

Cover: 1992 was labelled the "year of the woman," primarily because of the political gains that women made in the 1992 elections. All of the papers included in this edition of the Wittenberg History Journal are products of women on the Wittenberg campus. It is only fitting that a monument dedicated to women would serve as a cover. The Madonna of the Trail can be found on U.S. Route 40 West near Snyder Park. It is a monument dedicated to the women who braved the frontier west of the Appalachian Mountains in the early years of our country.

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The 1993 Wittenberg History Journal is dedicated to Dr. Cynthia Behrman to commemorate her years as a professor of history and inspirer of budding historians. The staff and I would also like to thank her serving as the advisor of the History Journal. I would like to thank the staff for all of their help; without their help I could not have done this. I would also like to thank the individuals who submitted entries; the choice was a tough one, but I am pleased with the result. I would also like to thank the History Department for their help. I would also like to thank Mrs. Kneisley in the Publications Department. Finally, I would like to thank Erin Purdy, senior editor of the Journal, for the advice and insights on all of the things that I would face.

Malykke Bacon

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An Expendable Woman: The Case of Mary Surratt

by Marg Sterling

(This paper won the 1993 Hartje Award.)

It was a blistering July afternoon. The air was still—no breeze to afford even momentary relief. The crowds which had begun to assemble early that morning packed the courtyard and lined the brick wall overlooking it. Men unable to obtain passes climbed the masts of ships moored in a nearby river in order to catch a glimpse of history. At 1:15 P.M., the door to the Old Penitentiary opened. Mary Surratt, leaning heavily on a guard and a priest, was led in to the courtyard. Clad in a plain black dress and bonnet, her face was visible beneath the thin black veil. As she gazed up at the wooden scaffolding, her lips began moving rapidly in prayer. Slowly she moved forward; past the sea of unknown faces, past the four freshly dug graves flanked by four hastily built pine coffins. Climbing the steps was difficult as Mrs. Surratt was weak and her waist was girdled with irons.

Assisted to an armchair at the far end of the scaffold, Mrs. Surratt stared at the noose dangling before her. A wail escaped her lips, quieted only by a crucifix placed in her hands by her priest. While a guard shielded her from the scorching sun with an umbrella, her arms and legs were tightly bound and a hood was drawn over her head. In a faint voice she cried, "Don't let me fall."¹ The order to proceed was issued by General Hancock, and at 1:25 on July 7, 1865, Mary E. Surratt became the first woman executed by the United States government.

How did this respectable, middle aged mother of three come to such an ignoble end? Was she really the "mater familias of the criminals" or simply an expendable woman sacrificed in the name of retribution?² Mary Eugenia Surratt was the widow of a drunken tavern owner. Unable to maintain the farm and tavern left to her by her husband, Mrs. Surratt leased the property in Surrattsville to John Lloyd and moved to Washington, D.C. There she opened a boarding house at 541 H Street. With the help of her son, John, and daughter, Anna, Mrs. Surratt maintained a "scrupulously neat and respectable establishment."³ John, a southern sympathizer, became enmeshed in the intrigue of conveying information from Washington to the Confederacy. His friends and cohorts began frequenting the H Street house, whispering secretly in the small upstairs rooms. Among John's friends were John Wilkes Booth, Lewis Paine (who called himself Wood and claimed to be a

Baptist preacher), David Herold, and George Atzenrodt. When his mother became concerned about their secretive behavior and frequent visits at odd hours, John Surratt assured her that they were all involved in an oil speculation deal—nothing more.

In fact, these men were conspiring to abduct President Lincoln. When that plot failed in March, 1865, their plans changed to murder. There is little evidence to suggest that Mrs. Surratt knew the nature of these plans. Although she treated John's friends with maternal affection, according to conspirator Lewis Paine, Mrs. Surratt was never privy to their plans or conversations.

In early April, John Surratt left Washington for Canada. In his absence, Mrs. Surratt, forced to handle her own business affairs, made several trips to Surrattsville to collect money owed to her. It was on these business trips that Mrs. Surratt was reported to have passed incriminating information and packages from Booth to John Lloyd. During her trial, Lloyd testified that Mrs. Surratt told him on April 14, 1865, to have the "shooting irons ready" for that night. Mrs. Surratt maintained that Booth's message was to have "things ready" for that night and that Lloyd would understand what "things" she meant.⁴

Arrested for aiding, abetting, and harboring the conspirators (including her son, John, whose whereabouts were unknown), Mrs. Surratt was tried in military court by nine hand-picked generals "organized to convict."⁵ Her conviction was secured by the testimony of John Lloyd, whose complicity in the affair seems to have been overlooked.⁶ Although her defense counsel presented thirty witnesses who rebutted Lloyd's testimony and affirmed Mrs. Surratt's upstanding character, the star chamber of judges quickly reached a guilty verdict and sentenced Mrs. Surratt to hang.

It was strongly felt by many at that time that Mary Surratt's conviction was merely a government ploy to flush out her son, John, whom they felt was the real conspirator. Few expected Mrs. Surratt to actually hang. In fact a recommendation for a stay of execution, signed by five of the convicting tribunal, was sent to President Johnson. It remains unclear whether that request was purposely diverted or whether it was intentionally ignored.

So, on that oppressive July afternoon, with the press and public clamoring for revenge in this "female fiend incarnate," Mary E. Surratt climbed the thirteen steps of her

destiny.⁷ As the trap door beneath her feet was released, Mary Surratt paid with her life for the sins of her son, his friends, and possibly for those of the entire Confederacy.

¹ "End Of The Assassins." *New York Times*, 18 July, 1865, 1.

² "The Conspirators, Their Trial." *New York Times*, 12 May, 1865, 1.

³ Champ Clark, ed. *The Assassination* (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1987), 25.

⁴ Jim Bishop. *The Day Lincoln Was Shot*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 96.

Notes

⁵ Clark, 201.

⁶ In the 1867 trial of John Surratt, Lloyd claimed that he was coerced into presenting false testimony against Mrs. Surratt during her trial. (Guy Moore, *The Case Of Mrs. Surratt*, 1954, [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954], 79).

⁷ "The Conspirators-Findings Of The Court." *New York Times*, 12 May, 1865, 1.

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To Control Athens: The Power Struggle over the Sicilian Expedition

by Erin Purdy

(This paper was the runner-up for the 1993 Hartje Award.)

In early April, 415 B.C., the Athenian Assembly met to reconsider its decision of four days earlier to launch an expedition to Sicily on behalf of the city of Segesta.¹ Athens was currently in an era of peace with Spartans, but the Peace of Nicias (named after the general who had arbitrated the treaty) was slowly breaking down due to the diplomatic intrigues of Athens, Sparta, and their respective allies. And, after six years of inactivity, younger Athenians were craving adventure and military exploits to recover Athens' glory (as well as their own). The Segestan request for military assistance in Sicily was a chance for such an adventure and perhaps, if all went well, an opportunity for Athenian expansion in the West. The Assembly had decided to assist the Segestans with a sixty-ship squadron under the command of three generals: Nicias, Lamachus, and Alcibiades.²

In the early months of 415, Nicias presided over the politics of Athens as he had since 421, when the era of peace he had arbitrated had begun. Nicias was a moderate and conservative man, cautious to fault, and opposed from the beginning to any Sicilian expedition.³ The second meeting of the Assembly was his opportunity to stop what he thought was a disastrous decision.

Nicias had as his primary political opponent one of his co-generals who had been the major proponent of the expedition. Alcibiades was young (around 38) and stunningly handsome where Nicias was old (near 60) and stricken with a disease of the kidneys. Alcibiades was clever and charismatic, with shrewd political and military ability often eclipsed by his outrageous and dramatic personal exploits.⁴ Unlike Nicias, who could boast of no aristocratic blood, Alcibiades could claim prestigious bloodlines from both of his parents, and felt a position of power and privilege in Athenian politics was his due.⁵ The Sicilian expedition was a golden opportunity for Alcibiades to rise to such a position, an opportunity Alcibiades had worked for arduously. To prevail, he had to diffuse Nicias' influence in the Assembly.

Nicias spoke frankly of his disapproval towards the effort to attack Sicily, declaring that Athens should first attempt to solidify their current holdings before attempting any new conquests. He did not claim any moral grounds for

his disapproval but instead expressed that a policy of caution should be followed — a typical speech from Nicias. But surprisingly, Nicias included in his speech a direct attack on the character of Alcibiades, questioning his motives for supporting the expedition. Nicias warned Athens not to be caught in a young man's search for power and wealth.⁶

Alcibiades rose to the occasion with the grace of a natural politician. He did not deny that he was young and extravagant, but argued that his extravagant displays of wealth had only increased the reputation of Athens abroad.⁷ He did not attack Nicias in retaliation, although he asked Athens to make the most of his own youthful vigor and Nicias' "luck" in the battle. Instead, Alcibiades argued that Athens could easily surpass in military skill the unorganized Sicilian cities.⁸ By appealing to the patriotism and visions of grandeur of those in the Assembly, Alcibiades triumphed. Nicias was left to give a description of the needed forces, which the excited Assembly pledged to raise and outfit over the next few months.

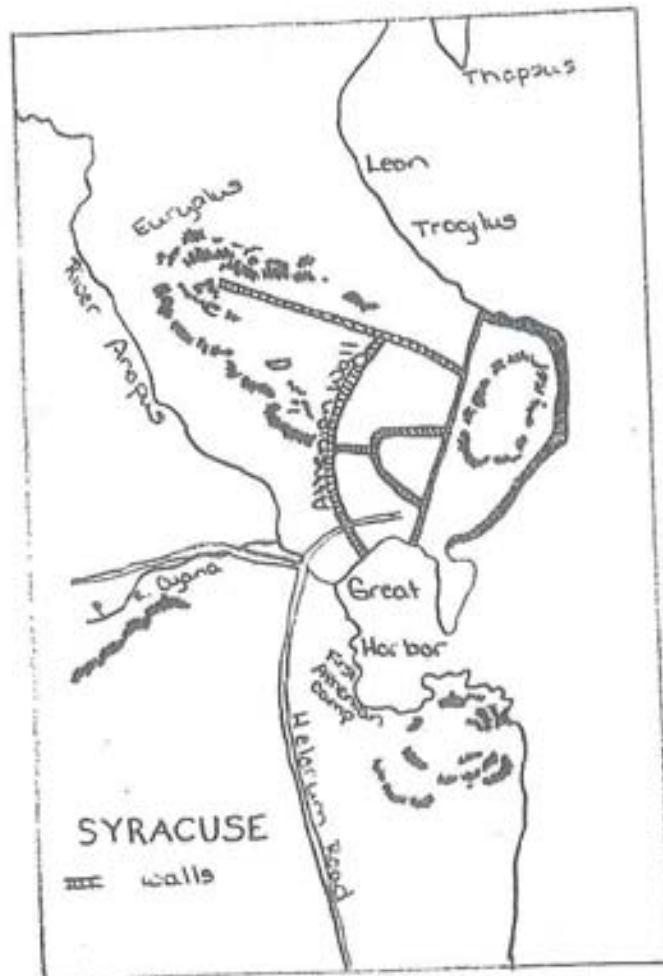
But Alcibiades' charisma could not override the ominous and disturbing events that occurred between the Assembly's decision to invade Sicily and the launch of the expedition. The second meeting itself was held on the day the women of the city held a funeral for Adonis, and the decision to invade was accompanied by wails of mourning.⁹ By far the most disturbing event was the defiling of Herms only a few days before the launch, which pushed the mood of foreboding to the point of hysteria. The statues stood outside homes and temples in Athens as a symbol of good luck and faith. Late at night, the statues were systematically defaced, their phalli knocked off, and their faces hacked. The vandalism was clearly an omen, a warning to a city about to embark on an important expedition, as Hermes was the protector of travelers.¹⁰ Was it the act of drunken pranksters, as it was widely rumored, or was such a systematic a deliberate event part of some political plan?

