

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
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University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Office of Grants and Faculty Development
800 Algoma Blvd.
Oshkosh, WI 54901
(920) 424-3215
www.uwosh.edu/grants

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Preface

We are pleased to bring you the sixth volume of *Oshkosh Scholar*. It reflects the commitment of UW Oshkosh to provide diverse learning opportunities for students including the opportunity to collaborate with faculty advisers on their research projects. In addition, students gain publication experience as they work with a team of editors and reviewers to prepare their articles for publication.

While education within a classroom setting is the foundation upon which universities are built, some of the most exciting learning experiences are those that take place outside of the classroom and are fueled by the individual student's interest and motivation. Collaborative research projects allow students to build the skills necessary for lifelong learning and create an environment that promotes rigorous academic engagement. In this volume, we are proud to present some of the finest examples of this academic inquiry.

Several articles in this year's edition of *Oshkosh Scholar* aptly illustrate the relevance of academic research and practical applications to today's problems. Using the example of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, Jennifer Haegele uses amateur aerial photographs to update urban flood maps, which can aid in local flood planning. Similarly, Michael Beaupre questions whether text messaging bans for drivers actually decrease the number of fatal traffic accidents.

Chris Tempas and Sara Willkomm chart the victories of historic groups and individuals who fought discrimination. Tempas probes school desegregation in Racine, Wisconsin, and reveals a successful and influential experiment in equal education. Women's efforts to overcome gender discrimination are also featured as Willkomm introduces us to the key players in the women's rights movement leading up to the famous Seneca Falls Convention.

Other articles provide insight into how interactions between people shape the world around us in profound ways. Matthew Moebius demonstrates a shifting conception of witches throughout a millennium, ending with the now-common stereotype of witches as females. Rebecca Stupka takes us into the world of psychology through a study of accommodating patterns in conversations between men and women. Turning to literature, Nicole Selenka reveals surprising and significant references to the Catholic Holy Trinity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

We invite you to peruse this varied sample of undergraduate exploration and discovery. We would like to thank the student authors, faculty advisers, and faculty reviewers who contributed to this volume. Additional thanks go to Susan Surendonk and this year's student editors, Arielle Smith and Amy Knoll. Without their passion and dedication, this publication would cease to exist. We would love to hear your thoughts about this year's volume. Simply send us an e-mail at ugjournal@uwosh.edu.

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Director, Office of Grants and Faculty Development

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Assistant Professor, Political Science

Oshkosh Scholar Faculty Adviser

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Production

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Clerical Conceptions of Magic and the Stereotype of the Female Witch

Matthew Alexander Moebius, author
Dr. Kimberly Rivers, History, faculty adviser

Matthew Alexander Moebius graduated from UW Oshkosh in May 2011 with a degree in history. His interest in medieval Europe as a primary field of study emerged from a longstanding interest in European folklore and mythology, and was developed under the guidance of Dr. Kimberly Rivers. His research focus in the field of medieval magic and occultism began to take shape during his work for the European History Seminar in spring 2011.

Dr. Kimberly Rivers is an associate professor and the department chair of history at UW Oshkosh. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 1995, and her research interests are in late-medieval intellectual history, and memory and mnemonics in late-medieval preaching and religious devotion.

Abstract

Working from the foundation laid by leading historians of medieval witchcraft—most notably Richard Kieckhefer, Norman Cohn, Michael Bailey, and Hans Peter Broedel—this study examines the conceptual development of a predominantly feminine witchcraft stereotype as understood within the perceptions of the educated clerical elite. The theories of these historians, each approaching the study of witchcraft in different ways and addressing mostly separate aspects of the phenomenon, are reconciled with one another and tied together in hitherto unarticulated ways to form a single, cohesive narrative of the emergence of the idea of the exclusively female witch. The gradual evolution of clerical conceptions of magic shifted in the later Middle Ages from a masculine conception to a more gender-neutral one, opening the door to feminization. The construction of the witches' sabbat, influenced by largely feminine pagan mythological motifs, pushed the idea in the direction of a female conception. Finally, influential writings dominated by aggressively misogynistic ideology finalized the association between women and witchcraft.

In the last four decades, the historical work done on late medieval witchcraft has been extensive. This scholarship has found the general topic of witchcraft to be one of immeasurable complexity and, therefore, the general approach of historians of medieval witchcraft has been to narrow their individual studies. Historians Richard Kieckhefer and Norman Cohn have done foundational work on the conceptual development of witchcraft. Kieckhefer's early work produced detailed analyses of trial records, including inquisitorial interrogations and witness testimonies, with the ultimate goal of uncovering how witchcraft was perceived by the common populace. Cohn's study of the relationship between witchcraft mythology and ideas associated with earlier heretical groups is still heavily relied upon by current witchcraft historians. Much excellent work has also been done by recent historians, notably Michael D. Bailey and Hans Peter Broedel. Bailey's work has emphasized the role of the evolution of general conceptions of magic throughout the Middle Ages in contributing to the creation of a defined system of witchcraft mythology in the fifteenth century. Broedel's primary focus has been on the influential 1487 anti-witchcraft treatise *Malleus Maleficarum*,

and on the various elements that make up the construction of witchcraft represented therein.

One of the specific aspects of witchcraft that has seen considerable attention in recent years is its relationship to gender. Both Bailey and Broedel have made admirable contributions to uncovering the historical development of a feminine witch concept. Bailey's theories of the feminization of the witchcraft concept tie in with his larger ideas on the evolution of clerical conceptions of magic. Broedel has discussed at length the influence of feminine mythological motifs taken from pagan traditions. Each present compelling ideas, but in each case the specificity of the scope of their arguments has limited the overall effectiveness of their conclusions. This study builds on the foundations laid by these historians' theories. It will draw not only on these recent studies of witchcraft and gender, but also on the general scholarship of witchcraft mythology. Combined with clues from the primary sources, the threads of these historical arguments will be woven together into a more cumulative view of the gender associations of medieval witchcraft.

Before attempting this task, certain distinctions must be made clear. When dealing with the history of witchcraft the researcher is constantly confronted with the problem of separating perception from reality. The history of actual events as they occur in tangible space is sometimes entirely distinct from the history of the conception of those events. This study is concerned primarily with the conceptual history of witchcraft and gender as it developed within the consciousness of the educated clerical elite. The nature of the larger subject of witchcraft makes the additional separation of learned and popular conceptions necessary.

The concept of witchcraft as understood by clerical authorities evolved differently than the popular ideas of malevolent magic and sorcery and was made up of entirely different components. As such, the ways in which popular and learned concepts were connected with gender-related themes throughout the course of their respective developments were equally different. The learned conception of witchcraft had developed by the end of the fifteenth century into a mythology that predominantly favored the stereotype of the female witch. This feminization of witchcraft occurred as a result of the combined influences of the following: (1) significant changes in the clerical conceptions of magic prior to, and leading into, the fifteenth century; (2) the construction of the witches' sabbat from anti-heretical stereotypes and feminine mythological motifs; and (3) clerical misogynist attitudes. The resulting conflation of feminine associations was emphasized in—and reinforced by—the *Malleus Maleficarum*, assuring the ultimate feminization of learned witchcraft mythology.

Clerical conceptions of magic in the late Middle Ages cannot be fully understood without delving into older theological doctrine. The learned authorities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries drew their understanding of magic from sources dating as far back as late antiquity. Most significantly, St. Augustine of Hippo's writing on the subject in the early fifth century established foundational theological doctrine regarding the magical arts. The classical magic of Augustine's time was thought to be performed through the assistance of spiritual intermediaries. As no human being was capable of producing any supernatural or preternatural effect on his own, assistance was thought to have been sought from a more capable entity. Practitioners often claimed that these intermediaries were merely benign spirits either of the elements or of the dead, or possibly even angels.¹ Augustine, however, concluded that they could be nothing other than demonic in nature. If any sorcerer or magician believed otherwise, he was the victim of demonic deception. In 425 Augustine wrote in *City of God*:

Who does not see that all these things are fictions of deceiving demons, unless he be a wretched slave of theirs, and an alien from

the grace of the true Liberator? . . . Rather let us abominate and avoid the deceit of such wicked spirits, and listen to sound doctrine. As to those who perform these filthy cleansings by sacrilegious rites, and see in their initiated state . . . certain wonderfully lovely appearances of angels or gods, this is what the apostle refers to when he speaks of "Satan transforming himself into an angel of light." For these are the delusive appearances of that spirit who longs to entangle wretched souls in the deceptive worship of many and false gods and to turn them aside from the true worship of the true God. . . .²

Furthermore, in *De Doctrina Christiana*, he elaborated on the subject by drawing a comparison between this demonic pact and the worship of idols:

Something instituted by humans is superstitious if it concerns the making and worshipping of idols, or the worshipping of the created order or part of it as if it were God, or if it involves certain kinds of consultations or contracts about meaning arranged and ratified with demons, such as the enterprises involved in the art of magic, which poets tend to mention rather than to teach.³

Since such practices involved supplication and sacrifice to entities that could be nothing other than demons, participation in them was tantamount to idolatry and apostasy.⁴

So all the specialists in this kind of futile and harmful superstition, and the contracts, as it were, of an untrustworthy and treacherous partnership established by this disastrous alliance of men and devils, must be totally rejected and avoided by the Christian. "It is not," to quote the apostle, "because an idol is something, but because whatever they sacrifice they sacrifice it to devils and not to God that I do not want you to become the associates of demons." . . . So in all these teachings we must fear and avoid this alliance with demons, whose whole aim, in concert with their leader, the devil, is to cut off and obstruct our return to God.⁵

Augustine's stance on magic remained powerfully influential on the official Church position even at the outbreak of the witch-hunting fervor a thousand years later.

The next document of significant import came roughly around the turn of the tenth century. This text, known as the canon *Episcopi*, first appeared in its earliest known version in a canonical collection compiled sometime around 906. The text opens with a condemnation of *maleficium*, or harmful magic,⁶ and an urgent warning to bishops and their clergy to push for an eradication of its practice wherever it might be encountered.⁷ Of more ultimate significance, however, is its commentary on a more specific concern:

It is not to be omitted that some wicked women, who have given themselves back to Satan and been seduced by the illusions and phantasms of demons, believe and profess that, in the hours of night, they ride upon certain beasts with Diana, the goddess of pagans, and an innumerable multitude of women, and in the silence of the night traverse great spaces of earth, and obey her commands as of their lady, and are summoned to her service on certain nights. But if they alone perished in their faithlessness, without drawing many other people with them into the destruction of infidelity. For an innumerable multitude, deceived by false opinion, believe this to be true, and so believing, wander from the right faith and return to the error of pagans when they think that there is anything of divinity or power except the one God.⁸

The condemnation made in this passage is not of magical practice in general, but of a specific set of pagan traditions. The nocturnal procession of Diana to which it refers represents a conflation of various pagan traditions of both classical and Germanic origin.⁹ Significantly, it focuses its condemnation on belief rather than direct participation.¹⁰ Although the *Episcopi* itself addresses these pagan traditions as separate from general practice of magic, that separation was to deteriorate over time and the two ideas eventually became conflated. Thus the *Episcopi*'s pronouncement of the falsehood of the pagan nocturnal procession in time came to apply to all magical practices. Roughly a century later, the legal scholar Burchard of Worms composed his *Decretum*, which included a repetition of the *Episcopi*'s condemnation of belief in the processions of Diana. When he addressed enchantment and sorcery, he condemned not only practice, but belief in such arts.¹¹ Additionally, with the merging of the ideas of *maleficium* and the nocturnal processions of Diana, the learned conception of magic also saw one of its earliest significant influxes of specifically feminine imagery. Although the clerical conceptions of magic largely remained either gender-neutral or of masculine leanings for some time, the Diana mythology would eventually contribute to the feminization of the witchcraft mythology. This influence will be further discussed later.

The *Decretum* of Burchard and other similar texts indicate that the concern of clerical authorities during the eleventh century was focused more on demonic delusion and false belief than on any real threat of actual magical practice. Participation in superstitious ceremonies or rites was considered infidelity to the Church and to God, and belief in the efficacy of such rites saw even more focused condemnation than direct participation.¹² One of Burchard's admonitions reads, "Have you ever believed or participated in this perfidy, that enchanters and those who say that they can let loose tempests or to change the minds of men? If you have believed or participated in this, you shall do penance for one year on the appointed fast days."¹³ Punishments of this nature—varying degrees of penance—are typical throughout Burchard's text, and are indicative of a fairly dismissive level of concern compared to the witch burnings of the fifteenth century.

