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Letter from

Dear readers,

It is my honor to welcome you to the fifth issue of the *AUM Historical Review*, which was a huge labor of love on the part of many talented students here at AUM. I am humbled to be able to present the following articles that showcase many of the best history papers that AUM has to offer. These articles give you just a taste of the talent each author has; each article has been finely crafted to enlighten and entertain you, our readers.

In this issue, we have two articles on Africa – one on the end of apartheid in South Africa and the other on the controversial female circumcision that occurs throughout the continent. Another article focuses on the architecture of the cathedral dome in Florence, Italy. We are including two articles on Alabama history – one on Nathan Bedford Forrest, a controversial Confederate general, and the other on the fiftieth anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery march. We end this issue with an interview with Dr. Michael Fitzsimmons, a longtime member of the AUM History Department who will be retiring at the end of the 2015-16 academic year.

Each one of these articles comes from AUM students who submitted their best work to our editorial board. It is a privilege being able to select the best of the best to be featured in the upcoming issue. As such, I would like to make our annual “Call for Papers.” The editorial board needs many submissions to choose from, and we hope that many of our readers will produce the best work they possibly can so that they might be published next year! When you see the flyers around campus, and you have some work that you are extremely proud of, please submit it to historicalreview@aum.edu. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

I would like to thank everyone who had a part in the making of this issue. I am indebted to Anthony Cognasi, Madison Clark, Beth Wesley, Andrew Lather, Erik Hooie, and Roland McDonald for their written work. Thanks also go to Professor Breuna Baine and her students Candace Hilton and Brittany

the Editor

Roberson for designing the current issue and to Tanya Burton for providing us with a map. We are grateful to Dean Michael Burger of the College of Arts and Sciences and to Dr. Tim Henderson and Karen Keller in the History Department for continuing to support us. I would also like to give a huge thank you to Dr. Gish for sponsoring the *Historical Review* and for always being there to motivate and to lend a helping hand.

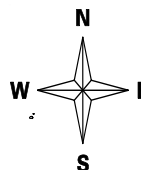
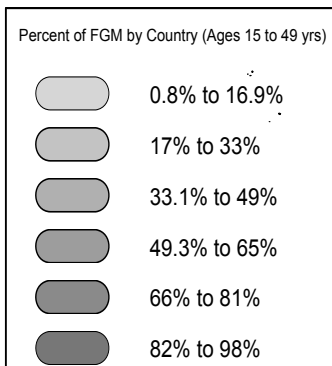
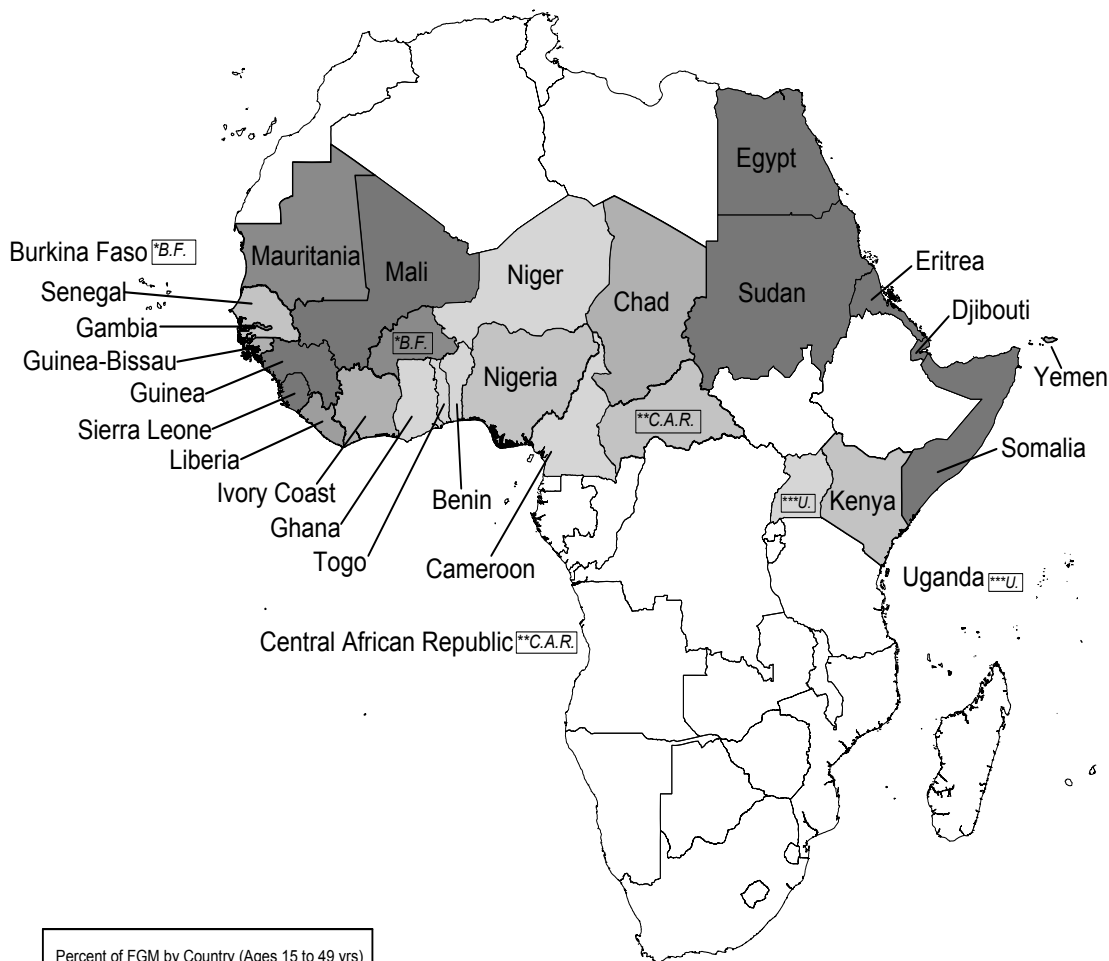
We also appreciate the support we received from our outside sponsors – the Lattice Inn, the Hank Williams Museum, the Capri Theatre, the F. Scott & Zelda Fitzgerald Museum, AUM’s Warhawk Shop, and our anonymous donor. Thank you for believing in the *Historical Review* and for giving us some monetary support so that we may keep putting out high quality work for years to come.

Also, a big thanks to my fellow editors Madison Clark, Kelhi DePace, Katie Kidd, Roland McDonald, Tyler Rice, LaKendrick Richardson, and Catherine Walden. All of your hard work and dedication to the *Review* shines through in this issue, and I cannot thank all of you enough.

And last, but certainly not least, thank you to our readers. I hope you all enjoy this fifth edition of the *AUM Historical Review*.

Will Segrest, Editor

The Cut That Genital Mutilation



African countries reporting instances of female genital mutilation between the ages of 15 and 49, based on data from the World Health Organization. (Tanya Burton)

Never Heals: Female in Africa and the Movement to End It

by **Anthony Cognasi**

In Africa, millions of young girls are subjected to a practice known as female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision. Many of these girls are forced to undergo this procedure without being informed of the risks or consequences associated with the procedure. Since the 1970s, many African countries have begun to outlaw female genital mutilation. However, these laws are loosely enforced. International organizations have condemned the practice as a human rights violation and this has pressured African countries to adopt stricter policies to eliminate female genital mutilation. Female genital mutilation is a serious violation of human rights. It endangers the reproductive health of women and limits their personal autonomy. International and domestic governments need to pass more legislation restricting the practice and launch campaigns and programs spreading information about its risks. The best way to end the practice of FGM is a grassroots campaign aimed at empowering women and removing the stigma of not being circumcised.

Female genital mutilation is a centuries old practice deeply rooted in the traditions of African people. Evidence suggests that female genital mutilation was practiced in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Oceania in the prehistoric period. However, today it is predominately practiced in central Africa, with twenty-eight African countries practicing female genital mutilation.¹ Female genital mutilation transcends borders, tribes, and religion. It is found in both predominately Islamic and Christian countries. Although it is not linked to any religion, female genital mutilation is defended by Muslims as being integral to their faith. The practice is heavily rooted in the culture and traditions of the villages and countryside of Africa. Governments trying to outlaw female genital

Anthony Cognasi is a senior majoring in history. His paper, which he wrote for Dr. Gish's Contemporary Africa course, won the Dr. Richard Evans Morse Memorial History Prize in 2015.



A Somali girl awaiting medical treatment in Mogadishu. (Stuart Price, African Union Mission in Somalia)

mutilation often find it difficult to enforce these policies. Girls are cut anywhere from shortly after birth to fifteen years old and often they are forced to undergo the procedure by older relatives.

Female genital mutilation is especially prevalent in northeastern Africa. More than 125 million girls have undergone some form of female genital mutilation and today another three million girls are at risk.² A twitter post by religious scholar Reza Aslan shows how female genital mutilation is common in both Christian and Islamic nations. Of women in Ethiopia, a predominately Christian country, seventy-four percent had undergone some form of female genital mutilation. While in Sudan, a predominately Muslim nation, eighty-eight percent of women experienced some form of female genital mutilation.³ The practice has been in decline since the first laws were created to combat it. The laws were mostly successful in urban areas where women have better opportunities for education, employment, and independence. Female genital mutilation is most commonly found in the rural countryside where local customs carry more authority than national laws. Moreover, local chiefs and elders exercise greater power in rural areas than politicians do in urban areas. As a result, the practice still affects a majority of women in twelve African countries and significant portions of women in sixteen others.⁴

Many Africans do not question these customs due to a lack of knowledge about the dangers of female genital mutilation and a lack of opportunities for women to get an education and become independent. As a consequence, many Africans see female genital mutilation as beneficial to the women that undergo it. Many Africans who practice female genital mutilation do so because they believe that the removal of the clitoris dampens a woman's sexual urges, making her more docile and obedient. A mother in Ethiopia claimed, "I had my daughter circumcised so she wouldn't break the dishes."⁵ This reflects the common sentiment that many African mothers feel. These individuals believe that female genital mutilation is necessary to have their daughter behave well and follow the laws and customs of their tribes. They maintain that girls who are not circumcised will be sexually active, rebellious, and troublesome. It is this belief that creates a stigma for girls who are not cut.

However, this stigma has various consequences for women. For many African cultures, girls are not considered women, or fully matured, until they have been cut. In certain communities, a child is sexless until they have been cut. Among the Kono people of Sierra Leone, circumcision, both male and

female, is seen as the removal of masculine or female parts of the genitals. It formally separates children into the male or female sex.⁶ Those that are not circumcised are deemed ineligible for marriage or, at the very least, females will have difficulty finding a husband. Furthermore, women who are not cut are considered dangerous rebels and they will be excluded from their community. If they are Islamic, they may face excommunication from the mosque as well. Maryan Hirsi Ibrahim, a Somali woman who is charged with carrying out the cutting ceremony in her community, explains it best: “a young girl herself will want to be cut. If a girl is not cut, it will be harder for her to live in the community. She will be stigmatized.”⁷ Female genital mutilation is so deeply engrained in some African communities that girls will willingly go through the process just to be accepted into the community. It is the only path, as they see it, to a husband, a family, and a stable life. This is the biggest obstacle to the elimination of female genital mutilation.

In its most basic form, female genital mutilation is the removal or partial removal of the clitoris, labia, and/or any other harm done to female genitals for non-medical purposes. The World Health Organization has four categories of female genital mutilation which are further divided based on the extent of the damage. Type Ia is the rarest form of female genital mutilation and involves just the removal of the clitoral hood. Type Ib is the complete or partial removal of the clitoral hood and clitoris. Type IIa is the complete or partial removal of the inner labia. Type IIb is the removal of the clitoris and the inner labia. Type IIc is the removal of the inner labia, outer labia, and clitoris. Type IIIa is the removal of the clitoris and sewing together of the outer labia. Type IIIb is the removal of the clitoris and the sewing together of the inner labia.⁸ A hole is left so that the girl may still urinate with difficulty and pain. The woman’s legs are then bound together so the wounds may heal. Tissue around the vagina is heavily scarred. Type III is the most common form of female genital mutilation being practiced. Type IV is any other form of damage done to the vagina for non-medical purposes. This includes ritual scarring, burning, or the stretching of the labia.⁹

Female genital mutilation has no known health benefits and many adverse health effects. The procedure itself is very painful and unsanitary. The same knife may be used to cut several dozens of girls without ever being washed, which contributes to the spread of diseases as well as infections. The girls are not given any form of anesthesia to dull the pain. In the days after the procedure, in which their legs are bound together, the girls are isolated from

the outside world. They will spend weeks being unable to move and racked with agony. Due to the unsanitary conditions of the operation, many girls are infected with HIV and AIDS. However, the greatest harm to the women comes in the increased chance of dying during childbirth later in life. In a major study conducted from 2001 to 2003 which looked at 28,000 women in six countries, researchers found that female genital mutilation can drastically increase the likelihood of dying during childbirth. Milder forms of female genital mutilation can increase the chances of death by twenty percent while the severe forms can increase it by fifty percent.¹⁰ Female genital mutilation severely hurts the health of women both in the short and long term. Its elimination would be a milestone in women's health.

The movement to end female genital mutilation has been a slow and gradual process. The first African movement to end the practice began when the Egyptian Doctors' Society called for a ban in the 1920s. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, European missionaries in Africa protested the practice. In the 1940s and 50s, British colonies banned the practice of female genital mutilation but it was loosely enforced. Small movements sprang up in other countries to ban the practice but met with no results. Beginning in the 1970s, the international community began to take notice of female genital mutilation and put pressure on African countries to ban the practice. American and British feminists began to research and publish books and articles on female genital mutilation which increased the awareness of the practice within Western society. In 1979, the United Nations held a conference on female genital mutilation and the UN general assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. The convention defines discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."¹¹ The convention was adopted by 188 states, including every African nation except Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan. The convention declared that female genital mutilation is a violation of human rights and since then, all African nations have passed laws to ban female genital mutilation.

However, the majority of these laws were poorly enforced until recently. For example, Guinea banned female genital mutilation in 1965 with the person, or persons, responsible for carrying out the procedure to be punished with life

in prison, but no case has ever been brought to court.¹² Even with the laws on the books, most officials are reluctant to enforce them. Laws are purposely watered down and filled with loopholes so that the practice may continue unabated. For example, in 1996 Egypt passed a law that banned female genital mutilation but allowed exceptions in the case of emergencies. Critics say that these loopholes are so broad that the law is rendered meaningless.¹³ Female genital mutilation continues because some officials embrace the practice but some are also afraid of public backlash. As John Chelangut, the vice chancellor of the Bokwu district of Uganda, explains, “This is a very sensitive period and no politician will talk about abolishing female genital mutilation because we shall lose votes.”¹⁴ Politicians are afraid that any attempts to enforce the laws will result in their being voted out of office. Popular opinion in rural Africa is still very much for the continuation of female genital mutilation and rural dwellers will take steps to protect this custom. Laws passed by the national governments are generally ignored by the chiefs and elders of the villages. These elders are the foundation of the law in rural Africa, based on customs hundreds of years old.

Despite all the health risks associated with female genital mutilation, there is still debate over whether the practice is ethical or not. On one side, there are those who say that the practice is a part of African culture and should be respected. The defenders of female genital mutilation claim that any attempt to eradicate or restrict the practice is a form of cultural colonialism on the part of Europeans and Americans. In their eyes, female genital mutilation is no different from male circumcision, a practice common in the western world. Sylvia Tamale, a law professor in Uganda, claims that western opposition to female genital mutilation stems from the western, Christian belief that African sexual practices are immoral and wrong and therefore needed to be corrected.¹⁵ Tamale does have a valid criticism. Traditional African sexual practices, such as polygamy, have always been looked upon with disdain by westerners. However, other traditional African practices do not carry such a high risk of death and other negative consequences. To ignore all these using cultural relativism is to ignore the suffering of over a hundred million girls in Africa alone. Female genital mutilation limits the freedom of women and damages their health which is why it must be eliminated.

