



ORACLE
THE HISTORY JOURNAL
OF BOSTON COLLEGE

VOLUME IX — ISSUE I

ORACLE: THE HISTORY JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE

VOLUME IX, ISSUE I

MASTHEAD

Siena Sefton
Editor-In-Chief

Chase Whitney
Managing Editor

Alan Tsui
Associate Editor

Morgan Lamphier
Managing Editor

Cristiana Santos
Associate Editor

Caroline Young
Associate Editor

Rachel Herschbein
Associate Editor

Madison McCall
Associate Editor

Zack Kaemmerlen
Associate Editor

Nicholas Calvey
Associate Editor

Samantha Ouelette
Associate Editor

Adam Copple
Associate Editor

Alisa Fixler
Associate Editor

Penelope Ismay, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Misogynist or Rhetorician? Machiavelli's Writings and Hegemonic Masculinity in Renaissance Florence	Jessica Orrell	1
Selling Sex, Drink, and Gender: A Storyville Story	Olivia Wolfe	27
"The Week That Changed The World" and The Strategic Triangle	Devin Valverde	41
From Campus to Cold War: The FBI's 1949 Yale Forum and Battle Over Public Image	Jeff Pierantoni	59
Fishy Business: Organized Crime in the Fulton Fish Market During Prohibition	Max Podolsky	104
"If America Had Rightly Considered It:" Robert Kerlin During the Long Red Summer	Edward Elliott	126
"She Who is Not"1 Living In the "Footsteps of Christ:" Trans*, Fluid or Gender Nonconforming Identities of Female Italian Saints in the Later Middle Ages	Andrew Zero	150

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article I

Misogynist or Rhetorician? Machiavelli's Writings and Hegemonic Masculinity in Renaissance Florence

Jessica Orrell
orrellj@bc.edu

“For Machiavelli, Politics emerges from what he takes to be the nature of man, *and* develops men into creatures of true manliness.”

-Wendy Brown

Niccolò Machiavelli is regarded as one of the most influential and enduring political theorists to date. Though he authored many important and thoughtful works on politics and history, he is especially well-known for his line, “Fortune is a woman, and if you wish to dominate her you must beat and batter her.”¹ While it is easy to misread a line such as this one as misogynistic and malevolent, it is pivotal that one looks deeper into the influences that surrounded Machiavelli in order to understand the true meaning and nuances of his works. By taking a stance on Machiavelli that understands his works not as ignorant byproducts of his positionality, but as rhetorical publications that make use of commonly held societal conceptions, Machiavelli is not robbed of his genius. Beyond this, through an understanding of conventional ideas of masculinity in that time period (along with Machiavelli’s curious position in society), it will be demonstrated that Machiavelli constructed his own sense of masculinity and defined himself through his work.

Sex and Conception: Foundational Understandings of Male Superiority

In beginning to understand gender relations during Machiavelli’s time, it is important to first examine the most basic intimate relations between men and women. In Renaissance Florence, interactions between men and women were legitimized through marriage, as relationships outside of this institution were considered scandalous by the Roman Catholic Church, which acted as the moral arbiter for Christian Europeans of the era. Additionally, “for centuries the Venetian ruling class had upheld the institution of marriage as an organizing principle in both politics and society,”² as it provided a means to keep wealth centralized and order the classes. Through the arranged marriage system, the elite could maintain their place in society, and, by limiting social mobility through the marriage market, the wealthy did not risk

¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli*, trans. Peter Constantine (Random House Inc., 2007), 96.

² Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

losing their dominance in the social hierarchy. Marriage and all things associated with it therefore became very important to the average Florentine's life: it could provide an opportunity for one to ascend into a higher family or offer the risk of losing everything by marrying down the ladder.

To consummate a marriage, the bride and groom were expected to have sexual relations on the night of their wedding, and it was understood that “the only legitimate reason for sexual intercourse is conception.”³ Because of this, the most personal relations between men and women were designated as a means to an end: that end being a child. It was therefore understood that sexual interactions should be completed in a manner that would most effectively produce a pregnancy. Doctors of this time drew largely from Greco-Roman theories that suggested that “men are hotter and drier, women cooler and wetter.”⁴ This traditional view of the sexes maintained the understanding that man was the active, driving force of the pregnancy, and woman was the receiving fertile ground. As such, men were considered much more important to the procreation process as they provided “seed, a sensitive and rational soul, and physical features. The man... also determined the sex of the newborn– the better sex being male.”⁵ Therefore, sexual activity was seen as an opportunity for men to fertilize, and for women to *be fertilized*. This is an important distinction because it places the emphasis on the male and asserts him as the one with the power in the relationship. By focusing on the man's more active role in conception, the woman is understood as subordinate and powerless..

Machiavelli himself alludes to male prominence and female subordination in the act of conception. In his play, *Mandragola*, Messer Nicia and his wife, Lucrezia, are struggling to

³ Rudolph M. Bell, *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 17.

⁴ Bell, 17.

⁵ Valeria Finucci, "The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance" (Duke University Press, 2003), 11.

conceive. When the possibility that the issue in their lack of conception is Nicia's sterility, he quickly dismisses this idea and states "me impotent!? Why, you're making me laugh! I'm as tough as nails, and I don't believe there is a more virile man in all of Florence."⁶ While Nicia is largely depicted as a buffoon, this demonstration of his ability to procreate being linked to his personal feelings of masculinity is important to analyze. Nicia clearly has a high opinion of himself, and his role as a man is closely linked to his role as a provider. Although Machiavelli appears to fall victim to common conceptions about procreation of the time by allowing Nicia to place the complete blame for the lack of conception on Lucrezia, it is important to note that the other characters in the play largely regard Nicia as the problem. Callimaco has hope in the fact that he can win Lucrezia over because of "the desire of [Nicia and Lucrezia] for children,"⁷ thus implying that the issue with the couple's lack of conception is Nicia, and that if Callimaco were able to sleep with Lucrezia, she would be able to become pregnant. This presents an interesting duality in Machiavelli's writing. On one hand, he is not so quick to write off problems with conception to be the result of female infertility, and largely makes a fool out of Nicia for conforming to this assumption. This perhaps demonstrates that he is not entirely sympathetic to misogynistic undertones of the time, and finds these notions to be humorous. Despite this, Nicia is clearly "the chief butt of the play's humor,"⁸ and his implied infertility could also be read as his lack of masculine prowess. He is made fun of for his overconfidence and impotence, while Callimaco is both fertile and able to please Lucrezia in ways that Nicia cannot. Although Machiavelli may be commenting on the ridiculousness of some of the socially accepted norms about female and male relations, he still asserts the masculine hero of the play as one who can

⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Mandrake*, in *The Comedies of Machiavelli*, ed. and trans. David Sices and James B. Atkinson (Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 187.

⁷ Machiavelli, 169.

⁸ Ronald L. Martinez, "Comedian, Tragedian: Machiavelli and Traditions of Renaissance Theater," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 215.

provide both seed and happiness to the woman, displaying his adherence to some of the commonly held masculine ideals of the time.

Beyond simple procreation, the commonly held notions about the importance of pleasure in sex are largely different from how they are understood today. Conception came at the expense of sexual pleasure, and although a few writers emphasize that “each sex is capable of orgasm,”⁹ it was understood that this should only be sought after due to the understanding that orgasm would increase the likelihood of conception. Since pleasure was only emphasized for its role in procreation, pregnancy without orgasm was explained through the assertion that “such women must have somehow enjoyed intercourse, even if they were unaware of it.”¹⁰ This placed the power during sex once again in the man’s hands because only he was seen as competent and aware enough to be able to know when he was feeling pleased or not. Although more progressive writers on the topic, such as Savonarola “wrote openly and positively about the importance of foreplay,”¹¹ rhetoric that “women be submitted to some amount of foreplay for the purpose of conceiving”¹² de-emphasized pleasure for its own sake. Even though some men thought it important to equalize sex in the sense that the woman enjoyed it too, the enjoyment was not for the sake of the woman, but ultimately for the man and his desire for an heir.

Common understandings about pleasure that stemmed from a religious basis were also useful politically in asserting man as a dominant force. “Sex as a pleasure of the body was perceived as so dangerous that it mobilized far wider disciplining mechanisms,”¹³ many of which were instituted by the Roman Catholic Church. It was additionally understood through the same

⁹ Bell, *How to Do It*, 34.

¹⁰ Finucci, "The Manly Masquerade," 16.

¹¹ Bell, *How to Do It*, 34.

¹² Finucci, "The Manly Masquerade," 17.

¹³ Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 55.

ecclesiastical lens that “sex with the woman on top...is sinful.”¹⁴ and therefore “the woman was to lie below the man.”¹⁵ These religious ideologies were important not just in Florentines’ personal lives, but in governance as well. During Girolamo Savonarola’s time in power, he “exhorted the Florentines to create God’s kingdom on earth.”¹⁶ Therefore, as church and state became more and more intertwined, not only were sexual norms regulated through ecclesiastical expectations, but through a legitimate political power as well. By creating a scriptural and social understanding that it was sinful for the woman to be literally above the man during sex (stemming from a utilitarian notion of pleasure), it was understood that it was both religiously and politically ordained for the man to dominate the woman. This allowed the normalization of these sexual practices to be “important not because [they were] biological but because [they were] political: woman needed to be postulated as inferior and man as superior.”¹⁷ This demonstrates how the church’s influence bled into the political and everyday life: the assertion of man over woman in the realm of sex and pleasure was used as a political force by the pious leaders at the time to create a social construction of man above women in every other aspect of life. From the ground up, women were asserted to be lesser and subordinate.

Machiavelli is notoriously critical of the institution of the church in many of his writings, most specifically *Mandragola*. The character “Timoteo, for example...represents the corruption of the moral and spiritual mission of the church by its appetite for power and wealth.”¹⁸ He additionally alludes to the corruption of the church in *The Prince*, by stating that “ecclesiastical principalities are sustained by age-old religious institutions, which are so strong and efficacious

¹⁴ Bell, *How to Do It*, 33.

¹⁵ Finucci, "The Manly Masquerade," 18.

¹⁶ Roslyn Pesman, "Machiavelli, Piero Soderini, and the Republic of 1494-1512," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Finucci, "The Manly Masquerade," 12.

¹⁸ Martinez, "Comedian, Tragedian," 215.

that these principalities will maintain their princes in power regardless of how they live or what they do,”¹⁹ alluding to the moral negligence and hunger for power of these ancient establishments. His disillusionment with the church is important to understanding Machiavelli’s ideas about sex at the time. As the church was largely responsible for the commonly held understanding of sex as only for procreation and the subsequent exclusion of pleasure from the equation, it stands to be reasoned that because of Machiavelli’s general skepticism of the church, he was additionally skeptical of these pious understandings of sex. As he understood the church to be a corrupt institution with very little legitimate grounds to legislate, Machiavelli likely found the removal of pleasure from sex and other similar religious regulations of sex to be irrelevant to his own personal practices.

Mandragola serves as an exemplification of Machiavelli’s personal attitudes towards the role of the church in understanding pleasure. In the play, Callimaco makes it his quest to have sex with the beautiful Lucrezia, as he has been “inflamed with such a burning desire to be with her,”²⁰ and he will do nearly anything to get her into bed. Unfortunately, Callimaco must overcome Lucrezia’s “own nature, since she is completely virtuous and not interested in affairs of the heart.”²¹ Lucrezia is depicted in the beginning of the play as a caricature of the woman who only sees sex as a method of procreation. Callimaco, the lustful and charismatic man, must use Lucrezia’s desire for children as a reason to persuade her to fulfill his sexual wishes. It can be understood through the relationship between Callimaco and Lucrezia that for himself (or men in general), sex serves as more than just a method for procreation. Through the character Callimaco, Machiavelli asserts that men are swayed by their unruly desire and passions, and pursue the pleasures of sex outside of the holy objectives encouraged by the church.

¹⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 44.

²⁰ Machiavelli, *The Mandrake*, 167.

²¹ Machiavelli, 167.

It is important to note, however, that this understanding does not apply to women. Lucrezia is presented as pious and very adverse to the complex plot devised throughout *Mandragola* to con her into having sex with Callimaco. Lucrezia states that she has “always been afraid that Messer Nicia’s desire to have children would lead us to do something wrong...to have to submit my body to this abomination...I wouldn’t have thought, if I were the last woman left in the world and the human race depended on me for survival, that I would have to undergo such a thing.”²² Although she is primarily upset because she has been led to believe that this sexual act will result in a man’s death, Lucrezia feels the pious urge to protect her purity and laments sex outside of conception, aware that her husband may have ulterior motives and she must keep him in line. Lucrezia’s only instance of wavering from this is when Callimaco recounts her feelings after they actually engage in the act, saying that “once she had had a chance really to appreciate the difference between my technique and Nica’s, between the kisses of a young lover and those of an old husband... she sighed a bit and said... ‘I will be yours completely.’”²³ Here it can be understood that after being exposed to a technique that is enjoyable both for her and her partner, Lucrezia understands the merits of sex and wants to find a way to engage in it more often with Callimaco. Perhaps, here, Machiavelli presents an understanding that it is men’s duty, as those intelligent enough to see through the church’s meaningless rules, to liberate women from this understanding that sex should only serve as a means of conception through the introduction of pleasure.

Through observing men be exalted in their relationships with women as providers (not just of sustenance but of life-force) and portrayed as the guiding and controlling force in all sexual activity, Machiavelli gained an understanding of intimate gender relations that he utilizes

²² Machiavelli, *The Mandrake*, 221.

²³ Machiavelli, 267-268.

in his writing. His skepticism of the church and his insistence on the corruption of the institution allude to a nuanced understanding of sexual relations that posited the man as sexually dominant, but perhaps was not dependent on the notion that “sex was a serious business.”²⁴ His disillusionment with ecclesiastical legitimacy may also have resulted in a questioning of women’s subordinate place in society based on political execution of these ideas. The basic positioning of man above woman that has been explicated thus far further informs Machiavelli’s political writings and serves as an important foundational ideology for a deeper examination of his works. Through his works, Machiavelli demonstrates a complex and well-informed depiction of gender relations by creating a humorous depiction of characters that fail to live up to the standards at the time, and simultaneously comments on these standards and their validity.

Gender and Power: Politics as Sexual

Machiavelli spent a large portion of his life not only writing about politics but participating in them as well. He occupied many different roles in the government under the rule of Piero Soderini, and his love for this work was clear in his personal correspondence. He spent his years in government working “at a dizzying pace in his various roles,”²⁵ demonstrating his insatiable desire to be in politics, and wrote to his friend Vettori that “fortune has seen to it that...I have to talk about politics,”²⁶ indicating that he perhaps even felt destined to pursue this type of work. Additionally, after he was imprisoned by the Medicis and was deprived of his role in government, he wrote to Vettori that he was “enjoying what remain[ed] of this life,”²⁷ emphasizing what little there was to an existence outside of politics. To understand what

Machiavelli perhaps considered to be the most important part of his life, it must be remembered

²⁴ Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 46.

²⁵ John M. Najemy, "Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515" (Princeton University Press, 1993), 59.

²⁶ James B. Atkinson, "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17.

²⁷ Najemy, "Between Friends," 98.

that “external events dominated Machiavelli’s experience of politics.”²⁸ His theoretical conceptions of politics stemmed from his lived experience both working in government and in a society with expectations and norms that are vastly different from modern practices.

Inextricable from the conversation of politics is power. Acquiring power, therefore, is central to Machiavelli’s discussion in his most famous political work, *The Prince*. As he advises the Medicis on how to return to influence in Florence, he states that “In those states where a prince and her servant govern, the prince has more authority, as...there is no man who is considered superior to him,”²⁹ thereby equating political success with authority and superiority. He goes so far as to state that “cruelty can be called well used...if it is executed...out of the necessity to secure one’s power,”³⁰ emphasizing that gaining control is the most important consideration. Modern interpretations even cite *The Prince* as a “treatise on how to wield power successfully.”³¹ Machiavelli’s theories and advice are thus dependent on ideas of power. To understand fully Machiavelli’s assertions about power, the influencing factors that surrounded him must be examined.

Nicholas Scott Baker rightly affirms “an acknowledgement of the close relationship of sex and power, between the political and the sexual, inherent in European societies and cultures.”³² Ideas of sex and gender play into not only how one rules and comes to power, but who exactly is in these roles. In the Renaissance era, government positions of prestige were exclusively reserved for men, a practice that not only reflected but also bolstered prevailing notions of masculinity. “To be male...was to be more perfect, more rational, possessed of greater

²⁸ Atkinson, "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait," 19.

²⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 17.

³⁰ Machiavelli, 36.

³¹ “How to Hold and Retain Power: A Machiavellian Approach.” *The Mind Attic: For People Who Are Passionate About Learning*, 2024, www.mindattic.org/machiavelli/.

³² Nicholas Scott Baker, "Power and Passion in Sixteenth-Century Florence: The Sexual and Political Reputations of Alessandro and Cosimo I de' Medici," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (September 2010): 432.

self-control, and more capable of success.”³³ Because men were seen as more rational creatures, they were the ones who were seen as capable of wielding positions of power. Additionally, “most gender theory demonstrates that since Aristotle, the mind has been gendered as masculine.”³⁴ Roles that required the use of intellectual faculty, such as politics and military strategy, were reserved exclusively for men because they were the only ones seen as able to do these jobs. By gendering the mind as masculine, all important roles that required its use were therefore also deemed “male,” allowing professions that hinged on the use of mental faculties, such as politics, to exclude women.

The pattern of man’s continual elevation to governmental roles and the adoption of moral ideals within politics served to provide societal reinforcement for the equation of maleness and power. Additionally, being subordinated to the power of another was seen as essentially feminine. This can be seen in the fact that individuals “are emasculated... [because] they are subjected to princely power.”³⁵ As young men grew up under male rulers, they saw the physical embodiment of their gender as success and ascension throughout the hierarchy, leading them to value dominance and superiority as universally accepted premises linked to their maleness. Additionally, male assertiveness in positions of power provides a societal embodiment of the basic relationships between men and women established during sex. The man continues to ascend above and over women not just in the bedroom, but in society as well. The basic structuring of these relationships, therefore, progresses into a larger-scale societal implication.

The element of physicality in power must additionally be examined. The ability of one to physically dominate another, and to subordinate one beyond just their role in society was an

³³ Baker, "Power and Passion in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 435.

³⁴ Gerry Milligan, "The Politics of Effeminacy in 'Il Cortegiano'," *Italica* 83, no. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2006): American Association of Teachers of Italian, 352.

³⁵ Milligan, "The Politics of Effeminacy in 'Il Cortegiano'," 345.

important factor. This notion of the masculine as physically apt could have resulted from the perpetual political conflict during the time. As the “Spanish, French, and Imperial troops fought ceaselessly on Italian soil during the first half of the sixteenth century,”³⁶ the average Florentine of the era was aware of the instability that existed just beyond their city’s borders. At any moment, one could be called forth to help fight in the next installment of the Habsburg-Valois war, and the vast majority of soldiers were men. It was generally understood through the lens of Christianity that men “were created in the image of God, [and] were believed to have a natural superiority over their female counterparts,”³⁷ therefore making them more physically able to fight in battle. In this sense, creating a social understanding that men were meant to be stronger and more able than women was actually militarily beneficial for society, as “it [was] men’s courage that [guaranteed] well-being and security.”³⁸ By emphasizing values such as supremacy, valor, and strength among the male population of the time, a society could be more secure in the fact that it would have a male population primed with the morals necessary to succeed in battle.

It is important to note the role women played in constructing these masculine ideals of being a warrior and dominant political force. Concurrent with the necessity for men of the time to grow up with the understanding that they may have to leave their homes, families, and lives behind to go off to battle was the fact that many women were made to stay home and act as the heads of their households. Alessandra Strozzi, an important woman of her time, represents this phenomenon well in her letters. Alessandra and her husband were “separated by his extended absences from Florence on diplomatic missions”³⁹ and his eventual death. She writes in her

³⁶ M. Rodriguez-Salgado, "The Habsburg–Valois Wars," in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, ed. G. R. Elton (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 379.

³⁷ Dr. Heather Graham, "Introduction to Gender in Renaissance Italy," *Smarthistory*, June 8, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/gender-renaissance-italy/>. Accessed April 22, 2024.

³⁸ Gerry Milligan, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature* (University of Toronto Press, 2018), 36.

³⁹ Heather Gregory, translator, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, bilingual edition (University of California Press, 1997), 4.

letters of being primarily responsible for “[taking] out some insurance,”⁴⁰ “finding [her son] a wife,”⁴¹ and arranging dowries for her children,⁴² all tasks that are seen as being traditionally handled by men. It is possible that this sense of emerging female power could have led to a perpetuation of the need for men to feel and act “manly” at the time. Not only was the masculine ideal maintained by the need for men to fight in the battles of the elongated Italian Wars, but when these men left, their wives were made to take over their traditional role in the household. This served to make men feel emasculated; their wives were taking up every household role that they previously reserved for themselves, and identified their masculine selves by carrying them out. In turn, they were forced to reassert their masculinity through intensified interest in war and new means of acquiring power outside of the household structure through increased activity in politics and the military.

Machiavelli incorporates the threatening position of women on men’s physical and social domination of women in his play, *Clizia*. Nicomaco’s wife, Sofronia, is constantly left to clean up the mess he is making. She wields significant influence and power in the household, and even threatens at one point to “turn not only the house, but all of Florence upside-down,”⁴³ indicating her social status. By elevating Sofronia to a more powerful position than her husband (and implicitly asserting that she is much more competent and able than he), Machiavelli pokes fun at Nicomaco simply by emasculating him by virtue of his wife’s prowess. She is additionally asserted here as a physically powerful and dominant force. By being able to “turn the house upside-down,” although a figurative expression, her physical prowess is implied. This, therefore, reverses the gender roles that would typically be exhibited between a husband and his wife.

⁴⁰ Gregory, 51.

⁴¹ Gregory, 141.

⁴² Gregory, 29.

⁴³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Clizia*, in *The Comedies of Machiavelli*, ed. and trans. David Sices and James B. Atkinson (Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 314.

Similarly to how Nicia is degraded in *Mandragola* for not conforming to the masculine ideal of provider and sexual dominator, Nicomaco is humiliated for his inability to be strong, powerful, and a leader. This provides another example of the influence of the commonly held masculine ideals in Machiavelli's writings, as his ridicule of a character hinges on his inability to be "man enough." Sofronia's proficiency is not to be overlooked. She is presented as incredibly competent, apt, and ultimately as being able to fix the mess her imbecilic husband has created. By presenting her positively, Machiavelli asserts that he is not critical of women in positions of power in the family. While Machiavelli utilizes these societal norms to emasculate and ridicule Nicomaco, he simultaneously asserts the non-threat of feminine prowess.

Beyond comedy, Machiavelli uses gendered norms as a means to evoke a political fervor in men and demonstrate to them how they can use their masculine abilities to their advantage. At first glance, Machiavelli's most notoriously misogynistic line, "Fortune is a woman, and if you wish to dominate her you must beat and batter her,"⁴⁴ seems to clearly suggest a violent and chauvinistic subordination of women. However, if it is considered that "virility in all its senses...is constituted and confirmed by displaying the ability to subject sexually a force figured as female,"⁴⁵ the emphasis is placed on the male need to assert his masculinity. Taking this into consideration, the statement can be read not as Machiavelli likening Fortune to a woman because he hated women and wanted to see her physically destroyed. Perhaps, to provoke men's more dominant and physical character traits, Machiavelli found it useful to capitalize on something he knew that many men at the time used to define their masculinity—domination in their intimate relationships and their bodily prowess. This reading posits Machiavelli not as a victim of patriarchal discrimination, but as a careful examiner of these dynamics. By appealing "to the

⁴⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 96.

⁴⁵ Barbara Spackman, "Machiavelli and Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223.

pride in masculinity of men,”⁴⁶ Machiavelli’s tactics are “likely to be rhetorically effective... to reinvigorate and import into political life...their fear of the feminine, their need to prove manliness, and as a consequence, violence, hero worship, relations of command and obedience.”⁴⁷ Similar to how fashioning the ideal man as a warrior perpetuated masculine ideas of strength and domination, Machiavelli utilizes the desire of common men to exert dominance within the family and reclaim their threatened position as heads-of-households to extend these masculine ideals to the realm of politics.

Finally, Machiavelli’s gendering of politics has implications beyond men’s relation to the political. He uses “the metaphor of the state as female”⁴⁸ to make implications about the State of Italy during the time. In *Mandragola*, Machiavelli uses the female Lucrezia as a metaphor for Florence, and by constructing a plot where Lucrezia is duped and trapped, her body literally invaded, Machiavelli alludes to “the corruption...of the entire civic body.”⁴⁹ His discontent with the current state of affairs in Italy is mirrored through a woman who is corrupted from her moral virtue and eventually swayed by suspect guidance from the church, reflecting “Machiavelli’s conviction that the Church bore a heavy burden of responsibility for Italy’s ruin.”⁵⁰ If taken at face value, Lucrezia’s manipulation looks to be a typical misogynistic display of the woman being abused and used. However, when Machiavelli’s understanding of the feminine (not woman herself, but the notion of femininity) as subordinate and meant to be dominated, his gendering of Italy as a woman serves the rhetorical purpose of implying that Italy has been corrupted. In tandem with his implications about the illegitimacy of the church, Lucrezia’s assault

⁴⁶ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Meditations on Machiavelli," in *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolo Machiavelli*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 58.

⁴⁷ Pitkin, "Meditations on Machiavelli," 58.

⁴⁸ John Freccero, *In Dante's Wake: Reading from Medieval to Modern in the Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Danielle Callegari and Melissa Swain (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 118.

⁴⁹ Martinez, "Comedian, Tragedian," 215.

⁵⁰ Martinez, 215.

demonstrates “a satire of Church and society.”⁵¹ Only through understanding Machiavelli’s complex understanding of the role of the feminine and the Church’s corrupt nature can a full analysis of Lucrezia’s character be formed.

In sum, pervading war and man’s threatened identity as a dominant force in the household influenced hegemonic masculinity in Renaissance Florence. By utilizing these norms, Machiavelli is able to allegorically liken Fortune to a woman and Lucrezia to the State of Italy in order to convey a political ideology. Using an understanding of men as dominant, powerful figures, Machiavelli incites men to action and urges them to reclaim their masculinity by becoming active in politics. Additionally, he alludes to the corrupted nature of Italy by relating the state to a woman.

Machiavelli as a Man: The Author’s Own Masculinity

Although “Machiavelli’s writings never transcended the conventional misogyny of his time,”⁵² this conventionality can be used to understand who he was as a man, husband, and author. Machiavelli’s works can be understood not only to be a product of the social situation he arose in, but also as rhetorical devices utilizing those societal norms through a deep and complex understanding of them. Machiavelli himself stated that “what ‘a young boy’ takes in ‘at an early age’ has a profound influence ‘because he must needs be impressed by it, and then afterward throughout all periods of his life he regulates his way of doing things from that.’”⁵³ It was his own understanding that the values and ideals present in society during his formative years would have a great impact on his further development. Additionally, “identity in the Renaissance was to a great degree based upon a performance of self.”⁵⁴ This conception of identity begs the question

⁵¹ Martinez, "Comedian, Tragedian," 215.

⁵² Pitkin, "Meditations on Machiavelli," 70.

⁵³ Atkinson, "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait," 15.

⁵⁴ Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 112.

of whether Machiavelli additionally asserted his own masculinity and gender identity through his works as a performance.

In order to understand what Machiavelli wrote, one must understand how he defined his own masculinity. Although Machiavelli embodies some of the typical hegemonic masculine ideals of the time, such as father, husband, and government figure, his own personal masculinity can be read to be much more complex. Machiavelli grew up in a “family with a distinguished record...but without the wealth and political status of the elite families,”⁵⁵ and as such, he was not awarded the high government positions that came with elite status, the ones he so closely coveted. Although he was “never a full-fledged ambassador,”⁵⁶ from the years 1498-1512, Machiavelli worked in many government positions such as “interpreter”⁵⁷ and “envoy.”⁵⁸ Machiavelli’s work in politics was extremely important to him (and his identity as a man), and it characterized his life and his intellectual endeavors. When he was forced into exile under the Medicis, therefore, his life took a drastic turn. He was “forced away from the political ferment in Florence [and] he led an outwardly dreary life.”⁵⁹ Deprived of his job and ability to assert his masculinity and therefore self through this work, Machiavelli may have had to turn to other avenues to prove to himself and the world that he could “be a man.” While he was no longer employed, this period of exile was among the most fruitful in Machiavelli’s life in terms of his works.

In the play *Clizia*, which Machiavelli authored during this time, he seems to poke fun at himself as an aging man and lover. The play centers around a ridiculous sex plot, and “many scholars have noted that this old lover in the comedy, Nicomaco, seems to evoke Machiavelli

⁵⁵ Atkinson, "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait," 15.

⁵⁶ Atkinson, 19.

⁵⁷ Atkinson, 18

⁵⁸ Atkinson, 18.

⁵⁹ Atkinson, 22.

himself.”⁶⁰ Through Nicomaco as an allegory, one can understand Machiavelli’s discontents with this time. In this light, the comments that Nicomaco makes throughout the play on his aging and unfortunate state as being in love with “a young girl, whom he most honorably brought up, until she was seventeen,”⁶¹ can be seen as Machiavelli poking fun at himself as an old man past his prime. Nicomaco states that there “are three excellent qualities in a husband: youth, beauty, and love,”⁶² alluding to Machiavelli’s understanding that the old lover is no longer excellent, and that he himself is no longer excellent. As men of the time aged, the qualities that defined their status as quality men (such as sexual prowess and military ability) would diminish. In a letter to Machiavelli, his dear friend Vettori writes, “and you and I, even though we are *old men*, we retain to a degree the [bad] habits we took up as youths,”⁶³ suggesting that himself and Machiavelli lament the notion that with old age comes decline as a lover, and therefore decline as a man. To compensate for this, they must participate in sexual activities to remain confident in their masculinity. Utilizing this method of fashioning a new identity for himself, Machiavelli includes so much detail about his extramarital affairs that Vettori becomes “troubled by the way Machiavelli let himself be swept up and transformed by love.”⁶⁴ While not working, Machiavelli finds one way to hold onto his masculinity by aligning himself with the sexuality of youth and therefore another image of the ideal man outside of the successfully employed.

Although Machiavelli appears to be desperately clinging to what remains of his manhood as viewed through the hegemonic lens of the time, his quickness to make fun of himself in both *Mandragola* and *Clizia* points towards an awareness about his unconventional place in society and what it means for his masculinity. The culmination of the preposterous events in *Clizia*

⁶⁰ Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 155.

⁶¹ Machiavelli, *Clizia*, 281.

⁶² Machiavelli, *Clizia*, 309.

⁶³ Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 110.

⁶⁴ Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 110.

occurs when Nicomaco (under the impression he is about to sleep with Clizia, the girl he has fallen in love with) experiences an accidental homosexual encounter with his servant. Nicomaco states “all of a sudden, I felt myself being jabbed into the rump, and I got five or six of the damnedest pokes right here under the tailbone!... instead of Clizia who do I see but Siro, my servant, standing erect all naked on the bed.”⁶⁵ While this encounter is often read as Machiavelli making fun of his own romantic relations, it could be understood instead to be the author offering up an explanation for how he defines his manhood. If one looks at Machiavelli’s caricature of himself having sexual encounters with a man as not a homosexual encounter but as Machiavelli figuratively becoming the subordinate, receiving party, and therefore the woman, the situation can be understood as Machiavelli attempting to convey a knowledge of his masculinity that is more complex than the traditional understanding. Additionally, the character Nicia (who is also sometimes seen as a parody of Machiavelli himself) has an implicit homosexual encounter when he thoroughly examines Callimaco. He states, “I told him to undress...you never saw such a beautiful body, all pink and firm and smooth. As for the other parts, don’t ask!”⁶⁶ and then in recounting actually viewing the sexual encounter between Callimaco and Lucrezia, Nicia states, “I put him in bed, and before going back out I made sure I saw with my own hands how things were coming along.”⁶⁷

It is clearly insinuated that the two characters in *Mandragola* and *Clizia*, who are most likely to be caricatures of Machiavelli himself, are having some sort of homosexual experience, perpetuating the notion that they exist outside of the masculine ideal of the time. Implicit in the homosexual encounter is the notion that one or both parties will at some point become the subordinate in the encounter, and effectively therefore become effeminate. By comparing himself

⁶⁵ Machiavelli, *Clizia*, 383.