The Assembly was in permanent session for the ten days before the fleet's departure. It was during one of these meetings that a man named Pythonicus stood and addressed the Assembly, reporting that Alcibiades, one of the very generals of the expedition, had participated in a parody of

the Eleusinian mysteries. To accuse anyone of such religious impropriety was serious charge. Immediately following the sacrilegious defilement of the Herms, the accusation was damning and inflammatory.¹¹

Alcibiades was a shrewd politician. The longer such charges stood, the more they would be believed. The extravagance, wit, and irreverence that brought Alcibiades public attention and even acclaim were the same characteristics that could make the charges believable. He was also aware of the inference that many would make: if a man is engaged in one type of religious impropriety, would he not likely be candidate for another? Alcibiades immediately denied the charges and called for a trial to prove his innocence. He was one step behind his enemies, however. Whoever had arranged the timing of the accusations and had most likely arranged the attack on the Herms, made it impossible that a trial could be held before the expedition's departure. The launch was to go on as planned.¹²

Thus, the great expedition to Sicily left Athens amidst strange omens and public unease. One of the three leaders had spoken frankly about his disapproval of the endeavor, another was accused of a serious crime and was suspected of another. The two were also intense political rivals. The expedition would end three years later for Nicias with hideous massacre of Athenian forces and his own execution in Sicily.¹³ But for Alcibiades, the expedition would be over in a few short months. In his absence from Athens, his enemies would stir public hysteria into hatred for the very man they had proclaimed general. More witnesses, most slaves, would accuse Alcibiades of profaning the mysteries. Alcibiades was recalled to Athens to stand trial for his crimes, but he escaped and defected to Sparta with his knowledge of the Athenian military's strategies. In Athens, he was condemned to death, his property confiscated, and his name was to be publicly cursed.¹⁴ Neither he nor Nicias would ever again stand with the power and acclaim as leaders of Athens as they had in April of 415.



Notes

¹ Peter Green, *Armada From Athens* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc, 1970), 3.

² Donald Kagen, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 172-173; Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates* (London: Methuen and Co., 1968), 298.

³ Kagen, 176-177.

⁴ Walter Ellis makes a strong case for the military ability of Alcibiades in his biography. Walter Ellis, *Alcibiades* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁵ The most illustrious of Alcibiades' ancestors was the famous leader Pericles, who acted as a foster parent for Alcibiades and his brother. Ellis, 9.

⁶ Green, 102, 107; Thucydides, *A History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book Six: 12-13.

⁷ Thucydides, Book Six: 16. When Alcibiades speaks of his extravagance improving Athens' image abroad, he is referring directly to the Olympic games of 416. He entered seven teams into the chariot races, capturing first, second, and fourth places for Athens. Ellis suggests that such extravagance was part of Alcibiades' power struggle with Nicias (who was also known to spend large amounts on public displays, usually of a religious nature). Ellis, 50.

⁸ Thucydides, Book Six: 17.

⁹ Green, 111-112.

¹⁰ Ellis, 58-60.

¹¹ Green, 116-117. The mysteries were very sacred rituals, but the stylish or decadent circles in Athens would parody them as entertainment. Alcibiades was most likely guilty of parodies, but not the defacement of the Herms.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 335-338, 345.

¹⁴ Ellis, 65

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Did Julius and Ethel Rosenberg Deserve To Die?

by Molly Wilkinson

(This paper was prepared for History 328: The United States Since 1945.)

On July 17, 1950, Julius Rosenberg was arrested on the charge of directing the spy ring that had recruited his brother-in-law David Greenglass into espionage in cooperation with the Soviet Union. On August 11, Ethel Rosenberg, Julius' wife and Greenglass' sister, was arrested as Julius' accomplice. After a near eight month imprisonment, the Rosenbergs were finally brought to trial, and after three weeks of testimony primarily by Greenglass and his wife Ruth, they were found guilty of atomic conspiracy. Refusing to hear the recommendation of the jury, Judge Kaufman sentenced them to death, saying:

[Your] putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb has already caused... the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resulting casualties exceeding 50,000 and... millions more innocent people may pay the price of your treason. Indeed, by your betrayal, you undoubtedly have altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country.¹

A majority of Americans supported the death penalty. According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: "The death sentences seem completely justified. . . [the electric chair] could well stand as a warning to any others who are not repelled by treason from love of country, but who must be restrained by fear."² However, some people protested the death penalty, both those who questioned the guilty verdict and also those who acknowledged guilt but believed that the Rosenbergs did not deserve execution for their crime.

Protest came chiefly from the National Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case, from the citizens of other countries, and from communist propaganda. Although solid evidence indicated that the Rosenbergs were guilty of atomic espionage, the death penalty as punishment for this crime was an injustice. The government followed through with the execution primarily to avoid appearing to succumb to communist propaganda while America was in the midst of the Cold War.

After a series of articles appeared in the liberal *National Guardian* insinuating that the Rosenbergs were innocent victims of a set-up, the National Committee to

Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case was formed.³ Many people, such as Rabbi S. Andhill Fineberg of the American Jewish Committee who wrote a book both endorsing the guilty verdict and the death sentences, dismissed the Committee as nothing more than a communist front⁴ However, this was not the case. The Committee struggled desperately to attract national attention for almost a year; were the Committee communist, it would probably have enjoyed immediate support from the communists. Also, David Alman, one of the founders of the Committee, visited communist headquarters seeking support and was rudely denied support with the statement, "They're [the Rosenbergs] expendable."⁵ Therefore, for almost the first year after their sentencing, the Rosenbergs endured life on death row, knowing that the one group advocating clemency received little public attention.

However, in November of 1952, the Rosenbergs' hopes were renewed. Almost overnight people throughout the world representing the entire political spectrum began enthusiastically campaigning for clemency. Although some questioned guilt, the main goal of the protests was the repeal of the death penalty.⁶ Although some of this protest was from communists, a great deal of it was not. For example, according to the more conservative *London News Chronicle*: "President Eisenhower was saying how the Coronation had thrown a vivid light on the glorious heritage of law that was common to the United States and to Britain. It is a pity that a heritage of clemency is not apparently common to them."⁷ Also, an article in *Commonweal* by a French citizen pointed out that people from all walks of life and all political leanings in France were opposed to the death penalty and asserted that it would be a "grave error in judgment" to attribute all protest to communist propaganda⁸

Why exactly did so many people oppose the death sentences? One objection centered around the light sentence given to Klaus Fuchs, the scientist who actually provided the spy ring with the atomic secrets. The Rosenbergs were found guilty of operating the spy ring that put into the hands of the Russians the information provided by Fuchs, not for actually divulging classified information themselves. *Christian Century* opposed the death sentences because of this light sentence of fourteen years given to Fuchs. The

magazine stated that Fuchs actually gave away the valuable information whereas the Rosenbergs were only messengers passing on information and said, "The thing we fear will be remembered is the unnecessary severity of American justice and its readiness to wreak its anger on the relatively minor figure when the major is beyond reach.⁹ Even those who believe that a death sentence fitted the crime changed their minds in light of the disparity in sentences. For example, according to Louis Nizer in his book *The Implosion Conspiracy*: "The crime was serious enough to warrant it, but the disparity of punishment given to others who were equally guilty resulted in uneven justice, which is equivalent to injustice."¹⁰

People also opposed the death penalty on the grounds that the information the Rosenbergs transmitted was basically useless. For example, Noble Prize winning physicist Harold C. Urey opposed execution, saying: "A man of Greenglass' capacity is wholly incapable of transmitting the physics, chemistry, and mathematics of the bomb to anyone." Therefore, the Rosenbergs did not deserve to die for recruiting Greenglass. Urey was also dissatisfied with the disparity in sentences.¹¹ Agreeing with Urey, renowned physicist Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Truman requesting clemency, citing the reasons posed "by my distinguished colleague, Harold C. Urey."¹² The argument that the information transmitted was of minimal significance was reinforced by the excerpt that defense attorney Bloch read from the *Yale Law Journal* at the sentencing hearing. The article argued that even without spies the Russians would have developed the atomic bomb. To us today, this is evident, but in 1953 most Americans believed the Russians far too "primitive" to develop the bomb on their own.¹³

Other opposition to the death sentence centered around technicalities in the case. For example, the Rosenbergs were tried under the Espionage Act of 1917 that only warranted execution in the case of wartime espionage that gave American enemies advantage over us.¹⁴ Although the Rosenbergs were convicted for espionage that occurred during WWII, Russia was our ally during this war. Judge Kaufman conceded this point but added that the Rosenbergs continued espionage after the war when Russia became our peacetime "enemy." In other words, he acknowledges that the espionage occurred during peacetime; this openly contradicted the Espionage Act that only allowed execution for wartime espionage.¹⁵ To prevent any further conflicts based on this discrepancy, the Rosenberg Law was passed in 1954, allowing execution for peacetime espionage.¹⁶

Another technicality surrounded that use of the 1917 Espionage Act in the first place. Because the trial was held in 1951, the Espionage Act should have been superseded by the 1946 Atomic Energy Act which only warranted the death sentence under the recommendation of the jury.¹⁷

However, Judge Kaufman refused to hear the recommendation of the jury as he prepared to sentence the Rosenbergs, saying: "The responsibility is so great that I

believe the Court alone should assume the responsibility."¹⁸

In other words, had the Rosenbergs been tried under the most recent law applying to their case, then they could not by law receive the death penalty. Although his colleagues on the Supreme Court eventually overturned his decision, this discrepancy was enough to persuade Supreme Court Justice Douglas to stay the execution in June of 1953 to allow further investigation into this matter.¹⁹

People not only sought clemency on grounds of parity and technicality but also, completely conceding the guilt of the Rosenbergs, sought clemency on humanitarian grounds.²⁰ One prominent humanitarian consideration was the fate of the Rosenberg children, Michael and Robert, aged six and ten. As Louis Nizer said in *The Implosion Conspiracy*: "Even a thirty year sentence would have deprived the Rosenberg children of a father's and mother's care, but it was worse to orphan them. It increased the horror of execution."²¹

Others encouraging clemency on humanitarian grounds included the Pope and various religious groups such as the French Catholics. Although Pope Pius XII himself did not support clemency, he did send a letter to Eisenhower recounting the many letters he had received requesting clemency. He made his request not on civil grounds debating guilt but rather on humanitarian grounds because "when the State is moved by justice, it is the mission of the Church to remind men of mercy."²² In addition to claims from the Pope, a letter written by a French citizen in *Commonweal* cited the various groups in France who opposed the execution on humanitarian grounds, ranging from religious groups to labor unions to veterans to intellectuals. The article said, "Many refused to express opinions on the legal points in the case, but all found monstrous the possibility that a mother of two children would be sent to the chair."²³