This relatively dismissive attitude toward magic persisted until the twelfth century, when European intellectuals discovered (or rediscovered) hosts of classical, Hebrew, and Arabic texts on the occult arts.¹⁴ The magical practices described in these texts were highly learned, authoritative, and sometimes even explicitly demonic. The contents were typically instructive as well as descriptive, and the branches of magical learning they included were usually astrology, alchemy, various forms of divination, and necromancy. As such, medieval scholars were, for the first time since antiquity, provided with an avenue of esoteric study that—unlike common pagan folk traditions—presented magic in the form of a scholarly pursuit. Western Europe suddenly saw a rise in interest, as well as actual practice, of these varieties of "learned magic." This caught the attention of clerical authorities, and they began taking the threat of actual demonic magic more seriously. Of special concern was the newly widespread interest in necromancy.¹⁵

This diabolical practice was one of the most highly complex, ritualized, and formalistic forms of magic most clerics would likely have encountered. It was never explicitly described in terms of gender, but there were several factors that led to its informal designation as a decidedly masculine field. Its mastery was entirely reliant on the study of complicated texts, and thus was restricted to the highly educated. The level of education required, the mastery of language, and the excessive amount of disciplined study would have made it difficult for most clerics to envision female necromancers.¹⁶ In fact, those same requirements led to the educated male clerics themselves making up the majority of practicing necromancers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁷ In

spite of this, Bailey has argued that the understanding and concerns of clerical authorities over necromantic sorcery in this period were essential to the later development of the learned concept of witchcraft in the fifteenth century, including its eventual association with women.¹⁸

The urgent sense of concern felt by clerical authorities about this pervasive demonic practice and the dangers it posed reawakened condemnation of magic in general. As the eyes of the Church were opened to the threat of these demonic rituals, they turned also to the common *maleficium* that had been so marginalized since the time of the canon *Episcopi*. Authorities began to move away from the notion that magic was nothing but a devilish illusion. They flocked back to the teachings of Augustine: magic was real, and it was *always* demonic. This view was given weighty support by prominent theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. St. Thomas wrote:

... if we take a miracle in the strict sense, the demons cannot work miracles, nor can any creature, but God alone: since in the strict sense a miracle is something done outside the order of the entire created nature, under which order every power of a creature is contained. But sometimes miracle may be taken in a wide sense, for whatever exceeds the human power and experience. And thus demons can work miracles, that is, things which rouse man's astonishment, by reason of their being beyond his power and outside his sphere of knowledge. . . . It is to be noted, however, that although these works of demons which appear marvellous to us are not real miracles, they are sometimes nevertheless something real. Thus the magicians of Pharaoh by the demons' power produced real serpents and frogs.¹⁹

It was in this light that theologians began to view popular magic and common folk traditions. These traditions, whether actually containing any elements of harmful magic or not, were increasingly placed by learned authorities under the umbrella of *maleficium*. If all magic was demonic in nature, then even the softly spoken incantations of the village healer who treated sick patients with ritually gathered herbs could be easily perceived as dangerous sorcery. Once this was established, however, authorities faced another problem of understanding. The archetypal necromancer was, by necessity, a scholar. He invoked demons and compelled them to perform his will, but he achieved this only through intense study and the performance of complex formulaic rituals. How, then, could one explain the common village *maleficus* mastering control of similar demonic forces through practices that were absurdly simplistic by comparison? How could the uneducated weather-magician raise a devastating hailstorm, killing cattle and destroying crops, with none of the labors of the learned sorcerer? Where did he learn his art if not from secret occult texts? In pursuit of a solution to this problem, clerics and theological writers spent generations inventing a mythology that would fit their worldview. This mythology was not developed through a singular conscious effort, but through a slow process of altering and absorbing different ideas, and influenced by established theological doctrine, pagan mythology, and stereotypes associated with heretical sects. The finished product was to become the definitive central element of the concept of witchcraft: the witches' sabbat.²⁰

The sabbat, a supposedly secret nocturnal gathering of witches where diabolical rituals were thought to be performed, provided a solution for the discrepancy in the modes of operation between necromancy and witchcraft. The functionality of the sabbat, in a way, came through exaggerating one element of the idea of necromantic sorcery to accommodate for the loss of another. When necromancers summoned

demons, they were viewed by theological authorities as submitting to a pact with the summoned demon, and, by association, with the devil. This demonic pact might be implicit rather than explicit, as the necromancer might be (and often was) operating under the assumption that it was he who held the dominant position and that the demon was submitting to him. Nevertheless, whether that sorcerer knew it or not, he had been drawn into a contractual relationship with the devil. The witches' sabbat took this concept even further. For religious authorities, the central aspect of witchcraft became the complete and explicit submission of the witch to the devil. The sabbat was the secret assembly at which this ritual submission would be made. In exchange for submission (which often included certain ghastly costs²¹), the devil would grant the witch immediate knowledge of demonic magic and the power to wield it. In this way authorities could understand how villages and countrysides could be found to contain innumerable uneducated wielders of diabolical *maleficium*. As this separation of witchcraft from educated ritual and formulae allowed for the emergence of a new figure in the common witch, the restriction of magic to the masculine gender was also lifted. In this way, the creation of the sabbat opened the door for the feminization of magic.²²

After this door was opened, witchcraft quickly made the jump from the previous ideas of masculine magic to being a gender-neutral field. The mythology of the sabbat itself contained several elements that, when taken together, had perhaps the largest influence on the gendering of the official concept of witchcraft. This mythology was developed over a considerable period of time, and went through several varying interpretations as it absorbed influences from various sources. The final picture of the demonic assembly in its most elaborate form has been most clearly and concisely described by Broedel, who has broken the sabbat mythology into six parts:

- (1) On the appointed night, the sectaries assembled at a remote or concealed site, often flying or riding demonic animals; (2) once there, they summoned the devil in one of his many forms, and worshiped him in disgusting or humiliating ways, most characteristically by the obscene kiss; (3) at the devil's command, they renounced Christ in graphic fashion, trampling on or otherwise abusing the host; (4) they slaughtered infants or children, who were brought along for this purpose, and put their flesh to some foul and often magical use; (5) they indulged in a high-spirited revel, eating, drinking, and dancing, until the evening's festivities were concluded with an orgy (6), in which they violated as many sexual conventions as the fertile imagination of the narrator could devise.²³

Each of these elements could appear in the sabbat mythology independently or in various combinations. They all came together in concert in the most well-defined and elaborate descriptions. This final picture of the sabbat became solidified in clerical conceptions by the middle of the fifteenth century, but each of the various individual elements began their influences in earlier stages. Each can be claimed to have contributed in its own way to the gendering of the concept of witchcraft. As will be shown, not every element advanced a specifically female conception, but those that did proved to combine more effectively with conscious outside influences that would later intervene in favor of a predominantly feminine witchcraft mythology.

The majority of Broedel's six elements can be traced directly to the influence of clerical conceptions associated with certain heretical sects of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. The second half of the twelfth century saw outbreaks of heresy in various parts of Europe, which drew considerable attention from the Church. Of these heretical groups, the most significant in their influence on the development of witchcraft were the Waldensians. When clerical authorities began persecution of the

Waldensians, they encouraged the spread of outlandish accusations of frightening misconduct. The resulting stereotypes that became associated with this heretical group included their participation in secret nocturnal meetings, worship of the devil, and incestuous orgies.²⁴ These accusations were taken seriously by popes, and Gregory IX's 1233 papal bull *Vox in Rama* named the charges against the heretics and ordered their condemnation. Many of the practices alleged by Gregory perfectly fit the model that would later be applied to the witches' sabbat:

... a black cat²⁵ about the size of an average dog, descends backwards, with its tail erect. First the novice, next the master, then each one of the order who are worthy and perfect, kiss the cat on its hindquarters; the imperfect, who do not estimate themselves worthy, receive grace from the master. . . . When this has been done, they put out the candles, and turn to the practice of the most disgusting lechery, making no distinction between those who are strangers and those who are kin. Moreover, if by chance those of the male sex exceed the number of women, surrendering to their ignominious passions, burning mutually in their desires, men engage in depravity with men. Similarly, women change their natural function, which is against nature, making this itself worthy of blame among themselves. . . . They even receive the body of the Lord every year at Easter from the hand of a priest, and carrying it in their mouths to their homes, they throw it into the latrine in contempt of the savior.²⁶

These accusations were so effective that it became standard procedure to apply them to groups that were perceived as threatening to the Church.²⁷ Similar accusations employed against another heretical sect in the fourteenth century, the Fraticelli, included all of the elements of the Waldensian accusations with the addition of ritual cannibalistic infanticide.²⁸

It should come as no surprise then that these same anti-heretical stereotypes were applied with equal vigor to the frightening new sect of *malefici* that was emerging in the consciousness of the clerical authorities in the fourteenth century.²⁹ By the early fifteenth century, these stereotypes had become thoroughly embedded in the mythology of witchcraft. This was accomplished with the aid of several pieces of extremely influential writing on the witchcraft sects, mostly from the 1430s. The most significant of these was, without a doubt, the *Formicarius* of 1438 by the Dominican theologian Johannes Nider. The *Formicarius*, along with other contemporary pieces like the *Errores Gazariorum* (of anonymous authorship) and the treatise of the lay magistrate Claude Tholosan, described in detail the demonic sabbat which had by now thoroughly absorbed the anti-heretical stereotypes.³⁰ These texts were also the first available for wide circulation among clerical and inquisitorial authorities, and so fueled the spread of witch-hunting fervor that was just beginning to take off.³¹

Since the heretical practices described in these stereotypes were freely associated with both genders, the witchcraft mythology that developed in the regions where these influences were strongest remained gender-neutral for a considerable time. Of all of the texts described above, only Nider's gives preference to the idea of the female witch, and even he doesn't make any insistence of exclusivity. In all of the texts, both genders participate freely (Nider merely claiming that women were perhaps more frequent participants than men).³² Areas in which anti-heretical stereotypes played an especially important role in the development of the sabbat (Switzerland, for example) initially saw significantly more men brought to trial than women. Other cultural contexts saw entirely different paths of development. There were regions where influences of popular magic traditions and pagan mythologies contributed just as strongly

to the creation of the sabbat mythology as the anti-heretical stereotypes.³³ The often predominantly feminine imagery associated with these popular traditions and mythological influences contributed significantly to the eventual creation of the idea of the female witch. In the end, these regionally variant ideas would converge into a more uniform mythology, carrying that feminine emphasis to the level of a universal stereotype.

Perhaps the most significant of these feminine mythological influences was that of Diana and her nocturnal processions. Popular belief in the legends of Diana, who supposedly led a raucous procession of women through the night, were based on a combination of similarly themed beliefs that came together to form an amalgam roughly centered around the nocturnal activities of women and female spirits.³⁴ The conflation of ideas that occurred in the texts following the condemnation in the canon *Episcopi* created a direct association between this piece of pagan mythology and the idea of *maleficium*. As *maleficium* became synonymous with diabolical witchcraft, it naturally followed that these associated pagan motifs would be drawn into the cumulative concept of witchcraft. The manner of its inclusion in the official witchcraft mythology was the idea of night flight. Witches were thought to rise from their beds at night and fly (a marvel achieved through any of a number of sinister magical operations) in devilish processions to the secret location of the sabbat.

Even before its absorption into the witchcraft mythology, the legends of Diana had become associated with other similar traditions of nocturnal female spirits. The ghostly female monsters known as *lamiae* or *strigae* came down from antique pagan tradition, and had, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, already become indistinguishable from the myths of Diana and her *bonae res* to most clerics.³⁵ The *lamiae* were spirits, usually taking the forms of old hag-like women, who stole into houses at night to kill children. For learned clerics who had already characterized Diana's *bonae res* as demons, the ideas were similar enough to cause confusion, and learned commentators eventually created from them a single construct drawn from elements of both traditions.³⁶ It was this cumulative construct that was absorbed into the witchcraft mythology in the early fifteenth century. The treatises on witchcraft from the 1430s demonstrate the conflation. The secular magistrate Claude Tholosan writes: ". . . Further, they imagine in dreams that they travel bodily at night, most often on Thursdays and Sundays, in the company of the devil, in order to suffocate children and strike them with sickness. They then extract the fat of the dead children and devour it and go to a certain place where they hold the synagogue of the region."³⁷ Here the reader can see the influence of Diana legends as the witch ventures forth at night in a procession led by the devil. The witch then enters the homes of others and murders children in their sleep, as did the *lamiae*. Each serves a purpose in the greater sabbat mythology: the slaying of children is used to obtain material remains to be used in the satanic rituals, and the nocturnal procession serves as a means to facilitate those deaths and as transport to the sabbat itself. Furthermore, the inclusion of the child-slaying elements of the *lamiae* myths creates a point of compatibility with the infanticide stories of the anti-heretical stereotypes. In this way the pagan mythological influences were able to combine with the anti-heretical stereotypes in a mutually reinforcing way, which also allowed the predominately feminine imagery associated with the former to begin superseding the gender-neutrality of the latter.

Finally, perhaps the most obvious factor influencing the ultimate feminization of the official witchcraft stereotype was the prevalence of clerical misogyny. Misogynistic tendencies in the clerical elite had a substantial role in creating the idea of the exclusively female witch. It is important, however, to understand that they were allowed to have this role largely because they were able to act on the foundation of

feminizing influences already in place. Clerical misogyny had always existed, but only in the mid-fifteenth century was it able to manifest itself in the creation of the female witch-stereotype. This was possible only because of the coming together of all of the factors described above. Among the most important figures to take advantage of the opportunity was Johannes Nider.

