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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

In reflecting on the past Gregorian calendar year, it is not difficult to find examples of how the economic, political, and social structures around us push and pull human actors in different directions at various levels of abstraction and magnitude: like entire nations or cities experiencing devastating economic crises or national laws excluding migrant and immigrant groups from finding homes. While this issue of *The Yale Historical Review* has no central theme, it includes essays exploring the wide range of historical scope and the great diversity of historical sources.

One instance of vast societal change occurred during the modernization and urbanization of Western European cities throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. In his essay, Jacob Wasserman ’16 investigates London cartography before and after the 1666 Great Fire of London in order to examine the shifting conceptions of space and cities as London emerged as a more modern, urban place. Emma Fallone ’16 looks to another major Western European city at another period of large societal shift, namely Paris of the late nineteenth century. Focusing on Impressionist art from that time, Fallone explores evolving Parisian conceptions of their city, its suburbs, and leisure. These two papers both highlight the malleable nature of populations’ understandings of their cities, understandings that many of us might take for granted as permanent realities.

Two of the essays in this issue focus more specifically on individuals’ reactions to the structures around them. In his essay discussing Republicans’ reaction to the 1798 Sedition Act, Thomas Hopson ’16 examines how Republican newspaper editors participated in political combat, attempting to sacrifice themselves for their party’s well being. In an example from a century later, Sarah Sadlier ’16, Stanford University, discovers how two widows of Civil War generals maintained their pledge of devotion to their husbands by carefully curating their husbands’ legacies, while also obtaining national acclaim for themselves. While these two essays come from different contexts and describe individuals acting against two types of oppressive structures - one political, one societal - they both illustrate how individuals capitalized on situations that were meant to restrict them, utilizing these situations to their own advantage.

Of course, throughout history, certain marginalized groups have faced unending challenges during their fights towards equality. In his essay, Myles McMurchy ’16, Dartmouth University, uncovers a media campaign led by Herbert Hoover and the Red Cross that characterized the rebuilding effort after 1927 Mississippi flooding as one of racial harmony and triumphant success, even as black activists sought to expose these powerful actors’ abuses against black citizens. In her essay on feminicide in Mexico’s Ciudad Juárez and elsewhere, Ryan Bailey Patterson ’16, University of Oregon, examines the role of politicized art as a grassroots movement to fight the violent oppression and destruction of female lives. These essays narrate the stories of marginalized groups throughout history who despite their comparable lack of agency decided to fight for a better, fairer future.

Luckily, we also offer you in this issue an interview with Professor Rohit De who returned to Yale in 2014 as a professor of legal history, bringing with him a unique and comprehensive understanding of the law’s power not only in his region of specialization - South Asia - but also across time and space. We would also like to thank Professor De, as well as the yet again record number of students who were generous enough to share their projects of historical analysis with us. We hope you will enjoy reading them as much as we have.

Sincerely,
Samuel Becker, Editor in Chief
Emily Yankowitz, Managing Editor
CONTENTS

7  IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT
Cartography, Rebuilding, and Reconceptualization after the Great Fire of London
Jacob Wasserman

36  ART AS A WINDOW INTO THE PAST
Impressionist Views of Haussmann’s Paris
Emma Fallone

53  HONORABLE DISOBEDIENCE
The Sedition Act and America’s Partisan Martyrs
Thomas Hopson

72  LIBBIE AND LASALLE
Professional Widowhood and the Cult of Domesticity in Post-Civil War America
Sarah Sadlier

87  “THE RED CROSS IS NOT ALL RIGHT!”
Herbert Hoover’s Concentration Camp Cover-Up in the 1927 Mississippi Flood
Myles McMurchy

114  RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE
Politicized Art and Anti-Feminicide Activism in Ciudad Juárez and Abroad
Ryan Bailey Patterson

132  AN INTERVIEW WITH ROHIT DE
Assistant Professor of History
Conducted by Lauren Wackerle
The Great Fire of London that swept through the city in September of 1666 destroyed not only the physical infrastructure of myriad London buildings, but also many of the maps that reflected how London’s cartographers had envisioned their city. In an investigation of this event and the maps that predated and postdated it, Jacob Wasserman ’16 examines London’s rebuilding efforts and cartography to explain how one European city conceptualized its transition into a modern, urban place. As London physically rebuilt itself, so too did cartographers rebuild the image of the city’s future.

By Jacob Wasserman, SY ’16
Written for “Cartography, Territory, and Identity”
Professor Bill Rankin
Edited by Christine Wang, Julie Lowenstein, and Katherine Shy
London’s map burned as easily as the city itself. Since 1606, booksellers had stored their products in Stationers’ Hall, a decrepit house behind Saint Paul’s Cathedral, and other nearby depositories. Within lay many of the collected works of England’s foremost travel writers and cartographers. These buildings, however, proved poor protection against the inferno that descended upon the city in early September 1666. On the 4th of September, flames reached Stationers’ Hall as “Lead [melted] downe the streetes in a streame… glowing with fiery rednesse.” Within the hall, the fire provided a real-time reflection of its exterior progress as it burned through maps and prints. Flames licked over the inked perspectives of shops and homes in a cartographic display of their own power. Over four days, the firestorm jumped from building to building and book to book, incinerating neighborhoods and pages alike. “The poore book-sellers have ben indede ill-treated by Vul- can,” wrote the diarist John Evelyn, estimating the blaze to have destroyed over £200,000-worth of texts. Literally and figuratively, the map of London had been reduced to ashes.

A place may be best understood in how it is depicted and conceived by its residents. If so, London’s maps explain much about the larger forces at work in a city caught in a time of dramatic transformation. While not without nuance, the map of London changed rather dramatically after the Great Fire of 1666. Beforehand, London’s cartographers tended to create chorographic depictions—semi-pictorial plots replete with perspective drawings and human scenes. After the conflagration, many cartographers tentatively but demonstrably moved toward ichnography, a style in which the street plan is viewed fully from above, with buildings reduced to geometric blocks. To be sure, this change was neither linear nor normatively good— the post-fire map captured the city differently but not necessarily more effectively. Still, London had changed, and its new maps reflected that.

Figure 1: The so-called Agas Map, issued in 1633 but based heavily upon the 1550s Copperplate Map. Note how the wall confines almost every building within. The map recede into a landscape-painting-like horizon at its top, with mountains and sky rising from the fields. This is a later copy engraved by George Vertue, entitled “Civitas Londinum Ano. Dni. circiter MDLX” (1633; n.p.: n.p., 1737) and printed in Whitfield, London: A Life in Maps, 38-9.
However, the mere fact that the look of the maps transformed only tells part of the story. In the wake of the inferno, the use of cartography changed along with its style. Maps became tools for rebuilding in a manner simultaneously hurried, practical, and visionary. All in all, if the Great Fire altered the map of London, then the map of London, in turn, shaped how the city was rebuilt. A new London emerged from the fire, and much of the reasoning behind its new layout stemmed from the innovations and limitations of post-fire cartography and geographic knowledge. To understand how a traumatic event like the Great Fire could have such long-lasting repercussions, a look at the maps, plans, and depictions the fire produced is therefore necessary.

Many a book tells the story of the Great Fire of London and its aftermath, but few explore London’s self-conception through maps. T.F. Reddaway’s 1940 classic *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* provides a thorough overview of the legal and political dealings in the years of reconstruction, but touches on maps only briefly. More recent biographies, such as Adrian Tinniswood’s study of Christopher Wren and Michael Cooper’s work on Robert Hooke, explore how their subjects invented and pursued their own plans for rebuilding. Yet they discuss the possibilities and limitations of geographic knowledge only in terms of invention, ambition, and politics, with little connection to concrete effects or historical precedents. On the other hand, a number of authors have published histories of London’s map, including Peter Whitfield and Simon Foxell. Both of these authors note the change in London’s cartographic depiction before and after the fire. While their analyses offer insightful comparisons of visuals, each mentions the Great Fire only as an introduction to a centuries-long survey of maps. Putting these two historiographical methods in conversation brings the importance and effect of London’s maps into focus. As the whole of Europe began the process of modern urbanization, London’s fire-fueled, accelerated change offers a case study into this transition.

“The Ancient Estimation of London”

“The City the Fire destroyed,” wrote social historian Roy Porter, “had worn a medieval face.” London of the 1600s may have been a seat of power and center for trade, but its layout was slow to change. For instance, the antiquarian John Stow spent many chapters in his 1603 *Survey of London* detailing the abiding connections between London past and present—“proofe,” he claimed, “of the ancient estimation of London.” Despite Stow’s protestations, though, the city had experienced at least some degree of change. Migrants flooded in from the countryside, almost
tripling the population during the previous century. But the layout and structure of the walled city adapted poorly to this influx. Some suburbs developed, but many people simply became tenants in an increasingly crowded and outdated town. In one area just outside the walls, Stow described how “filthy Cottages” sat alongside roads that “…scarce remaineth a sufficient high way for the meeting of Carriages and droves of Cattell.” As London strained, its political and social system also remained uneasily tethered to the past. After experimenting with a republican Commonwealth, England saw monarchy return with Charles II in 1660. However, the Restoration government soon faced unrest and unease, culminating with the Great Plague of 1665. Stow’s old London had failed to keep pace.

If London in the early 1600s physically retained its character of old, so did its maps. Before the fire, London was generally mapped from the so-called “prospect view.” In this alignment, the Thames runs horizontally near the bottom of the page, and the viewer looks at London from an oblique, raised view, as if sketched from the south from a high tower. Cartographers tended to draw buildings in perspective, with geometric accuracy traded for giving important edifices pride of place. Only surviving in fragments, the so-called Copperplate Map of the 1550s epitomizes this early style. Farmers, workmen, horses, and cows stand next to perspective houses and churches,
capturing an idealized slice of life in the London of the era. Even as some modernizations began to encroach, London and its maps kept to the same course. The 1633 Agas Map, shown in figures 1 and 2, made few changes to the Copperplate Map, focusing on the walled city proper and depicting fertile countryside stretching out to the horizon beyond. Similarly, the author and cartographer John Norden published a major map of London in 1593. As seen in figure 3, his angle moves closer to vertical, but the city depicted remains thoroughly rooted in an earlier time, with what little development existed beyond the walls covered by guild crests. Norden drew the map for his travel account Speculum Britanniae, whose text describes the long history and mythology behind places like London, instead of contemporary development.\textsuperscript{11} Norden made maps as art and history, not for navigation or other practical uses.

Of course, both the city and its maps experienced change even before the Great Fire. The cartographer Richard Newcourt, for instance, created a gigantic, detailed plot of the city in 1658.
The last major map before the fire, Newcourt’s piece in figures 4 and 5 illustrates how London had begun to spill out of its walls into nascent suburbs, such as Westminster. The street plan is clearly shown, and buildings have become repeated units instead of individual sketches. Still, though, the map heavily distorts the city’s geometry and relies on the same type of perspective drawings as earlier maps. A few other maps had begun experimenting with ichnography, but they remained in the military or maritime realms. London itself would have to be reshaped before its maps could be.

More common than maps were panoramas and etchings, and no one was as prolific with these as Wenceslaus Hollar. An immigrant from Prague struck with wanderlust, Hollar bounced from patron to patron and city to city, all the while producing an incredible volume of engravings. Typical of Hollar and of the period overall, his panorama “London” from Bankside, in figure 6, could be classified in the same genre as Newcourt or Norden’s maps, were it not for its less elevated perspective. From panoramas to prints to book illustrations, Hollar’s vision defined the printed look of London right before the fire. Despite his huge output, though, Hollar had a still-larger project in mind. After viewing Newcourt’s map, Hollar resolved to construct his own, now known as his “Great Map,” using the best surveying techniques available. While he promised a potential donor that his depictions of buildings would “as much [resemble] the likeness of them as the Convenience of the roome will permitt,” he also boasted that his street plan would be “proportionably measured.” However, the plan proved too different from the prevailing style to attract support. Despite Hollar’s entreaties of donors, he never found the funds to complete the map before the Great Fire changed the city he wanted to represent.

Hollar desired a new London on paper, but others tried to make one in brick and mortar. A group of polymaths, surveyors, scientists, and otherwise well-to-do gentlemen established the Royal Society in 1660, and the first task many of them attempted was the reshaping of London. Reorganizing the city, members of the Society believed, would represent a similar endeavor to their scientific experiments. Among the foremost of them was the diarist and botanist John Evelyn. A compulsive organizer and eternal optimist, Evelyn saw the layout of his city as a serious ill in need of a cure. In 1662, Evelyn received appointment to a royal commission on “reforming the buildings, wayes, streetes, and incumbrances” of the city. He and his compatriots set to work right away, paving major thoroughfares and issuing directives on proper street-cleaning. But their
work proceeded piecemeal, while Evelyn dreamed of a change to the whole city. Through regime change and plague, Evelyn bided his time for a moment when London would finally become malleable.

“A RASA TABULA”

As much as Evelyn and his colleagues had dreamt, they never imagined their spark of invention would prove literal. In the early morning of Sunday, September 2, 1666, embers in the oven of Thomas Farriner’s bakery set fire to the wharves along the Thames. Despite the dry summer beforehand, the city administration reacted without much concern; Lord Mayor Thomas Bludworth, London’s chief official, infamously quipped that “a woman might piss it out.” As if in a Greek tragedy, hubris in the face of a mightier power became the city’s downfall. Whipped up by the wind and enabled by a lack of adequate firebreaks, the fire spread rapidly, engulfing the city for three more days. Forced onto a boat on the Thames, diarist Samuel Pepys watched the flames from nearly the same view as the creators of the city’s maps and prints. Instead of an idyllic medieval town, Pepys saw “one entire arch of fire from this to the other side of the bridge, and in a bow up the hill.” Only when the winds died down on Wednesday the 5th did the blaze subside, revealing the extent of the devastation. Evelyn’s diary entry from the 10th reads in full: “I went again to the ruines, for it was now no longer a Citty.” Indeed, while only eight people perished in the flames, London was left fundamentally changed. Over four-fifths of the walled city lay in ashes, with at least 13,000 houses and hundreds of shops, halls, and churches destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people wandered without shelter, displaced from their now charred homes. Beyond the human cost, London’s former cityscape, upon which the city had long been mapped and conceived, lay ruined. The conflagration “obliterated at a stroke virtually every trace of a medieval city that had been six centuries in the making,” observed historian Neil Hanson. Whether tragedy or opportunity, the Great Fire burnt down one London and left open the possibility of creating another. Evelyn did not exaggerate in concluding, “London was, but is no more.”

The next month would decide which London would emerge. Still staggering from the scale of the losses, King Charles and the city government acted swiftly but without a coherent plan. Five days after the fire, the Court of Common Council forbid property owners from immediate reconstruction. Charles himself then issued a proclamation on the matter three days later. On the surface, he promised an idealistic vision of “a much more beautiful city” that would become “…the most convenient and noble for the advancement of trade of any city in Europe.” He prohibited hasty and unplanned rebuilding, authorizing the removal of any unapproved construction. Nonetheless, Charles denied that “any particular person’s right and interest [would] be sacrificed to the public benefit or convenience.” As such, his grand ideas, like widening the main streets and building a city wharf, lacked any specific locational detail. Instead, he pledged a comprehensive survey of the destroyed properties before any plan was finalized and promised “a plot or model…for the
whole building through those ruined places.” Regardless of the specifics, Charles recognized the necessity of cartography and surveys in order to realize his vision. Mapping would no longer be a years-long pursuit for travel guides and artists. Charles needed a map—a new kind of map—and he needed it fast.

The king’s plan required two elements: a detailed survey of land ownership and a map of which areas had been burnt down. For the latter, Charles turned to the man most experienced at depicting London: Wenceslaus Hollar. Within days, Hollar’s request to map the fire’s results received an enthusiastic response from a government desperate to use cartography to reshape the city. On September 10, Hollar and associate Francis Sandford were tasked “to take an exact plan and survey of the city, as it now stands after the calamity of the late fire.” They set to work immediately, surveying the damage and creating a map at an unprecedented speed. By November, Hollar’s map, shown in figure 7, began wide distribution. It offered Londoners a radically changed view of their radically changed city.

Hollar’s map shows a London hollowed to its very core—but ripe for transformation. The
drawing strikingly depicts the old city as an empty swath. “The blanke space,” as Hollar captioned it, lies raggedly demarcated from the unaffected outer districts beyond. Hollar included few buildings within the fire zone, all drawn as simple rectangles viewed from above, suggesting their ashen foundations. Streets and the blocks they surround receive little contrast, as if to say that they could be shifted around without any obstacle. Of course, Hollar may have been forced by approaching deadlines to leave out details and use blank space. But Hollar borrowed from his unfinished pre-fire map for much of the non-affected area—meaning he was not as rushed as it might seem. Moreover, he partnered with John Leake and other surveyors to engrave two updated versions of the map, in 1667 and 1669. Each included incredible specifics, like a listing of over 170 destroyed places of interest. Hollar and his fellows took the time to add this considerable extra detail, but they still left the stark, white spaces and geometric building renderings. To be sure, many elements, like perspective-drawn houses and guild crests, remained from earlier maps, but now were segregated from the ichnographic plan. The post-fire city, Hollar recognized, could not be mapped in the same way as the pre-fire city if it was to be rebuilt.

Hollar’s maps influenced the thinking of the key players in the rebuilding of London. His work impressed King Charles, who named Hollar His Majesty’s Scenographer, a position affording some financial and anti-piracy protection. Hollar’s maps, though, were no mere trifle of the king. As historian Ralph Hyde relates, all the major committees and organs of rebuilding utilized Hollar’s plots. For instance, William Brouncker, first president of the Royal Society, showed Hollar’s map to an impressed Samuel Pepys only days after its release, as it was passed around the circles of court power both in England and abroad. Through Hollar’s work, these officials changed the way they viewed the city.

As John Evelyn wrote to Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the Royal Society:

The want of a more exact plot, wherein I might have marked what the Fire had spared, and accommodated my desigene to the remaining parts, made me take it as a *rasa tabula*, and to forme mine idea thereof accordingly: I have since lighted upon Mr. Hollar’s late Plan, which looking upon as the most accurate hitherto extant, has caus’d me something to alter what I had so crudely don.

While Evelyn may have already seen the city as a blank canvass for creativity, Hollar’s image allowed him to confirm and refine such ideas. Indeed, he later wrote that any plan for a restructured London should be mapped by someone of Hollar’s skill. Within a few years, the former London that Hollar drew aflame in a drawing accompanying the 1669 map had been replaced by a new, geometric city in the minds of those in power. Hollar’s map was “ruthlessly functional,” and the planners of the new London thereby conceived of the city as Hollar depicted it.
“A MORE GLORIOUS PHOENIX” 38

“I have seventeen Modells of the City of London of my own making,” Sir Positive jokes in Thomas Shadwell’s 1668 comedy *The Sullen Lovers*. 39 Delivered by a know-it-all character, the line drew laughs for satirizing the multiplicity of grand rebuilding plans, some of which appeared even as the fire’s embers still flickered. 40 “Every body brings in his idea,” remarked a somewhat sardonic Evelyn. 41 Indeed, the blank slate presented by Hollar was a temptation for the planners and thinkers of London—a canvas upon which they hoped to create their masterpieces. Throughout the months and years following the Great Fire, the process of cartography reciprocally inspired and enabled these master visions—yet also proved to be their ultimate demise.

The fastest-made proposal came from the young architect Christopher Wren, later famous for rebuilding Saint Paul’s Cathedral. Wren’s plan called for a dramatic reshaping of London along the lines of Europe’s capitals. In his London, diagonal boulevards radiated from circular piazzas and divided the old city into commercial zones. Saint Paul’s Cathedral and the Royal Exchange served as focal points along carefully constructed sightlines and axes. While dramatic in its changes, Wren’s proposal was not entirely impractical—all the major buildings would stay in place and the topography of the city would not be disturbed. 42 Still, as he attested in a document submitted with his plan, his ideas offered a stark choice: either London could become “the most convenient City for Trade in the World” or “…slide into Its old barbarity.” 43

His map, shown in figure 8, corroborates this viewpoint. Working before Hollar finished his map, Wren went farther by including almost no buildings at all. Monotone blocks, colored gray in later versions, replaced perspective drawings of old. Wren eliminated any sense of human-scale, drafting without reference to the size and needs of an individual, but rather the collective city. Wren’s was a city without man as its measure, a city whose blocked-out whole exceeded the sum of its manmade buildings. 44 His son later described his father’s model as “very regular[,] with particular Beauty and Symmetry, suitable to so Noble a Situation.” 45 Wren promised a world capital of finance and culture, but only by reducing the fabric of the city to gray blocks between avenues.

“Dr. Wren had got the start of me,” admitted John Evelyn. 46 Presenting his plan to King Charles on September 13th, a mere eight days after the fire, Evelyn learned that Wren had bested him by two days. Wren’s hastiness caused Oldenburg of the Royal Society to complain that he should have waited for approval from the Society before his submission. But Evelyn remained upbeat, reporting to a friend that the king approved of the many similarities in both plans. Evelyn, who had long dreamed of reshaping London, now had his chance. 47 Proper arrangement of streets and re-siting of buildings, he argued in a tract submitted to the king and later published, could restore London “not to its pristine, but to far greater beauty.” 48 Evelyn echoed Wren’s dichotomy: London would end up “a very ugly city” without his plan but become a city that could “dispute… with all the cities of the World” with it. 49 Evelyn’s planned London may have shared the same land as the old one, but it would be a completely new city, the likes of which had never been seen—or
Even more so than Wren’s, Evelyn’s proposal both affected and was effected by cartography. In the early pages of his tract, Evelyn asserted that “an exact plot, according to the geometric scale of feet, ought in the first place to be taken.” And while Evelyn’s own original map is not available, engravers’ copies based upon it show the same modernizing and homogenizing tendencies present in Wren’s map. Moreover, though Evelyn was also initially rushed, he, unlike his fellow planner, edited and revised his map, deliberately choosing to keep his ichnographic style throughout. Over three versions, depicted in figures 9 and 10, Evelyn’s spatial thinking evolved in reaction to other maps. Evelyn expanded the area his plan covered after seeing Hollar’s map and added a “Y”-shaped intersection in front of Saint Paul’s, “as the most accurately ingenious Dr. Wren has designed it.” However, even with these changes, Evelyn’s vision remained as impractical as it was majestic. For instance, instead of adapting to the topography of the city like Wren, Evelyn proposed to use rubble to fill in valleys, as shown in his rather rigidly linear plots. Therefore, in his maps, Evelyn plotted the “more glorious Phoenix” he and the fellow elites of his idealistic age hoped to see arise.

Even so, neither Evelyn’s nor Wren’s maps proposed changes as drastic as those of some of the other plans. Scientist and surveyor Robert Hooke drew up a now-lost grid plot, which he cir-
Figure 9: The first two revisions of John Evelyn’s plan. The top plot is his original, while the bottom shows that Hollar’s map changed how Evelyn mapped and conceived of the city. Engraved by George Vertue based on the original. Published as “Londonum Redivivum” (London: Societas Antiquar., 1748), XVII/8, Crace Collection.
cumspectly brought to the Royal Society, Lord Mayor, and aldermen for approval before submitting to the king. Meanwhile, Richard Newcourt drew up perhaps the most surprising map. Newcourt, who once used mostly medieval techniques to create the last major pre-fire map, now proposed a plot more radical than Wren’s, Evelyn’s, or Hooke’s. In his own words, “black pricks,…lines[,] and figures” had replaced intricate buildings drawn in perspective, as seen in figure 11.54 His maps now featured a pattern of identical, repeating module blocks, each centered upon a church. Only the faintly delineated Thames at the bottom places the plot in London as opposed to any other city.55 Thus, the fire transformed Newcourt from promulgator of visions of the old London to creator of radical ideas for the new. Finally, Captain Valentine Knight submitted perhaps the most extreme plan, calling for London to be paved over by twenty-four parallel roads in an almost perfect grid. No building would be given pride of place in his hyper-orderly city, shown in figure 12. Knight’s map, and especially his bold suggestion, according to The London Gazette, that “considerable advantages to His Majesty’s Revenue” would be gained “…if His Majesty would draw a benefit to himself from so publick a Calamity of his people,”56 incensed Londoners. With the populace on edge, the king promptly had Knight arrested for his cartographic presumptions.57 Mapping after the Great Fire therefore carried significant consequences and weight in the eyes of the public and the king.
Accounts differ over which, if any, plan the king and court favored, but Parliament had the final say. According to MP John Milward, the House of Commons first considered “a model or models: many spoke for them but more spoke against them.” A third faction proposed a “midle way”: a widening of streets and strict building codes, but no comprehensive plan. In the end, the House could not agree and tabled the matter. Instead, as special Fire Courts held jurisdiction over immediate disputes, a commission of three royal appointees and three City representatives, including Wren and Hooke, was tasked with formulating a long-term plan. In order for them to operate effectively, though, the commissioners required a detailed survey of property lines and residence ownership—the second of the two geographic endeavors the king had originally desired, along with Hollar’s map. Without the survey, London would end up rebuilt almost exactly as it once was.

Geographic representations of London both enabled and destroyed any chance of radically restructuring London. Long after the fire, acolytes of Wren claimed that his plan was “unhappily defeated by faction.” The selfishness of individual landowners who rebuilt too quickly, they as-
serted, obstructed the common good, and Charles’ still-weak place on the throne prevented the government from interceding. While property rights and official impotence did play large roles, this explanation misses the cartographic necessities of the rebuilding. A new London required an accurate survey, and both the lack of general cooperation and the failures of the commission doomed the survey’s chances of being completed. The commissioners did apply all their scientific and political acumen to the task, ordering rubbish clean-ups and mandating property-owners report their landholdings to booths set up in each ward. Hooke surveyed over 50,000 feet of streets and property lines in only nine weeks. But the commissioners disagreed on the shape of the new city, and as they debated how to widen streets or move buildings, the survey floundered. Landlords and tenants bickered over responsibility for clean-up, others began rebuilding unsystematically, and no one in power could entice or compel cooperation.

Thus, when Parliament met again in January, needing to act rapidly, they chose the best course they could in the absence of a survey. The Rebuilding Act of 1667 did change the structure

Figure 12: Valentine Knight’s plan for London. Saint Paul’s is almost the only building shown within the mesh-like grid of streets. This map proved so inflammatory that Knight was imprisoned. Published as “Proposals of a New Model for Rebuilding the City of London, with Houses, Streets and Wharfs, to Be Forthwith Set Out by His Majesty’s and the City Surveyors: With the Advantages That Will Accrue by the Building the Same Accordingly, Viz.” (London: n.p., 1666), XVII/11, Crace Collection.
IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

of the city, mandating wider avenues and instituting a strict building code with height limits and fireproofing requirements. In the end, the results of the survey were published and used to rebuild, but not soon enough. London therefore did not rise completely anew from its ashes, but neither did it retain its old form. Still, an “obstinate Averseness of [a] great Part of the Citizens” did not prevent the outcome Wren envisioned, as his son later claimed. Rather, the practical limitations of geographic representation left “the Surveyor…confin’d and cramp’d in his Designs.” As much as the fire had affected London’s maps, those maps in turn affected London’s rebuilding.

“A RECORD TO POSTERITY”

By August 1667, Wenceslaus Hollar had grown desperate. “My poverty…has urged me to unspeakable straites,” he confessed in a letter to Evelyn. Despite his royal appointment, Hollar had run up a £100 debt. Distressed yet determined, Hollar pressed on with the “Great Map” of London he had begun seven years earlier. Based upon the pre-fire city, it had now become obsolete

Figure 13 (on the essay cover, pg. 7): With the help of Hollar and Hooke, John Ogilby created an incredibly detailed wall map of London in 1677. The map is completely ichnographic and quite accurate in scale. Ogilby’s map shows how much both London itself and its conception among its depicter had changed. Published as “Large and Accurate Map of the City of London: Ichnographically Describing All the Streets, Lanes, Alleys, Courts, Yards, Churches, Halls, and Houses, etc. Actually Surveyed and Delineated” ([London], [Ogilby and Morgan], 1677), P1007, II/61, Crace Collection.

