

Dec^r 3th Williamsburg 1861

18/1861

Confederate States of America
to makeing a coffin for J, H,
Harvy belonging to Com^d B 15th
v, a, Regt^l Lifeguards Captⁿ
Walker died at Episcopal Church
Hospital and was sent home

10 0

THE JAMES BLAIR

Dec^r 3th Confederate States of America

to makeing coffin for J, D,
Gibbs belonging to Com^d H, 10th,
Regt, Captⁿ died at Colledge
Hospital and his grave is the 26th
to diggin for same
to conveyance to the ground

10 0

2 50

1 00



HISTORICAL REVIEW

Dec^r 4th Confederate States of America

1861

to makeing a coffin for James
Dewett belonging to Com^d G
10th Regt, Regt (Captⁿ Horn) died at
Colledge Hospital and he is in
the 28th grave in this row
to diggin grave for same
to cartage to the grave

10 0

2 0

1 0

VOLUME 1 ~ 2010

Dec^r 5th Confederate States of America

The James Blair Historical Review

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The mission of the *James Blair Historical Review* is to publish the College of William and Mary's best undergraduate history research papers, and thereby showcase the talent of the College's history students and the strength of her Department of History. The Historical Review seeks to provide a professional platform through which students can explore historically significant themes and issues.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

I am thrilled to present the inaugural issue of the *James Blair Historical Review*, the College of William and Mary's first undergraduate history journal. The Editorial Board and I sought to establish a forum to publish history research papers in recognition of the outstanding scholarship of history students at the College. We received 70 submissions, and used a triple-blind review process to select the five published papers. It was humbling to receive such interest in the journal and inspiring to witness the dedication of the College's students to historical research. In the triple-blind process, the Submissions Editor assigned each paper a number and removed the name of the author. Three different peer reviewers assessed each paper, and scored it based on originality and depth and quality of research. I am confident of the integrity of the review process, and congratulate the published authors. This journal would not have been possible without the hard work of the Editorial Board and Faculty Advisor, Hiroshi Kitamura. I hope that we have laid a strong foundation, and that the *James Blair Historical Review* will continue to promote exceptional research and generate interest in history for years to come.

Sincerely,

Emilie Raymer
Editor-in-Chief

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THE FIELD OF CLOTH OF GOLD: Henry VIII's Display of Princely Magnificence

Amy Limoncelli

From June 7 to June 20, 1520, Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France held a meeting in a vale between the villages of Guines in English-owned Calais and Ardres in France. Ostensibly intended to promote friendship between the two powers, the meeting had few tangible results politically. Rather, it became an occasion for each monarch to demonstrate his princely magnificence through displays of wealth and opulence that included tournaments, feasts, masques, and architectural achievement. This was especially true for Henry VIII, who used the meeting as an opportunity to illustrate to European rulers that he was their peer in majesty and might. Contemporaries referred to the occasion as “le camp de drap d’or”, or the Field of Cloth of Gold, because cloth of gold, the most expensive fabric of the time, dominated the decorations of the pavilions, tents, and costumes.¹ The meeting’s pageantry suggested chivalry and peace, but each ruler’s desire to appear wealthier and more powerful than the other undermined this theme.

At age twenty-nine in 1520, Henry VIII was a handsome and strong young king who viewed himself as an art patron, musician, theologian, and scholar in addition to monarch.² During the reign of his father, England had been a relatively minor European force and the English Court lacked the lavish displays of its continental counterparts, since Henry VII focused on strengthening his dynastic control within England rather

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than attempting to impress the European powers. However, by the time Henry VIII ascended the throne, conspicuous consumption of wealth was increasingly becoming a symbol of power and the new king believed that a grand court was a political necessity. Moreover, Henry VIII had inherited a stable throne and substantial coffers, giving him the ability to project a new image of splendor on the Continental stage. He therefore began to project his princely magnificence by increasing his court's extravagance and public spectacle.³ The court organized lavish entertainment, tournaments, and banquets to signal to European rulers that Henry was their equal: in the eyes of Europe, magnificence equated power.

Arrangements for the Field of Cloth of Gold began in October 1518 with the signing of the Treaty of Universal Peace, designed to promote harmony among the Christian powers. England, France, the Empire, the Papacy, and several other European states including Spain, Denmark, Scotland, and Portugal signed the treaty.⁴ At this time, Henry and Francis agreed to a marriage alliance between the Dauphin of France and Princess Mary, both of whom were young children. The two kings also agreed to conduct a meeting in the near future. However, when Emperor Maximilian died in January 1519, Europe abandoned hopes of universal peace as Francis and Charles of Spain rivaled for rule of the Empire. Both kings sought an alliance with England, a growing naval power.⁵ In May 1519, Charles and Henry met in Dover, causing Francis to doubt that he would ever meet with Henry as well.⁶ However, this concern proved false in January 1520, when planning for their conference began. Francis appointed Cardinal Wolsey as a proctor to organize the meeting according to the terms of the October 1518 treaty.⁷ In a March 12, 1520 proclamation, Wolsey outlined the agreements he had made with the French: Henry, Queen Catherine, and Mary, Duchess of Suffolk, would travel to their castle in Guines before the end of May 1520, while Francis, Queen Claude, and Louise of Savoy, mother to the king, would travel to their castle in Ardres. The first meeting

between Henry and Francis would occur on horseback “in an open place, not dressed with any pavilions.” Later, both kings would “do some fair feat of arms between Guines and Ardres; the place to be appareled, ditched, and kept by an equal number of French and English.” The proclamation emphasized protocol and equality, specifying that “when the king of England enters the territory of the French king he is to have the pre-eminence; and vice versa.”⁸ The entertainment would include sporting events such as jousts, tournaments, archery, and wrestling; masques and performances by minstrels and royal choirs; and elaborate banquets.⁹ Competition between France and England was evident throughout the planning process, as both parties worried that the other would break agreements, such as the specified size of their accompanying retinues, in an attempt to outshine the other.¹⁰

Preparation of the meeting-site began in February, with each side’s progress carefully watched by the other.¹¹ In this spirit of rivalry, news of the French pavilion’s grandeur caused the English to strive to make theirs even more spectacular.¹² English officials decided that the old castle at Guines, badly in need of repair, was not nearly luxurious enough for the king and queen’s use. Instead, the English built a temporary brick palace of approximately 328 square feet, with four towers, a gatehouse, an inner courtyard, and a castle-like façade to match the theme of the tournaments.¹³ The designers chose its style and furnishings to represent English magnificence, using a total of 5,000 feet of glass for the large arched windows on the first floor.¹⁴ One door of the palace had “two gilt pillars, bearing statues of Cupid and Bacchus, from which flowed streams of malmsey and claret into silver cups, for any to drink who wished.”¹⁵ Inside, the palace had vast state apartments, a dining chamber, chapel, jewel house, and several offices and galleries, all lavishly adorned.¹⁶ Only the finest decorations from England ornamented the palace, such as gold and silver plate, rich tapestries, and furniture of cloth of gold. The chapel was especially ornate, complete with a large silver organ and

cloth of gold embellished with pearls to cover the altar.¹⁷ The English paid over £6,000 in construction material alone for the palace.¹⁸ Since the palace and adjacent castle could only house the King and a limited amount of advisors, the majority of the English entourage lived in a variety of tents, halls, and pavilions in the surrounding area. The encampment consisted of 820 structures in total.¹⁹

Henry VIII brought a vast retinue to the Field of Cloth of Gold, including Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, 114 nobles and gentlemen, two dukes, one marquis, ten earls, five bishops, twenty barons, four knights of the garter, and seventy knights. He also had a massive amount of people to serve him, including twelve chaplains, twelve sergeants at arms, 200 of the King's "tallest and most elect" guard, seventy grooms of the chamber, 266 officers of the household and 205 grooms of the stable.²⁰ The Queen had her own personal retinue on a smaller scale than the king's, and nobles brought their own servants as well. In total, the English retinue amounted to 5,172 people and 2,865 horses.²¹ The sheer magnitude of this retinue alone demonstrated Henry's great authority. Furthermore, each individual was expected to reflect the magnificence of the English court, and therefore faced great personal expenditures to outfit themselves for the journey. Everyone had to follow strict protocol on their dress according to their rank: gentlemen wore silk, yeomen wore cloth.²² Each attended on Henry "in their best manner, appareled according to their estates and degrees."²³ Five large ships and several smaller ones crossed the Channel to carry the expense of people and supplies, for which expenditures exceeded £8,839.²⁴ The English and French took great care to record the exact number of people in attendance to both parties to ensure the equality of their representation.²⁵

After Henry arrived at Calais on May 31, he sent Wolsey to visit Francis. Ever ready to reflect the splendor of his monarch, Wolsey traveled with fifty gentlemen dressed in crimson velvet with gold chains around their necks.²⁶ In the days before the first royal meeting, Wolsey and the king's

advisors discussed political issues with the French, including a confirmation of the marriage alliance between the Dauphin and Princess Mary. These negotiations concluded before the two kings met on Thursday, June 7.²⁷ On that day, the English and French retinues processed to an opulent tent of cloth of gold constructed in the vale. The tent had richly embroidered tapestry, carpet, and a cloth of state that covered two crimson chairs.²⁸ The English royal procession was in itself an act of grandeur: in addition to the thirty-nine nobles and gentlemen, Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, seven bishops, two dukes, one marquis, ten earls, and the gentlemen of all their individual retinues, 500 of the King's guard and 2,000 foot soldiers led the procession, heralded by the music of trumpeters.²⁹ When the two kings finally met, they "embraced bareheaded, dismounted, and embraced again, and took each other by the arm to a fine pavilion all like cloth of gold, which the king of England had prepared."³⁰ Henry contrived to stand to the left of Francis, since the meeting was on English soil and Henry was therefore the "host."³¹ The kings professed their friendship in a meeting that lasted approximately an hour.³²

After the kings had met and reaffirmed their alliance, the tournaments began. Like the banquets, dancing, and masques to follow, their theme reflected the notion of peace between England and France. These *pas d'arms* or feats of arms included jousting and individual combat, both on horseback and on foot, and a group tournament.³³ The tournaments provided not only entertainment, but also the opportunity for each nation to display its military strength. Even though the participants used blunted weapons and heavy armor to decrease real danger, the competitions were symbolic of their nation's ability, and therefore taken seriously. The nine-hundred-foot long field itself was an image of magnificence, complete with grand spectator galleries and two private chambers within the lists for the kings to arm themselves.³⁴ As was customary for tournaments of the time, the challenge had a symbolic setting. Chivalry was a central theme, as evident in a French document describing the

ideal competitors as “desirous of honour, not trying to outdo one another, but to continue in good deeds, for the honour of God and Our Lady and all the company of heaven, and for the love of their ladies, having the permission of their prince and intending to maintain the articles of the challenge.”³⁵ A Tree of Honor entwined with two other trees representing England and France stood upon an artificial mountain within the lists, symbolizing that the challenge would defend the honor of both countries. Three shields hung upon the Tree, representing the three parts of the challenge: jousting at the tilt, the tournament in the open field, and armed combat on foot. Those wishing to enter a challenge had to approach the tree and touch the specific shield to enter the competition.³⁶

Jousting began on Monday, June 11. Since Henry and Francis had announced the challenge together, the two never jostled against each other directly, but this did little to mitigate the event’s competitive tension.³⁷ The order of the lists was one battleground for rivalry between the two nations, as neither wanted to have less honor than the other and therefore sought precedence.³⁸ Furthermore, while the kings never jostled against each other, they did hold a wrestling match in which Francis succeeded in throwing Henry to the ground. This did not help relations, although Henry later emerged victorious from an archery contest. Both kings also competed fiercely on the tilt yard, though, again, never against each other.

