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## MISSION STATEMENT

Like its parent journal, the mission of the *Journal of Student Research* is to promote excellence in leadership practice by providing a venue for students and future academics to publish current and significant empirical and conceptual research in the arts; humanities; applied natural, and social sciences; and other areas that tests, extends, or builds leadership theory. Primarily, JSR seeks to provide a platform for academic growth.

# Journal of Student Research

## CONTENTS

Editorial Details ... *inside front cover*  
Mission Statement ... *inside front cover*  
About the Journal ... *inside back cover*

### Editorials

*By Somnath Bhattacharya, Ph.D. ... iii*  
*By Hagai Gringarten, Ph.D. ... iv*  
*By Maria D. Suarez ... v*

## ARTICLES

“What’s the Matter with this Man?” Locating Feminism in Blues Music  
*By Gina Watts ... 1*

Assessing Ghanaian Women’s Economic Opportunities  
*By C. Estefania Lamas-Hernandez ... 17*

Spanish and Portuguese conversas: A model for Sephardic Jewry under the  
Ashkenazic hegemony.  
*By Yehonatan Elazar-Demota ... 25*

#BreakingNews: Media Convergence on CNN.com  
*By Aaron Strockis ... 37*

## LIFE FORWARD

A Conversation with a Student Leader on Civic Engagement  
*Josh Rosner ... 43*

# Journal of Student Research

## Inaugural Editorial

I am honored to write this inaugural message for the *Journal of Student Research*. The Journal, the brainchild of faculty members committed to the idea that students have a definitive and often unique perspective on world issues - a perspective that is equally deserving of a compelling platform - presents original articles that, in this issue, run the gamut from locating feminism in blues music to a perspective on Spanish and Portuguese Conversas of Sephardic Jewry and other articles in-between.

Academia today is marked by departure from an overwhelmingly Socratic domain to one that emphasizes greater student involvement in their own learning; a model of learning by doing or playing or via games...a new paradigm known as ‘active learning’ or using the ‘hands-on’ approach. The *Journal of Student Research* is exactly that: It provides a much needed venue for students to obtain an audience for their thoughts; a platform for their view-points on events bygone and events ahead; for reflections as yet uncluttered from established mores of institutionalized thinking. The student authors of this journal speak in a voice that is colored by their own experiences; in a tone that is reflective of a world and time more in flux than ever before; of their own place in a transformational moment in time.

I found the articles here to be harbingers of even more unique perspectives for the issues ahead. They read fresh; insightful; opinionated; reasoned; thoughtful and thought provoking... traits that we could only hope to engender using traditional Socratic methods. But let the students loose; let them learn by doing; let them establish high metrics of editorial penmanship and original content; let them express themselves as scholars, authors, and editors; let them congregate with faculty and advisors of equal zeal and independence of thought, and what you have is a witch’s brew of contemplative prose and introspective excellence like no other. To me, that is the *Journal of Student Research*.

I invite you put on your thinking caps and peruse these works of excellence from our collective students. They will leave you marveling at how they think, feel, and express themselves. I believe that in these student-authors we leave our own legacy of scholarship and perspectives in the good hands and great minds of future scholars.

Som Bhattacharya

Dean, School of Business

# Journal of Student Research

## Welcome Editorial

**W**ith great dedication and enthusiasm I am pleased to welcome the inaugural issue of the STU *Journal of Student Research* (JSR), a digital journal that will publish original, scholarly research on multidisciplinary topics.

The Journal is a culmination of creative teamwork with my co-founders and journal advisors, Nina Rose, J.D., and Raúl Fernández-Calienes, Ph.D.. The JSR is managed and edited by a great team of dedicated students, led by Maria Suarez and assisted by Alexandra Valdes and Cody Frank, J.D. We aim to publish exceptional scholarly articles written by students from around the world as well as reviews of books, and interviews with accomplished students and academics in various disciplines.

My team and I will focus on moving the Journal forward in our global community, and ensuring our commitment to academic and professional excellence. Although sponsored by the St. Thomas University School of Business, the Journal welcomes student-editor involvement from any university.

President Ronald Reagan once said at the height of his presidency, “*Even now, I wonder what I might have accomplished if I had only studied harder.*” I hope this Journal will encourage a continued effort to create, and disseminate valuable and interesting student research.

Onward,

Hagai Gringarten, Ph.D.

Co-founder and faculty advisor

# Journal of Student Research

## Editorial

**W**elcome to the inaugural edition of the *Journal of Student Research*. It is my truest honor to present to you the first edition – with many more following – of this student publication here at St. Thomas University.

We are a professional student journal, with high academic standards. Our mission is to offer a platform for academic growth, and promote the skills and creative spirit of young entrepreneurs.

The *Journal of Student Research* is the offspring of the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* (JMR), a publication with international recognition. This great work was only possible with the guidance and support of Dr. Hagai Gringarten, editor-in-chief for JMR, who together with journal faculty advisors Raúl Fernández-Calienes, Ph.D., and Nina Rose, J.D., envisioned a student journal to foster academic participation by students.

The articles in this volume reflect St. Thomas University's rich culture, diversity, high quality education, and global entrepreneurship. In this volume, you will find three articles pertaining to ethnic and gender studies. These publications highlight female contributions to civil society as a whole. Our last article focuses on current and relevant issues with media perceptions.

In the spirit of new ventures and following-your-passion, I leave you with a quote from a famous U.S. entrepreneur:

*“Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”*

– Steve Jobs

Respectfully yours,

Maria D. Suarez

Editor-in-chief



“Summer Double Rainbow”  
2014

Panoramic Photograph of STU Library

By Maria Suarez

*Featured Article*

**“What’s the Matter with this Man?”  
Locating Feminism in Blues Music**

**Gina Watts**

*Southwestern University*

Abstract

Blues music is a crucial part of American cultural and musical history. This article studies the reflection of politics of gender and feminist ideals in the genre. To understand the influences of gender and its role in the American culture, this study analyzes the performance of classic blues songs by the American singer, songwriter, and actress Ruth Brown; she sang about topics that were often neglected in the discourse of that time period - sexual freedom, domestic abuse, and the right to travel and move independently. Changes in Ruth Brown performances are also analyzed with the appearance of subsequent performances by various modern artists like Charlie Daniels, Bonnie Raitt, and Susan Tedeschi. Analyzing the varied embodiment and content of feminist blues songs leads to a better understanding of the blues’ contribution to the feminist experience of women in the United States.

*Keywords:* gender studies, feminism, sound studies, cultural studies, blues music, Ruth Brown, race

**Introduction**

A story is told amongst blues musicians about a boy named Robert Johnson who played on street corners for pennies. Things changed almost overnight: Johnson’s performances captivated his audiences and the legend went around that he had met the devil at the crossroads, offering up his soul in exchange for the ability to play the guitar. Whatever else may be true, his sudden climb to success and popularity was as talked about as his unexpected and mysterious death a few short years later—the devil taking his due, many said. The legend has been written about and interpreted by scholars more times than could be counted, and Johnson’s song “Crossroads” has been covered by musicians too numerous to recount. Clearly, there is an enduring magic in this story. Whether or not the devil had a role, one thing is clear: the blues was seen as a pathway to a new kind of life and, indeed, a way of life itself. In her song “Feeling Music Brings,” Susan Tedeschi says: “I wanna be a piece of life in all living things” (Burbridge, 2002). This paper will look at the life in Ruth Brown’s blues music and her strides into feminism through her songs on sexuality, female independence, and the dangers of domestic abuse. How can this candidness in blues effect change? How have the blues changed since that time? Much analysis has been done on connections between blues and American

culture, particularly through the lens of race. This article adds to this body of work by analyzing the production of a politics of gender in blues music and the cultural change it has the power to create.

### **Ruth Brown and the Blues**

A major player in blues music in the 1950s and beyond was Ruth Brown, known by some as “Miss Rhythm.” Given Brown’s social influence as a popular touring musician, one can reach a greater understanding of gender influences on the blues by analyzing her songs. Further, the subjects she took on in her lyrics position the genre as a more open-minded counterpart to the conservative American culture in her lifetime. Ruth Brown became famous during the 1950s, playing in many segregated clubs in the south where she was immensely popular. Her popularity never faded, resulting in her induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in the 1990s. Like many queens of the blues, she shed light on topics that were often neglected in mainstream discourse, through rhetoric involving irony and irreverent humor toward these topics of discussion – despite their serious and important influence on women’s lives. Among these topics were frank discussions of sex and sexual freedom, domestic abuse, and the right to travel independently. Because of this work through her music, this analysis places Ruth Brown as a previously undervalued contributor to feminist work, both in the 1950s and today.

### **Methodology**

Blues music is a surprisingly elusive subject. When starting this project, it became evident that certain types of songs fit into the analysis and not others. The boundaries are not always clear, because even basic components like the instruments used in blues music have changed since Ruth Brown’s early popularity. How is it that a song with an upright bass and a brass band is the same genre as a song with electric guitars and drums? Though that is not the focus here, there are a few technical aspects that go into defining the recipe of blues music. One example is the development of the blues scale, which differs from both the minor and major scales commonly used. Since blues music was created and passed down without any recorded origin, often based on old slave hollers, blues was not a type of music taught in a classroom. Instead, it was learned by listening, resulting in small differences that give the sound a different tone. A more important defining quality, though, is the presence of emotion. On some level, everyone knows what the blues signifies. Other genres can be labeled as “emotional,” but the history of the blues is a dark one. Often depressing, though not necessarily, emotion is at the root of every blues song; granting the genre its power and its authenticity.

Ruth Brown’s songs have been covered and redone by any number of artists in recent decades. Brown herself performed several adaptations of older songs. Songs included in the scope of this project will be some of Brown’s hits of the 1950s such as “Wild, Wild Young Men” and “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean,” as well as songs she took on later in life like “Never Make Your Move Too Soon” and “If I Can’t Sell It, I’ll Keep Sittin’ On It.” By utilizing today’s artists to explore developments since the start of Brown’s performance career, this analysis seeks to show how meaning in song lyrics and performance aspects can contribute to modern understandings of feminism. To look at this, covers and reimaginings by newer artists, like Susan Tedeschi, Bonnie Raitt, and Charlie Daniels, will be used. Aspects such as gender,

race, musical genre, and class will be taken into account as potential influencers of the different sounds and meaning.

Susan Tedeschi belongs to a separate generation, born in 1970 and finding her popularity in the late 1990s (Tedeschi Trucks Band, 2014). Her performance of “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean” changes the tempo and some lines, even adding a new verse that seems to change the end of the story. Charlie Daniels, a white male country artist, makes a drastic change to the politics communicated in his performance of Brown’s song. His rendition of “Wild, Wild Young Men” tests the boundaries of what turns a cover into a different song entirely. Bonnie Raitt is valuable to analysis as well for her performance along with Ruth Brown on songs like “Never Make a Move Too Soon” and “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean.” Raitt comes from a later generation than Ruth Brown, becoming popular in the 1970s and remaining so today. Like Ruth Brown, she was also swept into certain social causes. A well-respected musician in her own right, Raitt often uses her position to participate in benefit concerts, speak out about political issues, and advance the agenda of Rhythm and Blues Foundation, an organization established by Ruth Brown (Bego, 2002). Her work with Ruth Brown in musical performances differs from the other artists in that she makes no evident changes to Brown’s style, sometimes only contributing her guitar and her voice to the background.

It is certain that modern performers who take on these songs will be approaching the song from a different historical and personal context. Therefore, a historical analysis of the differences in the embodiment and content of these songs will provide insight into the historical moments and social contexts in which they took place. Particularly, this analysis will show the ways in which blues music created a space to have more open conversations and how literal movement across space and social mobility have been tied together for women in the blues in different ways. At stake are several important questions: how has the situation of black women or women in general changed in the last several decades? In what ways does American culture accept or not accept certain topics of conversation, such as sexuality or gender roles? How can music or musicians act as instruments for change? This analysis could never provide a definitive answer for each of these questions, but it does contribute to the conversation surrounding race, gender, sex, and music in America.

