

LEGACY

A Journal of Student Scholarship

Volume 8

2008



A Publication of the Sigma Kappa Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta
& the Southern Illinois University Carbondale History Department

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Andrea White

The Green World Effect

Northrop Frye, a distinguished literary critic and theorist of the twentieth century, coined the term “green world” in one of his books titled *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). In *A Student Guide to Play Analysis*, Dr. David Rush, Head of Playwriting at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, defines the term nicely with “any place away from ‘here’ where interesting and sometimes wonderful things happen that change people.”¹ For example, in *A Midsummer’s Night Dream* the two lovers escape to the forest and fall victim to Puck’s plunders. This world of magic that allows them to escape the hardships of real life is their green world. Alice from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865, and *Through the Looking Glass*, published in 1871 (hereafter *Alice and Looking-Glass*), and Dorothy from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, published in 1900, (hereafter *Oz*) have had their fair share of magical green world adventures. Alice’s green worlds would of course be located down the rabbit hole in Wonderland and the world through the other side of the mirror, while Dorothy’s would be the utopian land of Oz.

Both stories have had enormous impact on the world, mainly England and America, respectively. In addition to repeatedly showing up in pop culture (“You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes”²), Alice and Dorothy also had a direct effect on their contemporary societies. Their stories not only entertained child and adult alike, but influenced the literary and psychological worlds of Victorian England and America. Although I had searched for evidence on how the two girls affected or even influenced politics, research showed that instead, influence flowed other way: contemporary politics affected their fictional worlds.

Wonderland

Most people in America and England know the story of Alice, either through Disney’s 1951 animated film *Alice in Wonderland* or the novels. A young aristocratic girl (modeled after actual

aristocratic girl Alice Liddell) follows a white rabbit down its hole and literally falls into Wonderland, a place where animals speak, objects speak and move, and anything ingested into the body causes rapid growth or shrinkage. Differing from the first *Alice, Looking Glass*, published seven years later, shows order; only, of course, all is backwards, making it difficult to get from place to place and causing definitions and norms to be flipped every which way. Alice, in these two worlds, is able to find her way through their "madness" and returns home once she is done with the nonsense. This nonsense can be analyzed and turned toward the psychology of children who read the books: Alice's worlds are full of "cruelty, destruction, and annihilation" and go further than the experimentation of the Mother Goose rhymes,³ thus critics wondered whether it caused destructive juvenile behavior.

Children's literature in Victorian times was quite different before Alice made her debut. Literature for the children was to "improve, to warn and rebuke,"⁴ and writers "hoped to eliminate or at least diminish the misleadingly 'silly' and 'useless' works of imagination."⁵ Didactic and moralistic literature was the "official" literature for children. For example, Grimm's *Fairy Tales* (beginning in 1812) and Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann's 1845 children's story *Struwwelpeter* and its "terribly crude illustrations"⁶ (see *Figures 1 - 3*) were not at all unsuitable for children. The actual story of *The Little Mermaid* (1837) has a tragic ending, hardly known due to the Disney version of the tale. After making a pact with the sea witch the youngest mermaid is transformed into a human and warned, post-transformation, that if she touches the seawater she will dissolve into nothing but sea foam. Finally able to tell the human prince her true feelings it is revealed that he is already engaged. She cries to the sea witch who tells her that in order to return to the sea she must kill the prince. Unable to kill the one she loves, the little mermaid jumps into the sea, dissolving into foam. Fairy-tales with not-so-happy endings were regular, and their illustrations vivid.

Children of the Victorian Era in Imperial Britain were seen as small adults and so were dressed and treated as such; "to do away with childhood is... to relieve parents of an important obligation."⁷ If someone were judged clinically insane they were said to have the mind of a child, this being another way of equating the child and the adult in the period. Carroll's metaphors in his *Alice* books actually comment rather well on the state of the Victorian child:

"I—I'm a little girl," said Alice, rather doubtfully...⁸

The Victorian child had no real identity until they passed a certain age, ensuring their existence by not succumbing to sickness early in life. Victorian children were forced to attend tea parties and recite poems on the spot, as shown by Carroll throughout the stories, as he repeatedly makes fun of this practice by having many of the characters demand poetry from Alice. The story even starts out with Alice quite bored while listening to her sister read to her.



Fig. 1:
*Now see! oh! see, what a dreadful thing,
The fire has caught her apron-string;
Her apron burns, her arms, her hair;
She burns all over, everywhere.*



Fig. 2:
*So she was burnt with all her clothes,
And arms and hands, and eyes and nose;
Till she had nothing more to lose,
Except her little scarlet shoes;
And nothing else but these was found,
Among her ashes on the ground.⁹*



Fig. 3

Snip! Snap! Snip! the scissors go;

And Conrad cries out –

Oh! Oh! Oh!

Snip! Snap! Snip! They go so fast;

That both his thumbs are off at last.¹⁰

Carroll was the first author to bring imaginative writing to a popular audience that was accustomed to religious, rational/moral, and didactic stories. By introducing Alice he ushered in the Golden Age of children's literature.¹¹ Carroll not only introduced the nonsense genre but the "dream vision" as well, rarely used before Alice's time. Carroll wrote a style that was unprecedented. Robert Phillips writes:

What Dodgson [Carroll] was doing in *Alice in Wonderland* can be seen if the reader compares the book to standard fare written earlier for children.... Few authors chose to model their stories upon the fairy tale or to incorporate fairy-tale elements into new narratives for children.... English books written for children were supposed to be realistic in order to provide essential instruction in religion and/or morality, that the child might become a virtuous, reasonable adult.¹²

Charles Dickens, Catherine Sinclair, Robert Browning, Thomas Hughes, and S.G. Goodrich are just a few examples of Victorian authors that kept the status quo about which Philips is speaking. Carroll broke the norm in literature and provided a rare case (at least, before the *Harry Potter* books) where a sequel rivaled its forerunner. Many critics agree that the Golden Age for children's literature started, if not with *Alice*, then around the mid 1860's, and lasted until the 1930's, when the literature became "thematically unambitious and morally innocuous."¹³ Not only did *Alice* send children's literature into a Golden Age, it influenced writing in general. Children's books now catered to imagination: *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), *Treasure Island* (1884), *The Jungle Books* (1894), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), *Peter Pan* (1904), and *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), to name a few.

According to Donald Rackin, "as Carroll changed time and space, so we have changed the assumptions upon which we form our judgments."¹⁴ Throughout his books Carroll frequently made jokes about Englishmen's perceptions of time and space. This function has been discussed by a number of critics, including Rankin: "It is an important component of the book's vision of universal anarchy; for what mankind typically desires is *not* an adjustable frame of meaning, but an unambiguous and permanent order"; as the ordinary nineteenth-century reader still clung "to her old conception of Time as linear and progressive."¹⁵

During the 1920's and 30's, philosophers saw the *Alices* as "the mythical representative of all her fellows above ground."¹⁶ These philosophers, mainly French literary theorists, artists, and authors, along with English *avant-garde* circles, pegged the *Alices* as the forerunner of modern surrealism. Leading Surrealists André Breton and Louis Aragon recognized Carroll as "the first teacher of how to play truant,"¹⁷ and saw his emphasis on irrationality and disorder reflected in the Surrealist movement. Carroll's text matched their "Second Surrealist Manifesto" of 1929. The best-known quote from this document is "everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions."¹⁸ One can see how the *Alices* relate to this type of thinking: Alice is never sure what is real, the "highs and lows" are seen as her height jumps from smaller than a key to above the treetops, and the communicable, the incommunicable, and contradictions frustrate her throughout both books.

Reactions to the *Alices* seem to have varied from child to child. While some found the stories an ideal escape from their adult-dominated lives, others found them frighteningly real and horrifying. William Empson reportedly said, "There are things in *Alice* that would give Freud the creeps,"¹⁹ and Paul Schilder, an American psychologist of the 1930's, believed the "unconscious, primitive material in the *Alice* books to be so threatening to children's psyches that he urged that children be forbidden to read them."²⁰ Alice's worlds turn out to be nonsensical places without love that are terrifying and lonely. Yet the works were enjoyed throughout Carroll's lifetime. After his death in 1889, interest in his works waned temporarily, but the war in 1914-1918 sent many readers back to Carroll's green world. There they could find solace.²¹

The American child was not bewildered by the class-conscious Alice but by the child/adult relationships to law and social manners. The child-heroine Alice is "reasonable, self-controlled, and polite, while all the other inhabitants, human or animal, of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass are unsocial eccentrics."²² Adding on to this cultural difference, the American child-hero, unlike the British child-hero, was an anarchist or savage concerned with movement and action. He was free to do, say, and think what he wishes.²³ Alice was quite the opposite: a lady who knew the rules and turned upset when they were not followed. Thus, Alice shocked the typical American child, not to mention that the British jargon in the *Alices* was enough to confuse an American child unaccustomed to a caste system.

The surrounding world influences what most authors write on paper. Carroll was no exception. He was born in January 1832 and grew up with seven sisters, a stammer, and devoted himself to the Oxford Church early in life. In short, the *Alices* could be allegories of the Oxford Movement, a campaign that called for reform of the Anglican Church. To put this history simply, the Oxford Movement wanted to revitalize Anglican spiritual life by leaning toward literal interpretations of the scriptures and opposing liberalizing tendencies or toleration of other Anglican sects or groups.²⁴ This was the crucial English theological debate of the time. Allusions to the debate pervade the *Alices* through the frenetic atmospheres in *Looking-Glass*. The series mirrors the illogic of much of the High Church (ritualistic, rule-bound) versus Broad Church debate (spiritual, individualists).²⁵

No evidence can be found of the *Alices* affecting politics, but politics apparently did affect Alice. For instance, some have seen

the Red Queen as a parody of Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, a leader of the Oxford Movement.²⁶ This allegory, however, is simply a theory that was thought up after Carroll's death, and it cannot be proved that he had a deeper political meaning in his *Alices*. Perhaps the one way the *Alices* did influence politics happened when Alice Liddell's copy of *Alice Under Ground*, previously in the hands of an American collector, was given back to the British people in 1948 "in recognition of Britain's courage in facing Hitler before America came into the war" as a gesture of American solidarity.²⁷

The connections to the Oxford Movement and those in Carroll's life are only theories and possibly far-stretched ones at that. It is well known that the *Alices* were written for Alice Liddell and her sisters, and published only after many had urged Carroll to do so. Any politics that affected his writing and/or vice-versa could be purely coincidental. This is simply not the case for our next green world as it was seemingly written entirely for and due to politics. Written as populist literature (covered up with the author's desire to create an American fairy-tale), the *Oz* books have just as many interpretations as allegories.

Oz

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and the *Alices* share a major characteristic: both have a female heroine traveling through a green world. Despite how much he did not want to admit it, L. Frank Baum, author of (most of) the *Oz* series, was heavily influenced by Lewis Carroll. One of the first books he published was in 1899, titled *A New Wonderland*²⁸ and Baum's book *Father Goose, His Book* (also 1899), was a collection of *nonsense* poetry. Baum admired Carroll because he got children to admire Alice more than the princes and princesses of fairy-tales.²⁹ When it comes to *Oz*, Carroll's work once again had indirectly affected future authors. According to Katherine Rogers, "the revolutionary absence of any moral whatsoever in the Alice books had set an invaluable precedent," allowing Baum to take complete creative freedom over his stories. Like Carroll, Baum includes questions (less philosophical, of course) for the reader to answer herself.³⁰

Inevitable comparisons were made between the two heroines, such as Rogers' observation that "both Dorothy and Alice are faced with unfamiliar situations that they cannot understand; both are unfailingly sensible and right-thinking in the face of arbitrary, incomprehensible behavior by more powerful adults."³¹ Where Dorothy is able to make sense of the world in which she finds

herself, however, Alice is subject to forces she cannot control nor comprehend. Baum criticizes this aspect of Carroll's story, saying children can solve puzzles and overcome difficulties. After some time, it is obvious that Baum was tired of being compared to Carroll. His comments about the *Alice* books became more and more hostile; for example, he called Carroll's story "rambling and incoherent."³² Though the two stories have their similarities, they are very different.

Dorothy Gale is an orphaned young girl living in the dusty Kansas plains with her Uncle Henry and Aunt Em. One day a tornado comes and picks her and the whole farmhouse up and drops her in the middle of Munchkinland. There she meets the Good Witch of the North and is given silver shoes, follows a yellow brick road, and picks up three companions along the way to the Emerald City: the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion, and the Tin Woodman, all of whom wish to go to the Emerald City to ask advice from the powerful wizard. All the while they are being hunted down by the Wicked Witch of the West, who not only wants revenge for the killing of her sister, the Wicked Witch of the East (smashed under the farmhouse), but also desires the silver slippers.

Most know the story thanks to MGM's 1939 film adaptation, and therefore miss out on much of what originally happened in the book. For example, Dorothy's ruby slippers were originally silver, and the movie presented Oz as a dream while in the original story it was an actual place. It is safest to keep these two media separated and focus on the original novel; there are far too many differences between the film adaptation and the original novel, and between the societies of 1900 and 1939.

For now, setting aside the notion that *Oz* was written as a Populist piece, Baum had other goals in writing this story. He set out to create a fairy-tale genre for American children. Children, as said earlier, already had the Grimm or Anderson stories, which held horrifying images. *Oz* holds excitement and danger but violence and evil are under control. The witches enchant Dorothy but never threaten to bake her in an oven. And the bad wizards and witches are no more dangerous than easily disciplined.³³ Baum wanted to take out the stereotypical dwarves and genies and remove the violence.³⁴ In his first attempt to make this American genre happen, Baum published *American Fairy-Tales* (1901), which flopped. Eventually he gave up the American genre idea, which theorists of *Oz*, such as Martin Gardner, say was for the best since the fairy-tales violated basic laws of fantasy, such as a sense of wonder. *Oz* had the sense of wonder,

Chicago and Boston did not. The Oz books became classics not because Baum had written an American fairy-tale, but because “he adapted the fairy tale tradition itself to twentieth-century American taste with imaginative ingenuity.”³⁵

Though the Oz stories were popular among children, neither Baum nor his books were recognized as literary works. The books hardly ever appeared on recommended reading lists, were excluded from libraries and courses in children’s literature, and *Ladies’ Home Journal* rejected publication of *Patchwork Girl of Oz*.³⁶ In the opinion of the critics, then and now, Baum’s work lacked literary quality. For example, according to Martin Gardner:

He tells his stories simply and directly, contributing little to the child’s sense of language or to his awareness of its potentialities; they do not read aloud well.... There is in the Oz stories no more than a trace of fun with ideas nor any of the multileveled nonsense of Lear and the logical lunacy of Lewis Carroll. And there are, however much one enjoys Baum, occasional dead spots in the action of some of the later stories.³⁷

Though Oz books were a popular item, the stories themselves did nothing for the “American” genre Baum was strove to create.

