohol is an American ideology. We love our beer, wine, whiskey, vodka, tequila, rum, gin, and scotch. Personally, I was a vodka and whiskey aficionado. That's a lie. Aficionados appreciate all the finer points of whatever it is they are aficionado-ing about. I was not an aficionado. I was an alcoholic. I was caught in the downward spiral of alcoholism that included most of the medical problems now commonly associated with the disease. Even after a doctor's visit in December of 2018 where I was warned that my liver, kidneys, and heart were most likely about to go to war against me, I still couldn't shake the stuff. I would get the shakes within six hours of a last drink. It seemed as if I truly had the disease! In a strange turn of fate, in January of 2019, I decided to stop drinking. Unfortunately for me, I was one of those alcohol abusers in the most serious category: alcohol-dependent. This meant I was going to face withdrawal and possibly delirium tremens.

Delirium tremens was no joke. I hallucinated everything from talking trees to a Santa Claus whose sled was powered by the souls of the damned who lived in my air conditioning ducts. This seems silly to think about now, but at the time, it was all terrifyingly real in my head. After all was said and done and I came out the other side victorious over the demons, I had plenty of time to contemplate my experience combatting the disease. During this contemplation, I began to wonder about the history of alcoholism in the United States. Specifically, I was intrigued by the idea of alcoholism being a disease. Having known personally several alcoholics in my time, I was used to hearing about alcoholism being termed a disease, but now that I had an acute sense of awareness on the subject, I could not help but question; Was I really diseased?

During my brief stint in Alcoholics Anonymous, I noticed

several more experienced members say things along the lines of "alcoholism is now known to be a disease." This terminology seemed to imply that this had not always been the case when it came to labeling alcoholism. This paper serves as a record of my journey through the history of the term "alcoholism." I intend to prove that alcoholism is a new term, and was not used widely before the mid-1880s. Before this time, alcoholism was considered an effect, instead of a cause. I will also examine some of the "treatments" available for this disease in the nineteenth century.

From the get-go, I operated on the assumption that alcohol has been consumed in large quantities in America since before the founding, so I start all this off by stating that alcohol has been a factor in American life from at least 1776. Within the vast history of alcohol and alcoholism, this paper will focus on the terminology surrounding alcoholism as a disease. A further assumption upon which this paper rests is that ever since alcohol has existed, there have been problems with alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse can be crime fueled by alcohol, deaths caused by alcohol, and so forth. As I searched through online databases, I noticed something peculiar. It seemed as if most scholarly research into alcoholism was

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related to the consequences of alcohol abuse, instead of the reasons behind the abuse. Exasperated, I turned to newspaper entries and searched for the term “alcoholism” and “alcoholic” in an attempt to find the earliest mention of the disease. My first hit came from a weekly publication in 1895 called *The Banner of Light*. Here, there featured a small blurb under the headline “ALCOHOLISM A DISEASE.”<sup>1</sup> The article quotes a Senator Lawrence of Berkshire County in Massachusetts, a former circuit judge who dealt with drunkards from all walks of life. According to the senator, “drunkenness at a certain stage becomes a disease, and every judge of a court realizes that confinement in jail accomplishes nothing. What is needed is medical treatment.”<sup>2</sup> This testimony from 1895 shows that some prominent individuals were already considering alcoholism a disease, and therefore curable by some medical means. In this particular article, the treatment for alcoholics is referred to as the “Keeley Treatment” and was considered “good in all cases where the patient really wishes to be cured.”<sup>3</sup> Common understanding of disease would suggest that any disease susceptible to treatment is usually affected by said treatment regardless of the wishes of the patient. This testimony reveals that as early as the late nineteenth century, medical practitioners were developing an understanding of alcoholism as a treatable, but unique kind of disease. Dr. Leslie Keeley had studied medicine in Chicago before serving as a Union surgeon during the Civil War. Here, he first dealt with drunkenness on a regular basis—whiskey is liquid courage, after all. After the war, Dr. Keeley (with his amazing caterpillar-like mustache) was one among the first waves of American doctors to operate under the assumption that alcoholism was in fact a bodily disease and not a failing of the weak-willed. According to Keeley, there was “no difference in general terms between drunkenness or alcoholism and typhoid fever and insanity.”<sup>4</sup> Further, Keeley believed that alcohol was “a poison that changed the cells of

the body, causing the disease of intoxication.”<sup>5</sup> He went on to claim that “the weak will, vice, moral weakness, insanity, criminality, irreligion, and all are results of, and not causes of, inebriety.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Keeley was also apparently a bit of an entrepreneur, and in this respect, he took things one step further and peddled his own patented cure for alcoholism. He even claimed that his treatment, if “administered correctly, would end 95 percent of addictions.”<sup>7</sup> Debuting in 1880, his Bichloride-of-Gold tonic cure for alcoholism was available to the general public through mail-order service. This tonic was meant to be injected into the arm of the ailing alcoholic and was guaranteed to cure the disease of alcoholism in as little as four doses! The injection was said to even leave a “reassuring gold stain”<sup>8</sup> on the arm. In claiming the success of his treatment, Dr. Keeley asserted “I will take any liquor habitué there, saddened and saturated by twenty years of alcoholic debauch, sober him in two hours, cut short his worst spree in four hours, take him from inebriety to perfect sobriety without nervous shock or distress, and leave him antipathetic to alcoholic stimulants of every sort and kind inside of three days.”<sup>9</sup> This was quite a claim, but as we can see from the 1895 article mentioned earlier, the Keeley Treatment was seemingly put to widespread and regular use with some semblance of overall positive results. This article suggests that the disease idea was becoming prevalent at the dawn of the twentieth century. By 1920, the question of alcohol had reached the federal government, as Congress passed the 18th amendment, also known as the Volstead Act, launching the Prohibition Era. The Temperance Movement was “grounded in the belief that alcohol is a dangerous drug – a poison – that threatens all who imbibe with physical, social, and moral harms.”<sup>10</sup> Prohibition was eventually repealed in 1933 and viewed by both the general public and elected officials as an abysmal failure.



In 1935, shortly after the repeal of Prohibition, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith founded the world-famous organization, Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). As the story goes, Bill was inspired by a conversation with an alcoholic friend who had found the strength to stop drinking through a religious conversion. Shortly thereafter, Wilson, now sober, found himself in Akron, Ohio, tempted to get drunk after the failure of a business deal. Instead, he sought out another alcoholic, a surgeon named Bob Smith.<sup>11</sup> This meeting of the two alcoholics and their reliance on each other as inspiration to remain sober sparked the initial idea and led to the founding of A.A. Spreading outwards from Akron, A.A. became “the most successful self-help organization of our time.”<sup>12</sup> A.A. is based on a group therapy ideology grounded in a twelve-step program, and has been shown in repeated studies<sup>13</sup> to be one of the most successful cures for the disease of alcoholism.