⁶⁶ Machiavelli, *The Mandrake* 263.

⁶⁷ Machiavelli, *Clizia*. 314.

to these characters, Machiavelli may be stating that he too is forced to exist outside of the masculine ideal of the time. Through a reading of Machiavelli presenting himself not necessarily as gay but as the figurative woman, Machiavelli ridicules himself in his feminine position in society: out of work, subordinate, and aging.

Machiavelli's own understanding of himself can best be explained through the fact that masculinity in Renaissance Florence was much more complex than the simple hegemonic view that is largely accepted today and that has been explicated thus far. Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* is generally regarded by scholars to be one of the greatest demonstrations of gender in the Renaissance period, and examination of this work can provide a multi-layered understanding of masculinity at the time beyond simply the powerful and dominant. By comparing Machiavelli to Castiglione's Courtier, it becomes clearer how Machiavelli's understanding of his gender may have been influenced by factors such as his role as a servicer instead of a provider.

The place of the Courtier in the court largely reflects Machiavelli's own situation within the political scheme in Florence. The Courtier, "a skilled diplomat, gentleman of the court, and even a military protector,"⁶⁸ held a unique position in that they had to be knowledgeable enough to be able to interact with all the guests of the court, but still were not a member of the elite. While the Courtier had to diplomatically converse with every different party in the room, Machiavelli had to serve as a correspondent for different political entities and gather information for the government he was working for. He had to be knowledgeable of global politics in a similar manner to how the Courtier was knowledgeable about the politics of the social market. In the same way, the Courtier had to be appealing to everyone and carefully formulate his appearance; Machiavelli similarly had to change his identity depending on whom he was speaking to and the role he was attempting to gain. Additionally, "dependent political status

⁶⁸ Milligan, "The Politics of Effeminacy in 'Il Cortegiano'," 348.

results in peculiar social demands that call for the redefinition of norms of masculinity,⁶⁹ and thus “effeminacy is undeniably a concern of the courtiers.”⁷⁰ Courtiers, like Machiavelli, must find a way to reckon with their manhood while still serving others, and thereby being subordinate. Subordination being equated with the feminine, asserting and understanding masculinity becomes more important than ever.

The courtier is warned to “pay attention to what type of man they wish to be taken for, and then dress accordingly.”⁷¹ By identifying Machiavelli as a Courtier it can be seen how he, in a sense, “dressed” how he wanted society to perceive him. By taking in the hegemonic masculine ideals of the time, Machiavelli grew up with an understanding that if he were to be considered a man, he must dominate. He must ascend and rise above not only women but society itself and enter the most virile possible career – politics. He has sought his entire life to enter the highest government post he can and assert his masculinity by doing so. Despite this, he remains subordinate in some respects to many government officials and must find a way to assert his masculinity elsewhere. In this, he turns to political writings where he utilizes allusions that demonstrate an understanding of what it means to be a man. By producing these works, he can put on the outfit of a man, fashioning himself as knowledgeable and powerful. Despite doing everything he can to form his identity to match the masculine ideal, Machiavelli is aware of his positionality. He makes fun of this in his plays and letters and is aware of the gendered norms that he attempts to conform to. Always changing face depending on the occasion and audience, Machiavelli is the true embodiment of the courtier.

Conclusion

⁶⁹ Milligan, "The Politics of Effeminacy in 'Il Cortegiano'," 348.

⁷⁰ Milligan, 348.

⁷¹ Milligan, 355.

Through his comedic ventures, Machiavelli raises doubts about the role of the church in mediating relationships between men and women. He takes a progressive stance towards sexuality and is not afraid to challenge conventions of pleasure and marital expectations. Despite this stance, he utilizes conceptions of masculinity to make commentary on the political state of Italy and incorporates a gendered view of politics to allude to what he considers the state's struggles. Along with creating a clever humanization of typical gender relations, Machiavelli utilizes the typical entangling of masculinity and power. This norm informs and shapes his writings, thus demonstrating a deep understanding of the ways in which gender influenced politics. He additionally attempts to ascend the political hierarchy and devotes his life to politics, demonstrating his attempt to fashion his own identity as a man.

Through contextualizing Machiavelli within the framework of his era and examining how his works serve as a method to assert his own masculinity, his writings transcend the myopic interpretation of being misogynistic diatribes against women. He displays a nuanced understanding of his own masculinity in the fact that he is a servant, and his effeminate roles shine through in his letters and self-depictions in his plays. While Machiavelli "called attention to the conventional expectations and made somewhat transparent gestures of respect towards them,"⁷² he both utilizes them and draws them into question. Machiavelli's knowledge and use of gender and masculinity in Renaissance Florence, therefore, elevates his writings to an even more intricate level, asserting his complex understanding of both the world around him and his place within it.

⁷² Najemy, "Between Friends," 62.

Bibliography

- Atkinson, James B. "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait." In *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, edited by John M. Najemy, 14-31. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Baker, Nicholas Scott. "Power and Passion in Sixteenth-Century Florence: The Sexual and Political Reputations of Alessandro and Cosimo I de'Medici." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (September 2010): 432-457.
- Bell, Rudolph M. *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Ferraro, Joanne M. *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Finucci, Valeria. "The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance." Duke University Press, 2003.
- Freccero, John. *In Dante's Wake: Reading from Medieval to Modern in the Augustinian Tradition*, edited by Danielle Callegari and Melissa Swain, Fordham University Press, 2015.
- Gilmore, David D. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. Yale University Press, 1990, p. xii.
- Graham, Dr. Heather. "Introduction to Gender in Renaissance Italy." *Smarthistory*, 8 June 2020. Accessed 22 April 2024. URL: <https://smarthistory.org/gender-renaissance-italy/>.
- Gregory, Heather, translator. *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, bilingual edition, University of California Press, 1997.
- "The Mind Attic: For People Who Are Passionate About Learning." "How to Hold and Retain Power: A Machiavellian Approach." 2024. Accessed 4 May 2024. URL: www.mindattic.org/machiavelli/.

- Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Mandrake*. In *The Comedies of Machiavelli*, edited and translated by David Sices and James B. Atkinson. Hackett Publishing Company, 2007, 153-277.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Clizia*. In *The Comedies of Machiavelli*, edited and translated by David Sices and James B. Atkinson. Hackett Publishing Company, 2007, 277-403.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. In *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli*, translated by Peter Constantine, 4-100. Random House Inc., 2007.
- Martinez, Ronald L. "Comedian, Tragedian: Machiavelli and Traditions of Renaissance Theater." In *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, edited by John M. Najemy, 206-223. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Milligan, Gerry. *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 2018, 36.
- Milligan, Gerry. "The Politics of Effeminacy in 'Il Cortegiano'." *Italica* 83, no. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2006): American Association of Teachers of Italian.
- Najemy, John M. *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Pesman, Roslyn. "Machiavelli, Piero Soderini, and the Republic of 1494-1512." In *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, edited by John M. Najemy, 48-64. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. "Meditations on Machiavelli." In *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli*, edited by Maria J. Falco, 49-93. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.
- Rodriguez-Salgado, M. "The Habsburg-Valois Wars." In *The New Cambridge Modern History*, edited by G. R. Elton, 377-400. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Ruggiero, Guido. *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance*. The

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

Spackman, Barbara. "Machiavelli and Gender." In *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*,

edited by John M. Najemy, 223-239. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article II

Selling Sex, Drink, and Gender: A Storyville Story

Olivia Wolfe

owolfe5678@gmail.com

Introduction

Selling sex has always been a precarious endeavor. The act itself is inherently vulnerable, exposing both participants to risks like venereal disease, theft, and even murder. Such dangers are often attributed to legislation criminalizing sex work, which forces the trade underground into a perilous black market where neither buyer nor seller feels safe seeking police protection. Al Rose, writing about New Orleans' legal red light district, commented on this precariousness, noting "when something that is genuinely popular is declared to be illegal, it is no longer effectively subject to any administrative regulation and the "problem," whatever it is, is almost certain to be aggravated."¹

But the legalization of prostitution in NOLA's Storyville district didn't fully neutralize these risks, nor did it erase the fears and moral concerns of its patrons. On the contrary, Storyville's success depended on its ability to craft an illusion of safety and sophistication that would ease the minds of those entering its gates. The district's Blue Books and the tourist machinery that existed to distribute them provide a key insight into this process, revealing a deliberate effort to replace negative associations with fantasies of glamor, control, and indulgence.

Alcohol—both its consumption and its advertising—emerged as a central tool in this effort. Gendered drinking culture in Storyville helped patrons navigate the charged space between respectability and indulgence. Masculine drinking establishments, such as saloons and clubs, acted as respectable entry points to the district, serving as controlled spaces where patrons could access Blue Books and steel their nerves. Advertisements for hard liquor, beer, and even ozone water emphasized rationality, strength, and healthfulness, framing alcohol as a symbol of control and confidence, qualities that reassured men of their masculinity while indulging in the district's offerings.

In contrast, champagne advertisements employed by madams leaned heavily into femininity, luxury, and exoticism. Champagne was positioned not only as an indulgence but as a marker of

¹ Rose, Al. *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, illustrated account of the notorious red-light district*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974, 183.

opulence and elevation, justifying higher price points and reassuring customers of the prestige and sophistication of their experience. Through these efforts, alcohol and its advertising became a critical tool in Storyville's broader strategy to de-problematize the sex trade, turning it from a moral and physical risk into a seductive fantasy of control, wealth, and pleasure.

Historiography

Historical examinations of Storyville tend to focus on the unique legal, economic, and social implications of the sanctioned red light district. *The Great Southern Babylon* by Alecia P. Long, for example, argues that the district acted as a reservation, containing prostitution within a set boundary in order to protect the respectability of increasingly public-facing women, while doubling as an escapist resort for pleasure-seeking tourists. Al Rose expands on Long's idea of Storyville as a legal reservation in his more general overview of the district, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic*. In this work, Rose pays particular attention to pre-Storyville prostitution, especially in the early New Orleans tenderloin district dubbed the Swamp, which he claims was the scene of over eight hundred murders between 1820 and 1850.² By highlighting the endurance of the oldest profession and the ill effects of leaving it unregulated (murders, unstable housing prices, increased police corruption), Rose advocates for the reservation model Long identified. In *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville*, Pamela D. Arceneaux instead focuses on the district's advertisements, which she argues reflect the rise of American consumerism and commodification of pleasure.

While these historians seem to imagine sex work as the sole vice of Storyville, a review of the archival material makes clear that this was a world equally influenced by alcohol. After all, beside the cribs and bagnios were a plethora of saloons, cabarets, and dancing halls—all of which primarily peddled liquor—and even high-end assignation houses made nearly as much off selling drinks as they did turning tricks.³ Therefore, building off Arceneaux's work, I intend to analyze how Storyville's Blue Books advertised alcohol and how it moved within the district in order to highlight

² Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 7.

³ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 31

various gendered efforts to de-problematize the selling of sex.

Entering Storyville, Masculine Geography

Storyville had a well-developed system for luring tourists, which relied on saloons as semi-respectable masculine gateways and information hubs for the district. In 1908, the Southern Railway company finished construction of its New Orleans station, which would serve as the terminus for premier passenger trains from across the American Northeast.⁴ The station was located at the intersection of Basin Street and Canal Street, a point which also marked the southwest corner of NOLA's legal red light district. Thus, as their trains ground to a halt along Basin Street, arriving tourists would be greeted by three blocks of living advertisement. Crucially, the bagnios that overlooked the railway were Storyville's finest—not single-room cribs but stately houses, complete with balconies and electric lighting.

If the view on arrival was not enough to lure a pleasure-seeking tourist into the district, he may have been further enticed with a miniature eight-page directory like *Hell-O* or *The Lid*. In *Being an Authentic*, Rose posits that Tom Anderson would hire “street Arabs” to distribute these books in exchange for a fee for each customer gained.⁵ While Rose doesn't provide a source for this claim, it does seem plausible. Similar patronage structures already existed between crib girls and their pimps and the little directories—which were quite literally $\frac{1}{4}$ of the size of a proper Blue Book—only contained ads for Anderson's properties.⁶ Regardless, tourists would not have required a directory to find Storyville; all they needed to do to come face to face with its gateway was turn around.

Crucially, this gateway was dominated not by flashy assignation houses but institutions of asexual male recreation. Along this crucial first block of Basin Street, there was at various times a shooting gallery, a cabaret, and always more than a few saloons. These amusements provided

⁴ *New Orleans: City of Old Romance and New Opportunity*. New Orleans, La. Bauerlein, Inc, 1924.

⁵ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 73.

⁶ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 151.

pleasure-seeking men with a respectable pretence to enter the district, while the saloons in particular doubled as a staging ground for more lascivious explorations. The premier of these gateway drinking houses was the Terminal Saloon. Spanning an entire block (Basin to Franklin), the Terminal Saloon dominated the entryway to Storyville, and it was there that the more comprehensive Blue Book guides to the district could be purchased. Tourists who instead followed the advice of their cherry-red *Hell-O* books would have found a similarly inviting entry at Tom Anderson's Saloon, where the political boss was said to hold court at his grand, show-stopping bar. Reinforcing the image of these saloons as information hubs, one issue of *The Lid* described Anderson's as "The Key-Hole to the district."⁷ These gateway saloons were deeply masculine, and not just because they occasionally used pornography as wallpaper.⁸ In the Storyville era, it was illegal for women—even prostitutes—to enter barrooms.⁹ Thus, ironic as it may be, the entrance to NOLA's red light district was an all-male affair.

Aside from providing men with a "cover" for entering the district, these masculine gateways may have served as a method of psychic control over female sexuality. In her book, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*, Emily Epstein Landau argues that "the Civil War and its shattering aftermath, among other factors, led to a loss of masculine self-assuredness" and a crisis in masculinity that Storyville attempted to capitalize on by selling a fantasy of male dominance.¹⁰ While it can be easy to imagine sex work as an industry synonymous with male dominance, the history of pre-Storyville prostitution makes clear that it could just as easily become a site of emasculation. In the Swamp tenderloin, Rose tells us, men were "processed" and turned out penniless "with assembly-line precision."¹¹ "Every proprietor had to be ready to defend his life and property at all times."¹² Thus, by containing brothels and crib houses within a

⁷ Landau, Emily Epstein. *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018, 110.

⁸ Arceneaux, Pamela D., and Emily Epstein Landau. *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans*. New Orleans, LA: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017, 69.

⁹ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 69.

¹⁰ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 112.

¹¹ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 7.

¹² Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 8.

boundary of masculine drinking, headed by male figures of guidance like Tom Anderson, Storyville's vendors reassured tourists that the district was ultimately a male sphere and, by extension, safe.

Men of Health and Brains, Advertising Drink

Advertisements for drinks in Blue Books, with the exception of champagne, also appealed to masculinity in order to assuage anxieties. Perhaps unsurprisingly, hangovers seem to have been a pressing issue in Storyville. A man named Billy Seebold sought to capitalize on the epidemic by selling his "Famous National Cocktail" for \$1.50 a bottle. According to an ad in the ninth edition of the Bluebook, Seebold's mysterious "bracer after a long night" could be found in any of the city's leading cafes.¹³ Seebold also manufactured the "Tann Tonic," which, though advertised "for the blood, indigestion, constipation, liver and kidney troubles," was probably sought out primarily for the promise that "after a bad night, it makes the day bright."¹⁴ Though Seebold seems to have cornered the market on pre-mixed hangover cures, other brands promised similar effects. An ad for Ozone Water, for example, touted the drink both as a mixer for highballs and a hangover cure, proclaiming "Wise People Drink Ozone Water."¹⁵

The anxiety around the health effects of overdrinking bled into marketing for hard liquor and beer as well. Green River Whiskey declared—both in ad copy and on the bottle—that it was a "Whiskey without the Headache," perhaps because it was "pure wholesome and unadulterated," while Moerlein's Barbossa Beer assured its customers that "Bottled Beers are the model for Purity and Healthfulness."^{16, 17} Crucially, though, both of these brands paired their healthful message with a dose of masculinity. While the advertisement for Barbossa Beer does feature a central female figure, she is nude and almost siren-like, hair floating around her head as if underwater. It seems clear that potential customers are not meant to identify with her but with the eponymous Barbossa, who is

¹³ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 101.

¹⁴ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 97.

¹⁵ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 89.

¹⁶ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 85.

¹⁷ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 89.

depicted on the bottle's label, crowned like a king and being offered a mug of, presumably, his own pure and healthful beer. The woman is depicted to add a twinge of magical sex appeal to the story of macho-man Barbossa, not to make the beverage itself feminine.

Compare this to advertisements for champagne, which, with remarkable unity across brands, tend to feature a single, clothed female figure holding a bottle.¹⁸ Where Barbossa's siren is brought to life via picture-book-esque line drawings, these champagne women are rendered in shades, drawing attention to the soft feathered accents of their hats and swell of their gowns; this stylistic choice creates a strong visual resonance between the champagne girls and the thumbnail photographs of well-dressed prostitutes they share page space with. Where Barbossa's siren sells female sexuality as an enhancement of male power, the champagne girls project female sexuality for the sake of it, subtly connecting themselves to fantasies of prostitution in the district.

By contrast, Green River Whiskey swerves the question of female sexuality entirely, instead choosing to cement its masculinity through association with the armed forces. In one advertisement, an illustration of the whiskey is accompanied by the bolded caption, "For Nine Years continuously and Now the Official Whiskey of all U.S. Marine Hospitals and used by them exclusively." Notably, this aside not only masculinizes Green River Whiskey but also reinforces its claim to healthfulness. After all, surely the U.S Marine hospital would not be using whiskey that would give its patients headaches! Both of these advertisements offer us clear examples of masculinity being used in the advertising of alcohol to assuage fears around the health effects of overdrinking.

The invocation of masculinity in these advertisements, however, could also work to ease less concrete fears. Nearly every Blue Book opened with an introduction, often entitled something like "How to Be Wise" or "Don't be a noax [*sic*] all."^{19, 20} These introductions promised the discerning pleasure seeker that "if you listen to this book you will never be led astray by touts or gold brick advisors," assuring him that their publication was "noted for its fairness as a directory for strangers

¹⁸ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 79.

¹⁹ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 71.

²⁰ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 74.

my who see fit to visit the tenderloin.”^{21,22} These assurances speak to the legacy of Swamp shysters, but they also characterize the consumers of Storyville as men seeking to be “wise” in their pursuit of pleasure; many alcohol advertisements also invoked masculinity to validate this self-image of conscious consumerism.

Take, for example, the cover for an alternative guide to Storyville, a 24-page red booklet titled “Sporting Guide of the Tenderloin District.” Where the covers of Blue Books tend to be fairly bare, save for an illustration or occasionally the year of publication, this sporting guide included two ads directly on its cover. One beneath the title touting “Men’s Furnishings” and one above which read simply: “Drink Raleigh Rye, For Men of Brains.”²³ Raleigh Rye is advertised heavily throughout the Storyville period, both in genuine Blue Books and publications like the *Sunday Sun*, and these ads are always accompanied by the slogan “For Men of Brains.”^{24,25} In fact, the slogan is often the only copy that appears. Rather than extoll the virtues of their whiskey, connect it to mystical siren-women or invoke the US army, Raleigh Rye simply asserts that the informed *male* consumer drinks their brand, appealing again to fantasies of male dominance while subtly flattering the customer’s supposed discernment.

Out of all the available Raleigh Rye advertisements, the copy on the front of the *Sporting Guide of the Tenderloin District* stands out because it makes plain the association between these fear-assuaging, masculinized liquor advertisements and Storyville guidebooks as a whole. Note that at a glance, the words most likely to stand out to a reader are not the guide’s title but Raleigh Rye and its iconic slogan. Ironically, this subtitle would likely have served fairly well, since at their core, Storyville’s guidebooks were also looking to cater to men of (at least imagined) brains.

This work could also be accomplished by directly co-opting the voices of masculine authority in the district. Nearly identical ads for Sanderson’s Mountain Dew, a brand of Scotch Whiskey, appear in two editions of the Blue Book. In the first, above an acrostic celebrating the

²¹ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 71.

²² Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 74.

²³ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 114.

²⁴ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 101.

²⁵ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 212.

most “popular whiskey under the sun,” is a box that reads simply GUARANTEES, while in the second, that text has been replaced by the more particular “Thos. C. Anderson Guarantees;” the ad is otherwise unchanged.^{26, 27} The later inclusion of Anderson’s endorsement suggests some sort of compensation on the part of Sanderson’s Mountain Dew. While it may seem odd to include a local celebrity endorsement in a guidebook intended for tourists, Tom Anderson loomed large enough in the district that his name was likely recognizable even to outsiders. He did, after all, own three different establishments under his own name alone. And while the authority that comes with that sort of ubiquity was likely at least part of what the whiskey brand was after when they secured his endorsement, Anderson was also the pinnacle of Storyville’s “sporting” model of masculinity. In the “funnies” section of their newspaper, *The Times Picayune* printed: “Does the C in Tom Anderson stand for Cat?” highlighting Anderson’s reputation as something of a player.²⁸ As with Raleigh Rye, the appeal to masculinity in this whiskey ad simultaneously works to buttress consumer confidence and flatter their own masculine self-conception.

Le Vin du Diable, Feminized Drink in High-End Bordellos

While “masculinizing” drink worked to reassert Storyville as a male sphere and soothe customers' anxieties around drink, it was incompatible with the female world of the bordello. Instead, high-end madams often integrated wine, especially champagne, into their advertisements in an effort to project opulence and exoticism, which worked to elevate the selling of sex and justify their higher prices. One of the earliest Blue Books, like many of its descendants, includes a key for understanding its entries, featuring such helpful tips as “To tell a landlady from a boarder, their names have been printed in Capital Letters.”²⁹ Unique to this particular edition, though, is the following distinction, printed on the same page:

* The star on the side of a landlady’s name indicates a first class house, where

²⁶ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 85.

²⁷ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 89.

²⁸ *The Times Picayune*. February 6, 1877.

²⁹ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 67.

the finest of women and nothing but wine is sold. The letter “B” on the side of a name indicates a house where beer is sold.

In these short lines, a remarkable connection has been forged between wine and quality. The star doesn’t simply indicate that wine is available—as with beer and the B—but that a house is of a higher caliber. Houses that serve only wine are conferred a level of class, suggesting that the drink had more social capital than beer or hard liquor.

The Madams of Storyville were aware of wine’s privileged status and, even if they could not earn an elusive star, some landladies used it as a marketing tool. While there were many styles of advertisements in Blue Books, among the most common was the Madam Page. Titled with the landlady's name, these single-page adverts consisted entirely of text advertising the Madam’s virtues or her clever girls, followed by the brothel’s address and phone number. Alcohol was not a common topic for Madam pages, but when it did surface, the drink in question was invariably wine. An advertisement of this kind for a Miss May Evans read,

May has the honor of keeping one of the quietest establishments in the city, where beautiful women, good wine and sweet music reign supreme. What more can a person expect? Just think of it! “Pretty women, wine and song.” In the palace of a King, one could not expect any more.³⁰

Evans mentions wine twice, making clear that she—or whoever wrote this copy—thought it was worth advertising. The mention of a King’s palace seems to insinuate that royals drink wine, conferring a sense of wealth and class onto the beverage. The line “good wine and sweet music reign supreme” is directly reproduced in a similarly laudatory ad for a house run by Miss Dorothy Dennig.³¹ This is not particularly unusual, phrases and at times entire paragraphs are often reused between Blue Books, but it does indicate that something about the combination of good wine and sweet music was an effective advertising strategy—good enough to steal!

Perhaps more telling than the mentions of wine, though, is the absence of any other alcohol

³⁰ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 88.

³¹ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 69.

in these madam pages. Saloons would often tout their selections of fine wine, beer, and whiskey, but nowhere in these Blue Books do madams promote themselves through good beer or liquor the way they do with wine. To explain this divide, it is worth considering the different goals of these establishments. Saloons in the district catered to men looking to eat and, more than that, to get drunk. Therefore, advertising the breadth of available alcohol was desirable. In contrast, while assignation houses also sold staggering amounts of alcohol, their primary concern was selling sex.³² In a market as competitive as Storyville, ensuring customers came to a particular bagnio required branding, which was often built through the madams themselves—hence the popularity of Madam Pages. As we saw with the “Champagne Girl” advertisements, wine was already linked in the public imagination to female sexuality, but it also afforded madams a sense of opulence and exoticism that helped to elevate their services above those of crib girls, justifying the higher price point.

We can find further evidence for this tendency toward opulence and exoticism in advertisements for the Arlington, run by the eponymous Madam Josie. Furniture was generally an important aspect of any madam’s marketing strategy. Alongside her promise of “good wine and sweet music,” Dorothy Dennig bragged that her house was one of the “most elaborately furnished establishments in the city.”³³ Josie Arlington took this preoccupation to another level. Rather than relying on more traditional text-based Madam pages, Josie took out multiple page spreads with illustrations of the Arlington’s facade, alongside photographs of its interior. Though small and grainy by modern standards, the photographs speak to Josie’s maximalist tastes, displaying rooms that seem to be jam-packed with furniture, rugs, and heavy drapery. One Blue Book advertisement for the Arlington reads, “Absolutely and unquestionably the most decorative and costly fitted out sporting palace ever placed before the American public ... Miss Arlington recently went to an expense of nearly \$5,000 in having her mansion renovated and replenished.”³⁴ The inclusion of a dollar figure for Josie’s renovation, as well as the assertion that it’s the most costly fitted-out

³² Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 31

³³ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 69.

³⁴ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to sin*, 41.

sporting palace, makes clear that furnishing an assignation house was an exercise in opulence, as much as aesthetics. Selling the fantasy of wealth, even just for a night, was part of a high-end madam's brand.

Beyond pure spectacle, the Arlington's interior was also notable for its various themed parlors, which could supposedly transport guests to Vienna, America, China, or Turkey. Miss Margaret Bradford co-opted a similar strategy for her Chateau's Turkish Room. Though it is difficult to discern from surviving photos what exactly made Josie and Margaret's rooms Turkish, their mere existence points toward a proclivity for exoticism in the district. This exotic fascination is also present in the advertisements of Madam Emma Johnson, who ran a "House of All Nations," which specialized in supposedly foreign girls. Miss Johnson even marketed herself as an exotic element, dubiously claiming that she was "better known as the 'Parisian Queen of America.'"³⁵ And Johnson was not alone in co-opting supposed Frenchness, in one ad dedicated to a working girl named Sapho, the reader is asked, "WHY visit the play houses to see the famous Parisian model portrayed, when one can see the French damsel at the 'Cos-mopolitan.'"³⁶ Beyond revealing Storyville patrons' concern with genuine exoticism, likely spurred by numerous reports of faux-foreign women, Sapho's ad once again portrays Frenchness as desirable. In fact, effecting Parisian sensibilities seems to have been en vogue both with prostitutes and capitalist backers like Tom Anderson, who in an ad for his new "Forbidden Fruit" cordial assured the reader it had been made with "genuine French methods."³⁷

The desire to associate assignation houses with opulence and exoticism—especially French exoticism—made wine a natural choice for special status in the district. While wine itself is often associated with France, it is worth noting too that the majority of wine drunk in the district seems to have been champagne. Genuine champagne brands such as Veuve Clicquot and Mumm's Extra Dry regularly took out advertisements in the Blue Books, positively dwarfing marketing for all other

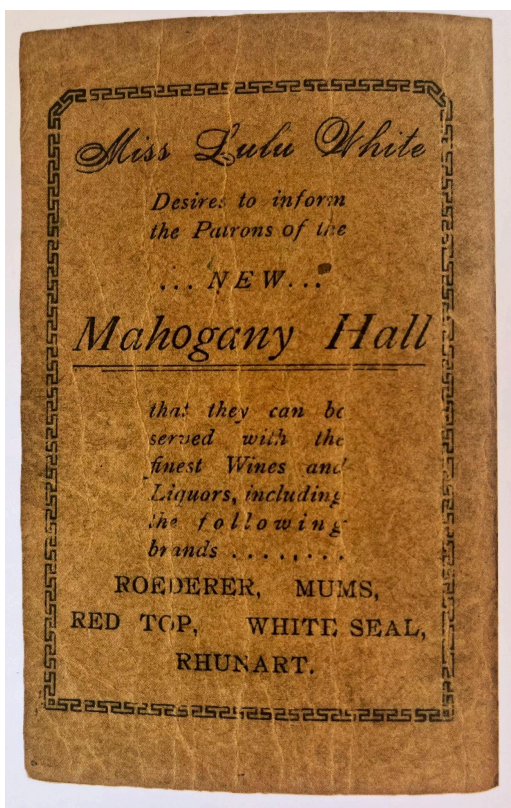
³⁵ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to sin*, 80.

³⁶ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to sin*, 96.

³⁷ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to sin*, 85.

types of wine put together. As an imported French good, associated in and of itself with opulence, champagne made a neat mascot for Madams of the district, and it was an association that persisted even outside of advertising. Reflecting on his experience with Storyville’s high-end assignation houses, pianist Clarence Williams recalled “places like that were for rich people, mostly white ... the customers would buy champagne.”³⁸ Similarly, while trying to explain the ritzy nature of Hilma Burt’s old place, Jelly Roll Morton clarified that its patrons weren’t “just” drinking wine. “I don’t mean sauterne or nothing like that. I mean champagne, such as Clicquot and Mumm’s Extra Dry...”³⁹

High-end madams’ attempts at personal branding through champagne also reveal their centrality to Storyville’s economy. While the district may have been enclosed by masculine institutions, it was not exclusively male-dominated. Take, for example, this advertisement for Madam Lulu White’s newly opened Mahogany Hall.⁴⁰



The announcement is not in the classic style of a Madam page—which typically had one block of standard-sized text—instead alternating between smaller italics and large bolded lines. Among the lines bolded are “Miss Lulu White,” “Mahogany Hall” and the five different brands of champagne the new house carried. Lulu’s choice to privilege these champagne brands so completely speaks powerfully to the beverage’s ability to act as shorthand for class, opulence, and exoticism in Storyville, but we can also see in this advertisement that her own name is given the same prominence as that of her business. For all intents and purposes, Mahogany Hall and Lulu White were

³⁸ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 77.

³⁹ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 114.

⁴⁰ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 106.

synonymous. After all, the “Queen of the Octoroons” owned her own house. In fact, the ad above comes not from a Blue Book but an alternative guide that Lulu herself published. While the cover announces the opening of Mahogany Hall, subsequent pages are dedicated to individual profiles of Lulu’s girls, a granularity of advertising which hardly ever appears in the Blue Books. Remember, the Madam Ads focus on Madams, and while they may include a list of the girls at a particular house, Lulu’s guide offers an unprecedented level of detail—including pictures!

Conclusion

In conclusion, alcohol was far more than a background element in Storyville—it was a key player in the district's construction of gendered identities and consumer experiences. Masculine-coded saloons provided men with a semi-respectable gateway into the red-light district, while reinforcing fantasies of male dominance, something that was especially crucial given the era’s “crisis of masculinity.” Liquor advertisements similarly reinforced notions of male dominance and discernment through endorsement and appeals to rationality and “heathfulness.” At the same time, high-end madams used wine, particularly champagne, to project opulence and respectability, distinguishing themselves from lower-tier establishments. These various strategies of marketing through alcohol reveal how gendered drinking worked to ease the social tensions inherent in the commodification of sex. Ultimately, the interplay between alcohol, advertising, and gender in Storyville underscores the broader ways in which vice industries navigate societal norms to construct palatable identities for their customers.

Works Cited

- Arceneaux, Pamela D., and Emily Epstein Landau. *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans*. New Orleans, LA: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017.
- Landau, Emily Epstein. *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018.
- Long, Alecia P. *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865–1920*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005.
- New Orleans: City of Old Romance and New Opportunity*. New Orleans, LA: Bauerlein, Inc., 1924.
- Rose, Al. *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974.
- The Times-Picayune*, February 6, 1877.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article III

“The Week That Changed The World” and The Strategic Triangle

Devin Valverde

devinrgv@gmail.com

On February 22nd, 1972, plastered on the cover of the People's Daily was a photo of Chairman Mao Zedong and President Richard Nixon shaking hands. The week of February 21st to 28th, 1972 has since been referred to as "The Week that Changed the World". Nixon had made it his expressed goal to build relations between the United States and China. Leading up to this meeting, the two countries engaged in a political tango. Outwardly, the United States sent Ping Pong Players to face off against the Chinese, leading to the creation of Ping Pong Diplomacy. Behind closed doors, Nixon and Kissinger maneuvered to position the United States in a political position that would enable a meeting between the two world leaders. For American citizens, this meant choosing William P. Roger as a Secretary of State to minimize obstruction to Nixon's foreign policy decisions. For his political maneuvering with China, Nixon leaned on Henry Kissinger to formulate a way for Nixon to meet Mao. "The Week that Changed the World" has developed substantial interest regarding what led to the leaders of the United States and China to be able to meet. This essay will cover the historiography regarding this topic. The historiography can broadly be categorized into two groups. The first group centers on American rapprochement with China from the perspective of the United States. This group generally keeps a consistent narrative and is supported by a substantial amount of primary and secondary sources. The second group is Sino-centric and tells the history from the perspective of the Chinese. Here, a subdivision occurs where some historians argue that US rapprochement with China was successful because of the external threat of the Soviet Union as a product of the threat that emerged from the Sino-Soviet split; other historians argue that US rapprochement with China was a product of political infighting within the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution.

