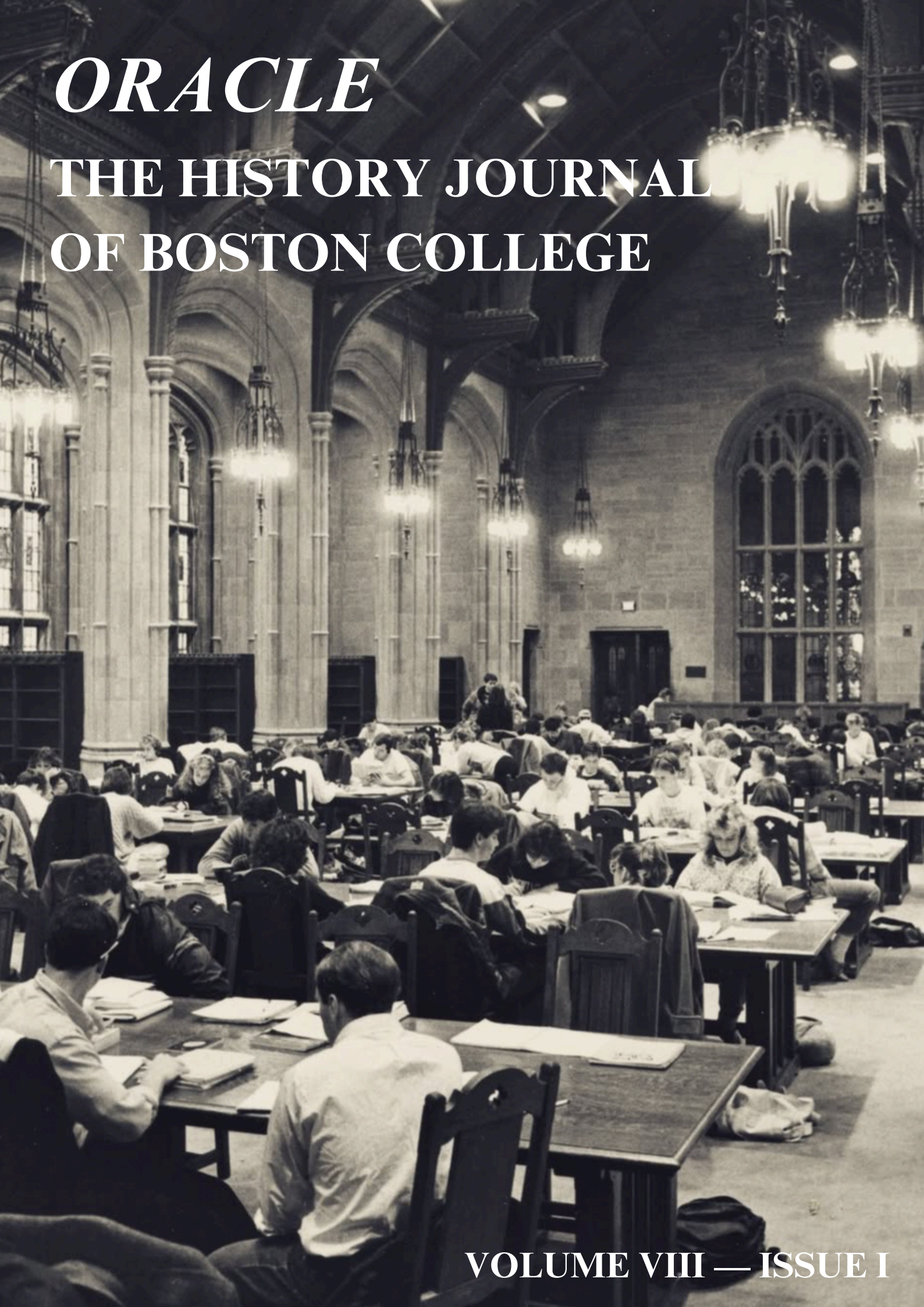
ORACLE

THE HISTORY JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE



VOLUME VIII — ISSUE I

ORACLE: THE HISTORY JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE I

MASTHEAD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Image courtesy of Boston College John J. Burns Library, Instagram

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume VIII | Issue I Article I

No Shame Afterwards: Carrington's Life Within and Beyond Biographic Tradition

Skylar Ball
sball@smith.edu

NO SHAME AFTERWARDS: CARRINGTON'S LIFE WITHIN AND BEYOND BIOGRAPHIC TRADITION

SKYLAR BALL

Abstract: In the Bloomsbury group, a circle largely remembered for its fluid understanding of sexuality and experimentations with non monogamy, Dora Carrington is not often the first character to come to mind. Yet her life is full of queer phenomena, and her art is resemblant of her uniquely unconventional life, one where she had romantic and sexual relationships with women, was in a lifelong companionship with a gay man, and expressed what may have been the inklings of a non-binary identity. This essay reexamines the tradition of biographic work on Dora Carrington, first by noting findings which have not been previously referenced in much capacity (if at all), and secondly by critically analyzing the biographical sources that exist of Carrington and noting how they are at odds with her lived experience as rendered in her first-person ego documents which she left behind. The biographical review section reveals that Carrington's experience of sexuality has been modified from the account which appears, both explicitly and implicitly, in her correspondence and journals, in order to fit a narrative of prevailing heterosexuality. It is necessary to find the throughline of both the flourishing of sexual and romantic queer relationships as well as understanding the heterosexism under which they operated, as well as exploring the culture and/or meaning of silence in work on Carrington: what has not been said may end up being the most important of all.

Virginia Woolf, in her short memoir "Old Bloomsbury," struggled to define what qualities admitted one to the elusive Bloomsbury group, and what excluded one from it.[1] A specific anecdote focuses on a surprising ingredient as an example of what made Bloomsbury what it was: semen. It was a late spring evening, and Virginia Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell sat in the drawing-room of the Bloomsbury group's Gordon Square house. Lytton Strachey's "sinister figure" stood on the threshold of the room, and he eyed a stain on Vanessa Bell's dress.[2] "Semen?" he deadpanned.

[1] Virginia Woolf, "Old Bloomsbury," in *Moments of Being* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1985), 197.
[2] Virginia Woolf, 198.

Historians have identified this passage as proof of the Foucauldian maxim that the end to the Victorian period was marked by the ability to discuss sex candidly.[3] Indeed, Bloomsbury is largely remembered for its entangled web of romantic and platonic relationships, the lines between the former and the latter often becoming blurred. Queer sexuality in particular is a marker of the Bloomsbury group and the people who were involved in their flamboyant swirl of emotion and creativity. In response to Strachey's utterance, Woolf reflected: "with that one word all barriers of reticence and reserve went down. A flood of the sacred fluid seemed to overwhelm us. Sex permeated our conversation."[4]

In a circle largely remembered for its fluid understanding of sexuality and experimentations with non-monogamy, Dora Carrington is not often the first character to come to mind. Yet her life is full of queer phenomena, and her art is resemblant of her uniquely unconventional life, one where she engaged in romantic and sexual relationships with women, entered a lifelong companionship with a gay man, and expressed what may have been the inklings of a non-binary identity. What does it mean to attempt to tell Carrington's story when previous iterations of her life have been shaped by authorial conformity to normative identity?

Literary scholar Jesse Wolfe has identified the social phenomenon of modernity as the context necessary to understanding modernism as demonstrated and arguably exemplified by the Bloomsbury group.[5] Wolfe argued that the period between 1900 and 1930 represented the crumbling of the "old order" and the rise of a culture that understood a meaningfully lived life to be one with successful sexual and romantic partnerships. His book provides a useful framework for considering the advent of a sexually open culture in the context of Bloomsbury; that is,

---

[3]Loesberg, Jonathan. "The Afterlife of Victorian Sexuality: Foucault and Neo-Victorian Historical Fiction." Clio 36, no. 3 (Summer, 2007): 361

[4] Virginia Woolf, 196.

[5] Jesse Wolfe, "Introduction: Narrating Bloomsbury," in *Bloomsbury, Modernism and the Reinvention of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), I.

Britain during the early twentieth century, specifically the first World War. Wolfe identifies urbanization as a factor that encouraged married couples to "alter the nature of wedded life," which the married couples of Bloomsbury certainly accelerated through the ways they "blurred Victorian 'spheres,' negotiated the limits of female emancipation, and increasingly saw marriage in terms of equality and companionship, in contrast to their parents and grandparents."[6] While the previous scholarly discussions on Bloomsbury and sexuality have focused on the congruences between the Victorian period and the Modernist era, Wolfe's account is unique in that he demarcates the distinct divide between the two periods and attempts to contextualize the change in the historical moment in which it occurred. Similar to Virginia Woolf, he supports the modernists' own claims of their difference from the Victorians and "suggests that the early twentieth century witnessed a renaissance of intimacies, a renewal of the radical promises of freedom and equality, after the pendulum had swung, through much of the nineteenth century, toward a model of stability and separate spheres."[7] The newly atomized society, with its emphasis on the individual, allowed for new frequencies of independent thought and solitary activity.[8] This historical context that Wolfe provides is necessary in understanding the long-discussed relationship between Lytton Strachey and Carrington, and the social pressures which defined meaningful life as dependent on romantic partnerships may offer some insight into the external factors which shaped their relationship. Wolfe casts doubt upon the idea of a devastating love affair that defied all odds and became the primary reason that biographers chose to document Carrington's life, not by virtue of her work or her unique sexual identity and lived experiences.

[6] Wolfe, in *Bloomsbury, Modernism and the Reinvention of Intimacy,* 5.
[7] Wolfe, in *Bloomsbury, Modernism and the Reinvention of Intimacy,* 5.
[8] Wolfe, in *Bloomsbury, Modernism and the Reinvention of Intimacy.*

In this essay, I hope to reexamine the tradition of biographic work on Carrington, first by noting my own findings which have not been previously pointed out in much capacity (if at all), and secondly by critically analyzing the biographical sources that exist of Carrington and noting how they are at odds with her lived experience as rendered in her first-person ego documents which she left behind. In the biographical review section, my primary finding was that Carrington's experience of sexuality has been modified from the account which appears both explicitly and implicitly in her correspondence and journals in order to fit a narrative of prevailing heterosexuality. It is necessary to find the throughline of both the flourishing of sexual and romantic queer relationships, understand the heterosexism under which they operated, and explore the culture and/or meaning of silence in work on Carrington: what has not been said may end up being the most important of all.

Carrington: "I Wish to God I Was Not Made as I Am"

In the swirl of the roaring twenties, among the sexual freedom and thriving nightlife that defined the decade, David Garnett threw a springtime birthday party. Among the guests were Dora Carrington, the Bloomsbury painter with a blonde bob who had been stuck in sexless relationships with both straight and gay men for her entire life, and Henrietta Bingham, a Smith College dropout from one of the most powerful families in the American South. Henrietta was playing the role of bartender, dressed in boyish clothes and flirting with male and female party guests alike. Carrington couldn't help but become infatuated with the Southern belle. "She has the face of a Giotto Madonna," Carrington wrote in a letter to her male lover (not her husband, who she had married months prior). "I became completely drunk and almost made love to her in

public."[9] While it is generally agreed upon by linguists that the phrase 'making love' did not carry with it the overtly sexual implications that it holds now, there is no doubt that Carrington was referring to an imagined sensual escapade with Henrietta. Henrietta marked her first experience of sex with another woman—Carrington then wrote that she experienced "no shame afterwards," in stark contrast to the narratives she left behind of sexual encounters with men in her life.[10] The discovery of her attraction to women was an important one for Carrington, yet all accounts of Carrington maintain that she never loved another woman for the rest of her life, which she cut short by suicide less than ten years later.

Carrington's story is rife with contradictions, as are most of the stories of the women in this paper. She lived a life of complications and distress caused by her fraught relationship to her gender identity and confusion over where she stood in her relationships with the various men of Bloomsbury. Her legacy as a minor character on the outskirts of Bloomsbury and the distraught companion of the genius Lytton Strachey is a disservice not only to her memory but to the larger study of the Bloomsbury group. Her life — and letters — reveal a different perspective about the world she lived in and the spheres she loved and lusted in — often messily, often devastatingly.

In her biographical collection of Carrington's letters, Anne Chisholm characterizes Bloomsbury as a group of individuals who "disregarded social rules, acknowledging and accepting homosexuality and bisexuality and regarding sexual freedom and friendship as just as important for human happiness as marriage and parenthood." Yet the women of Bloomsbury were still subject to the influences of heterosexuality and misogyny, and were in fact often placed squarely at the intersection of the two by their male compatriots. Carrington is a poignant example of this: parts of her life were tainted by compulsory heterosexuality, her socially

[9] Dora Carrington to Gerald Brenan, June 1, 1923, in *Carrington's Letters,* 1893-1932, ed. Anne Chisholm (London: Vintage Books, 2017), 248.
[10] Carrington to Brenan, July 21, 1925, in *Carrington's Letters*, 296.

constructed need to assimilate to the social culture of womanhood, and the judgment and shame she was subjected to by those in her inner circle. Her resistance to these constructions was often fiery and even more frequently misunderstood by the people around her: her short hair, her preferred name, and her refusal to commit to monogamy.[11] While Bloomsbury mythology maintains that Carrington died in devotion to a man who could not love her; she, at times, feared she could not love him. Yet her legacy does not always reflect these complexities. This, then, is what I hope to accomplish in this section: a nearly comprehensive analysis of Carrington's negotiations with and understanding of her own sexual and social identity in order to both contextualize the section which is to follow regarding biographical renderings of her life, as well as provide insight which has not yet been articulated.

Carrington's first experience with romance and sexuality that survives in her correspondence was one of repulsion. Mark Gertler was a Jewish painter who was obsessively devoted to Carrington, with their meeting as classmates at the Slade School of Fine Arts (often simply referred to as the Slade) laying the foundation for years of relentless pursuit on Gertler's part. He never completely faded from the margins of her life, but his involvement was primarily in Carrington's earlier years, before she became fully integrated into the Bloomsbury group. In a letter from 1915 Gertler explicitly instructed Carrington *not* to mention their "sex troubles," as he called them, in her reply as he was "heartily sick" of the situation, which likely consisted of Carrington's refusal to have sex with him.[12] In frenetic capital letters, Gertler demanded emotional intimacy from Carrington: "I WANT *SIMPLY* YOUR *FRIENDSHIP* AND *COMPANY* MORE THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD."[13] In a tongue-in-cheek response that would

[11] Dora Carrington signed her letters with only 'Carrington;' when she had to use a first name, she went by Doric, a sort of defeminized version of Dora.
[12] Gertler to Carrington, April 1915, in *Carrington's Letters*, 19.
[13] Gertler to Carrington, April 1915, in *Carrington's Letters*, 19.

become Carrington's signature affect, she cut and pasted these words from Gertler at the top of her response to him. Her response followed:

> I *cannot* love you as you want me to.You must know one could not do, what you ask, sexual intercourse, unless one does love a man's body. I have never felt any desire for that in my life… I do love you, but not in the way you want. Once, you made love to me in your studio, you remember, many years ago now. One thing I can never forget, it made me inside feel ashamed, unclean. Can I help it? I wish to God I could. Do not think I rejoice in being sexless…. Whenever you want my friendship and company, it will *always* be here. You know that.[14]

It is apparent from this correspondence that Carrington was attempting to juggle a sexual repulsion towards Gertler that was impossible to ignore, considering her painstaking awareness of his emotional needs in an attempt not to offend him. She straddles the line between disavowal of his affections and the retaining of his friendship and companionship, certainly pressured by the social context in which she lived—at this point, she was twenty-two years old and would have been expected under normal circumstances to be married sooner rather than later. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that she felt that as a woman she was to comfort and fulfill Gertler, despite her utter disgust towards his aggressive sexual advances. "I do not love you physically, that you know, but I care for you far more than I do for anyone else."[15] The following spring, a letter to Gertler indicated that he had asked Carrington to live with him. She declined, stating that "I could never live with you sexually day after day… It is because you want me sexually that you are miserable… only my corporeal body has left you."[16] Her sign-off, "I wish to God I was not made as I am," indicates both a longing for conformity under heterosexual standards as well as an understanding of her own identity as immutable and unchangeable.

[14] Carrington to Gertler, April 16, 1915, in *Carrington's Letters,* 19.
[15] Carrington to Gertler, December 1915, in *Carrington's Letters*, 27.
[16] Carrington to Gertler, Spring 1916, in *Carrington's Letters,* 36.

This prompts necessary questions about what Carrington's understandings of sexuality would have been at the time. Thirty years prior, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs had published *Critische Pfeile*, which was the final pamphlet in a twelve-part series on male homosexuality widely regarded to be the first scientific theory of homosexuality. The advent of sexology followed soon after, and psychoanalytic theory as popularized by Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones was prevalent among the primarily queer, intellectually curious Bloomsburians. Freud and Jones were closely interconnected with members of Bloomsbury—the Woolfs' Hogarth Press was the first to publish Freud in English, and Strachey's influence on the popularization of psychoanalysis was both among the exclusive Bloomsbury circle and beyond it. Specifically, Freud and Jones' relation to Carrington is important insofar that it allows for a glimpse into what she would have been reading, learning, or hearing regarding the pathologization of an identity that she wasn't quite sure how to comprehend. Chisholm's edition of *Carrington's Letters* notes both Carrington and Lytton's aversion to Freudianism, whose followers tended to "regard homosexuality as a curable disorder." However, Lytton's brother James Strachey had been analyzed by Freud before undergoing the process of translating Freud's works for the Hogarth Press.[17]

In a letter to Christine Kuhlenthal, also an old friend from the Slade, Carrington described a fog of depression that had overcome her in the same months as her aforementioned correspondence with Gertler:

> I am still depressed… Mostly because I am longing for something which I cannot have, accentuated by the joy of spring everywhere… is getting irritable and nervy a malady which all young females suffer from? All this isn't because I want to love a man, as Havelock would probably tell me. I never felt less disposed. I just always feel melancholy, and haunted by the idea that I am hypocritical.[18]

[17] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 106.
[18] Carrington to Christine Kuhlenthal, Spring/Summer 1915, in *Carrington's Letters*, 22.

The question of what Carrington was longing for, yet could not have, remains to be answered, although it would not be outside the realm of reason to speculate that she was grappling with her long-standing sexual and romantic feelings for women which she later admits to having experienced throughout her youth. In fact, coupled with her emphasis on the fact that she did not want to love a man, it seems like a reasonable inference. She references Henry Havelock Ellis, a physician who authored the first English medical textbook on homosexuality, whose conceptualizations of homosexuality were likely an early influence on Freudian thought.[19] Ellis had an open marriage with Edith Lees Ellis, who was openly a lesbian.[20] This confirms an awareness of—and interest in—theories of queer sexuality that were being circulated at the time of Carrington's writing, which is significant when attempting to unravel Bloomsbury's ethical and moral attitudes towards sexuality. Part of what I found significant while reading Carrington's letters was the fact that while male homosexuality was widely accepted in the Bloomsbury circle, misogyny permeated their sphere and created an atmosphere of distrust and aversion to female expressions of queer sexuality. Contemporary iterations of this phenomenon can be seen clearly in biographical depictions of Carrington, who is usually remembered as the lifelong companion of Lytton Strachey. Strachey himself is memorialized as a key character central to the inner workings of Bloomsbury; his close friendship with Virginia Woolf often foregrounds him in biographical accounts of Bloomsbury, and his sexually promiscuous nature placed him at the center of much of the social seismology of the group. Carrington's relationship with Strachey developed in a matter of months following her rejections of Gertler's advances; after his fumbled attempt to kiss her on a walk through the gentle hills of Asheham, Carrington learned of his

[19] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988),
[20] Kate Atkinson, "Ellis, Havelock (1859-1939), in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism,* ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni (Oxfordshire: Routledge, February 5, 2017), dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781135000356-REM1610-1

homosexuality and was infuriated.[21] Michael Holroyd's biography of Lytton Strachey details Carrington's attempt to punish Lytton: she crept into his room while he slept, tightly grasping a pair of scissors, planning to cut off his beard. But his eyes opened just as she planned to take the first strands of hair off of his face – and Holroyd maintains that she fell, "there and then and for the rest of her life, violently in love with him."[22] This is perhaps the most well-known Carrington-related anecdote among those interested in Bloomsbury culture; Holroyd does not describe its origins and does not cite a source for it, casting doubt upon its authenticity.

Her relationship with Lytton was marked by its noncommittal nature—both Carrington and Lytton acknowledged very early that "the physical" (read: sexual intimacy) was going to be neither successful nor lasting—and longstanding emotional intensity. Carrington's eventual suicide has been narrated as linked to her despair over Lytton's death of stomach cancer. Chisholm describes this period in which Carrington and Lytton cohabitated, in a section entitled "Building Love," as a time where Carrington "[built] her world around Lytton Strachey. Her love for him drove her determination to make a home in the country for them both."[23] I believe it is necessary to determine whether or not this so-called 'devotedness' was due to the social conditions under which she operated that necessitated heterosexuality. Lytton was a gay man, and Carrington was not at this point sexually interested in men in any substantial way. Chisholm notes Carrington's "surrendering" of her long-discussed virginity to Lytton, verbiage that regardless of intent carries with it antiquated perceptions of virginity as a prize for a man to walk away with. Carrington's wariness to perform an incredibly intimate act for the first time with someone of a gender she may not have ever been sexually attracted to should not be read as her

[21] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 28.
[22] Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 184.
[23] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 33.

withholding a valuable object. She was socialized in a Victorian home, where "any mention of sex or the common bodily functions was unthinkable."[24]

Prior to her explicitly sexual experiences with Henrietta Bingham, Carrington showed signs of what could be understood as a crush on a woman in a stream-of-consciousness letter to Gertler:

> Maria [Nys] was there. Looking rather lovely in a voluptuous way. She became morbidly depressed the evening of the concert over Ottoline [Morrell], and walked about pale, with heavy eyes in the moonlight. I felt a strange desire to torment & tease her, & let her have one of her crises. As it was she felt a strange heroine with no one to notice her. I don't believe Ottoline ever noticed her mournful attitudes on the floor once!! I went out into the garden with her … Katherine [Mansfield] and I wore trousers. It was wonderful being alone in the garden. Hearing the music inside, & lighted windows, and feeling like two young boys - very eager. The moon shining on the pond. Fermenting, & covered with warm slime. / How I hate being a girl. I must tell you for I have felt it so much lately. More than usual. And that night I forgot for almost half an hour in the garden, and felt other pleasures strange, & so exciting, a feeling of all the world being below me to choose from, not tied with female encumbrances, & hanging flesh.[25]

Carrington's description of the euphoria that she and Katherine experienced from wearing trousers and "feeling like two boys" is striking, and part of a larger pattern of Carrington's disconnection from her biological sex. Her correspondence indicates that she found pleasure in binding her breasts and pinning her hair up, attempts to androgynize herself. In fact, she would often dress up in male clothing and engage in some form of gendered sexual roleplay with Lytton, a further indication of Carrington's discomfort with her body.[26] When visiting her friend Barbara, who had recently given birth, Carrington demonstrated a complete aversion towards both childbearing and towards children themselves—her and Lytton often called children *le petit peuple*, which literally translates to "the small people" but was used also to refer to the 'lower

[24] Carrington, Dora, *Carrington: Letters and Extracts from Her Diaries*, ed. David Garnett (New York: Holt, 1970), 193.
[25] Carrington to Gertler, September 8, 1916, in *Carrington's Letters*, 50.
[26] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 69.

orders' of society. "I saw Barbara yesterday morning, she looked surprisingly well and a Japanese grub in the cot beside her. What is the female body made of? For she told me it took nearly 24 hours coming out with acute pain all the time."[27]

Carrington's relationship with Lytton, while perhaps somewhat rooted in the necessity of social survival under the framework of heterosexuality, was likely more complicated than just that. Carrington's emotional connection with Lytton comes across as far more sincere in her letters than the one she shared with Gertler, and the separation of platonic attachment with romantic attachment was likely hard to untangle; even now, it is a complicated question of how different the two really are.

Carrington's letters to Lytton do demonstrate passion, genuine care, and an attachment that would lay the foundation for a relationship built upon unequal power dynamics in which Lytton almost always had the upper hand. In October 1917, she wrote:

> And you are sitting in your room, toasting your feet in front of an empty grate, surrounded by your legions of paper knights and horsemen. Oh it's wretched having lost you and not to have you tonight to talk to… Forgive me for writing but I wanted you so badly. One is not even left alone to cry. Dearest Lytton I love you so much.[28]

Carrington's affect is marked by very poignant sincerity. Her affection, and level of emotional dependency, is far much more evident with Lytton than it ever was in her letters with Gertler (although their early correspondence from the Slade has been lost). Even if Carrington's relationship with Lytton was tainted by her own confusion about her romantic feelings and an inability to discover sexual compatibility, it would be a disservice to Carrington's memory to deny the emotional weight of this relationship that would follow her throughout the rest of her life and ultimately to its end. It is ultimately also possible that the pressure that Carrington faced

[27] Carrington to Gertler, November 15, 1918, in *Carrington's Letters*, 104.
[28] Carrington to Lytton Strachey, October 18, 1917, in *Carrington's Letters*, 70.

to center sex and sexuality as the basis for her depth of feeling is a factor which contributed to their lifelong partnership—which was later to be understood as a romantic one, despite potential evidence indicating differently.