Another claim made by proponents of female genital mutilation is that no direct link can be established between female genital mutilation and HIV/AIDS transmission. Many Africans, as well as some medical researchers, believe

that the link between female genital mutilation and HIV/AIDS is the result of an anti-FGM bias among the researchers. This bias allegedly taints the research methods which generate results that confirm the researcher's bias. Abimbola Olaniran's article in the *African Journal of Reproductive Health* concludes that "very few objective researchers have been able to affirm the claim of positive association between [female genital mutilation and HIV/AIDS transmission]."¹⁶ The proponents of female genital mutilation believe that there are other reasons for the presence of HIV/AIDS in virgins who have undergone the practice, such as lying about premarital sexual conduct. More non-biased studies are needed



Road sign in Uganda.
(Amnon Shavit)

to show whether there is a link between female genital mutilation and HIV/AIDS transmission. However, even if there is not a link, female genital mutilation still has a number of adverse health effects that constitute a serious health threat to women.

Another criticism of the movement to end female genital mutilation is the claim that female genital mutilation is an empowering act for women and helps integrate women into the larger community. The leading proponent of this is Fuambai Sia Ahmadu, an anthropologist from Sierra Leone who underwent

female genital mutilation as a child. In her article, “Empowering Girls in Sierra Leone,” she describes how women “fondly recall these celebrations” following the cutting, how women who had undergone the cutting were given an honored status in their communities, and how the ability for women to undergo female genital mutilation “is associated with women’s ability to withstand and survive childbirth, among other positive attributes.”¹⁷ Ahmadu makes a strong statement about how female genital mutilation is perceived in Africa. Women who survive the cutting have celebrations thrown in their honor, are given respect by members of the community, and are seen as desirable brides. None of these things is a result of the procedure but of the way that the community views female genital mutilation. The main task of the anti-FGM movement is eliminating these “positive attributes” that the community associates with FGM.

Opponents of female genital mutilation call it a human rights violation. Female genital mutilation violates twenty international conventions and treaties outlying the rights of human beings, as well as five regional treaties (covering

Female genital mutilation is regarded as an attempt to limit the sexuality of women. The practice is designed to remove any joy for the women from sex and in many cases to make sex either highly uncomfortable or impossible.

the United States, Europe, and Africa) outlawing the practice.¹⁸ Legislators, health experts, and woman’s rights activists around the world have decried the practice and have called for its elimination. Female genital mutilation is regarded as an attempt to limit the sexuality of women. The practice is designed to remove any joy for the women from sex and in many cases to make sex either highly uncomfortable or impossible. In addition, health officials have made calls to end the practice due to the spread of disease and increased chance of unnatural death and death during childbirth which is associated with the procedure. Adrienne Germain, president of the International Health Coalition, says, “Female genital mutilation is a health issue, a killer of women and children.”¹⁹ Finally, female genital mutilation violates the rights of children as such a permanent, life threatening procedure is not in the “best interests” of the child.²⁰ Young girls, usually below the age of five, are physically forced to undergo female genital mutilation. Even when girls willingly undergo cutting, it

is the result of societal pressures. Therefore in all circumstances, children are being forced against their will to undergo female genital mutilation.

Female genital mutilation is linked to the repression of the rights of women. A study by the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* found a close relationship between female genital mutilation and women's autonomy in Eritrea. The study concluded that women who had undergone female genital mutilation were more likely to have their daughters be cut, to support domestic abuse, to be kept out of the work force, and to have little to no say in the decisions that affect them.²¹ Furthermore, the study also found that female genital mutilation crosses regional, ethnic, and religious divisions. The scarring and mutilation of the female genitals is symbolic of taking away a woman's sexual desire, which practitioners of FGM see as the cause for reckless and rebellious behavior. These individuals cut women so they will be obedient and subservient to their husbands. By stopping female genital mutilation, women are not only being set free from a lifetime of pain but a lifetime of servitude and inferiority. The end of female genital mutilation will be a large step forward in securing and expanding the rights of African women.


In recent years, there have been more and more steps taken to end the practice of female genital mutilation. In the late 1990s, the World Health Organization identified female genital mutilation as a major health concern affecting women. In the 1990s and early 2000s, a majority of African nations passed laws limiting or banning the practice. However, as previously mentioned, many of these laws were purposely watered down and loosely enforced. In the past five years, many African governments have outlawed the practice and have begun to strictly enforce the ban. Some countries like Somalia have banned the practice and those caught and convicted of female genital mutilation can be fined. In 2012, a traditional cutter and six mothers were tried, convicted and fined for practicing female genital mutilation.²² In 2008, Egypt formally outlawed the practice and created punishments for doctors or persons that are caught performing female genital mutilation. The punishment could include a two year jail sentence and/or hefty fines. In 2014, the first ever female genital mutilation trial was held in Egypt after a thirteen year old girl died from the procedure. However, the doctor who performed the procedure, Dr. Raslan Fadl, and the girl's father were acquitted after a lengthy trial. Dr. Fadl was still ordered to pay the equivalent of £450 to the girl's mother. Atef Aboelenein, a lawyer for the Women's Centre for Guidance and Legal Awareness, commented, "Of course there will be no stopping any doctor after this. Any doctor can do any FGM he

wants now.”²³ There is reason for dismay, but there is also reason for hope. It will be a slow and gradual process to stamp out female genital mutilation in nations where it is deeply ingrained into their religious and cultural mindsets. Although this case fell short of its intended goal, it was the first step into bringing female genital mutilation into the courts. This will serve as a warning to doctors, who will be more hesitant to perform the procedure in the future.


However, the best, and possibly only, way to end female genital mutilation is through grassroots community-based programs. Female genital mutilation has largely been eliminated in the urban areas of Africa, where governments have the most authority. However, as noted before, the practice is still prevalent in rural Africa, where politicians have little influence. It is in rural Africa where the education and employment opportunities for women are lacking. In order to ensure that they have a stable future, women must marry young. Many men do not want a wife who is not circumcised because of their deeply held beliefs that uncircumcised women will not make good wives. Therefore, to eliminate female genital mutilation in the rural communities, the predominant cultural attitude that female genital mutilation is beneficial and desirable must change. Media plays a huge role in ending the practice. Trials of those implicated in female genital mutilation receive large amounts of airtime on the news networks. Advertisements detailing the harmful effects of female genital mutilation are played on television and radio. Furthermore, lobbying groups have been formed to influence local legislators and campaigns have been financed by international groups to spread the knowledge of legislation banning the practice to the rural communities. However, the most important aspect is sending people out into the community to form personal relationships with rural Africans and spreading information through inter-personal dialogues. One of the most important guidelines stressed by UNICEF in its statement on ending female genital mutilation released in 2013 is, “Although legislation that explicitly addresses FGM/C is necessary, it is by no means sufficient. Concerted efforts of various stakeholders that include awareness raising, education, dialogue with communities and public statements are also essential in abandoning the practice.”²⁴

In addition to many African nations taking action to end female genital mutilation, many western countries are taking steps to help those fleeing female genital mutilation. Because of increased immigration, female genital mutilation has spread to the United States, Australia, and other western nations in Europe. These countries began banning and criminalizing female genital mutilation in

the 1980s. Recently, western countries have begun to grant asylum to girls fleeing the practice. One such example is the case of Fauziya Kassindja. Kassindja was a young girl living in Togo, a small West African nation. Although her father was a strict Muslim, he sent her and her sisters to school and exempted them from the practice of female genital mutilation. However, when



He arranged to have her marry a man twice her age who already had many wives. A prerequisite of this marriage was that she was to be cut.



she was seventeen, her father died from a massive heart attack. As a result of tribal law, control of her was given to her uncle, an Islamic fundamentalist. He arranged to have her marry a man twice her age who already had many wives. A prerequisite of this marriage was that she was to be cut. However, with the help of her mother, sisters, and complete strangers, she was smuggled out of Togo to Germany and then to the United States. Expecting to be protected in America, Kassindja was instead imprisoned for eighteen months. With the help of a law student, Kassindja was finally granted asylum on June 13, 1996 in a landmark case which opened up asylum for women escaping gender based persecution, such as female genital mutilation.²⁵

Kassindja's story illustrates several problems facing women trying to escape female genital mutilation. The first is the trappings of tribal law and custom. Although Kassindja's mother and sisters did not want her to be married and cut, they had no control over her because women are under the complete authority of the male head of household. In order for female genital mutilation to be stopped, women in these oppressive patriarchal societies must be liberated. Second, it illustrates the perceptions Americans have of refugees. Immigration is a sensitive issue in the United States and in Europe. Citizens fear that by allowing refugees to enter the United States, they will be flooded by foreigners. Kassindja's legal counsel, Layli Miller Bashir, found that of the one million people who immigrate to the United States a year, one-tenth are refugees and one-third of these are women.²⁶ Therefore, giving asylum to women fleeing female genital mutilation would not open a floodgate of immigrants. Furthermore, Kassindja's experience highlights the treatment that many refugees receive when they arrive in the United States. Kassindja was thrown into jail with

violent prisoners, put into solitary confinement, and not given proper medical care. The United States is known as a refuge for the persecuted and outcast. It is a shame that those who hold America in such a high regard and come to the United States out of desperation should be treated in such a despicable manner. The treatment of refugees should reflect the regard in which these people hold the United States.

The United States is not the only country aiding those fleeing female genital mutilation. In the early 2000s, many European nations began offering asylum to women fleeing gender based persecution. In 2006, the United Kingdom's House of Lords upheld a decision to grant asylum to a Sierra Leonean woman who was escaping female genital mutilation. A court of appeals, stating that FGM is "traditional and a part of the cultural life" in Sierra Leone, had reversed an earlier decision to let the young woman stay. However, the House of Lords determined that gender based persecution falls under UN refugee laws which require its members to shelter people fleeing persecution. Lady Richmond, one of the judges that reviewed the case, declared that women are "just as worthy of the full protection of the refugee convention as are the men who flee persecution because of their dissident political views."²⁷ Since that court decision in 2006, many more European nations have begun to grant asylum to women fleeing female genital mutilation. However, this practice faces opposition from the growing anti-immigration movement in Europe, which especially targets immigrants from Africa and the Middle East.

It is only by changing the attitudes of Africans that we can eliminate female genital mutilation. Although pressure from the international community has forced African governments to ban and criminalize the practice, statistics show that this is only the first step in freeing women from female genital mutilation. By empowering women to become independent, African women can live a life free from pain and discomfort. Statistics show that female genital mutilation is decreasing in every nation as women in Africa gain education and employment opportunities. With increasing urbanization, African governments will be better able to enforce the ban. As female genital mutilation decreases, so does the stigma associated with those who have not undergone the procedure. Many women are gaining respect and prestige in their communities even though they have not been cut. New laws and punishments are frightening doctors into abandoning the practice. Although the practice is still common, it seems as though opposition to female genital mutilation is growing inside Africa and, within a couple of generations, it will become a thing of the past.

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Selma,



President Obama giving a speech as a part of the 50th anniversary commemoration of Bloody Sunday, taken March 7, 2015. (Pete Souza, White House)

1965-2015

by Madison Clark

Standing on a crowded street, the masses of people numbered into the thousands as the burning noonday sun blazed on Selma, Alabama. Vendors decorated Broad Street, selling everything from hot dogs to souvenirs as festive reggae and soulful jazz melodies filled the air. This was no ordinary Saturday in March; this day marked the fiftieth anniversary of what infamously became known as Bloody Sunday.

On March 7, 1965, six hundred protesters gathered at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in an attempt to march from Selma to Alabama's capitol in Montgomery. Spurred by the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson—a small town preacher who was murdered by a police officer—citizens in the community decided to publicly voice their concern over the continued injustice African Americans faced. Yet, by order of Governor George Wallace, the police were to stop the protesters by any means necessary. Thus, with cameras rolling and pictures being captured, those in the position to serve and protect used clubs, tear gas, and horses to brutally attack the non-violent demonstrators. This day would serve as a catalyst in getting the rest of the nation involved with providing equality for Alabamians. As images of Bloody Sunday reached all areas of the country, thousands flooded to the South in order to help local activists.

Fast forward five decades, and the country has transformed from unlawful racial segregation against African Americans to having its first elected black president. To commemorate the heroic events of the protestors who stood for justice on Bloody Sunday, President Barack Obama came to visit Selma, AL and deliver his message of hope and progress. Such a visit naturally brought with it a great leap of revenue for the state of Alabama. Hotels as far north as Birmingham and as far south as Mobile were completely booked and small businesses promoted their products before thousands of visitors; consequently,

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the small, quiet Southern city was again the spotlight.

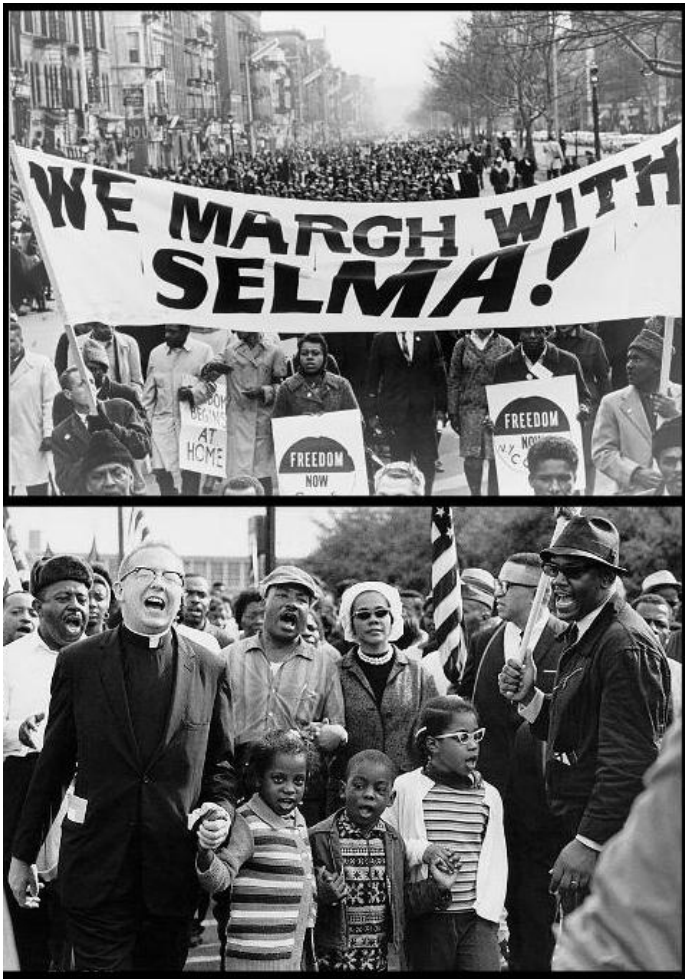
As I stood in the crowd among the thousands rallying to see the president, I met several travelers visiting from a variety of states. Grace, a college junior from Asheville, North Carolina, explained how she and her friends planned on hiking the actual Selma to Montgomery trail later that month. A middle-aged lawyer from Atlanta expressed how happy she was to see everyone cooperating so well with each other. Despite the multitudes in line to get a closer spot to see the president, citizens were still patient enough to let missing family members through in order to find each other. Younger people got to come through the crowd sooner and the elderly were given special consideration.



A collage of photos circa 1965 featuring (clockwise from top left): the police attacking protesters in Selma on Bloody Sunday, a civil rights march in New York, and two photos of Selma to Montgomery marchers. (New York World-Telegram & Sun and the FBI)

Before his address to the city, President Obama was preceded by several other political leaders, including Governor Robert Bentley, who received a less than favorable response from many in the crowd. Yet, an ecstatic uproar occurred when the legendary Congressman John Lewis took the platform and described his memories of what happened half a century ago. He emphasized how although there are still obstacles to overcome today, and how racial tensions still certainly exist, “things are a lot better than what they used to be.”

