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On The Cover

The Wittenberg University History Department has been housed in four other buildings, prior to moving to Hollenbeck Hall in the winter of 1999. Pictured on the front cover are the five buildings in which the History Department has made its home.

Myers Hall (1845-86) – Myers was the original building of Wittenberg University. It housed classrooms and dormitories for students and faculty.

Recitation Hall (1886-1963) – Recitation Hall was built through money donated by residents of the city of Springfield; the University had outgrown Myers as its only structure.

Zimmerman Hall (1963-78) – Zimmerman became the stomping ground for history majors after the elimination of the home economics program, which was formerly housed here.

Ermarth Center for the Humanities (1978-99) – Synod and Leamer Halls, which make up the Ermarth Center for the Humanities, became the home of the history department after the departure of the Hamma Divinity School from Wittenberg. The school is now located in Columbus, Ohio, in consolidation with Capital University.

Hollenbeck Hall (2000) – Wittenberg's first freestanding academic building in more than thirty years was dedicated January 28, 2000. The building houses the departments of history, philosophy, religion, political science, English, and foreign languages, as well as the East Asian and Russian Area studies programs. The Math and Writer's Workshops and the International Education office also make their home in Hollenbeck.

From the Editors:

The 2000 Wittenberg University History Journal contains a wide variety of papers in many styles and covering very different subject matters. These papers were the cream of the crop from an exemplary group of papers, and selecting these few was a strenuous decision for the editorial staff. The staff enjoyed reading the submitted papers; this *Journal* would not be possible without such quality student submissions.

Gratitude is extended to the members of the Department of History, with a special thanks to department secretary Margaret DeButy, for all of their support, advice, and guidance. We would especially like to thank our advisor, Dr. Tammy Proctor, for all of her assistance over the last few months. Finally, a resounding thank you to our editorial staff, who worked tirelessly to make this *Journal* the fine piece of work we present to you. It is the dedication of all these individuals working together that allows the History Journal to become a reality every year. We hope you enjoy this year's *Journal* and appreciate the support we have received from the Wittenberg community.

Melinda Scott
Sarah Lanzel

**The Wittenberg University History Journal
1999-2000 Editorial Staff**

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The Hartje Papers

The Martha and Robert G. Hartje Award is presented annually to a senior in the spring semester. The History Department determines the three finalists who write a 600-800 word narrative essay dealing with a historical event or figure. The finalists must have at least a 2.7 grade-point average and have completed at least six history courses. The winner is awarded \$400 at a spring semester History Department colloquium and all three entries are included in the *History Journal*.

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Context Under Pressure: The Henry Wirz Trial

*By Josh Guerrieri
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At 10:15 a.m. on 10 November 1865, the doors of The Capital Prison opened, revealing a sick old man. As he made his way through the courtyard to the scaffold, the crowd exploded with excitement, for this was the moment for which they had longed. The man, so hated for his involvement in the Andersonville prison camp, stood in stern silence as the charges were read. "Remember Andersonville!" pierced the morning air, reaching nearly deafening levels. This moment was the culmination of a long fight against a spiteful nation and a bruising political climate, and it was probably a relief to the tired ex-soldier. Moments before the noose was adjusted around his neck, the major directing the execution apologized for the way it was being carried out, explaining that he was only following orders. The weak old man looked up at the guard and responded, "I know what orders are Major. I am being hung for following them."¹

Soon after Captain Henry Wirz spoke these words, the trap door was sprung and he was executed for "conspiracy to commit murder, by allowing the conditions at Andersonville [prison camp] to exist," and for actual murder at the camp.² These charges were rendered in response to the atrocities that occurred in Andersonville, a Civil War prison camp for Union soldiers. Wirz commanded the camp for about one year beginning in April 1864, and nearly 13,000 men died in the camp's fifteen-month existence. Amazingly, Wirz was the only man to shoulder the blame for what happened there.³ However, what may be even more amazing, is the way the legal system of the United States convicted this man in a trial full of injustices that, by today's standards, would have been outrageous. In fact, the trial

was so botched that the issue at hand, war crimes, was pushed to the background. In the minds of most everyone, the guilty verdict was rendered even before the trial began. Wirz had to fight an overwhelmingly biased public opinion and an unforgiving political climate. Furthermore, he fell victim to a prejudiced jury and a crafty prosecutor. With this as the backdrop for the trial, the actual testimony and evidence became arbitrary, making irrelevant the question of whether Wirz really was simply following orders. This context provides the explanations for the unjust manner in which Wirz was arrested, convicted, and hung.

Had he known the odds he was to face, it is doubtful that Wirz ever would have accepted his assignment to take up the command at Andersonville Prison. The prison, in Sumpter County, Georgia, was built in an effort to alleviate some of the overcrowding at other prison camps. Construction began in December 1863, and the first prisoners arrived in late February 1864. Initially, conditions at the camp were good, but as the prison's population grew and the Confederacy's position in the war worsened, the prison conditions deteriorated. Though the prison was built to accommodate only ten thousand men, the number of prisoners reached almost twenty thousand by early June. Rations became scarce, disease became common, and the daily death rate exploded. In August of 1864, the prison population rose to thirty-three thousand men, only adding to the horrendous conditions. As the number of men on the inside of the prison increased, so did the number of men on the outside. Just outside the gates, heap of dead, rotting men became more layered every day. The problem grew worse when General Grant, in a letter to Secretary of

War Edwin Stanton, requested that the prisoner exchanges between the North and South cease, proclaiming that the "exchanges simply reinforce the enemy at once."⁴ Without any relief from overcrowding, food supplies dwindled causing disease to pervade throughout the camp. James Madison Page, a former prisoner at Andersonville, touched on the conditions, saying, "Scurvy is now fearfully prevalent. Hundreds are dying daily. It is caused by not having proper food—a change of food is absolutely necessary to relieve scurvy."⁵ Unbelievably, these horrendous conditions were attributed to a sole man—Henry Wirz.

Born in Zurich Switzerland in 1822, Wirz earned an M.D. degree from the University of Zurich. Penniless, he immigrated to Boston in 1849 and moved to Kentucky in 1854, where he married for a second time. Wirz set up shop as a physician in Kentucky, but he moved to Louisiana shortly afterward because of pressure from other doctors. He fell in love with the South, and upon the opening of the Civil War, enlisted in the Confederacy. After serving in the battle of Manassas, in which a bullet rendered his right arm useless, Wirz was commissioned as a captain. He quickly moved up the ranks of the Confederate army, and in late 1863, he was sent to Europe to carry special dispatches for Jefferson Davis.⁶ Upon his return, in April 1864, Wirz was ordered to take charge of the interior of Andersonville Prison. This order would prove fatal.

Wirz's job at the prison was to oversee routine operations, maintain order, and uphold the general condition of the prison. These responsibilities, according to Wirz's arrest warrant, were abused in ways that deliberately caused soldiers to die. Thus, in May 1865, Henry Wirz was arrested, and he stood trial on the twenty-first of August. A judge advocate, Norton Chipman, and a military commission were assigned by Edwin Stanton to govern the trial. Chipman acted as the prosecutor in a trial that was one-sided from the outset. All of the men of the military commission (essentially the jury) were former Union soldiers. "It would seem that the commission was top heavy with men too heavily involved in their home states to risk jeopardizing their, hoped for, postwar political career by finding Henry Wirz not

guilty."⁷ With this as the trial setting, things did not look good for Wirz, and his attorneys knew it. In fact, after Wirz's lawyers were denied relief from a charge on what they felt was double jeopardy, some of his legal team just quit. Hence, Wirz began his defense already in a hole that only got deeper as the trial wore on.

Although Wirz was found guilty, it is clear that equity and fairness did not dictate the order of the court. The most convincing evidence comes for the actual trial records themselves.⁸ The records unabashedly reveal a trial full of inconclusive and contradictory evidence, hearsay, and sometimes, downright lies. The first charge leveled against Wirz claimed that he allowed the conditions of the camp to decline enough to purposely cause soldiers' deaths. However, testimony from the trial uncovers that many things were out of Wirz's control. For example, a 5 July 1864 letter by Colonel D.T. Chandler, the Confederate adjutant and inspector, discusses the conditions of the prison this way: "There is no medical attendance provided within the stockade . . . The sanitary condition of the prison is as wretched as can be . . . I beg leave to recommend that no more prisoners be sent to this already overcrowded prison . . ." Not only does Chandler refuse to blame Wirz for the conditions, he commends him for the job he is doing. In the same letter, Chandler explains Wirz's attempts to sanitize the stream running through the camp, asserting, "An effort is being made by Captain Wirz, commanding the prison, to fill up the marsh and construct a sluice . . ."⁹ From this letter, it seems quite clear that Wirz was doing what he could.

Also in the *Official Records*, letters written by Wirz to his superiors repeatedly demonstrate that there was an effort to alleviate the miserable condition of the prison. They show that he was neither oblivious nor apathetic about the deteriorating conditions. In a letter to Captain R. D. Chapman, acting adjutant of the post of Andersonville, Wirz wrote: "The bread which is issued to the prisoners is of such inferior quality, . . . that it is almost unfit for use, and is increasing dysentery and other bowel complaints . . . Hoping that you will give this your attention as soon as possible . . ."¹⁰

In addition to the documents from the *Official Records*, letters from Wirz's supporters,

some of who are Union soldiers, plead that the conditions may have been inevitable. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Daily News* a former Andersonville prisoner explained that it did not seem fit to blame Wirz for the conditions. Upon hearing of Wirz's arrest, he penned:

The mortality at Andersonville resulted, mainly, from the following causes; First, want of proper food; second, from want of shelter; third, want of medical attention; fourth, causes of a purely local nature, coupled with the moral degradation exhibited by the prisoners themselves . . . I have no personal interest or object in making this statement, . . . Love of justice and an utter disbelief in the total depravity of man alone impel me.