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During the early years, “A.A. got a boost from the alcohol research program at Yale University under the leadership of biostatistician E. Morton Jellinek.”<sup>14</sup> Dr. Jellinek had published two scientific articles about alcoholism, one of which lined up with the ideals found in A.A. Later, Dr. Jellinek published a book in which he “identified five varieties of alcoholism, designated by the Greek letters alpha through epsilon, of which two—gamma and delta— had sufficient indication of alcohol dependence or addiction to constitute a disease.”<sup>15</sup> Then, in 1944, mostly in response to the studies on

alcoholism at Yale University, Mrs. Marty Mann founded the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism (now called National Council on Alcoholism). Mrs. Mann, who was the first woman to achieve sobriety through participation in A.A., stated that her specific goals were to “eliminate the stigma surrounding alcoholism, to educate the public that alcoholism was a disease and alcoholics were ‘sick,’ and to promote public support for helping alcoholics.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, approaching the mid-twentieth century, multiple large-scale organizations were confidently labeling alcoholism a disease and devising treatments accordingly.

Others in the medical field have challenged the characterization of alcoholism as a disease. These challenges begin with the question of whether “alcoholism is properly labeled a disease,”<sup>17</sup> and contend with the specifics of “loss of control, the possibility of returning to controlled drinking (with or without intervention), and whether and in what ways alcoholics are different.”<sup>18</sup> One prominent critic of the disease label, Dr. Herbert Fingarette, believes that “alcoholics do not constitute a distinct group within the population of people that have problems with alcoholism.”<sup>19</sup> According to Dr. Fingarette, a large part of the American population consumes alcohol at levels that would label them as heavy drinkers, and out of this heavy drinking group come many of the problems associated with heavy drinking. While these drinkers are not addicted, they do drink enough to suffer medical consequences brought on by their heavy drinking—but crucially, this is all by their choice. Much of the debate about the classification of alcoholism as a disease has been historically linked to the question of blame. Is the alcoholic to blame, or is the alcohol? The ideas of choice and will power are key here. Usually, choice and will power have no effect when it comes to disease in the common sense. If alcoholism is to be truly thought of as a disease, it is counterintuitive to think of “curing” the disease, if the patient

has the power to regress back into the disease by the choice of drinking alcohol again. Therefore, it is logical to claim that alcoholism is in fact a behavioral issue arising from the abuse of an addictive substance, and not a disease.

Dr. George Valliant, research psychiatrist at Harvard and a leading proponent of the disease argument, has proposed the idea that “uncontrolled, maladaptive ingestion of alcohol is not a disease in the sense of biological disorder; rather, alcoholism is a disorder of behavior” and that “alcohol dependence lies on a continuum and that in scientific terms behavior disorder will often be a happier semantic choice than disease.”<sup>20</sup> Valliant goes on to say, “Calling alcoholism a disease, rather than a behavior disorder, is a useful device both to persuade the alcoholic to admit his alcoholism and to provide a ticket for admission into the health care system.”<sup>21</sup> This suggests that alcoholism can be labeled as a kind of curable disease, though not a disease in the classic sense as caused by some virus or bacteria. So then why the fuss over the question of labeling alcoholism a disease rather than a behavioral disorder? According to Dr. Philip Cook, a sociologist at Duke University, “The disease label may help remove the stigma from alcoholism, since it suggests that the alcoholic has lost volition and hence is no longer blameworthy for all the damage he does to his family and community.”<sup>22</sup> This reveals that the label of alcoholism as a disease (or not) is closely linked to ideas of blame and morality.

Alcohol has been an important part (for better and for worse) of American society since before the nation’s founding. This means that alcohol abuse has been an issue for as long as alcohol has been manufactured. Around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, newspapers show that doctors and prominent individuals were starting to consider the abuse of alcohol a disease, and to be potentially curable. During

this time period, the potential cures were mostly opiate filled snake oil tonic elixirs sold by travelling salesmen claiming to be medical miracle workers. By the 1920s, the federal government was involved in attempts to address alcohol abuse, passing the Prohibition Era laws that would also eventually fail to cure the problem.<sup>23</sup> Following the federal government’s involvement, two former alcoholics pioneered the use of group therapy and self-help techniques, which operated from the assumption that alcoholism was a disease. These techniques proved to be some of the most successful treatments for alcoholism yet discovered. By the 1940s, scientific papers were confirming the success of applying the A.A. doctrine in the fight against alcoholism in America.<sup>24</sup>

Amidst the rise of modern medicine in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is persistent debate in the medical community as to whether alcoholism is a disease or a behavioral disorder. As neurologist and psychiatrist Dr. Vladimir Hudolin says, “Although alcoholism has recently come to be recognized as a disease, this recognition has not resulted in comprehensive, national, control programs. Moreover, the very concept of mental disease, emotional disturbance, and behavior disorder has become unclear.”<sup>25</sup> It sort of seems like the more we learn about alcoholism the more difficult it is to classify it one way or another. As the sociologist Dr. Cook has said, “The belief that alcoholism is in some important sense a disease spawns the hope that medical research can discover its causes, identify those who are most susceptible, and develop effective treatments.”<sup>26</sup> Since appearing in the public sphere in the late nineteenth century, the concept of alcoholism as a disease has been taken up by many prominent and influential organizations focused on treatment and cure. Yet many in the medical community still challenge the label, raising complex questions about blame, morality, choice, and will when it comes to disease.

As for me, I count myself lucky. I have so far, in over two years of sobriety, not experienced the cravings or relapses so commonly reported by alcoholics. After my research into alcoholism as a disease, I'm not sure if I was ever truly "diseased" or just drank way too much, becoming addicted like one becomes to cigarettes and other substances. I would posit that my experience in questioning my own label as diseased or not serves as a window into the greater issue in

medical society at large. It seems that the experts are not really sure about classifying alcoholism a disease or not. The only thing they can agree upon is research into ways to help cure those afflicted with alcoholism. I suppose in the end it does not really matter if alcoholism is labeled a disease or a behavioral issue. What matters is the hope that those who suffer from alcoholism can be helped to overcome their problems as related to alcohol consumption.

## ENDNOTES

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**Brantley**

Kaitlyn Avery





## BEHAVIORISM AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: REFRAMING THE GERMAN RESPONSE TO THE THIRD REICH

Allyson Payne

In *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, William Sheridan Allen outlines the slow but steady takeover of a small German town, Northeim, by the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP). Some of the expected hallmarks of Nazism present themselves over time in his narrative, including parades, ammunition raids, and the presence of a work camp nearby. Simultaneously, others, which readers also generally have come to expect in any sort of literature concerning daily life in the Third Reich, are noticeably absent. Examples include overt violence against Jews and other NSDAP undesirables, physically enforced participation in NSDAP events, enforced party membership, and generally just fear. Where one would expect a chaotic and fear-filled narrative, Allen presents a relatively calm transition to Nazi power.<sup>1</sup> While many historians can and do easily explain away the perceived absence of the expected violent mistreatment of Jews by citing that there were not that many Jews living in Northeim in the first place, and that the NSDAP leadership enforced measures that ensured Jews simply evacuated, the absence of fear provokes deeper analysis. If the German people did not seem to be or were not afraid of the NSDAP, why did they not try harder to resist the party and its policies? This question about the absence of fear may seem isolated to the case in Northeim, but it is a part of a broader debate: were the German people coerced into the acceptance and practice of Nazi ideals, or did they simply consent?

