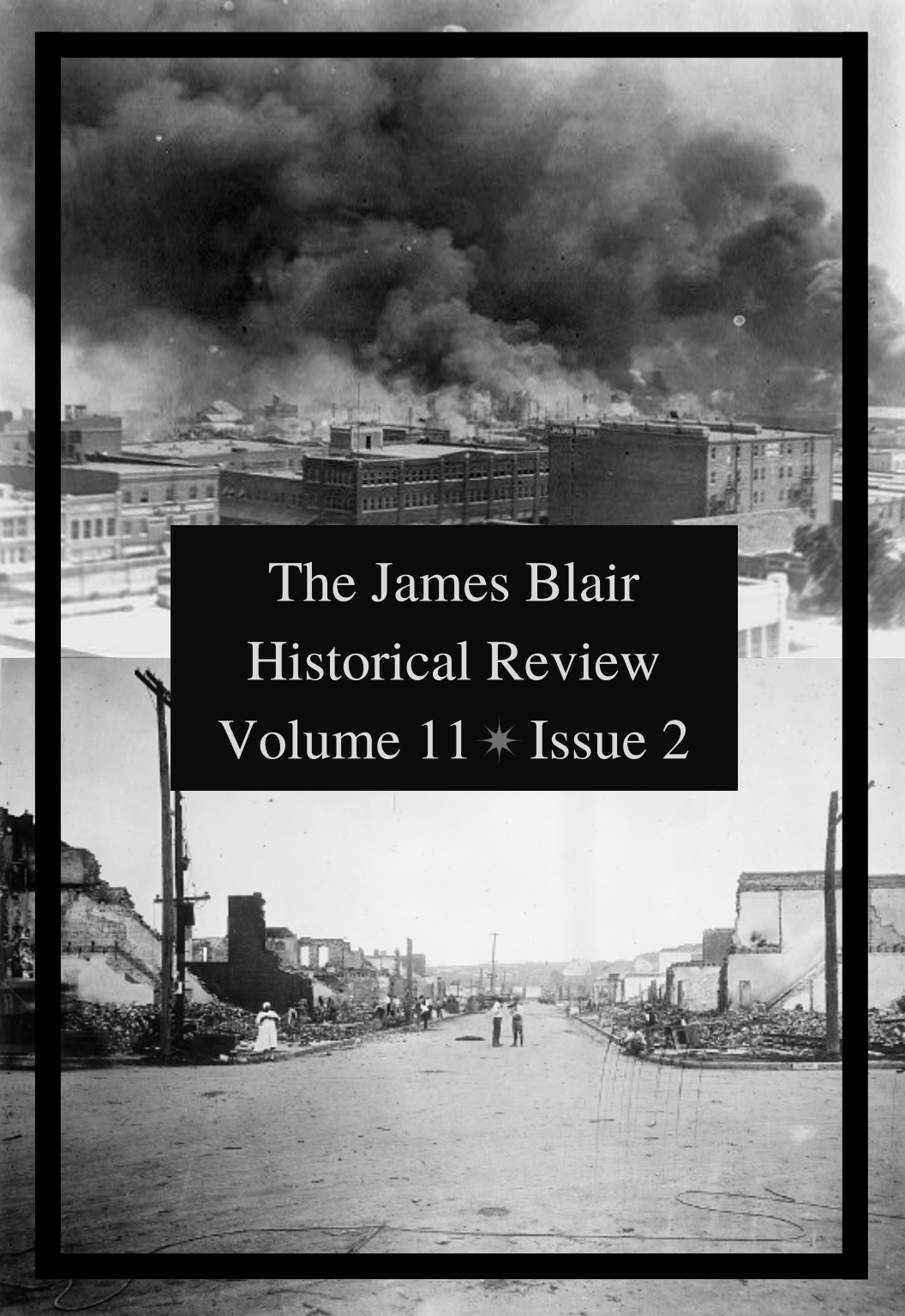

The James Blair Historical Review

Volume 11 ✶ Issue 2

Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the James Blair Historical Review's Editorial Board, it is my honor to present to you the latest issue of our journal.

As insightfully remarked by British historian and academic George Trevelyan, "Let the science and research of the historian find the fact and let his imagination and art make clear its significance." Though this quote is dated given its exclusive use of "he," its sentiments still very much ring true. Those who write history should be praised both for the diligence that they show in the gathering of new information as well as their brilliant minds that illustrate the significance of their findings. This is the essence of historiography, and the authors in this issue have made fantastic additions to the scholarship.

Willa Stonecipher's "Erotic Language and the Beguines: Mary of Oignies, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Agnes Blannbekin" outlines fascinating information on the beguines' use of erotic language within medieval Christian mysticism. Allyson Cook's "'A Haven for Homosexuals:' The AIDS Crisis at William & Mary" provides vital historical contextualization of AIDS activism at the College of William and Mary during the 1980s and 1990s. Max Goldkuhle's "Racial Lenses in Radical Periodicals: Immediate Responses to the Tulsa Race Massacre from the Black and White Revolutionary Press" lends insight into the divisions in the revolutionary press' views of the Tulsa Race Massacre across racial lines. Anna Rosenfeld's "The Eaton Affair: The Role of Washington Society in Early Antebellum Politics" delves into the differences in opinion and motivation of the women involved in the Eaton Affair based on their lives and backgrounds. I sincerely hope that all who read these works enjoy them as much as I have.

It would have been impossible to create this issue of the JBHR without the indispensable hard work of all contributors. First, I would like to congratulate our authors on producing such quality and intriguing works of history and thank them for giving us the privilege of publishing their papers. To our Editorial Board: Gracie, Grace, Italia, Sophia, Riley, and Cecilia, I extend the sincerest gratitude. From the bottom of my heart, thank you all for working with me to continue the success of the journal; you are all very much appreciated. In addition, the work of our peer reviewers is felt throughout the entire publishing process. You all uphold our academic standards and provide vital feedback to us and our authors, and I thank you for your work. Also, a sincere thank you to Professor Ayfer Karakaya-Stump for her collaboration, advice, and interest in our journal. Finally, a special thanks to William and Mary's Harrison Ruffin Tyler Department of History as well as the College's Media Council for their organizational and financial support which is essential to the vitality of the journal.

It is with a mixture of sadness and optimism that I depart the JBHR. Though I will miss leading the journal in our pursuit of presenting new history to the world, I also have great faith in our next Editorial Board to continue that mission. Riley, Aoife, Grace, Jack, and Sigi—I am truly excited to see what you will accomplish with the next editions of the journal. With that, I present to you the James Blair Historical Review's Spring 2022 edition.

Many thanks,

Xavier Storey, JBHR Editor-in-Chief 2021-2022

About the Author

Willa Stonecipher is a student in the Joint Degree Program between the University of St Andrews in Scotland and the College of William and Mary in Virginia. She is fascinated by medieval history, especially gender history, queer history, and hagiography. In the future, she hopes to continue to study history at the graduate level.

Allyson Cook is a May 2022 graduate from William & Mary where she majored in History and minored in Sociology. She is particularly interested in women's history and the history of sexuality. After graduation Allyson is planning on working in New York City. She would like to thank the wonderful faculty at William & Mary for their support, especially Professor Meyer and Professor Watkins.

Max Goldkuhle is a second-year history student at the College of William & Mary and a Richmond native. He is interested in the modern social, economic, political, and cultural history of the greater United States. Through his work, Max hopes to grapple with issues of historical memory, environmental preservation, and social justice.

My name is Anna Rosenfeld and I'm from New York City. I'm going into my fourth year at the University of Virginia studying history and government. After graduation, I'm hoping to attend law school or graduate school to study early American political history. At UVA, I work for the Miller Center on the Presidential Recordings Project.

James Blair Historical Review Staff

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After the race riots June 1st, Tulsa, Okla. United States Oklahoma Tulsa, 1921. June. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2017679759/; Alvin C. Krupnick Co, photographer; *Smoke billowing over Tulsa, Oklahoma duringrace massacre*. Oklahoma Tulsa, 1921. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/95517018/.

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Erotic Language and the Beguines: Mary of Oignies, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Agnes Blannbekin

In the modern mindset, the close relationship between the erotic and the spiritual within medieval Christian mysticism seems counterintuitive. However, within the cultural codes of the period, the erotic was seen as an appropriate lens to portray closeness with God and Christ. As such, the language of eroticized spiritual desire is present within the literature of the beguines—semi-religious lay women—whose mysticism was defined by affective piety and a strong emphasis on the eucharist and the passion, among other important spiritual components.[1] As a canon of work, the mystical literature of the beguines is lush with erotic language that paints a greater intimacy with the divine.

The beguines experienced and expressed spiritual desire through an erotic lens to a great extent, as seen through the works by and surrounding Mary of Oignies, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Agnes Blannbekin. This essay will first contextualize the beguine movement and describe the phenomenon of affective piety. Then, the semantics of 'erotic' will be discussed and the historiography of the beguines will be explored. To prove the large extent to which beguines utilized erotic language,the essay will analyze the use of such language in the three sources in chronological order, beginning with the *Life of Mary of Oignies* by Jacques de Vitry, then the *Letters, Visions*, and poetry of Hadewijch of Brabant, before moving on to the *Life and Revelation*s of Agnes Blannbekin. Before each analysis, the historiography of the text will be provided. Each work expresses erotic spiritual desire through different themes. Phallic imagery, nuptial imagery from the Song of Songs, and asceticism is seen in erotic terms by Mary of Oignies. Love mysticism, courtly love, and union are the avenues through which Hadewijch of Brabant expresses eroticized spiritual desire, and they can be viewed through an original queer lens. Agnes Blannbekin visualizes

spiritual eroticism through nudity, physical contact with Christ, and the motif of fire. Moreover, the *Life and Revelations* of Agnes Blannbekin have received little scholarly attention, making this investigation novel.