So began the years at Tidmarsh, the country home. It was 1917, and Carrington was still reeling from the official announcement of her brother's death at war when she began to search for a country house to share with Lytton. Gertler had become increasingly suspicious of her relationship with Lytton, and as she continued to string Gertler along while simultaneously keeping him at arm's length, her connection with Lytton grew. The purchase happened in November, and shortly after, Carrington spent a cold Christmas at their mill home in the country with Lytton and friends. What she was unaware of were Lytton's secret letters to Virginia Woolf, complaining about the cold and the isolated nature of the home, even as far as to wonder if he had been remiss to cohabitate with Carrington. "That woman will dog me… She won't let me write, I daresay."[29] He retreated to London after the holiday, leaving Carrington alone in the four-bedroom home. Her loneliness is well-documented in her letters to Strachey:

> I am sorry to add to your troubles, by badgering you with letters. But HOW else can a young lady living in the country by herself - neglected by her swain, worn out by the fatigues of the day - and tired of her own company - pass the evening? Beds weeded in front of the windows. Vast bed in the orchard planted with cabbages & a print dress nearly made![30]

Carrington was able to find comfort and self-satisfaction in her assimilation to a situation that mirrored marriage. At least, she was able to convince herself that she felt comforted by it, writing, "Dear Lytton, it's been rather amazing living with you for so long. Now that I am alone I can sit down & think or ponder upon it."[31] But her anguish at the isolation and boredom of her years at Tidmarsh, with Lytton often gone, is not to be understated. Soon she was to enter into a

[29] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 80.
[30] Carrington to Lytton Strachey, June 10, 1918, in *Carrington's Letters*, 84-85.
[31] Carrington to Strachey, June 10, 1918, in *Carrington's Letters*, 85.

far more demanding relationship with Ralph Partridge, one which would evolve into a marriage that never held fidelity as a key virtue. Ralph Partridge, however, began his relation to Bloomsbury by way of his sexual flirtations with Lytton. It seems that much of Carrington's acquiescence to Ralph's courtship of her was due to the way that she was able to leverage Lytton's affections by having the straight-identifying Ralph as her lover, channeling Lytton's interest into her by way of Ralph. She would later describe their relationship as a "Triangular Trinity of Happiness."[32] Before they were to marry, though, a third man entered the picture: Ralph's wartime friend Gerald Brenan. Brenan was drawn to Carrington's "sweet, honeyed smile," and it appears that Carrington enjoyed Gerald's heterosexuality as it ensured that he would not involve himself in the already complicated Carrington-Lytton-Partridge *ménage à trois*.[33] Instead, his status as a Bloomsbury outsider allowed Carrington to write to him candidly with her thoughts on both Ralph and Lytton. In describing previous instances of sex with Lytton, she wrote: "Do you know even at the most intimate moments, I never get the feeling of being submerged in it. I find myself outside, watching also myself and my workings as well as his, from the detached point of view."[34]

At this time, Carrington was attempting to find her place as an artist in a male-dominated society; despite Bloomsbury's reputation for being a liberated sphere, she never managed to escape the misogyny that pervaded the most liberal of the group's members, to no fault of her own. As her relationship with Gerald progressed, she found his presence to be an outlet and a continued source of support for her musings. In a letter from the fall of 1920, she wrote:

> One cannot be a female creator of works of art & have children. That is the real reason why so few women have reached any high plane of creators. And the few

[32] Carrington to Strachey, November 6, 1922, in *Carrington's Letters*, 219.
[33] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 131.
[34] Carrington to Brenan, January 12, 1920, in *Carrington's Letters*, 140.

> that did become artists; I think you will admit, were never married, or had children. Emily Bronte & her sisters, Jane Austen, Sappho.[35]

Not only is this Carrington's attempt to negotiate her relationship to her own gender identity and the reproductive expectations placed upon her by her traditional family, it indicates the broader pressure that women were under to choose between childbearing and creative output, career, or a personal life separate from the trappings of domesticity.

When she married Ralph in 1921, on the precipice of the roaring twenties, she refused to change her last name to Partridge, lost her wedding ring on their Italian honeymoon, fought constantly with her new husband, and only found solace when meeting Lytton in the Italian hills.[36] Was this comedy of errors the root of an unsuccessful marriage, or was Carrington never truly of the belief that the marriage was anything more than a means of survival? Certainly her passions for Ralph Partridge are not illuminated in any surviving correspondence. In a letter to Lytton one month before they were to be married, she describes their mutual situation:

> Virginia then told [Ralph] that she thought I was still in love with you. Ralph asked me if I was. I said that I didn't think perhaps I was as much as I used to be… He knows that I am not in love with him. But he feels that my affections are great enough to make him happy if I live with him. I cried last night Lytton, whilst he slept by my side sleeping happily. I cried to think of a savage cynical fate which had made it impossible for my love ever to be used by you. You never knew, or never will know the very big and devastating love I had for you.[37]

One thing worth noting is that she describes her affections for Lytton—and later for Henrietta—in letters with her friends, something that she never does for the man who is by all standards supposed to be the love of her life. It was not more than two months into their marriage that Carrington had begun a full-blown affair with Gerald.

---

[35] Carrington to Brenan, October 1920, in *Carrington's Letters*, 156.
[36] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 176.
[37] Carrington to Strachey, May 14, 1921, in *Carrington's Letters*, 170.

After two years of trudging through a sexless, loveless relationship with Ralph, marked by frequent lapses in fidelity with Gerald, Carrington was to find someone who sent her spiraling into the throes of deep-seated, long-suppressed sexual desire. This person was able to do something that neither Lytton, nor Ralph, nor Gertler, nor Gerald had ever been able to do for Carrington: drive her mad with lust. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, it was not a man but a woman, an American girl, twenty-two years old (Carrington, at this point, was thirty) by the name of Henrietta Bingham. Upon meeting her for the first time, Carrington noticed that Henrietta was "[her] style, pink with a round face dressed in mannish clothes, with a good natured smile."[38] Henrietta, accompanied by her lover and professor Mina Kirstein, was to run into Carrington two months later, at David Garnett's birthday party. Carrington was unable to restrain herself, and under the combined influence of Henrietta's masterfully crafted cocktails and her infatuation, she "almost made love to her in public."[39]

The first person she told of this escapade, at least in surviving writing, was Gerald: "I am sure she is far more beautiful than your E! … Ralph cut my hair too short last week. When it has grown longer and my beauty restored, I shall visit the lovely Henrietta and revive our drunken passion. Gerald dear I care so much for you."[40] Several things necessitate analysis here: firstly, Carrington compares the physical attractiveness of her sexual "conquest" to that of the woman Gerald was slated to marry; while the identity of 'E' is unclear, it is possible that it refers to another Smith student Eleanor Carroll Chilton (class of 1922), one of Henrietta's former lovers. Furthermore, in this passage, Ralph acts both as a literal and figurative instrument of separation between Henrietta and Carrington. And yet she does not see him as a legitimate obstacle standing in the way of her access to Henrietta, as his blunder with her haircut might suggest. It is also

[38] Carrington to Brenan, March 6, 1923, in *Carrington's Letters*, 236.
[39] Carrington to Brenan, May 31, 1923, in *Carrington's Letters*, 248.
[40] Carrington to Brenan, May 31, 1923, in *Carrington's Letters*, 248.

relevant that she blends her telling of her romantic evening with another lover with her words of affection to Gerald. This poses the question of whether the men of Bloomsbury would have considered lesbian relationships to be less threatening to their relationship to a woman's lover than heterosexual affairs. It seems a reasonable inference to make, given the hoops Carrington had to jump through in order to justify her relationship with Lytton to Gertler, and later to Gerald. It is altogether unsurprising that womens' queer sexuality was deemed as an extension of friendship; that the Bloomsbury men considered other men to be important enough to become objects of jealousy while women were not to be feared is a probable cause of this.

On the flip side of Gerald's lack of concern towards Carrington's growing affection for this woman, Lytton and Ralph both expressed disapproval of Henrietta.[41] As the summer passed her by, she found herself becoming more aware of Gerald's rising sensitivity on the matter – yet she did not cease communication about her affection for Henrietta. "I got carried away by Kentucky Princesses who after all compared to my Amigo are not worth one half minute's thought," she wrote to Gerald in June, just a week after she spent an afternoon tea at Henrietta's borrowed Knightbridge flat, dining on biscuits and garlic sausage and tea with lemon, gushing over her "unusual" goodness..[42] A letter to Gerald from the following day describes Carrington's utter adoration for Henrietta, suggesting that she was in some way struggling to find the balance between the fleeting nature of what was to be a short-lived fling and the excitement and novelty of the whole affair:

> All yesterday we spent at Ham Spray. Henrietta came down with Tommy to lunch, and helped paint the walls all the afternoon. After tea we all went for a long walk to the top of the Downs. And H and I went far across ploughed fields, through a little cornfield plantation… She won me by being completely captivated by my Downs. I long for you to know her. I can hardly bear to care so much for anyone that you do not know also! She dresses badly, talks American, and has a hundred

[41] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 272.
[42] Carrington to Brenan, June 13, 1924, in *Carrington's Letters*, 273.

> faults but somehow they don't matter, she is so beautiful, and so charmingly sensitive.[43]

Her insistence that Gerald and Henrietta must meet is resemblant of her earlier 'triangular trinity' with Lytton and Ralph, but also a telling example of her inability to maintain a relationship without male influence—this is likely an impact of the way that she was socialized to submit to men's emotional needs and desire for social domination. It is relevant insofar in that it provides insight on the nature of non-monogamy and freedom of sexual relations in the time period, exemplifying both the liberatory nature of sexuality among the Bloomsbury group compared to the social conditions under which they were raised and also the intersection of misogyny and homophobia that thrived among Carrington's male associates like Lytton and Ralph. After all, Carrington was able to make amends with her husband's mistress Frances, and the two got along quite well despite the circumstances, in stark contrast to Carrington's necessary secrecy regarding her affair with Gerald. Carrington's actions infer both the lack of weight and also the power of revulsion that queer women's relationships held within Bloomsbury, especially compared to gay men's relationships. Their concerns were founded in the real possibility of Carrington's losing interest in them, since Chisholm notes that by July, Carrington had become reluctant to "spend the night" with Gerald, having found sex with Henrietta a revelation.[44]

Carrington's negotiations for privacy with Gerald had become frantic amidst her juggling of many lovers. As the summer drew to a close, an incident of an unsealed letter left her fuming:

> Oh, but you did enrage me yesterday. Or rather I raged against Fate, and flu and thin envelopes and curious Amazon post mistresses and sensibilities and everything I could rage against. You posted your last letter to me unsealed. Really it was never glued, because when I examined it most carefully I saw the glue was virgin — unlicked. The post mistress gave it to me breathless with agitation and confusion… in a terrific loud voice so that R outside in the car, heard every word. Imagine my feelings all the way back in the car to Ham Spray. Can you? Or does

[43] Carrington to Brenan, July 25, 1924, in *Carrington's Letters*, 275.
[44] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 275.

> that mean very little to you? I was so sick with agitation, that by the time I reached my room I could hardly read what was inside. Please, please give up thin envelopes. They are fatal to keeping stuck even if licked and please remember to seal your letters, or I shall go mad.[45]

In this instance, she was practically begging Gerald for some semblance of privacy, privacy that was not typically afforded to women regardless of class or social status. Carrington's anxieties about exposure had stemmed, quite reasonably, from the group's practice of sharing letters over breakfast at Duncan Grant's Suffolk farmhouse.[46] "Promise you will *not* show my letter to a Wisset breakfast or I will *never never* write to you again quickly. Promise," she wrote to Lytton in 1916, far before Gerald entered the picture.[47] Even her virginity, in the pre-Lytton years, was a topic of discussion among all of her companions, providing entertainment for the group at the expense of her privacy. Years later, in a letter to Stephen Tomlin discussing her work in the production of the Russian ballet, she would write "this is a very private letter and I shall MURDER you if you show anyone my scenario, or pictures."[48] While her insistence on secrecy may seem resemblant of paranoia, it is imperative to consider Carrington's status as a woman who was never granted privacy. Aldous Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow,* was a "satirical portrait of goings-on at Garsington with a disobliging and very recognisable portrait of Carrington as a tiresome virgin."[49] And Gilbert Cannan, in 1916, published Mendel, a fraught portrait of Carrington's old suitor Mark Gertler with an emphasis on his "tormented relationship with Carrington."[50] Carrington despised the novel, writing, "How angry I am over Gilbert's book! Everywhere this confounded gossip & servant-like curiosity."[51] Her condemnation of the nosiness and entitlement to personal information that Cannan's book exemplified speaks to her

[45] Carrington to Brenan, October 19, 1924, in *Carrington's Letters*, 278.
[46] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 41.
[47] Carrington to Strachey, June 19, 1916, in *Carrington's Letters*, 41.
[48] Carrington to Stephen Tomlin, July 1931, in *Carrington's Letters,* 382.
[49] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 44.
[50] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 27.
[51] Carrington to Brenan, November 1, 1916, in *Carrington's Letters*, 54.

discomfort with these conditions. To live a life defined by the complete and utter lack of emotional confidentiality that marked Carrington's relationships must have been humiliating — possibly even dehumanizing.

Carrington's friendship with Lytton's sister-in-law, Alix Strachey, became a source of reassurance in her comprehension of her newfound sexual identity. In the winter of 1924, she wrote to Alix, laying foreground for how her relationship with Henrietta was to fizzle out in the coming months:

> I really confess Alix I am very much more taken with H than I have ever been with anyone for a long time. I now feel regrets at being such a blasted fool in the past, to stifle so many lusts I have had in my youth, for various females. But perhaps one would have only been embittered, or battered by blows on the head from enraged virgins. Unfortunately she is living in London now with a red-haired creature from America, so as she tactfully put it; "You must wait, if you can. My passions don't last long, but at the moment…" I find her completely sympathetic. In other words nothing she does ever gets on my nerves. And most of the things she does charm me very completely. She is a little terrifying, partly because I know her so little.[52]

Alix's bisexuality allowed Carrington to be forthright with her about her own understandings of her sexuality. Alix was undergoing analysis in Berlin, and "knew all about Ernest Jones," the psychoanalyst treating Henrietta and Mina.[53] As Carrington and Henrietta began to drift apart, separated both by space and by the social conditions (those of which included Carrington's other lovers, Henrietta's other lovers, and Bloomsbury's general distaste for Henrietta) under which they were operating, Carrington composed another letter to Alix, her frustration shining clear as day:

> Now I've recovered slightly from my misfortune, and misadventure, I dream only once a week — instead of every night — of that wretch H and I think of her only 2 hours out of the 24. I've also used my self control to such purpose that I've not written to her since December the 10th… It's left me a warped, and gnarled old tree, with a pain in my head whenever I hear the name of 'H' or the word

[52] Carrington to Alix Strachey, Winter 1924, in *Carrington's Letters,* 281.
[53] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 28.

> American. I did not lose her through pride as you suggested in your letter, but through excess of L [love? lust?]... I suspect she found my affections so cheap that she doubted they could be worth very much… I can't be such an ass as her American female bitches that she consorts with.[54]

Having accepted the fact that Henrietta was no longer going to be a part of her life, Carrington attempted to prioritize her shared life with Lytton at their Ham Spray house that winter, retreating to the domestic confines of their purported heterosexuality. Her attempts to keep Gerald nearby were perhaps driven by either a desire for validation or for a mental leveraging of power over Ralph, and she denied the feelings she had for Henrietta to him, in stark opposition to what she had written to Alix:

> Do not blame yourself that anything was ever your fault. I hardly think it was mine. It was simply an irony of fate, that drew out suddenly from a past bundle of suppressions, these feelings of mine for H, which are of course perfectly futile and senseless. My secretiveness has always been my own misery. But when I tell you I suffer literally, physically sometimes, when I hear my inside self discussed - but if you haven't had these feelings it is difficult to explain.[55]

How much of these notions of 'suppression' were influenced by Freudian intellectual thought and nascent psychoanalytic theory? Carrington earlier described Henrietta to Alix as a catalyst who had brought up all she had suppressed in her thirty-three years; with Gerald, she turned the narrative around to characterize her feelings for Henrietta as senselessly resulting from irrelevant suppressions of her youth. Gerald's response was perhaps more apt than he intended: "Perhaps for your own happiness you should give up men and become a complete sapphist."[56]

In the coming years, Carrington would entertain flirtations with other women, but present sources argue that they never crossed the boundary of an explicitly sexual relationship. She became enamored with Dorelia John, an enigmatic bohemian mostly memorialized for her role as the wife and muse of painter Augustus John. Her two teenage daughters, Poppett and

[54] Carrington to Alix Strachey, February 4, 1925, in *Carrington's Letters,* 288.
[55] Carrington to Brenan, July 19, 1925, in *Carrington's Letters,* 294.
[56] Brenan to Carrington, Summer 1925, in *Carrington's Letters,* 297.

Vivienne, did not escape Carrington's interest; she referred to them as Dorelia's "R.D.s (Ravishing Daughters)."[57] Carrington had harboured a crush on Dorelia for the last ten years, mentioning her in passing as "amazingly beautiful" on two separate occasions (years apart, might I add) and describing her appearance at a party thrown by Virginia Woolf's psychoanalyst younger sister: "Dorelia like some Sibyl sitting in a corner with a Basque cap on her head and her cloak swept round her in great folds, smiling mysteriously, talking to everyone, unperturbed watching the dancers. I wondered what went on in her head. I fell very much in love with her… it's something to have seen such a vision as she looked last night."[58] Now this was coming to fruition, albeit in a rather roundabout way, as Carrington pursued Dorelia's 16-year-old daughter. Carrington had the habit of sending drawings as part of her correspondence, and Poppett was no exception — her letters to the teenager included drawings of (presumably) Poppett in blissful rural scenes, entirely in the nude, soft curves on display in a manner that seems too intimate - and knowing - to be entirely nonsexual.[59] "I got some very passionate kisses out of Beakus… but had a much more passionate affair in Saxon's flat afterwards in a very small camp bed with Poppett John. Oh! La! La! As she says…"[60] To Poppett, she wrote: "It seems a terribly long time since we lay together in that sweet embrace in the taxi on Monday…. I suppose a hundred lips have pressed yours since I last drove in that romantic taxi to Chelsea. But mine I assure you Madame have been surrounded by wire netting ever since."[61] Her affection for Poppett and Vivien may have stemmed, somehow, from a place of boredom: "My life is a complete blank except for my passionate love affaire with Vivienne & Poppett John."[62] It is possible that Augustus John,

[57] Carrington to Dorelia John, Christmas 1927, in *Carrington's Letters*, 328.
[58] Carrington to Strachey, November 2, 1920, in *Carrington's Letters,* 161.
[59] Carrington, "Untitled," Drawing, August 1928, in *Carrington's Letters,* 345.
[60] Carrington to George Rylands, October 20, 1928, in *Carrington's Letters,* 348.
[61] Carrington to Poppett John, Summer 1928, in *Carrington's Letters,* 340.
[62] Carrington to Sebastian Sprott, November 20, 1928, in *Carrington's Letters,* 350.

Poppett and Vivienne's father, was also aware of the possibly sexual nature of their relationship, as Carrington documented in a letter to Lytton:

> We had a strange party at Fryern the other night, and I had the strangest of strange conversations with old Augustus.
> A[ugustus]: Do you like cxxxs [cunts] Carrington?
> C[arrington]: 'Um – yes – I do.'
> A: 'So do I. I adore them.'
> Then he confided in me all his love affairs. Dear, oh dear![63]

The possibly incestuous quadrangulation of Poppett, Vivien, Dorelia and Carrington (with the potential involvement, even, of Augustus) has not been documented extensively, nor does it survive outside of their correspondence, except in one photo of the pair kissing. Her lingering affections for Dorelia would not go unnoticed, however, and she referred to her as "Princess Dorelia" in passing—a pet name reminiscent of her dubbing Henrietta the "Kentucky Princess."[64]

Carrington's lifelong aversion to childbearing was realized in the autumn of 1929, when, having entered into a halfhearted affair with a sailor called Beakus Penrose, she began to suspect that she was pregnant. As Chisholm notes, there are no overt references to her suspicion either in her journal or her correspondences. Much to Beakus's relief, Ralph arranged a discreet abortion in December, which Carrington "seemed to have taken … in her stride."[65]

By 1931, Lytton had fallen extremely ill, a continuation of years and years of problems with his health. After nursing him for years, Carrington had grown somewhat exasperated with his complaints, and emotionally separated herself from his inability to devote himself entirely to her. He was bedridden that winter, diagnosed first with typhoid fever and then with ulcerative colitis before doctors came to the conclusion that he suffered from terminal stomach cancer. As

[63] Carrington to Strachey, August 7th, 1928, in *Carrington's Letters,* 346.
[64] Carrington to Strachey, September 27, 1927, in *Carrington's Letters,* 364.
[65] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 369.

his health deteriorated, Carrington spent most of her time at his bedside. His deathbed confession is perhaps the most memorialized moment of Carrington's life: "Darling Carrington. I love her. I always wanted to marry Carrington and I never did."[66] Biographers of both Carrington and Lytton have questioned Lytton's truthfulness in this utterance. Holroyd asserts quite simply that "it was not true," thinking it impossible that a definitively gay man could love a woman, ignoring the fact that Carrington herself was queer and showed no sexual attraction to men other than that which seemed to come out of social pressure.[67] In Lytton's last days, Carrington attempted to commit suicide: with Ralph in the house, she poured herself an unknown amount of whiskey, walked outside quietly and, illuminated only by the red tint that the rising sun cast the January sky in, entered the garage and turned the car engine on. With Lytton on the precipice of death, Ralph was alarmed by Carrington's absence and, hearing the sound of the car's engine, found her passed out in the driver's seat. "Ralph held me in his arms and kissed me, and said: How could you do it?"[68]

The months following Lytton's death contain Carrington's most professional, proper prose in all of her records of correspondence. She adopted manners of socializing that she had never conformed to before, omitting her usual drawings and sending out Lytton's belongings to people she thought would have liked to have them. Chisholm notes that she also engaged in ritualistic destruction of reminders of Lytton, burning his underclothes and spectacles in a bonfire. Her overwhelming grief attracted concern from Leonard and Virginia Woolf, who came to Ham Spray and found her alone. She sobbed to Virginia: "There is nothing left for me to do. I did everything for Lytton. But I've failed in everything else."[69] Virginia's answer—something

[66] Anne Chisholm, in *Carrington's Letters,* 393
[67] Holroyd, in *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography,* 706.
[68] Chisholm, in *Letters,* 393
[69] *Diary of Virginia Woolf,* Vol. 4, March 12, 1932, 81-82.

along the lines of how life seemed hopeless and useless to her, too, after Lytton's death—may have swayed Carrington's judgment, considering the volatile combination of Carrington's devastating grief and her admiration of and infatuation with Virginia. The next morning, she slipped into one of the few reminders she had kept of Lytton, one of his yellow silk dressing gowns, and watched herself in the mirror as she cradled the shotgun, pointed it at her heart, and pulled the trigger.

To me, this final declaration that everything she had done in her life was for Lytton indicates not a timeless love resemblant of the great Shakespearean tragedies but a reflection on how much she had sacrificed in her own life in order to appease Lytton: her passionless marriage to Partridge, her isolation at Ham Spray, her lifelong devotion that was never quite reciprocated. It would perhaps be of use to examine the ways that Lytton shaped her life, both in terms of their undeniably powerful emotional connection and in terms of the limitations that their pretended heterosexuality placed upon Carrington.

Carrington's legacy, then, is markedly defined by her relationship to Lytton and the supposed all-consuming love that she felt for him, right down to her last moments. Holroyd perpetuates the narrative which attributes Carrington's suicide to complete devastation regarding Lytton's death: "No possibility of anything resembling recompense existed for her on the wide, wide earth, since she could no longer talk with Lytton; since of all the scenes around her, of all her favourite pursuits, of whatever delighted her ear, her eye, and her understanding, his society was the vivifying soul."[70] This perception is dripping with misogyny and an inability to view Carrington as a complex human outside of her relationship with Lytton. Disregard for her artwork prevailed both in her lifetime and beyond it, despite the fact that her work both reveals valuable insight into her life, and that it is worth reflecting on, by merit of its creativity,

[70] Holroyd, in *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography,* 718.

personality, authenticity, and demonstration of extreme technical skill. Carrington's life was full of contradictions—but what queer woman in the 1920s did not live a life of incongruity? She was incredibly sexually guarded, except when Henrietta swept her defenses away, in which case she could not avoid almost "making love to her in public."[71] She was embroiled in a lifelong struggle with her gender identity and her female body, one which did not absolve her from the misogyny that surrounded every aspect of her life from her work to her relationships. She lived large, with a love for parties and socializing and drinking, but she also feared exposure of her private self. Carrington's most well-documented contradictory aspect was her relationship with Lytton, which is not always (if ever) depicted as an inner conflict.

One would hope that Bloomsbury scholarship has been collaboratively moving towards a more complete portrait of Carrington, one acknowledging the details of her emotional and romantic situation in a way that does not reduce her to the men she knew. The following section will detail biographical accounts of Carrington's life and attempt a critical analysis of their shortcomings and the homosexual trappings that they fall under, considering the elements of misogyny that influenced both her life and retellings of it.

"Queer Potentials" versus Queer Realities: Scholarship and Popular Media on Carrington's Gender and Sexual Identity

The first time I heard of Carrington, it was in the context of her nude portrait of Henrietta Bingham. The sketch is a memento from their 1924 fling—Henrietta poses, posture erect, with her shoulders down and her hands placed assertively on her hips. She wears nothing but a pair of

[71] Carrington to Brenan, June 1, 1923, in *Carrington's Letters,* 248.

kitten heels.[72] I was reading Emily Bingham's 2015 biography of her great-aunt Henrietta, which explores quite comprehensively the nature of Henrietta's relationships with her professor Mina Kirstein, with Carrington, and with Stephen Tomlin—all Bloomsbury affiliated. When I turned the page, the nude sketch jumped out at me. Who was the woman who drew this? While I'd not yet developed an academic interest in Carrington's life and art, I retained the following about Carrington: her refusal to conform to traditional feminine expectations of appearance, coupled with her sentiments about her own womanhood which she expressed throughout her life, made her an early example of non-binary identity; I also remembered that she had a blonde bob.

Most people's mental picture of Carrington, if it exists at all, was not shaped by a biography of one of her female lovers, but rather by the popular media that exists about her: namely, the 1995 film *Carrington*, whose film's tagline reads "she had many lovers but only one love." While it would be neither useful nor true to deny the legitimacy of Carrington's connection to Lytton, which did take the form of a lifelong impactful companionship, the view of her relationship with Lytton as her one great love is reductive in that it rids Carrington of her real experiences of complex infatuations, as well as of the misogyny that Lytton imposed upon her which greatly affected the social and material conditions of her life. The idea of Carrington as Lytton's loyal devotee, rather than the full story of her sexual repulsion towards men and her affairs with women, serves a narrative which elevates heterosexuality as a structure that triumphs over both Carrington and Lytton's conceivably homosexual inclinations.

