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THE DEMON OF THE BELFRY

INVESTIGATING THE EVOLUTION OF THE PENNY PRESS AND THE EMMANUEL CHURCH MURDERS

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THE DEMON OF THE BELFRY

Investigating the Evolution of the Penny Press and the Emmanuel Church Murders

SEAN STEBBINS

THE PENNY PRESS'S SENSATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE 1895 EMMANUEL CHURCH MURDERS (COMMITTED BY SAN FRANCISCO MEDICAL STUDENT THEODORE DURRANT) HIGHLIGHTED THEIR OBSESSION WITH DEVIANT SEXUALITY AND GRUESOME VIOLENCE. CONTEMPORARY NEWSPAPERS CONTINUALLY CITED DURRANT'S LACK OF ROMANTIC SUCCESS, HIGHLIGHTED HIS PECULIAR MEDICAL BACKGROUND, SPECULATED ABOUT HIS INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS MOTHER, AND EMPHASIZED THE MAIDENHOOD OF HIS TWO YOUNG FEMALE VICTIMS—ALL WHILE ENGAGING IN WHAT SCHOLAR KAREN HALTUNNEN TERMS THE "PORNOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE." SCHOLARS HAVE NOT SUFFICIENTLY STUDIED HOW NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER MEDIA DURING THIS TIME ROMANTICIZED TRADITIONAL SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY FETISHIZING VIOLENCE—ESPECIALLY IF THAT VIOLENCE WAS SEXUAL IN NATURE. THIS PAPER WILL ARGUE THAT RAPIDLY CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL NORMATIVITY DURING THE GILDED AGE—AND THE CONFLICT BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES ON BOTH SIDES OF THAT FIERCE DEBATE—MANIFESTED THEMSELVES IN THE IMPLICITLY, AND OFTEN TIMES EXPLICITLY SEXUALIZED COVERAGE OF DURRANT.

On April 3, 1895, William Henry Theodore Durrant—Theo, as his friends called him—made his way down 21st Street in San Francisco, California. A young student at Cooper Medical College, now Stanford Medical School, was heading to the Emmanuel Baptist Church, at which he was a Sunday school teacher. He was accompanied by 21-year-old Blanche Lamont, a fellow parishioner, and friend. Eventually arriving in the early afternoon, the pair entered the building one after the other. Though Durrant left the church at around 5 PM, Lamont was not seen again. Nine days later, Durrant entered the church with another parishioner—21-year-old Minnie Williams—before eventually leaving to attend a friend’s house party a few hours later. Williams, too, had disappeared. As word began to spread throughout the city of the two young women’s disappearance, suspicion turned on Durrant. Several witnesses had seen Theo enter the church with both women, and rumors of the young man’s purported romantic failures began to spread.

On April 13th, as a few women of the church decorated for the upcoming Easter holiday, one of them opened a cupboard—finding the unclothed and mutilated body of Minnie Williams. It was only a matter of hours before police had reached the church’s belfry, finding Blanche Lamont’s rotting, naked body draped across the floor, her blood-stained head stuffed between two wooden planks. Police arrested Durrant just two days after discovering the bodies. Doctors confirm both women were raped just before or even after death, and prosecutors charged Durrant with the murders of both women, sending San Francisco into a frenzy. Newspapers nationwide picked up the story, marveling at the ferocity—and significantly, the sexual brutality—of the so-called “Demon of the Belfry.”

The rise of the American penny press reached its height during the Gilded Age as newspapers across the country pumped out story after story detailing thrilling criminal investigations, daring feats of athleticism, astonishing

technological innovations, and most profitably: chilling murders. The penny press’s sensational coverage of Theodore Durrant highlighted their obsession with deviant sexuality and gruesome violence. Contemporary newspapers continually cited Durrant’s lack of romantic success, highlighted his peculiar medical background, speculated about his intimate relationship with his mother, and emphasized the maidenhood of Lamont and Williams—all while engaging in what scholar Karen Haltunnen terms the “pornography of violence.” This paper will argue that rapidly changing conceptions of sexual normativity during the Gilded Age—and the conflict between representatives on both sides of that fierce debate—manifested themselves in the implicitly, and often explicitly, sexualized coverage of Durrant.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE EMMANUEL CHURCH MURDERS

While there is no scholarly study of Theodore Durrant, there are books and articles that help contextualize his murders of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams and their obsessively sexual reportage. Jesse Battan’s articulation of the linguistic and political divide between Victorian moralists and members of the Free Love movement, for example, counteracts traditional notions of the Gilded Age as an era dominated by sexual repression. As John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman point out in their comprehensive history of American sexuality *Intimate Matters*, Americans during the late nineteenth-century were far more accepting of non-traditional sex than they had been in prior decades as forces opposed to sexual suppression (like the Free Lovers) became significantly more prominent and birthrates across the country steadily declined.¹ In her study of late-nineteenth-century sexuality, Freedman argues that during the Gilded Age, sex became less associated with procreation and more related to personal pleasure—a reality that engendered immense hostility on both sides of this new sexual divide.² The conflict between tradition and liberation played out in all facets of American

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society. However, it was especially pronounced in the penny press, which often made light of bizarre or eccentric sexual behavior to sell more newspapers.

In the early days of the Durrant case, the press obsessed over his rumored lack of romantic success as some harbinger of wrongdoing. Oliver Chan and Kathleen Heide's research on sexual homicide somewhat vindicates this suspicion, revealing that most sexual murders of adult women happen at the hands of adult men seeking sex, as Durrant was.³ James Alan Fox and Jack Levin's study of patterns common to different instances of "multiple homicide[s]" confirms that the desire for sex is often a chief motivation for crimes of passion.⁴ Contemporary newsmen also suggested Durrant's status as a medical student—particularly his supposed interest in studying "female diseases"—all but proved his complete guilt. Herbert Kinnell's insightful research on potential connections between the medical field and serial homicide reveals several unambiguous realities relevant to this thesis: people interested in death seem to gravitate to the medical field.⁵ Erich Fromm's psychological inquiry into motivations for violence further reveals the numerous links between necrophilia, which many of Durrant's classmates stated he had, and violence.⁶ As the penny press at the time lacked access to this body of research, they indicated that the dominant force behind their relentlessly sexual coverage was likely a battle over sexuality at the time rather than well-sourced psychology.

