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The Atlanta Review of Journalism History is particularly thankful for the expertise of the scholars of American media history listed below. Their devotion to the field of study and their generous donation of time and talent have been essential contributions to the quality of the essays in the Review.

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AN EDITORIAL COMMENT

Cotter Christian’s essay brings the British aesthete Oscar Wilde out of his context into the Old South soon after the defeat of the Confederacy. On a tour that reached Atlanta by the Fourth of July in 1882 Wilde gave a talk focused on how people could make themselves feel better in their daily lives by beautifying their surroundings. It was that philosophy of aestheticism that he had taken across the South that summer, and it had made him popular in the newspapers of the region. As Mr. Christian discovered in his extensive research, women were especially eager to attend and hear him talk of artful ways to making everyday life more cheerful or at least less dreary. “Here in the South it should be the home of art,” he told the Atlanta audience in July. “There is no vegetation that is not yours. You have the two perfect essentials for a cultivation of high art; beautiful flowers and beautiful women.”

Misty Hope has also broken new ground with her research on the campaign to abolish state-run debtors’ prisons. That practice, implanted from England, was staunchly defended until the 1830s on the idea that non-payment of debt was immoral and justified jailing—no matter how small the debt. Not even heroes of American Revolution were spared. This and much more is revived by Ms. Hope’s discoveries in U.S. newspapers of the period 1815-1831. As she noted, “Debtors’ prisons held not only the poor and destitute, but also two men who signed the Declaration of Independence: Robert Morris and James Wilson.” Abolition of debtors’ prisons was first step toward a more civil solution to debt: negotiated bankruptcy.

What brand of journalism did Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune expect when it hired as a foreign correspondent a German living in England who had just published The Communist Manifesto? For one thing, Karl Marx was prolific when it came to writing about British Imperialism, especially in India, as Devna Thapliyal found in reading his reports to the Tribune in the 1850s. When Indian troops in 1857 engaged in a bloody revolt against British rule, Marx traced the blame to British misrule: “However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys [Indian soldiers], it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England’s own conduct in India, not only during the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule.”

Lisbeth “Lizzie” Borden, tried for the ax murders of her father and step-mother in 1892, has been made famous through fiction, song, opera,
film and doggerel. Yet there is still more to be learned through historical method, by a close look at the press coverage of her trial. Caitlyn Walters’ findings indicate a significant role played her gender. In the light of modern feminist perspectives, Ms. Walters noted that the “most demonstrative sensational gender reference” was embedded in Borden’s defense attorney’s final statement as reported in a Chicago newspaper: “She is a lady, the equal to your wife and my wife. She is a lady whom we would never have suspected of such a thing. Is sex a protection against crime? It is hard to consider women guilty of such a crime.” The jury acquitted Lizzie Borden. The crime has never been solved.

All four papers were previously presented at academic conferences. Mr. Christian’s essay was selected as the Best Graduate Student Paper at the 2013 Southeast Symposium of the American Journalism Historians Association. Ms. Hope, Ms. Thapliyal and Ms. Walters presented their papers at the 2012 Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War and Free Expression at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Ms. Hope and Ms. Walters both won Top Student Paper Awards.
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The editors of the *Atlanta Review of Journalism History* greatly appreciate the professional expertise of the members of its Editorial Board and other colleagues associated with the *Atlanta Review* who devoted their time and talent to critiquing the essays we have published here.

The editors of the *Review* also greatly appreciate the annual financial support of the Student Activity Fee Budget Committee for the allocation that makes printing of the journal possible.

For this issue, we thank Editorial Board members William Huntzicker of St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, Debbie vanTuyll of Georgia Regents University in Augusta, and Wallace Eberhard, Professor Emeritus of the University of Georgia, Athens. We also welcomed the critical assistance of two other distinguished colleagues, Nancy Roberts, Professor and Director of the Journalism Program at the University at Albany, SUNY, and David Bulla, Associate Professor and Head of the AEJMC Scholastic Journalism Division in the College of Communication & Media Sciences at Zayed University, United Arab Emirates. All are excellent scholar-teachers exemplifying the three disciplines of university life: Teaching, Research & Service.

The *Atlanta Review* is published by the Journalism History Society in the Department of Communication of Georgia State University in Atlanta. In this 11th issue we are saying goodbye to a graduating doctoral student, Managing Editor Dr. May Fawaz-Huber. A scholar with a background in television journalism in Lebanon, she helped raise the level discourse in the *Review*. She headed an excellent staff of very capable scholars: Kiana Nicholas, who graduated with a B.A. degree, Jessica Vega, a senior, and two undergraduate Goizueta Scholars, Jareth Muñoz and Rosa Felix. Thanks also to Steve Hudson for his technical assistance in the production of the *Review*.

I join them in welcoming you to enjoy our offering of exclusive prize-winning essays!
Oscar Wilde Tours The Post-Reconstruction South: The Response To The Aesthete And His Lectures June-July 1882.

Cotter Christian

Throughout June and July of 1882, Oscar Wilde toured the Southern United States. Wilde lectured on the Aesthetic Movement in 19 cities in the South to promote the Gilbert and Sullivan opera, Patience. During the tour, he flattered the South in several local newspaper interviews. His message of aestheticism came at a time when the poor and still war-ravaged South was in need of inspiration and escape. Wilde sympathized with Southerners and offered a visual and auditory spectacle worthy of their attention and the price of admission.

Oscar Wilde came to the United States in 1882 to promote Gilbert and Sullivan’s opera, Patience, which was scheduled to tour across the country at the same time. The opera was a comedy that affectionately poked fun at the late 19th century Aesthetic Movement, including a character resembling one of the Movement’s most notable advocates, Oscar Wilde himself. As a way to advertise the opera, promoters sent the flamboyant and outspoken Wilde to the United States from his home in London to lecture on the topic of Aestheticism. While his lectures were often mocked in the press, the Aesthetic Movement was a cause in which he truly believed. His travels brought him to more than two hundred speaking engagements throughout North America, and included a two-month tour in the Southern United States.

This investigation sheds light on the unique characteristics of Wilde’s Southern tour by looking at relevant news media articles as well as secondary sources. Press accounts of Wilde’s tour often focused on the tour as a whole, or his engagements in specific states or cities, or looked at the Southern engagements through a contextual lens. Taken as whole, the press coverage reveals and reinforces several key concepts. Wilde possessed a mystique that captured the attention of Southern citizens and their newspapers, his Irish roots inclined him to identify with the Southern cause; his tour managers utilized that mystique to cultivate public interest, and through myriad compliments paid to the South’s

inherent natural beauty and people, Wilde made strong efforts to connect with his audience.

From the moment of his arrival in New York on January 2, 1882, Wilde attracted the attention of the nation through his unique dress, mannerisms, vocalizations, and notions of aestheticism. His lectures and travels were covered in papers across the country, setting the tone for his reception in the different cities and creating a buzz in anticipation of his arrival. In the South, the *Daily Arkansas Gazette* ran coverage of Wilde’s arrival in New York, describing the poet’s look and attire, responding to the public’s fascination with his unusual appearance.2 *The Atlanta Constitution* set the stage for Wilde’s reception in the South by publishing numerous accounts of Wilde’s travels before his Southern tour. On one occasion, the *Constitution* reprinted short press articles from cities where Wilde had lectured, stories that referred to his lectures and appearances in a joking and negative tone. One reprint, from the *Philadelphia Times* stated, “Another affair or two like the one in Baltimore, and Mr. Oscar Wilde will have to saw wood for a living.”3

The Dublin-born poet was only twenty-five when he came to the United States for his first lecture tour. But he had a strong academic background and a well-known family. As Wilde told the *New York Times*, his father, Sir William Wilde, “was President of the Irish Academy, an enthusiastic archaeologist, and a frequent and brilliant contributor to the press.”4 Wilde’s mother was a poet and surrounded herself with scholars and artists, likely inspiring Oscar’s future interest in both literature and aesthetics. The *Times* noted that, “Wilde graduated with honors from Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1878 and shortly afterwards won the Newdigate Prize for English literature.”5

In America, Wilde sought to inform audiences of the wonders of the aesthetic life. He accomplished this through lectures including, “Decorative Art in America” and “The House Beautiful,” the latter addressing residential interiors. Wilde described the Aesthetic Movement to the *New York Times* as “the real search of the soul for the true, or, to speak more exactly, the search for the secret of life.”6 The movement arose during the Industrial Revolution when the focus of production

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3 “Oscar Wilde’s Eccentricities,” The Atlanta Constitution, January 24, 1882, 4.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
had shifted from hand-crafted labor to machines. Wilde asserted that “mass production... diminished the value of life by cheapening the beauty and depriving craftsmen of their livelihood.” Part of his mission was to revive the importance of craftsmen and bring beauty into everyday life. He told the Courier-Journal of Louisville that the proponents of the Aesthetic Movement “want to see that you have nothing in your houses that has not been a joy to the man who made it, and is not a joy to those who use it.” In Charleston he proclaimed, “To live one’s life is to love the beautiful!”

The concept of the Aesthetic Movement was typically well received throughout his tour. The Atlanta Constitution noted Wilde’s teachings as a way to improve life, “the aspirations of modern aestheticism include the Beautiful, the Good, the True and the Useful, why should not the practical be exalted and refined?” The San Antonio Express reported that the aesthetic message “impressed upon his followers the necessity and utility of [instilling] in the minds of our growing youth a love of the beautiful in both manmade and [found in] nature.” Agreeing with Wilde that local skills and craft should be favored over imports, the reviewer noted that Wilde “made one assertion that all can agree on, and that is that every city, where it is possible, should manufacture everything used by her people instead of sending long distance for them and at great expense.”

Wilde’s lecture tour through the South occurred after he had already visited much of the Northeast, Midwest, West, and parts of Canada.” By then, he had given 80 lectures in 74 cities and towns. After resting a week in New York, he started on what the Atlanta Constitution called “an unheard of expedition, to lecture in the south during the summer. The original itinerary had scheduled Wilde for only three weeks in the South, but now it would be five weeks. His

11 “Oscar Wilde,” San Antonio Express, June 22, 1882, 1.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
correspondence to his manager shows, the Southern tour schedule did not meet his expectations: “[f]ive weeks for sixteen lectures—nothing could be worse in every way. It is quite stupid and gross and will do me much harm,” Wilde wrote. This comment was in stark contrast to his self-described mission when, upon landing on the dock in New York City, he said, “I have come here determined to get acquainted with the big-hearted American people—I shan’t return to Europe until I do.”

The Southern tour now included 21 cities in eight states from Texas to Virginia. He started in Memphis and went on to New Orleans; Fort Worth; Galveston; San Antonio; Houston; Mobile; Montgomery; Columbus, Georgia; Macon; Atlanta; Savannah; Augusta; Charleston; Wilmington, Delaware; Norfolk; Richmond; and Vicksburg, Virginia. Although considered part of the South at the time, his earlier stops in Richmond and Louisville, Kentucky, were not part of the official Southern tour because they were scheduled by a different manager. His reception in those cities had convinced Wilde and his manager that a Southern tour was a viable opportunity.

Wilde faced a socio-economic uphill battle in ensuring strong turnout for his lectures in the post-war South. The region was significantly poorer than the North and had been emotionally ravaged by the war. In their 1936 study of Wilde’s tour, Lloyd Lewis and Justin Smith proposed that, “Politically and economically, Wilde was entering the South at the worst possible time for a lecturer on Art.” Wilde’s message, however, was intended to resonate with the more financially challenged audiences in the South, in his pronouncements that handicraft should result in art for all people: “if we wait for art to be bestowed upon the more expensive things, art will always be for the rich.” The cost of attending the lectures was not considered inexpensive and averaged around one dollar per ticket. Adjusted for inflation, these prices

18 Ibid.
19 Lloyd Lewis and Henry Justin Smith, Oscar Wilde discovers America [1882], [1st. ed.]. (Harcourt, Brace, 1936), 357.
would be close to $23 today, a significant cost for a one-hour lecture on aesthetics. The high ticket prices was largely due to the high cost of the tour. As the *Atlanta Constitution*, noted, “the expenses of his tour have been greater than that of any other lecturer who ever came to this country.”

Despite the price, Wilde attracted large crowds, especially in New Orleans, where, according to the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, “his second lecture, at Spanish Fort, seven miles from the city, drew two thousand” people.

One way in which the Southern tour attracted audiences was through the reassignment of management to a Southerner. The tour was assigned to “the management of Mr. Peter Tracy of Memphis by special arrangement with D’Oyly Carte, Esq., of London.” Carte did not accompany Wilde in the South as the firm figured that a Southern promoter would better identify, and not alienate, the audience. Southern solidarity remained a strong force since it had been only 17 years since the end of the Civil War, and it was thought that bringing on a local promoter would help the Southern audience feel that they were supporting a “Southern enterprise.” Indeed, there was no mistaking that newspaper advertisements for the lectures mentioned General Peter Tracy, an Irish ex-patriot, as a Memphis resident, to help bolster Southern support.

As another strategy for maintaining attendance, Wilde’s entourage included an advance agent, Frank Gary, who ensured that the poet was the talk of the town prior to his arrival. Gary would visit the destination a week before Wilde’s arrival, purchasing advertisements in papers and feeding stories and images to the press. (Figure 1) By the time Wilde reached a destination, Gary would have already moved on to the next city, providing local newspapers with anecdotal stories of Wilde and his travels, enhancing the perception of the legend, and adding to the gossip and discourse of the town. Before arriving in Macon, Gary had informed the *Telegraph* that Wilde had been traveling with so many flowers that he

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24 “Advertisement.”
25 Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde discovers America* [1882], 355.
required an extra porter. Such hyperbolic stories perked the interest of locals, helped sell tickets, and established Wilde as a spectacle and curiosity.

Gary’s stories of excessive luggage were accurate. Although it was wildly believed among aesthetes that they should oppose the notion of mass consumption, Wilde did not travel lightly. His abundant amount of personal artifacts was often fodder for press commentary and his own self-directed criticism. “It is not in the right harmony of things that I should have a hat-box, a secretary, a dressing-case, a trunk, a portmanteau, and a valet always following me,” Wilde conceded in a letter written to the poet and social activist Julia Ward Howe. He recognized in his letter the excesses of his travel accoutrement, wondering what Henry David Thoreau or Ralph Waldo Emerson would think of his lavishness. In the end, he justified his frivolity by pleading, “as long as I can enjoy talking nonsense to flowers and children I am not afraid of the depraved luxury of a hat-box.”

Fanfare accompanied Wilde’s travels, and by the time the tour had reached the South, their routine had been solidified. They travelled

27 Lewis and Smith, Oscar Wilde Discovers America [1882], 370.
29 Ibid.
from city to city via train, reaching destinations with just enough time for interviews and other brief, social engagements prior to his lecture.\textsuperscript{30} Interviews with reporters were conducted in his hotel room shortly after his arrival in each city.\textsuperscript{31} Additionally, Wilde would often receive non-journalist visitors during this pre-lecture time frame, including, on one occasion, Capt. Frank Wilkinson. Capt. Wilkinson visited Wilde in his room at the Purcell House in Wilmington, N.C., on July 16, 1882. The guest came adorned in a uniform typical of aesthetes, including, as a Sumter, S.C., publication noted, “knee breeches, a new sailor shirt profusely decorated with small sunflowers, and a big red onion pinned over his heart.”\textsuperscript{32} The visitor spent much time complimenting Wilde’s lecture on decorative art, calling it “too supremely too, too exquisitely superb – too ecstatically aesthetic to think of.”\textsuperscript{33} Despite the extensive negative attention that Wilde received in the press, the lecturer always provided ample time in his schedule for interviews with local journalists and to meet with sympathetic admirers.