Certainly, nothing illustrated this change more than President Barack Obama. As the crowd yelled out in excitement and joy for the commander in



chief, Obama acknowledged all of the representatives present and encouraged Selma to remember the spirit of those just a generation ago. He remarked how inspiring it was to share the stage with his hero, John Lewis. He likewise pointed out the great faith he, along with those that marched, had “not just in God, but . . . in America.” Obama highlighted how the protesters of the civil rights movement were not always celebrated, but often rebuked as communists, degenerates, and agitators. “Yet what can be more American,” the President remarked, “than what they did on this bridge?” In what many call one of Obama’s greatest speeches, the president then addressed how the march continues today. He specifically

mentioned the fight for women’s equality, LGBT recognition, and immigration reform as part of an ongoing struggle for justice, igniting the crowd to cheer boldly in agreement.

As the speech came to an end and visitors began the trek back to their cars and hotels, a sense of despair seemed to loom in the air among many of the locals. Walking back to my vehicle, I overheard a couple state how after that weekend, the nation probably wouldn’t notice Selma again for another twenty-five years. Indeed, anniversaries such as Bloody Sunday are surely to be commemorated in ways similar to this year, yet it is depressing to imagine that a city once infamous for the great accomplishments in the civil rights movement now silently sits on the Alabama River without much attraction or attention. Hopefully, the couple’s prediction won’t come true, and a heightened sense of interest will grow in this historic, revolutionary city.

Senza Armadura: Inspiration for



View of the Duomo by Beth T. Wesley (from "Venuto del Duomo" by Hallaender)

Filippo Brunelleschi's the Duomo of Santa Maria del Fiore

by Beth Wesley

In his 1550 work, *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, Giorgio Vasari exclaims that the Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi was a gift from above because prior to his appearance, architecture was suffering a sad state of decline. Known affectionately as Pippo and born in 1377, Brunelleschi has been called the first architect of the Renaissance. He is credited with the engineering marvel of erecting the Duomo of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence between 1420 and 1436. Spanning 143 feet six inches and reaching a total height of 375 feet, the immense dome is the largest ever constructed of masonry. To universal amazement, this was accomplished *senza armadura*; that is, without the aid of centering, an underlying wooden support then commonly utilized in construction.¹ Brunelleschi's dome was all the more marvelous in that it solved an architectural problem that some thought impossible. Designed by Arnolfo di Cambio in 1296, the Cathedral of Florence was greatly enlarged during the mid-fourteenth century by Francesco Talenti. The expanse of the dome area was so vast that conventional wisdom declared it would be impossible to cover without employing flying buttresses. Yet the Florentines, in their disdain for the Gothic style, were determined to eschew the use of such devices. Therefore, with no solution forthcoming, the great cathedral sat open to the elements for almost a century. The city was perplexed and anxious to find a remedy, so the agency in charge of the cathedral's construction, the Opera de Duomo, held a competition to see if anyone could create an acceptable design. The prize was bitterly contested, particularly between Brunelleschi and his nemesis, Lorenzo Ghiberti, who had won out over Brunelleschi in a previous design competition for the bronze Baptistery doors. The Opera (or Office of Works) awarded the cupola project

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to Brunelleschi, even though he initially refused to divulge how he planned to erect the massive dome with neither inner centering nor exterior buttresses. Biographers have attributed Brunelleschi's ideas to his study of ancient Roman architecture, but recent analysis suggests that he may have gleaned methods from studying Byzantine domes. The aim of this discussion is to explore the possibility of eastern sources for Brunelleschi's inspiration and to examine plausible explanations for his secrecy.

Vasari's biography draws largely from the earlier work of Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, who wrote *The Life of Brunelleschi* sometime between 1482 and 1489. Both Manetti and Vasari emphasize that Brunelleschi studied ancient

Both Manetti and Vasari emphasize that Brunelleschi studied ancient architectural ruins in Rome, observing the classical elements and acquiring engineering knowledge that he later applied to buildings in Florence, notably the cupola problem.

architectural ruins in Rome, observing the classical elements and acquiring engineering knowledge that he later applied to buildings in Florence, notably the cupola problem.² Although Manetti and Vasari attribute Brunelleschi's inspiration for the construction of the Duomo to insights gained while exploring Rome as a young man, some historians and architects question the accuracy of this correlation. They propose that his ideas may have arisen from exposure to other sites, such as the domes of previous Tuscan, or even of Byzantine, architecture.

This controversy arises from two major considerations. First, the early accounts of Manetti and Vasari are unreliable because of their inventiveness and pointedly biased praise of Brunelleschi and strident criticism of his enemies. Second, key architectural elements employed in the Duomo are found in Byzantine and other eastern examples rather than in ancient Roman sites. Yet the biographies by Manetti and Vasari, while clearly slanted favorably toward their subject, are the only available primary sources concerning Brunelleschi. Manetti claims that he knew and spoke to Brunelleschi. This relationship would

have occurred during the final years of Brunelleschi's life when Manetti was a very young man. However, Manetti did not write his manuscript until he was in his fifties and his treatment of Brunelleschi is blatantly adulatory. These and other factors produce doubts about the dependability of Manetti's account. However, he did access original documents at the Office of Works of the Duomo. Even his critic, historian Howard Saalman, admits, "next to the buildings themselves and the relatively limited number of early documents which have survived, the [*Life*] is our primary source."³ While Manetti's *Life* describes the architect and his work in detail, it has its flaws.

In fact, Saalman, who edited Manetti's biography of Brunelleschi in 1970, declares that one cannot create a history of the cupola based solely on Manetti because of his preferential treatment. Among Saalman's criticisms of Manetti are his unabashedly biased treatment of the celebrated architect, as well as the lack of documentation for several accounts of Brunelleschi's experiences. Saalman shares the opinion of earlier Renaissance scholar Carl Frey, who noted Manetti's bias. Further, the decades between Manetti's meeting with Brunelleschi and the publication of his biography, in addition to the many years that had passed since the construction, concern Saalman. As he explains, "at the time Manetti was writing, Brunelleschi's childhood years lay back a century, the Baptistery competition eighty years, the early cupola discussions sixty-five, the completion of the cupola fifty." Further, it is important to keep in mind when considering Manetti's dependability that if he met Brunelleschi, it was shortly prior to the architect's death. Saalman notes that Manetti is not writing chronologically so much as literarily and polemically.⁴ Overall, even though Saalman ultimately accepts some of Manetti's assertions, he finds the biography undependable.

Manetti himself presented his work as highly credible compared to that of his contemporaries, saying, "you may read the narrative as a true account and not as a fable like so many that are written." He asserts that a young Brunelleschi traveled to Rome to observe architecture and, while there, saw ruins and intact domes, vaulted by various methods. He relates that Brunelleschi spent many years in Rome pondering the ancient architectural elements, all the while having in mind the dilemma of the cupola construction awaiting solution in Florence. Manetti declares that Brunelleschi "rediscover[ed] the fine and highly skilled method of building and the harmonious proportions of the ancients," in hopes of employing those techniques elsewhere. In his laudatory manner, Manetti continues to say that Brunelleschi, "with a good eye, intelligent and alert in all

things...observed the method and the symmetry” in these ancient structures.⁵ Renaissance specialist Jacob Burckhardt and other historians regard this attention to ancient wisdom and classical achievements as the inspiration for the resurgence associated with the Italian Renaissance.

Burckhardt propounds in his work, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, that the “memorials and monuments” in Rome “energetically fostered this development.” Manetti asserts that Brunelleschi’s grasp of classical engineering led directly to his ingenious achievements in Florence and to the character of the other buildings he produced. Manetti credits him with the reemergence of such elements as symmetry and the classical orders, connecting these applications to Brunelleschi’s time in Rome. He observes that prior to Brunelleschi’s first journey to Rome, he had revealed no evidence of knowledge of antiquity. With a grand air of excitement, Manetti announces that Brunelleschi “brought back to light” the grace of ancient architecture.⁶

Indeed, the long period of apparent decline in Italian architecture lamented by Vasari is attributed to the loss of the ancient techniques. Brunelleschi is credited with being the first to resurrect the classical elements and this is considered the catalyst for the re-birth of the Renaissance. Manetti states emphatically that since the end of the classical era and before Brunelleschi “no one paid attention to the classical method of building.” Exhibiting a bit of contemporary bias, esteemed British historian J.H. Plumb notes, while “Rome lay in ruins, Brunelleschi began re-creating the austere harmonies of the classical world and giving to the Florentines a proper setting for their intense civic consciousness.” This rebirth of ancient architectural elements, as seen in Florence, contrasted sharply with the Gothic architecture seen in Milan and Venice.⁷

Architectural historians acclaim Brunelleschi as the first Renaissance architect to apply the classical orders Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian “in a consistent and appropriate manner.” Manetti elaborates that over the course of his long study in Rome, Brunelleschi “found a number of differences among the beautiful and rich elements of the buildings...[and] by means of close observation he clearly recognized the characteristics of each type...[using] them at the time and place he considered best.”

In his both scholarly and entertaining architectural biography *Brunelleschi’s Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture*, Ross King explains how Brunelleschi rediscovered the correct proportions of the classical

architectural elements by taking precise measurements. Manetti describes Brunelleschi's activities in Rome as seeing "and reflect[ing] on the many beautiful things which...had not been present in other masters from antique times." Manetti claims that Brunelleschi mastered these methods secretly.⁸ Clearly, Manetti's bias colors this account, but it is fair to conclude that Brunelleschi did indeed apply himself to the study of architectural solutions to vaulting.

The proposed dome in Florence, "if built, would be the highest and widest vault ever raised." Before Brunelleschi, no one in Florence or all of Italy was able to construct it. Rejecting the Gothic style and having decided to avoid the use of flying buttresses, which Italians despised, the original architect and his successors had presented no solution for the erection of the huge dome. The dome of Santa Maria del Fiore was "the greatest architectural puzzle of the age. Many experts considered its erection an impossible feat." Since the church in Florence had awaited a solution to the challenging problem of how to construct the massive cupola for more than a century, King surmises that Brunelleschi would have been interested in ancient Roman vaulting techniques. Indeed, according to the adoring biographer Manetti, Brunelleschi especially studied methods of vaulting. At this time, when Brunelleschi was a young man in the fifteenth century, there were many domes extant in Rome for him to "scrutinize," such as the "colossal" Pantheon or the Domus Aurea, which had an octagonal base, as does the Duomo. King points out that Brunelleschi would have seen these examples as proof that he could complete the dome in Florence.⁹ However, one key method the Romans had employed was the use of a fast-drying volcanic ash concrete, the art of which had been lost. Brunelleschi was going to have to invent new methods to address the cupola challenge.



Statue of Filippo Brunelleschi in the piazza of Santa Marie Del Fiore. (Jason Pier)

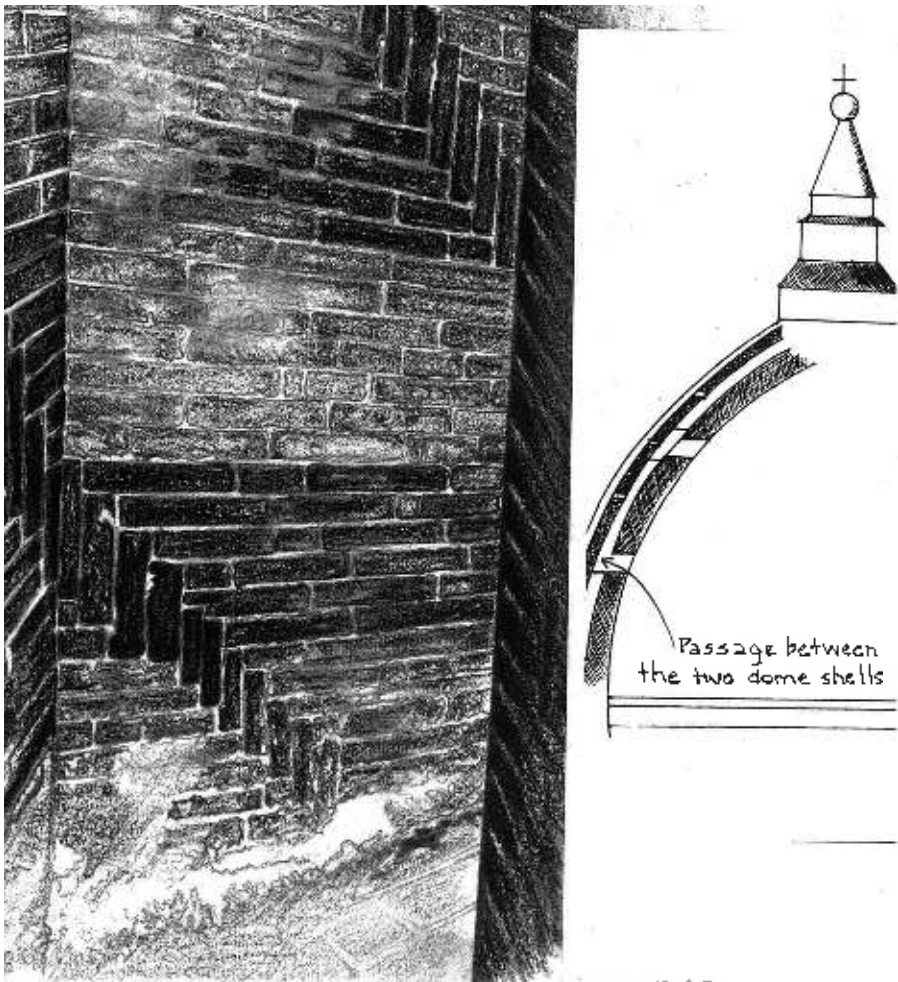
Although there is no extant documentation concerning Brunelleschi's travels, Manetti claims that the young man frequently returned home and then resorted back to Rome. King clarifies that the duration of Brunelleschi's Roman travels is undocumented. However, documentation confirms that when in Florence in 1417, Brunelleschi was consulted by the authorities concerning the cupola project. After this, Brunelleschi focused his energies upon the dome project. The vaulting dilemma ever on his mind, he focused his investigation and intensified his study of the ancient methods. Manetti relates these experiences in Rome as if Brunelleschi had described them to him in some detail. He explains how, with the help of a good friend, the young sculptor Donatello, Brunelleschi undertook a meticulous study. Manetti claims that Brunelleschi and Donatello sketched and measured buildings in Rome and in the surrounding areas, even making excavations "to see the junctures of the membering of the buildings." These drawings contained "numbers and symbols which Brunelleschi alone understood."¹⁰ It is believed that this curious code may well have been Arabic numerals, and this gives rise to a possibility that Brunelleschi's study also included eastern architectural methods.