The beguines were semi-religious lay women who occupied a position between cloistered nun and secular woman. First arising in the thirteenth century as a primarily urban phenomenon in the Low Countries, beguines lived alone or together in groups (beguinages) throughout western Europe and committed their lives to poverty and charity.[2] Although they would sometimes live together loosely in groups, beguines were distinct from other religious women in that they did not follow a rule. Dominican scholar L.J.M. Philippen splits the growth of the beguine movement into four stages: the first and earliest stage is composed of "individual devout women…who reject marriage" and do not join a religious order; the second stage contains women who live "in loose connectedness to one another;" the third includes women who live in communities in connection with a parish church; and the fourth stage is defined by women who live in "well-organized communities," typically occurring in the late thirteenth century and later.[3]

Scholars give a myriad of explanations for the rise of the beguine movement. The *Frauenfrage*, or women-question, asks why women turned to a religious lifestyle in the large numbers that they did.[4] One possible answer, according to Emilie Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, is that many women turned to a semi-religious lifestyle due to the inability to provide a large enough dowry to enter a monastery, lack of noble parentage, and the inability of women's monastic houses to keep up with the demand for a cloistered life.[5] Another explanation is that the charismatic authority of figures within the beguine movement attracted women to join.[6] Whatever the reason behind the movement's growth, the beguines became known for their embracement of mysticism, fueled by the rise of affective piety.

Coined by Caroline Walker Bynum to characterize the new type of devotion beginning in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the term 'affective piety' is widely accepted by contemporary scholars.[7] Affective piety describes the focus on Christ's humanity, particularly the Passion, creating a "highly sensory, emotion-drenched devotion to Christ."[8] As Bynum herself writes, affective piety manifests as external behaviors, and the focus on the external "is in turn rooted in a proliferation of religious and social groups" such as the beguines.[9] Affective piety saturates the works of the beguines and proves to be a useful lens for examining their acts and language. Eroticism is a component of affective piety, with its focus on intimacy with the divine, though expressed in sexual terms.

Within the field of mysticism, scholars debate the semantics of 'erotic' and the characterization of language as erotic imagery. Nancy Partner writes frankly, "in every essay I have read, the blunt word 'sex' is absent, replaced by the politely distant 'erotic;' the act of intercourse is euphemized as 'marriage,' or disembodied as 'union,' and there are no orgasms at all."[10] At the opposite end of the spectrum, Saskia Murk-Jansen dismisses any amount of sexual desire behind erotic imagery, writing that mystics are "simply using an image which has common currency in order to describe a situation" instead of picking apart their language to reveal repressed sexual desire.[11] In finding middle ground between these two perspectives, I argue that erotic language represents a desire for spiritual intimacy with the divine in sexual terms. Therefore, words such as 'orgasmic' for 'ecstasy' and 'intercourse' for 'union' are appropriate equivalencies with regard to erotic metaphor. While the word 'erotic' may be distant, it captures the ambiguity absent from 'sex,' speaking more to the metaphorical rather than to the actual act of sexual intercourse.

The corpus of work surrounding the beguines is rich and varied. A wealth of primary sources written about and by prominent beguines

exists, from the three sources discussed here to Marguerite Porete and Mechthild of Magdeburg's writings. Apart from primary sources, the body of secondary sources surrounding beguines and female mystics is extensive, delving into both the history of the beguine movement as well as providing in-depth analyses of individual experiences. The mid-twentieth century scholarship of mysticism was dominated by priests and monks, whose knowledge of Latin allowed them to read many sources in the original text, although the work produced was for a limited audience. [12] The cultural turn of the sixties sparked an interest in mysticism. Beginning in 1991, Bernard McGinn's landmark *Presence of God* series serves as a vital wealth of knowledge about Christian mysticism as a whole.[13] As a result of the interest in Christian mysticism, Oxford, Cambridge, and Wiley-Blackwell produced compendiums on the subject. More recently, scholarship has turned to the senses and to the history of emotions with a special focus on the experiences of female mystics.

Jacques de Vitry wrote the *Life of Mary of Oignies* in Latin in 1215, two years after Mary's death. By writing a life of a semi-religious woman, he attempts to transform Mary into an exemplar to inspire and to be emulated by others, thereby elevating the lifestyle of the beguines to the societally accepted life of the cloistered religious woman.[14] De Vitry's interpretation of Mary's life is imbued with political purpose to contradict the Albigensian heresy while simultaneously gaining acceptance for the beguines, ultimately attaining "papal dispensation" for their lifestyle.[15] Although a limitation of the *Life* is that it was not written by Mary herself and does not capture her experience firsthand, it still holds value in that de Vitry knew Mary personally and therefore had intimate knowledge of her life. Moreover, the *vita* reflects an outsider's viewpoint of a beguine and the beguine movement. A great deal of secondary literature on the *Life of Mary of Oignies* exists, with a focus on language and Jacques de Vitry's aim for writing such a *vita.*

The *Life of Mary of Oignies* by Jacques de Vitry makes ample use of erotic imagery. First, de Vitry details phallic symbols. He writes that "Sometimes she saw rays coming out of the image of the crucifix that came towards her and penetrated as far as her heart."[16] Here, erotic language is used to describe the fulfillment of spiritual desire. The rays emitted from the cross represent the phallus which then penetrates her heart. The use of divine phallic imagery speaks to the concept that the "virgin is the passive partner to whom God does something."[17] This idea echoes the medieval view of heterosexual intercourse inspired by Aristotle; the man is the mover and the woman is the moved.[18] The phallic imagery is inverted "when her subtle and enfeebled spirit, consumed by the fire of holy love, penetrated above the heavens like the aroma of smoking green twigs."[19] Combined with sensory imagery, the erotic motif of fire strengthens Mary's otherwise weak spirit and transforms it into a phallic symbol, allowing her to 'penetrate' the heavens. This exists as a role reversal from the previous example; instead of being the moved, with the ethos of divine love, Mary is the mover.

As part of the erotic imagery within the *Life*, references to the *Song of Songs* are frequent and representative of bridal mysticism. An erotic love poem within the Bible, the Song of Songs is an allegory for an individual's relationship with God, Christ, and the divine. Bernard of Clairvaux brought the *Song of Songs*, its erotic imagery, and his mystical interpretation into the forefront of religious thought in his *Sermons On the Song of Songs* in the twelfth century, as the most notable commentary since Origen almost one thousand years before.[20] De Vitry writes, "when [Mary] ate milk and honey from the lips of the Bridegroom (cf. Song of Songs 4.11), her heart was affected in its innermost parts with a gift of honey-dripping wisdom."[21] The imagery of eating from the mouth of Christ is deeply intimate and erotic. De Vitry places Mary into the role of 'Bride' within the context of the Song of Songs and uses the erotic imagery to express spiritual desire. He also notably inverts

imagery from the Song of Songs, portraying Mary as the queen and Christ as a boy: "When the Lord appeared to her in the likeness of a boy tasting of honey and smelling of spices, she would often gladly admit him into the pure and richly decorated chamber of her heart."[22] As a clear inversion of Song of Songs 1:4, it is the queen Mary who invites her humanized beloved, Christ, to join her in her chambers.[23] In the poem, it is implied that intercourse takes place within the king's chambers, giving the passage from the *Life* an erotic overtone. By portraying Mary as the lover and the Bride of Christ, de Vitry co-opts the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs and uses it to describe Mary's close relationship with the divine.

Lastly, Jacques de Vitry utilizes erotic imagery in description of Mary's asceticism that occupies a unique position between pain and pleasure. This delicate in-between space is defined by theorist Karmen MacKendrick as 'counterpleasure,' providing an adequate paradigm through which the erotic portrayal of Mary's ascetic experience can be viewed.[24] After Mary's marriage at the age of fourteen, "Living apart from her parents, she was now set on fire with such ecstasy of ardour and punished her body with such warfare…[that] she would pray for a lengthy period."[25] Mary's ascetic measures are described using the erotic motif of fire, taking her to a state of ecstasy. Ecstasy literally means "to step out of oneself" and is parallel to the sexual pleasure of orgasm.[26] Moreover, the ecstatic pleasure Mary derives from asceticism exists as a counterpleasure. In a striking example of counterpleasure described through erotic terms, Mary cuts out a piece of her flesh with a knife, and as a consequence, "she had been so inflamed by an overwhelming fire of love that she had risen above the pain of her wound and, in this ecstasy of mind, she had seen one of the seraphim standing close to her."[27] Once more, the pain of her extreme asceticism brings her to an ecstatic state. In this manner, as MacKendrick writes, "the ascetic does not merely *resemble* the erotic but takes erotic

pleasure to a one-sided extreme."[28] Indeed, Mary's spiritual desire is conveyed to the audience of the *vita* through an incredibly erotic lens. Between orgasmic ecstasy, the fire of love, and the pain of ascetic practice, the *Life* embodies an erotic experience of counterpleasure.

The works of Hadewijch of Brabant were composed in the first half of the thirteenth century. Worthy of note is that Hadewijch wrote in the vernacular Dutch, differing from the works of cloistered nuns and from *vitae* of beguines. While she and her work were known in the fourteenth century, they soon faded into obscurity before being rediscovered in 1838 in Brussels by a group of medievalists.[29] Since then, scholars have produced a great body of secondary sources surrounding her work, especially with regard to the love mysticism and motifs of courtly love shown within her texts, yet have neglected applying queer theory to her texts.