Figure 14: A comparison of the area around Saint Paul’s between Newcourt’s 1658 map, top, and Ogilby’s 1677 map, bottom. From Whitfield, London: A Life in Maps, 54.
as a navigational or planning aid. Changing strategies, Hollar decided his map would now serve a new purpose: preserving “a record to posterity” of a London otherwise lost.60 “My plan of the Citty as it was before the Burning thereof,” he argued to Evelyn, “[is one] which no man living upon the Face of the Earth is now able to performe besides my selfe.” Hollar solicited support from the king and men like Evelyn for his masterwork. Though he viewed part of Hollar’s draft in October 1666 and encouraged its development at the time, Charles declined to provide further support.71 Like many of the city’s elites, Charles had little desire to preserve the London of old, even in paper form.72 Hollar’s attempts to revive his old project threatened the possibility of transformation.

While the physical layout of the city may not have changed nearly as much as planners had hoped, the town and its map had still been fundamentally altered. True, London did not receive grand boulevards or rectilinear zones. However, it did end up with small pieces of these larger plans, such as Wren’s magnificent design for Saint Paul’s Cathedral.73 In parallel or even to a larger degree, the map of the city—and the general way it was conceived—also transformed, irrevocably if gradually. If these new maps are any evidence, the idea of “London” came to represent a more cosmopolitan city spanning a wider area. On the page, as in reality, London had broken out of its medieval walls.

John Ogilby capitalized on the ways London and its perception had changed. Before the fire, the dancer-turned-publisher had produced a range of books, including a Hollar-illustrated edition of Aesop’s Fables. The conflagration, however, left him with barely £5 to his name. But like Richard Newcourt, Ogilby’s style and products transformed as a result of the fire. Turning to cartography, the ever-enterprising Ogilby published England’s first road atlas in 1675, whose long strip maps used a 5,280-foot mile consistently for the first time. Finding that these new maps sold well, Ogilby recruited a team of eminent figures in the world of British cartography, including Hollar, Robert Hooke, and William Leybourne, to produce a master map of London after the rebuilding.74

The map, shown in figures 13 (on the essay cover, pg. 7) and 14 and released in 1677, introduced a slew of innovations. Ogilby drew on Hollar’s knowledge from his unfinished pre-fire map and Hooke’s expertise in surveying science; the three met frequently throughout the production process. Going beyond Hollar’s 1666 map, the new plot was London’s first major map to include no perspective-drawn buildings, instead showing edifices drawn as solid, rectilinear shapes. Strikingly, Saint Paul’s, often the centerpiece of pre-fire perspective drawings, became a detailed floorplan, as if the viewer could see through the roof of the newly redone cathedral. Unlike the plans produced right after the fire, the map’s ichnographic style cannot be attributed to either hasty-ness or practicality, given its lengthy preparation and huge size for wall-hanging. Instead, a new London had been deliberately depicted in a new way. Buildings received different shadings depending on their use, a grid system allowed for easy indexing of hundreds of locations, and new survey and scaling technologies like the graphometer improved overall accuracy. While Ogilby died before the map’s final release, his step-grandson ensured it would sell widely by taking out weeks of
newspaper advertisements, issuing an explanatory pamphlet, and trumpeting Ogilby’s title as His Majesty’s Cartographer. In fact, “it remained the de facto source map of the city for another seventy years,” Foxell wrote. Overall, Ogilby’s map put to paper the scientific, rationalist spirit of the elites of the age, showing how they reconceived London even if it had not been rebuilt as desired.

If Ogilby’s map changed how the city was depicted, Hollar and others questioned what area was depicted. Since Elizabeth I’s reign, London authorities had struggled to contain the city’s sprawling growth. Despite decrees forbidding any building within a ring outside the city walls, construction continued. The fire proved the death knell of even a de jure prohibition on suburban growth: Charles was forced to allow construction outside the city for the many displaced citizens and businesses. Maps in the decades after the Great Fire visualized this trend. Produced concurrently with the Ogilby map, “A New Map of the Cities of London and Westminster and [the] Borough of Southwarke with Their Suburbs,” shown in figure 15, was independently published by Hollar in 1675. From its very title, the map demonstrates how the idea of “London” had started to include other urban areas like Westminster and Southwark, long shown only at the edge of pre-fire maps if at all. In this map, Hollar departs from the “prospect view” so common before—one that even Ogilby used—instead orienting the map true north and allowing the Thames to meander across it. Earlier maps depicted the walled city of London and incidental environs; Hollar showed the full metropolitan area of a world capital. And what Hollar engraved, others began to think: “Our Great Metropolis, London,” echoed Ogilvy and Morgan in 1677, included “in a large Sence, the Cities of London and Westminster, with the Borough of Southwark, and the whole mass of contiguous Buildings.” Of course, the era of serious suburbanization remained centuries away, but the foundations had been laid on the pages of Hollar’s map.

As the fire passed from emergency to memory, its legacy lived on in the map of London. For instance, Hollar included his Bankside panorama of London before the fire atop his 1675 map of London—a striking comparison in both style of representation and the city represented. But when not placed in contrast, the traits of post-fire maps were retroactively applied to the pre-fire city. Thus, while Hollar may never have published his “Great Map,” he did include a much less detailed retrospective inset of “London and Westminster before the fire” in a 1667 map of the British Isles. The fire represented such an important event that it merited prominent mention in a map of all of Great Britain, as seen in figure 16. Moreover, the inset uses limited perspective drawings and shows the zoomed-out view of the whole metropolitan area that Hollar pioneered. Hollar thus projected the London of the future onto the London of the past. In many a map in the decades to come, especially a huge, six-panel plot by Robert Morden and Philip Lea, this trend continued. In maps, as in reality, London—a city whose population topped half a million soon after the fire—had undergone many changes. So while Hollar may not have produced the “record to posterity” he once intended, the cartography used by him and his fellows did leave its mark on the actual and conceptual image of London.
“MADE, NOT BORN”

Many centuries later and an ocean away, Yale president A. Bartlett Giamatti asserted “cities are made, not born.” The point holds just as true for 1600s London. The city, the conscious congregation of humanity, is fundamentally a choice, an “artifact” of human creation. Thus, the rebuilding of London should not be viewed merely as a makeshift response to a god-sent catastrophe. The physical plan of London resulted from the improvements and limitations of geographic knowledge on the part of those who depicted it. In turn, that layout affected everything from social stratification to disease transmission. Many accounts of London’s rebuilding, though, assume that since a grand remodeling did not occur, the city fell back upon its default, if perhaps a slightly modified default. However, no matter how London was rebuilt, its rebuilding was still a choice, one both of those in power and of those living on individual parcels of land. More research must be done into the latter group to explore how geographic self-conceptions of the city among non-elites changed in response to the fire. But even if limited to those with the power to reshape the city, a history of London that treats the rebuilding as a failure does not succeed. True, Wren and Evelyn did not see their plans realized, but the city that did result was just as much an active choice. That choice could only be made based upon the information at hand, which, after the fire, was presented in a very different visual manner. To adapt Giamatti, London was remade, not reborn.

In 1677, builders completed the Monument to the Great Fire. A 202-foot-tall Doric column topped by a bronze urn spouting flame, the Monument allowed visitors to climb up and view London as Hollar and many other pre-fire cartographers once did. The city stretched out beneath the viewer at almost the same oblique angle as the choreographies of old once used. But while the viewpoint may have been the same, the city viewed had rather fundamentally changed. Around the monument in 1677 sat a city that had defied the very depiction the pillar supplied its climbers. Fittingly, the story of the monument offers a microcosm of the story of London as a whole: Wren and Hooke each submitted plans for the structure, but both ended up compromising as the city government chose a cheaper design. Even with its messy planning, the monument proudly declares on its inscription, “London rises again” – a message shared by many of the maps and mapmakers in the aftermath of the fire. Thus, as the monument allowed Londoners a new way of seeing their city, so too did London’s maps.

NOTES

1. All dates before 1750 in the text and in footnotes are referenced by the Julian calendar, in use in England at the time. However, for ease of understanding, dates have been converted to New Style (in which the new year begins January 1), as opposed to the Old Style then in practice (in which the new year began on March 25).


9. Ibid.

Figure 16: In this 1667 Hollar map of the British Isles, the legacy of the Great Fire is prominently featured. The inset at the top right shows London before the fire but uses the style of mapping common only after it. Beneath the insets on the right is a short text description of the start and course of the fire. Published as “A New and Exact Map of Great Britannie” (London: Overton, 1667), P648, II/57, Crace
IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT


15. Evelyn, Diary, ed. de Beer, May 14, 1662, 437.


22. Ibid., September 7, 1666, 499; Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 26, 47; and Porter, London: A Social History, 87-8.


24. Evelyn, Diary, ed. de Beer, September 2, 1666, 495 (emphasis original).


27. Ibid., entry 19, 111.

28. Ibid., entry 110, 228; Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 68; Pennington, Descriptive Catalogue, xli; and Turner, “Hollar’s Prospects and Maps,” 154.

32. Wenceslaus Hollar, “A Map or Groundplott of the Citty of London with the Surburbes Therof: So Farr as the Lord Mayors’ Jurisdiction Doeth Extend, by which Is Exactly Demonstrated the Present Condition of It since the Last Sad Accident of Fire, the Blank Space Signifying the Burnt Part, & Where the Houses Be Those Places Yet Standing,” map (London: Brooke, 1666), P1003, II/53, Crace Collection.


34. Calendar of State Papers, entry 110, 228 and entry 22, 256; Pennington, Descriptive Catalogue, xli; Ralph Hyde, The A to Z of Restoration London (The City of London 1676) (London: London Topographical Society, 1992), v; Pepys, Diary, November 22, 1666, 695-6; and Foxell, Mapping London, 28.

35. Evelyn to Oldenburg, December 22, 1666, 299-300.


38. Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 399.


41. Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 398.


43. Christopher Wren, “Consequences of Rebuilding the City upon the Old Foundations,” [1666], in Jardine, *On a Grander Scale*, 263.


47. Ibid.; Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. de Beer, September 13, 1666, 500; Tinniswood, *His Invention So Fertile*, 150; and Henry Oldenburg to Robert Boyle, September 18, 1666, in Hall and Hall, eds., *Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, vol. III, 231.


49. Ibid., 54.

50. Ibid., 30.

51. Ibid., 46.


53. Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 399.


Knight, “Proposals of a New Model for Rebuilding the City of London, with Houses, Streets and Wharfs, to Be Forthwith Set Out by His Majesty’s and the City Surveyors: With the Advantages That Will Accrue by the Building the Same Accordingly, Viz.,” map (London: n.p., 1666), XVII/11, Crace Collection.

58. Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 154.


60. Henry Oldenburg to Robert Boyle, October 2, 1666, in Hall and Hall, eds., Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg, vol. III, 238.

61. Milward, Diary, September 27, 1666, 9; Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 399; Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 55-9, 62; 311-12; Jardine, On a Grander Scale, 255; Journals of the Common Council 46, f. 123, in Sydney Perks, The History of the Mansion House (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1922), Google Books, 144; and Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 155-7.


63. Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 60, 63, 311-2; Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 157-8; “His Majesty Having Been Graciously Pleased…” London Gazette, September 20-4, 1666; Cooper, “A More Beautiful City,” 134; and Tinniswood, By Permission of Heaven, 230.


65. Stephen Wren, Parentalia; or, Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens; viz. Matthew Bishop of Ely, Christopher Dean of Windsor, etc. but Chieflly of Sir Christopher Wren, Late Surveyor-General of the Royal Buildings, President of the Royal Society, etc. Etc. (London: Osborn, 1750), 269.

66. Ibid.

67. Calendar of State Papers, entry 105, 430.


69. Calendar of State Papers, entry 105, 430.

70. Hollar to Evelyn, August 1667, 43.

71. Hollar biographer Gillian Tindall has found one payment from King Charles to Hollar in October 1668, but dismisses it: it was only £50 and was made without mention of Hollar’s map project. Regardless, Hollar never completed his pre-fire map (Tindall, Man Who Drew London, 225).

72. Calendar of State Papers, entry 110, 228, entry 105, 430, and entry 109, 431-2; Hollar to Evelyn, August 1667, 43-4; and Tindall, Man Who Drew London, 172.

73. Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 158, 170-1.


75. John Ogilby [and William Morgan], “Large and Accurate Map of the City of London: Ichnographically Describing All the Streets, Lanes, Alleys, Courts, Yards, Churches, Halls, and Houses, etc. Actually Surveyed and Delineated,” map ([London], [Ogilby and Morgan], 1677), P1007, II/61, Crace...

78. Ogilby and Morgan, London Survey’d, [2].
80. Calendar of State Papers, entry 105, 430.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
85. Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 231-3 and Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 244.

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IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT


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While contemporary stereotypes of Parisians might suggest that their habits of “leisure culture” and their relationships with urban, suburban, and rural spaces have remained constant for hundreds of years, the period of industrialization and urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century was also a turning point in the way city-dwellers conceived of, and participated in, the suburbs around their city. In this essay, Emma Fallone ’16 analyzes Impressionist art from the period in order to discover how artists reflected the dramatic changes that swept through Parisian and French society. Through paintings, these artists offer a view of how Parisians themselves understood their lives, their city, and importantly, their leisure.

By Emma Fallone, ES ’16
Written for “The Emergence of Modern Paris”
Professor John Merriman
Edited by Simon Horn, Eva Landsberg, and Katherine Shy
The year was 1868, and radical revolutionary leader Raoul Rigault was fleeing the police yet again. His incendiary words against the Second Empire had caught the attention of police spies, likely the very same men who were now mere steps behind in attempting to bring him to justice. Thinking quickly, Rigault dashed into the Gare de Lyon and jumped aboard the first train that he saw, which happened to be traveling out into the countryside. He left the train when it reached a forested region called Moret-sur-Loing, near the suburb of Fontainebleau. After wandering aimlessly for two days in this foreign landscape, having lost not only the Parisian police but himself as well, Rigault happened upon a lone man standing at an easel in the middle of the fields. As the painter would recall decades later, a young man “…of an appearance not terribly engaging appeared. His clothes were torn and covered in mud, his eyes wild and his movements jerky.”

Initially assuming Rigault to be a madman, the painter prepared to defend himself. Yet after the fugitive explained his situation and pleaded for a place to hide, the sympathetic painter simply offered him a smock and box of paintbrushes. This was all that Rigault would need to blend in, he explained – the only Parisians who ever came out to the suburbs were Impressionist painters; attired as such, the peasants wouldn’t give Rigault a second thought. The grateful anarchist obeyed and successfully returned to Paris as a free man. He would later become a key player in the creation of the Paris Commune. As for the painter? He was none other than Auguste Renoir.

Aside from the tantalizing, coincidental intersection of the lives of these two historic figures, what can this story reveal about Parisian life at this particular point in time? The unusual circumstances that made an event such as this possible are highly reflective of late nineteenth-century urban Paris and its relationship with the suburbs. At this time, the city was in the midst of a major transformation, which saw traditional ways of life being pushed aside by powerful forces of modernization. In the previous era, the suburbs of Paris had been to a large degree isolated from the urban city center; viewed as backwards and dangerous, they were rarely visited by city-dwellers. The few who ventured outside the city walls in these early days were painters, especially early Impressionists like Renoir. But the drastic changes in Paris’s urban landscape wrought by Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann, coupled with the forces of industrialization and the growth of railroads, began to change not only the geography of the city, but the entire culture of urban society itself. The resulting development of a new “leisure culture” fundamentally altered the relationship between Paris and its suburbs, as these spaces were conceptualized and utilized in entirely novel ways by a new generation of Parisians. Thus, while Renoir’s costume advice may have reflected an older culture, the mere fact of Rigault’s ability to so easily flee to Fontainebleau signifies a new porousness of Parisian city limits. It was Impressionists like Renoir who stood witness to this change, their paintings recording both the dramatic restructuring of urban and suburban landscapes and the cultural ideal of a new leisure class that developed as a result.

Before the reign of Emperor Napoleon III and his prefect Baron Haussmann, the city of Paris was a far cry from the shining, expansive cosmopolitan city that enchants the imaginations of
ART AS A WINDOW INTO THE PAST

The year was 1868, and radical revolutionary leader Raoul Rigault was fleeing the police yet again. His incendiary words against the Second Empire had caught the attention of police spies, likely the very same men who were now mere steps behind in attempting to bring him to justice. Thinking quickly, Rigault dashed into the Gare de Lyon and jumped aboard the first train that he saw, which happened to be traveling out into the countryside. He left the train when it reached a forested region called Moret-sur-Loing, near the suburb of Fontainebleau. After wandering aimlessly for two days in this foreign landscape, having lost not only the Parisian police but himself as well, Rigault happened upon a lone man standing at an easel in the middle of the fields. As the painter would recall decades later, a young man “…of an appearance not terribly engaging appeared. His clothes were torn and covered in mud, his eyes wild and his movements jerky.” Initially assuming Rigault to be a madman, the painter prepared to defend himself. Yet after the fugitive explained his situation and pleaded for a place to hide, the sympathetic painter simply offered him a smock and box of paintbrushes. This was all that Rigault would need to blend in, he explained – the only Parisians who ever came out to the suburbs were Impressionist painters; attired as such, the peasants wouldn’t give Rigault a second thought. The grateful anarchist obeyed and successfully returned to Paris as a free man. He would later become a key player in the creation of the Paris Commune. As for the painter? He was none other than Auguste Renoir.

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Before the reign of Emperor Napoleon III and his prefect Baron Haussmann, the city of Paris was a far cry from the shining, expansive cosmopolitan city that enchants the imaginations of many today. Until the mid-1800s, Paris could in many ways still be called a “medieval” city. The
layout of the urban center was chaotic and claustrophobic, a dense, labyrinthine tangle of narrow, winding streets and alleys. The crowding and disorder of Paris made traveling throughout the city a profoundly unpleasant experience, as French novelist Honoré de Balzac bemoaned in 1834, writing of his city: “For people accustomed to the splendors of life, is there anything more ignoble than the mud, the cries, the bad odor, the narrowness of populous streets?” Indeed, in the days of pre-Haussmann Paris, the streets were almost wholly the domain of the “sans-culottes.” The noise and refuse of everyday, lower-class life spilled out onto the streets, clogging the narrow lanes and creating an unhealthy, dark, and potentially dangerous environment.

Thus, especially for the bourgeoisie, passage through public space was not a pleasurable activity but rather just an unfortunate necessity of urban life. The upper classes traversed the streets simply to go from one place to another, spending only as much time in this realm as was absolutely necessary. The bourgeois social sphere was thus largely confined to indoor settings; the only way that it could break free from this restriction would be if the very urban landscape of the city itself was dramatically altered. As historian David Jordan astutely notes, “The hurly-burly as well as the manners and habits of those that thronged the streets made them more than a distasteful inconvenience for the bourgeoisie….All these had to be dislodged, banished from the center of Paris for boulevard life to become widespread and bourgeois. The streets had to be cleaned culturally as well as physically.” Awareness of and frustration with the many varied disadvantages that the tangled layout of Paris caused – especially to the upper classes – had been on the rise for decades. As Voltaire implored in a pamphlet published in 1749, “May God find some man zealous enough to undertake such projects, possessed of a soul firm enough to complete his undertakings, a mind enlightened enough to plan them, and may he have sufficient social stature to make them succeed.” By the crowning of Emperor Napoleon III in 1852, the need to solve the Parisian urban problem could no longer be ignored. And Baron Haussmann was just the man that Voltaire – and many others – had been waiting for.

An analysis of the influence of Baron Haussmann on the urban landscape of Paris could fill an entire book – and indeed, many comprehensive works have been published on the subject. To summarize, from the moment of his appointment as Prefect of the Seine in 1853, Haussmann spearheaded dozens of major urban renovation projects. His goal: “aérer, unifier, et embellir” – to create fresh air and open space, to unify the city as an organized whole, and to make it a capital with beauty to rival any other major European city. Under his orders, wide, open streets were cut throughout the city along major axes of movement, paralleling the Seine and connecting main landmarks. These “Grands Boulevards,” the most famous of which include the rue de Rivoli, rue Saint-Antoine, Boulevard Strasbourg, and Boulevard Sebastopol, were bulldozed straight through old neighborhoods, suddenly and drastically remaking Paris in a new image.

By creating a major new network of streets throughout the city, forcibly smashing a new grid straight through the old network of streets and buildings, Haussmann altered not only the way in which the Parisians traversed their city but also their entire relationship with the urban landscape.
in which they lived. The change was even reflected in the Parisian vernacular— as Jordan observes, “The prefect had cut the city into sections and the very slashes – the boulevards – re-defined urban life, fixed its contours, and indelibly marked Paris. The word boulevardier entered the language as a noun in 1866 and as an adjective in 1877, designating one who frequented the Grands Boulevards for pleasure, not transportation. Haussmann did not have chiefly in mind the creation of la vie boulevardière, but it became his most memorable cultural achievement.” This new conception of the landscape of the city center as not merely a zone for transportation but also a space for public leisure was amplified further by the creation or renovation of many new squares, such as place du Chateau-d’Eau (the modern Place de la Republique) and Place de l’Europe; and public parks and gardens, such as those of the Champs-Élysées and Parc Monceau. Scholar Pamela Todd succinctly summarizes the effect of these changes on the image of Paris in the days of Haussmannization, as the city “was rapidly becoming the capital of pleasure. A beguiling city through which to stroll… Their capital had become a city of tourism, entertainment, shopping and light. The vast circulatory system of the boulevards kept everything moving…No other city could boast such brilliance, opulence, and display. And – best of all – the splendor of the modern city was available to everyone who walked in these spaces.”

The transformation of Paris, with its new wide, airy boulevards and parks, brought with it a change in the social culture and behavior of Parisians themselves. Now that many of the main streets were no longer cramped and clogged with refuse, the outdoor urban landscape became not just something to endure, but rather something which could be enjoyed simply for its own sake. More than that, it became a site for social interaction, amongst all levels of Parisian society. Suddenly, it was possible – and indeed, highly pleasurable – to spend all day wandering throughout the expansive, beautiful streets, observing the swirl of the highly social milieu and basking in the thrill of seeing and being seen. If the residents of Paris were social actors, then Haussmann’s boulevards were their stage – and the resulting performances were brilliant indeed.

The excitement of this heady, nascent leisure culture proved to be a powerful inspiration to a new generation of artists. Some painters interpreted it as a system promoting frivolity and superficiality: As Renoir grumbled to his son, who recorded the tirade in his memoir, “…ready-made clothes [are] now the fashion and people [begin] to look like tailors’ dummies. You see, the trouble with ready-made clothing is that everybody can afford to look well-dressed, as well-dressed as a commercial traveler. You have the workman disguised as a gentleman for the modest price of twenty-five francs fifty. When I was a youngster, workmen were proud of their profession. Carpenters wore baggy corduroy trousers and a blue or red flannel sash round their waist, even on Sunday; house painters wore a beret and flowing tie. Now they’ve replaced pride in their profession by this idiotic vanity of trying to look like the bourgeoisie. In consequence, the streets of Paris seem to be filled with supers out of a play by the younger Dumas.” Others embraced the change. Yet whether enthusiastic or dismayed, Impressionists’ paintings were unavoidably infused with the “new Paris” and its accompanying cultural shifts – they painted the city that, for better or for worse, they now
lived in and knew.

One member of this new generation of Parisian artists was Gustave Caillebotte. Caillebotte was unique among Impressionists in that he actually could be considered a member of the rising wealthy leisure class that was created by Haussmann's urban planning. The untimely death of his father, a successful textile merchant, left Caillebotte with a substantial inheritance at the relatively young age of 26. This fortune allowed the young artist to enjoy a relatively upper-class lifestyle and funded his full-time enrollment at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1873. After becoming an established painter and making strong connections with other prominent figures such as Edgar Degas, Caillebotte became a leading member of the Impressionist movement, often using his substantial resources to finance exhibitions and support his contemporaries. His rare view into the intimate details of the lives of his subjects and his personal experience of this new lifestyle granted Caillebotte an unusual perspective and enabled him to represent the reality of life within the “new Paris” in a way that most other Impressionists simply could not.

One painting that captures Caillebotte's intimate understanding of the rising Parisian leisure class is “The Young Man at the Window,” which depicts a well-dressed man standing at an open window in a lavishly furnished Parisian apartment. His back is turned, granting the viewer hardly a hint as to his identity – yet we can follow his gaze through the window to take in the full panorama of city life dominated by the sunny, broad, clean boulevards of Haussmann’s design. As scholar Anthony Sutcliffe argues, “Caillebotte's emphasis on Haussmann's Paris takes on a personal significance. The walls, curtains and furniture of Caillebotte’s rooms, and the endless facades of the streets, alike enclose their bored, wealthy prisoners….Caillebotte portrayed an almost aimless life in which the rich spent most of their time in minor pursuits in their homes, leaving occasionally for a stroll…” Overall, works such as “The Young Man at the Window” powerfully convey a “…theme of boredom sometimes complemented by a sense of imprisonment,” as the wealthy subjects almost seem to fade away, becoming one with the city whose new layout so strongly influenced their daily lives.

This idea of melding figure and ground as a metaphor for wealthy urban life in Haussmann’s Paris was expressed even more explicitly in the defense of the 1876 Impressionist exhibition written by prominent naturalist writer Edmond Duranty. Entitled “La Nouvelle Peinture,” the piece called for artists to turn fully away from simple subject-based works and instead focus on portraying contemporary city life, to “…no longer separate the figure from the background… In real life, the figure never appears against neutral, empty, or vague backgrounds….The frame of the window, depending on whether we are near or far, seated or standing, cuts off the outside scene in most unexpected ways…” These new urban ideas even made it into contemporary literature, as Henry James wrote while on vacation in Paris in 1876 that he saw his hotel window as a frame through which he could see the “canvas” of the city.

Yet Caillebotte also went further, stepping outside of the confines of upper-class Parisian apartments to depict the new urban life upon the recently paved boulevards themselves. As Herbert
ART AS A WINDOW INTO THE PAST

comments on these works, “The modernity of these paintings lies, in part, in their exploitation of Haussmanian planning, a seeming acceptance of the Second Empire’s most controversial feature: its ruthless urban geometry.” Caillebotte’s “Paris Street; Rainy Day” is set at one of the locations best situated to appreciate the work of Baron Haussmann: the intersection of five major boulevards that were a part of Haussmann’s new plan for the city. Coincidentally – or, in fact, perhaps not so – Caillebotte grew up only five blocks away from that very spot, on the rue de Miromesnil. From young adulthood, he lived within this drastically altered version of Paris experiencing firsthand the new, pleasant elements of boulevard life – the enjoyment of the stroll through the city, the streets as a setting for social interaction – that his works represent. Yet in addition to his awareness of the glamour of the rising leisure culture enabled by Haussmannization, Caillebotte was also sharply cognizant of the costs of such a societal shift. Despite the number of people present in the scene, all of whom are now able to enjoy the experience of promenading on the new, wide streets, a sense of isolation strongly permeates “Paris Street, Rainy Day.” Each of the individuals and couples are both physically ensconced beneath their own umbrellas and also mentally separated, avoiding interaction or even eye contact with the other city-dwellers or the viewer. This sense of loneliness – a reaction to overwhelming new opportunities for social interaction that was not eager participation but rather a fearful retreat inwards – accurately captures social phenomena in nineteenth-century Paris. The muted gray and tan tones of the painting and the implication of rain only further add to the gloom. Caillebotte, in sum, seems to point to a depression among modern Parisians, brought on by the massive changes wrought by Haussmann, and the destruction of their familiar neighborhoods.