Through these competitions, the English expressed not only military might but also wealth, spending over £1,000 on swords and armor and over £3,000 on clothing and horsebards to ensure that their challengers were well-prepared to compete against the French in both strength and riches.³⁹ The competitors and their horses wore expensive and elaborate costumes that often incorporated symbols of England. One of King Henry’s horses wore a costume of russet velvet with cloth of silver, decorated with golden branches of the sweet briar, a pleasant flower if treated kindly but armed with thorns if rudely handled, suggestive of the king himself.⁴⁰ Throughout the

competition, the French and English women watched from the galleries, vying to wear the more ornate dresses and jewelry.⁴¹ Both groups of ladies appeared on the first day of jousting “richly dressed in jewels, and with many chariots, litters and hackneys covered with cloth of gold and silver.”⁴²

Elaborate banquets, masques, and dancing occurred between the tournaments. These events provided more occasion for the display of wealth and magnificence. On Saturday, June 10, Henry traveled to Ardres to be entertained by the French, while Francis traveled to Guines to be entertained by the English.⁴³ At this first banquet, Henry wore a “mantle of cloth of gold made like a cloak, embroidered with jewels and goldsmith’s work, a ‘seion’ of cloth of gold frieze also embroidered with jewels, a beautiful head-dress of fine gold cloth” and “a beautiful collar made of jewels, three of which were very conspicuous.”⁴⁴ Meanwhile, in Guines, witnesses reported that “the lords of England feasted the French lords in their tents marvelously, from the greatest to the least.”⁴⁵ The English scoured markets in England, France and the Low Countries for food supplies, spending over £8,839 on food and £1,568 on wine, beer, and ale.⁴⁶ The banquets were sumptuous and of extreme proportions, often consisting of three courses, each a substantial meal in itself. They featured “subleties”, elaborate decorated scenes sculpted from sugar that depicted heraldic beasts like leopards or ermines, or allegorical figures such as Mary and Gabriel.⁴⁷ Trumpeters announced the arrival of each course, and vocal and instrumental music entertained the diners during their meal.⁴⁸ Again, precedence and protocol remained imperative during banquets, with seating arrangements carefully considered. Often, the royal party, the ladies, and the gentlemen would eat separately before gathering to dance.⁴⁹

The highlight of evening entertainment at the Field of Cloth of Gold was the masque. Since masques were highly fashionable on the Continent, Henry commissioned several during the meeting in order to emulate this trend and project his own magnificence. The masques were themed to medieval

romance, classical mythology, or some other allegorical illustration of a theme, such as peace between England and France. They involved elaborate, moveable scenery, such as castles, mountains, and ships; and ornate costumes and jewels.⁵⁰ A great theatre had been designed to present eight masques as the culmination of the festivities, but strong winds destroyed the building and the entertainment had to be moved.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the masques were performed on a spectacular scale. In the final masque, King Henry appeared as Hercules, a symbol of heroic virtue. He wore a shirt of silver damask, a garland of green damask leaves around his head, and a “lion’s skin” of gold damask on his back and led the “Nine Worthies,” all dressed in cloth of gold with beards of gold wire.⁵²

The prize-giving ceremony at the tournament’s conclusion represented a final opportunity for Henry to display his wealth. Queen Catherine presented the best French joustiers with jewels, rings or collars, and bestowed upon Francis a diamond and ruby ring. Similarly, Henry gave the French jewels, gold vases, and monetary gifts. The French reciprocated in kind: Queen Claude gave Henry a litter of cloth of gold and Wolsey a jeweled crucifix.⁵³ This gift exchange, while portrayed to be purely out of friendship, was in reality no more than a final showcase of wealth.

Through the great displays of wealth at the Field of Cloth of Gold, Henry VIII sought to project his power and status on the European stage. Therefore, the English spared no expense to ensure that this meeting was on the grandest scale possible, with magnificent architecture, tournaments, banquets, masques, costumes, and attendees. Yet, despite its profession of chivalry, the meeting failed to strengthen friendship between England and France. Instead, competition gradually increased between the two countries and ultimately led to war. However, while the diplomatic aim of universal peace remained unfulfilled, the Field of Cloth of Gold was nevertheless beneficial to England as an opportunity for Henry VIII to illustrate his princely magnificence as he expanded his power and influence in

Europe.

NOTES:

¹ Joycelyne G. Russell, *The Field of Cloth of Gold* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Sidney Anglo, *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 2.

⁴ Sidney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 135.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷ J.S. Brewer, arr., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1965), no. 592, 201.

⁸ Brewer, iii (1), no. 673, 224.

⁹ Russell, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 141.

¹³ Russell, 37.

¹⁴ Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 141.

¹⁵ Brewer, iii (1), no. 870, 309.

¹⁶ Russell, 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁸ Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 141.

¹⁹ Russell, 46.

²⁰ Brewer, iii (1), no. 704, 239.

²¹ Russell, 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 60.

²³ Brewer, iii (1), no. 704, 239.

²⁴ Brewer, iii (1), no. 919, 337.

²⁵ Brewer, iii (1), no. 704, 238.

²⁶ Russell, 86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁹ Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 146.

³⁰ Brewer, iii (1), no. 870, 310.

³¹ Russell, 102.

³² *Ibid.*, 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁸ Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 149.

³⁹ Anglo, *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster*, 17.

⁴⁰ Russell, 132.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴² Brewer, iii (1), no. 870, 311.

⁴³ Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 154.

⁴⁴ Brewer, iii (1), no. 869, 305.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁴⁶ Russell, 149.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵¹ Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 168.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵³ Russell, 180.

SACRIFICE AND SALVATION: Religious Drama in Colonial Mexico

Andrew DiAntonio

Protruding from Lake Texcoco, like a heavenly mountain, the Templo Mayor dominated the Tenochtitlan that Hernando Cortes entered in 1519. The *huey teocalli*, as it was called in Nahuatl, rested at the center of the Aztec world. From its lofty pinnacles, Aztec priests administered the sacred rituals that maintained the cosmos. However, within five years the temple was destroyed and upon its ruins sat the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City, a physical symbol of Christianity's triumph over Aztec paganism. Yet, the conversion of the Nahua to Catholicism was more intricate than the destruction of a temple. Desecrating physical symbols could not erase the ancient religious practices of the Aztecs. Nahuatl Christian religious dramas attest to the continuity of Nahua spirituality even after the arrival of the conquistadores. Extant dramas, dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reveal dramatic patterns in which Nahuatl literary styles and sacred symbolism were affixed to Christian plays. The purposeful inclusion of Nahua influences into Christian theater accomplished two goals. It allowed for the new Christian religion to resonate with the Nahua's ancestral religious ethos and communicated to the Nahuas the tenets of Christian orthodoxy. By examining Nahua religious dramas for both style and content, certain traits emerge, revealing that Spanish missionaries accepted some aspects of pre-Columbian drama extensively, while rejecting

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others as undoubtedly too pagan.

Arriving in the Valley of Mexico soon after the triumphant conquistadores, Franciscan, Cistercian, and Jesuit missionaries moved quickly to adapt Christian dramas to look and sound like their Aztec predecessors. The colorful and vibrant pageantry of Aztec rituals had been incredibly moving for the throngs of Aztecs who had worshiped in the temple precincts of Tenochtitlan and other religious centers. Even provincial and rural Nahua ritual was imbued with a vividness and splendor that astonished the earliest European arrivals. To enrapture the interests, and undoubtedly the souls, of the Nahuas of Mexico, Catholic missionaries undertook a process of reinterpreting Aztec auditory and visual symbolism.

As in Christian worship, music was a fundamental aspect of Aztec ritual. Rhythmic percussions and an array of wind instruments accompanied the ritualized telling of Aztec myth. While the scope of this paper does not allow for a deep exploration of Aztec music, a rudimentary understanding is necessary for evaluating to what extent it was later Christianized. Sacred drums were vital to rituals across Mesoamerica, with the vertical *huehuetl* accompanying rites for male deities, while rites related to female divinities were attended by musicians playing the horizontal, two-surfaced *teponaztli* drum.¹ The fertility symbolism of the two drums is apparent, and must have been to the Catholic missionaries as well, who replaced indigenous drums with traditional European percussion instruments. While no extant musical scores have been found along with Nahua dramas, if music performed during masses gives any indication, musical accompaniment to Nahua drama must have also followed European models.² Catholic missionaries seem to have understood the need for musical interludes in ritual plays, but found the rhythmic Aztec music too pagan.

Ritual dances were likewise adapted for use in Christian plays. There are no existing accounts of pre-Hispanic Aztec dances from before the arrival of the Europeans, but anthropologists have been able to reconstruct many forms of

dance by looking for practices in rural Mexican dances that appear to have no European antecedents.³ Aerial dances, where dancers are suspended from high poles, remain central to religious folk traditions even in the present day.⁴ A 1530 codex from Colhuacán reveals that the aerial dance, known as the Volador, was performed during baptisms. The codex depicts the four dancers adorned with wings, suggesting that the dance had been Christianized, allowing for the dancers to perform as angels.⁵ Processional dances, which had existed in pre-Hispanic times, were also adapted for Christian use. The Dance of the Santiagueros, which was performed in honor of Saint James, also points to the purposeful adaptation of Aztec ritual to Christian purposes. More of a highly choreographed play than a proper dance, the Santiagueros drama depicts an apocryphal tale of Saint James' battle against evil forces, namely an army of Moors led by the deplorable and black mask-clad Pilatos (Pontius Pilate).⁶ While certainly not a standard piece of Christian orthodoxy, the symbolism of James, the patron saint of Spain, defeating the Moors clearly indicates Spanish authorship. However, the form of the dance, and the dichotomy of absolute good defeating absolute evil reflects earlier Aztec dances, namely the processional battle between Huitzilopochtli and the demoness Coyolxauhqui.⁷

Lastly, to convincingly present Christian drama to the Nahuas, missionaries needed an appropriate venue to perform their adapted dramas. In pre-Hispanic Aztec ritual, priests and their acolytes had performed the sacred dramas at the center of the great temple precincts. Staged on the steps and platforms of the pyramid-temples, priests and performers donned the costume and characteristics of various gods and spirits.⁸ A barrier, both physical and theological, thus existed between the performers and the audience as the ritual occurred at the heart of the sacred precincts. By enacting these rituals at the *axis mundi*, the rites were intended to recreate creation. Yet, at the same time the audience remained intricately involved in the ritual, often responding to prayers and songs.⁹ Like

the earlier Aztec ritual drama, Nahuatl Christian plays were also performed in sacred spaces. Missionaries constructed missionary compounds across Mexico. Most, though not all, contained a cathedral church, schools, dormitories, and large chapels to hold the Nahua natives. In comparison to the chapel, the church was small and reserved for monks, Spaniards, and Christian Nahua nobles. The chapels, usually open to the elements on two sides, were used to catechize the masses. It was here, or in the plaza between the chapel and the church, that plays were performed.¹⁰

For Catholic missionaries the religious dramas were wholly distinct from the ritual of the Eucharist. Dramas were a convenient and entertaining way to educate the masses in Christian theology and morality. Just as the chapel or plaza could never actually be the Christian *axis mundi*, the performers could never be the characters they portrayed. In the Aztec rituals, the priests, actors, dancers, and musicians recreated sacred cosmological events. The actors did not become the gods, *per se*, but rather the gods became the actors. For the Aztecs, these rituals were not reenacting events that had occurred once in history, but rather recreating ancient, yet perennial, rites.¹¹ A ritual drama in which the priests made a human sacrifice was just as important theologically in 1500 AD as it had been in the creation of the world.¹² For the Christians the purpose of the play was entirely different. The Nahua actors were emphatically not the characters they represented. Biblical persons had existed once in time and in place, and thus their “appearance” on stage was symbolic and didactic.¹³ Unlike the Aztec drama which existed at the heart of their sacred theophany, Christian drama was not only inferior to the theophanical Eucharist, but merely a tool by which Nahua men and women became associated with the complex theologies behind it.

In terms of literary style, Catholic missionaries were much more willing to adopt earlier Aztec forms. Aztec ritual drama was wholly different from Christian forms. In regards to the theatrical genre of the Aztecs, historian Marilyn Ravicz, who

first translated a number of Nahua plays into English, asserts that “[Aztec dramas] did not involve western or Aristotelian concepts of tragedy or comedy, proper divisions of actions into beginning, middle, and end; nor was dramatic action divided into acts and scenes in the manner with which the Western world is familiar.”¹⁴ Rather Aztec drama relied on the recitation of divine liturgies presented by priests in the guise of the gods. Although gods and supplicants might respond to one another, their interactions are not dialogues in the Western sense, but rather homilies delivered between characters.¹⁵ The use of a chorus and call and response between priest and worshippers was also common. When reading Nahuatl Christian plays, these styles become apparent. The Nahua play *Holy Wednesday*, however, provides the best analysis of adaptation of Aztec styles, as the play is directly based on an extant Spanish drama *Lucero de Nuestra Salvación*. Written by a Valencian bookseller named Izquierdo Zebrero in 1582, *Salvación* details the conversation between the Virgin Mary and Christ on the Wednesday before the Crucifixion.¹⁶ The Holy Virgin pleads with Christ not to go to the Cross, longing for her son to live. Only when the Old Testament Patriarchs, held in Hades, beseech Mary to allow him to go, does she relent.¹⁷ While historians disagree as to when and where the Nahuatl *Holy Wednesday* play was written, the subtlety of the Nahuatl suggests it was translated by a native Nahuatl speaker, around 1600. However, perhaps the term translate, is incorrect, as the *Holy Wednesday* drama seems to be an adaptation of the Spanish original.¹⁸ The conversational tone of the *Salvación* is absent in the much longer Nahuatl version. Rather, dialogue is replaced by a series of extended monologues. In the following quotation from the *Salvación* Christ recounts to his mother why he must take up the cross, despite the fact that if he willed it he could achieve the salvation of man without doing so:

I might remove the morning from this tested world, and the waiting and payments, without

dying on Calvary, with my most absolute power.¹⁹

The section is short and simply reaffirms the universal power of Christ. The much longer Nahuatl version, however not only affirms these tenets of Christian theology, but also elaborates of the meaning and cause of human suffering.