Contrasting these sexual accusations with the ones later hurled at famous dancer, and Durrant's sister, Maud Allen speaks to the gendered dichotomy of sexual discourse in the late nineteenth-century. Toni Bentely's comprehensive review of numerous dancers reveals how the male audience commanded Allan to "cover up" during many of her performances despite her growing popularity among women, illustrating this gendered divide.⁷ Lacy McDearmon's research detailing how Allan's career ended because of a highly publicized scandal involving a British parliamentarian who accused her of countless sexual "vices" illustrates the broader battle over sexuality during the Victorian Era—and the ways in which media sensationally exploited this battle to their own advantage with incidents involving both men and women.⁸

Newspapers often speculated about the unknowns of Durrant's murders in graphic detail, continually engaging in what Karen Haltunnen calls the "pornography of violence."⁹ Americans, she notes, developed a keen interest in horror and death during the mid-nineteenth century

that accelerated in later decades, peaking during the Gilded Age with thrilling stories of murder and violence being published daily in newspapers across the nation. Haltunnen explains that as interest in violence grew, so too did its "pornography," with books, newspapers, and other media detailing brutal crimes—like the Emmanuel Baptist Church murders—in increasingly graphic detail.

THEODORE DURRANT, ROMANTIC FAILURE

Newspapers that covered the Durrant story obsessed over his perceived romantic failures in several different ways but did so initially by exploring his failed attempts at an intimate relationship with both his victims: Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams. An early report from the *San Francisco Call* explained how the two women "received a lover's attention from Durrant," with journalists already hinting at some sort of failed attempt at courtship.¹⁰ When an acquaintance of Williams's informed readers that she had "indignantly repulsed" a marriage proposal from Durrant early last summer, the penny press confirmed its sexualized narrative.¹¹ Reporters soon seized upon the claims of Blanche Lamont's aunt, Mrs. C. G. Noble, who testified to "the frequency of Durrant's visits at her house and his attentions to her niece," and lauded her assertion that Durrant had also "proposed marriage to Blanche last December, but had been refused when the girl learned he was engaged to another woman."¹² Papers also emphasized Durrant's supposed suggestion to Noble (before being arrested) that they search for Lamont's body together "in a house of ill-fame"—a brothel.¹³ In the early days of his case, the penny press established Theodore Durrant as a



BLANCHE LAMONT AT HECLA, MONTANA WITH HER STUDENTS, 1893 (COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

sexually-deprived romantic failure who murdered to fulfill his brutal perversions, an inhuman monster so despicable he was even inclined to visit brothels while pretending to search for the bodies of women he killed. While some were later proven to be accurate, these relatively unfounded initial characterizations illustrate Gilded Age fetishizations of sexual violence.

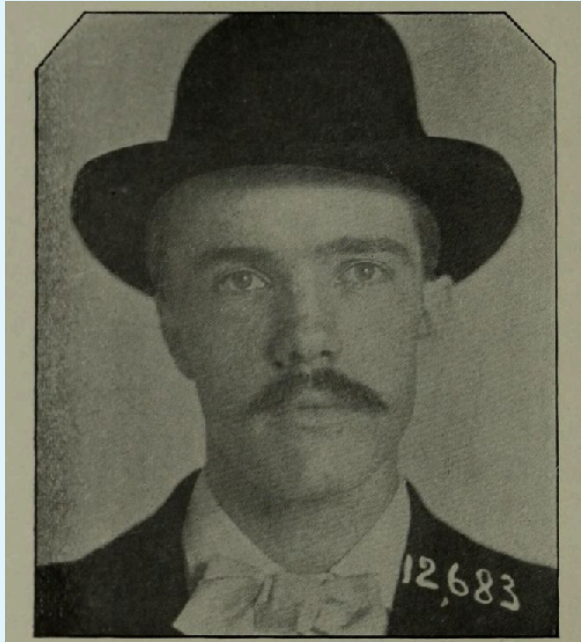
Another element of the penny press's obsession over Durrant's romantic failures relates to his physical appearance, which strongly suggested his guilt. *The San Francisco Call*, for example, diplomatically described how a murderer (not necessarily Durrant) "will not be generally attractive to other men, [who] will have a feeling of utmost repugnance for him [...]. For women, especially girls, he will be found to have a peculiar fascination, but he will lack the skill to use it shrewdly"—characteristics newspapers claimed Durrant *happened* to have.¹⁴ A later story from *The Indianapolis Journal* contended that Durrant's "dominant" facial characteristics "are vanity and sensuality," and that the shape of his head "would indicate not only extreme sensuality, but that its owner would be inconsistent, changing the object of his admiration frequently."¹⁵ Months later, once Durrant's trial had begun, newspapers still editorialized about how Durrant's "clean-shaven lips reveal the coarse sensuality of his mouth," continuing to tie his physical features with sexual criminality.¹⁶ Contemporary newspapers' fascination with Durrant's physical features—and their claims that those features somehow illustrate all manner of romantic perversions—reflect the intensifying Gilded Age sexual divide between those committed to traditional conceptions of heteronormativity and those seeking to change them.

Newspapers also explored Durrant's attitude toward women, casting him as an aggressively sexual (if often unsuccessful) womanizer who frequently solicited their company. *The Salt Lake Herald*, for instance, charged that "Durrant was more than passionately fond of women, and

at every opportunity sought their society," but that "he confined himself to the purer and better girls of his circle of acquaintances," like Lamont and Williams, who the press continually deified.¹⁷ Others stunned readers with highly sexualized headlines like "The Man was as Licentious as He Was Pious," "Insulter of Women," "His Baseness was Boundless," or even "No Woman was Safe."¹⁸ And some newsmen unambiguously blamed Durrant's murders on his womanizing personality, with one paper directly stating that "no other motive for the crime can be assigned [than] passionate jealousy, which is known to have a wonderful power to transform the most peaceable into fiendish brutes."¹⁹ Again, Durrant's *actual* romantic proclivities—he often (though not always) did live up to his reputation in the press—are not entirely relevant. More significant is that the late nineteenth-century penny press exploited his rape and murder of two women to publish implicitly and explicitly sexual content for their readers, exposing the rapidly changing conceptions of sexuality during that time.

