

# The Compulsion to Do Away With Anonymity

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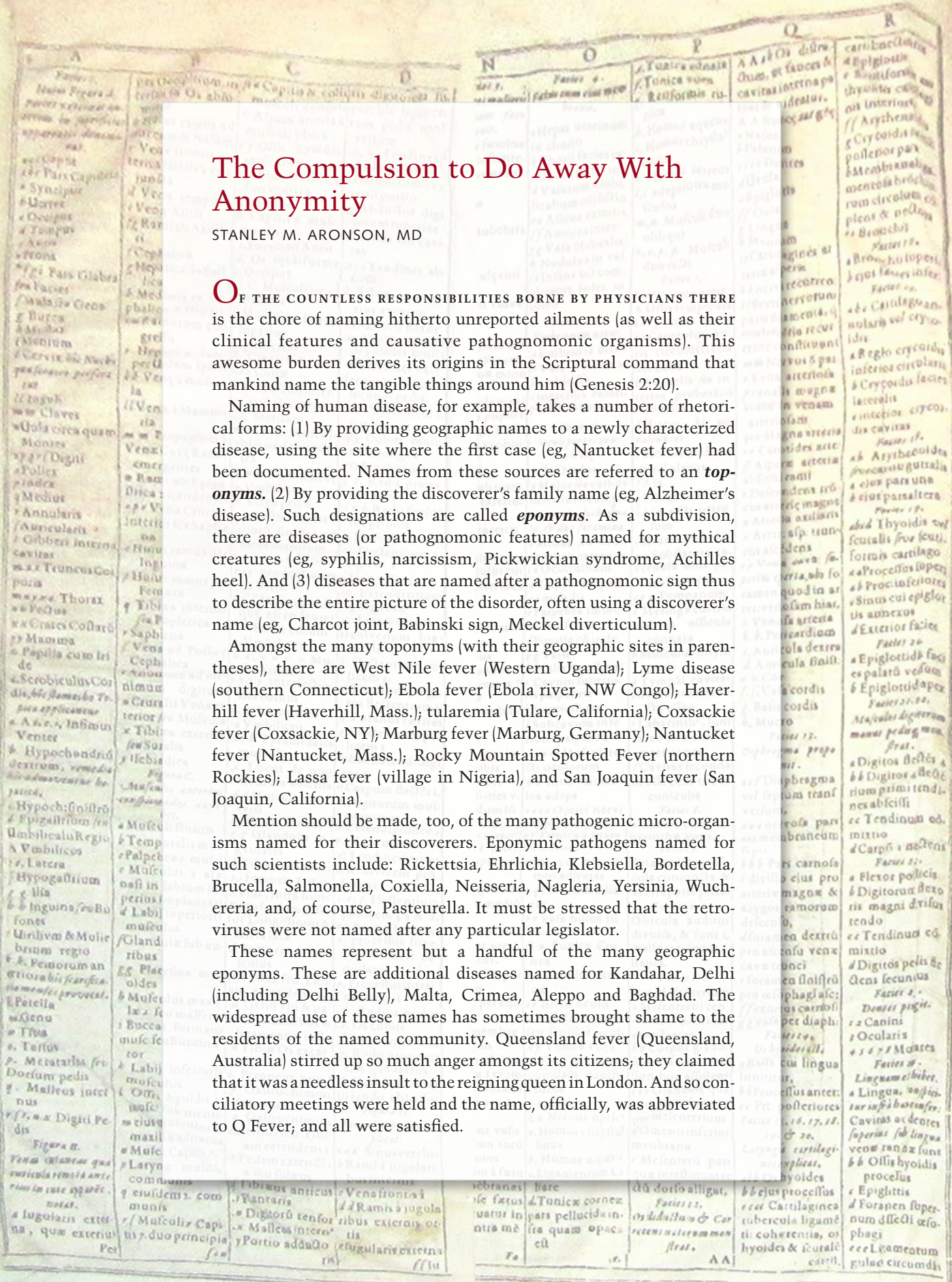
OF THE COUNTLESS RESPONSIBILITIES BORNE BY PHYSICIANS THERE is the chore of naming hitherto unreported ailments (as well as their clinical features and causative pathognomonic organisms). This awesome burden derives its origins in the Scriptural command that mankind name the tangible things around him (Genesis 2:20).