There were even more who attacked the American system of justice as inhumane. Renowned philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre called the death penalty a "legal lynching which smears with blood a whole nation."²⁴ A writer recounting the case in *Nation* also attacked American justice on humanitarian grounds: "I cannot help feeling that the British treatment of Fuchs shows a higher degree of civilization than the sentence in this case."²⁵ Individuals such as Rabbi Fineberg of the AJC defended America's system of justice, citing as evidence examples of the Soviet Union's comparatively low standard of justice.²⁶ An editorial in *Christian Century* best refuted such reasoning: "If the best we can say for what we do is that it is not as bad as something we have long claimed outrageous, there is little reassurance in that."²⁷

Another objection to the death penalty was that the Rosenbergs were victims of anti-Semitism. This argument was really only popular abroad and lacked significant validity. For example, both the judge and prosecutor were Jewish. Nonetheless, writer Howard Fast in an article in *L'Humanite* countered this fact by insinuating that the

Jewish judge and prosecutor were part of a conspiracy; the Rosenbergs "have been tried by Jews and sent to death by other Jews. Exactly the old technique of the Jewish Tribunal employed by Hitler."²⁸ However, despite attacks such as this, even the most liberal groups in America did not embrace the theory of anti-Semitism. For example, neither the American Civil Liberties Union nor the American Jewish Committee believed that the case raised any civil liberties issues. If sufficient evidence indicated anti-Semitism, these organizations would have probably become concerned.²⁹ However, a recent analysis of the case, *The Rosenberg File* by Ralph Radosh and Joyce Milton, suggests that the ACLU/AJC hesitancy to side with the Rosenbergs could possibly be attributed to the general tendency of leftist groups during the McCarthy era to take advantage of the chance to "prove that he or she was not soft on communism when it really counted and national security interests were at stake."³⁰

Many people who opposed the death penalty felt especially that it was unjustified for Ethel Rosenberg. Some of this objection centered around her gender and her two young children. For example, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover hesitated to condone Ethel's execution because "A death sentence for Ethel might be in tune with public opinion of the moment, but once passions had cooled the execution of a wife and mother... might well come to be perceived as cruel and vindictive."³¹ Other objections to the execution of Ethel concerned whether or not she was an equal participant in the crime. For example, a list of questions prepared for Julius at the execution in case he decided to confess made only one reference to Ethel's participation: "Was your wife cognizant of your activities?" In other words, the government was willing to execute Ethel as a "full-fledged partner" without certainty that she was even aware of the activities.³² In an article in *New Republic*, Ralph Radosh and Sol Stern suggest that Ethel was not an equal partner and therefore did not deserve to die. They believed that "Ethel would not have died had Julius been willing to confess. The U.S. actually had little or no valid evidence implicating Ethel but charged her anyway as a way of inducing Julius to talk."³³

Despite all of these objections to the death penalty, the Rosenbergs were executed on June 19, 1953. Why was this? One answer lies in communist exploitation of the case during an era in America of heightened antagonism towards the Russians. As stated before, the Rosenbergs were given the death sentence in April of 1951, and the National Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case was founded later that same year. However, the communists shunned this Committee, and public fury over the death penalty remained fairly low until, in November of 1952, demands for clemency intensified all over the world. Radosh and Milton attribute this upsurge in a large part to the communist propaganda machine: "There could be no question that the rise in pro-Rosenberg sentiment, both in the United States and overseas, was the result of a

tremendous outpouring of support from Communist intellectuals, publications, and trained organizers."³⁴

But why, when the communists had known about the execution for over a year, did they wait until the end of 1952 to jump to the support of the Rosenbergs? One explanation is that the communists were finally assured that the Rosenbergs would not confess and incriminate the Russians in any way; thus, the communists could safely support them.³⁵ Another reason for the communists' change of sentiment could have been the need for them to detract from some of their own inhumane actions. For example, in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Slansky and ten other former leaders of the Czechoslovakian communist party were executed. Their trials showed not a trace of justice, and their convictions indicated anti-Semitism because one of their crimes was Zionism. These trials were the source of much negative publicity and caused many divisions within the Communist Party. Thus, "What the Western European Party leaders desperately needed at the moment was an issue that could deflect attention from the Slansky purge trial, and the Rosenberg case fit the bill perfectly."³⁶

Regardless of why the communists developed such fervor for clemency at so late a time, their exploitation of the case contributed significantly to the fact that, despite very valid objections, the government followed through with the executions. The opinion that communist propaganda may have been the reason the Rosenbergs were executed was articulated as early as 1953 in *Commonweal*: "Perhaps if they [the communists] had not exploited it so shamelessly there would be a greater sentiment toward commuting the Rosenberg sentence to life imprisonment."³⁷

That the communists waited until convinced the Rosenbergs would not admit any guilt lends support to the belief of many that the communists wanted the Rosenbergs to die. They were merely exploiting the case for propaganda purposes to gain martyrs for the communist cause. For example, much of the American public believed that the communist "purpose was not to save the Rosenbergs but to antagonize the U.S. government into executing them. This would give the communist cause everywhere a powerful example of martyrdom and brand the U.S. a ruthless nation."³⁸ In order to deny the communists their martyrs, some people decided to support clemency for the Rosenbergs.³⁹ In this way, communist propaganda helped the clemency effort. Unfortunately, for most people communist propaganda in the midst of the McCarthy era strengthened the resolve to see the execution; no one wanted the U.S. to appear to succumb to communist pressures. For example, *Commonweal* stated, "They [the communists] have maneuvered the President into the position where if he did grant a stay it would be widely interpreted as succumbing to communist pressure in this country and the pressure of Soviet propaganda abroad—which is precisely what the United States cannot afford at this time."⁴⁰ The fact that so much "politics" entered into a decision concerning the lives of two individuals is best

summed up by Radosh and Milton: "While the Rosenbergs were not the victims of a frame-up, they were indeed helpless scapegoats of a propaganda war—a war in which their deaths would be counted as victory for both sides."⁴¹

The specific effect McCarthyism and the Cold War had on the execution of the Rosenbergs is difficult to measure. However, it is fair to say that McCarthyism did effect the execution because the government was determined not to give into the communists by sparing the lives of the Rosenbergs. The Rosenbergs may well have received clemency had they been convicted during a different time period. The January 1953 issue of *Commonweal* agrees: "Whether they would have received as drastic a sentence had they been tried, say, in 1946 rather than during the cold war, is doubtful."⁴² People from other countries seemed especially able to note the effect of McCarthyism of the execution. For example, *Commonweal* points an incriminating finger at the Cold War era and McCarthyism: "We French Catholics note with a growing apprehension that sort of iconoclastic rage, that frenzy for purging and

'book-burning' and 'witch-hunts'—and all else that is signified over here by the name of McCarthyism."⁴³ In fact, the influence of McCarthyism has been cited as a possible reason why more American people and especially liberal groups such as the ACLU did not speak out in the Rosenbergs behalf. The silence of these people can be attributed to their fear of being labelled pro-Communist, a fear "stronger than the fear of communism itself."⁴⁴ Despite so many valid objections from people fully acknowledging the Rosenbergs' guilt, the Rosenbergs were executed in the electric chair on June 19, 1953. This unnecessary tragedy can best be explained in that Cold War anti-communist sentiments had such a grasp on America that they influenced the government to kill two people rather than to swallow its pride, even if doing so meant appearing to succumb to communist propaganda. The full extent of the tragic Rosenberg executions can best be described as "a sickening and disheartening failure—of the American conscience, of the American sense of fair play, of American moral leadership, of American justice."⁴⁵

Endnotes

¹ Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton, *The Rosenberg File* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983), 284.

² Jonathan Root, *The Betrayers* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1963), 223.

³ Radosh and Milton, 323.

⁴ S. Andhill Fineberg, *The Rosenberg Case: Fact and Fiction* (New York: Oceana, 1953), 35.

⁵ Radosh and Milton, 327.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁷ "An American Failure," *Nation*, 27 June 1953, 534.

⁸ Robert Barrat, "From France: The Rosenberg Case," *Commonweal*, 14 August 1953, 465.

⁹ "Reflections on the Rosenberg Case," *Christian Century*, 14 January 1953, 36.

¹⁰ Louis Nizer, *The Implosion Conspiracy* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1973), 487.

¹¹ Radosh and Milton, 433.

¹² Root, 260-61.

¹³ Radosh and Milton, 282-83.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 452.

¹⁵ Freda, Kirchwey, "Mercy for the Rosenbergs," *Nation*, 10 January 1953, 24.

¹⁶ Radosh and Milton, 452.

¹⁷ Root, 18.

¹⁸ Radosh and Milton, 276.

¹⁹ Root, 18.

²⁰ "Payment Deferred," *Newsweek*, 26 January 1953, 42.

²¹ Nizer, 487.

²² "The Pope and the Rosenbergs," 27 February 1953, 513.

²³ Barrat, 466.

²⁴ Radosh and Milton, 351.

²⁵ Arthur Garfield Hayes, "The Rosenberg Case," *Nation*, 8 November 1952, 423.

²⁶ Fineberg, vii.

²⁷ "The Rosenbergs Are Executed," *Christian Century*, 1 July 1953, 763.

²⁸ Radosh and Milton, 351.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 448.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

³² *Ibid.*, 417.

³³ Arlie Schardt and Emily F. Newhall, "Julius Guilty, Ethel Framed?" *Newsweek*, 2 July 1979, 64.

³⁴ Radosh and Milton, 348.

- ²² "Payment Deferred," 42.
²³ Radosh and Milton, 348-49.
²⁴ "Regarding the Rosenbergs," *Commonweal*, 9 January 1953, 344.
²⁵ Root, 21.
²⁶ "Payment Deferred," 42.
²⁷ "Regarding the Rosenbergs," 344.

- ²⁸ Radosh and Milton, 452.
²⁹ "Regarding the Rosenbergs," 344.
³⁰ Barrat, 466.
³¹ "Who Sentenced the Rosenbergs?" *Nation*, 20 June 1953, 514.
³² "American Failure," 533.

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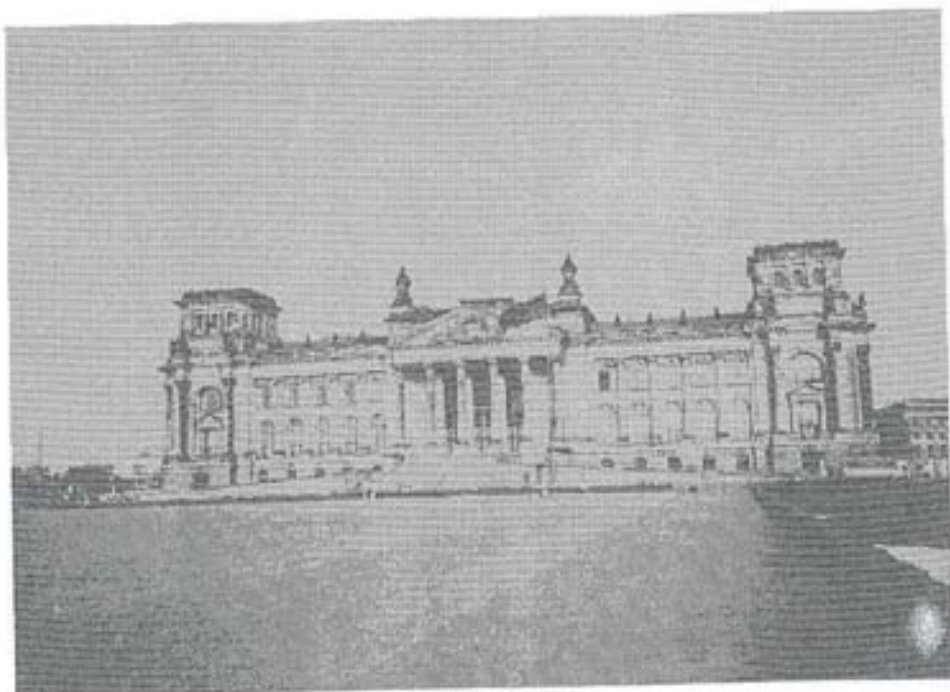
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291. The Craft of History. 4 credits.
A course required of all majors and designed to acquaint them with the basic skills of historianship: reading, writing, research, and analysis in light of the nature and users of history.

