

Florence Nightingale: Shattering the Barriers of Uncleanliness, and Family and Social Disgrace

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Historical Paper

Length of Paper: 2,467 Words

Florence Nightingale nestled deeper under her bed linens. She was careful not to touch the candle to her sheets. It was late at night, and she was reading a book instead of sleeping. From the start, she didn't fit the usual expectations of how a Victorian girl should act. Throughout her life, Nightingale broke through many barriers, such as society's uneducated notions about cleanliness, and how it was undesirable to be clean. She raised the sanitary standards in hospitals, saved thousands of lives in time of war, and impacted people around the world. She would be remembered for her determination to help those in need, as well as her courage to go against society's expectations of women. Breaking through these barriers of being a woman, fighting for a cause not many others believed in, and being discriminated and disowned for her passions made Nightingale a legend in nursing and cleanliness standards.

Childhood

Florence Nightingale was born May 12, 1820 in Florence, Italy, to a very wealthy family with a high and respected social image (Jazyńska 15). Growing up, her parents believed their children should have nothing but the best, which included education. Parthenope and Florence were homeschooled (Reef 12). When they were done with their schooling, they had a “gentlemen's education”. During the 1800s, girls were taught only the basics, and boys were given a proper education. The Nightingale sisters were lucky to get a proper education.

As a young girl, Nightingale was interested in her surroundings. Often, she journaled about her experiences and what she learned (Jazyńska 17). Once, she claimed she heard “the voice of God” tell her she had a special mission in life (Gorrell 21). Ever since then, she began to take care of ill people and grew quite fond of animals. Whenever she found an incapacitated critter, she

would take upon herself to care for it. Caring for animals had sparked her interests of nursing (Jazyńska 18). As a teenager, she debated politics and current events with her father, and was intrigued by the world around her. Her mother, sister, and she would often do charity work or volunteer. This is another thing that pushed Nightingale towards her future career in nursing.

In 1837, when she was seventeen, illness was sweeping through her town in England. Nightingale saw this as her chance to practice her nursing skills (Jazyńska 31). Using all the knowledge she gathered from her experiences, as well as everything she learned from her hours of reading, she put her skills to the test. As she cared for her patients, she realized that she was very content when taking care of others. She knew her calling was nursing, and she would go on to pursue that on a much larger scale.

Early Adult Life

Every parents' hope was for their daughters to get married and never have to work again. Her sister, Parthenope, was already looking for a husband (Jazyńska 36). However, Nightingale was writing her own story. She felt marriage would tie her down and prevent her from fulfilling her mission in life. In her early adult years, she was proposed to by Richard Monckton Milnes. Although Nightingale's parents expected her to marry, she was uninterested and turned Milnes down. Instead of getting married, she wanted to go to college (Gorrell 31). Despite her pleading, her parents said women were not supposed to go to college. Discriminatory expectations kept her from pursuing what she wanted to do, but she wasn't going to let this barrier stop her.

In 1846, Nightingale found a nursing school in Germany. She was so desperate, she decided to visit the nursing school, Kaiserswerth. Knowing her parents would never allow her to go, she

told them she was staying at a spa in Germany. At Kaiserswerth, life was very different (Jazyńska 48). Instead of maids and servants waiting on her hand and foot, she had to do everything independently. Throughout her time in nursing school, she learned more than nursing skills alone. She also learned how to be independent and take care of herself (Reef 48).

When Nightingale returned home to England, she became very depressed and confused. She knew her passion was with nursing, but it upset her that she couldn't pursue it because of her family (Jazyńska 51). She did not want to tarnish their perfect image and she definitely didn't want to be a disgrace to her family. One day, Nightingale decided she had enough. This barrier was not going to keep her back any longer. Marching up to her parents, she told them the truth about her trip to Germany. She found the courage to ask them to allow her to go back to school. Reluctantly, her parents caved (Jazyńska 53). Finally, Nightingale was able to overcome this barrier with triumph! Unfortunately, this was only one of many barriers she would need to overcome.