And, above all, for the credit of our country, let it never be said that an American soldier, whether Northern or Southern, could deliberately assassinate thirteen thousand defenseless men, trusting to him alone for protection.¹¹

Despite Wirz's letters and the letters of his supporters, the military commission still felt compelled to convict. The prosecution was not finished, though, as they argued that Wirz was also a barbarous tyrant, guilty of murder.

As stated earlier, Wirz's responsibilities included maintaining order. He knew that keeping order in the prison entailed a certain system of obeying rules and following orders, in which he needed to be strong and stern. Without a strict system the prison would become dangerous. However, as his conviction demonstrates, Wirz was thought to have overstepped his command. During the trial, prisoners griped about the way Wirz treated them, explaining that he was a mean-spirited despot. In particular, soldiers testified about the brutality of some of Wirz's tactics such as the "dead line." The "dead line," a rail of logs that ran parallel to the inside walls, was created to aid in escape prevention. Anyone who crossed the line was to be shot by the guards. If prisoners were able to make it past the line, Wirz would employ dogs to track escaped prisoners. These tactics came under fire as the prosecution painted a terrifying portrait of Wirz. According to the prosecution, Wirz was "a man filled with venomous profanities . . . running around with a drawn pistol, screaming and

cursing. . . ."¹² Portraying Wirz as a mean and crazy maniac, the prosecution found it easy to pin the label murderer on him as well. Of the thirteen specifications in the second charge, eleven were for specific acts of murder by Wirz including shooting, stamping, and beating prisoners to death. But, again, examining the trial records, it seems that the prosecution was painting this picture from rather inconclusive testimony that was sensationalized into faulty conclusions about Wirz.

The records are full of testimony by Union soldiers who said that they never saw or heard of Wirz killing anyone. One such statement came from Robert Kelly, who testified: "I was a prisoner at Andersonville. . . . I was in the stockade from May 3 till September 10, 1864. During the time I was there, I cannot say that I knew or heard of Captain Wirz's kicking, striking, or shooting a prisoner, so that he died. . . ."¹³ However, statements like these seem to have been disregarded by the commission.

Instead, the more skewed testimony of some of the Union soldiers seems to have won the day in court. One of these rather vague testimonies came from Prescott Tracey who stated, "I never saw him commit act of cruelty . . . but I saw him give orders to do it, to shoot a man. I could not give the day exactly; . . . that is all I know."¹⁴

The one witness who did the most damage to Wirz was Felix de la Baume, who held the crowd spellbound with his masterful oratory. Baume descriptively testified that he saw Wirz shoot and kill many soldiers on many different occasions. However, a few weeks after the trial, some German soldiers recognized Baume as a fraud. After admitting that his real name was Felix de la Baume Oesser, he also admitted to perjury. Incidentally, Baume may not have been the only soldier to lie under oath. Many of Wirz's defenders argue that, given the resentment of Wirz, it is quite possible that many other witnesses lied.¹⁵

Numerous other injustices marred the trial as well; the reports from the prison doctors were mutilated, Union soldiers in defense of Wirz were not allowed to take the stand, and the priests and some of the Confederate guards that worked at Andersonville were not permitted to give a testimony. Regardless, Wirz was sent to the gallows in a trial that the major northern

newspapers had the audacity to label fair and appropriate. So, why would a nation tolerate such outright injustice? To shed light on the answer, the political climate and public opinion must be factored into the equation. These powerful and penetrating forces are strong enough to warrant claims that they, in fact, are the reasons for the wrongful trial and conviction.

In the post-Civil War period, the nation was still very much divided. Though the end of the war in 1865 was supposed to heal the nation's wounds, it could not erase the resentment of those involved. Despite winning the war, Northern public opinion remained hostile towards the South not only for the secession, but for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Northerners demanded revenge, jumping at any chance for it. This was obviously not a climate that Henry Wirz would have benefited from, for he was trampled by it.

The Northern newspapers played a key role in the stampede by opening the public's eyes to the atrocities at Andersonville. The papers enraged the already hostile public with biased articles and drawings. Feeding the people with many stories and photographs, the papers depicted Wirz (and the South) as inhumane. Edward Roberts, author of a recent history on Andersonville writes, "*Harper's Weekly* carried the first illustrations made from photographs taken of the released prisoners. The whole nation was shocked at what they saw."¹⁶ What they saw were photographs of men with bones poking through their skin, sores all over their emaciated bodies, and many times, bloody stumps where their feet once were. *Harper's* accompanied these pictures with biased coverage about Wirz. On 12 August 1865, before the trial even began, one article stated, "Of his guilt, there is no doubt, unless there be doubt whether there were an Andersonville Prison and whether he were the keeper—points which are not denied."¹⁷ In other attempts to sway the public, *Harper's* ran sketches that seemed to demonize Wirz. This type of propaganda was not only common to *Harper's*; many northern newspapers including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Tribune* also covered the trial.

The *New York Times* covered the trial intensely, with almost exclusive front-page

coverage for many days in a row. Front-page titles like "AN INCARNATE FIEND—HOW CAPTAIN WERTZ[sic] MURDERED OUR PRISONERS," appeared in big bold print almost daily.¹⁸ Wirz's lawyers recognized how influential the papers could be, and thus they wrote to the *Times* expressing their concern. "We have seen in your paper an article in relation to the approaching trial of Captain Wertz[sic], which we think, in connection with others of a like nature, requires notice at our hands. . . . We appeal to the newspaper press not to bring its powerful influence to bear to prejudice the public mind against Captain Wirz."¹⁹ This statement, though, did not deter newspapers from printing accounts of Andersonville and Wirz that further infuriated the North. In his book, *The True Story of Andersonville Prison*, James M. Page explains this sentiment best, remarking, "At the close of the war, the feeling was so intense in the North on account of the suffering and mortality among the prisoners of war at Andersonville that something had to be done to satisfy the popular demand for the punishment of those supposed to be responsible for that suffering and the loss of life among these prisoners, and Major Wirz was doomed before he was tried, as the party for these results."²⁰ Unfortunately for Wirz, he not only had to battle this incensed public opinion, he also faced a political climate that when mixed with the public demand, combined to form a potent and deadly formula.

One reason for the unfavorable political climate was the personal agenda of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Edward Roberts, author of *Andersonville Journey*, sees Edwin Stanton as having considerable influence on the trial. Roberts attributes a large portion of a chapter to discussing Stanton's role in the trial. According to Roberts, "Stanton worried that what had been won on the battlefield, would now be lost in the post-war peace. He feared that in the euphoria of peace, the former leaders of the defeated Confederacy would simply return to their positions of power . . . just as if the Civil War had never occurred."²¹ Stanton felt that the former Confederacy leaders should be punished and Jefferson Davis was at the top the list. Stanton had Davis arrested on 10 May 1865 for treason against the United States. This charge,

though, did not satisfy Stanton because he was convinced that Davis had a hand in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. After months of investigation, however, Stanton still had not gathered enough incriminating evidence; so Salmon Chase, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, wrote Stanton requesting that Davis be released. Though this embarrassed Stanton, he still felt he could punish Davis—enter Henry Wirz. Stanton bet that Wirz would plea that he was following orders, which could provide a link to Davis. Wirz surprisingly pleaded that he too was a prisoner of war and that “the vagueness of time, place, and manner of the offenses made the charges valueless.”²² Regardless, it is rumored that even on the scaffold before the execution, Stanton reportedly offered Wirz clemency if he would just implicate Davis.²³ Wirz refused the offer, but as a result, he sealed his fate. Thus, Wirz again takes on the role as a victim of circumstance.

Though Stanton came up empty in his case against Davis, he still managed to save face by hanging Wirz. In the eyes of the public, someone still had to pay for the atrocities at Andersonville, and Wirz was a perfect candidate. Stanton was not immune from this tremendous public opinion, for he was “the recipient of a good deal of steady pressure from Northern Press and governors . . .”²⁴ Though he may have thought he failed because he could not nab Davis, he probably gained some political support by executing Wirz. For Stanton, this was a victory, in that he won public approval. As if battling Stanton’s political goals was not trying enough, yet another aspect of the political climate seems to have suffocated justice. Wirz also faced a nation in the midst of rebuilding that did not appear to want to deal with any more of the lingering effects of the Civil War.

Andrew Johnson took office on April 15, 1865, following Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. Johnson too had an agenda—one that entailed unifying and reconstructing the nation. He wanted to assimilate the South back into the national power base, but he wanted, also, to be careful not to surrender the spoils of victory gained by the North. “The president’s generous amnesty policies and the moderate background of his gubernatorial appointees complimented the limited demands he outlined for the Southern

restoration into the Union.”²⁵ Perhaps a little optimistic, Wirz saw some hope in the new president. In the days leading up to his execution, Wirz seemed to recognize that he had been bullied by a misguided public demand and unfavorable political climate, but he hoped that his luck would change if Johnson knew of his predicament. So Wirz, praying that Johnson would not be blinded by public demand, wrote this letter to the president:

With a trembling hand, with a heart filled with most conflicting emotions, and with a spirit hopeful one moment and despairing the next, I have taken the liberty of addressing you. . . . by thousands I am considered a monster of cruelty, a wretch that ought not pollute the earth any longer. . . . I doubt that I am the Captain Wirz spoken of. . . . there speaks a small but unmistakable voice within me that says: ‘Console Thyself, thou knowest thy innocence The pangs of death are short, and therefore I humbly pray that you will pass your sentence without delay. Give me liberty or death. The one I do not fear; the other I crave.’²⁶

This letter reveals much about Wirz’s character. Appealing to religion, patriotism, and justice, Wirz wrote in the hope that, in the end, equity would prevail. He appears confident of his innocence, yet he seems somewhat understanding of the circumstances that doomed him. It is difficult not to feel compassion for Wirz, yet, Johnson somehow managed this task. Johnson’s lack of response, though, is hardly surprising in light of the way Wirz was treated all along. Wirz’s lead attorney, Louis Schade, also wrote to Johnson highlighting the travesties of the trial, and again, pleading for help.²⁷ Neither letter, though, elicited any response from Johnson, which in itself, demonstrates that Johnson probably was more concerned with other matters.