It is necessary that I destroy the garment of sad fasting for the dead, the winding-sheet of the dead, that people on earth go about wearing. It is the old error, original sin. Their souls are dressed in it, the demon, Lucifer enslaves them with it. And this: oh my precious mother, if I am not stretched by my hands upon the cross there on Mount Calvary, then how will people be rescued?²⁰

This much longer, almost liturgical, recitation not only reflects the earlier Aztec style, but also delves more deeply into the essential theology of the Christian religion. It is plausible that missionaries utilized the more stilted Aztec form, as it allowed them to not only present the Christian narrative in a literary form familiar to the Nahua, but also to elaborate on the main tenets of Christianity for a newly converted audience. Additionally, while it is difficult to see in English translations of the text, the Nahuatl version uses a more formal register of speech when addressing the divine than does the Spanish original.²¹ These trends are evident in all other Nahuatl dramas, but the *Holy Wednesday* play is exceptional since the Spanish original survives.

Once a compelling means of presenting Christian dramas had been developed, missionaries needed to adapt the content of the dramas to fit the religious needs and expectations of the native peoples. Often missionary playwrights transformed the setting of the narrative to fit the cultural norms of the New

World. By doing this they could change the external setting of a narrative, but maintain the orthodox message of the story. More importantly, perhaps, by transplanting the biblical world into Nahua society, the authors of these dramas allowed the Nahua people to identify with the biblical characters and adopt them as their own ancestors. This allowed the Nahuas to be authentically part of the Christian narrative. Lastly, missionaries could remove details of the narrative or emphasize details commonly overlooked in the original texts, to condemn or discourage practices still lingering in Nahua society.

By the time of the Conquest of Mexico, the Spanish who arrived to take control of the land had been within the Christian fold for centuries. While the country itself had been fought over by Christians and Moors since the eighth century, the Catholic identity of the Old Christians was ancient indeed. People throughout Spain understood the sanctity of Catholic saints and more importantly knew how to properly revere them. To the Nahua peoples of Mexico, however, biblical and post-biblical saints were foreign beings. Catholic missionaries therefore had the difficult task of instilling in the newly converted Nahua the sense of adoration owed to these saints. Throughout Nahuatl dramas there are many instances where biblical personages are transplanted from their biblical setting into the social world of ancient Mexico. The sixteenth-century play *Sacrificio de Isaac* provides a perfect example of this Nahuatlization. Presumably written between 1570 and 1600, the *Sacrificio de Isaac* retells the story of the Binding of Isaac for a Nahua audience.²² Abraham and his family are transformed from Levantine nomads into Aztec warrior nobles. Abraham hosts grand banquets for his family and his fellow nobles, while at the same time he remains aloof and dignified. At several occasions during the play Sarah makes references to breast feeding Isaac, suggesting this feast is the same feast mentioned in Genesis 21:8, which Abraham throws when Isaac was weaned.²³ According to Viviana Díaz Baisera, archaeological evidence from both ancient Israel and Mesoamerica reveals that most children were weaned at the

age of three, and that in the former society and very likely the latter, parents held banquets to “celebrate their surviving the most dangerous period in their lives.”²⁴ If this is the case, then the similarity between these two ritual feasts would have further helped Nahua audiences associate with the biblical past. Ritualized language, related to Aztec antecedents, appears frequently in the text as well. When praising his son Isaac, Abraham exclaims:

You, oh my necklace of gold! You, my bracelet
of precious stones! Oh you, my girdle of silver,
by beloved son, come here!²⁵

By transplanting Abraham and Isaac from their traditional biblical setting, the author has made them accessible to the Nahua Christians. Abraham and Isaac, along with the rest of the characters, have been made into native ancestors. When the angel intercedes at the end of the play, and promises Abraham that his descendants will “merit the Kingdom of Heaven,” this promise now includes the Nahuas, whose great warrior noble ancestor, Abraham, guaranteed them a place in Christian history.

The play *Adoración de los Reyes*, likewise interprets Christian symbols through a Nahua worldview. From the same collection of manuscripts as the *Sacrificio de Isaac*, the play presents the story of the Magi’s quest to find the Child God. Undoubtedly performed during Epiphany, the play presents the biblical Magi as Nahua nobles, just as the *Sacrificio de Isaac* did Abraham.²⁶ However, perhaps even more intriguing is the treatment of the Star of Bethlehem. In one extensive monologue Melchior recounts how the ancestors of the Magi diligently watched the night sky for a sign of the savior’s birth:

In reality and truth, the old ones, our grandfathers,
have taught this prophecy with the idea that

they were to wait the great and noble Lord and his star. In order that they might know and be honored whenever this presage – the sign or star in the sky – might appear, they placed twelve learned ancients on the peak of a mountain in order constantly to inspect in the East, and be waiting whenever the wonderful Star appeared to be admired. Furthermore, sixteen hundred years have passed since they awaited it.²⁷

This emphasis on the observing the heavens for the appearance of the Star strongly recalls the Aztec fascination with astronomy and time. The author seems to have chosen to Christianize the ancient Aztec astronomical tradition, whereby allowing the Nahua people to be inheritors of the Christian narrative. Just as the Magi lived before the coming of Christ, so too did the ancient Aztecs live before the arrival of Christianity.

The theme of redeeming the past is also found in *Holy Wednesday*. In the original Spanish version, the Old Testament patriarchs are used as a device to convince the Virgin of the importance of Christ's redemptive death. The author of the Nahuatl version pays greater attention to the Patriarchs and "great many others" who will be brought from Limbo to heaven during the Harrowing of Hades.²⁸ For the faithful Nahua, the promise that Christ would redeem from Limbo a "great many others" gives hope that their own ancestors might too be saved from damnation. While certainly not Catholic orthodoxy, the salvation of the Aztec ancestors by the Christian God must have been comforting to many a Nahua.

Lastly, missionary authors of Nahua drama adapted aspects of Christian stories to correct behaviors they believed were sinful among the Nahua peoples. In the *Sacrificio de Isaac*, the character of Ishmael is described as Isaac's friend, not half-brother. In the Genesis account of Ishmael's banishment the relationship between Abraham and his concubine, Hagar, and their bastard son is essential to the plot. It is a story of family

inheritance and social standing. In the Nahuatl version these themes are absent. The reason for the abridgement must stem from the desire by Spanish missionaries to stamp out the Aztec practice of concubinage. If Abraham was presented as keeping a concubine it would be more difficult for the missionaries to justify prohibiting it. The *Sacrificio de Isaac* also vehemently attacks the practice of human sacrifice. When the angel commands Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac, he declares that God hates human sacrifice and would never condone it. For the Nahuatl audience, whose ancestors had so recently practiced human sacrifice on an unimaginable scale, condemnation directly from God must have been an effective means of preventing the practice from continuing. However, Díaz Baisera suggests that despite the final condemnation, the Nahuatl audience would have at first associated this demand with their own ancestral deities' need for sacrifice, mentally linking the Christian God with their own cosmology. Only in the end does God prove to be a distinct deity with distinct commandments. The evolution of God in this story, from a blood thirsty Tlaloc-like character into the loving Christian God must have created a dichotomy for the Nahuatl commoners, who perhaps internalized the play and allowed its plot to justify why human sacrifice had been forbidden.²⁹ The play credits God with ending the practice, not the earthly Spaniards who arrived only a few decades before.

Catholic missionaries were adept at translating Nahuatl ritual symbolism into the Christian narrative. Their attempt to bring ancient Aztec religiosity into their own faith system produced a syncretic dramatic theater in which Christian orthodoxy was partnered with the sounds and sights of Nahuatl pageantry. There was a change in the purpose of dramatic presentations and the role of the actors in the play. In Aztec plays, the gods became actors and reenacted religious rites; these dramas held great theosophical importance. The actors in Christian plays, however, were just actors, their purpose was to educate, not perform miracles. The Christian authors of Nahuatl dramas strategically adopted pre-Columbian performance

aspects and adapted biblical stories to create a melded drama to fit into the mix of Spanish and native societies. Aztec music, dance, and literary style were added into Christian traditions while biblical stories and characters were brought into the Nahuatl setting and social world. By combining these aspects, the missionary playwrights created a biblical history that the Nahuatl could adopt as their own.

NOTES:

¹ Guy Stresser-Péan, *The Sun God and the Savior: The Christianization of the Nahua and Totonac in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009), 147-150.

² Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 183-185.

³ Stresser-Péan, 255-57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 261-63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 327-30.

⁷ John Bierhorst (trans.), *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 148-49.

⁸ Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz, *Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico: From Tzompantli to Golgotha* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 22-24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

¹¹ Louise M. Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 43-46.

¹² Ravicz, 9-11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37-39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶ Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 11-14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49-51.

¹⁹ Izquierdo Zebrero, *Lucero de Nuestra Salvación*, in *Holy Wednesday: A Nahuatl Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*, Burkhart (trans) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 130.

²⁰ Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 131.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

²² Ravicz, 83-85.

²³ *Sacrificio de Isaac*, in *Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico*, Ravicz (trans) (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 86-87.

²⁴ Viviana Díaz Baisera, *The Pyramid Under the Cross: Franciscan Discourses of Evangelization and the Nahuatl Christian Subject in Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 83.

²⁵ *Sacrificio de Isaac*, 88.

²⁶ Ravicz, 119-122.

²⁷ *Adoración de los Reyes*, in *Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico*, Ravicz (trans) (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 127-28.

²⁸ Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 95.

²⁹ Baisera, 95.

“BLACK AS AN INDIAN AND DIRTY AS A PIG”:

The Unexpected Perseverance of Female Hospital Workers during America’s Civil War

Anna Storm

Cornelia Hancock, a young woman from New Jersey, described her physical appearance in a letter to her family saying, “I am Black as an Indian and dirty as a pig and as well as I ever was in my life.” This statement exemplifies the dramatic change in lifestyle embraced by Civil War nurses within both the Union and Confederacy from 1861 to 1865. Hancock seemed amused by her change in attitude regarding hard, dirty work and surprised by her relative happiness, given her situation.

Upper-class Civil War women rationalized entering the work force to contribute to the war effort by claiming that they were fulfilling their duties to their husbands, sons, and brothers who had left home to fight as soldiers. While criticized by some, these women felt as though their contributions at home were meaningless compared to the labor they could provide in a hospital. In the eyes of these women, their men needed care and this care would not be provided without the help of civilian women. Most women who entered the work force did not claim to be a part of a feminist movement set on achieving citizenship or expanding women’s rights. Rather, female nurses considered their hospital service, work traditionally performed by men, as a logical expansion of the definition of motherhood—a wartime necessity. All Americans did not perceive this practice as acceptable; however, most women working in hospitals

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ignored the social stigma attached to their work and allowed the gratitude of their patients to encourage their decision to temporarily enter the work force, thus helping to maintain an unexpectedly high level of wartime morale within military hospitals.

During the Civil War, at least 20,000 female employees filled Northern and Southern military hospitals, field hospitals, and military camps.² These women, from all social classes, performed all sorts of jobs, including cleaning, cooking, writing letters for soldiers, and cleaning and dressing wounds. Numerous factors influenced female nurses' decisions to leave home and enter the workforce. Many middle- or lower-class women who worked in hospitals did so to earn money to support themselves and their families at home. In contrast, most upper-class, white women in both the Union and the Confederacy were motivated by a need to contribute in a meaningful way to the war effort for which their men were fighting. Interestingly, this same motive drove Southern and Northern women to military hospitals and their experiences were strikingly similar. According to Drew Gilpin Faust, in *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, "Southern women greeted the appearance of unexpected numbers of sick and wounded soldiers in the summer of 1861 as an opportunity for action, an eagerly sought means of contributing to the Cause."³ Northern efforts were organized and led by women such as Dorothea Dix, the Superintendent of Female Nurses for the Union Army, who established a sort of protocol, stipulating that "the applicant must be over thirty, plain looking, dressed in brown or black and no bows, no curls, no jewelry and no hoop skirts."⁴ Additionally, applicants were expected to provide at least two letters of recommendation to prove their "morality, integrity, seriousness, and capacity for the care of the sick."⁵ In many ways, these regulations were put in place to protect the reputations of female volunteers.

Dorothea Dix's regulations were closely related to the belief that female workers fostered a familial, specifically

motherly, relationship with their patients. By regulating the age and appearance of female hospital workers, Dix sought to prevent hospital romance and maintain a professional relationship between female nurses and male patients. While many women considered themselves surrogate mothers of their patients, few encouraged passionate relationships between hospital employees and soldiers. Older, plain-looking nurses attracted less attention from male soldiers than young women, so they were more readily accepted into hospitals, especially in the Union. According to Cornelia Hancock, Dorothea Dix considered Hancock “too young and pretty” to serve as a Union nurse.⁶ Dix was not the only female to feel this way. Hannah Ropes, a Union nurse, discouraged her daughter from adopting the same profession as herself, saying, “Now, it would not do for you to be here. It is no place for young girls. The surgeons are young and look upon nurses as their natural prey,” which suggests that Dix’s criteria turned away women who might not treat a soldier as a son.⁷ Dorothea Dix and Hannah Ropes, two women who worked in hospitals, clearly considered themselves acceptable hospital workers, yet shared the belief that girls did not belong within their own workplace. Wartime necessity enabled motherly women to enter hospitals; however, according to these sources, girls and young women were not considered mothers and were ordered by many to remain at home.

