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Well-Behaved Librarians Rarely Make History: Juliette Hampton Morgan and Alabama Librarianship in the 1950s

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Introduction

Juliette Hampton Morgan was the first white Alabama librarian to publicly support racial equality and desegregation initiatives, yet she remains largely unknown amongst library professionals, including those in her home state of Alabama. Outside of Montgomery, Alabama, where the central library in which she worked was renamed in her memory, little is known of her. This is evidenced by the scant information about her in the Alabama Library Association's archives at the University of Alabama, the lack of recognition by the Alabama Library Association, and the slight understanding of Alabama librarians regarding her role in Alabama library history. (Knowledge gained from author's work with the Alabama Library Association, extensive research in the Alabama Library Association archival collection – University of Alabama, and author's interactions with highly involved library professionals from across the state). The story of this "sensitive" librarian who challenged the southern status quo through her vocal encouragement of desegregation, including in public libraries, is vital for a comprehensive knowledge regarding the history of southern public libraries (Dobbins, 1957). While non-southern public libraries had their own racial issues to address, many public librarians in the South, and especially in Alabama, experienced a private "conflict" between their professional values to provide the "highest level of service...[and] equitable access" to *all* library users, and their segregated societies that legally separated users, making it nearly impossible to achieve their profession's goals (Graham, 2001, 1-2; American Library Association, 1939). Most librarians kept their struggle quiet, limiting it to private communications or confidential professional records. In contrast, Morgan documented her experience publicly, revealing how she gave voice to a "silent majority" of Alabama librarians who supported desegregation and prepared "the way for a happier and more equitable future" in Alabama libraries (Morgan, 1957). Currently, little scholarship on her professional life, influences, and impact is available. While Mary Stanton's biographical work is significant to understanding the life of Morgan, Stanton stated in an interview with this article's author that, as she was not a librarian and she did not focus on Morgan's librarianship, encouraging further research on her professional life (Mary Stanton, personal communication, March 1, 2019). This article attempts to do that and add to the library literature on this topic.

Early Influences

Born February 21, 1914, Morgan enjoyed a comfortable childhood in Montgomery, Alabama. She came from a strong American Southern lineage with her ancestors serving in the Georgia state legislature and fighting for the South in the Civil War. Her beloved maternal grandmother, Big Mama, Juliet Olin, even boasted membership in both the Daughters of the Revolution and Daughters of the Revolution Confederacy (Stanton, 2008; Stanton, 2006, p. 49, 61). Contradictorily, her family also possessed a strong legacy of rebellious ideology, a trait evidenced in the lives of her parents, Frank and Lila, one that Morgan inherited. For a Southern man in the early twentieth century, Frank Morgan held progressive views and supported policies that improved African-Americans' everyday life (Grover Hall, personal communication, July 28, 1938; Stanton, 2006, p. 21). Additionally, he abhorred the Ku Klux Klan and supported Montgomery's antimasking ordinance, which helped to curb KKK activities in the city (Kahn, n.d.; Stanton, 2006, p. 22-23; Hall, 1927). Morgan not only watched her father supporting these progressive policies, but she also shared his passion for politics and history. Simultaneously, she witnessed her mother, and Big Mama, as they passionately fought for women's suffrage alongside their local group, the Montgomery Equal Suffrage League (Stanton, 2006). Observing the closest female figures in her life fight for what they believed truly influenced Morgan (Stanton, 2006; J. Morgan, personal communication, January 1957). In fact, she partially credited her mother as "a decided influence" on her political and social activism, particularly her "don't give a damn" attitude (J. Morgan, personal communication, July 8, 1952).

While the Morgans were decidedly progressive, the legalized separation of black and white Montgomerians still affected the family. While Frank Morgan supported progressive initiatives, he also approved of the segregated society that the 1896 Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, helped establish. In this ruling, the Supreme Court determined that "enforced separation of the races...neither abridges the privileges or immunities of the colored man," and thus, states could legally create "separate but equal" accommodations, which states like Alabama promptly did (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, May 18, 1896; Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 3-4). Alabama's 1901 Constitution mandated a segregated society with racially separated schools, transportation, and other tax funded institutions like public libraries; thus, Morgan lived in a city that enforced "racial segregations in [all] public accommodations," policies that most white citizens did not criticize or even question (Novkov, 2007). Undergirding

these formal laws was the predominance of white supremacist ideology that strove to preserve “Anglo-Saxon blood in the South” and considered the two races “living side by side” as a violation of “the most rigid laws of nature” (“South is Handicapped,” 1914; “What AI Will Need to Win,” 1928). Even progressives like Frank and Lila Morgan viewed themselves as superior to African-Americans and demanded unflinching respect from them. Though they “forgave lying, theft, and laziness in their black employees,” it was only because “they believed them to be incapable of anything better” (Stanton, 2006, p. 23).