After spending four months at the nursing school, Nightingale returned home. Now that she was 33, she was no longer under her parents' control (Reef 56). In 1853, she got her first job at a general women's hospital (Gorrell 52). Working day and night, she was able to improve the hospital conditions greatly. She made many changes, such as more bedsheets, decorated rooms, a library, hand bells to get nurses' attention, and hot water on all floors (Jazyńska 59). During this time, she was also helping her friend Sidney Herbert. Herbert worked with the army as Secretary of War, and would often ask Nightingale for her opinions (Gorrell 55).

In 1853, the Crimean War began. As the war progressed, supplies in the war zone dwindled. Shortcuts were made and hospitals were not being provided with even the bare minimum. Being unhappy with the news, Nightingale decided to reach out to Herbert. After she wrote the letter,

she anticipated his response. Herbert said that he would be grateful if Nightingale came to aid in the war (Jazynka 64). Knowing this was her chance, she did not hesitate to go.

The Crimean War

On October 21, 1854, 38 nurses boarded a cargo ship to Scutari, Turkey. It was a grueling two week long trip, but Nightingale survived. On November 4, 1854, they arrived. As soon as she set foot on ground, soldiers from the front lines were being rushed past them to the hospital (Gorrell 62). A big battle had just taken place, which wounded over 400 men in merely 20 minutes (Jazynka 68). As Nightingale entered, she was appalled. There were “blocked drains, broken toilets, leaky roofs, and no cleaning supplies” (Gorrell 67-68). Most soldiers lay on cots on the floor with no bedsheets in overcrowded quarters. The hospital was infested with rodents and bugs, and supplies such as food, bandages, and medicine were very scarce (Reef 77). She did not waste time getting to work.

Nightingale worked tirelessly day and night to help these feeble soldiers. The soldiers’ conditions were bad, and many never recovered. Some limbs in battle, and their cuts would often sour and get infected (Reef 79). Unfortunately, this was not what killed most of the men. Disease spread easily with lack of hygiene. Over two-thirds of the men that died passed away due to various diseases (Gorrell 71-72). The most common disease was “Crimean Fever” (Nightingale 15). Being very contagious, the Crimean Fever killed many soldiers. Working 20 hours a day, Nightingale did everything she could to help these soldiers and cure them of their diseases.

Another barrier Nightingale faced was discrimination. Male doctors would refuse to take orders from her or do what she asked. They would ignore her and some refused to work with her

(Jazyńska 69-70). Nevertheless, this barrier did not hold her back. She did not let prejudiced people keep her from doing what she loved. Working while ignoring the doctors' rude glares and comments was something she grew accustomed to (Gorrell 85). Writing constant reports about low supplies and letters asking for more, she still found time to help the soldiers. Even at night, Nightingale would work. She would walk around the hospital corridors carrying a lantern to check on her patients (Jazyńska 80). At night, when the soldiers couldn't sleep, she would talk to soothe them. She did not only care about helping them physically, but keeping their spirits high. She earned the nickname of "Lady With the Lamp" as well as "The Angel of the Crimea" (Gorrell 77).

Sickness never took a break, and Nightingale didn't either. When supplies finally arrived, including soap and brushes, she gathered the healthier patients. Together they scrubbed the hospital from top to bottom (Jazyńska 72). Injured and ill "soldiers were still coming in, sometimes 700 at a time" (Reef 84), so she always had her hands full. Nightingale was such an amazing nurse and heroine, news reporters would come to the hospital to talk to her. Once, in *The Times*, reporter William Howard Russell wrote, "When all the medical officers have retired to the night, and sickness and darkness have settled down on miles of the sick, she may be observed, along with a little lamp, making her solitary rounds". This spread the word of Nightingale's impactful and important achievements, as well as her kindness towards others. Fans of her work began to write letters to her, as well as songs and poems about her. Another respected author, who went by the name Mrs. Gaskell, wrote, "so excessively gentle in voice, manner, and movement, that one never feels the unbendableness of her character when one is near her. Her powers are

astonishing!” She was a big influence on others to help the poor, in addition to encouraging cleanliness in hospitals.