Caillebotte’s work reflects many aspects of the Haussmanization of Paris, including not only the issues within the growing boulevardier class but also the tension between the new societal focus on leisure and the industrialization which sustained it. This dynamic is seen most prominently in his work, “Le Pont de l’Europe,” as the arrangement of elements within the painting serves to emphasize a class divide. On the far left side of the scene stretches a grand boulevard, reaching far into the distance with a hint of cityscape beyond. In the center-left region walk two Parisians. Their expensive dress and position in the center of the boulevard’s sidewalk clearly denote them as members of the upper class, flâneurs out to engage in the new realm of socialization and leisure created by the wide avenue upon which they stroll. In contrast, the far right side of the painting is dominated by a massive steel railway bridge, with an industrial landscape visible behind. In the center-right, leaning on the bridge railing, is an industrial worker of some sort, dressed in work clothes and accompanied by an ungroomed dog. Though he might be contemplative, it seems more likely that he is merely taking a rest from his labors. The irony is palpable – the individuals on both sides are engaging in leisure, but it is of course the hard work of the latter, in the rapidly growing realm of industry, that allows for the repose-centered lifestyle of the well-dressed pair. Herbert concludes that the dichotomy caused by these railroad tracks is central to the overarching meaning of the work, as “The key to Caillebotte’s painting is the cyclopean metalwork, embodiment of industrial power, aggressive symbol of the transformation of Paris. Caillebotte’s frank use of its
unembellished geometry brings this raw power out into the open. Its stark lines are deliberately ugly…They stand for Haussmann’s controlling directives which slashed through this part of Paris to create a new quarter around the expanded rail station….He does not praise the new Paris. He strips away all that is natural and delicate…and in doing so he exposes the harsh power, full of tensions, which underlay industrial Paris and its new society.”

Industrialization and the rise of the railroads that occurred concurrently with – or even because of – Haussmannization had consequences not only for Parisians’ relationship with their home city, but also for their relationship with its suburbs. To the residents of the “old,” pre-Haussmann Paris, the villages outside of the city were an almost alien land, dangerous and undesirable. In his analysis of the journeys taken by Parisians in and out of Paris during the late eighteenth century, Richard Cobb notes that the distance between these two locales was not only a physical one, but also – more importantly – a mental one. He argues, “A two-way traffic that is much more difficult to analyse is a mental one, based on a mixture of experience, observation, memory, fear, prejudice, and myth…the conditioning of mentalities that face in opposite directions: inwards towards the capital, and outwards, towards le pourtoir de Paris, the dark, alarming tribal lands…” This is not to say that the city-dwellers were not aware of the villages – they were, at least in theory. The city did rely on the goods brought in from the countryside, most obviously food and raw materials – but even then, the only points of contact between Parisians and villagers were often the specific markets to which villagers would travel to sell their wares, notably at Les Halles, a number of ports along the Seine, or smaller markets at the points of entry to the city. Indeed, “attitudes displayed towards these places [by Parisians] revealed a mixture of arrogance, contempt, mistrust, and fear…the Parisian view [was] that most of the inhabitants of the rural periphery were really nothing better than naked savages and cannibals, and that these people were innately nasty, brutal, and bloody.”

The woodlands loomed especially large in Parisian imagination, especially the expanse of the Bois du Boulogne, which bordered the city. As Cobb observes, “…Paris was closed in, on almost all sides, by extensive forest and woodland…nothing in fact could have been less reassuring…The highroads were but uncertain, fragile frontiers between huge areas of primeval jungle…” Some of the only pre-Haussmanization Parisians to venture forth into this territory were, in fact, painters. Impressionists were drawn to the countryside for exactly the reasons that many Parisians stayed away – the purity of unspoiled nature and the refreshingly simple way of life. In such a context, the story of Rigault and Renoir begins to make sense.

The dramatic mid-century shift that occurred in the Parisian conception of and relationship with the countryside can be attributed to two main factors: the rise of the new leisure culture encouraged by Emperor Napoleon III and further enhanced by Haussmannization, and the increasing industrialization and resultant growth of railroads. The expanding network of railroads that spread outward from the city of Paris, initially a result of the need to transport higher volumes of industrial goods, was soon capitalized on by Parisians as a new mode of public transportation. The growth of the railways had, in a sense, “…brought the surrounding countryside much closer.” Suddenly,
traveling to the suburbs did not necessitate an arduous and potentially dangerous trek through the “uncivilized” wilderness – city-dwellers could simply step on the train within the city, and then step off again at any number of the quaint little country villages which quickly began to offer in abundance the sorts of pleasurable leisure activities demanded by wealthy Parisians. Indeed, “The real revolution in travel within France was ushered in by the development of the railways, which made a major impact on the aesthetic of the Impressionists….Speed reduced distances, blurred appearances, and intensified pleasure. Tourism quickly flourished on the northern coast of France, and opportunities for leisure activities increased in the suburbs as a result of the creation of the system of railways radiating from Paris.”

The 1837 opening of the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris’s main, centrally-located train station, in 1837 created a hub for easy transport to the countryside for weekend excursions. One of the areas most preferred as a destination for leisure activities by the Parisians was a stretch along the banks of the Seine which included such villages as Asnieres and Argenteuil (to the northwest of Paris), Sevres and Versailles (to the southwest), and Bougival and Louveciennes (to the west). These destinations were not only the domain of the wealthy. The growth of industrialization and the resulting commercialization of railroad transport made such journeys accessible to a majority of city-dwellers; a train ticket from the Gare Saint-Lazare to Bougival cost just two sous and took little more than half an hour. Both the railroad companies and the French government recognized the economic and social benefits of the growth and accessibility of this new realm of leisure, and worked intentionally to encourage it. For their part, “The railroads, by no means passive servants, advertised heavily in Paris and the suburbs….Cheap fares for weekends and holidays soon made clear the intimate connection of leisure with prosperity for both the railways and the villages….Louis-Napoleon included a number of suburban festivals in the list of amusements his government subsidized.”

The impact of this increased traffic to the suburbs was enormous, wholly transforming the lifestyle and culture of the relatively small, formerly quiet country towns which suddenly became major vacation destinations. Almost overnight, the main economic foci of these villages shifted drastically, from a primarily agricultural and trading-based livelihood to an economy centered on the tourism industry. It is no exaggeration to argue that “Parisians coming out to the suburbs for holiday pleasures were a force for change. They were the clients of innumerable cafes, restaurants, dance halls, hotels, bathing and boating establishments, vacation chalets, and pleasure parks. Old buildings were converted for these purposes, and many new ones built, as former owners gave way to entrepreneurs.” Guinguettes, or “pleasure gardens,” were established up and down the banks of the Seine, near towns like Bougival and Argenteuil, taking advantage of the cheaper price of wine outside of the city limits of Paris. Catering directly to the new population of Parisian weekend visitors, these were places where one could socialize, drink, dance, watch the boats passing by on the river, and be fully immersed in the pleasures of leisure. And these enticingly quaint locations, replete with carefree men and women and set amidst the beauty of the natural world, were the perfect
source of visual inspiration for a rising generation of Impressionist painters.

The intertwining of industrialization and leisure culture, and their effects on life within both Paris and its suburbs, can be seen in Impressionist paintings of several aspects of the changing countryside. One key element for analysis is, again, that of the railroad, the spirit of which is perfectly embodied in Claude Monet’s “The Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil.” Monet’s choice of this riverside town was no accident. In many ways, Argenteuil perfectly embodied the modernization that was occurring in similar locales throughout the countryside, influenced by the rise of industry and leisure. Located just nine kilometers from Paris, Argenteuil was easily accessible via both train and boat, and as such soon became a popular weekend destination for Parisians as well as a regional center for recreational yachting. Monet captures both of these forms of transportation in his painting. The elevated railroad tracks and the river dominate the center of the painting, one on top of the other, and the dark train and pair of crisp white sailboats are without a doubt the central focal points of the composition. Framing the scene is a peaceful mix of hues of blue and white, as both the steam caused by the motion of the train and the billowing clouds (indicating the presence of winds that propel the sailboats) become almost indistinguishable and together blend into the light blue of the summer sky.

This juxtaposition serves a purpose more significant than simply creating the scene – there is a relevant symbolic aspect to Monet’s composition, as well. As Herbert astutely notes, “The parallel harmonies of city and country, and of work and leisure, are symbolized in the smoke and the clouds, a peaceful blending of man-made and natural vapors.” In another analysis, he takes this argument yet a step further, emphasizing the implicit meaning in the relative positions of the railroad and sailboats: “By stressing that sun, wind and sailboat are all going along the axis of the river, at right angles to the bridge, Monet reinforces the symbolic confrontation of the boat, symbol of leisure, with the train. Together the boat and the railroad stand for the new Argenteuil: the modern suburb that has given up its agricultural role to the pressures of urban leisure and industry. Both boat and railroad represent the new forces that were radically altering Argenteuil, forces that disrupted traditional life in this village, creating wholesale changes in the use of the river and its shore, in land ownership and land use, in the types and numbers of local residents and in the work that they did.”

A further interesting and significant element in the composition of Monet’s work is the choice not to paint any figures sailing the boats. Clearly, there must be at least one person within each sailboat, and the inclusion of observers on the shore suggests that Monet was indeed aware of the presence of people in his scene. Yet the intentional decision to render the boats simply and plainly, as if they were floating down the river almost of their own accord, allows Monet’s work to convey the implicit tension caused by the rise of the leisure class that these boats represent. In past generations, any boats on the river here would have been primarily serving a commercial function, piloted by true “river boatmen,” whose livelihood it was to ferry goods to and from Paris in order to facilitate trade. However, with well-to-do Parisians flooding these river towns in search of relax-
ation and pleasure, the way that the river was used was utterly changed. The majority of boats that dotted the waterways were now sailboats, yachts and other types of pleasure-crafts, owned and operated by wealthy city-dwellers with little nautical experience, for the simple purpose of diversion. The majority of actual commercial transportation was now carried out via train – an element also present within the scene. The sailboat shifted from the traditional realm of work to the new – and, to the villagers, fairly alien – domain of pure leisure. Thus, as Monet’s boats are “embodiments not of local residents, but of well-to-do Parisians, they make us think of their absent owners, rather the way an empty chair summons up a human body. They have the appeal of anticipation, of waiting patiently for their owners who, contemplating such paintings in the city, could dream of holiday sport in the open air. The exclusion of people in [the sailboats in] these paintings aids such dreams of leisure….The paintings let us become the ideal visitor…”

For at least two Impressionists, another key site of observation was the Grenouillère, a popular “floating café” situated on an island in the Seine between the country towns of Bougival and Saint-Michel. Works by Monet and Renoir which capture this area are widely recognized as “defining works in the canon of Impressionism,” landmarks both in the development of the Impressionist style of painting and the genre of depiction of everyday life and leisure. Indeed, “At the Grenouillère, [Renoir and Monet] were in the midst of finding techniques that would convey an ostensible naturalness of vision. They had to develop new means to communicate what they sought: the effects of spontaneous vision, one that would appear to be unmediated by prior, arbitrary conventions…”

The Grenouillère region, on the banks of the Seine, near Saint-Michel and Bougival, was the ideal location for the achievement of these painterly ambitions, as it fully embodied the new type of leisure culture and Parisian relationship with the suburbs that had risen as a result of Haussmannization and industrialization of the nineteenth century. Country towns such as these were fully transformed by the influx of tourism, becoming havens for the simple pleasures of boating and repose. The popular French magazine L’Evenement Illustre called La Grenouillère “Trouville on the bank of the Seine,” as “…it proved a powerful magnet for the noisy, well-dressed crowds of Parisian pleasure seekers who responded enthusiastically to the siren call of railroad advertisements and railway company posters….The train from Gare Saint-Lazare took just half an hour, cost just twelve sous and deposited [Parisians] in a riverside paradise…”

Monet’s and Renoir’s paintings depict similar scenes, likely what a visitor would see during a typical weekend day: a group of well-dressed people, probably Parisians in the suburbs for a weekend excursion, socializing on the small “camembert” island out on the water. A few vacationers swim in the rippling waters of the Seine, whose glassy surface shines invitingly with the reflections of the verdant foliage and blue sky above, and several sailboats are moored nearby, suggesting the range of leisure activities available for the city-dwellers to enjoy over the course of their visit. The ideals of the new Parisian leisure culture could not be more clearly expressed, as the rich paintings both portray a world in which “Bathing, boating, and dining-out in the ‘country’ are among
our desires, escape from urban cares is our yearning, bright colors and sensual movement are our solace and our stimulation. These are all explanations for the fame of Renoir’s and Monet’s sketches of the Grenouillère.”

In both their depictions of life within Paris and scenes in the countryside, Impressionists such as Caillebotte, Monet, and Renoir were able to capture the rapidly modernizing culture and landscape in a way that few other artists could. Haussmannization, industrialization, railroad expansion, leisure culture, and the transformation of the suburbs were defining characteristics of French life at the end of the nineteenth century. The goal of the Impressionists was to represent a slice of that life, of their everyday experiences. Yet a new culture and new economic focus – in many ways, a new world – required a new mode of representation as well. And the Impressionist style of painting was the perfect fit. Indeed, “The technique of the impressionists, at first highly controversial, eventually was accepted as the perfect vehicle for their themes of leisure….Impressionist technique embodies an apparent spontaneity that suits the idea of life seized on the qui-vive, a lack of finish that leaves room for improvisation, a heightened color, and animated brushwork that appeal to the sensuousness of our leisure-oriented culture…”

Taken at face value, the works of these artists may seem to be little more than hazy views of pretty pastoral or city scenes, created hastily and almost without effort, using loose brushstrokes and thick daubs of paint. Easy to create and “easy on the eyes” – such paintings would seem to perfectly embody the newborn Parisian leisure culture that they depict. Yet just as the seemingly carefree new lifestyle was fraught with underlying tensions – the isolation found amidst the overwhelmingly open, social boulevard spaces; the loss of traditional rural culture and transformation of villages into tourist destinations catering to “foreign” vacationing city-dwellers – so too does the beauty of Impressionist paintings belie their deeper meanings.

The same themes of uncertainty at the swift, major changes sweeping French culture are present in the artworks’ richly symbolic details; in addition, interestingly enough, the seemingly effortless style of painting that characterizes this era in fact can only be successfully achieved through careful thought and planning. As Robert Herbert wisely concludes, “An exhibition of Impressionism is the result of hard effort, but viewers can nevertheless indulge their own sense of leisure thanks to the high culture involved, which insulates them from the reality of work. Impressionism has become the perfect expression of a culture of leisure.” The viewing of an Impressionist painting is far more than simply a richly satisfying aesthetic experience – it is a chance to gain a peek into the past, to view the world of Paris and its suburbs at the end of the nineteenth century as the Parisians themselves did, with all of the changes and tensions that made it an intriguing area of study and a fascinating time to be alive.

NOTES

ART AS A WINDOW INTO THE PAST


10. Anthony Sutcliffe, “The Impressionists and Haussmann’s Paris” (French Cultural Studies 6, June 1995), 208.

11. See Fig. 1.


17. See front cover.


19. See page 36.


31. See Fig. 2.
39. See Figs. 3 and 4.
ART AS A WINDOW INTO THE PAST

Figure 1: Gustave Caillebotte, “The Young Man at the Window,” 1876. Private Collection. Oil on canvas.

Figure 2: Claude Monet, “The Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil,” 1873. Private collection. Oil on Canvas.
Figure 3: Auguste Renoir, “La Grenouillère,” 1869. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. Oil on canvas.

Figure 4: Claude Monet, “Bain à la Grenouillère,” 1869. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Oil on canvas.
ART AS A WINDOW INTO THE PAST

BIBLIOGRAPHY


TITLE IMAGE

Crippled by the 1798 Sedition Act, it appeared as if the Republican press faced extinction. Yet a mere two years later, Thomas Jefferson captured the presidency, ushering in a thirty-year long period of Republican rule. In seeking to explain this reversal, Thomas Hopson ’16 argues that Republican newspaper editors engaged in political combat, sacrificing themselves as political martyrs for their party’s cause. Refusing to be restrained by the Sedition Act, these editors went as far as provoking their own prosecutions in order to both expose the Federalists’ abuses of power and elicit the public’s sympathy for the Republican Party.

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Written for “The Creation of the American Politician, 1789–1820”
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The first victim of the Sedition Act was a United States Congressman. Matthew Lyon, a Representative from Vermont, served four months in jail for criticizing President Adams in his semi-monthly newspaper, The Scourge of Aristocracy. Due to this charge of “scurrilous, feigned, false, scandalous, seditious, and malicious” conduct, Lyon faced another burden: running his reelection campaign from a jail cell. Through it all, Lyon remained confident. “[T]he friends of Liberty, sensibly feel the injustice and indignity done to me and themselves; they will be neither idle nor bashful at the next election.”

The claim proved prescient. When the votes were counted, Lyon could proudly declare, “Whenever gaols and fines shall become the common reward of patriotism and virtue, they will cease to be a terror, [only] a sham [of] thieves and robbers.” He had won 65 percent of the vote, and as he left his “dismal prison,” a crowd of supporters followed him from Vermont to Philadelphia.

Lyon’s experience mirrors larger patterns in the history of the Sedition Act. When a Federalist Congress first passed the law in July 1798, it drew broad public support and was virtually unopposed within the Adams administration. The Republican press also faced an internal crisis, a state of disarray in which the Philadelphia Aurora stood “almost alone [as] a standard bearer for the political opposition.” Thomas Jefferson, a leading member of the Republican party, understood the paper’s weak position and feared that “if these papers fall, republicanism will be entirely brow-beaten.” As Federalists continued to secure indictments under the Sedition Act—they secured fourteen in total, especially targeting all the most prominent Republican editors—it looked as if his worry might come to pass.

The election of 1800 marked a turning point. It was a decisive victory for the Republicans, inaugurating a thirty-year period of Republican Party rule. As part of this turnaround, the Sedition Act, once a source of Federalist strength, had become a target of popular anger. Moreover, the Republican press, having struggled to survive, had emerged as the principal cause of the Republican revival. John Adams himself would later lament that “the Republican press generally was largely responsible for the ‘revolution’ wrought in 1800.”

In studying this swift political reversal, historians have approached these questions from a variety of angles. A good deal of scholarship has focused on the national political disputes surrounding the Sedition Act and the Republican response. This literature, taken together, gives a thorough survey of the constitutional arguments at work in this period. Another collection of scholarship has focused on the role of the press in early national America and yields considerable insight into the structure, coordination, and rhetoric of the Republican newspapers. Historians have also analyzed the role of Republican printers through the lens of biography. Although these texts bring out the nuances of the individual sedition trials, their narrow scopes restrict their ability to describe a broader Republican strategy.

The existing literature centers on a common narrative: between 1798-1800, a loosely coordinated Republican press emerged to challenge Federalist policy with a variety of constitutional arguments, allegations of administrative corruption, and hyperbolic satire. This standard view, how-
ever, insufficiently accounts for the ways in which the Sedition Act presented Republicans with a unique challenge. It also fails to illustrate the sophisticated political tactics employed by Republican journalists to reshape public opinion at this time.

Through their coverage of the Act, printers not only reported on public affairs, but also participated in politics themselves. Between the passage of the Sedition Act and the election of Thomas Jefferson, Republican printers deliberately provoked their own prosecutions, using their trials as platforms to expose Federalist abuses. They framed these experiences with a common rhetorical language, portraying and labeling themselves as martyrs to the cause of liberty. Moreover, printers took pride in inciting Federalist condemnation, interpreting such attention as evidence of their pure republican commitments. As such, by pairing this strategy of martyrdom with constitutional and satirical argument, they created a press strategy that proved successful and swayed popular opinion across the fledgling republic.

The foundations of this rhetoric were laid in 1798, when printers Benjamin Franklin Bache, John Daly Burk, and Matthew Lyon publicized their trials to defy Federalist prosecutors and elicit popular sympathy. The idea reached its fullest form during the Presidential campaign of 1800, when James Thomson Callender, William Duane, and Thomas Cooper deliberately provoked their own sedition proceedings to aid the Jeffersonian cause. By tracing a history of their public engagement, this paper hopes to further elucidate the period’s political culture and methods of “political combat.”

To understand the political strategy of Republican printers, it is important to understand the role of the press in early national America. Pennsylvania Judge Alexander Addison once observed, “Give to any set of men the command of the press, and you give them the command of the country, for you give them the command of public opinion, which commands every thing.” For a party to win elections, it first needed to influence the press.

This explains the vitriolic nature of early inter-newspaper disputes. The Federal Gazette was not exaggerating when it declared a “Newspaper War!!” against a host of Republican papers, including the Aurora, the Recorder, the Bee, and the Oracle. Regarding the editor of the Aurora, the Gazette declared, “No sooner had this Chief of Anarchy given the signal for attack… than to work went all his Understrappers in the different parts of the United States.” Partisan printers assumed the worst about their rivals, tending to accuse them of collusion or conspiracy.

In fact, Federalist printers had accused their rivals of “sedition” as early as 1792, equating opposition to the policies of the federal government with opposition to the government itself. Republicans, in turn, made light of these accusations. Between May and July 1798, the Aurora ran a series of advertisements by Daniel Isaac Eaton, a bookseller in London who boasted that he was “Six Times Tried for Sedition” in Europe. This advertisement, placed prominently in the premier Republican journal, reveals how its Republican audience understood the word “sedition.”
The writers and audience of the “papers of sedition” were not intimidated by Federalist accusations but instead took pride in them. To be accused of sedition was to draw the ire of tyrants, and only a true Republican could accomplish such a task. This attitude underlay the appeal of what would eventually become the strategy of political martyrdom.

This conviction was tested when sedition became a federal crime. Amid fears of a war with France, Congress and the Adams administration passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798. The text of the Sedition Act provided that if “any persons shall unlawfully combine or conspire together, with intent to oppose any measure or measures of the United States… they shall be deemed guilty of a high misdemeanor.” Another section of the law added clarity to this pronouncement, forbidding citizens to “write, print, utter, or publish… any false, scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States… with attempt to defame the said government” or bring it into “contempt or disrepute.”

When the Aurora first got wind of the Sedition Act, its response foreshadowed the general outline of the Republican strategy. By publishing the text of the law alongside the First Amendment, the paper implied that the Act violated not only the Constitution but also central republican values. In response to the apparent hostility of the Sedition Act to the nation’s growing Irish population, the Aurora went so far as to suggest that Irish immigrants might need to look abroad for “a place where [their] love of liberty [would] not be deemed a crime.” Perhaps, one correspondent mused, they ought to “start a colony in Africa.”

Writers’ criticisms of the Sedition Act varied significantly in tone. Some, like in a 1798 issue of the Time Piece, were aggressive: “Tar and Feathers, to all those who attack the freedom of the press. May the man who first suggested the proposed sedition bill, be the only sufferer under it.” Others assumed a lighter, more humorous style. One issue of the Aurora reported: “[T]here was a long and warm debate whether thinking could be called Sedition… Republicans you can think a little longer!!!” This ability to poke fun at the Sedition Act is consistent with the Republican conviction that “sedition,” as the Federalist press used the term, was a badge of honor.

The first victim and Republican martyr of the sedition trials was Benjamin Bache, the editor of the Aurora. On June 16, 1798, the Aurora printed a classified state paper—a letter from the French Foreign Minister to an American diplomat—two days before Congress received a copy. The document was used to suggest that, contrary to the assertions of the Federalist press, France did not seek war with the United States. Immediately after its publication, the Gazette of the United States accused Bache of conspiring with the French government. How else, it argued, could the editor have received such an important document? Moreover, even after Bache was found innocent on this count, authorities soon charged him with the more abstract offense of “libeling the President & the Executive Government, in a manner tending to excite sedition, and opposition to the laws.” Because the Sedition Act was still making its way through Congress, this charge was brought under English common law.

Upon news of the upcoming trial, the Aurora was steadfast in its defense of Bache. The June
27 issue declared, “The Editor... pledges himself that prosecution, no more than persecution, shall cause him to abandon what he considers the cause of truth and republicanism, which he will support... while life remains.” Subsequent issues of the newspaper would publish constitutional critiques of the sedition proceedings, with fellow Republican papers contributing to this effort.

Bache added his distinctive voice to the fray with a popular pamphlet, Truth will out! In it, he wrote that “he [had] be honoured with a greater portion of persecution from the [Federalist] faction, than had before fallen to his share for all his labour.” This language illustrates how Bache, like Daniel Eaton, associated Federalist ire with effective opposition to tyranny. The paper’s rhetoric suggested that accusations of sedition should be viewed as marks of pride by Republican readers. The pamphlet also took a more direct swing at Bache’s opponents. Regarding two Federalist Congressmen, it declared, “If they have a sense of honor left, they will feel... their silence, while it deprives the Editor of plenary justice can only disgrace themselves.”

This language of honor tapped into the “politics of character” that shaped contemporary political discourse. In this regard, Freeman observes, “Dishonor a man, and you could destroy his political career; dishonor enough of your opponents, and you could topple their cause.” By putting himself on the ‘high ground’ of honor, Bache implied that both the Federalists and their much-vaunted Sedition Act could not be trusted. Other Republican editors would emulate this tactic in the coming months, and this language of honor would soon be embedded in the rhetoric of political martyrdom.

The principal effect of the government’s prosecution of Bache was an increase in the influence of the Aurora. Although Bache passed away before his trial, his image lived on as a symbol of resistance to Federalist rule. A column in the Boston Chronicle, published two months after Bache’s death, recounted an imaginary debate between the late editor and a prominent Federalist journalist, Gazette of the United States editor John Fenno. There, even beyond the grave, Bache could proudly declare, “[D]o you think that persecution was likely to stop the thoughts and pen of a free American?”

Memorial tributes to Bache portrayed him as a martyr. A November issue of the Aurora, now under the leadership of William Duane, included the following: “I mourn with you for the death of our good friend Bache—he was too good a man to be tortured with the Sedition Law—God saw it in that light, and took him to himself.” Even though Bache’s death had nothing to do with his sedition trial—its true cause was yellow fever—it was nonetheless remembered as a sacrifice for republican ideas; in the view of the general public, Bache had died for the sake of political principle, consecrating the cause of Republican printers in the process.

John Daly Burk, the editor of the New York Time Piece, had a similar story. Accused of publishing “seditious and libelous” utterances against the President, Burk was formally tried for defamatory libel under the common law. This time again, Republican papers took care of their own; just as the Time Piece wrote in favor of Bache, so too did the Aurora write in support of Burk. On July 10, 1798, the latter declared that the indictment was proof of how “Mr. Burk, ha[d] not lived in
vain; he [was] dangerous to a few wicked partizans, who wish[ed] him put out of the way; but
[wanted] the courage to meet him as a gentleman.”

Burk too issued a confident defense of his conduct. On July 17, he apologized that the liberty of the press “betray[ed] some vexation… but sincerely hope[d] that the prosecution of printers for libels will never put a stop to it.” The Time Piece, more so than its fellow Republican papers, also published thorough constitutional arguments on the sedition proceedings. Some of these arguments took up an entire broadsheet, an unusually large space among contemporary newspapers.

Whereas the Aurora benefited, at least rhetorically, from Bache’s prosecution, the sedition proceedings against Burk caused a major setback for the Time Piece. On July 16, the Commercial Advertiser reported that “[t]he two Editors of the Time Piece, it seems have had a squabble.” After Burk wrote a “most violent invective against the President,” his co-editor Dr. James Smith argued that it went “too far and would even work a forfeiture of their recognizance.” He did not want to publish such an aggressive piece, lest he face prosecution under the Sedition Law. As such, on July 20, Smith published an advertisement in the Time Piece resigning his post and stating, “The subscribers to the Time Piece are desired not to pay… any sums of Money due for that paper beyond the 13th of June.” Prompted largely by Smith’s departure, the Time Piece soon folded for financial reasons.

This intra-editor dispute reveals the presence of very real debate within Republican circles about how to best respond to the Sedition Act. The public relations strategy of Burke and Bache—not to mention those of Callender, Duane, and Cooper in 1800—was controversial, and their messaging was much debated and carefully crafted in response to a sensitive political problem.

This debate had high stakes, as the odds for Republican papers were increasingly grim. By August 1798, an impartial observer might have argued that the Federalist strategy of sedition trials was succeeding. Bache was dead. Burk had fled arrest and was hiding in Virginia. It appeared that the Federalist-leaning New York Daily Advertiser finally had grounds to “rejoice in the prospect of unanimity.”