Outside of her family, Morgan encountered more crude supremacist attitudes. When she worked at Neely’s, a Montgomery bookstore, the proprietress referred to a “well-dressed Negro woman who requested they order a book for her and gave her name as “Mrs. Brown” (J. Morgan, personal communication, n.d.). The owner indignantly told Morgan, “that’s the first one I’ve ever had to use ‘MRS’ to me. I didn’t call her that!” (J. Morgan, personal communication, n.d.). This established attitude prevailed amongst Montgomery society. Challenging it could bring disastrous consequences in the form of social ostracism, public harassment, and attacks from the Ku Klux Klan (and later the White Citizens Council).

In addition to the familial relationships and societal environment, Morgan encountered two individuals who helped contribute to her activist ideology and spirit, as well as her intellectual and professional development. The first, *Montgomery Advertiser* editor Grover C. Hall, Sr., showed Morgan the power of the written word when he challenged the Ku Klux Klan through his editorial columns in the 1920s (Stanton, 2006, p. 21-23; Hall, 1927). Morgan observed how Hall used writing, as opposed to politics, to change and improve society, something she attempted to do in her later life. Hall considered her a “brilliant, thoughtful girl...[with] fire and spirit...[and would] never be a stodgy conformist” (Grover Hall, personal communication, July 28, 1938). Morgan’s later activist writings in *The Montgomery Advertiser* proved Hall’s prophecy true. The second individual was Marie Owen Bankhead, aunt to famous actress Tallullah Bankhead, and best friend of Juliet Olin, Morgan’s grandmother – Big Mama. Most importantly, the indomitable Marie helped develop the Alabama library profession and founded the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Her husband, Thomas Bankhead, established the Alabama Library Association in which Marie later served as President (Stanton, 2006, pp. 6, 19, 34, 48 & 72; Bankhead, 1904, p. 1; Greenhaw, 1993, p. 86-86). As good friends with Big Mama, Marie spent a significant amount of time with Morgan in the late 1930s while Morgan lived with Big Mama post-college graduation working as a teacher. Marie must have passionately presented librarianship as a professional option since it was only a few years later in 1942 that “bookish” Morgan took a “substantial salary cut” and left teaching to become a librarian (Stanton, 2006, pp. 48 & 72; Dobbins, 1955).

Path to Librarianship – Education and Professional Life

Like most modern librarians, Morgan did not start her professional journey intending to be a librarian. Instead, it was “multi-faceted [path], with many circuitous detours” (Lo, Chiu, Dukic, Cho, & Liu, 2017, p. 424). It began with her arrival at the University of Alabama in the fall of 1930, where, at the early age of sixteen, she completed a degree in English within three years and obtained a graduate degree in English within two, finishing her studies by 1935 (Stanton, 2008; Stanton, 2006, p. 26-41). While a student, Morgan spent a great deal of time studying in the Amelia Gorgas Library, however, if it inspired her to pursue librarianship as a profession, she gave little indication in her letters from that time. She obviously found it to be a place of refuge, especially during the turbulence of the Great Depression and growing racial tensions in Alabama (J. Morgan, personal communications, 1930-1936; Stanton, 2006). Later, Alabama’s only accredited library school was established, and even later, the Morgan family developed a library school scholarship dedicated to the memory of Morgan, making it possible for future librarians to pursue their master in library and information studies (Mary Stanton, personal communication, March 1, 2019; Jep Morgan, personal communication, June 2019).

Morgan’s first professional endeavor began concurrent with her graduate studies when she was granted a teaching fellowship in the English department (C.H. Barnwell, personal communication, July 19, 1934). After her time at the University, she discussed teaching at the “University center in Montgomery,” but due to the limited number of students the director said that “he didn’t think there would be enough pupils...to warrant...the \$90 or \$100 a month” Morgan needed (J. Morgan, personal communication, n.d.). Instead, she returned to Montgomery “unmoored” and registered as a “substitute teacher and drama coach” at Lanier High School – her alma mater (Stanton, 2006, p. 49). Though not ideal, it gave Morgan time to serve as her grandmother’s companion, connect with burgeoning Montgomery activists, and participate in political and social improvement initiatives (Stanton, 2006, p. 49). Finally, she was given a full-time position at Sidney Lanier High School, but soon realized it was not the ideal career for her. In addition to her dislike of all-nighters to grade papers and the responsibility to discipline students, she later said in an interview, “teaching [is not] something you [can] leave behind you...it’s a 24-hour job” (Morgan, n.d.; Stanton, personal communication, March 1, 2019; Dobbins, 1955). What she did not express publicly was that she experienced “nervous exhaustion” – or, panic and/or anxiety attacks – and the school environment was not suitable for her mental health needs; thus, she sought out an environment in which she could continue educating but in a calmer setting and on an individual basis. Perhaps she remembered the tranquil hours she spent in the University of Alabama’s Amelia Gorgas Library, or maybe Marie Bankhead who consistently gave evidence as to what libraries could do for Alabama society, influenced Morgan. Either way the head librarian at Montgomery Public Library, Jean R. Damon,

hired her in 1942 as an assistant librarian. Juliette Hampton Morgan had entered the Alabama library profession (Dobbins, 1955).