Baum’s goal was to connect with his child readers and make their worlds easier. He made sure girls could connect to Dorothy by not giving her an age or physical appearance. Boys did not have problems identifying with her because she showed an adventurous spirit that they admired. Through Dorothy, Baum wanted to show children their capacities and that they could meet any challenge they had to face.³⁸ Also helping Baum’s case was his simplistic writing style, which many critics denounced. Gardner writes, “the thinking processes in the book are similar to the thinking of a child.”³⁹ Despite this criticism the books appeal to children and adult alike because they convincingly affirm positive, optimistic views. This perspective was appealing during the hard times at the turn of the twentieth century, when the middle and lower-classes, mainly farmers, were hounded by banks charging high interest on loans and mortgages.

Beyond escapist appeal, Baum’s work may have been a Populist political allegory. Baum was a politically active newspaper editor. One article he wrote called for the annihilation of Sioux Indians (for which Baum’s descendants apologized to the Sioux nation in

2006). In Aberdeen, South Dakota, Baum edited a small weekly newspaper that tapped into the radical views of prairie farmers of the American Northwest during the 1880s.⁴⁰ When Baum marched in torch-lit parades for William Jennings Bryan in 1896, he dressed up the event as a Populist allegory. An occasional visitor to the Baum household, Susan B. Anthony, would stay with the Baums when visiting Aberdeen. W.W. Denslow, *Oz's* illustrator, drew political cartoons for newspapers, some of which showed strong connections to images and characters in his illustrations in the *Oz* books (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Denslow's *Puck* Magazine cartoon from 1894 depicts an Aunt Em-like farm woman labeled "Democratic Party" caught in a tornado representing political change.⁴³

According to Neal Earle, critics have presented four major interpretations of the four *Oz* books: the Political Parable (most widely known); the Utopian/Escapist fantasy; the Feminist/Radical agenda; and the Psychological/Therapeutic motif.⁴¹ The Political Parable got its basic material after William McKinley defeated Bryan in 1896 and there were still issues unresolved with the farmers of

the West and the banks of the East. According to this interpretation, the opening of *Oz* shows the despair on the farms. The Wicked Witch of the East stands for the Eastern financial interests as she kept the Munchkins in bondage; the Tin Woodman represents the mindlessness of factory labor; the Scarecrow represents the farmers who are unwise not to see that they need to bind together; and the Cowardly Lion is Baum himself – “the politician who failed to deliver the votes.”⁴² Dorothy’s silver shoes, with which she travels across the gold brick road, represent the conflict between the silverites (those who believed that silver should be a monetary standard along with gold) and goldbugs (those who wanted to keep the gold standard monetary system), and the wizard in his emerald city is the evasive President McKinley. So where the critics saw a children’s story, plainly written and thus dully reviewed, the main picture was elaborately interpreted by later critics.

Of course, the political interpretation is debatable as there is evidence that Baum was a Republican and supported McKinley (going against the evidence of him marching in torch-lit parades for Bryan). Though he was an avid supporter of Women’s Suffrage and Populist states were the first on suffrage, he did not consistently support the broader political ideas of the Populist movement.

A return to innocent origins and striving for a better world lie near to the surface of the Utopian/Escapist interpretation, which emerged around the same time as the Populist allegory allegations. In this reading, *Oz* represents an idealized America, a harmonious utopia. *Oz* was finished in the same decade that the American Frontier was closed and the mildly restrictive Immigration Act of 1903 was put into effect. For many native-born Americans, “the ‘undefiled, green republic’ as the arena for the pursuit of happiness, this Jeffersonian-image that Americans had carried for generations, seemed to be eclipsing before their very eyes.”⁴⁴ This theory takes us far, very far away, away from *Oz* stories. Over the rainbow, if you will. Proponents of *Oz* as utopia are up against the fact that Dorothy’s sole purpose through the story is to get back to Kansas after she realized that over the rainbow, where she wished to be, is not as good as home.

As psychology became increasingly popular, so did its use in analyzing literature, which brought about the Psychological/Therapeutic motif of *Oz*. In this interpretation, the main story deals with Identity, Illusion, and the Ideal Self.⁴⁵ Technology becomes the handmaiden of illusion as the wizard, using god-like powers, states, “I am everywhere, but to the eyes of common mortals I am

invisible.”⁴⁶ The wizard is confronted with the psychological conflict between the Role and the Self, with the role being determined by Society, and the Self by the individual. In 1970 Sheldon Kopp wrote “The Wizard Behind the Couch” in which he used Baum’s story as a metaphor to explain “the possibility of personal growth through coming to accept ourselves, with humor if need be, and of the central role of a loving relationship in solving our problems.”⁴⁷

The final interpretation is that *Oz* reflects a feminist viewpoint. To these interpreters, *Oz* is a “not-so-veiled flirtation with the cardinal postmodern issue of gender.”⁴⁸ What started this investigation was obvious: Baum’s wife, Maude Gage, was the dutiful daughter of esteemed suffragette Matilda Joslyn Gage, co-author of the Women’s Bill of Rights with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Baum, as struggling newspaper editor, defended the cause of the women’s movement. With symbols such as the Gale home collapsing on the wicked witch, Dorothy becomes a liberator by breaking with her past.⁴⁹ Throughout *Oz*, Dorothy grows in confidence and leadership, rescuing herself and her companions. There is no prince or reconciliation with a father figure. This is progressive *and* American.

Just like the *Alices*, there is no shortage of interpretations, critiques, and theories that try to analyze *Oz*. The reason why the story has had such a hold on popular cultures across time is due to the many issues it touched upon. The four interpretations help show how *Oz* had a powerful (though indirect) influence over the decades. However, most political reference and influence from *Oz* came after the MGM release of *The Wizard of Oz*, which is much more popular than its original novel. Moreover, there is no evidence that the story actually contributed to the literary world of the time (only that it was popular to children and some adults). Looking at the evidence, *Oz* was written as a political allegory and not just a children’s story. So despite the popular hold *Oz* had over the decades due to the many issues and interpretations people have found in it, a good question to ask about Baum’s classic story is Was the novel actually any good or was it MGM’s Technicolor film adaptation that turned it and Dorothy into classics?

In considering *Oz* and *Alice*, the direct effects of the two female protagonists are not as obvious as the indirect effects, which are uncountable with the number still rising. There are countless pop culture movies, books, comic strips, comic books, television shows, video games, etc. that refer to the two stories, and many that base their story lines around *Alice* or *Oz*. T.S. Eliot is said to have

been influenced by Alice,⁵⁰ as have J.R.R. Tolkien,⁵¹ Neil Gaiman, and Vladimir Nabokov, who translated the *Alices* for a Russian audience.⁵² James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* was directly influenced:

"Wonderlawn's lost us forever. Alis, alas, she broke the glass! Liddell lokker through the leafery, ours is mistery of pain."⁵³

Furthermore, the neurological condition micropsia is named Alice in Wonderland Syndrome (AIWS), which affects human visual perception, leading one to see things smaller than they actually are. In computer gaming, a "rabbit hole" refers to the "initiating element that drives the player to enter the game."⁵⁴ And "going down the rabbit hole" is a reference for taking drugs. "I'm melting! I'm melting!" has been spoofed in countless films, and musicals such as *The Wiz* and *Wicked* are based on the *Oz* books. And of course there is the whole dispute about Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*.

As literature, the *Alices* had a major effect, bringing imagination and nonsense into children's lives and changing the way children were viewed in Victorian times. Without Carroll, Baum might not have had the freedom to write a story such as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The two stories have obviously had their effects on all types of artists throughout the century. It is odd, though: where Alice and Dorothy's green worlds didn't necessarily change them to any extent (as a green world usually does), they provoked change in us and our society, and moved us far enough past entertainment to directly and indirectly affect our literature, psychological, and political worlds.

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Glenda Sullivan

Progressive-Era Women and Housing Reform

The Progressive Era brought many changes to the United States. Industry and mass production created jobs and opportunities for employment in cities. From 1901 to 1910, 8.8 million immigrants settled in the United States; another 5.7 million arrived in the following decade, and many crowded into such cities as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.¹ The large influx of people stirred concerns among the native-born population, strained municipal resources, and created acute housing shortages. Moreover, much of the housing that was available was poorly constructed and did not provide adequate sanitation, lighting, safety, or space for children to play. Diseases spread through the densely populated areas, taking the lives of young and old alike. Factories contributed to pollution in the air and water. Although some residents feared the influx of newcomers, urban reformers sought to improve the conditions for the newly-arrived immigrants. Some sought government intervention in housing reform while others worked with voluntary organizations to improve housing conditions, educate the poor, and feed the hungry. Women reformers often took the lead in lobbying for better living conditions for poor immigrant families. And though often unrecognized for their significant contributions to housing reform, they served important social and political roles, educating the larger public about the need for reform, and organizing the political community to legislate needed changes.

At the turn of the century, women, especially middle-class reformers, moved more fully into the public arena. Educated and politically aware, they included settlement house workers, volunteer leaders, and trained academics. Some called for greater equality between men and women and lobbied for a variety of reforms, including suffrage. Other women emphasized their difference from men, drawing on what they regarded as their “maternal instincts” to press for improvements in urban America. Scholars have demonstrated that women who focused on reform in the Progressive Era came from both groups. But, as such

historians as Maureen Flanagan have discovered, women who saw themselves as different from men played an especially important role in pressing for better homes for immigrants, African Americans, and wage-earning women. Women looked within the walls of the tenements, saw the faces of the needy, and were compelled by their maternalism to improve housing conditions. Relying on the experiences gained by caring for their own homes and families, women housing reformers were able to utilize these skills to help others. Male reformers, on the other hand, primarily focused on the financial aspects of housing and the rights of property owners. According to Flanagan, "even honest men opposed housing reform that would have in any way restricted the rights of property."²

These significant roles of women reformers have not, however, been fully explored. The desire to help others often took many forms; some humanitarian, others more coercive. In efforts to "assimilate" newcomers to their new homeland, for example, Progressive-era women also tried to replace the traditions of immigrants with those that would help them become more "American." Still, these women reformers took it upon themselves as women to improve the lives of immigrants. Although such historians as Molly Ladd-Taylor, who coins the phrase "progressive maternalism," identify the variety of reforms women advocated, they scarcely mention the importance of women and housing reform. Progressive-era women were, however, essential to the movement for better housing, and they firmly grounded their reform impulses within a form of maternalism.³

Progressive-era "maternalism" created within some women a desire to help others in need, such as the poor and immigrants. As Ladd-Taylor explains, ". . . progressive women reformers assumed that women had a special capacity for nurture by virtue of being women, stressed women's political obligation to raise the nation's citizens, [and] held privileged women responsible for all children's welfare . . ."⁴ "Such clearly defined gender roles," author and professor Christine Woyshner affirms, "necessitated that women — if they were to have a public role at all — use their motherhood as a lever in establishing rights and fomenting social change." "Women of this era," she continues, "were able to enter the public world, despite the widely held belief that they belonged at home, by arguing the community, city, or town was an extension of the walls of their homes."⁵ Women contemporaries also noted the vital role of domesticity in fueling the spirit of reform. In 1915, for example, women's rights activist and historian Mary Ritter Beard wrote,

"In the sphere of municipal housekeeping, which forms such an easy transition from domestic housekeeping, women have proved themselves interested and efficient in suggesting reforms and helping to see them completed to the minutest detail."⁶ Caroline Bartlett Crane, founder of the Women's Civic Improvement League in Kalamazoo in 1904, argued that many features of municipal affairs corresponded to housekeeping, especially those that focused on sanitation and health, and further insisted that women must be "actors" and not simply "helpers" in public health reform.⁷

This study will show that women's housing reform efforts through the Progressive Era varied from exposing shocking conditions to stimulating public sentiment and political action for needed reform. Articles published in major newspapers such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *New York Times* provide an indication of the numerous and varied housing reform activities in which women were engaged during the Progressive Era. Women even took the lead in providing housing themselves by buying and renovating houses for the urban poor and thereby demonstrating that decent housing could be provided at affordable rents. Women also made surveys of housing conditions to educate political leaders and organize such groups as the City Homes Association in Chicago, which helped, for example, with the passage of the city's tenement housing ordinance in 1902. But their actions did not stop there. Unlike their male counterparts, who were reluctant to rely on government action, women reformers lobbied at the local and state levels and by 1920, according to Flanagan, the Woman's City Club had turned its attention away from city government to the national level and called for a federal bureau of housing.⁸

Conditions in urban areas aroused both fear and concern among middle-class reformers. The urban population grew so quickly that housing needs could not adequately be met, and sanitation and overcrowding became serious problems. In Chicago, for example, although outdoor privy vaults had been outlawed after a slum investigation in 1893, many tenants without other choices continued to use outdoor privies. Tenants who had access to indoor water closets, often located in a hallway or cellar, typically shared them with multiple families. Tenement housing surveys often found that the indoor facilities were not in working order. Overcrowding was also a problem. To help pay the rent, families often took in boarders. Dark rooms, or rooms with no outside light or ventilation, contributed to health problems. Garbage accumulated

in the hallways and in the streets, providing a haven for the rodent population. These poor living conditions resulted in the outbreak and spread of such diseases as diphtheria, typhoid, cholera, small pox, and yellow fever.⁹

There were few, if any, regulations for control of pollutants produced by new industries. Tenement house residents lived in the midst of businesses including factories, bakeries, grocery stores, and slaughtering facilities. In fact, sometimes slaughtering not only took place in the stockyards but also in tenement housing. A 1912 survey by the Chicago Woman's Club found the following: "Family of eight in apartment used by father as chicken slaughtering place. Clotted blood mixed with feathers and dirt deposited everywhere from reeking stairs to last room. Kitchen floor deep with feathers."¹⁰

Analysis of housing problems undertaken by concerned citizens and organizations confirmed that the problems with urban housing were ongoing and would not easily be corrected. According to Robert W. De Forest, first Tenement House Commissioner of New York City, "The first tenement law regulation in America was enacted for New York City in 1867" due to reform efforts that began in 1842.¹¹ Journalist and photographer Jacob Riis stunned the public with his 1890 exposé, providing visual images of tenement life in *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. Riis's photographs confirmed that housing problems were still prevalent despite tenement laws.¹²

In responding to housing problems, women reformers not only drew from their "progressive maternalism" but also from earlier experiments of British women reformers. In particular, Progressive-era women examined the work of Octavia Hill of England. In 1865, Hill had purchased three rundown tenement houses with a loan from a friend and was able to demonstrate "what could be done by a landlord who established right relations with tenants, and who cooperated with them in making dwellings suitable places in which to live."¹³ Author Fullerton Waldo noted in 1917 that "Students of her methods came from near and far to be instructed" and that her influence in housing could be found in Germany, Holland, Sweden, and in the United States.¹⁴

Settlement houses were established within communities to provide education, health services, and recreation for the poor and immigrant population while seeking community and political reforms for problems that affected the communities, including housing. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Star in Chicago established one of the best-known settlement houses, Hull House, in 1889. By

1911, there were over 400 settlement houses operating in the United States.¹⁵

In 1892, the Working Women's Society conducted an in-depth survey of housing conditions in New York. Focusing on tenement housing in the Mulberry Street Bend area of the city, the Working Women's Society sought to "enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the public in demanding better homes for working people."¹⁶ In addition to describing the poor condition of many of the buildings, this committee also noted numerous fire hazards. In one instance, the report indicated that in a clothing store, rags and ashes cluttered the floor, two to three inches deep.¹⁷

In 1893, nurse and social activist Lillian Wald founded Henry Street Settlement, located in the Lower East Side of New York, to help meet the medical needs of the poor and immigrants. Wald encouraged the American public to "know immigrants as folks, rather than as tables of statistics." "Why can we forget," Wald explained, "that in to-day's raw immigrant is really hidden tomorrow's citizen, enfranchised and powerful. For our own sake, we should protect and educate newcomers."¹⁸ From that perspective, reform was not only a humanitarian gesture but also a means of social preservation.