While the press continually covered Durrant's perversions in a general fashion, they did analyze some of his specific romantic failures from time to time, most notably with a woman named Lucile Turner. On one soon-to-be infamous occasion, Durrant accosted Turner, another parishioner at the Emmanuel Baptist Church like Lamont and Williams, and asked "if she had never been examined. She was somewhat surprised at his question and answered no. Durrant then said she ought to be and that he could do it."²⁰ Turner's testimony engrossed journalists covering Durrant, and they referred to it throughout their coverage of the case.²¹ The press also took special care to note Durrant's unusual apprehension during Turner's testimony, a break from what they characterized as his typically unfeeling demeanor: "During Miss Turner's examination," one paper noted, "Durrant looked very pale and anxious, and has not shown such pronounced symptoms since his arrest."²² For contemporary journalists, the Turner incident was a goldmine. It offered readers licentious details

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THEODORE DURRANT'S MUGSHOT
(COURTESY OF INTERNET ARCHIVE)

day after day and perfectly conformed to their already well-established narrative of a sex-deprived monster whose romantic failures had triggered a murderous rampage—the perfect story for an American populace that craved scandalous sexual details like never before.

The Lucile Turner episode presented the penny press with a profitable window into one of Durrant's specific romantic failures, but they relentlessly published details about his generally "poor luck" with women, too. *The Call*, for instance, reported the vague remarks of several different people throughout the course of the case, all of whom remarked things like "from what I knew of Durrant he was not of the kind of men who are very successful in making love to young women."²³ Another man offered his investigative services and insisted that he had "located three young women who claim to have been taken into the church by Durrant and compelled to leave the edifice on account of his improper conduct."²⁴ Other papers, like *The Arizona Republican*, discussed an instance in which Durrant escorted another young parishioner to a room in the Emmanuel Baptist Church, left her there for a few minutes, "and returned entirely nude," further feeding into the sexual narrative.²⁵ Newsmen often followed detectives at

tempting to track down women rumored to be former lovers of Durrant, like one case in which investigators traveled to neighboring San Jose "looking for a young lady who is said to have received insulting proposals from Theodore Durrant, who selected Emmanuel church as the place for his attempt."²⁶ Even the strategy of Durrant's own lawyers hinged on the same kinds of sexual details being published by the press. *The Salt Lake Herald* reported less than a month after Durrant's arrest that the defense would try to demonstrate his innocence by proving that "he did not have a reputation as a lady-killer; that another member (now an ex-member) had; that this person was one whom all the young ladies of the church distrusted; that he frequently took liberties with them; that upon one occasion he was alone with a young lady in the vestry and that his actions were such as to cause her to have a serious hysterical attack."²⁷ The barrage of details about Durrant's romantic ineptitude with a variety of women solidified his initial image in the penny press as a sexual freak driven to murder. But that barrage also underscored the penny press's obsession with the most erotic aspects of his character possible rather than with the main bulk of evidence in an apparent effort to appeal to their sex scandal-driven readers.

INVESTIGATING DURRANT'S PAST

While they did devote much of their sexual reporting to his romantic mishaps, the press also examined other aspects of Theodore Durrant's past through a sexual lens, beginning with his time at Cooper Medical College. "Durrant was looked upon as queer when at college," one *Call* report notes, going on to explain how even though he "was fond of the society of women he declared the year he entered college that his relations with them had never been intimate."²⁸ Newsmen also jumped on comments from fellow students admitting that "he spoke strangely about women from time to time and read much on subjects which are safest in the hands of hard headed specialists," indicating a "trend of mind which dwells upon the morbid."²⁹ Other papers directly linked Durrant's medical schooling with his sexual perversions, one story describing how some faculty at Cooper believed "Durrant was afflicted with psycho-mania sexualis, a not unknown though infrequent mental disease," another simply inquiring, "Durrant studied surgery. Did he study murder at the same time?"³⁰ A particularly scathing assessment of Durrant's character out of *The New York Tribune* went even further:

"Medical experts who have studied Durrant's case unite in declaring that he is an abnormal crank, whose perverted

nature has been stimulated by the study of sexual crimes. His medical college associates say that in private talk about women he revealed a foul imagination, and that his fondness for discussing topics that are usually ignored, even between men, gave him the reputation of being an erotic maniac. As assistant superintendent of the Emmanuel Sunday-school he performed all his duties in an irreproachable way, but since his arrest it is known that he insulted several young women and that he was in the habit of making weekly visits to the local [brothel].”³¹

Rather than focusing on Durrant’s bungled attempts at romance, these reports confirm newspapers’ narrative of his sexual perversions by approaching them from an altogether different angle—medicine. They exemplify the penny press’s fixation upon Durrant the sexual maniac rather than Durrant the murderer and illustrate the growing divide between forces opposed to and supporting changing conceptions of sexual norms during the Gilded Age.

Contemporary newsmen further directed their readers’ attention to rumors that Durrant committed the murders, as one paper put it, “for the purpose of medical investigation,” fueling sexualized narratives of his crimes even further.³² It is known that Durrant was an ardent medical student and took a great interest in diseases of women,” one report from *The Herald* read, “and being



EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH, WHERE DURRANT MURDERED TWO FEMALE PARISHIONERS IN 1895
(COURTESY OF OPENSE HISTORY)

unable to conduct his investigations in any legitimate manner, murdered the girls for that purpose.”³³ Journalists turned to his suggestion to Miss Lucile Turner “that she allow him to make a medical examination of her, [him] telling her that he knew of a good place in the church where it could be done without anyone being the wiser” to link an already well established aspect of their coverage to these rumors.³⁴ Ironically, even by publishing dismissals of such reports, newspapers gave them more credence, one article outlining in great detail the rumor “that Blanche Lamont was lured to the church by Durrant’s promise to perform a criminal operation on her to save her from disgrace” before briefly admitting that “the city autopsy physician [stated] the rumor was without foundation.”³⁵ Ultimately, the more analysis the penny press devoted to Durrant’s supposed medically-motivated investigative appetites, the more they became part of the story. Newsmen recognized this fact and intensified the practice anyways, reflecting their preoccupation with the sexual aspects of the Emmanuel Baptist Church murders before all others.