Carrington (1995) is a biographical film—who it actually intends to biograph is a question that remains to be answered. Considering that the very first shot is of Lytton, the fact that Carrington's character has almost no characterization whatsoever, and her entire life (as represented by the film) begins when she meets Lytton, *Strachey* would perhaps be a better title

[72] Dora Carrington, *Henrietta Bingham,* 1924, in *Carrington's Letters*, 332.

for the film. The opening sequence credits Michael Holroyd's 1967 *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* as the basis for the film.[73] Why, then, does the movie claim to be about Carrington? Gertler's artistic output receives more attention than Carrington does throughout the entirety of the film, and events are reordered in order to emphasize the dominant role that Lytton plays in her life—for instance, Carrington is shown meeting Lytton before Gertler makes his first on-screen appearance. Lytton's homosexuality is documented, but Carrington's is not; there is no discernable mention of Henrietta, whereas Lytton's homosexuality is a central plot point. The film foregrounds Carrington's attraction to men far more than it ever mentions her repulsion to men; her sexual disinterest in Gertler is situated as a one-off, contrasting the actual record of her apathy towards sex with the majority of men she was 'romantically' involved with, including her husband. Perhaps the strangest thing about what the movie gets wrong is the fact that it shows Lytton arranging Carrington's abortion, when in fact it was Ralph Partridge who paid for and organized the procedure. I understand this as an attempt to place Lytton in the center of Carrington's life, right down to her unwanted pregnancy and subsequent experience with reproductive healthcare. There is no mention of Carrington's androgyny and discomfort with her female body other than the fact that when Lytton first sees her, he mistakes her for a boy.

Holroyd's characterization of Carrington is undeniably flat; there are points in which it becomes unbearable to read due to the degree of narrative liberty Holroyd takes, mostly radiating misogyny:

> She was not really pretty, and certainly not beautiful - her body being made for action, like a boy's. But she radiated an extraordinary aura of attractiveness. Her mind was intuitive rather than intelligent, and she had not been well educated. Nor did she talk particularly well, her voice being unusually flat and only in moments of emotion taking on a more expressive melodious tone. Although not

[73] Holroyd, in *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, 669.

> erudite herself, she had the charming gift of making others feel clever, drawing them out and listening with rapt attention to every syllable they spoke.[74]

It would appear that Holroyd's favorite thing about Carrington was her intriguing attractiveness. In describing Gertler's effect on Carrington, he wrote that "he seemed composed of elements which knew no tradition, which were as far removed from her own dull background as it was possible to imagine," and that Carrington must have been "undoubtedly [...] excited by Gertler's wild personality."[75] Holroyd's attempts to predominantly insert masculine figures in the center of many of Carrington's experiences are not to be ignored in considering how he has constructed much of the narrative regarding her life.

Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina's biography, *Carrington: A Life,* came six years before the film *Carrington* and at times seems not to have actually been consulted by Christopher Hampton, writer and director of *Carrington* due to its lack of inclusion of the source material. The paperback version of the biography advertised itself as "the life that inspired the major motion picture," thereby inextricably linking the film to the biography as well as offering an endorsement, but many of the events that Gerzina covers in her biography (which was primarily geared towards an academic audience, unlike the film) are neither depicted nor even mentioned in the film.

While Gerzina takes a far more expansive approach to documenting Carrington's life, there are still several shortcomings in her retellings and assumptions of the narratives present in *Carrington: A Life*. Her introduction is primarily a summary of Carrington's life and relationship with Lytton; she describes Carrington's dismissal by scholars as "yet another physically

[74] Holroyd, in *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, 183.
[75] Holroyd, in *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, 198.

attractive but sexually repressed and frustrated artist of the Edwardian and Georgian period," then quoting David Garnett's justification of his interest in her life:[76]

> Tens of thousands of young women have china-blue eyes, talk in little gasps and have sex trouble, but one does not want to wade through their correspondence. Carrington would have always been attractive to her friends; what makes her interesting is her relationship with Lytton Strachey, the critic who sprang into fame with Eminent Victorians and his biography of Queen Victoria. Carrington devoted her life to Lytton, and after his death from an undiagnosed cancer of the intestine decided that it was not worth living and shot herself.[77]

Gerzina acknowledges Garnett's statement's truth, but complicates it by arguing that it oversimplifies her life: "She was, in fact, so complicated that writers of fiction, who several times used her as a model, preferred to reduce her to a single characteristic rather than try to come to terms with her complexity… While sexuality, infidelity and modernity were undeniably aspects of her own personality, they were equally balanced by a loathing of her own femaleness, a devotion for seventeen years to one man—albeit a homosexual—even while married to another, and respect for many aspects of traditional English country life."[78]

It becomes increasingly evident throughout the course of the biography that Gerzina, while chronicling far more of the events and complexities of Carrington's life than are apparent in the film, perhaps shares Garnett's view that Lytton's existence is Carrington's most interesting characteristic. My issue with Garnett's statement, which I believe makes it entirely moot, is the presupposition that Carrington is interesting *because of* her relationship with Lytton. In fact, I would argue that there is nothing shocking or fascinating about a woman devoted to a man who does not provide her with reciprocal affection and emotional labor, and that it is in fact one of the most commonplace and longstanding phenomena in the tradition of heterosexuality. What

[76] Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Carrington: A Life* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989), xvi.
[77] David Garnett, ed. *Carrington: Letters and Extracts from her Diaries* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 10.
[78] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, xvii.

fascinates me about Carrington—her queer sexuality, her potentially non–binary identity, her artwork and her peculiarly sincere way of writing—do not really have much to do with Lytton Strachey at all.

Gerzina's biography is groundbreaking in that it is the only full-length biography of Carrington ever published, and it is also a very useful source as it does not exclude any primary sources in order to construct a certain narrative. What I mostly find troubling about *Carrington: A Life* is the subtle verbiage that Gerzina uses to fill in the gaps of what we know about Carrington's life based on her journals and correspondence, one which perpetuates the narrative of Lytton's all-consuming importance while avoiding extensive analysis into Carrington's sexual identity. Gerzina relied heavily on Holbrook's *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* in order to construct the story of Carrington's life; this is ever-apparent in her retelling of the famous moment where Carrington sneaks into Lytton's room to cut off his beard. Gerzina tells the story with authority: "from that moment, until the end of her life, she was absolutely in love with him," she writes, citing Holbrook's biography (which itself does not have any evidence for this claim).[79] Yet she does not interrogate who this narrative of Carrington's utter devotion may have served—could it be Lytton Strachey, the genius to whom she was simply a loyal companion? It is worth consideration, especially considering that the story comes first from a biography of Lytton rather than any of Carrington's first-person sources.

In a passage regarding Carrington's early sexual relationship with Lytton, Gerzina writes that "while their sexual preferences and difficulties boded ill for a physical relationship between them, the remarkable thing was that they cared enough about each other to attempt it… It seems likely that they did indeed have a physical relationship, but how far it went and exactly how long it lasted (it did not last very long) will never be known. The most important aspects are their

[79] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 70.

willingness to try, and the fact that Carrington offered herself to Strachey first."[80] Mention of Carrington's "long-standing vow of virginity" precedes this inference; what Gerzina does not immediately contextualize, however, is the pressure that Carrington experienced from all those around her to give up her sexual hang-ups and perform the most intimate of acts. In discussions of her virginity, Gerzina writes that when Carrington had previously agreed to have a sexual relationship with Gertler, by the time that came to fruition she "found herself quite unable to do so and remained a virgin. Her fears and shame were simply too great."[81] Could it be possible that it was not just shame that prevented her from having sex with Gertler but disinterest and repulsion, as is rather clearly demonstrated in her correspondence? "You must know one could not do, what you ask, sexual intercourse, unless one does love a man's body. I have never felt any desire for that in my life…"[82] At this point, Carrington was 22 years old. In that same vein, might it also be possible that Carrington's willingness to have sex with Lytton was just as related to the constant pressure and belittling she faced from her peers regarding her virginity as it was to her comfort and sense of safety around Lytton? It is necessary to remember the caricatures of Carrington as a tiresome virgin that were published in novels by Aldous Huxley and Gilbert Cannan, both of which are indicative of the teasing and disdain she faced. There is absolutely no denying the difference between her relationship with Lytton and her relationship with Gertler, but a more complete picture would reveal far more about the complexities and inner turmoil of Carrington's life.

Carrington did not necessarily thrive in the domesticated sphere; in fact, her dismay at the loneliness she often faced at Ham Spray due to Lytton's absence is well-documented in her correspondence. Yet Gerzina writes of Carrington's dependence on the household: "Although she

[80] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 90.
[81] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 66.
[82] Carrington to Gertler, April 16, 1915, in *Carrington's Letters,* 19.

had struggled to quit the regimented Victorian household, she later found that she could be happy and work only in that well-oiled machine, the smoothly-run house."[83] While Carrington and Lytton both found comfort in their seemingly heterosexual pseudo-marriage, to erase Carrington's clear discomforts she experienced in the Ham Spray years and beyond also preserves the idea of Carrington as Lytton's steadfast companion who could not help to do anything but keep the home nice for him.

When Henrietta enters the picture, Gerzina's biography becomes more complicated, introducing notions of bisexuality and sexual passion that may not have aligned with Carrington's understanding of her own experience: "the discovery of [Carrington's] own bisexuality and first real sexual passion clouded her judgement."[84] As projection of modern identities onto historical characters is something I have focused on in my research on Carrington, I find it important to try to historicize Gerzina's formulation with this. It was not common to use the word 'queer' to refer to non-normative sexual identity until the 2000s, and if Gerzina could only choose between 'bisexual' and 'lesbian,' it makes sense to go with the one that would not negate the relationship which supposedly defined her life. While I entertain my own personal speculations about Carrington's identity, mostly based on her consistent lack of sexual attraction towards men, I am extremely reluctant to apply a modern label to someone who lived 100 years before me—in my opinion, Gerzina's use of the word 'bisexual' therefore does not pose an issue. I am also appreciative of Gerzina's use of a label that defined Carrington's identity as decidedly *not* straight, which I think provides important accuracy to the story of Carrington's life, as she very likely did not think of herself as similar to the model Victorian heterosexual woman.

[83] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 73.
[84] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 210.

Gerzina's lack of analysis into Lytton's instant dislike for Henrietta, however, leaves something to be desired:

> For the first time in her life, Carrington was in active pursuit of a particular lover. Men had always been attracted to her, but she had never taken on the chase herself. With an eagerness and openness that could only yield disappointment, Carrington threw herself into the courtship. Lytton's instincts were entirely against this involvement, and she was forced into subterfuge, pretending that when Henrietta accompanied the sculptor Stephen Tomlin and Alix to Tidmarsh, she had not invited her. She was 'self-conscious about [her] feelings' for the woman, and wanted no criticism, particularly if it were justified.[85]

What, then, of the male lovers Carrington took? Lytton showed no issue with Carrington's relationships with Gertler, with Gerald, with Ralph, and even later with Beakus. Even a sentence on the possibility that heterosexism had influenced Lytton's "instant" dislike of Henrietta may have revealed far more about the nature of his relationship with Carrington. Another factor of note in Gerzina's retelling of Carrington's relationship history is that in the appendix, the *Relationships* section lists Mark Gertler, Ralph Partridge, Gerald Brenan, Beakus Penrose, and, of course, Lytton Strachey. Henrietta Bingham is not listed as one of Carrington's relationships.

The most obvious example of Gerzina's centering of Lytton in Carrington's life story comes in the afterword, in which she attempts to unpack Carrington's suicide and her lasting legacy:

> Those who knew Carrington insist that her life was tragic only in its ending. Her great originality, ability to entertain and intrigue others, and love, offset, in their opinion, the misery she experienced in her final months. I hope this biography has made clear those aspects of her life.
>
> At the same time, she was a very complicated woman whose difficulties cannot be summarily dismissed as idiosyncrasies. What makes her life merit a close look are the things that made her different: her unique outlook, her strong artistic ability, the environments she created for those she loved. These things combined with characteristics which often made them hard to achieve. Her outlook estranged her from her family; her insecurity about her painting kept her

[85] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 209.

> from popular or commercial success; some, like Gerald Brenan, believed that the living spaces she created were more important than outside relationships, and ultimately damaged those relationships. But all these qualities found harmony and near perfection with Lytton Strachey.[86]

I wonder about the difference between stripping a historical figure of their agency and attributing all of their challenges to the context in which they lived versus recognizing the aspects of their life that may have been shaped by external factors— in Carrington's case, these were heterosexism and misogyny. It seems possible that her insecurity about her paintings was in some ways attributable to constantly living in Lytton's shadow. Gerzina denies this, writing that it was "no fault of Strachey's. He admired her work unreservedly and did whatever he could to buoy her spirits and career."[87] Regardless of whether Lytton himself was responsible for Carrington's lack of confidence in her work, Gerzina clearly thinks that some of her insecurity was due to the judgment passed upon her by other members of the Bloomsbury group. It is not as black-and-white as it may seem: some of the group's disapproval of the Carrington-Lytton relationship may have been based upon knowledge of the arguable incompatibility of their sexualities, while other origins of their dislike may have been rooted in misogyny and disrespect for Carrington. Acknowledging the nuance in both historical and scholarly perceptions of Carrington is imperative to a full understanding of her life. Gerzina's biography falls short in some areas, but still provides far more context and compassion towards Carrington than the (mostly nonexistent, with the exception of Garnett's remarks) scholarship, as well as the film that followed.

In 2016, nearly thirty years after the publication of the biography, Gerzina published a new essay entitled "'[T]here were so many things I wanted to do & didn't': The Queer Potential

[86] Gerzina, in *Carrington: A Life*, 303.
[87] Gerzina, 303.

of Carrington's Life and Art." In this article, Gerzina writes about the new materials which make possible a more comprehensive understanding of Carrington's sexuality, including Chisholm's biography of Frances Partridge and the publication of *Irrepressible*, a biography of Henrietta Bingham written by her great-niece Emily. Gerzina's narrative of Carrington's early life remains largely the same as in her biography, attributing her fears about sex to her upbringing:

> If we put this into the context of a young woman, no matter how rebellious, who was raised in a Victorian family where 'any mention of sex or the common bodily functions was unthinkable,' and who left home as a teenager in 1910, it is easier to understand why she found it difficult to take a step that others found entirely natural. For Carrington, it appeared impossible to make the leap from freedom to desire and, au fond, she did not love Gertler. Love, however, changed the story: what Gertler did not know was that it was not to him that she had eventually surrendered her much-discussed virginity, but to someone no one ever imagined. Quickly disabused of his initial perception of her as a boy, Strachey began to join her for long walks…
>
> One day he suddenly stopped and tried to hold and kiss her. She recounted this later in horror to Barbara, and plotted revenge. She slipped into his bedroom that night while he was sleeping, intending to cut off his beard. Instead, he opened his eyes, and she fell deeply, and permanently, in love.[88]

Her emphasis on Carrington's lack of love for Gertler as the primary reason why she did not want to have sex with him, rather than an innate apathy and/or repulsion towards the male body—as Carrington said in a letter to Gertler, she had "never felt any desire for [a man's body] in [her] life,"[89] a stark contrast to her later reflections on "so many lusts I have had in my youth, for various females."[90] The dominating Lytton narrative continues with an affirmation of Carrington's "permanent" love for him, a story that originated in Holroyd's biography of Lytton Strachey but is no longer cited in this newer article as it has become part of Bloomsbury mythology, so widely recognized that it does not require a source.

---

[88] Gretchen Gerzina Holbrook, "'[T]here were so many things I wanted to do & didn't': The Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art," in *Queer Bloomsbury,* ed. Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016,) 189-209.
[89] Carrington to Gertler, April 16, 1915, in *Carrington's Letters,* 19.
[90] Carrington to Alix Strachey, Winter 1924, in *Carrington's Letters,* 281.

Gerzina also describes the nonmonogamy which marked Carrington's marriage to Ralph: "Whatever they imagined marriage might be, it soon involved affairs on both sides, Carrington with Partridge's close friend Gerald Brenan, and Ralph with a series of women. At first Ralph did not seem to mind, but then he made it clear that infidelity was fine for him, but not for his wife."[91] It might also be important to discuss the social grace Carrington was required to demonstrate towards Ralph's mistress Frances, grace which was not reciprocated by Ralph towards Carrington in the slightest—this is certainly an aspect of Carrington's life shaped by her socialization as a woman which reveals much about the social identities of the group when viewed through a gendered lens.

Gerzina does provide some analysis into the misogynistic attitudes towards Carrington's relationship with Henrietta:

> Her friends' responses to this affair are fascinating, and show how misogyny crept into what otherwise seems a very sexually open group. Brenan, far from being jealous initially, actually offered them his rooms for their trysts. He had always found her sexual interest in him 'unpredictable' (Brenan 85), and did not view her as a lesbian, despite her intense fling with Henrietta. Ralph worried that she would be hurt, for Bingham had a reputation for seducing and abandoning both men and women, but he showed none of the possessiveness he had about other men. Lytton too worried that her heart would be broken, as seemed inevitable, since her emotional investment seemed so great.[92]

This, primarily, is what I would argue is missing from her 1989 biography; the inclusion of an acknowledgement of it in this article makes it all the better for it. Gerzina provides an interrogation of Carrington's relationship with Poppett John complete with drawings and photos that had not been previously shown in her biography, asserting that the relationship was very likely nonsexual but still undeniably romantic and flirtatious, despite their seemingly very sexual nature coupled with the overt correspondence that exists between Carrington and Poppett. What

[91] Gerzina, in "The Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art," 198.
[92] Gerzina, in "The Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art," 201-202.

is the motive behind denying the sexual nature of their relationship? For Carrington to be over thirty while pursuing a sixteen-year-old girl is certainly troublesome, certainly stomach-turning and undeniably would be nice to brush aside. But biographers have a responsibility to interrogate the less-than-appealing aspects of their subject's life; even perhaps a questioning of what exactly their relationship consisted of would provide useful insight into how Carrington coped with losing Henrietta. While it certainly isn't pretty, it is *more* than certainly relevant.

Gerzina concludes the essay with a quote which appears to be a reflection on her earlier biography:

> 'Recent scholarship on Bloomsbury shows how easy it becomes for biographers and critics to pass authoritative judgments that enforce highly normative values', writes Christopher Reed. 'Much about Bloomsbury – and 1920s culture more generally – surprised and discomfited later generations, as evidenced by reactions to less stylized (more explicit, less campy) explanations of Bloomsbury's attitudes toward sexuality when these appeared decades later.' Carrington, in her life and art, and even in her death, challenged all normativity.[93]

What, then, is *latent* about Carrington's queer life? The title "Queer Potentials" implies dormancy, undeveloped sexuality, a story that requires reading between the lines to understand the full implications of. If Carrington challenged normativity in all of her life and art, why is the essay called "Queer Potentials" rather than "Queer Realities?" However, the acknowledgement of biographers' tendency to pass authoritative judgements which enforce normative values—primarily, in Carrington's case, ones of heterosexuality as a prevailing narrative—is absolutely necessary, and rather fitting considering the centrality of Lytton in Gerzina's biography of Carrington. Reed himself does not implicate Gerzina in this; however, she clearly found it fitting enough to reference with thirty years of hindsight regarding her biography.

Christopher Reed's aforementioned writing on Bloomsbury sexuality and biographical tendencies also offers an important framework for studies of Carrington's life. In "Bloomsbury

[93] Gerzina, in "The Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art," 208.

as Queer Subculture," he writes about the importance of authorship in how it partakes in authority, and the pathologization of sexuality both in biography and in memory:

> The issue of choice is important. Vanessa Bell, Dora Carrington, and Lydia Lopokova all rejected men who desired them sexually when they chose men who desired men. This can be psychologized on an individual level. We are told that … Carrington's boyishness extended to ambivalence about her gender and sexuality (as she put it, "I hanker after intimacies, which another side of my nature is perpetually at war against")... Whatever the relevance of these explanations, they all presume that a woman's decision to opt out of the conventions of heterosexual coupledom ("we'll not 'set up' in a house with a neat maid in black and white and napkin rings," insisted Carrington of her relationship with Strachey) requires an explanation framed as a psychological problem. What if, rejecting psychology's tendency to conflate normativity with health in a model of pathology and treatment, we instead followed Vanessa Bell in pathologizing sexual possession and jealousy?[94]

Reed's insights place the biographer at the forefront of creation of an understanding of a person's life, arguing that even implicitly understood frameworks become apparent in biography. This is an approach I hope to take in understanding Gerzina's biography of Carrington; despite the fact that her biography is sympathetic to Carrington and does not purposely omit information or try to construct an untrue narrative, it still retains the structures of misogyny and heterosexism, at no fault of Gerzina's own but as evidence of these troubling trends in the biographic tradition.

Concluding Thoughts

Carrington's life cannot be told in absolutes, whether those absolutes pertain to her fraught understanding of her gender, the question of a label for her sexuality, the true nature of her relationship with Lytton, or any other facet of her life imaginable. There is no right answer to how much of her life was shaped by the environment surrounding her and how much of it was

[94] Christopher Reed, "Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group,* ed. Victoria Rosner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 71-89.

inherent to her character. There is no final piece of the puzzle to Carrington that will suddenly make her relationships, her loves and lusts, her oddities and quirks all make sense. Yet by piecing together a record of Carrington's life that is based not only upon the surviving correspondence and other first-person documents that she left behind but on how the scholarship and media portrayal that followed her death shaped a widespread perception of her personality, it is possible to begin to understand her.

"I feel like I know her," I said to a friend after completing my preliminary research on Carrington, a sentiment I've said many times before about other subjects I've written about. Perhaps this is the downfall of the biographer, an assumption of authority. Then again, is it so wrong to want to set the record straight? There is no escaping the feeling of knowledge that comes from spending time with the life materials that somebody left behind; my experience studying Carrington is no exception to this rule. However, I hope that I have perhaps begun to interrogate which structures have shaped the narratives that exist of Carrington's life and death without attempting to enforce a certain narrative onto her story. Adrienne Rich, in her groundbreaking article on compulsory heterosexuality, wrote that women "may have faithfully or ambivalently obeyed the institution [of marriage], but our feelings — and our sensuality — have not been tamed or contained within it."[95] This holds true for Carrington, who refused to be tamed or contained in her life; even posthumously, her life's story of sexuality, of passion and desire and discomfort and curiosity, is thrashing in its restraints, ready to escape.

[95] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631-660, at 654.

Bibliography

Atkinson, Kate. “Ellis, Havelock (1859-1939).” In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, edited by Vassiliki Kolocotroni. Oxfordshire: Routledge, February 5, 2017. dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781135000356-REM16.

Bingham, Emily. *Irrepressible: The Jazz Age Life of Henrietta Bingham*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

Carrington. Biography, 1995.

Carrington, Dora. *Carrington: Letters and Extracts from Her Diaries*. Edited by David Garnett, n.d.

——— *Carrington's Letters*. Edited by Anne Chisholm. London: Vintage Books, 2017.

Holbrook Gerzina, Gretchen. *Carrington: A Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989.

——— “‘[T]Here Were so Many Things I Wanted to Do & Didn’t’: The Queer Potential of Carrington’s Life and Art.” In *Queer Bloomsbury*, edited by Brenda Helt and Madelyn Deltoff, 189–209. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

Holland, Kathryn. “Late Victorian and Modern Feminist Intertexts: The Strachey Women’s Roles in A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas.” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 75–98.

Holroyd, Michael. *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

Kent, Susan. “Gender reconstruction after the First World War.” *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century.* Harold L. Smith, ed. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.

Kuhn, Phillip. “Footnotes in the History of British Psychoanalysis: Observing Ernest Jones Discerning the Works of Sigmund Freud, 1905-1908.” *Psychoanalysis & History* 16, no. 1 (2014): 5–54. https://doi.org/doi:10.3366/pah.2014.0138.

LaPlanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac Books, 1988.

Loesberg, Jonathan. “The Afterlife of Victorian Sexuality: Foucault and Neo-Victorian Historical Fiction.” *Clio* 36, no. 3 (2007): 361–89.

Morrell, Ottoline. *Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell: A Study in Friendship 1873-1915*. Edited by Robert Gathorne-Hardy. New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc, 1964.

Reed, Christopher. “Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, edited by Victoria Rosner, 71–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Rich, Adrienne. “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631-660, at 654.

Wolfe, Jesse. *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Woolf, Virginia. “Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 4,” 1932.

———. “Old Bloomsbury.” In *Moments of Being*. Boston: Mariner Books, 1985.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume VIII | Issue I Article II

Freedom Waders: Chicago's Struggle for the Right to Swim

Alexandre Hinton
alexandre.hinton@mail.mcgill.ca

FREEDOM WADERS: CHICAGO'S STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO SWIM

ALEXANDRE HINTON

Abstract: This essay examines the pivotal role of the Rainbow Beach wade-ins in challenging Chicago's segregated swimming areas during the civil rights movement. Led by young activists, including NAACP Youth Council leader Velma Murphy Hill, these protests faced violent resistance but highlighted the city's entrenched racism. The essay explores Chicago's history of racial violence at beaches, beginning with the 1919 race riot, and argues that the wade-ins were instrumental in accelerating white flight and reshaping segregation tactics. Finally, it analyzes how de facto segregation at Chicago's beaches continues today through policies like permitting, beach badges, and environmental barriers.