After raising the sanitary standards, Nightingale was still not done. In addition to bettering hospital conditions and reducing the death count from 40 percent to two percent, she also instituted a classroom, library, laundry room, and an “invalid’s kitchen” (Gorrell 77 & 84). An invalid’s kitchen was a way to give the patients with special dietary requirements the proper nourishment (Gorrell 85). She asked widows and soldiers’ wives to help in the laundry room, and healthier soldiers to help her clean. Many soldiers and their family members appreciated her concern for her patients’ physical health, and mental stability.

Unfortunately, in May of 1855, age 35, Nightingale fell ill with Crimean Fever (Jazyuka 84). Patients cried over the thought she might die. Generals and officials advised her to go back to her home in England and recover. Having come so far, Nightingale was not going to stop now. Even though the war was still raging, knowing it would come to an end made the bold choice to stay. Although she recovered enough to get back to work, there was no known cure for Crimean Fever. This illness would continue holding her back in years to come (Jazyuka 86).

Despite her efforts, many soldiers were dying from unknown causes. Nightingale decided to figure out why. After scouring hospital records, it became clear why patients were getting sick. The hospital was built on top of an old sewer. “She had the water supply completely flushed out and replaced with fresh, clean water drastically decreasing deaths” (Jazyuka 86).

Finally, the Crimean War ended. On March 30, 1856, a peace treaty was signed and combat had ceased (Reef 95). Nightingale stayed until every patient returned home safely. Due to her attention to detail, her passion for nursing, and her kindness towards others, she was able to

overcome many barriers and impact people globally. She saved many lives during war time, and changed the sanitary standards in hospitals around the world. Being able to break through the barriers of being a women in a male dominant world, and the barrier of uncleanliness made her stronger. Having changed society's preconceived notions about uncleanliness, she became famous; a legend in nursing and sanitary standards. Although the pinnacle of her career concluded, she still had more to do.

Life After the War

Traveling home, Nightingale used the pseudo name of Miss Smith, for she wanted to avoid attention (Jazyuka 86). Being a humble person, she did not like the fame, but she used her power wisely. Successfully, she was able to convince hospitals to reform. In addition to changing the sanitary standards and the preconceived ideas about cleanliness, she brought her family together. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert honored her for her bravery and her powerful influence on the world. The Queen and Prince also gave her a large sum of money. With that money, she started a fund for nursing, in addition to opening the Florence Nightingale Training School For Nurses (Gorrell 94). Having made a very powerful affect on the world, she wasn't able to enjoy very much.

After never fully recovering from Crimean Fever, Nightingale's illness continued, and she grew weaker. Expectedly, she did not let this barrier stop her. Heroically, she was able to accomplish many great things from her bedroom. In 1858, she joined the Royal Commission, which was inspired by her. The Royal Commission's purpose was to improve the health of the army (Jazyuka 88). Later, in 1860, she published a book titled, *Notes on Nursing* (Nightingale 1).

The book was about how to care for yourself. A year later, the Civil War began in America. Through her good friend Herbert, she gave advice to the American military and helped keep their soldiers strong and healthy (Gorrell 111). Although she was confined to her bedroom, Nightingale still found ways to connect with the world.

Although Nightingale grew older, she still worked until the very end. It was noted that she wrote over 200 reports, and 13,000 letters, spending 12 hours a day writing (Jazynka 97). Through her research of the Crimean War, she found that 16,000 out of 18,000 deaths were caused by diseases spread through unsanitary conditions (Gorrell 106-107). Knowing that no one wanted to read a long report about her discoveries, she created a coxcomb, (sometimes called rose) diagram. In 1907, Nightingale was the first woman to be awarded the British Order of Merit. Another woman would not receive this award until 1968 (Reef 114).