Another part of Durrant’s past scrutinized by newspapers relates to his actual academic performance at Cooper Medical College, which most outlets depicted as suspiciously strong. “[Durrant] read textbooks, crammed science for his examinations and is said by his family to have read little or none of the lighter literature of the day” alleged one story from the *Call*, hinting at Durrant’s supposed peculiarity.³⁶ His standing in none of his classes fell below 97 percent” read another out of *The Herald*, the author concedes that “Theodore Durrant is the last man whom anybody would suspect of committing a murder.”³⁷ Even in jail, as multiple outlets discussed, “Durrant is studying medical books and says upon his release he will continue his course until graduation”—an interest that surely bordered on an obsession.³⁸ Newspapers’ juxtaposition of these details chronicling Durrant’s academic success with the aforementioned side effects of studying modern medicine constitutes another example of their sexualization of the Emmanuel Church murders. While not as explicit as lengthy tirades explaining Durrant’s many perversions, these kinds of oblique associations nonetheless contributed to the penny press’s erotic narrative of Durrant and his crimes.

Outside of his *actual* experience as a medical student, newspapers littered their stories with a variety of psychosexual speculation regarding Durrant’s past behavior, all of which conveniently played into their depiction of him as a romantically deprived carnal maniac. Durrant’s main in-

terest, as newsmen had already established, was his medical studies—but one story claimed that because he “was very much interested in his studies and work, fond of describing the horrors of a dissecting room,” he had in fact lost “any feeling of reverence for the human body.”³⁹ When the city’s autopsy physician concluded his report, several stories almost *excitedly* noted the fact “that the murdered girl had been outraged [raped] prior to the murder,” adding an entirely new element to the existing sexual narrative.⁴⁰ Other stories made light of “expert” opinion linking Durrant’s academic interests with seal violence, like that of police surgeon Summers, who claimed medical backing for the theory that there were “men whose animal passions could not be aroused without the sight of blood,” and insisted that “the post mortem examination clearly proves that the victims were killed and afterwards outraged.”⁴¹ An incredibly early report from *The Herald*—released mere days after Durrant’s arrest—testified to his “Jekyll-Hyde character”: “In Emanuel church he was noted for his religious fervor. Other residents of the Mission district say he was a frequenter of saloons, played cards and billiards in wine rooms, nightly visited with other youths saloons with side entrances for women. His classmates at the medical college say that Durrant was blasphemous and flippant in conversation, especially about women.”⁴² Reporters gravitated towards the most outrageous and openly erotic elements of the Durrant case in an unprecedented way, and often without much evidence. The uniformity of their narrative—and the fact that papers favored the sexually eccentric over the accurate—underscores the ways in which the changing sexual values and attitudes of the Gilded Age impacted reportage of Durrant.

SCRUTINIZING DURRANT’S PRESENT

Another angle in the penny press’s coverage of the Durrant case sought to examine not his past, but his present.

“To the American penny press, Durrant’s lack of emotion in court and jail, his already well-established sexual perversions, and the fact that women flocked to see him throughout the legal proceedings (despite his apparent guilt) confirmed his status as a carnally-motivated villain that defied every traditional conception of sexuality”

More specifically, his behavior following his arrest. Journalists initially directed this kind of reporting at Durrant’s deportment in court and jail, which they claimed illustrated his guilt in the same implicitly sexual manner his romantic failures had. Articles marveled at Durrant’s lack of emotion throughout the legal proceedings, especially when the evidence was stacked against him. One report noted that “whether their testimony is strong against him or only inferentially accusing, his expression is the same. [...] He talks very little to his lawyers, pays absolutely no attention to the crowd [...], and watches the proceedings with unconcern.”⁴³ Other papers mentioned his “calm, imperturbable expression,” his “stolid indifference,” or his “air of unconcern,” hinting at an almost unnatural level of disinterest in his fate.⁴⁴ Reports discussing Durrant’s behavior in jail were no different—“Durrant keeps up his wonderful composure,” one article observed, adding that at “about 10 o’clock yesterday morning several students, the majority being ladies [...] paid him a visit.”⁴⁵ To the American penny press, Durrant’s lack of emotion in court and jail, his already well-established sexual perversions, and the fact that women flocked to see him throughout the legal proceedings (despite his apparent guilt) confirmed his status as a carnally-motivated villain that defied every traditional conception of sexuality.

Many newspapers’ vilification of Durrant’s deportment in the courtroom reached entirely new heights during discussions of violence, especially when that violence was sexual in nature. Newspapers described how Durrant “showed no emotion” during descriptions of Minnie Williams’s brutal rape and murder, sitting “calm and unconcerned” with “about the same degree of interest that is manifested by the Sphinx as it gazes over the sands of Egypt.”⁴⁶ Descriptions like these hardly stood out. According to many newsmen, the person in whom the evidence “produces the least mental perturbation is the prisoner itself,” this particular

author choosing to revoke Durrant's humanity by simply referring to him as "it."⁴⁷ The same article cast Durrant as "an enigma, a monster of crime and depravity"—a man whose sexual crimes were so heinous he no longer deserves that title.⁴⁸ These reports continually ostracized Durrant in truly remarkable ways. However, their main objective was to single out the sexual nature of his crimes as the thing that held the most significance. By portraying Durrant as a violent sexual freak who listened to recitals of savagery "with no more emotion than he would display at a college lecture," the penny press solidified their unabashedly erotic narrative to please their voracious readers' yearning for that kind of content in ways Americans had not in prior decades.⁴⁹

In addition to their use of his cold demeanor as evidence of sexual impropriety, the penny press also examined Durrant's many female admirers as a means of amplifying the sexual undertones of their reporting. The first incident discussed by the national press occurred on April 24th, shortly after Durrant's arrest, when "a female crank" claiming to be "a Gypsy queen" talked briefly with Durrant in his cell before announcing to a pool of reporters "he is not the man."⁵⁰ The episode sparked visits from women around the Bay Area, a development which journalists seized upon. "Women are Daft Over Durrant" declared one *Silver Blade* headline, its author marveling at how "the county jail is besieged with women daily, anxious to see Durrant and leave flowers for him."⁵¹ Other articles reviewed the young women "who seem to regard [Durrant] as something of a hero," visiting his jail cell "to gape at him through the bars."⁵² Stories of his female admirers perfectly played into the already well-grounded sexual nature of his crimes, with Durrant now appearing as some sort of hypnotic force with unnatural sexual charisma—at least enough to convince "foolish women," as one author lamented, of his innocence.⁵³ Such stories typified the sexualization of the Emmanuel Baptist Church murders, exposing yet more instances of the penny press's obsession with the most erotic elements of his crimes.