Whether explicitly stated or not, this conversation surrounding coercion and consent underpins much of the existing literature on the general German population under the Third Reich. The centrality of the 'coercion versus consent' debate to the study and subsequent practice of the history of the Third Reich finds its roots immediately following the

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war. Historians from both East and West Germany were determined, as Ian Kershaw points out, to demonstrate that the German people had indeed resisted to some extent, implying that the Germans were not pleased with the NSDAP and, further, that the NSDAP had coerced the German people into obedience.<sup>2</sup> Given what people knew about the NSDAP atrocities against minority groups, historians generally accepted this narrative. But over the succeeding years, with the publication of works such as Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul's "Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent: Gestapo, Society, and Resistance," the idea of coercion came under fire as it became clear that the accepted image of the NSDAP marching around with their Gestapo taking in or immediately punishing anyone suspected of resistance in jail may have been exaggerated.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, in Allen's work, Peter Fritzsche's study *Life and Death in the Third Reich*,<sup>4</sup> and some of the oral history interviews in Alison Owings' *Frauen*, it seems that people simply gave in to the NSDAP and their violent policies either because they wanted to remain neutral



or because they received something in return from the NSDAP that reinforced their consent.<sup>5</sup>

The conversation surrounding coercion and consent often slips into questions and assessments of responsibility about whether the Germans consented or were coerced, yet it also often bypasses any sort of official definition of the two terms. Even in more explicit pieces such as Richard Evans' "Coercion and Consent in Nazi Germany," the conversation focuses on responsibility and not on defining the terms themselves.<sup>5</sup> If historians do not adequately define coercion and consent, they cannot possibly determine whether or not Germans fell into one category or the other. Moreover, without a contextual understanding of these terms, historians cannot, in good faith, reach (and have not reached) any responsible judgment.

Even still, to assume that coercion and consent deserve definitions assumes the validity of their apparent dichotomy. Just as most works bypass defining the terms and move toward a judgment argument, those same works underpinned by the debate also fail to validate the dichotomy in the first place. Historians largely accept coercion to mean that the NSDAP forced the German people into submission with threats of violence or ruin. This conception of coercion garners much attention from these same historians due to its sensational nature and exonerative qualities. On the other hand, consent can be defined as voluntarily giving an entity permission to carry out its will. Though it is a simple definition, it is one the reality of which historians must ignore in order to reinforce. The keyword of this definition is 'voluntarily,' which if taken at face value in this context, implies that Germans thought little about what it meant to accept the Third Reich and just did accept the Third Reich, atrocities and all. This sort of concept, of course, completely strips the Germans of any sort of agency or capability and forces historians to 'figure out' what specifically made the

German population susceptible to totalitarian take over.

Those familiar with the topic see historians do just that in many published works, no matter the topic. In *Frauen*, Alison Owings' aim is to decide for herself the guilt, innocence, or at the very least, the nature of the involvement of German women with the NSDAP—yet her analysis slips in questions geared towards environmental factors which may have influenced each woman in her decision to or not to support the NSDAP.<sup>6</sup> Eric Johnson's *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany* works to assess the level of Germans' guilt by determining what knowledge they were privy to during the Nazi years.<sup>7</sup> Still, Johnson, although this is not his main goal, provokes conversation over what made the Germans particularly unable to resist. Allen, in his aforementioned work *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, works to figure out what traits in the people of Northeim left them particularly receptive to Nazism so that when the NSDAP took over, there was not really a fight.<sup>8</sup> In less obvious works, such as Detlev Peukert's "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution,'" anti-Semitism appears as the product of an ideological shift, with the additional point that the Germans were highly receptive to such a shift because of World War I.<sup>9</sup> This determination of particularly German traits is also a popular topic in forums where the foremost German historians consider the various events leading up to, during, and after the NSDAP rise to power.<sup>10</sup> These sorts of narratives are problematic in that they inadvertently blame the German population for accepting the NSDAP but simultaneously exonerate the Germans by blaming their susceptibility largely on factors beyond their control.

To accept the 'coercion versus consent' dichotomy is to, at least somewhat, excuse the Germans either way and to land—either they were forced or they were uniquely receptive to totalitarian ideological and physical takeover as a people—

on the comfortable conclusion that either way it was out of the Germans' hands. At worst, it completely forgives the German people because they were forced against their will. At best, the dichotomy allows for shallow blame to be placed on Germans as a whole because the ability to accept the NSDAP evils is labeled as unique to them. This judgment is a moral one and uncomfortable for historians to make—though this does not stop them from attempting. In any case, if considered on a spectrum, coercion and consent can feasibly be placed together on one end or on completely opposite ends. Neither reality is feasible because humanity does not operate on a black and white binary. This would suggest that a third option exists outside of coercion or consent.

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Indeed, although many works support the dichotomy of coercion and consent, either inadvertently or advertently, there is evidence within them of a third option. Though often glossed over, in truth the German acceptance of the NSDAP had less to do with fear or susceptibility and more to do with what Germans got out of the NSDAP seizing power. Within the agentless dichotomous framework of 'coercion versus consent,' the NSDAP seizure and implementation of

power is presented as something simply done to the German population. When presented in this way, it actually provides little valuable commentary on whether or not Germans were responsible for what happened and what their reasoning for doing so may have been. A more productive way to understand the German and NSDAP dynamic is to reframe it relationally. Instead of accepting the NSDAP seizure and implementation of power as something done to the German people by force or by susceptibility, the relationship can be better understood as mutually beneficial. The NSDAP provided something to the Germans in return for their support. By reframing the relational understanding of the dynamic between the NSDAP and the German populace, more emphasis is placed on behavior, a concept far more useful for historians who wish to incorporate discussions about agency and capability.

Shifting the debate towards a new focus on behavior would not be unfamiliar to historians of the Third Reich and, in fact, would be in line with both modern and contemporary scholarship. To date, historians have devoted much time to studying the behavior of NSDAP instigators by employing analytical behavioral studies, including the Milgram and the Stanley Prison experiments, and including them as serious aspects of their historical works. One example among many is Michael Bess' *Choices Under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II*.<sup>11</sup> In line with previous scholarly examinations of the behavioral aspects of Nazi rule, then, historians will benefit from incorporating the behavioral analysis of B.F. Skinner. In 1937, American psychologist B.F. Skinner introduced the world to operant conditioning. Operant conditioning, in the simplest of terms, refers to a type of behavioral conditioning in which response frequency is determined by the type of stimuli administered. Operant conditioning can then be broken down into three facets based on the type of stimuli administered. These three

facets are punishment, negative reinforcement, and positive reinforcement. In this case, punishment means administering negative stimuli to decrease a behavior, negative reinforcement means removing negative stimuli to increase a behavior, and positive reinforcement means administering positive stimuli to increase a behavior.<sup>12</sup>

The correlation between coercion and punishment is clear. Historians who advance the argument that the German populace was coerced into supporting the NSDAP, by the NSDAP, are generally referring to the idea that the Nazis used threats of doxing, boycotts, and violence up to and including death in order to keep the people from rising up in revolt. The evidence for this argument is not difficult to find. In the various interviews of her *Frauen*, Owings asks why the participants did not resist in general or why they did not do more than they had done to resist the NSDAP. Frau Wilhelmine Haferkamp gives the classic and representative answer, telling Owings that of course she did not speak out against the NSDAP. If she had, she would have been shot.<sup>13</sup> In another example, in Allen's study of Northeim, those who disobeyed the ammunition laws were punished, and in one recorded incident a woman who did not 'heil' with enthusiasm was sent a threatening letter from Ernst Girmann—Northeim's NSDAP party leader—which stated that such actions could likely leave her vulnerable to acts of violence, acts of violence from which he would not protect her because, according to Girmann, they would be deserved.<sup>14</sup> Allen also describes the situation in Northeim as one where even the threat of NSDAP retaliation was enough, as there was a known work camp nearby.

