TOWSON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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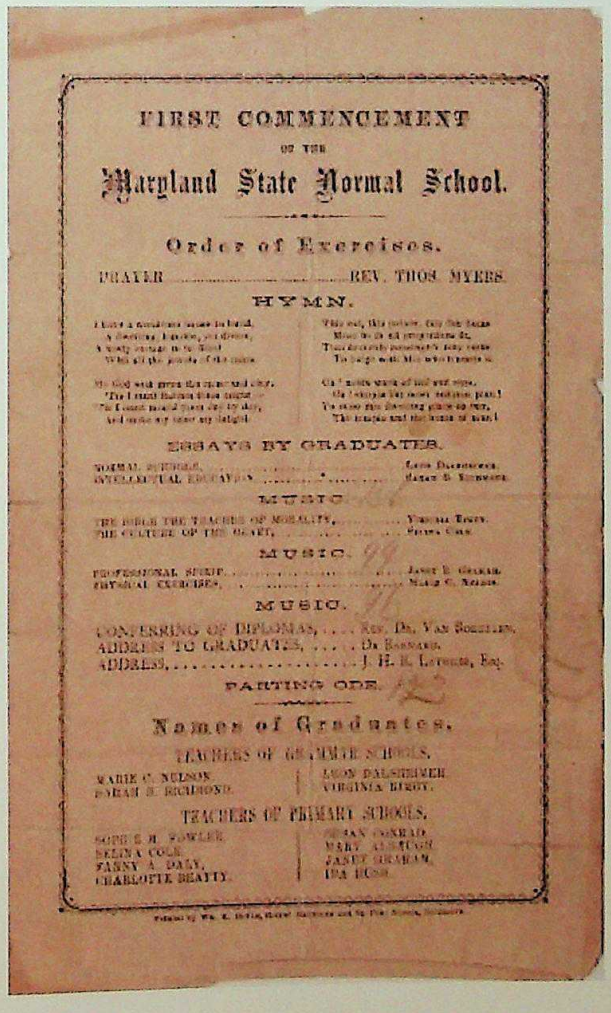
Journal of Historical Studies

2026



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OF THE
Maryland State Normal School.

Order of Exercises.

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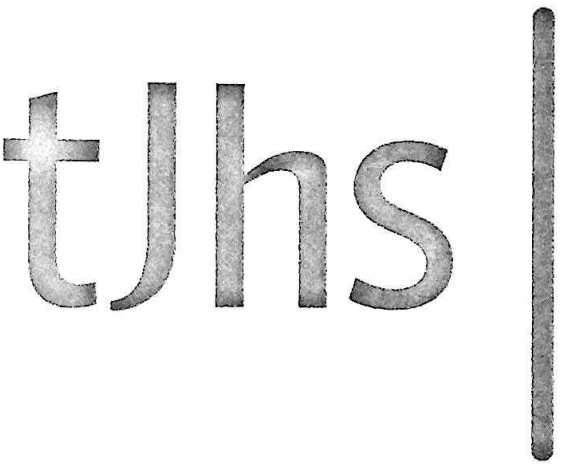

Towson Journal of Historical Studies

Volume 23

2026

Department of History
College of Liberal Arts
8000 York Road, Towson MD 21252

The photo included on this cover, sourced from our own Towson University archive, depicts the university's first commencement program in 1866 TU has evolved in many ways, and the development of our educational resources, especially the TU Archives is what allows us to publish a journal such as this. It is essential for us, when furthering our research, to remember TU's own history.

Towson Journal of Historical Studies is a faculty referred journal for the publication of original undergraduate work in history.

Towson Journal of Historical Studies, 2026 Edition

2026 Editorial Committee

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Note From the Editor

We are honored to showcase the 23rd edition of the *Towson Journal of Historical Studies* to our readers. Like many editors before us, we are glad to become a part of this publishing tradition that has remained continuous since 2003. We want to thank everyone who contributed to this edition, which is unique for how the editorial committee was constituted. In previous years, the journal was run as a production of our branch of *Phi Alpha Theta History Honors Society* through student volunteers who published the journal punctually under difficult conditions. In 2023, the Department resolved that students should earn some credit for the hard work and commitment that has sustained the journal. We hereby recognize the contributions of our heroes past.

This year, the journal received a high number of submissions, which we interpret to symbolize the journal's appeal among students in the College of Liberal Arts. It is also a testament to the quality of historical training that many courses have components that encourage students to conduct research and write publishable articles. It was difficult to determine which to publish among many quality and well-reviewed submissions. To all the students who gave us the privilege of reading their papers, we offer our gratitude for your continued support and interest in TJHS.

In this edition of the TJHS, we present articles on diverse themes and historical periods. Our editorial decisions were guided by our desire to offer a wide range of scholarly interests. The edition also reflects the urgency with which authors demand for historical reevaluation. We are privileged to offer Dr. Jillian Stinchcombe's article on "The Queen of Sheba" from a lecture she delivered to the Phi Alpha Theta. Her invocation that historians reexamine public stories and conventions is a valuable guide to this edition.

Jonathan Castle's examines the United States foreign policy to Pakistan by evaluating how the secrecy of foreign policy making can sometimes obstruct national interest and what citizens think of their government and country. Similarly, Joel Strong revisits the Philadelphia Riots of 1844 to highlight the centrality of religion in how rioters and victims

represented their experiences. In "The Bum-Ditties of the African Diaspora," Emily New wades into the roots and meanings of the Banjo. We find her intervention in the debate on musical instrument roots very revealing. Adam Harris' De ASTRONOMIA GALILAEI situates Galileo as a Copernican in ways that explain his convictions despite the formal church's persecution. Finally, Jack Wynd recovers the multicultural roots of the Lewis Chessmen and highlights the endurance of artistic cultures in everyday usages and elite identity.

Each of these articles reflects the high level of academic research completed by undergraduate students at Towson. We would like to thank each author for their hard work and willingness to cooperate with our editing process. We also extend our thanks to the faculty reviewers, who took the time to read these submissions and give their feedback.
Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

We are deeply grateful to our faculty advisor, Dr. Oluwatoyin Oduntan, for his guidance and support in bringing this journal to fruition. This year's editorial board, integrated with a course component, benefited from his expertise. Beyond publishing the journal, his lectures on provincial newspapers, the history of the book, and the evolution of publishing have enriched our understanding of editorial work.

We hope you enjoy these articles as it has been a pleasure to publish them.

Towson Journal of Historical Studies
Daniel Riale
Editor in chief

Feature Articles

The Queen of Sheba

Dr. Jillian Stinchcombe

Guest Lecture presented to
Phi Alpha Theta
March 26, 2026

Hi everyone, thank you so much for being here today. I'm very excited to speak with you about my research on the Queen of Sheba. Now question: how many people here had heard of the Queen of Sheba before reading the title of this talk, or if you've taken one of my classes, before I spoke about her in a class context?

What I find when I speak about the Queen of Sheba is she is a figure who many people have heard of, but mostly have a sense of "I think I've heard of her." She's famous for visiting the Israelite king Solomon at his court, but not many people know that off the top of their head. There's this sort of ambient awareness of her – I've seen several restaurants with her name, especially Ethiopian restaurants; Beyonce calls herself "Queen Sheba" in her 2019 song "Mood 4 Eva;" in the 2022 film *3000 Years of Longing* there is a Queen of Sheba figure played by the Ugandan model Aamito Stacie Lagum; you may even be familiar with Sheba cat food, which is hearkening back to this figure in a very indirect way.

I really enjoy researching the Queen of Sheba because she is a study in contradictions. On the one hand, she is famous enough that people have a sense that they know the name, but she is obscure enough that relatively few people confidently know who she is or where her story emerges from. She is quite rare, in that she's a non-Israelite woman who is portrayed in positive terms in the scriptures of Judaism (1 Kings 10:1-13, 2 Chronicles 9:1-12), Christianity (Matthew 12:42, Luke 11:31, and Islam (Q 27:20-44), but in each, she is only mentioned once briefly, and never discussed again. None of the scriptural accounts give her a name, or describe what she looks like, but she's known in the modern world (for those who know of her, at least) as a beautiful woman who had a romantic or sexual relationship with Solomon,

in some stories a relationship that resulted in a child with him. Many Ethiopians will tell you without a doubt that she is an ancestor of the royal Solomonic house that ruled the country for centuries, but you will hear a similar story of ancestry from Yemenis, as well.

As we shall see in the course of this talk, I don't really think it's useful or appropriate to try to adjudicate these claims – whether or not she was beautiful, or who, exactly, can claim descent from her, are less interesting questions to me as a historian than the question of how we got from there to here. What are the changes that occurred in traditions about her that allowed such a range of views to be held? Particularly salient in the year 2026, why are is the Blackness of the Queen of Sheba such an obvious, given fact to many people when our earliest sources don't say anything about her looks, ancestry, or origins? Though we cannot say exactly what she looked like or even confidently state that she existed as a historical figure, we can trace the history of traditions about her in order to understand how a seemingly stable idea of a single figure can result in such a diverse range of traditions and views.

Now, my understanding of this crowd is that many of you plan to or are considering becoming teachers, so I'm going to pay special attention through this talk to different registers at which we might talk about the issues raised by the Queen of Sheba – how I would discuss these issues with younger crowds, high schoolers, college aged, and graduate students. I look forward to your questions and discussion afterwards to see what parts of those discussions felt resonant and what parts felt confusing.

The Queen of Sheba in the Hebrew Bible

I'll start with our earliest source on the Queen of Sheba, which emerges from the Hebrew Bible, which if you are Jewish you might know as the Tanakh and if you are Christian you might know as the Old Testament. In Biblical Studies and Religious Studies we call it the Hebrew Bible because the texts in it are written in Hebrew; Old Testament implies a newer testament, something which is relevant only to Christians, and Tanakh implies a particular set order and

grouping of texts which are significant to Jewish readers but not necessarily to everyone else.[1] So I will use this term Hebrew Bible not because Old Testament or Tanakh are incorrect, but because we're in a room with people of diverse religious backgrounds; the only "us" here is an academic community, not a religious one, and the term Hebrew Bible reflects academic conventions.

I will say, for those of you aiming to be a teacher, this is an important distinction, between what we call "academic" vs "confessional" approaches – if you teach at a religious school, of course, the "us" of your classroom will have a faith component, but for those of you teaching at public or non-religious schools, this is how I would recommend approaching teaching religious texts. The benefit of using an academic approach is it maximizes the community of readers, not presuming they are coming to the text with faith commitments or particular beliefs about God or the truth of the Bible; the downside is that it's harder to ask "how does this text teach us how we ought to live" which, I want to emphasize, is an extremely important question; it's just one that is only sometimes relevant to, for example, a history class.

Okay, back to the Queen of Sheba: our first text about the Queen of Sheba is found in a part of the Hebrew Bible called 1 Kings. Now, those of you who have taken my class know that the Bible is not a single text, but a collection of texts that were written over the span of roughly a thousand years or so, from ~900 BCE to ~164 BCE. There's examples of poetry, law, myth, and history. Kings is an example of a historical text, and it's exciting to teach because it's the part of the Bible that really corresponds to other historical accounts (from Egypt, from the Neo-Assyrian Empire, from the Babylonian empire, etc.) Kings was probably edited for quite a long time, which we know for complicated textual reasons I won't get into, but an early version of it was probably written by around 600 BCE or so.[2]

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[1] For a nice discussion of this distinction, see Andrew Tobolowsky, "Introducing the Hebrew Bible and the History of Ancient Israel," *Ancient Jew Review* August 19, 2019. Accessed April 20, 2026. <www.ancientjewreview.com/read/2019/8/5/introducing-the-hebrew-bible-and-the-history-of-ancient-israel>

[2] For an overview of how scholars think about the book of Kings today, see Michael Avioz, "The Book of Kings in Recent Research (Part I)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 4 (1), 11–55 as well as Michael Avioz, "The Book of Kings in Recent Research (Part II)," *Currents in Biblical Research*, 5 (1), 11–57.

Kings, like all historical accounts, has a perspective. That perspective is: human kings are not to be trusted. Very occasionally you are lucky enough to get a good king, but even pretty good kings tend to mess up, and there aren't even many decent kings in the first place. This is true even of Solomon, who is one of the best-known figures from the Bible.

Solomon is famous for being wise and a successful king. According to Kings, Solomon is arguably too successful. He builds a temple in Jerusalem, which is great, and he does so through successful economic trade with neighboring kingdoms and taxing his subjects.[3] Every king needs tax revenue! However, keep these ideas of success in mind because we will return to it.

The visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon's court is a sort of culmination of his life's successes. We are told:

And the Queen of Sheba heard what was to be heard about Solomon due to the name of the Lord, and she came to test him with riddles. She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, camels bearing spices, and lots of gold and precious stones. She came to Solomon and she told him everything that was in her heart. Solomon answered her, all of her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king, nothing which he did not announce to her. (1 Kings 10:1-3)

Now, notably here: are we told anything about what she looks like? Are we told anything about where Sheba is? Are we told anything about how she came to be Queen, or what her family is like?

No, definitely not. Her point in the story here is to act as a far-off witness to Solomon's greatness. She is, functionally, a hype woman, and we can see that in the next verses where what she sees and what she says, which comprise the bulk of the verses of this story, that her being a witness is the main reason why we are told of her visit.

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[3] For the story of Solomon in Kings, see 1 Kings 1-11.

The Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the house which he built. And the food of his table and the sitting of his servants and the attendance of his ministers and their clothing and his cupbearers and his whole burnt offerings, which he brought up to the house of the Lord, and there was no spirit left in her. And she spoke to the king: "The report was true which I heard in my land, about your things and about your wisdom. I didn't believe the reports until I came and saw it with my own eyes. Look, not even half of it was reported to me- you have wisdom and prosperity/goodness exceeding that which I was told. Happy are your men, happy are your servants, those standing before you continually hearing your wisdom. May the Lord your God be blessed who delights in you such that he set you upon the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel eternally, he made you king to do justice and righteousness. (1 Kings 10:4-9)

We are also told that both monarchs are wealthy.
She gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold and quite a lot of spices as well as precious stone. So many spices have not come since like those which the Queen of Sheba brought to the king Solomon. And also the navy of Hiram, who carried gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir very much sandal-wood and precious stones; the king made sandalwood pillars for the house of the Lord and for the house of the king, harps and psalteries for his singers. No such sandalwood came nor was seen unto this day. The king Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all her desires which she asked, beyond that which he gave to her from the hand of the king Solomon. She turned and she went to her land, she and her servants. (1 Kings 10:10-13)

We're only told that the Queen of Sheba gives Solomon gifts, but when the text tells us he did "all that she desired" it is actually ancient Near Eastern contractual language saying he gave her extravagant gifts in return.[4] So, if she came and gave him the equivalent of a Rolls Royce, he was able to give her a Ferrari from his garage because of his trade with Ophir and Tyre. They are both wildly wealthy, in other words.

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[4] Nam, Roger S, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 76-86.

Now, remember how I said Solomon was successful because of his economic trade? This scene in many ways emblematizes Solomon's success. He is so wealthy and well-known a stranger comes from far away to test his wisdom, finds that he's even better than his reputation, and is able to exchange high-status gifts with him. He's really good – but again, almost too good. In the next chapter, we are told Solomon had many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1). Marrying a woman from a neighboring political entity is the equivalent of having an embassy in your capital, it was good political sense in the ancient world, but he worships their foreign gods with these foreign wives, which, while normal behavior for ancient kings, is a big no-no for an Israelite king.[5] Most importantly, it's something Solomon had explicitly promised not to do in 1 Kings 3:5-14 as well as 1 Kings 9:3-9. Because Solomon had broken his promise, in chapter 12 God decides to take the kingdom away from his family. This doesn't happen immediately, but in 1 Kings 12 when Solomon's son comes to power, the people ask the son to lower their taxes – which he arrogantly refuses to do, and they defect and form a new country, which leads to a whole host of issues and divisions. However, that's a story for another setting; for our purposes what's important is that the Queen of Sheba was both a symbol of Solomon's success (and a witness to us living after Solomon's death, that he really was that great) and also foreshadows his downfall, because he's really good with foreign women.