This is how History 291, the course which Dr. Behrman primarily taught, is described in the Wittenberg Registrar's Catalog (1992-1995). This section contains some of the papers produced by students in the class.



The Berlin Wall



Reichstag in Berlin

A Deeper Cut: The Admission of the Two Separate German States into the United Nations in 1973 and Its Effects on the Hopes for German Reunification

by J. E. Clayton

Until the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, most of the German population thought reunification was little more than an unattainable, token goal of the democratic Federal Republic of Germany [FRG], actively fought against by her sister state, the communist German Democratic Republic [GDR]. Even before the official separation of the two states in June of 1973 with the signing of the Basic Treaty, very few Germans themselves believed reunification to be a possibility.¹ Many factors led up to the assumptions held in 1973 that the two Germanys would remain permanently separated. One of these factors and the strongest deterrent to reunification was the admittance of the states as separate sovereign nations into the United Nations. Their membership in the UN, approved by the Security Council on 22 June 1973², and the main reason behind the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1973³, led most of the world to believe that reunification had been dealt a fatal blow.

An understanding of the political and economic relationship of the two German states after World War II helps to clarify the situation in 1972 and 1973 which led up to the UN admission of two separate German states. The division of Nazi Germany at the Elbe River and through the Harz mountains left the Soviet-occupied eastern sector weaker than its brother, which was controlled by the remaining Allied forces of the United States, Great Britain, and France.⁴ East Germany was approximately one-third the size of the Nazi empire and had less than one-third the population of the FRG.⁵ Politically as well as economically, the growing FRG remained bound to its Eastern half in many ways. West Germany Basic Law stated that the Bonn government was only temporary, contingent on the reunification of Germany, and "The entire German people [were] called upon to achieve in free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany."⁶ This commitment on the part of the Bonn government was supported by \$248 million of interest-free credit offered to the GDR⁷, and a ministry in Bonn, worth \$160 million annually, with sole purpose of researching and promoting reunification.⁸ Bonn also pursued these connection with the East for the sake of

West Berlin, which lay in the center of communist East Germany. West Berlin's security and political status was a major point of contention at this time.⁹

The standing trade situation between the two states made the GDR the only Eastern Bloc nation with access to Common Market goods. Bonn refused to recognize politically the border between the states, and therefore the GDR was able to make about \$140 million annually by trading goods with FRG without duty or late delivery penalties.¹⁰ East Germany's access to Western products created a clash of interests between the communist ruling party of the GDR and communist leader Leonid Brezhnev of the USSR. He had begun to put significant political pressure on the East German government to continue the detente [easing] of the borders between the states and maintain trade situation¹¹, especially after his visit to the Federal Republic early in 1973.¹² One of the reasons Brezhnev did this was to secure the trade agreements his government had made with the FRG during this visit.

Despite the advantageous economic situation that Bonn had extended to the GDR, the communist government had been very hesitant to accept this tie to the West. Politically, any connection, much less alliance, to the FRG was disadvantageous to the country's separatist policies and propaganda, which cast the West and especially the FRG in the role of 'class enemy.'¹³ The GDR had been pursuing sovereign nation status through recognition by other sovereign nations and was, in essence, fighting for its existence as a communist nation. This policy prevented the government from endorsing any connection to the FRG.¹⁴

In this context it becomes apparent why both Germanys were affected by the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971 and why they agreed to the Basic Treaty of 1973, despite hesitations on part of both states. In the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971, a meeting of the heads of state from the United States, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union¹⁵, the security and status of the western sectors of Berlin was the focus. The main goal of the negotiations was to clarify West Berlin's status in light of imminent UN

membership for the two Germans.¹⁶ West German Basic Law and the Constitution of West Berlin defined the western half of the city as a part of the FRG.¹⁷ The GDR and the USSR, however, saw West Berlin as a separate state¹⁸, for many of the same reasons that the GDR was emphasizing her own sovereignty. The East's refusal to recognize this connection resulted in violations of many of the basic Human Rights outlined in the UN, such as arbitrary detention of the citizens of West Berlin within East Germany.¹⁹ The Quadripartite Agreement did not change the status of West Berlin, but served to clarify what that position was: a separate state with some connections to the FRG, which itself had, however, no political power over the western sectors Berlin.

In late May of 1973, only five months before the two Germans were to gain admittance to the UN, Brezhnev visited Bonn²⁰, but left Bonn and Chancellor Willy Brandt without a solid answer on the USSR's position on the status of Berlin, and even failed to give him "acquiescence in Bonn's right to represent West Berlin at the UN when both East and West Germany [were] admitted."²¹ This issue was a major stumbling block to UN admittance. The Allied powers of the West—the US, Great Britain, and France—maintained the position which they had clarified at the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971: the FRG had their permission to represent the interest of the western sector of Berlin at the UN as well as at other international organizations.²²

The Berlin Question, among other issues, became one of the greatest points of contention between the FRG and the GDR, and it led to the creation of the Basic Treaty in 1972.²³ This document was the first official treaty between the two states and a compromise on the part of both; the FRG would yield recognition of the GDR as a sovereign nation and admittance into the UN as such, and in return the GDR would agree to a gradual easing of borders [and hostilities at the borders], and the freedom of West Berliners to unrestricted travel between the Berlin and FRG.²⁴ This treaty, and UN admission was made possible in many respects because of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, a program of politics and policy focusing on the Eastern Bloc.²⁵ The goal of *Ostpolitik* was to secure relations with the Federal Republic's communist neighbors. It was successful enough to open up a working relationship between the USSR and the FRG²⁶, as well as allow the Federal Republic to recognize and exchange ambassadors with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, Eastern Bloc nations that had not formally recognized, or been recognized by, the FRG.²⁷

The reaction in both German states to the treaty was overwhelming. It caused public outcry in the FRG so intense, that it led Bavaria to seek enforcement of West Germany's Basic Law.²⁸ This would have made the signing of this treaty, which was contradictory to the goal of reunification, illegal. The GDR reaction to the treaty led to "Many more East Germans . . . [being] classified as holders of official secret and thus . . . [being] made to feel nervous

of contacts with Westerners."²⁹, as well as stricter, more tedious searches at the border. Peter Bender, a specialist on East Germany and Eastern Europe at that time, explained why the Basic Treaty proved particularly unsatisfying to the GDR: ". . .in the Basic Treaty the GDR had to pay for foreign policy gains with domestic policy losses."³⁰ The *detente* at the borders makes East Germans "[vulnerable] to the seductions of the West . . ."³¹; the communist ruling party of the GDR had also been pushed into the Treaty by the influence of 'Soviet *Westpolitik*'³², the Soviet equivalent to *Ostpolitik*, which was trying to expand and formalize ties with western nations.

The border itself, described by one journalist as ". . .the 100 yard wide strip . . . [stretching] up hill and down dale for 836 miles[;] the broken back of Germany"³³ was perhaps the biggest wound preventing the German hope of reunification. Strewn with watchtowers, guard dogs, land mines, and SM-70 auto-firing devices³⁴, the border had taken many victims. Between 1961³⁵ and 1973, it was estimated that over 149,000 East Germans had escaped to the West, 90-160 people had been shot and killed by border guards, over 69 on the Berlin Wall alone.³⁶ Even after the Basic Treaty was signed, East German border guards remained under orders to shoot to kill any escaping fellow citizen.³⁷

Hours before Willy Brandt gave his speech to the UN in honor of German membership on September 18, 1973, four East Germans had been shot as they attempted to escape over the Berlin Wall.³⁸ Even in this tension-filled situation both German states "renounced the use of force" and "acknowledged Germany's role as instigator of past wars,"³⁹ while each still maintained its stance on the reunification issue. Scheel, UN representative for the FRG, stated: "Our aim remains clear: The Federal Republic of Germany will continue to work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation will recover its unity in free self-determination."⁴⁰ Winzer UN representative for the GDR, in his statement to the General Assembly, "emphasized that the Germans were indisputably separate nations."⁴¹ The UN's recognition of the GDR's sovereignty was a tremendous success for the communist ruling party of the GDR; membership in the UN increased the number of governments that acknowledge the independent state from 30 in 1969 to over 100 in 1973.⁴²

Despite the Security Council's unanimous approval of German membership in the UN, which required years of negotiations, not all countries approved of the admission. The strongest voice against membership came from Israel and Guinea. Yosef Tekoaf, Israel's representative at the UN, objected to East Germany's admittance on the basis that the GDR had not recognized its responsibility for Nazi atrocities, by paying reparations to Israel as West Germany had.⁴³ Guinea objected to the FRG with allegations that it had supported the white minority government in South Africa and participated in sabotaging the government of Guinea.⁴⁴ Even in the US, people expressed strong opinions

about the decision; articles both for and against East German admittance into the UN appeared in editorials in the *New York Times* in July of 1973.⁴⁵ Despite these objections, the General Assembly approved the admission of the two separate states without a vote on September 18, 1973.

The UN gained a great deal through the inclusion of the two Germanys. Their admission as the 133rd and 134th members brought the UN closer to its goal of universal membership and encouraged the membership and encouraged the membership of other divided nations and Eastern Bloc countries.⁴⁶ It also signified a marked improvement and detente in East-West relations, which many hoped would later encourage armament talks and an easing of borders in the Eastern Bloc.⁴⁷ The UN received a substantial subsidy from the two Germanys, second only to the contributions of the US and the USSR.⁴⁸

Many actions of the two German states during this time period seemed to reflect an attempt by those states to atone for their atrocities in World War II. This attempt was apparent in the FRG's generous contributions to special committees in the UN even before its membership⁴⁹, and its efforts through *Ostpolitik* to atone for Nazi sins in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.⁵⁰ East Germany paid reparations to many Eastern Bloc nations that were devastated by Nazi aggression in World War II and the East German government had shown considerable financial support for Jewish and non-Jewish victims on Nazism in the GDR.⁵¹ These attempts at atonement on the part of the German states were consistent with the attitude of the Super Powers at the time. In both the *US Department of States*

Bulletins and the televised speech given by Brezhnev to the German people in May of 1973, the German people were reminded of their Nazi heritage and the world-wide suffering they had caused.⁵²

In this environment, the hope of reunification looked futile at best. Although the Allied forces of the US, Great Britain, and France had given the FRG full reign in regard to self-government, they still withheld from the FRG the freedom to pursue self-determination in the East and Berlin. The USSR and East Germany were both strongly opposed to any talk of reunification and working internationally to prevent it from ever being a possibility. Both the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971 and the Basic Treaty worked against reunification by formalizing the separation of the two states. East German actions on the border only served to reinforce the division of the Germanys. Even in the FRG, where reunification was officially supported, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* was formalizing the sovereignty of the GDR and other Eastern Bloc nations, not before being recognized by the West. Above all was the membership as two nations in the UN, which made it possible for over a hundred nations to officially recognize East Germany; the admission in itself presupposed that the status of the two states would not change in the near future. In addition to these deterrents, there was also the general belief held by most other nations, and the Allies especially, that a reunified Germany would be too strong as a unified nation, and with its new industrial power would turn once again to nationalism and Nazism. In this light it is easier to understand the prevalent mood in regards to reunification at this time.