Wilde drew press attention for his unusual attire which he used to advertise for his thoughts on the aesthetic life. Newspapers at the time were pleased to indulge him. Before his arrival in Texas, a \textit{Waco Daily Examiner} article began with a description of his legs at a recent lecture. “He wore black silk stockings and black knee breeches, which gave his legs a general and remote resemblance to two sticks of licorice.”\textsuperscript{34} Descriptions of his apparel appeared in other reports as well. \textit{The Galveston Daily News} described Wilde’s dress in detail – from the lace on his dress shirt to the color of the buckle on his shoes – then summed up his aesthetic by comparing it to “a sort of revival of the old court dress we read about in books.”\textsuperscript{35} Even the punishing Southern heat did not keep Wilde from donning his extreme wardrobe. During their interview at the Markham Hotel in early July, an \textit{Atlanta Constitution} reporter noted that, “his dress was not the court costume he wears while on the stage, but it deserves special mention… his coat was a black velvet jacket.”\textsuperscript{36}

The Southern press gave much attention to Wilde’s clothes and his

\begin{footnotes}
32 “Another Disciple,” \textit{The Watchman and Southron} [sic][Sumter, SC], July 18, 1882, 1.
33 Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
overall physical appearance. "His appearance was striking in the extreme, so odd he appeared," wrote a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution*. The *Galveston Daily News* claimed Wilde "reverses the old proverb of ‘a bull in a China shop.’" His hair also caught attention, as his long locks and distinct part down the middle were uncommon. These features and affectations were made more prominent by Wilde’s large six-foot-four frame which often received mention. The *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* painted a more pleasant description of Wilde when announcing his attendance at a fraternity dance in the paper’s home city. The paper described the young ladies of the dance being "charmed with his splendid figure, polished manners, and pleasing speech." Wilde’s unusual appearance was one of the strongest manifestations of his aesthetic beliefs, and it did not go unnoticed by the Southern press.

The promotional efforts of Gary and Tracy, and perhaps, more substantially, the curiosity stimulated by the press concerning Wilde’s dress and mannerisms, contributed to generally strong attendance at the lectures. Before speaking in Montgomery, that city’s paper published an announcement of the impending lecture by indicating that “Mr. Wilde draws big crowds of only the best and most refined people.” Although he drew large audiences, he did not always hold the audience’s attention for the duration of the lecture. In San Antonio, the *Waco Daily Examiner* reported that Wilde spoke to a large audience “made up of refined people, half of whom left before Oscar was half through.” Nonetheless, Wilde collected large amounts from ticket sales, leading *Harpers Weekly* to complain that, “The American pilgrimage of the young gentleman has been a huge and prolonged joke, all except the dollars he is reported to have collected.”

After Wilde’s lectures, some newspapers ran reviews which varied greatly in their assessment of his speech. The *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* was particularly kind in describing, “the close and respectful attention with which the audience listened to the lecture betrayed their interest

37 Ibid.
38 “Letter from San Antonio,” 1.
41 “Advertisement.”
in its subject and the manner in which it was treated.”\textsuperscript{44} Another kind review of his San Antonio lecture in the \textit{Austin Daily Statesmen} indicated that it was “listened to with considerable interest and contained much matter worthy of serious consideration.”\textsuperscript{45}

Negative reviews focused less on the content and more on the theatre environment, acoustics, and Wilde’s delivery. The \textit{Evening Light} in San Antonio reported that “many of Oscar Wilde’s pet sentences were lost on account of his very poor delivery and squeaking of the new boots of some of the thirsty ones going out for refreshments.”\textsuperscript{46} After the same lecture, a reviewer in the \textit{San Antonio Express} claimed that Wilde delivered his lecture with much monotony, “so that the back seats could not follow the discourse with any degree of pleasure.”\textsuperscript{47} Other papers mentioned that acoustics and audience discomfort detracted from Wilde’s message, which was generally well received.

Wilde said he enjoyed the natural beauty of the South and he flattered the region during lectures and interviews. He said this inherent beauty should be inspiration for a resurgence in Southern art. Wilde found Georgia to be a particularly “beautiful wooded country,”\textsuperscript{48} where his idyllic sunflowers grew wild. On the 4\textsuperscript{th} of July at DeGive’s Opera House in Atlanta, the \textit{Constitution} reported that he spoke to society men and women of the beauty of the South and its connection to art.

Here in the South it should be the home of art. You have beautiful surroundings so different in the North. There is no vegetation that is not yours. You have the two perfect essentials for a cultivation of high art: beautiful flowers and beautiful women.\textsuperscript{49}

He reassured his audiences that they need not worry about the art that was being created in the big cities of the Northeast because the beautiful environment of the South would support their own, unique art.\textsuperscript{50}

The sunflower’s presence in the South inspired Wilde and

\textsuperscript{44} “News Item - Wilde at Hop & Review of Lecture,” 4.
\textsuperscript{45} “Oscar Wilde -- His Lectures,” \textit{The Austin Daily Statesmen}, June 22, 1882, Morning edition, 1.
\textsuperscript{46} The \textit{Evening Light} via Lewis and Smith, \textit{Oscar Wilde discovers America [1882]}, 365.
\textsuperscript{47} “Oscar Wilde,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, June 22, 1882, 1.
\textsuperscript{48} Hofer and Scharnhorst, “Oscar Dear, Oscar Dear!,” 163.
\textsuperscript{49} “Oscar Wilde: Arrival of the Great Esthete and His Lecture,” 8.
exemplified his aesthetic principles. Natural beauty played a crucial role in
the Aesthetic Movement as evidenced by Southerners’ use of sunflowers
as their *de facto* symbol. This flower represented perfect proportions
and simplicity—qualities which, according to the Aesthetic School, when
reproduced to “conform to the practical needs and uses of everyday life,”
brings beauty to the trivial and regular.51 He noticed the sunflowers in
the hair of women who passed by his Atlanta hotel and the sunflowers
sold by youth outside of his lectures.52 The *San Antonio* Express noted the
audience reaction when, “he made no allusion to the aesthetic sunflower
which no doubt disappointed some of the young ladies in the audience
whom we mentioned were prepared with that gorgeous blossom which
grows so [abundantly] in this climate.”53 When a reporter with the
*Charleston News and Courier* asked if the attention the public was suddenly
showing to sunflowers was a temporary fad, Wilde seemed to take credit
when he responded, “You have lived all your life among sunflowers, and
never until now noticed anything beautiful in them.”54

Wilde also spoke passionately about the South’s magnolias
as exemplary of aesthetic beauty almost rivaling the sunflower.
Conversations about flowers and the natural beauty of the south often
dominated interviews. Asked why the aesthetes chose the sunflower
and lily, Wilde praised the magnolia, but stated that it could not be easily
used as the symbol for the Aesthetic Movement because, “Nothing could
be more beautiful or more fragrant ah, but you can’t draw or paint the
magnolia… its outlines are not distinct.”55 In Alabama, Wilde declared
that the trip had been “worthwhile… merely to see the magnolia in full
bloom.”56 Such discussions of the natural beauty of the South helped him
relate to his audience.

Wilde found American women to be particularly beautiful,
but elevated Southern women to a pedestal. “American women are
very beautiful, and some of the finest types of beauty I have ever seen
I found in the South,” proclaimed Wilde to the *New York Sun*.57 This
same sentiment he repeated on various occasions. *The Charleston News*

51 “Practical Aesthetism,” 4.
52 Hofer and Scharnhorst, “Oscar Dear, Oscar Dear!,” 164.
53 “Oscar Wilde,” 1.
54 Hofer and Scharnhorst, “Oscar Dear, Oscar Dear!,” 164.
55 Ibid.
57 Matthew Hofer and Gary Scharnhorst, eds., “Loveliness and Politeness,” in *Oscar
Wilde in America: The Interviews* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press,
2010), 165-166.
and Courier reported that he claimed women of the South to be much more beautiful than any he had seen in the country.\textsuperscript{58} This attention to Southern women may have landed Wilde in some hot water when he returned to the North. The New York Sun asked whether or not Wilde had proclaimed Miss Alsatia Allen of Alabama “the most beautiful young lady he had seen in the United States.”\textsuperscript{59} As a true showman, he recognized that many of his audience members were women, and it was necessary for him to compliment his followers. “This is a remark, my dear fellow, I supposed I have made of some lady in every city I have visited in this country.”\textsuperscript{60}

Wilde also complimented Southerners on their dispositions, which he found suitable for an aesthetic life, especially compared to Northerners. His frequent praises gained much support and applause.\textsuperscript{61} In interviews, he was often quoted as favorably comparing Southerners to Northerners, claiming that Southerners are “of a warmer temperament and of a more imaginative mind”\textsuperscript{62} and offering that “Southerners are more agreeable than Northerners.”\textsuperscript{63} His impression of the South “helped restore confidence and helped bring to [the Southerners] attention qualities they never realized they had.”\textsuperscript{64} His more honest portrayal of the South may have come from a letter to Julia Ward Howe on July 6. In it he told her, “I write you from the beautiful, passionate, ruined South… picturesque too in her failure to keep pace with your keen Northern pushing intellect; living chiefly on credit, and on the memory of some crushing defeats.”\textsuperscript{65}

Wilde found many similarities between his Irish homeland and the South. Both regions had, at some part in their histories, sought independence from another nation. At the time of his visit, Ireland was plagued with civil unrest as the Irish were seeking Home Rule from England which would grant them the ability to self-govern.\textsuperscript{66} Wilde identified the connection between Ireland’s quest for self-rule and the South’s failed attempt at secession resulting in the Civil War. “We in

\textsuperscript{58} Hofer and Scharnhorst, “Oscar Dear, Oscar Dear!,” 164-165.
\textsuperscript{59} Hofer and Scharnhorst, “Loveliness and Politeness,” 165.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Hofer and Scharnhorst, “Oscar Dear, Oscar Dear!,” 163.
\textsuperscript{63} Lewis and Smith, Oscar Wilde discovers America [1882], 362.
\textsuperscript{65} Hart-Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, 122-123.
Ireland are fighting for the principle of autonomy against empire, for independence against centralization, for the principles which the South fought,” he told a reporter in Atlanta. He went on to praise the efforts of the South, despite defeat, by saying, “Although there may have been a failure in fact, in idea there is no failure possible.” Independence was on the mind of the Irishman, and he sought to use the connections between the Irish struggle and the South’s war to create alliances between these peoples: “the head may approve the success of the winner, but the heart is sure to be with the fallen.”

Wilde also identified with the former president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, because of their shared interest in self-governance. After the war, Davis had been publicly advocating that Southerners respect and honor the Union: “United you are now, and if the Union is ever to be broken, let the other side break it.” However, it was his previous, unrelenting advocacy for states’ rights that attracted Wilde. Davis’ statements were often misinterpreted for the intention of arousing differences between North and South but, as the Raleigh News and Observer noted, “he has always maintained that the South fought for States’ rights and the right of self-government in the people of the States.” It was this conviction that drew Wilde to Jefferson Davis in 1882, despite his more recent advocacy of Union solidarity, and led to their eventual meeting.

The news of Wilde’s meeting with Davis, who at the time was 50 years his senior, was well covered through announcements and commentary in the press, but lacked many details. The Montgomery Daily Advertiser noted that this unlikely duo met on June 27 at Davis’s home in Beauvoir, Mississippi. Some of the harshest commentary on the ex-president meeting with a “laughing stock” came from the Selma Times via a reprint in the Montgomery Daily Advertiser:

The Vice-President of the Confederacy is the last man in

68 Ibid.
71 “Jefferson Davis: His Words of Patriotism,” The News and Observer [Raleigh, NC], January 27, 1882, 1.
the United States we should suspect of taking an interest in the laughing stock of the day. He is so modest, retiring, elegant in his dignity that we would not have thought it possible for the self-asserting, pseudo-fanatical, long haired, aesthetic humbug to have penetrated the quiet home of the grand Southerner.\footnote{73}{“The Selma Times on Oscar Wilde and Vice-President Davis,” \textit{Montgomery Daily Advertiser}, June 29, 1882, Morning edition, 4.}

The reporter’s animosity could have been attributed to the fact that Wilde did not include Selma on his tour, as its newspaper indicated: “Oscar ought not to have slighted Selma–Is it too late yet?”\footnote{74}{Ibid.} Despite the perceived interest in the meeting and the commentary that ensued, there appeared to be a lack of coverage by reporters of their conversation.\footnote{75}{Lewis and Smith, \textit{Oscar Wilde discovers America [1882]}, 368-9.}

Wilde described their encounter and provided his opinion on the former Civil War leader in interviews and letters. When asked by the \textit{Atlanta Constitution} about the meeting, Wilde replied, “He impressed me very much as a man of the keenest intellect, and a man fairly to be a leader of men on account of a personality that is as simple as it is strong.”\footnote{76}{“Oscar Wilde: Arrival of the Great Esthete and His Lecture,” 8.} Wilde went so far as to elevate Davis to the level with Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.\footnote{77}{Ibid.} In his letter to Julia Howe on July 6, Wilde mentioned his visit with Davis and proclaimed, in an uncharacteristic manner, “How fascinating all failures are!”\footnote{78}{Hart-Davis, \textit{The Letters of Oscar Wilde}, 122.} It was in Wilde’s best interest to maintain a positive critique of the admired Jefferson Davis while still on tour in the South, but perhaps, from his correspondence with Howe, we see a more realistic expression of his opinion on Davis.

While sympathizing with the South on its desire for self-government, Wilde differed greatly from the mainstream Southern attitude in his attitude towards African-Americans. This was evident in how he travelled through the South with an African-American valet, W.M. Traquair.\footnote{79}{Rogers, Ward, and Maclnerney, “Oscar Wilde Lectures in New Orleans and Across the South in 1882,” 38.} Wilde insisted on treating Traquair in a manner then uncommon in the South. In one instance, Wilde’s manager purchased three sleeping car tickets for Wilde, his manager, and the valet for a ride
between Atlanta and Savannah. The train company did not allow the sale of sleeping car tickets to black patrons and informed Wilde that Traquair would need to vacate to a different cabin. Wilde did not wish to comply with the request, and it was not until the sleeping car porter spoke directly to the valet that the group complied with the train company’s request. The porter informed Traquair that the train would be travelling through Jonesboro, and “if the people saw a Negro in the sleeper, they would mob him.”

The valet retreated to a first-class cabin reserved for black travelers. This event, and Wilde’s defense of his black valet, were in line with his overall impression of African-Americans during his time in the South.