Like Mary of Oignies, Hadewijch of Brabant expresses spiritual desire through an erotic lens through motifs of fire and imagery from the Song of Songs. She differs, however, in her eroticized love mysticism, or *minnemystik*, and images of courtly love and union. The constantly-used '*minne*' encompasses a vast number of meanings within the texts. Sometimes Lady Love, sometimes God, and often Christ and the Holy Spirit, the multiplicity of meaning creates a nuanced term.[30] In Dutch, *minne* is a feminine noun, thus permitting Hadewijch, as Murk-Jansen argues, to portray God as the "changeable and unattainable" lady of courtly love.[31] As a consequence, Hadewijch often portrays herself as the knight figure; however, she does not always place herself in a masculine role. This represents a 'queering' of the traditional tale of courtly love, and Hadewijch's writings often hold homoerotic overtones with respect to Love, whose feminine portrayal remains uncommon within the canon of mystical literature.[32] For instance, when describing Love in *Visions*, Hadewijch writes, "her right side was full of perfect kisses without farewell," creating the imagery of long, passionate kisses

with a lover.[33] In this passage from *Visions*, Hadewijch writes as the feminine self, eschewing the constructed identity of a courtly knight she often uses in her poetry, and thereby queering the text. While the heterosexual couple of Christ and a female lover appear with the greatest frequency, "pairings of lover and beloved, both envisaged as female" are common within mystical literature, with some of Hadewijch's works belonging to this queered canon of work.[34] Moreover, the constant switching of genders for both the narrator and God within Hadewijch's work is characterized as 'la mystique curtoise' by Barbara Newman, and is a prime subject for the application of queer theory in future scholarship.[35]

Hadewijch is not known for nuptial imagery within her work; instead, she "differed in construing bridal love not in terms of covenant but as courtly love."[36] Certainly, influenced by the literature and culture of her time with regard to courtly love, Hadewijch invokes courtly love through an erotic lens. She writes in *Letters*, "before Love thus bursts her dikes, and before she ravishes man out of himself and so touches him with herself that he is one spirit and one being with her and in her, he must offer her noble service and the life of exile."[37] The act of ravishment and touching to become one invokes intercourse, which is only attainable at the cost of knightly service to Love. Here, the lover is a servant to Love, and is subject to her will, replicating the relationship between knight and lady. The motif of courtly love is extended when Hadewijch writes in her *Poems in Stanzas,* "At all times when the arrow strikes, / It increases the wound and brings torment."[38] The arrow of love exists as a phallic symbol that pierces the lover. In her portrayal of love as suffering, Hadewijch aligns her characterization of love with that of Andreas Capellanus, whose highly influential *The Art of Courtly Love* from the late twelfth century acted as a seminal work in the definition of courtly love.[39]

Hadewijch also expresses union with Christ through a distinctly erotic lens, with the language used being reminiscent of the language of sexual intercourse. In her *Letters,* she writes:

> Where the abyss of his wisdom is, he will teach you what he is, and with what wondrous sweetness the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other. But they abide in one another in fruition, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, and soul in soul.{40]

Of particular interest is that the Beloved, representing Christ, and the lover 'penetrate' each other, rather than just Christ 'penetrating' the lover. In this way, there is no singular mover nor moved, but rather a reciprocal *movement*, thereby creating an elevated relationship between humanity and the divine through the language of sexual intercourse. The word 'fruition,' in this context meaning the achievement of union with Christ, has a climactic overtone. In the context of this passage, it is comparable to orgasm. The repetitive structure of 'mouth in mouth,' and so on, creates a kind of physical sensuality that makes two beings into one, thus achieving union. Apart from this passage, Hadewijch continues to use the language of union and fruition in troves in *Letters, Visions*, and in her poetry.

The *Life and Revelations* of Agnes Blannbekin was composed in Latin in the early fourteenth century. It belongs to a unique genre of co-authored texts; *Life and Revelations* was copied down by an anonymous Franciscan scribe who acts as Blannbekin's confessor. A Latin edition of the text was published in 1731 but was quickly subjected to ecclesiastic censorship. Austrian scholars Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Vogeler published a critical edition of the text in 1994 that combined the eighteenth-century edition and

medieval manuscripts. Dinzelbacher and Vogeler negatively characterized the text as "more than questionable" and "unusual and exotic in [its] bizarre character," an assessment that has been refuted by the positive scholarship of more recent historians.[41] Ulrike Wiethaus' translation of Dinzelbacher and Vogeler's text is the first English version of *Life and Revelations* and has been positively received by the scholarly community.[42] A limitation of the source is that, due to the co-authored nature of the text, it is impossible to know the extent to which the material of the text belongs to Blannbekin. Another limitation is that the scribe reports that Blannbekin was hesitant to provide him with details of her visions and experiences. While this detail does well to characterize Blannbekin as humble, it also raises the question of if Blannbekin left out visions or details that might shape interpretation of her mystical experience.

The *Life and Revelations* of Agnes Blannbekin express spiritual desire through an erotic lens to a great extent. A departure from the two texts previously examined, bridal imagery and invocation of the Song of Songs are absent from the *Life and Revelations.* The most striking example of erotic spiritual desire within the text comes when Blannbekin considers the circumcision of Christ. As Agnes was "crying…she began to think about the foreskin, where it may be located [after the Resurrection]. And behold, soon she felt with the greatest sweetness on her tongue a little piece of skin alike the skin in an egg, which she swallowed," with the piece of skin implied to be Christ's foreskin.[43] Her tears speak to affective piety, and the fact that Blannbekin has Christ's genitalia in her mouth has blatantly erotic overtones and invokes oral sex. Yet, this image attests to a chaste spiritual desire for intimacy with Christ. As Ruth Mazo Karras writes, such images "are at once *both* erotic *and* spiritual," a statement which rings true for Agnes Blannbekin. [44]

Agnes Blannbekin also experiences Christ through an erotic lens when she sees him nude. In a vision, "an extremely beautiful man appeared to her…completely naked and surrounded by immense light. She felt neither horror nor displeasure in seeing the shape and nudity of all his limbs, but rather was filled with a consolation of spirits."[45] Instead of being repulsed by Christ's nudity, Blannbekin seems attracted to it in a spiritual sense. Moreover, the erotic image of naked Christ is meant to stoke spiritual desire. In that, Karras argues, pornography and hagiography share a common goal: to "call forth further action in the imaginations of viewers and readers."[46] In this manner, *Life and Revelations* utilizes erotic imagery to inspire piety in others.

A common motif within the text is the flame of desire, which is in itself erotic terminology. For instance, Blannbekin tells that "during divine visitations, her chest was often filled with heat, so that the heat diffused throughout her body burning her sweetly, not painfully" and "when the blood has become hot through devotion, all limbs become pleasantly warmed, but without sexual overtones and blemish."[47] These passages describe spiritual desire in terms of sexual desire, as the heat spreading throughout Blannbekin's body is akin to arousal. Notably, Blannbekin's co-author makes the distinction that it was in a spiritual rather than a sexual sense, which is important considering that it is a recognition of the use of erotic imagery. Along the same line, Agnes recalls, "The Lord also laid the palm of His hand over her mouth and face, and from this contact she felt a marvelously fragrant odor and the fire of devotion and love in her heart. And she glowed from such ardor of desire that she could barely contain herself."[48] Here, Christ physically touches her, and this contact elicits a reaction similar, once again, to sexual arousal. The motif of fire is also repeated, complemented by the sensory imagery of smell.

Overall, the beguines utilized erotic language to express spiritual desire to a large extent, as seen through the *Life of Mary of Oignies*, the

works of Hadewijch of Brabant, and the *Life and Revelations* of Agnes Blannbekin. Each text's authorship offers a different view of beguine life; de Vitry writes from an outsider's perspective, whereas Hadewijch provides a first-hand expression of her spirituality, and Agnes Blannbekin and her confessor collaborate to create an account of her experiences. While they may be different, the texts all heavily rely on erotic imagery through a myriad of themes to describe beguine spirituality, which is significant as it represents the trend of affective piety and a closer, humanized relationship with Christ and the divine. There is a great body of literature on the three texts explored in this essay; however, scholars have not taken an in-depth look at the erotica of Agnes Blannbekin, nor the application of queer theory onto the erotic imagery of Hadewijch of Brabant. In all, the study of erotic imagery within the texts of the beguines is ripe with opportunity, as they used it as a language of their brand of spirituality.

Endnotes

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[40] Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love,* 66.
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[42] Mary Suydam, "Review of *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: "Life and Revelations"*" (Woodbridge, 2002), trans. by Ulrike Wiethaus," *Speculum* 79, no. 4 (2004), 1,040.
[43] Blannbekin, *Agnes Blannbekin*, 35.
[44] Karras, *Sexuality*, 69.
[45] Karras, *Sexuality*, 101.
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[48] Blannbekin, *Agnes Blannbekin*, 111-112.

"A Haven For Homosexuals:" The AIDS Crisis at William & Mary

Introduction

"Can you tell which students are HIV+? They can't either. *Protect Yourself. Use a Condom.*"[1] This slogan is featured on a 1993 poster that the Student Health Center created for the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. By this time, the AIDS epidemic had become a political and public health crisis in the United States. In the face of this crisis, activist groups brought AIDS into national attention. This paper argues that at William & Mary students, professors, alumni and administrators worked to address the AIDS crisis in the face of negative societal stigma and campus-specific opposition. As shown by contemporaneous sources collected from other colleges, the history of AIDS activism at William & Mary is representative of other college communities. William & Mary's examples of resistance and positive change are still relevant in a time when AIDS and connected social issues have certainly not disappeared.

Sources

Shortly after media outlets first reported "gay cancer," as it was sometimes called, a variety of AIDS activist groups were started in the United States, including in Philadelphia, New York City, and San Francisco.[2] In *Infectious Ideas*, Jennifer Brier explores AIDS activism and the politicization of the AIDS crisis. With *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African-American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS*, Dan Royles continues this scholarship by elaborating the specific effects AIDS had on the Black community and how they organized against it. ACT UP, or the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, was created in 1987 in New York City.[3] It became one of the most effective AIDS activist groups in the country, fighting the FDA, homophobic senators, the president, the

president, and churches in their effort to stem the tide of death caused by AIDS inaction. ACT UP is the focus of Sarah Schulman's work in *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993*. Little of this AIDS scholarship concerns college students, and certainly none of it focuses on the William & Mary campus.

A number of primary sources address how members of the William & Mary community responded to the AIDS during the 1980s and 1990s. Naturally, most of these sources are William & Mary specific, such interviews that William & Mary's Earl Gregg Swem Library conducted with gay alumni through the Stephens Project. The Stephens Project is named after Stephen Snell and Stephen E. Patrick, both of whom were active in the William & Mary Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association (WM GALA). The goal of the Stephens project is to collect oral history interviews from LGBTQ+ members of the William & Mary community. [4] Swem Library also maintains records from the Lesbian and Gay Union at William & Mary. Professor Emeritus George Greenia and alumni Stephen Snell collected Swem Library's sources on the William & Mary Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association. *The Flat Ha*t, the William & Mary student newspaper, contained a number of articles addressing topics about health, sexuality, and the gay and lesbian community. Other William & Mary specific sources are interviews the author conducted with Dr. George Greenia, who taught at William & Mary from 1982 to 2016 and with Dr. Leisa Meyer, who has taught at William & Mary since 1994. These William & Mary specific sources are supplemented by academic journal articles about AIDS on college campuses, which this paper treats as primary sources as they were published in the 1990s.

Who saves records and what records are saved are key issues in any historical research. Many of these records were collected and saved by white, gay men, so while this paper has a thorough view into their experiences, more research is needed to accurately represent the specific experiences with AIDS that transgender people had at William & Mary,

as well as the complexities that race and class would have played.[5] Most of these primary sources refer to what we now know as the LGBTQ+ or queer community as the gay and lesbian community and generally do not refer to transgender or gender non-conforming people. Due to this exclusion, this paper opts toward using the language that the sources use to stay aligned with the complicated historical specificity of the 1980s and 1990s, a historical specificity that included transphobia.