### **Literature Review**

The cultural and theoretical studies involved in this project are vast and varied: feminist theory, blues music history, ethnic studies, and sound studies, which all prove crucial. To begin, Bell Hooks’ and Judith Butler’s contributions to feminist theory will be the point of departure toward understanding modern feminism. In hooks’ (2000) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, she spoke about the place occupied by black women:

Black women with no institutionalized ‘other’ that we may discriminate against, exploit, or oppress often have a lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist social structure and its concomitant ideology... It is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as envision and create a counter-hegemony. (p. 16)

She imagined this perspective can be empowering for the individual and good for the feminist movement as a whole. Ruth Brown's own ability to criticize and challenge typical power structures is a good example of the implementation of this idea.

Judith Butler's contributions to the discipline cannot be ignored. Her work on the construction of the body and gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (2006), while its application can be broad, is reflected in Ruth Brown's literal performance of music. Butler (2006) asked: "Is 'the body' itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by markers of sex?" (p. 175). Understanding how the constructed nature of the body contributes to gender performance opens the door to understanding how a person can subvert these expectations. Butler later asserted:

Such acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, ... Such acts... are performative in the sense that the essence or identity they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (p. 185)

This point of view is important to this analysis of Ruth Brown's work in two ways. First, it aids in the understanding that Ruth Brown's performance and identity was constructed in part by the political and social world around her – whether she used that construction to subvert norms or conform to them. Second, it is important to remember her performances as understood today will necessarily be different from conceptions of her as a musician in her own era. As such, it would be dangerous to assign intentions and thoughts to Brown based on her performance when her performance was a construction to begin with; one that does not necessarily reveal its motivation or source. With all this in mind, the notion of performativity is perfect for expressing the way Ruth Brown might have represented, subverted, or questioned gender expectations through her musical performances. Her own words interpret this subject as written in her autobiography *Miss Rhythm*, published in 1996.

Angela Davis' book *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998) provides a brilliant model for the shape of this study. While her work focuses on Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holliday, popular female singers, rather than Ruth Brown or other modern artists, she introduced several key ideas for this study. Davis noted, "Feminist interpretations of blues and jazz women's legacies can contribute to an understanding of feminist consciousness that crosses racial and class borders" (p. xviii). She presented the notion of "the politicalization of sexuality" as a major site of investigation, as well as their models of class representation and social consciousness. As Davis is careful to say, it "would be preposterous" (p. xvii) to attempt to put the 'feminist' label as it is defined today on artists of the past. Rather, this article investigates the ways in which historical points of view on gender roles and sexuality can illuminate our perspective today.

Michael J. Budds (2001) achieved similar work in his contribution to *Women and Music*, "African-American Women in Blues and Jazz." He insisted that such artists were "providing important models of independence for other black women" (p. 462) when they performed. It is important to note that Budds and Davis, among others, use blues and jazz not interchangeably but often together. The two are markedly different in style, but it is true they have a common origin; therefore, sources on both are used.

Maria V. Johnson (1996) contributed further to the feminist discussion of the blues with her work “You Just Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down’: Alice Walker Sings the Blues.” Walker, writer of *The Color Purple*, was heavily influenced by blues music. As Johnson argued, blues music was the vehicle Walker used to “celebrate the lives and works of blues women, to articulate the complexity of their struggles, and to expose and confront the oppressive forces facing Black women in America” (p. 221). Johnson’s work is a wonderful example of how blues music travels through media as well as through space, and its application of blues music to a larger world of meaning concerning gender and race is an inspiration for this work.

Cameron Bushnell (2011) provides another window into the blues as mediated through other sources. Her essay, “Jazz in Translation: Developing a Racial Politics,” uses Jürgen E. Grandt’s concept of translation (2004) to solidify the connection between racial tensions and blues music.

*Jazz* presents music not as metaphor, but as a transmuted structure in whose aesthetic form might be read political content...Translations represent a will to know and a will to communicate an otherwise coded knowledge, and in the case of *Jazz*, the mode of translation is necessary to decode threads of cultural traditions, family origins, and social histories enciphered in the language of music in conditions of repressive social conditions, migration, slavery and violence. (pp. 237–238)

Ruth Brown translates several taboo topics through her music in the same way. Memory also plays a role in Bushnell’s analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*:

[The novel] unfolds the secrets of individual lives that are released in death—secrets that are the key to discoveries about family origins that impact the identities of those living. The repository for these secrets is jazz. Music is a sediment of social relations in which reside unseen, unspoken, and, at times, misunderstood stories and histories of African Americans making the music and living the sung lives. (p. 236–37)

The concept of translating racial history through music is a necessary consideration when studying the blues. While Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith (2007) did not specifically address the blues, their work on the connections between memory studies and feminist studies help to solidify the idea that blues can function as a feminist form of memory. They said, “both [feminist studies and memory studies] assume that we do not study the past merely for its own sake; rather, we do so to meet the needs of the present. Both fields emphasize the situatedness of the individual in his or her social context and are thus suspicious of universal categories of experience” (p. 226). Looking at the past, as try put it, “constructed and contested,” lends weight to a feminist understanding of the blues, as well as making clear why this subject of study is important today.

Gene Santoro and Karl Miller focused more closely on the social and racial history of blues and jazz music. Santoro (2004) said it plainly, “[p]olitical or social commentary has always been part of jazz, implicitly or explicitly. How could an art form originally formulated by outsiders be otherwise?” (p. 258). This question gets exactly at the heart of this analysis – how belonging to a different race, gender, or class, impacts the messages produced in songs. This study seeks to discover how those messages are communicated and where they are located. Miller (2010) was interested in this as well; with particular regard to race. In his view of blues

history, “there existed a firm correlation between racialized music and racialized bodies: black people performed black music and white people performed white music” (p. 4). Today, this seems to have shifted, with many white performers taking on blues projects, and it is interesting to see where this is considered inappropriate and where it is not.

From here, the sources move to sound studies more generally. Josh Kun, William G. Roy, and Murray Schafer all provide useful concepts and terms for analyzing music and its place in society. Kun (2005), in *Audiotopia*, theorized that “music functions like a possible utopia for the listener, that music is experienced not only as sound goes into our ears and vibrates through our bones but as a space listeners can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, be safe in, learn from” (p. 2). To understand these particular blues songs in this way helps to construct the social world around them and gives them an important role within it. Roy (2010) expanded on that idea in *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, saying that “the effect of music on social movement activities and outcomes depends less on the meaning of the lyrics or the sonic qualities of the performance than on the social relationships within which it is embedded” (p. 2). Each of these perspectives on music lend themselves to a historical understanding of blues songs in that they emphasize the importance of the social world surrounding the music.

Schafer (1993) provided many useful terms, all of which help to make sound a concrete object of analysis. Among those terms are (1) keynote, “the anchor or fundamental tone”; (2) signal, those which are “listened to consciously”; and (3) sound-mark, “a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community” (p. 9–10). Each of these served his broader purpose of endeavoring to “treat the world as a macrocosmic musical composition,” or what he calls a ‘soundscape’ (p. 5).

The landscape is as important as the soundscape, in that the blues took place in particular geographies of the United States. For this, W. J. T. Mitchell and Kenneth Foote’s works on space and the meanings attached to it in America are important to consider. W. J. T. Mitchell (1994), in *Landscape and Power*, suggested the use of ‘landscape’ as a verb, as “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed” (p. 1). He went on to say that despite the conception that landscape is natural and neutral, “landscape is a dynamic medium... a medium that is itself in motion from one place or time to another” (p. 2). Considering the influence of blues as a travelling medium requires seeing landscape as a force that affects social relationships.

Kenneth Foote’s book *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (2003) contributed useful concepts as well. In discussing which types of events become state-sanctioned memorials, Foote noted that sites of racial violence are often not marked, because “these sites are difficult to assimilate with heroic notions of the national past, and the sites themselves demonstrate a sort of collective equivocation over public meaning and social memory” (p. 35). Here, the blues serves as a more abstract landmark to the painful history of slavery and segregation in a way it may not be recorded by the state. Brown’s performance of songs that speak to the experience of domestic abuse, for example, provide a musical monument to violence that might often be invisible.

### **“This is Ruth’s Place”: A Biography**

To begin our story, it is important to understand Ruth Brown’s world and the spaces she inhabited. Brown was born in 1928. Growing up, she looked up to artists like Billie Holiday, Hadda Brooks, and Dinah Washington. Being born in that era meant she knew a world where

segregated schools were a reality. During those times, women needed evidence of adultery to obtain a divorce. In her 1996 book, she talks about experiencing segregation on her tours in the south:

In New Orleans we played a hall that normally had whites upstairs in a place known as the 'spectators' balcony,' with seats for blacks in the stalls. They had sold out on this particular night, and with the balcony seats overflowing they gave the stall seats to the whites as well, pushing the blacks behind the stage. When Billy [Ford] walked on and saw what had happened he told Bill [Basie] and the band to turn their chairs around to face the blacks. How he got away with it I'll never know, but he did. (p. 89)

This relative freedom and agency among black blues performers, particularly females, gets at core of this study – the power and influence of a respected musician, such as Ruth Brown, to bring important issues into focus.

Ruth Brown was raised participating in church choirs, but quietly made the switch to rhythm and blues, performing for soldiers at the local United Services Organization (USO) when her father thought she was at choir practice. Brown shares that her father didn't want her participating in that "kind" of music, or what he called "the devil's music" (p. 36). That was a popular and common reference to blues music given the lyrics of the genre. This conflict eventually came to a head and had her running away from home at the early age of 16. Her first jobs were as a singer, at diners and for the service men enjoying the USO's entertainment nights. In her book, she jokes that "If Dinah Washington was well on her way to fame as Queen of the Blues, I was surely Queen of the Paratroopers" (p. 46). Eventually, she settled with the Band of Atomic Swing, and when that ended she was hired by the Millander Band. Brown toured across the country with the Millander Band and the bandleader Lucky before she was callously fired in the middle of a show. However, she made it to Washington, D.C. and began performing at the Crystal Caverns, where Atlantic Records talent scouts discovered her in 1949. The rest was history, and she was soon the main star of Atlantic Records, known by some as "the house that Ruth Brown built" (p. 68).

Her travelling did not stop there, and in fact, much of her career was spent touring. As a classic motif in blues songs, the theme of travel as part of Ruth Brown's success as a musician speaks to the importance of understanding the landscape of the blues. Mitchell (1994) theorized landscape as "a focus for the formation of identity" (p. 2) and it is this function that is important here. Ruth Brown's identity as a popular singer was formed and defined by her touring. Without her travel, she may not have reached the same levels of success in her career. More generally, the blues' portrayal of identity has often depended on travel as a motif. The marginalized stories that are told through the genre are placed on the map through this process, in a way they are not recognized by state-sanctioned memorials. This idea ties in with Foote's (2003) concept that much of racial and gendered violence is denied "durable, visual representation" (p. 33) in landscape, and other forms must act as a different type of memorial.

Instead of being on the map, racial and gendered violence is given a memorial through the music itself. In some ways, this form of memory is less durable for its lack of physicality, but it can also be considered stronger for the way it can travel wherever it is needed. It is a way of remembering the past that does not participate in the social hierarchy that can act to suppress unwanted memories. Hirsch and Smith (2002) made a point of connection between feminist theory and memory studies:

“...developments in feminism and cultural memory demonstrate that content, sources, and experiences that are recalled, forgotten, or suppressed are of profound political significance... [and are] shaped by the voices that speak to us out of history; relative degrees of power and powerlessness, privilege and disenfranchisement, determine the spaces where witnesses and testimony may be heard or ignored.” (p. 226)

The telling of marginalized stories through music does not allow patriarchal sources of power to dictate which stories are remembered. Rather, women themselves are telling the stories, refusing to let these be forgotten by history. And so, the blues serves as a method of memory through the influence of feminism, allowing room for open conversation about relevant issues.

