A History of Racism, Prejudice, and Social In/justice at Vanderbilt University Medical Center: An Archival Assessment of Labor, Relations, and Race

By

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For all of the first-generation Commodores

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They believe home is a place where one is enclosed in endless stories. Like arms, they hold and embrace memory. We are only alive in memory. To remember together is the highest form of communion.

bell hooks. Where We Stand : Class Matters. Routledge, 2000.

"Take no one's word for anything, including mine—but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear. "

Excerpt From: James Baldwin. "The Fire Next Time." iBooks.

"Because of an irrational but easily roused fear that any social reform will unjustly benefit blacks, whites fail to support the programs this country desperately needs to address the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, both black and white.
Lulled by comforting racial stereotypes, fearful that blacks will unfairly get ahead of them, all too many whites respond to even the most dire reports of race-based disadvantage with either a sympathetic headshake or victim-blaming rationalizations."

Excerpt From: Derrick Bell. "Faces At the Bottom of the Well." iBooks.

"I realized that Mrs. MacDonald didn't say she risked everything because she hoped or expected to win out over the whites who, as she well knew, held all the economic and political power, and the guns as well. Rather, she recognized that—powerless as she was—she had and intended to use courage and determination as a weapon to, in her words, "harass white folks. […] "Mrs. MacDonald avoided discouragement and defeat because at the point that she determined to resist her oppression, she was triumphant."

Excerpt From: Derrick Bell. "Faces At the Bottom of the Well." iBooks.

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest records of Native American tribes navigating across Tennessee hunting grounds from the Paleoindian period to the multitude of military forts erected through the Civil War, the land known as Nashville has been instrumental in the development of the American South and helped shape the trajectory of the nation (Barker & Broster, 1996). Through centuries, the landscape, demographic, and industries have altered, but Nashville has maintained its air of utility. While the city's functionality, largely due to natural resources like iron ore deposits and the Cumberland River, is not debatable; the ways in which the land has been used and the nature of the agents' intentions is up for debate in regard to the city's moral and historical legacy (Rust, 2018). While I shy away from providing too general a history, it is important to understand that Black and brown people have been repeatedly oppressed and misplaced as the city transformed time and again.

Those responsible for the displacement of Black and brown people in the city of Nashville employed various tactics of offense to execute their domination. Through the 18th and 19th century, European descendants removed Cherokee tribes from the area through massacres and manipulative treaties that ultimately forced them off their ancestral land and invoked bloodshed against the noncompliant (Native History, n.d.). Many Native Americans fought alongside the British during the Revolutionary War, as colonial demands for native territory increased, and during the Civil War, about 3,500 Native Americans served in the Union Army (Civil War, n.d.). Despite their displacement and mistreatment throughout history, many Native Americans risked their lives alongside their oppressors in the building of this nation. A similar narrative exists for Black communities throughout Nashville's past.

Many historians believe in 1864 more Black Union troops participated in the Battle of Nashville than any other Civil War battle. This particular Union victory thwarted the Confederate's last attempt to reclaim the city. A majority of these "colored brigades" were groups of former slaves, essentially fighting for their freedom (*Granbury's Lunette*, 2021). Two years prior, in 1862, Union commanders "recruited and forced" 2,000 Black bodies to erect and station Fort Negley, to defend the city from Confederate attacks (*Fort Negley*, 2009). Captain Morton, the army engineer hired to oversee the efforts, wrote "To the credit of the colored population be it said, they worked manfully and cheerfully, with hardly an exception," about the Black men and women who faced death at the hands of Confederates, both as soldiers and as formerly enslaved assets. They ate army food rations and slept in the fort without blankets (*Fort Negley*, 2009).

This intentional emphasis on Black cheerfulness in the face of exploitative and inhumane conditions is a tactic employed to preserve white supremacist status quo, ease white conscience, and construct the notion of Black inferiority as natural. Here we begin to see the complexities within working dynamics between oppressed and oppressor as well as the obfuscated narratives of Black existence as relayed by white oppressors, which sets the tone for labor and cultural norms between Black and white people for the next 160 years. This concept serves as the primary theoretical ground upon which I seek to critique the narrative within the Vanderbilt University Medical Center's archival materials, in regard to the history of exploitation of Black workers.

I use the legacies of Black and brown people in Nashville to highlight the complex relationship between the oppressed and oppressor. This relationship is further skewed when labor intersects race, and white supremacy constructs an environment in which the oppressed are

dependent upon those who exploit them. This exploitation of Blacks by white dominating powers has historically cultivated a sense of survival in minorities who are challenged to adapt for survival. These adaptations are often mistaken for the welcoming of the discriminatory conditions that shape the narratives of the past, making it seem like Black and brown people naturally found comfort or appreciation in their subordination. The production of these dynamics and the obscuring of historical narratives allows for the masking of injustice. Speculative methods that allow for the imagination of alternative realties aids my critique of what is presented in the archives versus what might have been experienced by the subject in reality. It was only a matter of time before the truth came to light.

The summer of 2020 has been marked by police violence and ensuing protests and the COVID-19 pandemic. These two nuanced events are responsible for all of the recent conversations surrounding two of the nation's most pressing issues: race and healthcare. 2020 did not create these issues nor did it make them relevant, as the popular rhetoric claims. The particular conditions present in 2020 were the perfect storm for launching this era of reconciliation. The global quarantine mandates brought the world collectively to a halt, slowing production, industry, movement, thinking, etc. Additionally, the unprecedented levels of connection we experience in our society through speedy social networks and news outlets that can share media, ideas, emotions instantly aided in the explosion of previously ignored crises. The American healthcare system has been hanging on by a thread and racism has critically impacted the lives of millions in lethal ways for centuries.

2020 slowed the world down long enough for people to think about the issues that the demanding pace of capitalism and production have been able to suppress, even to those they affect the most. Black Americans and their allies had the time to organize and demand police

reform and even abolition. The working class quit their jobs and refused to return without increased wages. Students lobbied for online lessons and employees pushed to work from home. Within a few months, the rules and conditions we were too busy to challenge began to change. In an attempt to escape the grips of cancel culture, numerous industries and institutions created boards and plans to reconcile with problematic aspects of their past in order to move the country forward. Vanderbilt has been among the many universities to join in on the journey of self-investigation.

In December of 2020, the Racial Equity Task Force, made of more than 100 Vanderbilt community members: faculty, staff, students, etc., delivered more than 200 recommendations to strengthen their "commitment to dismantling historic injustices and structural racism," (Whitney, 2021). Among the recommendations was the idea to create a task force to "document and publish Vanderbilt's history of racism, discrimination, and social justice efforts," which is how this thesis began to take shape. This project is essential to Vanderbilt's future, as we as a community and nation must learn from the mistakes of the past and fully address them in order to heal wounds and move forward in the pursuit of an equitable institution and overall health system.

For my thesis, I will be conducting archival research to specifically analyze the treatment of Black staff in the early years of VUMC as well as interpret Vanderbilt's reaction to national affirmative action protocols in order to critique the notion of Vanderbilt as a longtime forerunner in justice and advancement - an essential claim of *the Vanderbilt way.* In order to fit into the length of a thesis I am restricting my analysis of the treatment of Black employees to the examples of Black staff–primarily janitors, working as grave robbers or "body snatchers" for the medical school's anatomy department in the earl 1900s and the University's affirmative action proceedings between 1968 and 1975.