As mentioned earlier, Nider's *Formicarius* did not insist that witches were exclusively women. However, Nider does make abundantly clear his opinion that women were more suited for the evils of witchcraft. The *Formicarius* first breaches the subject of women and witchcraft with a discussion of Joan of Arc, who had been burned in France just a few years prior. He uses Joan's case as a stepping stone to approaching the larger issue of the inherent female susceptibility to sin. His argument was, in short, that women were cursed with physical, mental, and spiritual weakness, and that these weaknesses made them more vulnerable to the temptations of the devil. To support this argument he drew on standard biblical, patristic, and scholastic sources. The credibility of these sources was largely responsible for the influential status of the work as a whole, and it also led later writers to draw inspiration from his anti-woman perspective.³⁸ The *Formicarius* was not the only influential text of Nider's that had something to say on the matter. His *Praeceptorium* laid out what would become the three canonical reasons for women's inclination toward superstitious practices. First, women were more credulous than men—a weakness that was, in Nider's opinion, mercilessly exploited by the devil. Second, they were of more impressionable natures, which naturally made them more sensitive to influence. Third, they had "slippery tongues," and for this reason they were more likely to spread what they had learned of magical arts to their fellow women. He also notes that because of their physical and emotional weaknesses, they were more likely to seek revenge through occult means. This point is of special significance because it directly links women's alleged natural tendency toward superstition with *maleficium*. This helps to explain why Nider thought women were more prone to witchcraft. If women were naturally inclined toward superstition, it logically follows that they would be naturally inclined toward *maleficium*, and as such toward witchcraft.³⁹

The connection between superstition and *maleficium* had been longstanding. Although today the word *superstition* carries implications of usually mundane eccentricity, this was not so in the late Middle Ages. Superstitious beliefs or practices were commonly listed alongside performance of harmful sorcery in medieval condemnations. The inquisitor Nicholas Eymeric, writing in 1376, called it "a vice opposed to the Christian religion or Christian worship," and declared it heretical behavior in a Christian.⁴⁰ The theology faculty of the University of Paris listed superstition alongside *maleficium* and the demonic pact in their public condemnation of all magic in 1398.⁴¹ In light of this, it is significant to note that Nider's commentary did not initiate the association between women and superstition. Early medieval penitentials consistently singled out women as guilty of superstitious practices. With superstition being so directly associated with *maleficium*, it was no wonder that theorists like Nider found ways to use those traditions to inform their conceptions of witchcraft.⁴²

As previously mentioned, the misogynistic principles of Nider and his *Formicarius* were greatly influential to later writers on witchcraft. The most significant of these writers to draw inspiration from Nider's work was also the first whose treatment of witchcraft would grow to outshine the *Formicarius* in widespread authoritative influence. This writer was Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Institoris, and his text was the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*.⁴³ Written in 1487, Institoris's extensive text—the title of which translates to "The Hammer of Witches"—was designed as an in-depth inquisitorial manual. It covers topics ranging from identifying witches and methods for

hunting and trying them, to the mechanical operation of their demonic magic and the variety of forms that magic could take. As an example of clerical misogyny the *Malleus* reigns supreme. Institoris rants at length on the weakness, sinfulness, and perfidy of women, devoting an entire chapter to the subject. Much like Nider, Institoris supports his position by assembling a formidable catalogue of ancient and contemporary authorities to testify to feminine weakness:⁴⁴

Now the wickedness of women is spoken of in *Ecclesiasticus* xxv: There is no head above the head of a serpent: and there is no wrath above the wrath of a woman. I had rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than to keep house with a wicked woman. And among much which in that place precedes and follows about a wicked woman, he concludes: All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. Wherefore *S. John* Chrysostom says on the text, It is not good to marry (*S. Matthew* xix): What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours!⁴⁵

He sets out what amounts to a more elaborate description of Nider's main arguments against women. Institoris, like Nider, describes women as "feebler both in mind and body," and for this reason "it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft."⁴⁶ Such views were no doubt common for the time, but were nowhere else so aggressively linked with witchcraft.⁴⁷ Institoris argued that all witchcraft could be traced to the same root as all characteristically female sin: carnal lust. After his list of complaints about the female character, he clearly states his answer to the question of why witches are necessarily women: "... the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations."⁴⁸ And furthermore, "To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is women insatiable."⁴⁹

The primary innovation of the *Malleus* was this insistence that harmful magic belonged almost exclusively to women. Male magicians exist in Institoris's text, but they are pointedly marginalized. Broedel suggests that perhaps the simplest explanation for this insistence (beyond the obvious misogyny, which, though clearly a powerful force in Institoris's worldview, seems insufficient on its own) is to accept that it derives from his own experience as a witch-hunter.⁵⁰ It would not be unreasonable to suppose that a majority—even a large majority—of accused witches in a given area could have been women. Institoris makes precisely this claim in the *Malleus*: "As for the first question, why a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men; it is indeed a fact that it were idle to contradict, since it is accredited by actual experience, apart from the verbal testimony of credible witnesses."⁵¹ Whatever the reasoning of its author, the *Malleus* proved to be incredibly successful. Acting on the foundations of its predecessors, and on the plethora of conditions which had paved the way for the idea of an exclusively female witchcraft mythology, the "Hammer of Witches" served as the final link in the chain of influences. Its widespread acceptance as the authoritative treatise on witchcraft assured the feminization of the clerical conception of witchcraft.

By the time the *Malleus* reached widespread readership, the stereotype of the female witch was becoming well established. The development of this stereotype over the course of the preceding centuries had been long and complex, and was now reaching its fruition. Conceptions of magic, once having favored the idea of masculine practitioners, had shifted to a feminized concept. The establishment of the witches' sabbat as the definitive central element of the clerical concept of witchcraft was

perhaps the strongest force in pushing the stereotype across the gender boundary. Its construction from a combination of anti-heretical stereotypes and feminine mythological motifs created powerful imagery that could easily be interpreted as strongly accusatory toward women. Misogynist authorities like Johannes Nider and Heinrich Institoris responded in the predictable way, seizing their opportunity to promote the feminized stereotype and the persecution of women as witches.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the rate of witchcraft trials increased greatly, often doubling figures from the first half.⁵² As Europe made the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, the witch-hunting craze persisted, and convicted witches were burned well into the eighteenth century. An estimated 40,000 people were executed as witches between 1450 and 1750.⁵³ Varying figures have been proposed for the exact percentages of male versus female convictions. It is clear that the vast majority of those executed for witchcraft were women, probably between 65 to 80 percent.⁵⁴ Direct responsibility for this cannot reasonably be placed on any one group or sector of society. Although complicated social and economic factors within rural village populations likely had the most direct influence on the nature of the accusations themselves, the clerical conceptions of witchcraft must also have greatly exacerbated the overall tendency to associate witches with women. After all, as Kieckhefer has pointed out, local parish priests could easily serve as modes of transmission for such biases between the classes.⁵⁵ And in the end it was the clerical authorities who carried out the trials and made the convictions. As has been noted by Bailey, if clerical conceptions of magic had not developed into a pointedly feminized stereotype, it seems unlikely that the witchcraft craze would have occurred in the way that it did.⁵⁶ The ultimate irony, of course, lies in that very shift of conception. In earlier periods, clerical authorities were concerned primarily with masculine necromantic sorcery, the practice of which historical evidence has proven to have actually taken place.⁵⁷ Persecution of these male practitioners was never pursued with the same fervor that was applied to the hunting of witches after the shift of clerical concerns. Witchcraft though, unlike necromancy, was an imaginary construct, and all evidence points toward the non-existence of any real satanic witch cult.⁵⁸ As the witch-craze broke out across Europe and the learned elite developed their feminized concept of magic, thousands of women were burned for a crime that in all likelihood never existed.

Notes

1. Various forms of divination were among the most common magical practices in the classical Greek and Roman traditions. There were countless varieties of divinatory practices, most of which were elemental. Astrological divination and astral magic drew not only upon observation of material conditions in the heavens, but also on invocation of the elemental spirits who were thought to dwell there. The spirits of the dead were similarly employed for purposes of divination in classical necromancy. See Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 125–33, 152; Isidore of Seville, “Etymologies, Book VIII, Chapter 9,” in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 51.
2. Augustine, “Demonic Power in Early Christianity,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 28–29.
3. Augustine, “On Christian Teaching, Book II (395–98, 426),” in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 44.
4. Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 123.
5. Augustine, “On Christian Teaching,” 46.
6. Understanding of this terminology is essential to the entire issue of medieval magic. The primary meaning of *maleficium* had once been “evil deed,” but as early as the time of Tacitus it had been used to refer to sorcery and malign magic. In the texts and treatises of the later Middle Ages, *maleficium* usually referred to harmful sorcery or its effects, or, less commonly, it was used to denote a material object in which malign magical force resided. A *maleficus*, thus, was generally a person who knowingly produced *maleficium*. The key thing to understand is that these notions were broad and ill-defined. There was no one homogenous category of specific practices that uniformly qualified; rather, *maleficium* was an amalgamation of harmful conditions that could be linked with some event, individual, or motivation that was perceived as malicious. See Broedel, 131–33, 173.
7. Regino of Prüm, “A Warning to Bishops, the Canon Episcopi (ca. 906),” in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 61–62.
8. *Ibid.*, 62.
9. Jeffrey Burton Russel, “Witchcraft, European,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph Strayer, 12 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1989), 660. More will be said on the specific nature of these traditions and their ultimate relevance to witchcraft mythology.
10. Here the *Episcopi* shows itself to be part of the *interpretatio Christiana*, the effort to combat pagan survivals by translating elements of pagan traditions into Christian theological terms, which would then be condemned within the Christian theological framework. The *Episcopi* labels the pagan goddess Diana and her ethereal attendants as demons and condemns those who would follow or even believe in their existence as devil-worshippers. See Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 39.
11. Burchard of Worms, “The Correcter, sive Medicus (ca. 1008–1012),” in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 64–67.
12. Michael D. Bailey, “The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 19 (2002): 124–25.
13. Burchard of Worms, “The Corrector,” 64.
14. Bailey, 125; The rise of scholasticism at this same time seems to have encouraged an increase in translation and absorption of Arabic texts in areas like Sicily and Spain, where European scholars were in close contact with the Islamic world. Such classical, Hebrew, and even Asian occult and magical texts had already been translated into Arabic and maintained by Islamic scholars for hundreds of years. See Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 117–19.

15. On the original meaning of the term, Isidore of Seville said, "Necromancers are they by whose incantations the dead appear to revive and prophesy and answer questions. *Nekros* in Greek means dead, while *manteia* means divination." See Isidore of Seville, "Etymologies," 52. However, by the Middle Ages the meaning had substantially changed. Medieval theological writers assumed, in the tradition of Augustine, that the spirits of the dead could not really be conjured, and that the necromancers summoned demons who pretended to be spirits of the dead. As such, the term *necromancy* came, in the late medieval period, to refer to the explicit and intentional conjuring of demons. See Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 152.
16. Bailey, 125–26.
17. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 152–75.
18. Bailey, 125.
19. Thomas Aquinas, "From the Summa theologiae: The Demons Tempt Man," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 101.
20. Bailey, 126–28.
21. Frightening sacrifices were demanded from the witch by the devil to secure the pact. Animal sacrifices might be made, or the witch might be forced to promise one of his or her own limbs (to be collected after death). More disturbing still were the descriptions of witches offering up the bodies and souls of their firstborn children for ritual sacrifice, the remains being subsequently used to create magical powders and unguents. See Michael D. Bailey, "The Medieval Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," *Exemplaria* 8, no. 2 (1996): 429, 430; Claude Tholosan, "Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores (1436–37)," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 164.
22. Bailey, "The Feminization of Magic," 127–28.
23. Broedel, 124.
24. In reality the Waldensians, like many religious subgroups of the Middle Ages, started simply as a community whose members chose to live in voluntary poverty in emulation of the life of Christ. The Waldensians remained, doctrinally, quite close to Catholic dogma, but rejected the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Some of the outlandish accusations may have been inspired by a corruption of actual Waldensian practice. To hide from would-be persecutors, Waldensians did hold their meetings in secret, and the accusations of orgies in the dark may be corrupt exaggerations of their actual practice of ending these secret meetings with communal prayer in total darkness. See Norman Cohn, "The Demonization of Mediaeval Heretics," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge (London: Routledge, 2002), 36–39, 42.
25. This black cat is meant to be the devil, or at least a demon representing the devil. The image of the devil appearing in animal form becomes common within these clichés, both in their application to heretics and to witches. The black cat is the most common animal form amongst these depictions.
26. Gregory IX, "Vox in Rama (1233)," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 116.
27. Cohn argues that the roots of these types of accusations can be traced back considerably further, even to the time of early Christianity. He claims that similar defamation was used in a more rudimentary way by the Romans against early Christians. He also notes, however, that it would be misleading to portray all clerical and inquisitorial authorities who participated in persecutions based on these accusations as aware of their fictional nature. If the application of these stereotypes was a conscious act of slander, it was perpetrated by a select few. Most clerics and inquisitors (and even the popes) thoroughly believed in the reality of the accusations and in the justice of the persecutions. Cohn, 37, 47, 49.
28. *Ibid.*, 43–45.
29. The conception of witchcraft not simply as scattered occurrences but as a defined sect was a natural and essential result of the sabbat mythology itself. The nature of the demonic assemblies implied a conscious collective, and this classification allowed for

- easier application of anti-heretical stereotypes. Once witchcraft became a sect, it could be classified as a heretical sect.
30. See Johannes Nider, "The Formicarius (1435–38)," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 155–59; "Errores Gazariorum (1437)," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 159–62; Tholosan, 162–66.
 31. For an in-depth analysis of the chronology of witch persecutions, see Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 10–26.
 32. Bailey, "Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," 432–33, 439.
 33. Martine Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region (1430–1440): Text and Context," in *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions*, ed. Gabor Klaniczay and Eva Pocs (Budapest: Ceu Press, 2008), 21–22, 27.
 34. The name Diana suggests a Roman origin, although much of the tradition itself seems more similar to the "Wild Hunt" of Germanic legend. Its nature as an amalgam of various traditions is evidenced by the existence of various names used in different regions, Diana merely being the most popular amongst clerical authorities. The leading goddess was also known as Hilda, Berta, Perchta, or any of several others. This goddess would ride through the night on various beasts, attended by fairy-like female spirits, and would call to sleeping women who would rise from their beds and come out to join the procession. These companies of women were often referred to as *bonae res*, because the original myths claimed the women brought good luck upon those who left gifts for them. See Broedel, 103; Russell, 660.
 35. Broedel, 107.
 36. Ibid., 104–07.
 37. Tholosan, 165.
 38. Bailey, "The Feminization of Magic," 122.
 39. Broedel, 171.
 40. Nicolau Eymeric, "The Directorium Inquisitorum (1376)," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 125.
 41. "The Theology Faculty of the University of Paris Condemns Sorcery (1398)," in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 131.
 42. Broedel, 170–71.
 43. The text is formally credited to Heinrich Institoris (also known as Heinrich Kramer, Institoris being the Latinized version) and his colleague James Sprenger, and the work was to some extent a collaboration of the two. Broedel (whose historical work focuses heavily on the *Malleus*) has claimed that it seems probable that Sprenger's overall contribution was minimal. See Hans Peter Broedel, "To Preserve the Manly Form from so Vile a Crime: Ecclesiastical Anti-Sodomitic Rhetoric and the Gendering of Witchcraft in the *Malleus Maleficarum*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 19 (2002): 144.
 44. Broedel, "The Construction of Witchcraft," 176.
 45. Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, translated by Montague Summers (La Vergne, TN: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), 51.
 46. Ibid., 52.
 47. Broedel, "The Construction of Witchcraft," 176.
 48. Kramer, 53.
 49. Ibid., 56.
 50. Broedel, "The Construction of Witchcraft," 175.
 51. Kramer, 50.
 52. See Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 11.
 53. The estimated numbers of witchcraft executions have fluctuated a great deal throughout the course of historical work on witchcraft, even in the last few decades. It was once thought that as many as nine million people had been executed. More recent scholarship has shown that even the more conservative figures of 100,000–200,000 have been notably exaggerated.