Gilded Age newsmen further pointed to Durrant's close relationship with his mother as evidence of his guilt thanks to some kind of troubled upbringing, often implying possible sexual impropriety. *One Call* report, attempting to find a justification for Durrant's imperturbability in the courtroom, guessed that "the proximity of the mother of the defendant may have something to do with his easy manner."⁵⁴ What began as a series of seemingly innocent remarks about a mother and her son's close relationship quickly spiraled out of control with speculative innuendo soon dominating all discussion of Durrant's mother. A story out of *The Louisiana Populist*, for example, found that "his mother is his staunchest advocate, just as was the aged mother of [infamous murderer and medical student] Carlyle Harris, whose history in some respects resembles that of Durrant's."⁵⁵ Another story from *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* speculated that a young miscreant out of Spokane, Washington named Karl Gerulff—"the son of a prostitute [and] a born criminal"—compared quite fittingly with "[monstrosities] like Tom Blanck or Theodore Durrant," other criminals said to have troubled upbringings.⁵⁶ Newspapers' scrutiny of Durrant's relationship with his mother indeed stemmed from, at least in part, nineteenth-century conceptions of women as mothers (and therefore the primary architects of their children's future behavior). But articles discussing their interactions, especially given the totality of their licentious coverage, unquestionably took on some sexual undertones, another reality that exposes the penny press's fetishization of sexual violence.

Significantly, papers' coverage of Durrant's mother actively excluded his father from nearly all discussion of his crimes. One article from the *Call* took this exclusion to almost comical levels—after briefly mentioning Durrant's father's entrance into the courtroom, the author remarked that "all eyes were turned in that direction to see if the mother of the prisoner would follow."⁵⁷ Of their interactions in the courtroom, one journalist alluded to an unusually intimate relationship, writing: "The mother of the prisoner was, naturally, the object of a good deal of curiosity. But very few in the courtroom had seen her before, and

"What began as a series of seemingly innocent remarks about a mother and her son's close relationship quickly spiraled out of control with speculative innuendo soon dominating all discussion of Durrant's mother."

were anxious to see how she was bearing up under the ordeal of her son's imprisonment and approaching trial. Those who expected to see red eyes and tears and agony was depicted upon the face of the unfortunate woman were disappointed. Her eyes were bright, there were no traces of tears, and no agony was reflected in the countenance of the prisoner's mother. She was calm—more than calm—talking to her son and smiling cheerfully upon him during the entire day in court.”⁵⁸ The author followed this passage with a single line mentioning the presence of Durrant's father. Again, while much of this undue focus on Durrant's mother can undoubtedly be attributed to nineteenth-century conceptions of women as the parents responsible for raising children, the penny press's conscious *exclusion* of his father from the conversation underscored the implicitly sexual narrative they established from the very beginning of his case.

ROMANTICIZING LAMONT AND WILLIAMS

Though they devoted the vast majority of their coverage to Theodore Durrant himself, newspapers sexualized the Emmanuel Baptist Church murders in another way: by emphasizing the maidenhood of his victims. Blanche Lamont in particular, received much praise from the press, who frequently reiterated her womanhood. The day after her disappearance, for example, the *Call* published a story concerning “a beautiful girl” that had gone missing.⁵⁹ Establishing her femininity from the outset. A subsequent report alleged Lamont “had a filled-in frame and was a romantic,” paving the way for later stories that outlined Durrant's exploitation of those characteristics.⁶⁰ Indeed, after Durrant's arrest, papers highlighted witness testimony to this effect. One acquaintance, Dr. Vogel, told the *Call* that “Blanche was such a good girl that she thought everybody was as good as she was and she might have been taken advantage of.”⁶¹ An early assessment from *The Herald* epitomized journalists' portrayal of Lamont, the innocent victim of an erotic maniac, describing her as a “slender, graceful, well dressed, brown-haired, accomplished [...] She was simply a very pretty girl, romantic, according to some of her school friends, intensely matter-of-fact according to her relatives.”⁶² Emphasizing Lamont's femininity alone would not necessarily have constituted a sexualization of the murders. But given that reporters juxtaposed such fawning descriptions of romantic purity with gruesome ones outlining sexual brutality, they clearly sought to create an apparent dichotomy between Durrant and his victims with sex at its center.

The penny press subjected Minnie Williams to similar treatment. However, given her temperamental differences from Lamont, they highlighted distinct aspects of her character that could have (in their narrative) contributed to her murder. However often reporters brought up Blanche Lamont the *romantic*—“the picture of the girl in the Fireside Companion stories who has adventures among the traps of a great city,” according to one report from *The Herald*—they just as often brought up Minnie Williams the *vulnerable*.⁶³ Shortly after her disappearance, for instance, the *Call* wrote that Minnie Williams, “frail, weak, [and] inexperienced,” had vanished.⁶⁴ Whereas reporters had argued Lamont's confident personality and extensive romantic experience could have gotten her into trouble with potential wrongdoers, with Minnie Williams, they claimed the opposite: her romantic, and, yes, sexual “inexperience” made her an easy target for predators like Durrant. From opposing, nearly contradictory angles, Gilded Age newsmen had identified both women's unique susceptibilities that had contributed to their murder—doing so through an exclusively sexual lens.