### **“Love Me Like A Man”: Sex and Sexuality in the Blues**

The clearest example of liberated conversation in blues music comes in the form of songs about sexual desire. Promiscuity among women and sex in general were considered inappropriate for conversation, persistent still today, but in blues music, it comes up rather frequently. Davis (1998) shares, “aspects of lived love relationships that were not compatible with the dominant, etherealized ideology of love—such as extramarital relationships, domestic violence, and the ephemerality of many sexual partners—were largely banished from the established popular music culture. Yet these very themes pervade the blues” (p. 3). Ruth Brown shows this carefree attitude toward relationships in her performance of “Wild, Wild Young Men” on her album, *Miss Rhythm*.

The song’s lyrics celebrate the singer’s ability to “make these young men go wild” and eventually “leave ‘em high and dry” (Ertegun, 1953). Brown performs the song with energy in her voice and a jaunty rhythm that leaves it feeling light and fun. Her voice soars through the opening of the song before settling into the rhythm of the song, and it becomes a soundscape that draws the listener into the world of the singer. Part of this is due to the lyrics. The woman in the song is clearly having great fun winding up these young men through various means – “Well, I just clap my hands/Well, I just wink my eye/Well, I just whisper ‘baby’/Well, I just heave a sigh” – and it becomes a topic of conversation among women – “All my girlfriends, they wonder how/How I make these young men go wild.” The men she plays with are represented as young and frustrated by her light-hearted treatment of them, but they do not react with any actions to suit their anger – “They can scream and break down, but they don’t kill me” (Ertegun, 1953).

The musical components of a song are another way of understanding the overall meaning. “Wild, Wild Young Men” includes many of the classic soundmarks of a jazzy blues song, including brass instruments in the background and the song’s quick beat. These make it obvious right from the start that the audience should be having fun with this song. While it would be a reach to label this song as some sort of manifesto for female sexuality, it is significant that the topic is approached with openness and a lack of judgment in the lyrics of this song. Most importantly, the song was one of Brown’s greatest hits. While some historical context is inaccessible today, it is at least fair to say that the subject matter was not driving people away. “Wild, Wild Young Men” refuses to punish female sexuality, a present topic in modern discourse.

Charlie Daniels Band released a song by the same title in 2000 on the album *Road Dogs*, a song that differs so drastically as to be a new song altogether. Despite starting with the same line (“Wild, wild young men like to have a good time”), the performance here is not only different musically but thematically. The rhythm of the song is no longer Ruth Brown’s light-hearted jaunt but rather an electric-heavy race through the lyrics. The narrator has changed from a woman having fun with some of the men she knows into a man judging other men for their behavior and ultimately deterring an innocent young girl away from such men, whom he says will view her as “nothing but a sweet toy” (Ertegun & Daniels, 1953). The light tone is gone, replaced with judgments and lecturing. His warnings suggest that men’s behavior is both dangerous and inevitable—a ‘boys will be boys’ mentality. It becomes the woman’s responsibility to steer clear, perhaps because of the departure from the original narrator of the song. Charlie Daniels, as a country singer with no blues background, lost Brown’s original message in this interpretation. Furthermore, the change in meaning does not properly pay due respect to the original performance of the song.

The purpose and potential influence in Brown’s version—work which speaks to hooks’ (2000) call to “envision and create a counter-hegemony”—is undone by Daniels’ judgments and warnings. Furthermore, this tone ties directly to the hegemony which places the taboo on discussions of sexuality in the first place (p. 16). Limiting personal freedom and inserting judgment in order to fit more properly into gender stereotypes runs counter to the work Brown’s song does, creating a space for conversations about sex.

### **“Gonna Move Away From Here”: Blues Travelling**

Travel is, undoubtedly, an identifying theme of the blues. Brown’s interpretation of this theme is crucial to understanding her work and role as a feminist influence. For black women, moving independently would have been difficult in some parts of the country. However, Brown’s songs on the subject do not generally reflect this problem. They communicate the fact that despite the difficulties, women still wanted the freedom to travel easily. A perfect example is her song “Never Make Your Move Too Soon,” which she performed later in life on Bonnie Raitt’s *Road Tested* tour with Raitt herself and Charles Brown in 1995. The song tells the story of a woman who goes to visit her man only to discover that he is off chasing other women. She finds opportunity in this discovery, choosing to take advantage of his keno card and live it up in Las Vegas. When he returns with apologies, she kicks him out of their house, and it is his verse that ends the song regretting his poor timing. The song perfectly feels like a blues song; with its piano and guitar intro and the beat providing a background that is difficult not to dance to. It contributes significantly to the strong personalities in the story – a fairly classic blues storyline of a romantic relationship gone awry. In Schafer’s (1993) terms, they act as the keynote sounds, which he claims have the potential to “[imprint] themselves so deeply on the people hearing them that life without them would be sensed as a distinct impoverishment” (p. 10). These sounds, classic blues patterns and guitar solos, would invoke a strong sense memory in anyone with any familiarity with the blues genre.

In the 1995 performance previously mentioned, Raitt opens the song by telling the story of an unexpected trip to see her lover but finding no one home: “but the landlord said you moved away and left me all of your bills to pay...look out baby I think you might have made your move too soon” (Jennings, 1977). It is Brown’s verse that points out that this is hardly a problem, “he left me with a Keno card, livin’ in Vegas ain’t too hard... I ran it up to about 50 grand, counted it

out and held it in my hand” (Jennings, 1977). In fact, she sounds detached as if her lover’s return hardly even matters, “I hear ya knockin’ baby at my door, but you don’t live here no more” (Jennings, 1977). Her voice at this line is particularly entertaining. She sounds utterly unmoved when he reappears at home after his behavior, and she gives him no room to object to being thrown out. Charles Brown, on his verse, accepts and doesn’t challenge her decision - “I’ll take my lovin’ everywhere, I come back to know they still care... One lover here, one love behind, one in my arms, one on my mind... One thing baby, never make a move too soon” (Jennings, 1977). His attitude represents is a man who has no expectations that this woman would keep him around following this incident. His infidelity catches up with him and he is utterly unsurprised that she moved on. This song, then, portrays a world where women travel independently and have no obligation to stay with a partner. The three singers perform the last line together, and it is ultimately a fantastic collaboration that has respect for the incredible careers of both Ruth Brown and Charles Brown. Though the performance takes place during Bonnie Raitt’s tour, she clearly wants to share the spotlight with them.

Similar is Brown’s song “As Long as I’m Moving,” from the *Rockin’ with Ruth* album. It is a song with a swing beat, with a background of piano, brass, and upright bass. The soundscape here pulls the listener to a different era than that of “Never Make Your Move Too Soon” but retains a similar level of independence in the role of the singer in the lyrics. This song focuses on the singer’s relationship with a man she says she is “crazy about,” but she mentions that “these young cats’ll make a girl lose her home.” This line, however it may sound without context, is hardly regretful. The chorus reveals that she is not much bothered by this. “I wanna go north, east, south, west...Every which way, as long as I’m movin’... I don’t care” (Stone, 1953). Using an intimate relationship to travel gives this woman two important types of empowerment; the freedom to choose a partner and the choice to travel at will. Moreover, this woman prioritizes travel as a goal of hers. Travel is a common theme in blues music in part because of the way the blues travelled across the United States, and also the travel experiences by the musicians themselves while on tour.

Susan Tedeschi sings a song that speaks directly to this potential in travel, titled “Gonna Move.” In it, she relates the story of a life spent searching for a way to express herself. She ends up moving several times by saying, “I knew in order to make a stand/I had to pull up my roots and move on in this land.” She is unapologetic in her need to move on, saying: “I’m gonna move away from here...You can find me if you want to go there” (Pena, 2002). Each of these moves eventually leads her to playing music as the truest expression of how she feels. The song makes use of electric guitar and drums, like much of modern blues, and therefore evokes the same soundscape as the 1995 performance of “Never Make Your Move Too Soon.” Most importantly, this song valorizes the act of movement in pursuance of personal goals, the very thing that brought Ruth Brown to her great success. Brown travelled extensively herself, as she shared in her book: she left home at a young age and thanks to that she was discovered by a record label. She also toured widely in the earlier days of her career (Brown 1996). Travelling allowed her to become an icon in blues music.

### **“If I Can’t Sell It . . .” – Innuendo and Humor**

Crucial to the blues is the irreverent tone taken with many of these types of topics, despite their inaccessibility for women in some situations. Blues songs are full of humor, irony, and innuendo. A favorite example of this is Brown’s “If I Can’t Sell It, I’ll Keep Sittin’ On It.”

This song is originally credited to Georgia White, a performer from the 1930s and 1940s. Brown performed this song in the Broadway musical *Black and Blue*, which opened in 1989. The song is, quite frankly, hilarious. Ruth Brown plays a secondhand furniture storeowner during an encounter with a man who thinks one of her chairs is too expensive, but there is more going on than meets the eye. It is best to let the lyrics tell the real story:

Now you can't find a better pair of legs in town/  
And a back like this, not for miles around,  
And that is why if I can't sell it/I'm going to recline upon it.  
I don't see any need to give it away. (White, n.d.)

Suffice it to say that she is not simply talking about a chair. The song is delivered with a slow, jazzy tune that acts as a keynote for Brown's words. It helps create the background of the environment Brown builds in the narrative—the store she owns surrounding her, the man who comes in and tries to assert himself, and her unapologetic response to him. The song's greatest strength is Brown's attitude. The lyrics come across as spoken in much of the song, complete with pauses and narrative tension. Her emotions come through clearly in the story, alternating through pride, amusement, and indignation at the man's arrogance. The lyrics are playful and meant to entertain. She even insists early on, "I mean just what I say"—an interesting assertion, considering the deceptive subject matter. The song also clearly reflects a sexual freedom and independence discussed previously, although the sideways approach used in this song marks it as different. This is hardly uncommon in blues music. Davis (1998) commented on her view of the cause of this trend: "Blues makes abundant use of humor, satire, and irony, revealing their historic roots in slave music, wherein indirect methods of expression were the only means by which the oppression of slavery could be denounced" (p. 26). This was also often used in songs about domestic abuse, leading some to interpret these songs as antifeminist in the way they treat that issue. However, much like here, there are hidden meanings that are more important than the message on the surface. What emerged were some clever ways of criticizing problematic institutions through humor. In this case, the issue is perhaps less severe, but the fact that Brown is taking the opportunity to reject a man who considers her too 'expensive' for him speaks volumes about her rights as a woman.

### **"Tired of This Man of Mine": Abusive Relationships in the Blues**

Even in songs that seem to be restrictive in their lyrics without the mask of satire, there is power and agency in bringing up a difficult subject. "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean" details an unfortunate relationship in which a woman is controlled and, by modern standards, abused by her partner. Moreover, in Brown's version, no escape is offered to the woman through the lyrics. Without an offered solution to the domestic violence discussed in "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," it has the potential to be frustrating for modern audiences, and perhaps this is why Susan Tedeschi changes the words in her version on the album *Just Won't Burn*. Tedeschi's additions effect a shift in agency from one version to another, one that is perhaps more relatable or more appealing to modern listeners.