Although Rome has generally been accepted as Brunelleschi's fount of knowledge, the extent of his awareness of Byzantine domes is unknown. However, historians point out that there were buildings in Italy from which the young architect may have been inspired. In his highly readable account, King elaborates: "scholars...argue that his architectural vocabulary...could actually have been acquired much closer to home, and from buildings of more recent date." Some historians propose that the account of Brunelleschi's sojourns in Rome are a fabrication of his adoring biographer Manetti, suggesting that he was exposed to the architectural principles he later applied to the Duomo by viewing more recent Italian buildings such as the Baptistery in Florence or San Vitale in Ravenna and the Basilica of San Marco in the Veneto.¹¹

John Onians, author of *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*, believes that Brunelleschi never went to Rome, but that Manetti fabricated the trip. Saalman especially expresses incredulity, noting that the trips Manetti describes occurred during years for which there is evidence proving that Brunelleschi and Donatello were in Florence. "One wonders," Saalman writes, "whether [the Roman legend] is not simply another invention meant to bring [Manetti's] hero into line with the latest humanist trends." Later, Saalman backtracks somewhat, admitting that Manetti most likely did not invent the Roman trips. Further, he concedes that while

the trips are undocumented, they are not implausible. There is every reason to believe that Brunelleschi would have recalled and described his travels to Manetti later in life. However, Saalman finds that even though Brunelleschi's buildings are ancient in some ways, many are "closer to Trecento traditions than to genuine Antique prototypes." Saalman notes that the details of his buildings are comparable to other Florentine Romanesque building, such as Santa Maria del Fiore's Baptistery.¹²

Manetti's description of a mysterious code alludes to Brunelleschi's usage of Arabic numerals, which had been outlawed in Florence since 1296. During the Middle Ages, in reaction against Islam, Arabic numerals were despised throughout Europe. Brunelleschi's employment of the Arabic style in his secret code is especially intriguing in light of the controversy over the possible genuine sources of his architectural insight. Since the Arabic numerals were forbidden, and only Roman numerals allowed in Florence, Brunelleschi's use of the Arabic



Herringbone brick pattern as seen between the two dome shells. (Beth Wesley)

perhaps indicates a willingness on his part to at least not reject, and possibly to explore, Eastern influences, despite the prevailing antipathy toward anything pertaining to Islam. Might the elderly architect have diverted Manetti away from discovering an Eastern source of his wisdom by filling his ears with tales of Roman adventures? No mention is made by either Manetti or Vasari of Brunelleschi ever having traveled to observe structures at other Italian sites nor of trips to the East to study Byzantine buildings. Nevertheless, King points out that Brunelleschi could easily have traveled eastward. Given the established trade route with the east, Brunelleschi could have joined a caravan, and this trip may have taken place between 1401 and 1418, which King calls his “lost years.” Even if he did not travel eastward himself, King suggests that he could well have “gained secondhand knowledge” of Persian or Byzantine methods from merchants or Muslim slaves.¹³

A further discussion of the architectural elements employed successfully in the Duomo serves to illuminate the controversy. The structural support for the immense dome is achieved by at least two methods found in the Ravenna and in Eastern examples, but not in Roman domes. These methods are the herringbone brickwork bond and the double-shelled cupola. This method of vaulting little understood by Manetti and “only partly understood to this day,” is called *senza armadura*.¹⁴ The dome was too large to build an effectual wooden support beneath it, so Brunelleschi’s plans had to address how to construct so large a dome without centering. The challenges included how to prevent the dome from collapsing upon itself. Brunelleschi solved the problems effectively; however, he was so secretive that his solutions have remained a conundrum.

As Saalman explains, the *senza armadura* method was probably used in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Byzantium. In *senza armadura*, a special brick and fast-drying mortar are used to create an almost “monolithic fabric” through “interlocking and overlapping patterns.” Saalman notes that other domes had been built of pumice or pottery, while the sixth century San Vitale in Ravenna was built with a double shell. This application of a dome within a dome is an Eastern, not a Roman, feature. Although Byzantine architecture did continue Roman architecture and the dome was common in Eastern architecture, the dome was eventually Byzantine architecture’s primary motif. Particularly, the double-shelled dome was an Eastern development, as well as the brickwork pattern utilized for structural strength. Conversely, although a herringbone brick pattern is seen in Roman decorative effects and in paving, it was never used as structural support.¹⁵

Further, while Roman vaults were constructed with a type of centering, that is temporary support, it is commonly believed that Byzantine domes did not use centering. Instead, they relied on “the simple use of large flat bricks,” a system which was “probably derived from Eastern methods.” Brunelleschi employed this special design in the Duomo, but it is unknown where he learned of it. Because the herringbone pattern is found in Byzantine domes, it is more likely that Brunelleschi was influenced by Byzantine architecture than by anything he studied in Rome. King elucidates the architectural issues and forces involved:

A dome is built on the principle of an arch, whose stones...are kept in place by mutual pressures brought into play by their own weight. Once complete, each of them is under circumferential compression and therefore, like an arch, becomes self-supporting. But the problem in constructing a dome arises from the fact that these rings [of stones] cannot be built instantaneously. Some form of temporary support is therefore needed until the rings are complete because, until they are closed, the tendency of the masonry is obviously to fall inward.

As no other Italian architect had thought to do, Brunelleschi employed the herringbone brick pattern to create a cohesive bond so that the dome would not fall in on itself.¹⁶

He designed an especially long, flat brick, insisting upon careful inspection of each batch. He also concocted a special mortar. “The upright bricks projecting from the horizontal courses...helped to hold in place the surrounding horizontal bricks as the mortar cured.” In this way, the unfinished rows of masonry remained firm because the upright bricks applied an exterior pressure. Moreover, in addition to the ingenious use of this so-called new idea of the herringbone bond, Brunelleschi’s dome was built with two domes, one within the other. King describes the experience of climbing the narrow staircase set within the two domes of Brunelleschi’s project, where one may see clearly the clever brickwork that holds the structure so dependably. “It is in this confusing and constricted space between the two domes that you can see at close hand the techniques used by Filippo and his masons.” King reports that he could see the herringbone brick pattern wherever plaster had fallen off. He informs readers that while this “structure was rare, though not unique, in western Europe,” it was more common in Persia, where it was employed in the building of Islamic mosques and mausoleums. So we see that it is a reasonable speculation to look

to the East rather than to Rome for the sources of Brunelleschi's inspiration. We might join with present day architects in concluding that the Islamic world's impact upon Western architecture is best seen in the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore.¹⁷

According to Manetti, when called upon by the Duomo Office of Works in 1420, Brunelleschi always insisted that centering would not be necessary to vault the dome. Although originally coy about divulging his methods, later, when further pressured by authorities, Brunelleschi wrote down his methods for the Duomo Office of Works, which made his plans into a book. King explains: "As a point-by-point technical specification for a major building, the [1420] program remains unique in the time before 1800." Remarkably, this little text is the first such book of specifications known to be issued by an architect. Brunelleschi himself was unique in his own genius, but through his accomplishment of the Duomo he sowed the seeds for many more great minds to flourish in the rich soil of Renaissance culture. King eloquently states that in Brunelleschi Renaissance writers saw "proof that modern man was as great as—and could in fact surpass—the ancients from whom they took their inspiration." Indeed, that such a dome could be raised without centering "was

Although originally coy about divulging his methods, later, when further pressured by authorities, Brunelleschi wrote down his methods for the Duomo Office of Works, which made his plans into a book.

the most enduring and breathtaking spectacle of the age," and Brunelleschi's success was widely acclaimed. Brunelleschi's contemporary, the architect Alberti, was so impressed with the achievement of the Duomo that he wrote, "I have come to understand that in many men, but especially in you, Filippo... there is a genius for [accomplishing] every praiseworthy thing."¹⁸ Brunelleschi's fame was so widespread that Alberti, Antonio Filarete, Francesco di Giorgio, and Michelangelo all reportedly traveled to Rome to learn from the ancients as they believed Brunelleschi had.

Enraptured, Alberti exclaimed, “Who could ever be hard or envious enough to fail to praise Pippo the architect on seeing here such a large structure, rising above the skies, ample to cover with its shadow all the Tuscan people, and constructed without the aid of centering or great quantity of wood?”¹⁹ What was the true inspiration for Brunelleschi’s vision? Did he engage in covert investigative trips to the East during the “lost years” between 1401 and 1418? Much remains mysterious about the Duomo story, but it is conclusive that the building methods are more Byzantine than Italian. Brunelleschi’s version of events may have obscured an Islamic architectural influence, but this possible subterfuge cannot negate that he successfully applied his genius to the greatest architectural challenge of his generation. Despite issues with the reliability of primary sources, and the finding that key architectural elements within the vault are of origins more Eastern than Roman, it remains that Brunelleschi’s triumphal erection of the Duomo triggered the resurgence of inspiration now known as the glorious Renaissance.

1. Giorgio Vasari, "Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446)," *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (Florence, 1550); Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (Della Pittura) (1435), trans. Jonathan Spencer (Yale University Press, 1966, from *Major Problems in the History of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl. Heath and Company, 1995), 28; Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, ed. Howard Saalman, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 36; Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, "Architecture in Renaissance Italy." (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); Ross King, *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 140, 9, 99, 41.
2. Howard Saalman, introduction to *The Life of Brunelleschi*, by Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 32, 10-11; Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, 42.
3. Saalman, introduction and notes to *The Life of Brunelleschi*, 24, 134; King, *Brunelleschi's Dome*, 170-171; Manetti, 36.
4. Saalman, 27, 23, 24, 129-130, 138.
5. Manetti, 34, 64, 50.
6. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (1878), rev. Robert Norton, from *Major Problems in the History of the Italian Renaissance* ed. Benjamin G. Kohl. (Lexington, MA: Heath and Company, 1995), 14; Manetti, 50, 52, 34, 42; Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, "Architecture in Renaissance Italy."
7. Manetti, 54; J.H. Plumb, *The Italian Renaissance* (New York: First Mariner, 2001), 59-60, 15.
8. Heilbrunn, 1; Manetti, 54, 52; King, 25-26, 4-5.
9. King, 4-5, 7, 26, 27, 30; Manetti 52.
10. Manetti, 62, 64, 31; King, 31.
11. King, 170-171; Saalman, 30, 134.
12. King, 171; Saalman, 24, 29, 26, 30.
13. King, 24-25, 170, 99.
14. Saalman, 26.
15. Theresa Grupico, Forum on Public Policy, "The Dome in Christian and Islamic Sacred Architecture" <http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/vol2011no3/archive/grupico.pdf> (2011), 6; Saalman, 134; Tom Binumol, "Lecture 1 - Byzantine Architecture" <http://www.slideshare.net/BinumolTom/byzantinearchitecture> (September 4, 2012), 9, 4, 8; King, 170, 10, 99.
16. Binumol, 9; King, 99, 98.
17. King, 162, 10, 170; Grupico, 5.
18. Manetti, 68, 70; Saalman, 137; King 159, 102.
19. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (Della Pittura), (1435), trans. Jonathan Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) from *Major Problems in the History of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl, 28; King, 31.

Notes

The



The old South African flag flying in Cape Town. (Aubrey Kilian)

End of Apartheid in South Africa

by **Andrew Lather**

The fall of apartheid in South Africa is one of the great historical events of the twentieth century. After nearly fifty years, South Africa finally threw off this oppressive racial policy that denied basic rights and opportunities to the vast majority of the country's population. There were many factors that helped bring apartheid to an end, each with varying levels of importance – internal resistance, strong leadership, foreign pressures, and changes in the attitudes of the Afrikaner population, the white minority which had long ruled the country. Of these factors, none was as important as leadership.

Before considering apartheid's downfall, it is important to understand apartheid itself. Apartheid, literally meaning "separateness," was a series of policies implemented by the National Party of South Africa from 1948 until 1994. These policies preserved the dominance of the white minority in the country by disenfranchising black South Africans and keeping them impoverished and divided. The government kept black South Africans separate from the white population by preventing them from living in the cities, forcing them to live either in townships or in rural homelands. The townships consisted mostly of simple, hastily constructed matchbox houses and prison-like singles' barracks, and were overcrowded, underserved by basic utilities such as water, heating, and electricity, and were poorly policed. The homelands were rural areas in South Africa that were undesirable to white farmers and therefore of marginal quality, thus eroding the residents' self-sufficiency. Both of these separate living areas meant that the white South African population had a ready pool of migrant labor from which to draw.

Black South Africans were kept poor through exclusion from higher paying jobs and management positions and were kept undereducated by a dramatically

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inferior “Bantu education” system. They were heavily restricted in South Africa as well, subject to brutal police repression and pass laws, which required them to carry pass books containing their identification and indicating where they were allowed to travel, work, and live. Black South Africans could not travel, live, or work wherever they pleased, but were required to get government permission to do any of these things. These policies were unpopular amongst black South Africans, and as time went on, even parts of the country’s white population began to condemn apartheid, especially as the international outcry grew.¹

Internal resistance against apartheid escalated as time progressed, particularly during the 1980s. In that decade, South African President P.W. Botha raised the hopes of the country’s black population by making small reforms and extending limited rights to non-whites. In 1983, he unveiled a new constitution that created a tri-cameral parliament, with one house reserved for whites, one for “coloureds” (mixed-race citizens), and another for Indians. The whites-only House of Assembly was the largest of the three and held veto power over the other two houses.² While this gave certain subsets of the non-white population a say in government, the National Party still had the final say, deciding what issues were to be voted on by which house. It could also dissolve parliament if it so desired.³ Furthermore, the new constitution still excluded the black majority from political power, although Botha “threw them a bone” by relaxing the pass laws, among other small concessions. The new constitution outraged the African population and as a result, violence rose dramatically as anti-apartheid groups stepped up their resistance efforts.

One of these resistance groups was the United Democratic Front (UDF), a coalition of several groups that formed in 1983 in order to oppose apartheid and the government’s constitutional reforms.⁴ The UDF resolved to make apartheid unworkable and South Africa “ungovernable” by engaging in mass protests, boycotts, and, in some cases, violent struggles.⁵ Protests by the UDF and other organizations within the country happened on an unprecedented scale, and violence during this time period was also widespread.⁶ The rapidly deteriorating situation led members of Botha’s cabinet to call for his resignation, and he was succeeded by one of his cabinet ministers, F.W. de Klerk, who then resolved to rescind the ban on the ANC and other organizations, release South Africa’s political prisoners, and begin formal negotiations for the inclusion of the black population in government.

Without the change in Afrikaner attitudes, apartheid would not have crumbled. During the 1980s, some Afrikaners began to soften their attitude toward political reform. The most prominent display of this change developed within the Broederbond, an elite organization of Afrikaner political thinkers which had previously been one of the main architects of apartheid. During the 1970s and 1980s, many within the organization began to recognize the need for giving black South Africans political rights.⁷ However, their reform-mindedness was relatively limited, as most hoped to negotiate with members of African traditionalist movements such as Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha organization. Those within the Afrikaner government who had had contact with the still imprisoned Nelson Mandela also showed a change in thinking, as they began to realize that the ANC's leadership was far more moderate than they had previously believed.⁸ An increasing level of trust began to build between these members of the government and the ANC, which helped further pave the way for negotiations.

The economic situation in South Africa during the 1980s and early 1990s helped bring the government to the negotiating table with the ANC. As unrest increased within the country, and as the government responded with ever increasing repression, the international community began to implement tougher sanctions. Foreign investors pulled out of South Africa, fearing that the unrest was putting their investments at risk.⁹ International banks ceased to make loans to South Africa as it began to have trouble paying off the debts it had already incurred.¹⁰ Furthermore, several nations, including the United States, began implementing harsher sanctions on the country, banning investments and loans by American businesses and banks respectively, while also severing air links with the country.¹¹ These measures combined to devastate the South African economy, as growth slowed dramatically, the value of its currency and its primary exports plummeted, and its ability to pay its debts began to falter.¹²

Another important factor that helped end apartheid was the leadership on both sides of the conflict. In the case of the National Party, the rise to power of F.W. de Klerk in 1989 opened the door for unprecedented reforms in the policy of South Africa. He seemed to be tuned into the changing attitudes within the Afrikaner power structure, and felt compelled by the worsening economic and diplomatic situation to open formal negotiations with the anti-apartheid leadership, primarily with the ANC's leader Nelson Mandela. When De Klerk became president of South Africa, he made the groundbreaking decision to

rescind the ban on the ANC and other anti-apartheid political parties and to release Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners with the purpose of entering into negotiations for a “new South Africa.”¹³ However, he did not enter into negotiations with the intention of forfeiting white rule; he hoped to create a government with black participation that was still dominated by the National Party.¹⁴ Furthermore, he was not an angel, as the government was responsible for sponsoring and instigating a great deal of violence against anti-apartheid groups.¹⁵ In the end, his efforts to maintain National Party control over South Africa failed, and South Africa transitioned to black majority rule with the ANC as the dominant party.