- See Russel, 658; Brian P. Levack, "Witchcraft," in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul F. Grendler, 6 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1999), 314; James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (London: Pearson Education, 2001), 6.
54. Russel, 664; Levack, 314.
55. Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 4.
56. Bailey, "The Feminization of Magic," 128.
57. See Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 156.
58. See Cohn, 48–51.

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Theology, Psychology, and Politics: The Holy Trinity in Morrison's *Beloved*

Nicole Selenka, author

Dr. Roberta S. Maguire, English and University Honors Program, faculty adviser

Nicole Selenka graduates in January 2012 with a degree in Secondary Education English and a minor in English as a Second Language.

Roberta S. Maguire, professor of English and director of the University Honors Program, earned her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park. At UW Oshkosh since 1997, Dr. Maguire teaches African American literature and culture courses, and her research focuses on African American modernism and jazz.

Abstract

This essay dissects the previously unstudied allusion to the Catholic Holy Trinity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and explains how her purpose in using this allusion, like the Trinity itself, is threefold. Excerpts from the novel reveal how Morrison uses the Trinity to develop her three main characters and their relationships to each other, deepening *Beloved's* already dense plot. Textual evidence for Morrison's exploration of the reality, fear, and enormity of the enslaved experience is also presented, and how Morrison unites these specific psychologically damaging experiences into a singular commentary on post-Civil War African American consciousness through her trinity of characters is demonstrated. Further, the political climate of the 1980s is investigated and the assertion that Morrison uses her allusion to the Trinity to comment on the tacit reversion of civil rights at the hands of the neglectful Reagan Administration and Rehnquist Court is made. These three interdependent aspects of Morrison's Trinity allusion are also used to illuminate *Beloved's* hauntingly obscure closing message.

Introduction

In her 1987 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison takes up a remarkably diverse set of historical and cultural ideas and quilts them together into an affective narrative. Based on the historic tragedy of Margaret Garner's infanticidal response¹ to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, Morrison's story follows Sethe, a mother and escaped slave who murders her young daughter in a fit of mercy, madness, and love when the family's capture and return to the plantation at Sweet Home seems imminent. Sethe and her surviving daughter, Denver, are haunted not only psychologically by the lingering reality of slavery as an institution but physically by the baby's ghost itself. When a strange young woman named Beloved sweeps into their lives, these two haunting realities collide to create a multi-leveled, unique experience in historical fiction.

The novel follows Sethe, a free woman in post-Civil War Ohio, who fights to suppress the horrific memories of her enslaved life on the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky and battles with the guilt of having killed her first-born daughter, whose violent ghost still haunts the family's new home at 124 Bluestone Road. Denver, traumatized by the baby ghost and a product of the anxious environment her mother's fear has fostered, becomes introspective and friendless, save for her mother and the baby ghost. Both women live in complacent isolation at 124 Bluestone Road until an old friend of Sethe's from Sweet Home, a former slave named Paul D, arrives. Sethe and Paul D attempt to kindle a romantic relationship, but the baby ghost seethes with anger

at the intrusion and Paul D is forced to exorcise it from the house. He succeeds, but just as a hope for future happiness in familial love emerges for the three characters, a young woman appears on their doorstep. Sleepy, sickly, soaked with water, and able only to recollect her name, Beloved changes the course of Sethe, Denver, and Paul D's lives immediately. The baby ghost incarnate and so much more, she challenges Paul D and Denver to delve into their respective pasts while ultimately forcing Sethe to confront her own.

Beloved is ornate, dense, and, like all of Toni Morrison's fiction, it is as undeniably beautiful as it is socially and politically conscious. This essay will demonstrate how Morrison, through her allusion to the Catholic Holy Trinity, unites three separate psychological remnants of slavery into one cohesive commentary on African American consciousness, and explore how she uses this Trinitarian understanding to address the revision of civil rights implied by a negligent Reagan Administration and Rehnquist Court in the 1980s. The Trinitarian reading of *Beloved*, as an intellectually rewarding complement to studying the novel with the traditional postmodern trinity of race, class, and gender in mind, will also illuminate her evocative closing message that "this is not a story to pass on."²

Literature Review

Critical essays that speak to Toni Morrison's use of Christianity, specifically biblical references, in her novels are numerous. Entire volumes of scholarship are dedicated to how these allusions function within Morrison's fiction, and academics continue to study why she chooses to infuse her novels with Christian themes, imagery, and messages so consistently. In dealing exclusively with *Beloved*, however, this scholarship narrows. Morrison draws upon the vastness of the Western literary tradition and the richness of African culture to an extraordinary extent in this novel, and consequently the study of her tendency toward Christian allusions has seemingly fallen by the academic wayside in lieu of *Beloved*'s more politically profitable aesthetics.

Fortunately, several scholars do maintain that this post-modern slave narrative can and should be read with a critical eye for Christian allusions. The most notable research done with *Beloved* in this vein delves into how Morrison reworks scripture throughout the novel, modeling the trials and triumphs of her characters on the teachings and Passion of Jesus Christ. Research suggests that one of the narrative's most pivotal moments incorporates biblical subtexts. The day before Sethe murders her "crawling already?" baby, Baby Suggs accepts two buckets of donated blackberries and intending to only make a couple of pies for her growing family, she inadvertently initiates a feast for the town's entire black community.³ This banquet, created from nearly nothing, is as reminiscent of Jesus feeding the multitude from five loaves and two fishes as it is symbolic of the Last Supper, the sumptuous Passover meal Jesus took part in the night before his brutal death.⁴ The community's delight in Baby Suggs' generous feast soon turns to disgust in its frivolous excess, and it is this envious reaction to the meal that sets the mechanism for "crawling already?" baby's death and Sethe's ostracism in motion. The community, resentful of Baby Suggs for hosting the celebration "that put Christmas to shame,"⁵ failed to give a warning cry when a slave-catching posse, the "four horsemen"⁶ bearing Sethe's apocalypse, came into town. Biblical subtext can also be inferred from the reverberations of "crawling already?" baby's murder. Sethe acts as Cain did after murdering Abel by refusing to acknowledge the human implications of killing her child, and as a result she is unwilling and unable to properly mourn her child.⁷

Morrison also weaves the Gospel into Sethe's anguished journey to freedom in Ohio. In Morrison's retelling of Jesus' Good Samaritan parable,⁸ Sethe, starving and

in labor, collapses in the woods to die when Amy Denver, a white indentured servant making her own bid for freedom, happens upon her. Ignoring race-based societal demarcations, Amy Denver not only nurses Sethe back to travelling condition but helps deliver the baby, her namesake, as well.⁹ In this same vignette, Amy discovers Sethe's whip-torn back, a weeping wound she likens to a chokecherry tree, and this symbol of debasement hardens into the tree-shaped scar Sethe will bear upon her back for of the sins of slavery¹⁰ just as Christ bore a literal tree upon his back for the collective sins of the world.¹¹

Scholars frequently touch upon Baby Suggs' preaching in their essays as well, searching for Morrison's meaning in the spiritual ministry Sethe's mother-in-law performs, "unchurched,"¹² for the newly freed black community in Ohio. Whether or not Morrison's intentions in designating a woman a preacher were iconoclastic,¹³ Baby Suggs' message of a human love untainted by the hatred and scorn of a white slaveholding society and her assertion that "the only grace they could have was the grace that they could imagine"¹⁴ is undeniably Christian.¹⁵ Morrison also references Jesus' public life and his mission as a healer in Baby Suggs; through her ministry, which gives a people who had never owned an object in their life, least of all their selves, the "spiritual space to claim the Self, which is the God-Spirit that links them to their human selves and to one another" she becomes like Christ, a healer of the masses.¹⁶

However, for all of the research into the biblical allusions Morrison includes in *Beloved*, only one brief mention¹⁷ is made of the hermeneutics concerning the powerful ties between Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved* that drive the novel's plot. Therefore, this essay seeks to fully expose the aesthetics of the Holy Trinity alive in Morrison's *Beloved* and illustrate how even a basic understanding of this theological concept can greatly enhance readers' understanding of Morrison's characters' complex relationships. Moreover, because Morrison declares her authorial sensibility at once "highly political and passionately aesthetic,"¹⁸ this essay will also demonstrate how the author uses her allusion to the Holy Trinity to comment on African American consciousness and subsequently suggest that she uses this commentary to address the political climate of the 1980s, the era in which *Beloved* was written.

Theology, Toni Morrison, and African American Tradition

Denominational conceptions of the Trinity differ, and there are several ways this symbol can be portrayed in fiction depending on which religious doctrine the author identifies with. Perhaps previous research has skirted Morrison's allusion to the Trinity due to the ambiguous nature of this dogmatic principle and the idea that Morrison's legitimate association with a specific strain of religious faith must be established in order to discuss her use of the Holy Trinity in *Beloved*. In a 2004 interview with New York University's Antonio Monda, Morrison explains how her connection to Roman Catholicism started in early childhood. She received a Catholic education, and in these formative years she was "fascinated by the rituals of Catholicism."¹⁹ Therefore, her understanding of the Bible and the Holy Trinity must be as firmly rooted in Catholicism as she once was. Though she left the Church after a crisis of faith in the wake of Vatican II,²⁰ Morrison's thorough comprehension of the complex concept of the Holy Trinity, particularly the Catholic concept of it, is palpable as she taps into this threefold unity to build an equally intricate relationship between her characters Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved*.

The Catholic Trinity is a literal representation of God in three persons; no subordination of its individual parts is implied, and it is not simply the metaphorical application of a trifold symbol. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the three divine Persons are only one God because each of them equally possesses the fullness

of the one and indivisible divine nature.”²¹ This is the conception of the Holy Trinity that Morrison uses in her novel: she applies the richness of her characters over the framework of these three expressions of God that are all equally, at once, and always one God. A basic understanding of this illogical mystery of faith is necessary to fully appreciate the way in which Morrison references it, and theologian Fr. Leonard Feeney provides a concise explanation with water as his example: liquid water, mineral ice, and water vapor are all at once water. They are never anything but formula H₂O, and their separate forms are but varied expressions of an identical substance, just as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are separate selves natural to one entity.²² Morrison takes this concept and applies it to Sethe, Denver, and Beloved with deliberate dexterity, and through this allusion she creates characters that are intertwined.

This is not to say that Morrison takes the Catholic Holy Trinity and inserts it point-blank into her novel with little or no adjustment; her penchant for wedding established literary symbols to African American culture does not allow such a concise explanation. Her simple adoption of the Trinity, in itself, is an ode to the African American tradition. Just as early African American slaves embraced the Christianity offered to them and found room within it to make it their own,²³ Morrison finds room within the Trinity to make this Christian icon hers. When this allusion to trifold unity climaxes, near the end of section two, in the chapter²⁴ that begins “I am Beloved and she is mine,” where all three characters’ consciousnesses are completely interwoven, Morrison’s prose takes on such a halting, staccato beat that readers can actually *feel* her reference to African tribal drums:²⁵

Beloved
 You are my sister
 You are my daughter
 You are my face; you are me
 I have found you again; you have come back to me
 You are my Beloved
 You are mine²⁶

Moreover, her decision to transform the established patrilineal structure of this relationship into an equally potent matrilineal arrangement also signals a direct reference to African culture,²⁷ as Africa has “been home to some of the world’s only matriarchal societies.”²⁸

The Aesthetics of Morrison’s Beloved Trinity

Within this trinity, Sethe, the matriarch, is the Creator; her ownership of the world she made possible for her children by fleeing Sweet Home and escaping to Ohio is unquestioned, particularly when she explains the “miracle” of it to Paul D: “I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn’t no accident. I did that . . . me using my own head.”²⁹ Furthermore, when she attempts to put her emotions during this exodus into words, Sethe uses phrases that establish her as a source of creation and divine love for her children: “But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about. It felt good. Good and right. I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between.”³⁰ With Mother as Creator, Morrison then slides Beloved, the reincarnation of Sethe’s sacrificial child, into this feminine trinity as the Daughter.

Sethe forfeits her child, an infant known only as the “crawling already?”³¹ baby, for the salvation of the world she has created for her children; when she sees her master coming through the gate to reclaim her family, his property, she executes her first-born daughter to save them all. “My plan was to take us all to the other side where

my own ma'am is,"³² she confesses, but she did not have to destroy her remaining children because Beloved's blood sacrifice was all that was needed. In slitting her infant daughter's throat to save the innocent child from a life of dehumanization, Sethe so horrified the family's would-be captors that they left her and her surviving children to the authorities, certain that the same "mishandling" that spurred their flight from Sweet Home had caused them to revert to what their former master termed "the cannibal life they preferred."³³ Morrison then references another Catholic tradition, the Eucharist,³⁴ to cement Beloved as a Christ figure when Denver "swallowed her [crawling already? baby's] blood right along with her mother's milk."³⁵

Denver, as the Holy Spirit, "proceeds"³⁶ from the Mother and the Daughter, as she is utterly dependent on both to define her. In terms of the Holy Trinity, this article of faith is difficult to define; even the *Catechism* is vague, stating only that "The Father generates the Son; the Son is generated by the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son."³⁷ The two imperative concepts here are that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son equally, and that a double procession is required for the Trinity to function.³⁸ Ironically, in this case the novel actually clarifies the allusion. When Sethe kills the "crawling already?" baby, she generates a baby ghost who, ever present, defines Denver's existence as much as her flesh and blood mother does. Therefore, Denver progresses, or "proceeds" twice, both hereditarily from Sethe and experientially from Beloved, who is the "crawling already?" baby ghost incarnate.