However, for the average German person, these threats were just that—threats. Historians point to public punishment, boycotts, and violence, which did indeed take place, but unless one was a targeted minority and since the NSDAP had no established terror laws focused on Aryans, the German

citizens were likely under little true threat.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, most of the cases in which a German was punished to the same degree as a minority individual was typically when found to be aiding said minority. Even in that situation, though, many Germans felt quite confident in defying the system with little fear of punishment.

In the same interview in which Frau Haferkamp wholeheartedly stated that she would have been hung for speaking out against the NSDAP, she related at length about how she fed the Polish prisoners working in the ditch outside of her house even after NSDAP officials told her not to and threatened her. In addition, Frau Haferkamp emphatically stated that she continued to support her Jewish neighbors even though her own husband worked for the NSDAP.<sup>16</sup> Further still, Allen describes how the Nazi neighborhood officers in Northeim could be bribed and that one officer would even bribe the neighborhood with wine because he wanted to be liked. He also writes about how the town felt confident challenging Girmann's changes to the religious school system.<sup>17</sup> In addition, according to *Frauen*, many knew about the atrocities committed against those with mental or physical deformities, but no one felt that they were in danger of similar actions being taken against themselves.<sup>18</sup>

All of this considered, the punishment argument is shaky, but scholarship describing the state of things at the top of the NSDAP are the nails in punishment's coffin. One of the most famous misconceptions of punishment is over the Gestapo. For a long time, historians and amateurs alike believed that, similar to the KGB, the NSDAP Gestapo were listening and watching at all times. But Mallman and Paul's research on the infamous Nazi secret police called this view into serious question.<sup>19</sup> In addition, with Devin Pendas' "Racial States in Comparative Perspective" and Ian Kershaw's "Hitler: 'Master in the Third Reich' or 'Weak Dictator,'" the image of

a surprisingly asynchronous NSDAP comes into full view.<sup>20</sup> In essence, Nazi policy was not coherent or well-enforced enough to establish widespread punishment, and thus punishment could not have likely been a useful behavioral tool in service of reinforcing NSDAP support, which also largely aligns with Skinner's theory on the effectiveness of punishment. If punishment was likely not an effective tool, what then effectively garnered German support?

Interestingly enough, without ever being named as such, negative reinforcement gets some attention in historical scholarship in the form of discussions about the role of anti-Semitism in reinforcing NSDAP support. It is no secret that a large part of NSDAP policy was rooted in anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism had always been present in Germany, but with the close of World War I and the essential downfall of Germany financially and politically, Germans were on the hunt for a scapegoat. Although Pendas argues that Germany had been trying to make amends with the Jewish population, Germans once again turned on the Jews and pinned the rotten post-war reality on them.<sup>21</sup> In addition to pinning all of Germany's troubles on the Jews, they imagined and disseminated the idea of a worldwide conspiracy in which Jews orchestrated everything, even events happening in contemporary Jim Crow South.<sup>22</sup> The idea behind this argument is that the NSDAP promised to get rid of the Jews, and others deemed undesirable, if they had the country's electoral support. This lines up theoretically with the concept of negative reinforcement: removing 'negative' stimuli [the presence of Jews] in return for favorable behavior [support of the German people].

However, there is much historical evidence from interviews, personal histories, and statistics, presented by Owings, Allen, and Fritzsche, among others, which contradicts the idea that the general German populace actively sought the removal

of Jews and other minorities. Already mentioned is Frau Haferkamp, who emphatically announced that she had a good many Jewish friends.<sup>23</sup> Though it is sometimes seen as negative by scholars today, according to Allen, Northeimers typically shied away from mistreatment of the Jews. In fact, Allen notes that, in Northeim, to some degree, the perceived mistreatment of the Jews by Jewish individuals was largely self-reinforcing. A Jewish man might see a friend on the street and assume the friend will avoid him, so to take the situation back into his own hands he might cross the road himself, leading to the friend avoiding him in the future thinking this is what the Jewish friend wants.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some historians suggest that anti-Semitism may not have been presented coherently at the time when people were developing their opinions on the NSDAP. For example, Allen reviewed the topics of the meetings from the beginning of the NSDAP rise to power in Northeim, which would have been when people were forming their opinions and possibly even loyalties to the NSDAP, revealing that very few of those meetings dealt with anti-Semitic themes. In addition, a statistical piece developed from interviews of those who lived through the Third Reich suggests that anti-Semitism was not a topic often spoken at length about, and that people rarely listed anti-Semitic sentiment as their reason for supporting the NSDAP.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, the role played by anti-Semitic sentiment in ordinary people's support for the NSDAP is unclear. While some might suggest that Hitler, as an avid anti-Semite, directly influenced and enforced the dissemination of anti-Semitism down the ranks to landing on the civilians, secondary literature suggests that this may be an oversimplification. In fact, historians heavily debate this and generally fall into two camps: either as 'intentionalists,' proponents of the idea that the Third Reich developed from Hitler's ideological intentions, or as 'structuralists,' who

emphasize Hitler as just one among many components of the Third Reich.<sup>26</sup> Detlev Peukert suggests that anti-Semitism as a policy point did not actually spring from Hitler but rather from the ideological transition from theodicy to logodicy. Logodicy, of course, was calling for societies in downturn to expel their “sick” or “deviants” for the good of the society.<sup>27</sup>

On a behavioral level, negative reinforcement is the most effective tactic to use when trying to reinforce a new behavior while using a new stimulus, yet in Nazi Germany negative reinforcement was not the most effective tactic used by the NSDAP. While the NSDAP might have been new to the political scene, Germans were familiar with both the turmoil of democracy and the standard despot style monarchy, so, in a sense, they would have been familiar with a hybrid of the two. Additionally, anti-Semitism, as mentioned above, was not unfamiliar to Germans. This was an ideology with which they would have interacted on a daily basis. By this logic, behaviorally, it makes no sense for negative reinforcement to be effective on this group of people. They were familiar with supporting such individuals and were familiar on some level with the Nazi promise to remove the Jews. Considering all of this, it does not appear that either anti-Semitism or negative reinforcement seemed to be a convincing catalyst for the general support of the NSDAP.

So, if punishment never quite developed properly and negative reinforcement was never set up to be effective, what then was? The answer to this question is the only type of Skinner’s reinforcement left – positive reinforcement. The reason for this is simple: in essence, a positive type of reinforcement, and especially a type which rewarded everyday behavior, made supporting the questionable NSDAP attractive to a group of people who had just been financially and culturally decimated. While historians are quick to list the ‘positive’ things the NSDAP accomplished, especially

in the late 1920s and 1930s, some even suggesting that these positives were nice perks for those who supported the NSDAP, none have suggested a concrete relationship between the so-called positives of Nazism for the German people and their enthusiastic support for the NSDAP.