The case of Congressmen Matthew Lyon—the first printer to describe himself as a “martyr”—served to reverse Republican fortunes entirely, becoming an important moment in the formation of Republicans’ public relations strategy. Lyon was an Irish-born Republican who based his 1798 re-election campaign on attacking Adams’ use of executive power. After his conviction under the Sedition Act on October 9, the presiding judge endeavored to make an example of Lyon and sentenced him to four months in jail with a $1000 fine. Because the Congressman failed to win a majority in the general election, he had to compete in a runoff from behind bars.

Lyon’s principal campaign organ was his self-run newspaper, The Scourge of Aristocracy and the Repository of Political Truths. Although the paper published its fair share of constitutional arguments against the Sedition Act, it also devoted considerable attention to characterizing Lyon as a martyr to the Republican cause. In one issue, Lyon describes how his jailer initially denied
him access to a pen and paper, threatening the Congressman with a “chain on the floor” should he protest. This lent additional weight to Lyon’s confession, “I never thought myself fit for a martyr, but I bear what they put upon me with a degree of cheerfulness, in hopes the people of the U. States will profit by the lesson.”"49 Two months later, he published a letter he received from Senator Steven Mason, which read, “every considerate man shudders at the danger with which civil liberty is threatened, and considers you as a martyr in its cause.”50 These appear to be the first time that a Republican printer was explicitly labeled a martyr. The idea, however, would catch on quickly.51

Beyond the Scourge, other Republican papers leaped to Lyon’s defense. The Aurora declared that Lyon “had the honour of being the first victim” of the Sedition Law and added, “the ancients were wont to bestow particular honour on the first citizen who suffered in resisting tyranny.”52 The Aurora and the Virginia Argus also republished the details of Lyon’s trial, demonstrating how a Federalist judge manipulated the jury selection process to remove all Republican votes.53

As a result of these efforts, Lyon won his reelection by a landslide, winning 4,476 votes over his opponent’s 2,444.54 This was 994 votes more than Lyon had won in the general election, and most of them probably came from former Federalists.55 It appeared, then, that Lyon’s rhetorical association with martyrdom was a grand success.

Nonetheless, Federalists persisted with the sedition trials. Some of these were local in scope. Whereas Bache and Lyon attracted Federalist attention for their influence on national politics, itinerant Republican organizer David Brown’s only offense was raising a liberty pole against the sedition law.56 Many trials bordered on the frivolous. In November 1798, the Virginia Argus published the following tale:

President Adams was passing through this town, on his way to the eastward: Luther Baldwin happened to be coming towards John Burnet’s dram-shop: a person that was there said to Luther, there goes the President, and they are firing at his a--: Luther, a little merry, replies, that he did not care if they fired through his a--: For this he has fallen sacrifice thro’ the means of three of four tyrants of this town.57

Although Baldwin can hardly be called an intellectual champion of Republicanism, the Argus still depicted him as a “sacrifice” to “tyrants.” Other Republican papers also took up the cause, warning “Beware of the Sedition Law!”, accusing Baldwin’s prosecutors of tyranny, and sarcastically concluding, “Here’s Liberty for you!” In this way, Baldwin’s story was told through the lens of rhetorical martyrdom.58

The trial of Abijah Adams, the editor of the Independent Chronicle, is useful as a measure of the public mood. After his indictment for seditious libel, Adams followed in Burk’s footsteps by publishing four extensive defenses of his conduct.59 Quite strikingly, Adams noted in his own work, “Few people… hesitate to admit that [my] prosecution may already have contributed to weaken the very cause it was expected to assist.”60 Contemporary printers understood that the Sedition Act
was failing at its mission; rather than promoting unanimity, it was providing ammunition against Federalist rule.

In describing the content of this ammunition, Charles Holt, the editor of the New London Bee, proved especially articulate. On April 12, 1800, Holt was sentenced to three-months in jail for violating the Sedition Act. Upon his release, he wrote the following column under the pseudonym Nathan Sleek: “Oh no good comes from those trials for sedition!; punishment only hardens printers, and pleases the fellows, for they come out of jail holding their heads higher than if they had never been persecuted. Finally, they assume the appearance of innocent men who have suffered wrongly.”

Here, Holt speaks firsthand from his own experience participating in rhetorical martyrdom. Imprisonment changed the social status of Republican printers; it not only increased their reputations—as shown in the trials of Bache and Lyon—but also put them on a moral high ground. Their innocence awarded them additional credibility in critiquing Federalist policy.

Federalist writers and politicians were oblivious to this phenomenon. On March 12, 1800, the Philadelphia Gazette declared, “three Foreign Emissaries… under the Chief Juggler [Thomas Jefferson] have at length obtained the entire management of the Jacobin puppets [the Republican press].” They have divided the nation into three segments, with “Callender tak[ing] the southern, Duane the eastern, and the Cooper… the whole of the Jacobin interest in the western country.”

Implied in this report was a blueprint for a new Federalist strategy; as the election of 1800 drew closer, it became increasingly clear that Federalist leaders needed to silence these printers in order to maintain popular support and secure victory.

Callender, a contributor to the Aurora and an independent pamphleteer, posed the greatest threat by the writers to Federalist interests. Having made a name for himself with his History of 1796—which focused on Alexander Hamilton’s extramarital affair with Maria Reynolds in 1792—he approached the Sedition Act with a confidence that bordered on arrogance.

In a letter to Duane, he suggested that the two deliberately prompt their own prosecutions:

Let us, by one grand effort, snatch our country from that bottomless vortex of corruption and perdition which yawn[s] before us. The more violence, the more prosecutions from the treasury, so much the better. Those of yourself and Cooper will be of service. You know the old ecclesiastical observation, that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.

Here, the rhetoric of martyrdom is made explicit: The best way to combat Federalist “corruption” was to show people, through “more violence” and “more prosecutions,” the “blood of the martyrs.” Only then would one have the “seed of the church”—in other words, the foundations for Republican government and the electoral victory of Thomas Jefferson.

Michael Durey, a biographer of Callender, takes this argument a step further. He argues that Jefferson and Madison were the true masterminds of the plan, as shown by their correspondence on their need to fan “the flame of public opinion.” Regardless of whether this is correct, it is clear
that either Callender or Jefferson drew inspiration from the experiences of earlier partisan martyrs. Bache and Lyon paved the way for the more deliberate rhetoric of Callender.

Ultimately, Callender was put on trial in June 1800 and sentenced to nine months in jail.67 Behind bars, he maintained his criticisms of the Federalist establishment, charging that if his critics were to “print a volume per day against [him], they should not hinder the publication of a single syllable, which [he thought] fit for the perusal of [his] fellow citizens.”68 Like Lyon, he placed particular emphasis on the fact that he was imprisoned, dating most of his pieces from “Richmond Jail.”69 He also took pride in being the focus of Federalist ire, “feared as [he was] hated by the robbers of the nation.”70

While behind bars Callendar wrote a number of works and articles, including a sequel to his popular pamphlet, The Prospect Before Us. In addition to a brief constitutional argument against the Sedition Act, the Prospect II accused the Adams administration of fraud and “official blunder.”71 It also connected these debates to the “approaching election” with the hope that “public indignation shall overtake and overwhelm the [Federalists] in their race of infamy.”72 Hence Callendar’s writings in jail reveal how both he and other printers used the rhetoric of martyrdom, not only to attack the Sedition Act as a piece of legislation, but also to actively campaign for Thomas Jefferson.

William Duane, the new editor of the Aurora, followed closely in Bache’s footsteps. Arrested for seditious libel on July 30, 1799, he cleared his name, only to find himself indicted again in early 1800 for contempt of the Senate.73 His specific offense was a criticism of the Senate’s Ross Bill, which proposed an overhaul of the Electoral College system and which the Aurora called a precursor to a Federalist coup d’état.74

Unlike his fellow editors, Duane was tried not in a court but instead in front of a Senate panel. Moreover, although the Senate allowed him to have counsel, the body restricted the types of arguments the counsel could make. For example, Duane could not dispute the Senate’s jurisdiction, only the facts at hand.75 In other words, there were only two arguments that could exonerate him: he had to either convince the Senate that the Act was corrupt or deny that he had control of the Aurora. Both tasks proved practically impossible to achieve and thereby rigged the trial against Duane from the outset.

As a result, when Duane invited Thomas Cooper and Alexander Dallas to serve as his counsel, they declined to participate.76 Cooper, in fact, published his refusal to do so in the Aurora, causing a stir that was soon reprinted in other Republican newspapers. Writing, “I will not degrade myself by submitting to appear before the Senate with their gag in my mouth,” he disputed the very legitimacy and honor of the Federalist Congress.77

To Duane’s contemporaries, it appeared that Cooper’s comment was not spontaneous. As the Columbian Centinel, a Federalist paper, reported, “It is very evident from the phraseology and sentiment of these epistles, [that] they were the effect of a preconcerted arrangement.”78 Duane and Cooper staged the dispute over counsel in a conscious effect to draw attention to the sedition trial and the injustice of Federalist prosecution.
As it happens, Duane and Cooper went so far as to coordinate their plans with the “Chief Juggler” himself, Thomas Jefferson. In a letter to Jefferson, Cooper recounts how he met with Duane and Dallas to discuss “the most expedient method of proceeding on [their] side,” including blunt discussion of the likely abusive Federalist response. Noting the possibility that “the request to be heard by Counsel should be refused,” Cooper added that this would be an ideal outcome. Abuses would only lend more fodder to the rhetoric of martyrdom.

By the trial’s end, Duane had drastically elevated his notoriety and social status, marrying the widow of Benjamin Bache in June 1800, “an enormous step up socially for a man who had married his childhood sweetheart” back in Ireland. This outcome further illustrates how opposing the federal government and participating in rhetorical martyrdom could improve one’s reputation within Republican circles. Rhetorical martyrdom not only benefited the Republican cause, but also individual Republicans.

Cooper, despite a similar boost to his reputation, did not fare quite as well. Arrested for seditious libel on April 9, he was sentenced to six months in prison on April 24. There, however, he had the opportunity to write Cooper’s Trial, an account of his proceedings explicitly designed to malign his Federalist prosecutors and the Sedition Act itself.

Reading Cooper’s Trial, it is clear that Cooper transformed his own experience into a show trial; with the full acknowledgement that he was bound to lose, he undertook measures designed to publicize his case. The best example of this was his attempt to subpoena President Adams. When this — predictably — failed, Cooper gained the opportunity to paint Adams as a tyrant in print, writing that he had “examined… the Constitution of the United States, to discover if any privilege of exemption from this [subpoena] process was given to the President by that Constitution [and] could find none.” Cooper’s work also adapted some elements of Callender’s rhetoric. Throughout Cooper’s Trial, he reminded readers of his imprisonment, dating his work from the “Prison of Philadelphia.”

During his sentence, rumors began to circulate that Adams might pardon Cooper. In turn, the editor rejected such a possibility in the Aurora, writing that he refused to serve as “the voluntary cats-paw of electioneering clemency.” One year later and in a similar vein, Cooper would write that he had “the honour of being sentenced for exposing some few among the errors of a weak, a wicked, and a vindictive administration.” These comments not only questioned the honor of the Adams administration, but also revealed Cooper’s attitude towards his imprisonment. The printer accepted his nine months in jail as a consequence of his principles and a weapon against Federalist tyranny. This willingness to stay in jail rather than aid the Federalist cause constituted one of the period’s most striking examples of rhetorical martyrdom.

By September of 1800, the national mood had shifted in favor of the Republicans, and it was clear that a newfound distrust of the Sedition Act was partly to blame. Justice Jeremiah Chase, a Federalist supporter of President Adams, attributed the surge in Republican popularity to three factors: the Alien and Sedition Acts, Adams’ support for a provisional army, and Adams’ alleged
monarchism. After the election, both Adams and Jefferson attributed the outcome to the role of press. Modern historians tend to agree with this diagnosis. In this sense, it appears that the Republican press strategy—shaped in part by the rhetorical creation of martyrdom—was a grand success.

Looking back, it is worth asking why this language of martyrdom was effective—why did it appeal to a contemporary audience? The traditional idea of a martyr was one who chose death over renouncing their Christian faith, and a list of toasts in the Hartford American Mercury highlights the religious connotations of the term. On July 4, 1800, one man toasted to “Thomas Cooper, the Northumberland martyr of liberty.” The next raised a glass to “Holt, Haswel, Callender… and all the republican printers throughout the Union – May they never become proselytes to that political heresy which makes it sinful to speak the truth.” This use of the term ‘martyr’ analogized Christian faith to a republican concern for liberty, compared the Christians’ deaths to the printers’ imprisonment, and connected the Federalists’ illiberalism to “heresy,” the sin of turning against God. It is easy to imagine how a predominately Christian audience would have found that metaphor compelling.

The rhetoric of martyrdom also complemented the printers’ constitutional arguments. As Daniels observes, Republicans in this period had an odd relationship with the U.S. Constitution; although they were staunch critics of the federal system in the early 1790s, they embraced the First Amendment after the passage of the Sedition Act. This move towards “constitutional orthodoxy” was part of a broader appeal to “a more conservative public mood.” Faced with charges of Jacobinism, Republicans wanted to turn the tables on their Federalist accusers, charging them with holding dangerous, innovative ideas, such as supporting political repression.

This explains, in part, the pairing of constitutional argument with rhetorical martyrdom. By labeling each other as martyrs, the Republicans cast themselves as defenders of an established institution. The rhetoric implied that whereas the printers had the practical ends of furthering republicanism and protecting the Constitution, the Federalists were merely confrontational. In this rhetorical framework, the Federalists were the party of opposition and therefore saddled with the burden of proof in justifying their cause.

That being said, the most important aspect of rhetorical martyrdom operated on a simpler, almost visceral level. By describing their tangible suffering under Federalist rule, the Republicans gave life to their more abstract constitutional arguments. It was one thing to accuse Federalists of supporting tyrannical laws but another entirely to show the execution of those laws and how they were, in fact, tyrannical. As such, Republicans had an incentive, not only to document existing Federalist abuses, but also to prompt additional persecution, as Callender, Duane and Cooper did in 1800.

The rhetoric of martyrdom, like most elements of the Republican press strategy, lay at the intersection of philosophical-constitutional debate and more purely emotional appeals. It was not
HONORABLE DISOBEDIENCE

a stand-alone theory, capable of clear demarcation, but rather a more fluid language, interwoven with a variety of arguments and employed in a variety of contexts. Nonetheless, the rhetoric played an inextricable role in Republicans’ broader strategy, shaping not only how the printers covered the trials, but also how they evaluated their own political roles. In this way, it appears that Jefferson owed his presidential victory, at least in part, to America’s partisan martyrs.

NOTES

1. Lyon was indicted on October 5, 1798, four days after publishing his first issue of the Scourge. James Morton Smith argues that Lyon would have faced prosecution even if he had never published the newspaper, as some of his earlier comments were sufficient to justify his sentencing under the Sedition Act. James Morton Smith, Freedom’s Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 229.


3. Ibid.

4. Pennsylvania Aurora General Advertiser, February 8, 1799. For a description of this crowd, see Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 244.

5. Smith obverses that John Marshall was the only prominent Federalist to oppose the Act. Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 155.


7. John C. Miller notes in Crisis in Freedom that “[b]esides Bache’s Aurora, Greenleaf’s Argus, and Adams’s Independent Chronicle, there were few Republican newspapers with more than local influence” in 1798. Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, April 26, 1798; John C. Miller, Crisis in Freedom: The Alien and Sedition Acts (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 29.


9. As Miller remarks, “[i]f the purpose of the Sedition Act had been to multiply Republican newspapers and to increase vastly their circulation, it could be accounted an unqualified success. In 1798, there were less than a score of Republican newspapers out of a total of two hundred; by 1800, there were at least fifty newspapers supporting Jefferson.” Miller, Crisis in Freedom, 221-222.


15. It should be said that both Smith and Stewart have referred to these printers as “martyrs.” However, neither argues that their martyrdom was deliberate, suggests that it might have been coordinated, or explains why it might have been effective. Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 212; Stewart, The Opposition Press, 476.


18. Federal Gazette, March 1, 1798.

19. On October 13, 1792, the Federal Gazette criticized those “who willfully or ignorantly misrepresent the design of a law and of those who framed it are busily at work to kindle sedition—when they deny facts that all the world may see with their eyes, and tell [people]… that the laws of Congress are oppressive and ruinous... for their doctrines cannot be admitted without justifying the resistance of the laws.” Federal Gazette, October 13, 1792. For another early example, see Federal Gazette, October 20, 1792.

20. Aurora General Advertiser, March 29, 1798; June 6, 1798; July 3, 1798; July 18, 1798; July 20, 1798.


22. For the full text of the acts, see Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 441–442.

23. Aurora General Advertiser, June 6, 1798.

24. Ibid., June 8, 1798. In brief, Republican printers employed several kinds of constitutional arguments against the Sedition Act: They addressed the meanings of “speech” and “speaking” in the First
Amendment; explained that “by the words ‘freedom of the press’ is meant a total exemption of the press from legislative control”; argued that a free press was “an attribute essential” to representative government; suggested parallels between the Sedition Act and British tyranny; and compared the Act to the French Arretes. Ibid., December 7, 1798; ibid., February 8, 1799; Independent Chronicle, January 7, 1799; Time Piece, August 8, 1798; Aurora, June 20, 1798. For more on Republican constitutional arguments, see fn. 13.

25. Time Piece, July 12, 1798. For other early emblematic pieces of satire on the Sedition Act, see Aurora, June 8, 1798; Time Piece, June 18, 1798; Independent Chronicle, June 18, 1798; Time Piece, June 20, 1798; Time Piece, July 11, 1798.

26. Aurora General Advertiser, June 18, 1798.

27. Smith, Freedom's Fetters, 193; Aurora General Advertiser, June 16, 1798.


29. Not surprisingly, Republican papers noted this distinctly English prosecution. Aurora, June 27, 1798.

30. Aurora General Advertiser, June 27, 1798.


32. Benjamin Franklin Bache, Truth will out: the foul charges of the Tories against the editor of the Aurora, repelled by positive proof and plain truth, and his base calumniators put to shame (Unknown, 1798), 3.

33. Ibid., 12.

34. Freeman, “Explaining the Unexplainable,” 23.

35. Miller observes that the spotlight benefited the finances of the Aurora. The paper had been losing money for a while, but the prosecution of Bache prompted some to pay back subscriptions to the newspaper. Miller, Crisis in Freedom, 96.

36. Centinel of Liberty, October 23, 1798 (republishing from the Boston Chronicle.) See also Aurora, November 1, 1798.

37. Aurora, November 9, 1798.

38. This memorial was reprinted in The Farmer's Register, November 21, 1798; Herald of Liberty, November 26, 1798; Scourge of Aristocracy, October 15, 1798. For more on the circumstances of Bache's death, see Smith, Freedom's Fetters, 203.

39. Burk was arrested on July 7, 1798. Ibid., 211.

40. Aurora, July 10, 1798.

41. Time Piece, July 17, 1798.

42. Time Piece, July 13, 1798; July 23, 1798.

43. The Commercial Advertiser, a Federalist newspaper, elaborated on the squabble between Burk and Smith with some likely fanciful details. It wrote, “Burk on this called Smith a paltry old woman… [and] gnashed his teeth with rage.” In response, “Smith laid hold of a handful of types all covered with ink and threw them dab into Burk's face—Burk returned the compliment with the same ammunition.” New York Commercial Advertiser, July 16, 1798.

44. Time Piece, July 20, 1798.

45. Smith, Freedom's Fetters, 216.

46. Ibid., 176.

47. Scourge of Aristocracy, October 15, 1798.

48. Independent Chronicle, October 17, 1798; Aurora, November 9, 1798; Smith, Freedom's Fetters, 226, 235.

49. The Scourge of Aristocracy and the Repository of Political Truths, October 15, 1798.

50. Scourge of Aristocracy, December 15, 1798.
51. A search in the America’s Historical Newspapers database cross-listed the word “martyr” with the names of the major Republican printers, e.g. search text “Bache AND martyr.” Another search cross-listed the word “martyr” with the names of the major Republican newspapers, e.g. search text “Aurora AND martyr.” Neither produced any ‘matches’ before the above citations, fn. 55 and fn. 56.

52. Aurora, November 1, 1798.
53. Aurora, November 9, 1798; Virginia Argus, November 10, 1798.
55. The Scourge reports that Lyon won 3482 votes in the general election and “aristocratic” candidates shared another 3503. If the designation “aristocratic” candidates refers to Federalists—which is the best explanation for the use of the term—it means that Lyon won over a significant number of Federalist votes between the general election and the runoff. Scourge of Aristocracy, October 15, 1798.

56. Not surprisingly, it appears that Brown’s story drew less media attention than those of Bache and Lyon. Columbia Centinel, November 7, 1798; November 10, 1798 (quoted in Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 259-261).

57. Virginia Argus, November 1, 1798.
58. This account was reprinted verbatim in the following papers. In this way, it provides a clear example of the coordination between the Republican presses. The Newark Centinel of Freedom, November 6, 1798; Aurora General Advertiser, November, 8, 1798; Independent Chronicle, November 12, 1798; Stewart’s Kentucky Herald, December 11, 1798. The Centinel of Freedom ran another piece in support of Baldwin on December, 18, 1798.

59. Independent Chronicle, April 11, 1799; April 15, 1799; April 18, 1799; April 29, 1799.
60. Independent Chronicle, April 29, 1799.
61. Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 379-383. For more on Holt, see Pasley, Tyranny of Printers, 132-152.
63. Philadelphia Gazette, March 12, 1800.
64. Durey, With the Hammer of Truth, 102.
65. James Thomson Callender to William Duane, April 27, 1800 (quoted in Durey, With the Hammer of Truth, 126.)

66. The two communicated these sentiments both to Callender and between each other. Durey, With the Hammer of Truth, 130.

68. Virginia Argus, October 3, 1800.
69. Ibid.; James Thomson Callender, The Prospect Before Us II (Richmond: M. Jones; S. Pleasants; and T. Field, 1800).

70. Virginia Argus, October 3, 1800.
72. Ibid., iv.
73. For an account of this arrest, see Phillips, William Duane, 81-83. For more on Duane’s trial, see Pasley, Tyranny of Printers, 176-195; Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 277-305.

74. Phillips describes this bill as follows: “The Constitution provided that the votes [for President] be counted by the Speaker of the House, but Senator James Ross of Pennsylvania proposed the substitution of a special committee [instead]… Its secret decision would be final… The committee would have six members, each from the Senate and the House, plus the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.” The Federalists would have had a clear majority and the thought was that they could use to rig the election. Ibid., 84-85. For more on the Ross Bill, see Dunn, Jefferson’s Second Revolution, 171-174.

75. Duane’s strongest defense would have been that the Senate is not a judicial body and therefore
was acting beyond its jurisdiction. Phillips, William Duane, 87.

76. William Duane to Thomas Jefferson, March 24, 1800; William Duane to Thomas Jefferson, March 27, 1800.

77. Columbian Centinel, April 5, 1800 (publishing from the Aurora); Steward Kentucky Herald, March 3, 1800.

78. Columbian Centinel, April 5, 1800.


80. Phillips, William Duane, 84.

81. Smith argues that Cooper’s refusal to serve as Duane’s counsel and comment regarding the “gag in [his] mouth” were the prime bases of this indictment. Smith, Freedom’s Fetters, 316.

82. Malone argues that, “The effort to have the president subpoenaed the Federalists also regarded as a device to delay procedure.” But this explanation is implausible. Cooper did not want to delay his trial, but to make it as public as possible for the sake of promoting the Jeffersonian cause. Thomas Cooper, Account of the Trial of Thomas Cooper, of Northumberland: on a Charge of Libel Against the President of the United States (Philadelphia: J. Bioren, 1800), 9. Malone, Thomas Cooper, 122.

83. Ibid., Preface. He did the same in letters to the Aurora. See Aurora, May, 17, 1800.

84. Cooper added that he was also awaiting a “satisfactory acknowledgement from Mr. Adams of the impropriety of his conduct” towards Cooper and his friend, Dr. Joseph Priestly. Aurora, May, 17, 1800.


86. Centinel of Liberty, September 16, 1800.

87. See fn. 11. In a letter to James Monroe, Jefferson remarked that Duane’s Aurora had “unquestionable effect in the revolution produced in the public mind, which arrested the rapid march of our government towards monarchy.” Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, October 19, 1823.


90. Hartford American Mercury, July 17, 1800.


92. For pairings of constitutional argument with elements of rhetorical martyrdom, see fn. 33, 55, 56, 64, 78, 88.

93. For Republicans’ sympathetic appeals within the rhetoric of martyrdom, see fn. 43, 55, 56, 63, 75, 82, 83, 88, 89.

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**TITLE IMAGE**

While General George Pickett’s Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg and General George Armstrong Custer’s Last Stand at the Battle of Little Bighorn have left indelible marks on the remembrance of the American Civil War, history has long overlooked these two generals’ wives. Confined to the private sphere, Victorian society expected women to adhere to virtues of true womanhood and the cult of domesticity including beauty, sacrifice, selflessness, and devotion to their husbands. Here, Sarah Sadlier, Stanford University ’16, illustrates how LaSalle Pickett and Elizabeth “Libbie” Custer embarked on careers as professional widows in the public sphere after their husbands’ deaths. Delving into newspaper coverage on Pickett and Custer, Sadlier suggests Pickett and Custer maintained their pledge of devotion to their husbands by carefully curating their husbands’ legacies, while also obtaining national acclaim for themselves.
After his “Last Stand” at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the celebrity of Gen. George Armstrong Custer was unrivaled. By the turn of the century, the American public heralded him as the icon of an ideal, heroic, and self-sacrificing soldier.¹ A 1910 commemoration of his battlefield exploits illustrates his near-mythic status:

Mrs. Custer now stepped forward, and pulling the cord of the flag which draped the statue, unveiled the figure of her husband. As Old Glory slipped down from the figures of man and horse, a band struck up the strains of “The Star Spangled Banner,” and the First battery, Field artillery, M. N. G. fired a 17 gun salute. The great crowd cheered and cheered again and the tears trickled down the face of the aged widow of the man who had devoted his young manhood to saving his country, and had died fighting its savage enemies on the Little Big Horn.²

The pageantry of this scene reveals less about Gen. Custer than it does about his widow, Elizabeth “Libbie” Custer. In this orchestrated public event, Libbie Custer alone bore the responsibility of unveiling the carefully crafted, larger-than-life statue of her husband. Upon seeing his figure immortalized in stone, the gentle woman wept for her lost beloved, and the audience recognized her devotion to this American patriot through her trickling tears. It was not his sacrifice at the Little Bighorn that was the focal point on that day—it was hers.

In the years following her husband’s death in 1876, Libbie Custer astutely shaped a career from her societal position as a “professional widow.” She earned her financial independence by lecturing and writing about romanticized representations of her marriage and her husband’s accomplishments.³ Custer’s efforts were by no means unique; in fact, she represented just one of many “professional widows” produced by the Civil War.⁴ Other than Custer, the most prominent professional widow of the age was LaSalle Corbell Pickett.⁵ While Custer perpetuated her husband’s legacy as an Indian fighter and the North’s “Boy General” during the Civil War, Pickett endeavored to elevate her husband, Confederate Gen. George Pickett, and his 1863 charge at Gettysburg as ultimate symbols of the Lost Cause—a literary and intellectual movement aimed at reconciling white Confederate society with the loss of the antebellum South.⁶ Both widows aspired to make their deceased husbands sectional, if not national, heroes; thus, each possessed an incentive to embellish, and in some cases falsify, her experiences in the North, West, and South, as well as the significance of her husband, in order to rivet her readers and appeal to a patriotic American audience.⁷

Custer and Pickett’s efforts to promote the legacies of their husbands stemmed from a desire not only for familial fame and financial independence, but also for societal recognition as the epitome of Victorian womanhood. During the post-Civil War era, women bore responsibility for their homes while men controlled that which lay beyond the domestic domain. Women occupied the private sphere while men engaged in the public one. According to the “cult of domesticity” that codified this arrangement, women derived fulfillment from caring for children and husbands. As
exemplified by Custer and Pickett, this devotion did not end in death. After their husbands’ untimely
demises, they made this dedication to their domesticity a public affair by protecting and nurturing
their husband’s legacies. Libbie Custer and LaSalle Pickett’s entry into the public sphere was not con-
tentious since they fit into an existing model of Victorian femininity wherein the woman possessed
the qualities of domesticity, purity, beauty, intellect, demureness, submissiveness, dependence, and
selflessness. By incorporating these desired character elements into their public presentations of
their private lives with their husbands, Custer and Pickett exerted a powerful influence on American
society and earned the respect of the American public in the process. In other words, they derived
their financial and popular success as professional widows from their ability to embody the virtues
of the cult of domesticity; paradoxically, projecting themselves as dependent and devoted wives also
earned them a great degree of independence.