Ruth Brown admits in her book to feeling reluctant about performing this song by saying, "maybe it reminded me of a past relationship I wanted to forget, maybe I felt that singing it would put a jinx on us. I had to be coaxed into by Herb [Lance], who upped the tempo from the

slow ballad it had been” (1996, p. 78). Her performance of the song features her “million dollar squeal,” at the ends of lines giving the song a great deal of personality (p. 123). In her live performance at the Apollo in New York in 1955, the emphasis is on the singer’s unhappiness. She seems to want to vent about her man’s treatment of her without searching for any solution to these problems. She almost approaches them as inevitable—not that this treatment is inevitable in all relationships, but that it is inevitable for her in this relationship as such there are no solutions to look for. She does not strike the listener as downtrodden. In fact, she sounds indignant and angry about this treatment. Even this anger, though, does not lead to any discussion of ending the relationship.

Many of the problems highlighted in the lyrics, if taken literally, would have this man in court as abusive today. He takes her money, he forces her to have sex with him – “Mama, he makes me squeeze him/ Still my squeeze don’t please him” and “can’t be trusted.” Further, the singer says that her friends do not understand his behavior and that she has “stood all that [she] can stand” (Lance & Wallace, 1953). Still, none of these push her to find someone new. The reason for this is in the lyrics as well: she loves him. To put it in modern contexts once again, the phenomenon of women loving their abusers is not uncommon. Additionally, a woman’s decision to leave her partner would have been more difficult for women in certain circumstances in the 1950s when this song was produced.

Susan Tedeschi’s version of this song tells a different story. The man in question does many of the same things as before, and both retain the exasperation inherent in the line “What’s the matter with this man?” However, from the beginning, Tedeschi’s lyrics focus more on her frustration and her search for a way out and her voice amps up the indignation at being treated badly. Not wasting any time, she insists in the middle of the song that she intends to “pack [her] bags and leave this man,” taking a more definitive step than Ruth Brown’s version ever does. She makes a plan: “I got to find me a good man now... One that’s gonna treat me right/And oh, one that’s gonna come home at night” (Lance, Singleton & Wallace, 1953). Throughout, the effect that comes across is one of a woman with more agency and independence, one who will not allow herself to be treated badly for long. Whether or not the time period in which it was released is entirely the reason for the shift in focus, it is true that a recording of Ruth Brown singing this version has been impossible to find. How much change is too much? On one hand, it seems that Tedeschi has changed quite a bit of the original song, mostly in her performance. She puts emphasis on different lines and words, she throws in more vocal tricks and the order of some of the lines has been rearranged, which is very typical of her music. Moreover, the song has more of a rock and roll base with a long electric guitar intro, several solos, and classic blues riffs. She loses the “million dollar squeal,” the brass instruments, and the upright bass and adds her own blues beat and a certain intensity to her voice. However, the overall message is still quite similar with a kick of action added to it. Despite the change in the instruments, both are quite definitely blues-y. The emotion behind the words gets at a similar level of frustration and loneliness.

It is important to point out that the mere fact that Brown’s lyrics are missing the definitive decision to leave an abusive man does not strip the song of any progressive power. Just the fact that this song was one of her most popular makes it clear that the message was spreading about the problem of domestic abuse. Even if the character in the song does not get her freedom, making a difficult subject more accessible may have made many real women’s lives easier. This song gives voice and a vocabulary to the problem of domestic abuse, and it seems very possible that this could help a person get out of a dangerous situation. Brown talks about her own

experiences with abuse and the difficulty of deciding how to handle it in her book, “Matters came to a head when [husband Earl Swanson] physically attacked me in our hotel room, beating me to my knees after a bout of heavy drinking and drug-taking. [My brothers] drove eighty miles to hand their ultimatum to Earl face to face: ‘*Never* as long as you live do you lift your hands to her again’” (p. 138). She goes on to say that “separation was inevitable, but I was pregnant again by that time. And it was a difficult, heavy and painful pregnancy” (p. 140). By not having the woman in the song take a definite stand as to leaving her abusive partner, she opens the conversation further for the more complicated aspects of leaving an abusive partner and recognizes the reasons such a thing might be a difficult decision.

### **“Just Give Me Something I Can Hold Onto”: Looking Forward**

These are only a fraction of the blues songs and female blues singers out in the world, but part of the goal of this project is to bring new focus in this direction. Music can do an impressive amount of work toward opening up conversations. Other musicians have the same depth and rich history as Ruth Brown and the blues is a genre in which many songs are kept in circulation through new performances. It would be exciting to see artists like Elizabeth Cotten or Georgia White receive scholarly attention, and the results would surely yield both a greater appreciation for their historical significance and a more complete understanding of what black female blues musicians bring to our conversations about feminism today.

Some questions were posed earlier and now, some answers have become clear. Certain topics of conversation were accessible in blues lyrics in a way that would take decades still to come into the mainstream conversation. In fact, some of these topics are still approached with discomfort. This points towards the need for Bell Hooks’ (2000) idea of a feminist revolution: to reach her vision, she says, “we need to have a liberatory ideology that can be shared with everyone. That revolutionary ideology can be created only if the experiences of people on the margin... are understood, addressed, and incorporated” (p. 163). What better vehicle for a shared liberatory ideology than music and art? Kun (2005) supported this view of a song’s potential power: “Music can’t topple regimes, break chains, or stop bullets. But it can keep us alive. Music can always surprise us, be unpredictable, refuse to submit to what is put upon it” (p. 17).

Ruth Brown may not have been setting out to do feminist work with her songs, but she contributed important performances to the feminist work being done by the blues at large, whether or not she did so intentionally. Everyone has the potential to contribute to this work. Maria Johnson (1996), in her article on Alice Walker and her writing, provides a blueprint for how scholars draw attention to these issues. After her careful analysis of Walker’s writing and its blues influences, she concludes that Walker’s strength is her lesson that “these prescriptive definitions [of racial borders] not only keep people from one another but... often tragically keep people from themselves” (p. 235). Walker’s use of the blues in her work suggests that the blues could rectify such a problem. The Rhythm and Blues Foundation gives another example. Ruth Brown began the Foundation after she was poorly treated by Atlantic Records, and other musicians like Bonnie Raitt have taken up the same cause. Their vision of their work states that they are “dedicated to the historical and cultural preservation of Rhythm & Blues music and recognition of participants in its community by providing services and programs to Rhythm & Blues artists and their fans” (Rhythm & Blues Foundation, 2008). While they do not claim to take an activist stance, the Foundation definitely takes an active part in communities through providing grants, educational workshops, and scholarships. Ultimately, Ruth Brown’s legacy and

the broader legacy of the blues itself can be felt everywhere. Brown continues to be an inspiration for that kind of work and it stands to reason she would be proud of that fact.

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### *Discussion Questions*

1. How much can we learn from musical or other performances, keeping in mind that they are indeed performances? How can we deal with that uncertainty as academics?
2. How can musicians effect cultural change?
3. Have these power dynamics shifted in today's blues music? If so, how?

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## Assessing Ghanaian Women's Economic Opportunities

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### Abstract

Women's economic subjugation may be pervasive, but it is neither untraceable nor unsolvable. Through defining the historical exclusion of Ghanaian women in several domains – namely familial, agricultural, legal, and financial – we gain a broader understanding of the factors perpetuating their economic inequality. Finally, after adopting a gender-conscious lens, the study begins exploring the context into which informal and formal microfinance operations were implemented, and assesses why a gender-conscious analysis is critical to their success. This study was produced with the hope that gender-conscious frameworks, like the one utilized by this study, will become a standard tool for future innovators and community partners to utilize in order to inform the research and development process, and create sustainable and empathetic solutions for increasing the status of women and girls worldwide.

### Introduction

It is a good idea to focus on women because, historically, women, though they outnumber men in the general population, have been marginalized economically and socially, and this has affected their economic empowerment. The general perception that in the traditional division of labour, women are bound to certain functions is a barrier that many women all over the world face. This perception is closely associated with a definition and understanding of space as divided between public and private spheres where women are seen as belonging to the latter. These notions are remarkably persistent and are indeed believed to be the basis of much of the difficulties women face in their effort at self- and community development. (Egyir, 2010, pg. 1)

**T**here are many dimensions of life in which women in Ghana have and continue to play subservient roles. Thus, to understand Ghanaian women's past, present, and future economic opportunities, it is important to employ a gender-conscious framework. For this reason, this study will first address structural inequalities facing women in Ghana throughout pre-colonial (prior to 1874), colonial (1874–1957), and pre-modern times (1957–1990). Then, this study will engage in a discussion about how microfinance efforts in Ghana are impacting Ghanaian women. Finally, this study will identify key areas for improvement in Ghanaian

women's social and economic lives. The purpose of this article is to introduce a critical dialogue about the impact of gender discrimination into the debate about Ghanaian women's economic opportunities, as well as assess the potential for Ghanaian women to participate in existing microfinance projects.

### **Women's Changing Position**

Prior to colonization, Ghana was a patrilineal society. Women were largely viewed as reproductive beings whose procreative abilities determined her family's prospects for social and economic security (Akita, 2010, p. 167). Here, a woman's worth was perceived solely on economic terms. That is, her fertility translated to additional handiwork in a predominantly agricultural society, while her dowry was seen by fathers as a pathway to accumulate additional wealth. The economization of women's bodies carried over into attitudes about marriage, where the dominance of subsistence agriculture encouraged polygamous relationships. At this time, men engaged in multiple intimate relationships in order to 'procreate additional labor' and expand a family's wealth (Library of Congress, 1994). This reinforced the practice of devaluing women's roles as wives. It denigrated women's contributions at the micro (household) and macro (community) level to the Ghanaian society.

It is also worth noting that Ghana's customary land laws largely excluded women from owning land, as deeds were passed amongst male family members. Though proprietary laws supported widows' rights to her husband's land, 'property grabs' occurred frequently. A woman's in-laws would utilize threats, intimidation, and physical violence in order to seize their family's plot, leaving the woman destitute (Government of Ghana, n.d.). In this regard, women's land insecurity has profound effects on their upward mobility and independence.

With the introduction of British colonialism in the nineteenth century, women experienced an increase in social status, especially in urban areas. As British cultural values came to be accepted by Ghanaians, practices of monogamy became normalized. Today, it is reported that polygamy is present in less than 25 percent of rural households and less than 13 percent of urban households (Social Institutions & Gender Index, n.d.). Additionally, as colonization transitioned Ghana from subsistence agriculture to the production of cash crops, women became responsible for cultivating their family's food supply, while men were capacitated to operate newly introduced agricultural technology, like hoes, because they were perceived as more capable than their female counterparts at adopting new technologies into their farming practices (Akudugu, 2012, p. 8). This added a new role to women's lives – women as farmers.

Though women in this region may have gained access into the realm of farming, without secure and stable access to land, women became discouraged from engaging in agricultural activities beyond subsistence. In effect, gendered land insecurity prohibited women from growing more lucrative and time-intensive crops such as tree crops (e.g. avocados, moringa, etc.) and weakened their economic prospects. Further, as is noted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), "land insecurity restricts women's access to credit from formal sources, as they do not have land collateral" (n.d.). Hence, women's land insecurity in Ghana, like other countries around the world, traps women within the cycle of poverty without access to land. There are few prospects for a woman's economic independence.

Despite a bleak economic situation for women within an already struggling economy, Ghana's independence spawned a significant women's movement, as well as *de jure* gender

equality. Ghana's constitution, adopted in 1992, outlines citizens' "fundamental human rights and freedoms," and includes protections for women as mothers, women as intellectuals, and women as skilled laborers:

Article 27:

(1) Special care shall be accorded to mothers during a reasonable period before and after childbirth; and during those periods, working mothers shall be accorded paid leave.

(2) Facilities shall be provided for the care of children below school-going age to enable women, who have the traditional care for children, realize their full potential.

(3) Women shall be guaranteed equal rights to training and promotion without any impediments from any person. (Government of Ghana, n.d.).