Velma Murphy Hill, a 21-year-old NAACP Youth Council Leader, recalled her emotions of the morning of August 28th, 1960, "I was saying to myself, 'don't be nervous, don't throw up,' because you're the leader here and you gotta be cool."[1] Hill's worries were well warranted. Within a matter of hours, the coalition of young student activists she was leading would be surrounded by a violent white mob on the shores of Lake Michigan. Despite the violence, Hill's group of activists, dubbed by the *Chicago Defender* as the "freedom waders," participated in sit-in-like protests at Chicago's Rainbow Beach repeatedly over the course of two years.[2] This paper will argue that the wade-ins at Rainbow Beach were a pivotal moment in the history of Chicago's segregated swimming areas. First, Chicago's deeply racist and violent tendencies in places of recreational swimming up until the wade-ins will be revealed. Secondly, the Rainbow Beach wade-ins and other civil rights actions in Chicago in the 1960s will be shown to contribute to the white flight phenomenon and the metamorphosis of segregationist tactics. Lastly, de facto

[1] Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview, August 22, 2022.
[2] Richard Steele, "Wading into Chicago's Segregated Past," WBEZ Chicago (WBEZ Chicago, January 6, 2016), https://www.wbez.org/stories/wading-into-chicagos-segregated-past/877ba2e1-5dc7-4c61-ae0e-6cc546bd2f92.

segregation of Chicago's beaches through permitting, beach badges, and environmental contaminants will be proven to exist up until the present.

Chicago's dark history of preventing African Americans from using the city's beaches is best exemplified by the race riot of 1919. On July 27, 1919, Eugene Williams, a seventeen-year-old African American teenager, accidentally drifted on a homemade raft into the waters of an informally segregated beach on 29th street.[3] In response, George Stauber, a twenty-five-year-old white man, threw a rock at Williams, striking him in the head. Williams fell off the raft and drowned to death.[4] Dan Callahan, a white patrolman, not only refused to arrest Stauber but also prevented an African American policeman from doing so.[5] William's death incited violence from both Whites and Blacks, leading to one of the deadliest riots in American history. Thirty-eight people were killed, and property damage was estimated in the millions.[6] African Americans, who made up just over five percent of Chicago's population, suffered two-thirds of the deaths and the overwhelming majority of the property damage.[7] African American residents in Chicago's "Black Belt," an area of the city which was the center of the African American community, found themselves in a similar situation to Eugene Williams, "struck down by riot violence with little awareness of what caused the attack."[8] While the race riot of 1919 is often highlighted as an important moment in Chicago's history, the city witnessed many other acts of racial violence associated with recreational swimming.

---

[3] Andrew J Conovaloff, "Searching for Eugene Williams," Chicago Magazine, accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.chicagomag.com/city-life/August-2019/Searching-for-Eugene-Williams/.
[4] Jonathan S. Coit, "'Our Changed Attitude': Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 2 (2012): pp. 225-256, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537781412000035, 230.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Coit, "'Our Changed Attitude': Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," 231.

Chicago's beaches have repeatedly been the site of prejudice against African Americans. Numerous incidents of violence centered around Jackson Park Beach, located south of 57th Street. In 1925, a white mob chased a young Black couple off the beach, beating them with sticks. When the couple asked a policeman for assistance, he responded, "This beach is for white people only. Come on and get out of here and go to your own beach: that's where you belong."[9] In response, the couple pointed out that African American beaches lacked bathhouses or showers and were overrun by rats.[10] Violence was not limited to adults or teenagers. In 1929, a white gang threw stones at a group of twenty-three African American Girl Scouts, driving them from Jackson Park Beach.[11] In 1931, a report declared that on South Side beaches, "groups of colored bathers have been insulted, molested, or threatened by bands of white hoodlums who resented their presence at the public recreation places."[12] At Calumet Beach on Chicago's South Side, African American picnickers faced violent mobs and were warned not to return to established all-white recreational areas.[13] In 1957, a mob of approximately six thousand White people threatened a group of Black families and chased them from the beach in what is known today as the Calumet riot.[14] These examples of violence show the breadth of resistance African Americans encountered on Chicago's beaches before the Rainbow Beach Wade-Ins. Yet, discriminatory behavior inspired by recreational swimming was not only limited to the beaches of Lake Michigan.

---

[9] Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Univ Of Pennsylvania Pr, 2014), 28.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "Racial Conflict at the Beaches," *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1929.
[12] Horace Roscoe Cayton and St Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis* (London: J. Cape, 1946), 104.
[13] Mary Lou Finley et al., *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 107.
[14] Mary Lou Finley et al., *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North*, 293.

Racial intimidation was a persistent issue at public swimming pools leading up to the Rainbow Beach wade-ins. By 1910, Chicago's Park Board had not located any recreational swimming pools within Chicago's "Black Belt," which stretched from 22nd Street to 51st Street.[15] This lack forced African Americans to find relief from hot summer days in predominantly white neighborhoods, where public pools were prevalent.[16] In the 1910s, White swimmers sometimes abused Black people in an attempt to discourage them from using the pools.[17] A playground director told the Chicago Commission on Race Relations that he had frequently seen White boys "maliciously dunk Black boys under the water and hold them down until they were close to drowning."[18] An officer at the Hardin Square recreational pool boasted that he could summon countless young men in the neighborhood to "procure arms and fight shoulder to shoulder with me if a Negro should say one word back."[19] Beyond these isolated incidents, the absence of pools in predominantly Black neighborhoods would have long-lasting effects. On a hot, mid-July afternoon in 1966, several teenagers opened a fire hydrant on Chicago's West Side as they did not have easy access to a neighborhood pool.[20] The teenagers were met with "rocks, bottles, and bricks" from White passersby.[21] The hydrant incident ignited three days of intense rioting on Chicago's West Side.[22] The discriminatory culture of Chicago's swimming pools shows that African Americans' right to recreational swimming was not only challenged on beaches but was a more widespread issue within the city.

---

[15] Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Univ of North Carolina Pr, 2010), Chapter 3.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago; a Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot in 1919* (New York, Arno Press, 1968), 287.
[19] Wiltse, *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, Chapter 3.
[20] Wiltse, *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, Chapter 7.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

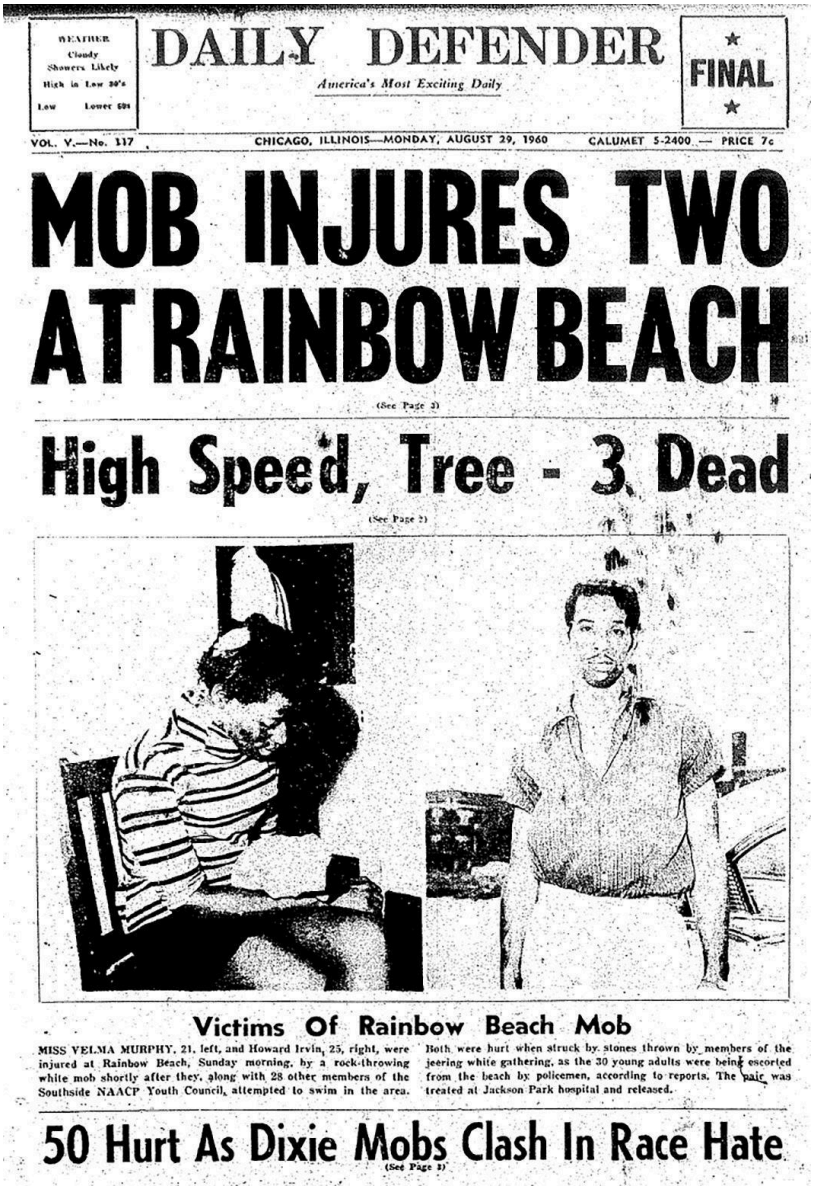
1960 marked the beginning of a new phase of the civil rights movement, one which challenged White segregationist policies directly. Direct activism, in less confrontational forms, had been used before 1960 in places of recreation in Chicago. For example, pioneering members of CORE carried out a major picket line campaign against Chicago's segregated White City Roller Rink in 1942.[23] However, the bolder sit-in movement was born in 1960 by four freshmen from Greensboro, North Carolina.[24] The college students were harassed, but media coverage of the event helped ultimately shift national opinion in favor of new civil rights legislation.[25] Groups such as SNCC helped propel the tactic across the nation to various areas, including beaches. In late April 1960, over one hundred African Americans, many of them children, attempted a wade-in of Biloxi Beach, Mississippi. The group was met by a White mob wielding "baseball bats, pipes, sticks, and chains," who viciously beat them."[26] Yet, the incident received media attention and caused outrage.[27] Later, in 1964, wade-ins were met with violence in St. Augustine, Florida, as White militants badly beat activists. Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, Martin Luther King Jr's advisor who joined the protest, later reported that "he feared more for his life and those with him on that occasion than at any other time during the civil rights movement."[28] The publicity given to the St. Augustine campaign helped facilitate growing support and the eventual passage of the civil rights bill.[29]

---

[23] Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, 4.
[24] "Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In," Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In (Educational Materials: African American Odyssey) (Library of Congress), accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/educate/lunch.html.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Gilbert Mason, *Beaches, Blood and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 68.
[27] Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, 163.
[28] David R. Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1991), 4.
[29] Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, 168.

The sit-in movement had a direct impact on Velma Murphy Hill in 1960. “I could feel the winds of change,” she said.[30] That summer, on a picket line in Chicago, Velma met a young activist who was being mentored by Bayard Rustin and A. Phillip Randolph.[31] His name was Norman Hill, and soon the two began to date. After hearing about an African American policeman who was run out of Rainbow Beach, the new couple began organizing a wade-in campaign. On August 28th, 1960, Norman and Velma, leading a group of thirty students, entered Rainbow Beach, one of the last remaining beaches segregated by custom.[32] Soon, a gang of White youths encircled the waders, hurling rocks and stones and screaming racial slurs. “We didn’t run, but we didn’t walk slow either,” Velma recalled.[33] One of the rocks struck Velma on the head, creating a wound that required over 17 stitches.[34] Norman helped to carry her off the beach and into a changing room. Eventually, an ambulance arrived, and she was taken to a local hospital.[35]

[30] Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Nick Juravich, “Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960,” Black Quotidian: Everyday History in African-American Newspapers, accessed April 11, 2023, https://blackquotidian.supdigital.org/bq/august-29-1960.
[35] Ibid.



WEATHER
Cloudy
Showers Likely
High in Low 70's
Low Lower 60s

DAILY DEFENDER
America's Most Exciting Daily

★ FINAL ★

VOL. V.—No. 117 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS—MONDAY, AUGUST 29, 1960 CALUMET 5-2400 — PRICE 7c

MOB INJURES TWO AT RAINBOW BEACH

(See Page 2)

High Speed, Tree - 3 Dead

(See Page 2)

Victims Of Rainbow Beach Mob

MISS VELMA MURPHY, 21, left, and Howard Irvin, 25, right, were injured at Rainbow Beach, Sunday morning, by a rock-throwing white mob shortly after they, along with 28 other members of the Southside NAACP Youth Council, attempted to swim in the area. Both were hurt when struck by stones thrown by members of the jeering white gathering, as the 30 young adults were being escorted from the beach by policemen, according to reports. The pair was treated at Jackson Park hospital and released.

50 Hurt As Dixie Mobs Clash In Race Hate

(See Page 3)

Figure 1. "Mob Injures Two at Rainbow Beach" | Source: Chicago Defender

The next day the *Chicago Defender,* the first Black newspaper to have a circulation of over 100,000 and a mainstay of the Chicago civil rights movement, published a front-page story about the wade-ins (Figure 1).[36][37] The *Chicago Defender's* editors even went to the lengths to use

[36] "The Chicago Defender," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html.
[37] "Cover Page," *Chicago Defender*, August 29, 1960.

a specially enlarged font for the headline, while the *Chicago Tribune* buried the story in its back pages.[38] The difference in coverage was emblematic of the mainstream media in Chicago failing to highlight resistance to the desegregation of recreational spaces. The *Chicago Tribune* had a long history dating back to the 19th century of it running racist editorials.[39] Yet, regardless of the inadequate coverage from the *Tribune*, the *Defender*'s coverage helped spark a larger response from young activists in the Chicago area.[40] Stitches still healing in her head, Velma Murphy Hill continued leading the wade-ins into September.[4142] The summer of 1961 brought a new set of wade-ins to Rainbow Beach. During one wade-in, three hundred police and over fifty squad cars were required to keep the peace. Yet, the police stood up for the waders, arresting ten individuals for throwing bricks, bottles, and other projectiles at the young activists.[43] The conduct of the police in this instance was an important victory for the wade-in movement. Another victory occurred a week later when one of the white rioters was fined $200 by a white judge.[44] The successes of the movement were encapsulated by the events of August 6, 1961, when the waders were met with no resistance for the first time since the wade-ins began.[45]

Unlike the 'freedom waders,' many civil rights actions in Chicago in the 1960s were not successes. Activists were drawn to Chicago due in part to its corrupt political machine led by Mayor Richard J. Daley.[46] Daley's administration was known for not working equally for all residents, especially African Americans and other minorities.[47] Daley himself had belonged to an

[38] Nick Juravich, "Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960."
[39] Bruce McKittrick Cole, "The Chicago Press and the Know-Nothings 1850-1856" (dissertation, University of Chicago, n.d.).
[40] Nick Juravich, "Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960."
[41] Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill, interview.
[42] Nick Juravich, "Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960."
[43] "Rioting Fades, Police Get Tough, Arrest 10 At Beach," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 10, 1961.
[44] "Blonde Rioter Draws $200 Fine For Sand Kicking Act," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 13, 1961.
[45] Nick Juravich, "Wade in the Water," *Chicago Studies*, 2008, 101.
[46] Richard Allan Anderson, "The City That Worked: Machine Politics and Urban Liberalism in Chicago, 1945-1963" (dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2018).
[47] Ibid.

Irish gang that participated in the beating of Blacks in the 1919 riot.[48] In 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. brought his crusade to the windy city by joining the Chicago Freedom Movement, a coalition of 44 civil rights organizations working to improve living conditions for Blacks.[49] Unfortunately, King was unable to prevent violence on both sides. Just as Eugene Williams and Velma Murphy Hill had taken rocks to the head, King was met with the same fate. When King stepped out of a car in Marquette Park on Aug. 5, 1966, he was met with the faces of 700 angry Whites.[50] King and hundreds of demonstrators had scarcely set out on a march when he was struck by a rock. "The blow knocked King to one knee, and he thrust out an arm to break the fall," the *Chicago Tribune* reported.[51] "I've been in many demonstrations all across the South, but I can say that I have never seen — even in Mississippi and Alabama — mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I've seen here in Chicago," King told reporters afterward.[52] Mayor Daley tried to end King's movement by agreeing to build public housing, but many of the promises were never fulfilled.[53] Tragically, immediately after the agreement was signed and King gave up his apartment in Lawndale, "the interracial nonviolent civil rights movement in Chicago disappeared."[54] Further, the SCLC's Operation Breadbasket, a project under the leadership of Jesse Jackson, failed to meet its goals of abolishing racist hiring practices by companies working in African American neighborhoods.[55]

---

[48] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land the Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (Paw Prints, 2008), 226.
[49] "Chicago Campaign," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, May 21, 2018, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chicago-campaign.
[50] Ron Grossman, "50 Years Ago: MLK's March in Marquette Park Turned Violent, Exposed Hate," Chicago Tribune, May 11, 2019, https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-mlk-king-marquette-park-1966-flashback-perspec-0731-md-20160726-story.html.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] "Chicago Campaign," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute.
[54] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, 240.
[55] "Operation Breadbasket," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, June 5, 2018, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/operation-breadbasket.

Civil rights direct action protests in the 1960s contributed directly to White flight. Chicago's South Shore neighborhood, which was adjacent to Rainbow Beach and was primarily White in 1960, registered more membership cards to their local neighborhood commission the day after the first wade-in of 1961 than any other day of the year.[56] The sharp increase in memberships for a neighborhood organization known to oppose the wade-ins shows that the confrontational nature of the protests scared White residents. Over the course of the next year, when the South Shore Commission failed to prevent a more gradual integration of Rainbow Beach, membership rates sharply dropped.[57] The membership drop was symbolic of the White flight which would occur in the neighborhood. In the 1960s, the neighborhood went from being 89.6 percent White in 1960 to 70 percent Black by 1970.[58] As of 2015, the South Shore was 93.5 percent Black.[59] In neighborhoods where direct action protests occurred, such as Englewood, where a battle was waged over subpar and segregated schools, racial profiles dramatically changed.[60] From 1960 to 1980, Englewood's White population plummeted from 51,583 to 818.[61] White flight began in the 1950s after the Brown V. Board decision and was caused by a complex set of factors.[62] These factors included but were not limited to the riots in response to Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, which caused over twelve thousand Army troopers to descend on Chicago, and a decline in manufacturing, which cost the city approximately 251,000 jobs

[56] Nick Juravich, "Wade in the Water," 97.
[57] Ibid.
[58] William Voegeli, "The Truth about White Flight," City Journal, January 20, 2021, https://www.city-journal.org/truth-about-white-flight-from-cities.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Katherine Skiba, "Feb. 19, 2016: Arrest Photo of Young Activist Bernie Sanders Emerges from Tribune Archives," Chicago Tribune, January 23, 2021, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-bernie-sanders-1963-chicago-arrest-20160219-story.html.
[61] "White Flight, by the Numbers," NBC Chicago (NBC Chicago, May 6, 2013), https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/white-flight-by-the-numbers/1951412/.
[62] William Voegeli, "The Truth about White Flight."

between 1960 and 1970.[6364] Yet, the examples of the South Shore and Englewood show that direct action helped accelerate the process. Wade-ins and other forms of protest brought the reality of integration to Whites' doorstep.

As many Whites fled inner Chicago for newly established suburbs, private beaches were established and became another way for Whites to resist integration.[65] Historian Kevin M. Kruse, in his book *White Flight*, showed the diverse areas of White resistance to desegregation in Atlanta from schools, parks, golf courses, housing developments, transportation networks, and many other elements.[66] Chicago's beaches are just another example of the many locations associated with White flight. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that the Whitest, wealthiest municipalities have the most restrictive public beach access policies today.[67] Further, their report found that places with large populations of people of color and working-class residents tend to have open access to public beaches, which on average, tend to be less clean.[68] Chicago's wealthy and overwhelmingly White North Shore: Lake Forest, Highland Park, Glencoe, Winnetka, Kenilworth, and Wilmette, populations increased due to white flight.[69] Today, each of these North Shore neighborhoods charge an astonishing $125 or greater per day for a visit by a family of five or require proof of residency.[70] This stark segregation can be seen in a chart compiled from the US Census's American Community Survey, which shows the

---

[63] Gary Rivlin, "The Night Chicago Burned," Chicago Reader, August 20, 2021, https://chicagoreader.com/news-politics/the-night-chicago-burned/.
[64] "Employment and Unemployment - Chicago," United States Department of Labor, n.d., https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/employmentandunemployment_chicago.html
[65] Lucas Stephens and Samuel Kling, "The Right to the Shoreline: Race, Exclusion, and Public Beaches in Metropolitan Chicago," Chicago Council on Global Affairs (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 22, 2020), https://globalaffairs.org/research/report/right-shoreline-race-exclusion-and-public-beaches-metropolitan-chicago.
[66] Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight* (S.I.: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[67] Lucas Stephens and Samuel Kling, "The Right to the Shoreline: Race, Exclusion, and Public Beaches in Metropolitan Chicago."
[68] Ibid.
[69] United States Census Bureau, "Table 17. Illinois - Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 1990," accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/tab17.html.
[70] Ibid.

dramatic differences between South Shore beaches, which are almost exclusively public, and North Shore beaches, almost all of which have highly exclusionary policies (Figure 2). Beaches that are isolated from Chicago, such as Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, which is mainly White and middle-class, are free and open.[71] These open beaches are primarily defined by a lack of transit connections to Chicago, which prevents low-income groups from reaching the beaches.[72]

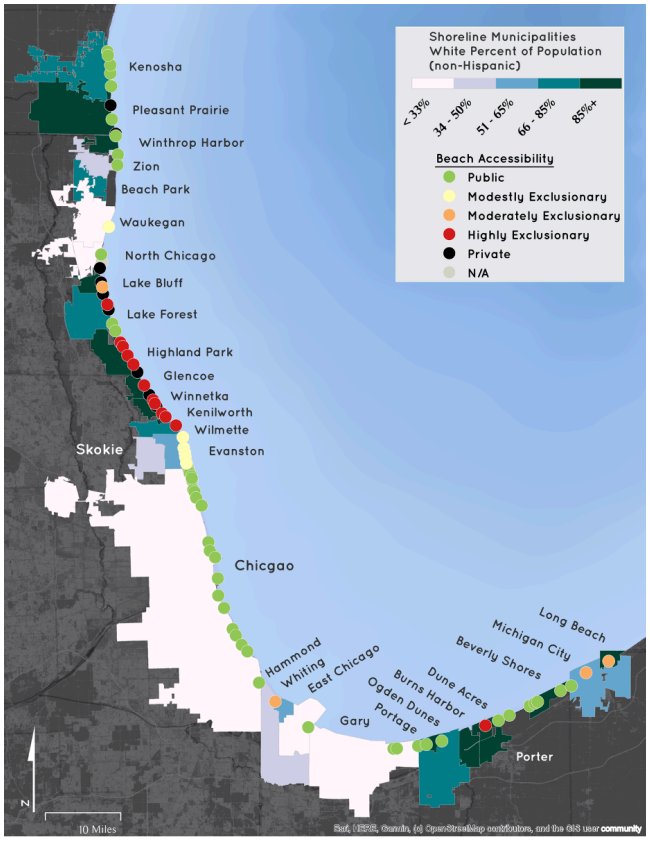


Figure 2. Municipal Beach Access Policies Map Analysis 2020 | Source: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Chicago's beaches are not only segregated by expensive beach passes and residency requirements, but the city's beaches are also further segregated by environmental contaminants. Chicago's inner city public beaches often fail water quality tests. A review of bacteria data

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

collected found that inner city beaches had water pollution levels that put swimmers at risk of getting sick on more than 80 percent of the days on which testing was conducted.[73] The highest levels of bacteria were all recorded on the South Side and included South Shore Beach and 63rd Street Beach.[74] An analysis of water quality data showed that Rainbow Beach fails the strictest Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) water standards more than 20 percent of the time.[75] Rainbow Beach was listed as one of the five most polluted beaches in Chicago by *Curbed*.[76] Meanwhile, Chicago's cleanest and safest beaches to swim at are located primarily next to affluent and White North Shore neighborhoods.[77] In 2018, the South Shore had 34 days of fecal bacteria above EPA guidelines, while the North Shore's Foster Beach had a mere 6 days above guidelines.[78]

The continued de facto segregation of Chicago's beaches and the poor conditions of public beaches frequented by minorities is reflective of the state of racial conditions in Chicago as a whole. Chicago attracted slightly more than 500,000 of the approximately 7 million African Americans who left the South during the Great Migration.[79] When Ida Mae Gladney, a sharecropper from Mississippi, described moving to Chicago in 1937, she exclaimed, "It looked like heaven to me."[80] Yet, the optimistic vision which Gladney described never panned out the way civil rights leaders intended. Tens of thousands of Black residents have left South and West

[73] "Study Finds High Levels of Fecal Bacterial at Chicago-Area Beaches," WTTW News, accessed April 11, 2023, https://news.wttw.com/2019/07/23/study-finds-high-levels-fecal-bacterial-chicago-area-beaches.
[74] "Study Finds High Levels of Fecal Bacteria at Chicago-Area Beaches," WTTW News.
[75] Tribune Graphics, "Map: Polluted Beaches in the Chicago Area," Chicago Tribune, May 21, 2019, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/chi-map-polluted-beaches-20140717-htmlstory.html.
[76] AJ LaTrace, "The Five Dirtiest & Most Polluted Beaches in Chicago," Curbed Chicago (Curbed Chicago, July 16, 2014), https://chicago.curbed.com/2014/7/16/10072522/the-five-dirtiest-beaches-in-chicago.
[77] Monica Eng, "The Scoop on Poop at Chicago's Beaches," WBEZ Chicago (WBEZ Chicago, September 21, 2021), https://www.wbez.org/stories/the-scoop-on-poop-at-chicagos-beaches/62122644-65d9-4fc4-b136-59825ffd45c4.
[78] Monica Eng, "The Scoop on Poop at Chicago's Beaches," NPR (NPR, July 1, 2019), https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/07/01/737182779/the-scoop-on-poop-at-chicago-s-beaches.
[79] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, 70.
[80] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020), 228.

side neighborhoods in recent years in what has been referred to as a "reverse migration."[81] According to census data, Chicago's Black population was lowered by about 10% between 2010 and 2020.[82] Chicago's Black population dropped to a mere 787,551 in 2020, its lowest number since the mid-1950s.[83] While gentrification is partly to blame, the exodus is largely due to the city of Chicago neglecting African American communities. Neighborhoods such as Englewood, which experienced the highest number of homicides, have also had the largest outflow of Black residents.[84] African Americans in Chicago continue to face forms of segregation at beaches, schools, buildings, parks, utilities, police precincts, and many other areas.[85]

The kinds of attacks which resulted in rocks being thrown at Eugene Williams, Velma Murphy Hill, and Martin Luther King Jr. may be rare occurrences today, but segregation is still alive and well in Chicago. Segregation of Chicago's beaches morphed in the twentieth century. The first sixty years of the century were defined by overt violence in places of recreational swimming. Yet, the victories of the Rainbow Beach wade-ins marked a significant change for segregationists. White flight, which was escalated by sit-in-like demonstrations, created a new form of segregated beaches: ones that continue today and rely on exorbitant beach passes, town permit regulations, and environmental contaminants. However, while segregation persists, violent White supremacist incidents have been radically curtailed since the 1960s. This change can be attested to the Freedom Waders and the countless grassroots civil rights groups which

[81] Charmaine Runes and Jacqueline Serrato, "Mapping Chicago's Racial Segregation," South Side Weekly, February 27, 2022, https://southsideweekly.com/mapping-chicagos-racial-segregation/.
[82] William Lee, "As the Black Population Continues to Drop in Chicago and Illinois, Few Regret Their Move: 'I Have Peace'," Chicago Tribune, accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-black-residents-exodus-census-20211122-uphhe7baknngtjoh45uhnqjepwy-story.html.
[83] Juan Perez Jr. et al., "Black People Are Leaving Chicago En Masse. It's Changing the City's Power Politics.," POLITICO, accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/12/07/chicago-black-population-decline-523563.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

challenged segregation. In the future, the Freedom Waders' bravery can act as a beacon for activists to draw their own lines in the sand.