Dorothea Dix believed that a certain type of woman could flourish within military hospitals and in order to protect and promote the opportunities afforded to these women, Dix created a system to employ those least prone to a hospital’s temptations. To many historians, Dix’s regulations correlate with a description of a typical mother. The notion that women considered themselves mothers of their patients is unmistakable in most diaries. Descriptions of patients as “helpless as babes,” “my special children,” and “my boys,” immediately bring to mind the image of a mother caring for a sick, helpless child.⁸ What is not immediately evident is the idea that women’s

ability to comfort and care for their patients gave them a sense of purpose within a war that excluded women from combat. Left at home to worry about their male loved ones, women needed a way to feel as though they could influence the outcome of the war and get their men home safely. The long hours and exhausting work associated with nursing also served as a distraction for women anxious about their family or the outcome of the war.

Numerous historians have argued that women, both Union and Confederate, were driven from their homes to military hospitals by the need to contribute to the war. Furthering this argument are historians such as Jane Schultz, who writes of women who "attempted to domesticate the hospital," in an effort to confirm their rightful place within a hospital.⁹ Segments of society considered hospital labor well outside the realm of appropriate work for women. By adopting a familial relationship with their patients, nurses could claim that their entrance into hospitals was natural and logical, given the circumstances of the war. Schultz, in *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America*, argues that soldiers' letters home included approving passages about their female caregivers and that soldiers preferred female nurses to male nurses.¹⁰ Schultz also touches upon the positive, "civilizing" influence that females had within hospitals and further claims that women romanticized their occupation, stating, "as the spirit of self-sacrifice became fashionable, some expressed it by removing themselves from home ties to perform the more sacred work of nursing."¹¹ While both Faust and Schultz make a convincing argument regarding nurses' mothering of soldiers, neither historian discusses female hospital workers' unusually high level of morale throughout the war.

Prior to the Civil War, most upper-class, white women did not perform hard labor. For upper-class nurses, life changed dramatically once they began their work away from home. Nurses worked long hours in unsanitary conditions and gave up luxuries they had enjoyed before the war. Despite these

unpleasant conditions, most nurses' diaries suggest a relatively high level of morale among nurses within military hospitals in the Union and the Confederacy. An unexpected confidence and devotion remained characteristic of female hospital workers because of their self-perceived contribution to their cause.

The pressure to filter emotions and report only happy events and feelings might have brought about the rosy image of hospital life painted by most nurse diaries. Nurses did not want their loved ones to worry about their situation and as a result, may have left out depressing stories of suffering and death and instead filled their letters with encouraging, hopeful anecdotes. In addition to writing letters to their own families, nurses also helped sick or wounded soldiers compose letters to their relatives. Martha Livermore recalled letters written by her coworkers. Of Miss Amy Bradley, Livermore stated: "The letters she writes haven't any blue streaks in them, but are solid chunks of sunshine."¹² Livermore's apparent approval of Miss Bradley's cheerful letters suggests that nurses did not simply transcribe the words of their patients, but inserted their own commentary of life within the hospital. In such cases, both nurses and soldiers sought to send good news home to concerned family members, thus making the ability to create such pleasant letters a valuable skill within military hospitals. Louisa May Alcott, herself a Union nurse, described her desire "to make the best of everything and send home cheerful reports even from the saddest of scenes."¹³ Such statements indicate that hospital life may not have been quite as rosy as some diaries suggest.

While some diaries contain such disclaimers, most nurses never mention struggling to maintain a false sense of happiness or optimism. Many attributed their energy and genuine positive morale to a strong, unwavering sense of purpose and patriotic duty. Union and Confederate women claimed to be too busy to realize or acknowledge how tired or sad they actually felt. Emma Edmonds, a Union nurse, captured this sentiment: "Oh, what an amount of suffering I am called to witness every hour

and every moment. There is no cessation, and yet it is strange that the sign of all this suffering and death does not affect me more. I am simply eyes, ears, hands and feet."¹⁴ These women were aware that their circumstances had changed dramatically since their employment in hospitals, yet most enthusiastically shouldered their new responsibilities and duties, only briefly reflecting on the cause of their willingness to work so hard. Hannah Ropes, while serving as a Union nurse, wrote: "But for love of country... where the strength comes from to do what I do is a mystery."¹⁵ Women working in hospitals, unlike women at home waiting for the return of their husbands, had a purpose and considered themselves fundamental contributors to their cause, Union or Confederate. This feeling of self-worth inspired them to radically change their lifestyle as a wartime sacrifice and went a long way in preserving their enthusiasm for the war effort.

Just as men considered service to their country a duty, women too wrote of their patriotic duty to the Union or Confederacy. Kate Cumming, a Confederate nurse, wrote about women's role within the Confederate effort: "I can not see what else we can do, as the war is certainly ours as well as that of the men. We can not fight, so must take care of those who do."¹⁶ Kate Cumming's opinions regarding gender were most likely more progressive than most women within the country at the time; however, she was not the only nurse who considered her work a duty and an honor. Hannah Ropes, a nurse for the Union army, wrote: "Now is the judgment of this generation. How plainly every man is being tested to show the true quality of his life, if he be a true man, honest, loyal, and noble as countryman, or no."¹⁷ Ropes clearly considered the Union's fight an honorable and moral one, and as such, regarded it her duty her to sacrifice for the Union's benefit. According to some nurses, a woman's duty did not stop at simply contributing. Phoebe Pember, the head matron at Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, Virginia wrote: "It was a pious and patriotic duty not to be afraid or ashamed under any circumstances,"

suggesting that women were expected to restrain their fears and face the challenge bravely.¹⁸ Pember later described her initial reaction to the first influx of sick and wounded patients, admitting an instinctive urge to return home: "My mind had been very unsettled as to my course of action in view of the impending crash, but my duty prompted me to remain with my sick, on the ground that no general ever deserts his troops."¹⁹ In this case, Pember equated her own duty to the Confederacy and the wounded troops in her care with the duty of a male general in battle, which suggests that Pember showed no distinction between genders in allocating patriotic duty.

One aspect of this unique experience for female nurses was living within a predominantly male setting. Surrounded by suffering, sick and wounded men, most women immediately perceived themselves as the "mothers" of their wards and aspired to be a positive influence on the soldiers in their care. Nurses took their jobs very seriously, were committed to the soldiers in their ward, and felt a rewarding sense of accomplishment upon providing sufficient care for the sick. Martha Livermore, a Union nurse, described such an instance in her diary. She observed that "as the soldiers were brought in, we fell into maternal relations with them, as women instinctively do when brought into juxtaposition with weakness, and we soon addressed them individually as 'my son,' 'my boy,' or 'my child.'"²⁰ Livermore's journal suggests that without the loving, maternal care of nurses, men, weak and alone, would have been without a mother figure to nurse them through their sickness or injury. In short, women felt as though their work in hospitals could have an important effect on the outcome of the war, thus encouraging them to sacrifice for the cause. While a woman could not follow her son or husband to war, the image one of her own loved ones suffering without a tender woman's care might have been enough to convince a number of women to leave home and work in a military hospital.

In addition to providing physical care for sick and wounded men, some women also realized their positive

influence on their patients' morals, which further defined the importance of their presence within hospitals. Hospitals were filled with male surgeons and male soldiers and some women were concerned that, like other aspects of the military, hospitals might become places in which rogue, immoral practices spread as quickly as disease. In her diary, Hannah Ropes recalled praying with sick men and encouraging them to refrain from swearing.²¹ In Antebellum America, women were considered the moral beacons of society and to many Civil War nurses, it was only logical for women to enter hospitals and provide much needed moral guidance. In this way, many Civil War nurses considered women's involvement in hospitals a logical and reasonable wartime necessity. Nurses were aware of their positive influences on the moral atmosphere of a hospital, and this awareness contributed to their sense of accomplishment and contribution. According to Phoebe Pember, for women hospitals were not a temptation to behave inappropriately, but rather an opportunity for a female to act as a lady should. She reflected that "if the ordeal does not chasten and purify her nature, if the contemplation of suffering and endurance does not make her wiser and better, and if the daily fire through which she passes does not draw from her nature the sweet fragrance of benevolence, charity and love—then, indeed a hospital has been no fit place for her!"²² Pember believed that hospitals could bring out the best aspects of a true lady's character, giving them the opportunity to be compassionate, loving mothers to men, who, because of the war, had no such figures in their lives.

Hospital workers did not often allude to the social pressures they faced; however, publications such as *Harper's Weekly* occasionally addressed the issue. A cartoon, printed in August 1862 and titled "Horrorified Husband," depicts a man speaking with his slave, who is saying, "Yes sir, She says she's gone Nuss-ing to Fortress Monroe – and she tole me to rub up your Regimentals, 'case you wanted to follow her."²³ This cartoon seems to mock men who allowed their wives or daughters to leave home and work in hospitals, suggesting that

some women whose husbands remained at home neglected their familial duties in search of adventure or independence. This cartoon mocked the self-sufficiency asserted by women as they summed up the courage to leave the comforts of home, many for the first time, to contribute to the war effort. While many men enlisted to experience the adventure of war, most women who chose to leave home were concerned with fulfilling their obligation to their absent loved ones, although some certainly yearned for the adventure of war.

Some women faced criticism from other female hospital workers in addition to pressure from society at large. Adelaide W. Smith, an independent volunteer from New York, wrote disapprovingly in her diary of the “manish attire” of Dr. Mary Walker, a strong minded physician who “at one time entered the court-room bearing the United States flag” and asserted her rights as an American citizen.²⁴ Smith’s negative perception of Dr. Walker indicates that women walked a fine line when they chose to work in hospitals. While Smith admitted that Mary Walker “did much good among sick soldiers,” she clearly believed that Dr. Walker overstepped the boundaries acceptable for women of the time by adopting a masculine manner of dressing and acting.²⁵ There certainly existed a spectrum of opinions regarding the subject, ranging from ultra-conservatives who believed a woman’s place was in the home, to progressive feminists like Dr. Walker, who saw the war’s opportunities as a means to achieve citizenship and expanded rights for women. In general, upper-class, white hospital workers considered it a duty and an honor to serve their country during the war, but planned to return home at the close of the fighting. Although some, such as Martha Livermore, hoped to maintain women’s expanded sphere throughout the post-war period, the majority of female hospitals workers assumed the change a temporary one. Their responsibility to care for sick or wounded men would expire when their own men returned home.

While most women were greatly encouraged by their interactions with patients and coworkers, some nurses revealed

discontent with the presence of lower-class women within hospitals. Phoebe Yates Pember, a head matron in Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, was quite critical of lower-class female workers, claiming that they were unfit to serve in hospitals because of their social status. Pember's recollections suggest a class divide that is echoed within other nurse diaries, stating, "now that the field was open, a few, a very few ladies, and a great many inefficient and uneducated women, hardly above the laboring classes, applied for and filled the offices."²⁶ Pember's conclusion implies a belief that lower-class women were less fit to serve in hospitals than upper-class women or men, but because men were needed to fight the war, hospitals would have to make do with lower-class, female employees.²⁷ Pember's criticism is most likely related to the various motivations that drove women to work in hospitals. Regardless of loyalty, lower-class women worked to earn a wage, while upper-class women sought to contribute to their cause. Because both upper- and lower-class women who worked in hospitals were criticized by some members of Northern and Southern society, upper-class women tried to distinguish themselves from lower-class employees by making a distinction between paid hospital staff and unpaid volunteers. This class-based trend helps explain Adelaine Smith's mortified reaction to the idea of receiving compensation for her work.²⁸ Despite their entry into the hospital sphere, upper-class female nurses did not consider themselves members of the working class and regarded wage-earning women as second class. This distinction between volunteering and working helped upper-class women rationalize their decision to leave home in spite of the social stigma related to hospital work. By declining compensation, upper-class women sidestepped the sensitive issue of whether or not they belonged in hospitals. These women, coming from comfortable home situations, wanted to transfer their workplace directly from the home to the hospital, deducing that as long as they were simply caring for those in need, they posed no challenge to antebellum social mores. While most wealthy

women did not overtly defy the status quo, their attitudes towards less fortunate employees did contribute to tensions within hospitals. While diaries occasionally allude to social pressures associated with hospital work, the comments rarely acknowledged the impact of the pressures. Nurse diaries from this time might be biased in some ways because most women who chose to keep a journal of their experiences were educated and presumably of higher social standing than those who did not. The general lack of reaction to this negative climate, whether created by society or other hospital employees, did not have a significant negative influence on the spirits of those upper-class hospital workers who kept written records of their work.