The influence of women housing reformers was especially evident in Philadelphia. Following the example of Octavia Hill, older tenements were purchased in 1896, and were successfully renovated providing improved housing for the poor. Waldo's *Good Housing That Pays, A Study of the Aims and the Accomplishment of the Octavia Hill Association*, published in 1917, documented the successful tenement housing experiment in Philadelphia. Rent was kept at a reasonable rate that the working poor could afford. The Octavia Hill Association in Philadelphia was able to realize a profit while providing decent housing. The Association also found that the process of rent collections was more successful when a female rent collector was used. For the tenants, the rent collector was much more than one who merely collected their rents. According to Waldo, she was also known for "lending an ear as 'guide, philosopher and friend' to a wide category of troubles great and small – none too large and none too minute for her fearless sympathetic consideration."¹⁹

In 1900, Mrs. Henry Wade Rogers, women's rights activist and wife of Northwestern University's president, encouraged a group of Jewish women at Sinai Temple in Chicago to "arouse public sentiment" to the city's poor handling of tenement housing and to "become the friends and neighbors" to those in need.²⁰ The

National Council of Jewish Women, founded in 1893, provided assistance with a "friendly" approach in helping meet the needs of immigrants. This assistance came by helping newly-arrived immigrants find lodging. They also provided vocational training along with information about other social and medical services available to those residing in the slums.²¹

In Chicago, the City Homes Association, made up of male and female members, conducted an investigation of housing conditions in 1901. The survey specifically excluded the worst housing areas, such as the "Black Belt," in an effort to sample "typical" tenement housing conditions in Chicago. The survey determined that Chicago was not prepared to make necessary modifications and accommodate future growth.²² The survey identified the need for impartial inspectors who would monitor housing conditions for violations and subsequent corrections. The investigations of the City Homes Association resulted, according to Flanagan, in the passage of a "new housing" ordinance in 1902. But reformers remained frustrated because the law was not enforced by the building department, and a subsequent legal ruling further restricted its impact by applying the law only to newly constructed buildings.²³

Beginning in 1902, women were hired as tenement inspectors in New York, providing another indication of the growing public role of women in the housing movement. These women inspectors formed positive relationships with tenants. The daily life of tenement dwellers went "on undisturbed before" them as they made their structural and sanitary inspections, followed up on anonymous complaints, and conducted reinspections to see if complaints had been corrected. Women inspectors were expected to meet the same physical demands as the men who held the same positions, including working long hours and exposure to bad weather conditions.²⁴

In Orange, New Jersey, a woman saw success as a volunteer sanitary inspector in 1903. Genevieve Wilson served as a "go between" for the tenant and landlord. Although supported by the Civic Sanitation Association of the Oranges, an organization composed of women, Wilson had no authority to enforce the recommendations she made to the landlords. She was, however, successful in making improvements and persuading landlords to make necessary changes. According to a 1903 *New York Times* article, she was effective due in part to "her persuasive personality and her womanhood."²⁵ Indeed, the use of "moral suasion" was a common tactic among women housing reformers.

Speaking before the Woman's Municipal League in New York in 1909, Dr. E. R. L. Gould, President of the City and Suburban Homes Company, asserted that women performed better as social workers than men. Dr. Gould suggested that such qualities as having a good business sense, energy, and intelligence made women good social workers. He also indicated that women social workers were welcomed into more homes because they helped residents feel comfortable. According to Dr. Gould, in an unusual case, he paid one woman 50 percent more than a man because of her abilities.²⁶

In 1911 and 1912, the Chicago Woman's Club conducted a survey of tenement housing conditions in the 20th Ward of Chicago to determine "To what extent are these laws and ordinances enforced, and if they are not enforced, what is the reason?" Rose Zwihihsy, a member of the Chicago Woman's Club, served as the primary investigator and conducted the survey over a period of eight and a half months. Zwihihsy found overcrowding, poor plumbing, filth in the yards, poor lighting, and poor ventilation. Safe places for children to play were difficult to come by. She also found that 87 percent of the children could play ". . . with the horse cart, wagon, truck, street car, whirl of dust, alley mud, garbage can, manure box and a thousand other obstructions . . ." but very few playground areas were available. Shocked by the findings, the Woman's Club used the survey to awaken public opinion and demand reform. Numerous agencies from throughout the city such as the Henry Booth Settlement and United Charities responded to the Woman's Club appeal for relief due to the results of this survey.²⁷

Another woman reformer, one Miss Collins of New York, also demonstrated a successful tenement project with properties she owned on Water Street. According to an article published in 1912 by Emily Dinwiddie, Supervisor of the Trinity Church Corporation Housing Department and the Housing Department of the Women's Civic Club of Manhattan, Collins completely renovated the properties, providing additional lighting for the once dark halls and larger back yards. Collins' philosophy was that when adequate facilities were provided, tenants would maintain them with pride. Like the Octavia Hill Association's project in Philadelphia, Collins demonstrated that decent housing could be affordable and realize a profit. Other benefits were realized as a result of improving housing on Water Street including fewer arrests within the neighborhood, fewer vacant apartments, easier collection of rents, and tenant pride that helped to maintain better facilities.²⁸

The Housing Committee of the Chicago Woman's Aid and

Department of Health articulated the “Ten Commandments of Good Citizenship” in 1913 and maintained that they would be beneficial for children’s health, improving sanitary conditions in the home, and for creating a beautiful city. “The Ten Commandments of Good Citizenship” reflected progressive maternalism and included:

1. Thou shalt honor thy city and keep its laws.
2. Remember thy cleaning day and keep it wholly.
3. Thou shalt love and cherish thy children and provide for them decent homes and play grounds.
4. Thou shalt not keep thy windows closed day or night.
5. Thou shalt keep in order thy alley, thy back yard, thy hall and stairway.
6. Thou shalt not kill thy children’s bodies with poisonous air, nor their souls with bad companions.
7. Thou shalt not let the wicked fly live.
8. Thou shalt not steal thy children’s right to happiness from them.
9. Thou shalt bear witness against thy neighbor’s rubbish heap.
10. Thou shalt covet all the air and sunlight thou canst obtain.²⁹

In an address in 1917 for the Women’s Club of Forest Hills, Long Island, Emily Dinwiddie indicated that housing conditions in the Borough of Queens were poor and recommended women to “band themselves into a campaign for better housing for those unable to pay heavy rent.” Dinwiddie placed blame for these housing conditions on the “greed for gain.”³⁰ For their part, landlords often showed little concern with the conditions of their property, whether existing buildings or new construction. When confronted with a safety concern about sewer gas, for instance, one landlord replied, “it didn’t matter, as all the twelve apartments were to be occupied by Italians.”³¹

Women's roles in housing reform also elevated the political role of women and brought increased recognition and attention to problems of inadequate housing. According to sociologist Linda Rynbrandt, "Women were assigned the task of defending their homes and families in the private sector but were increasingly unable to do so without becoming involved in public political reform in the more modern, industrial society."³² The Nineteenth Amendment legalizing national women's suffrage was not ratified until 1920, yet women had been taking active roles in municipal and local government for some time. As contemporary housing reformer Caroline Bartlett Crane believed, "women did not need to wait for the vote to make an impact on society."³³

Progressive-era women's actions, then, laid the foundation for subsequent reform in the New Deal. From 1933 to 1937, Roosevelt's Public Works Administration (PWA) Housing Division would build approximately 55 housing developments throughout the United States providing 25,000 federal housing units. Not only did this program provide jobs for the unemployed during the Great Depression, it provided federal housing for low-income families. The Chicago Division of the PWA Housing Division built Trumbull Park Homes as well as the Jane Addams Houses and the Julia Lathrop Homes, named for two Progressive-era women who were active in the development and work of Hull House.³⁴

The Chicago Woman's Club survey of 1912 had sought to answer two questions: "To what extent are these laws and ordinances enforced, and if they are not enforced, what is the reason?" The Chicago Woman's Club asked one final question and provided this potential solution for housing reform:

What is to be done? One step toward the reform of the law will be taken when societies and organizations, having good housing at heart, will form a central organization in the interests of good housing. A membership of delegates from those societies and interested individuals, formed for the purpose of disseminating information and awakening public opinion, would constitute a dynamic force in working out this reform.³⁵

Progressive-era women were willing to form this "dynamic force" in housing reform by stepping out of the comforts of their homes providing the caring, nurturing virtues of maternalism as well as extending the nature of housekeeping to help others in need.

Like many of the changes that Progressives sought, not every effort to improve housing conditions was successful. For those efforts that were successful, however, many lives were affected in positive ways. The task at hand must have seemed insurmountable at times. The Civics Committee wrote, "Apparently, so far as sweeping reform is concerned, an earthquake or holocaust seems the only hope."³⁶ However, where little hope had existed before, women's efforts made the lives of the poor and immigrants, particularly women and children, a bit brighter. To borrow part of Maureen Flanagan's book title, Progressive-era women were effective in housing reform efforts because they were able to "see with their hearts."

End Notes

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Michael-Ann Johnson

A History of Municipal Swimming Pools from 1908-1956

On July 27, 1919, a young black man was swimming at the Twenty-Ninth Street Beach in Chicago, when a group of young white boys knocked him off his raft by throwing stones at him. It was reported that he and a group of friends began to float into an area that was unofficially designated white. At this time, Chicago had not implemented Jim Crow restrictions at its beaches. The young man fell into the water and the white boys interfered with his rescue and he drowned.¹ This caused a seven-day racial riot, during which two black men were killed and fifty others, both white and black, were severely injured. It was an “orgy of shooting, arsons, and beatings.”²

Public swimming pools represent perhaps one of the least examined municipal spaces, yet they hold an important place in the history of American culture. These spaces combine a multitude of complex questions and issues surrounding race, gender, and community inclusion. Swimming pools were wildly popular and they became a source of controversy in many forms. Because the nature of swimming was very intimate, people were aroused and often agitated by the styles of swimwear, mixing of gender, and the thought of interracial swimming. This led to the eventual exclusion of black Americans at these popular establishments in northern cities. Southern pools excluded blacks from the beginning and refused to integrate even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In order to maintain segregation, southern municipal pools were either sold and privatized or filled in and closed.

Jeff Wilste, a social historian, has investigated these issues in his 2007 book, *Contested Waters: A social history of swimming pools in America*. In his study, Wilste treats Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Washington DC, Baltimore and St Louis as northern cities. Even though the latter three definitely have a southern influence, their swimming pools all followed a pattern of development similar to Chicago and New York.³ Wilste asserts these facilities started as bath houses or bathing beaches segregated by sex not race, but

moved to conventional swimming pools or swimming beaches that became gender integrated, which in turn caused them to become racially segregated. By using Wiltse's framework and newspaper articles as primary sources, this paper will deepen the discussion of how swimming pools in northern cities transformed into Jim Crow-restricted municipal spaces.

At the turn of the century, swimming pools were not designed for recreation or exercise; they were built to provide large bathtubs for the working-class poor.⁴ These giant tubs were contentious due to the intimacy and the Victorian values that dictated behaviors within society at the turn of the twentieth century. Careful placement and construction of these bathing pools maintained segregation between class and gender, but, according to Wilste, race was not a consideration in northern cities until later.⁵

Between 1890 and 1913 municipal pools in northern cities were segregated by sex, not race. An article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* mentions, "[A] negro was drowned while swimming off Twenty-Fifth Street. It was supposed he was seized with cramps."⁶ This bathing beach was racially integrated at this time. In 1911, CF Colson, a community member, wrote to the editor of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* complaining, "[S]ince the ladies of the household cannot always have a masculine escort, I was glad of the 'dividing fence' so that I might feel that they... were safe from such annoyances as half grown negro boys changing clothes in full sight."⁷ This article demonstrates that before the fence, blacks and whites were allowed to swim together and that men and women were segregated.

From 1900 to 1911 swimming became extremely popular as thousands flocked to bathing beaches. The once utilitarian space had transformed, because of demand, into a site for recreation, exercise, and sight-seeing. Attendance statistics at a St. Louis bath house showed a steady trend; in the first year of operation, 517 people used the bath and by 1911 4,352 had washed in this space.⁸ In 1913 another St. Louis pool drew as many as 50,000 people at a time; half would swim while the other half watched.⁹ People frequented pools as often as they attended movies. An estimated 30 million Americans swam 350 million times in pools in 1934.¹⁰ Newer bathing facilities became large elaborate spaces and there was a sense of pride associated with a town's swimming pool. Smaller communities would hold picnics and large gatherings and their pools could accommodate the entire town's population. Community members took pride in their town's swimming pool and attended city hall meetings to discuss the administration practices

of these spaces. Citizens complained of behaviors of children, risqué swimming suits, and even restrictions on black peoples' use of the pools. This was a space for community involvement and had a democratizing effect on neighborhoods.¹¹

In 1913 St. Louis opened Fairgrounds Pool. The pool was an enormous circular shaped pool with a sandy beach and waterfalls. It was defined as a family establishment by city administrators, meaning it was gender integrated and focused more on family entertainment. It was one of the first to take the leap of allowing men and women to swim together. It was also one of the first northern swimming pools to segregate by race even before the doors opened.¹² A few years after the opening of Fairgrounds Pool, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York and other northern cities began to follow St. Louis by implementing Jim Crow regulations.¹³ This begs the question, why did city officials decide to implement Jim Crow rules to racially divide swimming pools that were once integrated?