Recall how I mentioned that Kings was written probably around 600 BCE. This matters because we have one other place in the Hebrew Bible where the Queen of Sheba is mentioned – in the book of Chronicles, which was written a couple of hundred years later. Chronicles is in many ways the "recap episode" of the Bible. It tells the history of the world from Creation until about 500 BCE or so, so it re-tells the story that is told in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, plus about a hundred extra years of history not included in Kings.[6] In Chronicles, Solomon is straightforwardly

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[5] For more context on this idea, see Podany, Amanda H, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] One of the best books on Chronicles and its function is Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* [English ed.] (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

remembered as a great king. He doesn't worship foreign gods and never does anything wrong. The story is virtually the same, but the context shifts, from one text where she acts as a type of literary foreshadowing to another where she is a straightforward witness to his greatness.

Now, if I were to teach this material to younger grades, I would focus on how little we are told about the Queen of Sheba herself. I would emphasize that later generations have always used imagination and tradition to "fill in the gaps" in biblical stories – painting pictures, making movies, creating poetry that says more than what we are told in the Bible. It's not lying, it's interpretation, and it's a really normal thing to see humans do; but part of our job as readers, as people with a good education, is to pay attention to what is in the original text and what is a later interpretation so we can see what we agree with and what we might disagree with.[7]

For high school aged students, I would want to cover the same ideas, and I would also want to focus on the perspective of Kings and Chronicles: the same story is deployed to very different ends. How does context, of the presentation of the character of Solomon, in this case, shape how we see the figure of the Queen of Sheba functioning in the text? I would want to use this case to introduce questions about bias and perspective in historical sources, noting that neither of the texts is lying, necessarily, but by selective omission or highlighting certain aspects of Solomon's character, we get a completely different sense. Seeing that at play in our biblical texts, can we think of examples of this happening in modern sources, like journalism, social media, or other places today?

In an undergraduate, college-level class, I would want to bring in other Ancient Near Eastern evidence, especially about Sheba. Do we know where it is? The long and the short is – no, we don't definitely know. There is a place called Saba, in Yemen, which seems a likely candidate, but frankly, the places where Sheba is mentioned in the Bible – in Kings, Chronicles, once in

[7] The field of biblical reception history focuses on this precise topic; for more, see Emma England and William John Lyons, eds., *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Job, once as a name of a person in Genesis – it is mentioned the way 20th century Americans refer to Timbuktu, which is a historical city, but when you see it in an old detective novel, it's basically a stand-in for "a land far, far away." However, we do know that there was trade in spices and jewels from across the desert, and so I would use this story as an opportunity to explore the evidence we have of long-distance spice trade in the ancient world, though we don't have time to do that here, today.[8]

In a graduate class, I would pull out the big guns and make the students look at the minor grammatical differences between the accounts in Kings and Chronicles. They're not that big – the equivalent of saying "the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem" and "the Queen of Sheba came into Jerusalem," etc. I would then ask them to contemplate the distance in time between when the text was written and when Solomon lived – because Solomon lived in the 900's BCE, before people were writing histories like this in Hebrew.[9] That practice emerged maybe a hundred or so years after his death, and Kings wasn't written until several hundred years after his death; so after getting a good grasp on the grammar of the original language, are there also theoretical considerations we can make about the working of memory across multiple generations, the ways that Kings and Chronicles used and cited their own sources, and even the degree to which the historicity of this account matters? Do we disregard this just because it's not an eyewitness account of the Queen of Sheba, or is it evidence of something else at play?

Okay, I could go on, but the poster promised to talk about race and racialization, so I'm going to turn to some later sources now, but I hope those levels of analysis and question are helpful or thought provoking to the future teachers in the room.

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[8] For an introductory overview of our evidence, see Kribus, Bar. "Arabia or Africa: Where Is the Land of Sheba?" *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 42, no. 5 (September 2016): 27–61; see also "Evidence of Solomon and Sheba?" *The Biblical Archaeology Review* (Washington) 49, no. 3 (October 2023): 13.

[9] The most robust discussion of this history can be found in Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

Josephus

Before I do talk about race and racialization, I want to establish something very important: race is a social construct. Now, some of you in here are in my Women in Antiquity class, so you know that when I say race is a social construct, that is not the same thing as saying it's not real. My favorite example of a social convention is we stop at a red light – red doesn't inherently mean stop, but if you don't stop at a red light, you are risking very real consequences. To say that race (like gender) is a social construct is to say that it's not an unchangeable, immutable biological fact; rather, it's a social convention, a way of grouping people (in hierarchies).[10] Now, social conventions can reflect certain aspects of physical difference – skin color or one's ability to either give birth or impregnate someone are physical markers that are the crude sorting mechanisms of race and gender, for instance – but the closer you look at how the social categories are divided, the blurrier the boundaries become (think of people who can "pass" as other races or are ethnically ambiguous, thinking about race, or people who are infertile or intersex in the case of gender). Talking about race as a social construct is a way that academics acknowledge the blurriness and instability of racial categories while also acknowledging the experiential reality that comes with the category of race – we are not all treated the same way in society.

This brings us to the part of the talk where we think about how race became such an "obvious" part of the figure of the Queen of Sheba, even if it's not obvious at all. The next figure to discuss is Flavius Josephus. He is not the next person to write about the Queen of Sheba – that honor actually goes to the New Testament gospel writers Matthew and Luke, but they have a really short statement about her as a judge at the end of time in one verse each. Josephus has a whole retelling of the story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon's court.

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[10] For a useful review of academic views of race as a social construct, see Smedley, Audrey, and Brian D Smedley. "Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on the Social Construction of Race." *The American Psychologist* (United States) 60, no. 1 (January 2005): 16–26.

Josephus wrote for a Roman audience; he had been a general in the Jewish Revolt against Rome which began in 66 CE, raged until the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, and continued at a somewhat lower temperature until 73 CE.[11] Josephus had been captured early in the war and predicted that his captor Vespatian would become the emperor; this prophecy proved correct, and so Josephus was taken into Vespatian's household (the Flavians) and allowed to live in Rome after the war with them. He wrote about the Jewish people for a Roman audience that would have regarded them as curious, if not outright uncivilized; Josephus thus wrote with an eye to showing his Roman audience that Judaism was a moral and rational way of life with a respectable history.

In Josephus' work on Jewish history, called the *Antiquities*, the Queen of Sheba is not named the Queen of Sheba; rather, she is the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia (*Ant.* 8.165-75). Why is this? Egypt was the breadbasket of Rome whereas Ethiopia was the edge of the known world.[12] She is both far-off, somewhat exotic, and wildly wealthy.

Josephus is the first person to explicitly link the Queen of Sheba to Africa. Like the Bible, he never discusses what she looks like or her background, but he lays the groundwork for later interpreters to do so.

Origen

This brings us to Origen of Alexandria. Origen was a Christian writer who lived in in the third century CE, so roughly a hundred and fifty years or so after Josephus.[13] He cites Josephus explicitly on several occasions, in no small part because Origen had Hebrew neighbors with whom he was in constant competition about biblical knowledge.

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[11] For more on Josephus and the context of his writing, see Martin Goodman, *Josephus's The Jewish War : A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

[12] On views of Egypt in Rome, see Maaike Leemreize, "The Egyptian Past in the Roman Present" in *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World* ed. James Ker and Christoph Pieper (Brill, 2014), p. 56-82. For Ethiopia as the edge of the known world, see Pierre Schneider, "The So-Called Confusion between Ethiopia and India," in *Brill's companion to ancient geography : the inhabited world in Greek and Roman tradition*, ed. Serena Bianchetti, & Pascal Arnaud (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 184-202.

[13] For an overview of Origen, see Joseph Trigg, *Origen*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

Origen loved writing about the Bible. He wrote homilies, commentaries, and letters where he creatively linked all sorts of biblical texts in novel ways. He famously wrote about a biblical book of poetry called the Song of Songs. The thing to know about the Song of Songs is it's really sexy love poetry, a dialogue between a man and a woman who love each other, and that love is both emotionally and also physically expressed. Quite famously the Song of Songs compares the female lovers breasts to towers, for instance (Song of Songs 8:10). This is not chaste, PG stuff; it's erotically charged, to say the least. There were some people who found this quite disturbing. How could something this sexy be included in scriptures? Origen had one answer: it was an allegory, a conversation between God and the Christian Church. However, allegories never work on just one level; allegory is a means of reading a text or a work and understanding it as saying something historical or literal, but also meaning something else, and I do mean *also*. The historical or literal meaning isn't obviated or rendered obsolete through the allegorical; it is enriched. The allegorical meaning of the Song of Songs is the relationship between God and the Church, but the historical context, to Origen, is that this is a conversation between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. You see, the Song of Songs in 1:5 says "I am Black and beautiful," and Origen explicitly remarks that since Josephus had identified the Queen of Sheba as the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, she must be the Black and beautiful beloved female speaker of the Song of Songs. For what it's worth, he also identifies this as a conversation between Moses and his Cushite wife, so he is really leaning on the multiplicity of interpretation and the Africa connection. I also want to highlight here that Origen is from Alexandria, which is in Egypt, so this is our first example of a person from Africa identifying the Queen of Sheba as an African figure. He is also the first person to explicitly discuss her skin color. So this is an old history, this history of linking her to Africa and to Blackness (which are not the same thing; plenty of Egyptians and Ethiopians don't actually identify as Black, though in the US the two are often linked uncritically).[14] However, it is

[14] See, for example, the discussion of Ethiopian negotiation of racial identity in Shelly Habecker, "Not Black, but Habesha: Ethiopian and Eritrean Immigrants in American Society," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (7): 1200-1219.

notable that it's still a development that emerges over a thousand years after Solomon and the Queen of Sheba would have lived.

Kebra Nagast

Finally, I only have time to discuss one more text, which is too bad because there are a *lot* of fun texts about her; if you want to know more, you can read my book when it comes out.

This final text I want to discuss is called the *Kebra Nagast*, or the Glory of the Kings.[15] The *Kebra Nagast* is sometimes called the 'national epic of Ethiopia.' It tells the history of the world in Ge'ez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopic Tawahedo Orthodox Church, with a focus on Ethiopia – not unlike Chronicles, actually. The kings in question are some Israelite kings and mostly kings of Ethiopia from a period called the Aksumite period, which lasted from the first century CE until around 950 CE or so; in the period after the end of the Aksumite empire the region was ruled by a dynasty called the Zagwe dynasty, of which little evidence remains. In about 1270, the Zagwe dynasty collapsed and a group called the Solomonic dynasty came to power.[16] The Solomonic dynasty was very invested in telling the story that they were the true inheritors of the Aksumite empire, which was the glorious past of the region, not some johnny-come-lately who had just seized power for their own purposes.

This text matters to us because the Kebra Nagast is also the longest premodern engagement with the figure of the Queen of Sheba. Here, we're told quite a bit about Sheba – it is located in Ethiopia – and the Queen here is given a name, Makeda. The story combines a lot of elements, but for our purposes what's notable is it combines Origen's view that she is the sexual partner of Solomon, as Origen asserted when he linked her to the Song of Songs, and his and Josephus' view that she was queen of Ethiopia. The text also tells us that she was

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[15] For a good discussion of the *Kebra Nagast* with a useful discussion of its presentation of the Queen of Sheba, see Wendy Laura Belcher, "African Rewritings Of The Jewish And Islamic Solomonic Tradition: The Triumph Of The Queen Of Sheba In The Ethiopian Fourteenth-Century Text Kebrä Nägäst," in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sabbath (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 441–59.

[16] For an overview of this history, see D. W. Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilization: Aksum & the Northern Horn, 1000 BC- AD 1300* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012).

smart. It spends multiple chapters on the "riddles" by which she tested Solomon, which are given half a verse of attention in Kings and Chronicles. It also tells us how they became lovers. The Queen of Sheba is fundamentally virtuous, and they weren't married (because presumably one of them would have had to give up their country and rule). How did this come about? The Queen is good, so it happened because Solomon tricked her. We, of course, recognize this as sexual coercion, but in the context of the story, it is meant to show that she is a woman of her word and also not promiscuous. Solomon is, if not promiscuous, at least known for having sexual contact with many women (most of which are in the confines of marriage, so whether or not it's promiscuous *per se* is a matter of the judgement of the reader).

There is a son born of this union named Menelik I. Solomon tried to offer him the throne in Jerusalem, but he refused it; according to the KN, he took a group of youths from Israel back with him to Ethiopia and there established a "new Israel." According to the text, the Ark of the Covenant (God's seat) went with them (not by Menelik's choice, but by the will of some of his companions and God). To this day, members of the Ethiopic Orthodox Tawahedo Church believe the Ark of the Covenant is in a church in Lalibela, and this belief partly inspired the Indiana Jones film on the topic.[17] Menelik is known as the first king of the Solomonic dynasty, which had lost power during the Zagwe period but whose ancestors had regained power in the thirteenth century CE. This family retained power through the 20th century; in Ethiopia's 1972 constitution, it explicitly states that Haile Selassie, then-emperor of Ethiopia, was a descendant of Menelik I (and therefore Solomon and the Queen of Sheba).[18] Haile Selassie is a controversial figure but he is also well known and even revered globally, where he has another perhaps better recognized named – Ras Teferi, the messianic figure of Rastafarianism.[19]

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[17] For a discussion of the Ark of the Covenant, see Stuart Munro-Hay, *The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant: The True History of the Tablets of Moses* (London; I.B. Tauris, 2005).
[18] For more on Selassie's life, see Ḥagai Erlikh, *Haile Selassie: His Rise, His Fall* (Boulder; Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019).
[19] For more on Rastafarianism, see Hélène Lee, *The First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2003).

The Kebra Nagast is the story which cemented the popular vision of the Queen of Sheba as a powerful Black woman, someone with whom Beyoncé would want to identify herself. What's significant, in my opinion, is this is an example of a group of people unambiguously identifying her as "us" or "ours" – our ancestor, our precursor, the person who links Israel's past to a particular vision of African and African diaspora Christianity. It didn't come out of nowhere, though. It builds on earlier traditions, some of which we didn't have time to discuss today.

Conclusion

Many people have tried to study the Queen of Sheba to find the "true origins" of this figure, but I argue in my research that that is not fruitful (we don't have access to her) and it's also frankly not the point. We don't have straightforward access to the real figure, but that doesn't mean we don't have any history about her – we have, instead, too much history to fit into a lecture like this or even, as I've found in my work, too much to fit into a single book.

The Queen of Sheba is consistently, but not always, racialized as Black or African in the modern world. This isn't incorrect. Because we don't have direct access to her, we cannot say one way or another what she looked like and whether she would have read as "Black" to modern eyes (note I say modern eyes – people in different parts of the world and in different eras have understood racial categories very differently than we do today in America). However, I do want to underscore the fact that she is also claimed as an ancestor by Yemenis, who see a direct link between the historical city Saba and the name "The Queen of Sheba." Now, Yemen is just across the Red Sea from Ethiopia, and in fact, during the Aksumite period Yemen and Ethiopia were often ruled by the same dynasty. So one way to understand the dual claim is that the Yemeni claim comes from the linguistic congruence of Sheba and Saba, as well as Saba's links to the ancient spice trade, on the one hand, and Ethiopian claim comes from the centuries-old traditions which link Africa (and specifically Ethiopia) to the Queen of Sheba. The shared political history of the region is another way to understand why both groups might legitimately claim ancestry from the one figure. I am not interested in telling

someone they are wrong to identify a biblical figure as their ancestor – that's not my job and it's frankly not my business. But it is a reminder of the social constructed-ness of these identity and especially of racial claims, which is not to undermine their reality but to recognize they look different according to one's position in time and space.

A Callous Calculation: American Responses to Atrocities in East Pakistan, 1969 - 1972

Jonathan Castle

Introduction

The April 8th 1971 edition of the *New York Times* carried a rather uncommon article by journalist Benjamin Welles. Welles, a seasoned global reporter and veteran of the Second World War's North African and Middle Eastern fronts was a regular contributor about the Indian subcontinent. His article covered something the American government often refused to address - the supply of American arms to the Pakistani government which were being used on East Pakistani civilians. Welles asserts that the United States sent over a billion dollars' worth of equipment to the Pakistanis between 1954 and 1965, including "Patton tanks, armored personnel carriers, heavy artillery, automatic weapons and jet fighters"[1], for the ostensible purpose of fighting communism. As reports of violence in East Pakistan by West Pakistanis spread, Welles, and other journalists including his *New York Times* colleague Chester Bowles and the staff of *LIFE* magazine connected that war crimes were being committed with American weapons. Nevertheless, the government remained stalwart in their support of West Pakistan which baffled the journalists and the American public. By the end of the 1971, eight months after Welles' article was published, as many as 3 million people had been killed, more than 400,000 women raped, and 40 million civilians displaced.[2]

In the era of anti-war sentiment in America, many presidential administrations would have exhibited extreme caution when pursuing controversial action, bending to public demands to exercise transparency. Following his decisive election victory in 1968, Richard Nixon and his

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[1] Welles, Benjamin. "U.S. Urges Pakistan Seek Peaceful Accommodation." *The New York Times* (1923-), 8 April 1971, 3.