Some historians suggest that anti-Semitism was considered a positive for NSDAP supporters. However, as stated previously, the relationship between the average German citizen and anti-Semitism is shaky at best. While there are undoubtedly cases of anti-Semitic fanatics out there, German civilians seemed to be capable of dissociating anti-Semitism from the NSDAP. Take again Frau Haferkamp. She waxed poetic about her Nazi child-bearing trophy, but seemed horrified by the NSDAP treatment of the Jewish people she knew.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Fritzsche argues that anti-Semitism was something to justify away Nazism rather than to revel in it, as is demonstrated in one mother’s letters to her daughter.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in this context, because anti-Semitism did not necessarily grow support for the NSDAP, anti-Semitism should not be considered a positive.

Conversely, a positive would be anything the average German citizen considered to be unequivocally good for them and that also garnered support for the NSDAP. Included within this category are the NSDAP’s reduction of unemployment, contributions to charity, and the development of the Autobahn, among other things. Ideological positives are also included within this category, as well as the sense of nationalistic pride in working without labor unions that the NSDAP seemed to give to workers. Though this may seem like an analysis of positives tailored to the argument intended, this is the relational reality of positives. As cyclical as it sounds, positives are considered to be positives both because of and by the level they increase support for the NSDAP. Additionally, the timing of these positive factors—



both ideological and material—correlate inversely with the NSDAP rise to power, which in and of itself suggests a relationship. As the NSDAP rose to power, the occurrence, or at least the suggestion of such positives, decreased as more negatives, such as anti-Semitism or violence, manifested in their absence. This is because the NSDAP needed to gain support quickly in the beginning. By establishing themselves as a party of progress and care—getting rid of unemployment, improving public works, lifting worker morale, contributing to charities, and reinforcing family values—the NSDAP was essentially providing the German populace with a reward for their support. And the Germans took this bait.

The question, then, comes down to intent. Was this showering of positives on civilians intentionally deployed to gain support, or was this sort of behavior simply innate to human activity? The NSDAP was known for their interest in shaping human behavior, including, but not limited to, their reward system designed to increase childbirth and the indoctrination of young boys and girls in the Hitler Youth. While these excursions in behavior farming might beg the reader to conflate them to the point of intention, the truth is that while the NSDAP was undoubtedly manipulative, Germans typically stayed away from American psychology. Germans preferred more theory-based psychology, while the Americans focused on more practice-based forms. Essentially, although behaviorism is rooted just as firmly in the early twentieth century as the NSDAP, the NSDAP likely never paid serious attention to this ‘inferior’ form of psychology and, thus, were unlikely to have knowingly implemented some intentional plan based on Skinner’s operant conditioning. This begs a final question: if intent cannot be determined, does that damage the integrity of the argument made here? Behaviorism prides itself on being a generalizable field due to the inherent human qualities upon which it focuses; thus, it is no stretch to layer Skinner’s

operant conditioning over a study about German support of the NSDAP. Behaviorism as a field of study is highly generalizable and lends itself to this sort of analysis.

It is clear that the debate over ‘coercion versus consent’ is an oversimplification which ignores human agency and capability, and that in its place, layering early twentieth century behaviorism over the accepted narratives can reveal both accepted flaws and overlooked relationships; however, the work to fully understand the relationship between the German populace and the NSDAP is far from complete. While an excursion into operant conditioning might reveal a relationship between the two, the dynamics between them remain complex. Central to this complexity is a full understanding of the term “support.” Did support for the NSDAP mean converting into a totalitarian fanatic? Did support simply mean allowing children to participate in the Hitler Youth? While this essay has explored which method of behavioral manipulation likely garnered the most support for the NSDAP, questions of definition such as those outlined above remain, suggesting the need for further investigation and revision of the German historiographic field.

## ENDNOTES

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- 3 Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul, "Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent: Gestapo, Society, and Resistance," in David Crew, ed., *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 166-196.
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## Decomposition

Claude Blair

“Can you feel how your body lives?” The *mushroom* said  
Sitting patiently out of a dead stump as the human in front of it breathes heavy, quick  
Like a scared rabbit, heart beating rapidly,  
Or like a threatened wolf, poised to strike

“Can you feel how your heart beats, your pulse quickens, your shoulders tense?  
Can you feel the thrumming energy throughout you? Feel what you humans call being ‘alive?’  
Every bit of you is operated by a smaller piece, every function comes along with tiny biomes  
and bits that keep you alive  
You yourself are an ecosystem, with millions of microbes and animals and plants that you  
cannot see, but can feel.”

The human raises a pistol to *mushroom*, cocked and ready,  
“You don’t scare me,” Says the human,  
“Tell me the truth of our existence, you fungal piece of shit.”

“But I am,” says the toadstool, red and glistening as it slowly saps the nutrients from the  
corpse of the tree  
“The truth of everything is that the ‘you’ you value so much doesn’t exist.  
You are simply an environment. Your cells are and flesh are the dirt that the flora and fauna  
exist on.  
You believe yourself to have great purpose, and perhaps in this unnatural, incomprehensible  
society that your species has built, you do.  
Perhaps you have a purpose that is beyond the understanding of the primal wilderness that  
you so eagerly abandoned.  
But you will never escape your true purpose. Try as you might, you are still an animal, and  
still just a vessel for the wilderness that lives inside of you.  
You can build, you can use your ‘sciences’, you can do all you can to escape from your  
origins and your truth  
But you cannot escape from the microcosms. From the fauna. From the flora.  
You can never fully escape from the wilderness inside you.  
Because despite all your efforts, you will eventually die.”

The toadstool cannot shy away from the threat pointed at it,  
But it does not need to.

“And the wilderness within you will feast.”



## **Pawpaw Fruit**

Caroline Myers

## NON-HUMAN AGENCY IN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Sheila Blair

Historians use the concept of agency to trace causation and change over time, employing it to emphasize contingency over inevitability and to remind us that nothing is ever predetermined. While it is usually assumed to be the exclusive realm of the human species, environmental historians have demonstrated that historical agency also pervades the non-human, or more-than-human,<sup>1</sup> world. Although many non-academic communities have long conceived of more-than-human personhood, it is noteworthy that a growing number of professional historians are also exploring this terrain. What follows here is a survey of three environmental historical texts that use the concept of non-human agency to draw meaningful conclusions about contingency and change in the outcome of world-historical events.