This thesis will begin with a section of background information to contextualize Vanderbilt University, medical education, and Black American health and status. A literature review about archival research will follow the background information in order to explain the thesis' methodology and demonstrate how archival research functions as an interdisciplinary tool, suitable for the historical analysis of VUMC. Next, the results section will situate the archival data collection within its proper contexts, followed by a discussion section that connects the past to the present and a final conclusion. Similarly, to the way I challenged Union Captain Morton's account of cheerful Black laborers at Fort Negley, I am interested in challenging Vanderbilt's narrative about the history of the institution's relationships with its Black community members by looking at policy initiatives and the themes that emerge at the intersection of labor and race.

BACKGROUND

History of Vanderbilt University

In order to begin to tell the story of VUMC's history, in regard to the implications of its physical location and influence, it is important to understand its initial relationship with the University of Nashville (UN). The UN was formerly Cumberland University founded in 1826, and was formally chartered by the State of Tennessee about twenty years later (*(169)Nashville University*, n.d.). The UN's medical school addition took place later on in the 1850s. In the background of the UN's timeline, Vanderbilt University was founded in 1873, primarily as a part of a larger effort to mend civil war wounds, suggesting that this was a time marked by global innovation and enduring political tension (*(169)Nashville University*, n.d.).

In 1874, the university decided to embark on a merging relationship with the UN medical school that allowed students to pay $5 extra, following the completion of the two-year program, to receive a medical degree from Vanderbilt rather than UN. Vanderbilt, at the time, was a medical school in name only (Kampmeier, 1990). 1874 was also the year that the Freedmen's Bank closed, sixteen Black men were kidnapped from a Tennessee jail and lynched, and the elephant was first used as the Republican Party icon (*Freedman's Bank*, n.d.; *Aug. 26*, n.d.; Artsy, n.d.). While society and medical intelligence advanced; the Black community clung to the vanishing achievements of reconstructions and prepared to face incredible uncertainty and struggle. By 1895, Vanderbilt no longer felt dependent upon the University of Nashville and initiated a split in the medical schools, primarily in the interest of increased oversight on operations (Kampmeier, 1990).

Key Figures / History of Vanderbilt

Throughout the 20th century, Vanderbilt underwent a number of changes both out of internal interest and outside pressure. The institution saw both positive and negative change that affected its own culture as well as the communities it impacted. Dr. Amos Christie was a Californian who received his M.D. from the University of California, San Francisco. In 1943, he arrived at Vanderbilt to serve as chair of the Department of Pediatrics. Apparently, he was a "beloved teacher," and a "respected humanitarian in the Nashville community." According to archival records, Dr. Christie performed work that would bend established racial norms preceding the national Civil Rights Movement (*Eskind Biomedical*, n.d.).

In the late 40s, during his time as chair of the department, he moved his Black patients into the whites-only ward at VU Hospital. Dr. Christie's primary objective as a clinician was to

provide the best possible care to each of his patients, so without approval or a warning, he moved them all downstairs and desegregated the wards. Records indicate that Christie was especially proud that the department had successfully treated Olympian Wilma Rudolph, a Black female runner, for polio as a child (*Eskind Biomedical*, n.d.). People like Dr. Christie as well as Dr. Alfred Blalock, who famously worked with the Black medical figure Vivien Thomas, who has recently received his just acknowledgement; illustrate the recognized fact that Vanderbilt did have powerful figures within its history who challenged racist practices and engaged in forms of racial justice.

While it is important to recognize these figures, it is critical to look beyond these anomalies in the interest of telling a sweet story, and dive deeper into the more generally accepted practices to better understand the true, dominant culture. For example, archival material reveals the character of Clarence Phillips Connell. He was raised in Nashville and graduated from Vanderbilt's engineering program in 1906 (Anonymous, 1930). At one point in time he served as the superintendent of Nashville, Tennessee parks overseeing the restoration of the Parthenon in Centennial Park. Later and more importantly, he served as the first superintendent to the newly constructed VUMC until his retirement in 1949 (*HybridizerConnell*, 1930).

With a quick Google search, Connell seems to be most renowned for his award-winning horticultural achievements in the development of a new Iris hybrid. However, more pertinent to VUMC, he was a key figure in the oppression and exclusion of minority patients. In the late 1940s, it is documented that Connell wanted to prevent the acquisition of new Black and indigenous patients, as he claimed they no longer provided the institution with research or training purposes (Eskind Archives). Keeping in mind that Connell's position likely afforded him a say in various decisions made for the medical center; it becomes easier to understand how

prejudiced practices became embedded in the institution's culture that persist still. When outwardly racist actors hold positions of power, build teams of like-minded individuals, and initiate discriminatory policy, prejudice easily becomes systemic and normalized. Figures like Connell are largely responsible for preserving and recreating VUMC's oppressive systems.

History of Black Medicine

While the post-Civil War era cemented many Black Americans' statuses as second-class citizens, there was highly significant Black achievement throughout Reconstruction, as mentioned above. In 1847, the first African American medical student earned their degree from a northern medical school (Murphy, 2021). Black Americans' participation in medicine increased over the decades, right along with global medical innovation and advancement. Between 1868 and 1904, seven Black medical schools were opened and operated around the country: Howard University Medical School est. 1868, Meharry Medical College est. 1876, Leonard Medical School 1882, New Orleans University Medical College 1887, Knoxville College Medical Department 1895, Chattanooga National Medical College 1902, and the University of West Tennessee College of Physicians and Surgeons 1904.

In 1910, the Carnegie Foundation published results collected by a group of trustees about colleges and universities across the US, Canada, and Newfoundland in order to confront the notion that among "institutions […] which bore the name college or university there was little unity of purpose of standards," suggesting that a significant amount of these organizations were noticeably lacking components to be considered a proper college or university (Flexner et al., 1910, p.vii). The release became known as the Flexner Report, and carried unforeseen implications for American higher education, especially for Black schools. The introductory

portion of the report specifically draws attention to the trustees' lack of authority to assume the position of a standardizing agency, yet the report gained immense determinable authority and impacted Black schools across the nation.

Additionally, the report's introduction explains a multi-decade "tendency to set up some connection between universities and detached medical schools, but under the very loose construction," illustrating how the report came to affect almost all of the aforementioned Black medical schools. On page 302 of the report, the authors provide their data collected on medical schools in the State of Tennessee - of which there were nine at the time. They explain that the state had 3,303 physicians and the population to physician ratio was about 1:681. This section goes city by city, evaluating each institution on laboratory facilities, clinical facilities, attendance, staff, etc. On page 305, Vanderbilt University Medical Department was described as an "organic department of the university," and the trustees note that there is no single faculty member fully devoted to the medical department. In regard to the University of Nashville and Tennessee Medical Department, they called it "a university in name only," solidifying its closing fate.

In the review (p.307), the first word written next to Meharry Medical College is "colored," while the review of its facilities is fairly pleasant, it is likely that due to its racial markings, there may have been an alternate set of standards. The Flexner Report overall stated that Tennessee had the most low-level medical schools than all other Southern states and concluded that the state could only be asked to continue doing its best. Interestingly, the report seems to assert that the white institutions were accepting alarming numbers of unqualified applicants in order to fill spaces, stating that the standard "has been lower in order to gather in students for six schools where one would suffice," (Flexner et al., 1910, p. 307). Ultimately the

report concluded that Vanderbilt seemed to be the institution with the most optimal medical school "to which the responsibility for medical education in Tennessee should just now be left," leaving it as the white medical school, and Meharry as the Black (Flexner et al., 1910, p. 308).