End Notes

¹ M.J. Kubie. "Two Germanys: end of the Myth." (il.) *Newsweek*. 82 (1 October 1973): 46.

² R. Alden. "UN Admission of two Germanys Approved by Security Council." *New York Times*. (23 June 1973): 1+11. Admission of the two Germanys was approved by the Security Council on 22 June 1973.

³ 1. "Now we are two." *Economist*. 247(23 June 1973): 36. and 2. "With the two Germanys closer together." *U.S. News and World Report*. 73(20 November 1972): 84. The Basic Treaty was finalized on 8 November 1972, but was signed on the 20 June 1973.

⁴ Paul Bender. "Special relationship of the two German states." *World Today*. 29(September 1973): 389.

⁵ "East Germany." *Collier's Encyclopedia*. vol. 11. p.37

⁶ "Now we are two." p.36

⁷ The interest-free credit extended by the FRG was justified by Born as domestic trade.

⁸ "Two Germanys: end of Myth." p. 36

⁹ G. Docker and others. "Berlin and the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971." *American Journal of International Law*. 67 (January 1973): 44.

¹⁰ "With two Germanys closer together." p. 84

¹¹ "Special Relationship of the Two German States." p.391

¹² Leonid Brezhnev's visit to the FRG in May of 1973 was the first visit to the FRG ever made by a high-ranking Soviet official; the visit was one of the results of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.

¹³ "Special Relationship of the two German States." p.389-97

¹⁴ "Two Germanys: end of the myth." p.36

¹⁵ "Berlin and the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971." p.44.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.61-2

¹¹ Ibid, p.48

¹² Ibid, p. 50

¹³ 1. Ibid, p. 50-1 and 2. J. Salwyn Schapiro. "Reading No. 23- Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *Liberalism: Its Meaning and History*. (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc. 1958) 139-42. and 3. D.J. Sobieski. "Why East Germany Does Not Belong In The UN." *New York Times*. (6 July 1973): 22.

¹⁴ See footnote #12

¹⁵ "Half a Loaf on Berlin." *New York Times*. (24 May 1973): 44.

¹⁶ "Chapter XIV: Admission of new Members." *Yearbook of the United Nations 1973*. (New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations, vol. 27) 261.

¹⁷ See footnote #3

¹⁸ 1. "UN Admission of two Germanys Approved By Security Council." p.1+11 2. "Special Relationship of the two German states." p. 393

¹⁹ "Germans at Turtle Bay." *New York Times*. 4 July 1973): 14.

²⁰ Craig Whitney. "Brezhnev urges Peace and Trust as Born Trip Ends." *New York Times*. 22 May 1973): 1.

²¹ "He meant what he said." *Economist*. 249 (6 October 1973): 39.

²² "No quiet on the Eastern Front" *Economist*. 247 (9 June 1973): 38.

²³ "No, it hasn't gotten any better." *Economist*. 248 (18 August 1973):32.

²⁴ "Special Relationship of the two German states." p.393

²⁵ Ibid, p.389

²⁶ Ibid, p.393

²⁷ "The Cruellest Frontier." *Economist*. 249 (24 November 1973): 37.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 36-7

²⁹ 1961 was the year in which the Berlin wall was built.

³⁰ 1. "No, it hasn't gotten any better." p. 32 and 2. "Talk now, shoot later." *Economist*. 248 (14 July 1973): 42. Please note: articles contain conflicting information regarding the number of East Germans killed while trying to escape to the West.

³¹ "No, it hasn't gotten any better." p. 32.

³² "Germans in the UN - at last: Willy Brandt's Call to the World." *German International*. 17 (October 1973): 10.

³³ R. Alden. "The two Germanys tell UN they renounce Use of Force." *New York Times*. (20 September 1973): 2.

³⁴ Ibid, p.2

³⁵ Ibid, p.2

³⁶ D. Binder. "East German's 'Great Moment' at UN." *New York Times*. (21 September 1973):1.

³⁷ R. Alden. "Two Germanys join UN as Assembly opens 28th Year." *New York Times*. (19 September 1973):1

³⁸ "UN Admission of two Germanys Approved by Security Council." p.1+11

³⁹ 1. "Why East Germany Does Not Belong in the UN." p. 22 and 2.-W.C. Schmauch and P. Oke. "The Debt for Nazi Crimes: East Germany pays its Share." *New York Times*. (26 July 1973):36.

⁴⁰ 1.-W.E. Schaufele. "UN Membership for FRG and GDR supported by US." *Dept. State Bull.* 69 (16 July 1973): 110-11 and 2.- "US welcomes admission of three new members to UN, Sept. 18, 1973." *Dept. State Bull.* 69 (22 October 1973): 519-19.

⁴¹ "UN Admission of Two Germanys Approved by Security Council." p. 1+11

⁴² 1. "On best behavior." *Economist*. 248 (22 September 1973):65. and 1. "UN Admission of Two Germanys Approved By Security Council." p.11. Please note: Percentages cited vary according to source; *Economist* source cited 7%, while *New York Times* article cited 6% for FRG and 2% for GDR.

⁴³ "On best behavior." p. 64-5

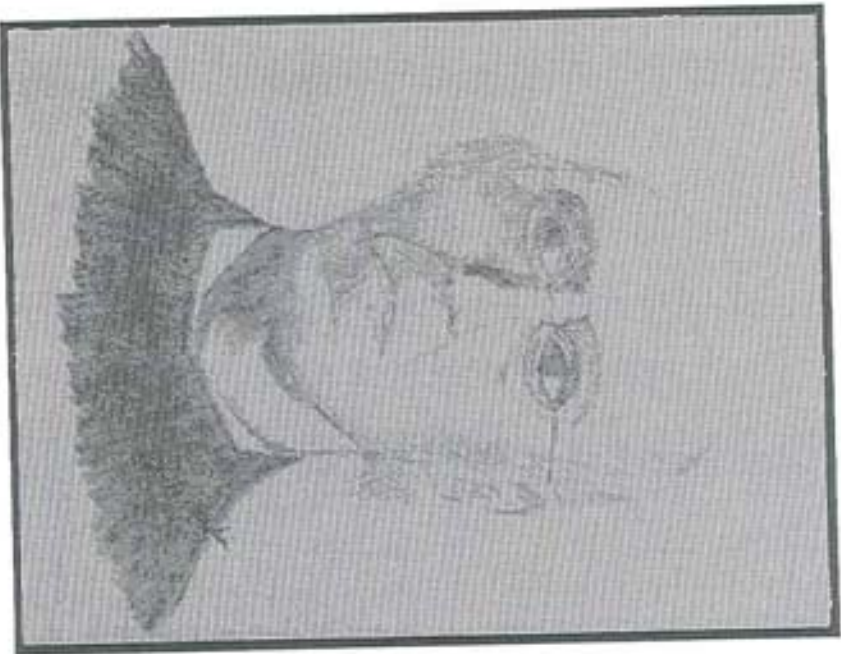
⁴⁴ "The Loose Ends." *Economist*. 247 (9 June 1973): 39.

⁴⁵ "The Debt for Nazi Crimes." p. 36

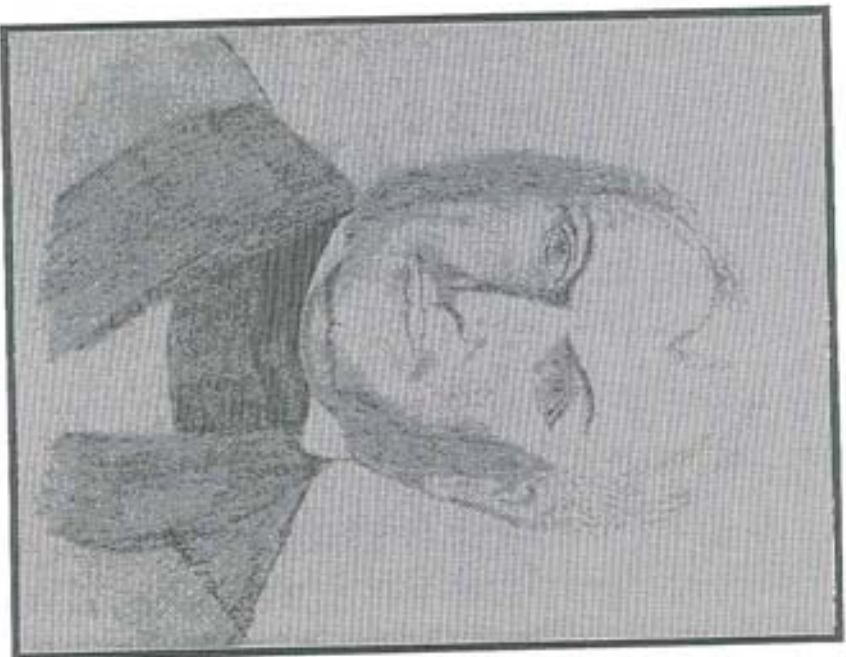
⁴⁶ 1. "US welcomes admission of three new members to the UN, Sept. 18, 1973." p. 518-19 1. "UN Membership for FRG and GDR supported by US." p.110-111 and 3. "Text of the Soviet Party Leader's Television Speech to the West German People." *New York Times*. (22 May 1973): 8.

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William Lloyd Garrison



James Gillespie Birney

William Lloyd Garrison and James Birney: Two Opposing Views on the Abolition Movement

by Jennifer Garman

Almost as "peculiar" as the institution of slavery itself, the abolition movement in the history of the United States became a melting pot of ideas on how to rid the country of the evils of slavery. As William Lloyd Garrison noted, it was a reaction against the institution which had made America lose all self-respect and ideas of justice.¹ The move served to aggregate the ideas of abolitionist as well as present these views to the public. However, as the movement expanded, it became apparent that the ideas of the abolitionists were not readily blending together in a common opposition, nor was the public accepting it with open arms. Representative of this were William Lloyd Garrison and James Birney, two individuals who emerged as leaders in the abolition movement.

Garrison, an abolitionist from Massachusetts, was the editor of the well-known anti-slavery newspaper the *Liberator*. Although considered by some as having done more for the emancipation of slaves than anyone else, he met with great opposition from both inside and outside the movement.² The *Bennington Gazette* nicknamed him "Lloyd Garrulous" and claimed that "he is withal a great egotist, and when talking of himself displays the pert loquacity of a blue jay."³ In addition, he was mobbed by the public in Boston where, "they coiled a rope around his body, nearly stripped him of his clothing, then dragged him through the streets till he was finally rescued."⁴ Although not as controversial as Garrison, Birney suffered some of the same attacks. A slaveholder from the south, he took a bold stand by freeing his slaves and declaring himself an abolitionist.⁵ Criticized by his neighbors in the south, he moved North only to meet opposition.⁶ On the night of September 5, 1841, his printing press for the newspaper the *Philanthropist* was destroyed for the third time.⁷ For the abolitionist, criticism was widespread and unavoidable.