Bibliography

Runes, Charmaine, and Jacqueline Serrato. “Mapping Chicago's Racial Segregation.” South Side Weekly, February 27, 2022. https://southsideweekly.com/mapping-chicagos-racial-segregation/.

Voegeli, William. “The Truth about White Flight.” City Journal, January 20, 2021. https://www.city-journal.org/article/truth-about-white-flight-from-cities.

Anderson, Richard Allan. “The City That Worked: Machine Politics and Urban Liberalism in Chicago, 1945-1963.” Dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2018.

“Blonde Rioter Draws $200 Fine For Sand Kicking Act.” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 13, 1961.

Cayton, Horace Roscoe, and St Clair Drake. *Black Metropolis*. London: J. Cape, 1946.

“Chicago Campaign.” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, May 21, 2018. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chicago-campaign.

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations. *The Negro in Chicago; a Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot in 1919*. New York, Arno Press, 1968.

“The Chicago Defender.” PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html#:~:text=The%20Chicago%20Defender%20was%20the,%22The%20Great%20Migration%22%20movement.

Coit, Jonathan S. “‘Our Changed Attitude’: Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 2 (2012): 225–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537781412000035.

Colburn, David R. *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980*. Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1991.

Cole, Bruce McKittrick. “The Chicago Press and the Know-Nothings 1850-1856.” Dissertation, University of Chicago, n.d.

Conovaloff, Andrew J. “Searching for Eugene Williams.” Chicago Magazine. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://www.chicagomag.com/city-life/August-2019/Searching-for-Eugene-Williams/.

“Cover Page.” *Chicago Defender*, August 29, 1960.

Eng, Monica. “The Scoop on Poop at Chicago's Beaches.” NPR. NPR, July 1, 2019. https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/07/01/737182779/the-scoop-on-poop-at-chicago-s-beaches.

Eng, Monica. “The Scoop on Poop at Chicago's Beaches.” WBEZ Chicago. WBEZ Chicago, September 21, 2021. https://www.wbez.org/stories/the-scoop-on-poop-at-chicagos-beaches/62122644-65d9-4fc4-b136-59825ffd45c4.

Finley, Mary Lou, Bernard LaFayette, James R. Ralph, and Pam Smith. *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018.

Graphics of the Chicago Tribune. “Map: Polluted Beaches in the Chicago Area.” Chicago Tribune, May 21, 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/chi-map-polluted-beaches-20140717-htmlstory.html.

“Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In.” Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In (Educational Materials: African American Odyssey). Library of Congress. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/educate/lunch.html.

Grossman, Ron. “50 Years Ago: MLK's March in Marquette Park Turned Violent, Exposed Hate.” Chicago Tribune, May 11, 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-mlk-king-marquette-park-1966-flashback-perspec-0731-md-20160726-story.html.

Hinton, Alexandre, Velma Murphy Hill, and Norman Hill. Norman and Velma Hill Interview. Personal, August 22, 2022.

Juravich, Nick. “Black Quotidian: August 29, 1960.” Black Quotidian: Everyday History in African-American Newspapers. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://blackquotidian.supdigital.org/bq/august-29-1960.

Juravich, Nick. “Wade in the Water.” *Chicago Studies*, 2008.

Kruse, Kevin M. *White Flight*. S.I.: Princeton University Press, 2013.

LaTrace, AJ. “The Five Dirtiest & Most Polluted Beaches in Chicago.” Curbed Chicago. Curbed Chicago, July 16, 2014. https://chicago.curbed.com/2014/7/16/10072522/the-five-dirtiest-beaches-in-chicago.

Lee, William. “As the Black Population Continues to Drop in Chicago and Illinois, Few Regret Their Move: 'I Have Peace'.” Chicago Tribune. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-black-residents-exodus-census-20211122-uphhe7bakngtjoh45uhnqjepwy-story.html.

Lemann, Nicholas. *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*. Paw Prints, 2008.

Mason, Gilbert. *Beaches, Blood and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

“Operation Breadbasket.” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, June 5, 2018. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/operation-breadbasket.

Perez Jr., Juan, Natalie Y. Moore, Lee Bey, and Shia Kapos. “Black People Are Leaving Chicago En Masse. It's Changing the City's Power Politics.” POLITICO. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/12/07/chicago-black-population-decline-523563.

“Racial Conflict at the Beaches.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1929.

"Rioting Fades, Police Get Tough, Arrest 10 At Beach." *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 10, 1961.

Skiba, Katherine. "Feb. 19, 2016: Arrest Photo of Young Activist Bernie Sanders Emerges from Tribune Archives." Chicago Tribune, January 23, 2021. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-bernie-sanders-1963-chicago-arrest-20160219-story.html.

Steele, Richard. "Wading into Chicago's Segregated Past." WBEZ Chicago. WBEZ Chicago, January 6, 2016. https://www.wbez.org/stories/wading-into-chicagos-segregated-past/.

Stephens, Lucas, and Samuel Kling. "The Right to the Shoreline: Race, Exclusion, and Public Beaches in Metropolitan Chicago." Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 22, 2020. https://globalaffairs.org/research/report/right-shoreline-race-exclusion-and-public-beaches-metropolitan-chicago.

"Study Finds High Levels of Fecal Bacteria at Chicago-Area Beaches." WTTW News. Accessed April 11, 2023. https://news.wttw.com/2019/07/23/study-finds-high-levels-fecal-bacterial-chicago-area-beaches.

United States Census Bureau, "Table 17. Illinois - Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 1990," accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/tab17.html.

"White Flight, by the Numbers." NBC Chicago. NBC Chicago, May 6, 2013. https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/white-flight-by-the-numbers/1951412/.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. London: Penguin Random House, 2020.

Wiltse, Jeff. *Contested Waters a Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. Univ of North Carolina Pr, 2010.

Wolcott, Victoria W. *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*. Univ Of Pennsylvania Pr, 2014.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume VIII | Issue I Article III

Before MMIW: Native American Women's Resistance to Systemic Violence in the Twentieth Century

Maddox Reimer
reimermaddox@gmail.com

BEFORE MMIW: NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN'S RESISTANCE TO SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

MADDOX REIMER

Abstract: The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) crisis represents one of the most urgent issues of racialized violence in modern-day Canada and the United States. While this crisis gained significant attention through grassroots activism and promotion in the early 1990s, historians have traced its roots to the enforced racialization of Native Americans through structural and legislative means that are rooted in the remnants of colonial power structures. Scholars have argued that while the racial ideologies used to marginalize Native Americans have transformed throughout history, violence has remained a constant threat that has been overlooked and/or ignored by law enforcement in Canada and the United States. This issue disproportionately affects women, who face significantly higher risks of domestic and sexual violence, as well as brutality from law enforcement.

In the early 1990s, activists in Canada and the United States formed the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement to address the crisis of systemic violence against Native American women. Throughout the following decades, federal and state legislation in the United States has moved towards allocating resources and support to tribal communities impacted by this crisis. While the MMIW movement has made considerable progress in the last thirty years towards raising awareness on this issue, there is currently an insufficient amount of research on the networks of support and activism that existed prior to MMIW. This research will connect examples of community support devised by Native American women in the United States—particularly safety and education shelters—throughout the twentieth century to the emergence of the MMIW movement in the 1990s. To this effect, this paper will argue that Native American women's awareness and response towards systemic violence long preceded the emergence of the MMIW movement; for decades prior, Native American women found

community-oriented ways of addressing this issue that subverted state and federal power structures in the United States. The legacy of these efforts, ultimately, is historically inseparable from a discussion on the MMIW movement.

A 2016 study funded by the National Institute of Justice found that over eighty percent of Native American women have experienced violence in their lifetime.[1] Further, researchers have pointed out that a lack of media coverage of these statistics has led to widespread ignorance towards this matter.[2] As platformed by the MMIW movement, acknowledgment of this crisis must take into account factors related to race, gender, and apparatuses of state and federal power—the media, for example—to engage the roots of such an issue critically. Regarding the racial dimensions of this crisis, a virtual exhibit published by American University notes that Native American women are "disproportionately targeted by those outside their own race," which represents an abnormality in patterns of violence in the United States.[3] While Native Americans in general are subjected to violence at disproportionate levels, an intersectional approach must also be taken to understand why Native women's experiences with violence constitute a "crisis." The rise of the MMIW movement in Canada in the 1990s, which eventually spread throughout the United States in the following decades, had adopted this approach; the movement signifies a grassroots effort towards resisting systemic, racialized, and gendered violence. This grassroots resistance, however, has clear historical precedents that must be considered.

---

[1] André Rosay, "Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and men." National Institute of Justice, (2016), https://nij.gov:443/journals/277/pages/violence-against-american-indians-alaska-natives.aspx

[2] Morgan Hawes, Danielle Slakoff, and Nikolay Anguelov, "Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Crisis: An Analysis of the NamUs Database," *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 34(2)*, (2023):184-207, https://doi.org/10.1177/08874034221098909

[3] "Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women: A Digital Exhibition," American University, accessed April 30, 2024, https://edspace.american.edu/mmiwlawsandlegacies/.

To understand the MMIW crisis, it must first be contextualized within hundreds of years of settler colonialism in North America. Historians have mapped the convergences of racism, capitalism, and patriarchy inherent under colonial power structures—past and present—as a framework for understanding systemic violence against Native American women.[4] On the connection between violence and settler colonialism, scholar Patrick Wolfe writes that settler colonialism is motivated primarily by motives of land expansion. In America, the "obstruction" created by Native American inhabitants towards European settlers' access to their land warranted the crafting of a racial categorization that "straightforwardly furthered the logic of elimination."[5] Compared to the racialization of people of African descent, whose enslavement became a source of labor and profit, Wolfe argues that Native Americans were merely racialized as bodies preventing the expansion of European territory. With the formation of settler colonial states in North America beginning in the sixteenth century, the ideology of settler colonialism has continued to define the relationship between White Americans, Native Americans, and land. While the manifestations of settler colonial ideologies have shifted—and perhaps softened in some ways—throughout history, its legacy has proven to be immutable up until the modern day.

Gender must be further analyzed in a discussion connecting the history of settler colonialism to the MMIW movement. In a journal article on colonial violence towards Native American women, author Hilary Weaver considers the transformation of gender roles in Native American communities before and after colonization. She writes that in many pre-colonial tribes, "[g]ender roles were usually balanced and egalitarian."[6] However, following the introduction of colonial, and hence patriarchal, power structures, Weaver notes that tribal general roles moved

[4] Hawes, Slakoff, and Anguelov, "Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Crisis."
[5] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409, doi:10.1080/14623520601056240.

[6] Hilary Weaver, "The Colonial Context of Violence: Reflections on Violence in the Lives of Native American Women," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(9), (2009): 1554. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260508323665

away from egalitarianism and "began to adopt internalized sexism and a type of 'trickle down patriarchy' found in contemporary Native communities."[7] While Native American communities writ large have faced disproportionate levels of violence in colonial and postcolonial American society, Weaver and other scholars provide a necessary framework for understanding how this experience is deeply gendered as well. Not only do Native American women face violence and oppression from state and federal powers—higher rates of police brutality, for example—but they are also subjected to patriarchal ideologies within their own tribal communities.[8] A book published in 2007 by Amnesty International provides a necessary synthesis of these ideas that points towards an understanding of this crisis in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This book points out that not only do Native American women face hugely disproportionate levels of sexual violence and homicide, but that the very acknowledgment of this crisis only skims the surface of reality. Popular understandings—and in turn responses—towards this issue are informed merely by law enforcement reports; this means, in effect, that one of the only ways to raise state and federal awareness is for Native American women to report it to the very power structures that are fueling it.[9] In turn, this issue highlights the need for research and activism that directly critiques state and federal law enforcement as perpetrators of violence against Native American women. The MMIW movement, in a contemporary context, must be supported as an organization working to this end.

Before a discussion on the historical precedents of the MMIW movement, this topic must be situated more deeply in discourses on race in America. The nature of MMIW—a response to racial gendered violence, in simple terms—requires an intersectional understanding of race and

---

[7] Ibid.

[8] Skylar Joseph, "A Modern Trail of Tears: The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) Crisis in the US." *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* 79 (2021). 10.1016/j.jflm.2021.102136.

[9] Amnesty International, *Maze of injustice: The failure to protect indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA.* (London: 2007), 14-18.

gender, rather than approaching these factors in isolation. In addition to providing a more dynamic conceptual framework for understanding this specific crisis, intersectionality has become foregrounded in a vast array of contemporary racial scholarship; adopting such an approach for a study of this nature assures the relevancy of this historical inquiry. Further, this paper's consideration of race will operate under the framework of "racialization" as used by sociology scholars Saher Selod and David Embrick in a 2013 article on Muslim American identity in the twenty-first century. Selod and Embrick argue that "[r]acialization as a concept reflects the changing meanings of race within different political, social, and economic contexts producing a more expansive and complex discussion of race."[10] While this definition is employed by Selod and Embrick in application to Muslim American identity, this terminology allows for an expansive application across racial groups. Just as Selod and Embrick use racialization to account for changes in cultural attitudes towards Muslim American identity, the term also applies to the instability of Native American racial categorizations throughout history. Additionally, the term rejects an understanding of race split between the polarity of cultural versus biological categorization. Given the ways in which racial identities and definitions transform throughout history, historical scholarship on race must employ terminology that can account for such changes. Finally, Selod and Embrick address criticisms that the terminology of racialization is not specific to race and that it also encompasses factors of gender.[11] Given this paper's intersectional approach, this criticism lacks relevance and even enhances the affordances of the term racialization in this sort of scholarship.

---

[10] Saher Selod and David G. Embrick, "Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship," *Sociology Compass* 7/8 (2013): 648.

[11] Selod and Embrick, "Racialization and Muslims," 647.

While the political involvement of Native American women stretches further back into the twentieth century, the American Indian Movement (AIM) of the 1970s provides a logical starting point for approaching the direct precedents of activism behind the MMIW movement. AIM was established in 1968, influenced by a lineage of Native American protest activism throughout the twentieth century as well as the more recent Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam War protests.[12] The organization had a broad agenda, encompassing the advancement of Native American rights, sovereignty, and legal justice. In an academic article on AIM, author Joane Nagel discusses the gender dynamics of the movement: "[d]espite the limits faced by women in AIM, many Native American women from the generation of AIM activism [rose] to prominent positions in tribal government and as leaders of native rights organizations."[13] Nagel highlights a recurring theme related to twentieth-century Native American activist movements: the relegation of women to roles of support and service while men often dominated the political rhetoric of these organizations. Despite this, AIM can be approached critically as an organization that both replicated patriarchal gender dynamics, but also one that allowed for the platforming of Native American women activists.

The activism and murder of AIM member Annie Mae Aquash, recognized as one of the most influential Native American women activists of the twentieth century, warrants particular attention in the historical connection between AIM and MMIW. Aquash was a Mi'kmaq tribal member from Canada who joined AIM in the early 1970s and was found dead—murdered—in South Dakota in 1976.[14] During her time in AIM, Aquash and other women activists in the

---

[12] Joane Nagel, "American Indian Movement (AIM)," *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, 2nd ed., edited by Patrick L. Mason, 100-102, Vol. 1. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2013, *Gale eBooks* https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX4190600036/GVRL?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=b62c00c7.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Eric Konigsberg, "Who Killed Anna Mae?" *The New York Times Magazine*, April 25, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/magazine/who-killed-anna-mae.html

movement challenged the foregrounding of men in AIM despite the fact that women made up roughly half of the movement's membership. While the circumstances surrounding Aquash's murder led to extensive federal and state investigations, Eric Konigsberg wrote in a 2014 article that "over the last decade, several teams of state and federal attorneys in South Dakota have established that her killing was in fact an inside job, orchestrated by AIM members who believed she was working as an F.B.I. informer."[15]

Fig. 1 & 2: The marriage of Anna Mae Aquash at Wounded Knee in 1973 (left); funeral of Anna Mae Aquash at Pine Ride in 1976 (right) (Photographs: title and photographers unknown, 1973 & 1976, accessed through an online archive: https://mgouldhawke.wordpress.com/2020/08/30/the-brave-hearted-women-1976/.)

Regardless of the specific circumstances surrounding her death, Aquash's influence on Native American women activists has been profound. An article published just after Aquash's death in 1976 by *Akwesasne Notes,* an Indigenous newspaper based in New York, laments that:

[15] Ibid.

> The Brave-Hearted Women who remain to face the dangers of the Indian World have sadly been given a martyr, Anna Mae … Will the Brave-Hearted Women decide that, with Anna Mae's death, the war is over? Or will they decide with Lorelei Means who declares, 'Hell, we're struggling for our life. We're struggling to survive as a people.'"[16]

In spite of the tragedy of her death, Aquash's legacy has remained a touchstone for Native American activism. Not only did she act against the structural patriarchy inherent in AIM, but her death also drew mainstream attention toward the intersections of race and gender that underlie violence towards Native American women.

Outside of AIM and activist organizations, opportunities for Native American women began to greatly expand in the second half of the twentieth century. While analyzing such a trend may seem like a counterproductive way of accounting for systemic violence and oppression, it is also important to acknowledge elements of this history that are not defined entirely by the traumatic nature of such issues. Further, understanding this trend leads naturally to a discussion on the systems of support that Native American women began to organize after the 1970s. These systems cannot be considered merely as responses to traumatic violence and patriarchal oppression; they also indicate the political and social progress achieved by Native American women throughout the twentieth century. In a Native American magazine published in 1940, author Eleanor Williams identifies the expansion of Native American women's voting rights and their increasing resistance to politically rooted discrimination. Williams writes that "Indian women are generally becoming more and more interested in tribal affairs as they observe how these matters affect the welfare of their families."[17] In another article published by the *Akwesasne*

---

[16] Shirley Witt, "The Brave-Hearted Women," *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Summer, 1976, 16+, *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/LTZHPD122311977/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=13314d22.

[17] Eleanor B. Williams, "Constitutional Rights of Indian Women Upheld in Development of Modern Tribal Government," *Indians at Work* 8, no. 2 (1940): 5+, *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/MFOXAZ335692046/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=fd7fdade.

Notes in 1975, the (then) director of the American Indian Press Associate, Laura Wittstock, writes that "it can now be stated that American Indian women are holding more positions of responsibility and authority, are more mobile, [and] have a greater part in the policy-making processes than at any other time since they were forced to live with and under an alien government."[18] Not only did these political advancements give Native women direct access to and participation in legislative processes, but they also expanded the awareness of Native women towards issues of violence and gender-based oppression. While the scope of their political involvement still remained largely on a tribal level, Native women's ability to enact political and social change grew significantly as the twentieth century progressed.

Shelters became one of the most common, and earliest, forms of explicit community support for Native American women facing issues of domestic violence, discrimination, and poverty. These shelters, many of which continue to operate today, provided Native women of all ages with a range of services: housing, education, community, and career services, to name a few. Among the first and most significant of these shelters was the White Buffalo Calf Women's Society (WBCWS), established in South Dakota in 1980. An annual report published by this shelter in 1982 demonstrates the shelter's operations, finances, and challenges. The report lists a total of 426 clients taken in throughout the year—148 adults and 278 children, ranging in age from seventeen to seventy-six.[19] A description included below these titles states that:

> Some of our clients have come with severe injuries and others because of fear of injury. We have supported other women because of trouble or joy, education about ourselves and the

---

[18] Laura Wittstock, "On Women's Rights for Native Peoples," *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Autumn, 1975, 39, *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IOEHMX590436355/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=01a26f9c.

[19] White Buffalo Calf Woman Society, 1982, TS 169: 12, The Association on American Indian Affairs: General and Tribal Files, 1851 - 1983: General Files, Mudd Library, Princeton University. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/AFAMFT155828020/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=053115f1&pg=16.

world, our children, rape advocacy, foster parent advocacy, alcoholism education, and other concerns relative to women, children, and the family.[20]

This description provides a valuable glimpse into how Native women sought out resources in response to factors involving domestic and systemic violence, but also for other reasons concerning their lived experiences. Such a perspective is particularly valuable in the context of this research, as it complicates historical narratives in which Native women are solely recipients of traumatic violence. By accounting for shelters like WBCWS, which provided education and culturally enriching resources, it is clear that Native women also sought to strengthen through community on the basis of more than trauma responses.

[20] Ibid.

Fig. 3: The White Buffalo Calf Woman, a supernatural entity of the Sioux religion who served as an intermediary between the Sioux people and Wakan Tanka, the supreme deity. Joshua Mark, "White Buffalo Calf Woman," *World History Encyclopedia*, Last modified September 07, 2023, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2277/white-buffalo-calf-woman/.
[21] (Painting: *Apparition of the Buffalo Calf Maiden,* Frithjof Schuon, 1959)

Similar to WBCWS, but dating back further to 1960, the Seattle Indian Center (SIC) connects to a historical review of early Native American community shelters. This discussion on the SIC is placed after that of the Buffalo Calf Women's Society, despite the former's older lineage, for two reasons; first, the Buffalo Calf Women's Society is the first shelter in the United States established specifically, and exclusively, for women; second, the influence of the Buffalo Calf Women's Society has proven to be more profound than that of the SIC, at least in connection to MMIW. Regardless, the SIC represents an important historical example of Native American communities organizing around matters ranging from violence to poverty to tribal wellness. In a document published after SIC's first year of operation (1960), the center reports being "visited by 225 persons of 40 different Indian tribes, coming from as far as Montana, Alaska, and the Mid-west."[22] This source demonstrates the significance of shelters and community programs on a local, as well as regional level. Similar to the Buffalo Calf Women's Society, the SIC provided "services of friendly hospitality, provision of clothing for many, counsel on problems of relocation … provision of a meeting place for Indian groups," and a variety of other programs aimed towards the advancement of Native American communities.[23] While the organization did not explicitly target the uplift of women, they were directly

[21] Joshua Mark, "White Buffalo Calf Woman," *World History Encyclopedia*, Last modified September 07, 2023, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2277/white-buffalo-calf-woman/.

[22] American Indian Womens Service League, 1960, TS 62: 8, The Association on American Indian Affairs: General and Tribal Files, 1851 - 1983: General Files, Mudd Library, Princeton University. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed April 27, 2024), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/AACIYT538059798/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=2603b53b&pg=2.

[23] Ibid.

influenced by one that did: the American Indian Women's Service League (AIWSL), formed in Seattle in 1958.

Fig. 4: An early photo of the American Indian Women's Service League, likely taken between 1958 and 1960 (Photograph: photograph & title unknown, accessed through a 2014 report published by Philanthropy Northwest.)

AIWSL was established in 1958 to address issues facing Native women in Seattle.[24] A newspaper article from 1958 states that "[t]he purpose of the organization is to deal with critical situations within the scope of women's activities—those affecting children, health, housing, etc."[25] At the time of its establishment, AIWSL's main goal was to help Native women navigate urban life. Following World War II, Seattle became a hub for industrial labor, and Native Americans throughout the Pacific Northwest became increasingly urbanized.[26] As a result, the strength of Native American communities relied on organizations like AIWSL, which sought to provide services and spaces for congregations while also recognizing that the lived experiences

[24] Karen Smith, "American Indian Women's Service League," The Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, 2006, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/AIWSL.htm.

[25] "Indian Women Organize," *Northwest Indian News,* September 1958.

[26] Smith, "American Indian Women's Service League."

of Native women were fundamentally different than those of men. Despite these gendered distinctions, especially in the name of the organization, AIWSL offered community outreach and support beyond the lines of gender. Further, while AIWSL did not explicitly address issues of violence towards women, the structure of organizations like this influenced later organizations that were more explicitly oriented towards issues of violence, like the White Buffalo Calf Women's Society.

Scholars have considered the ways in which shelters and community-based organizations have worked to address issues of systemic racial inequality. In an article that connects race to women's movements, Laurel Weldon points out that women of color experience disproportionate levels of violence—both in domestic and societal contexts—and that racial discrimination inhibits their access to necessary resources. Further, women of color are often subjected to racist attitudes and confrontations in non-community-based shelters and service centers. As such, Weldon highlights the importance of services provided for women of color within their own communities.[27] Complementing Weldon with a more experiential perspective, Cruz Begay considers the importance of a women's shelter within a remote community in the Navajo Nation. Begay points out that rural isolation, combined with limited access to resources and information, often inhibits Native women's ability to receive medical and social support in response to domestic violence.[28] After working to establish a successful women's shelter in an isolated Navajo community, Begay posits that shelters are a necessary form of social infrastructure for Native American communities—especially for women.