Contextualizing Affirmative Action

In order to pull apart and analyze Vanderbilt's engagement or lack thereof with Affirmative Action, it is essential to have an idea of how these national policies developed and the arguments and sentiments surrounding them. The typical story of Affirmative Action begins in the 1960s, and primarily focuses on the pinnacle period between '63 and '69, when the policies came to fruition. Since its enactment, this policy has elicited extreme controversy. On the one hand, folks are able to see its equitable intentions and potential to just scratch the surface of remediation for America's relationship with its Black population. On the other hand, the term itself, invokes tremendous resentment from others, as it is viewed as an antiquated, unfair advantage for Black people. Dr. Katznelson argues that this narrative, regardless of the stance, largely ignores the political past of when Affirmative Action was white.

Upon approaching the end of the 20th century, the United States desperately needed to establish long overdue regulations to police the pervasive racism that obstructed Black American progress and advancement. In 1961 President Kennedy ratified Executive Order 10925 to ensure that employers "will take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin," (*Affirmative Action*, n.d.). Affirmative Action and its related group of operations, intended to alleviate the discriminatory practices nationally present in the workplace and other previously segregated public sectors. This order mandated that "contractors" document their

affirmative action guidelines and prove their compliance in the form of report results and statistics. In addition to employers, “educational institutions which have acted discriminatorily in the past must take affirmative action as a remedy,” which would identify private institutions like Vanderbilt University as well as its medical school & hospital facilities.

In “Integration, Affirmative Action, and Strict Scrutiny,” Dr. Elizabeth Anderson clearly defines Affirmative Action’s pursuit of compensation and integration. The compensation aspect of the policy seeks to remediate an establishment’s discriminatory past, while the integration element aims to confront the present barriers to equality for underrepresented minorities (Anderson, 2002). She argues that the integration component is the most appropriately applied to the state of racial prejudice in university settings.

1964 was the year of the Civil Rights Act, and after this achievement, Black Americans charged forward to pursue voting rights in 1965. President Johnson, who had formerly underlined racist policies that appealed to his Texas constituents during his time as a congressman, charged Congress to formulate a bill that eliminated voting barriers for Black Americans, claiming “‘We shall overcome,’” as MLK had two years before. Johnson worked to appeal to Black Americans and assured the public of his goal to “reach the time when the only difference between Negroes and whites is the color of their skin,” (Katznelson, 2005, p. 4,13).

Black people faced dire conditions on all fronts in American society. By 1963 the Black unemployment rate was around 30% and the median Black income stood at a dismal 53% of that of their white counterparts. President Johnson acknowledged that Black and white wealth had grown more distinct from one another, and the emerging Black middle class desperately needed support. He noted to a graduating Howard class in 1965 that the rates of Black students in higher education had doubled from 1950, and in a more or less respectability politics manner

congratulated the "distinguished individuals," for their contribution to Black advancement in true American style (Katznelson, 2005, p.15). Though he failed to address the recent policies that contributed to the widening disparities, he acknowledged the fundamental distinction between poor Blacks and poor whites, stating that "the white poor [...] did not have the heritage of centuries to overcome," tapping into the essence of compounding, generational inequity (Katznelson, 2005, p.16).

Prior to Johnson's presidency, he was quite active in the policy making circles that largely produced the *state of Black Americans* which he spoke about during his address. He left these bits out of his account instead of taking the opportunity to face the destructive implications of the New Deal and Fair Deal. During the emergence of the New Deal, Southern interests were assuaged with comparisons drawn between their current proposition and the ways in which Woodrow Wilson's Freedom Deal previously strengthened Jim Crow (Katznelson, 2005). In formulating these New Deal policies, they set out to exclude as many Black people as they could, not writing race into law, rather manipulating circumstances that were racially defined. In this way, policy was used as a technology to disable Black citizens (Hunt-Kennedy, 2020).

For example, professions like farming and domestic work were largely occupied by Black laborers in the 30s, nearly 60%; so in turn they were intentionally left out of legislation that enforced minimum wage standards, working hours regulations, and Social Security through the 50s. Additionally, authority to carry out assistance programs for the poor were relinquished to local officials who harbored deep racial disdain. So, as the New Deal rolled out and offered many whites the opportunity for social mobility and economic advancement; Black Americans were either buried or obstructed. Katznelson tells us that this is when Affirmative Action was white, "new programs produced economic and social opportunity for favored constituencies and

thus widened the gap between white and Black American," (Katznelson, 2005). The different trajectories of these two policies demonstrates the effects that result from the intersection of race and labor.

Concerning the state of African Americans in 1944, economist and sociologist Gunnar Myrdal said, "their incomes are not only low but irregular. They thus live from day to day and have scant security for the future," concerning their economic status and illustrating the reality Black workers faced (Katznelson, 2005, p. 30). Three out of four Black people lived in the South at this time, which is why some form of initiative on Vanderbilt's part could have been significantly impactful for Black growth. Additionally, this reality underscores the sense of desperation many Black Americans felt to hold onto their jobs, especially if the position were deemed *good*, that will help contextualize Vanderbilt's relationships with its employees historically.

Unfortunately, Black health paralleled the dreadful Black economic state, with both conditions essentially rooted in poverty. The cost of a doctor's visit in the 1930s was about $3. This cost, as well as the price of medication, was unattainable for most domestic and farm workers. Most Southern hospitals refused to admit African American patients, and left them to contend for the 20,000 beds in the Black hospitals. At the time the national bed to population ratio was about 4.5 per 1,000 for whites and about 1-2.5 per 1,000 for Black patients, at best (Katznelson, 2005). These circumstances had implications for all sorts of health conditions, like higher maternal and infant mortality and lower life expectancy.

Johnson's ambitious vision began to fizzle. Racial violence intensified in 1965 and it became crystal clear that, rather universally, white Americans were not interested in a united, racially motivated attack on poverty and inequality. Katznelson insists that the affirmative action

policies of FDR and Truman's administration were white; Johnson implemented policies that opened up opportunities for Black citizens to participate in jobs and higher education that previously barred them. Johnson knew that civil rights alone would not make a dent in this inequality.

In 1966, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission distributed reports that the federal government would begin withholding service to contractors that failed to "hire and promote Negroes and other minorities fast enough," emphasizing the policy's urgency. By 1968, the EEOC had created and implemented data on racial labor trends (p.146). The agency employed various tactics to diffuse the policies throughout society such as public hearing and pressure on companies for compliance. The Nixon administration ran with these sentiments through the early 70s with specialized operations to target lagging sectors. They utilized practices of "disparate treatment," drafted by Johnson that required minority workers in highly segregated sectors be hired in proportion to their percentage in the local labor force, which advanced affirmative action beyond its compensatory potential (Katznelson, 2005, p. 157). Additionally, the Nixon administration acted on underutilization, which looked at the availability of minority workers in comparison to their employment in particular roles. Interestingly these policies and standards seem to translate to the book keeping that emerged at Vanderbilt. Keeping track of the number of Black, female, and Asian members of the faculty and staff were present each year. Additionally, the VUMC archives contain documents of correspondence between Vanderbilt and the Equal Employment Opportunity office.

ARCHIVAL METHODS

For this thesis I conduct research in Vanderbilt's Eskind Biomedical Library and needed a better understanding of how to approach historical archives. Archives allow researchers to examine pieces of the past to gain a better understanding of particular histories. When most people think of an archive, they imagine grand examples such as the National Archives in Washington, D.C., which houses the Constitution, or the Armistice Museum in France, housing the Treaty of Versailles. Many people do not realize historical gems reside within small collections. Small assemblages tell a valuable story. People have saved materials to create archives around the world for centuries. Historians use archives to gather details about the past in order to tell a particular story. This critical literature review will help the reader gain a sense of what an archive is, why historical archival research is necessary, how to approach a historical project and work in the archives, and provide two examples of important work done utilizing this method.