Student Activism

Lesbian and gay students connected community building with fighting against homophobia and AIDS stigma. William & Mary student groups communicated with other gay and lesbian groups at Virginia Tech, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Georgetown University.[6] The club at James Madison University contacted the William & Mary Lesbian and Gay Union (LGU) for advice and information.[7] In 1984 the advisor of the WM LGU invited JMU LGU members to their next dance.[8] The gay and lesbian group at Virginia Tech sent their club newsletter to William & Mary. Virginia Tech's newsletter mentioned news about lesbian and gay communities at colleges in Iowa, Illinois, Delaware.[9] Gay and lesbian college students were aware of activism on other campuses.

In fact, William & Mary's Lesbian and Gay Union was guaranteed funding because of activism that their neighbors at the Virginia Commonwealth University had done earlier. Students at VCU founded a Gay Alliance of Students in 1974 and were denied funding because it was a homosexual student organization.[10] With the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, they sued the Commonwealth of Virginia and won in 1976. The court decision mandated funding for "homosexual" student organizations on the basis of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. As this case was won in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit, the decision applied to colleges and

universities in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia.[11] This jurisdiction includes William & Mary. The effects of this case, as well as the communication and similarities between these lesbian and gay groups, suggest that colleges in the 1980s likely had similar experiences with homophobia as well as AIDS activism, emphasizing the representative quality of this William & Mary specific research.

Faculty member Dr. George Greenia founded William & Mary's Gay Student Support Group (GSSG) in 1982, when he arrived at William & Mary. The GSSG met on Monday evenings in a church basement. It provided a confidential space for gay and lesbian students, inviting them to discuss gender and relationships.[12] The GSSG was advertised in *The Flat Hat*, so students could find information about it if they needed.[13] The Lambda Alliance, a gay group, had existed at William & Mary in the late 1970s, but it had disintegrated by the time Dr. Greenia came to campus.[14] Andrew Emery '86 reported that while he was at William & Mary, homosexuality was a hidden topic on campus, making the existence of the GSSG a vital step for gay and lesbian community-building at William & Mary.[15] Emery acknowledged that while he only went to one GSSG meeting, his boyfriend was heavily involved and found going to the GSSG very helpful during his personal coming out process.[16]

Meanwhile, the Lesbian and Gay Union (LGU) was founded in 1984, two years after the GSSG started. Lasting until 1987, it provided a non-confidential but more open and social space of expression and community for gay and lesbian students. The LGU received funding from William & Mary in the fall of 1984, shortly after its founding. The LGU also looked to alumni for support when GALA was being formed in 1986.[17] Like the GSSG, the LGU was advised by Dr. George Greenia. While the GSSG was a confidential support group, the LGU sponsored a variety of events such as movies, dances, and public

lectures.[18] In 1985 the LGU reported that it had over thirty members and more showed up for dances, although Emery '86 remembered the first LGU-sponsored dance differently: "I think there were about eight people there [. . .] my heart was just racing walking into that room."[19] Although few people attended this dance, it was still an important step for the community.

These gay and lesbian groups gained enough awareness to warrant a front-page article in the student newspaper. An October 26, 1984 article in *The Flat Hat* announced the creation of the Lesbian and Gay Union with the headline "Support groups strive to meet needs of gay students."[20] This article was prominently displayed on the front page of the newspaper. Extensively quoting Dr. Greenia, the author discussed both the LGU and the GSSG. The article also quoted Dr. Jay Chambers, who worked with the Center of Psychological Services. The author importantly discussed how and why the LGU and the GSSG were founded, providing helpful information for both gay and straight students about why the support groups were needed and what the groups did.[21]

Both the GSSG and the LGU were involved in educational activism at William & Mary. In 1984 the LGU sponsored a talk from a professor in the School of Education about sexual health, while the GSSG brought a counselor to talk about healthy relationships.[22] In 1985 the LGU provided referrals to the AIDS Hotline for the Tidewater area and to the AIDS Housing & Education Fund in Norfolk.[23] That same year, the GSSG sponsored at least two doctors to speak on health issues at their meetings.[24] In Spring 1987, during their Gay Awareness Week, the LGU and Health Services, cosponsored "The AIDS Movie."[25] During the 1980s, the community-based LGU and GSSG performed important activism despite the negative stigma that existed around homosexuality and AIDS.

The WM LGU was active from 1984 to 1987, but in Fall 1987 it was replaced by the Alternatives.[26] The Alternatives was financially and

materially supported by the William & Mary Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association. In fact, a $200 donation from WM GALA in Fall 1987 allowed the Alternatives to sponsor a fundraising dance.[27] The Alternatives was an explicitly activist organization with the stated purpose of promoting "alternative lifestyle awareness and understanding throughout the campus community."[28] This activism included AIDS work, as the Alternatives wanted "to work with other campus organizations to raise the level of awareness on the issues of Aids [sic] and safer sex."[29] For the Alternatives, the gay community was intrinsically connected to activism, especially AIDS activism.

In line with these activist goals, over Valentine's Day in 1988, GALA helped the Alternatives hand out "Safer Sex" packets.[30] Other AIDS activism included an AIDS Benefit Dance and sending a letter to William & Mary's President Verkuil asking him to include sexual orientation in the William & Mary non-discrimination policy. In 1988 they were able to donate $400 to Tidewater AIDS Crisis Taskforce.[31] These actions during their first year are evidence of gay students' urgency to create a campus community for themselves and also to support AIDS activism outside of William & Mary. These were brave actions amidst the AIDS stigma and homophobia of the 1980s.

AIDS undeniably touched the William & Mary community on individual levels. Dr. Greenia explained that he knew some students and professors who had HIV, but that these people kept it very private, partly due to the stigma around it.[32] Dr. Meyer corroborated this statement, saying that she did not know of anyone who was public with their HIV status at William & Mary when she started teaching.[33] This understandable privacy explains why there are no prominent records about these students in Swem Special Collections. Moreover, all lesbian and gay students would have been affected by AIDS stigma. Dr. Greenia explained that during the AIDS crisis "if anybody talked about HIV, there was guilt by association," meaning that the gay and lesbian

community was implicated in discussions of AIDS and HIV.[34] Eric Peterson '95 echoed this statement, saying that both homosexuality and AIDS were considered "icky" while he was in college in the early 1990s.[35] The perceived "ick" of homosexuality and AIDS emphasizes the bravery and dedication of student activists.

By the 1990s the Alternatives were joined on campus by SAGE, or Straights and Gays for Equality, which was concerned with activism as well.[36] These two groups were in communication with each other and collaboratively organized events such as a vigil in 1993 to educate community members about hate crimes.[37] This vigil hosted speakers who spoke about campus issues such as rape, racism, and homophobia. During the 1990s the GSSG, SAGE, and the Alternatives were three active groups on the William & Mary campus that tried to meet the needs of the gay and lesbian community. In the early 2000s Dr. Meyer was the faculty advisor for a new student group, Wilma & Mary, which focused on creating safe spaces specifically for lesbians on campus.[38]

Many William & Mary students remained opposed to gay and lesbian students. When the LGU received school funding from William & Mary in 1984, some students responded with homophobia. Two students who were upset that the LGU received funding each published an article in *The Flat Hat* expressing their views. One of these students used Bible quotes to decry the use of school funds for the Lesbian and Gay Union.[39] This homophobia continued into the 1990s. In one 1993 *Flat Hat* article a student was quoted saying that she was "tired of all this campus homophobia [. . .] my life here has become virtually unbearable . . . you try living in a society that negates your lifestyle."[40] In a later oral history interview with Swem Library, Eric Peterson '95 confirmed that homophobia impacted his college experience, saying that he had not been out while he was at William & Mary.[41] Gay and lesbian students at William & Mary in the 1980s and 1990s confronted virulent homophobia.

Some students, however, voiced cautious approval of homosexuality and the LGU. After the two articles complaining about the LGU's school funding were published in *The Flat Hat*, the newspaper received so many letters to the editor that it could not print them all in one issue.[42] Of the letters *The Flat Hat* published, they all voiced support for the LGU's funding and lambasted the other students' homophobia. One response, typical in tone of these letters, explained the writer's support of the LGU:

> Homosexuals are not freaks, they are people with the same dreams and fears as you and me. Given, I find it difficult to completely understand and accept homosexuality, but isn't that part of the reason why these groups exist? Not to cater solely to homosexuals, but to answer any questions and to help educate all the members of the campus community, gay or straight.[43]

Another typical response reads:

> Homosexuals are not aliens from another planet. They should not be regarded as such simply because their sexual preference is different from yours. Very little is known about the causes or roots of homosexuality and we should not, out of ignorance or fear of the unknown, reject people who, in one aspect of their life, are different.[44]

While these students view gays and lesbians as "others" or "different," we still need to acknowledge their acceptance and support of the LGU, as seemingly reticent as it was. Interestingly none of the published responses mentioned AIDS, although in 1984, when these responses were published, AIDS had already been reported on in the media.[45] This lack of attention to AIDS in 1984 indicates that the broader campus community was not yet as cognizant or as fearful of the epidemic as they would be later in the 1980s.

Professor Activism

Professors, including Dr. Greenia and Dr. Meyer, devoted their own time and energy toward making William & Mary a safer space for students affected by AIDS. Dr. Meyer started teaching on campus in 1994, towards the end of the height of the AIDS crisis. She has taught classes on gender, sexuality, and women's history, including as chair of the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Department and later chair of the American Studies Department.[46] Dr. Greenia, who taught in the Modern Languages Department, was the faculty advisor to the LGU and the GSSG. The experiences of these two professors show that faculty played a central role in AIDS activism on campus by working with students, administrators, and alumni.