Article 36:

(6) The State shall afford equality of economic opportunity to all citizens; and, in particular, the State shall take all necessary steps so as to ensure the full integration of women into the mainstream of the economic development of Ghana. (Government of Ghana).

However, *de jure* gender equality in Ghana did not translate into *de facto* equality. The passing of the constitution may have granted women statutory rights, including statutory land rights, but customary rights still prevailed in much of the country.

Rural to urban migration also significantly impacted Ghanaian women's economic opportunities post-independence. As men migrated to urban areas, women were left to take over their husband's agricultural activities, increasing their labor burden. With their husbands gone for months or years at a time, women effectively became single mothers. Further, increased time pressure on women led crop yields to substantially decrease. This led women to purchase goods—or hire local boys to till their land in an effort to increase productive efficiency, which drastically strained her family's already dire economic situation.

In sum, though the roles of Ghanaian women in the labor force may have transformed over time, as a group, women remain largely subordinate to men. While customary laws continuously reinforce existing structures for gender discrimination, the legacy of colonialism and the introduction of international value systems add nuance to the economic subjugation of Ghanaian women. The next section will aim to explain different factors for this phenomenon, as well as identify opportunities for improvement.

### **Women's Economic Subsistence**

Although Ghanaian women achieved legal equality with the passing of the constitution in 1992, women's subordination pervades all aspects of life, including their prospects for economic independence. The economic subjugation of women has conventionally rested on several factors, including women's roles as homemakers, agricultural workers, and petty traders. Yet, implicit in these activities is illiteracy, as well as a lack of access to education, starting capital, and reproductive agency.

With over 75 ethnic groups, Ghana's is rich in history and tradition, and consequently, differing attitudes exist towards women's position in public and private spheres throughout the

country (Egyir, p. 8). Among these, ethnic groups with notable gendered traditions include the Akan, which comprise 47.5% of the population, and the Ga-Dangme, which comprise 7.4% of the population (Government of Ghana). Because of its matrilineal social organization, Akan women assume both traditional domestic and childcare roles, while also holding responsibilities in the family's agricultural production.

Despite Akan society's more egalitarian nature, Akan men are responsible for the more 'laborious' tasks, including plowing and using farm machinery. Meanwhile, Akan women are tasked with more 'repetitive' tasks, like harvesting and preserving crops. The Akan also utilize a gendered system of traditional craft production where men take on weaving, carving, and metalworking, while women almost exclusively make pottery. It is important to note that men's crafts sell at a higher value than do women's in the markets (Schwimmer, n.d.). However, women in the Ga-Dangme ethnic sub-group do not participate in farm work. Instead, Ga-Dangme women participate mostly in petty trading, especially in the fishing industry near Accra. Though the Ga-Dangme group's practice initially served to evenly split men and women's responsibilities, once men began the rural-urban migration process, women were left to carry out agricultural activities in addition to their jobs as petty traders.

Further, an important—and frequently disregarded—aspect of women's economic subordination is the concept of the "double-day," which recognizes that women carry both bread-winning and bread-making responsibilities. In other words, apart from laboring grueling days in the field and market, women and girls are responsible for childcare, food preparation, and retrieving the family's water and fuel provisions. Often regarded as "invisible work," women's non-remunerated duties complicate their opportunities for economic empowerment and independence.

As in the production of handicrafts, women's work in the field is undervalued and perceived as 'unskilled' labor. These attitudes lead female workers to be deemed replaceable, which breeds a culture of obedience and acquiescence. A powerful illustration of this phenomenon is given by Nora Amu (2005), a Canadian economist, who argues that women's work is often perceived as 'trivial' because it is "considered as [a natural] part of women's chores" (p. 45). Therefore, women's numerous chores stunt their mobility and productivity in other areas of life, drastically reducing their leisure time. Alongside longer workdays to make up for the gendered pay gap, equivalent to .73 cedis per 1 cedi a man makes, women are forced to make a precarious choice between focusing on their family's immediate needs or make a long-term investment in their family's future by purchasing agricultural supplies like seeds and tools, immediate expense tradeoffs (Library of Congress).

Because Ghanaian women are typically the ones charged with paying for their children's education, additional non-remunerated activities will directly trade off with their family's future opportunities. Increased workload also prevents women from seeking microfinance loans and other financial services—as well as from participating in capacity-building workshops—which could benefit their families in the long run. For women to strategically utilize their newfound spheres of influence, they must first be able to gain either economic security or be alleviated of domestic tasks through the implementation of timesaving appropriate technologies, an important dialogue that is outside the scope of this particular study. Thus, the next section will seek to identify the structural barriers women have historically faced in pursuing financial services, as well as the barriers women currently face in facilitating their long-term economic security through microfinance programs.

### **Women's Opportunities for Empowerment Through Microfinance**

Given that the majority of Ghanaian rural women are poor, [illiterate,] and lack access to key productive resources like credit, they are more likely to be lower in status, experience low self-confidence and [loss] of hope for themselves and their children. (Asamoah, 2012, p. 6)

The ability of Ghanaian Rural women to transform their lives would thus depend more on external factors that have the potential to develop their individual abilities and also grant them the needed financial resources to back their choice and opportunities. In spite of existing in a culture deep-seated in patriarchy, the Ghanaian government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local organizations are encouraging women's participation in the public sector through various service initiatives. The most notable is the introduction of microloans. However, as in the agricultural sector, the development of financial institutions excluded women from participating. At the start of the twentieth century, informal cooperatives and bank services called *susu* provided "social and economic support for the less advantaged." Over time, credit unions established themselves formally in communities predominantly serving cocoa farmers (Egyir, p. 3). Yet, during this period, women were widely excluded from cocoa farming, attributed to factors like land insecurity, lack of starting capital, and attitudes about women's success as farmers, making loans difficult to be obtained by women. This widened the gap between men and women in communities, further entrenching beliefs about the codependence of women.

Nonetheless, when Ghana achieved independence in 1957, it began recreating its national identity. Consequently, the 1960s saw the establishment of formal banking schemes. However, many urban banks operated at the expense of rural areas, rapidly depleting rural customers of their savings by investing in the development of urban areas (Ibid, 3). This created a need for rural banks—defined as a community-run financial institution built within 25 kilometers from their headquarters—whose sole objectives are to "mobilize, support, and encourage villagers to contribute to national economic development" (Ibid, 2).

Then, the 1970s and 1980s brought a great economic downturn to Ghana, creating a need for reforms to restructure the financial sector. At this point, women had begun to enter the commercial workforce en masse, leading many government and community leaders to resent women and attribute the economic downturn to their increasing participation:

From the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, urban market women, especially those who specialized in trading manufactured goods, gained reputations for manipulating market conditions and were accused of exacerbating the country's already difficult economic situation. With the introduction of the Economic Recovery Program in 1983 and the consequent successes reported throughout that decade, these accusations began to subside. (Library of Congress, p. 86)

Simultaneous to these reforms in Ghana, Bangladesh was experiencing its own financial revolution. In 1947, professor Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist from Chittagong University, identified the need for loans adapted to rural economic opportunities. To ensure that loans be made available to the poorest citizens in a country, especially women, he established the Grameen Bank Project in 1976. After experiencing great success of his loan program with a 97

percent repayment rate, he formally incorporated the Grameen Bank in 1983. Many microfinance institutions are now modeled after the Grameen Bank, including many in Ghana.

Because commercial banks were regarded as structurally biased against the rural poor, the introduction of microfinance organizations provided villagers with the opportunity to increase their economic prospects by providing loans, savings, insurance, transfer services, among others. Where rural citizens would oftentimes be excluded from loans because of their low levels of education and limited formal entrepreneurial experience, microfinance institutions saw an investment opportunity. Through these organizations, rural populations could increasingly break cycles of poverty. Thus, microfinance “is one of the critical dimensions of the broad range of financial tools for the poor” (Asiama, 2007).

Additionally, the innovation of the Grameen Bank inculcated the importance of gender-consciousness in organizations like the Bank of Ghana, the Financial Sector Adjustment Programme, the Ghana Microfinance Institution Network (GHAMFIN), and the Sinapi Aba Trust. They discovered that, without an explicit focus on women in the development and implementation steps of strategic planning, it is likely that many loans given to women would be taken by her husband or other family members. This discovery revolutionized financial services and encouraged the active inclusion of women. With a new appreciation for gender-conscious strategic development, many institutions intentionally work with – and for the betterment of – women. Often, these institutions ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent occurrences like loan-theft from male family members. Though their safeguards may not always be effective, heightened awareness of the situation of women in her respective community ultimately increases the likelihood of her – and the program’s – success.

### **Conclusions and Appropriate Social Technologies**

Recalling Asamoah’s sentiment at the outset of the previous section, successful women’s economic empowerment programs can only be created by assessing cultural and subcultural contexts and the gendered practices that exist within them. Recognizing the historical stratification of women at all dimensions of life demystifies inequality, making it simpler to identify areas of opportunity. Thus, before implementing field projects targeted at women, it is crucial to conduct research on gender ideologies in the area and ensure the appropriateness of programmatic strategies.

Like microfinance programs, other social technologies that could increase the status of Ghanaian women could include cooperative daycares, farm shares, grocery stores, or fish markets run by members on an alternating basis. A cooperative daycare, for example, could operate on a similar premise to the cooperative daycare started at the University of Chicago in 1914 (Clark-Stewart, p. 34), but could utilize the values outlined by the Canadian women’s lobbying group in *Social Policy, Social Services* (Pierson et al., pp. 306–307).

Though such community-oriented efforts may initially experience pushback from male elders, a decreasing male population in rural areas presents women with the opportunity to negotiate their power and agency within their own cultural contexts. In this regard, empowering women in Ghana, as in other parts of the world, involves both an independent and a communal approach. By simultaneously providing women with the necessary tools for achieving self-determination and encouraging community-building efforts, it becomes possible to create sustainable solutions with both short and long-term impacts.

However, these solutions must undoubtedly include a discussion about changing gender roles, and input from key female stakeholders. If society is to answer the perennial question of how to empower women, it must first reflect on what women have experienced historically, where women stand presently in their social contexts, and ask women where they want to go—as individuals and as a community. It is only through both intentionally contemplating and acting on these points can society create sustainable and empathetic prescriptions for a better tomorrow.

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## JOURNAL OF STUDENT RESEARCH

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## **Spanish and Portuguese *Conversas*: A Model for Sephardic Jewry under the Ashkenazic Hegemony.**

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### Abstract

The Sephardic Jews are those that descend from Iberia and were expelled in the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries from Spain and Portugal. Sephardic Jewry has gone through many changes since the “Jewish Golden Age” in Spain. The forced conversions in 14<sup>th</sup> century Spain and 15<sup>th</sup> century Portugal proved to be disastrous for their heritage. Those that suffered this fate are known as the *conversos* and *conversas*. Amid the turmoil of the Holy Office thereafter, the *conversas* demonstrated that they were capable of transmitting the Jewish tradition clandestinely, while living as outward devout Catholics. Their experience serves as a precedent for change, such that the contemporary male-elite Sephardic Jewish leaders can no longer limit Jewesses on the basis of social-cultural constructions of the Talmudic and Medieval periods. Furthermore, contemporary Sephardic leaders have found themselves pressured to work under the Orthodox Ashkenazic hegemony to gain respect. This paper uses Rachel Adler’s concept of “engendering Judaism” in order to explain why Jewesses should be included in the Jewish tradition. This implies that they should be allowed to read from the Torah in public, wear ritual ornaments during prayer, and receive rabbinic training.