What is an archive/ archival research?

Zachary Schrag (2021), defines archives as "permanently valuable records," such as meeting minutes and letters that serve as documented evidence of the past (p. 187). These unique documents preserve history in a manner unmatched by widely circulated sources (Schrag, 2021). Archival research involves the study of collections of documents and artifacts "to gain an understanding of a selected organization, leader, or professional group," (Mills & Mills, 2018 add p number). Schrag (2021) writes about archive logistics, explaining how some are private and some are public by choice or force. Some institutions keep a tight seal on their records and

archives out of fear that researchers may expose embarrassing or incriminating details of their past (Schrag, 2021). Through my relation to the Racial Equity Task Force I was granted access to Vanderbilt University Medical Center's historical archives in order to conduct investigative research for the institution itself.

Mills & Mills (2018) detail the three major historical approaches to archival research: modernist, postmodernist, and a-modernist, and how they define archives and conceptualize the past. The modernists regard the past as "ontologically based in fact," rendering the archives as factual evidence of history and its narratives as true accounts of the past (Mills & Mills, 2018). The postmodernists deem the past "ontologically unavailable," suggesting that archives only represent and produce the dominant narratives of the past. This asserts a stark difference between history and the past; the past is what happened and history is an attempt to convey it through some form of narrative. The a-modernists claim "'knowledge of the past' is socially constructed through a series of human and nonhuman actors to create a sense of history," acknowledging the human role in constructing narratives (Mills & Mills, 2018). I understand the collections in Eskind through a combination of the postmodernist and a-modernist approaches. These archives represent the dominant narrative of Vanderbilt's past, not necessarily the facts from an equitable perspective, thus further methodology, such as speculation, is needed to supplement my project.

Why is archival research important?

Prendergast (2018), an oral historian, asserts memory is not a representation of absolute fact; rather it is a process of organizing significance. She asks how we look for significance in women's stories (interviewees from the USSR for the famous Harvard Project), when the stories are shaped and delivered by men? This resonates with the overall concerns in archival research about the role of the powerful in dictating the narratives of the powerless. Specifically, for my

thesis, this relates to the idea of white men having control of the narratives and stories of Black people within the archives. How can we really know how a Black janitor felt when his experience was intercepted by a white professor? Prendergast (2018) highlights the role of contextualization in the critical analysis of historical archive documents, suggesting historians are able to situate transcriptional archives in a broader understanding of a particular period or culture and gain a better sense of the significance.

Beginning a Historical Project

Schrag (2021) outlines the approach historians should take when visualizing their research design, the first step in any project. Schrag claims "if you can define these three elements: characters, sources, and actions - you have control," (Schrag, 2021, p.73). He insists that a historical composition need not cover every detail to be complete, rather the careful crafting of connected events can effectively produce the whole story. This justifies my careful selection of two cases to tell the story of Vanderbilt's past.

Historians write about scenes, events, and people they have not seen, experienced, or met. This links with the epistemological approach of science and technology studies that concerns the idea of speculation and virtual witnessing, creating a mental image of a scene one did not directly witness (Cunningham, 2001). Schrag asserts that a historian cannot construct a record of events, only a record of records, with smaller projects striking a particular balance between primary and secondary sources (Schrag, 2021).

Historians use different methods to collect and interpret sources. Schrag (2021) suggests historians gain sufficient familiarity with their subject so they are able to recognize patterns and identify anomalies. This includes critical reading in source interpretation, defined as extracting

information from a text beyond what the creator originally set out to communicate. Critical reading can manifest as doubting a source or asking what we can further learn from it. In critical reading and interpreting sources, the historian must consider aspects of agenda, credibility, nuance, context, and change (Schrag, 2021). Historians are responsible for using their broader knowledge of the history to determine and communicate the significance of a particular source (Schrag, 2021). This particular suggestion guided the formulation of the background section to provide the reader with information about Nashville, VUMC, Black Americans, and Affirmative Action, to contextualize the findings in the archive.

How to do archival research

Archival researchers should begin by becoming familiar with the citation and publication rules for each archive. Schrag (2021) emphasizes the modern role of archival photography, detailing the benefits of both DSLR and smartphone cameras for efficiently collecting a record that can be viewed later. Historians must approach the archive and its associated archivist(s) with respect, keeping in mind general rules such as no food or drinks, pens, coats, or large bags (Schrag, 2021). [While these suggestions may seem obvious to some, I learned the hard way after entering the Eskind library with markers, ball-point pens, a tote bag, and a Starbucks tumbler full of coffee.] Historians must remain calm in the face of frustration, because archival research is unpredictable work. The smallest portions of evidence can contribute to a greater project (Schrag, 2021).

The SAGE Handbook suggest four primary criteria for evaluating archival documents: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Mills & Mills (2018) caution historians against the tendency to seek out materials confirming their stance and disregarding

those which do not. This advisory motivated my inclusion of the work of Dr. Christie, who I mentioned desegregated the ward in the 40s, in order to demonstrate the complexity in the history and refrain from only selecting racist evidence to support my claims. Finally, Mills & Mills (2018) discuss the overarching issue of silences within archives affecting all approaches to archival research, noting it primarily as an issue of collection and storage.

In order to work through the silences and absences, historians should use a range of sources when faced with a scarcity of existing records, see a larger story in smaller fragments of evidence, and utilize existing historical tools to excavate the powerless voices in the archives of powerful people (Mills & Mills, 2018). Historians and the choices they make for their work shape the stories that they are able to tell. In regard to selecting the people to shape a historical project, Schrag states "to tell someone's story is to assert that their life mattered," (Schrag, 2021, p.71). This thesis asserts that the lives of low-wage staff as well as minority students and faculty mattered then and continues to matter.

Examples of projects using archival research

Prendergast (2018) writes about the methods these male graduate students employed to capture the accounts of the people they were interviewing. Their notation styles provided insight into the way the respondents might have been feeling about the questions and the memories they provoked. She critiques the ways in which the interviewers altered the narratives by excluding particular details as "irrelevant" (p.208). Mills & Mills argue the importance of considering what does not get collected and how it equally shapes the archive as what is included. The archives dictate "what we see, know, understand, and accept as real," (Mills & Mills, 2018).

According to Sarah Cruickshank (2021), Johns Hopkins University learned in 2020 their founder, Johns Hopkins, was listed in the 1840s census as a slave owner, deconstructing the legacy of Hopkins as an early abolitionist. The news led to a panel forum to discuss current projects dealing with the institution's history and their goals for the future. Among the projects is a multi-year research-based investigation described as "hard painstaking work of historical inquiry," (Cruickshank, 2021). A team at the Chesney Medical Archives compiled a collection of documents recording exclusionary practices, the details of segregation and integration, and institutional policies promoting diversity and inclusion in order to assess the institution's overall racial history within the hospital, medical center, and school of public health (Cruickshank, 2021).

Cruickshank largely discusses the transparency of the institution's researchers with the difficulty of their task. Historians and students discussed the challenges they face connecting evidence in the archives to reveal the institution's history of racist and discriminatory practices. These research teams set out to reveal the deception within the institution's legacy, including partial truths and falsified founding stories, to reconcile with their past and cultivate a proper future. Sasha Turner, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins, suggests these archives reveal an alternative theory of abolitionism, obscuring the false presumption of their innocence and noncompliance in racism and white supremacy. Their biggest challenges are avoiding "simplistic conclusions" and "uncritical appraisal of historical figures," a concern for institutions across the nation addressing their shame-filled pasts (Cruickshank, 2021).