Dr. Greenia explained that he became involved in the student gay and lesbian community when he came to William & Mary in 1982 because he was openly gay and had previous training in the Catholic ministry.[47] This experience made it easier for Dr. Greenia to coordinate with William & Mary campus ministry to start the GSSG, which met in the basement of St. Bede's Church on Richmond Road.[48] In 1984 Dr. Greenia was the faculty advisor when the LGU was formed.[49]

Dr. Greenia's involvement in the gay and lesbian community proved vital when the AIDS crisis broke out in the early 1980s. In a 2021 interview with the author, Dr. Greenia described how he became involved in AIDS activism at William & Mary:

> And we got into the eighties and the crisis or the AIDS crisis blew up on us. I ended up one of the few people on campus willing to talk about HIV and AIDS in public forums. And, even our healthcare professionals were nervous about committing themselves. We didn't know that much. We were finding things out, but one of the early things we found out and with guidance from ACHA, ACHA, the American College Health, uh, Association,

> and they said our infection rates are probably running one per 500 students on every campus in America. And so the problem is that gives us, you know, a number of students on campus, one per 500, [for] 8,000 students, we're talking about 16 students or so, who don't know they're infected. And since it's an especially sexually active period in your life, if there's no telling, and because gay people, certainly in that period were very secretive about their sexual contacts. And because your dating pool is so small in a small town, it was a perfect storm.[50]

Dr. Greenia was one of the few people on campus "willing" to talk about AIDS. Health professionals and other college administrators should have discussed the AIDS crisis, as that is their job. Dr. Greenia partly associated this unwillingness to talk about AIDS to ignorance, saying "we didn't know that much."[51] He also confirms the stigma around the AIDS crisis by commenting that people "were nervous about committing themselves." Yet at the same time, Dr. Greenia acknowledged the urgency of the AIDS crisis and the urgency on a college campus of talking about AIDS. It is partly due to the failure of other people that Dr. Greenia felt "a moral obligation" to take on such an important campus role in addition to his other responsibilities as a professor and advisor to the LGU and the GSSG.

Dr. Greenia's role on campus was recognized by both supporters and opponents of his activism. In oral history interviews, both Emery '86 and Peterson '95 mentioned Dr. Greenia's presence on campus unprompted. Although neither Emery '86 nor Peterson '95 were heavily involved in AIDS activism or the gay community at William & Mary, they both knew of Dr. Greenia. In his interview Dr. Greenia said that students would go to him to come out as gay or talk about their HIV-positive status. He also mentioned that students with AIDS would sometimes visit

him when they came back to campus. Emotionally supporting vulnerable students on campus was one of the many responsibilities Dr. Greenia assumed.

The William & Mary administration reacted negatively to Dr. Greenia's campus involvement. Dr. Paul Verkuil was the president of William & Mary from 1985 until 1992, during crucial years of the AIDS crisis. After the founding of William & Mary Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association, Verkuil became upset with the actions of GALA and blamed Dr. Greenia:

> I got a phone call to come to the Brafferton, and suddenly I was sitting in a room with eight men, all men, of course, President Verkuil and his closest aides. And he's reading me out. And I thought at one point, you know, I'm the only guy in this room that he can't fire. Um, I had tenure and I thought that's what tenure is for, um, to protect those who were speaking out. But my job wasn't at risk fortunately.[52]

Dr. Greenia had created a strong enough reputation on campus that President Verkuil personally blamed him for the important activism GALA was doing. Dr. Greenia confirmed that when he arrived on campus, people told him to not be openly gay because it might affect his job and his chances of getting tenure. This concern that being openly gay could affect Dr. Greenia's job is a clear indicator of campus and societal homophobia during the early 1980s. Dr. Greenia's involvement with the William & Mary gay and lesbian community is especially notable because Dr. Greenia did not find President Verkuil supportive of the gay community or AIDS activism.

Verkuil and his staff's interest in the William & Mary image at the expense of any concerns about the lives of gay and lesbian students was evidenced in 1988 when they considered adding a sexual orientation

non-discrimination clause to the student handbook. WM GALA and the Alternatives had repeatedly sent letters to Verkuil demanding the inclusion of this non-discrimination clause.[53] In a memo to Verkuil, Assistant to the President Reginald Clark weighed the considerations of adding a non-discrimination clause:

> 1. Do we want to be the first state institution in Virginia to implement a sexual orientation clause in its non-discrimation statement?
> 2. If yes, it reaffirms our commitment not to discriminate against individuals. But on the other hand does it reaffirm a myth that the College is a 'haven for homosexuals'?[54]

While the non-discrimination clause in the student handbook changed in 1990 to include sexual orientation, the staff's earlier consideration of these changes were not about the moral or ethical value of protecting and acknowledging the equal humanity of the gay and lesbian students under the administration's purview, but rather about William & Mary's image.[55]

The administration did not explicitly protect different types of gender expression until 2014. This change also required extensive work by faculty through organizations such as the faculty assembly which had representatives from all the schools at the university. Dr. Meyer explained that the faculty assembly was responsible for many progressive changes at William & Mary; "The assembly year after year after year made a statement [that] LGBTQ issues needed to be incorporated and anti-discrimination language needed to be incorporated. Every year, from the mid-1990s onward."[56] This relentless work eventually paid off. On December 9, 2009 William & Mary's President Reveley connected anti-discrimination practices to gender expression in an unofficial public statement, though it was not until 2014 that gender expression and identity were more explicitly protected.[57]

As a public university, William & Mary maintains a delicate balance between what members of the university want and what the Virginia General Assembly mandates. Virginia is a "Dillon Rule" state rather than a "Home Rule" state, meaning that local governments have limited authority.[58] For example, from 2010 to 2014 Virginia had a conservative governor and a blatantly homophobic attorney general.[59] This affected the progressive change that the William & Mary administration could enact. Both Dr. Meyer and Dr. Greenia mentioned that the attitudes of Virginia's state government affected the official policies that William & Mary could enforce in regard to AIDS and queer rights.[60] Although immense roadblocks have slowed down change, members of the faculty have still worked in past decades to improve William & Mary. Faculty are involved in more than just classroom settings. They also have the power to create safer spaces for students to live, learn, and grow.

Alumni Activism

GALA, the William & Mary Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association, tried to help gay and lesbian students on the William & Mary campus; unfortunately they were often stymied in their efforts by campus administrators. GALA was founded by William & Mary alumni with support from the LGU.[61] Dr. Greenia explained that "there were gay alumns who were very concerned about protecting gay students on campus from HIV."[62] Dr. Greenia went on to add, "and this was a moment when gay alumns could make a serious contribution to the health and welfare of, um, gay people currently enrolled at William and Mary. And so they wanted to do AIDS education campaigns."[63] However, the administration was not supportive of GALA's goals. This pushback from the administration, fought by stubborn activism from GALA, is reflected in two specific measures: GALA's condom grams and the Richard Cornish Endowment Fund.[64]

As part of their effort to help students on campus and combat AIDS, GALA handed out condoms on campus despite explicit disapproval from the administration. In a February 1993 article in *The Flat Hat*, a brief notice titled "Condom Grams" was listed. The notice advertised that "Students can send two condoms to a friend as part of National Condom Week Feb. 14-19. Free condoms will be available in the Lobby of the Campus Center . . . ."[65] GALA funded this initiative, handing out the condoms with the help of Cynthia Burwell, who worked at Student Health.[66] The handouts contained pamphlets on how to use a condom. Another accompanying pamphlet specifically mentioned that "Second only to abstinence, correct use of condoms is the most effective way to prevent the transmission of STDS, including AIDS."[67] The pamphlet goes on to list AIDS death tolls, communicating the seriousness of AIDS and the urgency of condom usage.

Dr. Greenia confirmed that these condom grams upset the administration. Showing how humor and activism are often combined for effective attention grabbing, Dr. Greenia said that GALA threatened to hand out condoms with "Go Tribe, Come Tribe" written on them.[68] Though GALA did not end up going through with this campaign, they did send out green and gold condoms in 1988 which upset the administration.[69] Indeed, in the records of President Verkuil, one of Verkuil's staff sent him a memo in 1988 explaining his suggested media plan in reference to the condom grams. The staff member thought it best "to state only that this group [GALA] is not affiliated with Society of the Alumni or the College in any way."[70] The President's Office prioritized their image over the sexual health of William & Mary students. Meanwhile, even in the face of opposition, GALA handed out these condoms as part of its effort to help the campus community.

After GALA was founded, its members wanted to donate money directly to the university to continue their goal of supporting gay students at William & Mary. Dr. Greenia explained that William & Mary

University Advancement decided they would accept the donations, but they would not put the GALA name to a particular fund, which GALA would not accept.

> And in the beginning, University Advancement and the alumni society said, we'll take your money, but we can't attach your name. Excuse me, you know, the money comes with the name. So we shopped around campus until we found the right person. And that was, um, Nancy Marshall, who was a university librarian. And she says, of course, I'll take your money. And of course I will put your name on it. [. . .] So we started the Richard Cornish Fund.[71]

As Dr. Greenia explained, the Richard Cornish Fund was an endowment started in 1993 with $25,000 dollars that was raised in eleven months. It was, and still is, an endowed library fund to buy books on gender and sexuality for William & Mary.

The Endowment is named after Richard Cornish, who was the first known person in the New World to be hanged for sodomy.[72] He was hanged in 1624 in Jamestown, Virginia, just down the road from Williamsburg. Naming the fund after this man has powerful implications. It proves that gay people have always existed; they were not new to the 1990s. The name is also a reminder of the continued oppression of gay people. During the 1990s, people were no longer hanged for sodomy in the United States, but it was still criminalized in certain jurisdictions.[73] Further, the stigma associated with homosexuality, especially male homosexuality during the AIDS crisis, was prominent when the fund was created. GALA's creation of the Richard Cornish Fund was political, as reflected in the political implications of the name.

A 1993 article on the Richard Cornish Endowment in *The Flat Hat* provides insight into the fund and into the campus response to it. The headline of the article is "GALA presents endowment: Gay and lesbian

alumni give money, materials to Swem."[74] The article is on the ninth page of the newspaper, meaning it is not prominently placed for the reader to easily find. Its placement suggests that the newspaper editors thought other topics in that newspaper edition such as sorority recruitment, new professors, and Swem's renovation were more important or interesting to its student readers than the Richard Cornish Fund.