Naming of human disease, for example, takes a number of rhetorical forms: (1) By providing geographic names to a newly characterized disease, using the site where the first case (eg, Nantucket fever) had been documented. Names from these sources are referred to an **toponymy**. (2) By providing the discoverer's family name (eg, Alzheimer's disease). Such designations are called **eponyms**. As a subdivision, there are diseases (or pathognomonic features) named for mythical creatures (eg, syphilis, narcissism, Pickwickian syndrome, Achilles heel). And (3) diseases that are named after a pathognomonic sign thus to describe the entire picture of the disorder, often using a discoverer's name (eg, Charcot joint, Babinski sign, Meckel diverticulum).

Amongst the many toponyms (with their geographic sites in parentheses), there are West Nile fever (Western Uganda); Lyme disease (southern Connecticut); Ebola fever (Ebola river, NW Congo); Haverhill fever (Haverhill, Mass.); tularemia (Tulare, California); Coxsackie fever (Coxsackie, NY); Marburg fever (Marburg, Germany); Nantucket fever (Nantucket, Mass.); Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (northern Rockies); Lassa fever (village in Nigeria), and San Joaquin fever (San Joaquin, California).

Mention should be made, too, of the many pathogenic microorganisms named for their discoverers. Eponymic pathogens named for such scientists include: Rickettsia, Ehrlichia, Klebsiella, Bordetella, Brucella, Salmonella, Coxiella, Neisseria, Nagleria, Yersinia, Wuchereria, and, of course, Pasteurella. It must be stressed that the retroviruses were not named after any particular legislator.

These names represent but a handful of the many geographic eponyms. These are additional diseases named for Kandahar, Delhi (including Delhi Belly), Malta, Crimea, Aleppo and Baghdad. The widespread use of these names has sometimes brought shame to the residents of the named community. Queensland fever (Queensland, Australia) stirred up so much anger amongst its citizens; they claimed that it was a needless insult to the reigning queen in London. And so conciliatory meetings were held and the name, officially, was abbreviated to Q Fever; and all were satisfied.



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## 100 Years Ago – Dr. Harriet Alleyne Rice of Newport: The struggles of an African-American physician

*Her brother George pursued medicine in Scotland under Dr. Joseph Lister*

MARY KORR  
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

One hundred years ago, in January 1915, Newport native **DR. HARRIET ALLEYNE RICE** (1866–1958), worked as an “interne” and “infirmiere” in French military hospitals to treat the World War 1 wounded. She had applied to the American Red Cross, but was turned down, according to her later accounts.

After serving three years, until the Armistice, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that the French Embassy in Washington, DC, presented her with the *Medaille de Reconnaissance de la Francaise* (Medal of French Gratitude) for outstanding service by a civilian.

Racism and sexism were dual battles Dr. Rice fought throughout her long professional life.

### Early life

Harriet was one of four children born to George Addison Rice and Lucinda



Dr. Harriet Alleyne Rice's passport picture circa 1915, provided by historian Keith Stokes of Newport. He says it is the only known photo of Dr. Rice. View his article on Dr. Rice here: [www.eyesofglory.com/a-woman-of-valor](http://www.eyesofglory.com/a-woman-of-valor)

(Webster) Rice, who owned their own home on Spring Street in Newport. Her father worked as a steward on the New England steamship, “The Pilgrim.”

Remarkably, Harriet's much older brother, George, overcame the burden of race in the U.S. by studying in Europe. According to Sutton, London archival materials, Dr. Rice “denied access to Columbia University's College of Physicians in the USA, moved to Paris. But, because of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, he moved on to Edinburgh in 1870, where he studied medicine under Joseph Lister [pioneer of antiseptic surgery]. In 1877 he applied for the post of Medical Superintendent at the Woolwich Union Workhouse Infirmary in Plumstead [England]. Five candidates were interviewed for this important post but George Rice was chosen.”