This essay will be formatted as follows. The first section of this essay will provide a simplified history of US-Chinese relations in and around 1972. The following section will discuss the historiography of US-rapprochement with China from an American perspective. This section will include a summarization of the arguments laid out by historians, and then it will discuss the validity of this argument as a product of present sources. The next section will focus on US-rapprochement with China from the perspective of China with a focus on the historical perspective that China built relations with the United States in response to the Soviet threat. This section will include a summarization of the arguments laid out by historians, and then it will discuss the validity of this argument as a product of present sources. The last section will focus on US-rapprochement with China from the perspective of China with a focus on the historical perspective that China built relations with the United States because of political in-fighting within the Chinese Communist Party. This section will include a summarization of the arguments laid out by historians, and then it will discuss the validity of this argument as a product of present sources.

“The Week that Changed the World”

Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 was predated by years of conflict between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party. These conflicts, along with the broader ideological conflict between Communist countries and Democracies, resulted in the global divide that characterized the Cold War. China and the United States found themselves in direct competition in several instances and also found themselves aiding the enemy of one another in various proxy wars. These conflicts would fuel tensions between China and the United States that led to the two countries having an inability to work alongside one another for the twenty years that

pre-dated Nixon meeting Mao. The next subsections of this essay will discuss some of the conflicts that resulted in the rift between China and the United States.

The Birth of the People's Republic of China

Following the end of World War II, the United Front of the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communists slowly fizzled away. Upon the surrender of Japan, the Soviet Union swiftly moved into Manchuria.¹ The Soviet Union took advantage of their situation. They declared that various railroads, banks, and even Port Arthur would belong to the Soviet Union.² They claimed ownership over various industrial machinery and shipped it back to the Soviet Union.³ While the United States attempted to combat this through international pressures, the Soviet Union would ultimately allow the KMT to move into Manchuria, a source of tension between the USSR and Communists later.⁴ The result was that the Communists located in Southern Manchuria would flee to North Korea where they would be refitted by the Communists there.⁵ Peace between the KMT and Communists did not last long. The Communists had worked hard to train and stand-up numerous units within China and even in North Korea.⁶ The KMT on the other hand had begun receiving support from a United States that was very weary of Communism, viewing it as a danger to democracies globally. By war's end, the United States had sent two billion dollars worth of military and economic aid to.⁷ As the United States saw the war turning against the KMT, they took on increasingly desperate measures to bring about a favorable peace. However, these attempts failed. By November 14th of 1948, the United States would be informed that their

¹ Marshall Green, John H Holdridge, and William N Stokes, *War and Peace with China : First-Hand Experiences in the Foreign Service of the United States* (Bethesda, Md: Dacor Press, 1994), 4.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁷ John H Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 2.

role as Consulate Generals would end.⁸ The Chinese had gone behind the backs of the West and colluded with the Soviet Union who advised Mao to get rid of the Shenyang Consulate.⁹ This resulted in the West being excluded from China going forward.

The Freeze

What had begun merely as political conflict would transpire into the direct exchange of fire during the Korean War. The United States came in direct conflict with the Chinese during the Korean War when Mao Zedong sent Chinese volunteers across the Yalu River to support North Korean forces.¹⁰ This resulted from General Douglas MacArthur's actions as the leader of forces in Korea. He had pushed the North Koreans to near the shared border of China and North Korea. Fearing a potential American invasion, Mao authorized Chinese forces to push into Korea to fight on behalf of the North Korean military.¹¹ While the Korean War would ultimately end with a stalemate at the 38th Parallel, the United States and China would experience heightened tensions. These tensions reflected the over 50,000 American soldiers killed along with hundreds of thousands of dead Chinese Communists.¹² They also were a reflection of the greater diplomatic tensions that evolved after the war when the two countries began exchanging prisoners of war. Roughly 14,000 Chinese POWs had requested to be sent to Taiwan instead of China, resulting in Chinese retaliation in the form of American prisoners being kept in China well into the 1960s.¹³

Taiwanese Strait Crises

⁸ Green et al, 10-11.

⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹⁰ Holdridge, 4.

¹¹ Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War : No Victors, No Vanquished* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹² Paul M Edwards, *The Korean War* (Westport, Connecticut ; London: Greenwood Press, 2006).

¹³ Holdridg, 6.

Tensions escalated as the United States continued to refuse to recognize the government of the People's Republic of China as the official government of China, instead recognizing the government of the Republic of China in exile in Taiwan as the rightful government of China. This had primarily resulted as the United States increased its diplomatic presence in Taiwan after the entrance of Chinese soldiers into the Korean War.¹⁴ Tensions came to a head yet again during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis when the People's Republic of China amassed forces along the coast across the way from Taiwan.¹⁵ The United States intervened on the side of the Republic of China, preventing a further escalation of war. Tensions once again arose when the PRC attacked some of the smaller Taiwanese islands.¹⁶ The United States and KMT had signed a mutual defense treaty in December of 1954 which caused greater tensions between the United States and China as it continued to legitimize Taiwan.¹⁷ The United States provided various forms of military aid, such as F-100 aircraft that would go on to shootdown Chinese flown MIG-15s and MIG-17s.¹⁸

The Vietnam War

One particularly sore spot for Americans was the Chinese support for Ho Chi-min and the Northern Vietnamese Communists during the Vietnam War. What had begun as a limited proxy war with the hope of helping the French had transpired into what would become an over-decade-long conflict to stop the spread of Communism in Vietnam.¹⁹ American troops would eventually become completely committed to the conflict in Vietnam, whereas China

¹⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, "United States Relations with China: Separation and Reopening (1950-2001)," 2001-2009.state.gov, August 13, 2007, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/90835.htm>.

¹⁶ Green et al, 46-47.

¹⁷ Holdridge, 8.

¹⁸ Ibid, 9.

¹⁹ Holdridge, 10.

would not admit their involvement. However, this did not stop the Chinese from providing logisticians and anti-aircraft capabilities to the NVA.²⁰ On two instances, the Chinese had shot down and killed two American pilots who had entered Chinese airspace.²¹

Sino-Soviet Split

In the years leading up to Nixon and Mao's meeting, the Chinese and Soviet Union slipped into the Sino-Soviet Split. A product of a multitude of factors, including land disputes and ideological differences, the Chinese and the Soviet Union saw a rift develop between the two Communist nations in a multitude of ways. The countries had seen their economic relationship begin to falter in the 1960s as a result of Mao's failed Great Leap Forward.²² Initially, Mao and the Chinese had managed to subvert suspicion from the Soviet Union by claiming that they were not experiencing any issues, however the Soviet Union would eventually catch wind of the truth. Around the same time, the United States had begun actively working to drive a wedge between the two countries by creating favorable relations with the Soviet Union. The United States and Soviet Union emerged from the Cuban Missile Crisis better off. The two countries had begun talks in 1958 about limiting their nuclear arsenals, however in 1963 the United States and Soviet Union had begun a path of nuclear rapprochement.²³ Mao on the other hand had become more firm and conclusive in his decision to pursue a nuclear arsenal, in contrast with the Soviet Union.²⁴ The Soviets and Chinese continued their downward trajectory, and played a part in the ultimate American decision for rapprochement with China in 1972.

Only Nixon Could

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 11.

²² Lorenz M Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split : Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 160.

²³ Ibid, 247.

²⁴ Ibid, 246.

The historiography that has emerged regarding the US rapprochement with China from the perspective of the United States argues that Nixon's decision to build relations with China was because he believed that the United States had an opportunity to divide the Communists and also because it would enable the United States to end their participation in the Vietnam War. Nixon was able to accomplish his goal of a rapprochement with China through the utilization of a communication channel established through Pakistan. The historiography regarding US-rapprochement with China has a plethora of primary and secondary sources. Focusing first on primary sources, politicians from the era, including Nixon, Kissinger, and other individuals involved in Nixon's visit, have written a multitude of auto-biographies and memoirs on Nixon's 1972 visit. Furthermore, Nixon's Watergate Scandal was critical in the development of sources. Typically, any recording made by the President is kept as personal property following the end of a President's time in power.²⁵ However, the Watergate Scandal led to the release of these tapes as there was a belief that the recordings may possess a comment showing Nixon's guilt in having conspired to infiltrate the Democratic National Convention headquarters.²⁶ The result was the release of tapes containing numerous conversations between Nixon, Kissinger, and others involved in the 1972 visit.

The historiography surrounding why Nixon had decided to pursue a rapprochement with China began before Nixon's time as President when he expressed his interest in US-Chinese relations under the belief that any democratic development would fail without bringing China into the fold.²⁷ This belief is noteworthy because Nixon's opinion contradicts that of the average American, as Americans had a greater disdain for China than they did for the Soviet Union at the

²⁵ Nixon Library, "White House Tapes | Richard Nixon Museum and Library," Nixonlibrary.gov, 2019, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/white-house-tapes>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Richard M. Nixon, "Asia after Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 111, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20039285>, 121.

same time.²⁸ Nevertheless, Nixon viewed the United States as needing a relationship with China. Firstly, he concluded that the United States would need to maintain its nuclear arsenal along with the Soviet Union until China was also on board with a limiting of its arsenal.²⁹ Furthermore, Nixon recognized the benefit that China brought in regard to the American capability to withdraw from Vietnam, as China would act as a regional leader that could stabilize Asia after an American withdrawal.³⁰ Furthermore, Nixon's beliefs were substantiated by Henry Kissinger, a realist who believed that the United States should abandon the policy of containment and work within the confines of its reality.³¹ The intelligence community further demonstrated support for rapprochement by determining that a rift had been forming between the Soviet Union and China.³² Thus far, the historiography shows that Nixon had a clear motivation to reengage with China that was supported by those around him. Nixon had determined that China's involvement in international relations was pertinent going forward to maintain global security. Furthermore, he saw an opening as China and the Soviet Union faced their own struggles.

The historiography then develops that the United States was able to succeed in its rapprochement through the establishment of a channel of communication between the United States and China through Pakistan. The pursuit of rapprochement initially appeared promising, as it seemed China was beginning to open itself up such as by paying its back dues to the Red Cross.³³ Initially, Kissinger had attempted to establish communications with the Chinese through the French.³⁴ However, Kissinger's attempts to establish communications between the US and

²⁸ Robert Ross, *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations*, 1998, 44.

²⁹ Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point : Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,), 2.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 11.

³³ Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, "Contact with the Chinese," September 12, 1970.

³⁴ Henry Kissinger, "Jean Sainteny," September 27, 1970.

China stalled, as his attempts to reach the Chinese through the French, but this channel never amounted to anything.³⁵ Simultaneously, Kissinger had begun working on an avenue through President Yahya Khan of Pakistan, with the hopes of avoiding an open channel such as in Warsaw.³⁶ The Pakistan channel proved to be fruitful, with an established communication between the United States and China between Henry Kissinger and Zhou En-Lai.³⁷ Subsequently, the governments of China and the United States agreed that Nixon would visit China, following Kissinger's conducting a secret visit to China to prepare for Nixon's trip.³⁸ Kissinger's trip had been a success, and also reflected a Chinese willingness to work with the United States in contrast with the Soviet Union that was much more hostile when receiving visitors.³⁹ With plans established and a connection made between the United States and the Chinese, Nixon was able to visit China.

The historiography of Nixon's visit to China is much more fleshed out than that of why the Chinese were willing to accept American advances for rapprochement. Aided by a vast number of primary and secondary sources, historians have been able to thoroughly track the development of Nixon's meeting with Mao from the time before Nixon's presidency to the days after Nixon left China. The historiography that could be more developed is Nixon's exact motivations for why he wanted to visit China. Nixon ran as Vice President with Eisenhower on a platform of being staunchly anti-Communist. The change in his willingness to work with China does leave room for a developing historiography of why Nixon had done such an about-face.

Opening China

³⁵ "Contact with the Chinese".

³⁶ Henry Kissinger, "Meeting between the President and Pakistan President Yahya," October 20, 1970.

³⁷ Henry Kissinger conversation with Richard Nixon, "Chinese Communist Initiative," December 10, 1970.

³⁸ Richard Nixon to Zhou En-Lai, "Message," May 10, 1971.

³⁹ Margaret Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*. (Recorded Books, 2007), 200.

Rapprochement as Deterrence

The historiography of Mao's decision to meet with Nixon has centered around the argument that Mao was driven to rapprochement with the United States because of fear that the Soviet Union was now a threat to Chinese sovereignty. Relations between the Chinese and the Soviet Union had begun to deteriorate as early as 1953 when Stalin died because the Soviets had assumed that they would remain as the leaders of the Communist world, even though Mao was now the most senior Communist leader.⁴⁰ China continued to feel as subordinate to the Soviet Union when the United States and Soviet Union agreed on the American-Soviet test ban in 1963.⁴¹ The relationship between the Soviet Union and China became rougher as the Soviet Union began to move troops to the Far East.⁴² Tensions came to a head in 1969 when Chinese and Soviet soldiers clashed on March 2nd on the Chen Bao islands, a territory disputed between the Soviet Union and China.⁴³ The two armies would clash again in day long battle on the 15th.⁴⁴ The fear that emerged was that the Soviet Union had developed to have imperialist tendencies and was now a greater threat than that of the United States. The conclusion that was reached was that "the contradictions between China and the Soviet Union were more serious than those between China and the United States".⁴⁵ This idea is highlighted in 1973 when Mao proposed the idea of halting Soviet expansion.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Macmillan, 130.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 135.

⁴³ John W Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968-1971* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Li Jie, *China's Domestic Policies and Normalization of U.S.-China Relations*, "Normalization of U.S.-China Relations" (Harvard University Press, 2005), 59.

⁴⁶ Gong Li, *The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations: China's U.S. Policy, 1972-1978*, "Normalization of U.S.-China Relations" (Harvard University Press, 2005), 122.

Historiography around this argument highlights the Sino-Soviet Split and its continuing volatility while also analyzing the thought of Mao as the primary national actor.⁴⁷ This argument is highly centralized on Mao as the main actor, taking away agency from others within China. The result of this is a lack of adequate sourcing. To begin, since the argument centralizes on Mao and the CCP, this argument is confined by what was stated by Mao in the lead-up to the rapprochement. Furthermore, what was said by Mao must be heavily scrutinized. Mao understood the profound impact his statements could have, meaning his statements were not a reflection of his beliefs so much as they were a means to enact action. Beyond this, as the next section will discuss, Chinese foreign policy and actions within the PLA demonstrated that the Chinese were pursuing the ability to defend themselves from a Soviet attack instead of relying upon the United States to come to their rescue.

One Party Divided

An alternative argument regarding why Mao had decided to accept President Nixon's advances regarding US rapprochement with China is because of political infighting amongst the factions of the CCP. One such argument is made by John Garver, a professor of Political Science. Garver's argument argues directly against the notion that the Chinese had pursued rapprochement with the United States as a form of deterrence against the Soviet Union before providing the alternative explanation that the main cause for rapprochement was Chinese factionalism within the CCP. This historiography is much more limited in the sources which are available, and while this historiography does not reach a definitive conclusion, this

⁴⁷ Wang Zhongchun makes the same argument utilizing the same wording as Li Jie that Mao had acted as a result of the contradictions of who was a greater threat. This reflects the prevalence of Mao thought and interest in Mao as a national actor.

historiography does work to combat the previously described historiography that Mao had pursued rapprochement as a form of deterrence.

To begin, part of this historiography is rooted in the fact that Mao and other national actors had already sufficiently addressed the potential Soviet threat. The Chinese had determined that they had adequately prepared themselves in a multitude of ways. First, the Chinese had felt that they had adequately prepared their infantry for a conflict with the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ Immediately following the skirmish between the Soviet Union and China in 1969, the Chinese substantially increased their military procurement budget until 1971.⁴⁹ Along with this, the Chinese had heavily pursued the nuclear route, developing an arsenal of nuclear weapons while the United States and Soviet Union had pursued nuclear rapprochement after the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁵⁰ While the United States would have proven to be a potentially valuable ally, the Chinese did not perceive this as necessary. Furthermore, the Chinese had begun to improve their relationship with the Soviet Union in the 1970s. One such example is that the two countries decided to increase their trade by roughly 300% in 1970.⁵¹ These two factors go to prove that while rapprochement may have been in part a means to deter the Soviet Union, to argue that deterrence was the sole reason would prove faulty.

Beyond the argument against the idea that Mao pursued rapprochement as a form of deterrence is the argument that Chinese factionalism drove Mao to pursue rapprochement. In 1977, Thomas Gottlieb of the RAND Corporation authored a report that argued that Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism is what led to the development of the Strategic Triangle. The

⁴⁸ Garver, 79.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Lieberthal, "Sino-Soviet Conflict in the 1970s Its Evolution and Implications for the Strategic Triangle" (RAND, 1978), 50.

⁵⁰ Luthi, 247.

⁵¹ Lieberthal, 55.

historiography of Nixon's 1972 visit to China from the perspective of the Chinese layout three separate factions within Chinese politics. The moderates led by Zhou En-Lai argued that the People's Liberation Army and the PRC was weak.⁵² Subsequently, they believed that the Soviet Union was China's greatest threat; therefore they argued that China must isolate the Soviet Union.⁵³ The next faction is the military led by Lin Piao, appointed successor of Mao. The military held the belief that the United States was the greatest threat to China due to American involvement in Vietnam. Lastly, are the Radicals led by Mao's wife Jiang Qiang and The Gang of Four who viewed both as threats, but was willing to align with the military in perceiving the United States as the main threat.⁵⁴ The rapprochement occurred in-part because of how the factions had aligned. Lin Piao was a soldier, not a politician, who had failed to hide his developing faction.⁵⁵ Zhou En-Lai was a seasoned politician who had avoided scrutiny.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Zhou En-Lai had managed to take advantage of his personal history as the former head of the military academy in China, bringing more officers into his faction as moderates.⁵⁷ While Zhou enjoyed a strengthening of his position, Lin Piao saw his allies weakening such as when Mao called for the criticism of Chen Boda.⁵⁸

The historiography further argues that the initial conflict between the Soviet Union and China in 1969 was the result of provocation by the moderates.⁵⁹ While Lin was in charge of the military as a whole, Chen Hsi-lien was the commander of forces in Shenyang which is where the

⁵² Thomas Gottlieb, "Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic Triangle" (RAND, November 1977), vii.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Garver, 110.

⁵⁵ Leo F Goodstadt, *China's Watergate*, 1977, 36.

⁵⁶ Jaap van Ginneken, *The Rise and Fall of Lin Piao*, 1977, 268.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 221.

⁵⁸ Garver, 137.

⁵⁹ Gennadii Vasil'evich Astaf'ev and A M Dubinskiĭ, *From Anti-Imperialism to Anti-Socialism*, 1974, 55.

attack occurred.⁶⁰ While Lin did not stand to benefit from such an action, provocation by the moderates such as Zhou En-Lai to attack the Soviet Union would improve the political standing of Zhou En-Lai and Chen because it would drive more support and military build-up for Chen's forces.⁶¹ Around the same time, Mao and the military along with many political elite became aware of the fact that a war with the United States and Soviet Union would surely end in defeat.⁶² Zhou continued along the lines of developing an anti-Soviet tone, which only reinforced the divide between the two countries.⁶³ Zhou and the moderates highlighted the development of imperialistic tendencies within the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ This reinforces that Mao's rapprochement was a product of factionalism as it demonstrates the agency of the moderates in their ability to affect Chinese actions. While much of the power was centralized with Mao, the external factions were able to navigate politically to advocate in favor of one side or another. Zhou En-Lai had managed to push the narrative that the Soviet Union was the main threat and had also benefitted from a minor skirmish. The culmination of this political infighting was an increased desperation from Lin Piao as he fell out of favor with Mao, resulting in a failed coup and his eventual death.⁶⁵

The most noteworthy issue with this historiography is the lack and limitation of evidence to argue for the idea that it was Chinese factionalism that caused Mao to pursue rapprochement with the United States. The sources that make up this historiography for those unable to read or understand Mandarin are limited to secondary sources because Americans and the British have been kept out of China in any notable capacity for over a decade by this point with few exceptions. Furthermore, the primary sources that would inform historians about this topic are

⁶⁰ Roger Glenn Brown, "Chinese Politics and American Policy: A New Look at the Triangle," *Foreign Policy*, no. 23 (1976): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1147867>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Garver, 127.

⁶³ Robert G Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1977* (Routledge, 2019), 16-17.

⁶⁴ Garver, 128.

⁶⁵ Ginneken, 27-29.

simply inaccessible if not nonexistent.⁶⁶ The CCP is very selective about what they release. One such example is the lack of resources regarding the Second Plenum.⁶⁷ While sources from the United States regarding this period became available considering the Nixon Watergate scandal and even the Soviet Union, some sources and transparency developed as a product of the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika, the same cannot be said about China. The result is a conclusion reached as a product of minimal sources that point to Chinese factionalism being the main cause for Mao's decision for rapprochement, along with a multitude of sources that prove that it was not Mao attempting to create a deterrence out of fear for a possible Soviet invasion.

Conclusion

In recent years, China has emerged as the greatest threat to the United States.⁶⁸ However, in 1972 President Nixon had viewed China as a potential ally and untapped market. Nixon's decision for rapprochement with China has had significant lasting impacts. "The Week that Changed the World" has continued to shape international politics, with the ramifications of rapprochement continuously being felt. However, the narratives surrounding how such a prolific event was able to occur have yet to be fully fleshed out. The first group centers on American rapprochement with China from the perspective of the United States. This group generally keeps a consistent narrative and is supported by a substantial amount of primary and secondary sources. This particular area has benefitted from a substantial number of primary sources. Multiple figures from this time period, including Nixon and Kissinger, along with other Americans present during Nixon's trip have written multiple books on the development of this

⁶⁶ Garver, 158.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 136.

⁶⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence , "Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," *New York Times*, April 9, 2021, <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/annual-threat-assessment-report/5bd104278cd017bd/full.pdf>.

trip. Furthermore, the recordings from within the Oval Office that Nixon had secretly recorded and were subsequently released following the Water Gate Scandal have provided a plethora of primary sources for historians to sort through. The second group is Sino-centric and tells the history from the perspective of the Chinese. Here, a subdivision occurs where some historians argue that US rapprochement with China was successful because of the external threat of the Soviet Union as a product of the threat that emerged from the Sino-Soviet split. While the Sino-Soviet Split most certainly enabled China to pursue rapprochement, to credit the Soviet threat as the sole reason for why Mao was willing to meet with Nixon is disingenuous. The available sources do not reflect this. Other historians argue that US rapprochement with China was a product of political infighting within the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution. While there may be evidence to support this, primary sources from within the CCP in the 70s are unavailable. Present research on the topic has stalled and will continue until more resources become available.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Kissinger, Henry. Letter to Richard Nixon. “Chinese Communist Initiative.” Conversation, December 10, 1970.

———. “Meeting between the President and Pakistan President Yahya,” October 20, 1970.

———. “Jean Sainteny,” September 27, 1970.

Kissinger, Henry . Letter to Richard Nixon. “Contact with the Chinese,” September 12, 1970.

Nixon, Richard. Letter to Zhou En-Lai. “Message,” May 10, 1971.

Secondary Sources

Brown, Roger Glenn. “Chinese Politics and American Policy: A New Look at the Triangle.”

Foreign Policy, no. 23 (1976): 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1147867>.

Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs. “United States Relations with China: Separation and Reopening (1950-2001).”

2001-2009.state.gov, August 13, 2007.

<https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/90835.htm>.

Edwards, Paul M. *The Korean War*. Westport, Connecticut ; London: Greenwood Press, 2006.

Garver, John W. *China’s Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968-1971*.

Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982.

Gennadii Vasil’evich Astaf’ev, and A M Dubinskiĭ. *From Anti-Imperialism to Anti-Socialism*, 1974.

Goodstadt, Leo F. *China’s Watergate*, 1977.

Gottlieb, Thomas. “Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic

- Triangle.” RAND, November 1977.
- Green, Marshall, John H Holdridge, and William N Stokes. *War and Peace with China : First-Hand Experiences in the Foreign Service of the United States*. Bethesda, Md: Dacor Press, 1994.
- Holdridge, John H. *Crossing the Divide*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1997.
- Jaap van Ginneken. *The Rise and Fall of Lin Piao*, 1977.
- Kirby, William C, Robert S Ross, and Li Gong. *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations*. Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth. “Sino-Soviet Conflict in the 1970s Its Evolution and Implications for the Strategic Triangle.” RAND, 1978.
- Luthi, Lorenz M. *The Sino-Soviet Split : Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Macmillan, Margaret. *Nixon and Mao*. Recorded Books, 2007.
- Nixon Library. “White House Tapes | Richard Nixon Museum and Library.” Nixonlibrary.gov, 2019. <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/white-house-tapes>.
- Nixon, Richard M. “Asia after Viet Nam.” *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 111. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20039285>.
- Ross, Robert. *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations*, 1998.
- Sandler, Stanley. *The Korean War : No Victors, No Vanquished*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Sutter, Robert G. *Chinese Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1977*. Routledge, 2019.
- Tudda, Chris. *A Cold War Turning Point : Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana

State University Press.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article IV

From Campus to Cold War: The FBI's 1949 Yale Forum and Battle Over Public Image

Jeff Pierantoni

jeff.pierantoni@yale.edu

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Yale and Federal Law Enforcement—Early 20th Century Alignment**
- 3. Wartime Collaboration**
- 4. Yale, the Bureau, and Cold War Beginnings—Part 1: Fisher Confusion**
- 5. Part 2: Public Discourse, Private Investigation**
- 6. The Conference and Bureau Image Orchestration**
- 7. Conclusion**
- 8. Bibliography**

1. Introduction

One June 4, 1949, Harvard student William S. Fairfield wrote an article in the *Harvard Crimson* that spurred an uprising of confusion on the campus of its Ivy League foe. His exposé, “FBI’s activities spread fear at Yale; Professor warned by operative to shun leftist groups,” articulated an onslaught of accusations against the FBI and a Yale complicit in allowing the agency to push the acceptable threshold of its role on campus. Whether that be recounting claims that an “eminently respectable Yale faculty member” was accosted over his citizenship during a mysterious phone call from a Bureau agent, or that Yale’s campus was home to a network of undercover G-men, Fairfield’s claims did not paint the FBI in a positive light.¹

Negative exposure to the media was certainly not ideal for J. Edgar Hoover, notoriously infatuated with the public image of his Bureau. Hoover, the Bureau’s director from 1924 to 1972, led the agency’s transformation from the modest, fact-gathering group, the “Bureau of Investigation,” into a sprawling federal institution—essential to this evolution was his meticulous cultivation of the FBI’s public image, intentionally delivered to both ordinary Americans and the politicians whose support controlled Bureau funding and oversight.²

While Fairfield’s article bruised the Bureau’s carefully managed press strategy, the scale of the issue remained a far cry from the high-profile nature of a horrific crime or federal investigation. After all, this was a university newspaper publishing a tangle of murky claims that were isolated to college campuses. Any involved response from the FBI risked signifying an overboard self-consciousness, or worse, suggesting there was some kernel of truth to the accusations Fairfield had the guts to publish. From a public relations perspective, the path of

¹ William S. Fairfield, "FBI's Activities Spread Fear at Yale, Professor Warned by Operative to Shun Leftist Groups," *The Harvard Crimson* (Cambridge, MA), Jun. 4, 1949.

² Beverly Gage, *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2022), 116-178.

least resistance seemed clear: dismiss the claims as baseless and steer clear of further entanglement with the scene of the supposed controversy, no matter how it portrayed the G-men.

Yet this is this the exact opposite approach the Bureau utilized in its rebuttal of Fairfield. The FBI slammed the *Crimson* in the most direct way possible. “J. Edgar Hoover wrote to Sedgwick W. Green, managing editor of the *Crimson*, calling Fairfield’s references to the FBI ‘inaccurate, distorted and untrue.’”³ Hoover’s personal confrontation did not end there. He explicitly “denied that FBI agents ‘[wandered] in and out of’ the Yale provost’s office every day and that ‘there [were] several undercover agents and general informants for every known agent.’”⁴

Even this written denial sent to the deliverer of the message to the public, or at least, the portion of the public that bothered to attend to the university publication, did not fully satisfy the needs of the Bureau. When presented with an opportunity to defend themselves in person at the source of the controversy: Yale University, the FBI doubled down on its efforts. What initiated as an unassuming invitation for Galen Willis, Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the New Haven FBI Field Office to defend the Bureau on campus in the Elm City became an even bigger ordeal—the Bureau responded not just by sending Gleason, but Assistant Director Louis B. Nichols.⁵ What ensued was a forum on October 24, 1949 in the Yale Law School Auditorium. There, in front of an “overflow audience,”⁶ Nichols and Gleason fielded questions from students and a panel of Yale Professors, with the clear intention of refuting claims from Fairfield’s damaging article.

³ Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶ Thomas H. Guinzburg, "Bureau Chiefs Refute ‘Crimson’ Charges, Deny Presence of FBI Agents at Yale: ‘News’-Sponsored Panel probes loyalty check, wiretapping, informers," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

Nobody forced the Bureau to send an assistant director to face inquiry from potentially unsettled Yale students or Fowler Harper, Yale Law School Professor and outspoken FBI critic.⁷ Rather, J. Edgar Hoover advocated for such confrontation.⁸ In a more contemporary context, this response's all-in approach to defending the practices of the FBI is out of the ordinary. While addressing rumors of campus surveillance published in collegiate newspapers might seem trivial given the Bureau's vast range of responsibilities, the unique context of Yale in the mid-20th century reveals why the FBI felt compelled to defend itself on campus.

J. Edgar Hoover's obsession with controlling the Bureau's public image was certainly a contributing factor to the ordeal, but at the time of the conference, Yale and the FBI maintained a unique relationship that involved Yale's position as a sought-after destination for federal employee recruitment. However, the two institutions shared 20th century ties that ran deeper than the byproducts of the second World War. Unpacking the partnership between the two institutions during the century that America advanced its global power is key to deciphering why the Bureau was so intensely resolute on safeguarding its reputation from the grasps of a collegiate publication.

2. Yale and Federal Law Enforcement—Early 20th Century Alignment

As America's global presence continued its authoritative expansion in the 20th Century, Yale entered the period as an institution with its finger on the pulse of federal policy. World War

⁷ "Yale's Conservative, Liberal Factions, Key Bureau Officials Compose Panel: Forum Lists FBI Representatives Nichols, Gleason, Law School Professors Harper, Rodell, PU Leaders," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 24, 1949.

⁸ Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

It's impact was felt on campus, whether through Yale men sacrificing their lives in the Great War, or through the University's contributions seen through impromptu ROTC and Student's Army Training Corps (SATC) programs.⁹ Although these partnerships were short-lived, the war's influence on Yale suggested that the institution's outlook was increasingly tied to the financial, political, and social climate of its host nation. In the years leading up to 1920, Yale was defined by its coping with financial struggles brought on by inflation and streamlining the school's organization as a successful business.¹⁰ As time progressed, "the rush of students after the war put numerous strains on Yale—on its teaching and housing as well as its finances. To top it all off, these students came from a new postwar world—a place of different attitudes and changed behavior—and this created additional pressures for the old institution."¹¹

The 1920s also signified another benchmark in U.S. history where federal power was accumulated: Prohibition. Surveillance branches of law enforcement at the federal, state, and local levels all expanded to fight the war on alcohol.¹² The evidence of such expansion was demonstrated by the establishment of the Prohibition Bureau whose over 1,500 field agents and 3,000 total staff members contributed to the tripling of nonmilitary federal prisoners from 1920 to 1933, many of whom were held for liquor law violations.¹³

The federal power grab tied to the enforcement of Prohibition even reached Yale's campus, particularly with Harry B. Fisher and the launch of Yale's Social Research Committee launched in 1927.¹⁴ The exact details of who exactly brought Fisher to Yale and how are

⁹ Brooks Mather Kelley, "War and Reorganization," In *Yale: A History*, 348-366. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 352-356.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 352-356.