The texts presented here reveal that the ways in which environmental historians engage non-human agency are dynamic and carry widely varying implications for whether the concept reinforces or destabilizes the long-standing centrality of the human subject in history. Many historians interpret and include more-than-human actors by virtue of their proximity or similarity to homo sapiens, or by the way their behaviors impact human life within conventional historical narratives. Yet in certain branches of environmental history, a new approach is emerging that seeks a more expansive definition of non-human agency by including characteristics beyond proximity or equivalence to what humans do. Such an approach gestures towards a world full of more-than-human activity that goes on ceaselessly, with or without the awareness or involvement of humans. Challenging anthropocentrism can open up exciting new possibilities for research that centers more-than-human activity, enriching

environmental histories while fortifying efforts towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

J.R. McNeill's *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* is a seminal environmental history that centers non-human creatures as historical actors. McNeill's research reveals how outbreaks of mosquito-borne malaria and yellow fever spread differently through human populations and, in so doing, shaped the geopolitical development of the region. His analysis looks at mosquitoes as historical actors, their behaviors blending invisibly with human activity to shape European attempts at settlement and conquest. McNeill explains that the high incidence of tropical fevers in European colonial advances was caused by multiple factors: differential immunity, ecology, climate, and the coevolution of human and mosquito behavior. While certain indigenous populations carried some resistance to malaria and yellow fever, Europeans did not. Furthermore, the diseases' vehemence manifested differently in different places; yellow fever spread more easily in urban environments while malaria did so in rural areas. Perhaps most significantly, ecological changes triggered by the developing plantation economy increased the potential spread of both diseases, and of yellow fever in particular. The burgeoning global trade in sugar caused widespread deforestation on Caribbean islands, reducing the population of insectivorous birds, while ships and port cities offered a plethora of warm and humid water storage facilities uniquely hospitable to mosquito breeding.<sup>2</sup> Changes in human behavior and economic activity created new ecological spaces for mosquitoes and mosquito-borne illnesses to spread and thrive, while differential immunity conferred invisible protection on some human populations more than others.



All of these factors contributed to the geopolitical outcomes of imperial activities in the region. Europeans regularly attempted conquest and/or settlement in the greater Caribbean from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries; perhaps the major obstacle they faced was disease. In one particularly dramatic example, eighty-five to ninety percent of all Europeans died during the attempted settlement of Kourou (a town on the coast of French Guiana), most likely of yellow fever, possibly in combination with other tropical diseases.<sup>3</sup> In military engagement, soldiers fared no better—smallpox and malaria decimated the colonists and the British respectively during the American Revolutionary War, the diseases cleaving to partisan lines because of differential immunity.<sup>4</sup> While Americans were more vulnerable to smallpox, the British had a greater susceptibility to malaria, which was widespread in the low country of the Carolinas where southern British campaigns ultimately faced defeat at Yorktown.<sup>5</sup> Not until medical professionals discovered that mosquitoes were a major vector of tropical fever, and implemented technological solutions to protect humans from their bites, were the raging epidemics and their influence on imperialism in the Caribbean brought to an end.

What McNeill's analysis helpfully illustrates is that even when humans are entirely unaware of the consequences of their coexistence with the non-human world, they are affected by it. In making his persuasive contention that mosquitoes were a causal factor in the geopolitical history of European imperialism, McNeill's analysis adheres to standard conventions of anthropocentric historical narrative. Mosquitoes are historical actors to the extent that they influence and shape human affairs; their agency is defined by how significantly their behavior affected human activities.

In *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*, historian Bathsheba Demuth builds upon the concept

of more-than-human agency in environmental history. Demuth skillfully demonstrates how whales, caribou, walrus, foxes, minerals, and sea ice differently impacted geopolitical outcomes as historical actors. In addition to recognizing these creatures' influence on human affairs, Demuth also highlights more-than-human agency as inherent to sentient life in and of itself, showing that choice, culture, and affect are fundamental elements of a "will-filled universe"<sup>6</sup> and not the exclusive province of humanity. The indigenous peoples of Beringia, some of whom she lived and learned with as a younger woman, guide her in contextualizing the relationship between human sentience and the sentience of non-human creatures. Yupik, Iñupiat and Chukchi helped her understand that "[w]ith no hard line between humans and other persons, land and seas were alive with sentience, judgment, and perilous whims."<sup>7</sup>

Whales, in Demuth's history, are active, agentic responders to the activities of humans. In contrasting Yupik and industrial whaling strategies, Demuth highlights whales' choices either to give their lives to the hunter or to resist. Facing Yupik hunters, she explains, bowhead whales "cooperated with human persons through a specific kind of transformation: by giving themselves over to die."<sup>8</sup> After multiple seasons of mass killing by industrial whaling ships, however, the same whales recognized the unique threat posed by commercial whaling and chose to flee.<sup>9</sup> Whales recognized threats, communicated through shared culture, and practiced resistance: "Their culture, at the surface observed by commercial hunters, became one of choosing not to die for the market."<sup>10</sup> Whales' decision-making also impacted commercial whaling. Whalers struggled to maintain profit margins once bowheads began actively avoiding them, and awareness of whale sentience and affect became a source of moral distress for both sailors and consumers back home.<sup>11</sup> Yet the effects of whale behavior on human society reflect

only one aspect of their sentience—fundamentally, their agency was revealed by decisions they made to protect or to sacrifice their own lives.

*Floating Coast* is more than an examination of the historical outcomes that can be traced to non-human behavior (whales or otherwise). Indeed, Demuth's broader and deeper concern is to probe the intimate and affective relationality that has historically structured existence in the Arctic: "That is the contradiction of existing in Beringia: in order to live, something, some being is always dying."<sup>12</sup> Demuth's more-than-human agency only partially hinges on its tangible effect on the human world. She locates it in the reciprocity of all multispecies interactions and presents it as inherent to the willfulness of a living universe. In so doing, she broadens the horizons of writing environmental history.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* pushes the boundaries of non-human agency in environmental history even further. Starting from the premise that industrial capitalism has profoundly damaged landscapes and ecologies the world over, Tsing looks beyond declensionist lament to a more important question: "What emerges in damaged landscapes, beyond the call of industrial promise and ruin?"<sup>13</sup> One entity that emerges is matsutake, a wild *mushroom* that thrives in humandisturbed forests and fetches a high price as a gourmet item on the global market.<sup>14</sup> In framing her inquiry this way, Tsing also directly challenges the convention of anthropocentrism and its implicit alignment with the progress narratives that have fueled industrial capitalism. Instead, she points out that "allowing only human protagonists into our stories is not just ordinary human bias; it is a cultural agenda tied to dreams of progress through modernization."<sup>15</sup> To step beyond this dream of progress and its shadow companion, ruin, Tsing focuses on more-

than-human entities as multispecies world-builders and as protagonists in historical narratives.