According to Wilste and David Oshinsky, another historian, the most obvious reason for racial segregation was gender integration. There was an overwhelming consensus that interracial relationships were forbidden and white women must be protected from the "savage" nature of black men, based on the belief that black men had no control over their desires.¹⁴ Even photographic images of women in bathing suits were said to cause blacks to have "a look like that of a hungry devil" and it was the "duty [of the superior race]... to make the most possible out of the Negro."¹⁵ This fear was prevalent across the country but strongest in the South. There was a belief that black men would sexually assault women and white men needed to "protect" them.¹⁶ The possibility of black men swimming with white women was untenable for the majority of white Americans due to the fear of uncontrolled sexual advances in this highly intimate space.

Between 1911 and 1915 there was a "wave of hysteria on the color question" creating increased racial oppression throughout the United States.¹⁷ The most significant catalyst for white fears was the Great Black Migration. In 1900 ninety percent of all blacks lived in the southern United States. With increased racial violence and the lack of job opportunities in the South, two million blacks moved to northern and western regions of the United States. Chicago saw a marked increase in its black population between 1910 and 1920, from 44,000 to more than 109,000. During the same period, New York City's black population increased from 92,000 to 152,000.¹⁸

These dramatic increases could be observed all over the country and caused northern attitudes to change towards blacks. Black people were forced into residential segregation and received limited economic opportunities because northern whites felt threatened by the new arrivals.

A few political leaders assisted in the hysteria by inciting hatred and violence. One such leader from Mississippi, James Vardaman, was a governor in 1908 and a US senator in 1913. He promulgated racist hate speech at every public engagement. He was proud of his white heritage and defended lynching and violence towards blacks. He openly stated he would deal with the "coon problem" and that the Fifteenth Amendment and the Declaration of Independence did not apply to "wild animals and niggers."¹⁹ In the eyes of William English Walling, one of the founders of the NAACP, Vardaman's words and hatred traveled north. He commented that Vardaman was "transferr[ing] the race war to the north."²⁰ It is not clear whether Vardaman had a direct impact on Jim Crow laws moving north but he definitely helped put white supremacy on the national agenda.

Vardaman found justification for racial hatred in a scholarly movement which tried to scientifically define blacks as inferior. According to Oshinsky, doctors, scientists, historians, psychiatrists, economists and social workers wrote articles and books stating similar sentiments to the effect that "black men and women are almost wholly subservient to the sexual instinct... negroes are purely animal."²¹ One scientist, Charles McCord, believed the so-called problem of the black person was genetic. He asserted that "blacks belonged to a child race" and they were "shiftless" and "impulsive." He concluded that blacks were "a danger to whites as well as themselves."²² This sentiment fueled racial tensions as blacks migrated north.

After 1915, racial violence rose dramatically. That year *Birth of a Nation* attracted thousands of viewers, grossing \$14,000 per day.²³ Using visual imagery to portray blacks as savages who wanted to sexually assault white women, the movie endorsed the Ku Klux Klan as the only means to overthrow the blacks of the South. This movie helped heighten anxieties toward the wave of southern blacks migrating north. These fears extended to swimming pools which became a locus for white/black conflict.

On July 29, 1916, Jackson Park Beach in Chicago was the scene of just such a riot. Two hundred white men attacked ten black men because of supposed insults thrown by the blacks. The same day

saw a racial riot at Chicago's Hyde Park and Woodlawn beach, with the arrest of one white man and two black men.²⁴ In 1919 more than twenty northern cities experienced racial riots as tensions grew.²⁵

Between 1915 and 1930, increased racial tension and violence in northern cities spurred civic leaders to implement Jim Crow restrictions at swimming pools. This was, according to Wilste, "part of a larger social and intellectual transformation."²⁶ Divisions between blacks and whites became a central theme and it was difficult for Americans to see past color lines to find meaningful solutions to crucial issues presented with the so-called Negro problem.²⁷

Toward the end of the 1930's, black Americans opposed Jim Crow restrictions. In response, cities opened swimming pools designated for blacks only. Indianapolis opened a black only pool that was described in an editorial as "the best swimming pool I have ever seen."²⁸ Smaller towns could not afford this option. They either had to allow interracial swimming, designate different days for whites and blacks to use the pool, or completely refuse black entry.²⁹ For some blacks, separate pools were acceptable and welcomed, but for others this violated their sense of justice and equality. Groups began protesting in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Colorado and California. One interracial group called the Modern Trend Progressive Youths entered a Gotham City pool, protesting segregation. The police were called and removed the group. The response of pool administrators was to close the pool during certain hours.³⁰ While it is not clear how this measure would have prevented protest and maintained segregation, the incident clearly shows resistance to integration.

Another example of northern cities embracing Jim Crow restrictions can be seen in Pittsburgh, which opened Highland Park swimming pool in August, 1939. The pool could hold as many as 10,000 people, and on opening day thousands stood in line, including blacks. The pool administrators singled out each black person and requested to see their "health certificates."³¹ This was new to the black swimmers because the other pools in the city were integrated and did not require certification. The Superintendent of Public Works was confronted by a local black citizen's group to obtain clarification on the new policy. The Superintendent was unaware of the new requirement and assured the group that there would be "no further discrimination."³² The following day another group of blacks arrived at the pool and were allowed in but they were immediately threatened by a large group of whites. They

asked for protection from the police officer on duty but he let it be known that once they were in the water, they were on their own. Subsequently, these black children “were beat[en] out of the pool.”³³ This was not an isolated occurrence. Frequently police refused to provide protection and instead of arresting the white assaulters, the blacks were arrested for inciting riotous behavior.

The group most instrumental in challenging Jim Crow swimming institutions was the NAACP. In 1932, Denver opened a swimming pool and immediately implemented Jim Crow restrictions. Blacks protested this decision but white city administrators stated that they would provide a separate facility for blacks. The local leaders from the NAACP refused, stating that “no such facility was wanted.”³⁴ The NAACP brought the matter to the District Courts and on Oct. 7, 1932 they won. Judge Charles C. Sackman ruled that, “Negroes have the same legal right to use public bath houses and bathing beaches that other persons have.”³⁵ The ruling implied that “separate but equal” did not apply to Denver’s swimming pools.

The Kansas Supreme Court contradicted this ruling in January 1938. It found that “because [swimming pools] were such intimate public spaces,” administrators had wide discretion to exclude anyone they saw unfit.³⁶ This wide ruling allowed for the continuation of discrimination in Kansas. The case did have one caveat that would later give legal footing for further cases. The pool in Kansas had been privatized to avoid integration by leasing the pool to a private citizen. The city tried to argue that they could not be responsible for the decisions of this private citizen. This was a point that the Kansas Court disagreed on, ruling that the city could not escape responsibility.³⁷ Privatizing pools became a tactic used to segregate and exclude blacks and this case would be used to defeat this practice much later. Other cities simply emptied and buried their pools to avoid legal challenges and ultimately integration.³⁸

After WWII, black Americans stepped up pressure to end discrimination in the United States. It was difficult to justify fighting a war to end tyranny while living in a country that promoted racial discrimination. The courts were shifting as well, but it would be several years’ after the end of WWII for real change to occur. In 1950, St. Louis was challenged about its segregation policy at Fairgrounds Pool. Members of the NAACP were denied entrance and they brought their case to the US District Court in St. Louis.³⁹ Judge Rubey M. Hulen granted the petitioners’ access to the pool on July 19, 1950 on the basis that the city could not exclude a citizen based on their race. He also went further, stating that constructing

a comparable pool might “mitigate discrimination, but [would] not validate it as to other sections of the city.”⁴⁰ Judge Hulén was suggesting that since blacks had to walk past other white-only swimming pools to get to the Jim Crow pools, blacks were not “receiving equal treatment under the Fourteenth Amendment and convenience was a component of equality.”⁴¹

After this ruling the mayor announced the pool would without delay racially desegregate. In its place, the mayor added, Fairgrounds Pool would be segregated by gender, essentially “turning back the clock thirty-seven years to 1913.”⁴² However, the white people of St. Louis were not willing to have racial integration in any form. Attendance dropped from the record set in 1948, of 313,000 swimmers to 60,000 in 1950 and a further reduction in 1951 down to 10,000.⁴³ This white residential flight was blamed on desegregation in the 1954 *Annual Report* by the park and recreation division and in 1956 Fairgrounds pool closed its doors.

The first major national victory to desegregate pools happened in 1956 when the city of Baltimore was sued by the NAACP. Baltimore argued that despite *Brown v. Board of Education*, swimming pools must remain segregated. Judge Roszel Thomsen upheld segregation stating that swimming pools were “more sensitive than schools.”⁴⁴ The NAACP appealed to the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit which unanimously overturned the ruling and ordered Baltimore to desegregate all of its pools. The city appealed but the US Supreme Court agreed with the Fourth Circuit and refused to hear the case.⁴⁵ Baltimore immediately complied and desegregated all of the pools on June 23, 1956. Baltimore’s integration was “without incident,” despite contrary predictions that integration would provoke racial violence.⁴⁶

However, there was an immediate drop in white attendance which equaled that of St. Louis. In 1955 attendance at the Baltimore pool totaled 23,320 and in 1956, the year of integration, attendance dropped to 870. This was a 95% drop and whites enforced segregation by abandonment.⁴⁷ Blacks fought and won a major victory for civil rights but they could not change the engrained hatred. Whites finally appeared to have admitted defeat and retreated to private pools.

The effects of white abandonment were devastating to municipal swimming pools. Without the large attendance of whites, swimming pools were left to deteriorate. Local, state, and federal funds were cut, pools were downsized or closed, and new pools were rare. This abandonment demonstrates a lack of collective responsibility for

the community and the power of white racism. Because of hatred of skin color due to the long imposed indoctrination of white supremacy, communities willfully neglected and even buried this once prominent space, denying future generations a viable social setting for the community.

End notes

- 1 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 July 1919, 31 July 1919.
- 2 Jeff Wilste, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 123-124.
- 3 *Ibid*, 7.
- 4 *Ibid*, 1.
- 5 *Ibid*, 25.
- 6 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 August 1913.
- 7 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 July 1911.
- 8 Wilste, 79.
- 9 *Ibid*, 79, 82.
- 10 *Ibid*, 119.
- 11 *Chicago Defender*, 9 August 1919; Wilste, 6.
- 12 *Chicago Defender*, 29 March 1913; Wilste, 79.
- 13 Wilste, 123.
- 14 David Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*, (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996), 96.
- 15 *Chicago Defender*, 18 October 1924.
- 16 Oshinsky, 101.
- 17 Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63.
- 18 James Horton and Lois Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2001), 217.
- 19 Oshinsky, 89.
- 20 Klarman, 12.
- 21 Oshinsky, 94.
- 22 *Ibid*, 95
- 23 "NAACP Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress." <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4966>. 11/8/07.
- 24 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 July 1916.
- 25 Klarman, 64.
- 26 Wilste, 125.
- 27 *Ibid*.

- 28 *Chicago Defender*, 16 September 1922.
29 Wilste, 146.
30 *Chicago Defender*, 2 August 1947.
31 Ibid, 126.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 *Chicago Defender*, 11 June 1932.
35 *Chicago Defender*, 8 October 1932.
36 Wilste, 150.
37 Ibid.
38 *Chicago Defender*, 17 August 1919, 31 May 1924.
39 Wilste, 176.
40 Ibid, 178.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid, 179.
43 Ibid, 179.
44 Ibid, 156.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid, 157.
47 Ibid.

Robin Nadeau

Medical Mistrust in the Making: The Tuskegee Experiment

In 1997 President Clinton offered a formal apology to the survivors of the Tuskegee experiment in a White House ceremony. In this apology Clinton acknowledged what the government had ignored for over 60 years:

The United States government did something that was wrong — deeply, profoundly, morally wrong. What was done cannot be undone, but we can end the silence. We can stop turning our heads away, we can look at you, in the eye, and finally say, on behalf of the American people, what the United States government did was shameful, and I am sorry.¹

The apology was long overdue and meant to bridge the gulf of mistrust that was the legacy of over forty years of human experimentation conducted by the United States Government on approximately 600 American men without their knowledge or consent. As one survivor present for the President's apology noted, "The apology is fine. But it is a little like too little too late."²

In 1932 the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) initiated the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male," which entailed tracking 399 syphilitic black men without their knowledge or consent and systematically denying them treatment for 40 years to chart the progress of the disease. The details of this horrific breach of public trust were released nationwide in 1972 through the Associated Press. Questions were raised and fingers were pointed as the government wrestled with the ethics and morality of what had been brought to light. In response to public outcry review panels were assembled and senate hearings held. Unable or unwilling to determine and hold the responsible party accountable, full treatment and medical care was offered to the survivors and their families. A lawsuit ultimately forced the government to settle with a cash award to the victims. Leaving behind a legacy of mistrust toward governmental programs and medical authorities many

cannot see past the blatant racism inherent in the study to fathom the betrayal levied against America's poor and disadvantaged. To grasp the magnitude of this perfidy one must first understand the disease, the study, and the lengths the government and medical profession were willing to go to deny these men treatment. The wide range of perspectives, opinions, and documentation offered on this subject and available for comparison illuminates the depths of public mistrust arising from this betrayal.

The experiment conducted by the PHS and commonly referred to as the Tuskegee Study centered on syphilis. A sexually transmitted or venereal disease, syphilis is passed from person to person through direct contact with a sore called a chancre.³ These chancres occur mainly on the external genitals, vagina, anus, or in the rectum though some also occur on the lips and in the mouth. Primarily, transmission of the organism occurs during vaginal, anal, or oral sex but in some cases pregnant women with the disease have passed it to the babies as they deliver. Since syphilis cannot live outside the body, contact infection from toilet seats, doorknobs, pools, bathtubs, clothing, or eating utensils is impossible.

Syphilis: Signs, Symptoms, and Treatments

Once a person has been infected with syphilis it becomes a chronic disease that is not always evident by signs and symptoms. The disease may hide for years, silently affecting the body and still able to infect others while the infected person experiences breakouts only intermittently. Syphilis has three distinct stages or periods though an infected person will not necessarily show signs of each. The primary or first stage is usually marked by the appearance of a sore or chancre within ten days to three months of initial infection.⁴ Skin rashes and open sores in mucous tissue usually characterize the secondary stage of syphilis.⁵ When the secondary symptoms disappear, the tertiary or latent stage of syphilis begins. Though it may not show up until many years later this final stage syphilis can severely damage internal organs including the brain, nervous system, eyes, heart, liver, bones, and joints. Some signs that may present themselves include lack of muscle coordination, paralysis, numbness, loss of sight, and insanity, significantly shortening the life of the syphilitic. There is no set timeline or sharp distinction between the second and third stages. Second stage symptoms have been observed fifteen years after infection while tertiary symptoms can appear in just under two years.⁶

The stages of syphilis were clearly defined as early as the 1600's

while the actual cause, accurate method of testing, and an effective cure would not be determined until the 20th century.⁷ Prior to the 1930's treatment for syphilis had remained basically unchanged since the initial European epidemic in 1494, when mercury began to be used as a treatment for skin lesions in a salve that was rubbed into the skin or taken orally with other curatives. Though not proven to cure syphilis, mercury proved effective in reducing visible signs of the disease.