The new South African flag (adopted in 1994) at South Africa’s constitutional court. (Arboresce)

On the other side, there were a variety of leaders who helped to end apartheid. One notable leader was Steve Biko, founder of the Black Consciousness movement that sought to inspire the African population to find their own identity, to live independently, and fight apartheid independently.¹⁶

His Movement helped to create a greater level of solidarity among black South Africans, and a greater level of activism among them as well. This was accomplished through speeches by Black Consciousness leaders, protest actions by Black Consciousness-inspired activists, and by the charismatic personality of Steve Biko himself. Sadly, Biko would not live to see apartheid's end, as he died of a brain injury in September 1977, having been beaten by the Security Police while in detention.¹⁷ His death brought greater international attention to apartheid and the abuses by the South African government in the name of quelling dissent and also further galvanized black South Africans in their resistance, as he became a martyr for the movement.¹⁸

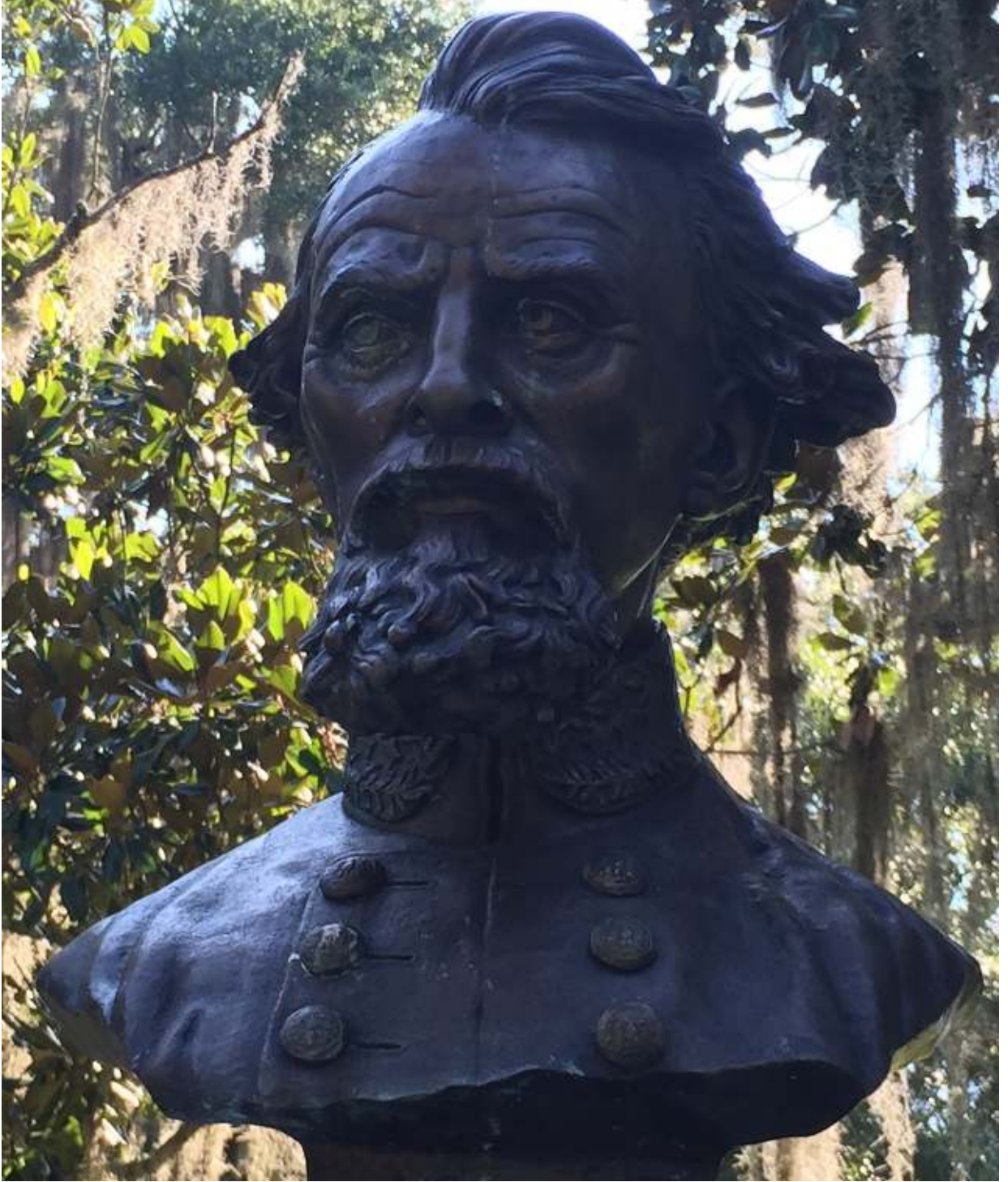
Nelson Mandela is arguably one of the most important leaders in bringing down apartheid. He was the face of the ANC and as such served as one of the main negotiators with the leadership of the National Party government. He had initiated secret talks in 1985, well before his release in 1990. This did much to assuage government fears of a radical, vengeful black majority government.¹⁹ Furthermore, he made impressions on everyone he met with his caring personality and his integrity, both of which gained him the trust of his fellow negotiators, while his single-minded focus gained their respect, admiration, and sometimes frustration.²⁰ His leadership helped South Africa's transition to a relatively peaceful nation, although there was still a great deal of violence before and during this transition.²¹

Out of these factors, leadership was probably the most important in helping to bring about the end of apartheid. Without De Klerk's willingness to open negotiations, the process of ending apartheid likely would have taken on a much more violent and destructive character. Without Steve Biko and his Black Consciousness movement, it is likely that the African population would have remained fragmented in its opposition to apartheid, allowing the government to more easily quell resistance. The unrest that South Africa experienced during the 1980s and early 1990s would likely have been far less widespread and organized, and the government may have been less willing to negotiate as a result. Without Nelson Mandela, the negotiations likely would have taken a different character if they even happened at all. His conciliatory attitude did much to allay white fears of black domination over the whites and subsequent oppression of the minority as revenge for the abuses of apartheid. Furthermore, his steadfastness ensured that true democracy would come to South Africa.

1. Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 2nd ed. (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2011), 22, 62, 70-71, 84, 137.
2. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 95.
3. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 95.
4. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 98.
5. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 98.
6. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 98-109.
7. Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 73-75.
8. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 74-75.
9. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 102.
10. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 102.
11. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 103.
12. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 108.
13. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 91-108.
14. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 120-132.
15. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 153-178.
16. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 80-82.
17. Donald Woods, *Biko* Kindle Edition (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1991), Chapter 4, "The Killing."
18. Woods, *Biko*, 205-225.
19. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 21-36.
20. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 21-36 and 37-56.
21. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 120-132; 133-152; 226-239.

Notes

Nathan Bedford Forrest:



A bust of Nathan Bedford Forrest in Selma. (Erik Hooie)

The Fort Pillow Massacre and the Reconstruction of the Ku Klux Klan

by Erik Hooie

The American Civil War ended nearly 150 years ago, yet in some places the conflict rages on. One such place is Selma, Alabama. In the year 2000, a monument to Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest was erected there on public land. Since then, it has been the object of controversy, vandalism, and in March 2012, theft. One does not have to search very far for answers to why a contention surrounds the general and his image. While his admirers cling to his exceptional career as a cavalryman during the war, many others summon up his more disturbing attributes and actions both during and after the war. The two main events in Forrest's life that give even historians trouble are the episode at Fort Pillow in 1864, and his involvement with the Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan.¹ Forrest's participation in the so-called "Fort Pillow Massacre," where black soldiers were executed, outraged people of the time, especially Union citizens, and any association with the Klan causes anyone, especially the modern student of history, to grapple with how to treat the general's memory. As Brian Steel Wills points out, Forrest is "far more complex" than either his devotees or his detractors often think.² A closer look at the details concerning Fort Pillow and the grounds for his accord with the Klan contributes to a complete picture of the general's complexity and places his legacy in context as both an admirable and controversial figure.

Nathan Bedford Forrest was a thirty-nine-year-old "self-made millionaire and one of the richest men in the South" when the war began. His fortune accumulated from cotton plantation investments and slave-trading. Reportedly, Forrest was "kind, humane, and extremely considerate of his slaves."³ He worked hard before the war and would do the same after the war. He returned home "to restore his properties" and "regain his prewar status as a successful

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planter.”⁴ He enlisted in Tennessee when most rich planters were excused from military duty.⁵ He advanced from the rank of private all the way to lieutenant general during the war, the only soldier, North or South, to do so.⁶ Forrest was born and grew up, largely uneducated, in the frontier environment that was Tennessee in the early 1800s.⁷ He was a product of the “rough-and-tumble, hardscrabble frontier culture” that spawned “the likes of Stonewall Jackson” and “Ulysses S. Grant.” Yet, Forrest had a singular character, possessing “a raw naked racism, a dependence on violence, and the inability to restrain himself and do otherwise.”⁸

Among Forrest’s most famous admirers was the late novelist, history writer, and star of Ken Burns’s *The Civil War* TV series, Shelby Foote. His novel *Shiloh* is considered “one of the most famous...about” the general and

“ On April 12, 1864, Rebel troops under General Nathan Bedford Forrest captured Fort Pillow, a Union garrison on the Mississippi River. The events that transpired became the source of never-ending controversy between North and South.”¹²

garnered praise from William Faulkner himself, who called it “the damnedest book I have ever read and one of the best.”⁹ Along with Abraham Lincoln, Foote deemed Forrest “one of the ‘two authentic geniuses’ of the War,” and “a fine man.”¹⁰ Regarding a statue of General Forrest in Memphis Tennessee, Shelby Foote observed, “While I can understand why blacks might see that statue as a symbol of racism, I think they’ve overlooked the facts about Bedford Forrest. He was certainly not the villain they perceive him to be.”¹¹ Just what that perception of Forrest is can be determined first by examining the Fort Pillow massacre.

On April 12, 1864, Rebel troops under General Nathan Bedford Forrest captured Fort Pillow, a Union garrison on the Mississippi River. The events that transpired became the source of never-ending controversy between North and South.¹² The garrison consisted of 295 white soldiers and 262 black soldiers, under Major Lionel F. Booth. On the river, Captain James Marshall supported the fort with the gunboat *New Era*.¹³ On April 4, Forrest had written to Major General Leonidas Polk of his plan “to attack at least one fort on the Mississippi: ‘There is a Federal force of 500 or 600 at Fort Pillow, which I shall attend

to in a day or two, as they have horses and supplies which we need.” An additional reason to take the fort was delivered to Forrest from “a ‘delegation’ of West Tennesseans who ‘earnestly besought him to leave...a brigade for their protection against’ the ‘nest of outlaws’ at Fort Pillow.” In this “nest” was Major William F. Bradford’s Thirteenth West Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.), some of whose members reportedly were Confederate deserters, “and the rest were men of the country who entertained a malignant hatred toward Confederate soldiers, their families and friends.” Bradford, a native Tennessean from Forrest’s own Bedford county, is said to have robbed the countryside of cattle, clothing, money, and with his men vented “upon the wives and daughters of Southern soldiers the most opprobrious and obscene epithets, with more than one extreme outrage upon the persons of these victims of their hate and lust...” Forrest had to deal with Fort Pillow if he was to depend upon West Tennessee as a source for men and supplies,¹⁴ as his cavalry corps attempted to slow down the Georgia invasion of General Sherman.¹⁵

On April 10, while at Jackson, Tennessee, Forrest sent Brigadier General James R. Chalmers’s division “to ‘attend to’ Fort Pillow.” At dawn on April 12, Chalmers arrived at the fort, and Forrest took charge when he arrived at ten o’clock. By the time he called for its surrender, Forrest believed his men were in a position to effectively capture the redoubt and that resistance from the Union forces would be fruitless. At 3:30 he sent Major Booth his demand:

The conduct of the officers and men garrisoning Fort Pillow has been such as to entitle them to being treated as prisoners of war. I demand the unconditional surrender of the garrison, promising you that you shall be treated as prisoners of war. My men have received a fresh supply of ammunition, and from their present position can easily assault and capture the fort. Should my demand be refused, I cannot be responsible for the fate of your command.

The fort’s official reply from Bradford, signing for and acting as the recently shot Booth, was “I will not surrender,”¹⁶ and Forrest’s culpability in the ensuing massacre dogged him for the rest of his days. With the refusal of surrender from the fort received, Forrest ordered his men to prepare for the attack. At the sound of the bugle, the Rebels rushed forward “with a shrill ‘rebel yell’” and descended into the fort. In the eyes of the Union, Forrest’s troops had taken advantage of the truce before the attack and had crept closer to the fort to overwhelm it at the proper time.¹⁷ In the words of Union Lieutenant Mack J.

Learning at the fort, “Forrest had resorted to means the most foul and infamous ever adopted in the most barbarous ages of the world for the accomplishment of his design.”¹⁸ Forrest had moved closer, though, because he was spooked by the movement of Northern ships on the river. As close as the Rebels were to the fort, to the Union soldiers they appeared to rise “from out of the very earth.”¹⁹

At issue at Fort Pillow was “the slaughter of surrendering soldiers,” many of whom were black, and the degree to which Forrest was aware of it all. At the time, both Northern and Southern opinions were “partisan and often exaggerated for effect,” but there was a general agreement that something horrible had occurred at Fort Pillow.²⁰

A description of what that horror looked like can be found in the report of Master Ferguson, U. S. Navy, concerning the “treatment of Federal troops at the capture of Fort Pillow”:

All the wounded who had strength enough to speak agreed that after the fort was taken an indiscriminate slaughter of our troops was carried on by the enemy with a furious and vindictive savageness which was never equaled by the most merciless of the Indian tribes. Around on every side horrible testimony to the truth of this statement could be seen. Bodies with gaping wounds, some bayoneted through the eyes, some with skulls beaten through, others with hideous wounds, as if their bowels had been ripped open with bowie knives, plainly told that but little quarter was shown to our troops. Strewn from the fort to the river bank, in the ravines and hollows, behind logs and under the brush where they had crept from protection from the assassins who pursued them, we found bodies bayoneted, beaten, and shot to death, showing how cold-blooded and persistent was the slaughter of our unfortunate troops.²¹

There is some “exaggeration for effect” in Ferguson’s record, yet there must have been an atrocity all the same, which is corroborated by other accounts. One of the garrison’s members recalled a “most horrible slaughter” than “could possibly be conceived. Our boys when they saw they were overpowered threw down their arms and held up, some their handkerchiefs & some their hands in token of surrender, but no sooner were they seen than they were shot down, & if one shot failed to kill them the bayonet or revolver did not.”²² Lieutenants James A. Smith and William Cleary of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry swore to the killing of men trying to surrender:

The Rebels came pouring in solid masses right over the breastworks.... The moment they reached the top of the walls and commenced firing as they descended, the colored troops were panic-stricken, threw down their arms, and ran down the bluff, pursued sharply, begging for life, but escape was impossible... The whites, as soon as they perceived they were also to be butchered inside the fort also ran down. They had previously thrown down their arms and submitted. In many instances the men begged for life at the hands of the enemy, even on their knees. They were only made to stand on their feet, and then summarily shot down.²³

Surely in war there will be no small amount of death. Regardless of how one feels about Nathan Bedford Forrest, his words “war means fighting, and fighting means killing,”²⁴ ring true. Yet, when the numbers are counted, and the makeup of the fort’s personnel is assessed, “the percentage of killed at Fort Pillow greatly exceeded the norm.” The fort contained 557 men. Around four hundred of these men were slain, injured, or apprehended. Among those captured were seventy-five black soldiers and forty black women and children returned to slavery. Any found in the hospital there were not spared harsh treatment either, with thirty blacks stabbed through with swords. Indeed, it was the nature of the fort’s population that enraged Forrest’s fighters. How dare white Southern Unionists fight with blacks against the whites of the South?²⁵