Conclusion

Archival research is an advantageous practice for conducting critical analysis of the past. While the definitions and methodologies may differ between historians, they agree on their duty to read beyond the words to interpret a more holistic story. I argue that this process of understanding what is not necessarily written, is a speculative method, contingent upon contextualization to root one's imaginative claims. All the experts emphasize the importance of listening for silences and identifying absences in the narratives. Institutions around the nation, seeking archival data to confront their pasts, are grappling with these inadequate details and relying on historical strategies to uncover details of their legacies. While the Eskind archives contain very little overt accounts of racism, I eagerly employ these guidelines and continue building the story.

RESULTS

Grave Robbing

VUMC's anatomy department's investment in grave robbing presents an interesting case for analyzing Vanderbilt University Medical Center's labor relations, specifically early practices regarding Black employees. Anatomy students in medical school, researchers for anthropology programs, and archeologists, to name a few, are among the groups of professionals who left a trail of empty graves through the turn of the 20th century. Grave robbings have occurred all over the world for centuries with various motivations. A lot of grave robbing is a result of the perpetrator wanting to steal jewels and other valuable belongings often left in the grave to accompany the deceased. However, the particular grave robbings to be discussed in this thesis

are referred to as "body snatchings," the removal of the physical body, and more specifically for our purposes, with intention of transforming it into a scientific cadaver.

The demand for cadavers increased into the mid 1800s, as American medical schools altered the way they taught anatomy, including human dissection. Some of these changes reflected the students' desires for a more hands-on experience. It was important that they dissected their own cadaver, rather than collectively watching a demonstration of dissection on a single cadaver. These changes were largely a result of the increasing demands to improve medical training and increase the students' intimate knowledge of the body (Highet, 2006). The individualization of dissection training allowed medical students to cultivate technical skills that were gaining importance for running a legitimate, respectable practice. This innovation progressed in spite of the fact that there actually were no legal means of obtaining cadavers. Highet (2006) states that, "without a legitimate source of cadavers, medical professors and students alike turned to body snatching," both to acquire the medical materials and often for a source of income (p.419). Apparently, this scheme swept the nation and body snatching was happening in all major cities with medical colleges. The bodies were stolen and transported by wagon to the institution in the night.

Anthropologist Lesley Sharp, identifies the particular ways in which the concept of Cartesian dualism, the body and the mind or self being separate entities, has assisted in the dehumanization of the deceased, relinquishing the authority to revoke consent to particular subjugations, such as dissection (Sharp, 2000). Following this thinking, once a person has died, they have parted from the Earth and left behind the body cavity. I imagine the emergence of this theory, coupled with the politics of what bodies they had access to, allowed many inquiring actors to ignore the moral and legal boundary violations associated with stealing these bodies.

The most important aspect of grave robbing (for our purposes) besides the agenda projected onto the bodies, concerned who exactly performed these robberies. As mentioned earlier in the background section to provide context, the economic state of Black people at nearly any time in American history has been statistically horrendous. Though the North was no Black oasis, the South presented especially difficult circumstances in the job market, and many Black people were employed doing some form of custodial or janitorial work (Katznelson, 2005). For the most part, employers did not pay these janitors consistently or well, and employers often asked more of these individuals than what their duties entailed, and Vanderbilt was no exception. The nature of these jobs in this context are what feminist theorists would consider overlooked or undervalued forms of labor (de la Bellacasa, 2011). The bodies of Black and poor people were most susceptible to the snatching because no one with enough power or money cared to protect their cemeteries. These types of bodies were also most likely to be required to do the snatching, as they held the least power and had the least room to negotiate the terms of their employment. This created an ironic scenario in which disposable bodies were being sent to dig up and retrieve disposed of bodies.

The Eskind archives contain multiple documents confirming that Vanderbilt University sent Black janitorial staff to graveyards to retrieve bodies for their anatomy students to dissect. Sometimes the students or professors accompanied the Black custodians to illegally vandalize these graves. Though no records of the original job descriptions are available, it is logical to assume that digging up bodies was not included or expected. These workers were essentially faced with performing the illegal and obscene request or risk losing their job, something Black Americans quite literally could not afford. Losing your job could be the difference between life and death in these dire economic circumstances, which makes this all the more exploitative.

Some writing from Dr. Sam Clark, a professor at VU medical school, provided to the *Journal of Medical Education* talks about a particular figure given the pseudonym "'Bill' (1881-1949)" who was honored for his "loyal service" to the anatomy department. He was described as someone well known by the faculty and students alike, who seemed to contribute to the program beyond the scope of his originally designated duties (p.1291). He was described as a "resurrectionist, embalmer, major domo in the anatomy department," without any indication of adequate professional medical training or employment (EBL-1134, 1962).

In this memo, Dr. Clark stresses *Bill's* loyalty to Vanderbilt "this participant [...] whose loyalty to the institution for which he worked, rather than the monetary reward, was his stimulus," which immediately triggers a slew of investigative questions (p.. To understand the major concerns this type of framing raises for researchers, it is critical to understand a little bit of the history between Black employees and white employers in America post emancipation. For decades, white employers and those complicit in the racial economic hierarchy were often convinced that their Black employees were content with their jobs and compensation. Whether they were actually convinced or just forced acceptance of a false truth, this thinking allowed those employers to see their white power in contrast to Black inferiority as natural. We see this dynamic, that is largely psychological and traumatic, play out in the history of Black Americans over and over.

A proper example of this dynamic exists within the good slave owner dialogue that paralyzed many enslaved people in a state of gratitude to their master as Dr. David Ikard explains in his novel *Lovable Racists, Magical Negroes, and White Messiahs.* Ikard writes about the character Solomon in the film and book *Twelve Years a Slave,* who represents a relatively abiding, enslaved African who considers his *owner* Mr. Ford, a good master. Ikard explains,

“What Solomon experiences as humane, if not heroic, treatment from Ford is simply a more sophisticated form of human exploitation premised on grooming emotional complicity rather than terrorizing/beating the enslaved into compliance,” detailing the manipulation in this racialized power dynamic that can be extended to various Black/white *working* relations (Ikard, 2017). While the book and the film *Twelve Years a Slave* are both fictional works, their factual premise gives immense credibility to the racial and relational dynamics they expose, and speculative methods allow us to draw parallels to understand what may have been actually happening in the anatomy department.

Another example involves domestic workers, primarily women who took care of other people’s children and homes. This employment power dynamic produced what we know now as the mammy trope, the Black maternal figure who eagerly leaves her own children to breastfeed a white woman’s, and is depicted as completely satisfied being paid insulting wages, having to use the restroom outside, and dodging sexual assault (Abdullah, 1998). Whether Bill was truly happy with his job is neither here nor there, what is important is his employers’ deliberate inclusion and insistence of this idea. Clark follows this up by stating, “I do not suppose one could discount, however, the excitement and the satisfaction of outwitting the law,” implying that the thrill of evading the law was another form of compensation for Bill, while also insinuating that Bill could have said no to these duties and still had a job to show up to the next day (p.1292). Bill, revealed to be William Gunter, was replaceable to the institution (EBL-1134, 1962).