Birney and Garrison both embraced the concept of immediate abolition, however, they came to support it through to opposite views. Garrison is credited with being the first to criticize gradualism and form a movement centered upon immediate emancipation.⁸ He began working for *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* in 1829 with Benjamin Lundy, another leading abolitionist, and it was during this time that he saw first-hand accounts of the

true evils of slavery.⁹ Garrison supported immediate abolition because he believed in its fundamental correctness. He felt that it was not merely the best solution, but rather the only solution and explained that "his feet were on the sand, and not on the solid rock, so long as he granted slavery the right to exist for a single moment."¹⁰ Garrison became so devoted to the concept that he separated from his co-editor who remained loyal to the idea of gradualism.¹¹ From then on, Garrison refused to compromise his idea that the only way to end slavery was to "lay the axe at the root of the tree."¹²

Birney did not have the emotional fervor of Garrison in his acceptance of the idea of immediate abolition, but instead took a logical approach in reaching this conclusion. He realized that it was perhaps the best available solution for dealing with the question of slavery. Birney was first a supporter of the attempt to transport ex-slaves back to Africa. As an agent of American Colonization Society, he toured the South attempting to promote its beliefs.¹³ However, Birney came to realize the following:

It is to be feared that we, who have been supporters of colonization, have, through ignorance, been instrumental in prolonging, at least through one lifetime, the dark reign of slavery on the earth, and in sending on generation of our fellow men, weeping witnesses of its bitterness, to a comfortless grave!¹⁴

In addition, Birney was also a critic of gradual emancipation and argued that it created no guilt for the slaveholder as well as angered the slaves who felt that nothing was being done for their rights, but rather for the benefit of their masters.¹⁵ This finally led Birney to support immediate abolition as the method that most fully realized the principles of Christianity. He recognized that the slaves have a right to freedom and it was his Christian duty to secure it for both of them.¹⁶ Since Garrison and Birney were both supporters of immediate emancipation, it seems ironic that each could be considered the others greatest critic. Their disagreement is found in their views of approach that the abolitionist should take in achieving immediate and unconditional emancipation. Birney was a great supporter of political action

while Garrison stood firm on the idea of moral influence and the reformation of values through methods other than political.

On the subject of political action, Birney stated that, "one good Congressman can do more for our cause than a hundred lecturers... The slaveholders gain their advantages in national politics and legislation, and should be met in every move they make."¹⁷ These two ideas are the foundation of Birney's view of the role of abolitionists. First of all, Birney was disturbed by the growing importance of slave power. He felt that it already possessed control over the national government through President Jackson, who held office 1829-37, and was accused of removing any official with anti-slavery views. Birney also claimed that both of the major political parties were bound by slave power. Not only did the Democrats draw a large percentage of support from the South, but the Whigs were also sensitive to slaveholder's demands because of Whig support for protective tariffs.¹⁸ The other half of Birney's belief was that political action should be a top priority in the cause for emancipation. He was among the first to see its power—and the first to use it.¹⁹ Birney stated that the functions of a voluntary anti-slavery society should be the diffusion of information, the promotion of discussion, and the formation of public opinion against slavery.²⁰ His goal was, thus, to adapt the societies into organized political movements based on the belief of "legislation being the only method known in this republic of bringing moral power into action."²¹

Garrison's foundation as an abolitionist was a strong belief and dedication to the part of the Declaration of Independence stating, "all men are created equal."²² He stated that in America, liberty was the right of every man and along with this came the right to protest if it was not granted.²³ Garrison had a more idealistic view of abolitionism than Birney, believing that there was absolutely no reason why humanity could not live in poverty.²⁴ In addition, he felt that it was the abolitionist's role to promote this harmony. Garrison insisted that, "moral influence, when in vigorous exercise, is irresistible. It has an immortal essence."²⁵ He believed that slavery was evil, but also believed that abolishment of it by the "strong arm of the civil government" was evil as well. Being a devoted pacifist, he felt that the appeal should be to the slaveholders, not the forcible suppression of slaveholding that may result from an anti-slavery law.²⁶ Where Birney advocated using the American Anti-Slavery Society as a source for launching political action, Garrison made an effort to remove it from everything that had to do with the power of Congress and government.²⁷ He stated that the Society should be solely for the abolition of slavery. It should not attempt to reform other areas and should be open to everyone (of different religion and political beliefs) on the single basis that they give no support to slavery.²⁸ Garrison's underlying belief was that the goals of abolitionists were not to be achieved through political "machinery," but through the hearts of men.²⁹ His argument

against Birney was that by first appealing to the morals of the public about the wrongs of slavery, political action would be the consequence.³⁰

What can be concluded from these two views is that both Birney and Garrison believed that their idea should be the driving force in the abolition movement. It is a question of which comes first as Birney believed political action would bring moral power into play and Garrison believed the opposite. The division between the two abolitionists grew wider as they became outwardly vocal against the ideas of each other. In Birney's *A Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists*, he directly criticized Garrison and his followers for attempting to use the Anti-Slavery Society as a means for promoting "no-government" principles.³¹ He felt that these principles were not upheld in the society's constitution and that although the society had no measures for expelling its members, it should be the duty of the members to resign when their opinions are not in line with those of the other members.³² Birney's rejection of moral persuasion goes back to his early days as an abolitionist. Through his involvement in the American Colonization Society, he became disillusioned by his attempts to gain support in the south.³³ He later became convinced that it was impossible to appeal to the slaveholders through the "selfish principle."³⁴

In response to Birney's *Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists*, which was clearly intended for Garrison and his friends, Garrison showed his dislike for the term "no-government" by saying that he was a strong supporter of the government, but only a "perfect government."³⁵ He insisted that it should be a government of heaven and summarizing his views as the following:

We cannot acknowledge allegiance to any government by a resort to physical force.... We therefore voluntarily exclude ourselves from every legislative and judicial body and repudiate all human politics, worldly honors, and stations of authority.³⁶

This led Birney to realize that No-government and Pro-government abolitionists could never get along and perhaps marked the final, irreversible division between the two men.³⁷

However, the consequences of this disagreement were not fatal. Each had individual successes as devoted abolitionists. James Russell Lowell's "Tribute to Garrison" begins by saying:

In a small chamber, friendless and unseen, Toiled o'er his types one poor, unlearned young man; The place was dark, unfurnished and mean, Yet the freedom of a race began.³⁸

Of Birney it was said, "obeying a high sense of duty, he sacrificed the comforts of wealth, home, and position to the cause of universal freedom."³⁹ Abolitionists spent their entire lives being criticized for attempting to establish justice, yet refused to back down on their beliefs. As

Garrison stated, "In short, I did what I could for the redemption of the human race."⁴⁰ In conclusion, the question they were facing was how one small group can

save a whole society. With the delicate subject of humanity, can just one solution prevail?

Endnotes

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⁵ Harriet Martineau. *The Martyr Age of the United States*. (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, and Co., 1839), 19.

⁶ Beriah Green. *Sketches of the Life and Writings of James Gillespie Birney*. (Utica: Jackson and Chaplin, 1844), 36-37.

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¹⁰ Wendell Phillips and Francis Jackson Garrison. *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children*. (New York: The Century Co., 1885), 140.

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¹³ Beriah Green. *Sketches of the Life and Writings of James Gillespie Birney*. 11-12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷ William Birney. *James G. Birney and His Times*. 340.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 222-227.

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²¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

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²⁵ Wendell Phillips and Francis Jackson Garrison. *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-79*. 135.

²⁶ William Goodell. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery; a History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres*. 538-539.

²⁷ William Birney. *James G. Birney and His Times*. 302.

²⁸ William Lloyd Garrison. *Selections From the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison*. 237.

²⁹ James G. Birney. *A Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists, By James Birney: With a Reply by William Lloyd Garrison*. (Boston: Dow and Jackson, Printers, 1839), 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³² *Ibid.*, 8.

³³ William Birney. *James G. Birney and His Times*. 128-129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁵ James G. Birney. *A Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists*. 16.

³⁶ James G. Birney. *A Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists*. 16. William Birney. *James G. Birney and His Times*. 292-293.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ Oliver Johnson. *The Abolitionists Vindicated*. 2.

³⁹ William Birney. *James G. Birney and His Times*. vii.

⁴⁰ Wendell Phillips and Francis Jackson Garrison. *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*. vii.

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Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education: Immediate Reaction from May Through October, 1954

by Melissa Stull

"To separate [Negro children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone. . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."¹

Chief Justice Earl Warren read this decision in the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* ruling on May 17, 1954 which declared school segregation unconstitutional. This unanimous decision nullified *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896 which legalized separate facilities for whites and blacks on the condition that they must be equal. In the fifty-eight years separating the two decisions, the equality clause had become increasingly disregarded; separate and unequal facilities thrived, especially in the South. The *Brown v. Board* decision sparked debate among group leaders, ministers, Northerners, Southerners, whites, and blacks. Although the constituencies held conflicting opinions, a recurring attitude permeated all of them. The immediate reactions of the N.A.A.C.P., the North, the Southern church community, and the South to the *Brown v. Board* ruling from May through October, 1954 reveal the diversity of the groups; yet, an underlying cautiousness pervades all of their responses.

Walter White, executive secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., correctly foreshadowed the ramifications of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling by predicting that it would be far reaching. *Plessy v. Ferguson* had dealt specifically interstate railroad travel but had affected all aspects of life, and White believed that *Brown v. Board* would do the same. This ruling would help eliminate some of the social barriers between the races. However, White was not so naive as to expect the South to comply whole-heartedly with the decision; Southern states, he thought, would continue to resist. Furthermore, from his experiences in the North, he realized that segregation would remain as long as rigid housing patterns existed. Primary schools would still be segregated, whereas high schools would become more integrated.²

Overall, White clearly supported the ruling which he considered to be a major victory for equality. He assured Black educators that the N.A.A.C.P. would get involved if their jobs became jeopardized due to discrimination. White acknowledged the hypocrisy in the North in terms of segregation; therefore, he was hesitant to criticize the deep South for resisting the desegregation decision. Although he acknowledged the segregation occurring in portions of the North, he did not condemn it. Why did White, as the leader of the foremost civil rights organization at the time, not condemn the segregation in both the South and the North?

The North's response to *Brown v. Board* reflects a cautiousness similar to Walter White's and the N.A.A.C.P.'s. They hailed the decision as the beginning of the end of racial discrimination; however, the North, for the most part, was unwilling to criticize the South. This is evident in the editorials appearing in Northern newspapers in the days following the decision. *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* expressed the sentiment that no other decision could have been possible. Moreover, the selection of words in the following passage depicts a serious contradiction: ". . . [blacks had] earned the right to be treated as first-rate citizens and earned it the hard way."³ The fact that citizenship had to be 'earned' shows that Blacks were not considered to be equal. Was the writer expressing his own bias or was his view a reflection of the Northern majority?

Other contradictions surfaced in an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune*. The article reads, "The principle established by this decision is not that anybody has to give up any of his prejudices. . . . The principle is the much simpler one that the state government, North and South, must regard all men as created equal so far as opportunities at the disposal of the state are concerned."⁴ Once again, irony surfaces - the government must treat men legally as equal, but individuals do not have to do so. This statement seems to be another appeasement - an attempt to reassure the South that no one "has to give up any of his prejudices." From these articles, it appears that most of the North is taking the middle position as did the N.A.A.C.P.

However, this does not mean that no one criticized the Supreme Court's decision. Fred Rodell, a Northerner, responded to Southern claims that desegregating schools

would only lead to chaos. Rodell explained that this statement was a scapegoat white Southerners used for not segregating. White adults feared an end to segregation due to their own self-doubts. Therefore, it was not only the education of children through desegregation means that was necessary, but the education of white adults. This, Rodell explains, was the "... kind of education most sorely needed in the South." It was "... not the education of the colored children in a civilized fashion, but the education of the white adults in the brand of inner strength that breeds humility and true humanity - unsegregated."⁵ Rodell's critique of the South put him in a minority, for the North, as a whole, was slow to judge the South.