Alabama Librarianship during the early to mid-20th century

As publicly funded libraries proliferated across the country during the second half of the nineteenth century, the profession in Alabama took a vital step – one that would play an important part in the history of Alabama libraries – and formed the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876, which dedicated itself to promoting “library service and librarianship” (American Library Association, n.d.). Important for Alabama library history, ALA founders designed the organization to allow state chapters (state library associations) to affiliate themselves with ALA but with the approval of the ALA Council, which could also rescind this affiliation (American Library Association, n.d.). As the late nineteenth century progressed, the concept of librarianship as a profession emerged and ALA, in particular, began to evaluate ways in which to codify it into a formal profession.

As this was occurring, the southern public library movement was only just beginning. Unlike in the North where the concept of libraries had existed since before the Revolutionary War, the South lagged due to many “causal factors,” like limited “economic ability,” “scholarship,” and lack of desire to have a well-cultured community. Morgan echoed this sentiment when she said “the ‘Right’ people of Montgomery don’t want it [a library] bad enough or don’t care enough to do anything about it” (Morgan, n.d.). While this was certainly true at times for the Montgomery Public Library, as the South evolved from agriculturally-dependent economy into the forward-moving New South, reform-minded middle class “clubwomen...businessmen, educators, clergy, non-public librarians” took up the cause of the southern public library movement. By the early 1900s, new public libraries emerged throughout the South, with nine established in Alabama. Of the nine Alabama public libraries, Montgomery had only one – the Carnegie Library in which Morgan later worked (Graham, 2002, p. 7). To improve the condition of public libraries in Alabama, Thomas Owen – husband of Marie Owen – and forty-nine representatives from the library profession established the Alabama Library Association in 1904. They dedicated it to “promote the welfare of libraries...and librarians” and to “encourage better use of libraries and promote and encourage literary activities in the State of Alabama,” with the specific demand to increase “public funding for library service” (Alabama Library Association, n.d.; Alabama Library Association, n.d.; Graham, p. 7).

A crucial difference existed in the creation of Alabama public libraries and the state association compared to those in northern states – racial segregation. Like other “civic institutions,” laws required that public libraries have segregated facilities with communities interpreting this in three general ways: 1) one building but with segregated “entrances, reading rooms, and book collections”; 2) designated days on which blacks could freely access

“libraries, museums, and the zoo;” and 3) separate branches, one whites-only and the other blacks-only, in different geographic locations (Graham, 2002; Wiegand & Wiegand, p. 21; Crewsswell, p. 558).

This was the model used in Montgomery, Alabama. However, it wouldn’t be until the late 1940s, almost fifty years after the establishment of white library services, when a “Negro branch library” opened under the direction of Bertha Pleasant, a formally trained librarian who received her “degree from the Atlanta University Library School” (“Adequate Montgomery Library Services Result of Vision, Sacrifice and Work,” 1960; Wiegand & Wiegand, p. 52). In other places in Alabama, for example, the Birmingham Library Board commissioned a task force to “investigate the possibility of opening [an African-American] branch,” resulting in the creation of the Booker T. Washington library branch. This was Alabama’s first African-American public library, with over two thousand books, magazines, and newspapers along with places to sit and study without disturbance (Graham, 2002, p. 12). In Mobile, the Library Board designed a solution with the creation of Davis Avenue Library in 1931, which was an “exact replica of the main library in miniature” (Graham, 2002, p. 12). Pragmatically, this allowed library boards to skirt legal issues as they could identify the all-important separate but equal facilities. Alternatively, there was some noble idealism as some, like the Montgomery librarian Nellie Glass, desired to offer library services to African-Americans for the same reasons libraries existed for white Alabamians: “to create an informed citizenry and [offer] myriad opportunities for self-improvement (Graham, 2002, p. 12, 57; “Adequate Montgomery Library Services Result of Vision, Sacrifice and Work,” 1960; Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 31). Black patrons took advantage of this as seen in their reading selections of black-specific newspapers and magazines, and in nonfiction books – with the exception, of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a favorite novel amongst African-American library patrons (Graham, 2002, p. 40-41).

Segregation extended far beyond the operations of southern public libraries into the mentality of some southern library professionals. A northern magazine posed the question to southern librarians: “why couldn’t blacks check out books in [white-only] public libraries?” The response: “Southern people do not believe in ‘social equality,’” with another reply saying “All the mean crimes...are done by some educated negro...[so]...the libraries in the Southern States (sic) are closed to the low down negro eyes” (Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 19). These sentiments showed how institutionalized the white supremacy ideology was amongst some public librarians. Still others saw no obvious racial tensions, with one librarian saying that “outsiders” caused the racial issues and that they “never had anything but pleasant relations with Negroes” (Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 41).

However, southern librarians differed in their attitudes regarding the racial issues and the segregation of public libraries, though the pressure to avoid social backlash – something Morgan would encounter – motivated most to

stay quiet. As Wayne and Shirley Wiegand explain in *Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, librarians saw themselves working within a social structure with strict leaders demanding they operate in accordance with the segregation policies of the day and did not desire to “run out of the social structure...[because] the majority does not want *anything* desegregated” (Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 45). The internal struggle grew even more pronounced in the mid-1930s when the American Library Association took its first steps in addressing the Jim Crow policies of southern public libraries by approving a resolution that required all future conferences to be held in non-segregated states (Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 187). Going further in 1939, ALA passed the “Library Bill of Rights,” in which they stated:

We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; *equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests* (American Library Association, 1939).