[2] Agarwal, Ankit. "The United States and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971: A Critical Inquiry." Indian Journal of Asian Affairs 27/28, no. 1/2 (2014): 24. Estimates vary greatly as to the actual death count; the Central Intelligence Agency suggested 200,000 deaths while Soviet newspaper *Pravda* suggests 3 million. Geoffrey Davis, a doctor brought to Dacca by the United Nations claims that the figure of 300,000 - 400,000 women is "probably too low."

National Security advisor Henry Kissinger took a different approach, to remain steadfast in the administration's position even in the face of public, domestic and international pressure by operating clandestinely to the degree that many high-ranking diplomats, officials, and global leaders were left in the dark. Consequently, the American public was largely unaware of the Pakistani atrocities, and many were left confused by the lack of government information. Why was the Nixon administration so adamant about being secretive? Why was Pakistan perceived as being so important? And how was the American public's response shaped by the media they were consuming? The American government's trepidation to act in the East Pakistan genocide arose from the desire to quietly build a working relationship with China, and because of Pakistan's key role as a conduit. The government therefore refused to publicly respond to West Pakistan's actions and risked questions about transparency and accountability from the American public, which broadly opposed Pakistan's actions, and their government.

The existing scholarship on the 1971 conflict can be broadly divided into two types. There were those which examine the regional conflict and its local impacts on one hand and those which examine the role of external players, particularly through the lens of Cold War politics. Sarmila Bose, an Indian-American journalist and author, published perhaps the best of the first type in her "Anatomy of Violence: Analysis of Civil War in East Pakistan in 1971" in which she focused particularly on the application of violence during the conflict, providing a balanced article, which illustrated the acts perpetrated by both belligerents: the

West Pakistanis and the Bengali secessionists. Bose painted a picture of the violence being committed while also framing it exclusively as a domestic conflict.[3] Ankit Agarwal on the other hand, analyzed the role of the United States in the conflict. He provided a critical evaluation of U.S. policy goals and the damage caused by their inaction in the atrocities.[4] These two articles, taken together illustrate the two-faceted nature of the war: while on the subcontinent it was a civil war, from the outside it was a major global conflict. Shehram Mokhtar also provided significant context of the Indo-Pakistani war of December by focusing

[3] Sarmila Bose, "Anatomy of Violence: Analysis of Civil War in East Pakistan in 1971," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2005.
[4] Ankit Agarwal, "The United States and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971: A Critical Inquiry," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs.*

on war photographs.[5] Shahram did not address the region's history, nor did it reach as far as to include the civil war preceding the Indo-Pakistani conflict. It did, however, look into the photographic trends, stereotypes, and standards which define the conflict's depictions in the press. This paper intends to land somewhere in-between, focusing on the American reactions to the war and its prelude. By using the existing scholarship to comprehend the role of Americans in the conflict it draws novel conclusions on the effects of the war and its coverage on the American public. It , particularly examines how the war enlarged the gulf between the will of the citizens and the actions of the United States government.

Pakistan: From Partition to Civil War

East and West Pakistan were divided as such from India due to the ostensible desire of the British to partition the subcontinent along religious lines to avoid Hindu-Muslim conflicts. The arbitrary nature of the split, in addition to unceasing tensions with India, created ethnic friction amongst Pakistani countrymen which the British, in their haste to disentangle themselves from the subcontinent failed to resolve.

At independence in 1947, Urdu was made the only national language of Pakistan, leaving the Bengali-speaking East Pakistanis without fair representation until 1955. Additionally, women's clothing in East Pakistan bore more resemblance to West Bengal in India, than to West Pakistan[6]. These socio-cultural differences were intensified by economic inequalities with the East which felt that despite contributing significantly to the Pakistani economy, it was left out of the West's prosperity. This condition which a future Pakistani President, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto called "a rural slum"[7] underline the disagreements in the newly independent state.

The Awami League, the political party of East Pakistan, offered a six-step solution including the decentralization of power, segmenting Pakistan into a series of federated states and transferring the majority of governmental responsibilities onto these federating units.

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[5] Shehram Mokhtar, "Reading War Photographs: The 1971 India–Pakistan War in the Anglo-American Press." *Visual Communication*, 19, 1 (2020): 121–41.

[6] Ranjan, Amit. "Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors." *India Quarterly* 72, 2 (2016): 133 Ranjan explains that Bengali women often wore "sari," a dress that, was considered by the state authority as being associated with Hindu women.

[7] Ranjan, Amit. "Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors." *India Quarterly* 72, 2 (2016): 134.

Similarly, they wanted to provide East Pakistan with a "militia or paramilitary,"[8] as they currently possessed none. Conversely, they conceded to regulate currency on a national level, streamlining inter-regional spending, and massively reform fiscal policy to resolve differences between the East and West. These policies were popular not just among the underrepresented East Pakistanis but also among the West Pakistanis, with the Awami League winning a decisive victory in the December 1970 elections and securing a majority in both the Pakistan National Assembly (PNA) and Eastern Provincial Assembly (EPA)[9]. This success lasted only a few months. In early March of 1971, the West Pakistani authorities indefinitely postponed the convening of the National Assembly. Three weeks later, on March 25, 1971, some 40,000 West Pakistani troops descended on East Pakistan to put down the Awami League. The next day, Bangladesh declared its independence.

Nixon and China

Upon his inauguration in 1969 President Richard Nixon had a goal for his Asian policy the main plank of which was to reopen Sino-American relations. Writing on February 1, 1969, mere weeks after his inauguration, Nixon insisted on "... exploring possibilities of rapprochement [*sic*] with the Chinese"'[10]. This memorandum, sent to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, was top secret. In it, Nixon states that, "This... should be done privately and should under no circumstances get into the public prints..."[11] This illustrates the two-fold nature of Nixon's policy, to establish connections with the People's Republic of China (PRC), and to pursue this course clandestinely. For Nixon, who marketed himself as staunchly anti-Communist, such reproachment had to be kept out of public channels but also among government officials. It also meant that the government would be searching for a clandestine method of reaching the Chinese.

This was not an easy task because channels of communication with the PRC had been severed since the Kennedy administration for more than a decade. Conveniently for Nixon and

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[8] Agarwal, Ankit. "The United States and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971: A Critical Inquiry." *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 27/28 (2014): 23.

[9] Agarwal, Ankit. "The United States and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971: A Critical Inquiry." *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 27/28 (2014): 23.

[10] Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger, 1 February 1969. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341.

[11] Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger, 1 February 1969. Box 34.

Kissinger, China had during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war established a relationship with the Pakistanis who were American allies. Moreover, the Chinese had engaged in a border dispute with India, in which the USSR sided with India, further irking the PRC and pushing them away from the idea of a united communist movement and thereby erasing any lingering obligation to abstain from interaction with the United States. Furthermore, the election of Pakistani President, Yahya Khan in 1969 coincided with the Nixon administration. China saw the Americans in a more favorable light than previously as enemies to the Soviet Union. The shifts were publicly apparent as the PRC published favorable coverage of Nixon which for the Americans implied the possibility of Pakistan serving as a clandestine communication channel between the U.S. and the PRC.[12]

Reactions from Home

As the West Pakistani troops engaged East Pakistan from March 25, violence escalated quickly. The American Consulate General in Dacca, Archer Blood wrote that "evidence continues to mount that the [West Pakistani troops] have a list of Awami League supporters whom they are systematically eliminating by seeking them out in their homes and shooting them down"[13]. This illustrates the targeted nature of the violence perpetrated by the West Pakistanis and the purpose of their campaign. This violence was not in retaliation but the West Pakistan government purposely targeting civilians who represented potential opposition. Specifically, the West Pakistanis targeted universities and public intellectuals which as the Consulate-General reports regarding the bloody attacks at the University of Dacca, "we have reports that Fazlur Rahman, Head of Applied Physics Department, Professor Dev, Head of Philosophy Department and a Hindu, M. Abedin, Head of Department of History, have been killed."[14] In other words, violence was being used to suppress free speech and undermine the results of the legitimate democratic election of December 1970. Nixon and Kissinger were in communication with the PRC through the West Pakistani government, specifically advancing the policy of rapprochement with China. However, neither the American public nor high-

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[12] Miller, Alice Lyman, and Richard Wich, "Strategic Realignment." In *Becoming Asia: Change and Continuity in Asian International Relations since World War II*, 161-193 (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2011)
[13] Blood, Archer. "Telegram 959 From the Consulate General in Dacca to the Department of State: Selective Genocide." 28 Mar, 1971. Department of State, Office of the Historian, National Archives, RG59, central Files 1970-73, POL 23-9.
[14] Blood, Archer. "Telegram 959.

ranking American diplomats were aware this planned reconciliation, which was key to Nixon's foreign policy.

The high-level secrecy highlights the administration's desire to keep America's relationship with China secret. As noted in the President's February 1969 memorandum to Kissinger, risked creating a disastrous swirl of dissent and distrust. Consulate-General Blood, in the same memo wrote that he questioned the "continued advisability of [the] present [U.S. government] posture of pretending to believe [Pakistan's] false assertions and denying... that this office is communicating detailed account [*sic*] of events in East Pakistan"[15]. Also on March 28, 1971, Samuel M. Hoskinson, another diplomat in the region asked: "is the present U.S. posture of simply ignoring... atrocities... still advisable...?"[16] These two memos illustrate how out-of-the-loop many top American diplomats were. Blood was the Consulate General in Dacca and was unaware of foreign policy which was intrinsically tied to the situation of his surroundings. This lack of clarity caused confusion, contradiction, and frustration.

Meanwhile, many in the American press were even more baffled. The *New York Times*, on April 7, 1971 called the support of West Pakistan "increasingly incomprehensible"[17]. Journalists challenged a statement from a State Department spokesperson who insists the "United States has no first-hand knowledge" [18] of American weapons being used by the West Pakistanis. This is unequivocally false because on March 28, Kenneth Keating, the United States ambassador to India, wrote in a memorandum to the Secretary of State that he was "appalled at [the] possibility these atrocities are being committed with American equipment..." [19] This once again illustrated the level of secrecy undertaken by the government. On April 8th, Benjamin Welles of the *New York Times* states that the government says, "reports from East Pakistan have been 'conflicting'" and that they view the conflict as an "'internal matter'" on which American statements would be "unjustified". Welles refutes

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[15] Blood, Archer. "Telegram 959."

[16] Hopkinson, Samuel M. "Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger." 28 Mar, 1971. NSA Archives at George Washington University, NPMP, National Security Council Files, Country Files, Middle East, Box 625.

[17] "Bloodbath in Bengal." New York Times (1923-), Apr 07, 1971.

[18] "Bloodbath in Bengal." *New York Times* (1923-), Apr 07, 1971

[19] Keating, Kenneth. "U.S. Embassy (New Delhi) Cable: Selective Genocide." 29 Mar, 1971. NSA Archives at George Washington University, Record Group 59, Subject Numeric File 1970-73, Pol and Def, Box 2530

this idea by concluding with the summary of American arms sales to Pakistan disclosed in this paper's front-page editorial[20].

The American public saw many contradictions here. Firstly, the reports that American weapons were not being used conflicts contrasted with the data presented by Welles. The public saw photographs and read news stories from journalists on ground in East Pakistan and yet heard their government actively denying what they saw. The proliferation of war photographs plays a major role in the public's understanding of this conflict even when their government failed to acknowledge the atrocities or its involvement in it. While the complexity of the Pakistani Civil War of 1971 cannot be denied, its depictions in the American press provided a decisive, one-sided view which shaded the American public's understanding and made them critical of their government's noncommittal approach.

War Photographs and the American Press

In keeping with the paternalistic depictions of South Asians, Bangladeshis and civilians of East Pakistan were pictured as victims in the American press. In his 2020 article Shehram Mokhtar argued that war photographs from this era differ greatly across races. Images of "half-naked Bengali women, crippled refugees, starving children, [and] shirtless peasants were comforting images in the West."[21] They appealed to the American desire to "help" those they view as needing it. This greatly impacted the American public response to the conflict. Specifically, it generated great sympathy from the Americans who saw the conflict without knowledge of its bidirectional nature. As Bose describes it, while many atrocities were committed by the more powerful West Pakistani army, violence flowed in the other direction as well. This nuance, which is prominent in American scholarship, is absent in photography, making sympathy far easier to extract from readers. Also, the candor of the images and reporting in magazines at the time was in direct contrast to the government's lack of clarity. For example, in *Life Magazine's* 1971 "Year in Pictures" article, the first section is dedicated to the war in Pakistan. It reported that, "... in the year 1971, no place and no people suffered more

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[20] Welles, Benjamin. "U.S. Urges Pakistan Seek Peaceful Accommodation." *The New York Times* (1923-), 8 Apr. 1971, 3.

[21] Mokhtar, Shehram. "Reading war photographs: the 1971 India-Pakistan war in the Anglo-American press." *Visual Communication* 19 (2020): 132

terribly than East Pakistan and its tormented inhabitants"[22]. Alongside this description are a number of photographs; most strikingly an image of a Bengali family—a father and three small children—crouched over the corpse of a child on a stretcher. This depiction seeped into the American consciousness and the public came to be sympathetic to the East Pakistanis. B. W. Gajwani, in a letter to the Editor of the *New York Times* published on April 5, 1971, wrote that he was "sure that in the present civil war in East Pakistan the sympathies of all freedom-loving peoples of the world lie with the Bengalis in that region"[23].

Indeed, these publications illustrate the emergence of popular morality in the American public. In the public view, opposing the West Pakistanis actions was the moral position which made the lack of transparency of the American government immoral and, more importantly, inexplicable.

Nixon, China, and U.S.-Pakistan Relations

The Nixon administration's support to the West Pakistanis was because of the importance it attached to Sino-American relations. This was, however, never acknowledged publicly. In July of 1971, Henry Kissinger visited West Pakistan and while there, it was publicly announced that he had contracted a stomach virus and would not be attending any engagements. In reality he had taken a brief secret trip to Peking, China. This clandestine mission via Pakistan was announced to the American public on July 15, 1971 during a broadcast address by Nixon. While he revealed the purpose of the meeting, its nature, and some details of its effects, Nixon makes no mention of Pakistan.[24] This is despite the fact that the Civil War was ongoing, and that Kissinger had been in Pakistan prior to his flight to Peking. This created another rift with the American public, who understood the Pakistan crisis and the China rapprochement as separate entities, rather than as a combined and mutually dependent. Had the American public had some grasp of the vitality of the relationship with West Pakistan to communication with China, perhaps their confusion would have been sated.

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[22] *Life Magazine*. "The Year in Pictures 1971 - East Pakistan: The anguished birth of Bangladesh." 31 Dec 1971.
[23] Gajwani, B. W. "Civil War in Pakistan." *New York Times,* Apr 05, 1971.
[24] Nixon, Richard. "Remarks by President Nixon to the Nation." *NBC* on July 15, 1971. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1971*, 819-820.

This was not the only time the Nixon administration failed to acknowledge the conflict in Pakistan. The University of California Santa Barbara's "American Presidency Project," which archives presidential documents, speeches, memorandums, and addresses, holds only 22 documents between the years 1970 and 1972 in which Nixon publicly references Pakistan. Amongst those, Nixon never once referred to the civil war as anything other than a "refugee crisis"[25]. This illustrates the capacity of the government to control the news, but it enlarged the gulf between the American public and the government. While the public, swayed by emotional reporting and graphic photographs, thought the Pakistan situation dire and in need of intervention, the government failed to see its significance, focusing rather on the benefits of relationship with the PRC, and not the repercussions. Instead, the Nixon administration sewed great confusion amongst the American public and failed to, in the eyes of the public, adequately handle a major humanitarian crisis.

Conclusion: Mrs. Ghandi's Reflection

In 1972, Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India and daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* titled "India and the World." in which she examines the global position of India, her father's legacy, and the 1971 war with Pakistan. The observations she makes are astute and reframe the conflict to an Indian perspective. America, she argues failed to understand the international context of Indian non-alignment, instead "interpreting [it] within the confines of neutralism which they imagined (India) to be slanted in favor of Russia."[26] The Americans feared communism so much that they severed relationships with willing allies like India which in her view, originally had good relations with the United States but slowly dropped over decades due to purported support of communism.