Tsing's focus on multispecies assemblages, rather than on individual species identities, destabilizes the centrality of the human subject while uncovering unlikely ecological resilience and survival. Assemblages, Tsing argues, are more than the sum of their parts, their conceptual open-endedness accounting for the fluidity and change over time that characterize living ecological communities.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, individual species mustn't necessarily prove their primacy within the assemblage or their "human equivalence (as conscious agents, intentional communicators, or ethical subjects)," <sup>17</sup> to warrant investigation or attention. Matsutake *mushroom* assemblages also include pine trees and oak trees, the *mushrooms'* primary arboreal hosts. Following these assemblages across Japan, Oregon, southwest China, and northern Finland, Tsing uncovers "the world-building proclivities of matsutake"<sup>18</sup> in the midst of vast deforestation and human disturbance. The resilient ecologies of pine trees, oak trees, and matsutake *mushrooms* may form assemblages of environmental historical significance, regardless of whether or not each individual species appears conventionally significant. By tracking the proliferation of matsutake assemblages through landscapes damaged by humans, Tsing offers a blueprint for radically decentering human hubris, reminding us that the intensity of human disturbance in the Anthropocene does not justify narratives that assume humans have a singular power to shape the living world.<sup>19</sup>

While environmental historians build a body of research that investigates the role of nonhuman agency in historical change, they should be prepared for paradigmatic and existential questions to arise. As scholars tasked with writing about change beyond the human, they will be on the front lines of ontological inquiries into the boundaries between

human and more-thanhuman agency; the texts reviewed in this paper are testament to the dexterity and skill with which environmental historians have already engaged these questions. No matter how powerfully humans have altered and continue to alter the environment, change comes back the other way as well: whenever and whatever we change, also changes us in turn.<sup>20</sup> Although anthropogenic causes of contemporary ecological crises to a certain extent do justify

an anthropocentric focus, it is equally necessary to recognize the survival and resilience exhibited by other creatures with whom humans share the outcomes of industrialism and global capitalism. Writing with an open ended concept of non-human agency and personhood can thus fortify efforts for a more sustainable future while gesturing towards potential future research in environmental history.

## ENDNOTES

1 I will use the terms “non-human” and “more-than-human” interchangeably throughout this essay.

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10 Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 43.

11 Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 45-46.

12 Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 315.

13 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 18.

14 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 3-4.

15 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 155.

16 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 22.

17 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 158.

18 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 211.

19 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 180.

20 This line is inspired by the Earthseed verse in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (New York and Boston: Grand Central Publishing, 2019), 3.

## Wading in Little Cahaba River

Rachel Houghton

I look for words under  
each beige and copper stone.  
River pennies and pebble  
snails cling, while crawdads bolt

before siltation clears.  
Glinty rumors of gold-  
line darters, Cahaba  
shiners, and freckle bellies

flit while flathead catfish  
lurk in cooler depths. One  
boy holds his find high—Luke  
Skywalker sans one arm.

I slow-creep fingertips  
through mud for papershell  
mussels. The Riverkeeper  
says they wait and wave their

mantles, longing to catch  
a fish. Glochidium  
to gills is the final  
impartation. My

hands come up fisted, full  
of mud. Empty. The boy  
cradles a flat football  
he found among the  
Cahaba lilies.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND EDITORS



**Alan Atkins** is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and has participated in a number of fine arts exhibitions regionally. Alan has completed major visual illustration projects for numerous 501C3 and community groups through UAB Bloom Studio. He also worked as an event coordinator and graphic designer with the School of Public Health at UAB, where he was responsible for designing logos, banners, flyers, etc. for their website and events. He typically works in a number of mediums including graphite, charcoal, colored pencil, pen & ink, India ink, and markers, and utilizes programs such Procreate, Adobe illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign and a number of other digital applications. Most recently, he worked at Pete's Prints in Hoover, Alabama, where he worked alongside professional graphic designers, illustrators, and printmakers who furthered his knowledge of the operation of printing equipment, production of pages, bindery operation, and the utilization of printing software & applications. Currently, he is furthering his studies and is applying to get his terminal degree in Fine Arts at an institution of his choice.



**Allyson Payne** is a second-year graduate candidate for a master of arts in history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham where she currently serves as a graduate teaching assistant and where she graduated with a bachelor of science in Psychology in 2018. She serves as an editor for the *Vulcan Historical Review* and has served previously as the production editor for Mississippi State University's student-led creative arts journal, *The Streetcar*. She also works as a film fellow for the Jefferson County Memorial Project in her free time. As a graduate student, Allyson's specific research interests include modern Europe as it intersects with intellectualism. Upon graduation, Allyson hopes to work in a secondary education environment.



**Benjamin Bunn** is a historian at the University of Alabama at Birmingham currently focusing on American history and the history of the ancient world. I have been at UAB for most of my undergraduate work and all of my graduate work. Beyond learning the process of the historian's craft, the UAB History department has given me the opportunity to meet some wonderful people and those are cherished connections I will take with me into the future. I have enjoyed my time around such wonderful people who embody the idea that history lives at UAB.





**Brian Sunderman** is an M.A. candidate in the history program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He received his undergraduate degree in anthropology from UAB in 2009. Brian intends to pursue a PhD and plans on teaching nineteenth century U.S. history and Civil War history at the college level. In his spare time he hangs with his cats and plays the guitar and piano.



**Caroline Myers** is a senior Bachelor of Fine Arts candidate at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Projected to graduate, with Honors, in May of 2021, she will continue in her studies with the intention of earning her Master of Fine Arts degree. Caroline will spend the summer studying at the New York Academy of Art, where she hopes to further explore her passion and refine her technique.



**Claude Blair** is a freshman English major, and he has been writing pretty much since the day he found out that he could. Ever since he was a kid reading every big tome he could get his hands on, he could always see a million different stories just waiting to be told, especially as a neurodivergent kid in the South. All he's ever wanted is to get some of these stories that crowd his head out into the world, and he can only hope this is a good first step. Either way, he's going to do his best to keep going forward.



**Diane Tucker** is Professor of Psychology at UAB with a long career as a neuroscientist and developmental physiologist. She is the Founding Director of the UAB Science and Technology Honors Program. In Spring 2015, Dr. Tucker began taking classes in the UAB Department of Art and Art History, struggling through the experience of being a novice after years of being an expert in her field. Dr. Tucker will graduate with a BA in Art Studio in May 2021. She looks forward to more opportunities to explore and create after retirement from the university this summer.



**Elena Mangrobang** is a graduating BFA senior with a focus on illustration and collage arts. Her primary interests lie within the realm of storytelling through fragmentation and provides the audience with the means of creating their own truth within these stories. She plans to continue developing this unconventional method of storytelling throughout her career and create a book or series of works that allow the readers to cultivate their own adventure and conclusion. After graduation, Elena plans to continue exploring other possible areas of interest and create art that encourages people to explore the depths of fantasy and the unknown.



**Geortez Williams** is a senior at UAB majoring in Secondary Education Social Science. He serves as a Sunday school teacher in his church and a substitute teacher in his community. Geortez has participated in several poetry oratorical competitions earning awards and even having some of his best works published. After completing his bachelor's degree in the fall, he plans on teaching high school social studies and eventually pursuing a masters degree in Secondary Education.



**Haley Wells** is a freshman majoring in History and English (literature concentration) with a minor in French. As a high-school student, she attended dual-enrollment classes at Jefferson State Community College, where her long-standing love of history bloomed into the desire to become a historian and professor of History. She will be starting her accelerated Bachelors-to-Masters program in the fall, and she hopes to go on to a PhD program after that. Her specific research interests include American colonial and Revolutionary War history, American Civil War history, the history of Westward expansion, Post-WWI history in America, and especially women's history. In her research, she works to focus on the diverse experiences of women throughout different periods in history, with particular attention to the history of women's education, female sexuality and sexual expression throughout history, women in American religion, and the history of women's rights movements. As a historian, she also hopes to use the lens of female-authored literature as a way of contextualizing women's experiences throughout American history. In her free time, she enjoys reading, hiking, creative writing, watching period dramas, and spending time with her family.