Despite all of the praises the North bestowed upon the Supreme Court decision and the rhetoric that surfaced from Northern commentary, the North still retained segregation. Clifford Dowday, a journalist born and raised in the South but employed in the North, commented on this: "In living terms, the low percentage of Negro population in the majority of the Northern communities has made it possible for the white to preen himself on his abstract humanity and lack of discrimination laws, while practicing de facto segregation."⁶ De facto segregation did continue in the North; this is a reason why the North hesitated to condemn the Southern actions and instead focused on the positive virtues of the Brown v. Board decision.

The churches of the South followed the same reasoning by de-emphasizing the practices of the South and the dissenting voices of some political leaders and concentrating on the morality of the Court's ruling. The Catholic Committee of the South, the Ninety-Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in North Carolina, the Southwest Texas Methodist Conference, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, along with numerous other churches endorsed the court's desegregation decision.⁷ All of them declared that they would begin making the ruling a reality in their schools and churches. The Ninety-Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church "... affirmed, by a vote of 236 to 169, that 'enforced segregation of the races is discrimination which is out of harmony with Christian theology and ethics.'⁸ The fact that 42% of these at the conference did not support this statement, reveals the hidden uncertainty with which many in the church viewed the Brown v. Board decision. This brings forth a question - did the churches vocally condemn segregation practices prior to the ruling?

The example the National Council of Churches further explains this dilemma. They supported the Supreme Court's decision, as most Southern churches did, and they called for a Christian example of brotherhood. Yet, churches were more segregated than schools! The council explained that as a non-segregated church must come.⁹ What about the leadership of the Church? It seems that the churches did not want to be the leaders in disrupting the status quo. Hence, although the Southern churches praised the Brown v. Board

of Education ruling, their actions indicated their reluctance to adhere to the ruling.

The N.A.A.C.P., the North, the Southern churches stood together in their support of the Brown v. Board ruling. On the other hand, a broad spectrum of responses emanated from the South ranging from immediate desegregation of the schools in Washington, D.C. to the condemning actions and words of Georgia's Governor, Herman Talmadge. The actions of Washington, D.C. and Georgia were the extremes; the general consensus of the South revealed a surprising calmness. One reason may have been that many Southerners believed the ruling did not and would not affect them. They did not anticipate much change because geography would aid in separating the races. The Court had also postponed the specifications of implementing the decision until October.

Many Southerners viewed this action of the Court as critical in avoiding violence. Harold Fleming, a staff member of the Southern Regional Council of Atlanta, believed the Court was wise to take two years to make a decision in the Brown v. Board case, for this allowed people time to accept the idea of desegregation.¹⁰ Hodding Carter, editor and publisher of the *Delta Democrat-Times*, in Greenville, Mississippi, argued that rushing things would only heighten white fears and anxieties. A legal ruling would not change attitudes; time was necessary.¹¹ The president of Morehouse College, Benjamin L. Mays, reaffirmed this: "The complete integration of the schools 'will become slower than you think.'¹²

Others in the South believed that desegregation had been occurring for several years. The *Louisville Courier-Journal* expressed the inevitability of the ruling: "The Supreme Court's rule is not itself a revolution. It is rather acceptance of a process that has been going on a long time and that is like an ocean's steady pressures - not easy to see as they move in, but finally impossible to restrain by any man-made devices."¹³ Harry S. Asmore, editor of Little Rock's *Arkansas Gazette*, thought that desegregation had been occurring for sixty years.¹⁴

Other improvements were taking place, as well. Carter stated that changes had been happening without legislation. He cited that there had been no lynchings in three years.¹⁵ Arthur Sutherland, a professor of law at Harvard University, expounded on this positive note. He stated that:

No state in the Union is populated by a separate species of cruel and brutal white men, seeking by cynical devices or by sheer defiance to escape the performance of constitutional duties. One has to travel in the present South to realize the contrary - to be convinced of the rapid increase of humanitarianism, of cultivation, of kindness, of comfort, of all the good things that go to make up a great civilization.¹⁶

Southerners obviously believed that they had been initiating morality on their own; the records show differently, however.

Several Southerners thought the ruling would enhance America's position as a world-wide leader. An article in *Life* magazine entitled, "A Historic Decision for Equality," stated that "... the Supreme Court not only kept pace with educational and social progress but at one stroke immeasurably raised the respect of other nations for the U.S."¹⁷ Time and time again when support for desegregation on the grounds that racial segregation was immoral could not be found, support could be fostered for desegregation on the grounds that it heightened the United States' position in the world.

Southern reporters and politicians immediately identified obstacles to desegregation which they used as reasons for continuing segregation. For instance, an obvious difficulty in desegregating would happen in communities with a large number of black people. Whites here would be much less accepting of opening up the schools. Moreover, Carter, the editor of a Mississippi newspaper, explained that the black man was "... still easygoing in his morals..." which made it difficult for whites to accept him.¹⁸ Carter's attitude reveals how deeply embedded racism was in the South - a solid blockade to desegregation efforts. Carter continued by saying that desegregation may jeopardize educational standards because black educators have not been trained as well as whites.¹⁹ The largest and most hindering barrier to desegregation was the deep-rooted racism of many Southerners.

Dowdey, born in the South but employed in the North as a journalist, claimed that the hypocrisy of the North impeded the desegregation ruling. He explained that it was the North who had begun the South's segregated school system after the Civil War. Furthermore, the North claimed that its schools were desegregated, however, black belts and white suburbs flourished. Dowdey would prefer not to desegregate but he agreed that the South would do so once the North had.²⁰ His convictions echoed those of others throughout the South.

In the *Brown v. Board* ruling twenty-one states were affected, the overwhelming majority of which were in the South. Each section of the South reacted differently. The border states responded calmly to the decision and proceed to develop proposals for implementing the Court's ruling. Washington, D.C., led by President Eisenhower, began desegregation plans immediately following the decision in hopes of leading the country peacefully through the process of desegregation. Kansas, Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico expected no problems in the ruling mainly due to the small number of blacks in these states.²¹

The other states did not react with such dignified composure. Texas Governor Allan Shivers commented that it might take years to implement the decision. The Commissioner of Education in Texas, J.W. Edgar, reaffirmed the Governor's position. North Carolina's State

Democratic Convention declared that obedience to the laws was the only option. The Louisiana House of Representatives, with only three dissenting votes, urged the continuation of separate but equal facilities. Florida hesitated to make any strong statements of support or defiance.²²

Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia - the deep South - did not exhibit any such reservations about denouncing the ruling. The *Birmingham News* in an editorial stated its regrets over the Supreme Court decision: "The News believes that the considerations of public interest and state's rights which underlie the superseded decision of 1896 still apply and would better serve the progress in race relations and education."²³ South Carolina also denounced the ruling and refused to comply. Likewise, a Mississippi superintendent of education stated that "... the decision to comply would not affect us at all. That's because we are not going to observe it in our country. It will be 'to hell with the Supreme Court' down here. Of course, we may all hang for it. But we won't hang separately. We'll all hang together."²⁴

These exclamations of Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi pale in comparison to the fiery assertions of Georgia's Governor Herman Talmage. The Supreme Court, Talmage claimed, has

'... reduced our constitutions to a mere scrap of paper... Georgians... will not tolerate the mixing of the races in public schools... I think about 98% of the white and colored people of the state prefer segregation... We're not going to secede from the Union, but the people of Georgia will not comply with the decision.'

He went on to claim that he was not "... anti-Negro or discriminatory."²⁵ Despite his claims of not being discriminatory, Talmage led his state in resistance to desegregation.

These states, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia, sought specific methods to circumvent the Court's decision. South Carolina focused on 'voluntary' segregation as a solution. School officials believed that most blacks would not be willing to be the first to alter the status quo. Those blacks who attempted to do so would be discouraged through the usage of social and economic pressures; most blacks were employed by whites. Accompanying this program of 'voluntary' desegregation was an attempt to gain the approval of black educators, who knew that it was unlikely that white schools would hire them. Another option South Carolina favored was gerrymandering of school districts; however, this would not affect rural communities where blacks and whites lived in the same neighborhoods. The idea of abolishing public schools was explored during the first two months following the Court's decision, but it was found to be impractical.²⁶

Mississippi hoped to perpetuate the current system of segregation by using a law already enacted in the state

legislature. The law basically dictated that pupil assignments could be influenced by the emotional needs of the student and the best welfare of those students already attending the school. Although the law did not mention segregation, the vague wording allowed for interpretation.²⁷ Similarly, Georgia explored many of the options South Carolina and Mississippi had. Another idea Talmage pursued involved creating separate sexed schools at the secondary level to discourage interracial relationships. Georgia and Mississippi continued their acts of defiance by refusing to participate in the October Court discussion on how to implement desegregation measures.

Although segregation remained a part of everyday life in the years following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, this ruling was the first step towards ending

inequities in race relations. Although the N.A.A.C.P., the North, and the Southern church community praised the decision as "... a milestone in the achievement of civil rights," they realized that desegregation would be difficult to implement.²⁸ They supported the Court but hesitated to criticize or force the South into action. The divided South pursued separate plans of action with the deep South blatantly and vigorously resisting desegregation. Those who supported the decision soon realized that a legal mandate may bring down the visible barriers separating the races, but it was incapable of changing people's racist convictions and actions. Black children still possessed feelings of inferiority despite the hopeful implications apparent in Chief Justice Warren's decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* in May, 1954.

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¹ "To All On Equal Terms," *Time*, 24 May 1954, 22.

² "What Negroes Want Now: An Interview with Walter White, Executive Secretary of the N.A.A.C.P.," *U.S. News and World Report*, 28 May 1954, 54-59.

³ "Editorial Excerpts from the Nation's Press on Segregation Ruling," *New York Times*, 18 May 1954, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Fred Rodell, "School Kids Are Color Blind: A Northerner Looks at the Supreme Court's Decision," *The Saturday Review*, 16 October 1954, 48.

⁶ Clifford Dowday, "A Southerner Looks at the Supreme Court," *The Saturday Review*, 9 October 1954, 10.

⁷ Charles Keenan, "Church Leaders on School Segregation," *America*, 10 July 1954, 378.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁹ "What Will The Churches Do?" *National Council Outlook*, June 1954, 17.

¹⁰ Harold C. Fleming, "The South Will Go Along: Segregation: A Report from Atlanta," *New Republic*, 31 May 1954, 7.

¹¹ Hodding Carter, "The Court's Decision and the South," *Reader's Digest*, September 1954, 51-52.

¹² John LaFarge, "Southern Catholics," 372.

¹³ Quoted in "A Historic Decision for Equality," *Life*, 31 May 1954, 14.

¹⁴ "The Last Turning?" *Time*, 24 May 1954, 98.

¹⁵ Hodding Carter, "The Court's Decision," 54.

¹⁶ Arthur E. Sutherland, "Segregation and the Supreme Court," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1954, 36.

¹⁷ "A Historic Decision," 11.

¹⁸ Hodding Carter, "The Court's Decision," 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Clifford Dowday, "A Southerner Looks," 38.

²¹ "To All On Equal Terms," 22.