Ghandi queries, "should not the people of the United States ask their government what they have gained from America's activities... in Asia? Has the United States succeeded in containing communism?"[27] These questions emerge from the Pakistan crisis of 1971 and they force

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[25] Nixon, Richard. "The President's News Conference." Washington, D.C., Aug 04, 1971. University of California Santa Barbara, *The American Presidency Project*

[26] Indira Gandhi, "India and the World." *Foreign Affairs* 51, no. 1 (1972): 74

[27] Ghandi, 75

Americans to consider the pros and cons of foreign policy. Was the relationship with the PRC so important as to allow the atrocities in Pakistan to occur? Was the United States justified in their activities? In a way, the attempts by the Nixon administration to improve their image, keep the unsavory hidden from the public, and publicly be anti-communist backfired. Ultimately, it was the secrecy, mystery, and confusion which lead to such harsh interpretations of the administration's actions and legacy. While Nixon and Kissinger were in many ways justified in their actions, the American public could not see it. This widening gulf between the citizens and the government, made apparent by the Vietnam War and further exasperated by this conflict, was hidden in the wake of Watergate. Yet, the style signaled a cultural shift, however, as the American public became aware not only of an international conflict but also their government's complicity. In this sense, the Pakistani Civil War is a case study of American intervention and public responses to it. The trepidation of the American government to intervene in the Pakistani Civil War and alleged genocide in East Pakistan came from the desire to build a new relationship with the People's Republic of China and Pakistan's key role as a conduit therein, but, instead, the refusal widened the gap between the American public, who broadly opposed the atrocities they were seeing in their newspapers and magazines, and their government. Prime Minister Gandhi asserts the vitality of Asia to global politics. She invited the United States to consider its role in global instability and conflict, and how this can be amended, prevented, or stopped outright. She wrote, "... so long as there are conflicts and dissensions in Asia there will be no peace in the world"[28]. The 1971 conflicts in Pakistan prove her right.

[28] Gandhi, Indira. "India and the World." *Foreign Affairs* 51, 1 (1972): 65–77. 76

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"Another St. Bartholomew's": The Philadelphia Riots of 1844 as Religious Violence

Joel Strong

Late on the night of May 9, 1844 the largely Irish neighborhood of Kensington, Philadelphia was burning. A Catholic nun named Sister Mary Gonzaga wrote a desperate letter to her mother from St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum that "We are in the midst of frightful dangers; a great portion of our peaceful city is the scene of a dreadful riot and bloodshed, two of our Churches burned to the ground..." She wrote of her fear that rioters would descend on the asylum and loot it or do harm to the nuns and the nearly one hundred orphans living in the asylum. Despite the presence of the state militia, Sister Mary did not feel at ease. "The military are out on duty, but it seems of no use. They [the mob] have burned whole rows of houses and shot many as they passed along." She updated her letter with more news as night turned to day, closing with a tearful "Adieu," asking her mother to "pray for your distressed children."[1]

What put Sister Mary's life under such threat during in May 1844? What turned two Philadelphia neighborhoods into a battlefield? What were the causes of these brazen assaults on innocent Catholics and their places of worship? I find this subject important because it is a notable example of what can happen when demagogues succeed in whipping up a crowd after using false rumors and claims to direct blame others for some disaster. Unfortunate victims can be convenient scapegoats because of such rumors. These riots offer an insight into religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants in the United States during the antebellum period, as well as economic tensions between the many Irish Catholic immigrants coming into the country during this time, and native-born Protestants who saw them as a threat.

[1] Raymond H. Schmandt. "Letter from Sr. Mary Gonzaga" in "A Selection of Sources Dealing With the Nativist Riots of 1844." *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 80, no. 2/3 (1969) 108-10.

The Philadelphia Bible riots of 1844 were a showcase of the ferocity of anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States. Hatred against Catholics stemmed from the idea that Catholics could not be good citizens of a republic and from fears that Catholic immigrants were the vanguard of an invasion force to turn the United States into a Catholic nation. The immediate cause of the violence came as Catholic schoolchildren in Philadelphia were granted the right to be exempted from Protestant religious services in school and to use their own translation of the Bible. Philadelphia Protestants claimed this was the beginning of a Catholic takeover of the United States and viciously fought these changes. These accusations were fanned by the Native American Party, a new political party which spread its claim that Catholicism was dangerous to American institutions. These accusations led to anti-Catholic rioting in May and July 1844 in which Catholic churches were destroyed by mobs and Catholic-owned homes were looted. The Native American Party painted their struggle as American Protestants fighting against what they said was the corruption of their country by foreign Catholicism, and eyewitnesses from both sides recognized the violence as religious in nature, with Protestants framing it as a heroic defense of a Protestant United States

Explanations for the Philadelphia Riots have varied among historians. In her article, Amanda Beyer-Purvis opines "Why these particular riots led to such widespread destruction, death, and injury is a question several scholars have addressed in their examinations of the unrest in Philadelphia."[2] She highlights the work of a number of scholars who have studied the Bible riots and ascribed several different possible causes to them. Beyer-Purvis focuses on economic causes with scholars such as Michael Feldberg placing the blame for the riots on Philadelphia's "changing economic landscape," including "a growing immigrant population, an increasingly established Irish Catholic working class, and rising class anxiety among skilled artisans" following the Panic of 1837.[3] Kenneth Milano also examines the role played by the Panic of 1837, as well as the increasing numbers of immigrants coming to Philadelphia and the conferment of the right to vote upon them, factors which "caused an increasing worry for 'native' Philadelphians about the growing

[2] Amanda Beyer-Purvis. "The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1844: Contest Over the Rights of Citizens." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 83, no. 3 (2016) 368.
[3] Beyer-Purvis, 368.

influence immigrants would have over the political process."[4] Most important to this paper however, is the role of religion in causing the riots.[5]

According to the Rev. Dr. Paul J. Foik, American history has seen recurring periods of virulent anti-Catholic sentiment provoked by "demagogues, conspirators against equality and freedom" who wished to "satisfy their own craving for power or to enrich themselves by commercialized bigotry."[6] Though Anti-Catholic beliefs were not always expressed openly, when they did show themselves, it was often with deep malevolence and violence. Despite Constitutional principles separating the church and the state or statements by some of the Founding Fathers regarding religious liberty, some politicians "tried by every means to abridge the liberties of Catholics."[7] These politicians justified their actions by pointing to the mass influx of immigrants to the northern sections of the country. An early example was the formation of the American Society of United Irishmen, which in 1792 "warned the English Government against a continuance of its abuses and threatened that unless reforms were forthcoming, the people would be driven to embrace republicanism." In response, British agents in the United States worked with prominent government officials to destroy the society's influence by casting it as a threat to American liberty and institutions. Foik credits this campaign and the falsities it involved as one of the motivations for the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 which was passed the year of the United Irishmen's rebellion in Ireland.

By 1835, there was a major increase in anti-Catholic sentiment as states on the east coast complained bitterly that the Atlantic coast cities were becoming the rendezvous of bands of revolutionary outcasts from Europe," leading to entire immigrant populations being targeted by wicked propaganda, discrimination, and eventually acts of violence. In a notorious example, in August 1834 a nativist mob attacked and burned down an Ursuline convent near Charlestown, Massachusetts.[8] The viciously nativist Philadelphia *Daily Sun* echoed these militaristic sentiments in a flaming editorial on the third day of the May 1844 riots, claiming that "Armed recruits in aid

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[4] Beyer-Purvis, 370.
[5] Beyer-Purvis, 369-370.
[6] Paul J. Foik. "Anti-Catholic Parties in American Politics 1776-1860." *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 36, 1 (1925): 41.
[7] Foik, 50
[8] Foik, 52-53

of the Roman Catholics are pouring in from various neighboring towns."[9] In what Foik calls "the darkest age in America's religious history," "Fire, rapine, bloodshed, [and] death" openly walked the streets of Philadelphia in May and July 1844.

At the time of the Bible riots, Philadelphia was a diverse city populated by immigrants from several European countries, which helped create tension in the city between these different groups. According to James Bergquist, Immigrants became a persistent issue in the politics of the Philadelphia region and of the nation and by the time of the Civil War, immigration had transformed the city. One of the largest tides of immigration came from Ireland and included all types of people, from political exiles fleeing repression following the Irish Rebellion of 1798 to poor workers hoping to get a new start in the United States. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia was a particularly enticing destination for Irish immigrants due to the city's textile and iron industries, as well as the vibrant canal and railroad building jobs, which had the unskilled jobs that Irish were able to fill. The Irish were widely distributed across Philadelphia's neighborhoods, although heavier concentrations were found in South Philadelphia and in industrial suburbs like Kensington. Bergquist writes that the Irish were heavily "subject to the fluctuations of the economy" and that they were the most affected by "competition among ethnic groups in the labor market." The Irish competed with other immigrant groups, such as the Germans and English, as well as with free blacks who came north to Pennsylvania after the state instituted a gradual emancipation law in 1780.[10]

Philadelphia was no stranger to mob violence in the period before the Civil War. According to J. Coval and K. Wilson, "Violence in fact permeated the antebellum city and was often highly discriminating, revealing the fears, anxieties, and challenges of an evolving city and nation."[11] Riots and violence were not only common, but even expected due to the city's demography and culture. According to Wilson, "In these heterogeneous neighborhoods, where one group often lived in close proximity to another, religious differences, economic habits, and social mores came into contact and conflict." With newcomers from several different groups concentrated in a few

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[9] Bernard C. Diethorn and Vincent P. Lannie. "For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840 [sic]." *History of Education Quarterly* 8, 1 (1968), 75

[10] James Bergquist "Immigration (1790-1860)." Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, April 2, 2022

[11] J. Coval and K. Wilson. "City of Unbrotherly Love: Violence in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia." Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1

poor and squalid neighborhoods situated outside the city limits, tension and unrest were inevitable. There were riots in 1828, 1832, 1834, 1835, 1838, and 1842, as well as other years. Violence was seen as a way for the politically disenfranchised to make their voices heard, a means of expression for laborers during this time of industrialization, and a vital way for urban men to express themselves.[12] Violence was also fueled by the absence of an organized police force. The only law enforcement available for those neighborhoods most likely to host a riot were night watchmen or sheriffs' Posses or the state militia which was mobilized only after violence was underway. A distrust of organized authorities also prevented the development of a formal law enforcement agency. Opponents of consolidation argued against tax adjustments and the political upheavals that would ensue. It was not until 1854 that a citywide police force was established in Philadelphia and more professionalization started.[13] By the time of the Bible riots in 1844, this sentiment had not changed much, as General George Cadwalader, commanding the state militia in charge of keeping the peace, wrote that it was "a source of much comfort to me to find that the course which has been pursued by myself and the troops under my command on recent trying occasions has met with the approbation of my fellow citizens generally."[14] Cadwalader was surprised and relieved to receive praise for actions that would not endear him to many citizens, but which were necessary to maintain peace.

The immediate cause of the riots was a dispute over the Bible in Philadelphia's public schools. The Protestant King James Bible was a mandated text in public schools as declared by the state legislature, and Catholic parents felt this made their children feel uncomfortable and encouraged them to refuse to read from it resulting in these students being called out and punished.[15] Students regardless of their sect were also compelled to take part in the singing of Protestant hymns and saying Protestant prayers. Frances Kenrick, the Bishop of Philadelphia requested that the city Board of Controllers allow Catholic schoolchildren to bring their own version of the Bible, the Douay Bible, "based on the Latin Vulgate translation of the fourth and fifth centuries instead of the translation of ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that the Protestant Bibles relied on." This translation also "contained the text commentary on biblical passages and interpretive notes,

[12] Coval and Wilson, 2.
[13] Coval and Wilson, 3-4.
[14] Schmandt, 108
[15] Diethorn and Lannie, 55

content which were expressly prohibited by the public schools in Philadelphia."[16] The Douay Bible was born out of a Catholic wish for their own English translation of the Bible. Many Protestant versions of the Scriptures had been issued and were used largely by the Reformers for polemical purposes," the notes the Douay version contained were "designed to answer the theological arguments of the Reformers. The public schools prohibited notes and comments because the main purpose of the Douay Bible was to provide a resource for English-speaking Catholics to be able to debate with Protestants. The use of this Bible in Philadelphia schools was likely seen as subversive to the dominant Protestant order. School officials were unaware that the Douay Bible was written to be as approximate as possible to the King James version. [17] In fact, one bishop wrote that "Challoner's revision was even nearer to the Authorized Version than to the original Douay, not in grammatical structure, but in phraseology and diction."[18] The version of the Douay Bible that Philadelphia Catholics used at the time of the riots was in substance quite similar to the Protestant King James Bible.

The Bible debate grew more intense in January 1843 when the Philadelphia Board of Controllers issued resolutions allowing those children who wanted to use a different version of the bible to do so. As described by Diethorn and Lannie, "In an attempt at compromise, the controllers retained the King James version in the schools but did not force Catholic children or teachers to read it," a state of affairs many Catholics were willing to accept but which few Protestants could tolerate. [19] In response to perceived threats, two nativist groups, the American Protestant Association and the American Republican Association were formed in late 1842 and December 1843 respectively. The Protestant Associations monthly lectures drew such large audiences that by the end of 1843 it instituted a series of weekly lectures to replace the monthly ones. Republican Associations quickly acquired a large membership and by the following March it had local units in every ward in Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs."[20] These nativists wanted to make a show of force in order to demonstrate to Philadelphia Catholics the supremacy of Protestantism.

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[16] Beyer-Purvis, 375
[17] Bernard Ward, "Douay Bible." *The Catholic Encyclopedia.* New York: Robert Appleton Company
[18] Bernard Ward, "Authorized Version." *The Catholic Encyclopedia.* New York: Robert Appleton Company
[19] Diethorn and Lannie, 67.
[20] Diethorn and Lannie, 62.

On May 6, 1844, a nativist rally was held in the heavily Irish neighborhood of Kensington to protest the recent changes made in the city's public schools. The anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant speakers were quickly interrupted by a commotion... from some cause or other which led to a physical altercation and stones and gunshots being exchanged.[21] Blaming Irish Catholics for the disorder, the protestants in attendance resorted to violence attacking houses and driving out "... the inmates driven out with the utmost consternation and alarm." The unrest only grew worse the following day and at around 2:30pm on May 7, the Catholic Church, called St. Michael's Second street, was set on fire. This was soon followed by the burning of "St. Augustine's church. Eventually the state militia was called in and helped bring an end to the violence and extinguished many burning buildings.[22] Once the dust settled, a grand jury was convened to investigate the cause of the riots, and in June it issued a final report in which "it accepted the nativist contention that the riots were due to the efforts of a portion of the community to exclude the Bible from our Public Schools despite much consternation and protest by Philadelphia's Catholic community.[23] But Philadelphia's troubles were far from over.

The violence began anew just two months later. Bishop Kenrick wrote in his diary on "July the fourth day. They who call themselves 'natives' paraded through the streets carrying banners, on which were represented the figures of an open Bible and a dead serpent. The word was passed through the streets that this symbolized the power [of] the Roman Church, now utterly extinct."[24] Seeing another huge gathering of nativists, and fearing a repeat rioting, the St. Philip's Catholic Church in Southwark (also outside the city at the time) began storing muskets in its basement and organizing parishioners to defend the building in the event of violence. However, this move led to rumors that the church had been fortified, and a large crowd gathered around St. Philip's on July 5 demanding that the weapons be removed. A militia troop drove off the crowd by threatening to open fire on them, taking some of them prisoner to deter a violent attempt to seize the church. After the prisoners were freed, the troops withdrew, and the nativists almost immediately broke into the church, only for the militia to return and regain control over the church. "However, the inevitable scuffle occurred. By nine o'clock, shots were being exchanged

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[21] John B. Perry, *A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia* (1844), 5.
[22] Perry, 18.
[23] Diethorn and Lannie, 87.
[24] Schmandt. "Diary of Bishop Frances Kenrick" in "A Selection of Sources Dealing With the Nativist Riots of 1844." *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 80, no. 2/3 (1969), 104.

between soldiers and rioters. A battle ensued, fought with spikes, files, broken glass, scrap iron, rifles, and even cannon on occasion."[25]

This dispute over the use of a Protestant Bible in classrooms with Catholic pupils was framed by both Catholics and Protestants as an attempt by the other group to force their religious teachings on students. After the Pennsylvania State Legislature passed a law declaring the King James Bible a mandatory text in the state's public schools, Catholics vehemently spoke out against forcing Catholic children to read a version of the Bible their parents and church did not see as legitimate. In an 1838 letter in the Philadelphia *Catholic Herald*, "Sentinel" Frances Kenrick asked, "Is it just to place the Protestant Bible in the hands of Catholic children, to make them commit its text to memory, and to respond to the questions which sectarian teachers may put as to its contents?" "Sentinel" added that freedom of conscience was the right of all schoolchildren whether they followed Christianity or not. Archbishop Kenrick supported the requests of Catholic parents who wished to remove their children from schools that used a Protestant Bible and engaged in Protestant hymns, prayers, and rituals. This sort of rhetoric caught the attention of Protestant-sympathizing publications such as the *North American* which warned readers of "an insidious papist plot to remove the Bible from the public schools" and claimed that Catholics have the impudence to tell us no *rule* of Faith, or no Bible shall be tolerated."[26] Some Protestants interpreted Catholic pleas for the right to use their own Bible as an attack on the entire school system which they saw as fundamentally Protestant.