Albert Castel describes the threat at the end of Forrest’s note as “a customary device” of his “used to bluff or frighten an enemy commander into a quick surrender.”²⁶ Wills writes that such a threat “was part of Forrest’s psychological arsenal” used to push “his enemy...to give up without further struggle.”²⁷ Describing his exchange with the fort in an 1868 interview, Forrest said, “I stated that the animosity existing between the Tennessee troops in my command and the Tennessee troops at the fort was such that I could not be responsible for the fate of the garrison.”²⁸ To know the population of the Fort Pillow garrison, from whence such animosity sprang, is to begin to understand the horrors that followed the capture of the fort. With “the ‘combination of race hatred, personal animosity, and battle fury’ present, it would have been shocking if no excesses had taken place there.”²⁹

The white population at the fort consisted of some who had forsaken Forrest’s outfit and had become Tennessee Unionists. Just the term “Tennessee Unionists” should make it clear why the general’s men hated them. Forrest referred to them as “renegade Tennesseans’ who violated the norms of

warfare and civilization. They were the cold-blooded savages who waged war on civilians, tortured prisoners, and compounded their sins by fighting beside former slaves.” Making matters worse for the inhabitants of the fort were the rumors of plundering by the troops there on pro-Confederate locals, prompting Forrest’s men to seek revenge. As Dr. Fitch, a Union surgeon and witness at Fort Pillow, wrote, “There seemed to be a great hatred on the part of Forrest’s men towards’ the Tennessee Unionists - ‘personal feeling - as I heard many of Forrest’s men charge the soldiers of the Thirteenth regiment with doing many things that were mean towards their friends since they had deserted Forrest and joined the Thirteenth Federal regiment.”³⁰ Along with Bradford’s refusal to surrender, the Union soldiers goaded Forrest and dared him to take the fort.³¹ Such bold talk in the face of overwhelming force, and that force under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest, seemed to have come from “whiskey barrels that had been stationed at various spots around the fort to induce artificial courage.”³² As Jay Winik notes, this taunting by the Federals “was the mistake of their lives.”³³

The black population of Fort Pillow, making up roughly half of the soldiers there, certainly posed a problem to Forrest’s men. Most of these men were part of the 6th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery, the rest belonging to the 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery. Many of these black Union soldiers were ex-slaves, contributing to a garrison that “was an explosive mix.”³⁴ The description of these men as “ex-slaves” might be better stated, especially from the point of view of the Rebels arrayed around Fort Pillow, as “escaped slaves.”³⁵ A main cause of the war was slavery, and it was that “peculiar institution” which defined the Southern way of life, including its systems of economy and politics. Total control of slaves was the foundation of the Southern system of the time. The prevalent fear, therefore, was a slave uprising, toppling the structure of subjugation. What the Confederate soldiers saw at Fort Pillow was in essence a slave uprising, with blacks armed against them in a struggle to alter the very nature of power and decency.³⁶ Bell I. Wiley contends, “The mere thought of a Negro in uniform was enough to arouse the ire of the average Reb,” and at Fort Pillow that thought became reality. According to James I. Roberson, Jr., “cold fury” was the reaction most often exhibited by Rebels when confronted with Union-armed ex-slaves. One Rebel trooper confessed to his mother, “I hope I may never see a Negro Soldier...or I cannot be...a Christian Soldier.”³⁷

While black troops posed a singular problem and threat to the Southern soldier, it must be pointed out that the Northern soldier shared at least some of

the racist attitudes exhibited during the war. Robertson notes, “Blacks wearing Federal uniforms brought forth the deep-rooted prejudices of Billy Yank.” Joseph T. Glatthaar concludes his study of U.S. Colored Troops, “in a society with such widespread and deep-seated prejudice as the North, rare indeed was the individual untainted by racism.” One Union soldier of a Pennsylvania regiment made clear the extent of such racism when he asked about “them dam niger Regiments” and declared that the army “had better not send any of them out here fore if they do our own Soldiers will kill more of them than the Rebs would fore a Soldier hates a niger more than they do a Reb.”³⁸ Yet it was the North that armed black soldiers, fighting alongside their white comrades for the Union and for freedom. The Confederacy was built upon the enslavement of blacks, and it fought bitterly to preserve its system of oppression. The following, which was read at a gathering of Confederate cavalry after the war, illustrates that the Confederate soldier’s violent racism was not isolated to the massacre at Fort Pillow:

Comrades did you ever fight Negroes in the war. Well, if so did you notice that your guns would shoot faster and straighter than ever before? Did you ever see a comrade after he surrendered to a Negro soldier, and if so where? And did you ever take a Negro soldier prisoner, and if so, what did you do with him? I never saw one captured nor one after he was captured. General Sherman says “war’s hell,” and we found race prejudice to be strong there.³⁹

When most white Southerners looked upon a black person they mostly saw a piece of property. With his background as a slave-trader, Forrest was no different, and certainly discounted the humanity of blacks. What he said concerning the aftermath of Fort Pillow is colored by this conviction: “I regard captured Negroes as I do other captured property and not as captured soldiers.”⁴⁰ Forrest’s words here seem to belie his original assertion to the commander of Fort Pillow that the soldiers there would be treated as prisoners of war. Indeed, Forrest was reportedly asked about this offer when the note for surrender was delivered to the fort by Captain W. A. Goodman. Capt. Goodman remembered about the offer, “It was asked whether it was intended to include the negro soldiers as well as the white; to which both General Forrest and General Chalmers replied that it was so intended.”⁴¹ Forrest spoke of the black Union soldiers of Fort Pillow as “a damned nigger regiment,”⁴² showing his racist temper, but his racism did not translate directly into the authorization or sanction of “indiscriminate slaughter.” Forrest thought of these men as

“deluded,” being led astray by the white men who had armed them and fooled them into thinking they could be real soldiers. With his background as a slave trader and planter, he did not think of black men, these escaped slaves, as soldiers, but as “commodities and laborers.” To Forrest, it was foolish and wasteful to destroy such “people property” who were really not responsible for their own actions. Not long after the event, Reverend David C. Kelley spoke to Forrest about Fort Pillow. Kelley recalled Forrest saying “that he was opposed to the killing of negro troops; that it was his policy to capture all he could and return them to their owners.”⁴³

The atrocities at Fort Pillow included the killing of soldiers trying to surrender, soldiers being buried alive, torching buildings and tents that housed wounded soldiers, and the shooting of black women and children there.⁴⁴ These horrors were the subject of a congressional investigation by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War that began on April 21, 1864, only nine days after the capture of the garrison. The two key members of the committee, Representative Daniel Gooch and Senator Benjamin Wade, gathered testimony from northern witnesses as they traveled Union territory.⁴⁵ Such biased testimony has led many Southern writers to challenge the committee’s report and findings. While there is justification for the criticism that the committee’s report was intended for propaganda, the report “contains strong, consistent, and convincing” testimony which points to the “massacre of the garrison after it had quit fighting.”⁴⁶ The congressional investigation was tasked with finding out whether the rumors of Union soldiers at Fort Pillow being killed after surrender were true. In this pursuit the investigators looked at episodes leading up to the Fort Pillow incident to show “that the atrocities committed” there “were not the result of passions excited by the heat of conflict, but were the results of a policy deliberately decided upon and unhesitatingly announced.” The testimony in the report was considered ample enough to “convince even the most skeptical that it is the intention of the rebel authorities not to recognize the officers and men of our colored regiments as entitled to the treatment accorded by all civilized nations to prisoners of war.” The massacre in question is portrayed in the committee’s report:

Then followed a scene of cruelty and murder without a parallel in civilized warfare, which needed but the tomahawk and scaling-knife to exceed the worst atrocities ever committed by savages. The rebels commenced an indiscriminate slaughter, sparing neither age nor sex, white or black, soldier or civilian. The officers and men seemed to vie with each other in the

devilish work... All around were heard cries of “No quarter!” “No quarter!” “Kill the damned niggers; shoot them down!” All who asked for mercy were answered by the most cruel taunts and sneers. Some were spared for a time, only to be murdered under circumstances of greater cruelty.

The report describes the hut and tents which housed the wounded being set on fire, with some of the escapees of the flames “met by those ruffians and brutally shot down or...their brains beaten out.” Not to be excluded, the report speaks to the horror show of live burials, stating “the testimony also establishes the fact that the rebels buried some of the living with the dead, a few of whom succeeded afterwards in digging themselves out, or were dug out by others.”⁴⁷

At the time of the congressional investigation of the events at Fort Pillow, Nathan Bedford Forrest was of course still in the field at war with the Union. He would speak of the matter, though, just four days after the war. The general was asked by Northern writer Bryan McAlister if he would write the true story of Fort Pillow, and the general replied, “Well the Yankees ought to know [it]; they sent down their best men to investigate the affair.” McAlister asked if that report could be believed. “Yes, if we are to believe any thing a nigger says,” was Forrest’s reply. The general then uttered one of his favorite sayings: “When I went into the war, I meant to fight...fighting means killing.” Seeming to fulfill his role as “butcher of Fort Pillow,” Forrest described the fort as “full of ‘niggers and deserters from our army’ who ‘were all drunk’ and ‘kept...firing’ as they ran down the hill to the river with their flag ‘still flying.’” The general said to the author that he had “stopped the fight,” and that any burning of soldiers or tents was done by the Federals themselves.⁴⁸

General Forrest would speak of the massacre again in an interview four years after Fort Pillow, touching upon what he believed was the cause of the outburst among his troops and what he did about it. His words at this time, which corresponded with his inclusion on the Tennessee delegation to the 1868 Democratic National Convention,⁴⁹ sound calmer and more reasonable. Forrest’s explanation of events reflects the scene before the battle that has been outlined above and served as a reason for the fort’s seizure. He said, “There were with me many citizens who had been wronged, and, I think, without waiting for the surrender of the men who had wronged them and their families, they shot them down.” Left out of the general’s explanation, of course, are the specific wrongs that his men were avenging. Some of these “wrongs,” in fact, took the form of armed ex-slaves fighting for their freedom. Forrest made clear

in the interview that he ordered the killing stopped when he learned of it, some twenty minutes after the initial attack, saying he “was compelled to shoot one of” his “own men who did not obey” him “promptly.” He further stated, “No man was killed after the capture by my order; and any killing that was done was without my knowledge.” The interviewer wrote that Forrest “could not understand why the fight there had been called a massacre; that its result was only natural in war, and he thought the public should so regard it.” No doubt the general had seen a lot in war that he would rather not have, yet these closing comments are in stark relief to what the public could read in the official Fort Pillow Report.⁵⁰

After taking in the gory details of the massacre and hearing what Forrest had to say about it, the question remains, how much blame can be placed upon the general? Forrest had related in the article printed by the *New York Times* that he found out about the killing after about twenty minutes and called a stop to it. That it took him this length time was likely because Forrest’s command post was “uncharacteristically” some four hundred yards away from the front line when the bugler sounded his call to charge.⁵¹ Several participants, notably on the Union side, testified to the detail that the general ordered the killing stopped. Elias Wells, a Union private, said “that the Confederates ‘killed all the men after they surrendered’ until orders came from Forrest to stop firing.” Also, Lieutenant Leaming recalled a Confederate officer ordering the arrest of a Rebel that had shot at the “darky soldiers.” Union Captain John G. Woodruff related that Confederate General Chalmers “said that he and Forrest had ‘stopped the massacre as soon as they were able to.’” On the Confederate side, Colonel D. M. Wisdom was ordered by General Forrest “to go down below the bluff and stop ‘any and all firing.’” Other Rebel soldiers expressed similar accounts, “one saying that Forrest personally ‘rode down the line and commanded and caused the firing to cease.’”⁵² Such accounts of the lengths Forrest and other officers went to in order to stop “undue slaughter” speak to the fact that a slaughter did take place.⁵³ The account from the congressional investigation report paints the dark picture of the carnage that went on until Forrest could put a stop to it. Other testimony, even from the Confederate side, shows that Forrest’s men at least believed their leader had ordered the garrison be given no quarter. One Confederate sergeant must have believed as much, because he wrote later, “I with several of the others tried to stop the butchery and at one time had partially succeeded but Gen. Forrest ordered them shot down like dogs and the carnage continued.”⁵⁴

Such a belief that Nathan Bedford Forrest actually ordered the killing of

soldiers at Fort Pillow leads to another aspect of potential blame to place at the general's feet. There was brutal and widespread slaughter at Fort Pillow, and those who surrendered as the Rebels took the fort should have been treated humanely, to say the least. But the above testimony backs up the notion that the massacre was not so much an official policy of Forrest as it was the action of individual troops reacting to what they saw before them. They reacted with rage when they saw "blacks had taken up arms against them...neighbors had



A statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest in Memphis, Tennessee. (Annie Lee Dearing)

chosen to don Union uniforms," and "they had been forced to attack a fort that should have surrendered." Yet Nathan Bedford Forrest, as the leader of these men who had committed such acts of retribution and hatred, was responsible for what happened at Fort Pillow, at least indirectly. His men "became extensions of their commander," who "acted as they believed their general would want them to act." Forrest detested the makeup of the fort as much as his men did. If he was upset about what occurred, it was not remorse over dead black Union

soldiers and “white ‘renegade Tennesseans,’” who deserved what they got in his eyes, but regret that he had lost control of the battle and his men.⁵⁵

The savagery of the events at Fort Pillow would hound Nathan Bedford Forrest the rest of his days. He was known as the “butcher of Fort Pillow,”⁵⁶ and the more simple, yet equally unfortunate, “Forrest of Fort Pillow.”⁵⁷ He regretted that his reputation and character had been sullied, if he did not regret his actions. He held firm his conviction that he had done nothing wrong. “I have never committed an act, uttered a word, or entertained a sentiment not in strict accordance with the most humanizing military usages, and fear no investigation into my conduct.” He wrote to President Andrew Johnson asking for amnesty as an ex-Confederate and told him that he would waive any immunity from a future investigation of the incident. The general was indeed concerned about his damaged reputation. Fort Pillow was a burden he had to bear. Some of the frustration of carrying such a burden manifested itself in a comment Forrest reportedly made to a woman in New York. He was there for the Democratic National Convention and the woman asked him two questions in quick succession. “Are you the Rebel General Forrest?” and then “And is it true you murdered those dear colored people at Fort Pillow? Tell me, sir; I want no evasive answer.” Forrest, who was facing her in his nightshirt, as she had come knocking at his hotel room door, spat, “Yes, madam. I killed the men and women for my soldiers’ dinner and ate the babies myself for breakfast.”⁵⁸

Considering the Fort Pillow massacre alone, Nathan Bedford Forrest has a villainous reputation and proves to be a controversial figure. After the war, he succeeded in further damaging his reputation with his involvement in the Ku Klux Klan.⁵⁹ As an admirer of Forrest, Shelby Foote has gone as far as to sympathize with the early Klan. In his words, “in some ways the Klan was very akin to the Free French Resistance to Nazi occupation. To expect people who fought as valiantly as these people did to roll over and play dead because there was an occupying army is kind of crazy.” Furthermore, Foote pronounces that “Forrest’s Klan was anti-black but not opposed to all black people. It was trying to keep illiterate blacks from occupying positions like sheriff and judge.”⁶⁰ Many Americans today are familiar with at least the notoriety of the Ku Klux Klan, if not its history. It is necessary to look at why the outfit was formed and what it became, if there is any “sympathy” to be entertained for Forrest and his Klan.