Newsmen usually published stories discussing each victim individually, but they likewise sought to uphold their joint maidenhood by grouping Lamont and Williams together from time to time. Some San Franciscans accomplished this job for them. Judge Conlan, the justice presiding over Durrant's case, personally informed the *San Francisco Call* of the unfortunate nature of his crimes: “[Jack the Ripper's] crimes had for their victims women of bad character,”⁶⁵ he argued, suggesting it was Lamont and Williams's sexual purity that made Durrant's murders all the more unacceptable. If, like Jack the Ripper, he had simply murdered prostitutes, perhaps the public outcry would not have been so severe. The *Call* further summarized the remarks of a Rev. Mr. Boynton (of San Francisco's First Baptist Church), who launched into a protracted tirade during one sermon that instructed women of the city to “promise themselves ‘I will not go anywhere, under any pretext whatever, unless accompanied by my father or my brother. I will not enter anyplace where there are not others.’”⁶⁶ Opinions like those of Conlan and Boynton dominated reporting on Durrant's murders, at least during discussions of his victims. And while they certainly exposed the misogynistic conceptions of womanhood that pervaded late nineteenth-century America, they also exemplified the kind of sexual division the press sought to establish between Durrant, the savage, and Lamont and Williams, the romantically vulnerable.

THE “PORNOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE”

Another phenomenon present in nearly all newspaper coverage of the Durrant case is something historian Karen Haltunnen terms “the pornography of violence”—that is, nineteenth-century America’s widespread fetishization of violence through its “pornography” in books, papers, and other media—all of which featured descriptions or images of vicious crimes in increasingly graphic detail.⁶⁷ The penny press’s coverage of the Emmanuel Church murders embodied this pornography to the extreme. An early report from the *San Francisco Call* detailed how a “knife had been driven again and again and again into [Minnie Williams’s] breast” before delving into the minutiae of Durrant’s violent acts in later coverage.⁶⁸ Durrant “cut her wrist so that she would bleed to death, and to complete the murderous work, had driven a knife to her heart and in a bestial fury slashed her breasts,” one story out of *The Wichita Daily Eagle* read, concluding that “the stabbing and slashing was done after the girl was dead.”⁶⁹ Ironically, the violent pornography cultivated more violent pornography, much of this variety speculative. *Call* reporter John McNaught, for example, informed his readers of the (unquestionably racialized) divide between what he called the “brute” and the “fiend,” the latter of which Durrant must be:

*“There are just two classes of criminals who outrage women and murder them. One of these is the low, brutish criminal whose lust and ferocity are tempered by an intellect hardly sufficient to lift him above the level of a gorilla. The second is the man of intellect whose intelligence is distorted by a species of sexual madness growing out of some perverse diabolism of nature. All criminal history attests that only these two classes often, the brute and the fiend, commit crimes of this kind.”*⁷⁰

As violent speculation ran wild, other stories began condemning the Emmanuel Baptist Church itself, one report from *The Anaconda Standard* claiming “a stain of human blood marks its history.”⁷¹ The author, apparently horrified,

went on to detail how one of the church’s former pastors “killed a newspaper proprietor,” while another, he added rather abruptly, “blew out his brains.”⁷² Such absurd descriptions epitomized the pornography of violence produced by Durrant’s murders, with newsmen devising evermore outlandish reports to satisfy the insatiable public.

While newspapers certainly fetishized all types of violence in the Durrant case, they especially did so if that violence was sexual in nature. In the immediate aftermath of the murders, newsmen raved whenever the police released shocking details, as in one *Call* report which gawked at their discovery that the murderer had shoved “a portion of [Lamont’s] underclothing” down her throat.⁷³ Indeed, such outrageously sexual details sent both newspapers and readers into a frenzy. Another *Call* story almost gleefully recounted how Lamont’s dress “had been unbuttoned and then torn from the body through impatience,” leaving her lying on the floor of the church’s belfry “absolutely nude.”⁷⁴ Reporters even *complained* of a lack of excitement as the months went on—(authorities had finished collecting most of the facts over the course of April and May 1895)—the volume of licentious details released on a weekly basis waning accordingly. *The Herald*, for example, lamented that “as the trial progresses interest in it seems to lag,” somberly describing how “the crowd of morbidly curious people who have assembled at the courtroom door day after day is growing less” as newspapers ran out of new Durrant-related “pornography” to distribute. However, such sobering realities failed to dissuade the penny press, which found entirely new, and unconventional ways to fetishize the murders.

One facet of this unorthodox approach involved reporting on the astonishing July 1895 development concerning a San Francisco playwright who planned to dramatize Durrant’s murders in his theatrical production. Manager of San Francisco’s Alcazar theater W. R. Daily, reported *The*

“Another visual assessment out of The Louisiana Populist depicted two versions of Durrant posing as Robert Louis Stevenson’s infamous villain Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, complemented by illustrations of a knife embedded in a skull”

“Ultimately, print coverage of “the Demon of the Belfry” and his crimes during the Gilded Age underscores the ways in which media dramatically shapes public perception, an enduring reality that continues throughout the contemporary United States”

Oregon Mist, “closed arrangements with Richard C. White to make a dramatization of the Durrant case,” adding that “Mr. Daily believes that there is plenty of material in the story of the Emmanuel church murders.”⁷⁵ Lacking substantive coverage as Durrant’s attorneys took their time selecting jurors, the penny press milked the theatrical development for weeks. Reporters amplified the divide between those eager to see the performance and others, like the pastors discussed in one *Herald* report, who believed the play would “demoralize the community.”⁷⁶ As it became increasingly clear the play would not end up being performed, *The Dalles Times-Mountaineer* went so far as to entertain the theory that “if the fiend Durrant is acquitted of the charge against him he will be engaged at a remunerative salary to play the leading role in the play based on upon the heinous crimes.”⁷⁷ In short, the penny press spent nearly a month producing new “pornography” by fetishizing the outrage over a theatrical production, the play *itself* a fetishization and pornographic offshoot of Theodore Durrant’s violent crimes. Such absurdities exemplified the pornography of violence produced by the penny press in their obsessive coverage of the Emmanuel Church murders.