Though not explicitly calling out southern library practices – as many could still claim they did provide “equitable service...and access” for all users – the document made the first attempt to address this issue. The fallout would take decades but it ultimately led to the Alabama Library Association (ALLA) unaffiliating themselves with the national organization.

However, even within the Alabama profession an internal conflict existed over this issue and dramatically presented itself starting in November 5, 1949, when Mobile Public Library director Horace S. Moses stated that the organization should invite black librarians to join as formal members. The Association president, Gretchen Schenk, began investigating the attitudes of the Association membership about “including blacks in the association” through an opinion ballot sent out in late November 1949 (Barrett & Bishop, 1998, p. 143). The feedback was extremely varied, with the most heated feedback coming from William Stanley Hoole, the director of the Amelia Gorgas Library at the University of Alabama, who claimed that ALLA’s Executive Council was trying to prejudice the Association’s membership and was biased due to Schnek’s non-Alabama birth. Without saying it “explicitly,” it was clear that Hoole “did *not* share the council’s affirmative thinking” (Barrett & Bishop, 1998, p. 144). The varied feedback from others members clearly showed the strength of the internal conflict amongst those in the profession. Some, like Marie Bankhead Owen – the friend of Morgan’s grandmother – refused outright saying that though she believed “in setting up libraries for Negroes and giving them every encouragement in their efforts toward advancement in the work among their race” but “they [black librarians] have a separate Education Association and I do not see why there should be a racial admixture [in the library association]” (Barrett & Bishop, 1998, p. 145). Still others thought that allowing them membership was fine as long as they could have a separate section or

“segregated” while others worried that “we [aren’t] ready for this” (Barrett & Bishop, 1998, p. 145). Yet, there were those who favored allowing “biracial membership” with one simply responding, “they are in the same field as we are” (Barrett & Bishop, 1998, p. 145). With this mixed response, again reflective of the mixed opinions of Alabama librarians, ALLA’s executive council appointed “a committee to further study the advisability and feasibility” of attempting to integrate the organization. After many meetings and heated exchanges, both in person and through written communications, with Director Hoole saying, “who is stuffing these Negroes down our throats?”, and failed votes, the issue of integration was tabled for the next fifteen years. It was into this environment that racially progressive Morgan entered when she became the Montgomery Public Library’s assistant librarian (Barrett & Bishop, 1998, p. 145).

Morgan: Activist Librarian

As one of her colleagues would later say, a library was Morgan’s “natural habitat,” and it was “inevitable she would find one and become an integral part of it.” That is what happened in 1942 when Morgan began working at the Montgomery Public Library (Wiegand & Wiegand, 2018, p. 21). Like her colleague would said years later, she quickly realized that this was the ideal profession for her, as it provided her a calm environment in which she could help patrons learn and explore the various information sources. Amongst her typical duties of shelving and checking-out books, creating a prize-worthy “filing” system, and ordering and cataloguing library materials, she provided excellent reference and research assistance (J. Morgan, personal communication, 1950s, “Gives a Comanche War Whoop,” n.d.; Will T., personal communication, July 7, 1949). In interviews when asked about this part of the job, it is easy to detect the joy and pride Morgan found in her “super-sleuthing” when providing information assistance to patrons (“Gives a Comanche War Whoop,” Dobbins, 1955; “Federation of Women’s Clubs Holds Workshop,” 1955; “Toy Exhibit Next Fall,” 1957). She also worked with students from nearby schools on finding research and information for term papers, worked with women’s social clubs to plan their programs and provide them research for their programs, and partnered with authors like Fanny Marks Siebels, who thanked Morgan for her dedicated assistance in Siebels’ book, *Wishes are horses: Montgomery, Alabama’s First Lady of the Violin. An Autobiography* (Siebels, 1958, Preface).

Morgan went beyond what typical librarians do and took her service out to the community. She took *every* patron’s “request – casual or abstruse” as a “personal responsibility and prerogative” (“Dedicated Citizens Overcome Obstacles to Sustain Montgomery Public Library,” 1960). It was not only in her service that she excelled, she strove to educate herself in librarianship and took great care in studying under the tutelage of her colleagues and supervisors (“Dedicated Citizens Overcome Obstacles to Sustain Montgomery Public Library,” 1960). As she said to Mary

Dobbins, a journalist for the *Montgomery Examiner*, she learned much from her first library director, Jean Damon, and was entirely indebted to the training she received from Montgomery Public Library director Nellie Glass and librarians Dixie Lou Fischer and Margaret McClurkin. In fact, up until her death, she was determined to continue “studying and learning” about librarianship (Dobbins, 1955). Finally, as many said later, as a librarian Morgan was kind, driven, intellectual, and compassionate - someone who took time to inform small children when getting their library cards, that the library was exactly where they belonged (“Dedicated Citizens Overcome Obstacles to Sustain Montgomery Public Library,” 1960). However, the library was not just Morgan’s profession, it was also the perfect environment for her to as it was calm – with the exception of after school – and allowed her time to think and process the current events occurring around her.