The outfit that would become the Ku Klux Klan started out “innocently”

either in late 1865 or early 1866 at a meeting of six young ex-Confederate soldiers in Pulaski, Tennessee. They complained of boredom with their post-war lives⁶¹ and “‘hungering and thirsting’ for amusement,”⁶² one of them suggested they form a “secret fraternity.”⁶³ The Klan would go on to use terror and violence as tools, but in its earliest incarnation, all evidence supports the point that it “was designed purely for amusement,” and “had no ulterior motive.” In a year’s time, when the Klan began to take the law into its own hands, some of the group’s founders harbored “mixed emotions” about what they had unleashed. These founders were conservative and generally backed the more political and social aims, as well as “the milder forms of intimidation” of the Klan. One of the six original founders stated anonymously in an April 1868 letter, “...If it [the Klan] has become a regular organization, with guerrilla and ‘lynch-law’ attributes, then better the Ku Klux had never been heard of, and the sooner such organization is dissolved the better for the country at large-especially for the South.” Even before the Klan became more organized and expansive, it went “from a social club to a band of regulators, self-dedicated to the curbing of lawlessness...and...to keeping the Negro in his place.”⁶⁴

The Ku Klux Klan was one of the “gangs” serving “as military arms of the Democratic Party,” during the late nineteenth century. The Klan’s activities have been described as “Democratic-supported political terrorism.” The main problem that faced the Klan was black suffrage. After they lost the war, many white Southerners feared “the black vote would lead to calls for equality and the undermining of the foundation of white superiority.” Slavery had been wiped out, but in the South, blacks still had to be made to know their role. Black suffrage held the potential to upset the white southerners’ ideas of an ordered society, but groups like the Klan also tilted at the windmills of perceived threats, particularly the danger of white women consorting with “equal” freedmen. The Klan took the law into its own hands, by punishing blacks with a “violent and speedy death,” lynching them, even before an offense could take place.⁶⁵

The Klan targeted white people as well. Southern editors of the post-Civil War period contributed to the violence by inveighing against “carpetbaggers” and “scalawags,” whom they described as bringing about an Armageddon. Fears about a race war in the South were very real, and editors painted a picture of just what would cause it:

As one North Carolinian put it, the sudden unleashing of the black hordes on the South and the attempt to elevate them to a level of political equality

with their former masters would create a “spirit of exterminating violence toward the black race. The weaker race would be destroyed, and Negroes would become as rare in the South as Indians or buffaloes.”

The Reconstruction imposed on the defeated South by radical Republicans was the official excuse for why groups like the Ku Klux Klan were formed. Certainly, violence against and hatred for blacks was inextricably linked to the organization. Other editorials of the age that contributed to such feeling include the one from South Carolina’s *Fairfield Herald*, for April 29, 1868, describing how “power” had been “snatched...from the hands of the race which settled the country...and transferred it to former slaves, an ignorant and feeble race.” The same paper on November 20, 1872, declared a Reconstruction policy “hell-born...which has trampled the fairest and noblest of states of our great sisterhood beneath the unholy hoofs of African savages and shoulder-strapped brigands,” handing fellow citizens over “to the rule of gibbering, louse-eaten, devil-worshipping barbarians, from the jungles...” Such editors, and by extension the Klan, claimed that God was on their side, “but there was nothing holy about their cause or their battles.”⁶⁶

Fear helps explain why men would associate with a group such as the Ku Klux Klan, and there were specific events that caused their anxiety to be compounded. At the outset of Reconstruction, the defeated South suffered turmoil and violence. Spring and summer 1866 saw racial confrontations in Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Louisiana. Memphis and New Orleans hosted the worst clashes that year. Forrest’s hometown of Memphis broke out in riot and violence directed at blacks by white police and firemen. Economic disorder from the war and the substantial increase in the black population of the city fueled the fury. A political convention of blacks and Union men was assaulted in New Orleans, again by white policemen. The death toll of both episodes amounted to roughly eighty to ninety blacks. For a man like Forrest, these riots were evidence of “society out of control.” Law and order was the remedy for such chaotic times. Law and order for many white Southerners, however, was a virtual return to pre-war society. If it came to it, “brickbats, clubs, and guns” would be used to restore the freedman to slave status.⁶⁷

The 1866 race riots made white southerners feel how vulnerable they had become and how uncertain were their days. The modern student of the post-Civil War era is hard-pressed to fully appreciate the social revolution experienced by white Southerners. The war had been a torment for most, yet

Confederate veterans longed for the reassurance of their wartime brotherhoods. To gain some measure of control over their lives, they desired to turn the clock back to antebellum days, complete with a return of black submission to white rule. The Confederacy and its slavery had been defeated, and the Rebels that still drew breath were changed and defined by the war. Shoulder-to-shoulder they had persevered under privations and conquest. After the war, parades, reunions, and “lost cause” celebrations became popular. The secret societies, like the Ku Klux Klan, were bred from this desire to regain control and make some sense out of a changing world.⁶⁸

The Ku Klux Klan was reorganized in spring 1867 at a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. This “political rebirth” of the Klan was ushered in with a Prescript and “an elaborate superstructure” fashioned to take on expansion well outside of Tennessee. Offices included the Grand Cyclops (with two Night Hawks assisting); the Grand Giant of the Province (with his four Goblins); the Grand Titan of the Dominion (and six Furies); the Grand Dragon of the Realm (with eight Hydras); with the top office belonging to the Grand Wizard of the Empire with his ten Genii to assist.⁶⁹ Not at all ironically, it turns out, it was Southern cavalry General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the “Wizard of the Saddle” who was sought out and given this commanding seat of the “Invisible Empire.”⁷⁰

That Nathan Bedford Forrest was a member and leader of the Ku Klux Klan there is little doubt. Around the same time of the Nashville meeting, Forrest went there to join up with this growing order. Members testified later that Forrest had been made a chief of the organization, based on his recent career and experience. James R. Crowe, an original member, stated that, “After the order grew to large numbers we found it necessary to have someone of large experience to command. We chose General Forrest.” A Memphis member affirmed that, “N. B. Forrest of Confederate fame was at our head, and was known as the Grand Wizard. I heard him make a speech in one of our dens.” From such testimony, it is believed that Forrest was indeed Grand Wizard. For his part, Forrest denied being a member, certainly not a leader of the group. His own testimony before a Congressional committee, though, adds credence to the belief that he was a commander of the Klan. He told of “getting at that time from fifty to one hundred letters a day,” and having “a private secretary writing all the time. I was receiving letters from all the Southern States, men complaining, being dissatisfied, persons whose friends had been killed, or their families insulted, and they were writing to me to know what they ought to do.” The general was asked why people saw fit to write him. He replied, “I suppose

they thought I was a man who would do to counsel with.” If these folks knew or had reason to believe he was at the helm of a powerful outfit like the Ku Klux Klan, they would certainly consider him worth their entreaties.⁷¹

A desire for order in the face of race riots coupled with a defense of his family and what he held dear contributed to the general’s decision to join the Klan. He had joined a furtive group by 1867 called the Pale Faces, one Forrest likened to the Masons. He explained that the group’s purpose was “to protect the ‘weak and defenseless’ and to prevent disorder.” These were important factors for him. To understand why he would ally with the Pale Faces and then the Klan is to understand his nature. His frontier life, his battle experience, and his personality shaped his self-consciousness and his worldly perspective. “He was the Jacksonian man of action, the rough-and-ready defender and protector of family and self.” To General Forrest, “defense, order (in the society this meant white supremacy), control, honor, and violence were essential elements of life.”⁷²

General Forrest defined the nature of the Ku Klux Klan, in an article printed in the August 28, 1868, Cincinnati Commercial, as “a protective, political, military organization.” He described its original mission as defense “against Loyal Leagues and the Grand Army of the Republic,” that had been retooled into “a political organization, giving its support, of course, to the democratic party.” When the general was asked whether he thought the Klan

“ A desire for order in the face of race riots coupled with a defense of his family and what he held dear contributed to the general’s decision to join the Klan. ”

had been good for Tennessee, he averred, “No doubt of it.” Yet the “Wizard” answered the question of “Are you a member of the Ku Klux, general?” with “I am not; but am in sympathy and will cooperate with them. I know they are charged with many crimes they are not guilty of.”⁷³ When Congress questioned Forrest about the organization and its activities, he testified that, “Some called them Pale Faces, some called them Ku-Klux,” and only presumed that it had a commander. He described the organization’s purpose as one not of politics but as “self-protection.” Forrest described why this protection was necessary in

words reminiscent of the description of what had gone on in Tennessee leading up to the Fort Pillow massacre:

There was a great deal of insecurity felt by the southern people. There were a great many northern men coming down there, forming Leagues all over the country. The negroes were holding night meetings; were going about; were becoming very insolent; and the southern people all over the State were very much alarmed. I think many of the organizations did not have any name; parties organized themselves so as to be ready in case they were attacked. Ladies were ravished by some of these negroes, who were tried and put in the penitentiary, but were turned out in a few days afterward. There was a great deal of insecurity in the country, and I think this organization was got up to protect the weak, with no political intention at all.⁷⁴

Forrest prefaced this description of current affairs by stating that the organization which became known as the Klan “arose about the time the militia were called out, and Governor Brownlow issued his proclamation stating that the troops would not be injured for what they should do to rebels; such a proclamation was issued.”⁷⁵ Tennessee governor William G. “Parson” Brownlow, a personification of “the bitter hatred for rebels so pervasive in East Tennessee,” crusaded against ex-Confederates using a disfranchisement law to secure the ballot box “against ‘the approach of treason.’” The law limited suffrage to white men “publicly known to have entertained unconditional Union sentiments” during the war.⁷⁶ While black ex-slaves were winning the vote, many of their white former masters were losing it. The state of Tennessee during Reconstruction was an arena for further rebellion and a promise of more civil war. The battle was joined between Brownlow and his chiefly ex-Confederate Conservative opposition. When violence was visited upon Negroes and Unionists, Brownlow called out the militia. In response, Conservatives denied such activity and organized to defend themselves against perceived military control and the manipulation of Negro suffrage. Both sides believed they were struggling for their very lives, and each associated the other “with utter darkness.”⁷⁷ Concerning the disfranchisement law, Brownlow declared in 1867 that he would enforce it, “and that ‘[i]f to do so it becomes necessary that there shall be violence and bloodshed, so be it.’”⁷⁸

Nathan Bedford Forrest went on to issue what some interpreted as a disbandment order for the Ku Klux Klan. One source stated he did so

because Brownlow declared martial law for Tennessee. Another source, Minor Meriwether, claimant to the office of the Klan's Grand Scribe, asserted that the group "had achieved its original purpose and that bad men had got into it," essentially what Forrest stated in his order. A third explanation from a 1930 interview of an elderly Klansman seemed to connect the order with the Conservatives' knowledge, in the aftermath of the 1869 gubernatorial election which spelled the end of Radical Reconstruction in Tennessee, that control of the state was coming their way and the Klan was no longer a political need. At any rate it was evident by summer 1869 that "the Conservative gentry of Tennessee renounced the Ku Klux Klan and severed their connection with it."⁷⁹

Before his "disbandment" order, Forrest was ready to do battle over Brownlow's desire to use militia in Tennessee. The general was particularly agitated with the governor threatening to shoot down Ku Klux, because Brownlow called "all southern men Ku Klux." Forrest announced, "If they go to hunting down and shooting these men, there will be war, and a bloodier one than we have ever witnessed." Furthermore, Forrest spelled out who his targets in such a war would be:

I have no powder to burn killing negroes. I intend to kill the radicals. I have told them this and more. There is not a radical leader in this town but is a marked man; and if trouble should break out not one of them would be left alive. I have told them that they were trying to create a disturbance and then slip out and leave the consequences to fall upon the negro; but they can't do it. Their houses are picketed, and when the fight comes not one of them would get out of this town alive.

Forrest was generally opposed to such a war, however, wanting "it distinctly understood that I...will only fight in self-defense."⁸⁰ A combination of an "anticlimactic" militia campaign and the 1869 election of a new governor, DeWitt C. Senter, a much more conciliatory Republican than Brownlow, caused a veritable second civil war in Tennessee to dissipate.⁸¹ A restoration of some measure of peace may have been desired by Forrest. In his "General Order Number One" of January 25, 1869, he called for "the masks and costumes of this Order" to "be entirely abolished and destroyed," because it had become "injurious...to the public peace and public safety for which it was intended."⁸²

Forrest's order can be viewed as an effort to suppress the Klan, as he later claimed,⁸³ yet it only influenced Klansmen who felt they should obey the formal directions of the organization. It has been suggested that Forrest hoped

the order would simply dissociate “Imperial Headquarters from responsibility for the behavior of rank-and-file Klansmen.” Interpreted as an order for disbandment of the Klan, it admitted to a continuation of the outfit to oversee implementation of its commands and punishment of any violators. Forrest issued the proclamation because, like in the case of Fort Pillow, he had lost control of the Ku Klux Klan. In his eyes, the Klan had begun as an “honorable and patriotic” group. He now needed to put distance between himself and the “sprawling, intractable monster” the group had become.⁸⁴ Pandora’s Box was open, with the Klan riding on, heedless of General Forrest’s orders.⁸⁵

Those who are still angry today about what went on at Fort Pillow and Forrest’s responsibility for it stand on firm ground. Even when the context of the event is understood, “he still stands indicted by history.” Jack Hurst writes that not only is Fort Pillow a singular event in its ugliness, it “is notable...because it can be viewed as a prelude to other horrors,” and these other horrors were realized in the menace of the Ku Klux Klan. “As the Klan’s first national leader, [Forrest] became the Lost Cause’s avenging angel, galvanizing a loose collection of boyish secret clubs into a reactionary instrument of terror still feared today.”⁸⁶ The furor encircling the bust of the general in Selma, included the comment from Rose Sanders, a lawyer and radio host there. She said, “Glorifying Nathan B. Forrest here is like glorifying a Nazi in Germany. For Selma, of all places, to have a big monument to a Klansman is totally unacceptable.”⁸⁷ We live in a different society than did Forrest and his generation. Our society was altered by the events of the Civil War and its aftermath. That aftermath stretched into the lives of people still living, who remember a South still plagued by racial strife and conflict. Even with the knowledge of history, and the context of the events in Nathan Bedford Forrest’s life, for some, wounds seemingly are fresh enough to prevent forgiveness for his and this nation’s sinful past. When Forrest’s Memphis, Tennessee statue had been cleansed of its vandalism, Shelby Foote remarked, “They ruined it when they cleaned it. It used to be a dark green bronze. Now it looks like it’s made out of Hershey bars.” Even an admirer like Foote seemed to understand that Forrest was far from perfect and perhaps his memory should likewise be marked with contentions and imperfections.⁸⁸ Without justifying Forrest’s racism, we must try to understand him. His attitudes and actions seem deplorable to us today, but not because we are especially evolved as a society. That such racism, shown in the scourge of slavery, was significant enough an evil to Americans in the 1800s, is borne out in the struggle that was the Civil War.