Although the article is hidden in *The Flat Hat*, its first paragraph suggests that in 1993 topics about homosexuality were still new and underrepresented within the campus community. The article starts with, " In today's politically correct society, William and Mary is discovering that there are more sides to cultural and historical issues than black and white."[75] Nancy Marshall, the university librarian, is quoted in the article saying that "'Currently Swem's collection of books, periodicals and pamphlets [. . .] with gay and lesbian issues is not as large as it should be."[76] Before the creation of the Richard Cornish Fund, William & Mary was not dedicated to buying resources on gay and lesbian topics. In the article Jennifer Armentrout, the vice-president of the gay group The Alternatives, snidely commented that the collection of gay and lesbian books at Swem was "not as good as the dog collection" referencing that in 1993 Swem Library had about 9,000 volumes about dogs.[77] The article further explained that William & Mary currently only had one course devoted to homosexuality, which was in the English Department. As this article demonstrates, when the Richard Cornish Fund was created, issues about homosexuality were still being introduced to members of the often resistant campus community.

In the second paragraph of this *Flat Hat* article, the author introduces GALA and the Richard Cornish Endowment. Again, gay alumni dedication to the fund is clear not only in the amount raised, but also through material donations. Stephen Snell, a member of GALA and chair of the Richard Cornish Fund, said in the article that "'more than one

quarter of GALA's membership donated money or materials.'"[78] As Dr. Greenia explained, gay alumni continued their dedication to the campus community despite administration pushback. They wanted to improve the situation of gay students on campus, no matter the obstacles or stigma in their way. The resistance of the administration, as well as broader societal stigma about homosexuality, makes GALA's dedication to the campus even more impressive.

The Richard Cornish Endowment continues today, underscoring its tangible, lasting impact on the campus community. According to the GALA website, the endowment size, which started at $25,000 in 1993, doubled to $50,000 a few years later. A later fundraising campaign brought the endowment to $100,000 in October 2006.[79] Gay and lesbian alumni were not only dedicated to improving the school in the 1980s and 1990s but also continued to be dedicated to the community over the next decades.

President Verkuil was vociferously opposed to GALA during this period. In a letter that Stephen Snell, chairperson of GALA, sent to Verkuil, Snell expressed his concern about Verkuil's belief that GALA was "dividing" the William & Mary community.[80] Correspondence in 1987 between the Assistant to the President, James Kelly, and a concerned party show that the President's Office was anxious about the media profile WM GALA was creating. In response to an article published about WM GALA in a Norfolk newspaper, a Roland Hall, who seems to have been an alum, wrote:

> I am deeply troubled by the enclosed, which apparently appeared in Norfolk during October. In our lifetimes we have witnessed enormous changes in moral values and life styles. Probably we will see a lot more changes as we move in the 90's and beyond. Most alumni probably consider themselves to be tolerant of life styles which are quite different from their own. But, if the news clipping is

> reasonably accurate, the college policy goes beyond tolerance. Many new problems can arise if our college gains a widespread image as a haven for misfits. We can lose desirable students. We can lose alumni support, financial and otherwise. In any case, the problem is a ticklish one.[81]

To Hall, GALA created a "ticklish" problem because GALA was raising awareness about homosexuality during a period when homosexuality was not tolerated; Hall was worried that this would reflect negatively on the college. This fear was affirmed by James Kelly's response to Hall that he could "certainly understand [Hall's] unhappiness with the article [. . .] these individuals have not been supported in any way."[82] Not only was WM GALA "not supported in any way" by William & Mary, but Verkuil actively worked against them.

Verkuil was so concerned with the profile that GALA was gaining that he wanted to sue them with the goal of making them stop using the William & Mary name. Verkuil contacted the Virginia Attorney General's Office in 1988, inquiring if he could reasonably sue GALA. Paul J. Forch, the Senior Assistant to the Attorney General, thought that WM GALA's use of the school's name would be protected under the First Amendment, so he did not advise pursuit of the case.[83] Again, President Verkuil proved that he was more concerned with William & Mary's image than supporting the actions of WM GALA, which as described, included educating William & Mary students about sexual health. Verkuil and his staff were not just apathetic to gay men and lesbians, they also actively worked against the lesbian and gay community during the AIDS crisis when the members of the community were already dying due to neglect. Especially considering the power and connections Verkuil had as the president of William & Mary, his adversity to the gay community was unequivocaly harmful.

Administrator Activism

Although the top members of the administration, such as President Verkuil and his staff, pushed back on activist efforts, there were other non-faculty members of the school who actively helped and supported AIDS work on campus. Sam Sadler, the Dean of Student Affairs, was one of these important supporters in the administration. In fact, in 1987 Sam Sadler, as well as Dr. Greenia, received Certificates of Appreciation from WM GALA.[84] Of all the people on campus, Dr. Greenia and Sadler were the ones chosen for this honor, emphasizing the important role they both played for the gay community. Dr. Greenia spoke highly of the work that Sadler did for the gay and lesbian campus community, including helping to revise the 1990 student handbook to include non-discrimination clauses for gay and lesbian students.[85]

Sadler worked directly with Dr. Greenia to spread AIDS awareness on campus as early as 1985. In a letter that Dr. Greenia sent to Sadler in 1985, Dr. Greenia thanked Sadler for confirming "that planning is going on concerning the AIDS crisis and that steps are being formulated for when we have to face an AIDS case here on campus."[86] In the rest of the letter, Dr. Greenia listed other measures he was organizing to spread AIDS awareness, including inviting a doctor to speak at the GSSG, showing a movie about AIDS, and inviting AIDS task forces to campus. [87] Sam Sadler was an influential person in the campus administration who used his power to do AIDS work.

Cynthia Burwell was the student health coordinator with Student Health Services at William & Mary starting in 1987.[88] As the student health coordinator, Burwell's dedication to campus health is clear in other sexual education work she did on campus. She helped hand out condoms with WM GALA in 1993. That same year, notices advertising "Peer Health Educators" appeared in *The Flat Hat.* While this notice does not specifically mention AIDS or homosexuality, it does list "Facts

and Referrals on Sexuality" as a potential group to join. The By-Laws of Facts and Referrals on Sexuality listed their Statement of Purpose as "To provide objective, value-free informational "Bare Facts" presentations on sexual anatomy, contraceptive methods, values clarification, homosexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, and area resources to all residence halls."[89] From this statement of purpose mentioning both homosexuality and sexually transmitted diseases, we can safely assume that Facts and Referrals on Sexuality contained information about AIDS.

Burwell engaged in other ways to spread information about AIDS. In the spring of 1993 posters advocating for AIDS awareness were created for William & Mary.[90] These posters by "The Iguana Group" told students to wear a condom to protect themselves from HIV. Although there are few records about The Iguana Group beyond its mention on these posters, it appears to have been a group created by Cynthia Burwell with Student Health Services.[91] On the poster, two people, one of whom was Cynthia Burwell, were listed to call for additional information about AIDS and HIV.[92] While it is difficult to estimate the effect that Burwell's work had on the campus community, at the very least, it shows that the Health Center and Cynthia Burwell cared about sexual health and wanted to get students involved in their sex education.

Academic journal articles from the 1990s suggest that AIDS education at William & Mary followed the trend of schools nationally. As these academic articles show, William & Mary is likely representative of many discussions and trends that were happening elsewhere. These articles include "Mosquitoes, Doorknobs, and Sneezing: Relationships Between Homophobia and AIDS Mythology Among College Students" by Rebecca J. Welch Cline and Sarah J. Johnson, published in 1992. The major finding of this article is that the more homophobic students were, the less knowleadgeable they were about AIDS transmission. More homophobic students were more likely to believe transmission myths, such as the myth that one could get HIV

from a mosquito. This trend must have been important for campus health educators such as Cynthia Burwell to consider. Further the wealth of academic articles with similar themes suggest that in the early 1990s, AIDS education on college campuses was gaining more attention from academic researchers in disciplines such as public health. Similarly, William & Mary Student Health started committing more resources to AIDS education in the early 1990s.

Conclusion

At William & Mary individual actors worked diligently through the 1980s and the 1990s to combat both homophobia and AIDS. All levels of the campus got involved, from students to members of the administration such as Sam Sadler. It is difficult to measure the direct effects of their important efforts. We do not know if the condoms that GALA handed out helped at least one person avoid HIV. Did Cynthia Burwell's posters encourage more awareness about HIV? How many research projects or individual interests have been supplemented by resources from the Richard Cornish Endowment? The value of the support that professors like Dr. Greenia and Dr. Meyer offered their students cannot be quantified.

Many people are still involved in the same fights that students, professors, alumni, and administrators were involved in at William & Mary during the 1980s and 1990s. States like Florida have banned talking about LGBTQ+ related topics in schools, and many other school districts are banning books they see as divisive. When a public school in Virginia Beach, an hour from Williamsburg, has recently banned books about gender expression, what examples can people today take from history at William & Mary? Change at William & Mary happened in conjunction with broader change in the United States, but it also occurred due to grassroots organizing efforts by community members who refused to stand by during critical political moments. At William &

Mary effective resistance came in multiple formats depending on the positionality of the people involved. Emotional support is resistance. Being openly queer is resistance. Finding and creating community is resistance. Monetary support is resistance. Handing out green and gold condoms is resistance.

William & Mary's current community proves the effectiveness of activism in the face of what might seem like insurmountable odds. In 1984 there were thirty students in the LGU; at the time of writing there were 209 members in a Lambda Alliance group chat and 858 members of a William & Mary Facebook group called "Swampy Memes for LGBTQ+ Teens."[93] There is a whole department dedicated to the study of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies and multiple openly queer professors. As of 2018, William & Mary students can attend Lavender Graduation, a ceremony specifically for queer students.[94] Members of William & Mary's Board of Visitors attended the 2022 Lavender Graduation, a notable step forward from the administration's views of openly queer alumni in the 1980s.

Important work continues to be done for the queer community. A Trans Locker provides clothing for transgender and gender non-conforming students, and there is a recent pilot program allowing students to change their name on student identification cards without a legal name change, which is a vital step for transgender students.[95] Despite the best efforts of opponents such as President Verkuil, and despite the fact that there is always more activism to be done, William & Mary is in many ways now a "haven for homosexuals."

Endnotes

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[17] Lesbian and Gay Union Records.
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[29] William and Mary GALA Records.

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Introduction[1]

The Tulsa race massacre of 1921 is perhaps the single most brutal outbreak of racial violence in the history of the United States. The massacre provides a concrete event to study the implicit racial biases within the ostensibly egalitarian political views of the time. In this article, I analyze issues of radical newspapers from the summer of 1921 to sketch out the ways in which race subtly differentiated nominally similar worldviews on the American Left. Immediate reactions to the Tulsa race massacre display how black and white radicals explained racial violence and reveal the complex and diverse relationships towards race among left-wing groups during this transitional period.