This study intends to narrow the historiographical gap that omits, or at least underestimates,
the importance of professional widows as purveyors of Victorian virtue and as apt crafters of their
husbands’ legacies. Other than biographies, no scholarship specifically addresses the repercussions
of professional widows’ actions in post-Civil War society. Few historians have acknowledged both
Custer and Pickett as professional widows, and these scholars have not comprehensively compared
the pair’s strategies for success in this career path, nor have they analyzed professional widows as a
larger phenomenon of the postwar era. Jennifer Bach’s “Acts of Remembrance: Mary Todd Lincoln
and Her Husband’s Memory” touches on this theme, as it briefly contrasts Lincoln’s widowhood
with Custer and Pickett’s widowhood. Bach correctly contends that Lincoln “enjoyed less popular-
ity than Elizabeth Custer and LaSalle Pickett, who, unlike Mary Lincoln, had cultivated images as
submissive, charming wives,” but her coverage of these military widows is less than a page in length.
Thus the topic merits further investigation.

Other sources that pertain to Civil War widows offer even less analysis of the cultivation of
“true womanhood” than Bach; however, they are useful for constructing the historical context of
professional widowhood after the Civil War. For instance, Bleser and Carol Gordon’s Intimate Strate-
gies of the Civil War: Military Commanders and Their Wives discusses the duties of military spouses
during and after the Civil War. In contrast, Robert Mills Wilson and Carl Clair’s They Also Served:
Wives of Civil War Generals covers the lives of women who would go on to become professional
widows, but this work primarily concentrates on the Civil War years. Meanwhile, They Also Served
sheds light on the Civil War’s role in changing gender roles, as well as the shifting private and public
identity of these wives. Still, these works do not adequately examine the historical significance of
professional widowhood.

To remedy this oversight, this study presents a portrait of professional widowhood in the
American North, West, and South using Custer and Pickett as quintessential examples of this type
of career woman. While Custer and Pickett’s publications demonstrate their value as dutiful house-
wives, contemporary newspapers best exhibit the respect and attention bestowed upon Pickett and
Custer for their modeling of Victorian womanhood. Thus, I will embark on an abbreviated analysis
SARAH SADLIER

SARAH SADLIER

75

of newspapers that cover the geographic range of the United States in order to analyze the use of “true womanhood” and Victorian values in Custer and Pickett’s public presentations of their husbands’ legacies and its reception by the American public.

The careers of Custer and Pickett began after the death of their husbands, when both women began giving lectures, attending commemoration ceremonies, and writing publications with the intent of immortalizing their husbands. The Western trilogy that Custer produced — “Boots and Saddles” (1885), Tenting on the Plains (1887), and Following the Guidon (1890) — portrayed her frontier experiences between 1865 and 1876 with her husband. With these works and other publications, she molded a profession out of writing reflections on her life with the famous and valiant Indian-fighter Custer; therefore, her public profile relied heavily upon the stainlessness of her husband’s image. Her principal purpose became defending her deceased spouse’s legacy. Newspapers across the country recognized her dedication to this cause, noting, “Mrs. Custer has written several books on her husband’s work and western camp life, her whole time since his tragic death having been devoted to literature.”

Similarly, Pickett began her professional widowhood around the same time as Custer. Although the Battle of Gettysburg transpired in July of 1863, Pickett’s husband did not perish until 1875. She began lecturing about his battle feats in the 1880s and published her first book in 1899, titled Pickett and His Men. Following the book’s success, Pickett toured America and composed editorials for Cosmopolitan, McClure’s and several other newspapers. Both women were prolific, impassioned writers and effective in appealing to their audiences, thanks especially to their endurance. Custer and Pickett outlived nearly all of their husbands’ contemporary critics. Custer was born in 1842, one year before Pickett, and Custer lived to be eighty-nine while Pickett reached the age of eighty-seven. Longevity alone cannot explain the efficacy of Custer and Pickett’s mythologizing or their financial and societal success as professional widows. In fact, it was Custer and Pickett’s rhetorical appeals to the Cult of Domesticity and their embodiment of “true womanhood” that gained them the nation’s respect and trust for their husbands, and by extension, recognition for the roles they played as dutiful, Victorian wives.

In an era in which the value of women was determined by their work in the household of their husbands, Custer and Pickett emphasized the primacy of the home in their past marriages, hoping that their audience would respond positively to their domesticity. Custer was the most successful in this undertaking. By 1907, one of the tourist sites in Michigan was “the site of the old ‘Custer home,’ the home where General Custer married Libbie, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Judge Bacon, and the only home the chivalrous and brilliant warrior ever knew.” This elevation of the home to the status of a monument was not only due to the General’s fame, but also due to the sanctity of the couple’s home in its domesticity and preservation of the Custer marriage. Their cabin in the West also served as a symbol of Custer’s domesticity. According to a female North Dakotan columnist, Custer, “like this clinging vine among the stalwart trees, adorned and blessed his frontier home — that thus, among the names of our army pioneers, whose achieve-
ments made possible the settlement of North Dakota, may be preserved the beautiful name of our beloved Elizabeth Custer." The language employed in this tribute to Custer implies that she was a saint-like figure, whose very female presence blessed the abode of the General. This columnist, along with other contemporary women, adored Custer, putting her on a pedestal for her bravery in accompanying her husband to the West and fulfilling her duties in the private sphere as the archetype of the devoted wife.

While her domestic virtues were perhaps Custer's greatest values in the eyes of her audience, in the descriptions of her and her home, it was evident that “true womanhood” was associated not only with a woman's physical place but also with the woman's physical attributes. One of the most valued Victorian qualities was unblemished beauty, and without dispute, both Custer and Pickett were beautiful women. Newspapers seldom referenced either widow without mentioning her elegance. For instance, when Custer was a young girl, she possessed a small figure, which “was slim erect, her features delicate and regular, her hair a rich, glossy brown, her eyes gray-blue framed in long dark lashes. Her greatest beauty however was a clear, transparent dazzlingly white skin and cheeks always bright with color.” By the time Custer turned sixty-one, her shining beauty had not dimmed. According to an Indiana newspaper, she was “still a young looking woman, and without knowing her exact age, one must consider that she was old enough to marry during the civil war.”

Likewise, newspaper columnists admired Pickett's refined, aged beauty as much as Custer's, if not more so. A Florida newspaper praised the seventy-year-old Pickett as a “gifted southern lady” who was “tall and exquisitely graceful, a woman of perfect taste, inherent sunshine, an exponent of ideal Southern refinement. She has beautiful waving, iron gray hair, swept back from a broad forehead, heavy eyebrows over large hazel eyes that sparkle and flash and laugh.” Custer and Pickett's attractiveness, elegance, and beauty, unsullied by the scourges of time, were a boon to their professional widowhood activities. The frequent allusions to their beauty suggest that their feminine appearance increased their value as representatives of Victorian womanhood. They were “true women” to an even greater extent because they retained their femininity as they aged, as well as their ebullient personalities. Pickett retained “many of the charms and attractive qualities of her youth,” and age “dealt leniently with her and [did] not [rob] her of that sweet and sunny temperament and delightfully pleasing personality for which the belles of Dixie were and are so justly famous.” Pickett represented the best of Southern feminine society, and this played to her advantage. She and her Northern counterpart had to cautiously use their feminine charms to woo their audience to their respective causes.

Custer and Pickett both toed a careful line between displaying their intellect and appearing humble. After a Pickett speech in North Carolina, one observer commended the widow, who was “full of brilliant conversation, quick wit, scintillating sunshine and good will for all creation, she is so undemonstrative and gentle that one must watch to realize that she is as much an effective leader today as her husband was half a century ago.” While the characteristics required for Pickett's husband to be a leader were manliness and strength, the prerequisite for Pickett was her feminized con-
veyance of knowledge. This appreciation for Pickett’s simultaneously intellectual and gentle nature was not an isolated incident. When “the distinguished” Pickett spoke, accounts frequently mention that she was “greeted with hearty applause.” To Through its applause, her audience expressed their admiration for her “easy, graceful and fluent manner,” and how the “lady’s voice is musical and well modulated…to those who were fortunate enough to procure seats near the speaker, the speech was a rare treat indeed.”

Pickett lectured with a seemingly unparalleled ability for a woman of her generation. Yet, she was also a proper Victorian lady. Although she could not be heard in the back of the hall, she did not raise her voice, instead keeping it soft and “well modulated.” This voice was made more feminine by its musicality, contributing to Pickett’s credentials as a role model for Victorian womanhood. Much like her counterpart, Custer frequently employed “gentleness” in her lectures, of which there were many. Her biographer lauded Custer for her use of “the gentle art” of knowing “her status, and how to use it.” By appealing to their audience’s appreciation of the Victorian virtue of gentleness, Custer and Pickett were able to appropriately and effectively disseminate their intellectual arguments made on behalf of their husbands’ legacies. They utilized their status as widows to enter the public sphere, but they did not make themselves mannish or assertive in the process. Instead, they remained demure females, dutiful to their husbands.

While Custer and Pickett paraded their femininity, they portrayed their paramours as the paragon of “manliness,” implying that their husbands deserved the dutiful affections that their submissive widows bestowed upon them. Despite their husbands’ passing, Custer and Pickett’s identities remained tied to their husbands’ military legacies. The stories that they wrote of their husbands were, in the words of Pickett, “an appeal to the manly character of men.” In almost every case, newspapers introduced both women as the widow of their more famous generals, preserving the status of the man as the patriarch, even in death. For instance, Custer was often “Mrs. Libbie Custer, wife of the famous General,” or “the wife of that great cavalry leader.” In all of her literary works, LaSalle Pickett used the name Mrs. General George E. Pickett beneath her own. However, this submission to their husbands’ names was not disempowering in a Victorian sense. To connect themselves forever with their husbands’ names was to endow their identities with elevated importance. Furthermore, to execute their marital duty to care for their husbands, Custer and Pickett assumed ownership over their husbands’ histories. By illustrating that they were so intimately associated with their men, they gained the authority and ability to protect their histories in a manner no other biographer could. Moreover, as Victorian wives, they had a responsibility to submit to and serve their husbands. According to a New York acquaintance of Custer, the professional widow was “as much admired as her illustrious husband” because before he died, she “was nearly always by his side.” This adherence to the tenets of the cult of domesticity thus won the approval of the public across the nation.

It was not simply Custer and Pickett’s observance of Victorian submissiveness and domesticity that earned the approbation of the American public; rather, it was their sacrifices for the country. During this period, the greatest loss for a Victorian woman was that of her provider and
her beloved. One female columnist noted, “It is time that some tribute was paid to the women who give more than life … There are statues erected to Gen. Custer: but Elizabeth Custer, his wife, is an infinitely greater figure,” for it was Custer who gave her young husband to her country. Gen. Custer’s sacrifice lasted a few days, but her sacrifice lasted through the long years of a long life, yet she made it bravely. Thousands of women are making the same sacrifice today [in 1917]. These women would not have their men stay at home if they could. They want their men to go, and they are sending them away with smiling lips. Their service should be recognized by something besides a pension. Money cannot buy the splendid spirit of patriotism that the women of American are showing.

Therefore, the loss of Custer’s spouse and her efforts on his behalf were more noble than even the most glorious battle death, at least in the eyes of the women observing the careers of these professional widows. Custer and Pickett were sympathetic figures, as many families had lost their own men during the Civil War. Yet, it was not just the loss of her husband that made Custer a hero in the opinion of this columnist, it was her patriotism in supporting her husband through his military campaigns. This selflessness and sacrifice, which Custer shared in her writings and lectures, was inspiring to proponents of the cult of domesticity, but it also invested widows with an increased national importance. While the men at Gettysburg gave their “last measure of devotion” on the battlefield, women’s devotion to their country was the sacrifice of their men, around whom their entire world revolved. The pain of devoted widows was more immense, more patriotic than those who died in the midst of battle because the pain of their loss was interminable. A reviewer of Pickett’s *The Bugles of Gettysburg*, observed that one of the most forceful messages of the work was the “love story that goes through the book… which entails a pledge of devotion most thoroughly kept.” After their husbands’ deaths, Custer and Pickett maintained this “pledge of devotion” by not remarrying, but their true devotion lay in their remembrance of their husbands’ bodily sacrifices through literature and personal histories. These “intensely interesting” and “wonderful stor[ies] of true patriotism,” were made publically possible by Custer and Pickett’s sacrifice.

Custer and Pickett appropriated the history of entire battles as their own personal histories. Both women exerted control over commemoration ceremonies to establish their authority over any stories relating to their husbands’ heroism and patriotism. For instance, Custer declined a 1913 invitation to Fort Rice, North Dakota, where there was a commemoration for the Battle of the Little Bighorn, because Sioux Indians were to attend. Custer despised the notion of her husband’s enemies being remembered in any positive light, and in her eyes, their very presence undermined the sacrifices of her Indian-fighter husband. In the preface to one of her books on Custer, her editor noted that “her facts are indisputable and at first hand,” and Custer exploited her claim to these “facts” to make herself the guardian who would protect his memory. As a biographical authority
on her husband’s life, Custer was particularly concerned with the manner in which her husband was portrayed, and because of her status as his widow, commemorators bowed to her wishes, removing an entire statue of the General after Custer expressed her displeasure with its representation of her husband. The orchestrated ceremony held in 1910 mentioned in the exposition of this paper was just one of the ways in which Custer figured prominently in shaping public perception of her husband’s memory. Similarly, in 1899, Pickett also ensured that “the memory of Gettysburg” was commemorated as “the sacred relic of her great tragedy,” meaning that “its glory and its terror be not desecrated to make a holiday.” Instead of hosting the raucous celebration of the battle’s anniversary, the planners deferred to Pickett’s wishes because like Custer, she held singular influence as the widow of the honored man. She alone knew him in the intimate, private sphere, and as the wife of a military hero, she was to be respected. In doing so, they made themselves authorities that could command and control public history and shape the American perception of their husbands.

With this newfound power, Custer and Pickett sought to aid the American public in the postwar reconciliation process, hoping to simultaneously widen the base of their husbands’ supporters. Both women attempted to bridge the divide between the North and South. An article from the nation’s capital named Pickett a most “distinguished woman, who for years has been lecturing throughout the country in an effort to bring together the North and South.” A reviewer praised Pickett’s The Bugles of Gettysburg as a book for both sides of the Civil War, “an appeal to the common humanity of all as manifested in the bravery of battle.” On the Fourth of July in 1887, Pickett attended a reunion of Union and Confederate soldiers where she was the “the center of attraction on the field.” She acted in a maternal manner, passing out daises and clover heads to veterans. The Southern soldiers fawned over her, providing twenty-five cents each for travel expenses.

Nevertheless, Pickett was not the only widow who earned the adoration of soldiers. Custer received multiple letters from Confederate men and women who admired her husband’s bravery. One wife of a Confederate general wrote an epic poem in 1876 for Gen. Custer, but she dedicated it to Libbie Custer, noting, “You have given voice to a sadness which was in all their hearts and have fervently impressed the general sorrow. It is a favorable sign of reforming friendship between the North and the South that the widow of a brave officer in the Confederate Army should lament so passionately the death of one who gained renown in the army of the Union.” As a result, Custer expressed her respect for the bravery of Confederate troops during the Civil War, and she hoped that this mutual understanding of her husband’s sacrifice would “prove the higher and better nature of men when soldiers can admire the gallantry and heroism of each other, even when differing in sentiment and belief.” Ultimately, both widows attempted to assure the American public that bravery was a universally venerated trait, and regardless of their husbands’ beliefs during the Civil War, their men deserved to be remembered as heroes. Reconciliation between the North and South became advantageous to their designs to popularize their husbands’ legacies; yet, as illustrated by the admiration that Custer and Pickett received, they also popularized themselves in the process.

Custer and Pickett’s fame spanned the United States, suggesting their success in securing
eminent reputations, historiographical influence, and immense fortune through their nationwide efforts. Their substantial newspaper presence as professional widows hints at the scope of their celebrity. Nearly every state's newspapers spread word of their travels or advertisements for their books and lectures, yet not a single article addressed the women pejoratively. In fact, the overwhelming support and admiration for Custer and Pickett's public efforts suggests that their status as widows of “true womanhood” won them protected public positions, which shielded them from their critics. These critics would have found it difficult to attack the reputation of women who publicly embodied the foremost values of Victorian society and sacrificed their manly husbands for their country. Without a counter-narrative to their mythologized histories of their husbands, Custer and Pickett were free to profit from their professional widowhood activities and pursue careers that affected both female and male circles. Both widows sought to maintain connection with other women: while Pickett’s name frequently graced the society pages of Washington, D.C. and further south for her work with the Daughters of the Confederacy, Custer’s appeared to have a greater effect on society in the Northeast, where she sought to establish a home for “aged literary women.” With their fame, Custer and Pickett could serve as examples to literary women and the Daughters of the Confederacy and empower these East Coast female groups to gain influence by making their private identities public.

Custer and Pickett’s renown even extended to the territories, suggesting that their growing autonomy, made possible by their increasing celebrity and fortune, did not detract from the praise they received for being dutiful widows. The adulation of these widows in Western newspapers began as early as 1877, when a Montana captain built a steamboat named the “Libby Custer.” Similarly, LaSalle Pickett lectures, such as the “Women at Gettysburg,” earned her exaltation in Trans-Mississippi newspapers. Articles chronicling her visits to the West often noted her positive reception by “large” audiences, which were “completely captivated by her interesting readings.” When Pickett traveled with Vaudeville to places like Iowa and Kansas and Ohio, she lectured on the battle of Gettysburg, educating settlers about her “gallant” husband. Instead of negatively impacting her reputation as a virtuous, respectful East Coast woman, Pickett’s forays into these types of public performances brought her greater esteem because she positioned herself as a dutiful wife to an exemplar of manhood. Pickett was not the only one who possessed mobility: in the Southwest, an 1898 Phoenix newspaper carried word of Custer’s return to “her Georgia home from a trip to Egypt, where she was engaged in gathering materials for another book.” This article not only demonstrates that Custer was popular in the Arizona territory but also that she possessed great financial resources as a result of her new career, which enabled her to engage in self-directed, independent travel. Pickett’s work also left the continent, as The Bugles of Gettysburg sold in Honolulu while Libbie Custer sojourned to the Philippines and wrote about the virtues of imperialism, comparing island natives to those her husband fought in the West. Thus, the power of their professional widowhood could be felt beyond the contiguous United States. In an era in which women were creatures of the home, the social, economic, and political independence that Custer
and Pickett achieved was nothing if not truly astounding. Still, their legacy lies not in their personal triumphs in achieving independence, but in the creation of narratives of heroic men and dutiful, Victorian wives.

Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg and Custer’s Last Stand at the Little Bighorn arguably remain the most memorable military actions of 19th century America. General Pickett and General Custer attained mythic status, but what of their widows who so dutifully cultivated their legacies? Libbie Custer and LaSalle Pickett garnered a reward perhaps better than personal immortalization—they received recognition via their roles as dutiful wives. By elevating their husbands, they elevated themselves. If their husbands’ service to their country merited such veneration, so too did their service to their husbands. Through the incorporation of Victorian private sphere virtues—such as domesticity, beauty, intellect, sacrifice, selflessness and above all else, devotion—into their public careers as professional widows, Libbie Custer and LaSalle.

**NOTES**

1. At the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, George A. Custer was a lieutenant colonel. During the Civil War, he had been promoted to the temporary rank (brevet) of major general, but he reverted back to his lower rank after the war’s conclusion in 1865. I use the “Gen. Custer” in this essay because that is how Libbie Custer referred to her husband in her writings.


4. The wives of Civil War generals often constituted the majority of this special class of women. However, prominent exceptions to this rule include the widow of Jefferson Davis and Mary Todd Lincoln. See Jennifer L. Bach, “Acts of Remembrance: Mary Todd Lincoln and her Husband’s Memory,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 47.


8. The term “professional widow” originated in Lesley J. Gordon, *General George E. Pickett in Life in Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 238. Since its publication, a few authors have used it in biographical works about widows, such as Mary Anna Jackson, the widow of “Stonewall

9. In David Hardin, After the War: The Lives and Images of Major Civil War Figures After the Shooting Stopped (USA: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), the author notes that Custer was “married for twelve years, and then she would be a professional widow for fifty-seven more, her eagle’s wings spread across the corpse and reputation of her golden boy” (245). Robert Wooster also calls Custer a professional widow in “Indian Wars of the Trans-Mississippi West,” A Companion to American Military History, ed. James C. Bradford, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 127; Gene Smith also uses the term once in Mounted Warriors: From Alexander the Great and Cromwell to Stuart, Sheridan and Custer (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 236.


20. “Mrs. Pickett’s Speech,” 8.

21. Ibid.


27. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
36. “A Romance of Gettysburg.”
39. This assessment is based on my abbreviated survey of American newspapers between the 1870s and 1920s. The only states or territories that did not mention either Custer or Pickett were Nevada and Alaska.
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PRIMARY SOURCES

SECONDARY SOURCES


LIBBIE AND LASALLE

TITLE IMAGE


In 1927, water gushed out of the Mississippi River’s levees, destroying nearly 100,000 homes and displacing close to 637,000 people in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. In one of the largest fund raising drives in American history to date, the Red Cross, along with Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, deliberately concealed the abuses that black refugees suffered in Red Cross camps in order to obtain donations for the rebuilding effort. In a thorough investigation of newspaper coverage, Myles McMurchy, Dartmouth College ‘16, highlights the battle between leading black activists who sought to expose these abuses and the media campaign led by Hoover and the Red Cross that characterized the rebuilding effort as one of racial harmony and triumphant success. This event played a pivotal role not only in race relations, but also in Hoover’s catapult into the presidency one year later.
The 1927 Mississippi River Flood was not only one of America’s greatest natural disasters, but also one of our greatest cover-ups. The relief efforts that followed the flood, directed by then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover in conjunction with the Red Cross, aimed not only to recover the South’s 16.5 million acres of inundated land but also to further Hoover’s reputation as a national hero deserving of presidential candidacy. Hoover first garnered the title of ‘Great Humanitarian’ as a result of his efforts to provide food to refugees after World War I; in 1927, his new role as head of flood relief offered a renewed chance to impress Americans by publicly rescuing those in need. Thus, at the center of his relief program was a mass media campaign highlighting his devotion to the 600,000 Americans who had been displaced by the flood. The Red Cross, too, depended upon a positive portrayal of its relief efforts, which relied on public donations.

To this end, it was imperative that media outlets deny the shortcomings of Hoover’s Red Cross relief: in many southern areas, local Red Cross leaders held black refugees in what amounted to little more than slavery. Black refugees were forced to perform the heavy labor that supported the camps and were barred from escaping by National Guard members, who oversaw their work with guns at the ready. Whereas white refugees were placed in indoor facilities, black refugees were detained in outdoor camps on the levee and systematically denied adequate food and shelter, with little promise of their homes ever being rebuilt.

Yet the abuses suffered in these camps did not go entirely unnoticed. In the weeks following the flood, northern blacks launched a campaign to expose Hoover and the Red Cross. Leaders such as anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells, NAACP chief Walter White, and investigative journalist J. Winston Harrington wrote to the nation’s leading black newspaper, the Chicago Defender, with their own reports of Red Cross relief camps—particularly that of Greenville, Mississippi, in which 90 percent of refugees were black. Greenville’s relief camp spawned both the worst of the Red Cross’ abuses and the greatest of Hoover’s media tactics. Even while black flood refugees in Greenville wrote clandestine letters to the Defender detailing the Red Cross’ malpractice, journalists with The New York Times portrayed the flood through stories about hard-working refugees, benevolent Red Cross leaders, and renewed kinship between the South and the North.

In the end, Hoover’s media campaign preserved his humanitarian legacy by hiding Red Cross racism from the nation at large. Despite the Chicago Defender’s relentless efforts to bring attention to the Red Cross abuses, the paper ultimately did little to tarnish Hoover’s reputation. Nonetheless, the newspaper was instrumental in promoting unity between Delta blacks and their Chicago advocates, which encouraged southern blacks’ movement out of the Republican Party and out of the South altogether. In Greenville, Mississippi, the Great Flood was a turning point in race relations; in this southern city that held tight to its sharecropping economy, it took a natural disaster to dismantle the relationship between the planters and their sharecroppers. By revealing that in 1927 slavery remained a threat in Greenville, the Chicago Defender’s exposés encouraged black residents to leave the South for northern cities such as Chicago. The flood campaign also encouraged northern reformers to peer into southern race relations and unite in mass protest—a move...
that indeed brought racial issues into the public eye a few years later during the 1931 Scottsboro Boys trial.

“CALL ON NEWSPAPERS”: THE INITIAL RESPONSE OF HOOVER AND THE RED CROSS (APRIL 1927)

The Great Flood was a natural disaster of unprecedented proportions that left counties in seven states flooded up to thirty feet high for as long as four months.¹ It began in 1926 when extremely heavy rains throughout the Mississippi River’s central basin caused the river’s tributaries to swell. In April 1927, the river burst its levees in over 145 places, flooding a region the size of New England. In flooded counties, nearly 30 percent of agricultural acreage was destroyed and an estimated 165,000 livestock drowned.² Almost 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed.³ Almost all of the 637,000 dislocated were from Arkansas, Mississippi, or Louisiana.⁴ In Greenville, Mississippi—an agricultural town located directly on the river—over 13,000 refugees were swept from their homes.

Almost 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed.⁵ After floodwaters broke the levee at Mound Landing, Mississippi on April 21, newspapers across the country published the testimonies of devastated refugees. One Greenville resident, describing the “waters rushing in from all directions,” noted that Greenville’s black population was particularly affected: “We couldn’t warn [Negroes] when we telephoned all subscribers yesterday. They had no telephones. Others thought the levee would hold. We don’t know what’s happened to them. Negroes are coming out of the lowlands in boatloads.”⁶ The “lowlands” referred to the areas of the Delta where black neighborhoods were historically situated, neighborhoods directly in the path of the Mississippi River’s regular flooding. As these reports reveal, black residents were the first to be displaced by the flood and also the least able to respond.

The disaster was well beyond the means of local relief agencies, as Mississippi’s governor Dennis Murphree expressed to President Coolidge: “Unprecedented floods have created a national emergency…this territory will be water covered one to twenty feet in twenty four hours, contains population 150,000…beyond capacity local and state agencies to relief and control.”⁷ In response, Coolidge acknowledged the magnitude of the crisis but shrank from direct federal intervention. “The government is giving such aid as lies within its powers,” he explained on April 22, “but the burden of caring for the homeless rests upon the agency designated by government charter to provide relief in disaster: the American National Red Cross.”⁸

To oversee the Red Cross’ efforts, Coolidge appointed Herbert Hoover as chair of a quasi-governmental commission consisting of five Cabinet members and American National Red Cross vice-chairman James Fieser. That afternoon, Hoover met with the team to quickly sketch a national response. The Coast Guard, Army, and Navy would round up refugees and move them to local Red Cross camps. Each Red Cross chapter would be put in charge of relief in its area, with particular power over all state resources granted to the chairmen of each chapter—in Greenville, this was
William Alexander Percy, a powerful planter’s son who was also a well-known writer. Hoover and Fieser also set to work creating camps in those areas where no Red Cross chapter existed.