¹¹ Brooks Mather Kelley, "James Rowland Angell and the Triumph of the University," In *Yale: A History*, 369-392. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 372.

¹² Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2022), 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁴ Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 180.

unknown, however, the “social researcher’s” background fit Yale administrators’ needs impeccably. Yale had a recent history of student riots over the issue of Prohibition, which resurfaced at football games and fraternity initiations.¹⁵ Fisher’s background was a direct foil to the proliferation of drinking, vice, and unruliness, a perfect balance for a Yale that was grappling with such 1920s stigmas and a student body that increasingly veered from the denominationally narrow religious worship that characterized the University over the previous two centuries.¹⁶

Fisher, a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, delivered anti-vice lectures, testified at grand jury investigations of gambling, and participated in raids of liquor law violators as a part of the New York Civic League, an organization devoted to enforcing Prohibition and delivering morals policing.¹⁷ Previously, Fisher worked as a private investigator for Emory Buckner, a New York City prosecutor who was appointed U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York in 1925.¹⁸

The liaison’s morals policing experience and connections to federal agencies both shined in his early years at Yale. In a Dean’s Committee report, Fisher reflected on his start in New Haven—January 2, 1927 marked the date of the first session of Yale’s Social Research Committee and its related active research program.¹⁹ Immediately following this first meeting, Fisher “placed two of [his] own Agents together with one from the Federal Narcotic Bureau and one from the Washington Prohibition Bureau...in the College Highway area of Connecticut and Massachusetts. These men worked entirely undercover with [his] New York City office and that of Mr. Emory R. Buckner, the United States Attorney.”²⁰ In the same report, Fisher outlined his

¹⁵ Ibid., 183.

¹⁶ Ibid., 183-184.

¹⁷ Ibid., 182.

¹⁸ Ibid., 182.

¹⁹ Ibid., 180.

²⁰ Ibid., 180.

ensuing journey to Washington, D.C., where he conferenced with the “Attorney General, the Head of the Prohibition Enforcement Administration, the Head of the Federal Narcotic Bureau, and the Assistant Attorney General.”²¹ Fisher’s work at Yale was thus intensely grounded in federal policy as seen through the interstate jurisdiction of his agents and his close collaborations with key federal enforcement administrations.

During the pre-war period, Fisher’s work on campus included a multi-year study of public liquor usage at the Yale Bowl and repeated reporting on venereal disease outlooks to the Yale faculty.²² Furthermore, the Yale employee maintained and leveraged his federal relationships and external collaborations after the end of Prohibition. In 1936, organizing an “investigation of the ‘shift girl’ houses in [Yale’s] own student territory...[Fisher] called in men from Washington and made the necessary set-up with the State Police so that the immediate action might be had on the first case showing any connection with the old inter-state shift-girl crowd.”²³ While the vague descriptor of “men from Washington” does not explicitly associate such men with the FBI, the report’s illustration of the continuation of Fisher’s post-Prohibition and pre-war relationship with federal authorities in Washington was crucial. Evidently, the relationship was embedded deep enough to transcend a lull in new federal policy that would have directly related to Fisher’s policing and research activities.

The mid-1930s in the U.S. was characterized by the growth of federal authority via the New Deal and FBI expansion,²⁴ events that would prove decisive for Fisher, Yale, and the nation

²¹ Ibid., 180.

²² “Special Report, Social Research Department, The Dean’s Committee,” Jan. 5, 1937. Box 78: Folder 801: “Finance Committees, Fisher, H.B.,” James Rowland Angell, President of Yale University, Records (RU 24). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

²³ “Social Research Report, October 14, 1936,” Oct. 14, 1936. Box 78: Folder 801: “Finance Committees, Fisher, H.B.,” James Rowland Angell, President of Yale University, Records (RU 24). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

²⁴ Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 106.

at the end of the decade and beyond, but also offered little day-to-day career development for Fisher from 1933 to the years before World War II. However, because he was able to maintain subtle connection with Washington during these slower years, instead of his authority completely fading, Fisher's continued collaboration with the federal government made him a natural bridge between Yale and growing federal power. By the time World War II escalated, Yale—having maintained ties to federal agencies through Fisher—operated an existing infrastructure primed for wartime collaborations with federal agencies, most notably, the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

3. Wartime Collaboration

World War II dynamically changed the relationship between Yale and the federal government—such mobilization of a relationship, particularly as partners in national security and intelligence efforts, was endorsed by top University brass. Yale's president in 1939, Charles Seymour, went as far as declaring that “the justification of a university is to be found in the service which it gives to the nation.”²⁵ Beyond attempting to live up to the potential sacrifices evoked with his statement, President Seymour and the rest of the Yale had no choice but to make concessions to the war effort to sustain the college in its own right. In 1942, Yale's losses of faculty and students called to service threatened the financial and long-term well-being of university.²⁶ With this in mind, President Seymour reached an agreement with the military to lease University housing, mess halls, and laboratories to house, feed, and train the country's armed forces.²⁷

²⁵ Brooks Mather Kelley, "Holding at the Three-Yard Line." In *Yale: A History*, 393-422. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 396.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 398.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

As the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) and Navy V-12 programs took hold on campus, Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight, and Trumbull remained the last civilian residential colleges—Army men filled Calhoun (now Grace Hopper) and Berkeley, and the Navy and Marines lived in Branford, Saybrook, Davenport, and Pierson.²⁸

Teaching efforts within these programs were also proof of Yale molding itself into a lever of government service. For example, the University capitalized on then-revolutionary intensive language instruction techniques, supplementing professors with native speakers in an effort to prepare troops for leadership roles in countries occupied by the US during World War II.²⁹ Such courses were included in a “special unit, the Military Intelligence School, [where] Professor George Kennedy taught a group of officers who were studying Chinese in order to train Chinese troops in modern warfare.”³⁰ Yale, not only was playing a role in supplementing the war effort with manpower, but was training military leaders to excel. With such a burden, the school became a military hub with sensitive war training information. This information in the wrong hands could have inflicted harm not just on the University but the country.

Such an avenue for possible national security threats was where Yale’s government liaison Harry B. Fisher’s role fit seamlessly. The social researcher’s contributions to the University mirrored present federal policy concerns—the man who was once organizing Prohibition raids on campus saw his role completely transform in 1941. At the center of this transformation was a relationship with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In a 1941 Dean’s Committee report, Fisher outlined his main responsibilities into two categories. The first list of tasks consisted of the “Registration of all Aliens connected with the University and the New

²⁸ Brooks Mather Kelley, "Holding at the Three-Yard Line." In *Yale: A History*, 393-422. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 401.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

Haven Hospital; The filing of lists of same with both the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service; The compiling of further information regarding those not declaring U.S. Citizenship intentions; And... the completion of the Student Alien lists and the necessary investigations connected therewith.”³¹ Fisher was also “called upon by the War, Navy, and State Departments, and the FBI to clear all members of the Faculty and other University personnel who have volunteered their services to the Government in a capacity. This list...also included Yale men of former years.”³²

Given the context of the war effort, Fisher, the intermediary between Yale and the federal government in terms of compiling information about select students and staff, saw his responsibilities intensify. With its demonstrated interest in potential foreign interests and student and faculty backgrounds on campus, the Bureau was front-and-center in terms of this intelligence gathering. Furthermore, Yale’s consistent output of soldiers and wartime government employees through dedicated wartime programs like the ASTP and Navy V-12 groups ensured that individuals at Yale were cleared in abundance. Hence, there was volume associated with Fisher’s work during World War II. As of January 1st, 1943, Fisher indicated in a Dean’s Committee report that he had received 553 individual file or record requests from government agencies.³³ The Yale employee noted that in addition to such requests made from over 21 distinct federal agencies, the individuals’ University files were “as valuable to [American] enemies as [they were to the American] government.”³⁴ The sheer amount of requests, coupled with Fisher’s systematic oversight, underscored the extent of the federal presence on campus through means of clearance.

³¹ Social Service Report: The Dean's Committee, Jul. 1, 1941. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Financial Report–1942-43. Social Research Committee, Dean’s Fund,” Jul. 29, 1943. Box 46: Folder 482: "Social Research, Dean's Committee on: H.B. Fisher, of the FBI, Correspondence and Reports, 1936 - 1945," Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, Records (RU 819). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

³⁴ Ibid.

Through Fisher specifically, federal agencies were not just occasional visitors to Yale—instead, they had embedded and ongoing roles in managing the inflows and outflows of information on campus.

In particular, the FBI was so embedded in loyalty investigations on campus that they advocated for the removal of Kenneth Kurihara, a Japanese-born economics reader on the Yale staff—they did so through Fisher. Kurihara was a Japanese citizen, born in Hokkaido in 1910 and arriving to America via San Francisco in 1930; before Yale, Kurihara had held instructor positions in the field of economics and modern languages at the University of Manila, University of the Philippines, and the Universities of Missouri and Iowa.³⁵ In 1943, Fisher wrote directly to Yale President Charles Seymour’s secretary, Carl Lohmann, indicating his “opinion that Mr. Kurihara’s [employment] in such capacity should be discontinued forth with.”³⁶ The liaison articulated that it was unacceptable for Kurihara to maintain a role on campus that was not what he was originally hired for: an assistant in the Japanese language ASTP program.³⁷ On top of framing Kurihara’s more recent position as a reader in the Economics Department suddenly unacceptable, Fisher declared that “in the future care should be taken that these enemy aliens are not permitted access to anything other than ‘contracted’ employment.”³⁸ Fisher’s glaring indictment labeling Kurihara as an “enemy alien” as opposed to just an “alien” spoke to the pressures placed on wartime security on campus. As the U.S. was at war and had enemies, so did Yale, and this was taken so seriously as to prevent Kurihara from internal mobility at an institution where had already been approved and hired.

³⁵ Letter from Fisher to Secretary Lohmann Advocating for Removal of Kenneth K. Kurihara from University Staff, Kurihara personal info and Misc. Telegram message attached, Dec. 14, 1943. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

A revealing telegram attached to this memo from Fisher implicated the FBI in advocating for Kurihara's removal from the Yale staff. In the telegram, Fisher is described not as a Yale employee but as "FBI Fisher," who clearly played the role of a point man between the goals of the Bureau and the Yale staff.³⁹ The telegram issued that two weeks prior to December 14, 1943, "FBI Fisher called [Whitney Griswold, who hired Kurihara] and asked him to keep [Kurihara] on while they were making their investigation. Then, about two days or so ago [Fisher] called [Griswold] and said the investigation was over, 'You can let him go know.'"⁴⁰ The terminology "FBI Fisher" was a clear indicator of either a Bureau staffing reference or Yale faculty confusion point that nonetheless tied the liaison officer to the FBI and therefore the University to the Bureau. This relationship was further exacerbated by the end of the telegram, which assuming for a grammatical error, mentioned emphatically that "if the FBI [does not] want [Kurihara] here, [Yale University] doesn't."⁴¹ Such a firm alignment on a niche decision: barring an employee from remaining on staff, signified trust and comfortable communication between the two parties. As World War II cemented this relationship between the two institutions, the foundation was set for continued collaboration after the end of the war. As Yale's campus still harbored interests of the FBI after A-bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Fisher remained a key figure in the relationship between the Bureau and Yale.

4. Yale, the Bureau, and Cold War Beginnings—Part 1: Fisher Confusion

As the FBI assumed the role of conducting loyalty investigations for federal employees during World War II, the Bureau had access to a wide web of informants, such as Fisher, needed

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

to gather the requisite information.⁴² While the war that defined the country's 20th Century rise to stardom had been won, stamping out Communism abroad but also domestically remained too large an American insecurity for the country to abandon the FBI's loyalty investigation tactics and informant networks.⁴³ As fears of Communist infiltration in the government intensified after the war, the Truman administration, recognizing the FBI's widespread public support, allowed the Bureau to take the lead in shaping its loyalty-security program.⁴⁴ This impetus granted the Bureau the opportunity to scale past its early days of loyalty investigations reinforced by the 1939 Hatch Act that Communists, Nazis, and others deemed political deviants from working in the federal government.⁴⁵ The Bureau grew from 3,559 Agents in 1946 to 7,029 in 1952, which by then, had checked 2 million federal employees.⁴⁶ The FBI's informant networks, vital for loyalty investigations, reached a peak of over 109,000 Informants in 1953 at locations deemed vital by the Defense Department.⁴⁷

Such growth in Cold-War Era investigations aligned with numbers reported by Fisher on Yale's campus. By 1951, two years after the 1949 conference in New Haven, Fisher indicated that since Pearl Harbor, he had compiled reports on over 4,000 Yale men for the FBI, armed services, private industries, and foreign countries.⁴⁸ Previously, near end of World War II, Fisher reported a total of only 553 files.⁴⁹ Much of this growth related to Yale continuing to be a relevant pipeline for government work during the early Cold War, where agencies would

⁴² Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 208, 209.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁸ PCD, BTH, GGS, FBI Official Denies Investigations of Student Organizations at Yale: Special Agent Willis Contradicts Yesterday's Statement that New Campus Groups Are Scrutinized By Bureau," Yale Daily News (New Haven, CT), Apr. 21, 1951.

⁴⁹ "Financial Report—1942-43. Social Research Committee, Dean's Fund," Jul. 29, 1943. Box 46: Folder 482: "Social Research, Dean's Committee on: H.B. Fisher, of the FBI, Correspondence and Reports, 1936 - 1945," Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, Records (RU 819). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

specifically seek out candidates from the school. Skip Walz, the Yale Crew Coach from 1946 to 1950, worked simultaneously for Yale and the Central Intelligence Agency, for whom he was a recruiter.⁵⁰ Walz was paid a \$10,000 a year salary for both positions, and was regarded as a chief recruiter for the Agency along with Yale History Professor Wallace Notestein.⁵¹

SAC in Charge of the FBI's New Haven Office, Galen Willis, confirmed Fisher's relationship with the Bureau remained key in postwar FBI clearing processes, as the Yale liaison was still responsible for sending records of Yale government job applicants straight to the FBI.⁵² Yet beyond this explicit relationship during the early Cold War, the same period that was marked by the stamping out of domestic Communism and an uptick in informant usage, was ridden with confusion on Yale's campus regarding whether or not Fisher was an employee of Yale or the Bureau.

A plethora of instances occurred where Yale faculty referred to Fisher as a member of the FBI. In a 1942 letter from SSS Dean Charles Warren's Office to Yale President Seymour, Warren or his office lead with "I am enclosing herewith confidential annual report of Mr. H.B. Fisher, of the FBI."⁵³ Additionally, specific Yale collections even refer to Fisher as a member of the Bureau, for example, Folder 482 of Box 46 (Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, Records (RU 819)) is entitled "Social Research, Dean's committee on H.B. Fisher, of the FBI, Correspondence and Reports." Additionally, Fisher was once mischaracterized as a Bureau agent by Yale Dean Lewis Havemeyer—this particular mix-up slighted Yale and the Bureau when Yale

⁵⁰ Robin Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1987), 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵² Cam DeVore, Gaddis Smith, "Fisher, FBI State Stand on Liberty: Liaison Officer, Willis Affirm Right of Elis to Form New Groups," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Apr. 23, 1951.

⁵³ Memo from Charles H. Warren to President Seymour with Fisher's 1942 Annual Report to The Deans' Committee on Social Research Attached, Aug. 31, 1942. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

prevented student John Williamson, class of 1953, from forming a University organization to fight against race prejudice.⁵⁴ When Williamson approached Havemeyer about forming the group, whose goal was to stimulate Yale students to contact government officials on behalf of the unjust treatment of minorities, Havemeyer told Williamson such club would harm his chances of receiving government commission, alluding to potential background checks from Fisher.⁵⁵ To clear the air, Yale and the FBI publicized statements shared by the *Yale Daily News* that acknowledged Havemeyer's mistake and defined Fisher's role as a Yale employee that directed relevant background reports to the FBI.⁵⁶

Even beyond the liaison's direct work with the Bureau that led to confusion about his role on campus, his FBI-mission tangential suggestions for Yale administrators and his interactions with former Bureau agents further muddled his identity between the two groups. Fisher, like the Bureau, was motivated by the development of policing tactics—he once took this motivation as far as urging the Yale Deans to establish a “School for the Development of Police Science or Science of Police Methods.”⁵⁷ In this same report, he advocated for a Civilian Finger Print Record Program for all Yale students.⁵⁸ While Yale staff was quite hesitant about implementing these ideas on campus, the fingerprinting in particular mirrored J. Edgar Hoover's embarkation at the Bureau of Investigation, where the Director pioneered a systematized fingerprinting database.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ “The FBI and Yale: ‘Whenever a new organization is formed here at Yale (and at any other university), the FBI immediately investigates the organization, its membership, and its purpose,’” *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Apr. 20, 1951.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ PCD, BTH, GGS, FBI Official Denies Investigations of Student Organizations at Yale: Special Agent Willis Contradicts Yesterday's Statement that New Campus Groups Are Scrutinized By Bureau,” *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Apr. 21, 1951.

⁵⁷ Social Service Report: The Dean's Committee, Jul. 1, 1941. Box 70: Folder 601: “Fisher, H.B., 1941-43,” Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Beverly Gage, *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2022), 114.

Striking similarities in mission and such persistent mischaracterizations of Fisher as an FBI agent underscore how deeply embedded the Bureau had become as the Cold War developed. With the growth of the Agency and its informant networks in play, the confusion surrounding Fisher's role at Yale mirrored this broader presence where the presence of informants and loyalty enforces was assumed rather than questioned.

5. **Part 2: Public Discourse, Private Investigation**

Fisher, while captivating the confusion of Yale students and staff as a potential FBI agent, exacerbated the sentiment of a growing Bureau presence on campus. Yet, by the time the FBI arrived on campus in 1949 to discuss its methods at the Yale Law School, another avenue of conversation added fuel to the argument of unchecked Bureau authority. This discussion was inherently much more political than the day-to-day responsibilities of the Yale-FBI campus liaison.

Months before the fall conference, the National Council for American Education published an informative brochure entitled "Red-Ucators at Yale University," part of a series of similar brochures created for other renowned American educational institutions. The report's stated goal was to "help rid the schools and colleges of socialistic, un-American teachings and teachers."⁶⁰ The pamphlet included the names of professors deemed left-leaning enough to maintain "un-American" tendencies,⁶¹ and in doing so, revealed the dynamic that was the assertiveness of anti-communism on college campuses in the postwar 1940s. In the University

⁶⁰ "Red-Ucators at Yale University," Jul. 15, 1949. Box 79: Folder 79: "Loyalty Investigations, 1940-1974, 5 of 8," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁶¹ Ibid.

setting, the revival of communist party organization and alignment had received a subtle boost after World War II, but such numbers were incredibly outpaced by their dominant political opposition.⁶² The same time period marked an era where Harvard played host to radical student organizations that accounted for around 100 student members, but a Republican club with 400.⁶³ Faculty radicals maintained even lower profiles than students, and for good reason—the Truman administration’s policy objectives highlighted by the loyalty-security program had trickled down to the university setting, where school administrators began targeting campus groups with known communist affiliations.⁶⁴

Such inquisitions did not silence one professor in particular that was mentioned in the Red-Ucators report, Thomas I. Emerson of Yale Law, who found himself tangled in the politics of the Bureau’s loyalty investigation tactics during the decade leading up to the conference. Born in New Jersey in 1907, Emerson hailed from a humble childhood and graduated Yale University in 1928. The Law Professor was also a Yale Law School alumnus, having graduated Magna Cum Laude and being admitted to the Order of the Coif, on top of having a stint as the Editor in Chief of the *Yale Law Journal*.⁶⁵ After law school, he worked in private law practice before playing a plethora of roles in Roosevelt’s New Deal administration—Emerson worked for the National Recovery Administration, National Labor Relations Board, Social Security Board, as well for the Attorney General and the Office of Price Administration before returning to Yale Law to teach in 1943.⁶⁶

⁶² Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 85.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁵ Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Jan. 20, 1941. Box 75: Folder 17: "FOIA Request - FBI file vol. I, dept of Justice Investigation, 1941, 1 of 3," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁶⁶ Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Mar. 16, 1949. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Emerson was remembered by the Yale Law School community as a distinguished scholar, professor, and advocate for political and civil rights, on which he authored a book, along with *The System of Freedom of Expression*.⁶⁷ Upon the professor's retirement from Yale, renowned law scholar Norman Dorsen recalled the strength of Emerson to refuse leaving his leadership position in the National Lawyer's Guild as it was slandered as a Communist front during the McCarthy Era, as well as his confrontations of federal power abuse, particularly with his 1948 critique of the Federal Loyalty Program and the FBI.⁶⁸

Naturally, the remnants of FBI history that discuss Emerson remember the law professor in a much different light. A rich case file history attempting to forge some sort of Communist connection, clearly expressed frustrations resulting from Emerson's slander of the Bureau, and being called a "scoundrel" by FBI Assistant Director Louis Nichols revealed the professor's villainous portrayal by the other side of the aisle.⁶⁹

The Bureau's distaste for Emerson was ignited by the aforementioned *Yale Law Journal* piece Emerson co-authored with David Helfeld, "Loyalty Among Government Employees." The 143-page brief addressed the Federal Loyalty Program through the lens of their constraining of political and civil rights.⁷⁰ The authors' preeminent concern was that "political freedom and the right to hold and express opinions diverging from the opinion of the majority [were being] made to appear incompatible with the overriding requirements of 'loyalty,' 'patriotism,' [and] 'national security.'" ⁷¹ Such qualms were aligned with the loyalty-security program's legitimization of

⁶⁷ Norman Dorsen, "Thomas Irwin Emerson," *The Yale Law Journal* 85, no. 4 (1976): 463-466.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 463-466.

⁶⁹ Letter from Nichols to Tolson Regarding Emerson, Feb. 14, 1950. Box 75: Folder 24: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁷⁰ Thomas I. Emerson and David M. Helfeld, "Loyalty Among Government Employees," *The Yale Law Journal* 58, no. 1 (1948): 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

weeding out suspected communists from the work force under the guise of national security—but the program was not the only means of the elimination of the Communist Party.⁷² According to the authors, the mechanisms that propagated “the suspension of traditional rights and freedoms,” through designation of “‘foreign ideologies,’ ‘infiltration,’ ‘subversion,’ and ‘espionage,’” included the House Committee on Un-American Activities, the Hatch Act, in addition to the loyalty-security program (issued as Executive Order 9835).⁷³ A common thread between all of these policies was the appropriation of Congressional funds for the FBI to conduct investigations on behalf of them.⁷⁴

Emerson and Helfeld’s characterization of postwar climate in America that stressed Anticommunism and “loyalty” past an acceptable point garnered attention from the public. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s dismay was central to the range of newspaper articles from New Haven to Washington, D.C. that outlined the piece and its criticisms.⁷⁵ Although the authors weren’t the only ones to villainize the Bureau (for example, the National Lawyer’s Guild had long opposed Bureau investigation practices,)⁷⁶ the piece’s FBI critiques became the impetus for the memorandum’s public controversy. This made sense, as during the 1940s and 50s, most Americans on the right and left trusted the FBI not only due to its reputation of competence and professionalism but also due to the incompetence of other agencies.⁷⁷ Liberals in the same two

⁷² Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 93.

⁷³ Thomas I. Emerson and David M. Helfeld, “Loyalty Among Government Employees,” *The Yale Law Journal* 58, no. 1 (1948): 1-20.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-20.

⁷⁵ Edward K. Nellor, “Yale FBI Critics, Biased, Unfair, Hoover Retorts,” *Washington Times Herald* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 20, 1949; “Two FBI Agents Assure Yale Panel Harvard Crimson Claims Are False,” *New Haven Register* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

⁷⁶ Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 223, 224.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

decades even utilized their support for the Bureau as a tool to clear charges that they didn't have enough tact in terms stamping out Communism.⁷⁸

By early 1949, FBI Director Hoover had enough, and wrote a letter to *Yale Law Journal* Editor in Chief Bayless A. Manning requesting a new article be published correcting a list of inaccuracies that Hoover himself had dissected.⁷⁹ Immediately after demanding a corrected version, Hoover attempted to dodge responsibility of the loyalty program, alluding to its founding by executive order.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Hoover's explanation of Congress appropriating funds for the FBI to police the order, gathering fingerprints and names of employees implicated by the order, as well as articulating the Bureau's open-ended task of "[obtaining] facts during the investigations of persons alleged to be disloyal"⁸¹ self-defined the order as incredibly dependent on the Bureau.

Hoover's letter continued a page-by-page breakdown of statements he took issue with, including denying charges of wiretapping for loyalty investigations⁸² and having too little civilian oversight.⁸³ Hoover's response was that "the FBI as it [was] constituted could never be a ruthless menace to democratic processes because of the character and training of the men who [constituted] its investigative force."⁸⁴ Meanwhile, prior and current Bureau agents' investigations and inquiries regarding Emerson at Yale didn't exactly heed the calls of advancing the democratic process. Instead, they proved the nature of loyalty investigations during the early Cold War Red Scare were prone to politics.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 220.

⁷⁹ Hoover Letter to Bayless A. Manning, Feb. 7, 1949. Box 14: Folder 6: "J.E. Hoover Correspondence," Robert Houghwout Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, (MSS61408). Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1.

⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 12.

Hoover had been involved or at least aware of Emerson at the latest by the beginning of the 1940s—on January 4, 1941, Hoover wrote to the SAC’s in Washington DC, New Haven, and New York city demanding a “thorough investigation of the character, qualifications, and background of [Emerson] who [was] being considered for appointment to a legal position in the Department of Justice.”⁸⁵ Hoover went on to express his concern that Emerson was “regarded as a member of the Communist party line.”⁸⁶ Just over two weeks later on January 29, 1941, the Bureau had created a case file entitled: “Thomas I. Emerson—Department Applicant (legal position).”⁸⁷ Emerson’s loyalty investigation was ridden with Cold War rhetoric—the case file’s synopsis led with the fact that “Emerson’s friends, acquaintances, and teachers [stated he was an] outstanding boy and student with no un-American tendencies.”⁸⁸ This positive claim directly contrasted to the more uninviting comments that reflected that Emerson “[was] perhaps a somewhat liberal thinker and friend of the underdog.”⁸⁹ Such immediate contrast cemented the political bias of the report.

This bias was also prevalent in direct informant-delivered testimonies contained in the report, particularly that of informant “2E,” who associated Emerson’s attitude that always wanted to take the side of the underdog with the lawyer’s role in the National Labor Relations Board.⁹⁰ The informant even attempted to distance himself from Emerson’s political positions, as the report indicated that “while he [did not] agree with all of the applicants political philosophies, he [was] confident that [the] Applicant [was] one-hundred percent American from a good American

⁸⁵ Letter to SAC DC from Hoover re Emerson, Jan. 4, 1941. Box 75: Folder 17: "FOIA Request - FBI file vol. I, dept of Justice Investigation, 1941, 1 of 3," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Jan. 20, 1941. Box 75: Folder 17: "FOIA Request - FBI file vol. I, dept of Justice Investigation, 1941, 1 of 3," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

family and that he [was] in no sense a ‘Red.’”⁹¹ Such prefacing and attempts at self-exoneration blurred the lines of FBI inquiry between national security interests and political perspective policing. These blurred lines revealed underlying pressure to conform with the Bureau’s underlying ideological expectations, an explanation for the agency’s relentlessness in their pursuit of Emerson.

The law professor being described as one-hundred percent American was not enough to save him from being the subject of politically-motivated FBI case files and correspondence throughout the decade. In the year before Bureau officials arrived to speak at Yale Law School, Emerson was the subject of a discrete inquiry relating to his potential musings on proposed federal legislation. Top FBI brass was made aware of the situation, revealed in a 1948 letter from JJ Gleason, SAC New Haven, notifying Director Hoover of rumors that the law professor was opposed to the Mundt-Nixon Bill.⁹² The bill, introduced by HUAC stalwarts Richard Nixon and Karl Mundt, received House approval as an act that required organizations designated as “subversive” to register with the federal government; although denied senate approval, it eventually resurfaced as the McCarran Act, which Hoover utilized to establish a liaison relationship between the FBI and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee.⁹³ The memo articulated a request to “discreetly attempt to ascertain if Professor Thomas I. Emerson [was] preparing some article or treatise in which the testimony of the director may be utilized. The Bureau [also asked] that extreme discretion be utilized in this regard.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² JJ Gleason, SAC New Haven, Letter to Hoover, Jul. 15, 1948. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁹³ Beverly Gage, *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2022), 390, 391.

⁹⁴ JJ Gleason, SAC New Haven, Letter to Hoover, Jul. 15, 1948. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Thus, the Bureau's interest in Emerson didn't end when he left the federal government—instead, it followed him back to Yale where it took the shape of political monitoring. The FBI's engrossment in Emerson also revolved around its own self-interest: the agency's tracking of his opposition to the Mundt-Nixon Bill suggested that the Bureau was in-tune with individuals' political stances and viewed potential intellectual critiques as threats. Such a vested preoccupation in legislation that could have expanded Bureau authority oozed the guilt of political expediency. Furthermore, Gleason's request for extreme discretion in investigations hinted rather explicitly to an awareness that direct interference or overt monitoring could backfire on the Bureau, exposing an embarrassing surveillance saga.

Nonetheless, the Bureau maintained pursuit of Emerson and his activities through 1949 despite a lack of fruitful evidence that the professor was a Communist. An updated 1949 case file on the professor opened with the a statement declaring “no specific evidence of CP membership [had] been found.”⁹⁵ Reasons for continued investigation according to the Bureau consisted of speculative associations and opinions that butted heads with Hoover, surely toeing the line of political foul play—the case file repeatedly referenced the National Lawyer's Guild's designation as a Communist-front organization by HUAC in 1944, and Emerson's opposition to universal military training in a *Yale Daily News* article.⁹⁶ There was also a reference to Emerson's “Loyalty among Government Employees” piece, which the report regarded as “the most comprehensive yet on the Loyalty Program.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Mar. 16, 1949. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Even beyond the Bureau's official investigation, private organizations and former agents sought to involve themselves in monitoring Emerson, attempting to grasp onto to the anti-Communist fervor that permeated the country. On June 28, JJ Gleason wrote to Director Hoover regarding a former FBI agent reaching out to Yale's Harry Fisher in attempt to monitor potential Communist happenings on campus.⁹⁸ Gleason issued that Jeremiah Buckley, former FBI Special Agent, attempted to make a confidential informant out of Yale liaison to the FBI Harry Fisher.⁹⁹ Buckley "specifically made inquiries concerning Dr. John Marsalka, Dr. John Punnet Peters, and Doctor Thomas I. Emerson, all of Yale University, and all subjects of security matter files in [the] New Haven office."¹⁰⁰ Buckley, who had started working for *Counterattack*, "a weekly newsletter of facts to combat Communism,"¹⁰¹ since leaving the Bureau, told Fisher this research was part of his investigation "of Communists and Communism on College and University Campi."¹⁰²

Facing both public slander from Hoover and the political monitoring that came with private investigations and inquiries from the Bureau and other groups, Emerson was forced into a two-front battle after speaking his mind on the Bureau and Federal Loyalty Programs. Not only did this cement Yale as an environment of interest to the Bureau, but it defined the school's early Cold War campus as a destination where political suspicion and academic freedom existed in tension. With a Bureau that not only investigated professors for their political stances but also carefully managed the exposure of such inquiries, a professor openly critical of the FBI, and a

⁹⁸ Gleason Letter to Hoover, re Counter Attack, Jun. 23, 1948. *Federal Bureau of Investigation Library*, CounterAttack Project: The FBI Files.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Peter Meyer Filardo, "The Counterattack Research Files on American Communism, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University." *Labor History*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1998), 189.

¹⁰² Gleason Letter to Hoover, re Counter Attack, Jun. 23, 1948. *Federal Bureau of Investigation Library*, CounterAttack Project: The FBI Files.

campus liaison often mistaken for a Bureau agent, Yale became a true focal point for the broader conversation of anti-Communism and federal authority during the Cold War. This dynamic had its foundation in Yale's longstanding partnership with the federal government, dating back to the World Wars and Prohibition era. It was also solidified through Harry Fisher's close ties to the Bureau. By 1949, Yale had developed into an institution deeply connected to the FBI while simultaneously fostering an academic environment that scrutinized the agency's overreach. There could not have been a more ideal stage set for controversy over Yale's relationship with the Bureau—and given the FBI's sensitivity to criticism, its acceptance of the invitation made perfect sense when confronted with the sympathetic and receptive platform offered by Yale undergrad William F. Buckley.