It is conceivable that Johnson simply asked himself this question: Was saving one man from injustice worth losing the public’s favor? To a politician, public opinion is everything, and Johnson, being a politician himself, knew this. Granting Wirz clemency would have probably meant weathering a storm of criticism and rage. Because Johnson had only occupied the office for a couple of months, it is unlikely he would put his career on the line for a

man that was so hated anyway. Once again, Wirz did not catch a break in his battle with political powers. This time, the political powers delivered the final blow to Wirz.

Even to this day, there are many dissenting opinions about the guilt or innocence of Henry Wirz. What should not be debated, however, is the overwhelming evidence that demonstrates that political and public pressure ultimately killed him. Upon his arrest, Wirz truly had nothing working in his favor. He fell into a deadly trap woven by a ruthless public demand and a submissive political climate. Perhaps the best conclusions about the trial came from Louis Schade, Wirz's lead defender. In a long letter dated 4 April 1867, and addressed to the American public, Schade reflected on Wirz and the trial. His letter may best be summed up in one sentence: "He was doomed before he was heard, and even the permission to be heard

according to law was denied him."²⁸ His conviction raises important questions pertaining to the amount of influence outside forces (i.e. political pressure and public opinion) have on forcing the government's hand to satisfy political needs.

Undoubtedly, the influence of public and political pressure has had some effect throughout history, but just how much of an effect is largely debatable. However, if the sentiments of a large audience are made prevalent enough, it seems evident that decisions can hinge on those feelings. Factions opposing a deeply rooted sentiment are liable to be squashed; so sometimes the best advice for those who are attempting to fight the popular opinion is never to get into the ring. Unfortunately for Henry Wirz, the climate of the postbellum period refused to allow this option.

Notes

¹ *Harper's Weekly* 25 Nov. 1865. Much of the opening paragraph is a summary of the scene depicted in this issue of *Harper's Weekly*.

² Edward F. Roberts. *Andersonville Journey*. (Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street Press, 1998), 133.

³ Part of the reason that Wirz shouldered all of the blame was because he did not flee like some of his superiors. Also, General John Winder, the commander of all the Southern prisons, died of a heart attack before he could be charged with anything. However, in the first charge against Wirz, there is mention of conspiracy that indicts Winder and many others.

⁴ The United States War Department. *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (Washington D.C.: War Department, 1880-1901), Series 2, Volume 7, p. 662.

⁵ James Madison Page. *The true story of Andersonville Prison: a defense of Major Henry Wirz*. (New York: Neale, 1908), 46.

⁶ It is unclear exactly why Wirz was chosen and what these special dispatches entailed.

⁷ Roberts, *Andersonville Journey*, 111.

⁸ There are a couple of sources from which to draw the official records including *The War of Rebellion* series, *The Trial of Henry Wirz*, and *The Tragedy of Andersonville*.

⁹ General N.P. Chipman. *The Tragedy of Andersonville*. (San Francisco, CA: Blair-Murdoch Company, 1911), 66-68.

¹⁰ The United States War Department, *Official Records*, 207.

¹¹ Letter to the Editor, *New York Daily News* (9 August 1865) cited in S.W. Ashe. *The trial and death of Henry Wirz: with other matters pertaining thereto*. (Raleigh, NC: Uzzel, 1908), 46, 50.

¹² Roberts, *Andersonville Journey*, 119.

¹³ Chipman, *Tragedy*, 222.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁵ Most of the argument comes from Rutherford's defense of Wirz.

¹⁶ Roberts, *Andersonville Journey*, 99.

¹⁷ *Harper's Weekly* 12 August 1865

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 4 August 1865

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Page, *True Story*, 11.

²¹ Roberts, *Andersonville Journey*, 105.

²² Rutherford, *Defense of Wirz*, 14

²³ Though there is no evidence of this, many Wirz defenders believe this story, in part, due to the letter by Wirz's attorney Louis Schade in which Schade recalls this event.

²⁴ Fletcher Pratt, *Stanton-Lincoln's Secretary of War*. (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1953), 337.

²⁵ Dan T. Carter, *When the War Was Over*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Univ. Press, 1985), 28.

²⁶ Rutherford, *Defense of Wirz*, 85.

²⁷ Schade's letter can be found in the War Department's *Official Records*.

²⁸ Rutherford, *Defense of Wirz*, 29.

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- Newspapers, Periodicals, Journals**
- Harper's Weekly*
New York Tribune
New York Times
Washington Post

Defining the Peasantry Conflicts of 1857: Collective Identity or Collective Action?

*By Andrea Brunsvold
Wittenberg Class of 2000*

If you were writing about the 1857 conflict in India shortly after it occurred up through the era of classical historiography, you probably would refer to it as the "Indian Mutiny" or "Sepoy Rebellion." Today, you might refer to it as the "Indian Rebellion" or Peasant's Insurgency," terms more indicative of a collective resistance to tyrannical colonial rule. The discourse concerning the Indian Mutiny/Rebellion has evolved over the course of the century. I believe that the change in historiography is partly due to the change in the academic perception of the peasantry, or in Marxist terms, the masses. The earliest writers—contemporaries of the events, such as Sir John Kaye—gave little, if any, attention to those who were collectively called "sepoys." Current historiography of Marxist subalternists, such as Ranajit Guha, glorifies the peasantry and the non-elite within India. The power of a unified underclass impresses Guha.

Still, I argue that both Kaye and Guha view the peasantry more similarly that it appears on the surface. Both see the peasantry as a collective identity, rather than a unique group of oppressed people who span various castes and classes to overcome these stations and unify themselves for collective action. Kaye sees the Indian peoples as mutineers who challenged British colonial rule. Guha flips Kaye's view, claiming that the peasantry is a powerful force that can cause change within the oppressive colonial rule. Utpal Dutt, on the other hand, through his play, *Mahavidroh*, attempts to represent the masses as a collective of individuals. Dutt correctly identifies the masses as a multi-caste conglomerate trying to defeat the British through a somewhat rough attempt at collective action. Where Kaye and Guha fail to even attempt representation of these people,

Dutt creates unique experiences that cause underlying tension—even among those attempting collective action. Also, where Kaye and Guha fail to discuss gender roles, Women play an important role in Dutt's play.

Those recording the events shortly after they occurred were predominantly haunted by one question, "why?" In trying to understand why the sepoys suddenly turned upon their British superiors, these authors created conspirators to lead the sepoys astray. Sir John Kaye's culprits were the Brahman, the members of India's highest caste, Hindu priests. In short, Kaye argues that the Brahman felt their caste was under attack as the "enlightenment," brought by the British, crept in upon them. He writes that the Brahman "saw that, as new provinces were one after another brought under British rule, the new light must diffuse itself more and more, until there would scarcely be a place for Hindooism to lurk unmolested."¹ And as various "abominable practices,"² such as suttee, murdering little children and the elderly, human sacrificing and random stranglings were forbidden by the British, Kaye claims that the Brahman priests began to feel their livelihood threatened. He believes that reason began to replace these superstitions purported by the Brahman, thereby thwarting their purpose.

But when Reason demonstrated their absurdity, and struck conviction into the very heart of the nation, there was an end of both the folly and the crime. The Law might do much, but Education would assuredly do much more to sweep away all these time-honoured superstitions. Education, pure and simple in its secularity, was quite enough in itself to hew down this dense jungle of Hindooism; but when it was seen that the function of the English

schoolmaster and of the Christian priest were often united in the same person . . . a fear arose that even secular education might be the mask of proselytism.³

"Reason," with a capital "R," stands as the more convicting force with the people under Brahman instruction. Reason, through Education (and Kaye claims this education is "secular") was threatening the superstitions used by the Brahman to control Indian people.

Note that Kaye is arguing that the Brahman caste is intimidated not by Christianity, *per se*, but by Reason—the product of the Enlightenment. As the masses are educated by Westerners, they will see the absurdity of the Brahman teachings and abandon them. This eliminates the need for Brahman, and they are, therefore, forced to incite the people against the British to preserve their jobs. Kaye even declares that it is out of love "for truth above error" and "intelligent progress above ignorant stagnation"⁴ that Lord Dalhousie had "emanated the annexations which had distinguished his rule."⁵ Kaye completely ignores evidence to the contrary that suggests native rulers disagreed. The Rani of Jhansi, for example, wrote a letter to Dalhousie herself. She points out that Dalhousie is not honoring the tradition that allows an adopted son to claim the throne of her deceased husband. Her letter implies that Dalhousie is using the lack of a biological heir as justification for annexing and taking control of her kingdom.⁶ Kaye, however, views these annexations as Great Britain's attempt to "extend her moral rule, and to make those people subject to powers of light rather than of darkness."⁷ He points to "Universities" and the increased expenditure upon native education⁸ as other threats to the Brahman. These institutions, which dispensed European knowledge, made plain to the "guardians of Eastern learning, that what had been done to unlock the floodgates of the West, would soon appear to be as nothing in comparison with the great tide of European civilisation which was about to be poured out upon them."⁹

Along these same lines, Kaye claims that the "encroachments of physical science were equally distasteful and disquieting" to the Brahmans. He believes they were intimidated

by such European wonders as the railway and electric wires. These wonders condensed time unlike anything the Indians had ever seen before the Western man came. As the Indians see the wonders of Western technology, they are inevitably impressed and captivated. Kaye wonders, "Of what use was it any longer to endeavour to persuade the people that the new knowledge of the West was only a bundle of shams and impostures, when any man might see the train come in . . .?"¹⁰

Typical of Kaye is to equate "West" with "Reason" and "East" with "superstition." Perhaps also implied is that the East is more prone to fanaticism, particularly the Brahman, who were the caretakers of the "East" and its "superstitions." Intimidated by the technology and rational superiority of the West, the Brahman incite the people against the British. It is understandable, therefore, that Kaye latches onto stories of conspiracy, such as Chowdeydar cakes and the circulation of chuppatties. The Brahman having the most to lose, are held responsible by Kaye for rumors of using Chowdeydar cakes and chupatties to send messages of revolt.