The set up and maintenance of these Red Cross camps required two ingredients: labor and money. “The National Red Cross will bear the expense,” Herbert Hoover instructed camp officials, “but we are depending upon your citizens to undertake the work and do its supervision on a voluntary basis.” In the Mississippi Delta, the obvious source of cheap labor was black refugees, who already supplied 95 percent of the region’s plantation labor. Black refugees were forced to haul supplies off ships and into relief camps, trudging for miles through knee-deep water and mud. Blacks alone repaired broken levees and cleaned polluted cities. When their work ended, they returned to the “colored camps,” in which they were forced to sleep on wet ground and eat with their bare hands. While whites enjoyed cooked meat and canned peaches, black refugees received bread and molasses. They lived alongside thousands of livestock, while white refugees often stayed in downtown department stores and hotels. While conditions varied among camps according to local resources and leadership, all Red Cross relief camps were segregated by race. This allowed for white refugees to receive new clothes first, and for white children to receive healthcare before black children. More importantly, segregating camps enabled Red Cross leaders to easily oversee their black refugee labor force.

Though Will Percy had initially intended to evacuate all of Greenville’s refugees, plantation owners insisted that the black refugees stay. Planters could not risk losing their agricultural workforce by sending black tenants to other relief camps, such as the one in nearby Vicksburg. “If the government takes our Negroes and our mules, they might as well just take our land,” said the head of one camp. Mississippian planters made numerous requests to Governor Murphree and to Adjutant General Curtis T. Green of the National Guard, calling for black refugees to “be guarded against a possible influx of labor agents who would seize this opportunity to take the refugees to the North and give them work.”

Will Percy acquiesced and set up camp in Greenville. “We are urging all white women and children to leave the city,” he announced. “White men may also go... There is need for Negro men to stay and establish the camp.” Black women and children stayed behind with male family members. All supplies for the roughly 50,000 people stranded in Washington County would be shipped to Greenville and unloaded by black workers. While black refugees did the work, the food and supplies they unloaded were delivered elsewhere, regardless of their own immediate need. Herbert Hoover approved the plan, impressing upon one local Red Cross leader that national relief agencies “are depending upon your citizens to undertake the work and do its supervision on a voluntary basis.” Black refugees were ordered by whites they did not know to repair their homes and plantations; one sign in Greenville read, “Refugee labor is free to all white men.” The National Guard, who patrolled the black camp with rifles and bayonets, practically imprisoning the refugees, kept Greenville’s system of peonage in place. Those who tried to avoid work or sneak out were beaten or killed.
Thus, Red Cross leaders like Will Percy found what seemed to be a convenient source of free labor without needing to look beyond their own camps. The reality that black refugees were being physically detained and denied access to food and shelter was not publicly disclosed. However, acquiring the funds necessary to support the camps did require a national media campaign espoused by Hoover, who had at this point become the public face of flood relief. President Coolidge’s hands-off approach appropriated no federal funds for the Red Cross, but instead depended upon the goodwill of the American public to donate the necessary five million dollars. In the first weeks of their work, Hoover worked with the Red Cross to prepare media strategies. “In the course of the next few weeks many representatives of magazines, newspapers, and feature syndicate companies will be in the flood area,” Hoover wrote to Red Cross personnel. “Give these writers every possible cooperation.” In Washington, Fieser separately ordered that it was “Essential [to] push all publicity angles next week or ten days for sake of financial drive.”

On April 24, the vice-chairman of Boston’s Red Cross called on northern newspapers to arouse public sympathy.

Relief in any disaster depends almost wholly upon the dramatic nature of the picture the public gets of the need. Something about a flood fails to take hold of the public imagination with the force of a more swiftly acting tragedy…lacking the vivid imaginative appeal of a tornado or an earthquake, the gradually rising flood waters have not yet touched the emotions of the whole people as have great disasters of other kinds.

The same day, The New York Times wrote, “Americans living outside of the submerged areas can have but little conception of the havoc made by the flood in river towns and the bottom lands.” These remarks acknowledged the disconnect between the flooded South and the distant North: Northerners did not, and could not, know exactly what was happening; their consciousness of Red Cross flood relief was necessarily constructed by the reports crafted by newspapers and radios. To encourage the public’s financial support, the Red Cross heralded its relief campaign throughout mainstream media. The Times stated Coolidge’s belief that “as always, the people will support the Red Cross in its humane task.” Coolidge lived up to his nickname of “Silent Cal” as he made few public statements about the natural disaster. As the president remained silent, Red Cross success stories championed their leader, Herbert Hoover. The flood problem on the Mississippi is “Being Solved,” boasted the Christian Science Monitor on April 25, and “Mr. Hoover is in Charge.”

In retrospect, it should come as no surprise that Hoover would pay close attention to media reports of the flood, given his unprecedentedly intimate relationship with the press during his presidency. On his first day in office in 1929, Hoover held a press conference for reporters promising a “new phase of press relations.” He asked the group to elect a committee comprised of journalists who could recommend improvements to the White House press conference. As President, Hoover declined to use a spokesperson, asking reporters to quote him directly. In his first 120 days in office,
he held more regular and frequent press conferences than any other President, before or since.\(^\text{18}\)
His belief in the power of the press was profound – as political theorists have noted, Hoover was the first president to systematically gauge public opinion by creating a quantifiable measurement of newspaper editorials.\(^\text{19}\) In 1930, his Administrative Assistant boasted,

> I personally scan daily analyses of editorial opinion covering 700 leading newspapers from every part of the country and representing every shade of opinion, and I also read many representative editorials selected from these papers. Quite the most striking impression received from this daily ‘finger on the pulse’ is the astonishing degree to which the President retains leadership of public opinion and confidence in the midst of the immense complexities and difficulties of the time.\(^\text{20}\)

Hoover’s meticulous press relations, evident in the above passage, had their roots in his calculated 1927 Red Cross media campaign—one of the largest funding drives in American history.\(^\text{21}\) From the moment that he took on the Red Cross project, his own potential presidency was at stake. Indeed, as Hoover had told his old friend Will Irwin in May of 1927, “I shall be the nominee, probably. It is nearly inevitable.”\(^\text{22}\) His top priority was to closely follow the press.

**“JIM CROW RELIEF CAMPS”: BLACK EXPOSÉS AND ROBERT MOTON’S APPOINTMENT (APRIL-JUNE 1927)**

Early reports emphasized the great difficulties facing Red Cross workers, as well as their great successes. On April 22 the Red Cross attempted to reach Greenville via riverboat “to take the [10,000] refugees to the camps at Vicksburg,” but wire and rail communication had been crippled as river front levees continued to inundate Washington County, leaving many refugees stranded in trees.\(^\text{23}\) To add to the difficulty, thousands of black refugees allegedly declined offers to go to Vicksburg, preferring “to remain on the ‘big levee,’ where their handful of belongings could be watched.”\(^\text{24}\) While some refugees may indeed have wished to stay, they did not really have a choice, as Percy ultimately forced thousands of blacks to remain on Greenville’s levee, even as whites were whisked away by ferry. While whites were relocated to second floors of offices or hotels, the National Guard kept some 13,000 black refugees on the levee.\(^\text{25}\) Some black refugees did indeed move to the Vicksburg camp, and the next day the *Times* celebrated their arrival, depicting “a mass of Negroes upon the embankment, waiting for the direction of the relief workers, quite willing to do as they were told and trustful that the ‘white folks’ would continue to provide their daily food.” The report described the black refugees as kind but clueless, who “knew only that they were fleeing from the hostile waters” and “had little to say of the conditions in Greenville other than that the water covered the city.”\(^\text{26}\)

Yet if newly arrived refugees had little to say about conditions in Greenville, a report pub-
lished later that week provided some clue as to the town's nervous state of affairs. “Stirred by sporadic looting of business houses by Negroes,” the town imposed a curfew on black refugees, and the National Guard in Greenville was “given orders to ‘shoot to hit’ unless summons to halt is obeyed, and to arrest all persons found on the streets after the curfew hour.” Five black refugees had been arrested for looting, and “National Guard authorities declare no mercy will be shown.” Still, the Times concluded that “conditions in the refugee camp and the town generally are satisfactory.”

In Greenville, a week after the flooding, approximately 4,000 whites remained on second floors of local buildings, while 13,000 black refugees lived on the levee, and another 5,000 were crowded into warehouses and oil mills.

Even in Southerners’ reports of racial harmony and goodwill in relief camps, there persisted an undercurrent of fear over the loss of their black agricultural workforce. This was a concern that planters had been facing for a decade, as southern blacks began migrating to northern industrial cities en masse after the First World War. The 1927 Mississippi River flood posed a new threat to the stability of the sharecropping system by displacing the already dissipating black workforce. Papers as foreign to the southern states as The Manchester Guardian described Red Cross efforts to “prevent any black sheep breaking away” among refugee laborers. To thwart the escape or rebellion of black refugees, Will Percy ordered 200 additional National Guard troops to Greenville on April 27.

If casual reports that the National Guard had been ordered to “shoot to hit” and “show no mercy” did not provoke public suspicion of mistreatment, J. Winston Harrington’s May 7 exposé in the Chicago Defender brought to light the “peonage” of Mississippi’s “Jim Crow relief camps.” In large print, the paper described “Refugees herded like cattle to stop escape from peonage,” forced to wear numbered tags on their shirt to ensure their easy identification. Harrington had been informed by Mr. Del Weber, a white Greenville resident who witnessed black refugees being detained. Harrington decried the presence of the National Guard, which earlier that week shot a black refugee from Cary, Mississippi “when he attempted to take food and clothing into a relief camp occupied by members of our Race.” A white worker declared that the death would be “a lesson for the rest of the Niggers.” As black refugees were being killed for taking food and clothing, white refugees in Greenville were “confined in downtown department stores and hotels, experiencing little or no suffering from the flood.” Harrington condemned the Red Cross camps as “worse treatment than our forefathers experienced before the signing of the emancipation proclamation.”

In addition, Harrington revealed that the Red Cross was misappropriating the donations that Defender readers sent on behalf of black refugees. “In many cases,” he wrote, “the food and clothing sent to the relief camps never reach the men and women of our Race. Heads of white relief camps confiscate the goods and distribute them.” The Defender thus inspired church and welfare organizations in Chicago to stage their own relief efforts to aid black refugees. By endorsing these independent relief missions led by Chicago charities, the Defender encouraged black readers to break away from Herbert Hoover’s Red Cross campaign, which failed in its duty to help all flood refugees. The paper had a vested interest in forging a link between black communities in the
North and the South: as the nation’s leading black newspaper, the Defender promulgated the Great Migration of southern blacks into northern industrial cities as early as 1915. Thus by 1927, the paper was poised to point out the problems facing blacks in the South and highlight the solidarity available in cities like Chicago.

That month, Walter White of the NAACP also reported on his visit to Greenville’s refugee camps. A passionate and prominent black journalist, White conducted an investigation at Greenville that threatened Hoover’s media agenda. Prominent social activists contacted Hoover in concern, including Jane Addams, who relayed “charges of race discrimination which are being rumored” and urged him to remedy the situation in his Red Cross camps. Fieser wired Hoover the following telegram: “Chicago Defender leading colored paper carries article concerning… Greenville… Chicago Tribune is interesting itself in article and asks for statement. Rush wire reply.” The need to silence Walter White and his peers at the Chicago Defender quickly became clear in Washington. Will Irwin, a journalist and friend of Hoover’s, described White as “a fanatic… literally the nigger in the woodpile and if anything can be done to placate or squelch him I think there will be no more trouble.” Irwin suggested that “perhaps if some of the big Negroes would communicate with him they might tone him down.” Such “big Negroes” referred to powerful black figures, such as those in the NAACP or Tuskegee Institute, and particularly black leaders in the Republican Party, in which blacks held sway in Northern cities such as Chicago.

Hoover promptly took action to curb the threat of black media. First, he contacted Henry Baker, the disaster relief director of the Red Cross, and ordered him to contact every Red Cross representative in the field in order to investigate the conditions of black refugees. “Any such action would be a negation of the spirit of the Red Cross,” Hoover said regarding accusations of refugee abuse, “and I do not believe it exists….See that no such activity exists….Send me a report at once.” He also contacted Walter White to personally dismiss his charges, stating, “I can say emphatically that I am sure that neither the Red Cross nor any other decent person would stand for unfair practices of the type you suggest.” Hoover did not want to acknowledge the race problem at Greenville any more than was necessary, in order to keep it hidden from the public. To achieve this, he followed Will Irwin’s advice and called the biggest of the “big Negroes” to placate the black community. On May 24th he contacted Robert Moton, principal administrator of Tuskegee Institute:

With a view to making certain the proper treatment of the colored people in the concentration camps of the flood district and with a view to inquire into any complaints, I would like you to advise me as to the appointment of a commission of representative colored citizens who can visit these camps and who can make investigation of any complaint or criticisms. Mr. Fieser who is the acting head of the Red Cross joins me in this request.

Hoover’s focus was to make the complaints and criticisms stop. Beyond this, he never actually addressed the atrocities occurring in his Red Cross camps. He hoped that with a team of black leaders
by his side to parrot his message of color-blind humanitarianism, whistleblowers like Walter White would fade away. And so, on May 28, he appointed Robert Moton to lead a newly created Colored Advisory Commission that would issue its own report on the conditions in Red Cross camps. Writers at the Chicago Defender seemed content with the creation of the Commission, claiming that their initial investigations into Greenville had “brought forth a storm of protest” and left Hoover “faced with certain unfavorable publicity.”

Herbert Hoover publicly asserted that flood relief remained successful and equitable. From New Orleans, Hoover “denounced a statement printed in the North that Negroes are being brutally treated in refugee camps as absolutely without foundation,” avowing that “they are being splendidly treated and cared for.” On May 29, the Times applauded Hoover’s creation of a “Board of Negroes” to “work with rehabilitation organizations for the relief of colored victims.” The image of black leaders supporting Hoover’s campaign successfully propagated his depiction as the ‘Great Humanitarian’ and turned the focus away from allegations of race discrimination. His goal of silencing criticisms by creating the Colored Advisory Commission seemed to have succeeded. This complimentary moment sparked dialogue about Hoover’s potential candidacy for President. The Boise Idaho Statesman proclaimed, “America is sold on the organizing and directing genius of Hoover…no wonder this man is persistently advanced as the logical man for the swivel chair behind the big desk in the White House!” A week later, The Oakland Tribune concurred, determining that “in personal fitness for the presidency there is no other American, even remotely, in Mr. Hoover’s class.”

It was particularly easy to champion Secretary Hoover, often photographed touring relief camps in knee-high boots, in contrast to Calvin Coolidge’s perceived inadequacy at dealing with the flood crisis. Coolidge’s failure to call a special session of Congress for federal aid was “embarrassing to the President,” given that by mid-May the Red Cross Relief Fund was deemed “certain to be inadequate.” Coolidge refused to so much as visit the flooded areas. During one visit to the relief camp in Little Rock, the Times reported, “only Mr. Hoover mentioned the President’s name. The Arkansans wanted to laud Mr. Hoover. They had made up their minds that he was going to get all of the honors, and he did.”

As Silent Cal left the Red Cross starved for funds, Hoover stepped up. A natural master of the press, Hoover asked for donations in a lengthy radio address to the American public. This was a prime moment to reflect on the successes of the Red Cross, thank Americans for their support, and assuage fears that refugees were being mistreated. Hoover described the flood problem in three stages: “the rescue stage, the stage of exile from homes, and the stage of return and reconstruction.” He asserted that the nation now was in the reconstruction stage—a term “used advisedly, because I should like to turn the implications of that term in the relations of the North to the South into a term of sympathy instead of a term of hate.” Hoover’s reimagining of national relations was not to come to fruition, however, as he did little to live up to this sympathetic ideology and allowed black refugees to suffer.

Central to the success of Hoover’s Red Cross campaign was rhetoric of interregional and
interracial unity. “We of the North have the duty to bind their wounds because they are of our own country,” Hoover reminded listeners, subsequently asking the “generous public” for two million dollars to keep reconstruction alive. He described the “lights and shades of the tragedy” – the lights being the Red Cross, an organization of “systematic leadership and human understanding” and the shades being the affected refugees, including “an elderly colored lady who spent a night in a tree” before being taken by the Red Cross. Upon her arrival at the camp, the woman was said to have remarked, “Go away, I don’t want no hot meal now, I don’t want no comfortable bed now, I just wants to sit and be grateful.” And this remark, said Hoover, expressed “the instantaneous sentiment of all the people coming out of the flood.”

Yet in Greenville, as William Percy’s regime grew more authoritarian and violent, the sentiment of black refugees was anything but grateful. In early June, Percy posted a public edict further restricting black refugees’ access to material relief. In seven points, he outlined his new rules. Among them, black women and children would not receive rations unless there was a man in their family, and black men would not receive rations unless they worked. In both instances, a white person had to certify that black refugees met these conditions before they could receive relief. J. Winston Harrington published Percy’s “work or starve order” in the Defender, alerting black readers that Greenville’s injustices were ongoing and that Hoover’s reassurances of equality were untrue, as “[Percy] has made it clear that discrimination and segregation will be carried to the fullest extent despite the fact that agencies throughout the country are endeavoring to see that all refugees are given an equal chance.” Indeed, African-American refugees felt anything but the sentiment of gratitude Hoover described in his May 29 radio address. In Greenville, a “near-riot” occurred when a black woman was thrown into jail for protesting her husband’s work order, and in Geismar, Louisiana, violence broke out when a 19-year-old black laborer was struck on the head with a gun for asking to rest. Only the arrival of national guardsmen prevented escalation.

But riots and violence were not the images that the press chose to associate with refugee labor. Hoover and the Red Cross recognized the Defender’s complaints about Percy’s work order but insisted on the nondiscriminatory nature of the relief camps. M.R. Reddy, executive secretary of the Chicago Red Cross, acknowledged that “tales of discrimination…have been sifting through to Chicago friends of Negro refugees,” but asserted that “the Red Cross is giving a substantial service to everyone, irrespective of color.” Reddy denied that Percy’s edict was out of line with Red Cross policy, stating that “with regards to the statement that Negro men in Greenville or their families will not be rationed unless the men join labor gangs, it has always been the policy of the Red Cross to refuse full rations to people who have jobs offered to them by which they could gain a livelihood for their families.” This ignored that Percy’s rule pertained only to black refugees, not all able-bodied men—a point the Chicago Defender later reported. On June 4, the same day that Harrington first exposed Percy’s “work or starve order,” the Washington Post highlighted that Greenville’s relief camp brought together “business man, planter, negro and convict [working] side by side.” Hoover also acknowledged refugee labor in his national radio address for Red Cross donations, praising the
“self-sufficiency” of the refugees, who “need loans, not assistance.” He was proud to tell American donors that “the work of the camps is done by the refugees themselves.”

Describing refugee laborers as self-sufficient and productive was a powerful rhetorical device. Most importantly, it negated the possibility of peonage; the noble image of laborers “gaining a livelihood for the families” was far from the reality of black refugees held at gunpoint to work for meager rations. It allowed mainstream media to turn a story of natural disaster and racial violence into one of rebirth and opportunity. “The trials which the flood brought to the Negro plantation worker in the rich delta lands of Mississippi, the Red Cross is trying to turn into blessings,” wrote The Christian Science Monitor, outlining a vision of reconstruction that would offer black workers economic opportunities. A. L. Shafer, state director of the Mississippi Red Cross, claimed landowners were canceling debts and “giving the Negroes a new start.” His vision for Mississippi’s reconstruction would “give Negroes a little stock, help them to raise crops for feeding…so they will not be so largely dependent on the merchants and plantation owners and have a little independence.” This envisioned plan would also alleviate planters’ ongoing fear of losing their laborers. “The Negroes are very migratory, and one of the great problems of the delta is the shifting of labor,” Shafer remarked. “But if they have pigs and chickens…they will think twice before going. It will make the Negro more contented, [and] will ultimately advance the interests of the plantation owners, as well.” Thus, mainstream media did frequently address black refugee labor, but only as it bolstered the interests of Hoover (by assuring Americans their donations aided “self-sufficient” laborers), of the Red Cross (by allegedly encouraging class conciliation and freeing indebted black laborers), and of southern planters (by keeping black tenants in a subservient position).

SEE ATTEMPTS TO HIDE FACTS: THE COLORED ADVISORY COMMISSION & THE CHICAGO DEFENDER (JUNE-JULY 1927)

Describing the flood as a modern-day Biblical Deluge allowed Hoover to craft enticing stories about what lay in store for southern blacks—stories he used to persuade Robert Moton to follow his commands. As Hoover’s official liaison between the Red Cross and the black community, he had to channel the messages that Hoover wanted to be heard. To win Moton’s favor, Hoover promised that should he become President the next year, and if the American people would support him enough, he would improve life for African-Americans, and “Moton and his people would play a role in his administration unprecedented in the nation’s history.” Hoover told Moton of a vision of economic and agricultural transformation for African-Americans, as had been espoused by Mississippi’s Red Cross director. His “land resettlement” plan would break up large southern plantations, replacing them with tens of thousands of small farms designed for blacks, financed through mortgages for purchasing twenty-acre farms, animals, and equipment. Hoover’s grand plan had the potential to transform the entire region.

Moton was thrilled by the possibility of lifting blacks out of poverty and improving their
status in the Delta. He became infatuated with Hoover’s relief campaign and hinted at its promises
to other black leaders. “I am not at liberty to give you details but you will hear about it soon,” he
mentioned at a meeting of the National Negro Business League. “The Red Cross fund will doubt-
less be the instrument for doing something on behalf of the Negro more significant than anything
which has happened since Emancipation.”57 At the request of Hoover and his colleagues, Moton
agreed to broadcast a radio appeal urging blacks to remain in the South. In this appeal, he insisted
that “whatever might be said to the contrary, the white man of the South loves the Negro. Many
who have gone north have not found conditions as they had expected…there is less reason now for
Negroes to leave the South than ever before.”58

As head of the Colored Advisory Commission, Robert Moton led his team of prominent
African-Americans in the first official survey of black welfare in Red Cross camps in early June.
Their report, presented to Hoover on June 14, disclosed that black refugees were beaten and forced
to work. Claude Barnett judged Greenville “the seat of what trouble there was.”59 But the full extent
of the Commission’s findings was never made public, as Hoover revised and sanitized the report
before its publication. Indeed, Moton had politely noted, “You may feel free to make any changes
or additions that may seem desirable to you.”60

The published report requested various reforms but addressed none of the camps’ major
abuses; its first two points advised that “recreational activities be established” in Greenville and that
“a screened structure with tables and seats be erected for the serving of food.” Regarding racial ineq-
uities, the plan only proposed improving only the clothing distribution system, since black refugees
often received clothes leftover from whites and “the distribution system [caused] a great amount
of confusion and unpleasantness.” As in his radio broadcast, Moton’s report also encouraged black
refugees to stay in their relief camps: he advised the Red Cross to employ “Negro industrial insur-
ce companies and Negro fraternal organizations to urge [black refugees] to remain in the camps
until their communities have been put into livable condition.”61 Because he wished to remain in
Hoover’s good graces in hopes of eventual “land resettlement,” Moton did little to “make certain as
to the proper treatment of colored folks in the concentration camps,” as Hoover had initially asked
of him.62

Those at the Chicago Defender saw through Moton’s vacuous report. Ida B. Wells wrote to
Hoover with concerns that conditions in Greenville were worse than reported; Hoover curtly re-
piled on June 4th,

I have appointed a committee of Colored leaders, under the chairmanship of Dr. Moton,
to make a complete investigation of conditions in all Colored camps in the flood area…the reports of these committees do not confirm the statements you mention. In case you desire further information in this connection, I would suggest that you address Dr. Moton direct.63
In one swoop, Hoover absolved himself of responsibility for whatever was happening in his relief camps, at least as far as race was concerned. With the reports of the Colored Advisory Committee as evidence that all was well, he was able to save face as he rejected Ms. Wells’ inquiry. In light of Hoover’s letter, Wells-Barnett decried black officials in the South as unable to “get the facts, or if they got them they would not dare publish them.”

Over the next few weeks, Wells and others at the Defender turned from exasperation to anger—particularly toward complacent African-Americans working for white southern leaders. “Blame ‘Uncle Tom’ ministers for the suffering among our people,” J. Winston Harrington asserted. “Ministers have been called together and told by the whites to instruct members of our Race of the necessity of assisting their white brethren to recover from the flood. They have also advised our people... not to leave for the North, since the South is the best place for ‘niggers.’”

On July 16, Ida B. Wells published a follow-up to her report on Hoover’s letter, in which she cynically described a recent conversation with “Claude Barnett of the Associated Negro Press [and] one of Mr. Hoover’s ‘Negro committee.’” Barnett had given Wells a copy of his Red Cross reports with “assurance the National Red Cross has been just and fair, ‘although local committees frequently have misinterpreted their policies.’” For Barnett to claim that “the National Red Cross is all right” was unacceptable to Wells; citing Percy’s “work or starve” order as evidence of continued peonage, she criticized Barnett’s ambivalence, asserting that “nowhere does he tell whether the Red Cross has removed the W.A. Percys.” Fuming that the Colored Committee enabled Hoover to ignore refugees’ suffering, Wells wrote, “These people of our race...are giving Mr. Hoover a loving cup in appreciation of his ‘good work’ for them, while their own people are being treated like slaves.”

While Ida B. Wells lacked official confirmation of Red Cross atrocities, she was informed in letters from black refugees of the violence and neglect they faced in the camps. “Who knows better than the sufferers themselves how they are treated?” she asked. The letters revealed that black refugees themselves despaired that their condition was being misrepresented to the public. One refugee from Greenville, “the gridiron of hell,” bravely wrote to Wells, indignant that Moton had observed no abuses worth reporting. “No, I guess not,” she wrote; “It is due to where the Colored committee members are living.” She insisted, “I can’t tell the half of [the abuses] on paper. I am afraid for what I have written, but I want you to know that the committee sent here by Mr. Moton did not see such treatment...those [Moton spoke to] are being used as catpaws by the white people.” Echoing Harrington’s condemnation of “Uncle Tom” ministers, the anonymous refugee included a clipping from The Greenville Democrat Times, “the leading paper published in this town,” which quoted Greenville’s black preachers “commending the white people of Greenville and thanking W.A. Percy for their assistance and urging Colored people to remain in Greenville.” These “Negro preachers are the only ones south of the Mason Dixon line who meet the white people,” she attested. She herself would have spoken to a committee member but was “in hiding, for fear I would be made to work like a dog under a gun and club and tagged like a bale of cotton.”
“THE RED CROSS IS NOT ALRIGHT!”

In addition to clandestine letters from black refugees, the Defender was informed by Walter White’s own field reports in the Delta. On July 2, White reported in The Nation on conditions “In The Flood District.” He sought to expose that relief camps were in fact slave camps, governed by the “enslaving customs” of forcing black sharecroppers to work for plantation owners and preventing their movement out of the camps. This report was subsequently republished in The Nation, which was not a black newspaper, but instead a Northern magazine published for a white progressive audience. Though not a direct call to action, the column did stress that these injustices, “if persisted in, would recreate and crystallize a new slavery almost as miserable as the old.”

One refugee’s letter to Ida B. Wells confronted their reality more directly, asserting, “Our people are in slavery.” To those readers of the Defender and the Nation, it became clear that Hoover’s proclaimed “stage of reconstruction” failed to uplift black flood victims, as its name might have symbolically suggested.

Ida B. Wells called upon Defender readers to take action. Black refugees had brought forth their testimonies and letters; readers, Wells argued, were responsible for responding to the cries for help. Wells seemed initially optimistic that the federal government would hear their cries. When she first published Hoover’s dismissive letter on June 11, she implored “we who can speak” to “send a united cry to the federal government for fuller investigation…let every Negro organization send resolutions to President Coolidge and Secretary Hoover, and to Senator Dencen here in Chicago.” Wells seemed to maintain faith in Secretary Hoover and believe that he was simply unaware that his Colored Committee was not witnessing the full extent of his camp’s abuses.