Another way the penny press fetishized the murders when they lacked new developments involved publishing readers’ violent poetry. The *Call*, for instance, published a “remarkable” poem by a man named George King, who put his unique spin on the church murders:

“Into the church they were decoyed by some fiend, but I won’t speak his name. / There to commit the bloody deed, he understood the game. [...] There he did assault her [Williams] in a fiendish way, / Then took her life by strangling, that’s what the Coroner’s jury say. [...] The perpetrator of the deed did it in cold blood, / More than human nerves he had, his business he understood. [...] Young girls all take warning by the two innocent girls’ sad fate, / And be aware of all false young men, with them don’t stay out late. [...] Mothers

all take warning by this sad affair, / Guard your girls day and night, of them take good care, / For if you don’t some day you may rue it when it is too late, / So remember well and bear in mind the two innocent girls’ fate.”⁷⁸

Newspapers littered their discussions of the church murders with similarly targeted poetry, highlighting the manner in which they relentlessly pumped out, or at the very least gave voice to Durrant “pornography.”

Newspapers further accompanied their reportage with various gruesome illustrations that escalated their pornography of violence for voracious readers to new levels, visually. *The Dalles Times-Mountaineer*, for instance, positioned several illustrations of Blanche Lamont’s rotting, naked corpse, the blood-stained floor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, and one of the knives used to stab Minnie Williams next to their discussion of Durrant’s romantic failures, rather heavy-handedly establishing their belief (or rather, lack thereof) in his innocence.⁷⁹ Another visual assessment out of *The Louisiana Populist* depicted two versions of Durrant posing as Robert Louis Stevenson’s infamous villain Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, complemented by illustrations of a knife embedded in a skull. At the bottom of the drawing, a snake slithered past Durrant’s feet.⁸⁰ Because the cost of photography precluded most news outlets from using it during the late nineteenth-century, the penny press took an illustrative approach instead. Their quest to reveal the most licentious and sensational details of the Emmanuel Church murders— they produced yet another variety of violent pornography that overshadowed the entirety of their coverage of Durrant.

MAUD ALLAN, DURRANT’S FATE, AND CONCLUSION

Durrant’s sister, erotic dancer Maud Allan, suffered similar treatment at the hands of the press a few years later after a brief (but successful) career in Europe. Whereas Durrant’s accusers often straddled the line between implicitly

and explicitly defining his sexual misdeeds, critics of Allan and her rumored homosexuality showed no such hesitation. They characterized Allan and her rumored sexual “degeneracy” as the antithesis of Lamont and Williams, idols of traditional nineteenth-century womanhood.⁸¹ Scholars Toni Bentley and Lacy McDearmon have chronicled Allan’s very open vilification in the British and American press because of those accusations, exposing the gendered dichotomy of sexual discourse in the Victorian era—and how the media theatrically exploited this discourse with events involving both men and women.⁸²

Eventually, interest in the Emmanuel church murders and their licentious details waned. After a media storm following the jury’s ruling, which found Durrant guilty of murder on November 23, 1895, public interest moved elsewhere. The court sentenced Durrant to death by hanging, and police transported him to San Quentin prison just north of San Francisco shortly after the conclusion of his trial—decisions which won much media praise. Though he maintained his innocence and appealed the court’s ruling several times, (generating the occasional article in the *San Francisco Call*, *The Herald*, or other papers that had covered his case), he was ultimately executed at San Quentin on January 7, 1898, with his mother by his side.

The late nineteenth-century penny press’s overtly sensual coverage of the Emmanuel Baptist Church murders influenced Theodore Durrant’s conceptions, his crimes, and his victims in a sexual way, and was itself the product of changing conceptions of sexuality during the Gilded Age. Both entire newspapers and individual journalists romanticized Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams, whom they cast as icons of traditional sexuality, while simultaneously fetishizing Durrant’s violence—particularly its sexual aspects. Their emphasis on his romantic failures, scrutiny of his academic career, and sentimentalization of his victims all contributed to the development of his extraordinary image in the American public’s mind: not a murderer driven to kill in traditional ways by traditional means, but a sexual deviant hell-bent on destroying traditional notions of sensuality. Again, such representations influenced Theodore Durrant’s public knowledge in specific, but they also—and more importantly— influenced the public’s conceptions of sexuality more generally. Ultimately, print coverage of “the Demon of the Belfry” and his crimes during the Gilded Age underscores how media dramatically shapes public perception, an enduring reality that continues throughout the contemporary United States.