Wilde showed particular interest in African-Americans in the South. What he saw as “exotic qualities” aligned very strongly with his thoughts on aestheticism. In an interview with the *Daily Picayune* while visiting New Orleans on June 16, Wilde noted, “One must go to Asia and Africa for picturesqueness in human costume and habits. In America, I have found it only in the Indians and the Negro, and I am surprised that painters and poets have paid so little attention to them.”

Upon returning from Texas, the black people that Wilde saw during his trip there made a lasting impression. “I saw them everywhere, happy and careless, basking in the sunshine or dancing in the shade, their half-naked bodies gleaming like bronze,” he told a New Orleans reporter. Additionally, while in New Orleans, he participated in voodoo rituals with local African-Americans. Despite accentuating the commonly perceived “otherness” of African-Americans by accentuating their exotic qualities, Wilde was drawn to the beauty of Southern blacks.

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81 Daily Picayune as referenced in: Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde discovers America [1882]*, 362.
83 Ibid.
The topic of independence surfaced again when Wilde visited Atlanta on a sultry 4th of July. From his room at the Markham Hotel described by the *Atlanta Constitution* as “reserved for esthetes,” he discussed his irritation with the Independence Day celebrations occurring on the street. He exclaimed to a reporter from *The Constitution*, “Oh the patriots, the patriots; let’s shut down the window and shut out the noise.” Wilde proclaimed his support of celebrating independence, stating that “amongst the most artistic things that any city can do is

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84 “Oscar Wilde: Arrival of the Great Esthete and His Lecture,” 8.
85 Ibid.
celebrate by pageant any great eras in history.” Unfortunately, he did not regard the Atlanta celebration as living up to the glorious event it honored. “Why should not the 4th of July pageant in Atlanta be as fine as the Mardi Gras carnival in New Orleans?” Art and celebration were essential to the aesthetic way of life, and Wilde considered the Independence Day holiday to be no exception.

Oscar Wilde had come to the South at a precarious time in the region’s history. He brought his message of aestheticism, art, and beauty to a people who were still reeling from the ravages encountered during the Civil War. As evidenced from the newspaper accounts of the day, his unusual dress, mannerisms, and way of speaking captured the fascination of Southerners, quickly promoting Wilde’s tour as one of the most successful of the time. He entered each city with much pomp, with a formidable publicity machine paving the way. Instead of alienating the people of this scarred region, Wilde sought to find similarities with his native homeland and found beauty in the land and the people of this region. One could pass some of these gestures off as self-proclaimed showmanship, but Wilde’s genuine interest and curiosity in the South as indicated in his letters and in the press rivaled that which his audience had for him and his unusual ways. Perhaps most noticeable through the consolidation of research regarding the Southern tour is that Wilde provided Southerners with a much needed escape from routine and quite possibly hope for a brighter future.

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
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Abolition Was Not Just for Slavery: 
Abolishing Debtors’ Prison in America by 
Changing Debt from Criminal to Circumstantial, 1830-31 

Misty Hope

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.” --William Faulkner

Since colonization of North America by the British, debtors’ prison was an important part of a working society. The opinion was that a debtor’s inability to pay was a lack of moral uprightness, and thereby he must suffer for his sin in prison until the debt could be secured or until death took the debtor’s life for payment. Critics who were not pleased with the system, which often left creditors without recourse to actually collect their debts, began to utilize the press to change public opinion. Their goal was to change the way a debt could be resolved without criminalization. This paper explores the press coverage from 1830-1831 in the movement leading to the abolition of imprisonment for debt.

On Tuesday, March 2, 1830, citizens in New York met at the Masonic Hall1 to discuss resolutions to abolish imprisonment for debt. A conference called by advocates for the abolition of debtors’ prisons voted unanimously for resolutions2 including the understanding that misfortune should not be called a “criminal offense” and that no person should be justly “deprived of his liberty” for nonpayment of debt in honest circumstances.3 This meeting was an important milestone in the process of abolition in the state of New York and throughout the United States. Led by James Herttell, Chairman and advocate for abolition, the committee resolved that “all mankind are born free, and with equal rights; that the right to life, and to personal liberty, cannot be alienated nor abridged by virtue of any voluntary contract.” 4 Attendees agreed “that human life cannot be justly destroyed, nor human liberty rightfully restrained but for some criminal

1 “Abolishing Imprisonment for Debt,” The New-York Morning Herald, March 5, 1830, 1.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 “Abolishing Imprisonment for Debt,” 1.
offence.”5 It was also agreed that “the constitution is the supreme ‘law of the land,’ by virtue of which ‘no person shall be held to answer for his crime unless on presentment of a grand jury.’”6

Some contended that anything less than complete abolition was not good enough. Richard Mentor Johnson, member of the House of Representatives in 1830 and later the ninth vice president of the United States of America, said, “My opinion is fixed, that nothing short of total abolition of imprisonment for debt will preserve the sacred principle of freedom from violation.”7 The orator Daniel Webster, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, asserted that imprisonment for debt should be done away with in all cases “where there is no evidence of fraud.”8 This significant meeting called upon all states to unite and act upon removing an extremely controversial law. The committee’s final verdict was that:

The law of imprisonment for debt ought to be abolished; and we hereby earnestly invite our fellow citizens throughout this and other States which have not already repealed the law in question, to unite and co-operate with us in the use of all fair and lawful means, to obliterate that foul blot which stains the pages of our statute book, dishonors the character of a free people, is inconsistent with the spirit of our republican institutions, and a reproach to the nation.9

Many argued that the law should be retained. Defenders felt that loss of liberty was justified to give security to the creditor. They knew of no other way to ensure that the borrower would repay the creditor. These defenders were accused of “weighing human liberty against dollars and cents”.10 The New-York Morning Herald printed an article demanding that a new process be created. The Herald did not see how the defenders could argue the case by saying it was an extra security. It could be argued that a man should be sold to pay his debts; just because it is a security to the debtor does not justify it. “Suppose it were lawful, when a man has not wherewithal to satisfy his creditors, to sell him and his family for slaves, in

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
order to satisfy justice.”

*The Herald* wrote that it may be an extra security to the creditors, but that did not make it moral.

Suppose, for a moment, that it were, as they say, an additional security. It by no means follows that it is just or proper. It might be an additional security that the insolvent debtor should be hanged, or put to torture; nay, it is certain, that this would make people much more cautious in contracting debts, and much more careful in meeting them.

In the early 1800s the young nation was in the throes of imprisonment for debt. By 1830, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania had “three to five times as many persons imprisoned for debt as for a crime.” Methods were in place so that, immediately upon default of a bond, the creditor could imprison the debtor and take possession of his belongings to satisfy the debt. If their property could not satisfy the debt, he would remain imprisoned until the debt was paid.

The practice of imprisoning debtors for inability to pay had been exported to America from England, where the dark side of the practice had been memorialized in literature. As one historian noted, “From Charles Dickens, who was inspired to write several classic novels based on the inspiration of his father who was imprisoned in England’s infamous Marshalsea prison in the early eighteen-twenties, to references in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the topic of debt was usually referenced as a tale of immorality or of misfortune.” English reformers had also begun to seek abolition of the practice in Great Britain.

In America between 1800 and 1830 “periodic economic depressions became a feature of the nation’s economy.” Under these circumstances poverty was widespread. War created industry but when the war ended, the economy struggled. “The War of 1812 gave an impetus to industrial development, creating new industries in cities and small towns, but after

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid, 75.
16 Ibid.
the war of 1812 and the wars in Europe ended, the American economy suffered a serious downturn. The first major American depression (1816) brought hard times to most American cities.”¹⁸ This caused thousands of small businessmen as well as farmers to be cast in prison for debt. The prisons became laden with debtors. “In 1830 there were more than ten thousand people incarcerated in New York City’s debtors’ prison, this at a time when the total population of the city was less than 150 thousand souls. More than half were there for debts of less than 25 dollars.”¹⁹

The press played a vital part in the developing of opinions. It was routine to see an article headlined “Imprisonment for Debt” and stories from gaol (jail) throughout the newspapers. Some of these articles were letters to the editors or updates on the legislative processes of different states. They often contained stories of “feudal barbarism”²⁰ which were emotional tales of men unable to pay as little as two cents²¹ and the sad state their families found themselves in without the “industry” of the head of household to care for them.²² By 1830, advocates for abolition used the press to publicize such atrocities through letters to editors, raising awareness of the cruelties. Often they mentioned women and Revolutionary War veterans to persuade readers to side with them on abolition of debt imprisonment; such emotional appeals eventually persuaded the public.

As one historian noted, “Overcrowded jails soon became a public scandal as well as a health menace.”²³ The public became aware of the situation through the press, which at times noted the opinions of foreign visitors. After interviewing a Turk, the Maryland Gazette published the observation that a debtors' prison was “a place where man is degraded to the condition of a rat.”²⁴

Personal stories were especially effective. One story in the Daily National Intelligencer in 1818 told about a young man named Brown who was “cast into the prison of this city for debt.” The storyteller informs the reader that Brown was intelligent and genuine, and that he was told that one of his creditors refused to agree to discharge him from the debtors’

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¹⁸ The Social Work History Station, 3.
¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ “Imprisonment for debt,” Raleigh Register [Raleigh, NC], Jan 22, 1819, 1.
²⁴ “A Turk’s thought on Imprisonment for Debt,” Maryland Gazette, April 29, 1830.
prison and the creditor had made a “solemn oath before his God to keep Brown in jail 'til he rotted!'” As Brown received this information, the storyteller wrote, “I thought I saw the cheering spirit of hope desert him forever.”

Prisoners were often helpless if their families needed them. The only pleasure for Brown was the daily visits from his wife. One day a messenger brought news that Mrs. Brown was “very dangerously ill and supposed to be dying in a convulsive fit.” Brown “darted to the door with the rapidity of lightning. The inner door was open and the jailer, who had just let someone in, was closing it as he passed violently through it.” The jailer knocked him over the head and “he was carried lifeless, and covered in blood, to his cell....Mrs. Brown died and her husband was denied even the sad privilege of closing her eyes.” And after some time, being called to his bed “and gazing on me, while a faint smile played upon his lips, he said he believed ‘death was more kind than his creditors.’ And after a few convulsive struggles, he expired.”

The article ended with a cry of injustice questioning what benefit it was to creditors to take this young man’s life:

Legislators and sages of America! Permit me to ask you—how much benefit has that creditor derived from the imprisonment and consequent death of an amiable man, in the bloom of youth, whom without this cruelty, might have flourished even now, an ornament and glory to the nation.

Debtors’ prisons held not only the poor and destitute, but also two men who signed the Declaration of Independence: Robert Morris and James Wilson. Morris was a member of the Continental Congress who supervised the finances of the Revolutionary War “largely on the basis of his personal credit.” When a land speculation venture failed, he spent three years imprisoned for debt and died, virtually a pauper.

Wilson was one of the six men who signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He was also a member of the Continental Congress and a justice in the Supreme Court. He had hoped to become the Chief Justice, but when debts came due from the same

26 Ibid.
failed land venture as Morris, he was imprisoned in New Jersey for a short time. After being released he fled to North Carolina and could not return to his post as Court justice for fear his creditors would place him back in prison. They eventually did, and upon release he took up residence in “Horniblow Tavern and died financially ruined.”

Often a prominent man would emerge from debtors’ prison greatly changed and no longer an asset to his community. A notable witness to such transformations was Thomas Bradford Jr. of Philadelphia. Bradford had been an inspector of a prison for debtors and “witnessed the evils resulting from imprisonment for debt.” He said “the debtor becomes reckless of character, dissolute, and ruined in many instances, and returns to society its bane and curse.” An example was Thomas Rodney, a member of the Continental Congress and then an officer in the Revolution and a judge of the Supreme Court of Delaware, who kept “voluminous” journals where he recorded everything “from the smallest slights to his dignity to the accounts of his dreams.” However, there were 14 months missing from his journals, during which he was imprisoned for debt. “When his journals resume, they depict a bitter, impoverished man, steeped in resentment and humiliation.”

Before 1830 it was also common for women to be imprisoned. There is the record of Mary Bellamy, who lost her husband who had been a trader. She “was left with numerous debts and eight small children.” For nine years, she tried to repay her husband’s debts but failed, suffering “a long imprisonment in the common gaol.” When prisons reached capacity, jailers forced women into cells with men. This caused a storm of commotion and legislators in several states passed laws which forbade the imprisonment of women for debt.

The families of the debtors were often left destitute. The creditors would take almost all possessions of worth to pay the debt, apart from a few exceptions that were protected by law, such as basic clothing, furniture, and household goods. If the proceeds were not enough to

28 Ibid.
30 “Imprisonment for Debt,” United States’ Telegraph [Washington, DC], Jan 27, 1830.
32 Ibid., 79.
33 Ibid., 73.
cover the cost, the debtor remained in prison. This process frequently left the families in ruins, without their providers to offer sustenance. In a letter to the editor of the African-American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, the author wrote of injustices he witnessed while his services have been called upon to assist those who have been incarcerated. He quoted a prisoner facing the difficulties the situation caused his family as saying: “Oh, for myself I can bear it, but for my wife and children!” He described his own tenderness at hearing the anguish of the debtor and seeing “the tear start in [the prisoner’s] eye!” He continues to describe the destitute state in which he found the families, having lost all “save a few chattels which the law protects.” He visited the debtor’s wife and although she had lost everything to the creditors, she felt that all would be okay if her husband could be returned:

All that my dear parents gave me, as memorial of their affection, has been torn from us; and as if that were not enough they have taken away our only earthly supporter and protector, my devoted husband, and this kind father of these children. Could his liberty be restored, we could forget all the rest, and be happy. His industry would soon make us comfortable.

The role of charity in debtors’ prisons was invaluable to help with boarding costs. As one historian noted, “The irony of debtors’ prison is that the prisoners were charged for room and board and were expected to repay the debts while provided no means to earn it. Re-compensation, for those lucky enough to pay it, usually came from family members or others with a vested interest in the debtor’s freedom.” John P. Roome, keeper of a New York debtors’ prison reported in the *New York Spectator* a long list of donations that were recently given to assist the poor debtors in his jail. These included items like mattresses and pillows, loads of wood, provisions from butchers and fishermen, old shirts and old shoes, as well as cash donations. In the same article a letter was published from an anonymous donor to help make the authors point. The letter asked the

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
40 “The Following Donations has been received,” *New York Spectator*, Jan 4, 1828, 1.
jailer to use the money he had donated to give relief to those imprisoned for small debts. “May I therefore beg that you will have it applied to the release of one or more of the small debtors, if the sum be sufficient for that purpose or for the purpose of food or fuel for the whole.”  

A certificate to prove the case of charity was printed in the *Daily National Intelligencer*. The Humane Society assisted those in prison and kept them from starving.

During the last year there were committed to said prison, for debts under twenty five dollars, seven hundred and twenty nine persons! That nearly all of them must have starved, but for the bounties of the Humane Society and individual charity, and that [the jailer] is compelled to beg for fuel to keep them from freezing.  

Charity was not always enough to free the imprisoned. Various records document cases of imprisoned men who were cared for through charity. In “the case of Dius Lyman,” he was imprisoned three years, until he died, all for a debt under $50. In the “case of George Riley,” he was imprisoned for $50 and remained for six years. During the entirety of their imprisonments both men were “fed by the Humane Society.”  