In August of 1910, Nightingale's condition worsened. Within two weeks, she unexpectedly developed bad symptoms. Unfortunately, she passed away on September 13, 1910. The world grieved at the loss of a true heroine. However, after her death, she was still remembered and honored. The Florence Nightingale Medal was created, as well as the Florence Nightingale Museum (Jazynka 103). Many statues and memorials were built in her honor and remembrance. Nightingale made a huge impact on the world, and is still remembered as a legend today.

Throughout her life, Nightingale broke through many barriers. She shattered the barriers of society's preconceived and uneducated ideas about cleanliness. During the Crimean War, she raised sanitary standards and made a powerful impact that is still inspiring people today. Society will remember her for her perseverance and determination to help the less fortunate, as well as going against society's expectations of women. Nightingale chose the road less taken, and she

changed humanity for the better. Breaking through these barriers of being a woman, fighting for a cause not many others believed in, and being discriminated and disowned for her passions made Nightingale a legend in nursing and cleanliness standards. In the words of Florence Nightingale, “Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better.”

Appendix A



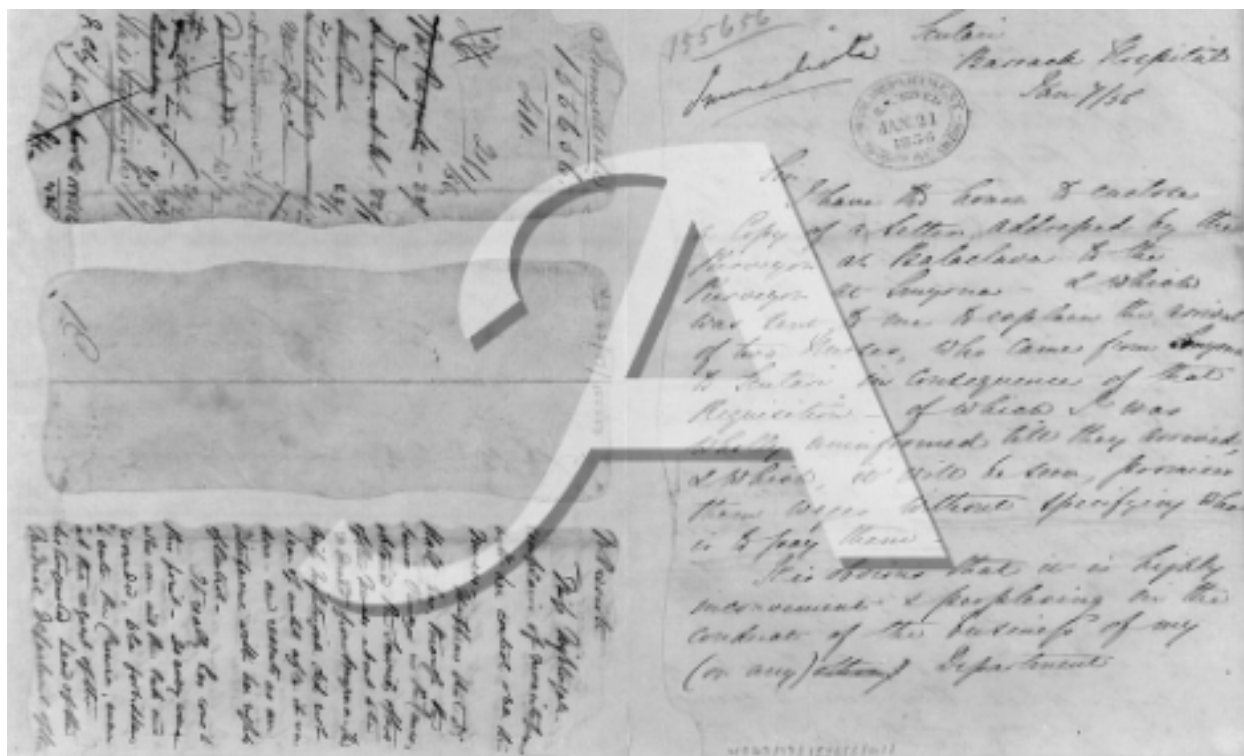
Map of Europe and the War Area. 2006. National Archives, Richmond. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/florence-nightingale/source-3/> Accessed 30 Jan.