However, weeks passed, no formal investigation took place, and the refugees’ letters remained fearful. By the end of July, Wells seemed to realize that the federal government would not listen. On July 30, she published a column detailing “Death in Government Controlled Camps.” That she described the camps as “government controlled” suggests she had come to consider these abuses as stemming not solely from W.A. Percy, but from Hoover himself. “Only race can act,” she remarked. “Nobody else is going to do anything about it if we don’t. So far the Defender is the only journal making any protest I can see.” This was indeed true; virtually no other paper covered Greenville’s abuses to any extent. Remarkably, Wells’ rhetoric was at points identical to Hoover’s in his April radio appeal for Red Cross donations; much as Hoover had called on the “generous public” to support the ailing south, Ida B. Wells called for the “combined influence of all our people in the North, East, and West, where our votes count, to put a stop to the slavery that is going on in [the South].” Her plea seemed almost a response to Hoover’s request for money, as she wrote, “It is the moment for us to demand that the South do justice to our people before she receives help from the nation.” If Hoover would not listen to letters sent by Chicago’s African-Americans, ran Wells’ logic, he might recognize when they stopped donating to the Red Cross.

Defender readers heeded the paper’s call to action. Mrs. Fredericka Banks of Colorado wrote to the editor, “I sent clippings of your June 4th paper on the treatment of our people in the flood district to Judge Cunningham, of Colorado Springs, who writes the random comments in our local paper. He was very greatly surprised to know that such barbarous conditions existed under the Red Cross.
Cross and he has written a letter and sent the [Defender] clipping to Herbert Hoover protesting… He says the Negroes all over the country should send in protests.”74 Hoover also received a letter from Senator Arthur Capper (Republican of Kansas), “[voicing] the protest of the colored citizens of Topeka against alleged mistreatment of Negro refugees.” Like Judge Cunningham, Senator Capper included a Defender piece detailing Greenville’s abuses, calling the report “reliable.”75 Hoover might have been able to ignore Wells’ individual criticisms, but he certainly noticed when judges and senators from thousands of miles away sent copies of her columns in protest.

Even if Ida B. Wells stressed that one newspaper alone could not solve the Greenville problem, still the Defender recognized its influence as the most-read black newspaper in the United States.76 “The Chicago Defender [has] brought forth a storm of protest that is now shaking the Southland and bids fair to rival any investigation ever held in this country from the point of view of its importance,” one writer claimed. “Since the Defender published its Harrington dispatch, [the National Guard’s] troops have been removed from Greenville and the city is again under police law.”77 Indeed, the National Guard had been asked to leave Greenville in July, but black refugees continued to suffer under the direction of Greenville police. Though conditions in Greenville had yet to substantially improve even after months of “the greatest protests,” the Defender still occasionally commended itself on a job well done.

DAMAGE CONTROL: “HEROIC HOOVER,” “HAPPY NEGROES,” AND MISSISSIPPI TOURISM (JUNE-AUGUST 1927)

Larger newspapers did not follow the Defender’s investigations, and no white-run newspaper criticized Hoover personally. The most contentious issue in the press was Hoover’s credit plan to finance ‘reconstruction,’ and when papers did criticize his scheme, Hoover “let nothing pass unanswered.” To every newspaper that called his plan inadequate, the media mogul wrote lengthy responses that often ran as special articles.78 Regarding Greenville, Claude Barnett assured Hoover and Fieser that the Colored Committee’s report had assuaged media panic: “The Defender demands ‘a probe of flood conditions.’ It is a weak and hollow cry, used to bolster their attempt to take credit.”79 The New York Times was anything but critical of Hoover: in the three month period after the flood, the paper referenced Hoover three times as often as during the months before. These references lavished him with praise: “Arkansas Acclaims Hoover as Savior,” one headline read. Hoover was “the man who will live longest in the grateful memory of the people, a man worthy of any honor that can bestowed upon him.” He was “Chief, and his word is law.” He was “one of the most approachable and genial of all great Americans,” but also “as plain as an old shoe.” He was “the nation’s first citizen” and “hero of the flooded South.”80

By the end of summer, such praise also insisted on Hoover’s appeal to African-Americans. This rhetorical shift was likely a response to the ceaseless accusations by Ida B. Wells. On July 31, the day after Wells wrote “Only Race Can Act,” the Times titled a column, “Destitute Negroes Put
Implicit Faith in Leader of Relief. "As Wells had included the anonymous accounts of black refugees in hiding, the Times responded with a lengthy story of one “Uncle Eph” from New Orleans. ‘Sho’ would have had a hard time didn’t Mr. Hoover come to fetch us on de high ground,” said Uncle Eph. “No wonder de niggers thinks well of Mr. Hoover. Sho’ would make a noble president.” And this, wrote the Times, was “the verdict of the Afro-American of the Mississippi Valley.”

This was also a caricatured dialect of the Afro-American of the Mississippi Valley that instead reflected the racial bias inherent in news media, even in northern publications like the Times.

Not only stories about Hoover, but also other flood reports spoke in terms of race relations—and always, race relations were depicted as positive. The Los Angeles Times featured a 12-part series written by Harris Dickson, an author of short stories with a fascination for “the negro in the United States.” His series gave romantic depictions of black refugee lives, focusing particularly on refugee heroism. One piece featured a black refugee’s valiant dash to get fellow tenants on the ferry to Vicksburg. A similar story titled “Humble Heroism” described Samuel White, “a New Orleans negro,” who constructed a “crude raft [and] made repeated trips until he had rescued twenty-five families.” Such selflessness, Dickson concluded, “illustrates the truth that bravery is not a matter of race or color, and tells how members of the negro race can rise heroically in emergencies.” As flattering (though likely fictionalized—and certainly patronizing) as Dickson’s stories may have been, they did not advance the cause of black flood refugees. These stories gave national readers the assurance that the only evil facing refugees was “Father Mississippi, that pestiferous river,” and that black refugees were helping themselves through their own heroics. Dickson’s accounts often ended with instructions of how to donate to the Red Cross.

Mainstream media heralded black refugees as important not only for their heroics, but also for their work ethic. “The Negro tenant is coming to the front. He is a very important factor in the re-establishment of agriculture, for in some sections of the flooded area he does practically all the farm work,” said H.C. Couch, chairman of the Arkansas Flood Commission. T. Roy Reid, an Arkansas Red Cross leader, concurred: “Let the Negro get to following a plow, and he’ll whistle and sing. He’ll work, too. They don’t observe any eight-hour days.” Both men remarked in awe, “There is lots of hope.”

Such stories of laborers being “happy to work” complemented another item on the media’s agenda: the approaching wave of tourists. Though half of Greenville remained underwater by late June, the town was “getting its house in order” for “thousands of tourists expected this summer to view the results of the Mississippi River flood.” This preparation, of course, was made possible by the free labor provided by “singing, whistling” Negroes, who “closely [followed] the receding waters…with hammers and saws, getting things in shape for what is expected to be a banner tourist season.” However, these workers only attended to choice sections of Greenville; as J. Winston Harrington noted, “Clean-up squads are now working in the white sections of the city keeping the streets and alleys in sanitary condition, while…sections of the city where our people live are used as dumping grounds for disease-breeding trash from the white sections.”
For Greenville to bounce back in time for tourists and spring planting required not just black laborers, but also national donations to the Red Cross. As the task of feeding 400,000 persons threatened to exhaust Red Cross funds, Wade Negus, president of the First National Bank of Greenville, feared that Americans had “forgotten almost half a million of their own people.” To writers at *The Chicago Defender* advocating tirelessly on behalf of these black refugees, such a remark must have seemed a slap in the face. “The nation has failed to grasp the magnitude of this disaster,” Negus insisted. “Herbert Hoover and the Red Cross have done a great work, but they are limited by their resources, which are contributions of the American people.” If Greenville’s leaders in fact feared the American public had forgotten about flood victims, this would suggest the *Defender*’s investigations failed to arouse national concern. What aroused Americans were stories of heroism and benevolence, of Chief Hoover and Uncle Eph.

**“WE DIDN’T KNOW THE RED CROSS WAS SUPPOSED TO HELP US”: CONTRASTING ACCOUNTS OF RELIEF (OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1927)**

On October 3, President Coolidge spoke at the annual American Red Cross meeting to summarize the national flood response, which began “on April 21st, when the city of Greenville, Miss., was inundated, [and] it was realized that a serious catastrophe was impending.” In Coolidge’s mind, the impending catastrophe was environmental, not social; concerning national relations, Coolidge asserted that the flood was in fact “one of the fine chapters in American history,” which “brought closer [the North and the South] in the bonds of sympathy and understanding.” Most of Coolidge’s address was spent thanking relief agencies, railroad companies, the Navy, farm banks, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Not once was race mentioned. Coolidge testified that the Red Cross’ “great humanitarian work in the Mississippi Valley” transcended national and racial divides, coming to be “recognized universally as the symbol of love, sympathy, and charity for all those in suffering and distress.” He assured Red Cross agents that those in the South were “most appreciative of the assistance given to their stricken states.”

Yet less than two weeks later, the *Defender* published an open letter penned by Mrs. Willis Jones, a former Mississippi flood refugee, that offered a story of the Red Cross so radically different that the contrast is nearly comical. “We didn’t know the Red Cross was supposed to help us till by chance we saw a Chicago Defender,” Mrs. Jones wrote. “We were shocked to see that money and clothes were collected for our benefit while mothers and children lay on straw and naked floors. The most unkind words we received were when we asked for clothes and food from the Red Cross.”

Such a remark inflamed the *Defender*’s black readers in Chicago, who had consistently donated to the Red Cross with the intention of supporting black refugees in the South. Months beforehand, the executive secretary of the Chicago chapter of the Red Cross had admitted that “the Negro colony of Chicago had been very generous in its contributions to relief funds” and was “justified in their effort to ascertain that their offerings reached the proper destinations.” Mrs. Willis Jones’ let-
ter revealed that the offerings had in fact not reached the proper destinations, and that black money was not being used to support black refugees.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Willis Jones was indeed most grateful “to those in the North who ministered unto us,” as Coolidge had boasted in his Red Cross address. But contrary to Coolidge’s sermon, Mrs. Jones was not grateful to the North at large but specifically to Chicago’s public and the Defender, who sent “angels of mercy” with clothes, food, and literature, to sing and pray with black refugees. As refugee letters revealed, Defender investigators traveled with charity workers in Chicago to provide relief to black refugees who were not being provided for by the Red Cross. “The Chicago Defender dared at such a time to give support to our people,” and so she gave thanks as “the prayer of a grateful family.”

Such charges against the Red Cross inflamed Hoover and his colleagues. In November he complained to Fieser, the Red Cross Vice Chairman, that “The colored complex has again arisen.” For months, Hoover had directed race-related grievances to Moton, as he had in his June letter to Ida B. Wells. But in November, W.E.B. Du Bois questioned Moton’s credibility in the NAACP’s Crisis magazine:

We have grave suspicions that [Moton’s] committee...will be sorely tempted to whitewash the whole situation, to pat Mr. Hoover loudly on the back, and to make no real effort to investigate the desperate and evil conditions of that section of our country...the one fatal thing for them to do, and the one thing for which the American negro will never forgive them, is spineless surrender to the administration and flattery for the guilty Red Cross.

Du Bois concluded, “Next month we shall have more to say.”

Hoover feared that Du Bois could publicly discredit the Colored Advisory Committee and put an end to his media success as the presidential election drew closer. He ordered Moton to conduct a November inspection tour of the Red Cross camps in preparation for another Colored Advisory Commission report. On December 12, Claude Barnett presented Moton’s report to Hoover, Fieser, and other Red Cross officials; Moton was unable to meet due to an automobile accident. The men were shocked to hear a report much more explicit and damaging than anticipated—a report detailing fearful black tenants scared of being whipped by white planters who stole refugees’ supplies. The report even suggested that the Colored Advisory Commission itself was ill equipped to correctly diagnose the level of racist abuse in the camps:

Obviously, the colored people who have for so many years lived in fear of ill treatment as a result of the plantation system will not tell... The responsibility for checking on situations like this should not be left to Negroes when the facts are known and are admitted by Red Cross officials. Confidential investigators from Washington would be able to make some interesting discoveries.
Staff of the Defender may have been pleased to learn that the Colored Advisory Commission agreed with their protests—that black officials in the South were unable to get the facts—but they would never know, because the report Barnett presented on December 12 was not released. A furious Herbert Hoover met with Moton on December 17 to demand that he rewrite the report. That night, Hoover called Fieser to brag that he had “laid Dr. Moton out.” Though Barnett pleaded that “the changes [to the report] suggested should not be made…because of the state of mind of the colored people of the country as it regards the flood,” Moton caved nonetheless, revising the report and issuing a press release fully endorsing the actions of the Red Cross. It became clear that Hoover was content to falsify the official story of his Red Cross camps for the sake of maintaining his own reputation.

The Colored Advisory Commission issued its final report in 1929. The publication included an introductory letter from John Payne, chair of the Red Cross, expressing “sincere appreciation” of the Commission for “its excellent presentation of the essential facts.” The Colored Advisory Commission had “pointed out every disadvantage and inequality uncovered” and given “stricken suffers a new hope and a new vision for the future.” The report did mention that in Greenville, “Complaints were received from some of the colored refugees” because “at first there was some disorganization, confusion, and restlessness.” But the Commission insisted the Red Cross had listened to Moton’s findings and, as per his recommendations, supplied knives, forks, and spoons; improved clothing distribution; and continued reporting to Hoover. The Commission’s final report skirted issues of peonage and near-slavery with vague language: “Extremities of human relations were bound to show exaggeration of already unsettled states of mind and sordid conditions due not alone to the current flood crisis, but to economic personal and group experiences which had long preceded the problems here related.” While it is hard to imagine that a team of black leaders could so quickly dismiss racist crimes as beyond their control, their non-offensive report likely did not represent their actual findings but instead reflected Hoover and Fieser’s editorializing.

The Red Cross also released its own final report that year. A lengthy document of almost 200 pages, it had little to say about race—those issues were supposed to be thoroughly covered in the Colored Advisory Commission’s separate report (though, as we have seen, they were not). Addressing the fact that “in large sections of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi most of the residents were colored,” the Red Cross assured it had “considered the special needs of all these racial groups in formulating rehabilitation plans.” The report included photos of white nurses at work, administering vaccinations and providing bottled milk; it contained only one photo of black refugees, subtitled “Colored children pose with fly traps.” Another photo showed “the scene of an important reconstruction task,” but it was an aerial view taken from afar, obscuring the actual workers.

The healthcare and reconstruction depicted in these photos was made possible by the “great spirit of the press in behalf of relief work throughout the flood.” Thanks to “the close and cordial
“THE RED CROSS IS NOT ALRIGHT!”

liaison service between the newspapers and the Red Cross National Headquarters” and the “whole-hearted aid given by the radio broadcasting stations of the country,” Americans in every state were kept abreast of flood updates and encouraged to donate. In fact, as the Red Cross explained, “several chapters reported having raised almost their total fund through radio broadcasting alone.”100 The news media not only encouraged Americans to donate to the Red Cross, but also ensured that Americans never learned of the racist abuses in flood relief camps. In the same way as The New York Times had reported that “Americans living outside of the submerged areas can have but little conception of the havoc made by the flood,” Americans also had little conception of the havoc made by the Red Cross itself.

By 1929 the final reports of the official agencies managing flood relief—the Colored Advisory Commission and the Red Cross—had cemented in national history the idea that Hoover’s relief camps were a resounding success. As much as The Chicago Defender claimed credit for “[succeeding] in having better treatment accorded to [African-Americans],” the newspaper’s actual systemic impact was marginal. Never did news agencies follow the “rigid investigation” launched by Harrington, White, and Wells; nor did their efforts convince Herbert Hoover or Robert Moton to tackle the likes of William Percy. This is not to discredit the Defender’s accomplishments; the newspaper likely gave hope to many near-enslaved refugees with its slightly grandiose claims. As the letter from Mrs. Willis Jones showed, the Defender and its charitable partners in Chicago offered inspiration “that will live with me and hundreds of others forever.”101 For a refugee woman sleeping on straw and bare floors, castigated by Red Cross officials for asking for a change of clothes, it made a profound difference to know that her voice was being heard and taken seriously. And to whatever extent it could send charity workers to the camps, the Defender provided direct relief of its own to compensate for Red Cross’ neglect toward black refugees.

CLOSING THE FLOODGATES: HOOVER’S PRESIDENCY AND THE END OF THE MEDIA MAELSTROM (1928 ONWARD)

With the help of Moton, Barnett, and the Tuskegee machine, Hoover avoided scandal and won the presidency, sweeping 40 states. He capitalized on the flood during his campaign, creating the first presidential election campaign film, titled “Master of Emergencies,” which featured his work in the Mississippi Delta.102 Once Hoover was elected, mainstream media turned away from flood relief; that “fine chapter in American history” was over. Even the Defender ended its attempts to expose Hoover and the Red Cross for their injustices. On November 10, 1928, the Defender paused to acknowledge “the tremendous good the Red Cross has done” and encourage African-Americans to enroll in it, “in the consciousness that we, too, have helped in the noble cause.”103 The same day, it admitted, “The campaign is over... Mr. Hoover will enter the White House and he will represent ALL the American people. We hope that, in spite of the things which have stood out so glaringly against Mr. Hoover, he will prove to be above them.”104 Hoover continued to enjoy
an amiable relationship with the press—at least, until the 1929 stock market crash, when he began screening reporters and greatly reducing his availability. While he may have been able to keep journalists from mentioning Red Cross slave camps, he could not keep them from mentioning the infamous “Hoovervilles.”

Though the press stopped reporting on Greenville’s flood camp, the town’s issues persisted. As late as March 1928, 12,000 residents of Washington County were still being fed by the Red Cross, but its funds had dried up along with the floodwaters. Hoover announced Congress would fund “adequate flood control measures,” but “no relief to flood sufferers.” His “resettlement plan” never came to fruition, prompting faithful Moton to finally declare that blacks doubted Hoover’s “personal concern for the welfare and progress of one tenth of the citizens of the United States.”

Greenville, once the “Queen’s City of the Delta,” never saw its anticipated comeback. Black residents remained inflamed by the abuses their community endured under Will Percy, prompting many to leave town. By early 1928 as many as 50 percent of blacks left Washington County, a migration promulgated in part by the Defender itself (not coincidentally, many former flood refugees headed to Chicago). The Defender had explicitly promoted the “Great Migration” as early as 1916, and its 1927 coverage of the Red Cross camps continued that effort. Moreover, the Defender gave black readers reason to distrust many widely-read newspapers and their Republican patrons. Black media showed flood refugees that Herbert Hoover’s Red Cross campaign was a fraud, that Robert Moton and “Uncle Tom ministers” overlooked their struggles, and that millions of Red Cross dollars sent by supporters in Chicago had been robbed from them. In October 1928, the Defender remembered Hoover’s “lily-white” betrayals: “The Colored folk in the North who have the ballot will not be unmindful of this shift in the attitude of the party which has always posed as the friend of their people.” That year, Hoover lost 15 percent of the black vote as compared to the previous presidential election; as the Defender noted, “strange as it may seem, the Democrats are more favorable to the political and social aspirations of the black man than are the Republicans.”

Although Hoover’s concentration camp cover-up was drowned out by mainstream media, it created a tidal wave of African-American protest and solidarity that would ripple for years to come.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 6.
3. Ibid., 7.
4. American National Red Cross. 1929. The final report of the Colored Advisory Commission appointed to cooperate with the American National Red Cross and the President’s Committee on relief Work in the Mississippi Valley flood disaster of 1927. Washington
6. Quoted in Barry 262.
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8. Hoover quoted in Barry 283.
10. Quoted in Barry 310.
13. Spencer 177.
22. Hoover to Irwin quoted in Barry 286.
25. Swinford 159; Berry 311-12.
30. Quoted in Barry 314.
32. Ibid.
34. Barry 319.
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36. Berry 318.
37. Ibid., 320.
43. The Oakland Tribune. May 23, 1927.
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47. “Hoover Asks Nation for $2,000,000 More in Appeal by Radio.” NYT. May 29, 1927.
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58. Ibid., 380.
59. Ibid., 330.
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69. Ibid.
70. Walter White, “In the Flood District.” Originally published in the Nation, but subsequently republished in the Defender. July 2, 1927
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78. Barry 375.
83. Dickson, “NEGROES SACRIFICE ALL TO RESCUE FLOOD VICTIMS.” *Los Angeles Times*. June 8, 1927.
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94. Dubois quoted in Barry 388.
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SECONDARY SOURCES


TITLE IMAGE

The murder of women is neither a new phenomenon nor a topic of historical research that has garnered a large body of research. In this essay, Ryan Bailey Patterson, University of Oregon ’16, delves into the topic of feminicide, studying the gendered contexts of the murder of women in terms of pervasive patriarchal power structures. Patterson focuses much of her analysis on the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez, looking at the role of politicized visual art in combatting the troubling trend. This essay follows a grassroots art movement that evolved into a transnational fight for basic human rights.

By Ryan Bailey Patterson, University of Oregon, ’16
Written for “Crossing Borders”
Professor Julie Weise
Edited by Olivia Pollak, Bernard Stanford, and Noah Daponte-Smith
Since 1993 more than 550 bodies of mutilated women have been discovered in the desert of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.\textsuperscript{1} Thousands of female bodies still remain missing. Approximately one-third of these murders occurred under similar circumstances: the victims were captured, raped, sexually tortured, and mutilated, and their bodies were disposed in peripheral, desolate areas of the city.\textsuperscript{2} The crisis exacerbated Ciudad Juárez’s notoriety as a place of rampant disappearances and brutal murders of women and girls. Scholars, activist groups, and the media associated the murders with a culture of impunity that devalued women’s lives, rendered women dispensable and disposable, authorized unpunished sexual violence against them, and dismissed the severity of such a profound violation of human rights. Women’s rights advocates and scholars call it feminicide.

Feminicide as a phenomenon has always existed, particularly in times of war, but Marcela Lagarde first introduced the term to academia in 1987. Julia Monárrez Fragoso used the term feminicidio to describe the sexual murders of women and girls in Ciudad Juárez first observed, documented, and publicized in 1993 by women’s rights activist Ester Chávez Cano.\textsuperscript{3} Feminicide is often used interchangeably with ‘femicide’; however, the terms differ. Femicide denotes the murder of women and girls because they are female, while feminicide expands on that definition to include the gendered contexts of these acts of violence — murders founded on a patriarchal gendered power structure.\textsuperscript{4} This definition suggests that feminicide is also a form of systemic violence, infiltrating the public and private spheres, and is deeply rooted in social, political, economic and cultural inequalities. The anti-feminicide activism I will examine in this paper worked to expose the visible forms of violence that are rooted in this patriarchal gendered power structure, rather than simply portraying these crimes as a gendered form of homicide. Therefore, I will rely on the term feminicide for the purposes of this research.

In reaction to the growing presence of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, the past two decades of activism across the U.S.-Mexico border have embodied more than the traditional protest repertoire of strikes, demonstrations, rallies, and marches. Because of increasing rates of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, cross-border activist organizations and independent artists have recognized the need to adopt more innovative and unique forms of protest, as well as consciousness-raising efforts to capture public attention and demand justice. These organizations and activists distinguished themselves by producing captivating visual art for both local audiences and broader art exhibitions, which traversed political borders, encouraged collective witnessing, and expanded support bases. This transnational, social movement expanded its range of intervention to make the struggle for social justice politically relevant in the broader context of globalization.

Significantly, the anti-feminicide movement used cross-border cultural productions to create, preserve, and reclaim the memories of its victims and the Ciudad Juárez community. Memory is crucial to the establishment of a collective identity; thus, artistic cultural
productions provided a platform for memorializing and restoring agency to victims — to give voice to those affected by femicide and gender-based violence and proclaim that the violence would not remain invisible.

The politicization of American and Mexican — as well as transnational — visual art between 1993 and 2010 reframed femicide and gender-based violence as human rights violations that warranted global attention. This reconceptualization occurred as the anti-femicide artistic movement transitioned from a grassroots effort to a transnational, activist coalition of artists and activists. By framing gender-based violence as a human rights issue, femicide in Ciudad Juárez became an emblem for gender-based human rights violations. Femicide in Ciudad Juárez also became an international point of reference in the assertion that human rights include women’s rights, a concept that is still not universally recognized. With this framework, activists also exposed deeply-rooted, state-sponsored systems of violence, impunity, and patriarchy — institutionalized misogyny that normalized mass-femicide and gender-based violence in Ciudad Juárez for nearly twenty years.

As a result of Ester Chávez Cano’s documentation and publicization of femicide crimes in 1993, many scholars refer to that year as the start of the feminicide crisis. But picking a single year as the starting point of femicide overlooks how deeply entrenched female violence truly is, while also disregarding the lived experiences of individuals. Thus, I seek to address the pre-1993 factors that led to women’s rights and anti-femicide activism, and its evolution from a grassroots to a transnational, artistic-activist movement. The paucity of literature on anti-femicide artistic expression does not address this change over time but rather assumes an ahistorical approach, focusing on (often) sensationalized depictions of femicide in media, film, and literature. Instead, I have chosen to focus on visual art forms — arts and crafts, photography, performance art, and video — to demonstrate the role of visual art in reframing femicide narratives, constructing femicide as a human rights issue, restoring agency to women, and facilitating collective memory creation.

"THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM," 1965-1993

A careful examination of the events that precipitated the explosion of violence in Ciudad Juárez during the early 1990s reveals how mass femicide and gender-based violence could occur, and why artistic activism at the transnational level would ultimately become necessary. In the mid to late 1980s, high concentrations of young, poor, and vulnerable women in Ciudad Juárez, a large city on the U.S.-Mexico border, enabled an unparalleled magnitude of femicide. Ciudad Juárez became a hunting ground for innocent female victims with the establishment of the Maquiladora Program, which replaced the Bracero Program in 1965. The Bracero Program, which placed approximately 4.6 million migrant Mexican workers in agricultural jobs in the U.S. between 1942 to 1964,
cilitated the migration of Mexican migrants across the border, especially to Ciudad Juárez. The termination of the Bracero program precipitated a local jobs crisis; the Mexican government created the National Border Development Program (PRONAF), which allowed foreign (primarily American) corporations to outsource production to Mexico, where labor was cheaper, and export finished goods back to the United States at little to no tariff cost. Thus, the Maquiladora Program was born. Lastly, neoliberal policies of the 1980s increased Mexico’s reliance on foreign investment, while structural adjustment programs made the maquila sector essential to the Mexican and American economies. A coalition between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, which culminated with the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, further expanded foreign investment in the border region, which drew scores of young women to find work.

Feminist activism has a rich and complex history along the U.S.-Mexico border that developed out of young female migrant workers’ agitation for better working conditions in the maquiladoras. Mobilization began on both sides of the border in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when local non-governmental organizations sought to increase wages and improve workforce training. Even as the female presence in the Mexican workforce increased in the 1960s, wages remained paltry and working conditions inhumane, forcing many women to work informally, in unregulated sectors, to supplement their incomes. A growing population of vulnerable females stimulated the growth of new, local activist organizations and movements. A pioneering organization in Ciudad Juárez was the Centro de Orientación Obrera (COMO), the Center of Worker Orientation, founded in 1968 by Guillermina Villalva de Valdés. Villalva, a tireless advocate for the rights of working-class women, sought to help women acquire diverse skills that would enable them to transition into various occupations with greater job security. Building up a globally conscious network of women, COMO flourished in promoting alternative employment for maquiladora workers, as well as education and cooperative societies. While COMO did not articulate violence against women as a central organizing tenet, their activism for working-class women nevertheless created a foundation for women’s rights activists, who would later mobilize against feminicide in the Mexican-American border region.