Sethe and Beloved also hold equal sway over Denver's heart and mind; Denver explains early on that her two older brothers' terrified exodus from the possessed house, the death of her revered grandmother Baby Suggs, and the fact that no one in the black community dared set foot on even the porch of their house at 124 Bluestone Road after Sethe deliberately murdered the "crawling already?" baby are insignificant episodes "as long as her mother did not look away,"³⁹ a sentiment that speaks to the power of their relationship in the face of Denver's adolescent loneliness. Denver's connection to Beloved is equally intense; unlike her mother, she recognizes her ghostly sister reincarnate in Beloved immediately. Their relationship, born of Denver's fervent desire to care for Beloved when she arrives on their doorstep nearly incapacitated from the weight of the living world and amplified by her commitment to protect her if Sethe's murderous tendencies resurface, evolves into something truly spiritual.

An immortal phantom in an earthly body, Beloved is capable of acting beyond her human faculties: she can lift furniture with one hand, insinuate herself into the hearts and minds of the living to incite discomfort or fear, and she can appear from nothing.⁴⁰ Denver, as a human girl, obviously cannot logically behave this way, but when Beloved, in a fit of happiness, dances around the room one afternoon and urges her sister to join her, Morrison grants the ethereal qualities ordinarily reserved for Beloved to Denver, who "grew ice-cold as she rose from the bed. She knew she was twice Beloved's size but she floated up, cold and light as a snowflake."⁴¹ Levitating from the bed to join her sister in a divine dance, Denver succumbs to a "dizziness, or feeling light and icy at once"⁴² while bouncing round the room and collapses into laughter with her long-lost sister. This melding, the physical dance that allows Denver to momentarily take on Beloved's spectral nature, is accentuated by a conversation they begin that is nothing if not otherworldly—a storytelling session that expressively unites Denver and Beloved to Sethe in one mind.

In the pages that follow, Morrison solidifies her allusion to the Trinity, the deep-seated interconnectivity that defies logic. As Denver begins to recount the story of her birth to Beloved, "the monologue became, in fact, a duet" and the two girls become one, the quilt they are lying on begins "smelling like grass and feeling like hands," and the quiet room drops out from around them.⁴³ Suddenly, out of a mere *desire* to

verbally recreate something “only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it”⁴⁴ they *actually* create it; together as one, they become intermingled with Sethe’s consciousness, and readers are privy to the thorough, direct account of Denver’s birth as told, impossibly, by two characters who simply could not relate this episode in such cinematic detail. By flowing naturally from the reality of Denver and Beloved’s storytelling into the eight-page, firsthand reality of Sethe’s labor and delivery, Morrison fortifies her allusion to the Trinity with the complex relationship these three characters share. Sethe, Denver, and Beloved are at once three separate entities, united intrinsically with each other as one collective mind. When each character’s particular, historical symbolism in Morrison’s trinity is accounted for, these multi-leveled experiences coalesce and American slavery emerges as their horrific common denominator. The three are so expertly intertwined that the totality of their interrelationship creates not only excellent fiction, but an insightful psychological statement: though free in body and conscious thought, the African American mind remains unconsciously tied to and irrevocably damaged by the American institution of race-based slavery.

The Threefold Psychology of Slavery

Throughout *Beloved*, all three characters come to represent three distinct vestiges of slavery that plagued the newly freed African American mind. Like the components of the Holy Trinity combined define one God, the reality, the fear, and the enormity of the enslaved experience are distinct in their respective incarnations yet correspond harmoniously as a singular, indivisible presence in post-Civil War African American consciousness. Sethe, as the aforementioned allusion to God the Father, is by her very nature omnipresent, caught in an eternal “now.” Though she spends the majority of her freedom working hard to “remember as close to nothing as was safe”⁴⁵ about her life in bondage, she lives in constant fear that the sound of a twig snapping or some other common occurrence will send her into a raw reverie where “suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes.”⁴⁶ Though freed legally, Sethe still lives life enslaved by her memory; for her, as for the Creator, past, present, and future meld into eternity and therefore time fails to heal the wounds inflicted upon her at Sweet Home. Sethe’s character becomes Morrison’s symbol for the brutal reality of slavery; inundated with painful, repressed memories, she never ceases to perceive enslavement as an imminent threat. As a result, Sethe’s drive to protect her family from dehumanization never diminishes. Even in her private musings about her blossoming romantic relationship with Paul D, a happy occurrence that might offer her hope for the future and an escape from the past, she resolutely declares that “As for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered.”⁴⁷

Consequently, Denver, who had never known the pain and trial of slavery directly, is also imprisoned by this same unspeakable past her mother eludes daily. Like the Holy Spirit’s function within the Trinity is to evidence the existence of God the Father and Christ the Son,⁴⁸ Denver’s character is bound to bear witness to the reality of Sethe and Beloved. She is a product of the environment they create and she must proceed from them. However, Sethe’s aversion to talking about the painful memories she is composed of, Beloved’s mute presence as the belligerent baby ghost, and the ephemeral nature of the dialogue Beloved is able to maintain as a human leaves Denver at a disadvantage. Knowing not to press her mother for information she is unwilling to share, Denver remains concerned with Sethe’s memories only as far back as her own birth and consciously cuts herself off from understanding the obscure and frightening history that silenced her mother.⁴⁹ Unable to gather enough details about Sethe or Beloved to function as she should within the Trinity allusion, Denver stagnates. Power-

less even to leave her house, she becomes paralyzed by the “out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again” mindset her mother’s fear and Beloved’s presence has fostered.⁵⁰ A testament to the only sentiments she knows and tormented by the terrifying residue of slavery that sticks to the periphery of her free-born life, Denver’s character becomes a symbol for abject avoidance of the past and haunting, distilled fear.

Beloved *is* this haunting; she is the embodiment of the enslaved experience.⁵¹ Just as the inconceivable power of God became man in Jesus Christ, the psychologically crippling immensity of slavery becomes human in Beloved. Aside from quite literally haunting the women of 124 Bluestone Road, she gathers in the collective soul of the “Sixty Million and more” to whom this book is dedicated. Through time-bending stream-of-consciousness, Morrison’s prose develops a wide range of experiences in Beloved, from the little girl crouching in the hold of a ship on the Middle Passage to the ill-treated little girl serving a lecherous man’s food.⁵² These perpetual voices Beloved contains are all enslaved, all aching to be heard, and when Beloved manifests herself as a reality in Sethe and Denver’s life, they are all too much to handle. These three consciousnesses—the lingering reality of American slavery, the fearful avoidance of this reality, and the gravity of enslavement as a whole—make up the collective consciousness of the post-Civil War African American community. Morrison’s allusion to the Trinity is upheld here, though in a decidedly godless manifestation, as all three mindsets are again equal, inseparable components of the African American experience in the 1870s.

The Hazard of Trinitarian Discord

The perfect balance of these three components is as intrinsic to the well-being of the African American community as the synchronization of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to the composition of God. If Sethe were to reign alone, in terms of her psychological symbolism, the African American community would give under the crushing weight of a life enslaved and face destruction by capitulation. If Denver and her psychology ruled, African Americans would live in fear of the free world and a listless demise brought on by the inability to succeed in freedom would follow. If Beloved’s psychology were allowed supremacy, the immensity of slavery as an institution would overwhelm free life and the African American mind would be dominated and defined by enslavement. No one component of either trinity can be allowed to overpower the others.

Morrison understands this Trinitarian equilibrium, as evidenced by Sethe, Denver, and Beloved’s sweet and harmonious relationship at the novel’s outset. Upon discovering that Beloved is her “crawling already?” baby come back to life, Sethe sets out to give her all of the childhood experiences, attention, and familial love she could have ever wanted. But Sethe’s eagerness to please her daughter soon borders on insanity: preoccupied with placating Beloved, Sethe loses her job and does not seek another.⁵³ Sethe throws herself into her family with newfound, fanatic ferocity. She spends their meager life savings on fancy food and dress and as their stores begin to dwindle, Beloved’s demands for attention grow stronger. What begins as a guilt-ridden mother’s second chance to prove her love for her daughter turns into an upheaval of the family structure, and Denver observes the gravity of this imbalance with remarkable clarity: “Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both. . . . Whatever was happening, it only worked with three—not two.”⁵⁴

Morrison destroys her trinity with imbalance, and the Catholic Trinity would be similarly destroyed if the unique relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were misunderstood. The degradation of Morrison’s trinity is marked by Sethe’s

motion to “cut Denver out completely”⁵⁵ from their fervent mother-daughter bonding and the confusion of both Sethe’s and Beloved’s roles in the relationship. Beloved adopts Sethe’s mannerisms, speech patterns, and dress until “it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who,”⁵⁶ and their roles completely reverse when commands from Beloved eventually garner only apologies and groveling from Sethe. The damage this division and disparity within the Trinity would do to the Catholic conception of God is unthinkable, as doctrine clearly states the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are as inseparable in their one substance as they are in their purpose: “the Trinity has one operation, sole and the same.”⁵⁷ But the real devastation to Morrison’s trinity occurs when “the mood changed and the arguments began.”⁵⁸ The delicate, mystical trifold relationship the three held, which previously allowed them a short-lived respite from a savage past, is upset when Sethe allows a domineering Beloved to relegate her to servitude, and history repeats itself. In terms of the Holy Trinity, this power struggle is inconceivable, but Morrison uses this implication to exaggerate the severity of Sethe’s situation: by distorting the balanced power intrinsic to the three-as-one structure, by obliterating the absolute harmony that *composes* God, God could, in effect, *cease to exist*.

The petrifying past Sethe has held at bay comes barreling down on her, both literally when she becomes a slave to Beloved’s whims and figuratively when Beloved’s aforementioned symbolic meaning is considered. On the literal level, Sethe is relieved that with Beloved she does not need to directly confront her past, as the “crawling already?” baby ghost knows all there is to tell,⁵⁹ but her obsession with and subsequent bowing to Beloved as Morrison’s metaphoric embodiment of the enslaved experience allows Sethe to be swept away into her memories, memories that begin to erode her. Emboldened by her mother’s plight, Denver overcomes the fear instilled in her and sets out for help, but Sethe steadily wanes as Beloved waxes into a pregnant glory, feeding on unspoken misery. Sethe’s physical collapse is imminent until the previously aloof black community, witnessing Denver’s desperation and heeding gossip of the “grown-up evil sitting at the table with a grudge”⁶⁰ at 124 Bluestone Road, unites to banish Beloved with prayer.⁶¹ This “amplified trinity” of 30 faithful women⁶² checks Beloved’s power and in doing so, sets Morrison’s trinity aright.

With this drama modeled on the hypothetical collapse of the Holy Trinity, Morrison outlines the repercussions of allowing the searing memories of slavery as a whole to cauterize the budding hope for future happiness in those who survived its terror. Though Morrison wrote this tragedy and trinity of characters with an eye for the past, she also did so with an ear to the present; the closing statement that “this was not a story to pass on,” and her urging to acknowledge history with prudence lest it repeat itself, was as important to the African American community in the late 1980s as it was in the 1870s.

Morrison’s Exorcism of 1980s Politics

In the 1980s, the Reagan Administration and the Rehnquist Court were the embodiment of African America’s most deeply rooted anxieties, a new Beloved; they were a powerful, political, and legally potent force for the reversion of civil rights. According to Robert L. Carter, U.S. District Court judge and civil rights advocate, the 1980s marked the most drastic adjustment in America’s approach toward race relations since *Brown v. Board of Education* in the 1950s.⁶³ But contrary to *Brown*, this alteration in attitude was to the detriment of the African American community. The steady thrum of progress that had sustained the Civil Rights movement through desegregation, bussing, and affirmative action was fading; both the federal court system and the American public seemed destined to revert to their pre-Civil Rights racial bias. The “overt manifestations” of racism were gone, but the sentiment remained, evidenced by

the persistent *de facto* segregation of cities across the country and combined with a rise in hate crimes among adolescent Americans, racial tension punctuated the decade.⁶⁴ Of New York City in the late 1980s, Carter said, "I feel as vulnerable and exposed to physical danger because of the color of my skin as I felt in rural Mississippi. . . . or Georgia in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s."⁶⁵

Even as it seemed Civil Rights would meet its end by being systematically dismantled from the bottom up, it was also on the verge of being picked apart from the top down. The conservative Reagan Administration did not seem to believe that government intervention was the proper tool for the advancement of minority populations.⁶⁶ This mind-set limited the courts' role in maintaining the hard-won legal gains that four decades of Civil Rights activism produced, and because most African American scholars, lawyers, and judges considered further racial reform impossible by any means but "through law," they perceived this lack of government concern as a death-blow to racial equality.⁶⁷ This decade of renewed racial tension and languishing government support for civil rights was the climate that produced *Beloved*, and when Morrison's trinity of characters and the separate traces of slavery they each symbolize are viewed in light of 1980s politics, her message that "this is not a story to pass on" reverberates with sobering effects.