2020

This image is a map of Europe during the Crimean War. Nightingale lived in Great Britain, and sailed over to Scutari, where the war was happening. This also shows who was in the war, such as

Great Britain, France, Sevastopol, Scutari, and Russia.

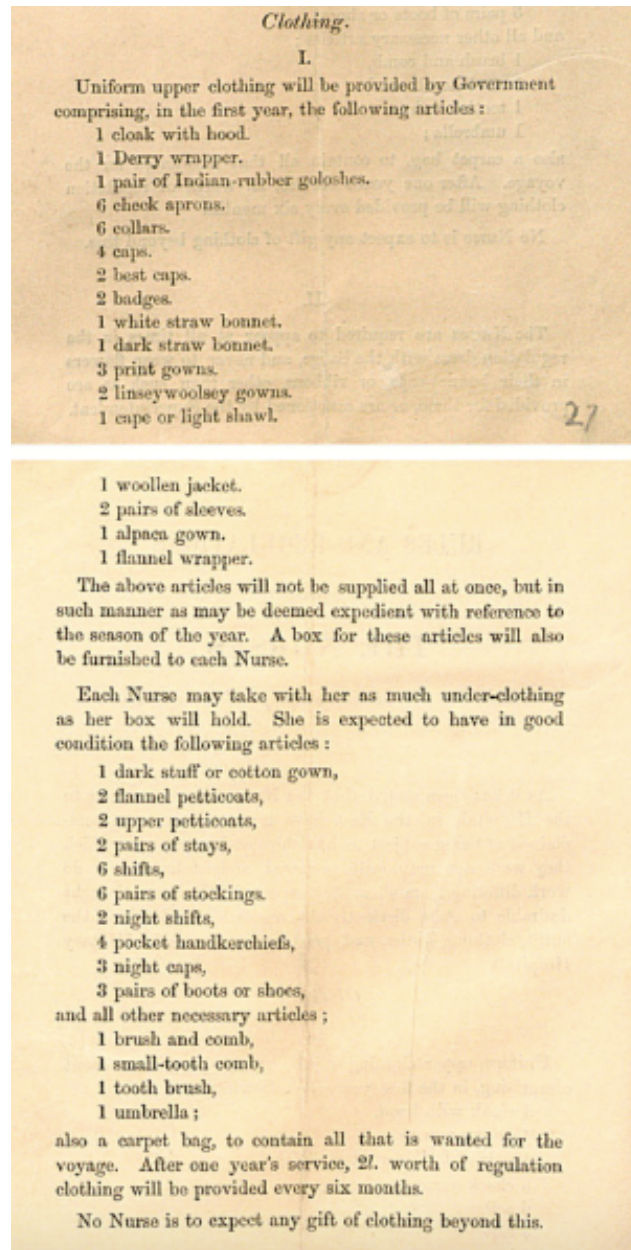
Appendix B



Nurses in the Crimea Correspondence and Memoranda of Florence Nightingale. 1853-1857. National Archives, Richmond. <https://images.nationalarchives.gov.uk/assetbank-nationalarchives/action/viewAsset?id=34427&index=12&total=15&view=viewSearchItem>. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020

This image is of a letter from Florence Nightingale. It was written between 1853 and 1857. The letter is about the conditions at the Scutari Hospital. Nightingale sent this to the British military, with complaints about the limited resources.