---

[27] S. Laurel Weldon, "Women's Movements, Identity Politics, and Policy Impacts: A Study of Policies on Violence against Women in the 50 United States," *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2006): 113, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148079.

[28] R. Cruz Begay. "A Women's Shelter in a Rural American Indian Community." *Family and Community Health* 34, no. 3 (2011): 229–34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44953510.

Returning to a discussion on race, these examples of Native American activism and community-based organizations represent efforts at addressing and resisting systemic, racialized violence that is rooted in the lasting impacts of settler colonialism. Selod and Embrick's conceptual framework for racialization can again be inserted into this analysis. They argue that "[r]acialization enables the intersection of gender and race that is so often missing from discussions of race," particularly in the sense that this concept rejects phenotypical and/or cultural definitions of race.[29] The racialization of Native women, in alignment with this framework, entails a process through which race and gender cannot be separated from each other. By extension, Native women's resistance to these racializing structures must successfully resist and subvert intersectional forms of oppression. This points to the necessity of small-scale, community-based action. Not only does "community-based" entail an organizational scope on a tribal and sub-regional level, but further refinements along lines of gender are also necessary in order to resist structures of patriarchy that have come to dominate Native American culture through the legacy of settler colonialism.

By approaching MMIW through a historical lens, the beginnings of the movement in the 1990s can be best understood within a decades-long lineage of Native American women's activism and community-based organizing as a means of resisting systemic violence. The modern-day success of MMIW in drawing federal and state attention to the crisis of violence towards Native women should not be separated from an awareness of the movement's precedents. Further, in order to critically engage with MMIW and its history, a theoretically-dynamic approach must be assumed. This entails an understanding of the intersectional nature of this crisis, primarily along converging lines of gender and race, as well as

[29] Selod and Embrick, "Racialization and Muslims," 652.

a framework for understanding race that can account for intersectional nuance. Through this, MMIW's ongoing advocacy for Native American women's rights and protection can be effectively complemented with historical narratives that speak to the ongoing agency, resilience, and power of these women.

Bibliography

American Indian Womens Service League. 1960. TS 62: 8, The Association on American Indian Affairs: General and Tribal Files, 1851 - 1983: General Files. Mudd Library, Princeton University. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed April 27, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/AACIYT538059798/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=2603b53b&pg=2.

American University. "Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women: A Digital Exhibition." Accessed April 30, 2024. https://edspace.american.edu/mmiwlawsandlegacies/.

Amnesty International. (2007). *Maze of injustice: The failure to protect indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA.* London.

Begay, R. Cruz. "A Women's Shelter in a Rural American Indian Community." *Family and Community Health* 34, no. 3 (2011): 229–34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44953510.

Hawes, M. B., Slakoff, D. C., & Anguelov, N. "Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Crisis: An Analysis of the NamUs Database." *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 34(2)*, (2023): 184-207. https://doi.org/10.1177/08874034221098909

"Indian Women Organize." *Northwest Indian News,* September 1958.

Joseph, A. Skylar. "A Modern Trail of Tears: The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) Crisis in the US." *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* 79 (2021). 10.1016/j.jflm.2021.102136.

Konigsberg, Eric. "Who Killed Anna Mae?" *The New York Times Magazine*, April 25, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/magazine/who-killed-anna-mae.html

Mark, Joshua J.. "White Buffalo Calf Woman." *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified September 07, 2023. https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2277/white-buffalo-calf-woman/.

Nagel, Joane. "American Indian Movement (AIM)." In *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, 2nd ed., edited by Patrick L. Mason, 100-102. Vol. 1. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2013. *Gale eBooks* (accessed April 27, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX4190600036/GVRL?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=b62c00c7.

Rosay A. B. (2016). *Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and men*. National Institute of Justice. https://nij.gov:443/journals/277/pages/violence-against-american-indians-alaska-natives.aspx

Selod, Saher and Embrick, David G. "Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship." *Sociology Compass* 7/8 (2013): 647.

Smith, Karen. "American Indian Women's Service League." The Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project. 2006. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/AIWSL.htm

"The Brave-Hearted Women." *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Summer, 1976, 16+. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/LTZHPD122311977/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=13314d22.

United Way of King County. "A Vision for the Urban Indian Community." June 2014. https://philanthropynw.org/sites/default/files/files/events/A%20Vision%20for%20the%20Urban%20Indian%20Community%20Report.pdf.

Weaver, H. N. "The Colonial Context of Violence: Reflections on Violence in the Lives of Native American Women." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, (2009): 24(9), 1552-1563. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260508323665

Weldon, S. Laurel. "Women's Movements, Identity Politics, and Policy Impacts: A Study of Policies on Violence against Women in the 50 United States." *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2006): 111–22. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148079.

White Buffalo Calf Woman Society. 1982. TS 169: 12, The Association on American Indian Affairs: General and Tribal Files, 1851 - 1983: General Files. Mudd Library, Princeton University. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/AFAMFT155828020/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=053115f1&pg=16.

Williams, Eleanor B. "Constitutional Rights of Indian Women Upheld in Development of

Modern Tribal Government." *Indians at Work* 8, no. 2 (1940): 5+. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/MFOXAZ335692046/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=fd7fdade.

Witt, Shirley. "The Brave-Hearted Women." *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Summer, 1976, 16+. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/LTZHPD122311977/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=13314d22.

Wittstock, Laura. "On Women's Rights for Native Peoples." *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Autumn, 1975, 39. *Indigenous Peoples of North America* (accessed March 25, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IOEHMX590436355/INDP?u=gonzagaufoley&sid=bookmark-INDP&xid=01a26f9c.

Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. doi:10.1080/14623520601056240.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume VIII | Issue I Article IV

Reconstruction and Rebirth: Amos Akerman's Georgia Years

Ted Shepherd
ted.shepherd@yale.edu

RECONSTRUCTION AND REBIRTH: AMOS AKERMAN'S GEORGIA YEARS

TED SHEPHERD

Abstract: Amos Akerman was the first U.S. Attorney General to bring thousands of prosecutions against the Ku Klux Klan. But his story began in Georgia. Using multiple primary sources including Akerman's diary and letters obtained from his living relatives, I explore his role in Georgia's Reconstruction. I describe the integral role he played in drafting Georgia's 1868 Constitution, including his zealous advocacy for Black suffrage. I report the brave steps he took in the face of threats to his own safety to ensure that Black citizens were allowed to vote in the 1868 election. And I explore the critical role he played in an 1869 legal case that secured the rights of Black citizens in Georgia to hold political office. Evolving from a Confederate soldier into a champion of civil rights, Akerman's is a story of redemption and rebirth.

On December 9, 1867, Amos Akerman entered Atlanta's City Hall for the first day of Georgia's Constitutional Convention. A northern-born former slave owner with no political experience, Akerman had trodden a twisting path to the summit of Georgia politics. Yet he would prove to be one of the leading lights of the Convention. And over the next two years, in the face of conservative backlash, Akerman would devote himself to revitalizing Georgia and defending its new black citizens. His legal crusade would eventually lead Ulysses S. Grant to appoint him U.S. Attorney General, making him the only Southerner to serve in a Presidential cabinet during all of Reconstruction. In this role, Akerman used the resources of the Justice Department to torment and eventually neutralize the vicious Ku Klux Klan, leading Ron Chernow to label him "the greatest ornament of [Grant's] cabinet and one of the outstanding attorneys general in American history."[1] Evolving from a slaveholding Confederate soldier into a champion of civil rights, Akerman's is a story of redemption and rebirth.

[1] Ron Chernow*, Grant,* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 711.

Remarkably, this story has received scant scholarly attention. The few historians who have taken an interest in Akerman have focused on his time as Attorney General, and especially on his prosecutions of the KKK during the 1870s.[2] Yet his tenure as Attorney General was only the culmination of a distinguished career in state politics. Before appearing on the national stage, Akerman fought for black rights in Reconstruction-era Georgia and became one of the leading Republicans in the State. This period has been entirely neglected: *zero* books or academic articles centered on Akerman's contributions to Georgia's Reconstruction have been published in at least a hundred years.

This lacuna may have its roots in the historical approach of the South's Lost Cause movement. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution recently suggested that Akerman's story has been lost to history because "the social order of this state and the rest of the South depended on your not believing that men like him existed."[3] If so, it is high time that Akerman and other Southern Republicans receive the historical attention they deserve. This paper begins to fill that void by examining Akerman's role in Georgia's Reconstruction.

Akerman's Early Years

Amos Tappan Akerman was born in 1821 in New Hampshire. After graduating from Dartmouth, he moved south to Savannah, Georgia, where he agreed to tutor the children of a United States Senator named John Berrien in exchange for the use of his law library.[4] Years

[2] Gretchen C. F. Shappert, "Fighting Domestic Terrorism and Creating the Department of Justice: The Extraordinary Leadership of Attorney General Amos T. Akerman," *Department of Justice Journal of Federal Law and Practice* 68, no. 1 (January 2020), 125-144; William S. McFeely, "Amos T. Akerman: The Lawyer and Racial Justice," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, eds. Morgan Kousser & James M. McPherson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 395-415.
[3] Jim Galloway, "Re-discovering Amos Akerman, a lost GOP hero of the 19th century South," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 29, 2019.
[4] Lois Neal Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman and his Role in American Politics," (Master's thesis, Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University, 1939). Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, 9; Rebecca Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman, A Biographical Sketch," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26,

before, Berrien had served as Andrew Jackson's Attorney General. In an ironic twist of fate, the young man he hired to teach his children would eventually fill the same post.

Akerman soon opened his own law practice.[5] Having some initial difficulties—"Law is uncertain in practice, whatever the devotees of the science may say"—he decided to try his hand at agriculture, and as time passed, his farm expanded.[6] Adopting the mores of his new home, Akerman supplemented his own labor by buying enslaved workers; by 1864, he owned 11 human beings.[7]

Akerman had complex views about slavery, an issue that poisoned North-South relations throughout the 1850s. On the one hand, he owned several slaves and disapproved of abolitionism. Indeed, he thought that slavery might actually be beneficial to the enslaved. "Most of them are slaves in Africa," he noted in 1846. "Perhaps…those who are brought to America will in the end become more elevated than their brethren in Africa by association with a superior race."[8] On the other hand, perhaps because of his upbringing in the North, he rejected secession. "The doctrines of the Nullifiers have been thoroughly refuted," he journaled in 1847, "but they are flattering to the vanity of a state and will therefore continue to be received."[9] Corresponding with a Northern friend about Southern threats to secede from the Union, he wrote, "Some Southern politicians are ready for it, but the sober portion of the people are far below that pitch."[10]

1885, *Georgia Historic Newspapers, Digital Library of Georgia, University of Georgia Libraries,* https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/.

[5] Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 14, 16.

[6] Amos Akerman, *Diary*, September 17, 1853, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 16. Akerman kept several diaries; Hamilton had access to one diary in 1939 that I have not found. Amos T. Akerman, *Diary of Amos T. Akerman, 1846-1857*, June 25, 1855, Private collection of J. Mark Akerman.

[7] Amos Akerman to Martha Akerman, June 7, 1864, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 34.

[8] Akerman, *Diary,* August 19, 1846, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 34.

[9] Akerman, *Diary,* March 9, 1847, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 34.

[10] Akerman to Cilley, Manchester, N. H., March 2, 1850, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 34.

When the Civil War began in 1861, Akerman decided to stay in the South. Having just moved to Elberton, Georgia, to form a new law partnership, he focused on his career for most of the war.[11] In the summer of 1863, however, he joined the State Guard and was called into active duty in 1864 when Sherman invaded Georgia.[12] He served until the Confederacy collapsed, but, as an Assistant Quartermaster, he probably never saw combat.[13]

In 1874, Akerman tried to explain why he remained in the South and served in the Confederate Army. "Reluctantly I adhered to the Confederate cause. I was a Union man until the North seemed to have abandoned us…Not caring to stand up for a Government which would not stand up for itself, and viewing the Confederate Government as practically established in the South, I gave it my allegiance, though with great distrust of its peculiar principles."[14] This narrative probably exaggerates Akerman's support for the Union. At the time, he repeatedly expressed sympathy for the Confederate cause. On July 4, 1861, for example, Akerman "addressed the volunteers and citizens" at Hartwell, arguing, "The South may consistently celebrate the Fourth of July, notwithstanding the secession. The first revolution was beneficial to her and also was a precedent for the second."[15] When he heard about the Confederate victory at Bull Run, he expressed hope that "this event will speedily end this miserable war."[16] And in December 1861, "At the request of Mr. Hull, who is trying to raise a company, I harangued the people on the war."[17]

---

[11] Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[12] Amos Akerman, *Diary*, February 23, 1874, quoted in Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers. Akerman kept several diaries; Felton had access to one diary in 1885 that I have not found.
[13] Akerman, *Diary,* February 23, 1874, quoted in Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[14] Akerman, *Diary,* February 23, 1874, quoted in Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[15] Amos T. Akerman, *Diary,* July 4, 1861, JMA Private Collection.
[16] Amos T. Akerman, *Diary,* July 24, 1861, JMA Private Collection.
[17] Amos T. Akerman, *Diary,* December 10, 1861, JMA Private Collection.

Regardless, Akerman was happy to return home at the war's end. Military duty had interrupted his legal career, and emancipation had damaged his farm.[18] So he "returned to Elberton and as soon as the courts were open, resumed the practice of law."[19]

The Beginning of Reconstruction

When the final gunshots of the Civil War died out in April and May 1865, President Johnson decided to continue Lincoln's strategy of swiftly bringing the Confederate states back into the Union.[20] He declared that the Southern states would be readmitted as soon as they ratified new state constitutions that rejected secession, abolished slavery, and repudiated their Confederate debts.[21] Grateful for these lenient terms, Georgia quickly fulfilled these conditions. By early November 1865, the state had drafted a new constitution that met these requirements and in December its new legislature ratified the 13th Amendment.[22] But Congress was wary of readmitting the Confederate states so quickly. Republicans resisted Johnson's efforts to quickly restore self-governance, believing that Southerners had not been duly chastened.[23] This feeling was inflamed when, in 1866, Georgia and other Southern states passed racist laws that drastically curtailed freed slaves' civil and political rights and rejected the 14th Amendment.[24] Thus, in March 1867, over Johnson's veto, Congress passed the First Reconstruction Act, which divided the South into five districts under the control of the US military. To be readmitted into the Union,

---

[18] Amos Akerman to his sister, August 2, 1865, quoted in McFeely, "Amos T. Akerman," 401.
[19] Akerman, *Diary,* February 23, 1874, quoted in Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[20] Edwin C. Woolley, *The Reconstruction of Georgia,* vol. 13*, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law*, ed. the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901), 3-5.
[21] Woolley, *Reconstruction of Georgia,* 5.
[22] *Ibid,* 6-7.
[23] *Ibid,* 14.
[24] *Ibid,* 10, 11.

the Southern states would have to write new constitutions that enfranchised black people, disenfranchised prominent Confederates, and ratified the 14th Amendment.[25]

Many Southerners were furious at the change in policy, decrying Yankee meddling in Southern race relations.[26] But Akerman was more sympathetic to the Northern view. "Some of us who had adhered to the Confederacy felt it to be our duty when we were to participate in the politics of the Union, to let Confederate ideas rule us no longer," he wrote years later. "In the great conflict, one party had contended for nationality and liberty, the other for state rights and slavery. We thought that our surrender implied the giving up of all that had been in controversy on our side, and had resolved to discard the doctrines of state rights and slavery. Regarding the subjugation of one race by the other as an appurtenance of slavery, we were content that it should go to the grave in which slavery had been buried."[27] In another letter he wrote that "Our citizens, or those previously recognized as such, had it in their power by the exercise of some patience and of some judgment, to settle forever the domestic question of the relations between the races, and the more general question of the relation of the South to the general Government and the North."[28] He thought that acceptance of Northern demands was the better part "of wisdom because it would soonest quiet the war, and whether we like it or not would bring us speedily to the shore on which we are bound ultimately to launch…"[29]

On October 29, 1867, Georgians went to the polls to elect delegates for the new constitutional convention required by the Reconstruction Act. Many white conservatives boycotted this "bogus concern called an election."[30] Among many grievances, they resented the

[25] *Ibid,* 16-17; *An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States,* 14 Stat. 428-430, c.153 (March 2, 1867).
[26] Woolley, *Reconstruction of Georgia,* 26.
[27] Amos T. Akerman to George Heidy, August 22, 1876, Amos Tappan Akerman Letterbooks, 1871-76, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.
[28] Amos T. Akerman to James Jackson, Nov. 20, 1871, UVA Letterbooks.
[29] Amos T. Akerman to James Jackson, Nov. 20, 1871, UVA Letterbooks.
[30] Woolley, *Reconstruction of Georgia,* 26.

inclusion of freed slaves. “We do not concede to Cuffee [a black delegate] and his race equal privileges with the white man in this Government,” wrote one angry Southerner.[31] “The God of Nature has created different races of men and has given this part of the globe to the white man for his inheritance.”[32] Ultimately, 37 of the 172 elected delegates were Black, twelve others were white conservatives, and the remaining 133 were white Republicans.[33] The last category included Akerman, elected to represent Elbert County.[34]

The Georgia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868

Akerman arrived in Atlanta in early December 1867 for the opening of the Convention. One journalist described a “man of medium and spare stature, scrupulously neat in his personal appearance.”[35] The journalist noted his “affable manner, with a quiet self-possession, which makes him at the same time easy of approach and dignified of demeanor.”[36] Although this was “his first appearance in political life,” Akerman quickly became a leading figure.[37] The New York Times later called Akerman “the principal framer of the present State Constitution,”[38] and even Democratic papers labeled him “one of the ablest, if not *the* ablest man” in the “sword-and-bayonet Convention at Atlanta.”[39]

---

[31] “The Negro Hard to Groom,” *The daily intelligencer,* December, 7, 1867, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Hamilton, “Amos T. Akerman,” 47.
[34] “Delegates Elect to the So-Called State Convention,” *The Weekly Atlanta Intelligencer,* November 20, 1867, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[35] “Mr. Dawes’ Substitute for the Georgia Bill Passed in the House,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1870, 1, The Times Machine, The New York Times, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1870/06/25/issue.html.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] “Talk at the Capital About the Resignation of Mr. Hoar. Amos T. Akerman, of Georgia, Appointed as His Successor,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1870, TimesMachine.
[38] “Talk at the Capital About the Resignation of Mr. Hoar. Amos T. Akerman, of Georgia, Appointed as His Successor,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1870, TimesMachine.
[39] “An Antidote,” *Georgia Journal and Messenger*, December 18, 1867, Georgia Historic Newspapers.

One of Akerman's primary contributions was his leadership of the Judiciary Committee. Bringing his legal talents to bear, Akerman crafted a new state judicial system that better insulated judges from political pressure.[40] But Akerman won the most fame—and obloquy—for championing black civil rights.

The elephant in the Convention Hall was black suffrage, which Congress demanded the Southern states enshrine in their new constitutions. Unlike many Southerners and former slave owners, Akerman had come to accept the virtue of giving black people the right to vote. "The extension of suffrage to colored men was at first an alarming imposition on account of the supposed ignorance of the class to be enfranchised," he later recalled.[41] "But on reflection, we considered that if ignorance did not disqualify white men it should not disqualify black men. We considered that colored men were deeply interested in the country and had at least sense enough to know whether government worked well or not in its more palpable operations, and therefore would probably be safe voters."[42] Although he had formerly owned enslaved workers, Akerman now believed that black suffrage would allow Georgia to recover from economic disaster and move forward from the Civil War.

> We saw that it was idle for the south to seek prosperity now by the old means of involuntary labor or anything akin to it and that if she would prosper it must be as other parts of the country prosper, by the industry of those who broke the soil and those who voluntarily labor for others, encouraged by fair wages, by the protection of the law, by the hope of advancement, by the respect of the community, and by the ennobling presence of an equal voice in public affairs. These views reconciled us to the suffrage of colored men and carried us into the Republican Party.[43]

---

[40] Georgia Constitution of 1865, art IV, § 1-2 (superseded by 1868); *Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia, Held in the City of Atlanta in the Months of December 1867, and January, February, and March, 1868, and Ordinances and Resolutions Adopted* (Augusta, GA: E.H. Pughe Book and Job Printer, 1868), 106-109.
[41] Amos T. Akerman to George Heidy, August 22, 1876, UVA Letterbooks.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*

On January 14, the Committee on Franchise submitted its draft for a constitutional provision on suffrage. It stated, "In all elections by the people, the electors shall vote by ballot."[44] Then, in the second section, it explained who could be an elector, significantly expanding the right to vote:

> "Every male person born in the United States, and every male person who has been naturalized, or who has legally declared his intention to become a citizen of the United States, twenty-one years old or upward, who shall have resided in this State six months next preceding the election, and shall have resided three months in the County in which he offers to vote, except as hereinafter provided, shall be deemed an elector; and every male inhabitant of the age aforesaid, who may be a resident of the State at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be deemed an elector, and shall have all the rights of electors as aforesaid."[45]

To protect black voters from legal discrimination or mob action, the Committee also proposed that "Electors shall in all cases, except treason, felony, or breach of the peace, be privileged from arrest and civil process for five days before the first day of election, and two days subsequent to the last day of election."[46] It would be "the duty of the General Assembly to enact adequate laws giving protection to electors, before, during, and subsequent to elections."[47]

Through his trial work and the speeches he had given during and after the Civil War, Akerman had become a skilled orator.[48] Now he threw his eloquence behind black suffrage. After one particularly notable speech, another delegate requested that "the Secretary of this Convention be authorized to have the able and eloquent speech of the Hon. Mr. Akerman, delivered in the Hall of the Georgia Constitutional Convention on the subject of suffrage,

---

[44] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia,* 148.
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid,* 149.
[47] *Ibid,* 149.
[48] Amos T. Akerman, *Diary,* July 4, 1861, July 9, 1861, and December 10, 1861, JMA Private Collection.

published in the official organs of this Convention, and that ten copies be furnished each member for their constituents."[49]

Akerman made one decision, however, that left an unfortunate stain on his civil rights record. On February 7, during the debate on suffrage, he proposed "to amend the second section by adding after the word 'vote'" the requirement that an elector "shall have paid all taxes which may have been required of him, and which he may have had an opportunity of paying, agreeably to law, for the year next preceding the election."[50] His amendment was adopted. Although Akerman probably had good intentions, white Democrats would exploit this provision to disenfranchise poor black people who had missed a tax payment or could not afford to pay a poll tax.[51] In later years, Akerman regretted and attempted to nullify the amendment he had previously proposed. Writing in 1871 about the promotion of black voting, he asked, "But is not our most serious difficulty in the tax-paying requirement of the voter? Is it not true that the majority of the colored men failed to pay last year…We should bring out so distinctly as to justify congressional action, the abuse which is made of the clause in our constitution requiring voters to be taxpayers."[52]

In contrast to this short-sighted mistake, Akerman was very prescient on another issue that would also haunt Georgia in the future: the right of black Georgians to hold state office. In its original Majority Report, the Committee on Franchise clearly settled this issue: "All qualified electors, and none others, shall be eligible to any office in this State unless disqualified by the Constitution of this State, or by the Constitution of the United States," it provided in Section 10.[53] A month later, though, the Convention voted 126 to 12 to remove this section from the

[49] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia,* 291.
[50] *Ibid,* 266.
[51] Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 86-87.
[52] Akerman to Atkins, November 13, 1871, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 86-87.
[53] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia,* 150.

Constitution.[54] Lacking this section, the Constitution was unclear about whether or not black people could be excluded from state office, and the issue was eventually thrown to the courts.

Akerman was one of the twelve delegates who had voted against removing Section 10.[55] Years later, he still lamented that the Convention had "refused to deny the colored man the right to hold office by two formal votes, but also refused to establish distinctly, by a formal vote, their right to hold office."[56] According to Akerman, "If that provision had been adopted, there would not have been the slightest doubt upon the subject [of black office-holding], and no ingenuity could have suggested a doubt as to the right of the colored members to seats in the legislature; but that clause was struck out of the report by the convention against my earnest protest, and by a vote of 120 ayes to 12 noes, only three colored members voting no, out of more than 30 in the convention."[57] Akerman tried to explain why the majority of delegates had deleted the provision. "I think some who voted against it did so for the purpose of excluding colored men from holding office; I think the majority did so because they believed they had the right without it. I am bound also to say, in all candor, that one motive which led to striking out that provision was to enable the constitution to be differently interpreted upon that subject in different parts of the State."[58] The Constitution's vagueness on this important issue would come to haunt Georgia—and Akerman.

On March 7, toward the end of the Convention, Akerman moved to insert the following provision at the end of the Constitution: "This Constitution may be amended by a, vote of two-thirds of each branch of the General Assembly, at each of two successive regular sessions;

---

[54] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia,* 310-312.
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] U.S. Congress, House, *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, *before The U.S. House of Representatives*, 40th Cong., 3d sess., February 12, 1869, https://www.loc.gov/item/2022699666/ (statement of Amos T. Akerman), 18.
[57] U.S. Congress, House, *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 18.
[58] *Ibid.*

but the elective-franchise shall not be taken from any class entitled thereto under this Constitution, unless such alteration shall have been submitted to the people, and ratified at a general election."[59] This would ensure that a Democratic legislature could not unilaterally revoke Black suffrage.