Based on nurse diaries and letters, white, upper-class hospital workers largely escaped the war weariness that swept both the Union and Confederate home fronts by the end of the war. Equally puzzling is that many upper-class nurses were willing to work long hours doing dirty, tiring jobs that they wouldn't have considered performing at home. Paired with the criticism that many received through the media and letters from home, the positive morale expressed within journals and diaries of Civil War nurses seems illogical at best.

The fact that many nurses enjoyed their strenuous routines suggests a newfound sense of purpose and patriotism experienced by workingwomen. Martha Livermore, speaking of a Sanitary Commission colleague, Mrs. Jane C. Hoge, seemed to recognize a pattern, writing, "The inspiration of the war developed in her capabilities of whose possession she was not aware, and she surprised herself, as she did others, by the exercise of hitherto unsuspected gifts. Of how many women workers of the war could this be said!"²⁹ Livermore, a Sanitary Commission employee, undoubtedly worked with numerous women during the war who were "surprised" by their abilities, but Livermore might have seen the broader social implications of women's increasing role within the work force while most nurses did not. Women's realization that they were capable of

succeeding within the workplace might also have helped them maintain their wartime optimism and faithfulness to the war effort.

In general, this feeling of significant and meaningful involvement in the war was sustained by the positive interactions between female nurses and male patients. Without the encouragement of their sacrifice and toil that was provided by sick and wounded soldiers, women might have easily lost faith in their cause amidst all of the death, pain, and suffering that filled military hospitals. Sick men, discouraged and frustrated with the war, presented a challenge to female hospital employees. Women believed that their patients' health would improve if their spirits were lifted and as a result, most women were willing to work long days in poor conditions to meet the needs of their patients.

Nurses' payment for their work ranged from material gifts to personal letters and contributed largely to their resolve to continue. Many women were richly rewarded for their efforts by the gratitude and appreciation of sick soldiers, giving them a feeling of purpose and accomplishment, formerly foreign to most, which made them excited about their work within hospitals. According to Louisa May Alcott, "if any needed a reward for that day's work, they surely received it," as soldiers frequently thanked nurses with smiles and grateful looks.³⁰ Many adopted a perpetually cheerful demeanor in an effort to brighten their patients' spirits. Alcott was a loyal supporter of this philosophy, writing, "He who laughed most was surest of recovery."³¹ Alcott's reflections on the war also suggest a preference for women over men within the nursing profession on the basis that women were more cheerful than men, and thus more able to cheer up weary patients.³² Many of Alcott's opinions and attitudes were not widespread during the war; however, *Harper's Weekly* published "Godey's Lady's Book," which featured a section titled *Nursing the Sick* that suggested "cheerfulness and alacrity without boisterousness are the essentials to success, especially if united to that womanly

sympathy with suffering which tends so much to soften the hours of pain or sickness.”³³ Southern newspapers encouraged women to leave home for hospitals. An article in the *Daily Morning News* of Savannah, Georgia titled “Female Nurses for Our Soldiers” stated: “Women of Savannah, I entreat you, but the love you bear for our common country, move at once in this important matter, and let not the soldier in his hour of trial and suffering sigh, but sigh in vain, for the fair soft hand of a woman to assuage his pains for smooth this lowly pillow.”³⁴ Such articles provide evidence that, at least in some places, women were encouraged to work in hospitals and that at least a portion of society supported the belief that a cheerful woman could have a positive influence on the health of a sick soldier.

Maintaining a cheerful demeanor amongst wounded and dying men was not an easy task. Emma Edmonds, a nurse and spy for the Union Army, found strength to continue her work by comparing her own situation to those of her patients. “The gratitude of the men seems to act as a stimulant, and the patient, uncomplaining faces of those suffering men almost invariably greet you with a smile,” she wrote. “I used to think that it was a disgrace for any one, under ordinary circumstances to be heard complaining, when those mutilated, pain-racked ones bore everything with such fortitude.”³⁵ In this way, sick soldiers kept nurses’ own problems in perspective. Homesick nurses were no further from their family or regular way of life than the injured, suffering soldiers that lay dying in the beds around them. Providing for the needs of their patients kept nurses from dwelling on their own problems, which often seemed trivial in comparison. Not only did nurses work hard, they often described their work cheerfully in their journals. Emma Edmonds’ journals reveal the feeling that “but the patriotic, whole-souled, educated woman twists up her hair in a ‘cleared-for-action’ sort of style, rolls up the sleeves of her plain cotton dress, and goes to work washing dirty faces, hands and feet, as if she knows just how to do it... and everything is done cheerfully so that one would think that it was really a pleasure

instead of a disagreeable task."³⁶ Edmonds acknowledged that her job, at times, was not pleasant; however, her journal reveals a desire to make it appear so. Edmonds, as well as other nurses, might have worried that patients and superiors would construe objections or complaints as a lack of patriotism or unwillingness to sacrifice for the cause. Surrounded by men who were dying for the Union or Confederacy, women were probably acutely aware of the relative degree of their problems.

Interestingly, the military sphere seems to have a much more negative impact on the morale of nurses than the death and illness that surrounded them each day, especially those nurses working for the Confederacy. Kate Cumming, a Confederate nurse, spoke often of the military progress of the Confederacy. Statements from Kate's journal, such as "if our government can not do better by the men who are suffering so much, I think we had better give up at once," reveal frustration with the rebel government.³⁷ Initially, Cumming's faith in the Confederacy seemed resolute; however, as the war progressed, her confidence wavered. Cumming apparently closely followed the progress of the troops and was devastated by the death of Stonewall Jackson.³⁸ Cumming's story is intriguing, as her faith in the Confederacy hinged upon the nation's success within the military sphere and was apparently unaffected by the death of soldiers within her hospital, as well as the negative attitudes of her patients. "With this retreat, as with every other I have seen, the men are so worn out that they tell all kinds of stories about the army's being demoralized. I have got used to this, and do not put faith in it. After they are well rested they will forget it."³⁹ Cumming's ability to disregard the downtrodden feelings of the Confederate soldiers in her care seems remarkable and undoubtedly contributed to her happy temperament.

Upper-class nurses might have been just as busy had they remained at home to run their household during the war, but the purpose of their hospital work was more easily identified with their cause and they likely received more rewards for their efforts than women at home. While hospital workers could not

escape the suffering inherent to any hospital, the hospital offered an unexpected positive environment that fostered a feeling of accomplishment and contribution within the consciences of nurses. This feeling of purpose and accomplishment, unfelt by vulnerable women on the home front, served as a buffer that largely protected nurses from the exhaustion and collapse of faith that proliferated throughout the home front by 1865.

NOTES:

¹ Henrietta Stratton Jaquette, *Letters of a Civil War Nurse, Cornelia Hancock, 1863-1865* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 10.

² Judith E. Harper, *Women During the Civil War: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 285.

³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 92.

⁴ Sylvia G. L. Dannett, *Noble Women of the North* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 60., cited in Lisa A. Long, *Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 187.

⁵ Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 15.

⁶ Jaquette, 3. .

⁷ Jon R. Brumgardt, *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 53, 74; Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches and Campfire Stories* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 64.

⁹ Schultz, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹² Martha Ashton Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army, and in Relief Work at home, in Hospitals, Camps and at the Front, During the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington

and Company, 1889), 220.

¹³ Alcott, introduction to *Hospital Sketches*, ii.

¹⁴ Emma E. Edmonds, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps and Battlefield* (Hartford: W.S. Williams & Co., 1865), 58.

¹⁵ Brumgardt, 116.

¹⁶ Kate Cumming, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 39.

¹⁷ Brumgardt, 117.

¹⁸ Bell Irvin Wiley, *A Southern Woman's Story: Life in Confederate Richmond* (Jackson: McCowat-Mercer Press, Inc: 1959), 92.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁰ Livermore, 346.

²¹ Brumgardt, 95-7.

²² Wiley, 146.

²³ "Horried Husband," *Harper's Weekly*, August 16, 1862.

²⁴ Adelaide W. Smith, *Reminiscence of an Army Nurse during the Civil War – Adelaide W. Smith, Independent Volunteer* (New York: Greaves Publishing Company, 1911), 245.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁶ Wiley, 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸ Smith, 260.

²⁹ Livermore, 160.

³⁰ Alcott, 39.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³² *Ibid.*, 68.

³³ Louis A. Godey, "Godey's Lady's Book," *Harper's Weekly*, February 1861.

³⁴ "Female Nurses for our Soldiers," *Daily Morning News* (Savannah Georgia, May 14, 1861), col C.

³⁵ Edmonds, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁷ Cumming, 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

INSURRECTIONS AND INDEPENDENCE:

How the Gunpowder Incident Thrust British and Afro-Americans into the American Revolution

Nicole Lidstrom

On the night of January 18, 1775, Governor John Murray, the fourth Earl of Dunmore and the head of the royal colony of Virginia, gave a ball including “a numerous company of Ladies and Gentleman” from Williamsburg in order to celebrate the royal birthday of Queen Charlotte and the Governor’s return from a successful campaign against the western Indians.¹ A year later, the firebrand Patriot Patrick Henry was enjoying the residence of the Governor’s Palace and Dunmore spent the summer and fall ravaging the coasts and inciting the slaves and servants of rebels against their masters. The Gunpowder Incident in April of 1775 is the pivotal event that turned British subjects into rebels, slaves into soldiers, and a political dispute into an armed Revolution. Not since Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 had white Virginians taken arms against their Governor, and, nearly a century later, both free and enslaved Virginians were seeing again the implications of an armed uprising of servants and slaves. The removal of the gunpowder from the Williamsburg magazine convinced gentry politicians that they were struggling with their peers in Philadelphia against a ministerial conspiracy against the Colonies. It also mobilized common Virginians into militias to fight for their American liberty or African slaves and white

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servants into Loyalist regiments to fight against the tyranny of their rebel masters. The Gunpowder Incident inflamed the undercurrents of gentry paranoia, common planter indifference, and slave discontent into action, and it assured that the questions of citizenship, radicalism, and imperial authority would structure the unforeseen rebellions. The Gunpowder Incident thrust Virginia into the American Revolution.

The slave-owning plantation elite of Virginia were a quasi-aristocracy that feared their own basis of power. They, like the biblical Egyptians, were in constant fear of their own Hebrews rising against them because African slaves frequently and actively sought their freedom.² The institutionalization of racism in the late seventeenth-century through a series of laws against African and Indian servants and slaves came in response to an increasing reliance of such labor over that of European indentured servants. In 1662 an act by the House of Burgesses declared that the free or slave status of a mother would legally apply to the child, and in 1680, it became illegal for “any negroe or other slave to carry or arme himselfe... nor to goe or depart from of his masters ground without a certificate.”³ White Virginians were concurrently repressing a specific population and insuring that they could not rebel against their captors.

Yet, from New York to South Carolina, African slaves started uprisings or conspiracies in a steady occurrence throughout the eighteenth-century. At least ten major slave conspiracies were discovered in Virginia alone before the revolutionary period.⁴ One of the most infamous in all the colonies was in South Carolina in September 1739 in which “some Angola Negroes assembled, to the number of Twenty...they there killed Mr. Robert Bathurst, and Mr. Gibbs, plundered the House and took a pretty man small Arms Powder.” Drawn to the promise of freedom in Spanish Florida, this small group grew to more than a hundred plundering the countryside until it was violently quashed.⁵ Other than the Spanish, it is also reported that poor whites inspired the

events that occurred around Stono, SC, threatening the institutional racism that was so carefully put in place by the government elite.⁶ The events of 1739 inspired slaves into two more separate rebellions around Charleston in 1740 and 1741 and filled North American white colonists with violent images of the fate of their West Indies co-nationalists.⁷

More than just domestic insurrections, slave uprisings were constantly connected with feared invasions by foreign powers, like Spain and France, a connection that would be repeated when Americans fought against British imperialists. Other than the Stono uprising, slave conspiracies in Maryland and New York, in the 1730s and 1740s respectively, were connected with possible Spanish naval invasions.⁸ As the Spanish threat was subverted by the French threat in the minds of British colonists, so too were slave conspiracies frequently begun by slaves who believed the French invaders would reward them with freedom. After General Edward Braddock's defeat against the French and Indians at Fort Duquesne in 1755, the political authorities of both Maryland and Virginia deployed military forces, not to protect against the French, but to keep down an expected slave uprising.⁹ After the defeat, Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia told Charles Carter that "the villainy of the Negroes on any Emergency of Gov't is w't I always fear'd" and he supported the deployment of sheriffs to "prevent those Creatures enter'g into Combinat[ion]s and wicked Designs."¹⁰

The motivation and ability of Afro-Virginians to revolt was an ever-present reality in revolutionary Virginia. Though only 1 percent of enslaved Virginians in the eighteenth-century had killed a white Virginian, "it is likely that by the 1760s almost every white person in the eastern counties [of Virginia] knew of a free person who had been killed by a slave."¹¹ Indeed, the increasing instability of the political conflicts and revolutionary rhetoric seemed to inspire slaves throughout the British colonies. In late 1774 and early 1775, slaves in Boston and New York attempted large uprisings, while in Virginia,

slaves in Westmoreland County, Ulster County, Chesterfield County, and the City of Norfolk planned revolts.¹² British Virginians not only feared these uprisings but also predicted that, should the colonies and Great Britain come into conflict, the planter's paranoia could be used against them by an invading force. In the November of 1774, James Madison said in correspondence,

If [sic] America and Britain should come to an hostile rupture I am afraid an Insurrection among the slaves may and will be promoted. In one of our Countries lately a few of those unhappy wretches met together and chose a leader who was to conduct them when the English Troops should arrive – which they foolishly thought would be very soon and that by revolting to them they should be rewarded with their freedom... It is prudent such attempts should be concealed as well as suppressed.¹³

Even in Great Britain, the idea of a British invasion connected with slave emancipation was at least in circulation among political circles. Arthur Lee claimed in 1774 that a pamphlet endorsing the emancipation and arming of Virginian slaves to quash a Patriot rebellion “meets with approbation from ministerial People.”¹⁴ In a letter to the Earl of Hillsborough in 1772, which was insightful considering his future as Governor of Virginia, Dunmore states that in the event of “an attack upon this Colony, the people with great reason tremble at the facility that an enemy would find in procuring such a body of men... [who] are ready to join the first that would encourage them to revenge themselves, by which means a conquest of this Country would inevitability be effected in a very short time.”¹⁵ Afro-Virginians were not only ready for an invading force, but British Virginians also thought the mixture of invasion and emancipation was inevitable.