In 1910, a German scientist, Paul Ehrlich, developed a chemical compound, arsphenamine, that was marketed under the trade name salvarsan. Introducing chemotherapy to modern medicine, salvarsan became the first proven organic treatment for syphilis and was viewed as a vast improvement over mercury.⁸ It was eventually determined that between twenty to forty injections of the compound, given in conjunction with mercury or bismuth ointments, were required for over a year to effect a cure.⁹ This was the standard therapy for syphilis at the start of the Tuskegee experiment in 1932 and remained the recommended treatment until the introduction of penicillin in 1943.

After the initial outbreak and widespread European epidemic of 1494 syphilis became endemic throughout society. Over time syphilis slithered into the dregs of society like a snake that would occasionally rear its head and strike fear and loathing into the consciousness of refined society. Syphilis quickly became a bad word, unspoken in polite society, and viewed as a disease of the poor, especially working class females. Governments attempted to control syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases by instituting mandates that forced prostitutes to register and be examined periodically. France in the late 19th century recognized that syphilis was not a class problem but had been diffused to all levels of society.¹⁰ The forced registration and examination of prostitutes would no longer suffice as a means for control. In this case France struggled against the ingrained etiquette and patriarchal culture that protected the privacy of males and the delicate sensibilities of the upper-class women, thereby increasing the spread of syphilis to innocents.¹¹

In the early 20th century Mexico City was coming to the same realization about the prevalence of syphilis and its effects on society. Dr. Bernardo Gastelum named syphilis as the leading health problem facing Mexico in 1926, claiming in error that sixty percent of the population was infected.¹² Acting upon this report, the PHS took the method developed by the American Social Hygiene Association to survey communities in the U.S. for syphilis rates and expanded

their staff so a greater number of areas could be examined in 1926. By 1936 they estimated that twenty percent of the population had been surveyed and the PHS could reasonably figure that "one man out of ten has had, now has, or will have syphilis" totaling more than a million new cases a year.¹³

Why Macon County, Alabama?

By the early 1930s, information about syphilis, including its origin, cause, symptoms, stages, effects, treatments, and prevalence, was available to medical researchers, which raises questions as to why the Tuskegee syphilis experiment was implemented, how the area around Tuskegee was chosen, and what the doctors hoped to accomplish. The answers are neither simple nor satisfying and rest primarily on the prevailing social narrative at that time. At the end of the 19th century the U.S. experienced a rise in public health concern and pushed for many innovative programs to address the issues that threatened American health. Though there was no scientific basis for it, the prevailing opinion held that diseases affected blacks differently than whites. Now, however, some public health officials realized that to protect whites they could no longer afford to ignore the health of blacks. They were forced to acknowledge that environment was the chief determinant of health, not race.¹⁴

The chief health officer of Savannah, Georgia, Dr. William Brunner, believed that the environments the blacks lived in kept them ignorant and unhealthy. He stressed that the cost in lives and suffering "would be the same result with the white race if they lived in the same environments" as the blacks.¹⁵ Arguing that social class and environment had a direct bearing on health assaulted the dominant racist belief that blacks were physically inferior to whites. Dr. John Trask, an assistant Surgeon General for the PHS, proved this point statistically using the 1910 census. Comparing death rates between urban and rural locations Trask proved that where people lived directly influenced their health. He argued that the most significant jump in statistics occurred when death rates were compared to wealth. Those who could afford to pay for healthcare and live in better environments lived significantly longer regardless of race.¹⁶

At first, despite these findings, many social hygienists ignored the poor of any race and concentrated their efforts toward white middle-class Americans. After World War I, however, and in sync with the scientific literature of the times, the emphasis of the social hygienists shifted from race to class. The American Social Hygiene

Association hired Franklin Nichols, a black professional, as a field representative to introduce social hygiene reforms and venereal disease controls to blacks. Unfortunately, Nichols spent most of his time lecturing at colleges that addressed only black middle-class Americans and ignored the lower classes that really needed the education.¹⁷ Federal support provided the key and within a year more than 64,000 patients were provided care that they normally could not have afforded.¹⁸

In Alabama, the campaign against venereal disease began in 1919 with the institution of treatment clinics that were primarily based on the ability to pay. The Alabama Board of Health agreed to furnish all the drugs and equipment needed for treatment on the condition that doctors charge no more than two dollars per treatment. By 1929, these clinics were serving over 10,000 patients, though this number was only a fraction of those who still needed treatment. The health officials later determined that the two dollar charge was too expensive considering the average syphilitic requires over twenty treatments per year and the average sharecropper had a yearly income of less than four hundred dollars.¹⁹ During this time, the Rosenwald Fund and the PHS joined together to institute a pilot treatment program for the treatment of syphilis in rural blacks.

The Rosenwald Fund was a philanthropic organization that actively promoted the welfare of blacks in America. Michael Davis was appointed director of medical services and enlisted the aid of the PHS to deal with the health problems of rural blacks. In 1929 Davis met with the Surgeon General of the PHS, Hugh Cumming, and laid down the operating guidelines for the joint venture. The Fund strongly encouraged the employment and training of blacks as nurses, public health workers, and doctors. Cumming selected Dr. Taliaferro Clark, a highly qualified senior officer, as the PHS adviser to act as go between. Cumming then presented Davis with the idea for a pilot treatment program, requesting that the Fund provide half the cost. An agreement was reached, the terms set, and the expertise of Drs. Thomas Parran and Oliver Wenger enlisted. Wenger had just completed a similar trial in Mississippi with favorable results while Parran was the director of the Division of Venereal Disease in the PHS. The Fund donated \$50,000 and the PHS decided on the five areas for implementing the treatment demonstration.²⁰ Macon County, Alabama, home of the Tuskegee Institute, was one of the sites chosen.

Conditions in Macon County, Alabama, in the 1930's were abysmal. The economy was dependent on cotton with the majority

grown by sharecroppers; the blacks outnumbered the whites four to one. On a visit to the area, Parran noted that malnutrition and diet-related illnesses such as pellagra comprised a major portion of the health problem among the inhabitants.²¹ Local relief efforts were markedly inadequate, especially during the Great Depression. Healthcare for the poor was non-existent due to the scarcity of doctors and the inability of most of the residents to pay. Some tenant farmers were fortunate enough to have a caring employer that thought them valuable enough to call a doctor in if they were sick. Macon County was the most primitive and poverty ridden site surveyed and chosen by the PHS because of these conditions. When coupled with the promised assistance and support of the Tuskegee Institute, local doctors, and the Macon County Board of Health, Macon County was ideal for the project.²²

Syphilis Treatment Demonstration

With the support of the Fund and the local health officials, the syphilis pilot treatment demonstration began in 1930. The cooperation and support of local influential whites was crucial to the program. Appealing to the economic interests of the planters, Parran and Wenger presented the case that "it would be more profitable to work a healthy field hand than a sick one," and often obtained permission to test the workers in the fields immediately. Note that it was not unusual for a planter to grant permission to test his workers without explaining the test to them or obtaining their consent.²³ Everyone was tested for syphilis, regardless of age or gender, to determine who was infected and required treatment. Parran suggests that most blacks submitted to the test without hesitation because the blacks trusted the government, the doctors were white and represented authority, and if the blacks were dealt with fairly they would comply.²⁴ Treatment for those infected had to be administered in a fashion that aided the patient while ensuring they would encourage others to be tested. From the beginning of the demonstration the use of "intramuscular injections of bismuth or mercury in the buttocks" was decided against because it left painful lumps and the doctors did not have the time to administer them in rubs.²⁵ The doctors finally settled on distributing rubber and canvas belts along with a mercury salve. The patient was to apply some on his abdomen each morning with the belt worn over the area all day to rub it in.

From the beginning of the demonstration it was evident that the patients had no understanding of what they were being treated for

and the doctors did not have time for lengthy explanations. Though it was later determined to be too generic, the doctors settled upon the term "bad blood" as a diagnosis because the patients were already familiar with the phrase.²⁶ This nebulous disorder referred to anything from anemia to venereal disease. The usage of this term and the failure to explain that they were being tested and treated for syphilis led to much confusion and many disgruntled participants since many had other complaints, illnesses, and diseases that they expected to be treated. This oversight on the part of the doctors greatly affected the ultimate objective of the demonstration, the control of syphilis. Regardless, the demonstration results were dramatic.

The incidence of syphilis in the rural blacks of Macon County, Alabama was initially gauged at thirty-six percent and determined to be the highest among the test sites though not the highest in Alabama. These figures raised the concern that the syphilis control demonstration would be used to attack the image of black Americans by supporting racist beliefs and would set progress toward acceptance and medical equality back. Family histories and medical assessments showed that over sixty percent of these cases were actually congenital.²⁷ According to Parran, social and economic factors were to be blamed for the high incidence of syphilis uncovered in these rural blacks as supported by the argument that yaws accounted for a majority of the positive Wassermann reaction tests for diagnosing syphilis.²⁸ The treatment demonstration ended in the spring of 1931 due to the economic depression. The Rosenwald Fund could not support the program all by itself when the state's share of funding failed to materialize. Clark wrote a final report that outlined the successes of the demonstrations and provided the idea for a new study.²⁹ The Tuskegee syphilis experiment originated from this idea.

Formulating a Plan

Clark believed that the high prevalence rate of syphilis in Macon County offered a once in a lifetime opportunity to study the effect of untreated syphilis. Not including the individuals that had received treatment during the demonstration, the county offered literally thousands of people with untreated syphilis who "lived outside the world of modern medicine yet close to a well-equipped teaching hospital."³⁰ Some historians have argued that Clark would have rather treated than studied the people but without funding could not do so, and that he proposed the experiment simply to salvage

what value he could from all the hard work invested in the syphilis demonstration. Since the medical profession already knew a great deal about syphilis some question what he hoped to learn by the experiment. At this time, however, many doctors--including Clark--still subscribed to the belief that blacks were affected differently than whites by the disease. A similar study had been conducted in Oslo, Norway, from 1891-1910, but the information gained was from white subjects and therefore believed to be different than the information that could be gained by a study in Alabama. Clark also argued that while the Oslo study had merely reviewed case records of patients, Alabama offered the unique chance to study syphilitics while alive.³¹

Originally the Tuskegee study was to last six months to a year and although some of the procedures, like the lumbar puncture, were risky, the doctors decided the benefits to science outweighed the risks to the men. In the beginning the question of withholding treatment never arose because of the intended brevity of the experiment. To understand why more questions were not raised regarding the study one must realize that the medical profession at that time was autonomous and regulated only by peer review. A great deal of effort had been invested in controlling who practiced medicine rather than in how they practiced after they were licensed. Ethical behavior was therefore determined by the doctors themselves and according to one historian, rarely was a physician willing to pass judgement on another. Under these circumstances Clark was merely required to consult with both public and private medical authorities in Macon County to proceed with the experiment. In September of 1932, the proposal was laid before the state authorities in Alabama and approved with few changes.³²

The experiment was approved with one major concession: everyone examined and found to have syphilis had to be treated. The experiment was to be of short duration making this stipulation rather pointless since effective treatment could not be administered in under a year. The state authorities also strongly recommended that the experiment utilize interns and nurses from the Tuskegee Institute to ensure local cooperation.³³ The requirement of treatment and the request to use the medical staff of the Tuskegee Institute gave the experiment the appearance of the original syphilis control demonstration and masked the true purpose. Since the original demonstration had been a huge success in garnering local, state, and national support the experiment could now benefit from the residual good will and trust. The next step was to enlist the

cooperation, support, facilities, and staff of the Tuskegee Institute and Andrew Hospital. Clark and Wenger drove to Tuskegee to meet with Dr. Eugene Dibble, the medical director of the Tuskegee Institute and head of Andrew Hospital. Dibble and the institute's principal, Dr. Robert Moton, were easily swayed and Dibble was asked to appoint a nurse to assist with the experiment.³⁴ A black nurse, Eunice Rivers, was hired to assist the newly appointed head of the study, Dr. Raymond Vonderlehr, and the PHS in conducting the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. With all the players in place and the cooperation of authorities guaranteed the only thing left to do was to formulate a protocol for the study.

Clark and Wenger turned to the leading syphiologists in the country and their peers to devise a plan on how to conduct the experiment. Many suggestions and ideas were tossed around before the protocol was determined. Based on many of the recommendations of Dr. Joseph Moore, the study would include only men, at least 25 years old, who could give accurate clinical histories and pinpoint infection over five years ago. Moore, a distinguished syphiologist from Johns Hopkins University, specifically warned against admitting subjects who had previously received any treatment for syphilis as it would contaminate the experiment. Upon a positive Wassermann test, a full examination, X-rays, and a spinal puncture to examine spinal fluid would be required for each subject. As much as he valued Moore's recommendations, Clark appreciated even more his statement that "syphilis in the Negro is in many respects almost a different disease from syphilis in the white" and his belief that this study would be of immense value.³⁵ Once the protocol was agreed upon the study began.

The Experiment Begins

In October 1932 Vonderlehr arrived in Tuskegee to begin the study. The team of doctors and Nurse Rivers met with influential local planters to make arrangements to test their workers. As with the demonstration, the aid of local churches and schools was enlisted to spread the word about the "special free treatment" and draw blood for testing. According to one historian, the people turned out in such large numbers for these meetings because they had little or no previous experience with medical attention or doctoring.³⁶ From the initial blood draw those with a positive Wassermann result were collected by Nurse Rivers and brought to the hospital for another blood test and a complete examination.

Initial results showed that the infection rate for syphilis was

only half of what the demonstration had reported, requiring a much larger group survey to supply the needed number of test subjects. Much more daunting than the testing was trying to treat those found with syphilis. As required by state health officials, every case of syphilis diagnosed was to be provided a minimum program of treatment. This obligation became a major point of concern to Clark and Vonderlehr as costs continued to mount and the workload increased.³⁷ The treatment given was not sufficient to effect a cure and was often limited to just the initial treatment as per the agreement. The doctors administered additional therapy to the men in the study because they believed that without treatment the men would not return for the follow-up examination. To eliminate suspicion of contamination by this treatment Vonderlehr re-tested the initially positive subjects. When re-tested, only three percent of the previously positive Wassermanns came back negative showing that the provided treatment had little effect on the test subjects.

