

Julia Betchart

Ever since my childhood, the library has provided a pivotal role: new ideas, endless topics to explore, and even the place of my first job! Although I've graduated from the small nonfiction section of the children's room to the impressive network of Shields Library, my appreciation for libraries has remained the same. It was only fitting that it was the central hub for my independent research project for History 103.

Before beginning HIS 103, my sponsoring professor, Professor Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, asked me what I would like to spend the quarter researching— it could be any topic within her scope of studies. *Any topic* is quite the invitation for someone who is not only an avid reader, but a history major! In my history classes, I've been interested in families and the role of women. I also considered my extensive travels in the American South, and my fascination with the deep history of the area, both the socio-cultural aspects and the terrible atrocities.

After meeting in office hours, Professor Hartigan-O'Connor provided me with a list of texts to skim over winter break to narrow down my research topic: *Unruly Women* by Victoria Bynum; "A Short History of the High Roll: Big Hair, Eighteenth-Century Style" by Kate Haulman; *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, edited by Amanda Vickery and John Styles; *Pantaloon and Power* by Gayle V. Fischer; *Riotous Flesh* by April Haynes; *The Body Project* by Joan Jacobs Brumberg; and *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*, edited by Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie. I was most interested in the intersection of the body and women's sense of self in *The Body Project*, as well as the power structures of the antebellum South in *Unruly Women*. I decided that my research would center on the American South and women in the 19th century.

I further refined my research topic after exploring the primary source documents from "Everyday Life & Women in America" within the Shields Library subject guide on Women's History. My assignment had been to search for documents published in the South between 1800 and 1865, and select 5 essays, articles, or addresses. While perusing the site, I stumbled across a medical guide published in 1863 in Tennessee, titled *Gunn's Domestic Medicine, or, Poor Man's Friend. Shewing the Diseases of Men, Women and Children, and Expressly Intended for the Benefit of Families*. I skimmed sections on childbirth, cholera, and even a how-to on amputations (hopefully some sections were used more than others!). Interestingly, the guide contained discussions of religion and Christian practices, seemingly out of place between pages on scientific or clinical information. In office hours, I discussed my findings with Professor Hartigan O'Connor. Was this a holistic approach to domestic medicine? A primitive Dr. Oz-style guide perhaps? Did 19th-century Southerners commonly weave together religion and medicine? Professor Hartigan O'Connor prompted me to pursue my newfound interest, and I decided to narrow my topic to the influence of Evangelical Christianity on health and medical practices in the American South, 1800-1860.

The turning point of my research was meeting with librarian Dr. Dan Goldstein in the Shields Library. Dr. Goldstein encouraged me to utilize subject guides on the History of Science, Women's History, US History, which helped me search for articles in a more targeted manner. Together, we searched the Shields catalog for books that would be useful, including keywords such as "medicine + Southern states" and "folklore + American south." One helpful tip he provided was to click on the hyperlinked subjects at the bottom of the catalog descriptions, such as "traditional medicine- Southern states- formulae, receipts, prescriptions," to find additional

titles. Although I found a plethora of relevant titles, one of the most informative books was *The People's Doctors: Samuel Thomson and the American Botanical Movement, 1790-1860* by John Haller. This book provided a solid background of the roots of the botanical movement, namely through Samuel Thomson, who inspired masses of botanical devotees in the South. I used this source to compare Thomsonian practices to Southern reinterpretations of botanical medicine, which were often based in theology.

Meanwhile, Professor Hartigan-O'Connor had provided a list of titles to supplement the research process. I submitted a short response paper for each book, which helped me organize my ideas. These titles included *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* by Christine Heyrman; *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South*, edited by Carol Blesser; and *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* by Sharla Fett, along with other essays and articles. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* in particular provided invaluable background information. From this source, I realized that Evangelical Christianity was not an isolated subset of 19th-century Southern society, but was rather an inherent part of the culture. I greatly incorporated this theme into my research paper.

Many of these secondary sources were complimented by primary sources from the HathiTrust, a digital library composed of the sources from numerous research libraries, including the UC system. From Dr. Goldstein, I learned that I could connect to the HathiTrust remotely by using my student login information via Pulse Secure. In the HathiTrust digital library, I struggled to navigate my way through overwhelmingly long lists of primary sources after typing in keywords, such as "homeopathy," "religion + health," or even "medical lecture + God." I stumbled across 19th century sermons, medical college lectures, and homeopathic journals and

subsequently analyzed each source to determine if the location, time period, and content was suitable for my paper. I'm not exaggerating when I write that I spent *hours* digging through primary sources to search for one or two sentences to support my topic! One method that particularly helped me was searching within each source directly; HathiTrust provides a feature where a user can type in search words and find them in the text. I would type in words as simple as "homeopathy" or "divine" and view the highlighted portions in each text to find relevant quotes and garner new ideas. From the HathiTrust sources, I noticed that as white male physicians struggled to assert their dominance in an increasingly unstable Southern society, they drew upon Evangelical Christianity to define what was –or was not– legitimate medical care. I had my thesis.

Part of a well-rounded research paper, in my opinion, is including primary sources from multiple perspectives. At the beginning of my project, I had recognized that my research would not only examine socio-cultural aspects, but would also acknowledge the arguably most painful aspect of Southern history: slavery. Although documented words of enslaved individuals are unfortunately a limited source, Professor Hartigan-O'Connor introduced me to Work Projects Administration interviews, a set of transcripts from interviews of former slaves. From these, I found an interview of a formerly enslaved individual on the topic of folk remedies and superstition. The interviewee talked about the medicinal use of goldenrod, amongst another herbal remedies. Interestingly, *Southern Folk Medicine* by Kay K. Moss, a source found through the Shields catalog, also cited the popular use of goldenrod amongst Southern whites. While both groups used the same remedies at times, I learned from other sources that slaves' remedies were often dismissed as superstition whereas those of white women were construed as part of pious,

motherly nurturing. From the resources provided by Shields Library, I was able to include a variety of narratives in my paper.

I believe what makes my research original is that it incorporates a variety of primary sources –interviews, lectures, sermons, etc– alongside a thorough analysis of secondary sources. I couldn't have done this without the mentorship of Professor Hartigan O'Connor, guidance of Dr. Dan Goldstein, and, of course, the subject guides, online catalog, partnering databases, and collections at Shields Library!