**Jaylah K. Cosby** is a Birmingham native and a master's candidate in the Anthropology of Peace and Human Rights Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Shortly after earning a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from UAB, she served as a 2020 Jefferson County Memorial Project Fellow. She is also a graduate assistant at UAB's Institute for Human Rights. Her passion is racial equality, especially within institutions like our country's criminal justice system. She completed the 2020 Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University, taking courses on transforming community spaces and restorative justice. Ultimately, her goal is to go into law and help write restorative criminal justice policies.



**Jessica Lo** is currently a freshman majoring in Genetics and Genomic Sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. With the aspirations of obtaining a Master of Science in Genetic Counseling, she hopes to contribute to the field of genetic counseling by helping develop better methods of informing families of underrepresented populations about the potential chances of inheriting specific genetic disorders. Although her intended academic career does not have direct ties with history, Jessica has always had and will continue to have interest in history, particularly women's history and American history. She will never forget her first time finding history fascinating, which was in second grade when she first learned about American presidents by doing a project on Woodrow Wilson.



**Kaitlyn Avery** is a junior at the University of Alabama at Birmingham pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in painting. She was president of the National Arts Honor Society at Chelsea High School. Avery showed her work frequently before undergraduate studies and won first place for painting in the VAA program at the University of Montevallo. While an undergraduate student she has continued to show her work regionally, including exhibitions at the Abrams-Engel Institute for the Visuals Arts multiple times. Avery hopes to attend graduate school and receive her terminal degree in painting, while pursuing a full-time career as a visual artist.



**Kallee Knox** graduated with Summa Cum Laude honors from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in the Spring of 2021, with a double major in History and Secondary Education: Social Sciences. She is currently focused on her education career as a teacher, but has plans to return to UAB to earn a master's degree in History and a master's degree in Secondary Education. Her favorite areas of research include Ancient World History, American History following Reconstruction, *German History*, and entertaining topics such as the history of Country Music and Classic Rock History. Kallee has worked on several history projects, such as her work in this issue of the *Vulcan Historical Review*, with her father, Thomas Knox. She enjoys exploring her family history and loves to help her friends and family capture their histories as well. In her spare time, Kallee can be found at Bryant Denny Stadium watching the Alabama Crimson Tide, on the lake fishing, or at her "second home," Walt Disney World. She thanks her parents, Thomas and Julee Knox, for providing her with the opportunity to embark on her academic journey to share her love for history with others for decades to come.



**Kameryn Thigpen** (she/her/hers) is from Birmingham, Alabama. Kameryn is a graduate of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science with a double minor in African-American Studies and Human Rights. During her time at UAB, Kameryn held many leadership roles in student organizations and became a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. Kameryn has also been a part of community organizations such as the Jefferson County Memorial Project and Woke Vote. Kameryn is an advocate for human rights, especially for incarcerated persons as she has researched the human rights of prisoners along with the abolition of solitary confinement, and the War on Drugs. Kameryn is also an advocate for human rights and civil rights. Kameryn's future goals include launching her social justice education and human rights website. She also plans to return to UAB for her Master's Degree in Public Administration and Criminal Justice. Kameryn also plans to start her nonprofit organization for community organizing around marginalized communities. Her long-term goals include running for public office one day to further advocate for the human rights of Black Americans and dreams to one day help pass a bill that abolishes solitary confinement in all 50 states.





**Kendra Bell** is a senior undergraduate student majoring in Anthropology and History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has been an editor for the *Vulcan Historical Review* since 2018 and currently works as a freelance copywriter creating digital content for a number of companies as well as an Academic Assistant with UAB's Academic Success Center. With a past of working in archaeological fieldwork, various museums, and local historical research projects, such as the Jefferson County Memorial Project and the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, she plans to attend graduate school to conduct research in archaeology and historic preservation for the purpose of creating better community accessibility to historical and cultural heritage. She is currently working on a project aimed at exploring the effects of environmental injustice on Birmingham communities and proposing community-based protocols to identify and preserve sites of historical significance. With research interests including historical archaeology, the anthropology and archaeology of social justice and human rights, landscape archaeology and phenomenology, remote sensing and geoarchaeology, alongside museum studies and preserving public history, she hopes to find a career that bridges the gap between historical academia and anthropological studies through advocacy work.



**Lexie Cathcart** is a second year graduate student in the history department at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Born and raised in the historic city of Mobile, Alabama, Lexie grew up surrounded by rich history and excellent teachers who taught her the importance of it. She began her undergraduate career in criminal justice at UAB in the fall of 2014 and received her bachelor's degree in the spring of 2019. Since then, Lexie has chosen to further her education in history, with interests in African American history, Black Power Era movements, race, and policing. She hopes to educate the masses on the beauty of African/African American history and assist law enforcement agencies in the creation of de-escalation tactics through the education of BIPOC histories.



**Mary Elizabeth Chambliss** is pursuing a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, graduating in May 2021. Her poetry has been published in multiple Best Emerging Poets anthologies and she is the 2018 recipient of the Mersmann Award for spoken word performances. Mary Elizabeth's quarantine hobbies include roller skating, painting, starting books and abandoning them two chapters before the end, yoga, crying, and mid-afternoon dance breaks. Her post-pandemic goals are to publish her graduate thesis (a novel) and talk to literally anyone besides her cat Charlie and her many many plants.





**Rachel Houghton** is pursuing a Masters in English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Her fiction won first place in the Barksdale-Maynard writing competition in 2019 and 2020 and has appeared in *The Great Lakes Review*. After graduation, Rachel plans to work in education and to continue her creative writing endeavors. When she is not writing, Rachel can be found digging in the garden or sipping a cup of tea while reading a good book.



**Sarah Coley** is a history major and an anthropology minor. She currently works as a Business Intelligence Analyst for a local technology company. She previously served in the Army on Active Duty and performed cultural and situational analysis. She earned an Honorable Discharge upon completion of her contract and currently serves in the Navy Reserve. She spent a really rewarding semester as the Interning Historian for Sloss National Historic Landmark where she gave historic tours and worked on the Museum Library. She continues to volunteer there. She is a senior at UAB and is considering applying to the master's program. She lives locally off campus with her husband, their four dogs, and 5 cats.



**Shannon Mary Bradt** graduated from the Alabama School of Fine Arts, where she studied creative writing, in 2007. She completed her freshman year of college at UAB in 2009. After a decade-long detour from higher education, the details of which remain protected by Attorney-Client privilege, she returned to UAB in 2020 and is now a junior English major with a creative writing focus. After college, her goal is to become the de facto poet laureate of western civilization's already-in-motion final act.



**Sheila Blair** is a second-year master's student in the history department at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Prior to matriculation at UAB, Sheila earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology at New York University and worked for a local non-profit. She is interested in social history, environmental history, and histories of health and medicine. No matter where life takes her beyond UAB, she is committed to using the tools of historical analysis as a means to resist oppression in all its forms and to work towards a more ecologically and socially sustainable future.



**Tyler Dennis** is a junior studying history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His interest includes American history with a focus on agriculture. After finishing his undergraduate work, he plans to attend graduate school, with the goal of achieving his doctorate and teaching at the collegiate level.

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