During the examinations the doctors began to notice an abnormally high rate of cardiovascular syphilis and little sign of neurosyphilis, leading Vonderlehr to announce that this was proof that syphilis manifested differently based on race. The X-rays and blood samples were sent out for a second opinion and the American Heart Association declared the findings invalid since the data had been misinterpreted.³⁸ By May of 1933 the doctors were ready to complete the final phase of the study: the spinal taps. The lumbar punctures were risky and very painful, enough so that they had been planned as the final phase of the experiment to prevent word of their painfulness from dissuading the test subjects from participating. Letters were sent out offering "enticement" to the subjects. These letters informed the subjects where to meet Nurse Rivers for the "special free treatment."³⁹ The letters worked and the men showed up for the spinal taps. Four taps were performed each day with Nurse Rivers picking the men up in the morning and driving them home that night. Unpleasant after-effects were expected, but the reality was much worse. Patients receiving spinal taps are not supposed to be moved immediately afterwards but these men were, with dire consequences. Nurse Rivers noted that the taps damaged her close rapport with the men and made it very difficult to gain their trust and cooperation again.⁴⁰ The study would have concluded with the final spinal tap in May of 1932 if Vonderlehr had not succeeded Clark as the director of the Division of Venereal Disease in the PHS. Vonderlehr believed that they were on the brink of an important discovery and broached the idea of continuing the study prior to Clark's retirement.⁴¹

Till Autopsy

With Vonderlehr at the helm, the study continued. It is believed that he originally elected to continue the study to prove that syphilis injured blacks as well as whites. Vonderlehr ignored that the experiment was fatally flawed by the fact that all the subjects had received some treatment and therefore could not be considered untreated. This issue was to haunt the entire experiment. By July 1933, the focus of the experiment had changed, with the emphasis being placed not on the study of the living syphilitics but on bringing the subjects to autopsy. The men were no longer patients or even subjects; they were living cadavers that were more valuable to science dead than alive. Vonderlehr proposed that Nurse Rivers be rehired to assist and that the Tuskegee Institute and Andrews Hospital perform the autopsies.⁴² Remarkably, his proposal for continuation was wholeheartedly endorsed by other medical authorities with only two recommendations: one, rather than follow the subjects to their death personally, have doctors in the area keep track of them and perform autopsies on commission and two, do not waste the money on rehiring the nurse. It was the opinion of Dr. Wenger that if "the colored population becomes aware that accepting free hospital care means a post-mortem, every darkey will leave Macon County."⁴³

Nevertheless, Vonderlehr hired Nurse Rivers to act as liaison and to assist in the study and gained the support of the state and local medical authorities for the continuation of the study. The local physicians were addressed in person to ascertain their continued support. Their approval implied agreement not to treat the men in the study so neither treatment nor the denial of treatment was ever directly discussed.⁴⁴ As directed by Vonderlehr, a control group of approximately 200 uninfected men were added to the 400 syphilitic test subjects. With the pledged approval and support of each medical group the noose of the experiment was drawn a little tighter around the necks of the study group ensuring that they would receive no medical care or treatment for the disease. Once the men were on Vonderlehr's list, treatment was systematically denied them.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that all but one of the local private physicians supporting Vonderlehr were white and their income was neither affected nor dependent on the blacks in the study, while the cooperating medical personnel at Tuskegee were black.

The men in the study were routinely given pink-colored aspirin that resembled the protiodide pills given to them in the original

treatment demonstration. Since most had never taken aspirin before they were amazed at how much better they felt. Years later the doctors started giving the men iron tonics with the same miraculous results.⁴⁶ The first subject was brought to autopsy in 1933 when his attending physician contacted the Tuskegee Institute with the news of the subjects' imminent death. Nurse Rivers collected the subject and delivered him to the hospital where he died. She obtained permission from the family and assisted the doctors with the actual autopsy. Nurse Rivers recalls that this was the hardest part of her job because asking the permission from families to do something she did not believe in was difficult. Often she had to make promises that the bodies would be treated with respect and show no signs of the autopsy.⁴⁷

Approvals to conduct autopsies came easier in 1935 when the Millbank Memorial Fund, an organization with strong eugenic leanings, awarded fifty dollars to pay burial expenses for each man autopsied. This grant was awarded each year thereafter till the end of the experiment. The burial stipends became a real incentive to the men who "didn't have anything for burials" and was often the only insurance they had.⁴⁸ Over the course of the study Nurse Rivers is viewed as instrumental to the success of the experiment because of the close bond she formed with the subjects and their families. Tasked with monitoring approximately 600 men, Nurse Rivers struggled to maintain accurate records and locations for each. Home visits were an important part of keeping track of the men and she is noted for attending not only their autopsies but their funerals as well. Often the subjects would rely on Nurse Rivers to serve as their intermediary during the government doctors' visits. Portrayed as the defender of these men and "somebody, who can serve as a cushion," Nurse Rivers stood up to the doctors during the annual roundups and ensured the men were treated with dignity and respect regardless of their current circumstances.⁴⁹ It is evident that Nurse Rivers made the men believe they were receiving effective medical care.

The experiment continued for many years with little interference. The familiarity between Nurse Rivers and the men proved quite valuable to the PHS, as she was able to prevent the men from receiving treatment on many occasions. In 1937 the Rosenwald Fund sent a black physician to the area to continue their program of treatment. Nurse Rivers was conveniently assigned as his assistant to prevent men of the study from being treated. The same situation occurred in 1939 when Parran became Surgeon

General and instituted a nationwide campaign against syphilis. When clinics offered treatment to her charges she ensured they were denied. Her defense against those who criticized her actions was that she was only following orders and that as a nurse it was not her place to question the decisions of the doctors. She believed that the treatments available in the 1930's were more harmful than beneficial though the same treatments were used universally with great success. The men chosen for the study were given preferential treatment according to Nurse Rivers and had become an advantaged group in Macon County.⁵⁰ Evidently Nurse Rivers could not see how her elevated status over the black men in the experiment blinded her to the racism inherent in this study designed to prove that blacks were different than whites. The start of World War II presented new challenges to withholding treatment. Several subjects were of age to enlist and ordered by the draft board to get treatment. A list of the men in the study was conveniently provided to the board and they were excluded from treatment.⁵¹

The moral turning point of the experiment came with the introduction of penicillin. Withholding treatment when the methods and medicines were less than effective was damning but to withhold the cure was reprehensible. In 1943 the PHS began administering penicillin to patients in treatment centers throughout the U.S. With an effective means of wiping out syphilis available the experiment should have ended but the doctors argued for its continuance as a last chance opportunity.⁵² Not one question was raised about the ethics of the experiment or the continued lack of treatment.⁵³

The experiment was not unknown among the nation's leading syphiologists since reports were periodically published in leading venereal disease journals after Vonderlehr published the first report of the study in 1936. In all, thirteen reports were published between 1936 and 1973. The PHS conducted a review of the experiment's procedures in 1951 and recommended only minor changes. The next major milestone was the issuance of certificates of appreciation and twenty-five dollars to the subjects: one dollar for each year they were in the experiment. This was the only monetary compensation that the men received up to this point. Nurse Rivers strongly believed that the car rides to and from Tuskegee, the free meals on the days they were examined, and the opportunity to visit with folks in town were ample compensation. In the 1960's the PHS began to distribute a few dollars per subject as incentive to continue to meet with the doctors. It was not until 1965 that a physician objected in writing to the PHS after reading the twelfth report published on

the experiment.⁵⁴ The letter of objection was studiously ignored.⁵⁵ The beginning of the end for the experiment came with the hiring of Peter Buxtun as a venereal disease interviewer and investigator by the PHS in San Francisco.

The Beginning of the End

Though far from Alabama, Buxtun overheard some coworkers discussing the Alabama experiment. He read the reports that had been published concerning the experiment and quickly realized that the subjects were unaware of what was being done to them. Buxtun wrote a letter to Dr. William Brown, the new director of the Division of Venereal Disease, expressing his concerns about the study with no immediate reply. Instead he was invited to attend a syphilis conference and then singled out for a personal brow beating. Buxtun resigned from the PHS shortly thereafter to attend law school and he penned another critique to Brown repeating his concerns about the experiment.⁵⁶ His questions could not be ignored this time and led to a complete review of the study to determine if the criticisms had merit.

Physicians of high-ranking positions throughout the field of medicine conducted the review with the majority deciding that the study should continue without any modifications. The one voice of dissension appeared to view the subjects as patients and therefore deserving of treatment. Buxtun's criticisms exposed how vulnerable the PHS had become to public opinion due to conducting the experiment without the consent or knowledge of the subjects. Efforts to protect the PHS included renewing ties with the local medical associations in and around Tuskegee to insulate themselves from any possible backlash.⁵⁷ In 1970 a concerted effort was made to update records and determine current location and status on all the remaining subjects. A final review was conducted at this time by the PHS recommending the continuation of the study as the wisest course of action.⁵⁸ After these reviews Buxtun finally received a reply dismissing his concerns outright.

Buxtun immediately formed a response that pointed out the legal and moral issues at stake besides medical ones and asked what the newly founded National Center for Disease Control (formally the PHS) planned to do to address these issues. No response was expected or received and the rest is history. Buxtun turned over everything he had on the subject to a newspaper reporter who broke the story on July 25, 1972. A mad scramble ensued as all involved tried to distance themselves from the fall out. Imagine how the few

literate men in the experiment must have felt when they opened up the newspaper and discovered that they had been human guinea pigs for the past forty years. In response to public outcry an Ad Hoc panel was formed to determine if the initial study was justified and whether the introduction of penicillin should have signified the end of the experiment. The panel attempted to ascertain whether the policies of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to protect the rights of patients were adequate and effective, and more shocking, whether the study should continue. The findings were essentially negative on all counts except toward the cessation of the study when penicillin was introduced.⁵⁹ Despite these findings the government failed to volunteer compensation to the subjects except in the form of free medical care and treatment. Is it surprising that this generous offer was categorically refused by some of the survivors?

Senator Edward Kennedy was outraged by the details of the experiment and the continued delay in getting treatment to the survivors. In 1973 he held senatorial hearings on human experimentation and called on four survivors to testify. This testimony clarified that the survivors had been misled about their disease, had not been informed that they were part of an experiment, and had therefore not granted their consent. Though not mistreated it was evident that the men had been deprived the basic human rights of respect, decency, and treatment.⁶⁰ Ultimately the threat of a lawsuit forced the government to grant cash settlements to the survivors and the families of the deceased. Since all the men in the experiment were poor, rural blacks the issue of race is stressed yet it is to be noted that many of the settlement recipients and their heirs evidenced a lack of social and economic mobility regardless of where they currently resided. Many were forced to "make their mark" when signing for the money.⁶¹ According to newspaper accounts at least 100 men had died of syphilis or related complications, at least 40 wives had been infected, and 19 children had contracted the disease at birth. Out of over 400 men denied treatment by 1972 there were only 74 survivors. At the time of President Clinton's apology, only nine remained.⁶²

President Clinton's apology given in 1997 was notably long overdue and believed by some to have sprung from his failed attempt to nominate Henry Foster as Surgeon General in 1995. Foster's nomination encountered problems when it was revealed that he was Vice President of the local medical society in Macon County, Alabama during the Tuskegee study, and allegedly had

knowledge of the experiment and failed to stop it.⁶³ While the failed nomination might have merely refreshed his memory of the experiment's details, I believe that the apology was a sincere attempt on the part of the President to right a wrong and restore the faith of the public in the nation's medical profession and governmental programs. Others believe that an apology cannot remove the sense of betrayal experienced by the poor and disadvantaged that is the legacy of the Tuskegee experiment, but in the words of Mr. Foster, "apologies more often help than hurt."⁶⁴

The experiment was clearly racist, conceived and conducted by seemingly unethical and morally deficient white physician-scientists against impoverished rural blacks. But racism is not the only culprit. The informed, consensual participation of the black doctors and professionals of the Tuskegee Institute and especially the lengthy involvement of Nurse Rivers complicate the label of racism. Their involvement helped to ensure that the health of poor and disadvantaged Americans of all races is endangered due to the legacy of mistrust. Understanding and remembering this experiment is essential to ensuring it never happens again.

End Notes

- 1 John F. Harris et al., "Six Decades Later, an Apology; Saying 'I Am Sorry,' President Calls Tuskegee Experiment 'Shameful,'" *Washington Post*, May 17, 1997, sec. A, final edition.
- 2 Charlie Pollard, quoted in *Ibid.*
- 3 Pronounced shanker. Philip S. Broughton, *Behind the Syphilis Campaign*. Public affairs pamphlets. (New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 1938), 4.
- 4 Arthur Corbett-Smith. *The Problem of the Nations, a Study in the Causes, Symptoms and Effects of Sexual Disease, and the Education of the Individual Therein*. (New York: Paul B. Hoeber, 1914), 25.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 26-28.
- 7 Guy A. Settipane, ed., *Columbus and the New World: Medical Implications*. (Providence, RI: Ocean Side Publications, 1995), 30.
- 8 The story of salvarsan is told well in Martha Marquardt, *Paul Ehrlich* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1951).
- 9 Charles C. Dennie, *A History of Syphilis* (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1962), 106.
- 10 Jill Harsin, "Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians: Medical Ethics and the Family in Late Nineteenth-Century France." *French Historical Studies* 16, 1 (Spring, 1989): 72.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 74.

- 12 Katherine Bliss, "The Science of Redemption: Syphilis, Sexual Promiscuity, and Reformism in Revolutionary Mexico City." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, 1 (February, 1999): 1.
- 13 Broughton, 7.
- 14 James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 37. Jones' book is fundamental to recent scholarship on the Tuskegee experiment and has provided a basic framework for sections of this study.
- 15 William Brunner, "The Negro Health Problem in Southern Cities," *American Journal of Public Health* 5 (1915): 189.
- 16 John Trask, "The Significance of the Mortality Rates of the Colored Population of the U.S.," *American Journal of Public Health* 6 (1916): 257-59.
- 17 Jones, 49.
- 18 Thomas Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937), 83.
- 19 Jones, 51.
- 20 Jones, 59.
- 21 Pellagra is a vitamin deficiency disease caused by a dietary lack of the B vitamin niacin and protein that causes the four D's: diarrhea, dermatitis, dementia, and death. It is common in people who obtain most of their food energy from corn and is endemic in the poorer states of the U.S. South. Parran, 170.
- 22 Ibid, 164 .
- 23 Ibid, 166-67.
- 24 Ibid, 164-65.
- 25 Ibid, 167-68.
- 26 Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 162.
- 27 Allan M. Brandt, "Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment." *Hastings Center Report* 8 (1978): 21-23.
- 28 Yaws is a nonvenereal infectious disease prevalent in southern blacks not because of race but because of poverty. The sharecroppers were malnourished, exposed to the elements, and because they were often barefoot they frequently suffered injuries that broke the skin. Yaws is closely related to syphilis and can cause false positives on the Wassermann test. Parran, 169 and Washington, 161.
- 29 Taliaferro Clark, Letter to J. N. Baker, August 29, 1932, in Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 73.
- 30 Jones, 92.
- 31 Ibid, 93.
- 32 Ibid, 96-98.
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- 34 Eugene H. Dibble, Jr., Letter to Robert R. Moton, September 13, 1932, in Ibid, 75.