Many had even smaller debts. Documents submitted to the Senate included a certificate listing the number of those imprisoned for under $50. “There were committed to said gaol, during 1816, for debts under fifty dollars, one thousand one hundred and twenty nine persons!” Another of those documents “narrates the case of Paul Harrison, imprisoned for 25 dollars, [and] who died in gaol.”  

Support grew for disallowing those with small debts from being imprisoned as a way of making the law functional and fair. In a letter to the *Observer and Telegraph*, U.S. Senator Daniel Webster specified “three simple provisions” that would allow the system to be more effective and resolve “nineteen twentieths” of the evils. First he stated that imprisonment “should not be allowed for debts fewer than 30 dollars.” Second, there should not be a mandatory thirty days “as preliminary to

41 Ibid.  
43 Ibid.  
45 Ibid.  
take the poor debtor’s oath.” Third, a creditor should “investigate” new property charges before bringing them to court. Webster believed other provisions would be useful as well, including disallowing imprisonment of women—such imprisonment being “barbarism which ought not to be tolerated.” The Daily National Intelligencer printed an article in support of the provisions Webster proposed, arguing everyone would benefit if the “recovery of small debts were abolished.” An article in The New-York Morning Herald reported that the number imprisoned in debtors’ prison in the city of New York from June 6, 1829-February 24, 1830 was 817. From that group “80 had debts less than 1 dollar, 233 above 1 dollar and less than 5, 174 above 5 dollars and less than 10, 140 above 10 dollars and less than 20, 442 above 20 and below 100, 98 above 100 dollars.”

The law’s ineffectiveness was a key argument against imprisonment. A debtor who was imprisoned could not work to pay off the debt. Silas W. Robbins, a circuit court judge in Kentucky, viewed the problem from both sides. While understanding that it must gratify the creditor to seek vengeance on the debtor, Robbins also felt that “it deprives the family of his exertions for their maintenance, and society of the product of his labor.” The majority of debtors imprisoned were men who were poor and needed to work to support themselves and their families. Being imprisoned kept them from this. Fourteen years earlier in North Carolina, the Raleigh Register had printed a similar argument against imprisonment:

Is it that the delinquent will be better able to pay his debts, after being confined a few months or a year in the pestilential damps of a prison? Or is imprisonment exacted as an equivalent for the debt itself?

The writer answered the posed questions by stating that none of these goals is met by imprisoning debtors.

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
52 “Imprisonment for Debt,” Raleigh Register, Jan. 22, 1819.
Not the former, because by being confined he is necessarily prevented from prosecuting any lucrative profession, and as has been truly said, society loses what his labor would be worth. Not the latter, because he becomes again liable for the amount of his enlargement. Hence the punishment is unjust, without affecting any one object for which penalties were invented. The public is not benefited—the creditor generally loses his money irrecoverably, and the debtor is frequently turned out upon the world a desperado or a beggar.53

Abolitionists continued to argue their case that enforcing the law was often more costly than productive and thus did not make economic sense. Congressman R.M. Johnson, who assisted Kentucky in abolition of imprisonment for debt, said that the state would have spent “a million dollars…in rigorous execution of the laws of imprisonment for debt,”54 had imprisonment for debt continued and now that abolition has occurred “the system of credit was never more sound and healthy.”55 In another article it is mentioned that 252 imprisoned debtors owed a total of $663 and the cost of confinement was $448.56 The Daily National Intelligencer published a document highlighting the cost associated with small debts. Benjamin Remington had been arrested for a debt of 54 cents and the total cost to process that arrest was $14.45.57 The cost to process was more than 28 times the cost of the debt and was often expected to be paid by the debtor.

There had to be a better way to secure creditors’ money. Frank T. Carlton, who published a study on the abolition of imprisonment for debt, believed that the abolitionists were pitted against the lenders to come up with a “more humane way of treating a debtor whose inability to pay would land them in a debtors’ prison.”58 The New York advocate James Herttell declared that the system was failing. He claimed that creditors have lost faith in the law of imprisonment for debt “as efficient means to coerce their debtors to make their payments that, hopeless of

53 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
success, they have for some time past, been gradually declining to seek or expect to obtain justice through that channel.”

Herttell stated that it was necessary to come up with new laws to replace the ones riddled with so many exemptions that they were no longer effective and were causing “social and mercantile demoralization.”

The North versus South tension also figured in the debate. Newspapers used emotions already heightened because of slavery to fight the battle over imprisonment for debt. While citizens in the anti-slavery North expressed a moral superiority over the slave states, how was it possible that the North had many more citizens enslaved by debt? An article in the Boston Courier criticized the North for its failure to act on debt imprisonment, citing statistics to show the extensive use of debtors’ prisons in the North. The article reported that in the year of 1829, Northern states imprisoned 2,742 debtors, while the same number of prisons in the Southern States imprisoned only 35.

The campaign in the press noted the states that moved forward toward abolition. Newspapers acknowledged the states that had begun legislation to relieve debtors or abolish debtors’ prisons, and criticized states that had not acted. The Boston Courier highlighted a law in Massachusetts that forbade imprisonment for less than $5, and stated that a similar law in “other Northern and Middle States” would free 451 from jail in 18 main prisons. The main opposition to enacting an exemption law of less than $5 “is said to have come from groceries and grog shops (liquor stores).” The Courier also mentioned a law in New Hampshire, which does not allow imprisonment for less than $13.33. A similar law in other “Northern and Middle States,” would have “saved” 1,454 from imprisonment in the 18 prisons.

Newspapers continued to report how many debtors could be freed by law being considered in the states. One new law in Massachusetts required the creditor, not the debtor, to pay the jail’s boarding fees. That law was said to reduce time spent in prison by one-third. Another law in South Carolina requires the creditor to take an oath that the debts were “true debts.” This, according to “a very shrewd and observing jailer,”

60 Ibid.
61 “Imprisonment for Debt,” Boston Courier, December 6, 1830, 1.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
would prevent many small debts from being prosecuted.\textsuperscript{65} Kentucky and Ohio, which had just abolished imprisonment for debt, would have, a year earlier, saved about 50,000 from prison, “as nearly as we can ascertain.”\textsuperscript{66} Their laws gave debtors the opportunity to work, pay their debts and support their families.

Almost all the prisoners, both those in close confinement, are poor men, men who have families to support, and who have not as much property in their hands as the law exempts from execution....Going to the goal of the enlightened city of New York, I have seen an American citizen (O sacred privilege of American citizenship in most places sacred! here trampled upon!) deprived of his liberty, without a crime...men ready to toil for their families, or bleed for their country!\textsuperscript{67}

During the legislative process, the press often kept citizens informed of what was occurring. Printed summaries of documents containing arguments for abolition appeared in many newspapers. In 1817, one document submitted to the Senate of New York and published in multiple newspapers pointed out some of the many injustices taking place with regards to imprisonment for debt as well as the prison population. One document was a certificate from James Bell, keeper of the debtors’ gaol in New York City, stating that during the past year 1,984 people were jailed for debt, and that the jail now held 600 debtors “and upwards.”\textsuperscript{68} Another document stated that each of 50 debtors presently confined has a “wife, and in the whole 73 children.”\textsuperscript{69}

While many fought for legislation to remove debtors’ prisons from the law books, the process of change was slow. The lack of enthusiasm of some lawmakers to act occasionally enraged the press. Newspapers published warnings to politicians. One such note of resentment appeared in \textit{The Albany Daily Advertiser}, and was reprinted in \textit{The New-York Morning Herald}, :

The Senate, yesterday, treated this subject with so much

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{67} “Original Communications, Imprisonment for Debt,” 1.
\item \textsuperscript{68} “Documents submitted to the Senate of New York, Relative to Imprisonment for Debt,” \textit{Daily National Intelligencer} [Washington, DC], April 26, 1817, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
contempt, as to refuse the bill from the Assembly a second reading. This aristocratic branch of our government, not infrequently treats with the contumely and neglect the wants and wishes of those who warm them into political life: But their day of retribution will come.  

Because abolition of debtors’ prisons was a state-by-state process, each state progressed at its own rate. A Massachusetts law prevented creditors from arresting debtors in their homes. This caused many to stay home and become “prisoners in their own homes.” Abijah Beach, a merchant sued for debts, became a prisoner in his own home for three years, causing him to “lead a life of inactivity, unprofitable to himself, the community and his creditors.” Then laws were passed to prevent anyone being jailed for owing less than $5. That law was soon extended to include those who owed less than $10. Considering the circumstances that the families and debtors were left with, lawmakers decided to increase the exemptions on property that could not be confiscated by creditors. Beginning in the 1820s exemptions included not only the original “basic clothing, furniture, and household goods,” but also began to include “the tools of a debtor’s trade, some livestock, the debtor’s dwelling house and forty or fifty acres of surrounding land.”

Some states led the way for complete abolition. In Kentucky in 1830, State Representative R.M. Johnson stated, “I am proud to say, imprisonment for debt is not to be found in our statute books, under any circumstance,” As early as well 1824, Maine had abolished debtors’ prisons, as a Maryland newspaper noted: “It will be gratifying to every friend of humanity to know that the legislature of Maine...abolished the laws of that state which authorized imprisonment for debt.”

The abolition movement gave some politicians a chance to advance their careers. In 1817, Martin Van Buren, then a rising political voice as a state senator in New York, supported a bill to abolish imprisonment for debt for the “good state of New York.” His role was duly noted by the Daily National Intelligencer in Washington. Although his bill failed, Van Buren had

71 Mann, Republic of Debtor, 73.
72 Coleman. Debtors and Creditors, xi. The five dollars or less imprisonment was a bill passed in Massachusetts
73 Balleisen, Navigating Failure, 12.
74 “Imprisonment for Debt,” United States’ Telegraph [Washington, DC], Jan 27, 1830.
75 “Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt,” Maryland Gazette and State Register [Annapolis, MD], March 11, 1824.
positioned himself for higher office as a champion of the common man.\textsuperscript{76}

When one state proposed legislation, abolitionist leaders publicized the action in newspapers and urged other states to do the same. While abolition was rare at the time, most states had a few laws to assist insolvent debtors. One of those piecemeal acts for relief of poor debtors allowed the release of prisoners from jail upon surrendering all property, even if that property was not enough to pay the full debt.\textsuperscript{77} The debtor then took a poor man’s oath that he was too poor to pay the debt at no fault of his own. As a result, “More than 50,000 debtors were set free in the next thirteen years.”\textsuperscript{78}

The poor man’s oath was not always enough to release debtors. While in prison the debtor was responsible for the cost of boarding, and often those costs kept him in prison. In 1818 in a letter to a North Carolina editor, a man signed his letter as “Shameful” in bringing to light an injustice:

As a friend to humanity, I transmit to your candid attention the situation of Capt. Brewer, now confined in Amherst goal…in which place he has been in confinement for nearly four years, on civil debt, the original of which amounted to about eight dollars and now altogether with his board amounts to nearly three hundred dollars.\textsuperscript{79}

The shamefulness related to the fact that, more than 35 years earlier Brewer was wounded while serving as a captain in the Revolutionary War. After a legally required 30 days in jail, Brewer took the poor man’s oath, but was not released because of the accumulating boarding debt.

He was a hero of our Revolution and held a captain’s commission through part or the whole of the struggle for our independence: But now he is immured in a prison 12 feet square with many others.\textsuperscript{80}

Eventually, the argument to exempt Revolutionary War veterans

\textsuperscript{76} “Imprisonment for debt,” \textit{Daily National Intelligencer} [Washington, DC], Feb 14, 1817, 1. Van Buren was referenced to as distinguished in a letter to the editor from a subscriber.

\textsuperscript{77} Countryman. \textit{Debtor and Creditor}, 77.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} “Shameful,” \textit{Raleigh Register} [Raleigh, NC], Aug 28, 1818, 1.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
from debtors’ prison won some legislative support. In February of 1830, almost a half-century after the last battle of the Revolution, a resolution for exempting the war veterans was introduced in the U.S. Congress. The remarks of the sponsor, Representative Burgre of Rhode Island, were published in Washington’s the Daily National Journal: “Little advantage can be derived from shutting up within the wall of a prison, a man tottering on the verge of the grave with no other wealth than the wounds he received in the defense of his country…and it is a matter of surprise that it has never before been thought of by Congress.”81 In support of the proposed exemption, Washington’s Daily National Journal argued that if anyone deserved the freedoms this country has to offer, it was the men who fought for it:

Those surely should enjoy the privilege of being free from imprisonment for debt, who fought for the freedom we possess: especially [since it] can be beneficial to neither the creditor nor the nation. It must be a disgrace to the country, and but poor consolation to the creditor, to see an infirm and aged debtor wearing out the remnant of a life which had perhaps been frequently periled for his country, within the walls of a prison, or expiring on his pallet, the victim of unnecessary and profitless cruelty.82

This reprieve for war veterans did not satisfy those who sought a system solution. The New-York Morning Herald opposed the exemption for Revolutionary soldiers and officers, stating that “this appears to us to be a half way measure only and totally inadmissible.” Displeased with the piecemeal process, the Herald asserted that, “We do not believe there is a revolutionary soldier in the country that would wish to have the exemption of imprisonment for debt apply only to him if he believed his application for that purpose would retard for a single session the passage of a general law.”83 Nonetheless, there was strong resistance to abolishing debtors’ prisons. Many argued that doing so would “destroy all obligations resting upon debtors to cancel the demands of creditors,” as the Boston Investigator noted.84 Further, abolition was said to be “destructive to public morals,”

81 “We are happy to find,” Daily National Journal [Washington, DC], Feb 4, 1830, 1.
82 Ibid.
84 Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt,” Boston Investigator, June 2, 1847, 1.
and imprisonment for debt was touted as “a healthy condition of society…. Thousands were weak enough to imagine that it would destroy all wholesome credit, or if credit was given, all moral obligation to cancel debts. They saw in the movement nothing but anarchy, destruction and injustice.”

By 1830, the abolition movement was overcoming resistance step by step. That year, the *New York Morning Herald* noted that legislation to exempt females from debtors’ prison had already been put into place. Then 1831, after “violent opposition,” New York’s legislature passed abolition and “allowed the unfortunate debtor his personal liberty”:

It was in the year 1831, in this so-called Christian, civilized, and intelligent community, after long and violent discussion of the subject, that the legislature of the great State of New York was able to record on the statute book the reform that allowed the unfortunate debtor his personal liberty. We remember well the violent opposition to this liberty, both before and after the law affecting it was passed.

At the national level, imprisonment for debt had been vigorously defended by people whom the *Maryland Gazette* said were “tenacious” in defense “of the old modes of proceeding” in reacting to a bill that proposed in Congress in 1822.

Col. Johnson has introduced into Congress his bill for the abolition of imprisonment for debt, [but] so tenacious however, are many people of the old modes of proceeding, however founded in error they may be, that it is impossible to decide at this juncture, as to its ultimate fate. We would hope however, for the honor of our country, that it may pass both branches of the legislature by an overwhelming majority.