Kaye is concerned primarily with two groups: the Brahman, and those led astray by the Brahman. Commoners are bypassed in Kaye's scholarship. He sees them as little more than children who are easily led astray by charismatic leaders.

Yet, somewhat surprisingly, Kaye does acknowledge the power the masses have when they are unified. He writes, "If the individual energies of the leaders of the revolt had been commensurate with the power of the masses, we might have failed to extinguish such a conflagration. But the whole tendency of the English system had been to crush out those energies[.]"¹¹ Consequently, Kaye's fleeting recognition of the masses' power is similar to that of Ranajit Guha's.

Ranjit Guha actually recognizes Kaye's work in his article, "Not at Home in Empire." He writes that Kaye's *History of the Indian Mutiny* is a "truly brilliant work of imperial historiography . . . [w]ritten in the manner of grand narratives of war and revolution . . ."¹² However, unlike Kaye's conspiracy theories and exultation of the enlightened West, Guha,

founder of *Subaltern Studies*, takes a Marxist view of the masses. Guha greatly glorifies the peasantry's ability to come together and assert power over the colonizer and native elite. It is important to note that he examines several peasant uprisings in colonial India, not just the events of 1857. He points out that there were over 110¹³ accounts of peasant uprisings during the British rule, a sign of continuing struggle and discontent on the subaltern's side. One of his main goals in the introduction to his book, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, is to combat the idea of the peasant revolt as being primitive and "pre-political."¹⁴

Guha believes that the early historiography was a mechanism of the state. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in her article "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," is upset by these attempts at creating a national history—she blames the West. She writes:

"History" as a knowledge system is firmly embedded in institutional practices that invoke the nation state at every step . . . It does not take much imagination to see that the reason for this lies in what European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together: the universalization of the nation state as the most desirable form of political community. Nation states have the capacity to enforce their truth games, and universities, their critical distance notwithstanding, are part of the battery of institutions complicit in this process.¹⁵

Chakrabarty is implying that the subaltern have no voice—the Western imperial nations alongside the third-world elite have created 'history' as an instrument of the state. In a need to understand what caused the revolts, the British state turned to the study of history. Guha also points out that the need to understand the peasantry's action shows underlying tensions created by not understanding them: "The tension of this relationship required a record for the regime to refer to so that it could understand the nature and motivation of any considerable outbreak of violence in the light of previous experience and by understanding suppress it. Historiography stepped in to provide that vital discourse for the state."¹⁶ In fact, Guha goes so far as to say that these early accounts *exist* because of the state:

their "raison d'être."¹⁷ This meant that the state had no need to disguise its "partisan character" which would later be the basis upon which Western historiography is built.

This historiography, Guha points out, is devoid of the peasantry. He feels that they are not accorded a place in the events of India's past, that "the peasant was denied recognition as a subject of history in his own right even for a project that was all his own."¹⁸

The early histories of the Mutiny/Rebellion do not represent the subject and cause of these revolts—the peasant. The British, striving to keep a clear distance from the peasants, assumed they could understand by merely reviewing events of the past with no subaltern context. Guha changes "rebellion" to "insurgency" to show the peasantry's collective power. He writes, "To acknowledge the peasant as the maker of his own rebellion is to attribute, as we have done in this work, a consciousness to him. Hence, the word 'insurgency' has been used in the title and the text as the name of that consciousness which informs the activity of the rural masses known as *Jacquerie* . . . etc."¹⁹ Guha is disgusted by "elitist" historiography that assumes the revolts are spontaneous or need the "intervention of charismatic leaders."²⁰

Underlying these "elitist" histories are three assumptions. He points out that "[w]hat is conscious is presumed in this view to be identical with what is organized in the sense that it has, first, a 'conscious leadership,' secondly, some well-defined aim, and thirdly, a programme specifying the components of the latter as particular objectives and the means of achieving them."²¹ Guha is claiming that any peasant action without these factors is assumed—by the elitist school of thought—to be "pre-political," and quotes Hobsbawm who claims that the masses have yet to find "a specific language with which to express their aspirations about the world."

Guha defends the masses. He is quick to point out that the peasants *were* a political movement and had political force. He points out that there were several power relationships in the lives of the peasantry that inherently involve politics: the tenant-cultivators, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers. He also points out that these relationships contain

elements of "dominance" and "subordination."²² Guha sees a "triumvirate" ruling the peasantry: the "landlord, the moneylender and the official" who "came to form under colonial rule."²³ The peasants exhibited their colonial awareness, Guha feels, by attempting to destroy these relationships and thereby "engaged himself in what was essentially a political task."²⁴ The peasant was by no means frivolously revolting. He "risked all by attempting to destroy [these relationships] by rebellion."²⁵ The peasant was not "spontaneous" in his revolts, and "knew what he was doing. The fact that this was designed primarily to destroy the authority of the superordinate elite and carried no elaborate blueprint for its replacement, does not put it outside the realms of politics."²⁶ The peasant, Guha concludes, was aware of his own "project of power."

Throughout Guha's work, however, he views the peasantry as a collective and they by no means are. They span castes that are very distinct from one another: untouchables, farmers, merchants, soldiers, etc. His predisposition towards Marxist glorification of the collective masses eliminates their unique voices. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak complains about Guha's representation of the peasant in her article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?": "The terms 'people' and 'subaltern classes' [are] uses as synonymous throughout [Guha's definition.] The social groups and elements included in this category represent *the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'.*"²⁷

Like Kaye, Guha fails to see the peasantry as anything but non-elite. In Kaye's case, the elite were the Brahman, in Guha's the bourgeoisie. Utpal Dutt, on the other hand, uses theatre to explore the peasantry in more detail.

Despite the fact that the majority of the masses are devoid of primary sources for their history, Dutt invents—responsibly—a voice for them. Nandi Bhatia, and Assistant Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario, discusses the ways in which Utpal Dutt uses the theatre to get across his ideas of historiography concerning the peasantry. She explains that "artists" in India "excavated India's heroic past . . . to generate a sense of Indian unity, instill patriotism among audiences, and foster a sense

of national identity via (mythical) revivals of India's golden age."²⁸ Utpal Dutt is a Marxist playwright in the "genre of historical drama."²⁹ His Little Theatre Group "became a central site for staging the struggles of oppressed groups against repressive forces."³⁰ Bhatia explains that Dutt recuperates history in an attempt to subvert its "colonialist myths." He advocates and "unveiling of history" that calls into question "bourgeois truths" based upon and distorted by "pretensions of impartiality."³¹

Dutt feels the need to comment upon the "profound divisions in post-colonial India which challenge the myth of Indian unity sustained by both alternative and official versions of nationalism." He uses his theatre to "engage a dialectic . . . and demands to explore its implications for official narratives of nationalism in post-colonial India."³² Much like Chakrabarty, he questions the "official" state narratives. He also seems to fill Spivak's request for un-generalizing the subaltern, at least according to Bhatia. She argues that Dutt offers an "alternative interpretation," to the events that restores significance to ordinary people's roles during the Mutiny/Rebellion.³³ Not only does Dutt represent a collective struggle, but he exhibits on which "crosses caste and class lines."³⁴ In this way, he is taking Guha one step further, by illustrating inherent differences in this "coalition."³⁵ Bhatia claims that Dutt's "project of excavating the past from the viewpoint of the subaltern populace . . . performs a dual task . . . [I]t exposes the limitations of colonialist (mis)interpretations of the first war of independence" and "it prevents a premature celebration" of ideas of Indian unity. "Dutt's play not only rewrites what the colonial rulers called the 'Great Mutiny' into an anticolonial rebellion, it also disrupts the mythical claims of Indian unity by exposing the ongoing caste and class conflicts in post-colonial India."³⁶

Dutt has an interest in the society as a whole—especially those under both colonial and Indian elite rule. In fact

"Dutt's drama focuses on the popular base of the insurgency to bring alive the constitutive role of the marginalized in the uprising—weavers, women, untouchables, the urban poor, prostitutes, and peasants—through which the sub-plot of the family drama of three

generations which inserts the history of British exploitation into the framework of the imminent uprising.³⁷

Yet, while Dutt's theatre "constitutes an ideological strategy that counters . . . imperialist revisions of the 'mutiny,'" he also "refuses to see the simplistic binary logic of colonizer and colonized, that heaps indiscriminate attacks on the colonizer, and displays, as well, the complexity of inner dissensions within a community organized on the basis of caste, class, and religious prejudice, and the failure of native leadership to aid in its success."³⁸ Dutt clearly does not merely blame the colonizers for the insurgency—even native Indian rulers oppressed those under them. Oppression cut across class lines as well, and unlike Kaye or Guha, Dutt seeks to draw attention to this. Another responsible step Dutt's theatrical historiography takes is in its representation of different genders. Bhatia points out that "[t]o account for the role of women in this historical moment, Dutt brings into the focus the nexus of gender and nationalism. However he complicates this nexus by casting one of his female protagonists . . . in the role of a prostitute" whose lover is the play's protagonist and whose nights are spent gratifying the English.³⁹ By placing a prostitute into his play, one who serves as an inspiration to the soldiers, "Dutt creates . . . neither the 'respectable' mother or wife, nor a woman who is socially victimized, but one who voluntarily

chooses to sleep with the enemy so she can aid her own people . . . [Dutt] places her as an equal among soldiers."⁴⁰

Another woman who upsets the traditional Indian stereotype of 'mother India' is the protagonist's mother:

Placed in a doubly Othered position of a colonial economy governed by unequal power relations on the one hand, and the nationalist equation of the Indian mother as the 'mother of the nation' on the other, Katsuri's role serves as a defiance to these differentiated tropes of entrapment. Chastising the soldiers in full emotion rage, she says: 'Tell me, while I am still in this world, what son of a bitch guarantees me two meals a day? I want you all to die, so I shall have a fresh supply of merchandise.'⁴⁰

Consequently, Dutt is breaking open the subaltern's collective identity and giving them unique voices, despite the lack of true identities available for him to work with. Unlike Kaye and Guha, who view the masses, or at least speak of them, in terms of collective identity, Dutt actually breaks them down into complicated interactions among a people who are themselves divided by caste and class. In this way, the historiography which generalizes the masses can be thwarted. A new identity, one which still marvels at the power of the masses, can be understood in terms of the many voices that combine in collective action.