Another aspect of this religious dispute was a deep-seeded belief that Catholics could not be good citizens of a republic. Nativists thought that Catholics were loyal to the Pope first, and any secular authorities were secondary in importance. There was a belief that Catholics derived all instruction in thoughts and deeds straight from the Vatican, leaving no room for personal will. Their claim was that Catholics blindly took in whatever they heard from their clergy without question, and their seemingly mindless fealty to the Pope was seen as a threat to American institutions if they were to ever get into positions of power. Catholics were also seen as insidiously attempting to undermine the Protestant foundations of the United States through their efforts to gain equal

[25] Diethorn and Lannie, 84-85
[26] Diethorn and Lannie, 51-52.

rights to religious expression in schools. The Native American Party viewed the quest for equality by Catholics as a nefarious anti-democratic plot, placing them in league with Catholic rulers in Europe who allegedly wished to see the United States collapse and be replaced by a monarchy.

Another fear was that European Catholic rulers were using immigration as a means to flood the United States with Catholics and turn the nation into one populated by "foreigners" and ruled by despotism. Proponents of this claim maintained that "because the Bible was the symbol of Protestant identification with Americanism, so Catholic complaints amounted to an un-American stance perpetuated by immigrant hordes who were subjects of a foreign ecclesiastical power."[27] For Catholics to even suggest that their rights were being ignored was evidence enough for Protestants to conclude that Catholics wanted to supplant Protestants as the dominant religion in the United States. The American Protestant Association said in their constitution that "Romanism was organizing itself under a foreign priesthood, for direct interference with our political elections... and segregating its adherents into a distinct body, alien in sympathy and interest from the mass of the American people."[28] The Association claimed that those Catholic immigrants were coming to the United States, perhaps even being sent by their rulers, in order to destabilize American politics and that they were doing this with the support and aid of their leaders in Rome. Even after over a year had passed since the rioting, the nativist magazine *The Republic* placed the blame for the violence squarely upon the foreign serfs controlled and organized by their Jesuit leaders who wished to create a cry of persecution in order to enlist sympathy and collect funds and other aid from the papists of Europe, The magazine speculated that Catholic objective could be "part of some other Jesuit scheme against the people and institutions of this country."[29] The magazine said that the Catholics sparked the violence in Kensington and Southwark as a means to attract sympathy and portray themselves as the victims, which the nativists claimed would invite more Catholics to immigrate to the United States and work more faithfully to undermine its institutions.

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[27] Diethorn and Lannie, 91
[28] Diethorn and Lannie, 61
[29] "The Southwark Riots." *The Republic, a Magazine for the Defence of Civil and Religious Liberty* no. 1 (August 1845), 1, 4-5.

Another argument by Philadelphia nativists was that Catholics were a religious minority in the country who were merely tolerated by the Protestant majority. They viewed themselves as kind for giving up their own rights so that Catholics could live freely. "[S]ince Catholics were not forced to attend [public] schools" the Philadelphia *Presbyterian* wondered, since Protestants founded these schools, and they have always been in a majority, why then should the minority... regard the most vital principle entering into their constitution as an infringement of their rights?" Catholic complaints would only be worth something if their children were forced to attend schools where a Protestant Bible would be read, but since there was "no compulsion" for them to do so, they would have to respect the rights of Protestants to express themselves religiously in school however they chose, including at the expense of Catholic students. The *Episcopal Reporter* asked its readers: "Are we to yield our personal liberty, our inherited rights, our very Bibles, the special, blessed gift of God to our country to the will, the ignorance, or the wickedness of these hordes of foreigners, subjects of a foreign despot...?" Diethorn and Lannie argued that for the most part, Catholics were foreigners who were under the domination of a foreign ecclesiasticism whose loyalty centered in Rome. In America they were a minority group and should be satisfied with their minority status. The fear of a Catholic takeover fueled the accusations made against Catholics during the Philadelphia school dispute.

Participants and witnesses to the unrest recognized that it was religiously motivated violence by Protestants against Catholics. The nativist participants expressed themselves in this language. Group of young nativists marched "brandishing a torn American flag bearing the inscription: 'This is the flag that was trampled underfoot by the Irish papists."[30] The position of the Protestant rioters and supporters was identified with defending their Protestant nation against the predations of foreign Catholics. Nativist publications echoed similar sentiments "The *Native American* declared that another St. Bartholomew's day is begun in the streets of Philadelphia. The bloody hand of the Pope has stretched itself forth to our destruction."[31] The paper referenced the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in France, where thousands of Protestants across the country were slaughtered by militant Catholics who wished to neuter Protestant political power. The Protestant rioters saw Catholic action regarding the school dispute as evidence of a vast conspiracy to crush American Protestantism. On the other side of the riots, Sister Mary Gonzaga

[30] Diethorn and Lannie, 73.
[31] Beyer-Purvis, 383.

also wrote in that late-night letter to her mother that "the clergymen have left their dwellings, the bishop his house, the priests and students have deserted the seminary everyone seeking a night's lodging in the family of some friends." Many Philadelphia Catholics, clergymen and laymen fled in fear of their lives due to their religious leanings. After explaining that the riots had been sparked by disputes between nativists and Irish Catholics at some political meeting, Sister Mary observed that the violence was "... nothing but a party of Protestants leagued against the Catholics under the name of Native Americans and the Irish. It is believed to be actually more religion than politics which is the cause of the riot."[32] This frightened nun recognized that the violence that had turned her life upside down was purely religious in nature.

Philadelphia sources were not the only ones to ascribe the riots to religious turmoil between Protestants and Catholics, as at least one newspaper outside the state heard news of the violence and quickly understood what had caused it. On May 11, the *Baltimore Sun* wrote despairingly of the news from Philadelphia that "It was bad enough in Kensington to see hundreds of innocent families driven from a blazing house and home, turned out beggars into the open street, and made scapegoats for the misconduct of others." The *Sun* referenced the grand jury report which placed the blame for that month's riots on Philadelphia's Catholic population. The paper opined that it might have been the Native Americans who were sacrificed to this "Moloch of blind and intoxicated fury; to-day it might be the Catholics, tomorrow it might be the Presbyterians or Episcopalians."[33] The *Sun* pointed out that what had happened to the Catholics in Philadelphia could happen to any other group if there was a popular movement to label that group a threat and stir up hatred with propaganda. The paper recognized that the violence was religious in motivation by identifying other Christian groups who could also become targeted.

American newspapers were not the only ones to identify religion as the primary motive behind the unrest. The London *Examiner* reported on the riots by retelling of the events of those horrible days in early May. However, the paper does include details that show how a religious motive drove actors in the riots. "Dr. Moriarty's [a priest at St. Augustine's Church] valuable library was piled, Vandal-like, into bonfires; and it is said that two or three pipers played, as at the fall of the

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[32] Schmandt, 108-109.
[33] "The Philadelphia Riots." *The Sun (1837-)*. May 11, 1844.

cross of St. Michael's [church], the tune of 'Boyne Water.'"[34] Boyne Water" is "a tune commemorating the Protestant William of Orange's victory over the Catholics of Ireland in 1690. By playing this song as a Catholic priest's library burned shows that the rioters had religion on their minds during the violence. At the end of its coverage of the riots, the *Examiner* noted that houses in Kensington were flying an American flag to show their nativist sympathies, and that these flags often also bore the name of the resident and things such as "'A. B. Methodist,' 'Episcopalian,' 'Protestant,' &c.; while one or two had the words 'No Popery.'"[35] That the residents of heavily Irish Kensington flew flags like this, perhaps believing that the rioters might leave them alone if they appeared friendly to the nativist cause, further validates the religions factor of the riots. On November 20, 1844, *The Manchester Guardian* wrote in its "Local and Provincial Intelligence" section about the annual meeting of the Manchester and Salford Protestant Association in the city where numerous speakers railed against Romanism and its "crafty" efforts to worm its way into the local government. One speaker then referred to the Philadelphia riots claiming they "had been fomented by the Jesuits, and that the grand struggle of the church of Rome in America, as in Ireland and England, was directed to get the protestant Bible out of public schools..."[36] In this reference to the riots, the speaker in faraway Britain acknowledged that the riots had a purely religious driver and that they were about Catholic efforts to give their children equal access to an accepted Catholic Bible in schools. The speaker also pejoratively called the Catholics "Jesuits," referring to the prominent Catholic religious order.

The Philadelphia riots of 1844 were an episode of religious violence by Protestants against Catholics, part of a legacy of anti-Catholic discrimination in the United States stretching back many decades. The Catholics merely wished to have their religious rights recognized but their efforts were met with bloodshed and hostility. Though the Catholics of Philadelphia were dismayed by this reaction, they were not completely cowed. Take Sister Mary Gonzaga. Nearly twenty years after she wrote her fearful late-night letter, she remained committed to caring for those less fortunate than her. During the Great Rebellion she presided over the hospital in Camp Satterlee... where thousands of wounded soldiers from the North and South... were tenderly

[34] "Riots and Conflagrations in Philadelphia." London *Examiner* (1896). June 1, 1844: 343
[35] London *Examiner* (1896). June 1, 1844: 343
[36] "Local and Provincial Intelligence." *The Manchester Guardian (1828-1900).* November 20, 1844, 1.

nursed by the daughters of St. Vincent under her direction." She then returned to St. Joseph's Asylum before dying peacefully in 1897 at 85.[37] Efforts to reduce the Philadelphia Riots to politics or migration miss the crucial role played by religion.

[37] James A. Corcoran, John R. Patrick, and Edmond F. Prendergast. (January 1901). "Book Reviews." *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*. 26: 199–200.

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The *Bum-Ditties* of the African Diaspora: The Roots and Reclamation of the Banjo

Emily New

Like the rabbit, we won't bend to your will
Like the spider, the smallest will still prevail
The stories of our elders, we find comfort in these
We smile to the sky, we move to stay alive,
And we're dancing
Oh, you steal our work for your profit, but we're dancing
Oh, you think our home we have forgotten, but we're dancing
— Our Native Daughters, "Moon Meets the Sun"

Joe Thompson was born in 1918 to a family of sharecroppers in Orange County, North Carolina. The music he grew up around was not something studied in a classroom, let alone written down on paper; it was a social practice handed down from one generation to the next. His father, John Arch Thompson played the fiddle. His uncle, Walter Thompson played the banjo and passed down his skills to Joe's cousin, Odell. Joe and Odell's grandfather was born in bondage on a North Carolina plantation in the 1840s and taught John and Walter the music that was passed down to him by the generations before him. At five-years-old, Joe's mother bought him a secondhand fiddle. It did not have any strings on it, but he "saw what some of (his) brothers do" and pulled wires from their tattered screen porch to string the instrument up.[1] In an interview with *Folkstreams* towards the end of his life, he recalled:

> I knew what to do 'cause I'd heard my daddy tune and play so much. Later, when I was working on the farm sitting up on the tractor, a tune would come into my head. At the end of the day, I'd jump off that tractor, go in the house, and try to play the tune. And I did play it. Or sometimes I'd sit down to play with other people. They'd start a tune and by the end I'm playing the same thing they are. It's from the ear but it's got to be in you.[2]

Joe would carry the tradition of Carolina Piedmont old-time music passed down from generation to generation performing at frolics, corn shuckin's, and church gatherings. Joe and Odell enlisted in the Army during World War II but they returned to find that the musical landscape of America

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[1] *The Life and Times of Joe Thompson*, Digital (Folkstreams, 2004), https://www.folkstreams.net/films/life-and-times-of-joe-thompson.
[2] "Octogenarian Fiddler Joe Thompson Is a Master of The... Folkstreams" *Folkstreams*, 2025.

had shifted. The familiar twangs of their childhood had been replaced by the Blues and Rock n' Roll. They hung their instruments on the wall and got jobs at the local furniture factory. As the last living member of the Thompson family tree to remember this specific style of old-time music, Joe would not be recognized for his musicianship until 2005 when he attended the Blank Banjos Gathering at Appalachian State University.[3] This conference of Black folk musicians from around the world sparked a dialogue about the excavation and reclamation of African musical traditions that were purposefully repressed throughout the 20th century.

When Rhiannon Giddens met Joe Thompson at the Blank Banjos Gathering, she felt a deep connection to the eighty-seven-year-old musician. The Gathering was the first of its kind, bringing Black folk musicians to gather and jam with their banjos, fiddles, bones, and other folk instruments. At this event, Giddens connected with fellow Black banjoist Dom Flemmons and fiddler Justin Robinson. They committed to learning at the feet of Joe Thompson and his knowledge of Piedmont old-time music. Giddens, Flemmons, and Robinson formed The Carolina Chocolate Drops, an old-time string band steeped in the musical traditions of the Thompson family. The Carolina Chocolate Drops raised eyebrows in the folk music industry and spark a contentious conversation about the origins of the genre when their album, *Genuine Negro Jig*, won the Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album in 2010.[4] This was the first time a non-white group won the award since it was introduced in 1987, and the last year it won the award. The Carolina Chocolate Drops were not the first Black old-time string band to ever exist. They simply illuminate a complicated history of African and African American musical innovations that were intentionally appropriated into the dominant aesthetic of white Americana and its mythology.

The banjo is a product of the African diaspora, recreated from the memories of enslaved Africans on Caribbean plantations in the late-1600s. While tangible proof of the banjo's origin is complicated by mismanaged historical records and Eurocentric bias, the instrument and its practice are one of the rare cultural survivors of the chattel bondage that stripped millions of Africans of their personhood, their homeland, and their ability to negotiate their place within the

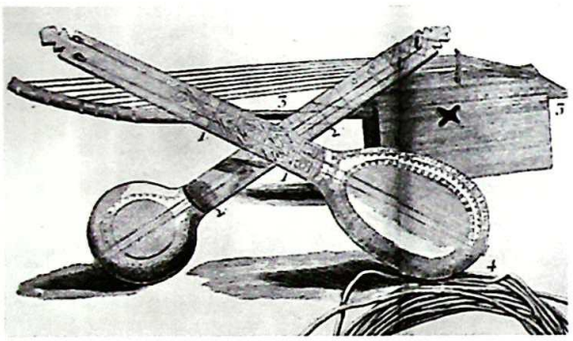
[3] "Don't Get Trouble in Your Mind: The Carolina Chocolate Drops' Story," *Youtube*, Digital (DeskPop Entertainment, 2016.

[4] "Nonesuch Records: Genuine Negro Jig," Nonesuch Records, November 13, 2009, https://www.nonesuch.com/albums/genuine-negro-jig.

diaspora. The banjo and the old-time music tradition it formed is not only an instrument produced by the transatlantic slave trade, but a vehicle for the contemporary reclamation and negotiation of what it means to be an African-hyphenate in the Western world. This essay examines the banjo's African roots, its evolution in the United States, and its reclamation by artists across the African diaspora in the 21st century as a tool for resistance, reclamation, and identity formation.