It was on her return to Montgomery in the mid-1930s that Morgan began cultivating a progressive ideology, growing it into a more radical worldview. Her exposure to the economic havoc the Great Depression, played with both black and white Alabamians, made her a strong supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal. Some Alabamians – including, several progressives - warned against this and seeing it as a downward, “radical” spiral towards communism with some claiming that Roosevelt’s wife, Eleanor, was colluding with “Reds and Communists” (“For a New Deal,” 1932). Another catalyst in Morgan’s development were the growing racial tensions in the state and her increasing awareness that the accepted white supremacist ideology, along with the segregationist policies dictating her society, was wrong. During the late 1930s she connected with “leading civil rights and anti-poll tax activist[s]” like Virginia Durr, and actively participated in several racially progressive organizations. These included the Democratic Club, the Fellowship of the Concerned, a group of interracial “Southern church women” whose purpose it was to “strike back at...violence and hatred at every opportunity, and the Alabama Human Rights Council (Rogers, Ward, Atkins & Flynt, 1994, p. 533; “Regional Convention Pages Include Charming Coterie,” 1938; “Woman’s Committee for Alex Marks,” 1948; Owsley, 1952; Stanton, 2006, p. 64, 154-155). This led to her involvement in political campaigns for progressive candidates and policies like “cooperation in world affairs,” socialized health programs, “federal anti-lynching” and “anti-poll tax” legislation. She also participated against proposed laws she considered morally evil, specifically the Boswell Amendment proposed in 1945 to prevent the growing “threat of universal Negro registration” (Tompkins, 1946; “16 Women Plan Fight Against Boswell Plan,” 1946; “John Sparkman,” 1946; J. Morgan, personal communication, January 30, 1946). On the surface, this quiet and reserved librarian did not appear to be the person that would publicly defy social status quo, but as a “moral radical” the violation of core “moral principles” compelled her to speak out against the injustice she observed (Stefani, 2015, p. 137). She did not see herself as fighting against her beloved Southern society, because she realized as Jonathan Daniels did in his book, *A Southerner Discovers The South*, that there were “many Souths” and that no “two

[Southerners] are quite alike” (“An Inquiring Southern Meets Southerners: A Daniels Comes to Judgment in His Native Land,” n.d.). She decided that she’d fight for her and others’ version of the South and give voice to this silent but “increasing minority” in the hopes the South would become the best version of itself (L. Morgan, personal communication, n.d.; Morgan, 1952).

In the beginning, most of her personal activism took the form of impassioned but well-reasoned letters – though more appropriately considered essays - published in various Montgomery newspapers, most notably in *The Montgomery Advertiser*. Compared to more radical and political activists, like her friend Virginia Durr and her mother Lilia, Morgan’s calm and reasoned approach to activism appeared too passive at first; however, Morgan had witnessed the power Grover Hall wielded in his writings against the Klan and knew the effectiveness of the written word. In her lifetime, Morgan wrote advocacy essays that covered a plethora of topics: support for the soldier voting bill during World War II, outrage over politicians’ censorship and dictatorial practices during the “Red Scare,” and passionate pleas that people vote in all elections (Morgan, n.d.; Morgan, 1943; Morgan, 1944; Morgan, 1946).

As she became more involved with biracial projects and organizations, Morgan became more radical in her ideology towards racial equality. Her involvement in biracial prayer meetings taught her the personal impact segregation and white supremacist attitudes had on friends and acquaintances just because they were black (Stanton, 2008). Even more significant, especially in light of her later writings, was the impact that her riding the bus had on her political and social views (Stanton, 2008). Because of her issues with anxiety and panic attacks, Morgan took the public transportation “four times a day,” something most women of her social class did not do. What she witnessed on the bus dramatically influenced her activism for racial equality (Stanton, 2008). Though she, as a white woman, received “excellent treatment” from the bus drivers, she saw as bus drivers treated black riders – who paid the standard bus fare but had to enter the back entrance and sit separate from the white riders – disrespectfully, with one driver calling an African-American rider on several occasions, a “black ape” (Morgan, “Lesson From Gandhi,” 1955).

These experiences motivated Morgan to take action. First, she engaged in her familiar form of activism: writing. In a 1952 article, “White Supremacy is Evil,” she first expressed support for a “federal commission” to handle the discriminatory actions “against minority groups” (Morgan, 1952). Thereafter she passionately explained her disgust at the Alabama Democrats – of which Morgan was one - usage of the “white supremacy” slogan (Morgan, 1952). She said that the slogan was “an insult to the colored races...[and a] disgrace to the white” along with it being “un-American, undemocratic, and unchristian (sic)” (Morgan, 1952). She made it clear that Anne Stefani was correct in labeling her a “moral activist,” as Morgan further claimed that a “moral question” was involved in civil

rights, and that southern Christians could not stand by like “good Germans” and ignore immoral laws that “force an inferior status on certain groups of citizens because of such accidents as color of skin or place of ancestry” (Morgan, 1952). Morgan took her own advice and stopped observing incidents of injustice on her daily bus rides but engaged in small acts of defiance. For example, when she witnessed a black woman pay her fare at the front “white-only” entrance and then, when the woman walked to the back “black-only” entrance, the driver drove away (Stanton, 2008). Unwilling to be a “bystander,” Morgan pulled the cord, stopping the bus, and called out to the driver to go back for the woman (Morgan, 1952; Stanton, 2008). She continued these types of disruptive practices for as long as she took public transportation (Stanton, 2008).