A version of this proposal was eventually adopted, but Akerman was not there for the final vote.[60] By that time, he had walked out of the Convention in protest over a radical debt relief measure. A majority of delegates had voted to include in the Constitution a provision prohibiting state courts from "render[ing] judgment against any citizen of this State upon any contract or agreement made or entered into, or for any tort or injury committed prior to the first day of June 1865."[61] Akerman considered this to be "villainy under the name 'relief'"—both economically disastrous and unconstitutional.[62] So he left the Convention early and returned home.[63]

The Presidential Election of 1868

After the Convention, Akerman traveled back to Elberton to resume his career and care for his family. But he couldn't stay away from politics for long. In August 1868, his name was put forward in the Georgia Republican Convention as a possible Republican Presidential elector. Initially, the black delegates in the Convention distrusted Akerman because of his race and prominence. One black delegate proposed a Black alternative, saying that he "was for the black man" and "if there were any men in his county but black men who were for Grant and Colfax he did not know them."[64] Another delegate, Hopkins of Chatham, stated "that Akerman was deadly

[59] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia,* 496.
[60] *Ibid,* 562.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Amos Akerman to Martha Akerman, February 6, 1868, quoted in Rebecca Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman, A Biographical Sketch," *The Cartersville Courant,* April 2, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[63] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia,* 499.
[64] "Nomination of Electors," *The Daily News and Herald,* August 21, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.

opposed to the negro, and that he would not support him."[65] But then other Black delegates stood up and defended Akerman. Two of them said Akerman "was the very best friend of the colored men, and would raise his voice for them at the risk of his life."[66] Wallace, another black delegate, "said Akerman made the best suffrage speech in the Convention."[67] In the end, "several negroes thus spoke up for Akerman, and he was unanimously elected for the State at large."[68]

As an elector for the 1868 Presidential Election, Akerman gave speeches around Georgia in support of Grant's campaign. His general strategy was to highlight the choice between "the end of strife and discord by the election of Grant, or the renewal and continuance of strife and discord by the election of Seymour," Grant's opponent.[69] "Seymour is great in words—a man of passion and prejudice," he conceded on one occasion, but "Grant is great in deeds—a man of judgment and reason."[70] Akerman also used his position to argue for racial equality. In one speech, he proclaimed that "The negroes should have equal rights with the whites" and, to soothe white fears of a race war, asked, "Why is there not a war of races when white and black horses work together."[71] He criticized those who would use violence to preserve white supremacy, lambasting "the ferocious spirits of [the Democratic] party who have disgraced the present campaign with more lawlessness than ever appeared before in American politics. Violent by nature, violent by training, violent by practice, they will persist in violence until they encounter the check of Grant's firm hand, or, in the improbable event of their own triumph, replunge the country in blood."[72]

---

[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] "Republican Meeting in Liberty," *The Daily New Era,* October 21, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] "Judge Cabiness Address Answered," *The National Republican*, October 20, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.

Akerman's speeches met Republican acclaim. The *National Republican* called one "sound in logic, powerful in facts and argument, chaste in language, and eloquent in delivery," and declared that even Democrats "would have agreed with us that the Colonel is a profound thinker, an honest man, and a fearless defender of THE RIGHT."[73] Many Democrats, however, emphatically did not. Throughout 1868, Democratic newspapers denounced Akerman as a race traitor and enemy of the South. One Democratic paper declared that "we have had entirely too much of carpet-baggers and squatter sovereignty" and charged Akerman with wanting "to establish State inequality in order to inaugurate negro supremacy and a depraved military despotism at the South."[74] Another newspaper later described its long-held perception of Akerman: "The speech was illustrative of the character the Sun has persistently given Akerman, as one, in whose veins there flows no drop of blood that is in sympathy with the South. Whose nature is so callous, selfish and restrained to admit of one kindly feeling toward those with whom he had lived for twenty years, and who have never treated him other than well."[75] Akerman tried to brush off these vitriolic attacks. "Do not get cross or unhappy at seeing me abused in the papers," he wrote his wife at one point. "It amounts to little, and on the whole, the criticisms have been less savage than I expected…Your husband is not as good as he should be, but he is not as bad as some of the papers make him out."[76]

But Democratic abuse was harder to ignore when it left the page and interfered with his daily life. On one occasion, Akerman traveled to a town in Lincoln County, Georgia to argue a case, but was unable to find lodging. As he informed the judge, "The keeper of the only hotel

---

[73] "The Meeting Last Night," *The National Republican*, October 25, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[74] "Absurdities of a Georgia Radical Leader," *The Weekly Constitutionalist,* September 23, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[75] "Mr. Akerman Makes a Speech," *The Savannah Morning News,* September 5, 1870, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[76]Amos Akerman to Martha Akerman, February 1, 1870, quoted in Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* March, 26, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.

here, at which I have been in the habit of putting up for many years, informs me that he fears that he will be seriously injured if he receives me, because a large number of the citizens of the country have threatened to withdraw all patronage from him if I am entertained at his house."[77] Akerman said that there "was no private family here whose hospitality I would ask or except (sic) in the present circumstances," so declared that he was "unable to attend to my business in this Court" and requested "that the cases in which I am employed may stand continued for the term."[78] The judge sympathized. "A non-resident attorney must stay somewhere in the place," he recognized. He decided that "he would not require of him an impossibility" and "granted the application" for delay.[79]

On another occasion shortly before the 1868 election, Akerman traveled to Wilkes County and received an even nastier welcome. This time, he successfully found a room at the local inn. But when he called for his horse on the night of his departure, he received a painful shock. When the animal was led out, he saw that some "mischievous boys" had shaved his horse's mane and tail and painted its body so that it looked like a zebra.[80] A grinning crowd stood around to see how he would react to this affront.[81] But Akerman just murmured that he didn't recognize this animal and returned inside. This turned out to be a stroke of luck. He learned later that a group of Klansmen were waiting to ambush him as soon as left the town.[82]

"It is certainly a thankless office to try to help those who are determined not to be helped," he later told a friend. "Whether, if in 1867, I had foreseen the strength of the prejudices to be encountered, I should have had the courage to enter the field on the side, which I believed

---

[77] "Outrage in Lincoln County," *The National Republican,* October 30, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] *Ibid.*
[80] "Convention," *The Cartersville Express,* November 20, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[81] Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 47.
[82] Alfred Akerman to Amos Akerman, quoted in Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 47-48.

both expedient and right, I cannot say, but, having entered, I was not disposed to recede, though hard pressed by many adversaries…"[83] Though saddened by Democrats' hostility to him, he was determined to do the right thing, even if it meant getting turned away from hotels. "For my politics, I am responsible to my conscience, and as long as my conscience approves them, I shall not change or modify them in the slightest degree to humor those citizens of Lincoln Country who have thus interfered between this landlord and his guests."[84]

The Presidential Election took place on November 5, 1868. That day, Akerman realized that "the controlling portion of the Democratic party can be moved to indignation by anything, however base morally, done in furtherance of Democratic success."[85] He experienced firsthand the Democratic effort to "recover by the ballot what they lost in arms."[86]

As a Grant elector, Akerman decided that he would escort black Georgians to the polls on Election Day to ensure they were treated fairly. He traveled to Ela, Georgia to help the black voters there. Akerman later testified to Congress about his experiences that day. "A greater part of the white citizens who were to vote at that place were democrats; a large portion of the colored citizens are republicans. I was known to be somewhat prominent in the republican party; and I had desired those colored men who were disposed to vote that ticket to meet at a certain place the morning of that day."[87] The morning started peacefully. "I made them a short address…giving reasons why I thought they would act wisely to vote the republican ticket, ending by telling them they were entirely free to vote as they pleased. If they chose to vote the democratic ticket, they could find democratic ballots at the courthouse; but if they chose to vote

---

[83] Amos T. Akerman to James Jackson, Nov. 20, 1871, UVA Letterbooks.
[84] "Outrage in Lincoln County," *The National Republican,* October 30, 1868, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[85] Amos T. Akerman to Mrs. Felton, December 21, 1878, Amos Tappan Akerman Letterbook, 1878-1880, Private collection of J. Mark Akerman.
[86] Amos T. Akerman to David Dimond, January 3, 1879, Letterbook, JMA Private Collection.
[87] U.S. Congress, House, *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 14.

the republican ticket, I would supply them with ballots."[88] The situation quickly took a turn for the worse. "While I was speaking in this way a number of white people, who were democrats, came up and stood behind me, or near me, and begun to interrupt me and dispute my assertions. Some of them were civil and respectful in manner; others used very violent, profane, and threatening language against those who should vote…the radical ticket."[89] These threats alarmed some of the black voters. Nevertheless, three hundred of them stayed and took Republican tickets from Akerman.

Akerman waited with the black voters for a couple of hours, realizing that "they had better not come up until there was a lull in the voting, as it might be considered an intrusion upon the white people to crowd upon them."[90] But when such a lull occurred and he led the voters toward the courthouse, a crowd of people yelled "'close up, close up,' and there was a rush to the courthouse, around the window, making it impossible for us to approach the window…Occasionally a person would approach the window and vote, but very few of the crowd about the window were voting; most of them were there merely blocking up the way."[91] The crowd yelled "profane, abusive, and threatening language…towards myself and to the colored people who were behind me."[92] Then the tense situation turned violent. Suddenly, "I heard confusion behind me, persons running and the report of a pistol; it was impossible for me to see by whom it was fired."[93] Only later did he learn what had happened:

> Two white men had gone into this crowd of colored men, the former master and employer of one of the colored men and his son, who denounced this colored man as one of the worst radicals in the country, the father pronouncing him a mean [n****r], and that he had been one ever since his freedom. Very threatening and abusive language was used

[88] *Ibid.*
[89] *Ibid.*
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] *Ibid*.
[93] *Ibid,* 15.

> toward him, and other white people gathered around, when one of them began to strike him under the chin; he begged them to let him alone; said he was not pestering them, and hoped they would not pester him. They persisted in beating him and he started to retreat; one person struck him on the head with a stick; then he began to run and the colored people around him to run; a white man, endeavoring to intercept him in his retreat, raised in his hand a very large stone as if to throw at him, but the [n****r] caught the stone, threw it down, and then ran on. About that stage of proceedings a pistol was fired at him, but did not hit him; he ran and was caught by a white person, who struck him upon the forehead with a pistol, cutting a very deep gash in his forehead; he ran around to the soldiers, and when I found him, was bleeding very profusely from this gash. The colored people had generally retreated to the same place, where they felt safe under the protection of the soldiers.[94]

After further harassment and intimidation, the majority of the black voters gave up. According to Akerman, "Many of the colored people told me they feared to vote; that if not subjected to immediate injury, they would find it difficult to get employment and homes for another year."[95] Ultimately, this voting place recorded 798 Democratic and 21 Republican voters. But Akerman believed that "several hundred voted reluctantly, through fear, and against their own preference in regard to the candidates…If there had not been any apprehension of violence, my opinion is there would have been about 1,800 votes cast in the county, there being above 2,000 voters in the county; and of these, my belief is that 1,000 or 1,050 would have been cast for the republican ticket, and 750 or 800 for the democratic ticket."[96] He believed that these numbers were broadly representative of Georgia as a whole.

Nevertheless, Akerman had hope for the future. "I do not think, in the future, the colored voters will be subjected to the same violence as in the past," he told Congress. "I think the effect of the late election, and of the efforts made by our democratic citizens to get the votes of the negroes, has habituated them to seeing the negroes vote and exercise these political privileges, and that they will obtain greater freedom in their exercise hereafter."[97] Akerman believed that

[94] *Ibid*.
[95] *Ibid*, 16.
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] *Ibid* 19.

Congress could encourage this progress, using its 14th Amendment power to ensure that states gave black citizens equal protection under the law. Later, as Attorney General, he would draw on his personal experience in Georgia to draft the Akerman Election Law of 1870, which helped to protect future black voters from the sorts of abuse he had experienced on that hot Georgia day.[98]

White v. Clements and Black Officeholders in Georgia

After the Georgia Constitutional Convention concluded in March 1868, elections were held for the new State House and Senate. Unlike in the election of Convention delegates, which most white Georgians had boycotted, the Conservatives now voted en masse.[99] They won a resounding victory in the April elections, taking half the seats in the State Senate and a majority in the State House.[100] Triumphant, they quickly turned their attention to the 25 black State Representatives and 3 black State Senators, whose presence infuriated them.[101] In September 1868, exploiting the Constitution's ambiguity on the right of Black people to hold state office, the Conservatives expelled these black legislators and seated the white Democrats who had run against them in their stead.[102]

Hearing of this expulsion, a white man named William Clements thought he saw a way to pull victory from the jaws of defeat. Clements had recently lost the election for Clerk of Chatham County Superior Court to a black man named Richard White. Clements thought the expulsion of the black legislators might be a precedent for overturning the voters' decision. Thus, in January 1869, he filed suit in the Superior Court of Chatham County, alleging that "Richard W. White is a person of color" and is "consequently ineligible to the office of Clerk" in a Georgia

[98] *An Act to provide for an Election and to alter and amend the Laws in relation to the holding of Elections,* Public Law No. 6 - O. 41, *Public Laws passed by the General Assembly of the State of Georgia* (1870): 6-10; "The Election Bill," *The Daily Sun,* September 24, 1870, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[99] Woolley, *Reconstruction of Georgia,* 26, 31.
[100] *Ibid,* 26.
[101] *Ibid,* 31.
[102] *Ibid.*

court.[103] When the Superior Court ruled that White was indeed eligible, he appealed the case to Georgia's Supreme Court, arguing that the Superior Court was wrong to construe the Constitution as barring black individuals from office.[104] Recognizing the importance of this case, an interested third party enlisted the help of a prominent Republican attorney, Amos Akerman, to represent White in the Supreme Court.[105]

Oral argument commenced on June 10, 1869, at 10 am.[106] Colonel Julian Hartridge, a former Representative in the Confederate Congress, represented Clements. Standing before the Justices, Hartridge argued that the delegates of the Georgia Constitutional Convention had only given black men certain enumerated rights: "They gave him the right to go into the courts, to sue and be sued; the right to testify in certain cases; the right to have his person and property protected; the right to pursue the path of knowledge, or of wealth, and the acquisition of the one or the other just like a white man."[107] But nowhere did the Constitution give black men the right to hold office, so Richard White was ineligible to do so.[108]

When Akerman's turn came to speak, he contended that the Georgia Constitution should be applied in exactly the opposite way. In his view, black men had the right to hold office unless there was an express *disqualification*. He charged first that Hartidge "ignores the revolutionary deluge which has swept over the land, and assumes that the ancient polity of the State is still our polity, that the present government is a continuation and not a new creation." This was not true; the destruction of the Confederate governments at the end of the Civil War annulled all preceding

---

[103] Richard W. White v. Wm. J. Clements, 39 Ga. 232 (1869), quoted in *Can a Negro Hold Office in Georgia? Arguments of Counsel, with the Opinions of the Judges, and the Decision of the Court in the Case of Richard V. White versus Wm. J. Clements,* (Atlanta, GA: Daily Intelligencer Book and Job Office, 1869), 4.
[104] White v. Clements, 16.
[105] "Eligibility of Colored Persons to Office in Georgia," *The Daily New Era,* April 29, 1869, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[106] White v. Clements, 28.
[107] White v. Clements, 54.
[108] *Ibid.*

laws and traditions. Hence, the only laws pertinent to this case were the ones that had been enacted since 1865.

Akerman then listed the Georgia Constitution's requirements for holding office: "Looking at the Constitution, we find citizenship, and a certain age, residence and professional standing are required of those who shall fill a few specified offices; and for no other office is any qualification specially laid down… Neither European blood is made a qualification, nor African blood a disqualification." As "all are qualified who are not expressly disqualified," this meant that black men had the right to hold office.[109]

Akerman conceded that some Americans were excluded from holding state office. "But it may be asked, 'whom do I mean by all?' for no one can mean so absurd a thing as that all persons on earth, or in the State, not of the classes expressly disqualified, are eligible to office. I answer, all to whom political functions are given by the Constitution; all who act in matters pertaining to the government; all who in a strict political sense we denominate the people. And these are the voters. These constitute the political family."[110] According to Akerman, the right to vote carried with it the right to hold office. And to the arguments of opposing counsel that it is unlikely "that the makers of the Constitution would open office to men so ignorant as most colored men are," Akerman replied, "Why is ignorance now, for the first time, so alarming? Is it not as dangerous under a white skin as under a black skin?"[111]

Akerman then closed. "In the absence of positive disqualifications, the right to vote includes eligibility to office; the capacity to select includes capacity to be selected; a capacity to be a principal includes a capacity to be an agent; a capacity to depute includes a capacity to be

[109] White v. Clements, 66.
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] *Ibid,* 78.

Deputed."[112] In sum, "the right to hold office not being given in the Constitution to the white man by name any more than to the black man by name, the black man, therefore, stands on the same footing as the white."[113]

The Court took five days to mull over the case. On June 15, the Court reconvened and announced its decision.[114] It ruled that the Superior Court had erred because "a person having one-eighth or more of African blood in his veins is not ineligible to office in this State."[115] Drawing on many of Akerman's arguments, it stated that, because black Georgians had not been expressly disqualified from holding office and no previous laws applied to this case, black people had just as much right to hold state office as whites.[116] This ruling did not directly affect the exclusion of Georgia's black legislators—"I have no doubt that the opinion of the Supreme Court would recognize the right of negroes to hold office, but the opinion of that court would not be binding upon the legislature," Akerman had noted a few months before—but it did set an important precedent.[117] Congress' Reorganization Act of 1869 declared the expulsion of elected legislators on the basis of race "illegal and revolutionary" and Georgia's black legislators were duly seated in January 1870.[118]

Akerman On the National Stage

Thus ended Akerman's participation in the nitty-gritty politics of Georgia's Reconstruction. In June 1870, President Grant nominated him to be the Attorney General of the United States. This appointment came as a surprise to the entire country: Akerman had never set

---

[112] *Ibid,* 67.
[113] *Ibid,* 77.
[114] *Ibid,* 103.
[115] *Ibid,* 109.
[116] *Ibid,* 106-108.
[117] U.S. Congress, House, *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 20.
[118] Woolley, *Reconstruction of Georgia,* 39.

foot on the national political stage. But those familiar with Akerman knew he could fill the role. Akerman "is today considered one of the leading lawyers of the State, and, in fact, in the South," wrote the New York Times. "He was one of the earliest and staunchest friends of equal and political rights to all men, and has been here several times before the President and Congressional Committees, as an earnest advocate for the admission of Georgia and its representation in Congress."[119] Georgia's Republican newspapers also applauded the appointment, declaring that it "meets the approbation of the Republican Party in this State and is a fitting tribute to the merits of that gentleman as a jurist and as a man. It is also a timely recognition of his services as a firm and undoubted Southern Republican who has given much of his time and talents to the cause of Reconstruction in Georgia."[120] Even some Democratic newspapers conceded that Akerman was the right man for the job. "The appointment itself is one - a Republican having to fill it - to which we shall offer no objection," wrote the Democratic Atlanta Daily Intelligencer. "The appointee himself is one of the leading Republicans in this State and is perhaps the best qualified of any legal gentleman of that party in it for such a position."[121]

Though now a national statesman, Akerman continued to battle for black rights. He spent much of his tenure as Attorney General overseeing prosecutions of the Ku Klux Klan, which he called "the most atrocious organization that the civilized part of the world has ever known."[122] Akerman was determined to stamp out this menace and was embarrassed by his countrymen's sympathy for its misdeeds. "To persons who had not the strongest evidence of the facts, a history

---

[119] "Talk at the Capital About the Resignation of Mr. Hoar. Amos T. Akerman, of Georgia, Appointed as His Successor," *New York Times*, June 17, 1870, TimesMachine.
[120] "Hon. Amos T. Akerman: The Georgia Republican," *Atlanta Daily New Era,* June 17, 1870, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[121] "The Appointment of Mr. Akerman, as United States Attorney General," *Daily Atlanta Intelligencer,* June 17, 1870, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[122] Amos T. Akerman to James Jackson, Nov. 20, 1871, UVA Letterbooks.

of the Ku Klux would be incredible," he wrote in his diary. "That any large portion of our people should be so ensavaged as to perpetrate or to excuse such actions is the darkest blot on Southern character in this age."[123] Under Akerman's leadership, the Department of Justice brought 3,384 indictments against Ku Klux Klan members.[124] He focused so much of his time and attention on the KKK that other members of Grant's Cabinet grew bored with his frequent updates. As Secretary of State Alexander Fish heartlessly noted in his diary one day, "Akerman introduces Ku Klux. He has it on the brain. He tells a number of stories, one of a fellow being castrated, with terribly minute and tedious details of each case. It has got to be a bore to listen twice a week to this thing."[125]

As Attorney General, Akerman continued to put personal integrity above all. He counseled his son, "Understand public questions. Ask what is right, not what is popular, and when you have ascertained the right, try to make it popular, but cleave to it, popular or not."[126] Unfortunately, other members of the Grant Administration were notoriously corrupt, and Akerman's unique probity eventually cost him his job. In 1871, a railroad company asked for his permission to transfer their Congressional land grants to other railroads.[127] When Akerman ruled against them, the railroads first enlisted U.S. Senators to lobby him, then offered him a $50,000 bribe.[128] Neither worked. "I will not subserve to certain selfish interests," Akerman said of the matter.[129] Ultimately, to get their way, the railroads successfully pressured Grant into firing Akerman and replacing him with someone more amenable.[130]

---

[123] Amos T. Akerman, *Diary,* April 9, 1847, JMA Private Collection.
[124] Shappert, "Fighting Domestic Terrorism," 126.
[125] Hamilton Fish, Diary, November 24, 1871, quoted in McFeely, "Amos T. Akerman," 410.
[126] Amos T. Akerman to Benjamin Akerman, January 5, 1873, Amos T. Akerman Letters, Private collection of J. Mark Akerman.
[127] Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 99.
[128] *Ibid,* 102, 107.
[129] Amos Akerman to Martha Akerman, August 30, 1871, quoted in Felton, "Hon. Amos T. Akerman," *The Cartersville Courant,* April 2, 1885, Georgia Historic Newspapers.
[130] Hamilton, "Amos T. Akerman," 107-108.

All of these traits—his commitment to black civil and political rights, his determination to do the right thing, and his utter incorruptibility—also characterized the start of Akerman's political career during the Reconstruction of Georgia. Ignoring the hateful rhetoric of his Democratic neighbors, Akerman fought for the equal rights of freed slaves, knowing that open-minded tolerance was the best course for them and, in the long run, for Georgia. Through his evolution from a racist slave owner into a fervent Republican and then into the scourge of the Ku Klux Klan, the arc of Akerman's life bent toward justice. His personal story shows what might have been if more Southerners had been willing to change their minds and accept the outcome of the Civil War, instead of spending decades clinging to the departed past.

Bibliography

Akerman, Amos T. *Diary of Amos T. Akerman, 1846-1857*. Private collection of J. Mark Akerman.

Amos T. Akerman Letters. Private collection of J. Mark Akerman.

Amos Tappan Akerman Letterbook, 1878-1880. Private collection of J. Mark Akerman.

Amos Tappan Akerman Letterbooks, 1871-76. Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

An Act to provide for an Election and to alter and amend the Laws in relation to the holding of Elections, Public Law No. 6 - O. 41, *Public Laws passed by the General Assembly of the State of Georgia* (1870): 6-10.

An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States. 14 Stat. 428-430, ch.153 (March 2, 1867).

Georgia Constitution of 1865, art. IV, § 1-2 (superseded by 1868).

Georgia Historic Newspapers. Digital Library of Georgia. University of Georgia Libraries. https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/.

Hamilton, Lois Neal. "Amos T. Akerman and his Role in American Politics." (Master's thesis, Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University, 1939). Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia, Held in the City of Atlanta in the Months of December 1867 , and January, February, and March, 1868, and Ordinances and Resolutions Adopted. Augusta, GA: E.H. Pughe Book and Job Printer, 1868.

McFeely, William S. "Amos T. Akerman: The Lawyer and Racial Justice." In *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, edited by Morgan Kousser & James M. McPherson, 395-415. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Richard W. White v. Wm. J. Clements, 39 Ga. 232 (1869). Quoted in *Can a Negro Hold Office in Georgia? Arguments of Counsel, with the Opinions of the Judges, and the Decision of the Court in the Case of Richard V. White versus Wm. J. Clements*. Atlanta, GA: Daily Intelligencer Book and Job Office, 1869.

Shappert, Gretchen C. F. "Fighting Domestic Terrorism and Creating the Department of Justice: The Extraordinary Leadership of Attorney General Amos T. Akerman," *Department of Justice Journal of Federal Law and Practice* 68, no. 1 (January 2020), 125-144.

The TimesMachine. The New York Times. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/browser.

U.S. Congress. House. *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, *before The U.S. House of Representatives*, 40th Cong., 3d sess., February 12, 1869. https://www.loc.gov/item/2022699666/.

Woolley, Edwin C. *The Reconstruction of Georgia.* Vol. 13*, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law*, edited by the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University. New York: Columbia University Press, 1901.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume VIII | Issue I Article V

The CIA's Covert Actions and True Mission

Artem Vazetdinov
artemvaz@bu.edu

THE CIA'S COVERT ACTIONS AND TRUE MISSION

ARTEM VAZETDINOV

Abstract: The paper examines how true the Central Intelligence Agency's involvement in international regime shifts is to its official mission of protecting American national security. The analysis is accomplished by detailing a variety of the Agency's tactics in government deposition and then presenting evidence-based paragraphs for each tactic. The tactics include manipulating elections, supporting pro-US leaders, destabilizing governments, and triggering the country's deterioration into chaos. Counterarguments are addressed and considered prior to reaching a conclusion. Finally, based on the wide variety of assessed primary and secondary sources, a conclusion is reached that the CIA's official mission is a disguise for power-expansionist ambitions demonstrated in the Agency's role in the assistance of regime overthrows.

Is the Central Intelligence Agency's foreign regime interventionism motivated by the official mission of 'safeguarding national security,' or the covert interest of establishing US world dominance?