6. The Conference and Bureau Image Orchestration

When William S. Fairfield's article hit the press in 1949, it signified a true tipping point in terms of Yale's confused relationship with the FBI. As convoluted as some of the *Crimson* reporter's accusations were, ample precedents existed on Yale's campus that allowed such Bureau actions to appear within the bounds of the anti-communist context that plagued college campuses like Yale during the period. Such a plague was reinforced by a plethora of examples: Yale President Charles Seymour had issued that "there [would not be communist] witch-hunts at Yale because there [would] be no witches."¹⁰³ Pertinent surveys reflected college professors were a sub-population characteristically scared of loyalty investigations and political witch hunts during the McCarthy era.¹⁰⁴ Yale professors were subjected to publicization from anti-communist

¹⁰³ William S. Fairfield, "FBI's Activities Spread Fear at Yale, Professor Warned by Operative to Shun Leftist Groups," *The Harvard Crimson* (Cambridge, MA), Jun. 4, 1949.

¹⁰⁴ Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 366.

publications such as the National Council for American Education's "Red-Ucators at Yale University"¹⁰⁵ as well as attempted investigation from the anti-communist publication "CounterAttack."¹⁰⁶

Nonetheless, Fairfield alluded to a mystifying web of Bureau agents on Yale's campus, in particular, "not just the eight or so regular New Haven agents, but the many more undercover agents, . . . liaison men on the faculty, the FBI informants, official, semi-official, and just plain snoopers."¹⁰⁷ The Harvard journalist also referenced campus disagreement over the level of FBI involvement at Yale, ranging from suspicions that students and faculty were actively being surveilled, to other beliefs that held there was little Bureau involvement beyond liaison activity required to clear government position applicants.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, such reporting was reasonable—campus liaison Harry Fisher had maintained his responsibility of clearing potential government employees past World War II, and the Bureau actively monitored Yale Law professor Thomas I. Emerson on campus, which would have required the work of informants on campus, if not the reporting of direct agents themselves.

Another allegation of Fairfield's was the reported interrogation of an unnamed Yale faculty member who was a refugee from Nazi Germany—purportedly, "one of the FBI's liaison men" gave the "eminently respectable Yale Faculty member" trouble over his naturalization status with an obscure line of questioning delivered through telephone call.¹⁰⁹ Yale was host to a relevant historical precedent for such claim—Yale FBI liaison Harry Fisher's active

¹⁰⁵ "Red-Ucators at Yale University," Jul. 15, 1949. Box 79: Folder 79: "Loyalty Investigations, 1940-1974, 5 of 8," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁰⁶ Gleason Letter to Hoover, re Counter Attack, Jun. 23, 1948. *Federal Bureau of Investigation Library*, CounterAttack Project: The FBI Files.

¹⁰⁷ William S. Fairfield, "FBI's Activities Spread Fear at Yale, Professor Warned by Operative to Shun Leftist Groups," *The Harvard Crimson* (Cambridge, MA), Jun. 4, 1949.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

responsibility in suggesting the ouster of Japanese Economics reader Kenneth Kurihara on behalf of the FBI during World War II carried a similar pattern of the Bureau attempting to impose pressure on Yale faculty positions.

Director J. Edgar Hoover immediately responded to the *Crimson's* allegations in a letter to the newspaper's editor in chief.¹¹⁰ This response, however, was merely the tip of the iceberg that became a publicity stunt for the Bureau: the 1949 visit to Yale Law. The event was predicated by Hoover and the Bureau's obsession with image and the politics of preservation, as well as a unique environment that conference moderator *Yale Daily News* Editor in Chief William F. Buckley delivered to the Bureau.

Image was a core component of J. Edgar Hoover's early buildout and control over the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The organization's systematic transformation started with *who* he hired—Hoover gravitated to those who shared a similar past, specifically his alma mater of George Washington University.¹¹¹ Bureau Agents frequently visited Hoover's former Kappa Alpha Fraternity, where in certain instances alumni connections were utilized to facilitate interviews with potential recruits.¹¹² After practically shaping the Bureau's image and likeness after his own background, any shot at the FBI was a shot at Hoover.

In terms of the active portrayal of the Bureau's public image, Hoover's Bureau wasn't just poised to play defense—the FBI took an offensive approach to portraying itself in a positive light. The evolution of the Bureau's Crime Records division showcased such a consciousness that was complemented by active outreach. Originally a crime statistics-focused group, Hoover

¹¹⁰ Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 153.

¹¹¹ Beverly Gage, *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2022), 116-117.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 118-119.

refurbished Crime Records to become a public promoter for the Bureau—the director even offered free speeches and editorials to interested newspapers, large and small.¹¹³ Met with an intense quantity of demand that Hoover himself could not meet, “Crime Records organized a speaker’s bureau populated by agents of good appearance and verbal competence who traveled and made speeches ‘with the zeal of old missionaries’ on Hoover’s behalf. The most important of them was Louis Nichols, a GW law graduate.”¹¹⁴

Nichols was mobilized by the Bureau after Yale student William F. Buckley, who had followed the events that unfolded after the release of Fairfield’s article, seized an opportunity to invite the Bureau to campus. Buckley, a soon-to-be future outspoken critic of Yale, was noticeably pro-FBI in his correspondence with the Bureau, making it known he felt as if the *Crimson* were enacting undeserved harm on an innocent agency’s reputation.¹¹⁵ Buckley wrote to New Haven SAC JJ Gleason, expressing his frustration with the “preposterous charges,” made by the *Crimson* and the “extraordinary misunderstanding” in the U.S. and at Yale over the role of the FBI.¹¹⁶ Buckley then proceeded to express his “[anxiety] to facilitate...a meeting between [Gleason, the faculty, and the undergraduate body to] outline the actual role of the FBI in the state and community levels.”¹¹⁷ The invitation eventually made its way to the desk of Hoover, who specifically recommended specifically recommended that Nichols travel to Yale to represent the FBI alongside SAC Gleason.¹¹⁸

Hoover, by sending Nichols, whose role had grown to be one of the most significant at the Bureau aside from Clyde Tolson, Hoover’s number two,¹¹⁹ ultimately demonstrated his

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹⁵ Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹¹⁸ Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

reverence for Yale as an institution. Not only had Hoover and the Bureau witnessed firsthand through clearance activities Yale's existence as a hotbed for government applicants, they respected the work of Yale-FBI liaison Harry Fisher,¹²⁰ and acknowledged its faculty's critiques of loyalty investigations as comprehensive and intellectual.¹²¹

The orchestrated nature of the conference itself, artfully manipulated with the assistance of William F. Buckley, reaffirmed the speaking event was grounded in the FBI's desire to be vindicated and respected by Yale and like elite institutions, rather than be a reflective opportunity to outline adjustments to Bureau loyalty investigations and potential presence on college campuses. According to Nichols, Buckley assured the FBI Assistant Director that questions or statements too critical of the Bureau would be ruled out.¹²² Buckley also invited the Bureau to add input on guest panel members—"Absolutely no. I learned long ago not to enter a wrestling match with skunks," was Hoover's response to initial planning that maintained Bernard DeVoto and Thomas Emerson as members of the conference's guest panel.¹²³ (DeVoto was outspoken in his view of the FBI overstepping in their interrogations of private citizens¹²⁴ and the Bureau had long been investigating Emerson for potential ties to communist cells.¹²⁵) Neither ended up a part of the conference's panel.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Gleason Letter to Hoover, re Counter Attack, Jun. 23, 1948. *Federal Bureau of Investigation Library*, CounterAttack Project: The FBI Files.

¹²¹ Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Mar. 16, 1949. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹²² Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 164.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹²⁴ Beverly Gage, *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2022), 360.

¹²⁵ Letter to SAC DC from Hoover re Emerson, Jan. 4, 1941. Box 75: Folder 17: "FOIA Request - FBI file vol. I, dept of Justice Investigation, 1941, 1 of 3," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹²⁶ "Yale's Conservative, Liberal Factions, Key Bureau Officials Compose Panel: Forum Lists FBI Representatives Nichols, Gleason, Law School Professors Harper, Rodell, PU Leaders," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 24, 1949.

Buckley even excused the FBI of wrongdoing before the start of the conference—in a *Yale Daily News* editorial greeting for the Bureau, he made his pro-FBI bias clear, politicizing Bureau critics by highlighting their harsh critiques. He casually pointed to “men at Yale who [classified the Bureau] as an American gestapo” and “the greatest threat to individual freedom in the US,” but instead of contextually developing such claims, he dismissed such arguments as lacking “poised discussion.”¹²⁷ Such a forum moderator outspoken in his belief that “the role of the FBI [was] all too often perverted and dragged through the political mire just to make a point”¹²⁸ was surely a positive in the eyes of Nichols, Gleason, and Hoover. Buckley even excused the FBI’s right to lack of transparency ahead of the conference itself—the student made clear that “there [were] questions which Mr. Nichols and Mr. Gleason [would] not answer for understandable reasons...however they [would] enlighten and inform persons of whose judgment of the FBI [was] irrational and superficial.”¹²⁹ Buckley cemented a lack of transparency regarding the Bureau’s actions as appropriate, whereas from the conference’s audience’s perspective, the point of the meeting was to provide transparency. Beyond Buckley’s characterization of the FBI’s inability to discuss certain topics as natural and appropriate, this very stipulation provided another incentive for the FBI to pursue an opportunity to speak on Yale’s campus—with the crutch of confidentiality, the Bureau had the ability to steer conversation away from certain topics or refuse to answer questions at its own will. A selective approach to information-sharing allowed the Bureau to maintain authority over how it represented its public image.

In terms of the conference itself, it was marked by this confidentiality and a denial of claims accused by panel members and audience participants—Nichols shut down the

¹²⁷ William F. Buckley, "Welcome to the FBI," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 24, 1949.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

possibilities of undercover agents existing on campus, wire-tapping in cases other than those approved by the Attorney General, keeping files on members of congress, and denying specific claims issued in Fairfield's article.¹³⁰ Such remarks were praised in a second Buckley editorial, "Hats off to the FBI," which lauded Nichols and his supposed forthcomingness after the conference.¹³¹ Hoover's response to the editorial was that it was "a classic," so useful from a public relations standpoint that he sent a copy of the editorial to the American Civil Liberties Union to reinforce the Bureau's transparency in the realm of promoting and maintaining academic freedom.¹³²

Proven by Hoover's repurposing of the selective reputation boost from Buckley, the FBI's motive in coming to campus was made clear—it was not to engage in reformative discussion or assume responsibility for confusion, it was to boost its public image in the eyes of Yale, an institution that had spent the 20th Century in proximity to a federal government that had been expanding its reach. Such politics of preservation aligned with patterns of Hoover's behavior as director that stressed the representation of the Bureau always being on the right side of the fight.

As the Bureau built up and continued to grow in its own right as an American institution under Hoover, an agency with the apolitical goal of protecting the American people relied on politics to continue accumulating responsibility—there is no other way Hoover would have been able to remain in the seat of a Presidentially-appointed position from 1924 to 1972 if he didn't play politics and outright people-please.

¹³⁰ Thomas H. Guinzburg, "Bureau Chiefs Refute 'Crimson' Charges, Deny Presence of FBI Agents at Yale: 'News'-Sponsored Panel probes loyalty check, wiretapping, informers," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

¹³¹ William F. Buckley, "Hats off to the FBI," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

¹³² Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 164-165.

Yet, as transparent as un-transparent as the FBI’s conference was, it reinforced just how integral public image of the Bureau was inherent to the country’s trust of an institution tasked with being its protector. The Yale conference provided a unique example in that it reinforced the Bureau’s self-consciousness in the context of educational institutions like Yale, emblematic of prestige and federal partnership. Through the rountable, the Bureau reasserted legitimacy on its own with a masterclass in orchestrating the terms of its own presentation.

7. Conclusion

Such self-consciousness has not left the Bureau—nor should it completely—to best achieve its goals to the specifications of its constituents, such an institution requires a constant gauge on the expectations and environment of the American people as a collective. Yet, today, the orientation of the Bureau’s self-consciousness has shifted dangerously. While former FBI Director Christopher Wray, who served from 2017 to 2025, held that the Bureau must “follow the facts, wherever they lead, no matter who likes it or doesn’t,”¹³³ Donald Trump created a political foil out of Wray’s Bureau, accusing it of conspiracy when its investigations implicated him.¹³⁴ Trump’s replacement for his prior appointee Wray, Kash Patel, a MAGA loyalist who has fundraised for January 6th Capitol rioter legal fees,¹³⁵ and published two pro-Trump children’s books¹³⁶ signals a shift from a Bureau with historical precedents for meticulously managing its image for the eyes of the public to curating loyalty to the Executive Branch.

¹³³ Christopher A. Wray, “FBI Director Christopher A. Wray’s Farewell,” Jan. 14, 2025, FBI Headquarters, Washington, D.C., [Video], 2:10:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Bd4_9jGM0k

¹³⁴ Sam Levine, “What is the Trump Mar-a-Lago case about and why is it significant?” *The Guardian* (New York, NY), Jun. 8, 2023.

¹³⁵ David A. Fahrenthold, “How Kash Patel’s Charity Aided Trump, and Patel Himself,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Jan. 30, 2025.

¹³⁶ Ana Faguy, “Who is Kash Patel? Trump’s new FBI director vows to shake up the agency,” *BBC News* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 30, 2025.

As the second Trump administration has taken action on college campuses in the form of DEI crackdowns¹³⁷ and demanding academic receivership for Columbia University's Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies Department,¹³⁸ the simultaneous evolution of the Bureau implicates academic freedom, the exercise of which the 1949 conference at Yale claimed to defend. As Hoover made use of Nichols' and Gleason's appearance in New Haven to reassert the manner in which the FBI was perceived in intellectual circles, the politically-reimagined Bureau of 2025 poses renewed risks to these institutions. Recent reports of Yale professors abandoning New Haven for teaching posts in Canada¹³⁹ reverberate echoes of the 1949 campus climate in the present day. Then, as now, the potential repercussions of dissent appear inextricably linked to federal scrutiny—Columbia University has even yielded to Trump's receivership demands in lieu of losing \$400 million in federal funding.¹⁴⁰

In 1949, the FBI denied political involvement on Yale's campus while behind the scenes, it monitored the political views of professors—in 2025, the output of Trump policy on college campuses has out-muscled any merits to claims defending such actions. The 1949 Bureau's appearance in New Haven established a cornerstone moment where the Bureau prioritized performance and political preservation over transparency. Today, America awaits the potential carnage of such performance and political preservation being fixated on appeasing Presidential power in lieu of preserving public trust. The Bureau and its leadership have always remained self-aware—but when this awareness veers too far away from the American people towards a

¹³⁷ Juliana Kim, "Over 50 universities are under investigation as part of Trump's anti-DEI crackdown," *NPR* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 14, 2025.

¹³⁸ Collin Binkley and Jake Offenhartz, "Trump demands unprecedented control at Columbia, alarming scholars and speech groups," *Associated Press* (New York, NY), Mar. 14, 2025.

¹³⁹ Ariela Lopez and Yolanda Wang, "Three prominent Yale professors depart for Canadian university, citing Trump fears," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Mar. 27, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ "Columbia University caves to demands to restore \$400m from Trump administration," *The Guardian* (New York, NY), Mar. 21, 2025.

single politician, its legitimacy, and the freedom of institutions harboring alternative beliefs, hang in the balance.

Bibliography

Newspaper Articles and News Publications:

Binkley, Collin and Offenhartz, Jake. "Trump demands unprecedented control at Columbia, alarming scholars and speech groups," *Associated Press* (New York, NY), Mar. 14, 2025.

Buckley, William F. "Hats off to the FBI," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

Buckley, William F. "Welcome to the FBI," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 24, 1949.

"Columbia University caves to demands to restore \$400m from Trump administration," *The Guardian* (New York, NY), Mar. 21, 2025.

DeVore, Cam, and Smith, Gaddis. "Fisher, FBI State Stand on Liberty: Liaison Officer, Willis Affirm Right of Elis to Form New Groups," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Apr. 23, 1951.

Faguy, Ana. "Who is Kash Patel? Trump's new FBI director vows to shake up the agency," *BBC News* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 30, 2025.

Fahrenthold, David A. "How Kash Patel's Charity Aided Trump, and Patel Himself," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Jan. 30, 2025.

Fairfield, William S. "FBI's Activities Spread Fear at Yale, Professor Warned by Operative to Shun Leftist Groups," *The Harvard Crimson* (Cambridge, MA), Jun. 4, 1949.

Guinzburg, Thomas H.. "Bureau Chiefs Refute 'Crimson' Charges, Deny Presence of FBI

Agents at Yale: 'News'-Sponsored Panel probes loyalty check, wiretapping, informers,"
Yale Daily News (New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

Kim, Juliana. "Over 50 universities are under investigation as part of Trump's anti-DEI
crackdown," *NPR* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 14, 2025.

Levine, Sam. "What is the Trump Mar-a-Lago case about and why is it significant?" *The
Guardian* (New York, NY), Jun. 8, 2023.

Lopez, Ariela and Wang, Yolanda. "Three prominent Yale professors depart for Canadian
university, citing Trump fears," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Mar. 27, 2025.

Nellor, Edward K. "Yale FBI Critics, Biased, Unfair, Hoover Retorts," *Washington Times Herald*
(Washington, D.C.), Mar. 20, 1949.

PCD, BTH, GGS. "FBI Official Denies Investigations of Student Organizations at Yale: Special
Agent Willis Contradicts Yesterday's Statement that New Campus Groups Are
Scrutinized By Bureau," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Apr. 21, 1951.

"The FBI and Yale: 'Whenever a new organization is formed here at Yale (and at any other
university), the FBI immediately investigates the organization, its membership, and its
purpose,'" *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Apr. 20, 1951.

"Two FBI Agents Assure Yale Panel Harvard Crimson Claims Are False," *New Haven Register*
(New Haven, CT), Oct. 25, 1949.

“Yale’s Conservative, Liberal Factions, Key Bureau Officials Compose Panel: Forum Lists FBI Representatives Nichols, Gleason, Law School Professors Harper, Rodell, PU Leaders,” *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 24, 1949.

Archival and Non-Newspaper Primary Sources:

Dorsen, Norman. “Thomas Irwin Emerson,” *The Yale Law Journal* 85, no. 4 (1976): 463-466.

Emerson, Thomas I., and Helfeld, David M. “Loyalty Among Government Employees,” *The Yale Law Journal* 58, no. 1 (1948): 1-20.

“Financial Report–1942-43. Social Research Committee, Dean’s Fund,” Jul. 29, 1943. Box 46: Folder 482: "Social Research, Dean's Committee on: H.B. Fisher, of the FBI, Correspondence and Reports, 1936 - 1945," Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, Records (RU 819). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

“Financial Report, Dean’s Committee on Social Research,” Jun. 30, 1940. Box 46: Folder 482: "Social Research, Dean's Committee on: H.B. Fisher, of the FBI, Correspondence and Reports, 1936 - 1945," Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, Records (RU 819). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Gleason Letter to Hoover, re Counter Attack, Jun. 23, 1948. *Federal Bureau of Investigation Library*, CounterAttack Project: The FBI Files.

Hoover Letter to Bayless A. Manning, Feb. 7, 1949. Box 14: Folder 6: "J.E. Hoover

Correspondence," Robert Houghwout Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, (MSS61408).

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. 1-12.

JJ Gleason, SAC New Haven, Letter to Hoover, Jul. 15, 1948. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA

Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University,

Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Letter from Charles H. Warren to Tom W. Farnam With 1941 Fisher Social Report Attached,

Sep. 11, 1941. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President

of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Letter from Fisher to Secretary Lohmann Advocating for Removal of Kenneth K. Kurihara from

University Staff, Kurihara personal info and Misc. Telegram message attached, Dec. 14,

1943. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President of Yale

University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Letter from Nichols to Tolson Regarding Emerson, Feb. 14, 1950. Box 75: Folder 24: "FOIA

Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University,

Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Letter to SAC DC from Hoover re Emerson, Jan. 4, 1941. Box 75: Folder 17: "FOIA Request -

FBI file vol. I, dept of Justice Investigation, 1941, 1 of 3," Thomas Irwin Emerson

Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Memo from Charles H. Warren to President Seymour with Fisher's 1942 Annual Report to The Deans' Committee on Social Research Attached, Aug. 31, 1942. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

"Red-Ucators at Yale University," Jul. 15, 1949. Box 79: Folder 79: "Loyalty Investigations, 1940-1974, 5 of 8," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

"Social Research Report, October 14, 1936," Oct. 14, 1936. Box 78: Folder 801: "Finance Committees, Fisher, H.B.," James Rowland Angell, President of Yale University, Records (RU 24). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Social Service Report: The Dean's Committee, Jul. 1, 1941. Box 70: Folder 601: "Fisher, H.B., 1941-43," Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

"Special Report, Social Research Department, The Dean's Committee," Jan. 5, 1937. Box 78: Folder 801: "Finance Committees, Fisher, H.B.," James Rowland Angell, President of Yale University, Records (RU 24). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

“Special Report: The Dean’s Committee on Social Research,” Undated. Box 46: Folder 482:

"Social Research, Dean's Committee on: H.B. Fisher, of the FBI, Correspondence and Reports, 1936 - 1945," Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, Records (RU 819). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Jan. 20, 1941. Box 75: Folder 17: "FOIA Request - FBI file vol. I, dept of Justice Investigation, 1941, 1 of 3," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Thomas I. Emerson FBI Case File, Mar. 16, 1949. Box 75: Folder 23: "FOIA Request - FBI file, vol. III, 1948-1950," Thomas Irwin Emerson Papers, Yale University, Records (MS 1622). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Wray. Christopher A. “FBI Director Christopher A. Wray’s Farewell,” Jan. 14, 2025, FBI Headquarters, Washington, D.C., [Video], 2:10:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Bd4_9jGM0k

Secondary Sources:

Diamond, Sigmund. *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 153-181.

Gage, Beverly. *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2022), 113-391.

Filardo, Peter Meyer. "The Counterattack Research Files on American Communism, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University." *Labor History*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1998): 189.

Kelley, Brooks Mather. "Holding at the Three-Yard Line." In *Yale: A History*, 393-422. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 396-401.

McGirr, Lisa. *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2022), 69-201.

Schrecker, Ellen. *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 106-366.

Schrecker, Ellen. *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 85-93.

Winks, Robin. *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1987), 33-35.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article V

Fishy Business: Organized Crime in the Fulton Fish Market During Prohibition

Max Podolsky

podmax@bu.edu

To the reader,

When embarking on a research paper, one must answer the formidable “so what” question. I struggled with where I wanted to take the topic of organized crime during the prohibition era in the Fulton Fish Market. The research lent itself to discussing the power struggles within a dogged phase in New York City’s history. However, I ultimately decided on analyzing how the Fulton Fish Market was unintentionally perfect for the onset of organized crime. Everything from the original steel frame of the old market building to the assigned parking spaces made the Fulton Fish Market conducive to illicit activities.

Histories of developing cities are riddled with the unintended misuse of space. These unintentional functions can act as key vessels in the development of urban spaces. My research unveils how prohibition shaped the illicit workings of the Fulton Fish Market and how, in turn, these illicit workings influenced the development of early-twentieth-century New York City. I would be lying if I said this was an easy paper to write. The vast documentation provided by New York public records is limited by organized crime families who were not keen on having their illegal activities documented. The substantial literary gap on the specific illicit activities carried out at the fish market prompted me to instead dedicate my research to how the Fulton Fish Market exemplifies the misuse of urban spaces.

Kind regards,

Max

Introduction:

A wave of optimism descended on New York City's Fulton Fish Market during January of 1920. A new era, free from alcohol, had finally arrived after years of anticipation. The beginning of Prohibition was a tumultuous period for the vibrant city of New York. This era was initially welcomed by the Market's vendors and workers who believed that the ban on alcohol would lead to increased seafood consumption. With the closure of bars, taverns, and saloons, many people expected restaurants to see a boost in business. In turn, vendors of the Fulton Fish Market hoped that increased foot traffic in restaurants would translate into more orders of fish and other seafood from their stalls.¹ Further, with speakeasies and dive bars on the rise, market workers anticipated that New Yorkers would seek out new food and drink pairings, creating more sales opportunities for New York's oldest and largest wholesale fish market. Instead, Prohibition set the stage for a different kind of endeavor – one tightly entwined with organized crime.

The Fulton Fish Market had successfully distanced itself from organized crime since its inception in 1883. The onset of Prohibition, however, made it nearly impossible to maintain this separation. New York crime families identified the market's well-established system as an ideal way to carry out bootlegging and other illegal activities. The bustling environment, with its constant flow of goods and people, provided the perfect cover for illicit operations. As the demand for illegal alcohol surged, mobsters began infiltrating the market by using intimidation and coercion to exert control over vendors and laborers alike. This shift not only jeopardized the market's integrity but also transformed the vibrant community into a landscape marked by fear and corruption. The legacy of the Fulton Fish Market, once celebrated for its dedication to honest trade, became entangled with the dark underbelly of organized crime. Although there exists a

¹ Slanetz, Priscilla Jennings. 1986. "A History of the Fulton Fish Market." *The Log of Mystic Seaport*. 38:1, p. 14

wealth of literature evaluating intermarket relations before and after Prohibition, there is a significant literary gap in research regarding life in the Fulton Fish Market during Prohibition itself. The Prohibition era was a time of considerable transformation, both within the market itself and the intrapersonal relationships among those in it. After the enactment of Prohibition policies in New York City, the Fulton Fish Market experienced a dramatic shift in atmosphere, characterized by apprehensive interactions and a sense of lawlessness.² The stark shift in the market's character following Prohibition raises several questions — particularly since the market was able to navigate other disastrous events like the Spanish Flu outbreak in 1918 or the Great Fire of 1835 without succumbing to organized crime — such as: What specific elements of prohibition altered the dynamics of the Fulton Fish Market, making it more susceptible to the pressures of organized crime compared to previous crises? And, how did the economic pressures created by the Prohibition era facilitate the rise of unlawful activities and power struggles within the market?

Understanding the interactions between market operations and legal restrictions during this era will illuminate how organized criminal enterprises adapted to exploit new opportunities, thereby reshaping both the market's structure and the lives of those who operated within it. Moreover, evaluating the relationships among local law enforcement, distributors, and fishmongers during this time will provide insights into how social networks were created in response to the developing landscape, unraveling a complex network of conflict and cooperation that defined life in the Fulton Fish Market during prohibition.

² Carroll, Brian. "Combating Racketeering in the Fulton Fish Market." In *Organized Crime and Its Containment* edited by Cyrille Fijnaut and James B. Jacobs. Boston: Kluwer, 1991

The onset of organized crime within the Fulton Fish Market transformed the way in which intermarket connections were forged and maintained, and the effects were experienced in all aspects of market life. Although the Prohibition era in New York City enjoys the luxury of vast documentation, organized crime within the fish market does not. However, available scholarly research suggests that organized crime was most revolutionary in three aspects of intermarket relations: the consolidation of power within local unions, the monopolization of seafood distribution, and the establishment of corrupt alliances with law enforcement. The following narrative overview and comparative analysis of these factors suggest that what was once an epicenter for vibrant connections and social gatherings became a destination only traveled to out of necessity.³ The changes within the Fulton Fish Market demonstrate how social connections among urbanites are not characterized by vigorous legislation, but rather by the cutthroat and opportunistic nature of metropolises. In other words, it is the people who define a space, rather than the space defining its people.

Pre-Market Conditions: 1883-1920

Understanding the rise of organized crime within the Fulton Fish Market requires examining the market conditions before Prohibition that made the surge in illicit activity both surprising and unprecedented. Before organized crime gained a foothold, the market was a bustling commercial hub valued for its integrity and positive influence on the city's economy. During its foundational years, the market operated under a strong culture of dependability and transparency. Maintaining trust with customers and suppliers was essential within an industry dependent on quality and freshness. The authors of *Gotham Unbound* state that, before

³ Slanetz, Priscilla Jennings. 1986. "A History of the Fulton Fish Market." *The Log of Mystic Seaport*. 38:1, p. 14

Prohibition, “suppliers were dependent on the goodwill of the wholesalers, something that rarely became an issue”.⁴ The Fulton Fish Market was built on a foundation of good faith and honesty whereby an honor code organically developed within the market’s community, fostering trust and reliability amongst traders. Moreover, *Gotham Unbound* explains that prices within the market fluctuated according to factors like quantity, quality, and demand, making fair prices reliant on the honesty and integrity of the market’s fishmongers.⁵ Fair trading practices and an established sense of comradery and mutual respect amongst market workers fostered the perception that the market was an energetic and welcoming sub-ecosystem within lower Manhattan. Customer loyalty was much more valuable than individual one-time swindles. As outlined by Historian Rees, “fish wholesalers didn’t rip off their regular buyers because they wanted their business again. Relationships based upon trust proved particularly important for selling a product for which the quality is difficult to discern with the naked eye”.⁶ These interpersonal relationships fortified the honor code present within the market, further contributing to its star-studded reputation within the community.

Before Prohibition, the Fulton Fish Market operated in a single sheet metal warehouse known colloquially as the “Original Market Building.” Constructed in 1907, this building was commissioned by the City of New York allowing the city to monitor and influence the dynamics of the market. The structure was constructed out of a steel frame and tin cladding — materials that lasted even when exposed to the elements.⁷ As shown in Figure A, the Original Building was

⁴ Jacobs, James B., Robert Radick, and Coleen Friel. *Gotham Unbound: how New York City was liberated from the grip of organized crime*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

⁷ Jacobs, James B., Robert Radick, and Coleen Friel. *Gotham unbound how New York City was liberated from the grip of organized crime*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

designed with numerous windows to help prevent structural damage in the event of a fire. These physical attributes made the building durable, reducing the need for frequent replacement. John Pintard, a merchant, and the founder of the New York Historical Society labelled the Fulton Fish Market “an elegant, quadrangular structure, superior in accommodation perhaps to anything of the kind, probably even in Europe”.⁸ The Market’s physical layout was designed to create a pleasant shopping experience. As presented in Figure B, neatly organized vendor stalls were arranged around a central area used for preparing and weighing the catches. The stalls were organized using a numerical system, making the market easy to navigate for both vendors and customers. Figure B also emphasizes the market’s prime location. Situated between South, Fulton, Front, and Beekman Streets, the market enjoyed high visibility which, in turn, attracted steady foot traffic.⁹ The market also benefited from Beekman Street being situated adjacent to Beekman slip, the terminus for the Fulton Ferry. The ferry regularly travelled between lower Manhattan and Brooklyn and added to the market’s exposure and foot traffic.⁹

The Fulton Market’s structure was extremely fine-tuned with specific intervals which made it an efficient working environment. The market operated from 10:00 PM to 10:00 AM Sunday through Friday, meaning most transactions took place in the cover of darkness.¹⁰ After fishermen sold their catches to suppliers, who began packing the fish at 10:00 PM, transport drivers delivered the frozen fish to the Original Market Building. To reduce traffic congestion and prevent delays in the market schedule, drivers were assigned specific parking spots, which enhanced the market’s overall efficiency.¹¹ By 3:00 AM, all frozen merchandise was

⁸ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

¹¹ Rees, *The Fulton Fish Market*.

unloaded and prepared for display by the market workers, as retailers from seafood stores and restaurants started to arrive.¹² Similar to the transport drivers, retailers were also allocated designated parking zones to streamline operations.¹³ The nocturnal operating hours were key to the success of the market because seafood is incredibly perishable and getting it from the docks to the market swiftly was pivotal. Additionally, handling preparatory tasks, like transporting fish, during the night allowed the market to remain open for longer, as these tasks were already completed by the time customers began arriving. The highly competitive nature of the seafood industry made these operational decisions essential for staying competitive with other fish markets and ensuring the market's continued success.

During its developmental years, the market was governed by a conglomerate of wholesalers and merchants rather than a single individual. The market operated with an egalitarian mindset where the exertion of power and status was uncommon.¹⁴ Each wholesaler had established networks and relationships, which allowed for a collaborative yet competitive environment. This further contributed to a sense of brotherhood within the market, cultivating an atmosphere where workers celebrated each other's success. The market was also a unique spot of cultural diversity. In the early twentieth century, The Fulton Market still had a predominantly Jewish and Italian foundation. However, the turn of the century saw "Koreans enter [the market] as well as a few Portuguese and Greeks".¹⁶ These ethnicities were specifically represented within the market due to their long standing fishing traditions, making them familiar with maritime work. Moreover, during this time, New York City served as a major entry point for immigrants from both Asia and Europe. Upon arriving, many immigrants sought employment in

¹² Rees, *The Fulton Fish Market*.