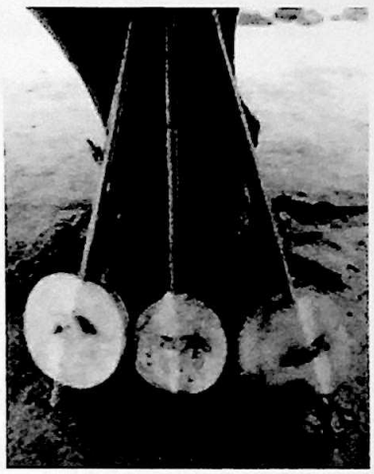
Africa Banjo Reconstrued

To understand the function and role of the banjo in the contemporary moment, we must look to the instrument's roots, construction, and the evolution in the Americas. There are no accounts of when the first banjo was created, or even an explicit connection between African instruments and the banjo. Instead, historians and ethnomusicologists have strung together varying accounts from European participants in the transatlantic slave trade and the physical instruments preserved in the Caribbean. In 17th century accounts of French colonial territories in the Caribbean, there is notice of "a gathering of Negroes where they dance in their own style all together to the sound of a drum and an instrument they call banza."[5] The banjo was called by a many names in its early history, such as banza, bangil, and banjer, however all early accounts of Caribbean plantations note three distinct characteristics of this common lute instrument. These are a circular base formed from a hollowed and dried gourd, a fret-less neck, and one to four strings. The earliest European documentation of the African equivalent of the banjo came from Richard Jobson's writings from his trip up the Gambian river in 1621. Jobson described an instrument with "a great gourd, and a necke thereunto fastened, resembling in some sort our bandora."[6] Jobson was likely describing the xalam instrument of the Wolof people, however the uncanny resemblance should not suggest that the Wolof xalam is the sole source of the instrument.



[5] Dena J. Epstein, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," *Ethnomusicology* 19, no. 3 (September 1975): 351.
[6] Epstein, 350.

Many different lute instruments across many cultures in West Africa bear a resemblance both in physical appearance and playing technique to the banjo. These instruments share the similarity of a hollowed gourd, goat hide that is stretched across the base, a long, wooden neck that supports strings, and knobs at the end of the neck which are used to tune the strings. The instrument most attributed to the banjo is the akonting, an instrument belonging to the Jola people in modern-day Senegal, the Gambia, and Guinea-Bisseau. Instruments such as the akonting, garaya, and ngoni are played with a distinct rhythm that involves brushing down on the long strings with the back of the nails twice and then up-picking the short string with the pad of the thumb.[7] This creates a rhythmic cadence that is informally called a "bum-ditty" in American folk music and an essential part of the Frailing or clawhammer technique in old-time music.



Akonting Instrument

On Caribbean plantations, the banjo was often the only instrument that the plantation owners permitted to be constructed and played. While drums and woodwind instruments were far more dominant across the many West African cultures, they posed a danger of being used as signaling devices in times of uprising and therefore were outlawed on plantations.[8] As Africans in bondage were taken to unfamiliar lands, and enslaved, they were surrounded by others who did not share their tongue or culture. The cultural diversity of the enslaved on these plantations led to a construction of shared identity for survival. As Laurent DuBois noted in his study of the banjo:

> In the plantation context, "Africa" took on a new importance as displaced people from throughout the continent were thrown together and had begun to communicate and survive together... Music and dance were particularly powerful ways to create moments of commonality and coalition... The enslaved generally shared an understanding of the social and ritual necessity of music, of its power to channel memory, and to heal.[9]

Thus, we see the banjo emerge as a vital instrument in the development of an African-descendant identity in the Americas. The banjo allowed a creative avenue to construct a shared identity and preserve a collective memory of their homeland.

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[7] Ulf Jägfors, "The African Akonting and the Origin of the Banjo," *The Old Time Herald* 9, no. 2 (December 1, 2003): 16–23, 4.

[8] Epstein, 352.

[9] Laurent Dubois, *The Banjo America's African Instrument* (Cambridge (Massachusetts, Estados Unidos) The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press, 2016), 52.

The first visual depiction of the banjo in North America is attributed to John Rose's *The Old Plantation* (c. 1785).[10] The painting shows a group of enslaved Africans in their leisure time on a plantation near Orangeburg, South Carolina. The focal point of the painting shows an enslaved man and woman *jumping the broom*, a ritual with roots in West Africa that celebrated marriages between enslaved people that were not recognized by the law, nor respected by the slave owners. The painting features two musicians: one holding a banjo and another holding a small, round, percussive instrument with two sticks. As important as this painting is to the documentation of the early banjo in North America, its accuracy requires further examination because John Rose was the owner of the plantation and the legal owner of the enslaved people depicted. His depiction was likely colored by his sense of superiority. Despite its contradictions, *The Old Plantation* illustrates how African Americans transformed the memories of their homelands into practices of resistance against enslavement.

More humane depictions of the banjo emerged in the mid-late 19th century, as abolitionist ideals became more mainstream in the American political discourse. William Sidney Mount's seminal portrayals of the banjo's practice with *The Banjo Player in the Barn* (1855) and *The Banjo Player* (1856) introduced the first humanistic depiction of the banjo and its players. Mount was never explicitly noted as an abolitionist, but he focused on capturing rural American folkways and "used his art to argue sensitivity for the dignity of the Black man."[11] Thomas Eakins's 1878 watercolor, *The Dancing Lesson*, portrays three generations of African Americans and their relation to the banjo. These are a young boy dancing, his father seated in a chair playing the banjo, and the grandfather discerningly watching the young boy dance.[12] Henry Ossawa Tanner was the first African-American painter to capture the banjo in 1893 with *The Banjo Lesson*.[13] Tanner's painting depicts a young boy on the lap of his grandfather in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, learning to play the instrument. These paintings that emerged in the 19th century show that the

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[10] John Rose, *The Old Plantation*, 1785, Watercolor on Laid Paper, 1785, Williamsburg, VA, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum.

[11] William Sidney Mount, *The Banjo Player*, 1856, Oil on Canvas, 1856, Washington, DC, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

[12] Thomas Eakins, *The Dancing Lesson*, 1877, Oil on Canvas, 1877, Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, https://www.nga.gov/artworks/66414-study-dancing-lesson-banjo-player.

[13] Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, Oil on Canvas, 1893, Hampton, VA, Hampton University Museum, https://smarthistory.org/tanner-banjo/.

banjo was not merely a rudimentary instrument that was periphery to plantation life, but a heritage that was lovingly passed down from generation to generation and taught as a centerpiece in the construction of the collective African American identity and transference of cultural practices.

Minstrelsy, Mockery, and Appropriation

Mount, Eakins, and Tanner's paintings were a drop of humanity against many racialized malevolence and harmful mockery that gained dominance in the 19th century. For well over a century, the banjo was exclusively associated with enslaved peoples and was only found on plantations in the United States. However, by the 1830s ministry music emerged as the most popular form of entertainment in the United States. What led to the success and appeal of minstrelsy to the masses came from the mockery of plantation slave life. Minstrel performers considered themselves "students of the negro," learning to play the banjo from enslaved African Americans.[14] These white performers darkened their skin with burnt cork, drew exaggerated white and red paint around their lips, and donned tattered clothes and curly wigs. They toured the country portraying racist, hyperbolic stereotypes of African Americans as unintelligent, uncivilized, and racially inferior. Minstrel music was not only the dominant popular culture across the United States, but found wide success abroad, performing in Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and Australia.[15] The international success of minstrelsy spread the stereotypes and mockery of African Americans abroad, and the banjo was a central prop to the performances.

Black banjoists also participated in minstrel music, helping to shape the banjo's genre. Very little is known about Thomas F. Briggs other than he was a freedman who had a modicum of success performing on the West Coast earning the title "Darky Apollo."[16] Shortly after his death in 1855, his songbook *Briggs' Banjo Instructor* was the first banjo reader ever published. It provided a manual to over seventy songs, both respectable folk songs as well as minstrel tunes. Briggs was simply documenting the music he heard around him, but unfortunately his songbook became a roadmap for white minstrel groups to tour the country and make livings for themselves. Briggs never saw a profit from his publication, as his instructor was published posthumously. Brooker

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[14] Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.
[15] Stephen Johnson, *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Amherst ; Boston: University Of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 244.
[16] Thomas F. Briggs, *Briggs' Banjo Instructor* (1855; Boston, MA: Oliver Ditson & Co.), 2.



Gus Cannon and the Jug Stompers (1928)

and Clayton's Georgia Minstrels, a troupe of twelve Black performers led by Charles Hicks, were amongst the few Black minstrel troupes that gained success by marketing their authenticity to the tropes being portrayed. They billed themselves as, "the only pure negro troupe in the world," wearing, "wigs furnished to them by nature."[17] Gus Cannon struggled to find gigs around the Mississippi delta as a Black man playing the banjo and fiddle. He was only able to book gigs by darkening his face with burnt cork and learning to play the "jug," admitting that he could only perform these denigrating routines by getting horrendously drunk beforehand.[18] While some Black banjoists did achieve success in the 19th century, it was only through humiliating rituals that they could earn a living. They performed in unsafe spaces and ultimately struggled to secure gigs at the same rate as their white counterparts in blackface.

Industry Segregation and Marginalization

By the turn of the 19th century, minstrel music waned in popularity, although the damage to the image of African Americans would be repurposed and disguised for centuries. The banjo had been a popular instrument amongst Black, white, Native, and Hispanic musicians and audiences. It was a cornerstone in the emerging jazz bands of New Orleans, often positioned in the back corner of the stage due to its reverberating sound.[19] The banjo found itself as a popular parlor accessory for young, upper class, white women.[20] In southern Appalachia, Irish immigrants had long mingled with African Americans of the region and developed a fast-paced, finger-pinking style that would evolve into the bluegrass genre. In the early 20th century, the banjo was performed and cherished across racial lines. The introduction of recording technology saw the birth of the music industry, which quickly sought to market sound by segregating genres into profit.[21] The burgeoning music industry insisted on "establishing a homology between aesthetic boundaries

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[17] Robert C Toll, *Blacking up : The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 199.
[18] Royster, 121.
[19] Conway, 62.
[20] Lydia Hamessley, "Within Sight: Three-Dimensional Perspectives on Women and Banjos in the Late Nineteenth Century," *19th-Century Music* 31, no. 2 (November 2007): 131–63,
[21] Miller, 188.

and distinctions."[22] This new commercialization of music applied the segregation of the Jim Crow South to its business tactics, marketing musical taste along racial lines.

Record sales were divided into "hillbilly records" for white consumers and "race records" for Black consumers. Race records were determined by what the recording companies thought African Americans wanted to consume, remaining "deeply committed to interpreting Black music as an extension of minstrelsy."[23] The record labels focused their race records on the emerging blues genre out of the Mississippi delta and vaudeville, a performance-focused, comedic genre employing many of the flamboyant performance methods of minstrelsy. The blues and vaudeville carried the subtext of immorality, with lyrics of drinking, dancing, murder, and straying from faith. If you were a white banjoist, then your recording would be marketed as "hillbilly," folk, bluegrass, and eventually *country*. Hillbilly records conjured the nostalgia of the "good ole times," and idealized the morality of the white, rural poor in a rapidly industrializing country.[24] Black banjoists soon realized that the record labels simply had no interest in recording them, because a Black face on a folk record was not marketable to a white audience. There was a significant amount of crossover between the two genres in practice and performance. However, the music industry hardened racial identity with music taste, leaving an indelible mark on the historiography of American popular music.

From the 1920s through the post-war era, country music rose in popularity, and the banjo was an essential component of its popularity in both country and bluegrass music. Earl Scruggs pioneered the three-finger picking style that positioned the banjo as a lead instrument in bluegrass, rather than a rhythm instrument. By 1972, the film *Deliverance* reflected white America's association of the five-stringed instrument as the choice of the impoverished, presumably inbred, and uneducated white folks of southern, rural Appalachia. The banjo became synonymous with images of whiteness, poverty, and the assumed politics of *those folks*. All the while, Black banjoists were de facto barred from the genre and no commercial prosperity. The segregation of musical taste and the manufactured mythology over who could claim ownership

[22] William G. Roy, "'Race Records' and 'Hillbilly Music': Institutional Origins of Racial Categories in the American Commercial Recording Industry," *Poetics* 32, no. 3 (June 1, 2004): 265–79, 272.
[23] Miller, 195.
[24] Roy, 122.

over American genres and aesthetics in the 20th century also functioned as a denial of a symbolic citizenship to African Americans. As country, folk, and bluegrass genres formed the aesthetics of the American identity, Black musicians and performers were consistently denied from participating in that process.


Elizabeth Cotten

The segregation of taste and musical ownership that the music industry enforced should not suggest that Black banjoists were not still learning and playing the banjo. Elizabeth Cotton, born around 1892 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, learned the banjo from her older brother. [25] She became a domestic worker out of economic necessity in her teenage years and did not play any instrument until she was in her 60s when she was hired by the Seeger family. Mike Seeger recorded her playing the banjo and guitar and invited her to play at the Newport Folk Festival and on other folk circuits in the early 1960s.[26] Her song "Freight Train" became a seminal Blues record, introducing a new way of playing the guitar that is rooted in the two-finger banjo technique.[27] Appalachian State University student Cece Conway noticed that banjoist Dink Roberts (1894-1989) played the instrument in a "almost syncopated" style that predated the blues.[28] Conway's 1979-1989 recordings of Roberts preserved his contributions to the genre but also highlighted how many sub-styles of the banjo existed and were nurtured by communities independently from the music industry. Several other Black banjoists, such as Blind Gary Davis, T-Bone Walker, Etta Baker, and Taj Mahal, were skilled banjoists, but found more acceptance and commercial viability performing within jazz and blues genres.

[25] Mike Seeger, "A 'Freight Train' Picker: Elizabeth Cotten," Smithsonian Center for Folklife Cultural Heritage, 2016.
[26] Bonzo Turrell, "Georgia Buck," YouTube, September 15, 2008,
[27] Vintage Music Hub, "Elizabeth Cotten - Freight Train (Rare Live Performance)," YouTube, September 9, 2021.
[28] Conway, 1.

The Black Banjo Renaissance

To understand any practice of the banjo today by the African diaspora is to see it as a revolutionary practice. Drawing from the writings of bell hooks and Grada Kilomba, Lorgia García Peña writes:

> Postcolonial, Afro-descendant people living in the Global North to write is to interrupt coloniality and refocus history from the perspective of colonized, minoritized, racialized subjects to contra*dict* its violence... writing is an important historical-political strategy for intervening in colonized national archives and mainstream globalized culture.[29]

Expanding Peña's view of postcolonial literature to a broader lens of musical performance, Black banjoists have been reclaiming their place in the folk/Americana genre by proudly asserting their identity and positionality within the music industry. Their mere existence and performance of the instrument has debunked the mythology of who "owns" these genres, who has the right to experience joy and prosper in the space the recording industry has created. The Carolina Chocolate Drops's success following the Blank Banjos Gathering opened the door for many, many Black banjoists and folk musicians in the Americana music scene. This renaissance of musicians, or the *rainbow coalition*,[30] as Allison Russell has coined it are actively reclaiming lost narratives of history and culture, centering Black women, queer, and disabled voices, and negotiating their place through their reclamation of and relationship to the banjo.

No artist has done more work to reclaim the banjo's history than Rhiannon Giddens. She not only sparked the conversation around who owns the banjo and old-time genre through The Carolina Chocolate Drops, but she has also devoted her career to researching the history of the instrument and the construction of these genres by publishing songbooks, producing docuseries, and intentionally weaving the history of the banjo into her music. Giddens took the melody from a particularly racist minstrel song in *Brigg's Banjo Reader* called "Git Up In De Mornin'" and rewrote the lyrics to dignify the struggle for education amongst African Americans. Each verse of "Better Git Yer Learnin'" takes the first person perspective of African Americans that were barred from education, from the lynching of slaves for learning to read, to the delayed news of emancipation in Galveston, to the Negro schools being burned down during Reconstruction by white mobs.[31] By keeping the original banjo tune and repurposing the lyrics, Giddens is conserving the history

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[29] García Peña Lorgia, *Translating Blackness: Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 199.

[30] Stephen Daw, "Allison Russell on 'the Returner' & Building Her 'Rainbow Coalition,'" Billboard, September 6, 2023,

[31] Our Native Daughters, Better Git Yer Learnin', *YouTube*, Streamed (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, 2019).

of the banjo and Brigg's contributions to American music, while also rewriting the narrative of the Black experience the 19th century. Her song "At the Purchaser's Option" is from the perspective of an enslaved woman standing on the slave auction block with her baby in her arms. The song is inspired by an advertisement that described an enslaved woman in that very position with her baby being marketed to the buyer as "optional."[32] The lyrics are mournful, as the woman knows she has no control or agency in whether she will be separated from her child, and that such a decision could be decided so callously by a white man with capital. In the chorus, Giddens proclaims, "You can take my body/ You can take my bones/ You can take my blood/ But not my soul."[33] Through this song, she recovers the lost narratives of enslaved women and honors their resilience to the chattel bondage.