The heaviness of this statement is evidenced by Morrison's trinity and the way in which her characters' respective symbolic implications for African American identity, their types, remain the same in the 1980s despite years of litigation. As in the 1870s, Sethe is still a newly freed woman. She fights to forget hardships of growing up black in America, but having been raised within the humiliation of segregation, the bitter sting of *de jure* discrimination still haunts her daily life. She seals her mind in the present, and while thinking of the steady march toward racial equality, of the victories won, and of the new life she has made possible for her children, she keeps the past at a distance. Then a news story, some random act of racial violence, sends her falling, falling, falling back into the open, waiting arms of Jim Crow. The historical chapters pertaining to the fight for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s remain integral parts of modern African American identity, and while succeeding generations are effectively removed from them, as Denver was removed from slavery, they still exact presence in African American thought in the 1980s.

A 1980s *Beloved*, ever the specter of slavery, has taken on many new victims' voices since the 1870s, but she still signifies the breadth of the African American experience in this new trinity. She haunts 1980s African American consciousness as she did the women's house at 124 Bluestone Road: as a sad, ever-present companion with an inclination to make her presence known when she feels she's being forgotten. In the novel, *Beloved* materializes then Paul D exorcises her as "crawling already?" baby ghost from 124 Bluestone Road, and it is when this new *Beloved* is evicted from the community's thought in the 1970s, when the Civil Rights movement finally yielded a "semblance of racial justice,"⁶⁸ that she manifests herself and becomes a problem by the 1980s for the contemporary equivalents of Sethe and Denver.

When the past comes back to destroy a contemporary Sethe and her hope for any further racial reform, Morrison's Trinitarian narrative becomes a warning. If 1980s African America follows Sethe's lead and her symbolic psychological meaning, if they give in to the weight of mounting public and courtroom pressure, if they fail to protect their advances at this crucial post-Civil Rights movement moment, then they will be forced to relinquish those rights and become slaves anew under retrograde politics. With civil rights deteriorating in front of their eyes, the new generation must, as Denver did in the novel, go out into the world and seek help. The young need to advocate, as their parents and grandparents did, for the rights they have now and look boldly into

the past, regardless of its horrors, to appreciate how they got them. Finally, the only way to exorcise the past is to collect as a community and, in the verbal recognition of this blatant evil, force it back to the periphery of consciousness where it belongs. With her simple closing phrase, “this is not a story to pass on,” Morrison both encourages and cautions readers; she urges them to explore, but staunchly resist, the pull of the past. None of the dehumanizing chapters of the African American experience are aspects to “pass on” or ignore because they are too horrific to investigate, but historical terrors should never be allowed to “pass on,” or become so psychologically ever-present that they exert power over present generations.

Morrison’s skill in employing the Trinity allusion to illustrate the multifaceted anguish of a newly freed community in the wake of slavery’s terrors amplifies not only the experience of African Americans in the 1870s, but the modern African American experience during the semi-recent setback to racial equality in the 1980s as well. African American identity, via her allusion to the Trinity, emerges as a complex and powerful combination of harsh recurring memories, a sorrowful distant past, and struggles to forget what ought to never truly be forgotten. Her allusion also intensifies the duality and import of *Beloved*’s closing message, in that all of these individual aspects, as coequal, coeternal, and copowerful, deserve study and understanding. But, as Morrison points out, a balance must exist among them for the continual success of the African American community.

Notes

1. Margret Garner, wife and mother of four, escaped from slavery with her family by fleeing to Southern Ohio in 1865. When the family’s former owner arrived to reclaim his “property,” Margret was unable to bear the thought of her children living their lives in bondage. Feeling death was preferable to a life enslaved, she murdered her young daughter with a butcher knife. She attempted to kill her remaining children as well, but did not succeed. Carmen Gillespie, *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 19.
2. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 315.
3. *Ibid.*, 158.
4. Susan Corey, “Toward the Limits of Mystery: The Grotesque in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.” In *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*, Marc C. Connor (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 41.
5. Morrison, 171.
6. *Ibid.*, 172.
7. Carolyn M. Jones, “*Sula* and *Beloved*: Images of Cain in the Novels of Toni Morrison.” In *Understanding Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Sula*, Solomon O. Iyasere and Marla W. Iyasere (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 2000), 343.
8. Carolyn A. Mitchell, “I Love to Tell the Story: Biblical Revisions in *Beloved*.” In *Understanding Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Sula*, Solomon O. Iyasere and Marla W. Iyasere (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 2000), 173–87.
9. *Ibid.*, 174.
10. *Ibid.*, 176.
11. Nancy Berkowitz Bate, “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Psalm and Sacrament.” In *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities*, Shirley A. Stave (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 27.
12. Morrison, 103.
13. Emily Griesinger, “Why Baby Suggs, Holy, Quit Preaching the Word: Redemption and Holiness in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Christianity and Literature* 50 (Summer 2001): 682–702.
14. Morrison, 104.

15. Bärbel Höttges, *Faith Matters: Religion, Ethnicity, and Survival in Louise Erdrich's and Toni Morrison's Fiction* (Heidelberg, Germany: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007), 85.
16. Mitchell, 182.
17. Betty Jane Powell, "Will the Parts Hold?: The Journey Toward a Coherent Self in *Beloved*." In *Understanding Toni Morrison's Beloved and Sula*, Solomon O. Iyasere and Marla W. Iyasere (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 2000), 150–51.
18. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Random House, 1974), forward.
19. Antonio Monda, *Do You Believe?: Conversations on God and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 117–18.
20. Ibid.
21. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2006), 20.
22. Father Leonard Feeney, M.I.C.M., "The Blessed Trinity Explained to Thomas Butler." *The Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*: par. 5, <http://catholicism.org/feeney-trinity.html>.
23. Yusef Komunyakaa, "Sorrow Songs and the Flying Away: Religious Influence on Black Poetry," *Cross Currents* 57 (Summer 2007): 281.
24. Though it has three distinct sections, *Beloved* is not divided into titled or numbered chapters. This "chapter" begins on page 248, near the end of section two.
25. Jeremiah A. Wright, "Words from the Pulpit: Faith in a Foreign Land." *Cross Currents* 57, (Summer 2007): 238.
26. Morrison, *Beloved*, 248–51.
27. Therese E. Higgins, *Religiosity, Cosmology, and Folklore: The African Influence in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (New York: Taylor & Francis Books Inc., 2001), 35.
28. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, "Africa's Women have Led in the Past, and Will Lead in the Future," *New African* 500 (Nov. 2010): 78.
29. Morrison, *Beloved*, 188.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 110.
32. Ibid., 234.
33. Ibid., 175.
34. Berkowitz Bate, 54.
35. Morrison, 237.
36. The Nicene Creed, a profession of faith for Catholic Christians, states: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the Giver of Life, Who *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified."
37. USCCB, *Catechism*, 20.
38. Kevin Knight, ed. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Question 36, 2008, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1036.htm>.
39. Morrison, *Beloved*, 20.
40. Ibid., 69, 147, 144.
41. Ibid., 89.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 93–94.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 12.
46. Ibid., 13.
47. Ibid., 54.
48. USCCB, *Catechism*, 42–3.
49. Morrison, 76, 71.
50. Ibid., 280.
51. Therese E. Higgins, 34.
52. Morrison, 243–47.
53. Ibid., 276.
54. Ibid., 279–80.
55. Betty Jane Powell, 151.
56. Morrison, *Beloved*, 276–77.

57. USCCB, *Catechism*, 20.
58. Morrison, 243–47.
59. *Ibid.*, 221.
60. *Ibid.*, 295–98.
61. Therese E. Higgins, 106.
62. Bärbel Höttges, 95.
63. Robert L. Carter, “Thirty-Five Years Later: New Perspectives on Brown.” In *Race in America: The Struggle for Equality*, Herbert Hill and James E. Jones (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 83.
64. Derrick Bell, “Remembrances of Racism Past: Getting Beyond the Civil Rights Decline.” In *Race in America: The Struggle for Equality*, Herbert Hill and James E. Jones (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 75.
65. Carter, *New Perspectives*, 84.
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67. Bell, *Remembrances*, 75.

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The Pursuit of True Freedom: School Desegregation in Racine, Wisconsin

Chris Tempas, author

Dr. Stephen Kercher, History, faculty adviser

Chris Tempas graduated from UW Oshkosh in May 2011 with a degree in history. His research began as a paper in a seminar on civil rights in Wisconsin during the fall semester of his senior year.

Dr. Stephen Kercher is an associate professor of history. He has been teaching twentieth century U.S. history at UW Oshkosh since 2000. His current research focuses on black student protest at Wisconsin colleges and universities in the 1960s.

Abstract

Throughout its existence, the United States had been inundated by racial conflict. Following the 1954 Supreme Court ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, school segregation became one of the most controversial racial issues in our country. In the North, where de facto segregation ruled supreme, integrating public schools proved to be an especially arduous task. Racine, Wisconsin, was a typical Northern city in many regards. However, due to outstanding community support and extraordinary leadership, particularly from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its president Julian Thomas, the Racine Unified School District triumphed over segregation. Because of its successful implementation of school desegregation, Racine became a model for racial accord for the rest of the country.

“Glory, glory, hallelujah!” was the cheer that echoed throughout the streets of Racine, Wisconsin, on a cold spring day in 1854, when more than 100 Racine men, in response to a “Revere-like summons” issued by crusading newspaper editor Sherman Booth, defied the injustice of racial prejudice and secured freedom for a fellow man. The man, Joshua Glover, was a runaway slave who had escaped from his master’s custody in St. Louis two years earlier. Glover was living in Racine and working at a local sawmill in 1854 when he was tracked down by agents of his owner, captured, and arrested under the Fugitive Slave Act. Taken aback by his unjust incarceration, a mob of more than 100 Racine anti-slavery activists led by Booth took the next steamer to Milwaukee, where Glover was being held. The crowd of angry Racine residents broke down the jailhouse door and freed Glover, allowing him to escape to Canada and reclaim what they believed to be his “indefensible right” to freedom.¹ This event spread anti-slavery sentiment across the state, leading the Wisconsin Supreme Court to shock the nation by making Wisconsin the first state to declare the Fugitive Slave Laws unconstitutional. During the tumultuous decade that preceded the Civil War, Glover’s emancipation inspired abolitionists across the nation to view Racine as a model for racial accord.²

During the middle of the next century, another period of turmoil enveloped the United States. In a country torn apart by racial issues, few generated more controversy than school segregation. Yet, just as the Racine community had bonded together to liberate Joshua Glover from his unjust imprisonment, it again proved exemplary in its successful liberation of African Americans from the injustice of segregated schools.

In 1975, after a decade-long struggle to desegregate its schools, America would once more look to Racine as a “model for the nation.”³

One hundred years after Joshua Glover earned nationwide celebrity, the United States Supreme Court ruled, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” This landmark ruling was intended to end the practice of segregated education in the United States. Yet in the years that followed, segregation was still in full bloom in many cities outside of the South.⁴

Prior to the 1954 *Brown* ruling, Southern-style school segregation was fairly simple—African Americans went to “colored” schools; whites went to white schools. Although far from easy, this made the desegregation of schools in the South a more straightforward undertaking. However, in most Northern communities, geography, not skin color, was the primary cause of racial segregation. Because racial segregation was fundamentally intertwined with residential segregation, desegregating schools in the North would prove to be a much more complex and arduous task. Despite supporting school desegregation in principle—a 1963 poll discovered that 75 percent approved of the *Brown* decision⁵—Northern whites opposed it in practice, arguing against the disruption of what they believed to be “the natural order of things.” According to historian Thomas Sugrue, “the debate over race and education in the North came to hinge on” one major notion, “the neighborhood school.”⁶

In 1962, *Time* magazine called the neighborhood school “a concept as American as apple pie,”⁷ but to most African Americans it was not nearly as appetizing. Even in the absence of officially separate schools, Northern whites used their freedom in the housing market to produce public schools that were nearly as segregated as those in the South. And these same Northern whites who professed their approval of desegregation fiercely defended the separateness of neighborhood schools. But schools attended predominantly by African American children were not equal to schools attended predominantly by white children. “Separate” really did not mean “equal.” Francis Keppel, U.S. Commissioner of Education, addressed this point in a 1964 speech: “Whether it exists by law or custom, by edict or by tradition, by patterns of employment or patterns of housing, segregation hurts our children, Negro and white alike. And nowhere is this damage more devastating than in education.”⁸

In Racine, like in other parts of the country, damage was being done. At the time of the *Brown* decision, racial segregation was relatively new to Racine County. It had always been a diverse area; Danish, Polish, German, and Czech immigrants made Racine a “melting pot” of sorts. Yet as late as 1940 this “melting pot” was distinctively white. The 1940 U.S. Census reported that only 432 out of the total 67,195 residents of Racine were “black”—less than 1 percent of the population. As in many Northern cities however, the onset of World War II created a demand for African American workers in Racine. By 1960, Racine County’s African American population had grown tenfold, becoming a significant segment in the community. And like in other Northern cities, the impact of this rapid minority population growth was amplified as a result of housing patterns and the compression of minority populations into concentrated neighborhoods. While newer schools in the suburbs were populated almost exclusively by white children, the minority student population was disproportionately concentrated in older, run-down, inner-city schools. According to the Racine Unified School District, by 1963, 73 percent of black pupils lived in an inner-city area that represented about four square miles out the 100 square mile district.⁹

Even though de facto segregation persisted in the North, it was coming under scrutiny as a destructive mechanism for African Americans, especially in schools. In the early 1960s, as the centennial anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation approached, many African Americans saw de facto segregation as the primary culprit

for the substantial gap in affluence, status, and power between themselves and whites.¹⁰ Nowhere was this gap more prevalent than in the public schools of cities in the North. Many, like the Reverend Charles H. Smith, member of the Board of Directors for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), were quick to point out the connection between unequal educational opportunities and inferior economic progress. As Smith saw it, de facto segregation not only denied African American children equal educational opportunities, but prevented them from attaining “the real freedom to which [blacks] have a right.”¹¹

Throughout the 1960s, as this “real freedom” still eluded many in Racine, the NAACP was widely considered what the *Racine Journal-Times* in 1970 would call “the major, if not the only, spokesman for the cause of equality for minority citizens” in the area. Although the local NAACP’s success hinged on much more than just one person, no individual was more important to achieving racial equality in Racine than Julian Thomas.¹²

A 1952 graduate (and Hall of Fame inductee) of Racine’s Washington Park High School, Thomas was hired as a factory worker at J.I. Case Company. At J.I. Case, Thomas worked hard and quickly rose to become an executive—no small feat for a black man at the time. He was elected president of the Racine NAACP in 1964 and would remain in that position for the next 22 years. Thomas served as president of the Wisconsin NAACP and as chairman of the seven-state region of the NAACP. He was also involved in numerous organizations, boards, and committees in the Racine community.¹³

Thomas’s considerable public influence was inspired by his ability to inspire trust and respect among all races. His steadfast and logical leadership would prove to be the cornerstone upon which racial integration in Racine was built. But in the mid-1960s, his goal of achieving racial integration was not shared by most citizens of Racine, white or black. Thomas realized that before Racine could overcome desegregation, he had to substantially augment awareness and interest in racial issues. In describing Thomas’s struggle, Keith Mack, an administrator at Lakeside School in Racine, drew on a quote from Dante: “The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in time of moral crisis maintain their neutrality.”¹⁴ Mack sensed that Thomas saw a moral crisis at the heart of de facto segregation of Racine schools. Thomas resolved to move people from every segment of Racine’s diverse community away from the position of neutrality to take a stand with him.