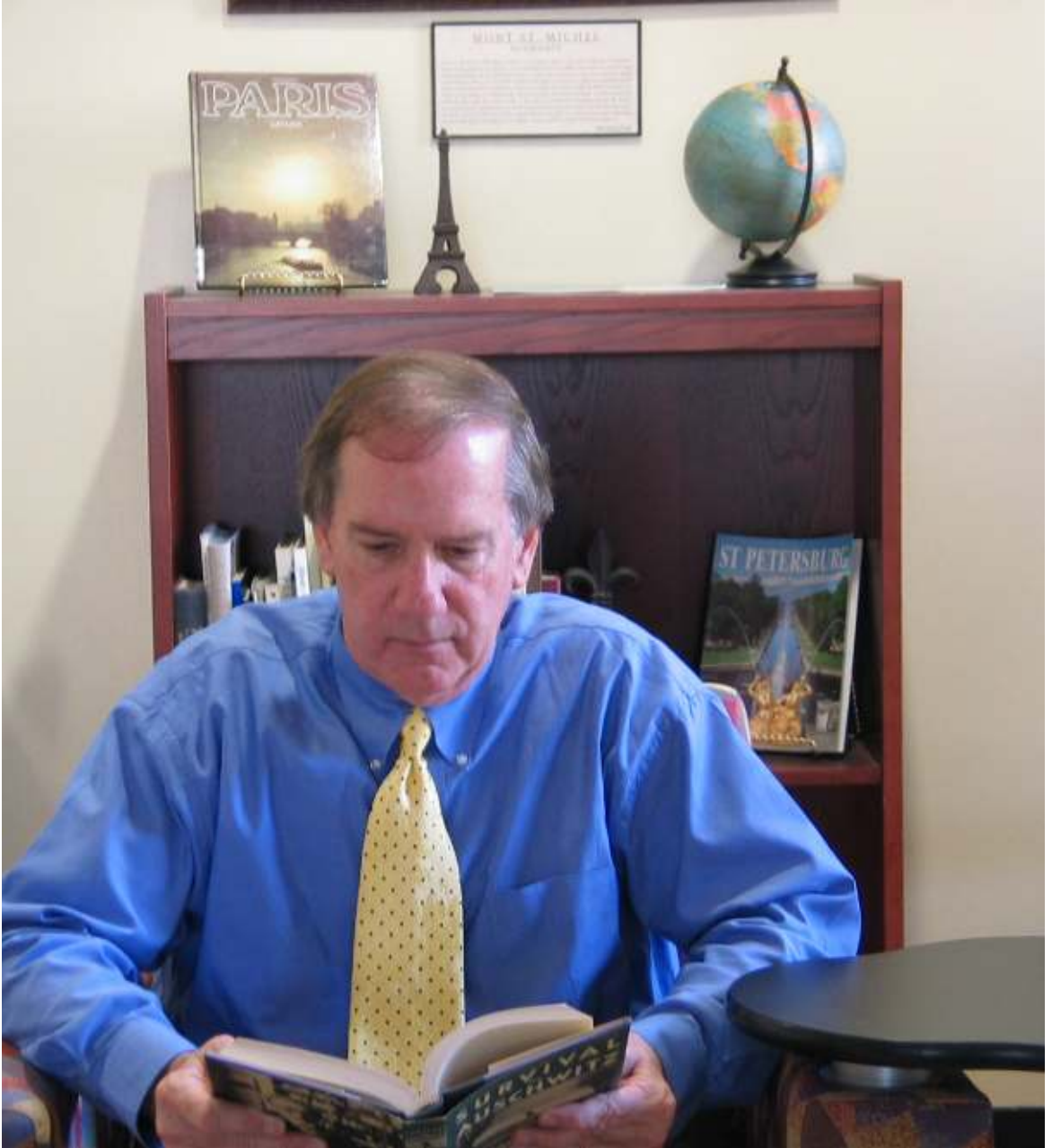
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An Evening



Dr. Michael Fitzsimmons at the AUM library. (Samantha McNeilly)

with Dr. Michael Fitzsimmons

by Roland McDonald

Dr. Fitzsimmons has taught at AUM since 1985 and is the longest serving member of the Department of History. He will be retiring at the end of the 2015-16 academic year. Recently he sat down with history major Roland McDonald to talk about his life in and out of academia.

Can you briefly describe what your youth was like? Sort of where you grew up and what you did for fun?

I was born in Chicago, Illinois. My family moved around: we moved first to New Jersey, then to Michigan then back to Illinois where I remained from the sixth grade on. So I think of myself as being from Chicago. I finished grade school in Park Ridge, Illinois—the suburb to which we moved, and I went to Maine South High School. I had close high school friends with whom I'm still in touch. It was a pleasant youth on the outside, there was some turmoil in my house, but Park Ridge was a good place to grow up. At that time, I can't say that I had a lot of interests or hobbies other than reading. I had a difficult patch from grades seven through ten where I was an indifferent student until I found myself for the last couple of years. It was really when I went to college that I became much more focused. I went to what was then an all-male school called Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, NC.

What was that experience like, sort of as a juxtaposition to high school?

It was entirely different. My high school was in this upper middle-class, Republican suburb. I went off and gained additional values than what I had grown up with but certainly found a sense of direction and purpose that up until that time I had been lacking. I became much more involved in studies and athletics—I was not allowed to participate in athletics in high school—so I was able now to at least do intramurals. And I made extraordinarily close friendships that endure to this day. We were very close class, and we remain very much in touch with each other. So it was really a turning point in my life. [The] college

Roland McDonald is a junior majoring in history and minoring in political science. His historical interest is ancient/classical history. Among his extracurricular activities, Roland is a member of the political science club. This is his first year serving on the editorial board.

[was] associated with a Benedictine monastery, so I learned that one can be competitive but also cooperative.

Out of that experience, what was something that stood out?

Well, perhaps the most electrifying moment was when the news of Kent State came across. Now, it was an all-male campus. All of us were concerned with the draft and the Vietnam War. And so, from about November 1969 to May 1970 the campus was really politicized, and Kent State was the catalyst for a lot of frustrations. Graduation would have been the greatest single moment and it was because we graduated as a class. We were all close, but we were all going into an uncertain future because of the draft. It was a very bittersweet moment for most of us—some of us were safe because of high draft numbers. Others, including myself, had low draft numbers; mine had already been called. And so we had to await what our fate would be.

What was your view on the war and the draft?

In terms of the Vietnam War, when I went to college and escaped the more conventional thinking of my high school, I was against the war, although my class was divided on the issue. I marched in a couple of the demonstrations in 1969 against the war. And like I said, it really came to a head with Kent State.

In hindsight as you are looking back with some of the information that you have gained now, would you maybe have done anything differently?

Let's see...in terms of what I would have done differently...I can't think of anything, really, that I would have changed. Maybe I would have waited to see if I would have been drafted or not. But in those days, if you received your draft notice you couldn't go to another service. So I decided to join the Navy.

Did you have a choice as to which branch you joined?

You did—if you didn't get your draft notice. If you actually received your draft notice, you could not go to another branch. So, I went and spoke to the Navy recruiter and joined the Navy. Maybe that's the one thing I would change. I didn't like it very much at the time, but now I value it more than I did then.

Where did you go for basic training?

I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Center. I was there from March until May 1972. And then I went the Naval Communications Training Center, the old

Corry Field, in Pensacola, Florida. I was training to work with Naval Security Group. And then, from there, I went to Okinawa from November 1972 to April 1974.

Can you describe some of your experiences at Okinawa? I know from your class that you had a lot of stories. I think you maybe had a story about a snake or something [at Okinawa]?

There was a snake called a Habu. I hadn't grown up much around snakes, and they were about 6 to 8 feet long. There were sugarcane fields and only a single road that led to my duty station. These Habu would warm themselves on that asphalt road at night. And after the Vietnam War ended and things had relaxed a bit, there was one of those shifts from 11 at night to seven in the morning where the chief said I could have the night off. But it was 12 o'clock, and he said there's only one catch: you'll have to walk back to the barracks. Well, that meant going back by means of the road. So I declined the offer. Somebody who had a car got off that night. They were just black snakes, and you couldn't see them. They could be fatal but only if you didn't get any medical attention. And they had a disjointed jaw that allowed them to have a much bigger bite, so they were pretty intimidating.

What event led you to become a history teacher?

When I was an undergraduate, I knew I would major in history, and I had a course in the French Revolution, with a man named Ken Margeson who actually had just gotten his PhD. and was only a few years older than I was. He taught me the French revolution. [At] Okinawa, I felt that I was getting stale, so I read a great deal in my off time. I would go to the Kadena Air Force Base Library and do reading there. Probably didn't see as much of the island as I should have, but I was directed towards going to graduate school.

How did you get out [of the military]?

I had to do reserve duty for three years, but I got out and immediately started graduate school at the University of North Carolina. I went from Okinawa to Chapel Hill and started in the summer session.

How did you feel about the institution, the University of North Carolina?

I was ambivalent. I got a first-rate education there, but the attitude was very antagonistic towards graduate students. Of my admitted cohort of seventeen,

only three of us finished. It was not for lack of intelligence or anything like that; it was just a program that for some reason was dysfunctional—it's the only word I can use. I learned a great deal there, but harbor absolutely no affection for the institution.

When did you take your first trip to Paris for research?

My first trip to France was for my dissertation research: a brief trip in 1978 to scour the archives to see whether the sources were there to support the topic that I had chosen on the legal profession in Paris. It was a bit tricky because the Commune, which had been a civil war in Paris, had seen the city burn along with all the records for the legal profession. So, I had to construct this in a roundabout way. I came back convinced that it could be done, so I spent the academic year 1979-1980 in Paris doing my dissertation research and came back and wrote my dissertation and completed my degree in 1981.

What did you write your dissertation on or rather what was your specific topic that you were researching?

It was on the Parisian Order of Barristers, which was the most prestigious legal body—it was equivalent to our Bar [Association] in France. They were attached to the high court of France, the Parlement of Paris. The topic gave me a chance to investigate a question that was very much alive in the 1980s on the nature of a bourgeois revolution. The barristers were unquestioningly bourgeois, and also adversely affected by the Revolution. It allowed me to make a sort of counter-argument to what was then a dominant interpretation of the French Revolution.

What were your impressions of Paris as a city and a place for research?

As a place for research I love it to this day. I love being in the archives, I love the sense of intellectual adventure. I go back as often as I can when I have a topic that I need to do research on. But also Paris itself is everything urban living can be—it's clean, it's safe, filled with culture, it's a walking city; it's quite enchanting. As are some of the other cities I've been to outside of Paris, but I like France and its culture very much.

From there could you tell us about your career as a professor—maybe some of the other places that you have taught and how you ultimately came to AUM?

Ah yes, I taught western civilization for a semester at the University of North Carolina in the spring of 1982; then, I received a Mellon Instructorship at Rice University in Houston, Texas. It was not a permanent position: the Mellon foundation sponsored [it] in order to help people remain in the profession to get an appointment. So, I taught at Rice University for three years and enjoyed it very much. It was an experience that helped me grow in a number of ways. Then, it was in 1985 that the position at AUM became open. I interviewed for it and was fortunate to receive it. I didn't expect that I'd spend my entire career here, but I have and have no regrets about it.

What are some of the changes that you have noticed in Montgomery in that time?

It has grown much more for the better. When I came here it was polarized. There was a mayor who, I thought, pursued polarization. He didn't want to invest in the city, so the downtown was dilapidated. Since he was voted out, the city, I think, has developed: the downtown has become more vibrant, but the best part is that the city has become much more multi-ethnic with Hyundai. It had been black and white; now [there's] Hispanic and Asian. I think it's enriched Montgomery in a way that I would scarcely have believed possible when I came here in 1985.

What are some ways that college is different from when you were in or when you arrived here?

When I started, I think the expectation was pretty high that you were prepared. If you weren't prepared, you were washed out, basically. There were very few resources to help students along. I do find that the support network for students, which has grown here at AUM even since I've been here, is altogether beneficial. [Also], I've been quite pleased at the appearance of the campus—the way it's been transformed and the new buildings that have appeared during the last several years under Chancellor Veres.

What courses have you taught?

I have taught Modern France, France from 1787 to 1870, The Holocaust, Early Modern Europe, Modern Europe, The Battle of Okinawa, a course on Paris from 1750 to 1950, and of course all of us teach History 1010 and History 1020, which is usually about two thirds of our teaching load. Each of those upper-level courses is about one per semester.

What has been your most rewarding teaching experience?

Probably teaching the Holocaust. I think that making students aware of the dimensions of the Holocaust and the potential that hatred can have to bring about such genocide [has] been the most rewarding course, and the one to which students have responded the most. It has a pertinence that is more than say the French Revolution, which is more distant even though many of the values we hold come from the French Revolution—especially the ability to improve society. The Holocaust, I think, has allowed me to reach more students than any other course.

Is it a course or the annual event here on campus?

It was a class I taught it from 1987 to 2014. I've also done the Holocaust program since it came—we do bring survivors to the campus once a year in conjunction with Holocaust education week. And that's been going on since 2003.

A few more questions: could you tell us about some achievements and awards that you have received, specifically the Distinguished Research Professor Award and the Ida Belle professor award?

Like I said, I had the good fortune to be appointed as a Distinguished Research Professor after my second book came out. It was another way that AUM did support research. And the Ida Belle Young Professorship came about from the Ida Belle Young request; again, my department nominated me, wrote the letter that I guess enabled me to earn the award. Again it is one of the reasons that I am entirely grateful for support of my department.

Wrapping up, what advice would you give to history majors [and other college students with different plans]?

History affords more opportunities than it is traditionally credited with. I think that AUM has had very good luck with people working at the [Department of] Archives. And really a history education trains one to be analytical, and employers [want that]. I think the stereotype is that if one majors in history you're pretty much limited to teaching; I don't see that as being the case at all. I think that especially now in a world that is much more multicultural, [the] knowledge of other cultures and peoples is beneficial and can be useful in any number of careers—from politics and policy to business to education certainly. And it can make one more sensitive in dealing with other cultures and people

as well.

This is a unique opportunity in their lives. They will never have the opportunity again to immerse themselves in study and self-improvement—or self-knowledge actually—that they have now because life catches up to you after you graduate from college. There was a commencement speech given here many years ago by a Saudi prince who said that college is like a greenhouse where you're kind of sheltered—I mean you grow up in this greenhouse until you go out into the world then prepared. Try to make the most of the experience and the opportunity. Your professors are here to help you; use them as a resource. I mean, most of us in this department are here because of a professor who helped us along and gave us a sense of possibility and direction, and we like to pass that heritage along to others. So I hope that they will make the most of the opportunity, and there are many more opportunities for [things like] travel abroad that didn't exist here. You were asking me how it has changed since 1985: the study abroad opportunities are greater. The honors program. AUM is a much more developed institution where one can without question receive a first-rate education, if one sets one's mind to it.

Well, what are your future plans now that you are retiring?

In retirement, I hope to do some traveling that I was not able to do [because of] research in France. I loved it but being in France at any particular time meant that I was not somewhere else. I recently took the ancestry.com DNA test and found out I was actually more Irish than I thought. With my surname, I knew I was Irish, but I am more Irish than I thought. So I hope that my first trip will be to Ireland. And I would like to do a bit of research on the French Revolution just to keep my mind engaged.



Dr. Fitzsimmons with Graydon Rust, the founding editor of the *AUM Historical Review*, at AUM's May 2013 commencement. (Frank Williams)

Additional Contributors

Tanya Burton is a Senior Research Associate for the Geospatial Research Institute at AUM. She is working toward a bachelor's degree in sociology/anthropology/geography with a concentration in Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Kelhi DePace is a recently graduated history and English double major, and was a member of the University Honors Program. She currently works at AUM's Learning Center as a writing tutor and teaches history, literature, and the Bible at a local Montgomery school.

Candace Hilton is a fourth year junior studying graphic design and designed the internal layout of this issue. She enjoys drawing, sculpture, and painting. After graduation, she would like to work for a magazine as a designer.

Katie Kidd is a senior majoring in history with a minor in fine arts. She and her husband Billy have three children. As a history major, she believes in the power of a good story and the importance of knowing our own stories. Katie has served four years on the editorial board.

Tyler Rice graduated with a B.A. in history in 2015 and was named the Department of History's outstanding student for 2014-15. He is now enrolled in AUM's Master of Liberal Arts program. During his undergraduate years, he was a School of Liberal Arts Representative and a member of Phi Alpha Theta.

LaKendrick Richardson is a senior majoring in history. Among his extracurricular activities, LaKendrick participates in the AUM history mentoring program and is a member of Phi Alpha Theta. This is his second year serving on the editorial board.

Brittany Roberson is a junior studying graphic design and created the cover for this issue. After graduation, she plans to go into the field of media missions and work on behalf of Southern Baptist missionaries.

Will Segrest is a senior majoring in history with a minor in theater, and is the current editor of the *Historical Review*. His historical interest is the American West. This is his first year serving on the editorial board.

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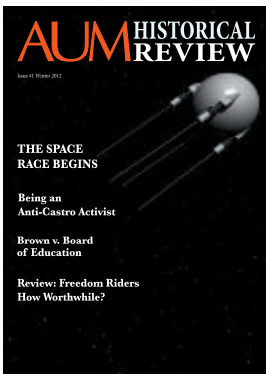
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