Notes

¹ Sir John Kaye, "The War as a Brahmanical Protest," in Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *1857 War in India: Mutiny or War of Independence?* (Boston, DC Heath and Company, 1963), 27.

² Kaye 27.

³ Kaye 27.

⁴ Kaye 28.

⁵ Kaye 28.

⁶ Rani Lakshmi Bai, "Two Letters to the Marquis of Dalhousie 1853, 1854," Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, eds., *Imperialism & Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 175.

⁷ Kaye 28.

⁸ Kaye 29.

⁹ Kaye 29.

¹⁰ Kaye 30.

¹¹ Sir John Kaye, *History of the Indian Mutiny, Vol. I*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971), xii.

¹² Ranajit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Spring 1997), 485.

¹³ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁴ Guha 6.

¹⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," in Bill Ashcroft, et al., eds., *The Post Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 384-385.

¹⁶ Guha 2.

¹⁷ Guha 3.

¹⁸ Guha 3.

¹⁹ Guha 4.

²⁰ Guha 4.

²¹ Guha 5.

²² Guha 6.

²³ Guha 8.

²⁴ Guha 8.

²⁵ Guha 8.

²⁶ Guha 9.

²⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Bill Ashcroft et al., eds., *The Post Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6.

²⁸ Nandi Bhatia, "Staging the 1857 Mutiny as 'The Great Rebellion': Colonial History and Post Colonial Interventions in Utpal Dutt's *Mahavidroh*," *Theatre Journal*, 51:2 (May 1999), 167.

²⁹ Bhatia 168.

³⁰ Bhatia 168.

³¹ Bhatia 168-169.

³² Bhatia 169.

³³ Bhatia 169.

³⁴ Bhatia 170.

³⁵ Bhatia 170.

³⁶ Bhatia 170-171.

³⁷ Bhatia 173.

³⁸ Bhatia 177.

³⁹ Bhatia 178.

⁴⁰ Bhatia 179.

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The Politics of Misinformation: John F. Kennedy and Failure at the Bay of Pigs

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"I have made a tragic mistake. Not only were our facts in error, but our policy was wrong because the premises on which it was built were wrong," President John F. Kennedy told advisor Clark Clifford in late April 1961 following the failure of a covert operation designed to overthrow the Communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro in Cuba.¹ The Bay of Pigs was planned meticulously, but, as expressed by President Kennedy, failed miserably. Two major factors contributed to the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion: the inaccurate information provided to President Kennedy by his advisors, which led him to believe that the operation would be a success, in addition to Kennedy's campaign promise to do something about Cuba, which led him to approve the first plan that crossed his desk.

When John Kennedy officially entered the 1960 presidential race on 20 January 1960, many doubts were held about his ability to lead the United States in time of Cold War and Communist influence. Throughout his Congressional career, Kennedy was thought to be soft on Communism. Cuba was a so-called four-letter word in the 1960s and represented the Cold War in America's backyard. Americans believed that Communists in Cuba, just ninety miles from the coast of Florida, posed a grave threat to the entire hemisphere and pressured Eisenhower, and later Kennedy, to act.

Kennedy felt that the Eisenhower administration had let the Cuban problem fall by the wayside. He said, "if the Eisenhower administration had given 'the fiery young rebel a warmer welcome in his hour of triumph, especially on his trip to this country,' Castro might not have gone over to the Communists."² Kennedy pledged to do something about the Cuba and the Communist influence of Fidel

Castro if he was elected President. Cuba was a point of controversy throughout the 1960 campaign, earning recognition at each of the four televised debates between Kennedy and Republican candidate Richard Nixon. In the third debate, Kennedy took the Cuban issue right to Nixon, saying, "Mr. Nixon would add a guarantee to islands 5 miles off the coast of the Republic of China, when he's never really protested the Communists seizing Cuba, 90 miles off the coast of the United States."³ Kennedy believed that Cuba would only be the start of problems in Latin America if nothing was done about the Communist government. In the fourth, and final, debate of the campaign, Kennedy declared,

We're going to have to try to provide closer ties to associate ourselves with the great desire of these people for a better life if we're going to prevent Castro's influence from spreading throughout all of Latin America. His influence is strong enough today to prevent us from getting the other countries of Latin America to join with us in economic quarantine. His influence is growing, mostly because this administration has ignored Latin America. You yourself said, Mr. Vice President, a month ago, that if we had provided the kind of economic aid 5 years ago that we are now providing, we might never have had Castro. Why didn't we?⁴

This campaign rhetoric would later lead to Kennedy's pressure to approve the first Cuban plan to cross his desk following his inauguration.

In the months between his election and inauguration, President-elect Kennedy met with President Dwight Eisenhower and his advisors for the traditional changing of the guard, pre-inauguration briefings. It was at this time that Kennedy first formally learned of the impending

invasion of Cuba, although he had suspected an attack had been in the works for some time. Travelling to the Kennedy compound in Palm Beach, Florida on 18 November 1960, Allen Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Richard Bissell, Assistant Director, outlined the impending invasion to the President-elect. "While . . . from this moment Kennedy harbored grave doubts regarding the size, daring, and concealability of the CIA invasion plan, Kennedy still gave the impression that he generally agreed with it, pending his final official approval."⁵ Kennedy was informed of the plan for the invasion to be organized by the CIA, overseen by the White House and carried out by Cuban refugees living and training in the United States. Dulles and Bissell briefed the President-elect a second time on the twenty-seventh of November⁶ and he was formally briefed by President Eisenhower himself on the sixth of December.⁷

Both Kennedy and Eisenhower knew that the president had not given Cuba a high priority in his administration. However, once Castro was discovered to be Communist, Eisenhower and his advisors, in addition to the American people, felt something must be done about the red presence in the Western Hemisphere, and Eisenhower had entrusted the planning of the mission to Dulles and Bissell. Eisenhower revealed to Kennedy that this invasion had been in the planning stages for nearly a year, since March 1960, and that he had appropriated funding of \$13 million for the project in August of that year.⁸ President Eisenhower advised Kennedy to go ahead with the plan, "mak[ing] it clear that the project is going very well and that it is the new administration's responsibility to do whatever is necessary to bring it to a successful conclusion."⁹ Eisenhower advocated his support even if it meant going public with the invasion. He told Kennedy, "We cannot let the present government there go on."¹⁰ Believing that he fully understood what was being intended, Kennedy thanked Eisenhower for the information and prepared to take control of the highest office in the land.

Inauguration Day dawned cold and snowy in the nation's capital that year¹¹ and no one knew just how hot it would get for the new President and his administration before

Kennedy's fabled one hundred days were over. The original Cuban D-Day was scheduled for 1 March 1961, giving Kennedy just under two months to make a decision if the invasion were to proceed.¹² The date of invasion was postponed several times to allow Kennedy more time to gather information and decide what he wanted to do.

Almost immediately after the inauguration, Dulles and Bissell, acting on behalf of the CIA, began pressuring the President for a decision on whether to go forth with the invasion. According to one participant, "Allen and Dick didn't just brief us on the Cuban operation. They sold us on it."¹³ The CIA director and his assistant outlined the plan for the President, making it as accurate as they could. However, their version of the story turned out to be inherently inaccurate, as they were too closely connected to the situation and too much in favor of its occurrence.

The CIA...supplied President Kennedy and his advisers with chosen reports on the unreliability of Castro's forces and the extent of Cuban dissent. The agency did not dwell, however, on its own Board of Estimates's memoranda that foresaw a continuous reinforcement of Castro's power, nor did it mention other pessimistic reports from independent observers.¹⁴

To put it bluntly, Dulles and Bissell refused to take no for an answer, due to the amount of time they had put in on the project. Dulles stated: "We had made it very clear to the President that to call off the operation would have resulted in a very unpleasant situation."¹⁵ Even knowing that a similar plan had not worked in Guatemala, the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff pushed ahead to get the President's approval. As a member of the Joint Chiefs declared, "You couldn't expect us . . . to say this plan is no damn good, you ought to call it off; that's not the way you do things in government. . . . The CIA were doing their best in the planning, and we were accepting it."¹⁶ In the end, rather than giving Kennedy several invasion plans to choose from, Dulles and Bissell simply demanded a yes or no decision from him on the plan they had outlined. Kennedy had no idea that Dulles and Bissell were overestimating the Cuban public's distrust of the Castro regime and

no idea that they were overestimating the effectiveness of the Cuban forces being trained in Miami. Not being one to be pushed into a decision, Kennedy told Dulles and Bissell that he was going to consult with his advisors before making a decision. This sounds like a good idea in retrospect, given the now-known inaccuracies in the CIA plan. However, Kennedy's advisors were to let him down as well.