Morgan did not limit her activism to the bus situation, but to all institutions, including public libraries. In her letter to the governor after the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision overturned segregation she urged him to form a committee that would determine “the best way to bring about gradual but steady, integration...not only in schools but certainly in all institutions supported by mutual taxation” (author’s emphasis). Furthermore, she wrote that public libraries, and other tax-funded institutions should be integrated, a groundbreaking step for an Alabama librarian to take as none had spoken out publicly in support of public library desegregation (Stanton, 2006, p. 149; Morgan, 1955). These actions resulted in some backlash. An Elizabeth Watts wrote in a June 12, 1952 letter to the *Montgomery Advertiser* editor, Morgan’s white supremacy article betrayed Southern society and advocated the creation of a “mongrel race” with whites and black races biologically mixing (Watts, 1952). Internally, Morgan’s advocacy for public library integration was “not appreciated by either her coworkers or her boss,” and she was warned to be “more circumspect” since she “represented the library to the community” (Stanton, 2006, p. 149-150). Morgan was financially dependent on her job, so, in late summer 1955, she promised to be “more discreet,” although she would not “stop writing letters.” Within six months, she broke her promise of discreet activism as she wrote her famous essay supporting the Montgomery Bus Boycott (Stanton, 2006, p. 149-150).

As one of the most “important events in twentieth century Afro-American history,” the Montgomery Bus Boycott first began on March 2, 1955, when Claudette Colvin refused to move seats “for a white passenger” (Garrow, 1989, p. xi, xii). However, since she was a young teenager, the decision was made to wait for someone who could carry the weight of a boycott movement and the media attention it would bring. When Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her bus seat, the African-American leadership, with Dr. Martin Luther King at the helm, decided to launch the Bus Boycott. Morgan and the rest of white Montgomery watched their black neighbors, employees, and acquaintances eschew public transportation and rally together to hitch rides, car pool, or walk. The white community had various reactions, with Mayor W.A. Gayle (the one who governed over the Montgomery Public

Library) scoffing: “comes the first rainy day and the Negroes will be back on the busses” (Halberstam, 2012, p. 48). It rained, and they did not; the movement continued (Halberstam, 2012, p. 48). Eleven days later Morgan wrote to the *Montgomery Advertiser*, stating her support of the Boycott and observing that the non-violent approach was very much like Gandhi’s peaceful protest, a philosophy, which African-American leaders would later claim and formally promote (Morgan, 1952). She made clear that she supported “law and order” but pointed out that apart from a couple of incidents, the Boycott followed a peaceful and orderly method (Morgan, 1952). Most poignantly, she prophetically stated, “one feels that history is being made in Montgomery” and maddening to “segregationists and moderates alike” claimed that black servants, tradesmen and women, religious leaders, and business scions were “making the most important [history] in [Montgomery’s] career” (Stanton, 2006, p. 169; Morgan, 1952).

Though not unfamiliar to criticism, the vehement taunts asking “if she had ‘nigger blood’ or...enjoyed sleeping with black men,” along with rocks thrown at her door or through her front windows, stunned Morgan and exacerbated her anxiety and depression (Stanton, 2006, p. 169). Making the backlash worse was that the attacks began to hit her in her place of refuge – the library. One person, retired Rear Admiral John Crommelin, an active participant in the White Citizens’ Council and the Ku Klux Klan, went to the library daily and voiced his outrage at Morgan, her colleagues, and her boss, Dixie Lou Fisher (Stanton, 2006, p. 169-170). Even worse, both non-patrons and patrons alike demanded Morgan’s firing (Stanton, 2006, p. 169-170). For others in Alabama libraries, the situation she faced after speaking out must have served as a clear warning. Fortunately, Fischer, who disagreed with Morgan’s politics but supported her freedom of speech, refused to fire her over the Boycott letter but pointedly told her to stop writing letters, which she did. With her cessation of writing and the Boycott’s successful conclusion, the backlash subsided. However, Morgan refused to be a “bystander” and instead participated in the Boycott by providing rides for “several black maids and cooks each morning and drove them home at night,” and while most of the white community ostracized her, these appreciative black women left “potted plants...bags of pecans and potatoes” as thanks (Stanton, 2006, p. 169-170).