In the developing political crisis with Great Britain, American Patriots continually used language of the situation

of their enslaved population to describe their own and inspire the common population into radical action. In September 1774, Ebenezer Baldwin of Connecticut saw the Coercive Acts as establishing “an arbitrary government” as “a settled fix’d plan for enslaving the colonies.”¹⁶ In late 1774, Patrick Henry persuaded the Virginia Assembly through the language of enslavement to Great Britain. He urged Virginia to create an army to defend against the British who had sent navies and armies to the colonies “to bind and rivet upon us those chains, which the British ministry have been so long forging.” From the coming conflict “there is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains our forged, their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston!”¹⁷ Indeed, as the revolutionary conflict peaked in fervor, the Virginian gentry continually aligned themselves with their American brethren in Boston and encouraged common Virginians to join political action with their northern friends. In May of 1774, the House of Burgesses enacted a Day of Fasting and Prayer in support of the Bostonians after the closing of the city’s port. Lord Dunmore told the Earl of Dartmouth that the event was meant “to prepare the minds of the people to receive other resolutions of the house... [which] may naturally be concluded could tend only to inflame the whole country, and instigate the people to acts that might rouse the indignation of the mother country against them.”¹⁸ In June 1774, Dunmore again reported to the Earl of Dartmouth saying that the Committee of Correspondence in Boston wanted Virginians “to join a general association against the importing any British manufactures, or even exporting any of their own produce to Great Britain.”¹⁹ As the Associations deepened the connection with the northern colonies and the new Continental Congress, extralegal forms of government became more common, much to the chagrin of the royal Governor. Committees were formed to enforce the non-importation associations, and subscriptions with the new militias protected the fragile authority of these extralegal structures. Dunmore believed all of these measures

were meant to increase the authority of the men of the House of Burgesses while inciting the common people into support for such rebellion. The governor essentially believed that the general population was exploited by the Patriots and that “the lower class of people, too, will discover that they have been duped by the richer sort.”²⁰ Dartmouth expressed “surprise that the people should be so infatuated as tamely to submit to acts of such tyranny and oppression.”²¹ In his conversations with the British Ministry, Dunmore believed Patriot rebels from all the colonies were joining in an American cause and were attempting to persuade the general population to support them.

Yet, though common Virginians supported the Association’s boycotts and fasting days, they would have nothing of the northerner’s rebellion nor did they have the inspiration of liberating rhetoric like their enslaved population. Through the calamitous events of 1774, most Virginians were passive at best, but they were most often indifferent to the supposed ministerial conspiracy from Britain or the persuasions of their Burgesses. Philip Fithian, a New Jersey tutor in Robert Carter household, said that poorer Virginians were enraged by the Coercive Acts in 1774, not because of British tyranny, but because “many of them expect to be press’d and compelled to go and fight the Britains!”²² They were also skeptical of the non-importation agreements and associations. Dr. Walters Jones reported at a Westmorland county meeting, that many people saw “the Law [resp]ecting Tea along, did not concern them, because they used none of it.”²³ Even the Independent Companies that the Governor railed against as supporting the extralegal Committees were made up of members of the gentry and wealthy yeoman.²⁴ The county militia, which all male Virginians were officially required to commit to for general protection of the colony and frequent slave patrols, was practically inactive, and in early 1775, common planters were “making great preparations for another Crop of Tobacco” before the non-exportation agreements went into effect.²⁵

Common Virginians, no matter the persuasion of their political leaders, were in no mood for a Revolution.

In the Virginia Gazette on April 22, 1775, Samuel Adams thanked the Virginians for their donation of supplies to the besieged city of Boston saying, “we have repeatedly had abundant evidence of the firmness of our brethren of Virginia in the AMERICAN CAUSE.”²⁶ Little did the Bostonian Patriot know that the “American cause” of the North had truly found its way into Williamsburg. In the same issue of the paper, it was reported that in the early hours of April 20th, Captain Collins of the Magdalen with a group of British troops “by command of Lord Dunmore, came to this city, from Burwell’s ferry, and privately removed out of the magazine, and carried on board the said schooner, about 20 barrels of gunpowder belonging to this colony.”²⁷ In the morning, an armed mob of city inhabitants went to the gates of the Palace to demand the return of the seized gunpowder. Only with the assurances of Peyton Randolph, the Speaker of the House of Burgesses, were the city leaders and Burgesses able to request answers from the Governor. To the Council of Burgesses, Dunmore declared that upon “hearing of an insurrection in the next county, he had removed the powder from the magazine, where he did not think it secure, to place of perfect security.”²⁸ This ambiguous “insurrection” was cleared up in a written proclamation to the City of Williamsburg on May 3rd, in which Dunmore stated that he had apparently removed the powder either “to anticipate the malevolent designs of the enemies of order and government, or to prevent the attempts of any enterprising Negroes.”²⁸ Dunmore claimed to have ordered the removal the powder from the magazine to prevent domestic insurrections from both Patriot rebels and slaves, and he also reminded readers of the readiness of the western Indians to renew their frontier attacks.²⁹ Along with the Governor’s printed response to the removal, the Virginia Gazette reported that two slaves in the City of Norfolk were executed “for being concerned in a conspiracy to raise an insurrection

in that town.”³⁰ Also, it seems the Burgesses and inhabitants of Williamsburg were convinced of some sort of slave uprising because Edmund Pendleton reported to George Washington a week later that there are “some disturbances in the City [Williamsburg], by the Slaves.”³¹

It was only later that the inhabitants of the capital became convinced that the Governor intended to begin his own slave uprising against Patriot rebels. Dr. William Pasteur, upon attending a patient at the Palace, apparently saw the Governor outraged after the armed mob the morning of the gunpowder seizure. Dunmore then “swore by the living God, and many like expressions that if a grain of powder was burnt at Capt. Foy or Capt. Collins, or that any injury or insult was offer’d himself or either of them, he would declare freedom to the slaves and reduce the City of Wmsburg to ashes.”³² Upon hearing of the county companies’ march on Williamsburg a few days later, Dunmore declared “that if a large body of people came below Ruffing Ferry... that he wou’d immediately enlarge his plan and carry it into execution.”³³ John Randolph, the Attorney General of the colony, also heard this threat to the city as Dunmore declared that “in case any armed people came to this Town, that he would fix up the Royal Standard... and that if any Negroes had offered their services... they would have been well received.” A few days after taking the gunpowder, Dunmore wrote to Dartmouth that he could “collect from among the Indians, negroes, and other persons, a force sufficient, if not subdue rebellion, at least to defend Government.”³⁴ Even back in January 1775, news came from Newport, Rhode Island that the circular letters of the Earl of Dartmouth commanded the colonial Governor’s to “take the most effectual measures for arresting, detaining, and securing, any gunpowder, or any sort of arms or ammunition.”³⁵ The fear that was in the heart of every slave-owning planter was exploited by the royal authority of the colony to demand obedience.

After the events of April 1775, Henry explained, that

to the general population, “you may in vain mention to them of the duties upon tea, etc. These things, they will say, do not affect them. But tell them of the robbery of the magazine, and that the next step will be to disarm them, and they will be then ready to fly to arms to defend themselves.”³⁶ Upon news of the removal of the gunpowder, fourteen militia companies from the surrounding counties descended on the City Fredericksburg, determined to march to Williamsburg to demand the gunpowder back. The Committee who were “friends to British Liberty and America” upon,

...highly condemning the conduct of the Governor on this occasion, as impolite, and justly alarming to the good people of this colony, tending to destroy all confidence in Government, and to widen the unhappy breach between Great Britain and her colonies, ill timed and totally unnecessary, consider this instance as full proof...that obedience to arbitrary, ministerial mandate, and the most oppressive and tyrannical system of government, must be the fatal line of conduct to all his Majesty’s present servants in America.³⁷

The meeting of militia at Fredericksburg was a very different makeup than the previous Independent Companies. Not only was there a drastic increase in membership to the militias, but they also contained men of lower wealth and rank than the earlier gentleman companies.³⁸ Though the Committee, convinced by the entreaties of Peyton Randolph, decided not to march on the capital, Henry, as commanding officer of the Hanover County militia, convinced his soldiers to continue with the original plan by comparing their situation with their American brethren in Massachusetts.

News had just arrived in Virginia the day of the Fredericksburg meeting that “a brigade consisting of 1000 or 1200 men landed at Phipp’s Farm, at Cambridge, and marched to Lexington, where they found a company of colony militia in arms, upon whom they fired without any provocation.”⁴⁰ In

a speech to his county militia, Henry “laid open the plan on which the British Ministry had fallen to reduce the colonies to subjection by robbing them of all the means of defending their rights, spread before their eyes, in colours of vivid description, the fields of Lexington and Concord, still floating with the blood of their countrymen.”⁴¹ The removal of the gunpowder in Williamsburg became nothing less than a conspiracy in the on the part of the British colonial administration. Henry marched with his militia to Williamsburg, and refused to stop, even after the multiple pleas by the Council and House of Burgesses, until he received a promissory note in payment to the people of Virginia for the powder removed. Dunmore, by this time having fled the capital for his ship the *Fowley*, declared the march as an act of treason saying Henry and his “deluded followers, have taken up arms and styling themselves an Independent Company, have marched out of their County, encamped, and put themselves into a posture for war...exciting the people to join in these outrageous and rebellious practices.”⁴² Though Henry’s march drummed up popular support for revolutionary action, the Council and moderate Burgesses like Pendleton thought Henry’s action “has lost him the Confidence and Esteem of most sensible moderate Men.”⁴³ Even Patriots in government like Randolph denounced the action as too violent to be effective, but to the militia soldiers, Henry was a hero. On his immediate journey to take his place at the Continental Congress, Henry was given an armed escort and paraded all the way to the border of Maryland.⁴⁴ The common “shirtmen” had found their revolution, and their political agency displayed during the Gunpowder Incident would both surprise and disappoint Virginia gentry politicians throughout the revolutionary conflict.