In 2019 Giddens partnered with fellow Black women banjoists Leyla McCalla, Allison Russell, and Amythyst Kiah to form Our Native Daughters. The group, sponsored by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage spent ten days in a cabin in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana to write and record the *Songs of Our Native Daughters*.[34] Their record subverts the colonial, white narrative of American folk music by centering the Black woman's relation to the banjo and American history. In "Polly Ann's Hammer," they rewrite the John Henry folklore, by singing from his wife's perspective:

When Polly had a small baby
On her knee, on her knee
Grabbed a hammer in her left hand
Ain't no one as strong as me

This here hammer killed John Henry
Won't kill me, won't kill me
This here hammer killed your daddy
Throw it down and we'll be free![35]

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[32] Andrew Hidas, "Rhiannon Giddens' and Joey Ryan's "at the Purchaser's Option," traversing, 2024,
[33] Rhiannon Giddens, "At the Purchaser's Option," *Freedom Highway*, Streamed (New York, NY: Nonesuch Records, 2017).
[34] Jonathan Bernstein, "Our Native Daughters: Rhiannon Giddens, Allison Russell on New Project," Rolling Stone, February 21, 2019.
[35] Our Native Daughters, "Polly Ann's Hammer," *Songs of Our Native Daughters*, Streamed (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, 2019)

Allison Russel described the writing process for the song as, "that collective hair rising on the back of our necks, because *finally* Polly Ann gets her song."[36] Our Native Daughters not only honors the persistence, but reclaims the honor and dignity of the Black women who had to endure the tribulations of being Black, while also being a woman and carrying on under restrictive gender roles.

The modern renaissance of Black banjoists reclaiming the instrument has been a social movement, dependent on the nurturement and stewardship of an inclusive community. The Black Banjos Gathering in 2005 was only the first step in forming this community. In 2019 Hannah Mayree created the *Black Banjo Reclamation Project* out of Oakland, California. The initiative hosts virtual and in-person workshops on playing the banjo, songwriting, and constructing gourd banjos across the country. Their mission is "uplifting inherent connections that Black people have to the banjo itself as a pre-colonial expression of our indigenous connections to land, cultural expression and traditional land based folk art practices."[37] Rissi Palmer, the first Black woman to chart at number one on country radio, hosts the Apple Music radio show *Color Me Country*, weaving playlists of Black country and folk songs with interviews of Black artists. In an interview with *The Bluegrass Situation*, she revealed how important the show is to create a space where Black artists are safe and not regarded as a novelty for their skin color:

> "I feel like so many times, as an artist of color in a genre that is predominately white, you're mostly talking to white journalists. You're mostly talking to white outlets. A lot of times you are othered... That starts to wear on you after a while." [38]

In 2025 Rhiannon Giddens sought out to recreate the magic of the 2005 Blank Banjos Gathering by organizing the first Biscuits and Banjos Festival in Durham, North Carolina, that featured a weekend of over forty Black folk artists and bands with educational seminars and workshops sprinkled between the performances. Operating outside the mainstream in the music industry, community building and social relations has played a role in empowering Black musicians to learn and perform the banjo.

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[36] Smithsonian Folkways, "Our Native Daughters - 'Polly Ann's Hammer' & 'You're Not Alone' [behind the Scenes Documentary]," YouTube, July 11, 2019.
[37] Black Banjo Reclamation Project, "About," The Black Banjo Reclamation Project, 2024, https://www.blackbanjoreclamationproject.org/about.
[38] Justin Hiltner, "'Color Me Country' Host Rissi Palmer Finds a Musical Home in North Carolina - the Bluegrass Situation," The Bluegrass Situation, September 29, 2020, https://thebluegrasssituation.com/read/color-me-country-host-rissi-palmer-finds-a-musical-home-in-north-carolina/.

By playing and performing the banjo in the 21st century, Black musicians across the African diaspora are resurrecting a historical connection to their homeland that has been fractured by chattel bondage, distorted by minstrelsy, and segregated by the music industry. The survival of the instrument portrays the role of memory in the diaspora and the importance of musical connectivity in forming an identity. The banjo in the 21st century has not merely been recovered by musicians such as Rhiannon Giddens and The Carolina Chocolate Drops, but *reimagined* as a vehicle for self-expression, resistance, and negotiating one's place in the African diaspora.

This article has waded into the controversy over the roots of the Banjo by demonstrating its long connection to Africa and its Diaspora. Enslaved Africans forged identity and resistance around the instrument across many generations. Its 21st century renaissance remains connected to these roots despite the politics of the music recording industry.

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De ASTRONOMIA GALILAEI: A Comparative Analysis of the Works of Galileo and the Society of Jesus

Adam Harris

Introduction

"And the sun and the moon stood still, till the people revenged themselves of their enemies." (Joshua 10:13) appears to imply that the earth is static and unmoving while the sun and moon rotate around and can be stopped by divine power. We now understand since the scientific revolution of the 16th century that it is illusory to assumed that the sun "rises" and "sets," because it is the earth which rotates around the sun. This was the subject of the Galileo Affair, a decades-long debate about earth's place and nature in the cosmos, and what to make of organized religion and biblical interpretations, and the authority of the Catholic Church on cosmology and European society.

It is widely perceived that the Catholic Church was inherently opposed to scientific progress, particularly to the heliocentric views championed by Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei. However, this perception presents a central paradox because while the Church condemned Galileo, members of its religious orders, most notably the Jesuits, were actively involved in scientific observation and inquiry, and they contributed significantly to advancements in mathematics, astronomy, and physics. Why did the Church, including influential figures like Cardinal Bellarmine, persecute and condemn Galileo despite the scientific engagement of her own members in seemingly similar pursuits? A closer examination of Galileo's work in its historical context, especially when compared with the scientific writings of contemporary Jesuits, shows that his condemnation stemmed from his resistance toward Church authority and his attempt to interpret Scripture on his own terms even though he was a layman.

Scholars like Richard Blackwell and Christopher Graney have been especially useful in revising the narrative around Galileo. I find their arguments to be compelling and much of their work on the subject has been instrumental in the writing of this paper. Blackwell is particularly strong at providing nuance surrounding the Galileo affair in its context with Church authorities like Cardinal Bellarmine. Graney on the other hand, has done excellent work bringing Jesuit astronomers to the public and his work on Giambattista Riccioli enables the comparison of the works of Galileo with his contemporaries.

Initial Controversies Surrounding Galileo

Following the Reformation in Europe, the Catholic Church convened to discuss and debate how she should respond to an increasingly frustrated population. The resulting discussions would culminate in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), where the Church concluded that disagreeing with the saints, doctors, and fathers of the Church in matters of faith and morals would be heretical and cause for punishment, both in this world and the next.[1] Some admitted, however, that the obscurity written in Scripture necessitated interpretation, but this was the job of the clergy and not of the common man. Even if a scientific demonstration in favor of heliocentrism was done, a careful reinterpretation of Scripture would be needed and carefully constructed by the Catholic Church.[2] The Council of Trent also established the Congregation of the Index, an administrative body tasked with analyzing and subsequently blacklisting any material thought to be dangerous to the faith and morals of the Catholic Church.[3]

Galileo held an alternate view on the subject, which was completely opposite to that of the Church. In his view, God was the author of both nature and scripture, so they cannot be at odds with one another. The only difference is that scripture was made to accommodate the minds of men so simple language had to be used. As such, the natural world and its systems should dictate scripture, not the other way around.[4] By his logic, this was why the sun stayed still for Joshua, not because the sun *actually* stopped but because it had only *appeared* to stop.

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[1] Nathaniel Brent, trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, ProQuest* (London, 1687), 13.
[2] David B. Wilson, "Galileo's Religion Versus the Church's Science? Rethinking the History of Science and Religion." *Physics in Perspective* 1, no. 1 (March 1999): 65–84 https://doi.org/10.1007/s000160050006, 81.
[3] Brent, 86-87.

[4] Richard J. Blackwell, and Paolo Antonio Foscarini. *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible: Including a Translation of Foscarini's Letter on the Motion of the Earth.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991, 196.

This was not the first time that Galileo disagreed with the Church and her teachings. As early as 1597, Galileo privately showed support for Copernicanism in a correspondence to Johannes Kepler thanking him for a delivery of his book, *The Cosmographic Mystery*: "... Many years ago I was converted to the theory of Copernicus..."[5] His telescopic observations discussed in *Sidereus Nuncius* in 1610 provided another area at odds with the Church. In his reports, he noted the terrain features on the moon as evidenced by the terminator line which separates night and day. If the moon were a perfect sphere, the terminator line would be straight.[6] Galileo also recorded four satellites orbiting Jupiter, which he named the "Cosmian/Medicean Stars" after his patron, Cosimo II de' Medici.[7] A few years later, in 1613, he wrote in his *Letters on Sunspots* the phases of Venus which could be seen from the Earth. In a geocentric model such as Ptolemy's, Venus appeared as a crescent or was completely obscured when viewed through a telescope, dependent on position in relation to the sun.[8] However, Galileo noted that Venus went through a full phasal rotation, which lined up more with the heliocentric model proposed by Copernicus. He also noted dark patches on the sun, giving credence to the fact that it is also not a perfect and immutable sphere but a changing one. All this evidence opposed the system of cosmology favored by the Church's Aristotelian natural philosophy. The church held that the heavens were perfectly created by the divine and could not change. Galileo's recording of terrain features on our Moon, the moons of Jupiter, the phases of Venus, and the existence of sunspots argues not only a moving universe, but a constantly changing one.

The event that set him directly against the church was his 1615 *Letter to Grand Duchess Christina*, a correspondence to the wife of Grand Duke Ferdinando I of Tuscany, wherein he attempted to mend the divide of Copernicanism and Catholicism by quoting saints like Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo to prove that the two worlds can be mutual.[9] Galileo argued in these letters that Scripture should be interpreted allegorically when it seems to contradict scientifically proven facts in response to Cardinal Caesar Baronius' statement that "...the

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[5] Edward Rosen, "Galileo and Kepler: Their First Two Contacts." *Isis* 57, no. 2 (July 1966): 262–64

[6] Galileo Galilei, *The Sidereal Messenger*, trans. Edward Stafford Carlos, Project Guttenberg (London: Rivington, 1880), 15-27

[7] Galileo, 68-77

[8] Galileo Galilei and Christoph Scheiner, *On Sunspots*, trans. Eileen Adair Reeves and Albert Van Helden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 65-67

[9] Galileo Galilei, "Letter to Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany," ed. Paul Halsall, Internet History Sourcebooks: Modern History, 1997

intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven. not how heaven goes."[10] When Francesco Ingoli, a well-connected clergyman who wrote an anti-Copernican tract, *Disputation concerning the location and rest of Earth against the Copernican system*, , presenting mathematical, physical, and theological arguments against Galileo, the belligerent lines had been drawn between Copernicans and the church.

The Church and Copernicans

In February 1616 (one month after Ingoli's essay), theological consultors of the Holy Office declared the propositions that the sun is the center of the world and immovable, and that the earth moves to be "foolish and absurd in philosophy and formally heretical" and "philosophically absurd and theologically erroneous in faith".[11] The first proposition was deemed "formally heretical" because it directly contradicted the literal meaning of Scripture as commonly understood by the Church. On March 5, 1616, the Sacred Congregation of the Index (the department responsible for revising and/or censoring books) issued a decree condemning Copernicanism as "false and completely contrary to the divine Scriptures".[12] Copernicus' *De revolutionibus* was suspended until corrected, and the Carmelite priest, Father Paolo Foscarini's book which attempted to reconcile Copernicanism with Scripture, was completely prohibited.[13]

Prior to the decree, Pope Paul V ordered Cardinal Bellarmine to admonish Galileo to abandon the Copernican opinion. According to a disputed memorandum, if Galileo refused, he was to be barred from teaching, defending, or discussing the doctrine in any way. His refusal of the injunction would lead to imprisonment.[17] Bellarmine issued a certificate in May 1616 stating that Galileo had not denied any opinion but had been informed of the Church's declaration that Copernicanism was contrary to Scripture and could not be defended.[18] This certificate became crucial later in Galileo's defense. Bellarmine himself believed that Scripture, in some instances, did teach natural philosophy and that the commonly accepted interpretation of Scripture should be preserved until solid proof of Copernicanism was offered. His view on scriptural interpretation followed those of the Council of Trent that if it is not in agreement

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[10] Galileo, Letter
[11] Christopher M. Graney, *Setting Aside All Authority*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015, 68.
[12] Blackwell, 122
[13] Blackwell, 122

with the church fathers, it is forbidden.[14] He did not distinguish between matters of faith and morals covered by Trent, such as the relative location of the Earth, or biblical statements like Abraham having two sons or Jacob having thirteen. For him, these were matters of faith due to the Holy Spirit being the speaker through a concept called "*de dicto* truth". This means that because it was written in the Bible, and the Bible is the real, divinely inspired word of God, anything written in Scripture must be *literally* true and believed by its adherents and especially by its clergy. This means that no God-fearing Catholic could doubt the number of sons of Abraham or Jacob, just as he cannot doubt the immaculate conception of Jesus Christ, just as he cannot doubt the immobility of the Earth as described by Joshua.

Despite the 1616 condemnation and the injunction, Galileo published *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* in 1632. While presented as a discussion of the merits of both systems, it was widely interpreted as a defense of Copernicanism.[15] Pope Urban VIII who had previously shown some sympathy towards Galileo was angered by the book. He felt betrayed and believed Galileo had ridiculed his own argument on the limits of human intellect. In August 1632, publication and sales of the *Dialogue* were prohibited. Galileo was summoned to Rome to stand trial before the Holy Office on charges of heresy for violating the 1616 injunction. The trial in 1633 focused on whether Galileo had disobeyed the injunction not to promote Copernicanism.

The underlying conceptual dispute, whether Copernicanism contradicted Scripture was considered settled and beyond recall, having been terminated by the 1616 condemnation. Consequently, the trial focused almost exclusively on Galileo's personal conduct and obedience to the Church. The central question became whether Galileo had violated the personal injunction placed upon him in 1616, which prohibited him from continuing "to hold, teach, or defend" the Copernican doctrine "in any way, either verbally or in writing."[16] The proceedings of 1633 contain minimal discussion of the levels of scriptural meaning, the distinction between literal and figurative interpretation of biblical passages, or the criteria for interpreting the Fathers of the Church. Instead, almost all references to Scripture merely served to reiterate that the 1616 Decree had already declared Copernicanism to be contrary

[14] Blackwell, 105-106
[15] William A. Wallace, "Galileo's Science and the Trial of 1633." *The Wilson Quarterly* 7, 3 (1983): 154–64
[16] Blackwell, 131

to the Bible making the issue fundamentally one of authority and disobedience rather than cognitive truth.

Accounting for the Church's position: Jesuit Astronomy and Church Authority

If Galileo's scientific discoveries and observations eventually led him to near-Protestant levels of dismissal of Church authority, then how could Jesuits remain under the careful watch of the Church? Jesuits were not just theologians and philosophers; many were also practitioners and teachers of mathematics and science. They were trained in mathematics and were open to using new instruments, leading to advancements in several fields.

Jesuit astronomers at the Roman College initially confirmed Galileo's early telescopic observations reported in *Sidereus Nuncius*. They confirmed the significance of the observations and at formal oration at the Roman College lauded Galileo for his discoveries.[32] Christoph Clavius, a prominent Jesuit astronomer and mathematician, played a crucial role in the reform of the calendar adopted in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII. Clavius himself saw the "weak foundation of the (Ptolemaic) common opinion" but initially rejected the Pythagorean (Copernican) view.[34] Through continued observations with a better telescope, he became convinced of the existence of the Medicean satellites (four of Jupiter's moons), the phases of Venus, and the irregularities on the moon, all of which were described in *Sidereus Nuncius*.[17] However, under pressure of pseudo-theological considerations, Clavius opted for the Tychonic system, a merging of the traditional Ptolemaic view of the solar system and the controversial Copernican model. In the Ptolemaic model, the Earth is at the center and the Sun, Moon, and all planets revolve around the Earth, whereas in the Copernican model, the Sun is central, and the planets revolve around it. Tycho Brahe, a Danish astronomer, devised a third option to connect the benefits of the others. In the Tychonic model, the earth still sits at the center, but the rest of the planets revolve around the Sun, and that system revolves around the Earth.

Clavius's students at the Roman College were among the first to look through Galileo's telescope. [18] While some may have harbored Copernican sympathies, the Church's condemnation in 1616 meant they could not accept that cosmology for over a century. They

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[17] Coyne, 156.