Outspoken leaders replaced by subordinate rulers, developing nations devastated by wars and authoritarians, governments and economies destabilized to the point of anarchy and turmoil—these are common patterns following the intervention of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) around the world. For decades, historians have debated the motives behind such regime changes, presenting evidence that results in differing conclusions. CIA, the world's premier foreign intelligence agency, has the protection of the United States "at the heart"[1] of its

[1] Central Intelligence Agency, "We Are the Nation's First Line of Defense," CIA, https://www.cia.gov/.

mission: to “further the U.S. national security objectives,” It claims to collect “foreign intelligence that matters,” “safeguards the secrets,” produce “objective all-source analysis”, and conduct “effective covert action as directed by the president.”[2] But is this Company truly defending the safety of the American citizens, or pursuing the interests of its leaders, often even eliminating indirect potential threats? Understanding the incentives behind the CIA’s involvement in regime changes across the globe, from Chile to Cambodia, is monumental for the appropriate evaluation of this inquiry. Analyzing various occasions of the Agency’s interference with the leader-determining processes in foreign states reveals patterns, particularly the establishment of pro-US puppet governments and the deliberate weakening of antagonistic countries. Such trends identify the downfall trajectory following the CIA’s involvement and punctuate the power abuse in actions motivated by the government and the Agency’s economic and political benefits. Despite its official mission of securing US citizens, the CIA’s abundant involvement in foreign regime change exposes the clandestine goal of eliminating the opposition to the US government, fueled by the aspiration to establish global dominance.

To appropriately interpret the CIA’s actions, it is crucial to connect them to US foreign policies. The top focus of American international relations since 1968 could be divided into three distinct periods: the Cold War era defined by the containment policy, the ‘Years of Sabbatical’, which were interrupted by the 9/11 tragedy, and the subsequent War on Terror.[3] During the Cold War, the CIA’s main efforts were directed towards containment – they went beyond the Agency-sponsored anti-Soviet propaganda, going as far as to initiate wars. The US resistance to the spread of communism in Indochina has been particularly devastating, including the infamous

[2] Central Intelligence Agency, “About CIA —– Mission and Vision,” Central Intelligence AgencyIA, accessed March 21, 2024, https://www.cia.gov/about/mission-vision/#:~:text=Our%20Mission,-At%20the%20CIA&text=Collecting%20foreign%20intelligence%20that%20matters,help%20keeep%20our%20Nation%20safe.

[3] Bruce Schulman, Boston University, “2024: Contemporary America in Historic Perspective,” 25 April 2024.

confrontation with North Vietnam, the secret war in Laos, and the destructive bombing of Cambodia. Particularly, the Angolan intervention was a significant conflict of the period. It was not only poorly justified by Kissinger, but also resulted in the Congress decision to shut down the operation for the first time, after millions of ineffective spending and thousands of casualties.[4] The 'Years of Sabbatical' marked a decline in CIA activity, as intelligence spending decreased by over 30% during the 1990s.[5] The major activity of the foreign intelligence service during this period was the involvement in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Lastly, in the aftermath of the tragic September 11 attacks, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) engulfed Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite current withdrawal from these countries, GWOT continues and will not "end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."[6] A covert operation in Afghanistan that escalated as containment efforts after the Soviet invasion of '79 became the CIA's largest operation, which "succeeded, turning Afghanistan into a quagmire for the Soviets and eventually leading to their defeat", but elements of the guerrilla groups armed by Carter's administration, "eventually morphed into al-Qaeda."[7] The mixed successes of the prior involvement in Afghanistan connect to the equivocality of the CIA's participation in the War on Terror, as "waging two decades of war has taken time and talent away from the agency's original purpose of preventing strategic surprise."[8] "The tactical tilt" in the form of GWOT led to "a diminished ability to understand, anticipate and counter longer-term threats" from nations like

[4] Mark Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits* (United States: Odonian Press, 2012), 27-28.
[5] Brendan McGarry and Emily Morgenstern, "Intelligence Community Spending: Trends and Issues," Every CRS Report - EveryCRSReport.com, November 6, 2019, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20191106_R44381_e1859aa317403b44879021ecaf27f57451e0180e.html.
[6] George W. Bush, "Freedom at War with Fear," *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People* (speech, Capitol, September 20, 2001).
[7] Amy Zegart, "Opinion | the CIA Spent 20 Years on the Front Lines of the War on Terror. It's Time for That to Change. - Politico," Politico, September 11, 2021, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/09/11/9-11-america-spycraft-510880.
[8] Zegart, "The CIA Spent 20 Years on the Front Lines of the War on Terror."

China and Russia, which "threaten American lives and interests far more than terrorist plots."[9] The endangerment of American citizens, caused by the Agency's misplaced priorities, raises questions about how said shift transitions to the defining tradition of the US foreign policy, from the unilateral self-interested Realist theory to more 'altruistic' Wilsonianism. Campaigning for the presidency as a realist, George W. Bush demonstrated his priority in boosting the global influence of the US. This international relations theory suggests that major powers should act as a counterforce to comparable competitors, while only "balance against hostile minor powers" if they "inhabit strategically important regions of the world."[10] The CIA actively intervened in even the smallest countries, such as Fiji and Vanuatu in the Pacific,[11] not because of the threat they posed to American civilians, but the Agency's interests like the use of the area as its nuclear test grounds. An unordinary change came as a consequence of 9/11, as Bush proclaimed that the US would support the growth of democratic movements and end tyranny around the world, which signaled a transition to Wilsonian theory based on values, and with the country taking the role of an 'international actor'.[12] The GWOT, despite harmful effects on the areas of its interference, is significantly more representative of the Company's official mission. The Central Intelligence Agency employed similar tactics in reaching its goals throughout the three latest main periods of international relations, yet the focal foreign policy of the US has changed, which affected the countries of its interference. Wilsonianism in the War on Terror only seemingly puts the CIA closer to the goals of safeguarding American citizens and supporting the growth of world democracy, and historically, it constantly prioritized American dominance, even if it came at the cost of numerous democracies.

---

[9] Ibid.
[10] Sebastian Rosato and John Schuessler, "A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 4 (December 2011): 803–19, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592711003963, 803.
[11] Mark Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 39-40.
[12] Schulman, "Contemporary America in Historic Perspective."

Manipulating elections is just one of the anti-democratic approaches utilized by the Agency with the goal of annihilating opposition and securing the power of the United States. The CIA's covert foreign electoral interference ranged from sponsoring vote-changing propaganda, doxing, and financial support to gerrymandering polling results. The intelligence service "hardly ever altered votes directly," as claimed CIA historian David Robarge, which however implies that it sometimes did.[13] Since its very creation through the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA began its questionable actions in the name of 'national security' by manipulating the elections in Italy, collaborating with neo-Nazi groups to prevent a likely victory of the unfavored communist candidate. In the following two decades, the Agency interfered with the election in Guatemala, placed Ngo Dinh Diem in power in South Vietnam, intervened in two rounds of elections in Chile, and disrupted the '67 elections in Greece.[14] "Some of those operations manipulated ballots directly; others manipulated public opinion; all were designed to influence election outcomes."[15] After the 1983 US invasion of Grenada, the CIA financed propaganda and managed the nation through polling, to assure victory of "a strongly pro-US candidate,"[16] shares Bob Woodward, whose books the Agency claimed "harm U.S. security" by hurting its relations with "other countries through exposure of things we (CIA) did to those countries."[17] This statement is an additional endowment of the Company's official mission—it appears unlikely that disclosing its covert efforts, which were directed towards protecting American citizens, would significantly damage its ties with other states. Yet if these efforts are more often channeled

[13] Jack Goldsmith, "Does the US Still Interfere in Foreign Elections?," Project Syndicate, January 11, 2021, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/does-united-states-still-interfere-in-foreign-elections-by-jack-goldsmith-2020-10.
[14] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*.
[15] David Shimer, "When the CIA Interferes in Foreign Elections," Dış Politika Enstitüsü, June 26, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.org.tr/when-the-cia-interferes-in-foreign-elections/.
[16] Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
[17] "Woodward Books Seriously Harms U.S. Security," Central Intelligence Agency, December 22, 2016, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90-00965r000807540021-8.

towards amplifying its power and hurting civilians of those other countries, the CIA's concern would make more sense, and exceed the risks of 'simply' uncovering techniques of intelligence collection. After the conclusion of the Cold War, "the transition from containing communism to promoting democracy made electoral interference a riskier proposition." The CIA's electoral interventions decreased yet considered twice in the 21st century. In Serbia in 2000, "the debate turned into action, as the CIA spent millions of dollars working against the tyrant Slobodan Milosevic." President Clinton admitted to authorizing the intelligence service to "interfere in the 2000 election in favor of Milosevic's opponents," as he believed this was promoting Serbia's democracy rather than hurting it, due to the war criminal status of the Yugoslav president. The major involvement of the CIA in the election was focused on "influencing minds rather than altering ballots" and the CIA Balkans-based operations officer, Douglas Wise, expressed that "all the instruments of our national power to create an outcome that was pleasing for the United States."[18] The Agency's latest known foreign electoral interference could be perceived as an action motivated by securing the US, as well as other nations and the extremity of Milosevic's government justifies it. However, struggling to justify the Iraq War, as Hussein's government was quickly overthrown and no weapons of mass destruction were discovered, Bush emphasized the promotion of Iraqi democracy. As it became clear that Bush's preferred candidate Allawi wasn't going to win, election interference was considered, but later aborted. The primary reason for the abortion was not the CIA's realization that elections in Iraq do not protect US citizens, but the growing difficulty in protecting the secrecy of the operations. Since then, similar interventions have been largely managed by Reagan.[19] Another CIA involvement in foreign elections is the clandestine financial support for the Mauritian Labour Party in the 1982 vote, motivated by the

[18] Shimer, "When the CIA Interferes in Foreign Elections."
[19] Dan Kovalik, *The Plot to Control the World: How the US Spent Billions to Change the Outcome of Elections around the World* (Skyshore Publishing, 2018).

fear of losing the ports on the islands,[20] which has little to do with the safety of the Americans. This operation again exposed the imperialist ambition of the United States. In most electoral manipulations, the CIA was acting in the interest of American Exceptionalism, "the idea that the US is a unique force for democracy and freedom in the world." The CIA frequently interfered with foreign elections, largely motivated by the intention to amplify American political strength, despite the collateral damage to other democracies. If the strategy of electoral interventions failed, the CIA would transit to more extreme methods, such as establishing puppet states, starting coups, and obliterating the country entirely. All this presents the motivation behind the CIA's regime-shift method of gerrymandering elections as establishing the US world dominance rather than fulfilling its official mission of protecting civilians.

Another approach used by the Central Intelligence Agency in overthrowing regimes is supporting pro-US leaders, and it is an interjacent method between electoral intervention and deliberate destabilization. The endorsement for governments or political parties that align with the interests of the US ranges from overthrowing unfavorable leadership to funding and establishing puppet states. Under the Reagan administration, the CIA transferred over $10 million to Solidarity, a self-governing trade union, which played a key role in ending Communist rule in Poland in the 1980s. Such covert actions are representative of the Agency's efforts in support of political sides, whose leadership benefits the United States. This approach in North-Central Africa is labyrinthine, as "Nixon and Kissinger lifted nary an eyebrow at Qadaffy's ouster of the pro-Western Libyan monarch" and then continued to purchase more expensive oil, the earnings from which Qadaffy used to "purchase billions in US arms, which he used to fulfill his role as regional policeman for the US."[21] The idea of the CIA's suspected

[20] Larry Bowman, *Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 78-80.
[21] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 33.

support for al-Qadaffi to control the region, even despite the greater US principles, is furthered by the indictment of two CIA agents who provided weapons and training to the Libyan regime. What convolutes this, is that only a year later, the CIA conducted a clandestine operation, providing support for pro-American Hissene Habre in Chad, the purpose of which "was to bloody Qadaffi's nose." Chad won the war against Libya with the help of US aid, which the CIA continued to provide in millions yearly "even after it became clear that Habré was committing atrocities against his own people."[22] This complex line of actions again demonstrates the Agency's neglect for the well-being of another nation in pursuit of its interests, which again hardly connected to its national security. A prior case of endangering a country while working towards its goals took place in Cambodia as the CIA deposed Prince Sihanouk by a "CIA puppet Lon Nol, who immediately began committing Cambodian troops to the war in Vietnam," which was the US objective that led to the destruction of the country, and the rise of Khmer Rouge.[23] Another complicated sequence of the regime changes the CIA holds authorship of, dates back to the days of Manuel Noriega in the School of the Americas, the knowledge from which he employed in the assassination of his predecessor Torrijos, consolidating power and rising to his dictatorship while on the Agency's payroll. The CIA turned a blind eye to Noriega's drug smuggling and ignored his violence towards the opposition. What jeopardized Noriega-CIA tie was his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair, where in defiance of laws, the Company trained Nicaraguan Contra in opposition to leftist Sandinista, which the Agency eventually defeated by covertly funding the election of favorable Violeta Chamorro.[24] As the Contra scandal escalated, Noriega's disobedience became too threatening and in the 1989 invasion, which resulted in US

[22] Reed Brody, "Justice Comes to Chad," JusticetoChad, March 20, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20080412210047/http://www.hrw.org/editorials/2002/justicetochad.htm.
[23] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 22-23.
[24] Ellis Cose, "The CIA on the Stump," Newsweek, March 14, 2010, https://www.newsweek.com/cia-stump-204476.

civilian casualties, he was arrested and then replaced by an obedient pro-US government. The Senate Committee on International Operations concluded that "the saga of … Noriega represents one of the most serious foreign policy failures for the United States."[25] and criticized the CIA for disregarding his corruption. Supporting pro-American leaders is the CIA's approach to regime, which was rarely associated with the protection of its citizens, but a method of power consolidation for the United States, which resulted in the endangerment of thousands of Americans and a major contribution to the drug trafficking in the United States.

Deliberate destabilization is another approach the Central Intelligence Agency used to reach its goals, and it takes various forms such as as making the economy 'scream', pitching countries against their neighbors, and culminating in facilitating a coup. The ultimate purpose of this strategy is to weaken the 'enemy' by causing chaos. War on and suffocation of the Nicaraguan economy, which the CIA by Chile's example 'made scream', climaxed in a bloody coup, as intended by Kissinger and Nixon.[26] One of the most common scenarios of the CIA resorting to this tactic is sabotaging smaller nations if they are against US interests. When Bishop came to power in Grenada in 1979, the CIA "embarked upon a path of internal destabilization and international isolation"[27] of Grenada, ultimately leading to his assassination and an American invasion. The CIA propagated the threat of Grenada in justification of the casualties in the operation, but ironically Grenada was "mired in poverty and hopelessness." Ever since the event.[28] A similar fate befell Jamaica, where "mild reforms" of US-objectionable Michael Manley "were sufficient to lead to destabilization efforts against the 'democratic socialist' experiment," as the CIA created financial instability, generating an internal crisis that "resulted

[25] Simon Tisdall, "Manuel Noriega: Feared Dictator Was the Man Who Knew Too Much," The Guardian, May 30, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/general-manuel-noriega-feared-panamanian-dictator-cia-asset.
[26] Central Intelligence Agency, Economic War Against Nicaragua Counterspy § (2010).
[27] James L. Dietz, "Destabilization and Intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Latin American Perspectives* 11, no. 3 (July 1984): 3–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x8401100301, 11.
[28] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 34.

in conditions that forced Jamaica to go to the IMF for loans."[29] In 1982, this tactic was, for once, used against the enemy of American national security, as "Reagan approved a CIA plan to sabotage the economy of the Soviet Union through covert transfers of technology that contained hidden malfunctions."[30] Finally, the Agency's plot to collude with countries in the Mideast with the goals of "provoking a war" and sending "a message to Third World leaders"[31] was exposed by Iraqi's ambassador: "Kuwait had been conspiring with the CIA to destabilize Iraq."[32] The CIA's method of intentional dissemination of instability through various approaches in situations that present no threat to American national security is another incrimination of the intelligence service's main motive being the inauguration of the US world dominance.

To finalize the debate, all of the considered Agency's approaches to regime overthrows would be reviewed in a 'case study' of Chile, concluding with the CIA's last tactic of obliterating the nation. In Chile, "to prevent the accession to the presidency of Marxist Salvador Allende, the total amount spent on covert action … during 1970-73 was"[33] $8 million, as the CIA conducted a massive propaganda campaign in support of opposition media and backed the resisting political parties, such as PDC, in both Congressional and presidential elections. In their first 'track', the Company attempted a 'Frei re-election gambit' for the pro-US candidate, utilizing both the method of corrupting elections and supporting subordinate leaders. "That approach having failed, the CIA was ordered to create a 'coup climate' by 'making the economy scream,"[34] which is its third regime-shifting strategy. The monumental operation to prevent Allende's victory by

---

[29] Dietz, "Destabilization and Intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean," 11-12.
[30] David E. Hoffman, "CIA Sabotage 'Helped Crush Soviet Economy,'" The Moscow Times, March 1, 2004, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/archive/cia-sabotage-helped-crush-soviet-economy.
[31] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 42-42.
[32] George Lardner Jr, "Iraqi charges alleged Kuwaiti memo proves a CIA plot against Baghdad," The Washington Post, October 31, 1990, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/11/01/iraqi-charges-alleged-kuwaiti-memo-proves-a-cia-plot-against-baghdad/8938a9c4-192e-40eb-a6b3-ab166aec609f/.
[33] Senate, Frank Church, and John G. Tower, Covert action in Chile, 1963-1973: Staff report of the Select Committee to study Governmental Operations with respect to intelligence activities, United States Senate § (1975), 13.
[34] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 19.

electoral interference, and then the creation of a puppet state and destabilization, serves as "an enduring symbol of Washington's hegemonic arrogance toward smaller nations," especially considering its ultimate failure, which then escalated into a "clandestine effort … that led directly to the 1973 military takeover led by General Augusto Pinochet."[35] Pinochet's dictatorship, a making of the CIA-backed coup d'état, devastated Chile, turning "a democratic, peace-loving nation into a slaughterhouse,"[36] thus eliminating the list of threats to the Agency's interests. Kissinger's deputy at the NSC, Viron Vacky, questioned if the threat of Allende's government "outweighed the dangers and risks" of the US intervention, stating that it violated US "principles and policy tenets," as there was no grave danger. Considering that the main threats associated with Allende were his potential push toward socialism and Nixon's concern that "Allende's free and fair election would become a model for other nations …, threatening U.S. control and alliances,"[37] substantiates that the consolidation of US power defined the CIA's effort in Chile. Another scenario of the Agency's demolition of a country is Afghanistan, where with the intention "simply to humiliate the Soviets," "it succeeded in creating chaos, but never developed a plan for ending it." And "when the ten-year war was over, a million people were dead, and Afghan heroin had captured 60% of the US market,"[38] which demonstrates how in non-essential containment efforts, the CIA endangered Americans with drugs, and later Afghan terrorist groups. Cambodia is the most illustrious example proving that destroying a country was a CIA tactic and not an outcome of its other approaches. There, the methodical destruction of a country, first through the bombing and then the CIA-orchestrated deposition of Sihanouk "dramatically strengthened the Khmer Rouge insurgency." "US crimes helped nurture and sustain the KR" and

[35] Peter Kornbluh, "'Extreme Option: Overthrow Allende,'" National Security Archive, September 15, 2020, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/chile/2020-09-15/extreme-option-overthrow-allende.
[36] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 20.
[37] Kornbluh, "Overthrow Allende."
[38] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 38-39.

monstrous Pol Pot who led the devastating Cambodian genocide, while supported by the CIA. After the failure of Vietnam, the CIA observed the tragedy in Cambodia with satisfaction, as forever scarring the nation and keeping its stronghold in ex-Indochina was its initial goal. Similarly, the destruction of Iraq "set the stage for the rise of ISIS,"[39] which majorly harmed the Agency's official mission of 'national security'. Because of the harm that is impossible to keep in secrecy, the method of obliteration is the rarest, yet its use proves that in pursuit of its interests, the CIA harms not only unfavorable regimes but also Americans, and the whole world.

The Company's involvement in regime changes presents abundant evidence where the CIA outrightly defies its mission and intervened in areas that are of little to no interest to the Americans. It often resulted in disastrous consequences, and even put US national security at risk. One could argue that the approach through the review of the Agency's tactics doesn't support this conclusion, however, even the War on Terror, one of the CIA's activities most closely related to its authorized mission, has negative effects on the US public right now, as it stimulated Israeli militarization and hostility towards Palestine while committing the US to support Israel, which created one of the major national struggles of today. Another "enduring legacy of the GWOT is an approach to intelligence that doesn't serve U.S. national security interests as it once did," with the CIA overtly distracted from its "primary mission."[40] The statistics are undeniable and they show that "CIA-sponsored regime … caused large declines in democracy scores, rule of law, freedom of speech, and civil liberties."[41] "The U.S. government created (CIA) to secure dominance over the 'free world' nations, which supply the U.S. corporations."[42] Its purpose is presented as safeguarding American national security, but in

[39] Brett S. Morris et al., "Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide," Jacobin, April 27, 2015, https://jacobin.com/2015/04/khmer-rouge-cambodian-genocide-united-states.
[40] Zegart, "The CIA Spent 20 Years on the Front Lines of the War on Terror."
[41] Samuel Absher, et al., "The Consequences of CIA-Sponsored Regime Change in Latin America," *European Journal of Political Economy* 80 (December 2023): 102452, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2023.102452.
[42] Central Intelligence Agency, Economic War Against Nicaragua.

reality, the Agency is guided by the 'plot to control the world' and the goal "to undermine and overthrow governments dedicated to progressive and necessary change, all in the name of 'freedom,'"[43] as its foreign policy "cloaked in the language of democracy and human rights" remains Imperialist. "Despite its name," and official mission, "the Central Intelligence Agency's main purpose is – and has always been – carrying out covert operations involving economic warfare, rigged elections, assassinations, and even genocide."[44]

[43] Dietz, "Destabilization and Intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean," 8.
[44] Zepezauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, 3.

Bibliography

"About CIA – Mission and Vision." Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://www.cia.gov/about/mission-vision/#:~:text=Our%20Mission,-At%20the%20CIA&text=Collecting%20foreign%20intelligence%20that%20matters,help%20keep%20our%20Nation%20safe.

Absher, Samuel, Robin Grier, and Kevin Grier. "The Consequences of CIA-Sponsored Regime Change in Latin America." *European Journal of Political Economy* 80 (December 2023): 102452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2023.102452.

Bowman, Larry W. *Mauritius: Democracy and development in the Indian Ocean*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991.

Brody, Reed. "Justice Comes to Chad." JusticetoChad, March 20, 2002. https://web.archive.org/web/20080412210047/http://www.hrw.org/editorials/2002/justicetochad.htm.

Bush, George W. "Freedom at War with Fear." *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*. Speech presented at the Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, September 20, 2001.

Central Intelligence Agency, Economic War Against Nicaragua Counterspy § (2010).

Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed May 6, 2024. https://www.cia.gov/about/mission-vision/#:~:text=Our%20Mission,-At%20the%20CIA&text=Collecting%20foreign%20intelligence%20that%20matters,help%20keep%20our%20Nation%20safe.

Cose, Ellis. "The CIA on the Stump." Newsweek, March 14, 2010. https://www.newsweek.com/cia-stump-204476.

Dietz, James L. "Destabilization and Intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Latin American Perspectives* 11, no. 3 (July 1984): 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x8401100301.

Goldsmith, Jack. "Does the US Still Interfere in Foreign Elections?" Project Syndicate, January 11, 2021. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/does-united-states-still-interfere-in-foreign-elections-by-jack-goldsmith-2020-10.

Hoffman, David E. "CIA Sabotage 'Helped Crush Soviet Economy.'" The Moscow Times, February 18, 2008. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/archive/cia-sabotage-helped-crush-soviet-economy.

Kornbluh, Peter. "'Extreme Option: Overthrow Allende.'" National Security Archive, September 15, 2020. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/chile/2020-09-15/extreme-option-overthrow-allende.

Kovalik, Dan. *Plot to control the world: How the US spent billions to change the outcome of elections around the world*. Skyshore Publishing, 2018.

Lardner, George. "Iraqi Charges Alleged Kuwaiti Memo Proves a CIA Plot against Baghdad - The Washington Post." The Washington Post, October 31, 1990. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/11/01/iraqi-charges-alleged-kuwaiti-memo-proves-a-cia-plot-against-baghdad/8938a9c4-192e-40eb-a6b3-ab166aec609f/.

McGarry, Brendan, and Emily Morgenstern. "Intelligence Community Spending: Trends and Issues." Every CRS Report - EveryCRSReport.com, November 6, 2019. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20191106_R44381_e1859aa317403b44879021ecaf27f57451e0180e.html.

Morris, Brett S., Tyler Austin Harper, Jared Abbott, Fred DeVeaux, Cori Bush, Shawn Fain, Luca DeCola, et al. "Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide." Jacobin, April 4, 2015. https://jacobin.com/2015/04/khmer-rouge-cambodian-genocide-united-states.

Rosato, Sebastian, and John Schuessler. "A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States." *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 4 (December 2011): 803–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592711003963.

Senate, Frank Church, and John G. Tower, Covert action in Chile, 1963-1973: Staff report of the Select Committee to study Governmental Operations with respect to intelligence activities, United States Senate § (1975).

Shimer, David. "When the CIA Interferes in Foreign Elections." Dış Politika Enstitüsü, June 26, 2020. https://foreignpolicy.org.tr/when-the-cia-interferes-in-foreign-elections/.

Tisdall, Simon. "Manuel Noriega: Feared Dictator Was the Man Who Knew Too Much." The Guardian, May 30, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/general-manuel-noriega-feared-panamanian-dictator-cia-asset.

"We Are the Nation's First Line of Defense." Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed April 17, 2024. https://www.cia.gov/.

"Woodward Books Seriously Harms U.S. Security." Central Intelligence Agency, December 22, 2016. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90-00965r000807540021-8.

Woodward, Bob. *Veil: The secret wars of the CIA*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Zegart, Amy. “Opinion | the CIA Spent 20 Years on the Front Lines of the War on Terror. It’s Time for That to Change. - Politico.” Politico, September 11, 2021. https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/09/11/9-11-america-spycraft-510880.

Zepezauer, Mark. *The CIA’s Greatest Hits*. United States: Odonian Press, 2012.