The resurrectionists, including Bill, are described in this account as employees of the medical school’s professor, who were an “active part of the market,” and had partners that told them information about times and locations of burials in order to set up robberies (p.1292). The information came from doctors, funeral directors, etc. According to the article, the “medical

school representative," would avoid doing the robbing themselves, and would opt for arranging retrieval at an agreed upon time and place. The article states, "the medical school representative might be the colored janitor, one or more medical students, the business representative, or the professor himself," but this has been clearly defined as risky work, which was likely more often than not delegated to Black staff, then students (EBL-1134, 1962, p.1292). This chain of command calls into question the racial norms that impacted the labor dynamics creating the hierarchy in which white students rested above Black staff.

Clark writes about conversations with Bill about his adventures. Bill shared that prison doctors would arrange for trusties to dig up newly buried former inmates for the representatives to collect. Bill mentions one Vanderbilt representative, John Prim, who was shot in the hip while trying to steal a body, emphasizing his awareness of the real danger involved with this business, that seems to be valorized in this history. Bill paid John's medical costs.

This story comes to a climax as the article finally mentions that Bill himself was shot during a resurrection operation in a graveyard. The fact is mentioned briefly, as to be glossed over as an inevitable casualty of a dignified job well-done. This fact is also immediately followed by the first piece of numeric data that pertains to Bill's compensation, "only $1.50 for his part," in a jarring juxtaposition displaying that this life-threatening work was in no way adequately compensated, which is most likely why all of this is prefaced with Bill's indifference to pay out of his admirable devotion to and love of his work (EBL-1134, 1962, p.1295).

One of the most effective ways to get away with something is to admit to it, but spin the narrative altering details of the truth in order to present the story most suitable for your intentions. The author of this document shared that details in the manuscript, which further explained Vanderbilt's pursuit for cadavers and sources for bodies, were deleted as they were

only necessary for a particular talk with a specific audience, indicating that much of the reality of these dangerous, illegal practices is intentionally lost (p.1291). This idea draws larger conclusions about the evidence in the archives in regard to its reliability in constructing accurate narratives of the past.

This analysis is by no means an attempt to degrade the work and lives of Bill and these men or to suggest that they were docile agents only to be manipulated and used. However, the context of times and the reality of the power dynamics cannot be ignored or denied when analyzing the history of VUMC's relations with its Black staff, especially as we see the trends of degradation, danger, and insufficient compensation continue for decades. Similarly, to the way in which we must question whether or not formerly enslaved Black people were "cheerful" about sleeping on cold stone at Fort Negley awaiting Confederate bullets, we must acknowledge the nuanced realities surrounding the archives and challenge the *fact* that janitors were happy to rob cemeteries.

Affirmative Action

The second case I build to analyzing VUMC's historical relationships with Black people is the institution's response to Affirmative Action policies. Vanderbilt had been tracking national trends regarding Affirmative Action responses and policy formation as early as January 1969. Dr. John Chapman, the longest serving VUMC dean**,** forwarded an article from *Medical World News* to the admissions committee. The document largely talks about the efforts of medical schools across the country to enroll more Black students and details the notion of "pirating" students away from other schools. The article included quotes from Stanford University's associate dean about utilizing their resources in order to "enroll people of different

backgrounds," also mentioning the university's aptness to support minority students who may enter medical school with some preliminary disadvantage.

The article acknowledges that the Medical School Aptitude Test is based on "white, middle-class educational values," and one's inability to perform well on these evaluations does not automatically indicate incapability or quantify one's intelligence (Admissions Committee, 1969). Additionally, the article reports about medical schools like Meharry, who had been open to Black students, seeing a drop off in "best-qualified minority applicants," similar to the more modern trends associated with the diversion of Black applicants and athletes from HBCUs to PWIs (Admissions Committee, 1969). While analyzing and interpreting VUMC's response, it is important to keep in mind that their admissions team was aware of these critically relevant issues.

In November of 1968, the department of health, education, and welfare conducted a compliance review of Vanderbilt University in regard to title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, regarding the institution's affirmative action proceedings. A letter written on February 7th, 1969 by Paul Rilling, the regional civil rights director, details the observations and recommendations of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to solidify Vanderbilt's compliance. They inspected the University's equal education and employment opportunities. The committee concluded in terms of education, Vanderbilt was near general compliance, and they included an extensively detailed map of observations and recommendations (Affirmative Action, 1969).

Among their recommendations, they suggested that Vanderbilt clearly state their equal education opportunity policy, that "should clearly indicate that minority students are welcome," in all published materials distributed to prospective students and the community – and suggested including complimentary photos of minority students (p.2). Additionally, they offered that the

University: hire someone in admissions to focus primarily on recruiting minority students, sponsor campus visits for minority student groups, conduct guidance counselor training specifically for working with disadvantaged students, and ensure that all groups that come on campus to recruit employees be in compliance with nondiscriminatory practices as well (Affirmative Action, 1969).

Rilling went on to state that Vanderbilt was not in compliance on employment for some of the following reasons: insufficient Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) posters, no plan for affirmative action to meet EEO requirements, recruiters on campus had not been compliance verified, insufficient authority relinquished to an EEO officer to implement equal employment, antiquated recruitment and referral sources that favor white applicants, outdated training programs with almost all white supervisory, minorities referred to lesser jobs, and "employment at the professional and faculty level is almost exclusively confined to whites. Approximately 98.7% of the faculty are white. Three-tenths percent are Negro and one percent are of other categories," demonstrating the segregated nature of the institution nearly six years after initial calls for affirmative action (Affirmative Action, 1969, p.3). The conclusions of this report largely identify Vanderbilt's stagnation in implementing Affirmative Action protocols, which could indicate indifference or worse opposition to the goals of these policies implemented to aid the advancement of Black Americans.

After these issues were reported, the team made some of the following suggestions: designating an EEO officer to the university to authorize and regulate administrative policy and aid in the development of an affirmative action plan for equal employment opportunity. They suggested that this officer be responsible for: circulating the EEO plan throughout the campus, handling all discrimination grievances and complaints, surveilling EEO program

implementation, conducting EEO seminars, following up with recruitment sources to ensure that a reasonable portion of minorities are referred for employment (terminating the relationship if not), keeping a comprehensive file of EEO progress, make sure EEO posters are nearly everywhere for employees to see, establish strict controls of the hiring policies and practices to make sure they are in compliance, manage diversity recruitment pools, maintain relationships with “local Negro leaders”, write out a promotional pathway plan for all employees to see, establish training programs to assist mobility, and validate placement tests immediately (Affirmative Action, 1969, p.4).

Their second overall suggestion is that “Vanderbilt University has the affirmative duty and responsibility to eradicate patterns of segregation wherever they occur” (p.6). He concluded the letter requesting a response to their assessment and list of recommendations by April, including a positive plan for affirmative action to be evaluated. After approval of their plan, Rilling informed the University that their team will be back to campus in 6-8 months for another compliance inspection and to talk about the University’s results. These suggestions were designed with the intention to demonstrate effective change. Many of them consist of follow ups and progress tracking as a means of holding these teams accountable and responsible for ensuring that change occurs (Affirmative Action, 1969).

On March 3rd, 1969, Dr. John Chapman wrote a letter of correspondence to Dr. Baston in response to the Office of Civil Rights’ letter sent out by Rilling about the university’s compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In regard to the visible and accessible publication of Vanderbilt’s EEO policy, Chapman details that in July of 1968 he included the university’s equal education opportunity policy in the AAMC handbook, which “reaches the widest number of students,” in compliance with the law. Next in the letter, in response to the

Office of Civil Rights' recommendation, Chapman expresses his hesitation to include photos of minority students in these prints, admitting that "we only have one 'minority group' student who might be slightly overworked were he to be in all the pictures, demonstrating the reality of the institution's *diversity* going into the 1970s (Affirmative Action, 1969). This small detail, that there was only one minority student in 1969, further highlights VUMC's reluctant and lacking response to Affirmative Action and Civil Rights protocols.