### Introduction

**W**ithin the contemporary Sephardic Jewish community, much is said about women’s issues. However, there is a conflict between traditional Middle-Eastern patriarchal values and post-modernist values from the West. These two opposing sides are clashing more often within the Jewish community and are evoking women to either revolt by creating their own version of the Jewish tradition, become apathetic, or to alienate it altogether. James Baldwin said, “Know whence you came; if you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go.” Hence, it would be befitting for the contemporary Sephardic community to delve on its history, from the Jewish Golden Age in Spain, to its demise, and survival via the crypto-Jewish networks. This study will include a sociological and historical analysis in order to answer the following question: What are the effects of shifts in gender roles within the Sephardic *converso* communities on later generations, and what effects of contemporary stress of them have on Sephardic communities today? The experience of the *conversas* will serve as an ardent testimony to the male elite, that Jewesses are not “lightheaded,” incapable of learning the intricacies of Jewish law, nor functioning in the

capacity as religious leaders. Thus, by fully including women, the Sephardic tradition will become “engendered.”

### **Traditional Views of Jewish Women**

One of the limitations that are placed on women in contemporary Sephardic communities is restricting studying in male seminaries to learn Talmud. Apart from the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud is the basis for all Jewish law and jurisprudence. The origin of this limitation comes from the Talmudic opinion of Rabbi Eli’ezer, who says, “Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, teaches her obscenity” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Sotah 21b). The great 13<sup>th</sup> century Sephardic sage, Moshe ben Maimon, codified this as law in the *Mishneh Torah*, as follows:

The Sages legislated that a man should not teach his daughter Torah, since the majority of women cannot focus their minds in learning, and [are] incapable of making deductions due to their poor mental states. The Sages said, he who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he taught her uselessness. (*Rambam Hil. Talmud Torah* 1:13)

He continues explaining that by “Torah,” it is meant the oral body of Law, not the written Law. He concludes that section by stating that a father should not even teach the written Law *a priori*.

### **Education in Medieval Spain**

It is interesting to note that this law is based on a majority of women within a specific cultural and social context. In Medieval Spain, girls practically did not receive any formal education and were married off at young ages. Abraham Neuman (1942) lends insight on this context:

The Talmudic teachers recognized the earlier biblical law which invested the father with the right to give his daughter in marriage during her minority to any candidate of his own choice, even against her own expressed desire and protest. Certainly in Spain, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, child marriages were matters of everyday occurrence and excited no comment. (pp. 21-22)

If daughters were married off at early ages, and then given to their future husbands upon reaching physical maturity, one can infer that their education was limited to domestic responsibilities. Moreover, Yom Tov Assis (1997) states:

The community did not create a public educational system open to all boys; as for girls, no formal education was provided for them practically anywhere in the Jewish world. The rich and members of the middle class provided private tuition for their children by engaging teachers who came to their house to teach the boys of the family. (p. 327)

Hence, since Jewish education in Medieval Spain was a privilege of the rich and middle class, it is evident that the majority of women were considered incapable of performing deductive analyses of legal texts given the lack of educational opportunities.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Women

Evidently, things have changed in contemporary times. One of the positive effects of democratization of learning is that, overall, education has been granted to both males and females. As a result, women have reached high positions as grammarians, poets, mathematicians, novelists, scientists, among others, while maintaining their roles as wives and mothers. Thus, when a contemporary Jewish woman of Iberian descent is discriminated against, based on the laws of nature in her body, it challenges her existential and sociological importance within the Jewish community. In fact, many of them have been alienated from the community for their interest in studying Talmud at the local *Beth Midrash*, or house of study. Rachel Adler questions, “Why do women talk during the synagogue service? Why do they seem so not interested in the service?” She also adds that, “[r]eal inclusion can occur only when women cease to be invisible as women” (Adler, 1998, p. 63).

## Prohibition of Public Torah Reading For Women

It is virtually unheard of in the Sephardic communities that women are called to the public reading of the Torah. “Since the rabbis claimed to know from elsewhere that women are exempt from Torah study, they concluded that women are also exempt from the rituals that are the functional equivalent to Torah study” (Alexander, 2013, p.137). Sephardic authorities in Israel and abroad believe that by calling women to the public Torah reading, it is equated with Reform Judaism, or distortion of the Law. In addition, the Sephardic Sage *par excellence* codified that “Women do not read in public because of the honor due to the congregation” (*Rambam Hil. Tefillah* 12:17). This “congregation” refers to the males 13 years of age and older.

Interestingly, it is understood and taught that a woman cannot participate in this regards because she may embarrass those men that do not know how to read. Importantly, during the Talmudic times, everyone called to the Torah read his own portion. Today however, due to the lack of preparation and education, the *ba'al qor'e* (reader) reads in the place of the person called to the Torah. If that is the case, then no one will be embarrassed since no one reads his own portion. Strikingly, in an educated community where all of the men can read for themselves, a woman would pose no threat to their honor.

Torah study was a central ritual of the nascent rabbinic movement. Through Torah study, rabbinic disciples crafted a covenantal community in relationship with God. Torah study was a ritual means of re-experiencing Sinaitic revelation. It also provided a social forum through which disciples established relationships horizontally with their peers and vertically with their masters. The social makeup of the informal rabbinic disciple circles was almost certainly exclusively male.

Alexander (2013, p. 178) explains how the biblical community evolved into the rabbinic elite community. As a result, women were excluded from the ritual which connects the Jews with the prophetic experience at Sinai and which also established them as a nation.

### **Lack of Agency for Jewish Women**

Another aspect within traditional Sephardic circles is that women are not trained to be ritual slaughterers, circumcisers, nor teachers of Jewish law. Once again, they are left out of being active agents as Jewesses. Both in the *Mishneh Torah* and *Shulhan 'Arukh*, it states that women can perform the ritual slaughter of animals (*Rambam Hil. Shehitah* 4:4; S.A. Y.D 1:1). Furthermore, the *halakhah* states that women can become experts by being tested on the laws and performing satisfactorily before a Sage. Also, in regards to the circumcision, Maimonides codified that in the case that the father did not circumcise his child on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after birth, he can perform it afterwards. If he neglected this precept, it behooves the community to do so, lest an Israelite male is left with his foreskin (laws of circumcision 1:1). Neither the Bible nor the Talmud limits the function of *mohel* (circumciser) to a male. Traditionally, it is a masculine task given the learning involved from which women were excluded. Consequently, since Sephardic women did not have access to Jewish education, they would never become teachers of Jewish law. It would have been in the *yeshibah* (seminary) that women would have acquired those skills, thereby enabling them to be active agents of their social-ethno-religious tradition. To their surprise, the dawn of anti-Jewish bishops would pose a challenge to the traditional lifestyle within the *alḥama* (Jewish quarter).

### **Forced Conversions in Spain**

The end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the demise of the Golden Age of Sephardic Jewry. Yitzchak Baer (1993) vividly describes the tragedies that took place all over Spain during this time. Ferrant Martínez urged in 1378 that twenty-three synagogues should be razed to the ground, confining Jews to their own quarter, thereby preventing them from interacting with Christians (Baer, 1993, p. 95).

According to Martínez, it was a “Christian duty” to convert all of the synagogues to churches and to settle the Jewish quarters. Riots broke out the regions of Andalusia, Castile, Aragon, Cataluña, and Extremadura. There were many martyrs, including the rabbinic family of R' Asher ben Yehiel. “In Madrid most of the Jews were killed or baptized...some of the Jews of Burgos were baptized, and a whole quarter inhabited by *conversos* soon sprang up” (p. 99). The forced conversions of Jews continued through 1391 and spread to the Balearic Islands. While there were many who fought to death, the holy anointing oil in the church quickly ran out due to the number of Jews that sought baptism (p. 101). Some Jews voluntarily converted in order to save their lives, with the hope of sailing to other lands in the near future. To their dismay, laws were established forbidding *conversos* from bearing arms and from sailing to Moslem lands. Baer further adds that in Tortosa, Jews were forcibly removed one by one from their homes to the homes of Christians in order to be baptized. Some apostate Jews also forced their wives, mothers, and children to convert (p. 109). As a result, whole communities were scattered and disintegrated due solely to conversions (p. 131).

## **New Christian Encounters with Jews**

Many enactments by the Catholic Church and crown were put in place in order to prevent the “new christians” from returning to Judaism, albeit creating the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism. In 1393 John I forbade the *conversos* from living and eating together with their Jewish brethren. The rabbinic authorities called them *anusim*, the coerced ones. The King enforced the separation of the Jews and Christians by obligating the Jews to dress differently than Christians (p. 125). Many of the *anusim* continued to practice Jewish rituals in secret, albeit living as outward Christians. Even though the crown forbade the *anusim* from Judaizing, contact with Jewish brethren continued throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the *anusim* tried with all of their strength to live as Jews. They were able to do so by visiting their Jewish brethren in secret, thus celebrating the Jewish festivals, and learning the tenants of their tradition. In addition, they had Jewish prayer books, Hebrew teachers, and ritual slaughterers (p. 273). Furthermore, Haim Beinart (2005) explains that the *anusim* were considered part of the Jewish community, despite their conversion. Thus, the *anusim* were counted in the “*minyan* (quorum of 10 Jewish males), since they were considered Jews and were permitted to participate in the gatherings.” At other times, they would form secret synagogues in order to keep their Jewish flame ablaze (p. 207).

The descendants of the *anusim* continued to practice Jewish rituals for the next 100 years, in opposition to the Church, as Baer further states:

As late as 1486, *anusim* of Valencia, like their brethren in Andalusia, were able to find refuge on the estates of the nobility. *Anusim* gathered in groups at the port of Valencia, sailing from there to the countries of the Orient, where they could live freely and openly as Jews. (1993, p. 359)

Apparently, the enactments of the crown proved to be futile against the fervent practitioners of the ancestral faith, and brought the institution of the inevitable Inquisition.

## **The Spanish Inquisition and Women**

Ten years before the Expulsion of 1492, the infamous inquisitor Torquemada fervently persecuted the Judaizing New Christians. He branded many as heretics, and led them to the stake as *auto de fe*'s, acts of faith. Upon surveying the inquisitorial records, there is overwhelming evidence that the women were at the forefront of the Judaizing. The Inquisition tribunal account of Juana Desfar (1492) reads as follows:

Juana Desfar came four times, ostensibly of her own free will, to confess to her judges. Nevertheless, in June 1492, the prosecutor-general demanded her arrest on the ground that her confessions were inadequate and deficient, and that, despite her oath, she had continued to practice the Jewish religion. While her first husband, a merchant from Barcelona, and her second husband, a notary from Valencia, were alive, she had conducted herself as a Jewess. She had fasted on Yom Kippur and induced others to do so, read to other *anusim* from her prayer book in the Valencian dialect and in the Hebrew language, and so forth. (p. 359)

Haim Beinart states that the “elderly women explained the rites and precepts to the young women of their families” (p. 208). “The family played a crucial role in many *conversas*’ lives, and, not surprisingly, particularly in those of the younger ones” (Melammed, 1999, p. 63). In the year 1500, a *conversa* by the name of Elvira Rodríguez was investigated by the Inquisition. Apparently Elvira knew so many Jewish rituals, despite there being no reference to a Judaizing past (p. 65).

Moreover, Melammed states, “the inquisitors realized the unusual importance of the home in crypto-Judaism and understood that the women willy-nilly became the carriers of the tradition that they viewed as inimical.” Hence, the children were left behind to carry on the teachings of their mother, albeit burnt at the stake (p. 15). Consequently, the Church and the crown worked together to devise a plan that would devastate the Sephardic community even more—the Expulsion of the Jews and the Moors.

### **The Expulsion of the Jews**

On March 31, 1492, the Catholic kings issued the Alhambra decree, also known as *Edict of Expulsion*. Jews were given four months to either convert or abandon the land that they had known for over a thousand years. Those who did not comply with the decree sentenced to death without trial. The reason for this decree was to purify the Christian faith, in response to the previous failures of the kings to segregate the *anusim* from the Jews in the Kingdom of Granada (Baer, 1993, p. 433). Furthermore, he also states, “there were between 100,000 and 120,000 exiles that migrated to Portugal” (Baer, 1993, p.438).