Randolph, about to travel to Philadelphia for the Continental Congress, was also treated as a hero and escorted through Virginia by well-meaning militia, though in late April, the Speaker of the House of Burgess and soon-to-be President of the Congress was declared a rebel, along with several Mas-

sachusetts Patriots, by a royal proclamation sent to General Gage.⁴⁵ Into the summer of 1775, the political crisis in the colonies was worsening, and the colonies increasingly joined together in their condemnation of royal officials. Attempting to take the remaining powder, “some young men got into the public magazine in this city [Williamsburg], intending to furnish themselves with arms, put were presently after surprised by the report of a gun, which was so artfully placed (said to be contrived by L--- D-----e) that upon touching a string which was in their way, it went off, and wounded three persons.”⁴⁶ With published calls for his assassination and the House of Burgesses calling for an “inquiry into the causes of the late great uneasiness given to the people” after the theft of the gunpowder, Dunmore and his family left the capital in the early hours of the morning on June 22. The Governor predicting that the angered Virginians would injure his family and “perpetuate acts that would plunge this country into the most horrid calamities, and render the breach with the mother country irreparable...thought it prudent for myself, and serviceable for the country, that I removed to a place of safety.”⁴⁷ While the members of the Governor’s Council and House of Burgesses were dismayed at the Virginia capital essentially becoming a city in rebellion against its executive authority, many of the county Committees were pleased with the news. News from the “smart skirmishes of New England” accompanied that of the fleeing of Dunmore, and the militias were hoping that General Gage would march out into the countryside, in order for the Patriots “to give him a warm reception.”⁴⁸

In the aftermath of the Gunpowder Incident, Virginia’s experience against royal authority was becoming a continental concern, and the revolutionary authority in Philadelphia was effectively taking over for the royal officials in exile. Throughout the summer and fall of 1775, Virginian militias and companies began defending the cities and plantations while Dunmore harried the Chesapeake coasts. In the fall, the Continental Congress reported “Lord Dunmore has been

many months committing hostilities against Virginia” and that any who captured him “would have received the thanks of all North America.”⁴⁹ Later in the year, the Committee of Princess Ann County in Virginia “wrote to the Congress for Troops as they are remote from the rest of the Colony” and hoped to defend themselves against Dunmore’s attacks.⁵⁰ The Williamsburg Committee of Safety requested help against Dunmore’s attacks, saying “all N. Am. expects it, and the safety of the whole does absolutely demand it; without the internal and essential security, the liberty & rights of America rest on doubtful ground.”⁵¹ More than just concrete military threats, the other southern colonies were sharing in Virginia’s fear of a slave uprising after the Governor’s stirrings in April. By the summer of 1775, the Patriot governments of Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were all in fear or preparing for an expected slave uprising once Dunmore’s fleet or other British officials invading from the coast.⁵² Shortly after the Virginia Gunpowder Incident, Governor Robert Eden of Maryland heard the report of six gentlemen about their “great apprehensions of some attempt being made by the servants or slaves for their liberty.”⁵³ In July, the Continental Congress drafted the “Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking up Arms” which contends “that schemes have been formed to excite domestic enemies against us.”⁵⁴ Now convinced that the Dunmore had always meant to free and arm the slaves of Virginia, James Madison said the enslaved population “is the only part in which this Colony is vulnerable; & if we should be subdued, we shall fall like Achilles by the hand that knows that secret.”⁵⁵ Virginia and the rest of the colonies were waiting for Dunmore to declare the independence of Afro-Virginians.

Even as late as October 1775, Dunmore told an associate on one of his plantations in Virginia that he wished to be seen as “as a sincere well wisher to the Colony.”⁵⁶ Also in October came the news that Dunmore had instructed John Conolly to go to “the Creeks & Cherokees, and through all

the tribes to Detroit” and would march through the frontier into Virginia “proclaiming freedom to all servants that will enlist.”⁵⁷ Conolly was captured, but the “diabolical scheme” by the Governor to free the slaves became a reality by November.⁵⁸ In his Proclamation of November 20, 1775, Dunmore declared martial law in the colony and that “all indented servants, negroes, or others (appertaining to rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining his majesty’s troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing the colony to a proper sense of their duty.”⁵⁹ The African slaves and white servants belonging to Patriot Virginians could now gain their freedom under the British standard. Along with a copy of the Proclamation, Henry sent a note from Williamsburg to Philadelphia, in which he hoped “an early and unremitting Attention to the Government of the SLAVES may, I hope counteract this dangerous Attempt. Constant and well directed Patrols, seem indispensably necessary.”⁶⁰ In December, Francis Lightfoot Lee told Robert W. Carter at Congress that “we are extremely alarm’d by an express from the Comtee. of Northhampton County to Congress informing that he as issued a Proclamation... The Comtee. asks for assistance, being apprehensive that their people from their exposed situation, & the number of their slaves, will thro fear be induced to follow.”⁶¹

As panic and fear gripped Virginia, Dunmore’s Proclamation was the final act to turn the moderates of the House of Burgesses and Governor’s Council into ardent Patriots. Robert “Councilor” Carter and William Byrd III, who had once offered his military services to the Governor, of the Governor’s Council allied firmly with Virginia revolutionaries.⁶² With the Governor inciting rebellion on their own plantations, British Virginians lost hope of reconciliation with royal officials.

The Virginia gentry were not the only ones to respond to the Proclamation. The issues of the Virginia Gazette shortly before and immediately after the Proclamation list runaway advertisements for slaves or servants who were expected to

have joined Dunmore's forces harrying the coasts. On November 17, 1775, a master from Stafford County had thought that his slave Charles ran away because he "intends an attempt to get to lord Dunmore... from a determined resolution to get liberty."⁶³ In January of 1776, four slaves, Harry, Lewis, Aaron, and Matthew were thought to be in Lord Dunmore's army.⁶⁴ In late 1775, Lund Washington reported uneasiness among the servile population at Mount Vernon⁶⁵ while, in June 1776, Landon Carter wrote in his diary that eight slaves had fled to Dunmore⁶⁶ Afro-Virginians were not the only ones to heed Dunmore's call to arms. A convict servant in Frederick County escaped from bondage with a white servant and African slave and headed to the British ships on the coast.⁶⁷ Back in July John Simmons in Maryland threatened that with more white citizens he "could get all the negroes in the county to back us, and they would do more good in the night than the white people could do in the day."⁶⁸ African slaves and white servants saw Dunmore's Proclamation as their call to independence, and they seemed to take complete advantage of it. Approximately 1,000 slaves escaped bondage and joined Dunmore,⁶⁹ but by the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000 rebel slaves and free blacks has left the American colonies.⁷⁰

While Afro-Virginians actively took their chance for emancipation, British Virginians saw the Proclamation as political tyranny that upset the colony's order and stability, rather than their own revolutionary actions. In a speech to his slaves in spring 1776, Robert "Councilor" Carter asked, "If the King should be victorious in the present War – has Ld Dunmore honesty to perform yt part of his Declaration respecting the Slaves but will he not sell them to white people living in the West Island, who are now friends & subjects of G.B.?"⁷¹ Rather than the House of Burgesses and County Committees, it was Dunmore who was a rebel because he was "in actual rebellion, having armed our slaves against us, and having excited them to an insurrection."⁷² British Virginians were

soundly rejecting the slave's hopes of freedom in the coming revolutionary conflict. At the same time that Dunmore got "many recruits for his Black Regiment"⁷³ the Continental Congress "moved that the Gen. shall discharge all the Negroes as well Slaves as Freemen in his Army."⁷⁴

The "Emancipation" Proclamation was the final stroke against royal authority in Virginia; British Virginians were declared to be in rebellion against their Governor and Afro-Virginians were given the opportunity to bring down the remnants of the colonial government. While the incidents of Lexington and Williamsburg in early 1775 had separate instigations, their long-term implications tied into the worsening relationship with the mother country that seemed hopeless by November. The morning events of April 20, 1775 in Williamsburg were eventually seen as the beginning of a grand revolutionary conflict for both sides, either as a continental ministerial conspiracy or the breaking down of the traditional institutions surrounding slavery. The Gunpowder Incident hit both white and black Virginians at the core foundation of their lives, and forced each Virginian to choose a side in the revolutionary struggle that was by no means certain to occur. Gentry planters and politicians sought greater ideological and political ties with the northern colonies and Congress, and the April events ensured that Virginian concerns became North American concerns like never before. Common planters were pushed into local political and military agency introducing a radical movement into Virginia events that worried the colonial government during reconciliation and the Patriot government during its formation. Finally, Afro-Virginians used the opportunity to seek freedom, at the same time white Virginians squashed any ideas of revolutionary rhetoric becoming reality. The Gunpowder Incident broke open the opportunities for political and physical liberty, and thrust Virginians into the American Revolution.

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- ⁴⁰ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), April 29, 1775, supplement.
- ⁴¹ Henry, 280.
- ⁴² Henry, 285.
- ⁴³ McDonnell, 66.
- ⁴⁴ Isaac, 281.
- ⁴⁵ Hume, 154.
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- ⁵² Holton, 9.
- ⁵³ Dillon, 32.
- ⁵⁴ “The Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms.” [Continental Congress, July 1775]. Greene, 258.
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⁶⁵ McDonnell, 145.

⁶⁶ Isaac, Rhys. *Landon Carter's Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

⁶⁷ McDonnell, 147.

⁶⁸ Holton, 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁰ Quarles, Benjamin. *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

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⁷² Holton, 13.

⁷³ Letter from James Hendricks to Leven Powell, April 5, 1776. Manuscripts Collection, Special Collections Research Center, Earl Gregg Swem Library.

⁷⁴ Robert Smith's Diary, September 26, 1775. Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 2, September 1775-December 1775, American Memory, the Library of Congress.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL RIGHTS: The 1967 Referendum

Lisa Kepple

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, legal rights of Australia's Aboriginal people were limited by racially discriminatory commonwealth and state legislation.¹ Specific laws varied between states, but generally speaking, indigenous Australians could not vote, receive social welfare, move about freely, control their own earnings and property, or act as legal guardians of their children.² By 1967, however, most of these civil rights violations had been corrected as a result of vigorous campaigning on the part of the Federal Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI).³ Specifically, legal discrimination by the states had been repealed, suffrage was granted in 1962, and all Aboriginal people had become eligible for social welfare benefits by 1966.⁴ With these developments in mind, the true goals of the 1967 Referendum can be assessed.

The 1967 Referendum campaign was technically concerned with two proposed constitutional changes. The first was to omit a line from Section 127 of the Constitution, which prevented Aboriginal people from being counted in the Australian census.⁵ Secondly, the referendum sought to remove the text from Section 51 that prevented the Commonwealth from being able to enact special laws pertaining to Aboriginal people.⁶ These proposed changes reflected the demands of

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prewar Aboriginal organizations and campaigners who had become active in the 1940s.⁷ During this time, a leading activist by the name of Jessie Street misunderstood what was actually written in the Constitution and thought that Sections 51 and 127 were, “the basis for racial discrimination in Australia and that their repeal would invalidate this and so result in citizenship rights for Aborigines.”⁸ This idea contributed to an historical political narrative that persisted into the 1960s and linked constitutional change with a greater Commonwealth role in Aboriginal affairs and the eradication of racial discrimination.⁹ A Federal Council petition campaign in 1962 collected many signatures and informed the public about these constitutional issues.¹⁰ Additionally, the Australian Labor Party officially adopted the amendment of Section 51 and repeal of Section 127 as party policy in 1959.¹¹ So, for the most part, the ideological framework for the 1967 Referendum campaign had been under construction since the 1940s.

Recognizing that most racially discriminatory legislation had been abolished prior to 1967, one must look elsewhere to identify the goals it was intended to achieve. Four significant motivating factors can be identified. One of the primary objectives behind the campaign for the ‘yes’ vote was a desire to create a federal mandate for the Commonwealth government to accept responsibility for Aboriginal affairs. Additionally, Aboriginal people in particular were motivated by an emotional desire to be recognized as human beings and fellow Australians. During the campaign, the goals advertised to the public by supporters mostly involved securing the legal status of Aboriginal individuals by establishing equal rights and citizenship rights. Finally, a fourth objective was to avoid international condemnation on the basis of Australia’s treatment of indigenous populations. What the referendum *actually* achieved was a mundane technical alteration of Sections 51 and 127 of the Constitution. In the short run, the only goal it accomplished was the emotional satisfaction that the supporters experienced after the vote. The overwhelming

public support for the ‘yes’ vote did not result in the bestowal of additional rights upon Aboriginals or any legislation or programs that would provide them with assistance during the Holt government’s term. In the 1970s, when the Whitlam Labor government came to power, the vote was finally taken on as a mandate for the Commonwealth to take action on behalf of indigenous Australians. Popular perceptions that the 1967 Referendum granted Aboriginal people the vote or ended racial discrimination are therefore not accurate.

Arguably the most important objective of Referendum advocates was to generate such a powerful affirmative response from the electorate that the Commonwealth government would be compelled to accept responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and take action. There were several reasons campaign leaders believed federal control of these matters was important. One reason was that there were still inconsistencies in 1962 in terms of what rights Aboriginal people held in different states.¹² For example, Aboriginal people could freely own property in New South Wales and South Australia, but not in any other states.¹³ According to supporters of constitutional change, like Shirley Andrews, the change would eliminate confusion by creating conformity at the federal level.¹⁴ An additional concern of the 1962 petition campaign was that giving the Commonwealth more power to legislate would result in the creation of “government-financed programs of housing, education, technical and vocational training to raise [the Aborigine’s] standard of living to that of the rest of the Australian community.”¹⁵ Specifically, the Federal Council desired to see the establishment of bodies like an Aboriginal Education Foundation and an Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Board, modeled after similar institutions for Maori in New Zealand.¹⁶ Only giving the power to the federal government could accomplish this, because only the Commonwealth would have the necessary funds and resources.¹⁷ The states were able to use a lack of available funding as an excuse for why they could not do more to improve conditions for Aboriginals in the past.¹⁸

Most importantly, the constitutional change would enable the Commonwealth to enact ‘special laws’ for Aboriginals where Parliament deemed fit.¹⁹ These special laws would address the unique disadvantages in economic and educational areas that Aboriginals faced in order to help them overcome those difficulties.²⁰

Another objective of the referendum campaign was symbolic, manifested in an emotive desire to right the wrongs of the past, or to correct for the injustices Aboriginal people had suffered. It was important to campaign leaders that the Aboriginal population as a whole be finally recognized as human beings. Part of this goal was the constitutional change that would include Aboriginal individuals in the Australian census. As it was written, Section 127 essentially “prevented [Aborigines] from being reckoned as ‘people’” both in the case of determining the population and for electoral purposes.²¹ A Federal Council leaflet from the 1963 petition campaign revealed these emotions saying, “Aborigines are people, despite Section 127...”²² Parliamentarians acknowledged this as well, describing the indigenous population as “nice, good people,” and identifying a sense of failure in relation to how they had treated Aboriginals in the past.²³ In this way, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal supporters shared an attitude that the passing of the Referendum was a moral responsibility that would hold symbolic importance. Campaign slogans and posters at the time reflected this perspective with sayings like, “Right wrongs, write ‘YES’ for Aborigines.”²⁴ A ‘no’ vote in the Referendum was thus representative of a denial of historical wrongdoing committed against indigenous populations or a belief that nothing should be done to improve their situation.