¹³ Rees, *The Fulton Fish Market*.

¹⁴ Slanetz, Priscilla Jennings. 1986. "A History of the Fulton Fish Market." *The Log of Mystic Seaport*. 38:1, p. 14 ¹⁶ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

industries where they had prior experience or in bustling commercial hubs, making the fish market an attractive destination for a large number of newcomers. The native-born Americans who occupied the market before this welcomed the influx of immigrants. They did not view immigrants as competition, but rather as a source of growth for the market as a whole.¹⁵ John Caruso, a salesman at the market in the early twentieth century, said it best: “There are no ethnic boundaries down here; money is the joining factor. Whoever has the money to pay for the fish, you’re my buddy.”¹⁶ His words reflect the pragmatic, business-first mentality that came first over cultural differences and united vendors and buyers in the competitive and bustling environment of the Fulton Fish Market.

In the early stages of the market, selling locally caught fish was a key feature. Not only was it more cost-effective than transporting fish from distant locations, but it also fostered a sense of local pride and tradition.¹⁷ In the case of the Fulton Fish Market, shad fishing was the locally prized catch. Shad fishing, although more like fish trapping than conventional fishing, took place on the Hudson River by the market’s fisherman. As depicted by Figure C, shad fishing involved a skiff casting large nets into the Hudson and periodically checking to see if anything had been caught. Shad fish held a distinctive position within the market. Despite its low cost, shad was seen as a gourmet dish, making it a general favorite among all classes.²⁰ The only drawback to Shad was their numerous bones. An 1884 guidebook to the fishes of the Atlantic coast humorously noted that “if all the bones of a shad were placed end to end, they would go twice around the world.”¹⁸ Shad fishing unintentionally strengthened the sense of community

¹⁵ Suzanne Hamlin, “A Man with Many Fish Tales,” *New York Daily News*, Good Living, March 6, 1985, 3

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

²⁰ Ibid

¹⁸ Louis O. Van Doren, *The Fishes of the East Atlantic Coast* (New York: American Angler, (1884), 91.

pride within the market. The local Hudson shad were prized on the New York market because they were widely perceived to be the best available. In 1894, a tradition was established in which the first shad of the season was adorned with ribbons and sold at auction. This ceremony became an annual event, drawing hundreds of market workers and loyal customers each year.¹⁹

These features cultivated an environment that was perfect for mob orchestrated activities. Everything from the structure of the building to the daily routine of the market made it a well-oiled machine primed for a takeover by organized crime. The constant flow of cash, complex web of transactions, and sheer volume of merchandise created ideal conditions for the rise of criminal influence within the market, proving that even the most honest of spaces were susceptible to dark, unintentional misuse.

Onset of Organized Crime: 1920-1933

While pinpointing the exact arrival of organized crime in the Fulton Fish Market is challenging, scholars agree that Joseph Lanza's organization of the Local 359 within the Seafood Workers Union in 1922 marked a pivotal moment in its infiltration of the market. Joseph Lanza, known as "Socks," was an emerging figure within the Genovese Crime Family who, at just 18 years old, sought to make a name for himself by attempting to take control of the Fulton Fish Market.²⁰ Lanza was the leader of the Seafood Workers Union, which became his way of entering the market and consolidating power. Although the story remains poorly documented, Lanza either helped bring Italians into the market or he saw that they were getting jobs there anyway and took advantage of that fact.²¹ By 1923, half of the laborers within the market were

¹⁹ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

²⁰ Fox, S. R. (1989). *Blood and power: Organized crime in twentieth-century America*. Penguin Books.

²¹ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

Italian Americans, and, upon joining the union, Lanza effectively became their “business agent” creating a tight knit, loyal community within the market’s union.²² The power of the union derived from its monopoly control of loading and unloading fish at the market. Since fish spoils easily and there was limited access to cold storage around the market, the failure to load or unload fish could completely ruin a business.²³ This was true for both wholesalers who received fish to sell to retailers and the retailers who needed that fish loaded into their trucks. By consolidating power through the trade union, Lanza was able to marginalize potential rivals and establish a network of loyal market workers through fear and intimidation tactics.

Lanza quickly built a reputation as a formidable force following his usurpation of the Fulton Fish Market. Transforming the market into a base for illegal operations, he implemented a handful of changes to tighten his control. For instance, fishing boat crews were no longer permitted to unload their own catches; instead, Lanza’s men handled all unloading for a ten-dollar fee known as the landing fee. Following this, each crew was required to contribute ten dollars to what Lanza termed the “unions benevolent fund”.²⁴ This was ultimately devastating to the long-term future of the market because seaports in other cities with no landing fees began to get more business.²⁵ Failure to cooperate with Lanza’s terms brought severe repercussions, crippling any fishing crew bold enough to defy him. The front page of the *New York Times*’ May 19th, 1926, issue exemplifies Lanza’s intimidation tactics. William Mack, labor organizer and officer within the Seafood Workers Union, was found dead outside a speakeasy on 215 Front Street.²⁶ Police arrested Joseph Zangara, an associate of the Genovese Crime Family, in

²² Walter Chambers, *Labor Unions and the Public* (New York: Coward-McCann, c. 1936), 144–45.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Fox, S. R. (1989). *Blood and power: Organized crime in twentieth-century America*. Penguin Books.

²⁵ *East Hampton Star*, September 16, 1932, 7.

²⁶ “Organizer is slain, thrown into street; laborer finds bullet-riddled body of man said to have been officer of seafood workers.” *The New York Times* (1926, May 19).

connection with Mack's murder.²⁷ While not an isolated case, this incident highlights the violent nature of Lanza's involvement with the Fulton Fish Market and underscores the treacherous working conditions that prevailed under the influence of organized crime. While sporadic acts of violence received more attention, common punishments also involved the destruction of fishing crews' merchandise. If a crew refused to contribute to the "union's benevolent fund," their catches would either be discarded into the harbor or left to spoil in the street²⁸. Lanza, unlike other mafiosi, seemed irreplaceable due to his deep-rooted connection to the market. Over time, he accumulated an extensive understanding of the market's inner workings, making his presence crucial to the market's functioning. In 1927, an informant told New York City law enforcement that "Lanza has always been the boss in the fish market. He still is the boss; if you send him back [to jail] for ten years he will still be the boss."²⁹ This comment referred to Lanza's arrest for juvenile delinquency at the age of 17 and served as a testament to the fearsome influence he had built within the market as the undisputed controller of the fish market.

The establishment of corrupt alliances between Lanza and New York City officials was another way in which organized crime asserted authority over the Fulton Fish Market. Given the affluent nature of the Genovese Crime Family, these alliances often involved mutual benefit; law enforcement turned a blind eye to Lanza's illicit activities in exchange for financial incentives or other favors. Like any corrupt alliance, Lanza's collaboration with the New York Police Department (NYPD) was ambiguous and multifaceted. Certain members of the department were susceptible to the coercion of organized crime. Captain John H. O'Brien, for

²⁷ Fox, S. R. (1989). *Blood and power: By Stephen R. Fox. organized crime in twentieth-century America*. Penguin Books.

²⁸ Jacobs, James B., Robert Radick, and Coleen Friel. *Gotham unbound how New York City was liberated from the grip of organized crime*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

²⁹ Leo Egan, "Official Testifies Stone Heard Lanza Jail Tapes," *New York Times*, May 14, 1927, 28.

instance, received bribes to overlook Lanza's illegal activities and violent enforcement tactics. As emphasized in *Gotham Unbound*, "[Captain O'Brien] accepted payoffs in exchange for the nonenforcement of certain laws within Lanza's market"³⁰ By constructing these connections with the city's law enforcement, Lanza created a lawless microcosm within the bustling city of New York, effectively making Fulton Fish Market untouchable in the eyes of New York's law enforcement. The market also became a popular spot for high-profile visitors, attracting everyone from prominent business figures to politicians and celebrities.³¹ Figure D depicts Congressman La Guardia posing with a 300-pound halibut that had been sold at the fish market. Although not directly linked to the market's illegal activities, the photo demonstrates Lanza's ability to attract high-profile figures to his "fiefdom," enabling him to further consolidate power, enhance his influence, and reinforce his authority throughout the city.³²

Lanza's totalitarian governance over the Fulton Fish Market extended into its retail sector, where fishmongers and wholesalers were also subjected to the complications of organized crime. Stephen Fox ascertains that "Lanza did not restrict himself to the union side, he ruled and made money from the open-air market on peck slip".³³ Fox elaborates that Lanza diversified his radius of authority to all aspects of the market. He established a watchman service that protected the automobiles of retail merchants who came to the market. On top of that, fish-processing plants would pay Lanza upwards of \$2,500 a year to keep their shops nonunionized. Further, in 1926, Lanza became a part owner of a cannery, allowing him to extort money from fish vendors and establish an unrivaled foothold on the market. Fox asserts that it is estimated that Lanza and his primary partners managed to amass approximately half a million dollars each year during the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Fox, Stephen, *Blood and power: Organized crime in twentieth-century America*, Penguin Books, 1989.

³² Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

³³ Fox, *Blood and power: Organized crime in twentieth-century America*, Penguin Books, 1989.

1920s through various strategic shakedowns of anyone they could target. Lanza was able to evade charges for these acts for the most part. However, his closest run-in with the law in relation to the market came in 1931 during the investigation of Judge Samuel Seabury into the activities of Manhattan District Attorney Thomas C.T. Crain in 1931. The Seabury committee aired testimony related to payments from wholesalers to the union in order to protect them against theft by union members loading and unloading their fish. Retail merchants also testified that they had to pay the union to watch their trucks so that they wouldn't be vandalized, presumably by the same union members.³⁴ Crain investigated the presence of racketeering at the market but brought very few charges because Lanza had allegedly physically threatened witnesses.³⁸

After the conclusion of Prohibition in 1933, organized crime within the Fulton Fish Market continued to prevail. In 1984, the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched Operation Sea Probe in collaboration with the New York Police Department to track connections between racketeers at the market and other organized crime operations.³⁵ In 1987, U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani filed a civil Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) suit designed to put the Fulton Fish Market under receivership. Unlike previous RICO cases, this suit was based on extensive connections between actors in the market and organized crime rather than prior criminal convictions. Giuliani built his case upon the idea that the mob controlled the union. While that may have been true, some skeptics criticized Giuliani's efforts as simply political. These charges against the Genovese crime family and the union all failed with District

³⁴ The [New London, CT] Day, December 14, 1931, 8 ³⁸
New York Times, August 3, 1940, 17.

³⁵ Jacobs, James B., Robert Radick, and Coleen Friel. *Gotham unbound how New York City was liberated from the grip of organized crime*. New York: New York University Press, 2001. 147-49

Court judge Thomas Griesa noting, “the proof offered by the Government has not been sufficient to support its essential claim that the Genovese family currently controls Local 359 and its principal officers.”³⁶ Although the lawsuit ultimately failed, Giuliani’s actions sent a clear message that the Government was fully aware of the illegal activities taking place at the Fulton Fish Market. This heightened scrutiny played a key role in the gradual decline of the mob’s influence over the market as the century came to a close.³⁷

Conclusion:

Overall, the Fulton Fish Market remains a prime example of how even the most honest of spaces can be twisted, manipulated, and morphed to accommodate unintended activities. The Prohibition era within the market serves as a stark reminder of how economic opportunities and thriving industries can become entangled with corruption and organized crime. What began as a bustling hub of legitimate trade soon became a focal point for illicit operations, illustrating the fine line between lawful enterprise and criminal influence. Despite its early reputation for trust and community, the market ultimately mirrored the broader societal struggles of the time; greed, exploitation, and the lure of power often overshadowed good intentions. The legacy of the Fulton Fish Market during this period offers important lessons about the vulnerability of any system to exploitation and the delicate balance required to preserve integrity in the face of toxic pressures.

³⁶ Arnold H. Lubasch, “Mafia Runs Fulton Fish Market, U.S. Says in Suit to Take Control,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1987

³⁷ Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 Nov. 2022.

Appendix:



FIGURE A: Photograph of the 'Old Market Building' which housed the Fulton Fish Market from 1907 to 1939 (1935) Gill, John Freeman. "A Slice of the Fulton Fish Market Gets a New Life." The New York Times, February 28, 2020.



FIGURE C: "Shad fishing on the Hudson River, raising the net between poles," c. 1899, Instructional Lantern Slides Collection, New York State Archives, Albany, NY



FIGURE D: At the time Congressman Fiorello La Guardia with a 300-pound halibut he received at the Fulton Fish Market in 1929. World Telegram & Sun, photo by C. M. Stieglitz

Bibliography

- Beck, Erin. *The Official Fulton Fish Market Cookbook*. New York University Press, 2001. p. 15.
- Bender, Thomas. *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea*. New York University Press, 2007, pp. 12–13.
- Carroll, Brian. “Combating Racketeering in the Fulton Fish Market.” In *Organized Crime and Its Containment*, edited by Cyrille Fijnaut and James B. Jacobs, Kluwer, 1991.
- Chambers, Walter. *Labor Unions and the Public*. Coward-McCann, 1936, pp. 144–45.
- Egan, Leo. “Official Testifies Stone Heard Lanza Jail Tapes.” *New York Times*, 14 May 1927, p. 28.
- Fox, Stephen R. *Blood and Power: Organized Crime in Twentieth-Century America*. Penguin Books, 1989.
- Jacobs, James B., Robert Radick, and Coleen Friel. *Gotham Unbound: How New York City Was Liberated from the Grip of Organized Crime*. New York University Press, 2001, pp. 147
- Kelly, Robert J. *The Upper World and the Underworld: Case Studies of Racketeering and Business Infiltrations in the United States*. Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1999, p. 109.
- Lopate, Phillip. “Fish Tale: Falling for a Live One.” *New York Times*, 5 January 2001, p. E37.
- Lubasch, Arnold H. “Mafia Runs Fulton Fish Market, U.S. Says in Suit to Take Control.” *New York Times*, 16 October 1987.
- O'Neill, Molly. “A Day Dawns at Fulton.” *Newsday*, 4 March 1987, p. C1.
- “Organizer is Slain, Thrown into Street; Laborer Finds Bullet-Riddled Body of Man Said to Have Been Officer of Seafood Workers.” *New York Times*, 19 May 1926.
- Raab, Selwyn. *Five Families: The Rise, Decline and Resurgence of America's Most Powerful Mafia Empires*. Thomas Dunne, 2005, p. 566.

Rees, Jonathan H. *The Fulton Fish Market*. Columbia University Press, 1 November 2022.

Slanetz, Priscilla Jennings. "A History of the Fulton Fish Market." *The Log of Mystic Seaport*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1986, p. 14.

The New London [CT] Day. 14 December 1931, p. 8.

Van Doren, Louis O. *The Fishes of the East Atlantic Coast*. American Angler, 1884, p. 91.

Warner, William W. "At the Fulton Market." *The Atlantic*, vol. 236, November 1975, p. 60.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article VI

**“If America Had Rightly Considered It:” Robert Kerlin During the Long Red
Summer**

Edward Elliott

eme58@cornell.edu

In late June 1921, a relatively unknown white man spoke at the 12th annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The weather in Detroit that week was oppressive – hot and rainy. Undaunted, 4,000 people inaugurated the conference by marching against racial prejudice. Perhaps this man, a 57-year-old English professor, marched in silence with them. Maybe he held one of the banners that proclaimed a protest against “MOB VIOLENCE” or “WRECKING CIVILIZATION.” Regardless, Robert T. Kerlin would not have been a familiar face to most at the conference when he delivered a talk on “The Press, The Pulpit, and Public Opinion.” Although the speech is largely forgotten today, the speech was at a time described by W.E.B. DuBois as “in many respects, epoch-making.”¹ Why? Although Du Bois did not elaborate, Kerlin’s speech was unprecedented. It was virtually unheard of for a white Southerner, especially one as privileged as Kerlin, to openly condemn racial violence and injustice. At the time, Kerlin was a professor at a Southern institution and the chair of his department. His only known statements on issues of race were racist ones. But about a month after he spoke in Detroit, he was fired for his statements in support of African American rights.

Kerlin spoke at the NAACP after closely following African American participation in World War I and post-war activism. His innate and unfailing faith in the ability of public opinion to change, and the public’s unwillingness to do so, highlight the difficulty in achieving material change. Conversely, Kerlin’s decades of activism offer a link between these early revolutionary stirrings and the Civil Rights Movement that followed the end of World War II.

This paper will follow the transformation of Kerlin from the end of World War I to his firing from the Virginia Military Institute in 1921. I will first attempt to contextualize Kerlin’s

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” *The Crisis*, 1921, 161-163. Du Bois is also quoted in Mark Ellis, *Race, Harmony and Black Practice: Jack Wooster and the Interracial Cooperation Movement* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 168.

background through a discussion of Kerlin’s life, the climate in America in 1919, and recent scholarship on the era. Then, I will consider some of Kerlin’s public statements from the period, arguing that he grew to see his activism as more important than his academic career, a move that eventually cost him that career. His story adds another dimension to the narratives of activism during this period – that of individuals not directly engaged in combat but impacted by it all the same.

— — —

A Son of the South: Kerlin’s early years

In 1921, shortly before Kerlin was fired, in an effort to save his job, he sought to present himself as a true Southerner, writing that he had always acted “in accord with the soundest traditions of the South.”² When considering his background, these claims seem very reasonable.

Kerlin was born in Missouri in 1866. His parents had held slaves on their farm until the Civil War forcibly ended the practice. In an autobiographical note written around 1910, Kerlin wrote that the Civil War, and the freedom it brought to enslaved persons, left his family poor in all but land. A common reaction to this would have been some form of resentment. His parents could not have been happy at a sudden reduction in status. However, Kerlin later sought to downplay his family’s slaveholding, writing in a 1920 letter that “my parents, I am sure, loved their Negro servants in the old days.”³ Later coverage of Kerlin seems to have bought into this story as well: a profile written in later years described his family as having held one slave, whom they “treated more as a member of the family than as someone in bondage,” and stated that his parents “preferred freedom to slavery.” Tellingly, an obituary of Kerlin goes so far as to say that

² “Statement of Colonel R. T. Kerlin to V. M. I Board,” *The Lexington Gazette* (Lexington, Virginia), September 8, 1921.

³ “Emmet J. Scott [sic] Receives Letter,” *The Monitor* (Omaha, Nebraska), November 13, 1919, 1. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

his parents were “not defenders of the institution” and had turned down the chance to inherit additional slaves.⁴ These claims, of course, contradict earlier documents and ignore the fact that Kerlin’s parents never voluntarily gave up the slaves they held.

In his early years, Kerlin was educated as much—if not more—on his family’s farm as in the classroom, and he likely picked up the racist attitudes ingrained in postbellum Southern society.⁵ Regardless, he soon developed a passion for learning and, after high school left the family farm behind to spend the next two decades of his life in education. Kerlin received a Master of Arts from Central College in 1890 and did postgraduate work at Johns Hopkins and Harvard, but did not earn a degree. When he was not in school, he taught English and worked as a minister, including a stint as chaplain in the Spanish-American War. In the mid-1900s, Kerlin finally completed his studies, graduating from Yale in 1905 with a PhD in English. After teaching at several universities, he was appointed to be the chair of the Virginia Military Institute’s English Department in 1910, at the age of 44. By this point, Kerlin was a well-regarded expert on European literature and had published several articles as well as an edited collection of *Milton’s Minor Poems*.⁶

These years in education do not seem to have changed Kerlin’s racial views and may not even have challenged them. In a 1908 letter to the editor of the *New York Post*, he advocated for

⁴ Robert Thomas Kerlin, Autobiographical note, c. 1910, <https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>; “Robert Thomas Kerlin,” *The Journal of Negro History* 35, no. 2 (1950): 230, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2715870>; “Robert Thomas Kerlin Still Active at Eighty-One,” *Negro History Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (1946): 35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44174631>.

⁵ Until he turned 16 and the family moved to Albany, Missouri, Kerlin’s schooling was limited to at most five months a year. The rest of his time was spent working on the family farm. Kerlin, Autobiographical note, 2.

⁶ After he entered college, the next two decades of Kerlin’s life were fractured and hard to track, as he rarely stayed in one place for more than a year. While this information is primarily sourced to Kerlin’s autobiographical note (2-4), it is also possible to confirm much of it in other sources from the time, including the *General Catalogue of the Divinity School of Harvard University* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Divinity School, 1915), 175, and the *Johns Hopkins University Register* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 1890), 12. Kerlin’s autobiographical note (twenty years removed) describes his degree from Central College as being in English Literature (3), but the *Johns Hopkins University Register*, published a year after Kerlin graduated, writes that his degree was in Political Economy (12). His subsequent career, however, makes English more likely. John William Leonard and Albert Nelson Marquis, eds, *Who’s Who in America* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1914), 1307.

the US government to give “to the white people of the South the right of making and administering their laws, of ruling.” He went on to describe the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed Black men the right to vote, as “the greatest crime ever committed by a civilized nation.”⁷ If this statement is reflective of Kerlin’s racial views (and we have no reason to believe that it isn’t), it suggests that they were fairly typical of white Southerners, even at a southern university. At the very least, he did not support movements advocating for Black civil rights. Confirming this estimation, Nahum Daniel Brascher, the editor-in-chief of the Associated Negro Press, wrote in 1920 that before the war Kerlin’s racial opinions were “absolutely an unknown quantity.”⁸

⁷ Robert Kerlin, “To the Editor of the *New York Evening Post*,” in *A Guide into The South*, ed. J. I. D. Miller (Atlanta, Georgia: The Index Printing Company, 1910), 296-301, <https://books.google.com/books?id=OQYyAQAAMAAJ>.

⁸ John Spencer Bassett, “The Mirror of Public Opinion,” *The Dallas Express*, September 4, 1920, 4. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Enter World War I

As far as contemporary scholars can tell, Kerlin's racial consciousness did not change noticeably until after the end of World War I—indeed, the war itself was crucial to changing his views.

In recent years, a growing number of works have been published with a focus on African American soldiers during the war and their experiences upon returning to the United States. Scholarly sources chart how the ranks of civil rights movements swelled with returning soldiers. Relatively less scholarship has focused on the growth of these movements from other sources.⁹ By the war's end, over 370,000 Black men had served in a segregated military, and millions more contributed to the war effort. As they served, often with distinction, these soldiers faced discrimination at every step, which contrasted sharply with Woodrow Wilson's calls for global equality. Scholars such as Chad Williams, Nina Mjagkij, and David F. Krugler have chronicled how these experiences often served to crystallize the racial consciousness of African American soldiers.¹⁰ Simultaneously, the migration of many African Americans from rural areas in the Southern United States to major cities heightened racial tensions, as white people living in those cities began to resent these new arrivals. Krugler attributes this to a decrease in the availability of jobs compounded by employers encouraging racial divisions to prevent workers' solidarity. Also growing in the late 1910s was the New Negro movement, which vocally advocated for resistance to violent white supremacy. When African American soldiers returned to the US, they were

⁹ For African American soldiers during the war, see Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience during World War I* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011); Chad L. Williams *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Part I; Adriane Lentz-Smith *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

¹⁰ Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial*; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*; Donald F. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 16-20.

ready to assert their rights. In the face of increasing discrimination (ranging from the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan to lynch mobs around the country), and continuing government inaction, many Black people had no other option but to resist.¹¹ And resist they did.

In this atmosphere of heightened racial tensions, white on Black violence increased dramatically. In 1919, during what is often referred to as the “Red Summer,” there were upwards of seventy-seven lynchings and twenty-six race riots.¹² Although violence on this scale was devastating and shocking to many, Robert Kerlin would not have been particularly impacted. He lived in a quiet college town, researched 17th-century poetry, was well educated and privileged, had served as a chaplain but never a soldier, and came from a white, slaveholding family. Any societal interactions he had at this time would not have presented society as inherently unjust or biased. In fact, while much of the Red Summer was unfolding, Kerlin was out of the country. He spent that summer in Verdun, France, teaching American soldiers stationed overseas.¹³ Had he remained in Northern Virginia, he may have felt the impact of racial riots around the country, especially those in nearby Washington and Norfolk, more acutely.

Nevertheless, Kerlin evidently followed events closely. Soon after the July riot in Washington, D.C., he began attempting to understand the reaction of African Americans by reading a few Black newspapers. This was not uncommon. As the historian William Jordan has

¹¹ The Ku Klux Klan, which had been re-started in 1915, had over 100,000 members four years later. See Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial*, epilogue; Kruger, 1919, 20-30. For the connections between soldiers’ experiences abroad, their return to the United States, and race relations, see Williams, Part II, and Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality 1890-2000* (Middlesex, England: Viking Penguin, 2001), Chapter 5: “The Great War and Racial Equality”, and Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville, Florida: Univesity Press of Florida, 2008).

¹² The causes of this increase in violence have been much theorized about. Most scholars cite some combination of the changes outlined above. Additionally, David A. Davis has suggested that there was an explosion of “racial tensions that had been sublimated to sustain the war effort.” David A. Davis, “Not Only War Is Hell: World War I and African American Lynching Narratives,” *African American Review* 42, no. 3/4 (2008): 477–91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40301248>, 478. For an overview of scholarship on this topic, see 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): 225–56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23249074>.

¹³ “Colonel Robert T. Kerlin Leaves for Educational Work in France,” *The Cadet* (VMI), February 22, 1919, 1. <https://digitalcollections.vmi.edu/digital/collection/p15821coll8/id/2616/rec/13>.

described, many white observers turned to the Black press to understand increased Black militancy (generally ignoring, of course, their role in causing it). They read some of the 300 such papers that covered the Red Summer in excruciating detail. Ranging from the widely circulated *Chicago Defender* to more local newspapers, many of these publications took firm stances advocating for uncompromising self-defense.¹⁴ What is more interesting than his initial decision to read the Black press, however, is Kerlin's reaction to what he found. Many white people, particularly those living in the South, responded by advocating for banning Black newspapers entirely. For instance, Arizona's governor Charles Hillman Brough wrote around this time that newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* "should be suppressed" for their incendiary phrasing.¹⁵ In contrast, after reading a few newspapers, Kerlin decided to compile a representative survey and to publish that survey for other white readers to see.

Why did Kerlin choose to start reading Black newspapers to this extent? It is worth noting that, for Americans of the day, there was no reason to view violence as contained to just one summer. As Williams notes, it may be more accurate to consider a "long Red Summer," one that spans from the war to the Tulsa race massacre of 1921.¹⁶ When Kerlin came home in September 1919, it must have seemed like the Red Summer was turning into a Red Year or Red Decade. In this context, it is less surprising that he would have felt a pressing need to understand what was happening. In his career as an English professor, Kerlin had experience with letting sourcing speak for itself, and he treated radical Black authors in the same way that he had once analyzed long-dead poets: with care and attention to detail. Kerlin described writing to "all the

¹⁴ For one of the most comprehensive surveys of Black newspapers during this period, see William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Jordan's introduction contains an overview of past scholarship on the topic.

¹⁵ Jordan, *Black Newspapers*, chapter 5: "The New Negro's Message to America". William G. Jordan, "'Getting America Told': The Black Press and its Dialogue with White America, 1914-1919," PhD diss. (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire, Winter 1996), 247.

¹⁶ Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 225; Kruger, *1919*, 35-43, 60.

[African American] weeklies for sample copies” and purchasing subscriptions to a representative sample of 70.¹⁷ He cast a wider net than this, though: Kerlin read a wide range of Black literature, including Emmett J. Scott’s history of Black soldiers in World War I. Kerlin found the book so moving that he wrote Scott in late 1919 to express his “abhorrence and shame at the violence now directed against the Negro.” In the letter, one can almost feel Kerlin’s eyes opening to the wrongs present in society around him. He wrote: “The more I read your race papers, the greater is my sense of your wrongs and your forbearance, the greater my estimate of your virtues and my realization of our sins.”¹⁸ This suggests that the Black press played a crucial role in changing the opinions of at least some white readers.

This experience helps explain Kerlin’s motivation in publishing two edited collections of African American writing: *The Voice of the Negro* (1920) and *Negro Poets and Their Poems* (1928). Just as he had edited collections of 17th-century English literature to make it more widely accessible, Kerlin sought to bring Black authors to a white audience. In the forward to *The Voice of the Negro*, which compiled extracts from the Black newspapers that he read in 1919, Kerlin commented that while he had been warned the book “would make disagreeable reading[, t]here are worse things than disagreeable reading.”¹⁹ This is one of the first indications that Kerlin was starting to consider his work relating to racial relations as something that *needed* to be published, regardless of the possible consequences. Kerlin hoped that by reading the works of Black authors, the public might be made more sympathetic to the cause of civil rights. He sought to foreground the brutal treatment of African Americans in the country and contextualize their reaction as something entirely understandable. As he was publishing the book, Kerlin wrote

¹⁷ Bassett, “The Mirror of Public Opinion”; “The Negro Fourth Estate and Post-War Prosperity,” *The Monitor* (Omaha, Nebraska), July 22, 1920, 1 and 8, <https://nebnewspapers.unl.edu/lccn/00225879/1920-07-22/ed-1/seq-1/>.

¹⁸ “Emmet J. Scott [sic] Receives Letter.”

¹⁹ Robert Kerlin, *The Voice of the Negro* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1920), Facsimile of the first edition: New York City: Arno Press, 1968, v.

to the staff of the Associated Negro Press, saying that he “desire[d] most of all to open the eyes of the people of my own race to the marvelous progress you are making.”²⁰ Further illustrative of his desire to expose Black newspapers to a broader audience, he also published an article in *Reedy’s Mirror*, a popular literary journal. The article was widely read and reprinted in mainstream newspapers such as the *New York World*. In the article, Kerlin charted the growth of Black newspapers during and immediately after World War I. He described the patriotism of many African Americans during the war, and how it contrasted with their treatment at home:²¹

[Black] troops labored in the Service of Supplies at Bordeaux and Brest without counting the hours, counting only the loss to our cause of any slacking on their part... This, while lynchings were being reported in their papers from home... It is this story that has embittered the Negro. It is this story that has given a new potency to his newspaper.

For evidence of how complete Kerlin’s transformation was, two years later he wrote to the minister Francis Grimké, “I do not think one white person in a hundred thousand ever has reflected upon the injustices and slights and injuries of thought and action and speech, which constitute the ground of your arraignment.”²² He also stated his intention to publish a second book with personal opinions on racial issues, though this never came to fruition.²³

Even though his more opinionated work was never written, Kerlin did not limit his work to purely objective writing and publishing. He joined the University Commission on Southern Race Questions, the Atlanta Inter-racial commission, and the Virginia Inter-racial committee, all relatively conservative organizations, with Black and white membership, founded in or around 1919 to improve racial relations.²⁴ Kerlin’s extent of involvement in these commissions is unclear, but he worked fairly often with the Virginia committee for several years. By

²⁰ Bassett, “The Mirror of Public Opinion.”

²¹ “The Negro Fourth Estate and Post-War Prosperity.”

²² Robert Kerlin, to Francis J. Grimké, December 27, 1921, in vol. 4, *The Works of Francis J. Grimké* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1942), edited by Carter G. Woodson, 340.

²³ Bassett, “The Mirror of Public Opinion.”

²⁴ “Statement of Colonel R. T. Kerlin to V. M. I Board.”

participating in these organizations, Kerlin was taking part in a broader trend among the “enlightened class of southern whites,” as their contemporary, the historian Carter G. Woodson, wrote, of trying to achieve a “better understanding of the races...to effect a closer relation between the blacks and whites by making an intensive study of the Negro.” Woodson noted that even many Southern conservative scholars were engaging in these commissions to “prevent this country from being torn asunder by Socialism and Bolshevism,” as fears of Communist infiltration spiked.²⁵ Kerlin, who would soon become an active Socialist, may have had more radical motivation, but at least he was not alone in his efforts. His choice to join these commissions marked the beginning of a compulsion to act beyond merely the research he had done, one that would soon grow.