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- 43 O. C. Wenger, Letter to R. A. Vonderlehr, July 21, 1933, in *Ibid*, 85.
- 44 Jones, 144.
- 45 R. A. Vonderlehr, Letter to H. T. Jones, November 20, 1933, in *Reverby*, 86.
- 46 Jones, 148.
- 47 Eunice Rivers Laurie, interviewed by Helen Dibble and Daniel Williams, 1977, in *Reverby*, 326.
- 48 Eunice Rivers et al. "Twenty Years of Follow-up Experience in a Long-Range Medical Study." *Public Health Reports* 68 (1953): 392-94.
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- 50 Laurie interview, in *Reverby*, 321-322.
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- 52 O. C. Wenger, meeting summary, September 18, 1950, in *Ibid*, 96-99.
- 53 Jones, 179.
- 54 Irwin J. Schatz, Letter to Donald H. Rockwell, June 11, 1965, in *Reverby*, 103-104.
- 55 Anne R. Yobs, Letter to E. J. Gillespie, June 15, 1965, in *Ibid*, 104.
- 56 Peter J. Buxton, Letter to William J. Brown, November 24, 1968, in *Ibid*, 105.
- 57 Ira L. Myers, Letter to William J. Brown, March 13, 1969, in *Ibid*, 106.
- 58 James B. Lucas, Letter to William J. Brown, September, 10, 1970, in *Ibid*, 107-9.
- 59 Final Report of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Ad Hoc Advisory, April 28, 1973, in *Ibid*, 157-181.
- 60 US Senate Hearings on Human Experimentation, 1973, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 93rd Cong., in *Ibid*, 136-149.
- 61 James J. Cramer, "The \$10-Million Giveaway," *American Lawyer* (October 1979): 23-24.
- 62 Harris et al, "Six Decades Later, an Apology."
- 63 "Group: As Foster Stood By, Blacks Denied Treatment In a Study, The Public Health Service Gave Placebos to Blacks With Syphilis. Foster Says He Didn't Know About It." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. February 25, 1995, final addition, A03.
- 64 Harris et al, "Six Decades Later, an Apology."

Jamie Brooke Nash

Jonesboro, Illinois: Where They Left Their Mark

Steadily, they flow into the lodge that is located on the outskirts of Jonesboro, IL. The ladies are in their heels and the men are all wearing ties. Clearly, they regard this fundraiser as being worthy of their best outfits. As each person walks inside, they are handed a program detailing the evening's events, and at the top of each program is a quote that reads, "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him. –Abe Lincoln." As each person reads this quote, I can detect a hint of a smile on each face. It seems this quote sets the mood for the rest of the night. I watch in awe as the front table continues to collect money from people paying for their meals or the items they bought during the auction. Towards the conclusion of the fundraiser, a man in a black suit announces that there are about two hundred people in attendance. Everyone claps because they realize that this means a huge amount of money (\$10,000 to be exact) has been raised. As I gaze around at all of the people who have helped with this first of a series of fundraisers, I cannot help but wonder, what is so significant about the Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Jonesboro, IL on September 15, 1858 that 150 years later people embark on a \$200,000 fundraising campaign to create a park and statues in its honor?

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In 1858 Stephen Douglas, a Democrat, and Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, were running for the office of U.S. Senator in Illinois. Douglas had been elected to the position in the previous two elections, and therefore was the incumbent in 1858. Though during this time U.S. senators were not elected by the people, but rather by state legislators, it was still vital that the candidates campaign, because the state legislators were supposed to vote for the candidate whom their constituents supported. Lincoln

suggested to Douglas that they partake in a series of joint debates throughout Illinois. Douglas agreed and selected seven towns. One of those towns was Jonesboro, located in Southern Illinois. Most sources agree that the central issues of the Jonesboro Lincoln-Douglas Debate revolved around slavery and popular sovereignty. In fact, historians frequently note that during 1858 the debate's significance arose from it being a "microcosm"¹ of the divisions that existed throughout the whole country; at the time, many felt the debate might reveal what was in store for the country's future. However, what is also significant is how the newspapers from 1858, like the debates themselves, revealed the divisions that existed in the country. This is especially evident when the papers covering the Jonesboro Debate, the southernmost debate site, are examined. The newspapers differ in that they portrayed the debate in favor of one candidate over the other by sometimes deliberately leaving out or making up parts of the debate, sometimes exaggerating numbers, or sometimes even resorting to name-calling.

In order to appreciate the significance of the Jonesboro debate and its newspaper coverage, this paper begins by looking at the background of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, and at the issues Lincoln and Douglas addressed in Jonesboro. Within the context of this "microcosm," I will then examine the partisanship and fabrications in the debate's coverage in newspapers from Southern Illinois, Chicago, and other areas of the country. Finally, I will return to Jonesboro to look at the debate's local significance and the current enthusiasm for the debate's upcoming 150th anniversary celebration.

During the year 1853, Stephen Douglas, a northern Democrat, was in a heated argument over the expansion of slavery while working on what would be known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He felt that the people living in territories and states should be able to express through their representatives whether they wanted slavery or not, and that it was not the duty of the federal government to make these local decisions.² Though there were many who disagreed with Douglas, his work on the Kansas-Nebraska Act helped make him famous and people became more familiar with his name. As to those that disagreed with Douglas, some felt that slavery was an evil and should not be allowed to expand, but in general were in favor of states' rights on issues other than slavery. Others felt that the Federal government should have the ultimate say on many issues, but especially slavery.

Issues such as these helped lead to the forming of the Republican Party. In 1858 Republicans nominated Lincoln to be their Illinois candidate for the U.S. Senate. Though they nominated Lincoln for several reasons, one trait of Lincoln's that captured their attention was his skill at debating, and they felt that he would have a chance when going up against the speeches of Douglas, who was also a great orator.³ As author Don E. Fehrenbacher explains in his book, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's*, Lincoln was "slow to call himself a Republican, but...in the determination of [the Republican Party's] essential character, no citizen of Illinois played a more important part than he."⁴

During the beginning of the campaign on July 9, 1858, Douglas gave a speech in Chicago, and the following day Lincoln gave one. On July 17th, Douglas traveled to Springfield, where he gave another speech in the afternoon, and during the evening of the same day Lincoln arrived in the city and gave the famous "House Divided" speech. Douglas supporters began complaining that Lincoln was following Douglas in order to address the large crowds that Douglas attracted.⁵ Finally, on July 24th, 1858, Lincoln suggested to Douglas that they engage in a series of debates throughout the state of Illinois, and though Douglas was disinclined at first to accept, he eventually did and then named the sites including Jonesboro.⁶

During 1858, people throughout America followed the series of joint debates in Illinois because they were curious to see the issues of slavery debated in a formal manner by two skilled orators. Americans were also curious as to what would be the end result of the debates, or rather, who would win the seat in the Senate. Douglas represented those who were in favor of popular sovereignty and the belief that if a state's inhabitants wanted slavery, then the state should be allowed to be a slave state. Lincoln, on the other hand, represented those opposed to slavery, and especially its expansion across the U.S.⁷ Many historians have even described the Illinois Senate race of 1858 as a "microcosm" of the country and the Presidential election of 1860.⁸ The Jonesboro debate was especially significant in 1858 because it was the debate site that was the farthest south, and thus in regards to the idea of a "microcosm," the town seemed to represent the South's sentiment that slavery should be allowed to expand.⁹ Therefore people were interested to see how Lincoln and Douglas would gear their speeches and how the audience would react to those speeches in one of many areas of Southern Illinois that was known to be mostly pro-slavery.¹⁰

Lincoln and Douglas knew that Southern Illinois, which was commonly referred to as “Egypt,” was predominantly Democratic. In 1856, the Republican candidate for President of the U.S. only received 3.8 percent of the total vote in the 9th Congressional District of Illinois, which included the majority of the counties in Southern Illinois.¹¹ Besides being an unpopular place for Republicans, it was also, not surprisingly, considered to be a bad place for African Americans. People of Chicago talked of the “negrophobia of Egypt,” and “one Chicagoan believed there were ‘snares and traps laid for fugitives (slaves) in Jonesboro’.”¹²

Jonesboro was the county seat of Union County. In 1858, Union County was a strong Democratic county; however, there was a division among the Democrats, just as there was between Democrats throughout the country.¹³ Some Democrats were Douglas fans who believed slavery should be decided by popular sovereignty, and other Democrats were supporters of President Buchanan, who were referred to as Danites and were pro-slavery. Therefore some people in Union County disliked Douglas because they believed slavery should be legal everywhere, whether the majority of a state supported it or not.¹⁴ Because of these divisions over slavery between Douglas Democrats, Danites, and Republicans, there was no doubt that slavery would be a hot issue debated at the third joint debate in Jonesboro. Also, because the issue of popular sovereignty was intertwined with the issue of slavery, it too was destined to be brought into the debate. Thus, the issues being debated would be the same ones being debated throughout the country.

From the start of the third joint debate in Jonesboro on September 15, 1858, Douglas showed his true Democratic colors. However, it is important to note that he framed his argument along the lines that slavery should be allowed if that is what a state’s majority desired. Therefore, even though some of the people of Union County were in favor of slavery at all costs, Douglas remained in favor of popular sovereignty on the issue of slavery. He stressed how he was in support of the people of the territories deciding their own laws as long as they were within the Federal Constitution. However, he then seemed to try to appeal to all of the Democrats of Southern Illinois, including Danites, by suggesting that Lincoln had a secret agreement with another politician, Lyman Trumbull, to unite their followers into one large abolitionist party and to pit the North against the South.¹⁵ He also criticized Lincoln’s “House Divided” speech, and said it was another example of Lincoln trying to set the North against the South. Again, this is an example of Douglas representing southerners’ hatred

of abolitionists. He asked why the country could not remain half slave and half free, and then pointed out that the country was this way when the Founding Fathers created the government. Douglas also emphasized the southern sentiment "that a negro is not and never ought to be a citizen of the United States."¹⁶

Just as Douglas remained aligned with the Democrats' position on slavery, Lincoln stuck with his Republican beliefs that slavery should be outlawed. People had been anxious to see if Lincoln would change his tone in Southern Illinois by not strongly expressing his northern anti-slavery sentiment, but he did not hold back his feelings.¹⁷ He began by saying, "I hope you won't make fun of the few friends I have here. That is all I ask."¹⁸ He then proceeded to explain that he agreed with some of Douglas's ideas about states making their own decisions regarding their affairs. He said he disagreed with Douglas, however, in that he felt that "the way in which our Fathers left this subject of slavery was in the course of ultimate extinction." He explained he did not want slavery to spread, and believed that slavery would become extinct if its spread was stopped. He also said there was not any truth in the idea of Trumbull and he having any kind of agreement to pit the North against the South.¹⁹ In order to show how Democrats were divided over slavery, Lincoln then gave examples of resolutions that were created by fellow Democratic friends of Douglas, but that appealed to the abolitionist cause.²⁰

During the conclusion of Lincoln's address, he stated that Douglas must have been crazy to say that he would "trot him down to Jonesboro." Lincoln said that he knew the people of Jonesboro much better than Douglas, declaring "I was raised among this range of people."²¹ Thus it appears that rather than changing his tone on slavery and popular sovereignty, he simply tried to appeal to the people of Jonesboro by claiming to be one of them. However, when it was again Douglas's turn, he pointed out that Lincoln was not raised among Jonesboro people, but rather over in Indiana.²²

In regards to the audience of the debate and how they reacted to Lincoln and Douglas, it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction because of the press's fabrications. However, today we do have some pieces of information due to several local historians' research, including George W. Smith, who interviewed people during the fiftieth anniversary of the debate in 1908. Of course, even this information is not completely reliable because it is fifty years after the debate. However, other historians seem to trust it more than the partisan papers of 1858.²³

According to the people Smith interviewed, there were only a few seats on the platform at the Jonesboro debate, and there were not any seats provided for the audience.²⁴ Many people that had come from the countryside “were sitting in homemade chairs in rickety farm wagons.” There was minimal help in preparing for the debate due to lack of funds in the county, and the fact that the Democrats were divided and thus some were not fans of Douglas.²⁵ These conditions may also explain why there were only between 1400 and 1500 people at the debate in Jonesboro and why it had the smallest crowd compared to the other debates, which sometimes drew as many as ten to fifteen thousand people.²⁶ The small crowd reflected negatively on Douglas since Jonesboro was the most southern site, where he was expected to draw a large crowd of supporters in favor of his views on slavery.

Though attendance was low, the people of Jonesboro, as well as other areas of Southern Illinois, did exhibit some signs of being more in favor of Douglas and his beliefs on slavery than Lincoln’s anti-slavery position. They exhibited this by the way in which they welcomed the two to Southern Illinois. For instance, the night before the Jonesboro debate, Douglas traveled to Cairo, Illinois where he was welcomed by a band down from Jonesboro, and then he attended a ball there.²⁷ In contrast, Lincoln spent the evening with David Phillips, with whom he was staying, and two people from the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, who were accompanying Lincoln. The four of them sat on the front porch of the Union House in Jonesboro watching Donati’s comet.²⁸ Then, when Douglas arrived in town the following day by train, he was accompanied by the Jonesboro brass band and a small cannon that was blown at people as they passed through towns along the way. This whole entourage then proceeded to the fair grounds where the debate was to be held. On the other hand, when the director of the band was interviewed by Smith in 1908 he stated that when he saw Lincoln walking towards the fair grounds, he did not recognize him, and few people seemed to even take notice of Lincoln as he passed by. He said Lincoln seemed to be “in deep meditation.”²⁹

Other than in the examples previously mentioned, it is difficult to know much about the audience and its reaction when the debate concluded. While most sources are in agreement that the central issues involved slavery and popular sovereignty, there are drastic differences in the way in which sources portrayed the debate. During the 1850’s, newspapers had begun to take on new roles by fighting for the press’s right to cover events such as political debates, and

reporters increasingly began to travel alongside candidates. This new role would make it possible for people all across the country to closely follow the debates and read about each one shortly after it had taken place,³⁰ which “helped to refine the press’s role in modern political coverage.”³¹ In fact, the candidates themselves began to depend quite extensively on the press to make the debates public. For instance, during one debate, Lincoln noticed that reporter Robert Hitt, who was traveling with him, was not on the debate platform and asked the audience about Hitt. The reporter then yelled that he was stuck at the back of the crowd. The crowd lifted Hitt over their heads and passed him to the front.³²

Though many papers were covering the debates, “the color, drama, and human interest of the 1858 campaign made it a natural test of the descriptive powers of the reporters,”³³ and sometimes reporters were quite “creative” with their descriptions. Reporters would portray the debates in favor of one candidate over the other, depending on whether that reporter was from a Democrat- or Republican-backed newspaper.³⁴ While newspapers today sometimes seem to favor one candidate over another, during 1858 there was not any doubt if a paper was a Douglas supporter or Lincoln supporter. Therefore, it is difficult to know many accurate unbiased details about the audience’s true reaction to each debate.