It was not only the inaccuracies of the information Kennedy was presented that led him to make the decision to go ahead with the invasion. Before approving the proposal, Kennedy called a meeting of his closest advisors on 4 April 1961, with the intention of making a final decision on whether to carry out the proposed plan.

Present at the meeting were: Secretary of State, Dean Rusk; Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, and Secretary of the Treasury, Douglas Dillon; General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA and his Assistant, Richard Bissell; Presidential Assistant, McGeorge Bundy; Paul Nitze, Kennedy's specialist on strategic planning at the Pentagon; Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State on Latin-American Affairs; Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Richard Goodwin, three Kennedy specialists on Latin America, and one outsider, Senator William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . . .¹⁷

While there was overwhelming support at the meeting for going ahead with the invasion, two individuals present expressed extreme concern about the invasion: Dean Rusk and William Fulbright. In addition, Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles, who had not been included in the meeting, was steadfastly against the invasion. Kennedy was unfortunate in not taking the advice of these three men into careful consideration when he made his final decision. It was also quite unfortunate that the President failed to consult his United Nations ambassador, Adlai Stevenson, who was kept in the dark throughout the invasion's planning.

As Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William Fulbright's opinion should have been one of the most weighty in President Kennedy's decision-making. However, it was only after he presented the President with "a

memorandum outlining the legal, moral, and political objections to an invasion"¹⁸ that Fulbright was invited to the meeting on the fourth of April. Fulbright was strongly against the Bay of Pigs invasion, mostly because of the moral repercussions he felt the United States would face in its aftermath. "To give this activity even covert support is of a piece with the hypocrisy and cynicism for which the United States is constantly denouncing the Soviet Union in the United Nations and elsewhere. The point will not be lost on the rest of the world – nor on our own consciences."¹⁹ Fulbright predicted that the operation would be a resounding failure and by allowing United States intervention, "we would . . . have assumed the responsibility for public order in Cuba, and in the circumstances this would unquestionably be an endless can of worms."²⁰ He recommended the President use the utmost caution in approving this mission as "the Castro regime is a thorn in the flesh; but it is not a dagger in the heart,"²¹ indicating he thought Cuba was not worth the risk of Cuban lives and American credibility. Fulbright was the most vocal, adamant critic against the Bay of Pigs invasion in President Kennedy's inner circle and his warnings were equally as adamantly ignored, for no one wanted to believe that the plan would fail.

Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles, upon reviewing the information for himself, also came out against the proposed invasion. He drafted a memo to the President and delivered the memo to his boss, Secretary of State Dean Rusk. In the memo, Bowles stated: "A great deal of time and money has been spent and many individuals have been involved in its [the project's] success. We should not, however, proceed with this adventure simply because we are wound up and cannot stop."²² However, President Kennedy never saw the memo; Rusk absorbed the information and integrated many of Bowles's opinions into his own. In addition, Rusk knew that "he [Kennedy] didn't like having a bunch of memos shoved at him."²³ Therefore, one of the most eloquently worded objections to the operation never reached the Commander-in-Chief.

From the time he learned of the impending invasion, Secretary of State Dean Rusk had

grave doubts about the overall feasibility of the operation. Upon reviewing Bowles's memo, these feelings became even more insistent. "Personally I was skeptical about the Bay of Pigs plan from the beginning,"²⁴ stated Rusk in his memoirs. However, believing that the rest of the administration was in favor of the operation, Rusk kept his opinions to himself during cabinet meetings on the subject. However, he was not complete silent on the matter; "although I expressed my opposition privately to President Kennedy, I should have made my opposition clear in the meetings themselves because he was under pressure from those who wanted to proceed."²⁵ This pressure came from members of Kennedy's cabinet, but most stringently from Dulles, Bissell, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Upon reflection, Rusk believed that he could have prevented the whole predicament if he had just made his feelings well known in the cabinet meetings. "If I had mounted a campaign within the administration and pulled together Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the Joint Chiefs and others, I might have blocked the invasion."²⁶ However, due to Rusk's quiet nature, Americans will never know if one vocal individual could have prevented the entire disaster.

United Nations ambassador Adlai Stevenson was the most notable advisor the President failed to consult. Stevenson later characterized this ignorance as "the most 'humiliating experience' of his years of public service."²⁷ Stevenson was not even informed of the planned invasion and was made to look like a complete fool in front of the Soviet ambassador when questioned about the invasion on the United Nations floor on the day it occurred. Even in the face of this humiliation, Stevenson supported the President and tried to cover up the American presence, stating, "If this was a United States military operation, do you think it would succeed or fail? How long do you think Cuba could resist the military power of the United States?"²⁸ This would have been true if the mission had been backed with the full power of the United States military. Kennedy missed out on a significant advisor and made the United States look disorganized and secretive by not keeping Stevenson abreast of the developments in the Cuban invasion.

After consulting nearly every available source, excluding Ambassador Stevenson, President Kennedy grudgingly made the decision to go ahead with the invasion, but reserved the right to cancel the invasion at any point. He also installed the stipulation that "in no circumstances whatsoever were United States forces to become involved in the landing."²⁹ This cancelled out the possibility of U.S. air cover for the invading forces, dooming the invasion in the eyes of many government officials. Kennedy did not realize what he had done to the effectiveness of the operation and was not informed of the problems this would cause for the invading troops. The invasion began on the seventeenth of April, with more than fourteen hundred Cuban refugees³⁰ landing at the Bay of Pigs. When the men left Guatemala, their training ground and base of operations, everything seemed favorable for the invasion; when they reached Cuba they found something significantly different. The individuals participating in the invasion were not told of the absence of American air support. As they arrived at this supposedly deserted stretch of beach, they found resort houses built along the waterfront. Instead of white sandy beaches, they found sharp reefs along the coastline, causing many of the ships to sink as they crashed into the reefs. By the time the invasion concluded on the nineteenth of April, over eleven hundred of the troops had been captured and over two hundred killed. Even though President Kennedy had compromised and allowed one hour of United States air support, it proved to be too little, too late.

Once it was apparent that the invasion was going to fail, Kennedy again turned to Eisenhower for advice, asking him to come to the Presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland for a meeting. At this meeting, Kennedy briefed his predecessor on what had happened and asked Eisenhower for his opinion. When Eisenhower asked Kennedy why he had refused air support, the President replied, "we thought that if it was learned that we were really doing this rather than these rebels themselves, the Soviets would be very apt to cause trouble in Berlin,"³¹ which Eisenhower thought was a preposterous notion. At the end of their meeting, Eisenhower warned the

President that "the American people will never approve direct military intervention, by their own forces, except under provocations against us so clear and so serious that everybody will understand the need for the move."³² This ominous warning would have a particular significance later in Kennedy's administration.

Even after consulting numerous sources, the ultimate decision on the Bay of Pigs belonged to one man: President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As Commander-in-Chief, it was only Kennedy who could have cancelled the operation. Looking back, one will never understand why he went through with the invasion. In fact, in the days after the invasion, Kennedy himself asked, "How could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?"³³ Even so, the decision had been his, and his alone. It was Kennedy who interpreted the information given to him by Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell and who missed the fact that this information was inaccurate. It was Kennedy who ignored the recommendations of trusted advisors William Fulbright and Dean Rusk and forgot to consult Ambassador Adlai Stevenson. It was Kennedy who refused to be burdened by paperwork and therefore missed out on the written objections presented by Chester Bowles. Many factors may have influenced Kennedy's decision. Not wanting to be seen reneging on a campaign promise just three months after his inauguration, Kennedy was quick to do something about Castro. He strongly desired to avoid domestic criticism on Communism and this type of invasion would show his strength in dealing with the red presence in the Western Hemisphere. In

addition, he wanted to prove his strength to leaders around the world who felt he had neither the age nor the experience to lead the most powerful nation in the world.

In a press conference following the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy outlined three lessons he learned from the failure of the invasion:

First, it is clear that the forces of communism are not to be underestimated, in Cuba or anywhere else in the world. . . . Second, it is clear that this Nation, in concert with all the free nations of this hemisphere, must take an ever closer and more realistic look at the menace of external Communist intervention and domination in Cuba. . . . Third, and finally, it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies or even nuclear armaments.³⁴

Even after the fact, Kennedy missed out on the inaccuracies in the information he was presented and the political purposes for these inaccuracies. The Bay of Pigs invasion was the single greatest blunder the Kennedy administration committed during their thousand days in office. However, it did not have the impact many expected it to; Dean Rusk surprisingly admitted, "I have always marveled that the Bay of Pigs fiasco did not inflict greater damage upon the Kennedy administration than it did. We survived that episode better than we had any right to expect."³⁵ The Bay of Pigs invasion was doomed from the outset, due to the inaccuracies in the reports presented to President Kennedy and JFK's strong desire to do something about Communism in the Western Hemisphere.

Notes

¹ Trumbull Higgins, *A Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987, 154.

² *Ibid.*, 58.

³ John F. Kennedy, *Third Presidential Debate* [database on-line] (Boston: John F. Kennedy Library, 1960, accessed 10 April 1999); available from <http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/60-3rd.htm>; Internet.

⁴ John F. Kennedy, *Fourth Presidential Debate* [database on-line] (Boston: John F. Kennedy Library, 1960, accessed 10 April 1999); available from <http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/60-4th.htm>; Internet.

⁵ Higgins, *Perfect Failure*, 67.

⁶ Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979, 68.