Once the Jewish community was banished, the *anusim* that stayed behind had no access to certain supplies such as books, wine, and food (Melammed, p. 31). The most detrimental result was the lack guidance and education of the Jewish faith. The men were mostly affected given the “male-dominated” nature of the Jewish religion. Women on the other hand, continued to dominate in the domestic realm (p. 31). Although there “were no more ordained rabbis, teachers, judges, ritual slaughterers, circumcisers, butcher shop owners, and the like, the women did not have to undergo a major change (p. 32). Paradoxically, the expulsion provided the crypto-Jewish women the opportunity to become the leaders that they would never have become within the traditional Sephardic community.

### **Forced Conversions in Portugal**

After having been expelled from Spain, the tens of thousands of Jews that left to Portugal later faced forced conversions. King Manuel I wanted to marry the daughter of the Isabella, the Queen of Asturias. However, the Church and the Christian people pressured the Portuguese monarch to get rid of the Jews. In December 1496, he decreed that all Jews be expelled from Portugal. Nevertheless, by 1497 he reconsidered the decree and ordered that all Jews of Portugal be converted to Christianity or leave the country without their children (Lowenstein, 2001, p. 36). That year, a week before Easter, Jewish children were taken from their parents and baptized. Parents held steadfast, and it was not until they were lured to Lisbon, in hope of seeing their children again, that they would be forcibly converted. To their dismay, they were dragged to the churches for baptism. Many committed suicide, while others were condemned to be burnt as *autos da fe*, acts of faith. Just as the Jews that were converted on Spanish soil in 1391, they were

called “new Christians.” To the consternation of the Church and the Portuguese monarchy, those new Christians would later prove to be heretical for their crypto-Jewish activities.

### **Crypto-Jewish Women**

It has been demonstrated throughout history that crypto-Jewish women preserved and transmitted their heritage through song and prayer. Norman Toby Simms (2005) states that women engaged in a “choric mode of education,” replacing the male rituals of prayer, study, and debate (p. 81). Throughout the world of the *anusim*, these women were known as *rezadeiras*. Amazingly, even though their knowledge of the Hebrew language was minimal to none, they managed to preserve the use of the divine name of God. David Gitlitz (1996) records one such prayer from Almagro:

May *Adonai* come, all-encompassing, greatly enlightened, well-provisioned. With You, worthy Lord, I take shelter, for You placed Your house on high so that neither harm, nor malice, nor hurt should come to Your tents which the Kings entrusted You. (p. 200)

Upon receiving a newborn child, some women would recite the following prayer:

O great God, I offer you this little angel. Take note of him; do not forsake him; shield him with Your divine arm of blessing, filled with grace and mercy. Then the baby was held to the breast and this prayer was said: ‘This be the blessing of *Adonai*, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Moses and of Aaron. May the blessing of the Lord cover him.’ (p. 200)

María Gómez, (1649) a martyr, confessed to the inquisitors of trying to “make her children perfect in that which their father and grandmother taught them and she did not care that they did not learn Catholic prayers. She taught them only Judaic prayers” (p. 227). Also, the late minister of *Shearith Israel*, the United States’ first Jewish congregation stated that a password among the *anusim*, the secret Jews who attempted to escape persecution by the Spanish Inquisition, was the inviolately preserved Hebrew name for the Lord.” Even though other traditional Jewish communities died out, the Portuguese *anusim* survived due to preservation of this name (De Sola Pool, 1957, p. 109). Apparently, the knowledge of the *rezadeiras*, female prayer leaders, was one of the means by which the *anusim* maintained connected with their brothers in the lands free of persecution.

### **Crypto-Jewish Education**

Since the crypto-Jewish tradition was limited to the domestic realm, women were in charge of instructing their children in all of the aspects of Jewish practices. Most important was to keep a *kasher* kitchen. No shellfish, pork, or other “unclean” foods would be found in their homes. However, many families had pieces of pork stored in the drawers of their dinner tables in order to ward off inquisitors or curious neighbors. Moreover, mothers taught their daughters about the laws of ritual purity in relationship to menstruation. In addition, they were taught how to “purify” themselves in a body of water before resuming sexual relations with their husbands.

Another important tradition was to practice fasting. The most important fast was that of “*Santa Esterica*,” or commemoration of Saint Esther. The life of Queen Esther served as the matron for the *anusim* since she also hid her Jewish identity. Also, the fast of *Yom Kippur*, known as *Kippur*, *Día del Perdón* or Day of Forgiveness, was essential to their faith, since this was the day when all sins would be absolved.

Women had extensive knowledge on the laws and customs of ritual slaughter. In fact, the crypto-Jewish women knew how to inspect the knife, slit the neck, and even check the organs of the animals to check for validity or the lack thereof. Doña Blanca Enríquez (1642) confessed of teaching the fundamentals of crypto-Judaism to “her sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, and all the rest of her kin. She asserted that it was the obligation of the Jews to teach the law to their children and to the children of their children” (Gitlitz, p. 219). Interestingly, mothers taught their daughters to light the Sabbath candles either in the cupboard or at the local church.

Furthermore, crypto-Jewish women played other essential roles. Mothers taught their children to recite a prayer upon entering a church, focusing their attention to the Supreme Being, albeit entering a church filled with wooden and stone idols. “I enter this building, but do not worship gods made of wood or stone” In contrast to the tradition before the forced conversions in 1391, crypto-Jewish mothers were in charge of arranging marriages for their children with cousins or other *anusim*. Furthermore, when the unfortunate reality of death came upon the family, it was the women that washed the bodies and prepared them for burial. Overall, women played a considerable role in preserving and spreading Judaizing practices” (Yovel, 2009, p.83). Unfortunately, the return to the normative Jewish community would limit them to a behind-the-scene role.

### **The Return to Normative Jewish Communities**

In every generation after the Edict of Expulsion, *anusim* were able to escape the clutches of the Holy Office by reaching one of the Jewish havens throughout Protestant Europe or the Ottoman Empire. The return and reintegration of the *anusim* to the normative Jewish community posed some conflicts, more for the women than for the men. Julia Rebollo Lieberman (2010) states:

The passages from the secrecy of crypto-Jewish life in the Iberian Peninsula and the Hispanic New World to the public practice of normative Judaism in Livorno, Pisa, and other “lands of Judaism” resulted in the restructuring of boundaries between the sacred/public/male sphere and the private/domestic/female one (p. 114).

As long crypto-Jewish women practiced secretly, they were at the forefront of their *modus vivendi*. Reverting back to the open practice of the Jewish tradition in another land meant that they would continue to dominate within the domestic sphere. On the other hand, their reintegration also meant that they would no longer be the protagonists, since men played the role as educators and leaders of the ritual.

*Hakham* Dr. Isaac Sassoon (2011) states that the “*halakhah*’s classification of people by gender for religious purpose rubs against the grain of our collective psyche” (p. viii). Today, it is difficult enough for them to prove Jewishness and to be accepted within the Jewish community, let alone the challenge of conforming to the patriarchal, and sometimes oppressiveness of the rabbinic authorities.

### Conclusion

Sephardic Jews have historically been known for their progressiveness, in contrast to their Ashkenazi brethren. Their progressive world vision stemmed from the emphasis on not only religious studies, but also philosophy and the sciences. Sometime in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Sephardic Jewry began shifting toward fundamentalism, as a response to post-war religious apathy, secularism, and the hijacking of the tradition by the influx of Jews from the Arab lands. A result of this shift is that Sephardic Jewry is suffering from lack of knowledgeable leaders, in the place of misogynistic attitudes toward women. As a result, Sephardic Jewry has come down to two forms: American and European vs the Israeli communities and their daughters abroad. While the world is becoming more globalized, and women are gaining more respect and visibility in society, unfortunately, the same cannot be said with the overall Sephardic community.

### Recommendations

What solutions can be proposed for this social conflict? Foremost, both men and women should be trained in Biblical and Talmudic scholarship. The Biblical tradition already recognizes the leadership of women, especially in the case of Deborah the judge and prophetess. Also, the inclusion of women in the legislative process of the establishment of *halakhah* is suggested in order to prevent contemporary abuses of the Law, such as in the realm of divorce law and levirate marriage. Consequently, the inclusion of women implies that they should be counted upon gathering for the purposes of saying *qaddish* and other benedictions. If the problem is that women are exempt by precepts that depend on time, neither does the same law imply a prohibition. Where it is argued that only men were counted in ancient Israel, it can be refuted that it only applied to soldiers, whereas today, both men and women defend the State of Israel. Moreover, ceremonial impurity of women cannot be placed on them as an exclusion, since the Biblical form of these laws have not been in effect since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. (Leviticus 15:19). Rachel Adler (1998) points out:

Yet after deriving so many norms about the spirit and decorum of communal prayer from the private prayer of Hannah, no rabbinic exegete attempts to draw the logical conclusion that women ought to be included in communal prayer. Although the interpreters can all imagine themselves as Hannah, they cannot see the Hannahs all around them. (p. 65)

Ultimately, Adler states, “Real inclusion can occur only when women cease to be invisible as women” (p. 63). In times when immediate action has been required, the Rabbis have said, “In the place where there are no men, strive to be a man” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Abot 2:1). In the case of the contemporary Sephardic Jewesses, the inverse can also be true—in the place where there are no women, strive to be a woman.

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**#BreakingNews**  
**Media Convergence on CNN.com**

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Abstract

This article examines the manifestations of media convergence by the news channel CNN via its online platform (CNN.com). For the purposes of this research, media convergence will adapt the widely-accepted *three C's* definition: the interconnectivity of computing, communication, and content, in addition to the cultural component presented by Henry Jenkins in his work *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. CNN.com integrates features like print, photographic, and audiovisual presentation styles previously unavailable on print or televised news formats. CNN.com also utilizes social media features like the column titled “What You’re Talking About” modeled after the “Trending” feature used in Twitter and Facebook. This article will also draw on the work of media theory pioneer Marshall McLuhan, whose predictions about mass media are reinforced with the advent of new information technology, and are once again pertinent in the context of online news. By examining the changes that appear on CNN.com, one can gain a deeper understanding of how and why consumer preferences have changed in the media convergence era. Finally, this article will examine the impact that media convergence in online news is having on human behavior, in the spirit of McLuhan’s groundbreaking work on the consequences of television’s influence on daily life.

*Keywords:* Media Convergence, CNN, Online News, Social Media, Marshall McLuhan, Convergence Culture

**Introduction**

**T**he online arm of the media hegemony contains many features pioneered in social media. Much like the moveable type printing press before it, the Internet has revolutionized how information is created, conveyed, and utilized. Social media and news websites—two byproducts of the Internet revolution—are linked as the primary online providers of current information today.

Largely due to more and more consumers using social media sites and mobile Internet than ever before, the rate of data consumption in the United States has been consistently increasing for the past few decades, (Bohn 2009). The recent proliferation of technology has

introduced new devices into everyday life including smart phones, tablets, and e-readers, all capable of bringing news instantly to the consumer. Due to the rapid pace at which they operate, websites similar to CNN.com have become a third live news medium in addition to television and radio, often bringing news to its users seconds after it occurs. The relationship between social media and journalism is in its early stages of development. The two clash constantly in the forum of online news.