Examples of partisanship were evident all the way from the local scene to the national scene. Locally, there were several Union County papers that covered the debate. In fact, before the Jonesboro debate, the *Union County Democrat* was created to support Douglas and Logan because the *Jonesboro Gazette* was run by a Danite, who was thought to be allied with the Republicans.³⁵ Unfortunately, both of these papers’ articles about the debate were lost when they were burned during the Civil War. On the other hand, many other sources that covered the debate did last through the Civil War. For example, the *Illinois State Register* is a state source that was in favor of Douglas. In its article about the debate, the paper explained that it printed the debate to show the “floundering of the black republican candidate for the senate under the dissecting knife of Douglas.”³⁶

There were many other papers throughout Illinois that covered the debate, but the example of the biased portrayals of the Jonesboro Debate can best be understood by comparing the national newspaper reports from the Democratic *Chicago Times* and the Republican *Chicago Press and Tribune*. For instance, even before the results of the debate were known, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* was predicting Lincoln’s victory and insulting Douglas, whom many

called "the little giant." In one article, the *Tribune* stated "Jonesboro is in the heart of Egypt, and here, if ever, the little giant will exhibit himself in the character of milk maid. It is altogether probable that both himself and his milking arrangements will come out of the trial badly damaged."³⁷ This article was a response to the quote at the first joint debate in Ottawa, where Douglas had stated that he would "bring Lincoln to his milk,"³⁸ meaning that he would bring Lincoln to his senses. Another article in the form of a letter also appeared in the *Tribune* before the results of the debate had been received and was signed by "Upper Egypt." The letter stated that Douglas, "will find, after 'trotting' [Lincoln] 'down to Egypt', that he cannot enshroud his policy in such impenetrable darkness but that more than the plagues of the Pharaoh will overtake him."³⁹

Once the newspapers had received the reports of the Jonesboro debate, they printed even more articles partial to one candidate or the other. The bold headlines of an article in the *Chicago Times* read, "Lincoln 'Trotted Out'," and "Douglas Triumphs Over All!" The article then greatly over-exaggerated the crowd and stated that "the number may be safely estimated at five thousand persons, in which the vast body of men there were probably about sixty Republicans and fifteen Danites. The rest of the crowd were Democrats." In reality, historians believe there were no more than 1500 people at the debate. The article then stated, "the enthusiasm of the people throughout Middle, Eastern, Western, and Southern Illinois in behalf of Douglas is intense; there is but one sentiment, one feeling, and there is but one purpose, which purpose is to re-elect him to the Senate."⁴⁰ If one were to have only read the *Chicago Times*, one would have been certain that Douglas had much support and that there was not any doubt that he would win the election.

The *Chicago Press and Tribune* also ran more biased articles after the debate. The headlines of one article read, "Douglas Rehearses the Same Old Speech," and "Douglas Impeaches the Democracy of His Friends Thomas Campbell and R.S. Malcony." One particularly outrageous headline read, "Was [Douglas] Drunk When He Made His Joliet Speech or was He Only 'Playful'?" While this article portrayed the debate in favor of Lincoln, it is also important to note that the article did estimate the crowd accurately, unlike the *Times*.⁴¹ Most likely, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* reported the number of those in attendance accurately because it was a positive for Lincoln that there were not many people at the debate. The *Times*, on the other hand, felt that in order to make Douglas look successful, they needed to exaggerate the attendance numbers.

The newspapers were not only biased in their summaries of the debate, but even when they printed what they claimed to be the exact verbatim speeches of the debate, they added in words or sometimes took out phrases in order to make the public favor one candidate's speech over the other. For example, the *Chicago Times* inserted the word "negro," instead of "nigger," in order to make Douglas look better.⁴² They also added descriptions of the debaters' reactions to each other and to the audience. For instance, in the part of the speech where Douglas suggested that Trumbull and Lincoln had a deal, the *Chicago Times* inserted that there were "roars of laughter" and Lincoln looked "as if he had not a friend on earth."⁴³ However, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* was just as guilty as the *Chicago Times*. The *Chicago Press and Tribune* teased about how Douglas brought a small brass cannon with him to ignite applause.⁴⁴ It also stated that at the beginning of Lincoln's speech he was "greeted with three cheers, and then 'three more'." The *Times*, on the other hand, claimed those "three more," were not cheers, but rather boos.⁴⁵ Though it could possibly be true, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* pointed out that Douglas "spoke considerably over his time both in his opening and concluding speeches."⁴⁶

Because people throughout the nation were very curious about the debate, it was not just covered by papers in Chicago. All over the country, papers were portraying the debate in biased ways, including the east coast, where an article in a Massachusetts paper stated that "Jonesboro is one of the darkest regions of 'Egypt,' thirty miles from Cairo, and three hundred from Chicago... Mr. Douglas' speech was not marked by his usual ability, and his delivery was very bad, while Lincoln's speech was said to have been the best he had delivered."⁴⁷ An article in the *New York Evening Post*, when describing Southern Illinois before the Jonesboro debate, stated, "Away down there, 'on Egypt's dark sea,' there floats but occasionally a Republican bark; but Lincoln will nail his colors to the mast."⁴⁸ Finally, there were some papers in the South that chose not to cover the debates at all because they were Buchanan supporters, and disliked Douglas and Lincoln. One such paper was the *Jackson Mississippian* which claimed that "the South could have no choice between a 'pair of depraved, blustering, mischievous, lowdown demagogues."⁴⁹ However, even in the towns in the South where papers refused to publish the debate speeches, people were still curious to see who would win the Senate race.⁵⁰

This curiosity, and the newspaper coverage of the Jonesboro debate and the Senate race from as far east as New York and

Massachusetts to places as far west as the new areas of Kansas and Nebraska were both directly linked to the idea that the debate was a "microcosm" for the country as a whole because the issues of slavery and popular sovereignty were causing arguments nationwide. Politicians and newspapers across the country led people to believe that the Senate election in Illinois might help in predicting the outcome of the Presidential election in 1860 and thus the entire nation anxiously awaited the outcome of the Senate election.⁵¹ Therefore the Jonesboro Debate, especially representing the southern part of Illinois, achieved national significance in 1858.

Locally in 1858, Union County residents also were aware of the national significance of the debate as a "microcosm." However, as historian George W. Smith learned in 1908 during his interviews of people that attended the debate, locally people also were interested in the debate because they had heard about Lincoln and Douglas being such skilled debaters and they were curious to see the joint debate. As Captain John P. Reese explained to Smith, when he and others watched Lincoln and Douglas speak, they realized that they were watching a great political debate in their backyard.⁵²

The Jonesboro debate is significant today for some of the same reasons it was in 1858, but now there are new reasons for this debate to be so historically significant. When the people of Jonesboro watched Lincoln and Douglas fight one another with weapons of rhetoric, they did not know that Douglas would win the Senate seat. They also did not know that they were watching two Presidential candidates of the election of 1860 speak, although some might have guessed that such an event was possible. The people of Jonesboro also did not know that Lincoln would win in 1860 instead of Douglas, and become one of the greatest Presidents of the United States. In fact, many historians believe that the debates helped Lincoln become more popular, and thus in a sense helped him win the Presidency. After the election of 1858, Lincoln had the debates published. While he was running for President, people who wished to know the details of his political philosophy and positions could read the Follett Foster publication of the debates.⁵³ It also seems that Lincoln was able to learn from the debates, and therefore they helped not only make him popular, but also gave him a glimpse of what would be necessary in his work for the Presidential campaign. Lincoln once said, "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."⁵⁴ In his biography of Lincoln, David Herbert Donald recognized how Lincoln was

shaped by events of his past, such as the debates, and how he had an “enormous capacity for growth.”⁵⁵

Besides the fact that Lincoln would become President, there is an event much more earth-shattering that the people of Jonesboro did not realize in 1858. They had no way of knowing that a marker would be placed in the park in Jonesboro to show where Lincoln and Douglas once debated, and that it would be “marking the nearing of the end of human slavery under the Star and Stripes.”⁵⁶ They also did not realize that thousands of Americans would fight one another in a bloody civil war and that many of them would die before human slavery in America could come to an end.

Today, however, the people of Jonesboro do realize these facts. They now know that with each passing of another debate, the country was coming that much closer to having Lincoln as its President, and also that much closer to the Civil War and the end of human slavery in the U.S. This is why the people of Jonesboro as well as the other small towns of Union County are working so hard to raise \$200,000 to create the park and statues in honor of the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas Jonesboro Debate.

Renowned poet and author Maya Angelou once said when discussing historical truths, “No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at his present place.”⁵⁷ It seems that the people of Jonesboro realize the importance of knowing where both they and their town have been, and they also know the value of celebrating their place of Jonesboro and the part it plays in history. They are trying their best to keep the spirit of the debate alive and are celebrating everything it represented—political debate at its best, the biased portrayals of the debate, the national and local significance in 1858, and of course, its new importance today. Perhaps, at the fundraiser that I attended, as people read where Lincoln said, “I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him,” those smiles that I detected on their faces were due to the fact that they were proud of their place of Jonesboro, and they were also proud of the part they were playing in ensuring that the importance of the Jonesboro Lincoln-Douglas Debate would forever be remembered.

END NOTES

- 1 There are several historians who use this term including John Simon and George W. Smith.
- 2 George W. Smith, *When Lincoln Came To Egypt*, rev. ed. (Herrin, IL: Crossfire Press, 1993), 14.

- 3 John Y. Simon, "Union County in 1858 and the Lincoln-Douglas Debate," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 62 (Spring 1969): 267-68.
- 4 Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 47.
- 5 Smith, *When Lincoln Came*, 26.
- 6 Simon, *Union County*, 270.
- 7 Darrel Dexter, "Lincoln, Douglas Debate at Jonesboro," *A House Divided: Union County, Illinois, 1818-1865* (Anna, IL: Reppert Publications, 1994), in *The Gazette Democrat*, September 15, 1994, sec. Special Lincoln-Douglas Debate Edition of replica of the *Jonesboro Gazette* of September 15, 1858.
- 8 Simon, *Union County*, 284.
- 9 Dexter, "Lincoln, Douglas Debate at Jonesboro."
- 10 Simon, *Union County*, xxiii.
- 11 *Ibid*, 278.
- 12 *Ibid*, 273.
- 13 *Ibid*, 277.
- 14 Smith, *When Lincoln Came*, 22. Douglas and Buchanan differed on the Lecompton Constitution of Kansas. Douglas felt that the people of Kansas should be allowed to decide if they wanted to be a slave state, and after much deliberation, he believed the people wished to remain slave-free. However, the Lecompton Constitution, which President Buchanan supported, was in favor of slavery in Kansas, and thus Douglas rejected it because it was not what the majority of Kansas favored.
- 15 "The Third Joint Debate at Jonesboro, September 15, 1858," in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete, Unexpurgated Text*, ed. Harold Holzer (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 140-143.
- 16 *Ibid*, 149-151.
- 17 John Y. Simon, "Abraham Lincoln in Southern Illinois," in George W. Smith, *When Lincoln Came To Egypt* rev. ed. (Herrin: Crossfire Press, 1993), xxxvi.
- 18 "The Third Joint Debate," 156.
- 19 *Ibid*, 156-58.
- 20 Abraham Lincoln "To Martin P. Sweet," September 16, 1858, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* Vol. 3, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 144.
- 21 "The Third Joint Debate," 173-74.
- 22 *Ibid*, 180.
- 23 Simon, *Abraham Lincoln*, 287. Simon is one of several historians who have written about the debate and cited George W. Smith in the bibliography.
- 24 Smith, *When Lincoln Came*, 127.
- 25 *Ibid*, 123.
- 26 Simon, *Abraham Lincoln*, xxxv.
- 27 Smith, *When Lincoln Came*, 120.
- 28 Simon, *Abraham Lincoln*, xxxi-ii.

- 29 George W. Smith, *A History of Southern Illinois* Vol. 1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 265.
- 30 Tom Reilly, "Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 Forced New Roles on the Press," *Journalism Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 734.
- 31 *Ibid*, 752.
- 32 *Ibid*, 740.
- 33 *Ibid*, 742.
- 34 *Ibid*, 743.
- 35 Simon, *Union County*, 278-79.
- 36 *Illinois State Register*, September 20, 1858 in *Lincoln vs Douglas: The Great Debates Campaign*, Richard Allen Heckman (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1967), 107.
- 37 "The Debate at Jonesboro," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, September 15, 1858 in *Collections of The Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. III: *Lincoln Series*, Vol. I, *The Lincoln Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Edwin Erle Sparks (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 213.
- 38 "The First Joint Debate at Ottawa, August 21, 1858," in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete, Unexpurgated Text*, ed. Harold Holzer (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 79.
- 39 "The Cause in Egypt," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, September 15, 1858.
- 40 "The Campaign—Douglas at Jonesboro," *Chicago Times*, September 17, 1858 in *Collections of The Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. III: *Lincoln Series*, Vol. I, *The Lincoln Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Edwin Erle Sparks (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 260.
- 41 "Great Debate Between Lincoln and Douglas At Jonesboro," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, September 17, 1858 in *Collections of The Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. III: *Lincoln Series*, Vol. I, *The Lincoln Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Edwin Erle Sparks (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 213.
- 42 *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete, Unexpurgated Text*, ed. Harold Holzer (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 142.
- 43 Quoted in Holzer, 148.
- 44 Quoted in Holzer, 155.
- 45 Quoted in Holzer, 156.
- 46 Quoted in Holzer, 184.
- 47 "The Senatorial Canvass in Illinois," Lowell, Massachusetts, *Journal and Courier*, September 22, 1858 in *Collections of The Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. III: *Lincoln Series*, Vol. I, *The Lincoln Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Edwin Erle Sparks (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 265-66.
- 48 "The Senatorial Canvass of Illinois," *New York Evening Post*, September 7, 1858 in *Collections of The Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. III: *Lincoln Series*, Vol. I, *The Lincoln Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Edwin Erle Sparks (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 202.
- 49 *Jackson Mississippian*, September 14, 1858, in Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 98.
- 50 Holzer, 1-7.

- 51 Roger Biles, *Illinois: A History of the Land and Its People*, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 96.
- 52 Smith, *When Lincoln Came*, 124.
- 53 Richard Allen Heckman, *Lincoln vs Douglas: The Great Debates Campaign*, (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1967), 144.
- 54 Abraham Lincoln, quoted in David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 15.
- 55 David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 14-15.
- 56 Smith, *When Lincoln Came*, li.
- 57 Maya Angelou in *New York Times*, April 16, 1972.

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