After COMO’s nearly twenty years of border activism, a 1986 documentary called The Global Assembly Line exposed employment in the expanding Maquiladora Program as tedious, exhausting, poorly compensated, and dangerous. The victims were predominantly young, female, and unskilled laborers. A maquiladora worker for Zenith Corporation confirmed the exploitative nature of the maquiladoras: “Within Mexico a worker has certain constitutional rights, individual guarantees, federal laws, labor laws that are supposed to protect us, and yet, we’re kind of semi-slaves." The systematic exploitation of women within the maquiladoras manifested in various forms: denial of basic freedoms, deprivation of good health, and consignment to a life without opportunities for economic development.
RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE

advancement. After *The Global Assembly Line*’s premiere, *The New York Times* heralded the documentary for its revelation of the hidden negative consequences of the establishment of free-trade zones. A visible affirmation of the systemic exploitation COMO had been mobilizing against for years, the documentary confirmed the necessity of securing greater rights for workingwomen. Yet, the shifting trend toward overseas production did not slow; worker exploitation continued. The long-standing dehumanization of workingwomen only contributed to the further exploitation of women’s bodies, setting the stage for the wave of feminicide that would plague Ciudad Juárez in the years to come.

**THE EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC ACTIVISM COMBATING FEMINICIDE, 1993-2010**

In addition to the Maquiladora Program and the northern migration of young women to the U.S., corrupt, apathetic, and overwhelmed local and state law enforcement further set the stage for feminicide of Ciudad Juárez women. With the noticeable increase in the murder of women and girls in the early 1990s, a diverse group of women united to confront it. Victims’ mothers, concerned family members and friends, and local activists gathered information and developed a substantive base of evidence to circulate among activists and distribute to the public. The victims’ mothers also pressured the local police to take action and staunch the tide of murders. Despite their determined efforts, the women were typically ignored; their daughters’ reputations were often, shamefully, tarnished. Mourning mothers united in solidarity by sharing memories of their daughters and their own experiences with the inept police force. Most women bemoaned the police’s lack of cooperation, recounting stories of being shuffled from office to office pressured to deliver bribes to have cases pursued, or being informed that evidence was lost, mishandled or misplaced. In Ciudad Juárez, victims’ families and human rights activists fought for justice against, not with, apathetic law enforcement.

Despite several years of police negligence in investigating the Ciudad Juárez feminicides, women refused to be bullied into submission. They responded in 1999 by increasing local mobilization, raising public awareness through visual art to engage a broader community of artist-activists. As a subtle, yet omnipresent, reminder of the pervasiveness of feminicide and police impunity, grieving mothers and local activists began painting black crucifixes on telephone poles along main streets and walls throughout the city (Appendix A). Black crucifixes, on top of a layer of pink paint, became the colors of the anti-feminicide movement. Activists also placed a large wooden crucifix at the international border crossing that connected the downtowns of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, Texas; each nail around the crucifix symbolized a victim (Appendix B). Flooding the streets with crosses provided silent witnesses to experiential instances of violence; the crosses represented the losses of daughters and the repressed anger that could no longer be stifled. As visual proclamations,
they represented a claim to public space for organized activism. Public officials, however, lambasted these crucifixes as scandalous; but when the mayor of Ciudad Juárez himself publicly ordered the mothers to stop, they refused. Their defiance was a determined reclamation of physical space within the city, their crosses a visual declaration of agency against the region’s gendered power hierarchy, their efforts a demand for justice for the murdered women.

The demand for justice also continued a tradition among human rights activists and organizations that sought truth and justice through vivid publicization of the details of such gruesome violations of human rights. This tradition evolved to draw attention to the collective suffering that might otherwise fade into obscurity in Ciudad Juárez. Eduardo Galeano, a notable journalist and writer often referred to as “the voice of Latin America,” used the phrase “the kidnapping of history” to refer to the mechanisms that impede the development of democracy, justice, and collective memory: “For those who are starving, the system denies them even the nourishment of memory. So that they don’t have a future, it steals their past.” The artistic expression of mothers and local activists established a strong resistance to the kidnapping of history in Ciudad Juárez. By sharing their stories, memorializing the dead, and seeking the truth, those women challenged historical amnesia; in solidifying collective memory, they strove to prevent the dead from being rendered anonymous and insignificant. The struggle required the development of symbols to memorialize “the lived traumatic experience” of the families and activists, by which they could ensure the conservation of their collective memory.

The twenty-first century saw a noticeable increase in international public awareness of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, largely because of extensive press coverage of the Cotton Field Murders in 2001. The mutilated bodies of eight women were discovered in a Ciudad Juárez cotton field, and the state police failed to effectively investigate their abduction and murder. The striking image of eight pink crucifixes at a memorial site featured prominently in the international media coverage. In addition, Lourdes Portillo’s documentary Senorita Extraviada (Missing Young Women), which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2001, helped to increase awareness. At the Sundance Film Festival in early 2002, the film received international critical acclaim for exposing feminicide in the border town. Both the documentary and the Cotton Field Murders media coverage served as catalysts for a broader anti-feminicide artists’ movement, and over the next few years imagery and visual art developed as an effective means of spreading awareness about feminicide. This growing awareness helped transform the artistic anti-feminicide movement from a local to transnational activist movement.

Imagery and symbolism as a medium for communication and exposition were significant in breaking the international silence and stigmatization surrounding feminicide. During the height of the anti-feminicide movement from 2002 to 2004, graphic design-
ers harnessed visual art as an effective way to spread awareness. They invited others to express their outrage by designing posters inspired by the slogan ‘The Woman of Juárez Demand Justice.’ In 2002, the first design activity, initially proposed by Rafael López Castro, coincided with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, when protest marches took place in several cities across Mexico. Nine designers produced an initial series of designs, which were eventually given to other anti-feminicide activists and organizations as a way to encourage them to apply their own text and messages. By 2003, designers from across Mexico and abroad had created sixty large format images to display in a metro station in Mexico City (Appendices C, D). In a city of more than twenty million, the images were able to reach a massive audience largely unaware of the severity of the crisis in Ciudad Juárez. This demonstrated visual art’s potential to encourage a new artistic-activist collaboration that could raise social consciousness and engender political action. The images’ accessibility helped make feminicide a topic of discussion nationally and internationally. Alejandro Magallanes, a designer intimately involved in the project, marveled at the crowds of people standing in front of the posters, discussing such a difficult subject.

Feminicide showed no signs of abating by 2004, but artistic activism created necessary exposure for the anti-feminicide movement. Public pressure mounted and compelled the Office of the Federal Prosecutor to review 150 previous murder investigations on behalf of the national government, a substantial improvement over corrupt and incompetent local law enforcement. The chief prosecutor, Maria Lopez Urbina, eventually concluded that there was probable cause for criminal and administrative investigations into more than 100 Chihuahua state public officials for negligence, omission, and other offenses. However, the federal authorities did not have jurisdiction to officially investigate, so unfortunately, the cases were returned to the local Prosecutor’s Office and courts in Chihuahua that initially mishandled the investigations.

The Frontera 450+ exhibition, an amalgamation of global representations of anti-feminicide artistic-activism, marked a shift from localized to transnational activism. The exhibit took its name from the 450 Ciudad Juárez women who had been murdered or disappeared up to that point, with the ‘+’ representing future victims if decisive action was not taken. Frontera 450+ was the first full museum exhibition on feminicide in the United States, running from October 2006 to January 2007 at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston. Although the museum did not keep a record of attendance rates for that exhibit, Alan Schnitger, a curator of the museum, stated that the show was well-received by the community and free to the public, which enabled greater accessibility. The Houston Chronicle wrote that, amid the horror conveyed in the art, the exhibit conveyed an undeniable call for consciousness and hope for healing. Margo Handwerker, an art critic for “Art Lies: A Contemporary Art Journal,” stated that while individual artistic representa-
tion varied, common themes prevailed that aspired to transform sympathy into empathy: “impassioned work, like the entire exhibition at its core, stirred emotions, potentially raising awareness and, most importantly, action.”

Seventeen artists from Ciudad Juárez, El Paso, and elsewhere contributed art for Frontera 450+ that linked art, social justice and political awareness. Many of the artists not native to Ciudad Juárez traveled to the city and immersed themselves in the local environment, often speaking with victims’ families as well. They drew upon such experiences to inspire their art, which used unique aesthetics to explore various angles of looking at femicide. This immersion experience for the artists demonstrated the importance of the artistic process in creating political meaning. The exhibit also marked a notable increase in the number of artists contributing anti-feminicide pieces to an organized event. The exhibit was also a demonstration of the international character of the movement; while located in the United States, artists from multiple countries contributed and attended. In fewer than ten years, the movement had become an irrepressible transnational effort.

A crucial aspect of Frontera 450+ was a captivating performance piece by Costa Rican artist Elia Arce. Arce recited the names of feminicide victims and invited audience members and victims’ family members to read names as well. Through recitation and audience involvement, Arce provided space for symbolic participation and for collective memory to coalesce. She connected bodies and identities; personalizing the murdered and disappeared was a crucial step in the recovery of truth and the breaking of silence. The performance piece also focused on the politics of memory — drawing attention to shortcomings of the historical/official record, which ignored the existence of hundreds of women. Through the recitation of names, Arce and fellow participants defied denial.

The participation by family members also presented a physical and emotional testament to the severe effects of femicide on the people of Ciudad Juárez. Arce’s performance piece marked an evolutionary step in the anti-feminicide artistic-activist movement. Prior to the exhibition, performance art had not been a common medium in the anti-feminicide movement, but Arce demonstrated that the art form could invoke a stirring spirit of solidarity, thus growing the activist base.

In 2010, an art exhibit at Drexel University, Ni Una Más, Not One More: The Juárez Murders, symbolized the culmination of cross-border artistic activism. For the first time, social media played a substantial role in an exhibit’s reception. The interactive comments section of an online article about the exhibit, published in the Philadelphia Weekly, encouraged viewer involvement and produced such comments such as, “Ni Una Mas spreads a powerful message and reiterated that art can create social change.” The exhibit also received international attention when reviewed by Reuters. Prior exhibits had received mostly local attention; Reuters’ coverage marked a shift in exhibit scope, mirroring the movement’s expanding trajectory on the international stage. Ni Una Más featured paintings, photog-
raphy, performance art and installations from twenty American, Mexican and European artists, including well-known artists such as Yoko Ono, Kiki Smith, and Brian Maguire. In conjunction with the art exhibit, academic, student and institutional departments collaborated to organize multiple events including lectures, concerts, film screenings and ARTMARCH, a public rally and performance arts piece. ARTMARCH served as the launch of the exhibition and other events, and involved 700 female Drexel University students, as well as other students and community members, dressed in pink marching through the streets of Philadelphia. The 700 female Drexel students represented the 700 women that had been murdered, or abducted and presumed dead, since 1993 in Ciudad Juárez. The march ended at the Leonard Pearlstein Gallery so ARTMARCH participants could engage with other activists and discuss the art on display.

The agendas of individual artistic-activists varied. While some wanted to make a point of identifying the victims in an effort to challenge their suppression from official narratives of cultural memory, others called attention to their absence. Yet others focused on the individual and/or collective rage elicited by the violence and used visual art to expose the endemic violence, to break the silence, and to give voice to the victims and their families.

The curators of the exhibit stated that Ni Una Más was created to be “unabashedly activist and political in intent,” to draw attention to the feminicide in Ciudad Juárez and to connect the issue of gender-based violence to broader societal power relations. Included in the exhibition was Andrea Marshall’s “The Rice Bath Diptych,” a self-portrait depicting the fictional feminicide of Maria Gonzales, whom her husband kills while she prepared a mole poblano dish (Appendix E). The first photo depicts a young woman preparing the meal for her husband and the second photo shows the gruesome scene of Gonzales’ naked and bloody corpse dumped in a bathtub along with mole and rice from the previous photo. There is no clear indication of what transpired between the two photos, and the ambiguity surrounding Gonzales’ death left the audience frustrated. This frustration was designed to provide a glimpse into the frustration felt by the families of feminicide victims. Marshall said she intended to evoke a reaction similar to what she felt in response to the Ciudad Juárez femincides – shock and sadness. Some representations of feminicide purely serve to sensationalize and serve the interests of the perpetrators and proponents of that violence. Marshall’s self-portrait, however, should be interpreted as an artistic vehicle meant to convey outrage and solidarity toward the feminicide victims, rather than a celebration or mere reproduction of violence. The gruesome nature of Marshall’s self-portrait also encapsulated the escalation in the intensity and explicitness of the art produced by artistic-activists since women began painting crucifixes throughout the streets of Ciudad Juárez. Feminicide crime rates remained relatively unchanged throughout the seventeen-year period despite growing media attention and public pressure on the Mexican state. Artists took
to more intense, graphic art to capture public attention and push for a substantive government/institutional response.

Another striking piece exhibited at *Ni Una Más* was Teresa Serrano’s performance video entitled *La Piñata*. The video features a piñata in the shape of a young woman dressed in a maquiladora uniform being destroyed by an unidentified man. Similar to *The Rice Bath Diptych*, the video displayed brutality that would horrify any audience. Marshall’s and Serano’s pieces are a small sampling among all those included in *Ni Una Más*; but they captured an escalation in intensity, compared to works at prior exhibits. Naturally, the motives of individual artistic-activists varied, but many focused on communicating the individual and/or communal rage elicited by the violence. This shift in artistic representation and message suggested growing frustration, despair, and sadness among the artistic-activists.

Other artists of *Ni Una Más* worked to reestablish women’s identities and elevate them from obscurity and anonymity. By doing so, they hoped to restore the individual lived experiences and humanity of these victims. Lise Bjørne Linnert’s “*Desconocida, Unknown, Ukjent*” began in 2006 as a response to the Ciudad Juárez feminicides and developed into an international community art project (Appendices F, G). Linnert’s exhibit at *Ni Una Más* spanned 8 feet by 30 feet, with the names of Ciudad Juárez femicide victims embroidered on white cotton labels. Over 4,000 people from across the world contributed to the project by embroidering a name on a label. The labels were then laid out to communicate a Morse code message of the Mexican national anthem, an artistic choice laced with political motives that hoped to re-emphasize the geographic context within which the feminicides occurred and to hold the Mexican state accountable for its consistent inaction. The politicized embroidery project demonstrated the power of invoking community participation to spread awareness of femicide. The project also demonstrated how politicized art, created at the individual and grassroots level, can amount to a worldwide movement.

The evolution of anti-femicide artistic activism demonstrates that there are myriad ways to combat violent phenomena, especially as a grassroots movement evolves into a transnational effort. Over the course of many years, politicized art compelled an international audience to look at something they had not seen before, or were previously too horrified to examine, and encouraged understanding through a new lens. Violence in Ciudad Juárez permeated all facets of society, and its consequences reached far beyond the U.S.-Mexico border, necessitating global attention and action. Cross-border social movements therefore engaged in innovative activism that resisted suppression, significantly increased public awareness, and reframed femicide and gender violence as human rights issues.
NOTES


Cano was appalled by the feminicides occurring in Ciudad Juárez and that these crimes were largely unpunished. Beginning in 1992, by primarily using press reports, Cano documented the names of murder victims, the date of their deaths, the circumstances of their deaths, who discovered the bodies, and the name of the person in charge of the various investigations. After amassing extensive notes and evidence that substantiated the claim that there was an alarming trend of feminicides occurring in Ciudad Juárez, Cano founded the Grupo 8 de Marzo, which consisted of Cano and other women lobbying for women-oriented legal reforms and pushing the municipal, state, and federal governments to create special investigators and prosecutors for sexual violence and feminicide.


6. The Bracero Program developed from an executive order in 1942 and then a series of bi-lateral agreements between the United States and Mexico that enabled millions of Mexican men to go to the United States and work. Their labor contracts were short-term and primarily consisted of agricultural labor. Many workers returned to work in the United States on different contracts. The program was the United States’ largest contract labor program. The argument made for this program was that World War II would result in massive labor shortages to low-income agricultural jobs and an influx of Mexican migrant workers would alleviate this labor shortage.


10. “Globally conscious network” denotes groups of people focusing their minds on the same thing, so they can influence “the world at large” (See Radin 1997: ch. 10).


15. Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border*, 82.


19. In 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights officially ruled that Mexico had failed to properly investigate the cotton field murders by falsely accusing two men of committing the crimes and fabricating evidence to earn a conviction.

20. The documentary earned the Special Jury Prize Documentary at Sundance and eventually received praise from the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe*.

21. These years are considered the height of the movement because activism reached a crescendo by 2004 with the massive V-Day movement, a cross-border solidarity march, which drew an estimated 5,000-8,000 people. See Staudt (2008).

22. The Center for the Study of Political Graphics (CSPG) maintained an online exhibit entitled “The Women of Juárez Demand Justice.” Although this exhibit is no longer available through the center’s main website, the images can be found through the internet archive www.waybackmachine.com by simply searching for the archived images from the site http://www.politicalgraphics.org in April 2004.


27. Alan Schnitger, email interview by the author, 4 June, 2015.


31. *Ni Una Más* is the name of a grassroots campaign launched by family members, human rights activists, and representatives of the border community to end feminicide in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua.


33. Sponsoring Drexel partners from the College of Arts and Sciences, Goodwin College, Earle Mack School of Law, Pennoni Honors College, the Intercultural Engagement and Diversity Initiative, Office of Multicultural Programs, Office of Student Life, Intercultural Journeys and the Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design. This is demonstrative of the coalitional activist effort within Drexel University to arrange this event/exhibit, which mirrored the coalitional effort of the anti-feminicide artistic-activist movement.
RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE


36. *La nota roja*, or the crime beat, is an entire newspaper industry built on publishing daily, gruesome front-page photographs of the newly discovered feminicide victims. It is a brand of yellow journalism that focuses on physical violence related to crime.


APPENDIX A

Description of the image: A telephone pole painted pink with a black crucifix and the word *justicia* (justice) painted on it.

APPENDIX B

Description of the image: Graphic art depicting a female body alongside the statement, “Ciudad Juárez: 300 mujeres muertas, 500 mujeres desaparecidas,” (“Ciudad Juárez, 300 women dead, 500 women disappeared.”)


APPENDIX C

Description of image: Graphic art depicting the lower extremities of body with the statement, “Las muertas de Ciudad Juárez demandan justicia.” (The dead of Ciudad Juárez demand justice.)

APPENDIX D

Description of image: A diptych depicting a woman preparing mole poblano in the first photo and her gruesome murder in the second photo.


APPENDIX E

Description of image: A localized snapshot of the embroidered names of feminicide victims for *Desconocida, Unknown, Ukjent*.

APPENDIX F

Description of image: An expansive view of the embroidery project Desconocida, Unknown, Ukjent that showcases its meticulous layout.

Source: Lise Bjørne Linnert, Desconocida, Unknown, Ukjent, 2006-., embroidery, Ni Una Más at the Leonard Pearlstein Gallery at Drexel University.

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RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE


Schnitger, Alan. Email interview by Ryan Patterson. 4 June, 2015.


The Bracero History Archive, “About the Bracero Program,” http://braceroarchive.org/about.
Description of the image: Located at the U.S./Mexico border, a crucifix nailed to a wood panel painted pink with the phrase, “Ni una más,” (Not one more) along with several nails representing feminicide victims.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROHIT DE

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH BY ASSOCIATE EDITOR LAUREN WACKERLE, TC '16
YHR: As both a lawyer and historian of modern South Asia, you have studied law and history at the University of India, Cambridge, Princeton and Yale. What led you to attend law school, and what were some of the reasons you chose Yale for your advanced legal training and to return as professor of history?

DE: Studying law was a relatively easy decision to make. Law in India is an undergraduate degree – so you finish high school and take the law school entrance exams. What drew me to law school was that it was interdisciplinary. It was a five-year degree, so you studied social sciences along with legal subjects. By the end of law school, I knew I wanted to be someone who did research on public policy. I came to Yale because it had a very small LL.M program compared to its peers and encouraged its students to focus on research and academia, as opposed to more corporate practice. Coming here made me realize that the Indian legal system is actually a strange beast – it is a system that operates in English, and has not organically evolved from the society it governs. The Indian legal system and many substantive and procedural laws were enacted under colonial rule, but lawyers today continue to operate within in naturally. Quoting common law in Calcutta to sort out Hindu temple endowments is a normal act. I think coming here made me think more about the historical legacy of Indian law - if it is an alien transplant, why do people engage with it in such a compelling way. I was always drawn to legal history and had the opportunity to take several classes at Yale. On graduating, I got the Fox Fellowship to spend a year at Cambridge, where I could engage with yet another legal academy, one that was very much focused on the doctrine of law. Cambridge was also a major center for South Asian history and conversations there helped me decide to go on to graduate school at Princeton.

YHR: How has your legal education influenced your courses as a history professor at Yale?

DE: My interests in law and legal culture drive my teaching. I am trained as a historian of South Asia, but I teach courses spanning regions and time in legal history. What allows me to do this is that the law works as a common language, a medium that allows us to think across space and time. Traditionally, legal history has been understood as a study of national systems. You study U.S. legal history to understand how the U.S.A. became a unique society and polity, or you study Chinese legal history to think about tradition and change in China. However, I strongly believe in using legal history to think comparatively across place and time. The archive of law demonstrates that all societies deal with very similar situations. One of my courses is “Law and History,” where every week we organize our readings around a theme, cutting across time and place. For next week, we will be reading about how traders dealt with uncertainty over meeting their contractual commitments when negotiating over long distances. We will compare the Arab traders across the Indian Ocean and traders across the 19th century Continental U.S. They seem to be very different places, but you see common questions, like how do you maintain trust, and how do you maintain existing networks? How do you enforce remedies? What is the value of paper? I also think law is great for
YHR: What led you to specialize in South Asian history as well as contemporary India and Pakistan constitutional law and political thought?

DE: It was partly biographical. I was an Indian lawyer, and I started working with the history of Indian law. But it was also partly because the history of post-independent South Asia is relatively unexplored. For the longest time Indian history was supposed to end in 1947 with independence. After that political scientists and sociologists would take over. The kind of scholarship we have on contemporary India was very different; it was data driven and it focused on models or building causal explanations. This was partly because much of the material that historians would work with in the archives was often unavailable. I felt that this area, despite being so close, was understudied and not as well understood. The legal archive – I worked at the Indian Supreme Court – offered a unique window to the postcolonial state. The second reason is that contemporary South Asian politics is inextricably linked with the law. Almost all issues go up to the courts, which are fairly activist by American standards. Everyone from social movements, political parties, and corporations are engaged in dialogues through litigation. So in some ways, my research seeks to understand how this became possible.

YHR: Can you explain in brief some of your current research regarding the Indian constitution as the state transitioned from a colonial state to postcolonial republic?

DE: The Indian constitution was written in 1950. It's one the first postwar constitutions written by a populist assembly. One narrative says, “we have this great republican constitution, it’s fantastic,” but as critics point out, the constitution is closely modeled on colonial government. It provides rights, but it also limits them extensively. It continues a lot of colonial institutions. But the most predominant critique is that this is an alien constitution. These values are not part of our culture. Even the greatest advocates would argue that we have to learn to use this constitution, it does not reflect the lived experience of the people. I was particularly struck by a statement made by a disappointed member of the Constituent Assembly who on reviewing the final document said, “I was expecting the music of the veena or the sitar, but instead find the harsh discordant notes of an English military band.” The same kind of question that drives me to study law comes up: why do ordinary Indians repose faith and meaning in this alien constitution? I look at how the constitution comes to structure everyday life in the decade after independence. I argue that this process was led by some of India’s most marginal citizens, rather than elite politicians and judges. It shows that the constitution, a document in English that was a product of elite consensus, came alive in the popular...
imagination such that ordinary people attributed meaning to its existence, took recourse to it and argued with it.

I am beginning a new project, which takes me beyond India. I intend to look at a series of political trials that took place across the world in the 1950s. Everyone appeared to be trying their opponents for sedition and treason. In the colonies they try nationalist leaders, in newly independent nations they try opposition leaders, and in the West they try communists. I am discovering that in many of these cases, there are strong linkages amongst the lawyers. There are lawyers who move across countries and who specialize in defending these opposition figures. I am hoping this will help me break down binaries between colonial and postcolonial, West and East, liberal and leftist, by looking at what lawyers do and how they forge networks of legal knowledge. Also, I’m excited to discover many of the lawyers involved in this particular moment go on to forge a range of progressive legal movements in their own countries. By tying these figures together, I want to show a global history of rebellious lawyering.

**YHR:** How do you see your research impacting current political situations in South Asia?

**DE:** This is a very important question. Most of South Asia is going through a politically rocky time. There is a sharp rise in sectarian intolerance, often tied to state complicity or state-instigated violence. Much of this turmoil is based on a certain warped sense of history: where individuals think their community suffered a historic wrong. There exists an element of grievance against people outside their group, be it caste, religion, ethnicity. So what can historians do? I feel particularly responsible being away from South Asia. My scholarship often touches upon issues that become current political controversies, the recent violence over beef eating, or the debate over Muslim personal law. For instance, I look at why beef got politicized after independence and how a compromise that was struck in the 1950s has now come to unravel. More broadly, what South Asian historians have been struggling to do is to introduce a critical way of thinking in public discourse. Oftentimes, history becomes a state project: and depending who is in power, historical narratives change. I believe what history can teach us to thinking critically regardless of who occupies political power.

**YHR:** Did you have any influential mentors that led you towards your current career path?

**DE:** I’ve been fortunate to have a number of mentors, who’ve helped me explore new areas as I transitioned from India to the USA and from law to history. At Princeton I worked with an Indian historian, Gyan Prakash, and an American legal historian, Hendrik Hartog. They were both interested in very different things, and I think working together with them helped me formulate some great questions. When I was studying law here, I worked closely with Bruce Ackerman, and he was deeply invested in thinking about popular constitutionalism in the U.S. I am particularly indebted to Mitra Sharafi, a professor at the Wisconsin Law School, who has really pioneered the field of
South Asian legal history. Perhaps I am most grateful for my high school history teacher, Chitra Srinivas. Growing up in India, history is not a career option for most people, and high schools don’t invest much time in teaching history. Chitra Srinivas was a wonderful teacher who made history both exciting and relevant, and there are at least a dozen professional historians of modern India who were taught by her in high school.

**YHR:** Between work as a Supreme Court clerk in India and your constitutional reform projects in Sri Lanka and Nepal what was the most valuable lesson you learned?

**DE:** I had a very optimistic view about courts when I was a law student. But when I worked inside the court, I realized how difficult it is to access. This inaccessibility makes it even more remarkable that people continually go there with hope and belief. Many people see constitutionalism in South Asia as flawed or a poor copy of Western constitutionalism. Working there made me realize there are completely different systems and despite the superficial resemblance, they were working out new arguments and questions. For instance almost all of these countries have recognized that the state needs to address deep social inequality. They all provide constitutionally guaranteed affirmative action, justifying it not on grounds of diversity but for addressing historical injustices. The other interesting argument relates to uniformity. Many people believe that uniformity is a prerequisite for equality. But in South Asia, constitutions recognize that substantive equality can often be achieved by non-uniform application of standards, permitting reservation for women, recognition of minority religious family law, allowing smaller provinces to have special privileges.

I make this argument in my South Asia lecture class, which is that if you want to understand what is currently happening in the world, South Asia is a place you have to look at because this is literally the laboratory for the 20th century. Unlike Europe, which saw the industrial revolution precede democracy, South Asia undergoes both simultaneously. What does this mean for political and economic theory? Given that most economic and political theory draws upon the historical experiences of Western Europe, how do we derive new theories from experiences of the rest of the world?

**YHR:** What is your favorite aspect of teaching Yale history students?

**DE:** They constantly surprise me. After teaching for some time, you think you know how the class will run, but that is not true at Yale. The students also do everything I tell them to do. They come in with a strong grasp of the readings. And finally, I am really struck by the commitment Yale students have to speaking their minds. I love teaching freshmen seminars. They don’t tell me what they think I want to hear, but what they are thinking. This makes teaching an adventure because you can’t always predict how your students will respond.
YHR: What do you enjoy outside of teaching and like best about living in New Haven?

DE: I have spent most of my twenties living in Princeton, New Jersey, which was effectively a village, and also two years in Cambridge, which also shut down at five pm. So living in New Haven has been fun! I live downtown and it is an urban community. You can walk. There are multiple restaurants and bookshops to explore. Outside of class I actually watch a lot of Netflix – which I probably shouldn’t be saying in an interview! And I’m working my way through several Indian cookbooks.