Johnson understood what abolition of imprisonment for debt

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 “Col. Johnson has introduced into Congress his bill for the abolishment of imprisonment for debt,” *Maryland Gazette* [Annapolis, MD], Dec 19, 1822, 1.
would mean to America. A man should be afforded every opportunity to pick himself up, make right his failures and take as many attempts at success as he is willing. The *Gazette* quoted Johnson: “Indeed, we begin to look back with surprise and astonishment that such a barbarity should ever have existed, or that a republican community should ever have supposed that such a gross violation of personal liberty should ever have been necessary.”

89 Ibid.
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‘An Italy of Asiatic Dimensions, the Ireland of the East’:
Karl Marx’s Newspaper Commentaries
on British Rule of India, 1853-1859

Devna Thapliyal

Much has been written about Karl Marx’s work as a philosopher, sociologist and political theorist, but much less is known about his career as a journalist. From 1852 to 1862 Marx wrote as a foreign correspondent for Horace Greeley’s New York Daily Tribune, an immensely popular American newspaper with a wide range of domestic and international coverage. Between 1853 and 1859, he wrote hundreds of commentaries, many of them concerning British colonization of India. Marx used this opportunity to criticize capitalism and test his theories about society. Until he stopped covering Indian issues for the paper in 1859, Marx unabashedly criticized British rule in India and in the process demonstrated to American readers his style of argument.

In 1852 Karl Marx was living in London when he began writing for an American newspaper, the New York Daily Tribune.\(^1\) Charles Dana, the Tribune’s managing editor, had visited Cologne four years earlier and met Marx, who then had recently published his Manifesto of the Communist Party. Marx profoundly impressed Dana, such that when the Tribune decided to expand its overseas reporting, Dana hired Marx.\(^2\)

Karl Marx’s politics seemed to be a natural fit with the open-minded Tribune. Founded by Horace Greeley in 1841, the newspaper was devoted to progressive causes. It was sympathetic to the working class and the new socialist thinking. Greeley’s newspaper provided a forum where writers could debate the many issues that America faced in mid-19\(^{th}\) century. Greeley himself identified with socialism and the paper became a platform for early socialists to question the justness and efficiency of the market.\(^3\) Under Greeley, the Tribune had built a readerships by publishing the work of liberal and utopian thinkers--

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1 In 1848-49, Prussian authorities arrested the staff of the New Rhenish Newspaper and recommended that Marx be deported. In 1850, he moved to London with his family, where he remained for the rest of his life.
among them the Hungarian revolutionary Lajos (Louis) Kossuth, the Englishman Charles Lane, the early labor unionist Jules Lechevalier St. André, and Margaret Fuller, the first American woman to become a foreign correspondent. For such a forward-thinking newspaper Marx would be contributing his European sociopolitical commentary.\(^4\)

Marx’s reputation made him an illustrious choice for the job of London correspondent. Having a German national there seemed to guarantee the paper a unique outlook on British news.\(^5\) Furthermore, in London, Marx had access to foreign newspapers as well as historic records in the reading room of the British Museum. As Marx was accustomed to spending hours poring over reading material, the British Museum proved to be integral in providing him with sources for his articles.\(^6\)

Marx’s correspondence with his friend Friedrich Engels indicated that he was quite critical of the *Tribune’s* brand of “socialism.” Having published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, he now saw his work as complicit in the very capital exploitation he loathed. In 1857, he wrote to Engels:

> It’s truly nauseating that one should be condemned to count a blessing when taken aboard by a blotting-paper vendor such as this. To crush up bones, grind them and make them into soup like paupers in the workhouse—that is the political work to which one is condemned in such large measure in a concern like this.\(^7\)

Marx, however, overlooked his qualms of working with the *Tribune* for a number of reasons. The position brought him a steady, much-needed income. The year before he took the job was the worst of his poverty-plagued career and his financial situation was only slightly alleviated with the Tribune’s paychecks of £2 per article. While his time was heavily invested in writing *Das Kapital*, creditors frequented his home demanding the capital he owed them. Frequently Marx depended on financial support from Engels and others.\(^8\)

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4 Ibid., 106.
6 Ledbetter, XIX.
7 Karl Marx, quoted in Ledbetter, XX.
8 Ibid., 180.
Marx also saw in the Tribune an opportunity to express his views freely without censorship. In Europe, the freedom of journalists was threatened by state and governmental censorship, all the more since the uprisings in 1848. By contrast, the rapid expansion of commercially successful journalism in America since the 1830s guaranteed freedom of speech and independence from political control. European authorities would have no control over Marx’s writing and he could publish his articles without the fear of the newspaper being banned or his articles being heavily censored.9

The possibility of reaching the Tribune’s thousands of Americans also appealed to Marx. Founded in 1841, the daily Tribune then enjoyed the title of the “world’s best-selling newspaper” and its weekly edition sold more than 200,000 copies. Marx, more accustomed to addressing a far more modest audience of a few dozen, could now spread his ideas to a multitude. The fact that the Tribune paid so well and the chance to reach a far greater number of people than Marx ever had with his writing, made Marx overlook his qualms with a corporation like the Tribune and led him to take the job.10

Engels himself was involved in this process as Marx often subcontracted his writing work for the Tribune to Engels. In fact, the first series of articles that appeared under Marx’s name were written by Engels, who was otherwise much occupied with his cotton factory. In a letter to Adolf Kluss, Marx admitted he was assigning too much of his work to Engels. “Engels really has too much work, but being a veritable walking encyclopedia, he’s capable, drunk or sober, working at any hour of the day or night, is a fast writer and devilish quick on the uptake.”11 Marx often sent outlines of articles and asked Engels to finish them. On matters relating to the military, Engels, who was well versed in the subject, proved immensely helpful. While a considerable amount of work was outsourced to Engels, especially in the first year, Marx wrote most of the articles that he submitted to the Tribune.12

Marx was often caught between thinking about the “talk of the hour and the riddle of the ages.” He found an opportunity to delve into both by covering issues of colonialism in Asia.13 Over the course of ten

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9 Haase, 202.
11 Ibid., 189.
12 Ibid.
13 Victor Kiernan, Marxism and Imperialism (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), 223.
years, he wrote almost 500 articles for the *Tribune*, many of which dealt with the issue of colonialism and, in particular, the British colonization of India. The subject gave Marx the opportunity to simultaneously criticize capitalism and test his societal theories. His philosophical application of reason and rationality regarding the events unfolding in the East became a common thread that ran through all of his work, whether journalistic or scholarly.\(^{14}\)

In 1853, when Marx published his first article on colonial India, the British East India Company was already incurring heavy losses.\(^{15}\) As more troops moved from England to India at the end of the 18th century, commercial profits plummeted. Instead of trade, it was the tax on the Indian states that provided some form of income to the Company. The Company was in the constant process of expanding by conquering more states in order gain additional revenue.\(^{16}\)

When writing about British colonialism in India, Marx characteristically ventured beyond the role of a journalist and adopted the tone of a sociopolitical commentator. This is visible from the very first of his dispatches about colonial India. In the article “Sir Charles Wood’s East Indian Reforms,” Marx presented readers with the facts relating Britain’s India Bill of 1853 followed by his observations, inferences and opinions about the process that he witnessed unfolding. Facetiously, Marx interjected Sir Charles’ speech with his own humorous observations.

Sir Charles delivered himself of an apology for the administration of India for the last twenty years. “We must look at India with somewhat of an Indian eye” – which Indian eye seems to have the particular gift of seeing everything bright on the part of England and everything black on the side of India. “In India you have a race of people slow of change, bound up by religious prejudices, and antiquated customs.” (Perhaps there is a Whig

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15 The East India Company, a joint stock company, was created in 1600 and soon after its founders established a number of factories in India. By the end of the 17th century the Company had started to seize territories in India. In the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century the Company fought in wars in various Indian territories and by the mid-19th century almost all of the country was under the Company.
Coalition party in India.\textsuperscript{17}

Marx underscored the hypocrisy of British officials and did not refrain from making personal attacks, as when he introduced Sir Charles Wood to the readers\textsuperscript{18}:

The “Sir Charles Wood,” who, as President of the Board of Control, will bring forward this sensible piece of reform, is the same member, who, under the late Whig administration displayed such eminent capacities of mind that the coalition were at a dreadful loss what to do with him, till they hit upon the idea of making him over to India. Richard the Third offered a kingdom for a horse – the Coalition offers an ass for a kingdom.” \textsuperscript{19}

In his continued coverage of the Parliamentary debates on India, Marx unequivocally expressed his dislike for British officials and aristocracy. In an 1853 article, he quoted Napoleon saying, “War is the science of barbarians,” and then went on to refer to the majority of representatives of the Parliament and members of the noble family as scientific barbarians. According to Marx, “the sons of the English aristocracy were too proud to become carpenters, carriers, shoemakers, bricklayers, and, farmers, earning their living at home in an honorable way, but must extend scientific barbarianism to the verge of hell itself.” \textsuperscript{20}

To Marx, the English colonization of India represented a manifestation of both capitalist economic progress and human degradation. In “The British Rule in India,” he made a case related to his own theory of capital. For his American audience, he tried to make India understandable by relating it to nations more geographically familiar. So he described India as an “Italy of Asiatic dimensions,” comparing the Himalayan Mountains to the Italian Alps, the Plains of Bengal to the Plains of Lombardy, the Deccan plateau to the Apennines, and the Isle of Ceylon to the Isle of Sicily. And he extended this comparison, noting “the same rich variety in the products of the soil, and the same

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Sir Charles Wood was the Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1846-1852 and later served as the Secretary of State of India from 1859-1866.
dismemberment in the political configuration. Just as Italy has, from
time to time, been compressed by the conqueror’s sword into different
national masses, so do we find Hindustan.” To explain India’s society,
he referred to it as “the Ireland of the East.” Yet India was even more
mysterious. “And this strange combination of Italy and Ireland, of a
world of voluptuousness and a world of woes, is anticipated in the ancient
traditions of the religion in Hindustan,” Marx wrote. “That religion is at
once the religion of sensualist exuberance, and a religion of self-torturing
asceticism.”

Although Marx had never visited India, his articles projected
a thorough knowledge of a land he knew from books and articles. His
commentaries indicated that he was well-versed in the history of India,
and he frequently provided background and context. When making a
point about the absence of a golden age in Indian history, he provided a
quick survey of Indian history before its colonization by Europeans.

But take, for example, the times of Aurangzeb; or the
epoch, when the Mogul appeared in the North, and the
Portuguese in the South; or the age of Mohammedan
invasion, and of the Heptarchy in Southern India; or, if
you will, go still back into antiquity, take the mythological,
take the mythological chronology of the Brahmin himself,
who places commencement of Indian misery in an epoch
even more remote than the Christian creation of the
world.

Marx obviously did not subscribe to the assertion that India
before colonization was a land of equality and prosperity. In his historical
view, India had simply gone from a period of “Asiatic despotism” to a
period of “European Despotism.” While creating a picture of village life
in India, Marx cautioned his reader that:

We must not forget that these little communities were
contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that
they subjugated man to external circumstances, instead
of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances,
that they transformed a self-developing social state into

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22 Ibid. Brahmin, one of the four ancient Indian castes, is comprised of privileged priests
and scholars.
never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey and Sabbala, the cow.  

Marx contended that British rule of India, for better or for worse, introduced the only revolution that had occurred in its otherwise stagnant history. Marx’s analysis of colonial rule in India was colored by the lenses with which he saw history functioning as a whole. He conceded that the British rule in India was actuated by the “vilest interests,” but it had also brought a revolution to a country whose history had been stagnant for years. With British rule, he saw the opportunity for change in the nation and believed that it was an unconscious tool of history which would bring about revolution. He then posed a question to readers by quoting Goethe:

Should this torture than torment us,
Since it brings us great pleasure?
Were not through the rule of Timur,
Souls Devoured without measure?

Nonetheless, Marx sympathized with the population under British rule. In his harsh polemic, he wrote that the misery inflicted on Indians by the British was different and far more intense than experienced by past populations. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid. Marx’s view on Asian history and society has always been a contentious topic among scholars. Until today, scholars remain divided on the interpretation of Marx’s words with some taking an apologetic position and disregarding his Eurocentrism altogether and others discrediting his theory as a whole because of his views on Asia. Other scholars, however, see the need to read Marx’s words in the context of his other works that reveal his sympathy toward the people of Asia and his definite stance against colonialism.
25 It was Marx’s belief that a capitalist society needs to be created before a revolution to establish communism can take place. Since India’s industry was engaged in a primitive or “Asiatic” mode of production prior to British rule, any changes in its society would not have been possible, according to Marx.
26 From Goethe’s West-östlicher Diwan. An Suleika.
27 Marx, “British Rule in India.”
28 Ibid.
society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of the old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu, and separates Hindustan, rule by Britain, from all its ancient traditions.  

Marx acquainted readers with systemic changes in Indian lives since the East India Company colonized the country. The British, Marx stated, uprooted traditional manufacturing industries in India and changed the material foundations of Indian society. Until the British arrived, the handloom and cotton-weaving industry dominated the country. Then British mercantilism—sending cotton to England and marketing British textiles to India—destroyed these native industries by inundating India, “the mother country of cottons with cottons.” In Marx’s frame of mind, the fundamental changes in India resulted from the economic domination by the British. “British steam and science uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindustan, the union between agricultural and manufacturing industry.” Marx saw British rule as an exploitation of Indian workers and resources and held it responsible for the decline of the nation and the misery of its people.

Two weeks later, in a related essay, Marx revisited the question of whether the evil of British rule would result in a greater good. This essay reflected shades of his Communist Manifesto and his work on Das Kapital. In “The Future Results of British Rule in India” Marx declare that “England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundation of Western society in Asia.” In his political vision, India might ultimately benefit from the “fruits of the new elements scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie”—but only after an industrial proletariat supplanted British rule in India, and only after the Indians overthrew their colonizers.

29 Ibid.
30 Marx, “British Rule in India.”
31 Ibid.
32 Haase, 209.
33 Marx, “The British Rule in India.”
34 Karl Marx, “The Future Results of British Rule in India,” New York Daily Tribune, August 8, 1853. India was ultimately decolonized in 1947 as the result of a non-violent movement against colonial rule, among other factors. It soon adopted a mixed-economy model, closely resembling a Socialist state model for the next 43 years. In 1991, facing bankruptcy, the nation switched to a market-driven economy.
An Italy of Asiatic Dimensions, the Ireland of the East

Marx emphasized that while he saw British rule as a separation of the Hindu people from their culture, the Indian people never had a comprehensive history. “Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive invaders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.” The paramount power of the Great Mogul was broken by Mogul Viceroy. The power of the Mahrattas was broken by the Afghans, and while all were struggling against all, the Briton rushed in and was able to subdue them all.” As such, disharmony had predestined India for conquest and “the question, therefore is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton.”

Thus a civilization Marx respected for its numerous achievements was declining, its growth hindered by numerous caste divisions and the existence of tiny self-sufficient villages that were oblivious to their limitations. He admitted that the “hypocrisy and inherent barbarianism of bourgeois civilization” was evident in British people’s subjugation of the Indian people, but, at the same time, a revolution was not possible in the conditions of Indian society prior to British rule. “The bourgeois period of history,” Marx wrote, “had to create the material basis of the new world.”

Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions of a new world the same way as geological revolutions have created the surface of the earth. When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the

35 Ibid.
36 The Moguls were conquerors of Turkish descent that invaded India in the early 16th century and established in Northern India the empire of Great Moguls in 1526. The empire reached its zenith in the mid-17th century, after which it started to crumble because of resistance from the Indian people and internal strife among the moguls. By the early half of the 18th century, the empire almost ceased to exist.
37 The Mahratta or Maratha was an Indian empire that existed from 1674-1818, and during its peak in the mid-18th century covered most of South Asia. During the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-1818) the Marathas lost all sovereign control and most of India fell under the control of the British.
38 Ibid.
common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble that hideous pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain.

Four years later, after Indian troops mutinied, triggering the Sepoy Rebellion, Marx’s dispatches confirmed his sympathies with the Indian people and against British colonization. The rebellion, as interpreted by Marx, was a predictable response to imperialism, evidence of a “rule of retribution” traceable to British rule.

However infamous the conduct of the sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England’s own conduct in India, not only during the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule...There is something in human history like retribution; and it is a rule of retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself.40

Marx noted the ultimate irony: the very Indian Army that the British created to conquer the inhabitants had now started a revolt against the British owners of most of the country.

As it happened, the sepoys, soldiers of the East India Company, found out about a development that would compromise both Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs. They would be required to use a new cartridge that had to be bitten to release the gunpowder before being rammed down the barrel their rifles. The cartridges were greased with the fat of cattle or pigs. The compulsory biting of the cartridges was decried as an affront to Hindus who considered cows sacred and to Muslims who considered pigs unclean. Their protest ignited the wider revolt.41

Marx faulted the British for subjecting Indians for 150 years to the Roman rule of “divide and conquer.” Rivalries among various races, tribes, castes, and creeds provided the British East India Company with opportunities to pit groups against each other, with the British providing military assistance. Eventually, the British rid themselves of warlike

40 Karl Marx, “The Indian Revolt,” New York Daily Tribune, September 16, 1857, 4. Sepoy, derived from the Persian word “sipah” for army, was the name given to Indian soldiers who were in the service of a European army.

41 Key, India, 438.
native tribes and then hired Indian troops to police their own people.\textsuperscript{42} This Company strategy, Marx explained, had situated the Company at the head of an imperial regime enforcing its will through sepoy army of Indian natives:

The Roman \textit{divide et impera} was the great rule by which Great Britain, for about one hundred fifty years, contrived to retain the tenure of her Indian Empire. The antagonism of various races, tribes, castes, creeds and sovereignties the aggregate of which is called India, continued to be the vital principle of British supremacy. In later times, however, the conditions of that supremacy have undergone a change. With the conquest of Scinde and the Punjab, the Anglo-Indian Empire had not only reached its natural limits, but it had also trampled out the last vestiges of independent Indian states...Hence a great change in the position of the East India Company. It no longer attacked one part of India by the help of another part, but found itself placed at the head, and the whole of India at its feet. No longer conquering, it had become the conqueror. The armies at its disposition no longer had to extend its dominion, but only to maintain it. From soldiers they were converted to policemen; 200,000,000 natives being curbed by a native army of 200,000 men.\textsuperscript{43}

Marx wrote the uprising in 1857 differed greatly from the others because of its “characteristic and fatal features.” This was the first revolt in which members of the sepoy regiments murdered their European officers, and Muslims and Hindus put aside their mutual antipathies to unite against a common enemy. Marx also noted that the revolt extended beyond a few localities. He contended, too, that the revolt reflected general feelings of disaffection that numerous Asiatic nations harbored against British supremacy.\textsuperscript{44}

Marx focused on the sepoy uprising of 1857 in twelve commentaries between July and December of 1857. Beyond his factual

\begin{footnotes}
\item[43] Ibid.
\item[44] Ibid. Marx and Engels were one of the first few writers that credited the Revolt of 1857 to be India’s first act of resistance against the British colonial rule. Today, the event is considered to be India’s First War of Independence.
\end{footnotes}
accounts, he continually provided background and social commentary—a truly compelling coverage of events as they were unfolding. Yet as the British began to quash the rebellion, Marx handed coverage of the fighting to Engels. Instead, Marx focused on analysis and commentary. When the British government claimed that it could capture Delhi and “reconquer” India, Marx challenged the claim, estimating that the British would need far more soldiers to succeed in their ambitious plan.

The fall of Delhi is thus again postponed, the alleged cause being now no longer the sole want of siege-artillery, but General Bernard’s resolution to wait upon reinforcements, as his forces—about 3,000 men—were totally inadequate to the capture of the ancient capital defended by 30,000 sepoys, and possessed of all the military stores....Until now all military writers were unanimous in considering an English force of 3,000 men quite sufficient for crushing a sepoy army of 30,000 or 40,000 men; if such was not the case, how could England—to use an expression of the London Times—ever be able to “reconquer” India?

Marx also brought to light brutalities British officers inflicted on the natives. His article investigated tortures in India and highlighted shortcomings in punishing those guilty of inflicting torture. Marx sympathized with the plight of the Indians and ended the article with yet another question addressed to the readers: “And if the English could do these things in cold blood, is it surprising that the insurgent Hindus should be guilty, in the fury of revolt and conflict, of the crimes and cruelties alleged against them?”

Marx’s investigation indicated that the torture of Indians at the hands of their British rulers was condoned by the East India Company. Though this exposé, Marx wanted to show that “the British rulers of India are by no means such mild and spotless benefactors of the Indian people as they would have the world believe.” His investigation revealed that officers accused or convicted of these practices had to pay a fine of

50 rupees, which went back to the Company.\textsuperscript{48}

As he continued to write about atrocities for the \textit{Tribune}, Marx found the English public unsympathetic to alleged wrongs against the Indians. Instead, by March 1858, the “tone of English press” reflected public sentiment for extreme measures:

To judge from the tone of the English press for the last few months, and the declamations of public speakers, even those of the clerical order, the English nation, from having been the patron and advocate of humanity and clemency, where the passions, the interests and the alleged wrongs of others were concerned, has all at once, in its own case, been seized with a tiger-like appetite for blood. \textsuperscript{49}

Marx related how British acts of violence would be retold as acts of martial vigor by English newspapers, whereas violence committed by the natives would be wildly exaggerated. He questioned the sources \textit{The Times} used for a story on violence that natives had inflicted on some British women. Marx found that the newspaper’s source was a parson living in Bangalore, thousands of miles south of Delhi, where the action took place. He stated that the “actual accounts of Delhi evince the imagination of an English parson to be capable of breeding greater horrors than even the wild fancy of a Hindu mutineer.”\textsuperscript{50}

Marx used the same article to point out the hypocrisy of British residents when it came to being horrified by an act of violence. He observed that, “cruelty, like every other thing, has its fashion, changing according to time and place,” and that the mutilations committed by the sepoys were reminiscent of the practices of the Christian Byzantine Empire and the prescriptions of Emperor Charles V’s criminal law or the “English punishments for high treason as still recorded by Judge Blackstone.”\textsuperscript{51}

The rebellion had exposed other weaknesses in the British administration in India, notably in the government-sheltered East India Company. In “British Incomes in India,” he provided a thorough breakdown of the incomes of the employees of the Company but questioned any benefit to the British economy as a whole. He contended

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item Karl Marx, “British Atrocities in India,” \textit{New York Daily Tribune}, April 5, 1858, 4.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that since its inception the Company had contracted a debt of over £50,000,000, while the British Government paid for the expenses of transporting and maintaining an army of 30,000.52

Further targeting East India transactions, Marx asserted that benefits were channeled to a tight cluster of English capitalists but English taxpayers bore the brunt of the Company’s losses. His investigation into the Company’s finances revealed that its 3,000 stockholders earned an annual dividend of £630,000, an exorbitant sum considering the Company did not show any profits. And in time, expenses had risen, Marx explained:

It is evident that individuals gain largely by the British connection with India, and of course their gain goes to increase the sum of the national wealth. But against all this a very large offset is to be made. The military and naval expenses paid out of the account of the people of England on the Indian account have been constantly increasing with the extent of the Indian dominion…the career of endless conquest and perpetual aggression in which the English are involved by the possession of India, and it may very well be doubted whether, on the whole, this dominion does not threaten to cost quite as much as it can ever be expected to come to.53

Marx’s analysis seemed to presage the economic decline of the East India Company. In the aftermath of the uprising, the Company’s financial crisis became a major issue in Parliament. One bill in Parliament had proposed a loan of £7,000,000 to cover the extra administrative costs of the year. Another request was for a further loan of £5,000,000 pounds.54 Parliament settled the matter not by lending the Company money but passing the Government of India Act of 1858, taking over direct rule of India.

Marx concluded no matter which British ruled India, imperialism was a costly venture. The costs of sustaining the administration in India had become so overwhelming that maintaining India as a colony was

53 Ibid.
not beneficial to the British.\textsuperscript{55} “The Indian financial crisis,” he declared, “shares with the war rumors and the electioneering agitation in the privilege of absorbing public interest in England….It involves both a temporary necessity and a permanent difficulty.” According to Marx, the temporary difficulty had been whether to maintain the East India Company. The permanent difficulty, however, referred to the question of the existence of India itself as a liability to English citizens.\textsuperscript{56}

After the India crisis subsided, there was a steady decline in the number of Marx’s articles published in the Tribune.\textsuperscript{57} In 1861, the American Civil War so preoccupied the Tribune that they reduced coverage of international affairs. In 1862 Charles Dana asked Marx to stop sending articles.\textsuperscript{58}

During his decade writing for the Tribune, Marx had given readers a distinctly different view of world affairs. His writing style was usually newsworthy, always opinionated, often fact-based, but seldom attributed to sources.\textsuperscript{59} Many of his commentaries and critical essays he constructed from reading materials at the British library.\textsuperscript{60}

The Tribune’s editorial staff had remained ambivalent about Marx’s contributions. While the paper was committed to Greeley’s ideas favoring socialism, a heavy Germanic tone in Marx’s prose displeased some of his American editors. The Tribune sometimes published a disclaimer distancing his more radical political essays from the view of the newspaper. Early on, in 1853, one editorial board message equivocated on Marx’s value: One the one hand, the editorial stated that, “Mr. Marx has very decided opinions of his own, some of which we are far from agreeing.” And on the other hand, the editors conceded: “those who not read his letters neglect one of the most instructive sources of information on the greatest questions of current European politics.”\textsuperscript{61}

Marx himself continued to harbor mixed feelings about the Tribune. He saw the journalism as interfering with his work on Das Kapital. In his treatise, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, the book preceding Das Kapital, Marx referred defensively to his journalistic career as “the imperative necessity of earning my living, which reduced

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Wheen, 245.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ledbetter, XXI.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Haase, 202.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ledbetter, XIX.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Editorial, New York Daily Tribune. April 7, 1853, quoted in Ledbetter, XXI.
\end{itemize}
time at my disposal.” Nonetheless, Marx acknowledged that he did find something of value in writing for the *Tribune*:

My collaboration, continued now for eight years, with the *New York Tribune*, the leading Anglo-American newspaper, necessitated an excessive fragmentation of my studies… Since a considerable part of my contributions consisted of articles dealing with the important economic events in Britain and on the Continent, I was compelled to become conversant with practical detail which, strictly speaking, lie outside the sphere of the political economy.

In his Marx’s extended relationship with the *Tribune*, the newspaper became the largest publisher of his work. In all, the *Tribune* published 487 of Marx’s submitted articles, of which Marx wrote 350 and Engels wrote 125 and they together wrote 12. The volume of these articles put together surpasses the volume of any other of Marx’s work, even his magnum opus *Das Kapital*. “While Marx has been remembered as a philosopher, economist and political theorist,” stated author and journalist James Ledbetter, “the historical record suggests that we should at least attempt to understand him as a journalist”.

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62 Marx, quoted in Ledbetter, XXI.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., XVIII.
65 Ibid.
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Rumors, Lies and Alibis:  
How Newspapers Sensationalized the  
Lizzie Borden Murder Case, August 1892-June 1893

Caitlyn Walters

The Lizzie Borden murder trial, one of the most infamous cases in the 1800s, intrigued the public across the nation because the daughter was accused of axing her parents, and because of the trial and its outcome—nobody was ever convicted of what some called the crime of the century. This paper adds to the discourse of analytical discussion of the case: how the sensational press coverage exposed social and gender issues.

She screamed, or so she said. After Lizzie Andrew Borden ambled into her home at 92 Second Street, she discovered the remains of her father’s body bludgeoned almost unidentifiably when just moments before he lay asleep on his sofa for his routine nap. Andrew J. Borden’s head was “literally hacked into fragments and the fresh blood trickling from every wound.” Miss Borden yelled for Bridget Sullivan, the servant, who was cleaning in the attic. Sullivan dashed down the stairs of the two-story home and stared, nonplussed, with shock at the body of her employer, unaware of how this could have happened and by whom. The body of Andrew’s wife and Lizzie’s stepmother, Abbie D. Borden, was found shortly after, face down in the guest bedroom in a pool of her own blood that Thursday morning.

Neighbors, friends, doctors and newspaper reporters swarmed the streets as the news of the atrocious murders quickly traveled by word of mouth. The Boston Daily Advertiser, the local daily newspaper in the Fall River area, printed this story as the headliner on August 5th which read, “MURDER MOST FOUL: Fall River excited by a Crime Which Has No Equal in its History – Police Baffled by the Lack of a Definite Clew, Though Members of the Family Are Suspected – The House Now

Guarded by Officers.” The story of the murders intrigued readers across the nation as hundreds of newspapers recounted the details. The press succeeded in covering the police investigation, preliminary hearing and the Superior Court trial, all of which interlaced with sensationalistic rhetoric. Moreover, as the case unfolded, the most frequently addressed and, ultimately, the most sensational aspects derived from onerous societal norms of the time. By examining the facts of the case through the lens of the press, it may be inferred that these societal norms influenced the press coverage, public opinion and potentially the verdict.

The murders were sensational in themselves and newspapers commenced the polemical Lizzie Borden story by exposing the gory details. The Boston Daily Advertiser said, “Their heads were chopped to pieces by repeated and fiendish blows with an axe.” The New York World said, “Seven sharp cuts were inflicted on the left side of Andrew Borden’s face and skull. The nose was almost cut off and the face and skull about the temple completely crushed.” Abbie Borden was described as having “the right side of her skull crushed in by so many blows that the examining physicians became tired of tracing them.” The North American reported that “Andrew Borden sustained twelve cuts in the face and skull, varying in length from four to eight inches, also suffered a fracture of the skull two by four inches and three inches deep. His wife’s head and face were battered all out of shape.” Other newspapers repeated the details which kept the Borden murders in the forefront of public attention.

Newspapers soon disclosed the more enigmatic aspects of the murders, like the suspects and clues, or the lack thereof. “After a thorough and persistent search no trace has been found of the murderer,” reported the Bangor Daily Whig & Courier. The police incessantly searched the house and property for a clue, but “inside the house where the bodies lay, the rooms were in perfect order. Every piece of furniture stood in its accustomed place, and every book and paper was laid away

3 “Murder Most Foul: Andrew Borden and His Wife Killed,” Boston Daily Advertiser, 5 August 1892, 1.
4 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 21.
The doors had been locked and doubled locked more so than any other house on Second Street, according to the police. The Boston Daily Advertiser added that the “murderer had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up and taken the weapon along.” Yet, the search only baffled the police, press and public when no clue surfaced after the first 24 hours following the murders.