Thomas was not the only activist who attempted to awaken Racine’s African American community to the challenges of desegregation. At the 1965 Racine NAACP annual banquet, Edwin C. Berry, executive director of the Chicago Urban League, challenged Racine African Americans to accept the “responsibility to become involved . . . to see that your children get an education.” Without education, he said, a black child “can’t make it in the modern world.” Like Thomas, Berry knew that active involvement was the only way to escape what he called “the cultural castration” that had befallen the American Negro. “We aren’t going to lick this thing by hiding,” he said.¹⁵

In the Jim Crow South, many whites employed blatant racism in order to keep African Americans in hiding. Although racism was tame in Racine compared to other parts of the country, some overt racism still persisted, particularly in the public school system. This came as a shock to many, including NAACP Education Director June Shagaloff. Since 1950, Shagaloff played a critical role in fighting school segregation throughout the United States. While she had witnessed a great deal of racism throughout her career as a civil rights activist, prior to her visit to Racine, Shagaloff said she “had always believed that racial prejudice was less in a northern state like

Wisconsin.” But Shagaloff was appalled when she saw the Confederate flag flying high over Racine’s William Horlick High School in April 1965. After seeing the flag, which she said symbolized “a history of slavery, bigotry, and prejudice” used at a public high school, she was no longer surprised at Racine’s “unwillingness to recognize *de facto* segregation in its school system.”¹⁶

Thomas felt that school segregation in Racine was not as much the result of racism but of apathy. Like many Northern whites, most white citizens of Racine were simply indifferent to the plight of the American Negro. According to Scott Johnson, a Racine student in the 1960s, segregation was simply “not acknowledged” by whites. Moreover, some Racine residents even put an optimistic spin on segregation, citing the “advantage” of neighborhood schools.¹⁷ Johnson’s recollection of white sentiment in Racine was echoed by experts like June Shagaloff. The “fact that too many people in Racine feel there is no problem,” she declared, was the major reason for the racial problems in the Racine Unified School District.¹⁸ Even the school district itself declared racial segregation to be merely a “function of living patterns...not the result of any policies of the Board of Education.” But to Thomas and his allies, it was the Board’s policies—or rather its lack of policies—that produced racial segregation in Racine’s schools.¹⁹

In October 1964, the Racine Unified School Board published “A Proposed Statement of Position,” its first open admission that the district did indeed have a problem. The board committed to “studying the problems of educating disadvantaged youth” in order to “develop programs to overcome the handicaps environment may have placed” on these children.²⁰ While some considered this an important step toward equal educational opportunities for minorities in Racine, many were not satisfied with what they viewed as “token progress.” Thomas was fearful that the school board underestimated the potential volatility of the situation. Unless immediate action was taken, Thomas declared, “There’s going to be another Birmingham right here in Racine.”²¹ He was referring to the widely publicized racial confrontations in Birmingham, Alabama, in the summer of 1963 that produced such rampant mayhem that the federal government was forced to intervene. Neither the school board, Thomas, nor anyone else in Racine wanted a situation like the one in Birmingham.

To avoid this type of racial conflict in Racine, the district needed to make meaningful progress toward solving the problem of desegregation. In 1966, it received a valuable, albeit inadvertent, introduction to racial integration. The closing of Franklin Junior High School and the subsequent opening of Gifford Junior High School required the district to redraw its junior high boundaries. At the start of the 1966–67 school year, Franklin Junior High’s former students, almost half of whom were black, found themselves dispersed among four junior high schools²² (see table 1).

The following year, the Racine Unified School District was again in flux. The closing of another inner-city junior high school and the opening of J.I. Case High School sent the district back to the drawing board. Again, new boundaries resulted in a more equal distribution of African American students. Although racial integration was not necessarily the purpose of the realignment of district boundaries, the dispersion of minorities that followed the opening of new schools in Racine presented the school district with an example to follow in the years to come.²³

As the heat of the school integration movement intensified in the North, Racine, a city previously icily indifferent to *de facto* segregation, began to thaw. In 1966, the Racine Unified School Board produced its “Report of the Special Committee on the Educational Opportunities of the Minority Group Children,” articulating 13 principles that would guide the “search for improvement of educational opportunities for minority group children.” Two years later, the board stepped up this search, making their stance

against unequal educational opportunities official by adopting a policy to “take specific action to erase undesirable cultural, ethnic, and racial imbalances.”²⁴ The passing of this resolution made all plans within the district contingent on the reduction of racial imbalance. Thomas of course supported this resolution, but dryly suggested it was a “little late in coming.” According to him, “it should have been done five years ago.”²⁵ Despite the extended wait, many in Racine were excited about the significant progress toward racial equality made by the school board.

Perhaps the biggest step taken on the path to desegregation in Racine came on the heels of the 1969 Howell School controversy. As whites all over the North staunchly defended their neighborhood schools, this Racine neighborhood school offered many African Americans a prime example of de facto segregation at its worst. Located at one of the city’s busiest intersections, Howell School had a minority student population of more than 75 percent. Throughout the 1960s, the school’s terrible condition had repeatedly garnered complaints from administrators, teachers, and parents. The building’s condition was so poor that there was a widespread concern that strong winds would cause the roof to collapse. In fact, Howell was the only school in the district that was required to have “high wind” drills in addition to fire drills. Several times, the Racine Unified School District had promised families in the Howell area, via bond referenda, a solution to the dismal situation. Each time, however, these families were disappointed by the district’s failure to act.²⁶

In the absence of any action by the district, the Racine NAACP decided that it had to take charge. In November 1969, following a formal inspection, the NAACP Education Committee declared Howell “blatantly unsafe” and an “absolute disgrace” to the city of Racine and to the Racine Unified School District.²⁷ Claiming that the inaction of the board had relegated Howell’s students “to a sub-human level,” the committee rendered the school district “guilty, not only of child neglect, but of hypocrisy as well.” The findings of the Education Committee left the NAACP with no other choice but to demand the immediate closing of Howell School.²⁸

After a prolonged deadlock on the issue, the Racine Unified School Board finally succumbed to the pressure and intimidation by the NAACP and passed a resolution to permanently close Howell School as of January 10, 1970. As with the school closings in 1966 and 1967, the closing of Howell contributed to the further dispersal of African American students among predominantly white schools.²⁹ Moreover, the closing of Howell confirmed the powerful impact of the NAACP and its young president, Julian Thomas. Although Thomas was already a revered leader prior to the Howell dispute, his successful leadership in this difficult and potentially volatile situation inspired unanimous confidence from the African American community. Equally significant, Thomas won the respect of members of the white community. Most people in Racine, black and white, had proved to be tentative in coping with racial difficulties. In Thomas, Racine recognized a leader who would provide the assertiveness needed to overcome these racial difficulties and direct others to do the same.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the realignment of district boundaries, dispersion of minority students, and racial enlightenment of the school board served to whet the appetite of those hungry for integration. According to Thomas, the NAACP “began to think in terms of . . . what centers could be utilized within the inner city where white kids would be brought in and minority children out.”³⁰ If busing was necessary, as most thought it was, then “it should include busing of students both ways,” Thomas proclaimed. This concept sent shock waves through Racine’s white, middle-class suburbia. Most of these parents had no problem with reducing “racial imbalances” and even with the busing of inner-city students to what the district referred to as “outer schools.” The idea of having their children bused to inner-city schools, however, seemed inconceivable.³¹

In 1972, the Racine Unified School Board began discussions regarding plans to desegregate schools in the district. Their hastily drawn plans included the busing of suburban children to inner-city schools. As in many Northern cities, two-way busing inspired bitter protest from many white parents in Racine. Even though almost half of all public school students rode the bus to school by 1970, opponents of busing championed neighborhood schools, defending the time-honored tradition of children walking or riding their bicycles to school. Across the North, the frenzy of the white electorate led many elected officials to jump aboard the anti-busing bandwagon. In 1972, Racine was no different.³² The white outcry against busing compelled the school board to dismiss the desegregation proposals altogether. According to Racine Superintendent C. Richard Nelson, the failure of the first attempt at desegregation forced the district to seriously reevaluate its approach. Although he said the plan was misunderstood, Nelson admitted that the district made some critical mistakes in its initial attempt to establish a strategy for desegregation, and realized that it needed to take a better "method of approach" in carrying out the order to desegregate.³³

Thomas and the NAACP, however, were not in the mood to be patient while the district worried about stepping on the toes of white parents. Almost 20 years since the *Brown* decision, many in Racine felt that the only way to achieve school desegregation in Racine was through legal action. In 1972, Thomas and the Racine NAACP, fed up with token progress and empty promises, laid plans to take court action against the Racine Unified School District. "The only thing that would prevent us from filing suit," Thomas said, "is for the schools [in Racine] to be desegregated."³⁴ Despite his strong desire for immediate action, Thomas recognized that the big picture of desegregation extended beyond Racine. In the eyes of the NAACP, Racine was an important, yet small battlefield in the larger war against school segregation. In 1973, Thomas informed the district of the NAACP's intention not to pursue a lawsuit in Racine until the Supreme Court had ruled on the pending Detroit and Denver desegregation suits,³⁵ citing "the great similarity between these school districts and ours."³⁶ Thomas and the NAACP continued to cooperate with Nelson and the district to pursue, in the words of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), "the legal right to a nonsegregated education . . . for all students."³⁷

Fittingly, later that year it was the Wisconsin DPI that drove the Unified School District to put the decisive nail in the coffin of school segregation in Racine. In June 1973, the DPI sent out state guidelines for desegregation to all school districts. These guidelines insisted on racial balance "within ten percentage points of the proportion of all ethnic groups in their district." William Colby, director of the DPI's Equal Educational Opportunities division, was hopeful that this would compel racially imbalanced districts to integrate. However, as he later explained, the state guidelines "were only recommendations and did not have very much force."³⁸ Yet combined with the external pressure from the NAACP and the Racine community, these guidelines finally pressed the district into a momentous decision that led the city to be viewed as a "model for the nation."³⁹

In a September 1973 meeting, school board president Gilbert Berthelsen motioned for a resolution that adopted the guidelines set by the DPI. The motion, scheduled for a vote in October, sparked intense debate in Racine. In many ways, the controversy surrounding the "Berthelsen motion," as it became known, echoed the wide-ranging debates across the North in regards to public school desegregation. Some, like Thomas, were elated at the prospect of ultimately realizing school desegregation and emphatically called for the passage of the motion. Thomas urged the school board to adopt the motion and "correct this damnable situation in our District."⁴⁰ However, Thomas's efforts to persuade some, especially board member Lowell McNeill, were

futile. In fact, McNeill was one of the motion's most fervent public opponents, even rejecting the idea that the district had segregated schools.⁴¹ Furthermore, he argued, the widespread busing that would accompany a desegregation plan would mean a "complete end" to the advantage of neighborhood schools.⁴² This point of view resonated in almost every Northern city and gained significant support among whites in Racine.

Other groups demonstrated their resistance to school desegregation in a more extreme manner. One group in particular, the National Socialist White People's Party, caused quite a stir in Racine. Wearing swastika armbands, members loudly denounced racial mixing and distributed literature supporting white self-determination. Although the presence of the National Socialists received considerable media attention, few whites in Racine shared their radicalism.⁴³

It was not just white citizens who opposed the Berthelsen motion. Many African Americans, including school board member the Reverend Lawrence Hunt, felt that the implementation of a desegregation plan would do more harm than good for minority students. Contending the proposal for a quota system would mean "resegregation" for black students, Hunt insisted upon the value of schools with a heavy concentration of minorities as a way to avoid "segregation . . . from their own culture." He alleged that many of the district's educational inequalities stemmed not from the physical distribution of minority students, but from the shortage of minority teachers and lack of emphasis on minority curriculum.⁴⁴

The most overwhelming objection from the African American community to the proposed desegregation plan surrounded busing. Maintaining that the burden of desegregation would fall squarely on the shoulders of minority students, many questioned whether the benefits of school desegregation outweighed the extensive busing that accompanied it. This stance was publicly supported by a few large community organizations, including the Racine Urban Ministry and the Racine Clergy Association.⁴⁵ To supporters of the Berthelsen motion, winning over this segment of dissenters was imperative to making desegregation work in Racine. As the school board vote approached, Berthelsen implored these dissenters to look past the flaws of the initial proposal, stressing that "segregation or desegregation . . . is the only issue before us."⁴⁶

On October 8, 1973, the Racine Unified School Board accepted Berthelsen's motion by narrowly passing the resolution requiring that "no school within the Unified School District shall have a minority population in excess of an amount 10 percent above the percentage of minority students in the District." The school board resolved to implement this resolution by the start of the 1975 school year.⁴⁷ Following the passage of this resolution, some feared the widespread dissent, protest, and violence that developed in other Northern cities attempting to integrate. However, as Colby recognized, there were "far more wholesome attitudes in Racine."⁴⁸ Not only did citizens want to avoid any sort of demonstrative violence, the majority was determined to circumvent the political football that had plagued other cities. Instead of forcing an ugly desegregation lawsuit, the community developed a sense of pride in the voluntary nature of desegregation in Racine. This respectful and virtuous reaction of Racine citizens to the school board's decision played a crucial role in the city's exemplary implementation of school integration.