⁷ Peter Kornbluh, *The Bay of Pigs Declassified*, New York: The New Press, 1998, 278.

⁸ Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 80.

⁹ Kornbluh, *Declassified*, 283-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹¹ Edward Klein, *All Too Human: The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy*, New York: Pocket Books, 1996, 268.

¹² Malcolm E. Smith, *John F. Kennedy's 43 Greatest Mistakes in the White House*, Smithtown, NY: Suffolk House, 1980, 81.

¹³ Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, "Anatomy of a Failure: The Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs," *Political Science Quarterly* 99 (Fall 1984): 481.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 476.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 476.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 477.

¹⁷ Smith, 43 *Greatest Mistakes*, 82.

¹⁸ Vandenbroucke, "Anatomy," 483.

¹⁹ Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 122-3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

²² *Ibid.*, 121.

²³ Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990, 209.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁷ Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 152.

²⁸ Adali Stevenson, "The Bay of Pigs" in *The Annals of America*, Volume 18, 81.

²⁹ Smith, 43 *Greatest Mistakes*, 84.

³⁰ Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, 131.

³¹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990, 553.

³² *Ibid.*, 554.

³³ Vandenbroucke, "Anatomy," 491.

³⁴ John F. Kennedy, *Public Papers of the Presidents: January 20 to December 31, 1961*, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1962, 305-6.

³⁵ Rusk, *I Saw It*, 216.

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RULES OF WITTENBERG COLLEGE!

1. The College bell will ring every morning at 6 o'clock, at which time every student is expected to rise.
2. At 6 1/2 o'clock the bell will ring, when the students will assemble for worship.
3. At 7 o'clock, the breakfast bell will ring.
4. At quarter past 7, every student is expected to have his bed made and room swept.
5. At 9 o'clock, the bell will announce the commencement of study hours.
6. At 12 o'clock the dinner bell will ring.
7. At quarter past 5 the supper bell.
8. At 7 P.M., the bell will ring for evening worship.
9. The recreation hours will be from breakfast until half-past 8 A.M., from 12 until 2 P.M., and from 5 until 7 P.M., at all other hours each student will be expected to be in his own room, so that all visiting must be done in recreation hours and AT NO OTHER TIME.
10. Every student shall keep in his room a bucket to receive the waste water and all rubbish, which must be carried out of the house, so that nothing of the kind be thrown out of the windows. Every one violating this rule will subject himself to a fine of 25 cents for every offense.
11. Every student using tobacco, will be expected to keep a spittoon in his room, and no smoking will be permitted in any of the halls or passages, or around the building, and no chewing in any of the recitation rooms.
12. Every student, during the winter session, must have his stove placed upon a sheet of zinc, and must remove the ashes from it at least once a week, and carry them out of the house in the iron buckets provided for that purpose.
13. No student shall play at hand or foot ball or any game of amusement in the house.
14. No student shall play at billiards, cards, dice, or any other unlawful game, or at any game for a wager, or keep cards in his room.
15. No profane, obscene, or disrespectful language will be permitted. All violations of this rule, if detected, will meet with severe discipline.
16. No student shall play on any musical instrument, or sing, or make any other noise, during study hours, or in any other way interfere with the comfort of his room-mate, or other students in the building.
17. If any student shall be vexatious to his room-mate, or shall damage and deface the room assigned him, the faculty may deprive him of his room, or inflict such punishment as the circumstances of the case require.
18. No student occupying a room in college, shall board in his own room without express permission from the faculty.
19. It is enjoined upon the students to observe, as far as possible, the same order and neatness in their rooms, as are practiced in well regulated families, refraining from all acts which may injure or deface the building, or any portion thereof.
20. All damages done to any room will be charged to the students occupying it, and all damage done to the recitation rooms, or any other part of the building, will be charged to the person or persons who have done, or caused the damage to be done.
21. No student shall be permitted, by cutting, writing, or in any other way to deface the walls, cupola, or any other part of the building. The violation of this rule will be regarded as a high misdemeanor.
22. No student will be permitted to keep fire arms, fire crackers, or deadly weapons, about his room or person.
23. No student shall be permitted to room or board out of the building, without special permission from the faculty.
24. Every student will be required to be present at every recitation of his class, and no excuse will be regarded as valid, unless presented by such student in person, either before or at the time of recitation, or in case of sickness, by his room-mate.
25. All students are expected to be in bed at 10 o'clock P.M. at which time all lights in the building must be extinguished.

The following papers are Hartje Award finalists...

The Japanese Success and its Roots in the Meiji Restoration

*By John Bodin
Wittenberg Class of 2000
Hartje Award Finalist*

The country of Japan has achieved a level of economic and political success that is unparalleled throughout the non-western world. Along with Germany, it is the United States only real economic competitor. To many developing countries, Japan serves as a role model on how to succeed through western-style modernization yet at the same time be able to retain its own unique cultural heritage. The Japanese have shown that being European does not have to be a prerequisite for success in the modern world. Although the causes behind Japan's success is are too complex and varied to be examined by this paper, a major component of that success would undoubtedly be the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The Meiji Restoration made Japan the first and most successful self-modernized non-Western country.

Rutherford Alcock, a British diplomat writing in 1863 after spending three years in Japan, described Japan in terms of Europe's medieval ages. Feudalism, he said, was found in Japan "with sufficient identity and analogy in all its leading features to make the coincidence striking."¹ Indeed, members of the Japanese ruling class, the samurai, remained bound to each other by ties of vassalage and extracted from the landed peasantry a portion of their crop as feudal dues. This all radically changed, when in 1868 a group of samurai reformers seized control of the country from the unstable Tokugawa shogunate. They wanted their regime to be known as the "Meiji Restoration," which purportedly "restored" the imperial family to its proper role after years of de facto rule by shoguns.

The political and economic changes that were instituted in the 21 years between 1868 and the acceptance of the Meiji Constitution in

1889, were truly revolutionary in scope and magnitude. These changes needed to be of such a dramatic nature, considering the purpose for which the Meiji Restoration was undertaken. This purpose, was the importation of western institutions, finance, and technology necessary for the establishment of a strong industrialized economy capable of keeping foreigners at bay. This was achieved first through political centralization, which resulted in the abolition of feudal domains and the end of administrative localism. It was believed by the reformers that only through the establishment of an absolutist and centralized state could they avoid the social upheaval that such rapid modernization might bring. Probably the most significant reform was the establishment of a centrally commanded conscript army and the subsequent abolition of the samurai as a class.² With the end of the samurai's monopoly on warfare came the destruction of the samurai's basis for power which removed the threat of opposition from the old feudal order. The ultimate Meiji goals were reached when the Meiji leaders managed to begin the industrialization process by a series of government initiatives. Just as the present Japanese government, the Meiji leaders saw economic development in nationalist terms. Japan pursued a policy of state capitalism, by which the government served as the principal manager and financier of modern industry. The government took on a number of plant operations, buying whole factories overseas, assembling them in Japan, and bringing in foreign technicians and workers to get them started.³

As an island nation, Japan's fundamental predicament is that it is vulnerable to foreigners who might overtly or subtly force their ways on

Japan. In this predicament Japan had two choices. Either to wall itself off from the outside world as it did during the isolationist period of the Tokugawa era, or to attempt to control the surrounding environment so it will not be able to spring any surprises on the Japanese. Thus, Meiji Japan underwent a radical transformation not only from handicrafts to modern industry but also from reclusive feudalism to expansionism. This new expansionism is seen through Japan's opening of Korea through the Treaty of Kangha, the Sino-Japanese war and the Russo-Japanese war. The victory over Russia was especially significant since it was the first time an Asian country

triumphed over a major European power. Japan had established itself as a peer of the other Western powers.

Japan stands today as the world's only non-white first world country. It has done this, not just through vigorous western adaptation, but also by the use of its unique cultural strengths such as its enormous drive and emphasis on community. As any visitor to Japan can easily testify, it has remained true to its own cultural identity. It has shown us that in this highly polarized world of poverty and power, there is alternatives to the white, western model of success.

Notes

¹ Paul Akamatsu, *Meiji 1868* (London: Ruskin House, 1972) 142.

² W.G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) 61.

³ Beasley, 66.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact: The Better of Two Deals

by Andrea Brunsvold
Wittenberg Class of 2000
Hartje Award Finalist

On 11 August 1939 an Anglo-French delegation arrived in Moscow to discuss a possible tripartite agreement. It was hoped an agreement with the Soviet's would deter Nazi Germany from invading Poland. Twelve days later, however, on 23 August, a Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact was signed between Joachim von Ribbentrop, Germany's Foreign Minister, and Jozef Stalin's regime. The Soviet Union had guaranteed Germany she would not get involved if Poland was invaded. The parties then dispersed and returned home to prepare for war.

A tempting question to ask is, quite simply, *why?* Why did the Soviet Union agree to Ribbentrop's offer of noninvolvement when her support could conceivably have stopped Hitler in the early stages of World War II—if not prevented him from invading Poland? A clue to the answer is evident in a question Marshal Voroshilov, the Soviet Commissar of Defense, asked the Anglo-French delegation on 14 August 1939: "Do the French and British General Staffs think that the Soviet land forces will be admitted to Polish territory in order to make direct contact with the enemy in case Poland is attacked?"¹ The delegation had no adequate reply. Poland, when consulted, informed the beseeching French that Soviet troops were absolutely not allowed on Polish territory. They resisted French pressure, according to P. H. M. Bell by "explaining simply that if the Red Army entered Polish territory it would stay there."² Despite their fears, the British and French respected Poland's autonomous decision, and assured them they would fight Germany without Soviet assistance. Meanwhile, the delegation had nothing to offer the Soviets that would make their participation worthwhile—

not even the assurance of Polish complicity.³

Legitimately, the Soviets were reluctant to accept a deal requiring them to enter Polish territory if Germany invaded. The Red Army would have to face Polish hostility while trying to defend them from the Germans. D.C. Watt asks a crucial question: "How could the Soviet Union, lacking a common frontier with Germany, make any serious plans for action without knowing whether they were allowed to operate in Poland[.]"⁴ Another deterrent was simple geography. Britain and France were able to sustain a war from behind defenses, using blockade and air warfare. The Soviets, however, would not be in a position to utilize a navy, nor had Soviet airmen any experience with carrying war to the enemy's industrial strongholds. The Red Army would need to enter Polish territory—where they were not welcome—and engage in the bulk of the fighting with no reimbursement for their efforts.⁵ One can hardly blame Marshal Voroshilov and Stalin for their half-hearted, dawdling interest in the delegation's offer.