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14. “Weaving a Web Round Theodore Durrant,” *San Francisco Call*, 16 April 1895, 3.
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21. "Durrant Murder Case," *The Record-Union*, 24 April 1895, 1.
22. "Miss Turner Weaves a Web," *The Salt Lake Herald*, 24 April 1895, 1.
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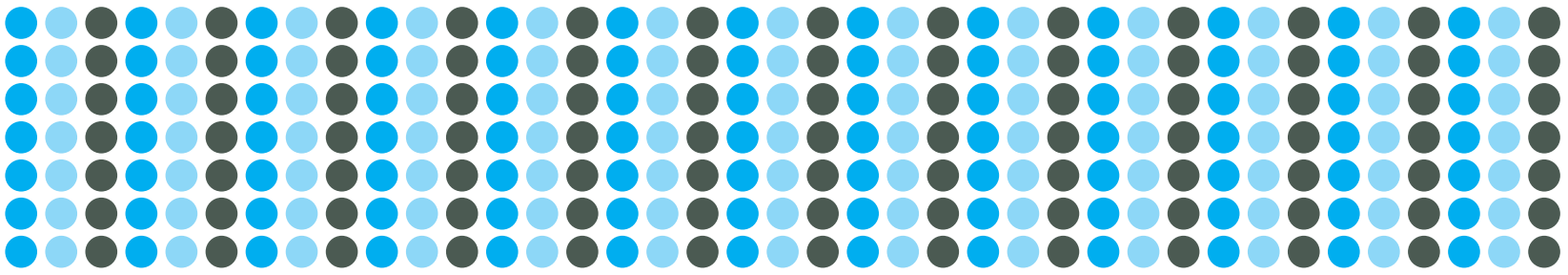
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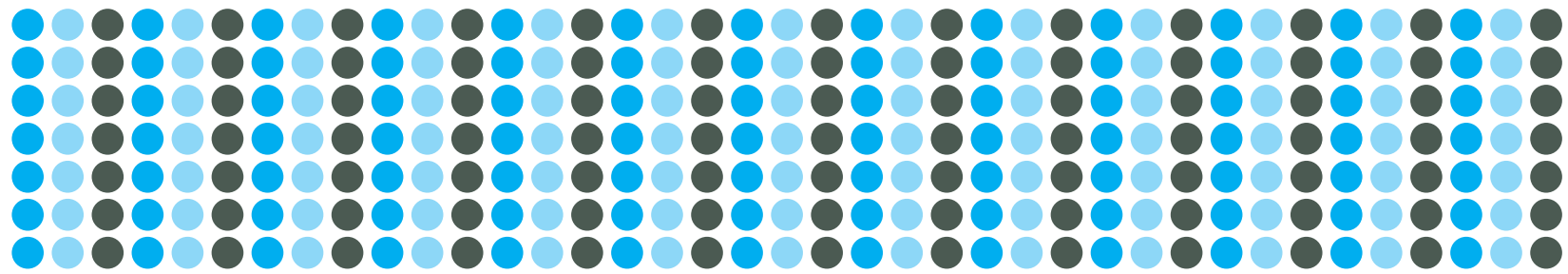
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- 13 THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME COMIC: THE STORY OF WILLIAM MCFADZEAN**
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- 15 EASTER PROCLAMATION OF 1916**
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- 28 FIGURE 3, PANEL A**
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35 **ARTIFICIAL SYNAPSES BASED ON FERRO-ELECTRIC TUNNEL JUNCTIONS**

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38 **TABLE III INFERENCE POWER AND POWER UTILIZATION**

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43 **BLACHE LAMONT AT HECLA, MONTANA, WITH HER STUDENTS, 1893**

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45 **THEODORE DURRANT'S MUGSHOT**

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60 **GRAPH ILLUSTRATING THE SHIFTS IN PRICE AND QUANTITY SUPPLY**

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6I **GRAPHS SHOWING THE NUMBER AND VALUE OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS**

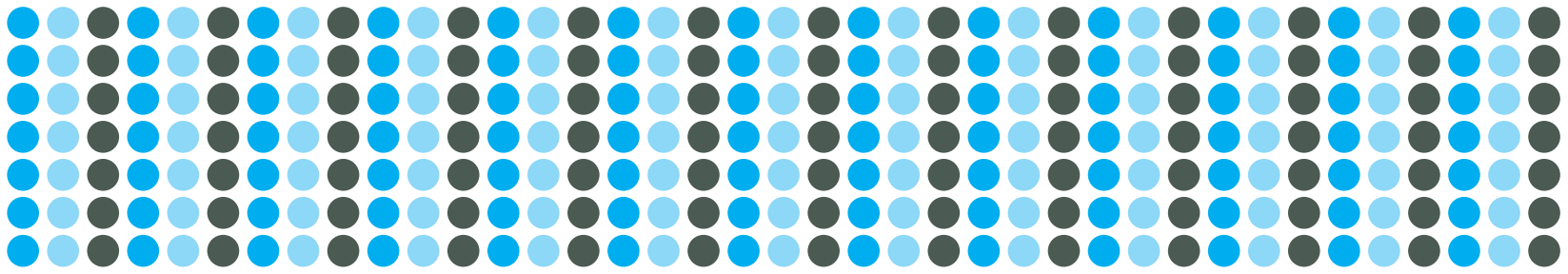
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6I **GRAPHS SHOWING GLOBAL QUERY SHARE BY SELECT SEARCH ENGINES**

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6I **GRAPHS SHOWING DOMESTIC US SEARCH QUERY SHARE BY SELECT SEARCH ENGINES**

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LIST OF ARTWORK

62 CORPORATE TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION SERVICES

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62 THE BREAKDOWN OF OPINION REGARDING BREAKING UP 'BIG TECH'

© Statista : Majority of Americans in Favor of Breaking up Big Tech (<https://www.statista.com/chart/19440/survey-responses-breaking-up-big-tech>)

71 FIGURE 1

© Samadi, Moradi, Moradinazar, Mostafai, Pasdar: Dietary pattern in relation to the risk of Alzheimer's disease: a systematic review (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10072-019-03976-3>), „Figure 2: Healthy and unhealthy diet in relation to AD.“

75 POTENTIAL SIGNATORIES, SIGNATORIES, AND PARTIES TO THE AIIB

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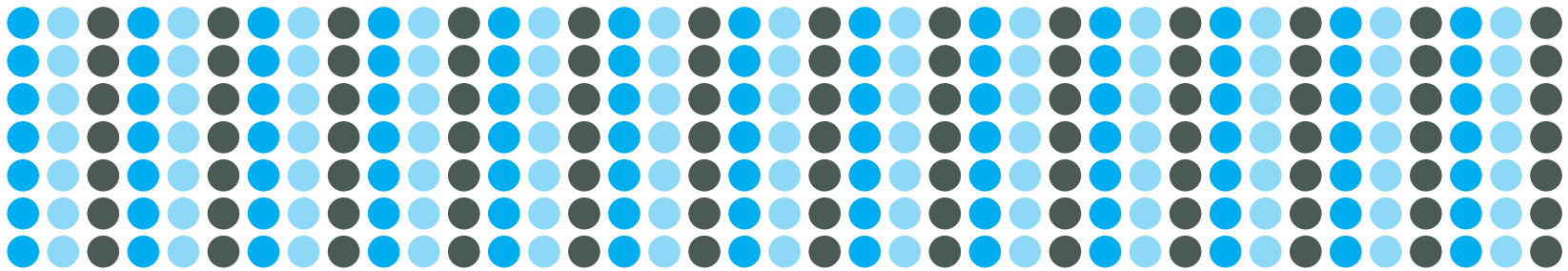
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98 CHARLES COUGHLIN, LEADER OF THE CHRISTIAN FRONT

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