— — —

A Turn to Activism

One of the most severe outbreaks of violence in 1919 took place in early October in Elaine, Arkansas. Although nobody could agree on why it happened, sources generally agree that white civilians and later soldiers started attacking a group of roughly 1,000 Black inhabitants in the region, who had been protesting. By the time the dust settled, five whites and anywhere between 20 and 856 African Americans lay dead. Contemporary white Americans saw in the descriptions of Elaine their worst fears of a race war being realized. Soon the mainstream media was reporting on a “Negro insurrection” that had been carefully planned to overthrow white authority in the region.

²⁵ C. G. Woodson, “Negro Life and History in Our Schools,” *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 3 (1919): 273–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2713778>; cited in Jordan, “*Getting Heard*”, 251 fn. 18.

This, of course, was entirely fabricated. There was no conspiracy, and importantly, no effort among the Black community around Elaine to do more than survive. Regardless, this did not stop an all-white jury from indicting 122 African Americans, including 73 for murder. It soon became clear that, although the outright massacre of Black people may have ended, the persecution had merely been shifted to the courtroom. The subsequent trial was performative at best: the jury quickly convicted eleven defendants, and all were sentenced to death by the presiding judge.²⁶

The NAACP quickly began (eventually successful) efforts to save the unjustly condemned men. The campaign provided legal aid and orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to the Governor of Arkansas that advocated for commuting sentences.²⁷ Kerlin, by this point, was a recognized expert on the Black press and followed the case closely. We know this since he wrote to the NAACP in early May, offering to write an open letter against the execution sentences. Kerlin was also aware of his unique status and felt that, as “a southern white man I may draw new and wider attention to the case... and public opinion may accomplish something.” Again, he displays a deep, blind faith in the ability of public opinion to right great wrongs. Walter White of the NAACP responded to Kerlin’s suggestion positively and reviewed the statement before its publication.²⁸ The letter was finally published in *The Arkansas Democrat* on May 25. Kerlin wrote that the trial was unfair and corrupt, as the men present had been deprived of legal counsel and witnesses tortured before delivering their testimony. He made use of several biblical

²⁶ The defense never offered a challenge to court proceedings, the courtroom was surrounded by a white mob during the trial, and the jury took as few as seven minutes to convict some of the defendants. Other defendants were not sentenced to death, but instead to prison. Grif Stockley, *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres of 1919* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), xii-xvi. Mark Robert Schneider, *African Americans in the Jazz Age: A Decade of Struggle and Promise* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 61-71.

²⁷ Schneider, *African Americans in the Jazz Age*, 71-73; Adam J. Hodges, “Understanding a National and Global Red Scare/Red Summer Through the Local Invention of Solidarities,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 1 (January 2019): 82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781418000610>.

²⁸ Quoted in Richard C. Cortner, *A Mob Intent on Death: The NAACP and the Arkansas Riot Cases* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 109.

references and appealed to “every pulpit in Arkansas” to advocate for saving the lives of the convicted men, writing that:²⁹

Not in the history of our republic has a more tremendous responsibility before God and the civilized world devolved upon the shoulders of the chief executive of any state than has devolved upon yours in re the Negroes of Phillips county, condemned for murder to death...The time will yet come when the world with full knowledge of this [the cruelties Black people face] will be revolted by such Congo barbarity.

Backlash to this letter was swift, especially in Arkansas. Kerlin wrote White on June 17 that the “Huns of Arkansas are evidently getting ready to come after my scalp,” and noted that VMI was receiving letters demanding that Kerlin be fired, leaving the Institute fearing a “loss of patronage.”³⁰ Within a month, Kerlin was called before the VMI Board of Trustees to defend his statements. By August, he was fired.

--

Uncomfortable Impacts: Kerlin’s Firing

Kerlin’s actions that summer seem to be those of a man deeply conflicted. Unfortunately, his papers are not publicly accessible and may simply not have been preserved. An autobiography that he wrote has been lost.³¹ Such a lack of material makes it difficult to definitively speak to his opinions. Kerlin did, however, make several statements in 1921 that went in the historical record. Through a close reading of these sources, it becomes possible to develop some insight into what Kerlin was thinking. Two of these statements originated in June: the first at a meeting of the Virginia Military Institute’s Board of Trustees on June 21, and the second at the NAACP’s annual conference in Detroit on June 29th. Kerlin would have spoken at

²⁹ “Text of Kerlin’s Arkansas Letter,” undated and labeled newspaper article, held in VMI’s Kerlin file, <https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>.

³⁰ Quoted in Cortner, *A Mob Intent on Death*, 111.

³¹ In email correspondence between author and the educator Andy Dinniman, who wrote a thesis on Kerlin based in part upon his autobiography, in March 2024, Dinniman wrote that the autobiography was left to a daughter, who was interested in donating it to an archive. This did not happen before she died, and her heirs found no such document in her belongings.

these events in quick succession, and it is not difficult, in fact, to imagine him setting out on the daylong trip to Detroit immediately after testifying before the VMI board.

These two fairly public statements covered similar topics in the span of just a few days. They offer a clear illustration of the tightrope Kerlin needed to walk. As much as he might have wished to make public statements on racial issues, he also faced the very real possibility of losing his job. Should he be fired for civil rights activism, Kerlin might struggle to find a job in the South, where he had spent his life. With a wife and kids to support, this could not have been an appealing prospect. Yet, compared to Kerlin's vocal criticism of discrimination at the NAACP conference and his subsequent activism, some reluctance can be read in his phrasing. Although he didn't explicitly support civil rights reforms, much of Kerlin's statement is ambiguous. He deliberately states, for instance, that he has said "nothing that any open and fair mind can pronounce disloyal, radical, unreasonable, or offensive to the most sensitive intelligence."³²

At the VMI hearing, Kerlin was facing the loss of his job. He had no choice but to speak carefully. The board was broadly hostile and began by accusing him of intending to "inflare public opinion" and "create a sentiment which would be adverse to this Institution." In response, Kerlin requested to make a statement that contextualized the writing of the letter, namely by covering his "general activities in regard to inter-racial relations in the South." The board denied this request, explaining that they had decided not to consider race relations while it considered the case before them.³³ To a modern reader, this is inexplicable. Kerlin's letter was directly tied to racial issues. Observers at the time saw the parallels, too. The *Wilmington Morning Star* reported on his firing with the headline, "His Connection with Inter-Racial Affairs Was

³² "Statement of Colonel R. T. Kerlin to V. M. I Board."

³³ "Before the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute," June 23, 1921, 4-5. <https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>.

Considered Bad for School.”³⁴ Kerlin understood the connection between his situation and race, and the board may have as well, but it was easier for them to ignore the relevance of race to his case to defend the status quo.

Although he was prevented from offering the statement he sought to, Kerlin read it into the record at an August meeting of the board and published it in a newspaper in September. In the statement, he carefully presents himself as anything but a radical, highlighting his Southern heritage and upbringing, and tacitly implying acceptance of prevailing racism and segregation. In another newspaper article written in September, he began by stating that “[i]t had not occurred to me that anyone who knows me could think I was capable of teaching ‘Social Equality’ as between the white and black races.” More interesting than what he says in the statement is what is left unsaid. Kerlin here does not discuss his choice to publish the “difficult reading” that was *The Voice of the Negro* and, although he does mention his involvement in inter-racial commissions, notably absent is mention of his work with the NAACP, a ‘Northern’ organization known for having radical connections in many Northern cities. His pending trip to the NAACP’s national conference when he first attempted to deliver this statement suggests that this omission was a deliberate attempt to seem less radical. Kerlin himself described the NAACP as being perceived in the south as a primarily ‘Northern’ organization in his speech at the conference, and it was likely not to have been an organization Kerlin wanted to highlight in Virginia, especially when he was hoping to downplay the magnitude of his activism. In fact, Virginia did not even get a chapter of the organization until over a decade later.³⁵

³⁴ “Why Kerlin Was Sent Away from the V.M.I.,” *The Wilmington Morning Star*, August 25, 1921, accessed via Newspapers.com.

³⁵ Robert Kerlin, “Some Corrections,” *The Lexington Gazette* (Lexington, Virginia), September 8, 1921; “Statement of Colonel R. T. Kerlin to V. M. I Board”; Robert Kerlin, “The Press, The Pulpit, and Public Opinion” Detroit Conference, June 1921, *Papers of the NAACP*, pt. 1, reel 8; Theodore Kornwiebel, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 95.

When Kerlin arrived and spoke in Detroit, he struck a different chord. He was most likely invited to speak as an expert on the Black press. However, his recent open letter and the subsequent backlash must have been on the minds of many present. In many ways, this talk represents perhaps the first confluence of Kerlin's two lives: as an academic and as an activist. Prior to this point, he had always been able to live removed from the consequences. In his talk, Kerlin noted that the lives of Black people in the United States "are not known in any adequate way, to the rest of the American people." He went on to emphasize the necessity of making this information known, a task that in the current climate was "almost impossible." Here, Kerlin could have been referring to two experiences. He had published *The Voice of the Negro* hoping that white Americans would read it and have the same revelations he once had. He was also probably considering his recent, more personal, experience at VMI, where he had been prohibited from speaking on race as an issue just days before.³⁶ Kerlin bitterly described "our so-called free press," evoking recent attempts to ban Black newspapers, as well as the attempts to get him fired. "Ours is not, generally speaking, an open press... And this is particularly true of it when the Negro is concerned." Speaking to his rationale behind publishing both *The Voice of the Negro* and the open letter, Kerlin argued that "the first of all safety measures, the first of all square deals, is the giving up of a full and fair hearing to the facts." He had recently been denied such a hearing. It is also clear that by this point, Kerlin had become convinced of the broader importance of his activism. He believed that had "the facts of Elaine been adequately published," the Tulsa massacre would not "be written in the blood-stained ruins of homes and the ash-heaps of stores and churches."

Kerlin then emphasized the need to read Black literature, suggesting that "if America had rightly considered [it], [they] would have brought about a different status for the Negro in

³⁶ Kerlin, "The Press, the Pulpit, and Public Opinion."

America.” Interestingly, Kerlin here displays little care for what public opinion itself was, emphasizing the need to make “our just and humane private opinion the public opinion.” To Kerlin, in this speech, public opinion was something that could be shaped through better informing of the public. This stands in stark contrast with Kerlin’s statements from Virginia, where he attempted to downplay his activism. Perhaps by this point, he had accepted that his activism might cost him his job and was willing to pay the price. Kerlin certainly appeared to adopt this tone. He proclaimed that “we must use the press, the pulpit, the rostrum, the street-corner,” and advocated a mass strike across the country in protest of the treatment of those condemned following Elaine. Kerlin attacked hypocrisy and cowardice in the society around him, concluding that he could not “but look with dread upon the future of this land unless the spirit of justice shall enter the hearts and control the actions of the white people in regard to the colored.”³⁷ After publishing his letter and seeing its aftermath, Kerlin must have expected that news of this radical speech would quickly reach VMI. But by this point, he may not have cared.

After testifying before VMI, Kerlin seems to have realized that there was little he could do or say to stop his firing, and perhaps he was no longer willing to stay silent, just as he had earlier been driven to publish his letter and *The Voice of the Negro*. He must have seen the parallels between his experience and those of two Southern professors almost two decades earlier. In 1902, the theologian Andrew Sledd had published an article stating, among other things, that some Black people were “in everything save color, superior to many white men.” Sledd, at the time a professor at Emory College, also attacked lynchings as “the work of our lower and lowest classes” and a form of murder. A year later, the historian John Spencer Bassett wrote that “[n]o sensible man in the North or in the South who is not blinded by passion will deny that the better Negroes of the country have made a remarkable record since the days of

³⁷ Kerlin, “The Press, the Pulpit, and Public Opinion.”

emancipation,” and said that Booker T. Washington was one of the greatest Southerners of the last century. Both statements sparked sizable controversies: Sledd was forced to resign because of the controversy, and only a public outcry saved Bassett from the hands of Trinity College’s Board of Trustees. It is not impossible that Kerlin followed these controversies at the time they happened, but he did not move to the region for several years. Years later, he must have seen parallels between his situation and these two cases. Kerlin must have taken particular solace in considering Bassett’s case. The historian Joel Williamson noted that the board did not vote to keep Bassett on staff because they agreed with his comments, but in support of Bassett’s freedom of speech. Williamson concludes that Trinity felt “freedom of thought and expression was essential to social, and Southern, salvation.” Bassett had set out deliberately to inflame Southerners, as had Kerlin.³⁸ Why was he treated so differently? The public outcry that had saved Bassett was entirely absent when Kerlin was fired. Perhaps the main difference was that in 1919, race riots were an uncomfortably real possibility. Elaine had sparked fears of an all-out race war. Kerlin wrote in direct response to that violence, whereas Bassett and Sledd were writing in a more academic capacity. While it is also possible that VMI had less principled leadership, or that Kerlin was simply less known than Bassett and Sledd, their cases seem eerily similar.

In January 1922, R. E. Blackwell, the president of Randolph-Macon College, wrote Kerlin to emphasize his understanding of similarities between these cases, and express his hope that Kerlin’s firing would not mark the end of his career: “I trust sincerely that you may fare as well as these two, for though Bassett was taken away from the South, he has had leisure to do

³⁸ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817- 1914* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press 1987), 291. Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 259-268.

good work in Southern History.”³⁹ Unfortunately, Kerlin’s career in the South was, after his firing, largely over.

-- -- --

Conclusion

Kerlin’s story offers some insight into the broader history of civil rights movements. While some historians take a narrow look at African Americans after the Great War around 1919 or 1920, others have continued their analysis into the late 1920s and 1930s. The traditional historical narrative has been to downplay the existence of civil rights organizations between 1919 and World War II, or to highlight their failures.⁴⁰ Work in the past couple of decades, such as that of Williams and Adriane Lentz-Smith, has begun to complicate this story, noting that while organizations such as the NAACP did not immediately achieve their goals, they never ceased their advocacy, setting the stage for future civil rights movements. Krugler also notes that Black resistance to the imposition of white supremacy continued well past 1919.⁴¹ Kerlin’s story adds to this scholarship and emphasizes that movements such as the NAACP did not consist simply of soldiers fighting for themselves but had a broad base of membership and support. Kerlin himself continued to protest until the late 1940s, witnessing the earliest stirrings of the civil rights movement that would ultimately be successful. Yet his story is also indicative of the movement’s failures during these years. Kerlin seems to have been somewhat of an outlier in his views among white Americans. He lost his job for his advocacy, and there was no major outcry among the public. The mainstream press hardly noticed.

³⁹ Kerlin later forwarded this letter to W. E. B. Du Bois. R. E. Blackwell to Robert T. Kerlin, January 9, 1922, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b019-i364/#page/1/mode/1up>.

⁴⁰ Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Times of Trial*, epilogue.

⁴¹ Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, Chapter 7; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, Part II; Krugler, 1919, conclusion.

At the same time, Kerlin's rise as an activist is a tangible impact of post-war activism. He began as an academic, studying a movement about which he knew very little and had no prior involvement. After researching, Kerlin felt he had no choice but to publish a compilation of his work, so that others might be exposed to the injustices of society in the same way that he had been. This was still arguably an academic pursuit, but also one he felt deeply about foregrounding. But that was not enough, and he then published an open letter, one that ended up costing him his job. Yet even as his job was on the line, Kerlin attended an NAACP conference and delivered an impassioned speech about the need to fight for a change in public opinion. Kerlin spent the rest of his life fighting for these causes and others. Upon his death four decades later, *The Journal of Negro History* described Kerlin as "a martyr in the cause of human freedom," and noted that he had spent the weeks leading up to his death picketing movie theaters in protest of segregation in his hometown.⁴² Kerlin, at least, was changed for good. Kerlin never lost faith in the possibility that if people would just try to understand what was happening, as he had, public opinion could be changed. Although it took decades longer than he expected, Kerlin's faith in transformation through public understanding was not misplaced.

⁴² "Robert Thomas Kerlin," 232.

Bibliography

- Bassett, John Spencer. "The Mirror of Public Opinion." *The Dallas Express*. September 4, 1920, 4. Accessed via Newspapers.com.
- "Before the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute." June 23, 1921. In the VMI Kerlin file.
- <https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>.
- Blackwell, R. E. to Robert T. Kerlin, January 9, 1922. Via the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center.
- <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b019-i364/#page/1/mode/1up>.
- 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. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23249074>.
- "Colonel Robert T. Kerlin Leaves for Educational Work in France." *The Cadet* (VMI). February 22, 1919. 1.
- <https://digitalcollections.vmi.edu/digital/collection/p15821coll8/id/2616/rec/13>.
- Cortner, Richard C. *A Mob Intent on Death: The NAACP and the Arkansas Riot Cases*. Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1988.
- Davis, David A. "Not Only War Is Hell: World War I and African American Lynching Narratives." *African American Review* 42, no. 3/4 (2008): 477–91.
- <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40301248>.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." *The Crisis*, 1921, 161-163.

- Ellis, Mark. *Race, Harmony and Black Practice: Jack Wooster and the Interracial Cooperation Movement*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- “Emmet J. Scott [sic] Receives Letter,” *The Monitor* (Omaha, Nebraska), November 13, 1919, 1. Accessed via Newspapers.com.
- Fairclough, Adam. *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality 1890-2000*. Middlesex, England: Viking Penguin, 2001.
- Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817- 1914*. Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press (1987), 291.
- General Catalogue of the Divinity School of Harvard University*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Divinity School, 1915).
- Hodges, Adam J. “Understanding a National and Global Red Scare/Red Summer Through the Local Invention of Solidarities.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 1 (January 2019): 82. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781418000610>.
- Johns Hopkins University Register*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 1890.
- Jordan, William G. *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Jordan, William G. “‘Getting America Told’: The Black Press and its Dialogue with White America, 1914-1919.” PhD diss. Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire, Winter 1996.
- Kerlin, Robert. Autobiographical note. c. 1910. In the VMI Kerlin file. <https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>.

- Kerlin, Robert. "The Press, The Pulpit, and Public Opinion." Detroit Conference, June 1921.
Papers of the NAACP, pt. 1, reel 8.
- Kerlin, Robert. "Some Corrections." *The Lexington Gazette* (Lexington, Virginia). September 8, 1921. In the VMI Kerlin file.
<https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>.
- Kerlin, Robert, to Francis J. Grimké, December 27, 1921. In vol. 4, *The Works of Francis J. Grimké*. Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1942. Edited by Carter G. Woodson, 340.
- Kerlin, Robert, "To the Editor of the *New York Evening Post*." In *A Guide into The South*. Edited by J. I. D. Miller, 296-301. Atlanta, Georgia: The Index Printing Company, 1910.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=OQYyAQAAMAAJ>.
- Kerlin, Robert. *The Voice of the Negro*. Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1920. Facsimile of the first edition. New York City: Arno Press, 1968.
- Kornwiebel, Theodore. *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Krugler, Donald F. *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Lentz-Smith, Adriane. *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Leonard, John William, and Albert Nelson Marquis, eds. *Who's Who in America*. Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1914.
- Mjagkij, Nina. *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience during World War I*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011.

- “The Negro Fourth Estate and Post-War Prosperity.” *The Monitor* (Omaha, Nebraska). July 22, 1920. 1 and 8, <https://nebnewspapers.unl.edu/lccn/00225879/1920-07-22/ed-1/seq-1/>.
- “Robert Thomas Kerlin Still Active at Eighty-One.” *Negro History Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (1946): 35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44174631>.
- “Robert Thomas Kerlin.” *The Journal of Negro History* 35, no. 2 (1950): 230. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2715870>.
- Schneider, Mark Robert. *African Americans in the Jazz Age: A Decade of Struggle and Promise*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- “Statement of Colonel R. T. Kerlin to V. M. I Board.” *The Lexington Gazette* (Lexington, Virginia). September 8, 1921.
- Stockley, Grif. *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres of 1919*. Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2001.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality*. New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 2005.
- “Text of Kerlin’s Arkansas Letter.” unlabeled newspaper article. c. 1921. Held in VMI’s Kerlin file. <https://www.vmi.edu/media/content-assets/documents/archives/KerlinDocuments.pdf>.
- Whalan, Mark. *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2008.
- “Why Kerlin Was Sent Away from the V.M.I.” *The Wilmington Morning Star*. August 25, 1921. 8. Accessed via Newspapers.com.
- Williams, Chad L. *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Woodson, C. G. "Negro Life and History in Our Schools." *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 3 (1919): 273–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2713778>.

Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume IX | Issue I

Article VII

"She Who is Not"¹ Living In the "Footsteps of Christ": Trans*, Fluid or Gender Nonconforming Identities of Female Italian Saints in the Later Middle Ages

Andrew Zero

andrewmszero1116@gmail.com

When thinking of the medieval period, many people instantly harken to ideas of the era's supposed backwardness. While there may be aspects of medieval society that *were* this way in comparison to the modern day, one that is not as behind as one may first think is nonconforming gender expression and generally queer or trans* experiences. This is because, for many, taking on the habit—be it men or women, or as they will now be referred to, male-at-birth and female-at-birth people—makes people more able to become what some scholars have theorized and labeled as a "third," separate gender.^{2,3} More broadly, medieval people "could occupy a variety of gender positions depending on the situation," with the centrality of the male-female binary being blurred and played with through Christian belief and expressions of said belief and the binary itself being in flux.⁴ Two famous female-at-birth saints from medieval Italy, depicted in medieval and modern sources as almost picturesque representations of female sanctity, even when they went beyond them: Saint Clare of Assisi (1194-1253) and Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). Though centuries apart from one another, their vitae and own writings clearly showcase gender nonconformity or even a complete transcendence of their assigned sex and perceived gender identities, which was able to be expressed through their religion. Though both have been noted as being outside the norm of medieval society in some way or another by scholars, this has not been labeled as 'queer,' or been studied more, even though their lives are much more indicative of a non-normative existence, especially when it comes to gender. As this paper will show, both individuals were able to transcend their sex at birth and subsequent gender identity and be more androgynous or fluid, neither fully 'female' nor 'male' as a result through medieval religious

² Ruth Mazzo Karras and Katherine E. Pierpont, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 7.

³ Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" In *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, edited by Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 34-8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhcn6.5>.

⁴ Karras, Ruth Mazzo, *Doing Unto Others*, 7

expression, which provided a space where people *could* be more openly queer, trans* or gender nonconforming in a way that was acceptable through Christianity and its beliefs.

With that, queerness—and by extension gender nonconforming or 'trans' identities—will be referred to in how they are described by medieval historian Ruth Mazzo Karras in her book *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*: the association of queerness to medieval saints in particular is not aimed at attempting to find a 'truth' to how saints identified, as the only ones who would be able to say are the saints themselves. Instead, the instance of queerness within saints' lives comes from the word "queer" itself being able "to describe a variety of sexual and gender transgressions" as "to be "queer" is simply to challenge norms," which Clare of Assisi and Catherine of Siena did throughout their lives.⁵ However, their stories are all the more representative of queer experiences due to their existence within medieval Italy, arguably a much more patriarchal society than other parts of medieval Europe in the late Middle Ages. The ways people themselves saw gender has become even more popular and has expanded into queer and transgender studies of the medieval period and its own ideas about gender, which were in flux or show examples of figures who showcase as much more gender nonconforming or fluid in expression of their genders in some way, shape or form. Therefore, with closer analysis of saints and the hagiographies or *vitae* written about them versus their own writings, and the ideas from gender and queer studies, these, I argue, can showcase clear examples of gender non-conformity or a transcendence of gender with two infamous saints from medieval Italy who have not yet been studied through these lenses.

The importance of gender nonconformity, or even its mere presence, has been present within Christian belief since its beginnings. Within the Bible itself, there is an emphasis on how people—'male' or 'female'—are all of God and his image, making them the same no matter what.

⁵ Karras, Ruth Mazzo, *Doing Unto Others*, 13.

As detailed by Jacqueline Murray in her article, "One God, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" it was only really when Eve was formed from Adam's rib that "the intrusion of gender" and sex made its way into the Garden of Eden, and by extension, society as a whole.⁶ Leah DeVun adds onto this point this in her book *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*, wherein Adam's original identity within the Book of Genesis was seen as an "androgynous" or a "'man-woman'," with no male or female sex being present—and then gender to be identified with—making non-binary-ness being *the* example of purity in a human, being a combination of the male-female binary and, for many, “the original condition of humanity,” that many religious people especially strived to go back to and identified with.⁷ With that said, there are passages from the Bible itself which emphasize the importance of this singular, uniting flesh, and therefore, androgyny that is possible with humanity. In reference to the Book of Genesis, it is in 2:20-4 in particular which shows Adam and Eve being at this equal, androgynous level, as through Adam's rib, "he made[a] into a woman...from the rib he had taken out of the man" or Eve, made from "bone of my [God's] bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man". Later, with men and wife "become one flesh," male and female.⁸ Further on, as Galatians 3:28 infamously states, "there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," seeing no distinctions between male and female, as they were all people and from the same place, or rather, person—God.^{9, 10} However, this importance towards and possibility of achieving gender transcendence of any kind that was so closely tied to early

⁶ Jacqueline Murray, Jacqueline, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?", 50-51.

⁷ Leah DeVun, "Introduction," In *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*, (Columbia University Press, 2021), 11-12, 21, 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/devu19550.6>.

⁸ Genesis 2:20-24. Retrieved from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202&version=NIV>.

⁹ Galatians 3:28. Retrieved from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%203%3A28&version=ESV>.

¹⁰ Dr. Tanya Stabler-Miller, "Bride of Christ or Devil's Gateway," HIST 310C: Medieval Women(class lecture, Loyola University-Chicago, Chicago, IL, Fall, 2024).

Christianity was not lost past the book itself, as many early venerated Christian figures—be it martyrs or saints—expressed ideas of gender non-conformity and bending, even a complete transition of gender from female-to-male. For example, Perpetua (182-203), who "changed into a man" and fought as one, or Saint Euphrosyne or Euphrasia of Alexandria (414-470), who had made herself known as "Smaragdus," and identified as male in order to enter a monastery and escape having to be married, which Catherine of Siena herself would be said to have wanted to replicate, and even be called by her name.^{11, 12}

Centuries later, beginning around the 11th and 12th centuries with the urbanization of medieval life, this social shift would continue making this behavior be present through religious expression. More specifically, it was through the formation of cities and more people living in them, inequalities such as poverty and struggle being more apparent, making religious expression evolve into that of more emotionally expressing sorrow for Christ and focusing on his corporeal, physical self, which came from his mother Mary, and for people to reflect emotional on their sins and feel guilt and on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, with a boom of the 12th century of this belief and growing wants to live the *vita apostolica* and, more importantly and essential to this paper, the idea of *imitatio Christi*, or the voluntary taking on the pain and suffering Christ put himself through as if it was their own, sharing it with Christ, and being like the Apostles and Christ himself through altruistic service to others and abstaining from goods of the world.¹³ This all gave opportunities to female-at-birth people to express themselves and imitate 'masculine' individuals and escape what was expected of them as female-at-birth people, with *imitatio*

¹¹ H.R. Musurillo, "The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicitas." In *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, translated by H.R. Musurillo, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 73.

¹² Aelfric of Eynsham, "XXXIII. Of Saint Euphrasia." In *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, Vol. 2, edited by Walter W. Skeat, trans., Walter W. Skeat, et al. (London, N. Trübner & Co., 1881) 336-355. Retrieved from https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/%C3%86lfric%27s_Lives_of_Saints/Of_Saint_Euphrasia.

¹³ Dr. Tanya Stabler-Miller, "Gender, Body, Soul" and "Eucharistic Piety in the High Middle Ages," HIST 310C: Medieval Women(class lecture, Loyola University-Chicago, Chicago, IL, Fall, 2024).

meaning both understanding Christ's pain, but also *being* or even *becoming* Christ, with people like Clare and Catherine being able to *become* men or something more fluid and outside of the binary. With this in mind, throughout multiple religious texts, Jesus Christ—and by extension God—were then identified as being more than just male: being both 'male *and* female', masculine and feminine, Father and Mother, 'He' and 'She'.¹⁴ Scholars, even in the eighties, saw this and discussed its appearance in medieval texts, most notably Caroline Walker Bynum and her groundbreaking work such as *Jesus as Mother* and, for this paper, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, being one of the first historians to discuss and use gender as a possible category to study or analyze history with, let alone queerness. Bynum discusses themes of androgyny or fluidity in expressions by saints, most through the idea of Jesus as a mother or a motherly figure *because* of this humanity coming from his mother, Mary, making him a more fluid or non-conforming figure that is able to then lactate and feed his believers from his "nurturing...breast-wound," with this reversal being popular amongst male *and* female religious people to experience suckling from this "breast-wound," or generally being fed by Christ in some way in visions or focus on this idea in their writings.^{15,16,17} With that, Christ was identified as a more fluid being, being both male and female, and religious people who were female-at-birth, wanting to imitate or even become like Christ in this way were able to do so through this fluid identity, showing how many arguably wanted to—and then could—go beyond their sex-based and gendered expectations from society.

¹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 260-1 264-7, 270-3, 275, 289.

¹⁵ Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 273.

¹⁶ DeVun, Leah, *The Shape of Sex*, in particular Chapter 6: "The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Alchemy in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance," which discusses the idea of Jesus being both male and female, and a non-binary or hermaphroditic figure in detail, 164, 185-199,

¹⁷ Dr. Tanya Stabler-Miller, "Saints and Suffering," and "Gender, Body, Soul," HIST 310C: Medieval Women(class lecture, Loyola University-Chicago, Chicago, IL, Fall, 2024).

Therefore, Bynum's discussions on gender and the possible transcendence of it is essential through Christ's identity and her specific focus on fasting and feasting lends itself to more broad ideas about reversals of, play with, or use of gender as a means of gaining authority as a woman within the medieval world, which are important to discuss. Bynum points out clear differences between male and female piety: it was through what symbols either sex chose, or rather, had available to them because of their sex, and therefore, gender, using Clare, and her male counterpart that she is oftentimes juxtaposed with, Saint Francis of Assisi, as an example in one chapter as a comparison between male-at-birth saints and female-at-birth saints. As Bynum states, "Clare and Francis expressed the same craving for self-abnegation and world denial," but this was expressed through contrasting metaphors and their behavior.¹⁸ The important factor here is what *was* available to said saints, as Bynum herself discusses, men, in wanting to imitate Christ, had to make themselves less dominant, while female-at-birth people did not have that option whatsoever, as they were already in that position and needed to find other ways to express themselves religiously, physically and mentally.¹⁹ With Clare, for example, Bynum discusses how even when she had shown interest in renouncing her worldly goods—specifically her wealth—like Francis. However, when wanting to follow this lifestyle through renouncing her own wealth like he did, she was "simply not permitted by" her family or the Church to do so, and it would be all the more difficult and dangerous to go against either the family or against any type of authority, especially in Italy in the Middle Ages for Clare and Catherine, no matter the century gap.²⁰ With that said, Bynum argues that *because* of how closely connected food and its preparation was to women due to it being a more feminine activity, that was one of—if not the only—part of life they could control around them, as according to Bynum, the woman's role of

¹⁸ Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 101-102.

¹⁹ Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 295.

²⁰ Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 24, 193.

preparing food was also a way “to control food”, making it the one resource females-at-birth could realistically control in order to engage in *imitatio Christi*, express themselves through their piety and be 'like' Christ himself, being both female *and* male.^{21, 22} Therefore, by renouncing food, female-at-birth people, like Clare and Catherine, were then able to renounce what was expected of them, and instead, have power over themselves, others, and be able to transcend and detach themselves from their expected femininity and past womanhood almost entirely through this rejection, bending their perceived, outward identities and their actual gender expression into something more expansive and of their own, whilst adhering to gender norms associated with women or female-at-birth people, such as their historic relationship to food.

Even if not inherently seeing either Clare or Catherine as 'queer', Bynum opened up the door for other medieval historians to be able to further analyze and interpret saints' gender expressions. However, this and any expressions that were more queer or showcasing of transgender identities, such as that of Clare of Assisi or Catherine of Siena, are still viewed as 'female' with expressions of sanctity that goes out of gender norms, which gets into how much of Bynum's work, though instrumental, has larger issues which need to be addressed. It is Bynum and other scholars' relationships towards gender and sex as being one and the same which limit her analysis, as the gender symbols she states are used by and are representations of female saints are still very sex-based—even an enhancement of it—and therefore, gender assigned at birth is intrinsically linked to behavior, making these saints still fully and complete feminine women, even if their gender identity presents as much more fluid, and arguably, they use food as a means of transcendence and opting out of womanhood completely, like Catherine and Clare do,. However, because she associates behaviors as 'male' or 'female,' it limits these saints down

²¹ Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 189-191, 193-194.

²² Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 279, 289, 296.

to their parts, rather than seeing beyond that, applying the strict gender binary of her time onto the medieval one, which as stated before, was itself much more in flux. So, though Clare and Catherine are female-at-birth, their gender expressions go outside any molds of 'female' or femininity being much more fluid in relation to medieval ideas about gender and what was expected of their sex. Even with these issues, Bynum still does find evidence of these types of behaviors through the primary sources, especially these saints' *vitae* or hagiographies written about them and their lives.

With that, medieval scholars, like Bynum, and their work with the available primary sources, especially that of religion and saints' lives, often have to find their examples within the writings of saints, and when, oftentimes, female saints' writings barely survive, if at all, many are dependent on their *vitae* rather than their own texts. Consequently, these can be skewed negatively with what was socially associated with female-presenting or female-at-birth people and the expectations of what a 'female' saint should be which turns into a check-off-the-list of stereotypes or exaggerations that should appear in a hagiography or *vita*, such as extreme fasting body mutilation for female saints, to name a few. However, these extra extremities could also be what makes a saint stand out and be gender nonconforming and should still be taken into account, as these details would still have to be mentioned for one reason or another—intentional or not—as any details of someone's life could slip into a formulaic genre like the hagiography. For Clare of Assisi, for example, in the *Legenda* or *Legend of Saint Clare of Assisi*, written by Franciscan friar Thomas of Celano, for example—whose hagiography is much shorter and less in detail due to Celano's lack of a close relationship to her—makes it initially seem like nothing would be able to be uncovered. However, even with this lack of length of Clare's *vita*, there are *still* details embedded within it, occurring early on in her life in showcasing a want to transcend

her female status. Most notably, in the segment about her upbringing before even knowing of Saint Francis of Assisi or the Franciscans, there is a portion of a segment which mentions her wearing a shirt made of hair and discusses her negative relationship towards the corporeal, physical world. Here, there is clear discomfort of her physical self when she still has to present as a noble girl to the world. As Celano details, "hid beneath her soft and costly garments in outward dress she would wear a little hair shirt, thus confirming to the world in outward dress but inwardly "putting on Christ".²³ This detail, though small, showcases how Christianity brought a sort of comfort through the nonconforming aspects it brought onto believers like Clare, female-at-birth, as she "inwardly" was more comfortable though her love and belief in Christ, even if in a hair shirt, while still having to wear what she "despised" which were "worldly pleasures," which include what she had to wear and be perceived in by others.²⁴ A little later, Clare runs away from home to join Francis of Assisi and his friars, as she "cast aside the filth of Babylon before the altar and gave the world "a bill of divorce", having her hair cut into a tonsure, which Catherine Mooney, in her article "Clare's Childhood and Conversion to Religious Life, 1193 to 1211", describes as a "ritual act that symbolized a rite of initiation, a sign of penance, and flight from the world," giving her the power of taking herself away from the world which perceived her as female and enforced traditional behavior onto her.²⁵ She later shows herself off to her family, who try to take her back "from such a sorry choice so unworthy of her noble race and so contrary to all family traditions" as they no longer had her "in their power", no longer in the hands of others, but instead, now able to make and shape her own

²³ Thomas of Celano, "The Legend of Saint Clare". In *The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi*, (St. Bonaventure: NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1953), 20

²⁴ Thomas of Celano, "The Legend of Saint Clare". In *The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi*, 20.

²⁵ Catherine M. Mooney, "Clare's Childhood and Conversion to Religious Life, 1193 to 1211." In *Clare of Assisi and the Thirteenth-Century Church: Religious Women, Rules, and Resistance*, 15–29. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dt0107.6.>, 20.

identity and overall existence within a strict, binary-driven world into something of her own, becoming a "beloved brother" of Francis.^{26, 27} Clare of Assisi's dedication to her Christianity is reminiscent, through a transgender and queer lens, of hardship due to a non-supportive family—and is later seen in Catherine of Siena's *vita* as well with her mother in particular—and being able to go past it, as they "kept up their opposition to her purpose of holiness," by throwing hurtful words and other "ill-treatment" her way *because* of her removing herself from her womanhood: of being a daughter, of being a future wife or mother, and beyond what was expected of her as an upper-class Italian girl, and in her family's view, soon-to-be woman at that time. Instead, she is adamant in her expression as she says that "under no circumstances would she be separated from the service of Christ," this "putting on" of Christ, almost becoming him or a more masculine person due to this hair on her body.²⁸

In contrast, Catherine of Siena's hagiographer, Raymond of Capua, in *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, her confessor and spiritual advisor in the last years of her life from 1374 to 1380.²⁹ This covers Catherine's entire life, alongside contemporary medieval Italian history, being written in the midst of and describing some of the beginnings of more immense societal uncertainty and upheaval throughout medieval Europe, such as the papal schism. With that said, gender and the importance of gender binaries are also essential to Catherine's story due to Italy's intense patriarchal societal structure, as arguably, there was less room for women or female-at-birth people to maneuver within the social landscapes of Italy, as compared with other countries, like France and the Lower Countries, where the option of being a *beguine* was available or one

²⁶ Thomas of Celano, "The Legend of Saint Clare". In *The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi*, 23.

²⁷ Christina Cedillo, "Habitual Gender: Rhetorical Androgyny in Franciscan Texts", in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 2015), 81, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.1.65>.

²⁸ Thomas of Celano, "The Legend of Saint Clare". In *The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi*, 24.

²⁹ Conleth Kearns, O.P. "Introduction," in *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans., Conleth Kearns, O.P. (Wilmington: Glazier, Inc., 1980), lviii for historical context of Capua and medieval Italy at the time.

had to join a convent, like Clare eventually did through the Second Order of the Franciscans, or The Poor Ladies. However, these binaries are not abided by—or are completely rejected—by Catherine, just like Clare throughout her life. Indeed, Capua himself reveals it was “the part assigned to her by God” to exist “more manfully”, going against her female-at-birth status, making her much more fluid, and therefore, queer through expression of her sanctity from her early adolescence to adulthood.³⁰

The *vita* is split into three parts, with Parts I and II in particular being where much of her behavior is noted as being un-womanly, or manly which makes her and her hagiography stand out in including such details instead of omitting them entirely. Capua’s work goes into detail about Catherine’s life, starting from her birth to when she joined the *mantellates*, or group of widowed religious women in Italy, in order to escape her family's expectations, especially marriage, to her political work in the midst of the papal schism and her interactions with Pope Gregory IX to Pope Urban VI.³¹ This is especially in her youth, as “she [Catherine] wanted to imitate the way of life of Saint Euphrosyne” with Euphrosyne—an infamous, in what Bynum would term, “transvestite saint” – being mentioned multiple times, who had pretended to be a man in order to enter a monastery or the—majority male—Desert Saints of early Christianity, figures who all are outside of regular gender norms.^{32,33} Though such an awareness of holiness or wanting to live a holy life from youth is itself typical of a female saint’s hagiography, however, with Catherine being intent on wanting to transform herself into a man or a more masculine role, even if it meant risking her own reputation—by extension life—by doing things like cutting her hair and rejecting any and all attempts to feminize her by her family, especially her mother, in a

³⁰ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans., Conleth Kearns, O.P. (Wilmington: Glazier, Inc., 1980), 108.

³¹ Kearns, Conleth, “Table of Contents,” in, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, v-ix.

³² Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 27, 38.

³³ Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 314-5.

society like medieval Italy, makes these hagiographies all the more unique.³⁴ As an entire segment recounts expectations on Catherine's appearance, she "arts of feminine make-up" and how it should be done, but instead, Catherine felt, her "purpose...debarred her from all this [marriage, makeup, men feminine], refused to comply...Her whole intent was set on pleasing God, not man" making her be more than just her female-at-birth status, and something more beyond that.³⁵ However, interestingly—either added by Capua himself as to not risk too more slippage of the truth than he already had—with or without realizing—of irregular gender norms expressed by Catherine after detailing her own confession to wanting to disguise herself as a man, or be like Saint Euphrosyne. It is then that Capua states, "God had filled her [Catherine] with this zeal," however, "He never permitted her to put her idea into practice in the way she then planned" which is in reference to her wanting to be like Euphrosyne, being inspired by her for as long as she could remember.³⁶ As F. Thomas Luongo finds in his book *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, moments like these showcase how Raymond of Capua placed an immense amount of attention on "Catherine's status," through her relationship with God, as he had an "awareness of the anomaly Catherine represented as a woman, let alone a saint," especially, her behavior as a child in her wishes to be like Euphrosyne, or later on in life, through how independent and open she was in the city of Siena, and later, beyond Italy itself and getting involved with Church-related political matters, making her all the more of a gender-bending, and gender-transcendent figure, through her and her relationship with God *because* of the attention brought onto it, and the seeming need to editorialize it through God himself as to not make her *too* much of an anomaly than she already was throughout her life.³⁷ This makes it all the more

³⁴ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 38, 41-46.

³⁵ Raymond of Calura, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 41.

³⁶ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 38.

³⁷ F. Thomas Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 52.

apparent that there is *still* a gender binary being enforced on her because of her being female-at-birth from all ends, as, like any queer person, it is all from birth, so Catherine being “filled” by God with this want to be like an infamous gender-bending saint, makes Catherine’s hagiography all the more evidence of an inherent queerness or fluidity that religion could give to medieval people on either side of the male and female specific binary, showing the ability to possibly go beyond entirely through her beliefs and behavior, even if physically still needing to be female.

This bending of gender norms and binaries by Catherine—and by extension Clare—also make their way into their beliefs and their expression of sanctity, as well. Catherine, in her *vita*—and life as a whole—she is shown to express herself and her non-conformity much more extremely than Clare. Even when she is referred to as his, or others', mother or is a motherly figure to her disciples, she does so in a similar way to Christ: as a travelling preacher, who is both masculine and feminine, an androgynous person who is spreading the word of God through being so close to God as his 'child' or 'Spouse', with Catherine identifying as both simultaneously. Having Christ as her 'Spouse,' Catherine using a more gender neutral term—even when being referred to as his bride—and being as active as she is religiously and politically, makes her a non-woman to those around her, as she is compared to both male and female religious figures, which in and of itself seems to be unusual for a hagiography of a female saint such as this, as he relates her to both the Virgin Mary and Paul, or Mary Magdalene and Moses, to name a few.³⁸ Most interesting, however, are segments where Capua recounts conversations with Catherine and the ways in which gender is bent throughout by Catherine, and by extension, God as her helper. Firstly, there is a conversation where she cries to Raymond, after her soul had left her body to meet with God, where she is described as saying she saw her body as a "prison" and generally "dark" for her to exist within, and seeing it much better when she is able to escape

³⁸ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 15.

it.³⁹ As she asks Raymond, "would you not feel pity for a soul that had been set free from some dark prison-cell and brought into the sweet light of day, and then once more locked up in the same old darkness as before?" seeing her body as limiting her soul's—and by extension her—freedom, with her physical body possibly not matching how she internally feels through her soul, which God was able to release from her "prison" of a body.⁴⁰ This phrasing, similarly to that found in her vita with Raymond, she arguably showcases signs of a dualist belief system, seeing the body and soul as separate beings, and an inherent body-related dysphoria which gender nonconforming individuals oftentimes feel themselves, seeing their inner selves as more of themselves than their body, which is a 'prison,' like it is for Catherine. Most notable, however, is when she seemingly turns into Christ while having a conversation with him, transcending gender in this transformation from woman to man, or against the gender binary as a whole as her face "became the face of a bearded man" which "bore a stamp of majesty which unmistakably marked out its owner as a lord amongst men" with Catherine gaining secondary sex characteristics of a beard and, therefore, the "majesty" of a man.⁴¹ It is because of how powerful she was becoming—through her growing relationship with God, her dedication to a religious life, and her service to God and the Church—her physical body is now able to miraculously be transformed into that of Christ, or a Christ-like figure. This "stamp of majesty," that Capua refers to makes herself able to be "a lord amongst men," or holier than the average person and then able to shift from female-presenting to male-presenting, with this fluidity being permitted because of her willingness to dedicate her life to Christianity.⁴² Others, though not as obvious as this interaction, continue this pattern of gender transcendence and bending, as in a conversation

³⁹ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 202, 337.

⁴⁰ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 202, 337.

⁴¹ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 82.

⁴² Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 82.

between Catherine and God, Raymond is told that she openly discussed her female sex and the negative aspects of it, especially in being involved in activities and spaces for men, with God replying, "No thing shall be impossible with God," and "Male and female I created them. Does it not depend on my own will where I shall pour out my grace? With me there is no longer male and female" as, to God, both "stand equal in my sight," expressing a nonconforming ideal of Christianity of the inherent androgyny between men and women in the eyes of God which had been apparent within the Bible, inspiring Catherine to continue taking on what she does: live publically preaching to others and being directly involved in Church-related matters, rejecting the binary completely by doing so.⁴³ In another, Catherine describes a conversation between her soul and God and how he "dealt" with it in a difficult time: "He did just what a mother does with the baby in her arms" as when the baby cries, "she [God] lets him [Catherine] have the breast to his heart's content" with Catherine being the baby, using male pronouns and God as the mother, using female pronouns, bending gender both ways.⁴⁴

However, this is where the issue of hagiography can come into play as evidence towards these kinds of queer identities in medieval people, as more often than not, these saints' lives are editorialized, or written in such a way that is 'acceptable' or is beneficial to the author, making their femaleness essential to them, when it barely was, if at all. As F. Thomas Luongo points out, hagiography creates "a more acceptable saintly persona" for the saint in question being written about.⁴⁵ This *especially* goes for Clare, Catherine and their hagiographers, Raymond of Capua and Thomas of Celano, as hagiographies are always made to make a point of some kind: to represent a particular order or belief within the Church, to promote the hagiographer, to ensure an image of a saint that is recognizable while also not diverging too much from the norm, or all

⁴³ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 116-117.

⁴⁴ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 183.

⁴⁵ Luongo, F. Thomas, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, 22.

three at once, especially for saints perceived as female. While someone as close to Catherine as Raymond wrote her hagiography, his purpose of writing this hagiography when he did was, of course, to get Catherine canonized as a saint. However, there is a second, more self-serving point to writing this, which is to make particular statements about the Dominican Order and the Church during a period which was marked by immense chaos and, consequently, distrust or distancing away from Christianity entirely.⁴⁶ This is made apparent as Capua expresses his worries to Catherine, “how can we possibly experience greater evils than these – Christians losing all sense of loyalty and reverence towards holy Church,” making it into a propaganda piece for the Order and, by extension, the Church, which were heavily impacted because of what was happening in the world at the time.⁴⁷ Capua wants to try and rectify or help Christianity through Catherine herself and writing her *vita*. This is done by including scenes of Saint Dominic and other infamous Church figures speaking to or surrounding Catherine herself one-on-one or as a group, praises being given to Dominic and the Order, the power of Christ or God and belief, and even an entire chapter about Saint Dominic himself, and so on and so forth.⁴⁸ Through Catherine’s example, which in itself is such a heavily accomplished life with a deep dedication to her piety, her relationship with God and her direct connection to reforming the Church would possibly make others want to follow her example and believe in the goodness of Christianity once again. Through this, she not only brings a much better image to the Dominican Order, with this simultaneously helping him in showing his own knowledge and dedication, but also strengthens his position within the Order and the overall Church hierarchy by possibly bringing in a saint.

⁴⁶ Raymond of Capua and Conleth Kearns, O.P., Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 232, 238-249, 264-7; Kearns, O.P., Conleth, "Introduction," in *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, xxx-xxxii.

⁴⁷ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 264-5.

⁴⁸ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 48, 50, 30, 70-73.

The same goes for Thomas of Celano and his *vita* for Clare of Assisi, which is all the more egregious. As Catherine Mooney notes in her essay in *Gendered Visions, "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Marie?: Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters,"* were those who did not have much of a relationship with her and were trying to distance the Franciscan Order from the Poor Ladies amidst Francis' death entirely, as they had no connection to them or to Clare as a person and did not want to because of her perceived female identity with a male religious order having themselves tied to her.⁴⁹ Because of these kinds of biases, hagiographers and their *vitae* can—and do—oftentimes misrepresent the subjects they write about, such as Clare and Catherine being deemed "womanly" or "feminine", even when they showcased behaviors and beliefs which were the complete opposite, forcing the binary opposite of their actual expressions onto them, which for Clare for example, meant being an imitator of Mary, instead of what she actually was: an imitator of Christ himself.⁵⁰ This goes for Catherine as well, as throughout her hagiography Raymond of Capua clearly tries to hide the fact she was a woman that was active and in the world, and instead, makes sure to emphasize how it was through God's 'marriage' and direction that she did so, minimally referencing her work and not regarding her letters whatsoever. Because of their perceived role as medieval female saints, either imitating religious women or having similar experiences and 'plot' points as other holy women in their *vitae*, making their work not be considered as something that could possibly be outside of that mold or having to be approved of by forces—the highest being God. They are both then associated with being feminine, and by extension, perfect examples for women to follow, with the whole picture not being available for those just learning about them.

⁴⁹ Catherine M. Mooney, "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Marie?: Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 71-74.

⁵⁰ Mooney, Catherine M., "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Marie?", 70-71.

However, the use of hagiography as a primary source should not be completely disregarded. Looking at the evidence, many scholars *still* find the value in using hagiographies in their own research, and in the case of gender nonconformity and transcendence, this is no different, as they still can showcase possibilities available not just for female-at-birth individuals finding these stories, but the true transcendence of gender that Christianity gave for whoever felt it was how they identified through it still being in the *vitae* and available for further analysis. For example, as discussed by Catherine Cedillo in her 2015 article “Habitual Gender: Rhetorical Androgyny in Franciscan Texts,” she uses a queer lens and zooms it in on the genre of hagiography itself, with this “rhetorical androgyny” being defined as an androgyny which “exists as spiritual motivation...but finds no corollary in everyday life due to social constraints,” or more simply, is able to be expressed internally and can be seen in personal writings or correspondences, but not physically identifiable through ways such as appearance or the body itself.⁵¹ With this, while focusing on Clare of Assisi, Cedillo’s focus on the androgynous, and arguably, gender nonconforming existence that was, in her eyes and seemingly in the eyes of the Medieval Church, essential to piety as the “ideal state” of a Christian, even when this androgyny was expressed through heavily gendered binaries, with this piety being an “out” for many medieval people who did not identify with their sex-based expectations, finding Christianity as a space of open expression for their own identities.⁵² Cedillo showcases that hagiographies could and *did* showcase that androgyny, and arguably, gender nonconformity, *was* possible, even if it was only possible to be spiritually expressed through religious beliefs and could represent a means for a woman or person that was assigned female-at-birth to just ‘be’, or exist as androgynous or be outside of the binary, escaping the expectations of femininity or womanhood

⁵¹ Christina Cedillo, “Habitual Gender: Rhetorical Androgyny in Franciscan Texts.” In *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 31, no. 1 (2015): 65, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.1.65>.

⁵² Cedillo, Christina, “Habitual Gender”, 66, 72.

almost entirely through religious means.^{53,54} The more modern scholarship, like Cedillo's and others work, which look at medieval sources within the lenses of queer and trans lenses—even if they are still seen as "new" – offer a broader framework for understanding the gender fluidity that was apparent and possible during the Medieval period, as saints were then able to blur the strict and heavily imposed gender categories and expectations of their time, creating a space that was open to expressions of fluidity or complete androgyny in their own identities and for their orders as female-at-birth or female presenting people, or could even extend to a gender nonconforming existence, as well which could not be expressed physically due to the dangers it could pose to said person. Medieval scholar Ruth Mazzo Karras, similarly, sees how hagiography is useful in identifying queer experiences, especially in female-identified saints as, "[w]hile medieval authors would still have identified any female-bodied person as a woman" they were still able to see the "genderqueer or gender nonconforming achievement of overcoming the feminine weakness" that women—according to general Medieval thought—had, going past their femininity and, by extension, womanhood, and this being recognized and praised within women's *vitae*, like Clare and Catherine.⁵⁵ However, luckily, with the writings of both Clare and Catherine surviving, these sources are able to support and share these gender bending, nonconforming or transcending qualities that are merely slipped into their hagiographies being at the forefront of their own writings, and by extension, identities.

Clare, with there being much less written material by her, letters sent by her showcase an intense want to imitate Christ himself and keep Francis of Assisi's original practices of the Franciscan Order or First Order onto her own, The Poor Ladies or the Second Order of the Franciscans, which in it of itself, was a battle to have papally approved to her liking.⁵⁶ She talks

⁵³ Cedillo, Christina, "Habitual Gender", 77, 81.

⁵⁴ Cedillo, Christina, "Habitual Gender", 66-9, 81.

⁵⁵ Karras, Ruth Mazzo, *Doing Unto Others*, 58.

about following the "footprints" of Christ, of "Him" or the importance of imitating him, or *imitatio Christi*, which Mooney uses towards her argument in her essay in *Gendered Voices*, seeing how much these phrases in their original language and ideas feature much more prominently for Clare than for Francis, going against what multiple scholars saw as a clear depiction of religious expression along the binary lines of female (Clare) and male (Francis).^{57, 58} As Mooney discusses—and is evident throughout both Assisi's writings themselves when read—Francis only uses the exact phrase of *imitatio Christi* once in his writings in their original language. Even with this, he is still associated heavily with *imitatio Christi*, seemingly being the poster child for it. Meanwhile, as Mooney points out and as in my findings within the translated version of the letters *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* shows, Clare uses the term and its translated meaning of following in Christ's "footprints" multiple times, advising those around her to imitate Christ at any chance she gets. However, this is not made apparent in any texts other than her own writings, as Mooney points out.^{59, 60} With that said, with how much more writings are attributed to Francis that are much longer than Clare's in comparison, it is the fact that Clare used the terminology and showed a *clear* passion for imitating Christ more than Francis that makes it all the more apparent that she was wanting to bend gender and, arguably—where Mooney did not delve into much, if at all, in her essay—was gender nonconforming and queer herself through her expressing this deep want and even *need* to imitate and even become Christ,

⁵⁶ Regis J. Armstrong and Brady, Ignatius C. Brady, "Clare of Assisi: Introduction," In *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, (Paulist Press, 1982), 171-4. This specific book is cited in Catherine M. Mooney's "*Imitatio Christi* or *Imitatio Mariae*? Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters," In *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, edited by Catherine M. Mooney, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 52-77.

⁵⁷ Armstrong, Regis J. and Brady, Ignatius C., "The Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague," "The Third Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague," and "The Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges," *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 195, 197, 199, 200, 208.

⁵⁸ Mooney, Catherine M., "*Imitatio Christi* or *Imitatio Mariae*?", 63.

⁵⁹ Mooney, Catherine M., "*Imitatio Christi* or *Imitatio Mariae*?", 63.

⁶⁰ Armstrong, Regis J. and Brady, Ignatius C., "The Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague," "The Third Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague," and "The Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges," *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 195, 197, 199, 200, 208.

rather than wanting to imitate any female religious figures multiple times in the minimal amount of her writings we have available, with in-depth research like Mooney's laying the groundwork for more expansive arguments like my own. This gender nonconformity extends itself to the official sanctioned rules of the Poor Ladies, as this androgynous identity is seemingly integral to the order, as according to the official *Rule of Saint Clare*, when entering the Poor Ladies, those entering are required to cut their hair—like Catherine had with the Franciscan friars—and to live impoverished in the way that the Franciscan Order did in practicing intense poverty and renunciation of goods—which included food—being like Christ and Francis himself, as in *The Testament of Clare*, it states “[t]he Son of God became for us the Way which our Blessed Father Francis” who “has shown and taught us by word and example,” and to keep on his teachings and examples as The Poor Ladies, making the order a more gender nonconforming and fluid space through it being so focused on poverty in the way of Francis and the First Order and fasting, truly taking away any corporeal goods away from themselves and acting more 'male', due to them being more like Francis, or by extension, like Christ.^{61, 62} There is also an idea that she discusses with Agnes of Prague in one of the four letters found from Clare to her, imploring her to contemplate God transform her “whole being into the image of the Godhead Itself through contemplation,” citing the words of Corinthians 3:18, which is, according to the editor “a prominent theme of Christian spirituality”, which makes a Christian gain “a likeness to God.”⁶³ With that, God—and by extension Christ—who had, as previously discussed, been interpreted throughout the later Middle Ages as either completely male, both male *and* female or androgynous by religious authority, means that taking on this likeness, being promoted by Clare

⁶¹ Armstrong, Regis J. and Brady, Ignatius C., “The Rule of Saint Clare”. In *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 210, 212-3.

⁶² Armstrong, Regis J. and Brady, Ignatius C., “The Testament of Clare”. In *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 227.

⁶³ Armstrong, Regis J. and Brady, Ignatius C., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 200.

to Agnes of Prague, being indicative of a want to transcend into another type of person or being—like God or Christ.

For Catherine of Siena, who has hundreds of letters which survive, her life in it of itself was gender nonconforming, which scholars have pointed out, but still identifies her as a woman without looking further and seeing more at play. As emphasized by F. Thomas Luongo, her writings reflect a fluidity with gender that she herself felt through gender-bending images and through being a public figure during a period where women were not permitted to be so and engaging in political matters as intense as the Papal Schism make her all the more "boundary-defying" and a "violation of categories" of the world and its expectations as someone that is female-at-birth.⁶⁴ Throughout her letters, she is direct in who she is speaking to, not taking any chances to sound 'feminine': understanding, gentle, or weak. Instead, she instructs many to "follow" in God's "footsteps", as Clare had to Agnes of Prague, even that those on the receiving end "ought" to throughout multiple letters to both men and women in power, be it those working in politics or were Church authorities.⁶⁵ As Luogo explains in studying Catherine's letters and their importance in reading them in their original political context: "she...sent her words where she as a woman could not easily go but addressed an audience few men could achieve".⁶⁶ This idea of her sending letters that went against her perceived identity as a woman or as female are present throughout her letters. For example, in a letter to the Curate of Casole, and others, she states: "I don't want us acting this way [sinfully] any more. No, I want you to follow the way of the Lamb who was slain with such blazing love," or another, to the priest of Semignano, where she is strict in what she says as "[t]his is what you are obligated to do [be a chosen vessel,

⁶⁴ Luongo, F. Thomas, *Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, 3, 20.

⁶⁵ Catherine of Siena and Suzanne Noffke, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, Vol. 1, trans. Suzanne Noffke (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), 285, 301.

⁶⁶ Luongo, F. Thomas, *Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, 3.

reconcile with God], and you must do it".⁶⁷ Using demanding phrases like "you must", and stating what she wants clearly in following Christ, or "the Lamb," and seeing themselves as one of them, referring to all of them together—"us" —she goes past what a female-at-birth person would usually do in writing to those she writes to in the first place, let alone making her mind known like she does throughout her epistolary interactions with others.

Catherine's more known and famous work, however, *The Dialogue of Saint Catherine of Siena: A Conversation with God on Living Your Spiritual Life to the Fullest*, is a dictated conversation she had with God. Throughout the multiple sections, there is an interesting dynamic at play, as the soul, referred to through feminine pronouns, such as "she" or "her," is referred to separately from a different figure—seemingly being Catherine—who is referred to as "daughter," but also by "thee" "thy" "thyself", separating the two different characters or beings and referring to others androgynously as a way to describe her own soul when talking with God, being much more fluid with her use of gender in describing herself, especially in separating her soul and her physical self. There are multiple references throughout of God telling Catherine that the soul—assigned a feminine role—needs to act "manfully," or generally being "manful", being discussed multiple times throughout the *Dialogue*.⁶⁸ With the importance of a 'manly' disposition, there are references to following in the "footsteps" of Christ, just like she had in her letters and Clare had in hers.⁶⁹ Along with all this, similarly to her *vita*, Catherine details of the "heaviness" and torturous nature of the body, using the same phrasing in referring to it as "dark" or a "prison...cell", as she had in Raymond's account, with God making mention of this relationship towards the body in telling Catherine or the soul "thou fliest thy cell as if it were a prison".⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Catherine of Siena and Suzanne Noffke, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, 276-77.

⁶⁸ *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena: A Conversation with God on Living Your Spiritual Life to the Fullest*, trans., Algar Thorold (Ashland: TAN Books, 1991), 26, 63, 84, 125, 139, 158, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/luc/detail.action?docID=4465408>.

⁶⁹ *The Dialogue*, 59, 156.

With that said, in one segment in particular, gender is bent multiple times, and describes the possible transcendence the soul can achieve through God. As "through the effect of love...the soul becomes another Himself", with God referring to "His servants" or "creatures" neutrally alongside the soul, who like her, "are another Myself, inasmuch as they have lost and denied their own will, and are clothed with Mine, are united to Mine, are conformed to Mine,". This wording is similar to what is referenced to by Clare with Corinthians 3:18, in one being able to become like God through contemplating him and expressing one's adoration for him, or be "another Myself" to God. This gender-bending is dispersed all throughout of what the soul should do or what the soul wants through and from God, never finding any strictness in its pronoun use and in who identifies as what, making it all the more apparent that Catherine was not limited in her gender identity and was potentially queer herself.⁷¹

In conclusion, the cases of the two medieval Italian saints, Clare of Assisi and Catherine of Siena and analyzing their *vitae* and their own writings go to show just how much more has been and can be further studied about medieval Christianity, the saints it praised, the inherent queerness present in the writings of and about medieval saints, and how religion was oftentimes used as a space for many to transcend gender norms and gender entirely, making saints more gender nonconforming than one may expect at first glance. As argued, Medieval Christianity offered some type of escape from society, themselves becoming queer and being praised for said queerness, or diversion from the norm of others through their holiness. These two saints' physical practices, spiritual ideas and inspirations, and the rhetoric used in their writings and contemporary writings of them, one can see the complexity and fluidity in medieval Christianity in terms of gender and its expression, and seeing two saints as more gender nonconforming or

⁷⁰ *The Dialogue*, 196.

⁷¹ *The Dialogue*, 26-7.

fluid than they previously have been, making trans* or gender lenses all the more essential to be utilized by medieval historians and other scholars to find such patterns throughout history, as being gender nonconforming or trans* has never been anything new or of the modern day: it is only its presentation which is different from what people know it to be now.

Bibliography

Ælfric of Eynsham, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*. Vol. 2, edited and translated by Walter W. Skeat, et al., London, N. Trübner & Co., 1881.

Retrieved from

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/%C3%86lfric%27s_Lives_of_Saints/Of_Saint_Euphrasia.

Armstrong, Regis J. and Brady, Ignatius C. "Francis and Clare: The Complete Works". trans.

Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, Paulist Press, 1982.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Catherine of Siena, and Suzanne Noffke. *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*. Vol. 1, trans.

Suzanne Noffke. Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000.

Cedillo, Christina. "Habitual Gender: Rhetorical Androgyny in Franciscan Texts." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 31, no. 1 (2015): 65-81.

<https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.1.65>.

DeVun, Leah. *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*. Columbia University Press, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/devu19550.6>.

Karras, Ruth Mazzo, and Katherine E. Pierpont. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*. Fourth edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023.

Luongo, F. Thomas. *The Sainly Politics of Catherine of Siena*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60075>.

Mooney, Catherine M. "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Mariae? Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters". In *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, edited by Catherine

M. Mooney, 52-77. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Mooney, Catherine M. "Clare's Childhood and Conversion to Religious Life, 1193 to 1211." In

Clare of Assisi and the Thirteenth-Century Church: Religious Women, Rules, and

Resistance, 15–29. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dt0107>.

- Murray, Jacqueline. "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" In *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, edited by Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, 34–51. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhcn6.5>.
- Musurillo, H.R. "The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicitas." In *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, translated by H.R. Musurillo, 70-77. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.
- Stabler-Miller, Tanya. "Bride of Christ or Devil's Gateway," "Eucharistic Piety in the High Middle Ages," "Saints and Suffering," and "Gender, Body, Soul." HIST 310C 001: Medieval Women. Class lecture at Loyola University-Chicago, Chicago, IL, Fall, 2024.
- Raymond of Capua. *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Conleth Kearns O.P., Wilmington: Glazier, Inc., 1980.
- Thomas of Celano, "The Legend of Saint Clare". In *The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi*, (St. Bonaventure: NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1953), 20. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/legendwritingsof0000unse/page/n7/mode/2up>.
- The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena: A Conversation with God on Living Your Spiritual Life to the Fullest*. trans. Algar Thorold. Ashland: TAN Books, 1991. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/luc/detail.action?docID=4465408>.
- Genesis 2:20-4 English Standard Version.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202&version=NIV>.
- Galatians 3:28 English Standard Version.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%203%3A28&version=ESV>.