The arrival of Joachim von Ribbentrop, however, re-ignited Soviet interest in the affairs of Western Europe. Bell points out that "[i]nstead of risk a war, [Germany] could offer certain neutrality. In terms of territory and spheres of influence, they came bearing gifts, ready to carve up Poland and to yield at once when Stalin asked for the whole of Latvia."⁶ The Anglo-French delegation was severely restricted in what they could offer the Soviets, as they respected Poland's autonomy in her decision not to admit Soviet troops if Germany attacked. Ribbentrop, however, had no qualms about dismissing Poland's apprehension. Hitler was intent on destroying her, and the Soviet's were welcome to help. In fact, as far as

Germany was concerned, the Soviets could share in the spoils when Poland was conquered.⁷ James L. Stokesbury also suggests that "[Stalin] could make a deal with Hitler, they could divide Poland between them, Hitler would (probably) turn west, and Germany, France, and Britain would fight it out, after which Stalin would move in and pick up the pieces."⁸

It is difficult to blame Stalin for accepting Ribbentrop's offer. He offered what the Anglo-French delegation could not: Poland and non-involvement. The answer to the question, "Why

did the Soviets accept Ribbentrop's offer of Poland and noninvolvement?" is simply: "It was better." The Anglo-French delegation could not even guarantee Poland's cooperation with the Red Army. If Stalin had any hopes of remaining in Poland after assisting her, they were not sufficient enough to form an alliance with France and Britain. The drawbacks far outweighed any beneficial outcome for the Soviets.

Consequently, Ribbentrop's offer appeared the better of the two, and the Soviet's seized the fact while Ribbentrop seized the day.

Notes

¹ Anthony P. Adamthwaite, *The Making of the Second World War* (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), 218.

² P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, 2nd ed. *Origins of Modern Wars* (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 292.

³ Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 463.

⁴ Watt, 456.

⁵ Watt, 451-2.

⁶ Bell, 296.

⁷ Watt, 457.

⁸ James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 65.

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Surviving the Torrent: Victor Heiser and the Great Flood of Johnstown, Pennsylvania

*by Sarah Lanzel
Wittenberg Class of 2000
Hartje Award Winner*

Thunder echoed through the valley. The people heard the rumble of the waters without seeing the thirty-six foot high wave as it descended upon their city.¹ It was May thirty-first 1889, and the South Fork Dam, a notoriously unstable earthen structure, had burst unleashing millions of gallons of water upon the population of the valley below. The water-logged population of Johnstown had already been enduring yet another annual flood fourteen miles down the valley, and citizens worked to save merchandise and possessions from the ever-rising water of the storm.

On Washington street, George Heiser contemplated the safety of his beloved carriage horses tied in their stalls in the stable. In the end, he sent his son Victor out to untie the horses and lead them to dry ground.² This errand surreptitiously saved his life.

As he untied his father's fine horses, he too heard the coming of the waters of the South Fork Reservoir as the wall of water and debris encroached upon his home.³ Victor emerged from the stable and saw his father motioning for him to climb onto the stable roof, which he did hastily. Later on in life he remembered watching the flood waters advance upon his home. He recalled that ". . . It was not recognizable as water; it was a dark mass in which seethed houses, freight cars, trees, and animals. As this wall struck Washington Street broadside, my boyhood home was crushed like an eggshell before my eyes, and I saw it disappear."⁴ He never saw his parents alive again.

A few moments after the floodwaters crushed his home they struck the barn upon which he was perched. The structure was ripped from its foundations and rolled over and over like a barrel. Victor desperately scrambled along

the sections above water and somehow managed to stay on top. As the stable was thrown into the neighbor's house, he leapt into the air and miraculously landed on the roof.

Unfortunately for Victor, the walls of the house collapsed under the pressure and he was dropped onto yet another home. This time he dangled precariously from the eaves, but couldn't hold on any longer and fell into empty space. Victor had landed on the barn roof upon which he had originally sought shelter. The screams of injured and dying people as well as the splintering of building surrounded him and blended with the roar of the rushing waters. Nearly everyone who was swept away by the flood had some piece of clothing torn away from their body, and some were left completely naked. From the barn roof, Victor observed people passing by him clinging to life on various objects.⁵ He recognized some of the people drifting by. Victor recalled that "I saw the Italian fruit dealer Mussante, with his wife and two children, racing along on what seemed to be their old barn floor'. Suddenly the whole mass of wreckage heaved up and crushed them out of existence."⁶

Victor continued to ride the crest of the wave clinging to the roof of the barn for dear life. He noticed that he was being propelled toward a jam of houses and debris that had collected between a two-story building and a stone church. Once again, he was tossed from the barn roof. He had to jump over the girders and trees the force of the water pitched at him, and after each jump miraculously landed on the barn roof. Finally, it seemed as if he was going to die; a freight car descended toward him. Just before he was crushed by it, the brick building gave way and released the pent-up water

pressure. Victor's barn roof, upon which he had once again landed, shot out from underneath the freight car and continued along the relatively peaceful crest of the water.⁷

Like many other victims, Victor drifted helplessly along the top of the flood waters, and waited to see where he would be deposited. He gazed around at the others struggling to stay afloat, and recognized more people whom he could not help. An African-American man prayed on the detached roof of his employer's house as he floated past Heiser. Victor noticed the flood was sweeping him toward the stone bridge where debris was accumulating. In fact, the debris was thrown against the bridge with such force that it shortly became a funeral pyre that incinerated people and animals, alive and dead. It continued to burn long after the floodwaters had receded. Fortunately, Heiser was swept toward the hills in the backwash, and eventually jumped onto the roof of a building when the momentum of the water slowed.⁸

The debris at the stone bridge lit up the sky, and the screams of the dying echoed through the night air. By dawn it had stopped raining, and the survivors of the Johnstown flood emerged to survey the wreckage of their city. Victor, like the others, set out to find his parents and friends. The following days and nights were spent recovering survivors and corpses as well as reclaiming the leveled city. One out of every ten people in the city of Johnstown, over 2,200 people, died in the flood.

Many of the survivors stayed to rebuild. Others, like Victor Heiser, had lost everything and everyone near and dear to them. These men and women gradually, if not immediately, moved on and created new lives for themselves elsewhere. Heiser himself eventually became a doctor. Mercifully, the dam itself was never rebuilt, and the site it occupied became a historical landmark. Today, drivers on route 219 can observe pristine white tombstones stretching as far as the eye can see against the kelly green grass of Grandview Cemetery, memorializing the victims of an unparalleled tragedy in Pennsylvania's history.

Notes

1 David G. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 145,147.

2 Richard O'Connor, *Johnstown: The Day the Dam Broke* (London: Alvin Redman Ltd., 1959), 99.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Victor Heiser, M.D., *An American Doctor's Odyssey: Adventures in Forty-Five Countries* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. Publishers, 1936), 4.

5 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

6 *Ibid.*, 5.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, 5-6.

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- **NOTE: The eyewitness account and newspaper articles were
sent to me from the Cambria County Historical Society in
Ebensburg, Pennsylvania. Some of these sources did not have all
of the bibliographic information, and one article did not have
enough information available to use for citation.

CONTRIBUTORS

John Bodin is a two-year captain on the Wittenberg men's lacrosse team and is vice president of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee. Next year, he plans to continue his education at University of Toledo Law School.

Andrea Brunsvold is a senior English and History double major at Wittenberg, and a member of Phi Alpha Theta, Gamma Zeta Chapter. She hails from Torrington, Wyoming. After graduation she will move to St. Louis and work towards her master's degree in exegetical theology. She loves cats, owns a snake and hasn't pulled her hair out – yet.

Josh Guerrieri is a junior at Wittenberg University and is a history and economics double major. He is involved in the Phi Alpha Theta History Honorary, the economics honorary Tau Pi Phi, and works as a tutor in the Math Workshop. Josh is also a member of the Wittenberg University track and field team and was the North Coast Athletic Conference champion in the decathlon last year. A native of Avon, Ohio, Josh is considering attending law school after graduation.

Sarah Lanzel is a senior History major who transferred to Wittenberg as a junior. This year she is a co-editor of the History Journal and active in both History Club and Phi Alpha Theta. She was inspired to write *Surviving the Torrent: Victor Heiser and the Great Flood of Johnstown Pennsylvania* as a result of her experiences working at a summer camp in Stoystown, Pennsylvania. She drove past the cemetery in which the victims were buried on her trips into Johnstown with co-workers on weekends and was told about the disaster. Her nomination for the Hartje award was a good excuse to research the history of the event. Sarah also won both the Hartje and Ermarth History Awards in 2000.

Melinda Scott is a junior at Wittenberg University, double majoring in elementary education and history. She is active in the Phi Alpha Theta History Honorary, the Wittenberg Education Department Honorary, the History Journal, and the Student Democrats. She is employed in the Office of Sports Information and is a member of the statistical crew for football and men's and women's basketball. Melinda is originally from London, Ohio and plans to teach at the elementary level following graduation in May of 2001.