The fractious political landscape of 1921 provides a fruitful opportunity for study because ideological differences within the revolutionary left approached a high mark at that time. In 1921, the United States' left wings were each claiming a distinct identity for themselves, often with the practical nuances of their ideologies' race planks left implicit. In this article, I will attempt to draw out the racial lenses at work in organizations that professed support for racial equality and supported sweeping political agendas in the name of complete equality. Generally, both black and white radicals agree on the economic basis of the riot and express a sense of general inevitability of racial violence as long as capitalism continues to exist. They diverge, however, when Black writers humanize the victims of the riot, not reducing them to powerless subjects of economic forces.

The historical record of the Tulsa race massacre has always been contested, but the following is a summary of the generally agreed-upon sequence of events. On May 31, 1921, Tulsa authorities arrested Dick Rowland, a Black man, for allegedly assaulting Sarah Page,

a white elevator operator. Accounts allege that Rowland stumbled upon exiting the elevator, accidentally taking hold of Page's arm as he fell. Page exclaimed in surprise, causing an immediate fervor in the vicinity. Despite Page never alleging assault, the Tulsan press printed sensationalized stories of the incident that afternoon, leading to a mob gathering outside the courthouse with the intention to lynch Rowland. That evening, a group of twenty-five armed Black Tulsans gathered to resist the mob of 300 whites. An altercation ensued and warfare broke out; Rowland's defenders were forced to retreat to Greenwood, a predominantly Black neighborhood of the city. The white mob continued to riot, burn, and loot in Greenwood throughout the night and into the early morning of June 1. There is record of private airplanes firebombing the neighborhood and the white mob frustrating firefighting efforts. State guardsmen arrived in Tulsa that morning, and martial law was officially declared at 11:30 AM. [2]

At best, the city and state authorities acted as neutral onlookers, but at worst they directly assisted the white mob. By supplying arms and deputizing vigilantes, the authorities in effect multiplied the size of their force by several degrees of magnitude. After the massacre, thousands of Greenwood inhabitants fled the city; residents who remained were subsequently placed in temporary internment camps. The municipal government and insurance companies offered less-than-meager compensation for the loss of life and property, and the city offered no legal recourse for the victims. The death toll was initially reported at thirty-six, including ten white and twenty-six Black casualties, though mystery still surrounds the official death toll. In 1993, a state commission increased the official estimate to 300 casualties. In addition to the egregious death toll, there were hundreds of serious injuries and thirty-five Greenwood blocks burned, with an estimated property destruction worth $1.8 million in 1921, nearly $24 million when adjusted for inflation [3].

After 1921, the massacre promptly faded from official memory as white Tulsan authorities purposefully swept it under the rug. Accordingly, there were no substantial attempts to craft a historical account of the Tulsa race massacre until the 1970s [4]. In the last half-century, historians have attempted to place the Tulsa race massacre in the context of the larger socio-historical forces present in the city at the time. Tulsa was a rapidly growing Western oil town and attracted African-American migrants from across the South pursuing a sense of community and an escape from racism. The city itself was segregated, with much of the Black working population employed by white-owned businesses. Greenwood, a neighborhood in North Tulsa separated from the rest of the city by the Frisco train tracks, was an enclave for the working-class Black population. In Greenwood, the Black middle class established a successful business district, sometimes called a "Black Wall Street." Despite its citizens being relatively marginalized, Greenwood was a self-sufficient community with its own social structure and vibrant culture [5].

Sociologist Joe Feagin coined the term "racial frame" to refer to an overarching racialized worldview that encompasses a broad range of ideologies and narratives embedded in individuals and institutions that dictate how individuals process and organize information. Importantly, these racial frames go beyond easily recognized prejudice, bias, and stereotypes, often comprising a more implicit form [6]. Racial frames were at play not only in the massacre itself, but also in those who attempted to make political sense of the event in its immediate aftermath.

Chris Messer, a historian of the Tulsa race massacre, applies an "integrated" theory of mob violence that explains the massacre by synthesizing a variety of macro- and micro-level structural, cultural, and contextual factors that are mediated by "racial frames" and are precipitated by a "triggering event" in a "conflictual arena" [7]. In other words, there were wider factors at play—segregation, racism,

Southern lynch culture, rapidly shifting city demographics, white envy at the rise of a Black business class—that manifested as mob violence in a particular space and time when set off by certain discrete events, namely the inflammatory allegations of assault levied at Dick Rowland. For the most part, contemporaneous articles in leftist publications make sense of the massacre by analyzing it as a product of social and economic structures and therefore analyze the massacre on Messer's terms, even if it is an inchoate attempt to do so.

The Tulsa race massacre provides a discrete, galvanizing event to test how leftist actors truly thought about race outside of the theoretical realm. Tulsa is considered one of the most deadly single outbreaks of racial violence in the history of the post-emancipation United States. The sheer barbarity and scale of the Tulsa massacre makes it unlike other types of routine racial violence that occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century. Using digitized periodicals from the period, this paper constructs a model for leftists' conceptualizations of the Tulsa massacre according to the racial frames present among the left in the summer of 1921. Four prominent radical left-wing magazines and newspapers lie at the heart of this investigation: *The Toiler*, the Cleveland organ of the Communist Labor Party; *The Liberator*, a Greenwich Village-based monthly magazine; and *The Messenger* and *The Crusader*, Black monthly magazines based in Harlem. Together they provide a glimpse into the array of left-wing opinions surrounding Tulsa.

There are racial as well as political divides between Black- and white-edited publications. In 1921, intense political differences existed within the organized left, especially between self-described Socialists and Communists [8]. This paper labels these publications with the term "radical" not because their contributors would appreciate being grouped with each other—quite the contrary—but instead based on some general criteria. The editors of radical publications understand capitalism to be the base of workers' suffering, stand for a drastic and immediate change in

the ownership of the means of production in a more democratic direction, consciously combat alienation under capitalism, embrace class struggle and outright revolution as means of liberation, and enshrine racial and gender equality into their political ethos, at least nominally.

Further, there is little evidence of a true difference in racial worldview between socialists and communists in 1921. When the communists split from the socialists in 1919, it was not on account of disagreement about race [9]. Many socialist platforms included the cliché of organizing against capitalism "without regard to race, or color, or sectional lines." While superficially antiracist, this colorblind approach often allowed white radicals to effectively neglect race in their organizing efforts, which was typical among white radicals of the era [10]. White radicals had spent decades organizing in a world with profound racial biases which were absorbed into their organizational politics.

Radical authors utilized racial frames when writing on the Tulsa race massacre. White writers either kept silent on the Tulsa massacre or wrote in ways that flattened Black Tulsans as purely the victims of racial oppression and capitalist exploitation. In contrast, Black-led publications humanized Black Tulsans by depicting them as active resistors. Each of these publications argues that racial violence is significantly linked to an economic basis and that certain economic factors caused the massacre. Articles from the summer of 1921 cited economic factors such as competition between Black and white working classes stemming from the precariousness and depressed wages, the white bourgeois spreading racial hatred in order to further their own class interests, envy towards the financial success of the Black business district, and Black families settling on prime oil lands. In essence, both Black and white radicals explained the riot in terms of class struggle. These analyses of the causes of the massacre are quite advanced for their time and stand in contrast with most white commentators at the time who embraced the lens that the "riot" occurred due to "Negro insurrection" or vice in

the Greenwood community [11]. Modern historians have also attempted to explain the massacre in the context of underlying factors, including economic ones, but few would go so far as to blame capitalism by name [12].

The White Press

A portion of the white radical press simply ignored the Tulsa massacre. Limited or zero coverage of Tulsa was found in several white publications that generally cover national news, such as *The Socialist World, Good Morning, The Industrial Pioneer,* and *The Workers' Council*. This does not necessarily imply willful racial bias on the part of these publications, and there are a variety of factors that may explain their negligence. However, the omission still indicates the presence of a racial frame employed by white publishers. White publications could afford to ignore the Tulsa massacre if they presumed it did not involve themselves, their interests, or their readership. This may show institutional biases of the organizations, as well as biases within the white left itself [13].

The Toiler is indicative of the white communist reaction to Tulsa. The newspaper is a four-page broadsheet weekly of the Communist Labor Party, an offshoot of the Communist Party formed by an all-white convention two years earlier [14]. The Tulsa massacre made front-page news in the *Toiler* in the June 11, 1921 edition with the headline "Civil War in Tulsa, Okla.: Orgy of Crime Leaves Scores Dead and Hundreds of Burned Homes" [15]. The short column begins:

> America's weekly race riot between American born Negroes and American and foreign born whites was carried off on schedule time but on a considerable [*sic*] larger scale and with more elaborate trimmings than usual last week. The moving finger of American race war moves in planless fashion now South, now North, now East, now West, leaving behind in letters of blood

> the story of a cultivated race prejudice which was born in the days when whites held blacks in slavery; and which has been fanned into burning conflagrations by the sinister teachings of white capitalist class civilization. Last week that finger stopped in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

This column has no author listed, but it is a reasonable guess to assume that it was written by James P. Cannon, who took over as editor of the newspaper from Elmer T. Allison in 1920 [16]. The author's cynicism may stem from living through the race riots of 1919, the "Red Summer," in which racial violence swept dozens of cities, most famously Chicago, Washington, and Elaine, Arkansas. The author is defeatist, hinting that he believes the racial riots to be predetermined under the capitalistic system, hence the term "weekly" and the use of the metaphor of a "planless" finger visiting American cities. The author argues that all racial violence, from slavery up to Tulsa, serves the class interest of "white capitalists." Placing the Tulsan massacre within the context of slavery is an impressive articulation for its time because it shows that the author writes from an understanding of race as a structural system of economic and social power.

The author goes on to describe the scale of loss: "Nearly a hundred dead, 7,000 homeless, 10 blocks of burned Negro homes, a property loss of a million and a half dollars; these with a population debauched by crime, fear, and hate stand out as the results of a race war that is becoming more chronic with each passing year." Despite depicting a scale of damage greater than almost anything printed in the mainstream press, these figures turned out to be far less than the actual casualties [17]. The *Toiler* writer displays a seemingly genuine sadness for the loss of life and property and a sympathy for the victims, but framing the loss as almost strictly material does not describe the way in which Black Tulsans resisted the mob or came to the defense of Dick Rowland [18].