How does the composition of CNN.com reflect patterns of media convergence and the integration of traditional print media, televised news, and social media? To address these patterns, this study will analyze the script, photographs, and videos as they are on the CNN.com Home Page, where the majority of general inquiry into headline news occurs. Due to the dynamic nature of online content, the Website will be examined as it was in February 2015, with no major structural changes occurring during this period. Since communication practices and norms vary widely across cultures, this study will not analyze any news outlets outside of the United States (U.S.), including CNN's "International," "Arabic," "Español," or "Mexico" editions, although they are accessible to U.S. viewers. Advertisements on the Website are not considered in this study. Nor will any features of the CNN.com Website beyond the information on the Home Page be considered, which excludes in-depth articles, subdivisions of the Website (i.e. politics, tech, entertainment), and links to affiliated sources.

This article will employ the widely-accepted definition of *media convergence* as the increasing interconnectivity of the *Three C's*—computing, communication, and content—as well as the cultural definition by Henry Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.

The flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted...[convergence culture] is shaped by the desires of media conglomerates to expand their empires across multiple platforms and by the desires of consumers to have the media they want where they want it, when they want it, and in the format they want. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2)

While there are numerous areas where the effect of media convergence is conceivably at play on CNN.com, this article will address three: the influence of social media features on presentation, the integration of written, photographic and audiovisual formats, and the effect of convergence culture on content. Through examining changes to CNN.com, one can gain a deeper understanding of how and why consumer preferences are changing in the media convergence era.

### **Online News Presence**

With the arrival of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, social media has greatly impacted the way online users communicate. As online information forums, social media platforms naturally coincide with online news in many respects. For example, many social networking Websites have implemented a "trending" feature, which uses algorithms to display the site's most talked about subjects, personalized for each user. Similarly, CNN.com uses headings like "What You're Talking About" to present topics that have garnered the most user attention. Features like the "Share" button further allow the operator to quickly connect a story to

their social media accounts thereby connecting news forums and social media platforms at the click of a button.

Online news presentation combines the abilities of the print newspaper format (print and photograph) with that of television news (audiovisual). Ten consecutive front pages in February 2015 displayed an average of 22 pictures (minimum 19; maximum 26) and 25 video links (minimum 19; maximum 31) in addition to 164 written headlines (minimum 158; maximum 173). An examination of 2004 CNN.com editions revealed consistently less video content and significantly more textual headline presentation dominating the home screen. Similar patterns appeared on related sites like *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. One of the likely drivers of the post-2004 increase in audiovisual representation was the emergence of social media. For context, online news proliferated prior to social media, with hundreds of U.S. newspapers publishing online versions by the late 1990s (Schultz, 1999, p. 1). Websites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube experienced their most rapid growth between 2005 and 2010. As the population has become familiar with data sharing and its various formats over time, CNN.com has evolved accordingly with audiovisual presentation eclipsing traditional printed headlines.

### **Viral Headlines**

Social media's presence is seen elsewhere on CNN.com. The online news discourse is incredibly dynamic. Subject matter can consist of a variety of topics, from natural disasters, Wartime updates, or the occasional political scandal. Such variety is not exclusive to online news. "British and American journalism...have always tended to exploit the mosaic form of the newspaper format in order to present the discontinuous variety and incongruity of ordinary life" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 185). What is a unique development, however, is the arrival of a new kind of content, which the study terms *viral headlines*. The previously stated shift toward audiovisual presentation enables this category to encompass stories about Internet content that has "gone viral" and gained appeal among a mass audience. Astronomical amounts of video footage contributed to this new genre of reportage through the spread of camera phones and a video-clip oriented culture.

Examples of viral headlines include South Korean pop star Psy's parody music video "Gangnam Style" publicized in 2012, which recently surpassed two billion views on YouTube, and received coverage on CNN.com. Recently, a CNN.com front page included an array of headlines like: "Eagle Covered in Snow While Trying to Protect Eggs," "The Purrfect Music for Cats," and the recurring segment, "30 Selfies of the Week." Regardless of any human-interest value they may provide, such stories have been criticized for being excessively frivolous, and neglecting the role of journalism to inform the population of consequential events.

### **What is Newsworthy?**

What the consumer finds newsworthy is undergoing a profound shift through the era of media convergence. A recent survey of U.S. Internet users examined audience attitudes toward news subject matter and discovered "only about one-third of the content produced by the mainstream news media is perceived as noteworthy" (Lee 2014). While the Website's variety of available content options reflects a diversity of public interests, the consistent presence of viral headlines suggests CNN.com is courting a demographic that uses the Internet as a means to find

entertainment. In an era of blurred lines between media formats, in which users migrate seamlessly across platforms, CNN.com is adopting the physical features of social media, but also accommodating the expectations and interests of its consumers as well.

A study of the evolving role of news media entitled “Internal Fragmentation of the News” elaborated on the constantly evolving role of news media.

The notion of journalists as authorities, or custodians of fact is constantly eroding. In the long run, journalism might lose its significance as society’s reflexive storyteller, reverting instead to its former role as a partisan instrument, a source of entertainment or a bit of both (Ben-Porath, 2007).

The tension between a journalist’s responsibility to inform the population and his/her economic incentive to satisfy readers is a constant presence. For the duration of this study, content trends suggest CNN.com is opting for entertainment.

### **Media Theory: Marshall McLuhan**

Despite the immensity of recent advancements in information technology, the changes on CNN.com might seem relatively subtle to the everyday user. The skeptic may question the significance of media convergence, arguing that information is information, regardless of the format in which it is presented. To respond to this critique it is useful to consider the work of media theory pioneer, Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan, hailed as a visionary, prophesized many developments in information media that have since materialized, as well as provided invaluable insight into their potential effects. His proclamation that “the medium is the message” refers to the notion that the medium by which information is transmitted has a major impact on the way content is received, even while the viewer is oblivious to its influence. Clay Shirky, author of *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, elaborated on McLuhan’s theory.

Even very small changes in people’s behavior can, in cumulative effect, lead to very large social changes. Which—back to the McLuhan idea of extension—says that new extensions of human capability often surprise and disrupt the culture, precisely because they are so unfamiliar, even if the initial effects are very small (Shirky, 2012).

Online news are having a significant impact on human behavior much like the introduction of the television into homes. The capability to instantly access myriad genres of information - from various sources presented in several formats - has increased user autonomy by providing unique perspectives and facilitating independent fact-checking. This has resulted in a democratization of the media, placing power increasingly in the hands of the user. A 2012 study examined the impact of social media on journalism and discovered that “a person’s social circle takes on the role of news editor, deciding whether a story, video, or other piece of content is important, interesting or entertaining enough to recommend” (Hermida et al., 2012). Thus, the online user is usurping the role of the journalists as gatekeeper of the news.

### **Impact on Human Behavior**

Online news has further impacted behavior through the creation of “citizen journalism.” The Oxford Dictionary defines citizen journalism as “the collection, dissemination and analysis of news and information by the general public, especially by means of the Internet.” CNN.com’s iReport feature was an early example of the consumer dictating the material ultimately reported. McLuhan, in what Shirky (2012) deemed his “most striking” pronouncement, predicted such an outcome: “As technology advances, it reverses the characteristics of every situation again and again. The age of automation is going to be the age of ‘do it yourself.’”

Finally, online news content is changing human behavior by altering the political process itself. Changes in the media industry have consequences for the political arena as well due to the close relationship between media and politics. Some argued we are entering a “post-political” era, in which widespread education and information availability has created sufficient individualism to limit the influence of partisan demagogues, thereby negating the bipolar framework and encouraging a sort of cosmopolitan democracy. Chantal Mouffe (2005) outlines in her book, *On the Political*, the position of post-political thinkers like Ulrich Beck. Such voices claim the beginning ambivalence, where no one possess the truth - belief that was precisely where hostile political rivalries originated. “The political programme of a radicalized modernization is skepticism” (Beck, 1997, p. 38). Mouffe goes on to characterize the theoretical framework of discourse in a post-political world.

One can therefore expect the growing availability of a ‘dialogic democracy’ where one is ready to listen and to debate with the other, and this both on the level of personal life and on that of the global order...visibility and openness to public discussion are the preconditions for the advance of social reflexivity and the granting of autonomy. (Mouffe, 2005, p. 46)

Such developments have emerged in part from the globalizing tendencies of new information technologies. But it has not been proven that technologies will foster healthier cross-cultural interaction and more effective international governance in the long-term. As a platform that assembles information from a global network of sources at an incredibly high rate of speed, CNN.com’s potential for transnational collaboration is missing from previous news formats. Thus, CNN.com and its diverse capabilities are shaping the political process.

### **Conclusion**

Taken as a whole, the features of CNN’s Website epitomize media convergence. The ability to link information to social media accounts has given the user a newfound influence and transformed the way information is presented by new features like iReport. In addition, the prevalence of viral content signals broader cultural changes that are reshaping the consumer’s relationship with news media and redefining perceptions of what is newsworthy. Finally, the integration of various presentation styles—including print, video, and photographic—combines communication abilities previously available only on separate, disconnected platforms. Marshall McLuhan offered a bit of wisdom that is once again pertinent to the online news era.

The 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. This happened whether the railway functioned in a tropical or a northern environment, and is quite independent of the freight or content of the railway medium. (McLuhan, 1964, p. 24)

Similarly, the online news structure has not introduced any new methods by which to communicate information or any new technologies not previously available. Nevertheless, the synthesis of presentation formats, along with the integration of social media abilities, makes the format revolutionary for the media industry as well as everyday life.

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## LIFE FORWARD

### A Conversation with a Student Leader on Civic Engagement



#### Josh Rosner

Josh Rosner is currently a student at St. Thomas University, majoring in Communications with a minor in Business. He is a college athlete competing in tennis and cross country. Josh was born and raised in Miami, Florida. His parents are from Montreal and Toronto, and he has three siblings – one brother and two sisters.

Josh serves as the vice-president of the American Marketing Association, and General member of the WSTU 95 Club. Josh is also a research assistant for the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*. His career goals are to become an attorney in sports law and business law.

Favorite quote: “It’s not how you start but how you finish.”

In his own words: “This is my favorite quote because nobody has the answer to succeeding in life right away. You have to work hard and appreciate all the things that come to your life. Hard work does pay off as long as you work hard and try to go after the things you want in life.”

**1. Tell us, what motivated you to become a student leader?**

Through my experiences being Vice-President of the American Marketing Association (AMA) Club, I was able to train students on event planning, and assist them with obtain internships. As a result, I was able to find my passion for helping people. I want to help students at St. Thomas University achieve their goals and guide them on whatever they want to be in life.

When becoming a leader, you can't focus on just your goals. You have to be selfless and worry about others before yourself. Joining AMA was one of the best experiences of my life. I learned how to become a leader and help others. The AMA club was a big inspiration to me becoming a student leader.

**2. With today's social issues, particularly police violence, why is it important for students to become activists?**

Standing up for what's right is what being a leader is all about. Being able to share your opinion and having a voice and inspiring people. Mahatma Gandhi once said: "Be the change you want to see in the world." He was saying that by becoming a leader, if you want to see something change, you go out and be that change and show your voice. If change doesn't come right away, you must be patient.

**3. What are some ways to become civically engaged in our digital age?**

Using social media has played a huge role in our society when becoming active. By posting something on social media, it takes people one second to look and either like it or turn away from it. I would use social media to post positive pictures about different events that are happening or internship opportunities that people should be recognizing. Today, it's all about a brand image. By displaying what kind of brand you are, you are becoming active and showing people what you can do for your community.

**4. Many believe that young adults and millennials are less likely to engage in political participation. Do you agree? If so, why?**

I do not agree. People are trying to look for change all the time. By sharing your opinion, people can become that change. Becoming a positive light for people can inspire someone to do great things. Guiding someone can inspire people to believe in what's right and show them an encouraging path to the future.

**5. Some students may not consider themselves as leaders. Others may think they do not have the power to generate change? What would you say to those students?**

Anyone has the ability to make change, but you have to be willing to stand up and make that change. Having a voice can be the most important part of being a leader because you can show a promising path to change. Helping build that positive change is something truly rewarding.

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