Further, Chapman responds to the recommendation that the university hire someone in the admissions department with the main role of recruiting minority students. Chapman demonstrates considerable pushback toward this idea. He essentially argues that the work he had been doing in regard to ascertaining minority students was sufficient. He states that he had been and would continue to "develop a working relationship to the premedical advisor at Tennessee A&I and Fisk," among other activities such as attending Macy Conferences where advisors from Black colleges were as well. Essentially, he insinuates that this recommendation is already being sufficiently carried out and can be expanded "on a broader base in the future if this seems advisable," (Affirmative Action, 1969). Chapman does, however, offer an open mind for the idea of assigning a minority group representative to the medical school admission committee for the following academic year (Affirmative Action, 1969).

Richard M. Scott came to Vanderbilt University medical center in 1967 as a business manager in the surgical department. In 1970 he assumed the role of coordinator of student records and services in the Office of Education. By 1972 he was working as the director of student services and nine years later served as the associate dean (*Collection: Richard M. Scott (1938-1993) Biographical File | Collection Guides*, n.d.). On December 16th, 1975, he sent a letter containing the addresses and information of "Black American applicants" who were invited

to attend Vanderbilt Medical School. This seems to be a common occurrence in the records. Lists of potential Black applicants were constantly sent back and forth in the pursuit of viable applicants. It turns out that these discussions occurred as a result of a major push and incentive to implement required affirmative action protocols.

On November 22nd, 1975, Scott attended the “Fisk University Workshop for Premedical Minority Students,” in which “minority” students rotated around classrooms meeting with representatives from five different professional schools. According to a letter by Scott addressed to Dr. Chapman, the Dean of Medicine, about 80 minority students visited the Vanderbilt room, essentially to listen to their pitches tailored to Black interests. He writes, “without exception, each of the students who visited the Vanderbilt room appeared to be genuinely interested, and indicated no hostility,” which raises the question of why Scott may have been anticipating hostility? Would hostility have been a result of the environment, being at Fisk? Would it have been simply a result of the racial demographics present in the room? Or would hostility have been the result of some unspoken reputation of Vanderbilt Medical Center among the Black community? (Affirmative Action, 1975).

In the letter he writes about his observations during the workshop, that each institution required the same criteria in the selection of minority candidates: “A proven academic record, particularly in the sciences, was essential for strong consideration to any medical school. Also, MCAT scores must be reasonably competitive, particularly in the Science category,” which offers a lot to unpack, especially regarding the notion of *reasonably competitive* (Affirmative Action, 1975).

On November 18th, 1975, a few days before the minority workshop, the Dean’s Office received a packet from the American Council of Education, titled “Higher Education and

National Affairs," that concerned "Private Colleges' Anti-Bias Rules Revised by IRS." This packet largely linked the acquisition of Black students to Federal income tax exemption for the University stating that the IRS proposed this new bill in order to ensure that these private institutions "do not practice racial discrimination in the admission of students," a sort of pressure placed on the administration (Affirmative Action, 1975, p.1).

One of the procedures outlined in the packet is referred to as Technical Information Release, which was essentially mandating that the University implement a policy stating that "they do not discriminate against applicants and students on the basis of race, color, and national or ethnic origin," and the procedure requires that this statement be included in all materials addressed to students (Affirmative Action, 1975, p.1).

Another important component of the bill required that institutions be able to prove that all of their programs were operating in compliance with their racially nondiscriminatory policy, which essentially meant readily available statistics and reports. The bill indicated that these nondiscriminatory practices must reach beyond admissions and into scholarships and loans, stating that they too must be made available free of racial discrimination (Affirmative Action, 1975).

The packet states that the IRS will require each institution seeking tax exemption status to provide racial composition for both the student body and faculty/administrative staff and report the amount of scholarship and loan funds provided to students–including the recipients' "racial composition". A fascinating portion of the bill states that tax exemption status would be contingent upon the institution stating whether or not any incorporators, founders, board members, or donors upheld the "objective of maintaining segregated public or private education," a remarkable feature that evidently was not very effective in practice (Affirmative

Action, 1975, p.2). This clause begins to tap into the idea of the lingering power prejudice has that gets absorbed and reproduces racism at the systemic level.

The bill further states that each exempt institution must maintain these records for three years: the race of the student body, faculty, and staff each year; documentation of scholarships and funds awarded without racial discrimination; copies of all distributable admissions materials including brochures and ads; and copies of materials used by the school to procure "contributions". (Affirmative Action, 1975, p.2). The IRS claimed that failure to provide any of the aforementioned material or records upon request will indicate noncompliance with the guidelines and risk the institution's exemption. This bill is an essential component in the investigation of Vanderbilt's sentiments and actions around non-discriminatory practices at the end of the 20th century. This document might serve as the key in explaining the lack of archival materials about race and affirmative action implementation prior to 1975. A key motivator for improving Black opportunity may have simply been tax exemption.

Walter R. Murray was a Nashville native who graduated from Pearl High School in 1966. He was one of Vanderbilt's first Black undergraduate students, and apparently was close friends with Perry Wallace, another Black VU pioneer, who has more recently received his flowers from the institution and community for his athletic trailblazing. Murray was elected to serve as the vice president of the student government association, helped found the Afro-American Student Association, and served as the first Black person on Vanderbilt's Board of trust in 1970. After graduating, he worked with the Vanderbilt Office of Undergraduate Admissions and in 1971 took on the role as the university's first "opportunity development officer," in charge of coordinating practices of equal opportunity for faculty and staff (*Rev. Walter R. Murray*, 2019).

Archives documenting correspondence between Murray as the opportunity development officer and university supervisors, demonstrate Murray's intentions to effectively enforce affirmative action protocols throughout the University. In 1973, a letter written by Murray, addressed to non-academic supervisors, discusses the details of non-discriminatory practices advised by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Labor department in regard to hiring, promotion, working conditions, and termination. In regard to hiring the suggested policies indicate that employment practices must "not overtly draw a distinction based on race, sex, or color, religion, or national origin," in order to deny opportunity. More directly, Murray writes that these protocols do not require the employment of unqualified applicants, rather they forbid the use of higher or inequitable standards for minority hires (Affirmative Action, 1973).

This is important because many documents of the time dealing with affirmative action implementation dwell on the idea or *fear* of accepting unqualified minorities. One precaution explained in the letter essentially warns employers about hiring someone with qualifications below the job description, because then the office cannot "justify to federal investigators the rejection of applicant with similar qualifications who could possibly charge race, sex, or age discrimination," essentially making contractors aware that if they were going to accept barely qualified white applicants, they must extend the same leniency to minorities to ensure compliance (Affirmative Action, 1973).

Another important feature of this documentation is the policy recommended for promotions. The university is advised that promotions be considered equally among employees and that procedures/tracks for promotion be clearly detailed for all to understand. Additionally, in this suggestion Murray highlights the federal government's recommendation that Vanderbilt

specifically increase their number of women in managerial/professional roles and minorities in high-level positions – easily achieved by internal promotion, a goal that still exists across the nation as well as within Vanderbilt some 50 years later. In regard to termination, Murray explains that federal policies will require sufficiently documented complaints pertaining to the employee's performance based on reasons unrelated to race, religion color, national origin, or sex - otherwise the action will likely be deemed discriminatory and outlines the appropriate manner to approach and settle internal disputes (Affirmative Action, 1973).