Another goal of achieving the ‘yes’ vote, especially for politicians, was to avoid international condemnation that was based on the poor treatment of Aboriginal people. Australia’s image abroad was at stake, so campaigners played up the angle that a ‘yes’ vote would contribute to transforming Australia into a modern nation in which its citizens could be proud.²⁵ A

speaker in parliament argued that revisions of the discriminatory sections of the Constitution were, “a matter of avoiding danger because they are subject to misinterpretation overseas and in certain circumstances could imperil Australia’s total security considerably.”²⁶ The government pushed for the revision of Section 127 on the grounds that, “Our personal sense of justice, our commonsense, and our international reputation in a world in which racial issues are being highlighted every day, require that we get rid of this outmoded provision.”²⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that, “all political parties thought that [Section 127] was completely out of harmony with Australian national attitudes and modern thinking.”²⁸ Indeed, Parliamentary debate in 1964 showed that politicians were well aware that, “while ever these sections of the Constitution remain, we are vulnerable to the United Nations Organization, for it will be said against us, and quite truly, that we are discriminating against the Aboriginal inhabitants of this country.”²⁹ A letter from Harold Blair to the Prime Minister urging his support for the ‘yes’ campaign warned him that, “many overseas countries are already watching eagerly for publicity in this country, waiting to see just how we feel about our minority group.”³⁰ Prime Minister Harold Holt, in turn, made his own plea to the public for the ‘yes’ vote on the grounds that a ‘no’ vote would, “injure Australia’s reputation as a ‘fair-minded’ people.”³¹ Not only were discriminatory practices perceived as out-dated, but it was thought that the world held Australians collectively responsible for what had happened to the Aboriginals, and thus looked to the national Parliament to accept that responsibility.³² This argument was probably not as ideologically important to Aboriginal activists except for the fact that it would help them secure votes.

Finally, practically all supporters of a ‘yes’ vote popularized the idea that the referendum was about securing equality and citizenship rights for Aborigines. Leaders of the Federal Council were aware that citizenship itself was not a matter addressed by the constitution and that Aboriginal people

were already citizens as of the 1948 Nationality and Citizenship Act.³³ So campaigners who truly understood the nature of the constitutional changes being pursued, like Shirley Andrews, “saw citizenship not merely as a bundle of civil rights but also as a set of social rights,” and they therefore were seeking to achieve “meaningful citizenship,” rather than citizenship in its technical sense.³⁴ In other words, citizens expected the constitutional change that would enable the Commonwealth to make special laws for Aboriginals to lift up the Aboriginal population to a comparable standard of living with other Australians. The Federal Council had been calling for the government to grant Aboriginals the same benefits enjoyed by all Australians since the petition campaign in 1962, in order to give them a “fair go.”³⁵ Parliamentary debates in 1964 reflected a desire to give Aboriginals “equal rights in all matters with all other Australian citizens.”³⁶ By 1967, supporters of the Referendum were convinced the Commonwealth government was, “the primary means of providing a form of citizenship for Aboriginal people which would create social and economic rights and so was more meaningful or real than citizenship in terms of political or civil rights.”³⁷ Due to the way this message was campaigned, many Australians were under the impression that the vote itself would determine citizenship for Aboriginals, give them the vote, and provide “improved conditions.”³⁸

Once the ‘yes’ vote was achieved, there were high hopes for the federal government to take swift action. Activist Charles Barnes wrote a letter to the Prime Minister soon after the Referendum was decided that called for, “some definition by the Commonwealth of the part it considers it should play in the field of Aboriginal affairs,” and noted that, “it would seem desirable that an early decision be made on where the responsibility of this should lie.”³⁹ *The Canberra Times* published an article days after the Referendum detailing that the Federal Council President, G. M. Bryant, called for an immediate attack on Aboriginal “material conditions,” especially housing.⁴⁰ Church leaders, after praising the outcome of the vote, joined in the

call for “effective legislation to further the advancement of the Aboriginals.”⁴¹ Another article interpreted the vote as “a firm directive [for the government] to go far beyond its past efforts and evolve an effective programme of native reform.”⁴² Kim Beazley, a member of Parliament and a strong campaigner for the ‘yes’ vote, published an article in the *Canberra Times* entitled “Now Action is Needed for the Aborigines,” detailing the changes she thought should be implemented concerning Aboriginal health, wages, and land ownership.⁴³ Clearly, there was widespread belief that the government was going to respond to the vote by working to establish new laws and programs to help Aboriginals. In reality, this did not happen.

Instead, the Coalition government preferred to continue to leave Aboriginal matters in the hands of the states, but it did feel compelled to *appear* to have done something proactive.⁴⁴ Harold Holt responded to a letter from activist Kath Walker saying, “You can be sure that the submission of the Referendum proposal reflected our concern for the rights of Aborigines, and that we will be taking steps to follow this up by further action, now that the people have expressed their views in such convincing fashion.”⁴⁵ To attempt to satisfy advocates of the Referendum, the government set up a small advisory office called the Council of Aboriginal Affairs.⁴⁶ Apart from this action, Holt essentially announced he was going to maintain the status quo on Aboriginal affairs, ensuring that legislatively, the Referendum was a failure in the short term.⁴⁷ A post-referendum cabinet submission reflected this attitude, saying “our original purpose was to remove apparently discriminatory references to Aborigines from the Constitution, not to wrest power from the states.”⁴⁸

When the Labor government came to power in November of 1972, they adopted the referendum as a mandate for the Commonwealth government to take more responsibility for Aboriginal affairs.⁴⁹ The referendum itself did not force the Commonwealth to accept this mandate, but it “bestowed upon the Whitlam government and its successors the moral authority

required to expand the Commonwealth's role in Aboriginal affairs and to implement a major program of reform."⁵⁰ Specifically, the Whitlam government spent vigorously on Aboriginal programs, established a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and asserted its primacy over the states.⁵¹

Looking back on the Referendum forty years later, prominent lawyer Larissa Behrendt pointed out in a senate paper the mythology surrounding what the 'yes' vote actually achieved; namely, the belief that it made Aboriginals citizens and gave them the right to vote.⁵² She noted that supporters mistakenly thought Aboriginal inclusion in the census would "start to break down the barrier that had occurred where indigenous people were treated differently to other Australians," so that they would be included in the nation.⁵³ In terms of the Commonwealth gaining the ability to make special laws for Aboriginals, she found that in the rare cases where that power was exercised, it was not always used benevolently.⁵⁴ In fact, much legislation that the Commonwealth has enacted on behalf of Aboriginals was actually done so under Section 96, rather than the amended Section 51.⁵⁵ Additionally, an unintended consequence of power-sharing between the states and the federal government has been that both engage in "cost shifting," whereby each level tries to attribute the responsibility to the other, leaving Aboriginal programs completely under-funded.⁵⁶ Finally, Behrendt found that while Australians tend to believe racism is no longer a problem, indigenous people continue to report that it defines their experiences in the Australian community.⁵⁷ She also pointed out under-spending on issues like health, education, and housing, which is contributing to the low socio-economic indicators for Aboriginal people.⁵⁸

Interestingly enough, the Referendum has come to be regarded as a "historic" and "momentous" event based on the mythology surrounding it.⁵⁹ For supporters like Faith Bandler who worked to secure the 'yes' vote, championing the referendum as a turning point further legitimizes their past efforts.⁶⁰ Historians who paint a similar picture of the

referendum may be motivated by their tendency to seek out “water-shed” events, rather than evaluating a complex process of change over time.⁶¹ Whatever the reasons, it is clear there is much popular misunderstanding about what the Referendum accomplished. Its most important contribution was probably that it was a significant demonstration of a change in public opinion, demonstrating that Australians were concerned about conditions for Aboriginals and interested in doing something about it. This attitude change, in combination with the Whitlam government’s decision to accept responsibility for Aboriginal affairs, facilitated changes in Commonwealth policy that, for the time being, worked towards improving conditions for Aboriginal Australians.

NOTES:

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² Ibid.

³ Bain Attwood, Andrew Markus, Dale Leslie Edwards, Kath Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum: Or When Aborigines Didn’t Get the Vote* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1997), 43.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ National Directorate, Vote Yes Campaign (FCAATSI), ‘Referendum on Aborigines (Background Notes)’, 31 March 1967 in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus’s *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 213.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 163.

⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁹ Attwood and Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, 45.

¹⁰ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 170.

¹¹ Ibid., 171.

¹² S. Andrews, 'Leaflet for the 1962 National Petition Campaign', 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Victorian National Petition Campaign Committee, 'Towards equal citizenship for Aborigines' (petition form), 1962.

¹⁶ 'Government Argument for a 'Yes' Vote for the *Constitutional Alteration (Aboriginals) Bill*', 1967.

National Directorate, Vote Yes Campaign (FCAATSI), 'Referendum on Aborigines (Background Notes)', 31 March 1967. in B. Attwood and A. Markus's *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History*, 214.

¹⁷ W. Wentworth, Parliamentary Debates, 'Constitution Alteration (Aborigines) Bill', 10 March 1966, 122.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Government Argument for a 'Yes' Vote for the *Constitutional Alteration (Aboriginals) Bill*', 1967.

²⁰ National Directorate, Vote Yes Campaign (FCAATSI), 'Referendum on Aborigines (Background Notes)', 31 March 1967. in Attwood and Markus *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History*, 214.

²¹ Government Argument for a 'Yes' Vote for the *Constitutional Alteration (Aboriginals) Bill*', 1967.

²² Andrews, 2.

²³ W. Wentworth, Parliamentary Debates, 'Constitution Alteration (Aborigines) Bill', 10 March 1966, 121.

²⁴ Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 'Right Wrongs Write YES for Aborigines on May 27' (pamphlet), 1967.

²⁵ Attwood and Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, 49.

²⁶ Wentworth, 122.

²⁷ Government Argument for a 'Yes' Vote for the *Constitutional Alteration (Aboriginals) Bill*', 1967.

²⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May, 1967.

²⁹ A. Calwell, Parliamentary Debates, 'Constitution Alteration (Aborigines) Bill 1964', 14 May 1964, 1904.

³⁰ H. Blair, Public Relations Director for the Aboriginal Children's Project, 'Letter to the Prime Minister', 10 May 1967, 2.

³¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May, 1967.

³² National Directorate, Vote Yes Campaign (FCAATSI), 'Referendum on Aborigines (Background Notes)', 31 March 1967. in Attwood and Markus *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History*, 214.

³³ Attwood and Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, 45.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ G. Bryant, 'After the Referendum - What?' *Smoke Signals*, Aborigines Advancement League, October 1967, 2.

³⁶ Calwell, 1903.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ C. Barnes, Minister for Territories, 'Letter to the Prime Minister', May 1967, 2.

⁴⁰ *The Canberra Times*, 29 May 1967.

⁴¹ *The West Australian*, 29 May 1967.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *The Canberra Times*, 1 June 1967.

⁴⁴ Attwood and Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, 61-62.

⁴⁵ H. Holt, 'Letter to Kath Walker,' June 1967.

⁴⁶ Attwood and Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, 61-62.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁸ 'Confidential Cabinet Submission No. 88', post referendum, 1.

⁴⁹ Attwood and Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, 64.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Attwood, Markus, Edwards, and Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum: Or When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, 61.

⁵² L. Behrendt, 'What did the 'yes' vote achieve?: Forty Years After the 1967 Referendum' Papers on Parliament, no.48, Jan 2008, 37.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ B. Attwood & A. Markus, 'The 1967 Referendum and All That: Narrative and Myth, Aborigines and Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no.111, 1998, 273-274.

⁵⁶ L. Behrendt, 'What did the 'yes' vote achieve?: Forty Years After the 1967 Referendum' Papers on Parliament, no.48, Jan 2008, 39.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁹ Attwood, Markus, Edwards, and Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum: Or When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, 65.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁶¹ Ibid., 66-67.