For the next year, Morgan struggled with her increased anxiety. Dr. Kay, a psychiatrist in Birmingham, prescribed tranquilizers for her mental health illness. Mirroring the turmoil inside her head, the city of Montgomery raged with bombings of prominent African-American leaders and violence threatened against others. However, Morgan, desperate to keep her position as librarian, refrained from engaging in written activism even in early 1956 when the courts granted Juanita Autherine Lucy an “injunction permitting her to register in the [University of Alabama’s] School of Library Science” (author’s emphasis) which was met with angry backlash. However she could not continue her silence when in early 1957 Buford Boone, the Tuscaloosa News editor, who had written vividly in the

aftermath of the Autherine Lucy that if “they [pro-segregation protestors] could have gotten their hands on her, they would have killed her,” spoke to a “jeering” Tuscaloosa’s White Citizens Council chapter (Stanton, 2006; “The Pulitzer Prizes,” n.d.). He advised them that “the Supreme Court’s decision [on segregated schools] was final” and urged “business and professional men to demonstrate leadership” in guiding Tuscaloosa peacefully through the desegregation process. After hearing this, Morgan felt compelled to write him a personal letter that applauded him for “moral courage” and compared his bravery with that of the cowardly actions of the White Citizens’ Council and the Ku Klux Klan (J. Morgan, personal communication, January 1957). Finally, and most significantly, she demanded that it was time to get on with the job that “we have put off far too long [and provide] full citizenship, equal right, and respect for all people” (J. Morgan, personal communication, January 1957). When Buford read her letter, he was motivated to share it with the world, asking Morgan for permission to publish it the *Tuscaloosa News*. Morgan knew that granting permission would violate her promise to her boss and restart the fiery backlash she had barely endured in the aftermath of the Boycott letter, but, as a moral activist fueled by her faith, she clung to one of her favorite verses from Scripture, Esther 4:14:

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. ***And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this*** (Stanton, 2006, p. 195)

With the knowledge of what could happen if the letter was published, she agreed, and on January 14, 1957, the Tuscaloosa News published her letter, signing what Lila Morgan would say was her daughter’s “death warrant” (J. Morgan, personal communication, n.d.).

The backlash began almost immediately when the Montgomery chapter of the White Citizens’ Council – of which the Montgomery mayor, W.A. Gayle was a member - republished her letter “in a widely distributed flier” and informed readers that she still remained employed as a librarian at the Montgomery Public Library. They claimed that since she was so “controversial,” most of the “City Commissioners and Library Board members want her dismissed for her inter-racial views” (White Citizen Council, “Juliette Morgan Stays at Library,” n.d.). The mayor began to push library director Dixie Lou Fischer and the Library Board hold-outs to fire Morgan, but all of them, though they disagreed with her politics and public activism, defended her and refused to fire her (Durr, 2006, p. 137). At this time Buford Boone wrote a letter to Lila Morgan, expressing his sympathy for the attacks her daughter suffered at the hands of “narrow-minded” political demagogues who didn’t have the courage to “stand for true democracy” (B. Boone, personal communication, February 16, 1957). It was not just the city officials attacking Morgan, in the library she had people playing tricks on her, patrons coming up to her and announcing “that they would

no longer patronize [the library] because Juliette worked there,” and even worse, ripping up their library cards in front of her, claiming they would no longer patronize the library (Graham, 2002, p. 101; Durr, 2006, p. 203). For someone who had always treasured the patrons and the service she provided to them, this crushed Morgan, leaving her feeling alone and isolated (Graham, 2002, p. 101; Durr, 2006, p. 203).

On top of the physical threats and continued attacks on her property, Morgan fell even further into a depression and experienced uncontrollable panic attacks, becoming plagued with physical symptoms of her mental illness, including gastrointestinal issues, lack of concentration, and heart issues. To deal with these, Morgan took a leave of absence from the library in late spring 1957 and began seeking treatment again with Dr. Kay in Birmingham (Stanton, 2006, p. 203-204; J. Morgan, personal communication, May 1957). This time her treatment included electroshock treatment and “any pill or potion,” which included Miltown, Equanil, and Seconal, all of which produced side effects that exacerbated her physical and mental issues (Stanton, 2006, p. 202; J. Morgan, personal communication, May 23, 1957). Through it all, Morgan tried to hold onto hope and begged her mother “not to be too mad...or to worry” because she “would rise again” (J. Morgan, personal communication, May 18, 1957; J. Morgan, personal communication, May 20, 1957). Despite these optimistic words, the reality was that Morgan was struggling to function on a daily basis (Stanton, 2006, p. 203). She came home in early July with her depression and anxiety in tow, sleeping medication, and increasing fear for her job. This was due to a July Library Board meeting where Mayor Gayle smugly decided that if the board or Dixie Lou Fischer would not fire Morgan, he would remove the money in his next fiscal budget that funded her position, thus eliminating her from the library staff in the upcoming months (Stanton, 2006, p. 203; Durr, 2006, p. 150). Finally, on July 15, the final blow fell on Morgan when a cross was burned in her front yard, a warning that the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens’ Council gave those courageous enough to publicly disagree with the status quo (Stanton, 2008). On the morning on July 16, 1957, Morgan called Dixie and resigned her beloved job as reference librarian at the Montgomery Public Library (Stanton, 2008). That night, after failed attempts to get into the local Mental Hygiene Clinic, Morgan went into her bedroom, closed the door, and wrote a note saying the following: “Please let everything I have go to my mother – earnings, etc., etc. whatever is in the bank. I can’t go on. Love, J” (J. Morgan, personal communication, July 16, 1957). The following morning, Lila found her daughter in bed, dead, with an “empty bottle of sleeping pills” on the nightstand (Stanton, 2006, p. 204). Though speculation over whether her death was self-inflicted or accidental, one thing was clear to those who loved her: cowards had harassed her to death because she dared to “probe into the paradoxes of Southern life” and challenge the status quo (Dabbs, 1967, p. 18).