Over a year later on December 27th, 1974, Murray wrote a letter to Vice Chancellor Vernon Wilson, again about Affirmative Action, but this time focused on "the affirmative action procedures we need to follow when recruiting for faculty positions," in order to comply with Executive Order 11246. He makes himself available for consultation on any questions regarding Vanderbilt's legal obligations. In summary Murray explains that the dean must remind department chairmen about the institution's commitment and obligation to employ qualified minorities and women, the positions must be appropriately advertised in a manner that can garner minority applicants, female and minority faculty should be included in the search whenever possible, all correspondence to potential candidates must include Vanderbilt's equal opportunity statement, effort must be made to familiarize the department with suitable minority applicants from the field, and records should be kept of the institution's attempts to recruit minorities and women "including letters, calls and visits," as well as documentation of all applicants by race and sex to produce upon request for federal investigations. Murray states that these procedures will help hold Vanderbilt accountable to its equal opportunity responsibility and once all steps have been taken each department is free to choose the "best candidate," (Affirmative Action, 1974).

DISCUSSION

Archival projects are far from simple and require interdisciplinary tools, especially when investigating the truth about the past. With the help of Christopher Ryland, the Eskind Library archivist, I was able to visit the collections multiple times to gather the data I needed to write my thesis. Ryland and my committee members warned that I would not find overt instances of racism within the archives, however, as I learned by writing my critical literature review on how to conduct archival research, the truth often lies between the lines. This requires critical engagement with the documents as well as proper contextualization to create an understanding of the narrative. The absence of overt accounts of prejudice in the archives is arguably better than records of racists acts, as racism typically functions systematically in our society, silently and automatically discriminating against minority groups. The elusive nature of racism in the archives parallels and allows me to call out the elusive nature of racism in society.

The information found in the VUMC Eskind archives, prefaced with background information and contextualized with theories and concepts from various disciplines, allows a story to begin about Vanderbilt University's history in regard to its racial practices and legacy. The archival materials about the University's deployment of janitorial staff to cemeteries for body snatching, offers a unique opportunity to analyze VU's relationships with its Black employees. Understanding the context of Black America at the time allows us to better understand the power dynamics between the institution and its employees when engaging with these peculiar examples of exploitation. Additionally, methods of archival research, outlined in the critical literature review, equipped us with tools to critically engage these narratives of Black

lives constructed by white voices. Methods utilizing speculation allow us to imagine or infer what is being communicated rather than what is simply written on the page.

Again, utilizing these archival research tools enables me to critically analyze the seemingly mundane data pertaining to affirmative action policies; and embark on formulating an interpretation of Vanderbilt's reaction to and implementation of policies of desegregation and racial equity. The archives contain various, loose letters of correspondence between admissions committees, external equal opportunity agencies, deans, etc. about the University's awareness of affirmative action mandates as early as 1968. Laws were enacted that required institutions to implement these changes in 1964, and yet as of '69, Chapman writes that there was still only one Black student. The CLR reminds us to assess the absences. The archives contain very little about affirmative action prior to the mid '70s. I conclude that this is linked to the reality that the University widely began to link affirmative action implementation to federal tax exemption, which served as one of the real motivators for integration work, rather than racial justice.

CONCLUSION

Through my research I have come to find that the mere reference to – Vanderbilt's *commitment* to racial equity, etc. –itself, is rather misleading. Many of the recommendations created by the task force in 2020, are the same recommendations that were made throughout the 1970s by minority affairs officers and Equal Employment agencies. Walter Murray became the opportunity development officer in 1971 and he and other individuals made many recommendations to the University on how to move toward the acquisition of racial equity throughout the institution. He recommended trainings on how to support minority and

underprivileged community members, promoting Black staff, and cultivating a welcoming, non-discriminatory environment. In 2020, the racial equity task force made similar recommendations on anti-racist training and called for the promotion of Black staff & the increase of low-wage salaries in order to create an inclusive Vanderbilt environment. The similarities among these recommendations indicates undeniable stagnation in the journey toward racial equity and supports the claim that Vanderbilt's commitments have been performative and empty.

Vanderbilt is now the largest medical provider in the greater Tennessee area and one of the largest medical centers in the entire Southeast. Each year, VUMC serves more than two million patients, working with over sixty hospitals and five thousand health clinicians in Tennessee and five surrounding states (*Vanderbilt University Medical Center | About Vanderbilt University Medical Center*, n.d.). According to reports from the racial equity task force, Black VUMC employees are overrepresented in lower paying jobs as of 2021 (Shelton, 2021). Many of these same employees reported experiencing racial prejudice at work. Additionally, the report indicated that there seems to be "no clear strategy for recruitment or career advancement of racial minorities," which lead to VUMC increasing the minimum wage to $15/hour and antiracist training (Shelton, 2021).

Building off some of the history previously shared about Black American health is simple, as the statistical trends have not changed much. Black Americans still have some of the poorest health in the country at almost all levels. With poverty representing one of the most important structural features contributing to the state of health, it is important to understand that Black Americans have a poverty rate of about 21% compared to non-Hispanic whites at about 8% (Oribhabor et al., 2020). The condition of poverty produces a number of facts with health implications that exacerbate death and disease. For example, Black Americans have lower rates

of health insurance coverage, face barriers to accessing healthcare, work low-income jobs with little to no health benefits, and as a result have higher rates of obesity, hypertension, diabetes, etc (Oribhabor et al., 2020).

As my premiere archival project, this thesis hosts a number of limitations. Before I was able to interpret or analyze, I had to learn how to engage with the archives and understand what I was looking for. This challenged my prior understanding of what counts as evidence and altered the way I accept "facts". As a beginner, I have certainly made mistakes along the way, but do not feel as though any of them obstructed my ability to make the overarching arguments that flow through this work. The archives themselves present limitations in regard to their scarcity and credibility. These documents presented only a small portion of evidence about the Black experience in VUMC's history. Additionally, COVID posed restrictions to the scope of my research. In the beginning, I hoped to further analyze the relationship between VUMC and Meharry, but health safety protocols limited access to the Meharry archives to community members only. In the future, researchers should look for more examples of the experiences of low-wage staff throughout VUMC's history and search the institution for records of complaints filed by Black community members. Additionally, oral histories should be collected from the wider Nashville community to better understand Vanderbilt's impact on the larger Black community and its constructed legacy within the city.

This project presents many opportunities for reconciliation with Vanderbilt's past and reconstruction of its future. The fact that many of the recommendations made in 2020 mirror the goals of Black community members following Jim Crow is frightening to say the least, but this is a critical moment to understand that our actions now and the intensions behind them will reflect in the next 50 years, as we see occurring now. There is an opportunity for Vanderbilt to make

real change, unlike the flimsy, financially motivated polices implemented in the past, in order to achieve racial equity. In order to ensure that these *new* recommendations do not produce the same stagnation, we must understand the importance of mastering the history in order to see how and why previous attempts went wrong. This allows us to anticipate barriers and equips us with the knowledge to make more effective protocols. We are now aware of the warning signs of stagnation: financial motivation, worker exploitation, and narrative manipulation. It is time to fully embrace the recommendations and implement them into optimal operations, understanding that each benchmark not met is another empty promise adding to the legacy of Vanderbilt University.

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