After the shock and awe of the murders began to subside, the police buckled under the mounting pressure to find the culprit. Overall, the police investigated more than a dozen suspects, but the first and most sensational suspect was Lizzie Borden. The idea that Miss Borden killed her father and stepmother alarmed some. Where was the motive? The only motive the police provided for the public to understand was greed. Those who believed Miss Borden to be guilty have theorized that the father, Andrew Borden, sexually abused the Borden girls; first Emma then Lizzie.

Their mother had died from an illness only two years after Lizzie Borden’s birth. Emma, the eldest daughter, cared for Lizzie until Mr. Borden remarried to Abbie two years later. The girls apparently did not take to her well. Mr. Borden and the new Mrs. Borden never had children of their own leaving a lingering suspicion to the sexual relationship they did or did not share. Miss Borden and her father were reportedly close for a time, which is supposedly common in incest situations. When Mr. Borden purchased the house on Second Street, the Bordens never changed its original duplex style with separate upstairs and downstairs sections furthering the family’s isolation. “The second floor had no hallways and the doors were locked in such a way that the daughters’ bedrooms and the guestroom could only be reached by the front stairs.” The house thus reflected the family’s disharmony:

The longtime absence of a wife-mother, the ages of the girls at the time of their mother’s illness, the autocratic father, the isolation of the family, the failure of the family to bond as a unit when the new Mrs. Borden moved in, the timing of the move to the new house, the structure of the house,

9 Porter, 4.
10 “Murder Most Foul,” 1.
12 Ibid.
the special relationship between Lizzie and her father, the tensions between both daughters and the stepmother – all these together suggest long-standing structural flaws that could have led to family violence and to the murders.\(^\text{14}\)

Aside from the motive, officials deduced that Lizzie Borden had the most evidence against her among all the other suspects. One of the most persuasive pieces of evidence against Borden related to the physical state of those at the Borden home prior to the murders.

Newspapers commented for several days that the Bordens felt sick the night before the murders. The Daily Picayune published an article on August 7\(^\text{th}\) which alluded to the possibility that Miss Borden poisoned her parents. “The family, except perhaps the youngest daughter, were all taken sick, and it was thought that they were poisoned.”\(^\text{15}\) The Daily Picayune suggested since the youngest daughter, Lizzie Borden, did not feel ill herself, then perhaps she slipped her family the poison.

The theory solidified after officials learned that Miss Borden went to a local drug store within 36 hours before the murders and attempted to purchase hydrocyanic acid, also known as the very deadly prussic acid. The Bangor Daily Whig & Courier followed the story to hear that Miss Borden allegedly “acquired the hydrocyanic acid in a diluted form, saying she wished to use it on furs. Examiner Dolan stated that the acid would be of little use for such a purpose as it had no antiseptic qualities.”\(^\text{16}\) The Rocky Mountain News said, “The story of the attempt to purchase poison has been verified by the highest authorities.”\(^\text{17}\) This confirmed with the police that Miss Borden attempted to buy the acid for no other purpose than to kill. The police tracked down the clerk who worked at the drug store to ask if anyone tried to buy prussic acid, and, if so, was it in fact Miss Borden. Officers Harrington and Doherty found Dr. Smith’s pharmacy where the clerk, Eli Bence, described an incident with a woman who tried to buy lethal poison the day before. Bence identified the woman as Miss Borden and “this then was a possible clue and the first and only one which the police had secured” regarding the poison.

\(^{14}\) Carlisle, 45.

\(^{15}\) “The Borden Murder Later Developments in the Case,” *Daily Picayune*, 7 August, 1892, 2.

\(^{16}\) “Fall River Tragedy Murder Probably Committed by a Member of the Household.” *Daily Bangor Whig & Courier*, 6 August 1892, 1.

\(^{17}\) “Puzzling the Detectives: The Borden Double Murder Mystery at Fall River,” *Rocky Mountain News*, 7 August 1892, 1
This poison story seemed to condemn Lizzie Borden, but it vanished from newspaper headlines as rapidly as it appeared, though, unfortunately, for reasons unknown. However, the police continued to pursue a plethora of tips, some more believable than others. Citizens began to tell stories of peculiar looking strangers who could have committed such crimes. The press published every story they gathered regarding these suspicious strangers from the instant the murders occurred throughout the entire investigation. Two witnesses, Dr. Handy and Officer Hyde, reported seeing a man slowly walking toward the Borden residence just moments before the murders. “I saw a medium sized young man, very pale, with eyes fixed on the sidewalk, passing toward the south,” said Dr. Handy in the Galveston Daily News. “He was acting strangely.” The strange man became known as “Dr. Handy’s Wild Eyed Man,” but the investigation ended suddenly after no other evidence materialized. “So faithfully in fact did the officers search for the stranger, all the while neglecting, if it may be called by that name, to follow more plausible clues.”

The Boston Daily Advertiser reported that an African-American man had told the police of two men he saw running to meet a woman at the Bordens’ house while he was loading ashes onto in his cart across the street. “They handed her an axe which she put under her cloak and carried to an outhouse.” The informant said it might have been covered in blood or else painted red, but neither these strangers nor the axe ever surfaced. Officers heard of a Portuguese man who worked on the Bordens’ farm carrying an axe the day of the murders. His alibi backed by his employer convinced the police of his innocence. Thomas Walker lived in tenements Mr. Borden owned and the two apparently had a quarrel that led to the departure of Walker from his tenement a few weeks prior to the murders. “Unpleasant words passed between them,” but his alibi was secured. The Daily Inter Ocean reported “detectives chasing down” a small clue involving “a camp of gypsy-looking horse

18 Porter, 51.
20 Ibid.
21 Porter, 51.
22 “Rumors and [Clues] Being Run down by Fall River Police,” Boston Daily Advertiser, 6 August 1892, 1.
23 Ibid.
24 Porter, 33.
traders camped on the outskirts, one of whom answers the descriptions
given by three persons of a man seen near the Borden house before the
murders.” Later, the defense tried to enter a letter as evidence signed by
Samuel Robbins “telling in a rambling way of the writer's interview with
a blood-stained stranger the day of the murders.” However, the writer
known as Walton, a peddler, never reappeared in Fall River again.

The police investigated other family members including Emma
Borden as well as John Morse, the brother-in-law of Mr. Borden. Emma
Borden was only suspected for a short time until the police verified
her alibi of visiting friends in Fairhaven. The Bangor Daily Whig &
Courier said, “The police suspicions rest in the family circle, particularly
John W. Morse who became very intimate with Mr. Borden and the
latter’s daughter.” Morse visited the Borden home the night before the
murders. The bedroom he slept in happened to be the bedroom where
Abbie Borden’s body was found. He went to town to his sister’s house
during the time of the murder. His sister and his sister’s daughter, Morse’s
niece, attested to the time he spent at their home also securing his alibi.
The Milwaukee Sentinel reported a nephew of Mr. Borden’s as a suspect
for a short time. “It arose from the fact that some time ago Mr. and Mrs.
Borden were overheard in angry talk with a young man over the division
of some property,” but he had not been to see the Bordens in over 10
months.

Some newspapers preemptively proclaimed Lizzie Borden
innocent after a crazed man unexpectedly confessed to committing the
murders. The Emporia Daily Gazette headlined the August 18th edition
with “Lizzie Borden Innocent: Charles Peckham Says He Killed Mr.
and Mrs. Borden out of Pure Love of Blood.” According to the press,
Charles Peckham staggered into the Fall River police station with his
hands held out to be cuffed and all but begged the officers to arrest him.

25 “Gypsies Suspected Now Detectives Chasing down Clews to the Borden Murders,”
Daily Inter Ocean, 7 August 1892, 3.
26 “General Crime News Lizzie Borden’s Lawyer Produces Evidence,” Morning
Oregonian, 27 August 1892, 9.
27 “The Fall River Murders,” 5.
29 Porter, 33.
30 “Borden Murder Mystery A Clue That Throws Suspicion on One of the Murdered
Couple’s Daughters,” Milwaukee Sentinel, 6 August 1892, 1.
31 “Lizzie Borden Innocent Charles Peckham Says He Killed Mr. And Mrs. Borden out of
32 Ibid.
He even insisted that the officers hang him immediately. “I entered the Borden’s house by climbing over the back fences and through the back door,” said Peckham.\(^{33}\) The police were puzzled by the blunt man, but immediately followed up on the closest possible suspect that could put an end to the curiosity of the murders and set Lizzie Borden free.

Unfortunately for the press and its restless public, police and Miss Borden, the lead turned into a dead end just as the others had. The Boston Daily Advertiser said that the same officers were sent to the farm on Old Sodom where Charles Peckham lived.\(^{34}\) Another six officers were sent to Steep Brook where a French man named Le Mai “complained he saw him carrying an axe and acting very strangely.”\(^{35}\) The police spoke with Peckham’s wife and constable Grinnel of Westport who vouched for Peckham’s sanity, though he seemed insane while at the police station. “He denied all knowledge of the murder and wanted to know why he had been locked up,” said officers.\(^{36}\) The Daily Inter Ocean took a jab at the police saying, “They are searching more to allay the popular clamor than to prove the man’s connection with the Borden murders.”\(^{37}\)

Newspapers began to ask why all eyes had turned to so many suspects, believable or not, without questioning the only other person in the house with Lizzie Borden during the murders, Bridget Sullivan, the servant. The Boston Daily Advertiser asked, “If Lizzie had an opportunity to commit this murder, Bridget Sullivan had an opportunity. She says she was outdoors, but who else saw her?”\(^{38}\) Florence King, a historian, wondered why Miss Borden never pinned the crime on Sullivan herself.\(^{39}\) Sullivan was of Irish descent and “the Irish were disliked in turn-of-the-century Massachusetts; a Yankee jury would have bought the idea of Bridget’s guilt. Yet Lizzie never once tried to shift the blame, and she never named Bridget as a suspect.”\(^{40}\)

The recorded relationship between Sullivan and Miss Borden can explain why she never turned on the servant. Miss Borden called

\(^{33}\) Ibid.  
\(^{34}\) “Lizzie’s Rope A Story That Makes the Case Dark for Miss Borden,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 20 August 1892, 1.  
\(^{35}\) “Self-Accused of Murder: Borden Killings Confessed to at Fall River by a Man Probably Insane,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, 19 August 1892, 1.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid.  
\(^{38}\) “The Tide Turns Lizzie Borden’s Hope Much Brighter,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 31 August 1892, 1.  
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
Sullivan “Maggie” instead of Bridget which some thought she did out of laziness.41 The maid who worked for the Bordens before Bridget was named Maggie. However, some believed Miss Borden purposefully called Bridget Maggie out of respect. During that time Bridget meant “Irish maid,” so by calling her Maggie, Miss Borden overlooked the connotation making Sullivan feel close to her. “Bridget adored Lizzie,” and Sullivan mentioned in writing once that, “Lizzie was always kind.”42

Although the press relayed all the information the police gave in relation to the multiple suspects and evidence found, several newspapers censured with negative comments the efforts of the police investigation. Some newspapers switched their stance on Lizzie Borden’s innocence because of the poor quality of work produced by the police. Consequently, the press’s doubt in the abilities of the police and the press’s fluctuation between her innocence and guilt added another sensationalism element to the case.

The negative criticism of the press toward the police created significant concern. The thought of throwing an innocent woman of higher social status into jail for the murder of her own parents dawned on the public as horribly problematic. The peril the city of Fall River would face for betraying its upper-class citizens frightened the public almost more than letting the killer escape the grasp of justice. A reporter from the North American, one of the newspapers that sided with Miss Borden’s innocence, interviewed City Marshall Hilliard who tried to ease the tension between the believers and nonbelievers. “The district attorney and myself are satisfied that the public authorities have ample cause for holding this girl, and she has not been imprisoned in haste.”43 This seemed only to dramatize the fiasco more after newspapers around the country republished this story and his words. The North American later “assailed the Fall River police for prolonged delay in the case and for directing all their efforts wholly toward proving Miss Borden guilty.”44 But, did the police find it necessary to arrest Lizzie Borden for the murders because they thought she was truly guilty or because she was the closest suspect they had acquired? Did they think it best to pin the murders on Miss Borden in hopes that it would help the citizens more quickly cope with the disaster? Newspapers used these questions to

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
generate doubt among the public, which heightened sensationalism.

In opposition, the St. Paul Daily News leaned toward Borden’s guilt after the words from Marshal Hilliard became public. A reporter supported the integrity of Sheriff Wright who held Miss Borden in his custody. He was a “jolly, fat and smart old gentleman, who while he was a terror to evil-doers, he would never arrest a person merely to satisfy public clamor.”45 This stance suggested that the hands controlling Miss Borden held her for reasons that may not all have been known at the time, but were legitimate in nature.

Regardless of the divided sentiment of press and public, Lizzie Borden was arraigned on August 12th, 1892 at 4:25 p.m. in front of Judge J. C. Blaisdell.46 Residents of Fall River eagerly scrambled to get a glimpse of her descent to jail, and out-of-towners snatched the closest newspaper describing the arraignment. However, the public was not necessarily convinced of her guilt or innocence yet at this point, but entranced by the sensational ordeal.

The sensationalism driven by the castigation of the police investigation carried through the preliminary hearing and the Superior Court trial. “Either Bridget Sullivan or the police deliberately lied about the hatchets. Either the police or the Marshal lied about finding the handle. The police captain or police officer lied about the wrapping of that hatchet head,” wrote the Galveston Daily News.47 Contradictory stories escaped the lips of almost every person who sat on the witness stand. Whether these were deliberate lies can only be theorized, because much of the trial and the case itself, was based on circumstantial evidence. Some newspapers focused their attention on the “lies” that dealt with the police and its conduct. Depriving citizens and the nation the security of an accurate and just police force gave the press an additional opportunity to sensationalize another aspect of this case. The Milwaukee Journal said, “No decent man complains of the investigation and everything to be done, but we say everything was not done and the proper methods not taken.”48 This clearly declared the stance some newspapers had, even though some citizens believed the police to have completed everything justly. On June 17, just days before the trial came

46 “Double Murder Sensation Caused by the Arrest of Lizzie Borden at Fall River, Mass, Bismarck Daily Tribune, 13 August 1892, 1.
48 “Tells of the Murder Arguments Begun in the Trial of Lizzie Borden,” Milwaukee Journal, 19 June 1892, 1
to an end, St. Paul Daily News described the mess the police made out of the case. Speaking for the public, it wrote, “The people seem to be unanimous in the declaration that the police made a sorry mess of their case.”\textsuperscript{49} This led to fierce outrage, because the jurors as part of the people, felt otherwise on the subject. “So heated were arguments that the deputy sheriffs had all they could do to keep the jurymen from engaging in rough and tumble fights.”\textsuperscript{50} Doubting the abilities of the police force did not go without fundamental debates between those active in the courtrooms and those who merely peeked inside.