Appendix C



A List of All Clothing Provisions and Requirements . 1854. National Archives, Richmond.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/florence-nightingale/source-4/> Accessed 1

Feb. 2020

SANTO 13

This is one of Florence Nightingale's handwritten reports. In the text it lists all the clothing she needs. Nightingale often wrote these reports, because the British military and government neglected to send the proper materials. This is one page of a report listing all the clothing she needed for the patients.

Annotated Bibliography

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This website on Florence Nightingale had photographs and newspaper article quotes from the 1800s. This helped me understand the way in which Florence Nightingale was able to take care of her patients very well, as well as how much fame and praise she got for her work. It also gave me details regarding the specific quotes that were said by newspaper reporters.

“Florence Nightingale: Her Writings.” *Countryjoe.Com*, 2020, www.countryjoe.com/nightingale/writings.htm. Accessed 17 Jan. 2020.

This website on Florence Nightingale had reports she wrote. This helped me understand how horrible the hospital conditions were. It also gave me details about how hard Nightingale worked, as well as how limited her resources were.

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This website on Florence Nightingale had letters she wrote. This helped me understand who was important to her in her life. It also gave details about the experiences at the hospital and at home.

“Florence Nightingale’s Report on Crimean Medical Fiasco at Bonhams | Fine Books & Collections.” *Fine Books & Collections*, 2020, www.finebooksmagazine.com/news/florence-nightingales-report-crimean-medical-fiasco-bonhams. Accessed 17 Jan. 2020.

This website on Florence Nightingale had reports she wrote during the war. This helped me understand the difficulty of working in bad conditions. It also gave details about how much work Nightingale did.

Gorrell, Gena K. *Heart and Soul: The Story of Florence Nightingale*. New York: Tundra Books, 2000.

This book on Florence Nightingale had newspaper articles about the war and Nightingale, and photographs from the 1800s. This helped me understand how much fame Nightingale got from her work. It also gave visuals, and newspaper pieces about the hospital and its conditions.

Maev Kennedy. “Florence Nightingale Letters Brought Together Online.” *The Guardian*, The Guardian, 20 Aug. 2014, www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/aug/20/florence-nightingale-letters-online. Accessed 17 Jan. 2020.

This website on Florence Nightingale had letters she wrote throughout her life. It helped me understand the conflict that caused the war. It also gave details about the conditions of the hospital and her struggles with discrimination.

Nightingale, Florence. *Notes on Nursing: What It Is, and What It Is Not*. New York: Appleton-Century, 1946.

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This website on Florence Nightingale had letters she wrote the Sidney Herbert, the secretary of war. This helped me understand the conflicts that caused the war. It also gave details about Nightingale's influential advice.

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This website on Florence Nightingale gave information about her life after the war. It gave details about her struggles with the Crimean Fever after the war.

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This book on Florence Nightingale helped me understand her life right before the war. It gave details of her travels and training.

“King’s College London - Florence Nightingale.” *Kcl.Ac.Uk*, 2020, www.kcl.ac.uk/aboutkings/history/famouspeople/florencenightingale. Accessed 18 Jan. 2020.

This website on Florence Nightingale helped me understand what she did in the Crimean War. It gave details about her day-to-day life, and what she did to help her patients.

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This website on Florence Nightingale helped me understand memorials and remembrance of her. It gave details about how Nightingale is still remembered today and the large impact she made.

“World Book.” *Worldbookonline.Com*, 2020, worldbookonline.com/wb/Login?ed=wb&tu=http%3A%2F%2Fworldbookonline.com%2Fadvanced%2Farticle%3Fid%3Dar391480%26st%3Dflorence%2Bnightingale#tab=homepage. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020.

This website on Florence Nightingale helped me understand her motivations for nursing. It gave details about why she went into it, as well as how she overcame discrimination.