By 1974, even though most of Racine had accepted the concept of school integration, the city was still sharply divided on the structure, size, and scope of a potential desegregation plan. The October 1973 resolution created a citizen's advisory committee to develop four plans for the desegregation process. "Minimum busing" was among the criteria the committee established for the development of the four plans to be presented to the school board in July 1974.⁴⁹ Yet busing, as it had been before the resolution,

would continue to be a focus of debate in Racine. Amazingly, in spite of the committee's intentions, all four plans drew flak from the public in regards to busing.⁵⁰

As the school board vote drew near, Thomas and the NAACP took what he called "a stand not to take a stand," deciding to not publicly endorse any one of the four plans. Although he had conveyed some of his likes and dislikes of the four plans to the school board, Thomas said he did not want to give the board "an excuse not to do anything."⁵¹ His decision to refrain from speaking out against the Redistribution Plan prior to the school board vote attracted some criticism from the black community. Pegged by the *Racine Star-Times* as the "one-way busing" plan, the Redistribution Plan had incurred a great deal of public opposition from the African American community because it "placed the burden of busing on minority students." However, Thomas and the NAACP recognized it was the only plan with a chance of gaining school board approval. As difficult as it was to remain silent, Thomas realized strong protest against the Redistribution Plan would only result in the postponement of school integration.⁵²

On August 12, 1974, the Racine Unified School Board voted to adopt the Redistribution Plan, which called for the busing of minority children away from the inner city, even ending regular classes at some inner-city schools. According to the Reverend Eugene Boutilier, "most knowledgeable members of the [black] community were not in favor of this plan." However, as Thomas understood, the possibility of further delaying school desegregation in Racine was far worse than the problems associated with the plan. Thomas and the NAACP were not the only ones to sacrifice short-term objectives in order to achieve the greater, long-term goal of school integration in Racine. The Reverend Howard Stanton, a board member, favored the Cluster Plan. This plan offered parents a choice, within their geographic "cluster," of the type of school their child would attend. Yet, despite his misgivings, Stanton voted for the Redistribution Plan, admitting that "the cluster plan [had] no chance of passing."⁵³ Even Superintendent Nelson had contended that the Redistribution Plan, as "the most acceptable plan to the white community," was the only plan with the possibility of being approved by the school board.⁵⁴

While it was no surprise to Thomas that the board selected the plan least upsetting to white parents, he was not prepared to surrender. Instead, Thomas began his quest to remedy the "one-way busing plan." As presented to the school board, the Redistribution Plan involved the least amount of student busing of the four plans. But as many opponents of the plan had maintained, it put "the burden of desegregation" on black students. The plan called for the reassignment of more than 50 percent of Racine's minority students, compared to only 3 percent of white students. Although he would not seek a reversal of the board's decision, Thomas demanded a meeting with school officials to share the NAACP's concerns about this "unfair" and "unacceptable" plan.⁵⁵

Those who knew Thomas had often heard him recite his favorite quote: "No man is too big to be small and the real test comes when a small man thinks big." In Thomas's case, thinking big about school desegregation in Racine led to a "real test" of his mettle as a leader. Faced with a plan that caused many in the black community to question the merit of school desegregation, it was up to him to salvage the vision of "true freedom" he had for Racine.⁵⁶

Pursuing a spirit of cooperation, a determined Thomas worked with Superintendent Nelson and other school officials to find a middle ground that appeased some of the concerns of African Americans in Racine. On January 4, 1975, a revised Redistribution Plan was presented to the board. In this presentation, the committee admitted that the original plan had "placed the burden of busing on the minorities." The revised plan had, to an extent, eased this burden by reducing the difference in the numbers of

children moving in versus moving out of the inner city. The revised plan also alleviated concern about the closing of three inner-city schools. Instead, these schools would become magnet schools, used for optional programs like fine arts. These magnet schools would also further reduce the difference in students being bused in versus bused out.⁵⁷ Finally, the revised plan also addressed class size, another grievance of many African Americans, by reducing the student-to-staff ratio to 24.9-to-1.⁵⁸

The revised Redistribution Plan, despite significant improvements, still left many black parents unsatisfied. Stressing the long-term potential of integration, Thomas worked tirelessly to convince African American parents to go along with the plan. “[It] does not meet all of our criteria, but it’s not far off,” he proclaimed. “It’s a workable plan.”⁵⁹ Parents eventually accepted the plan, as they came to understand that the benefits of desegregation far outweighed its shortcomings. It was Thomas’s effort to promote compromise and unify support in the black community, despite his own trepidations about the desegregation plan, which laid the foundation for the success of school integration in Racine.

September 2, 1975, the first day of school in the newly desegregated Racine Unified School District, brought a quiet unease to Racine, perhaps a calm before the storm. As students prepared for new schools and teachers prepared for new students, no one knew what to expect. Superintendent Nelson, however, was optimistic about the coming school year. As the head of the district, he had the primary responsibility of carrying out the order to desegregate. Armed with an unwavering belief in the value of school integration, Nelson publicly and privately won over doubters throughout the district. Desegregation was important, he proclaimed, not only because the laws indicated segregated schools were illegal, but because of its social and academic payoff. Nelson also firmly believed that integration would procure economic benefits, reversing white flight from Racine. Like Thomas, he understood that desegregation could encompass more than just a school district. And like Thomas, he knew the value of community action in achieving such lofty goals. Despite first-day jitters from some in the community, Nelson’s optimistic predictions prevailed. After all of the clamor leading up to September 2, he could not have been more elated in publicly announcing that “the first day under the desegregation plan was quieter than a usual opening day.”⁶⁰

Racine became celebrated across the country for its successful school desegregation, earning the type of praise that would have made Racine’s earliest liberator, Sherman Booth, and his men proud. *The New York Times* called the school integration program in Racine “a model for the nation.”⁶¹ Applauding the “mature manner in which this most difficult of community problems was approached,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* suggested Racine serve as “a standard for other metropolitan areas to follow.”⁶² Residents of Racine echoed these sentiments. “Things have gone very smoothly,” said one teacher of the desegregation effort. In a 1976 survey, 90 percent of teachers and more than 80 percent of parents “believed desegregation was working successfully.”⁶³ Perhaps the best indicator of the success of desegregation was the approval of children like Terry Price, an African American fifth-grader bused from the inner city. Of his new school, Terry cheerfully professed, “I just like it here better.”⁶⁴

Yet the triumph of desegregation did more for Racine than just give children like Terry a better school. Although many originally saw desegregation as solely a way of equalizing educational benefits between blacks and whites, the effects of desegregation resonated to a much larger degree, advancing interracial and intercultural relations in every facet of the community. Like Thomas, others in Racine used desegregation to think big, incorporating it into the broader role of promoting a racially harmonious society.

Activists and scholars across the nation were eager to determine the source of Racine's success. Some of the relative ease of desegregation in Racine could be credited to its voluntary nature. Because it was "not forced suddenly down the throats of citizens," Superintendent Nelson maintained school desegregation in Racine did not inspire animosity as it did in other Northern cities. On the contrary, he said residents "were determined not to become another Boston," referring to the racial discord that disrupted Boston schools.⁶⁵ After the plan was adopted, it was accepted by the community, even by those who had opposed it. Without a doubt, the city's unified stance toward desegregation was instrumental to its success.

Another aspect attributed to the smooth implementation of desegregation was its relative gradualism. According to Nelson, time was a "key factor," enabling the community and staff to "get used to the idea, read about it, and follow its planning process." The two years granted to the district following the Berthelsen motion in 1973 were meant not to delay integration, but to permit the district to develop a plan "carefully, gradually, and with citizen input and cooperation." These two years, Nelson said, also allowed for "a flurry of activity" aimed at "minimizing the culture shock" of integration.⁶⁶ Many teachers, administrators, bus drivers, and secretaries were unfamiliar with the unique cultural aspects of Racine African Americans. To breed a greater degree of familiarity, district personnel were required to attend seminars, workshops, and human relations training in preparation for the coming school year. During the summer, the district also planned activities—picnics, basketball camps, Milwaukee Brewers baseball games, swimming parties—to give children an opportunity to mingle with their new classmates.⁶⁷

The two years following the Berthelsen motion also provided the district, the NAACP, and others time to build community support for the desegregation plan. The community, Nelson claimed, was the real reason desegregation in Racine was so successful. To illustrate this, he pointed to an August 1974 full-page advertisement in the *Racine Journal-Times*, just prior to the board's vote on the selection of one of the four proposed desegregation plans. The advertisement, which included more than 230 signatures, endorsed the unequivocal desegregation of Racine schools. This visible sign of community support, Nelson said, was crucial to the successful implementation of desegregation. He called the community's commitment in spite of differences "the most essential resource of all" in the desegregation process.⁶⁸

Within the community, perhaps no one was more committed than Thomas. He spread his passion for "real freedom" throughout Racine, countering years of apathy and indifference. Tom White, former president of the Wisconsin NAACP, said of Thomas: "During crisis times, Julian [was] called upon for experience, not only by blacks but also by the total community."⁶⁹ Superintendent Nelson and other school officials, though sometimes at odds with Thomas, recognized and appreciated his strong, supportive leadership in the process of desegregation. They realized that without the positive force of Thomas and the NAACP, the racial accord established through school integration could never have been achieved in Racine. African Americans, on the other hand, were grateful for Thomas's great mental courage as he led them into the battle for "real freedom." To resolve the crisis of school segregation, Racine depended on Thomas, a leader who had the respect of the entire community.

In a 1979 speech, Thomas's esteemed colleague Superintendent Nelson described desegregation as "a very small down payment on an investment whose dividends are good education, citizenship, justice, and the welfare of the entire community."⁷⁰ At the time, very few cities in the North were willing to make this payment. Yet Racine, Wisconsin, because of its outstanding community support and extraordinary leadership, bought into desegregation, and once again became a "model for the nation."⁷¹

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Appendix

Table 1. African American student distribution

1965–66		1966–67	
Franklin	48.7*	Gifford	13.8
McKinley	6.9	McKinley	13.7
Mitchell	8.4	Mitchell	13.4
Washington	14.9	Washington	17.4
* African American students as percentage of total student population at given school			

Source: “Desegregation Plan for Unified School District No. 1 of Racine County.” National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Racine Branch: Records, 1954–1984. Box 16, Folder 4.



Figure 1. Julian Thomas

Photo courtesy of Oak Hill Museum Archives.

Source: <http://www.racinehistory.com/timeline2.htm>

Post-Event Urban Flood Mapping by Amateur Aerial Photography and Assessment of Potential Damage: Case of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Jennifer Haegele, author

Dr. Mamadou Coulibaly, Geography and Urban Planning, faculty adviser

Jennifer Haegele graduated in December 2010 from UW Oshkosh earning the merit of magna cum laude and obtaining a B.S. degree with endorsements in geographic information systems, criminal justice, and computer science. During the 2010 academic year, she collaborated with Dr. Mamadou Coulibaly through the Undergraduate Student/Faculty Collaborative Research Program. She worked for AeroMetric as a LiDAR technician while awaiting attendance at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIUC) for graduate school. In fall 2011 she started her master's program in criminal justice at SIUC.

Dr. Mamadou Coulibaly is associate professor of geography and urban planning at UW Oshkosh. He has a master's degree in geology and a Ph.D. in geography from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. He teaches geographic information systems (GIS), remote sensing, water resources management, and world regional geography. His research involves GIS applications for water resources management and urban flash flooding. Since 2006 he has been the treasurer for the Wisconsin Geographical Society.

Abstract

On June 12, 2008, the city of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, was blindsided by a major flood because many never knew that their residence was located in a flood-prone area. Most city roads were reported to be under water and in some places bridges were even submerged by the Fond du Lac River. A lot of the damage was so severe that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) awarded Fond du Lac more than \$1.2 million to assist with repairs of homes and the city. As with the case of Fond du Lac, mapping flood-prone areas can prepare potential victims and enforce local floodplain management policies. To accomplish this, FEMA launched the Map Modernization project, which aims to update the nation's flood maps. However, the agency is not able to do this alone and has decided to partner with local agencies to produce more accurate flood maps. Therefore, this project investigated the possibility of mapping urban flood areas from amateur aerial photographs and compared the resulting flood map to the most recent FEMA maps of the study area. On a broader level, the study updates the FEMA flood maps of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and the methodologies developed in this study can help similar cities across the nation adjust their flood maps.

Statement of the Research Purpose

Urban natural disasters are worsening because, among other reasons, an increasing portion of the world's population lives in large cities. Thus, urban hazards, such as flooding, pose serious challenges for the future. Exposure and vulnerability are the components of hazard that are changing fastest and have the gravest implications for urban populations (Mitchell 1999). Also, flooding is the most common environmental hazard due to the attraction of humans to river valleys and coastal areas and because these natural features are widely distributed (NC Division of Emergency