Newspapers eventually exposed some of the lies and counter-testimonies told in the preliminary hearing and Superior Court trial that seemed worthy of sensationalism. By doing so, the newspapers kept a circulation of gossip transpiring through the nation. Chicago’s Daily Inter-Ocean revealed the story that the Matron at the police station, Hannah Reagan, leaked a story about a conversation that transpired between Miss Borden and her sister Emma.\textsuperscript{51} On August 25\textsuperscript{th} the Inter-Ocean reported the incriminating “you gave me away” story. Reagan told reporters Miss Borden said to Emma, “You have given me away and I know it, but remember, I will not give in one inch; never, never. That is all I care to say to you.”\textsuperscript{52} From that moment on, Miss Borden laid with her back to Emma in her cot without another word passing between them for more than two hours until visiting hours closed. Reagan, ambushed by theories that she had lied about the whole conversation, stuck to her story during the Superior Court trial. However, when the topic of the conversation reached the stand, “Emma denied absolutely the ‘you gave me away’ story, and swore that no quarrel took place between them in Matron Reagan’s quarters.”\textsuperscript{53}

Bridget Sullivan’s testimony also fell prey to the speculative light of criticism. Reports from the Bangor Daily Whig & Courier showed some sympathy toward Sullivan saying, “It was plain she was doing her best to tell the truth and whole truth,” but discrepancies raised suspicions.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} “Lizzie Borden Indiscreet Accusing Her Sister of Betraying Her, She Incriminates Herself,” Daily Inter Ocean, 25 August 1892, 1.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} “No Startling Disclosures The Testimony in the Lizzie Borden Trial Rather Tame,” Bangor Daily Whig & Courier, 9 June 1893, 1.
From her original testimony, Sullivan mentioned Miss Borden crying after she found the dead bodies, but Sullivan denied that statement during the Superior Court trial. Additionally, a few other primary witnesses who encountered Miss Borden immediately after the murders testified that not one teardrop fell from her eyes. In the Daily Inter Ocean, both Miss Russell and Officer Harrington “testified that the prisoner was not in tears during the day of the murder.”

Beyond the sensational coverage of the police investigation and trial proceedings, newspapers found several aspects of Lizzie Borden’s character, demeanor and appearance to be the most effective and successful factors to raise the level of sensationalism. The press, from the moment of the murders until the end of the Superior Court trial in Massachusetts, constructed a masculine version of Miss Borden to symbolize her guilt and a feminine version to symbolize her innocence. Some newspapers swayed the audience to visualize Miss Borden, “an average looking woman with an above average inheritance,” as masculine. Others, like the Daily Picayune, illustrated her as “a very pretty woman and quite fleshy.” With these connotations, the press tampered with the idea that a masculine woman could be capable of such a crime whereas a feminine woman simply could not be. This enticed readers to imagine either a foul, masculine woman or a pretty, feminine woman to sensationalize the situation. This dichotomy directly correlated with the society’s ideology of men and women and their inherent differences. It divided the public; half saw Miss Borden as a crazed woman with male tendencies capable of hacking her father and stepmother to pieces, while the other saw her as a victim of injustice.

What exacerbated the controversy of rendering Lizzie Borden culpable of the murders emanated from the perspectives on gender, class and race during that era. Miss Borden grew up in a wealthy white family. “A member of Central Congregational, she taught Sunday school, served as secretary-treasurer of the Christian Endeavor Society, and was a card-carrying member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.” But, most importantly, she was a woman. A short excerpt from a newspaper article from the Boston Investigator can give an overview of

56 Carlisle, 47.
58 King, 22.
the “differences” between women and men by society in the 19th century.

Women, take them on an average, are far nobler and better creatures than men; but the best are still women, not angels; and the worst are very bad, and yet not, to my mind, as bad as wicked men. For a woman at worst is still an animal; but a man at his worst is a calculating machine with a little spinal marrow in it for oil. We are on the whole (the present race of us) tenfold baser than our women, but it is wholly the women’s fault that we are so.”

According to society, women were found to act off emotions rather than logic. Women possessed neither logic nor strength.

At the preliminary hearing, witnesses’ testimonies of Miss Borden’s physical appearance directly after the murders marked the first of many detailed descriptions of her impassivity. During that time, elitists, especially women elitists, suppressed their emotions intentionally. “This was the quality that got Lizzie in trouble with Officers Fleet and Harrington, and the head of the Fall River police force, Marshal Hilliard.”

Her friends and neighbors, like Mrs. Churchill, explained that her calm demeanor after discovering the bodies was predictable. This could have been a combination of the elitist ideal Miss Borden wanted to uphold or her own way of coping with such a tumultuous situation.

Newspapers conveyed the indifference of Lizzie Borden in such tones that protected her elitist ways yet also made her vulnerable to being chastised by the public during the initial investigation. She did not faint or cry like most women were expected to do; not because men desire for women to act in such ways, but because these actions were thought to be congenital. A Providence reporter and Civil War veteran who searched the Borden’s home after the murders said, “Most women would faint at seeing her father dead, for I never saw a more horrible sight and I have walked over battlefields where thousands were dead and mangled. She is a woman of remarkable nerve and self-control.” Julian Ralph from the New York Sun wrote, “It was plain to see that she had complete mastery of herself, and could make her sensations and emotions invisible

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59 “Women and Men,” Boston Investigator, 31 August 1892, 3.
61 King, 23.
62 King, 25.
to an impertinent public."\textsuperscript{63} To ward off a backlash, Miss Borden gave an interview to the New York Recorder in which she defended herself from such censure: “They say I don’t show any grief. Certainly I don’t in public. I never did reveal my feelings and I cannot change my nature now.”\textsuperscript{64}

People knew Lizzie Borden, as well as the Borden family in general, to keep quiet, which was not uncommon for high society types. The family rarely interacted with each other for years and that mentality permeated from her in more stressful situations, with respect to the murders in particular. Miss Borden was “never known to go out with men, but at least she went out.”\textsuperscript{65} In comparison to her sister Emma and stepmother Abbie, she was quit the gregarious Borden.\textsuperscript{66} Over her years and with having been born into a family of privilege, Miss Borden acquired a status in the Fall River community that turned useful and, at times, detrimental in her defense.

By the end of the preliminary hearing, newspapers exposed the general attitude toward Miss Borden, which assumed her guilty. The prosecution delivered their seemingly undeniable evidence, and the defense struggled to counter it. Miss Borden’s initial testimony contained several contradictions, which did little to minimize doubts of innocence. However, her testimony was eventually retracted. The ex-governor Robinson, Miss Borden’s attorney, argued that her declarations were involuntary and that she was under no direct counsel at the time. As reported in the Milwaukee Sentinel, the judge concluded the preliminary court hearing saying that, putting gender aside, she was probably guilty and should go to trial:

…”sympathy had been laid aside and duty, stern duty, requires upon this evidence but one thing to be done. Supposing a man was seen in the chamber of Mrs. Borden, the guest chamber of death, and that he was in the room of the father when death came. Suppose that a man should tell as many different stories as Lizzie has done – the way would be plain. I find that she is probably guilty.”\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Masterton, 39.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} “Lizzie Borden Held for Trial: The Judge Declares That He Finds Her Probably Guilty of the Terrible Murder,” \textit{Milwaukee Sentinel}, 2 September 1892, 1.
The Boston Daily Advertiser reported the majority opinion of Fall River as believing Lizzie Borden to be guilty. “It cannot be said that the public at large condemns or criticisms Judge Blaisdell’s judgment. Upon the whole, then, according to the belief of the citizens of Fall River, all has turned out just as it must.”

Newspapers verified Miss Borden’s continued dispassion after the Judge’s verdict was read on September 2nd, and the police took her away to lock her in jail until the Superior Court trial. The Daily Bismarck Tribune reported that “she was somewhat nervous but did not show feeling by either tears or trembling.” Her “almost masculine countenance betrayed no emotion” as she rode to the Taunton jail.

Even when she reached the jail her expression gave no bearing to any emotional state stirring inside of her. The North American noted “the only sign of interest she manifested was when Taunton was reached, when she aroused from her lethargy for a second, then dropped her head on her hand and closed her eyes.” She stalked unconsciously to her proposed cell, “apparently seeing nothing and noticing nothing.” These descriptions of Miss Borden’s journey to jail and imprisonment repeated in many editions of newspapers that day throughout the nation.

Mary Livermore from the Boston Journal wrote on September 6th in opposition to Miss Borden’s imprisonment questioning why she should be treated like a convict before she was convicted. “Can you inform us why Lizzie Borden is punished as if she were a criminal in advance of her trial, and merely because some officials suspect her of being guilty?” A reporter from the New York Herald believed that had Miss Borden’s mirrored that of a normal woman, her innocence would never have been questioned. “Perhaps if Lizzie Borden would rave around and tear her hair a little the authorities would let her go. A girly girl of the fluffy angel variety would not even have been suspected.”

This case continued to exhibit the disturbed and rigid gender

69 “Double Murder Sensation Caused by the Arrest of Lizzie Borden at Fall River, Mass,” Bismarck Daily Tribune, 13 August 1892, 1.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
ideology that stifled women’s natural progression in society at that time. Women internalized this case differently in comparison to men and flocked to support Miss Borden when evidence favored her. Women supported her because of the injustice they suffered on a daily basis, and the case only exemplified injustice by pinning the blame on a woman. A woman should not have to act hysterically in order for people to believe she acts honestly. Miss Borden kept her composure the way it was believed that an upper-class woman should, but that should not condemn her nor be the deciding factor.

The Commonwealth vs. Lizzie Borden began on June 6, 1893, at the Superior Court of Massachusetts in New Bedford. Numerous newspapers described her appearance in length on the first day she entered into the courtroom and the sensationalism her arrival initiated. The Boston Daily Advertiser said, although “there was an air of cheerfulness about her,” her face had no feature that would “make it attractive.” The North American offered her “long confinement, anxiety and tension of feeling” as an explanation for her overall dull but suffering countenance. Another element that betrayed Miss Borden’s masculinity was her attire that day which “was what women would have described as cheap.” The New York Times commented on her “marvel of calmness” while “she watched the great fight being made in her behalf with apparent unconcern.” Her reappearance back into society did not compliment her well; although citizens yearned to see her, most found her masculine and moreover, guilty.

Lizzie Borden awed the press and the public after she finally expressed an emotion on the second day of the trial. A witness testified against Miss Borden and the St. Paul Daily News said she “regarded him with only casual interest” and “laughed softly to herself.” Although the intent behind the ambiguous laughter remained unknown, this pivotal lapse in composure enthralled the press and the public. Will she let out more, and, if so, in what way? Her more outrageous and suspicious emotional outburst seemed to prompt the switch to her innocence.

76 “Her Life Battle Begun The Jury to Try Lizzie Borden Quickly Impaneled,” North American, 6 June 1893, 1.
77 Ibid.
As Miss Borden revealed her emotions more evidently, the public saw that she was more “woman” than initially reported by the press. “Her apparent indifference has disappeared and she seems to be easily moved by the tragic events of the trial as would any sensible woman under the circumstance,” said the North American. This gender attribution mollified tensions within the courthouse, which soon showed favor toward Borden’s defense.

Toward the last few days of the trial, newspapers noted the crowd outside the courthouse grew nearly out of control. “Sheriff Wright has made all preparations he could to handle the crowds” and “all available officers had their hands full no matter where they happened to be stationed,” reported the Daily Inter Ocean. Miss Borden continued to feminize her decorum as women “flock[ed] to the scene of the trial” and “overwhelmed her with floral offerings,” reported the St. Paul Daily News. Here, the sensationalism of gender ideology began to play the most important role in deciding the fate of Lizzie Borden.

Perhaps the most demonstrative and sensational gender reference manifested when Miss Borden’s counsel concluded with his closing argument. The emphasis of her spotless record, position in the Christian religion and high social status helped portray Miss Borden in the way the defense had always tried to. Ultimately, ex-Governor Robinson described a view of her they could not forget:

She is a lady, the equal to your wife and my wife. She is a lady whom we would never have suspected of such a thing. Is sex a protection against crime? It is hard to consider women guilty of such a crime. If they are stronger in their love, also they are stronger in their hatred. Some of the greatest criminals of the world have been women. But, we must face this case as men.

On June 20, 1893, the 12 jurymen who sat patiently and absorbed all the lies, truths and sensationalistic drama that had transpired in the courtroom during the past 15 days, isolated themselves in the deliberation

81 “Lizzie Borden on Trial Jury Impaneled in the Famous Massachusetts Murder Case,” The Daily Inter Ocean, 6 June 1893, 1.
82 Ibid.
83 “Her Counsel Argues Ex-Governor Robinson Pleads for Lizzie Borden,” Daily Inter Ocean, 20 June 1893, 1.
Only an hour had passed before the courtroom again included the jury, returned with their decision. At 4:15 p.m. they reported the verdict: “not guilty.” “A cheer went up which might have been heard half a mile away through the open windows and there was no attempt to check it.”

Citizens stormed the steps of the courthouse as the news sailed through the streets of Fall River. As a free woman, Miss Borden traveled back to safety, though she could not find such safety at her home because of the “crowd of 2,000 that surrounded the Borden home.”

During the 10 months she spent in jail, Miss Borden had gained a worldwide reputation. She secretly avoided the crowd by going to a friend’s house in New Bedford. A reporter from the Boston Daily Advertiser deduced her location and asked to interview her. She agreed with no mention of the trial proceedings allowed. “Lizzie is looking better than ever before. She was dressed in a black silk dress and was smiling pleasantly.” The interview concluded with Miss Borden saying, “I am the happiest woman in the world.”

Overall, sensationalism drove the publicity this affair received. Whether the case deserved such national attention remained debatable. However, the press coverage raised a series of questions pertaining to societal norms during that time. Moreover, the way the press focused on social norms within the coverage of the case revealed how these norms competed with and may have prevailed over truth and justice, which ultimately could have altered the outcome of the trial.

For example, this case brought to the public’s attention the importance of thorough police investigations. Newspapers, from the time of the murders to the last day that Borden sat at the prisoner’s dock, criticized the performance of the Fall River police officers. Whether this castigation was warranted or simply used for sensationalistic purposes, it did question the accuracy of the investigative techniques the police practiced. Much of the trial was based on witnesses’ accounts as prime evidence, but the police realized how those were easily countered by other witnesses. The press’s emphasis on tenuous investigative work exposed a flaw in the justice system upon which the society heavily depended.

**Notes:**
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
Finally and most importantly, newspapers’ ample descriptions of Borden’s character, demeanor and appearance questioned the status of gender in the justice system. The press followed both the defense and prosecution as they utilized the governing gender ideals to persuade the public and the jury. In pictorial drawings, some newspapers contorted Miss Borden’s appearance, ingrained with masculine qualities, to suggest her guilt. Ultimately, the feminine descriptions of Miss Borden seemed to have won the heart of the press and public and court. Unanswered questions riddled the case. Should gender norms have been used as an excuse for any an individual’s behavior? Did gender norms, based on sexist views, have precedence in the courtroom? Regardless, the sensationalistic elements conveyed by the press launched this story of rumors and lies and alibis from a local tragedy to one of century’s the most infamous—and discussed—murder cases.
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