Brother and sister reconnected in London, before Harriet headed for the French battlefields.

In his archival papers, there is a newspaper clipping which reports that Harriet achieved the top ranking in Greek in her Rogers High School graduating class but that she was not eligible for the prize of \$75 given annually to the best male Greek scholar. Another publication, the *Friends Review*, carried the story and stated, “as she was not eligible to the award a gentleman from New York City sent her \$75 in gold.”

### First African-American graduate at Wellesley

After high school, Harriet went on to Wellesley College and was its first African-American graduate, in 1887. She studied medicine at the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children,



Dr. George Rice (center) in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he studied under famed British surgeon, Dr. Joseph Lister, circa 1870s.

SUTTON LONDON ARCHIVES

COURTESY OF KEITH STOKES

and graduated in 1891. She interned the following year in Boston at the New England Hospital for Women and Children.

At age 27, she resettled in 1893 at the now-famed Hull-House in Chicago, a community established as a social experiment by social worker and suffragette Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. There Dr. Rice was assistant physician, and held various other jobs, such as postmistress, to earn money.

Dr. Rice is mentioned in several books about Hull-House and in its archival materials. These historical papers depict her as a woman of high ambition who aspired to work and achieve based on merit. Neither Chicago, nor the world, nor even the progressive Jane Addams, encouraged her aspirations to establish a private practice and work in any hospital of her choosing.

Dr. Rice did not want to labor for free, taking care of the urban poor, as Addams urged. The latter persuaded Dr. Rice to accept a "fellowship" at the "colored" Provident Hospital in Chicago, which Dr. Rice did reluctantly and for a short period, thinking it as little more than "charity," according to various papers. She then served as medical director of the Chicago Maternity Hospital.

### Later years

Eventually she left Hull-House and Chicago. She lived in Newport for a time, and in 1910, worked as an assistant in a pathology laboratory at the Boston Dispensary. Much later in her career, by 1933, she worked in a laboratory at Columbia University Medical Center. (See letter at right.)

In 1935, she received a survey from her alma mater, Wellesley College that posed a series of questions to each alumna about her life and accomplishments. To the question: "Have you any handicap, physical or other, which has been a determining factor in your activity?", she wrote: "Yes! I'm colored which is worse than any crime in this God blessed Christian country. My country tis of thee."

Born during the so-called "Progressive Era," Dr. Rice lived to the age of 92 and is buried with her parents in God's Little Acre colonial cemetery in Newport. Today, she is recognized as a pioneer in the African-American community. ❖

Harriet A. Rice, "Letter to Miss Mary, June 12, 1933," TL (photocopy). Swarthmore College Peace Collection Jane Addams Papers Series 1, Supplement, Swarthmore, PA. [Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Editor, Jane Addams Papers, Microfilm Edition (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, 1985)]

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER  
630 WEST 168TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

June 12, 1933

Dear Miss Mary:-

After all these years of steady hard work at this great Medical Center, the "financial depression" is going to put an end to my steady job the first of July. So that I've got to go back to the old, demoralizing, heart-breaking occupation of begging for work.

It makes everything, life and work and all, seem awfully futile. The favorite form of diversion -- shall I say? -- in New York at present is jumping out of window, or turning on the gas, or the like. But, somehow, I'm not quite ready for that yet --, although after some months of enforced idleness and "puttering about" and begging for work, -- why, I may be.

I dared not write Miss Addams, not knowing her condition of health (which I hope is good). So I am asking -- not with joy, upon my word; -- if there is any corner into which I might fit at Hull-House; or in Chicago, in fact. I "fit in" much better than I used. I know a little more of the world though I cannot say I understand life any better than I did. My thoughts turn to Hull-House. -- well, it's not unnatural after being there so long. I speak several languages and opportunities there are varied. Although my work for these years has been purely scientific, it has brought me no recognition. This is a man's world, and they won't let a woman get any farther than they can help -- or hinder.

I'll not write any more because it is all -- everything is -- so frightfully useless. I am no worse off than many another; only it is hard to take things "lying down." I just to have to keep on fighting a while longer.

Faithfully yours,  
Harriet A. Rice