[18] Sheila J. Rabin, "Early Modern Jesuit Science. A Historiographical Essay." *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 88–104

recognized the incompatibility of the Ptolemaic system with Galileo's findings. Jesuits made important contributions to observational astronomy through the study of meridian lines in churches, leading to the first observational confirmation of Kepler's elliptical orbits by Giovanni Domenico Cassini, who studied with the Jesuits.[19] Cassini's Jesuit colleagues, Giambattista Riccioli and Francesco Maria Grimaldi, verified his observations. Riccioli's *Almagestum novum* presented an extensive discussion of heliocentrism, ultimately rejecting it on scientific and religious grounds, reflecting the prevailing Jesuit stance after Galileo. This work cemented itself as the foremost document against Copernican thought.

Riccioli, a Jesuit astronomer, aimed to determine which hypothesis was true based purely on reason. His analysis concluded that the hypothesis of Earth's immobility must be asserted as true. Riccioli's analysis in *Almagestum novum* reviewed 126 arguments related to the Copernican debate 49 of which favored earth's motion (pro-Copernican) and 77 opposing it (anti-Copernican). While this is a significant number of arguments, Riccioli did not believe that the count alone determined which hypothesis was correct.[20] He found that the vast majority of these 126 arguments, from both sides, were inconclusive. Many were either based on ignorance or considered inane, and Riccioli noted he was almost ashamed to include some, though he did so because others used them. For instance, he included the anti-Copernican "birds" argument (number 27), which questioned why birds would dare rise if the Earth were moving beneath them, but he noted that Copernicans could answer this by invoking the concept of common motion, where birds and other objects share the Earth's movement. Similarly, the pro-heliocentrism argument (number 22) that the sun is the center of the planetary system (supported by observations like the phases of Venus and Mercury) was deemed answerable because it only showed the sun was the center of the planetary system, not necessarily the entire universe. Theological arguments, such as the placement of hell in the center of the Earth, requiring the Earth to be at the center of the universe (as it's the farthest point from heaven), were also presented, but Riccioli dismissed these as irrelevant to the scientific question of Earth's motion.[21] Riccioli found only a select few anti-Copernican arguments to be truly convincing arguments that heliocentrists could not adequately answer. This included a failure to detect the physical effects of Earth's motion and the size of

[19] Rabin, 92
[20] Graney, *Setting Aside All Authority*, 2, 5.
[21] Graney, *Setting Aside*, 6.

the star.

Riccioli argued that if the Earth were rotating, specific observable physical phenomena should occur that were not detected. His "Coriolis effect" arguments (anti-Copernican arguments 10, 17, and 19) presumed predictable deflections of falling bodies (eastward) or projectiles (different trajectories for shots fired north/south versus east/west) if the Earth rotated. He noted that skilled artillerymen should have detected these projectile deflections if they existed. Riccioli considered these arguments strong, believing Copernicans had no solid answers to some of them.[22] These fell under his category of physico-mathematical demonstrations. While acknowledging that the effects might be too small to be detected by the instrumentation of the time, he still viewed the lack of observation as a strong point against Earth's motion.

Although Riccioli's analysis was presented as based purely on reason for much of the *Almagestum novum*, religious and scriptural authority clearly also played a role in his rejection of Copernicanism. He quoted Scripture and Church documents, including decrees from the Council of Trent's Fourth Session and Pius IV's profession of faith, arguing that the stability of the Earth and motion of the sun, as described literally in the Bible, were *de fide* truths unless contradicted by established facts of nature or other certain truths of revelation. Since, in his view, his scientific analysis did not definitively establish Earth's motion but rather presented significant scientific challenges to it (particularly the star size issue and failure to detect predicted motions), the literal interpretation of Scripture regarding Earth's stability stood.

Complexity and Contradiction of Jesuit Positions

Initially, Jesuit astronomers at the Roman College showed openness to Galileo's telescopic observations and confirmed them.[23] They were participants in the birth of modern science and saw the crumbling of Aristotelian natural philosophy. However, for didactic purposes and as a philosophical foundation that supported theology, the Jesuits generally adhered to the Aristotelian framework. This adherence was reinforced by the understanding that Aristotelian philosophy provided a solid basis for and the preambles of the faith. Within the Society, there were tensions between those enthusiastic about Galileo's findings and those more cautious due to the potential theological and philosophical implications. Some Jesuit astronomers at

[22] Graney, 117
[23] Coyne, 154.

the Roman College faced displeasure from their philosopher and theologian colleagues who were wary of the anti-Aristotelian implications of Galileo's discoveries.[24] Figures like Christoph Grienberger exemplify this tension. While persuaded by new scientific findings (e.g., on floating bodies), he felt obligated to defend Aristotle due to orders from the Jesuit General.[25] Even prominent figures like Clavius were "hesitatingly approaching Copernicanism". There is even evidence of disagreements between Jesuit scientists and censors regarding the criticism of Aristotle and the acceptance of new astronomical ideas.

The official position of the Jesuit order, particularly under Father General Claudio Acquaviva, emphasized "uniformity of doctrine" based on the philosophy of Aristotle, as codified by St. Thomas Aquinas (Thomism) and St. Ignatius of Loyola (founder of the Jesuits).[26] This was intended to maintain a solid basis for philosophy and theology. Acquaviva issued orders in 1611 prescribing the following of Thomism in theology and Aristotelianism in philosophy in all Jesuit schools and publications, including geocentrism in natural philosophy, which was an "unwelcomed restraint" on Jesuit astronomers, according to Blackwell. This mandate for "solid and uniform doctrine" had a direct effect on the writings of Jesuit scientists, even before the formal condemnation of Copernicanism in 1616, leading them to return to older Aristotelian cosmology.[27] Faced with the growing observational evidence against the Ptolemaic system and the theological difficulties of the Copernican system, many Jesuit astronomers adopted the Tychonic system as a compromise. This system allowed the planets to orbit the sun while the sun and moon orbited a stationary Earth, aligning with some observational data and avoiding direct contradiction with certain interpretations of Scripture.

Galileo's Resistance and Downfall

Galileo was a staunch advocate for the physical reality of the Copernican system, not merely considering it as a convenient mathematical hypothesis. He sought experimental verification to show that Copernicanism was accurate and was not just a mathematical tool for prediction. His writings, such as *Letters on Sunspots*, argued that his telescopic observations, including sunspots and the phases of Venus supported the Copernican system as a true depiction of the universe. He considered himself a philosopher of nature, aiming to understand the true nature

[24] Coyne, 157
[25] Blackwell, 148.
[26] Coyne, 158.
[27] Blackwell, 50.

of things.[28] Even his *Dialogue*, despite its format, was widely understood as a promotion of Copernicanism. Galileo himself was convinced he could understand the divine mathematical structure behind his observations, leading him to believe that "God was a Copernican".[29]

Furthermore, Galileo's personality and approach in debates likely alienated some within the Church and even among Jesuits. His public derision of Aristotelians and his perceived heavy-handedness in the *Dialogue* contributed to the opposition he faced. For instance, by placing the Pope's favorite argument, that God's infinite power allows for tidal motion in ways beyond human intellect, meaning no human explanation can be regarded as true or conclusive, in the mouth of Simplicio, a character often portrayed as foolish, Galileo was seen as ridiculing the Pope. While some Jesuits initially honored Galileo for his discoveries, disagreements over issues like sunspots and comets led to bitter controversies, such as the one with Orazio Grassi.[30]

Galileo's relationship with Pope Urban VIII significantly deteriorated in the years that followed. Urban VIII's sympathy for Galileo was betrayed by the *Dialogue*, and he believed that Galileo had not presented his (the Pope's) argument fairly and had even ridiculed it.[31] This personal offense, combined with the discovery of the 1616 injunction against Galileo made a trial unavoidable. The broader context of the Counter-Reformation also contributed to a defensive posture within the Church against any perceived threats to her authority and the traditional understanding of Scripture.

Conclusion

By the time of Galileo's trial in 1633, the issue had largely shifted from debating the scientific merits of Copernicanism (which the Church considered settled in 1616) to focusing on Galileo's obedience. The central legal issue became whether Galileo had violated the 1616 injunction. A Jesuit, Melchior Inchofer, was one of the three members of the Special Commission that recommended the trial and later judged that Galileo's *Dialogue* violated the earlier injunction.[77] Inchofer took a strong stance against geo-centrism, making "severe and insidious

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[28] Coyne, 158.
[29] Wilson, 82.
[30] Wallace, 154.
[31] Wilson, 81.

accusations against Galileo," reflecting the opinions of others like Scheiner.[32] His actions exemplified how, by this time, Jesuit writers and figures were increasingly engaged in the "refutation of Copernicanism as an apologetic goal," often incorporating scriptural arguments against it into scientific treatises, accelerating this tendency after Galileo's guilty verdict.[33]

Furthermore, some scientific arguments against Copernicanism, like the star size problem based on apparent telescopic diameters and the lack of observable parallax requiring impossibly vast stellar sizes, were discussed and used by figures involved in the process, including those influenced by Jesuit astronomers like Scheiner. While not solely a Jesuit argument, it was one of the scientific reasons cited by opponents of Copernicanism.

The Church condemned Copernicanism and Galileo based on its official interpretation of Scripture and adherence to traditional philosophy, reinforced by concerns for authority and obedience, particularly in the Counter-Reformation. Jesuits, as key intellectual figures within the Church, played crucial roles in this process: Cardinal Bellarmine articulated the need for demonstrative proof before reinterpreting Scripture and delivered the initial admonition; the Society's mandate for doctrinal uniformity after 1616 compelled its members, despite potential private scientific leanings, to oppose Copernicanism publicly and prioritize obedience; and figures like Inchofer actively participated in the trial process based on the prior condemnation and injunction. Their collective actions and adherence to obedience significantly shaped and reinforced the Church's condemnation and Galileo's eventual fate.

[32] Coyne, 162.
[33] Blackwell, 162.

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The Shield Biters of Uig: The Scottish Context of the Lewis Chessmen

Author: Jack Wynd

Unearthed from the sands of Uig Bay on the isle of Lewis in 1831, seventy-eight pieces of ivory carved into game pieces have come to be appreciated as some of the most evocative artifacts of the medieval North Atlantic World.[1] The "Lewis Chessmen," as they would become known were carved between the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These figures of kings, queens, bishops, and warriors are striking not only for their craftsmanship but also for their ambiguity. Scholars have long debated whether they were made in Norway, Scotland, or the broader Norse-Gaelic world, underscoring their cultural hybridity with Scottish insular stylistic traits intersecting with Norse carving traditions[2]. The Lewis chessmen reflect the cultural and artistic exchange between Norse and Gaelic traditions in medieval Scotland, showing how art expressed identity and power in a time of convergence.

By the twelfth century, Scotland and its western isles were part of a wider Norse-Gaelic world forged through both conquest and coexistence[3]. Viking settlers had established strongholds across the Irish Sea, from Dublin to the Isle of Man and the Hebrides, creating a maritime network that linked Norway to Scotland and Ireland[4]. On the Isle of Lewis, Norse rule existed alongside Gaelic culture, producing a society that was both linguistically and artistically hybrid. Norse nobles adopted local customs, and Gaelic chieftains integrated Scandinavian modes of warfare, ornament, and religion into their own traditions. Magnus III of Norway, remembered as "Magnus Barelegs" for wearing the Gaelic kilt, symbolizes the degree of cultural fusion achieved in this frontier zone[5]. Out of this complex social fabric arose the *Kingdom of the Isles*, ruled by the *Lords of the Isles*, who presided over an archipelago bound by shared trade,

[1] Caldwell, Hall, and Wilkinson 155-156
[2] Caldwell, 178-180
[3] Graham-Campbell and Batey 70-73
[4] Graham, 35-42
[5] Caldwell, Hall, and Wilkinson 198-199

intermarriage, and artistry. It was in this dynamic environment that the Lewis Chessmen were carved from walrus ivory, a material imported through Norse trading networks that extended into the Arctic[6]. Whether crafted in Trondheim or another Scandinavian workshop, these pieces reflect a culture in which artistic forms and political identities travel freely across the North Sea[7]. Their very existence attests to a moment when the boundaries between Norse and Gaelic worlds blurred, producing a shared visual language that would define much of medieval Scottish art.

From this cultural crossroads emerged an artistic vocabulary that blended the sculptural depth and expressiveness of Scandinavian craftwork with the ornamental abstraction of Gaelic insular design. The hands that carved these small warriors were fluent in both the sagas of the Norse and the poems of the Gaels. They pulled strands from each to weave something distinctly hybrid. The Lewis Chessmen display this synthesis most strikingly in their figural style: kings and queens sit stiffly upon ornate thrones, knights sit atop steeds prepared to gallop into battle, and warders, warriors on foot who often served as rooks in this period, brace for a fight, covering themselves with their kite shields. Some of these wardens bite the rims of their shields (Fig. 1), eyes wide with a manic energy that identifies them with the Barserkir-famed warriors of Viking lore who, through ritual trance known as Berserksgangr, aided by the ingestion of hallucinatory mushrooms, would reave through battlefields with the fury and fearlessness of beasts. Heimskringla and other sagas describe these men howling like wolves, tearing at their hair, and biting their shields as they entered this feral frenzy. This pagan battle ritual is contrasted by the warders' compact, formal posture, placed in the battle line of a chessboard, evoking more knightly duty than berserker rage[8]. Indeed, their very placement on the board indicates the great shift this culture was undergoing, as instead of standing at the shoulder of their liege, they stand at the edge of the board, that place of honor taken by the bishop.

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[6] Tate et al. 2017, 192-193
[7] Graham-Campbell and Batey 264
[8] Hall and Caldwell 239-241

One of the many notable features of the Lewis chessmen is the inclusion of bishops. Before this point, their position on the board was held by a messenger or archer figure known as an aufin, themselves supplanting the original piece, as the alfi, meaning elephant, still present in many sets of the era (Fig. 2). The bishop's presence represents the sweeping Christianization of the remaining pagan cultures of northern Europe[9]. The introduction of ecclesiastical figures into a game of war may seem ironic, but by the 11th century, religious authority had become an inseparable part of political power. The bishops of the Lewis set, carved with composure a crozier in one hand and the other holding a book, or in a sign of benediction. (Fig. 3). The solemn priests taken with the grimacing warders paint a picture of a society in transition: the pagan sagas at its back and the whole of Christendom before it. Beyond their craftsmanship, the Lewis Chessmen serve as visual statements about hierarchy, faith, and identity in a world balancing between pagan legacy and Christian order. The chessboard itself reflects the rigid structure of medieval society: kings and queens rule from the center, bishops advise from either side, knights enforce their will, and pawns labor on the front line. In this sense, the game mirrors the social reality of twelfth-century Scotland, where spiritual and temporal power were intertwined. The inclusion of bishops, unprecedented in earlier Scandinavian sets, signals more than artistic innovation; it proclaims the integration of the Church into the very fabric of daily life. The bishop's calm authority contrasts sharply with the grimacing warders, visually transforming the chaos of pagan battle into the discipline of Christian chivalry. For the elites who commissioned and owned these pieces, such imagery carried profound meaning. The kings and queens embodied dynastic legitimacy; the bishops symbolized divine sanction; and the knights and warders represented loyal service and controlled strength. In this way, the Lewis Chessmen were not simply tools of leisure but miniature expressions of governance and faith, objects that taught through their very arrangement the balance between earthly might and heavenly order. The hoard's hybrid imagery invites looking back at the past and creates new meanings and reconciliations around social identity and political power in the Isles. The Chessmen thus stand as carved reflections of a culture in transition, negotiating its dual inheritance through play, ritual, and art.

[9] Graham-Campbell and Batey 249-251

The Lewis Chessmen endure not merely as relics of a distant past but as eloquent witnesses to a cultural dialogue that shaped the medieval North Atlantic. Carved at the meeting point of Norse vigor and Gaelic romance, they record in miniature the fusion of two peoples, pagan and Christian, warrior and priest, raider and ruler. Through their material, form, and symbolism, they reveal how art preserves a record of reconciliation; taming the ferocity of the Viking and bending it to the feudal piety of the courts, like the Scottish one which sat in Stirling, reaching out into the highlands and beyond. Each figure, whether king or pawn, reminds us that history is often a game of negotiation, that art, like chess, is most compelling when it bridges worlds.

Figure 1. Warders 6, 7, and 8 of the *Lewis Chessmen*, Ca. 1150-1200. In the collection of the British Museum: Museum numbers: 1831,1101.124, 1831,1101.123, and 1831,1101.125



Figure 2. *Crazy Elephant,* Charlemagne Chessmen, ca. 1080-1100, In the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Inventory number: Inv.55.313



Figure 3. Bishop of the *Lewis Chessmen*, late 12th century. in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland, Museum Reference H.NS 25



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