Morgan's Legacy

Two days after her death, Morgan's funeral was held at the St. John's Episcopal Church which was filled to capacity (Stanton, 2006, p. 205). In the immediate aftermath of her death, those who knew Morgan well remembered her in tributes submitted to the *Montgomery Advertiser* and letters written to her mother. Mary Dobbins both honored Morgan and shamed the Montgomery community in her letter, saying "she was a rare spirt, a sensitive, understanding woman..." that "cowardly people tried to extinguish" (Dobbins, 1957). U.S. Circuit Judge Richard Rives wrote to Lila and said that Morgan's "sense of justice and fine ideals will live on to inspire others" and another friend said that the world would be a better place if more people were like Juliette (R. Rives, personal communication, July 18, 1957; L. Morgan, personal communication, December 8, 1961).

However, amongst the professional colleagues in the library community the silence was almost deafening. Her colleagues could not give public acknowledgment regarding the passing of Morgan or the circumstances surrounding her death. Instead, the staff made their grief known in subtle ways over the subsequent months and years. For example, Dixie Fischer and Margaret McClurkin wrote two poignant tributes for her in the *Alabama Librarian*. Again, after the traumatic experience they witnessed with Morgan, they could not directly address the deeper issues revolving around her death but their subtle hints spoken into the silence were as loud as shouts (McClurkin, n.d.; Fischer, n.d.). McClurkin hinted at Morgan's sacrifice in an effort to achieve racial justice with her quote from Philip Wylie's *Innocent Ambassadors* that says "I have made the world some small bit better in my fashion; I have given you my life as an imperfect example; pursue and enhance the best of me, for you are now in my stead" (McClurkin, n.d.). Fischer was more direct and said that Morgan "championed the oppressed, the handicapped, the underprivileged...[and] could rise to militance (sic) for a righteous cause [and] speak out forthrightly for truth and justice" (author's emphasis) (Fischer, n.d.).

Three years after Morgan's death, when the new Montgomery Public Library building opened, a special section of the *Montgomery Advertiser* outlined the history of the library, along with detailed accounts of the librarians who had served throughout its fifty-six year history. Over two paragraphs were devoted to Morgan, praising her for her kindness, compassion, humor, intelligence, and, most significantly, her articulate essay writings published in the *Montgomery Advertiser* ("Adequate Montgomery Library Services Result of Vision, Sacrifice and Work," 1960). However, apart from these subtle acknowledgements, the Alabama library profession stayed quiet about Juliette Hampton Morgan and the issue of segregation.

Despite this silence, change did come more quickly than even Morgan could have expected. Within five years after her death, Robert L. Cobb and his friends walked into the still-segregated Montgomery Public Library but were

refused service from the librarian on-duty (Graham, 2002, p. 76). Like Rosa Parks seven years earlier, Robert and his compatriots refused to leave, continuing their peaceful "sit-in" until the police arrived. Though the White Citizens' Council and pro-segregationist city officials attempted to block legal action, in August of the same year the federal district court ruled that the library must integrate. On August 13, Morgan's dream of expanding Montgomery's public library services to African Americans came true when over a dozen black patrons registered at the downtown branch and Robert L. Cobb checked out his first item, *Much Ado About Nothing* in the integrated facility, a book the literature and drama lover Morgan would have appreciated (Graham, 2002, p. 77; Morgan, 1955).

As the decades passed after her death, Morgan's story dimmed from memory. Fortunately, her mother – persuaded by the formidable Marie Owen Bankhead – preserved much of her life in a scrapbook entitled "The Epic of Juliette Hampton Morgan," and then generously donated it the Alabama Department of History and Archives (Stanton, 2006, p. xi). When she made her donation, Lila said she hoped that people would "find much of interest [in this donation] – if not today, in days to come." This proved true when Mary Stanton, the author of Morgan's first and only biographer, discovered the collection, and from there Stanton said bringing Morgan back to the world's memory became a "project of love" (M. Stanton, personal communication, March 1, 2019; M. Stanton, personal communication, February 2019). Her research helped bring attention to this "vilified" librarian and led to Morgan's induction into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame in 2005 with decision to rename the Montgomery Public Library in her memory (Benn, 2005). In the ceremony, officials from the city, who fifty years before had demeaned, harassed, and attacked Morgan, now said that they "promise to pass on her legacy to children and posterity through the bricks and mortar of this *Juliette Hampton Morgan Memorial Library*" (Patton, 2005).

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