²² "Talmage and Segregation: He Makes his Last Stand," *Newsweek*, 31 May 1954, 31.

²³ "Editorial Excerpts," 19.

²⁴ "Will South End Negro Schools? Here's the Story of What States Plan To Do Next," *U.S. News and World Report*, 28 May 1954, 24.

²⁵ "Talmage and Segregation," 31.

²⁶ "Will South End Negro Schools?" 22-23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁸ "What Will the Churches Do?" 17.

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The 1972 Presidential Campaign's Appeal to Women

by Pam Ehresman

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1972 was a busy political year, full of pressing issues such as the Vietnam War, inflation, and busing. Neither of the candidates nor the electorate had enough energy to devote to other concerns, let alone women's concerns - yet they did. President Nixon and Senator George McGovern paid enough attention to women's issues to engage in a battle over them. As insignificant as the battle may seem compared to the Vietnam War, the candidates' struggle to win women's support resulted in women substantially strengthening their political influence.

The women's movement was the main cause of women increasing their activity in the 1972 campaign. The notion of women's rights did not spontaneously occur to McGovern and Nixon as a worthwhile issue to emphasize. On the contrary, wrote *Life* magazine, "From a running sometimes strident start in the 1960s, the idea of women's equality has caught in the national mind."¹ Moreover, the focus of the women's movement changed from social action to political action as it began to organize itself, influence candidates, and run candidates of its own.² Perhaps as a result of the recent move toward organization, *Time* magazine felt that in 1972 politicians were genuinely responding to women's demands such as equal pay for equal work, day-care, and abortion rights.³ Congress had reflected women's increased political power when it passed the Equal Rights Amendment earlier that year.⁴ It would be foolish, however, to conclude that all Americans were in agreement about women's political activism; the conservative view that a woman's domain should remain private prevailed in the minds of many. For instance, two television newsmen reporting on the National Women's Political Caucus remarked that next will be a convention for "left-handed Lithuanians."⁵

Until 1972, women had not made a great impact on politics, comprising 53% of the voting population, but only 3% of elected officials.⁶ The Democratic Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, intent on improving those statistics, devised a new rule for selecting delegates to the national convention. The reform rule declared that the composition of the state delegations must represent the populations from which they were drawn. It aimed to involve more women, minorities, and young people in the

political process.⁷ The Republicans, not wishing to appear opposed to the democratic ideal, and at the same time not wanting to alienate GOP conservatives, simply called for more open representation at their convention.⁸ To prepare for greater female participation at the conventions, both parties formed the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). NWPC Executive Director Doris Meissner explained its purpose: "We want the women at the convention to be aware of their common political interest. And we hope that as a result they will push for fair representation in credential fights, in platform decisions, and in floor debate."⁹

Women's groups and leaders endorsed candidates in 1972 just as any other organization did, using their own criteria. A feminist newsletter, *The Woman Activist*, rated senators' votes on four women's issues and scored Senator George McGovern at 100 percent. The issues included an amendment to the ERA barring women from the draft, an amendment to a higher education bill which would cancel a provision prohibiting discrimination based on gender, and a move to strike a day-care proposal from anti-poverty legislation. The newsletter also found that more democrats than Republicans had pro-feminist voting records.¹⁰ The more liberal Democratic party, guided by McGovern, won the approval of most feminists, including Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem.¹¹ The approval, however, was not whole-hearted. Steinem endorsed McGovern only as the best "white, male candidate,"¹² clearly implying that she would support a woman if it were possible. She and other feminist, though, credited him with the success of the new delegation rule and the NWPC.¹³ In contrast to McGovern, Nixon had a mixed record on women's issues. He endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment, yet later vetoed a popular day-care bill.¹⁴

McGovern found fault with Nixon's record on women's issues. On August 25, he publicly accused Nixon of mocking women's rights:

Out of 12,000 top policy positions in this Administration, 105 appointments have gone to women - that's eight-tenths of 1 per cent; hardly impressive to an electorate that may be up [*sic*] by 51 per cent women. It's not only unjust, but it's stupid politics.¹⁵

McGovern went on to demonstrate his commitment to women's rights by introducing five women, including Bella Abzug, appointed to high campaign posts, with Shirley MacLaine as his chief advisor on women's issues.¹⁴ Nixon immediately responded to McGovern's accusations by proclaiming August 26 "Women's Rights Day." Defensively, Nixon corrected McGovern's figure of 105 appointments to 118 then noticed that 118 was triple the number of women that had worked in top positions when he took office. In addition, he pointed out that for the first time in American history, two women chaired regulatory agencies simultaneously, and that he had nominated six women to the rank of general in the armed forces.¹⁷ Nixon concluded his response by promising to "insure women every opportunity to the make the fullest contribution to our progress as a nation."¹⁸ The *New York Times* interpreted McGovern's and Nixon's confrontation as "a sharp reminder that women constitute half of the voting population."¹⁹ The candidates battled over winning women's favor because the women's movement had begun to organize women in both parties into a powerful political voice that the campaign could not ignore. The candidates were preparing themselves for women to vote as a block and not paired off with their husbands - a modern way to view women's influence.

To understand how women influenced each party and its presidential candidates, the national conventions and platforms must be examined. The exchange between McGovern and Nixon on August 25th and 26th was, in part, an attempt to make amends for disappointing some key women at the conventions.²⁰

Women composed nearly 40% of the delegates at the Democratic National Convention, including many prominent feminists.²¹ The party appointed a woman, Jean Westwood, as the Democratic National Committee chair - a first for either party.²² Women felt excited about their advanced level of involvement until McGovern's "tactical maneuvers"²³ began to curtail their ambitions. First, at the last minute McGovern pulled back his support for the South Carolina challenge in which the NWPC proposed to add seven more women to the South Carolina delegation.²⁴ Second, McGovern did not support an abortion plank because he feared it would cost him votes - a stand that feminists were aware of before the convention. The surprise hit when a right-to-life speaker stepped up to the microphone, a political move that McGovern promised that he would not make.²⁵ In addition to other broken promises, although McGovern pledged to support a woman as a co-chairperson, he demoted her to a vice-chairwoman under a male chairman, infuriating many women at the convention.²⁶

Reacting McGovern's decisions, Steinem exploded, "You promised that you would you would not to take the low roads, you bastards!"²⁷ Smarting from the governor's betrayal, she now attacked him when she when she had once faithfully campaigned for him. McGovern, she complained, only cared about how many McGovern

delegates the women would deliver; she felt used and degraded.²⁸ What Gloria Steinem and other miffed feminists did not understand was that if McGovern conceded too much to women's demands, he would lose a popular electoral base; he would lose the election to a more conservative Richard Nixon - an even greater loss to feminists. Steinem and others, caught up in their feminist idealism, had lost sight of practical politics. Or perhaps, since this was their first try at the political game, they never fully understood the rules. A top McGovern aide summarized the conflict in interests: the feminists expected that "the McGovern campaign should have collapsed its identity into the women's rights movement. That was absurd."²⁹

Women at the Republican National Convention chose a different approach to influence Nixon and the Republican platform. Republican women championed many of the same causes as the Democratic women, yet they presented themselves as determined ladies rather than angry feminists. Because the Republican convention took place over a month after the Democratic, GOP women had the opportunity to draw lessons from the Democrats' experiences. The convention began with a keynote from Anne Armstrong, co-chair of the Republican National Convention and the first woman to ever give the keynote at a national convention. Jill Ruckelshaus, a woman *Time* dubbed "the Republicans' answer to Gloria Steinem," pressured the party to adopt an abortion plank and did not get any further than the Democrats had.³⁰ More successful was Congresswoman Peggy Heckler, who fought for a plank supporting federally-funded day-care, even though Nixon had recently vetoed a similar bill. Although disappointed, she compromised and gained a strong endorsement of childcare in the platform.³¹ The Democratic platform did not even mention day-care. Because the Republican women did not attend the convention with lofty expectations, they left much less bruised than had the Democratic women.

Analyzing the women's rights planks in the two platforms demonstrates the one-up contest that the Republicans were determined to win. The Democrats' plank, entitled "Rights of Women," succinctly stated fifteen objectives including "a priority effort to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment," bringing sexual discrimination under Civil Rights laws, and full enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act.³² In contrast, the Republican plank, more emphatically titled "Equal Rights for Women," was longer and made broad statements about the party's commitment to women, such as, "This administration has done more than any before it to help women of America achieve equality of opportunity."³³ Hidden in these effusions were the most conservative stands of the Republican party. For example, the Democrats wanted equal pay for comparable work, while the Republicans asked for equal pay for equal work. The Democrats listed specific amendments they wanted to add to acts or codes;

the Republicans simply stated that they wanted to end discrimination against women and did not list how they proposed to do so. The Republican plank acted more as a sweeping gesture, attempting to appease women yet not alienate party standards. The Democratic plank did not include broad, supportive statements and thus did not appear as enthusiastic about women's rights. However, the Democrats, less concerned with winning women's approval because most women already supported them, could not afford to be more specific and critical in their plank.

In the 1972 campaign, significant change took place for women at the basic level of American politics when they increased their participation as party delegates. This country has since built on that initial change to run a woman for vice-president and elect an African-American woman to the Senate. The recent rise of women in elected positions might not have occurred if the 1972 campaign had not affirmed women's importance in the political process. If only for a brief time, women and their rights became a main issue in the 1972 presidential campaign, forcing the candidates to focus on women and their growing influence in politics.

Notes

¹ "Now Women Talk Back," *Life*, 9 June 1972, 46.

² *Ibid.* and "New Face of Politics," *McCalls*, October 1972, 101.

³ "Toward Female Power at the Polls," *Time*, 20 March 1972, 34.

⁴ Susan Tolchin, *Clout: Womanpower and Politics* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1974), 16.

⁵ Quoted in Nora Ephron, "Women," *Esquire*, November 1972, 18, 28.

⁶ Tolchin, 17.

⁷ Pochitta Pierce, "What Do Women Want at the Conventions?" *McCalls*, July 1972, 42.

⁸ My interpretation added to Tolchin, 32.

⁹ Quoted in Pierce, 42.

¹⁰ "Feminist Rates Senators' Votes," *New York Times*, 23 April 1972, 45.

¹¹ Inference based upon the number of sources connecting feminist leaders and organizations with George McGovern.

¹² Quoted in "Gloria Steinem Aids McGovern's Cause," *New York Times*, 12 February 1972, 15.

¹³ Ephron, 14.

¹⁴ "Senators Bar Weakening of Equal Rights Proposal," *New York Times*, 21 March 1972, 1, and Tolchin, 230.

¹⁵ Quoted in "McGovern Asserts Nixon Policy Cost Millions of Jobs," *New York Times*, 26 August 1972, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, and Ephron, 14.

¹⁷ Robert S. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Proclaims 'Women's Day' After Accusation by McGovern," *New York Times*, 27 August 1972, 33 (N). August 26 was the 52nd anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Ephron, 10.

²² "Outsiders on the Inside," *Newsweek*, 24 July 1972, 36.

²³ Semple, 33 (N).

²⁴ Ephron, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶ Tolchin, 33.

²⁷ Quoted in Ephron, 18.

²⁸ Tolchin, 34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ "How to De-Radicalize: Republican National Convention," *Times*, 4 September 1972, 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² The Democratic and the Republican platforms of 1972 were printed in *Facts on File*, 1972. The Democrats' Women's Rights plank is on page 539.

³³ The Republicans' Equal Rights for Women plank is on page 670 of *Facts on File*, 1972.

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