The column concludes:

> Now Tulsa is seeking to regain its 'prestige' by a grand jury investigation, rebuilding the destroyed Negro homes and otherwise cleansing its moral and physical countenance. But the dead—are dead. Now the finger will move on to fresh killings.

The author probably meant to implore the *Toiler*'s readership to resist Tulsan elites' inauthentic attempt to sweep the violence under the rug. "The dead—are dead" asks the reader to dwell on the lives lost rather than accept the gesture of presumed deflection, but the author's statement also diminishes the potential meaning gained through community rebuilding efforts, many of which were led by the Red Cross and Greenwood inhabitants themselves [19].

In the following issue, June 18, *Toiler* published a more detailed article regarding Tulsa, this time on the "Economic Basis of the Tulsa Riot," written by E.T. Allison [20]. Allison argues that the Tulsa massacre "did not 'just happen,'" but can be attributed to the economic base:

> The entire "civilization" of the far greater portion of this country was at that time based and grounded upon the slavery of the Negro. To understand the early period of this country's development one must not fail to reckon with the foundation upon which its economic, civil, and moral superstructure was built—chattel slavery.
>
> Ten million inhabitants of a country, even of the extent of the United States, bound together by ties of race, historical development, and similarity of economic and social status, cannot be readily divorced from any calculation of social forces of that country. And it would be entirely erroneous to attempt such on the basis of the larger freedom granted the Negro since the Civil War. His changed relation to his masters and to the white

> society is an almost fictitious one, especially in the South where his greatest numbers still live and labor. The Negro race is linked up with unbreakable bonds (economic) with the white civilization. The labor of these millions is still peremptorily necessary in the realm of King Cotton and even in various basic industries of the North.

Allison's analysis is essentially a Marxist materialist one. The argument that the bonds of slavery were not abolished, but shifted forms from chattel to wage slavery, because the exploitative relationship between capitalist and worker has not changed. The use of the term "superstructure" to describe social and moral institutions in the context of capitalism hints that Allison was probably well-read in Marx. Allison is also clear that the agrarian economy of the South is not uniquely backward, but integrated within the economy of the North, also hints at Marxist economic theory: it is not that the South alone needs to be reformed, but that the entire economy needs to be changed. Allison connects white capitalist society's "conspiracy against the Negro" to Europe's pogroms against the Jews, writing that "the causes are the same, as are, too, the results." Any African-American "who attempts to raise himself and family into a higher plane of life and social position is always damned and often doomed by the white society which dominates the country," and anything that will keep down African-Americans and "keep him there as dirt beneath the feet of his masters is good in the eyes of white civilization" [21]. To Allison, it is competition between the powerful white and small black business sectors that caused the riot, in addition to tension between white and black workers for wages and security.

Allison's analysis goes much further to rationalize the Tulsa massacre than the first *Toiler* article, but it still does not attribute any agency to those living through the violence. Allison seems to assume that the Tulsa

massacre being caused by the capitalist economic base in no way means that there is no action which people may take to address racial violence. The *Toiler* articles, even if sympathetic to Black Tulsans' loss, reduces them to unavoidable victims of the socio-economic system. In the minds of the *Toiler* writers, nothing may be done to address racial violence short of the complete eradication of capitalism. Theoretically, the organ of the militant Communist Labor Party should be concerned with the agency of working-class people defending themselves against the brutality of a violent state, but this does not appear in the *Toiler* in reference to Black Tulsa [22]. A plausible explanation for the omission is that *Toiler* writers, despite their sympathy for Black Tulsans' loss and apparent commitment to eradicating racism, do not view the Black working class as the primary subjects of revolutionary action [23].

The *Toiler*'s reduction of race violence to socio-economic forces may serve as a defense mechanism, distancing the white authors from the white community responsible for the violence. If the *Toiler* authors place racial violence only in the context of class analysis, they may avoid confronting the uncomfortable premise that there may be something about whiteness itself that allowed the massacre to occur, even if the ultimate causes were economic in nature. Whiteness is something that the *Toiler* authors share with the looters and murderers of Tulsa, and drawing attention only to the economic basis of the massacre may be an attempt to circumvent the authors' participation and complicity in white supremacist structures and to alleviate white guilt.

It would be deterministic in its own right to assume that white editors were incapable of publishing race-conscious articles about Tulsa. The *Liberator* comprises a sort of middle ground between the *Toiler*'s class reductionism and Messenger's and Crusader's creation of a black political identity. The *Liberator*'s column "Tulsa—Oklahoma," appearing in the July 1921 issue, comes down as hard on the lawless "white mob," the Tulsa press's "screaming headlines," and the "lax"

municipal authorities as any other article we have seen thus far [24]. Further, the article speaks to the importance of Black Tulsans to the "economic and industrial life" of the city and defends Black Tulsans' "organiz[ing] for defense." Although the *Liberator* is a predominantly white publication, the author of the article (whose race is undetermined) quotes Roscoe Dunjoe, the editor of the Oklahoma City-based *Black Dispatch*, when explaining the causes of the massacre [25]. Dunjoe's inclusion shows that the magazine, at least as an informal practice, integrated Black journalists into the creation of the magazine. Claude McKay, a famous literary figure of the Harlem Renaissance, is also listed among the four main editors of this issue [26]. The result is that Black Tulsans have a greater depth of narrative in the magazine's version of what happened in the Tulsa massacre even though it is predominantly white.

The Black Press

The Messenger and *The Crusader* show two sides of radical Harlem in 1921. *The Messenger*, published by Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph, frequently allied with Socialist principles and figures. Owen and Randolph both escaped the South and earned college degrees before settling in Harlem and producing the *Messenger*. *The Crusader* was an organ of the African Blood Brotherhood, (ABB) an underground Black liberation organization with an anti-imperialist bent founded by Cyril Briggs, a Caribbean-American immigrant. The ABB allied itself with the Communist Party in the early 1920s [27]. Both *Messenger* and *Crusader* stood for the creation of a modern, politically conscious Black identity centered around Harlem, but they straddle the line between allies and as competitors. *Crusader* shared many of the *Messenger*'s targets—Garveyism, accommodationist thinking of older Black leaders, and the politico-economic system at large—but did not necessarily concur on *Messenger*'s chosen political means. Advertisements for *Crusader* subscriptions appear in the *Messenger* from May-June 1919 to

April-May 1920, indicating friendliness between the two magazines, but those advertisements inconspicuously drop off around 1920, perhaps indicating effort by Randolph and Owen to distance themselves from the ABB [28].

The *Messenger*, billing itself as "the only magazine of scientific radicalism in the world published by negroes," saw socialism through a Black lens and saw Blackness through a socialist lens. The *Messenger* editors place class solidarity above race solidarity in their unique articulation of the economic basis of the massacre:

> There are no race riots between capitalists. Only the workers fight each other because of race. While the workers fight, the bosses harvest the fruit of labor's toil. […] Only upon the realization that all workers, black or white, Jew or Gentile, native or foreign, have nothing to gain, but all to lose, through race wars, will they drop their daggers and join hands against their common enemy—white and black exploiters [29].

"Capitalists," those owning capital, have no need to fight along racial lines because of the privilege of being capitalists. Workers, on the other hand, resolve the insecurity stemming from their class position by embracing racism. The *Messenger* sees racism and capitalism as structural and interrelated forces, and thus an organized political opposition must respond to both.

Similar to E.T. Allison's argument of the "economic basis" of the Tulsa massacre, Chandler Owen places the Tulsa massacre within the context of Tulsa's "unique situation—a complete division between Negro and white capital and between Negro and white labor" [30]. The point of divergence, however, is that the Messenger editors humanize Black Tulsans by emphasizing their agency to resist, and by connecting their struggle to a novel, emphatic identity of the "New Negro."

For instance, Owen's narrative of Tulsa places the reader among the tense crowd outside the Tulsa Courthouse:

> The whole atmosphere is charged. The scene is pregnant with excitement. On the faces of the whites can be seen that dogged and tenacious Anglo-Saxon determination to have its own sweet way. […] Shifting our view, we next watch the Negro countenances. Fearless of sonsequences *[sic]* their eyes show an heroic fatalism, the kind of expression which emanates from knowledge of almost certain death in the performance of inevitable duty from which, however, one has no desire to escape [31].

Unlike the *Toiler* articles, Owen gives human form to both the perpetrators and the resistors of the massacre. According to Owen's narrative, Black Tulsans began chanting lines from Claude McKay's famous poem "If We Must Die." McKay, a well-known poet of the Harlem Renaissance and a friend of Owen and Chandler, composed the poem two summers earlier during the Red Summer of 1919 [32]. The poem's first stanza goes:

> If we must die, let it not be like hogs
> Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
> While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
> Making their mock at our accursed lot.
> If we must die, oh, let us nobly die,
> So that our precious blood may not be shed
> In vain; then even the monsters we defy
> Shall be constrained to honor us, though dead! [33]

It is questionable whether those in Tulsa would know the words of McKay's poem. Besides Owen's, the author could find no other record of the Black crowd chanting this poem. Regardless, its inclusion sheds light on the ways in which Messenger creates a narrative that gives

Black Tulsans an active role in creating meaning through their suffering. McKay's poem sanctifies the struggle from the Black perspective; by fighting with honor, bravery, and conviction, Black Americans can ensure that their losses are not "in vain."

Owen's narrative depicts a relatively equal battle between white and nonwhite forces. When a Black person is about to be harassed by a police officer, he "indignantly shoves" him away. When the firing starts, "Negroes shot back," "take the offensive," "retreat," and "make a stand." Owen's language, regardless of its fidelity with the events, constructs a narrative of struggle that is manifestly different from the *Toiler* articles. Owen continues:

> Outnumbered seven to one, opposed by the police force, harassed by aeroplanes, dropping bombs on them—the Negroes, though battling heroically, are forced to yield. …Their homes are gone. Their loved ones are dead. Gloom encircles their firesides. They see a dank and cavernous future. The glowing embers are but the only evidence of the charred and blackened ruins of their modest homes, secured and built through a life of toil. "The human mind naturally shrinks from the perpetration of a palpable evil." So Tulsa reflected, decided to raise the money and rebuild the Negro homes. Here was one gleam of justice and of joy [34].

In Owen's narrative, Black Tulsa did as much as was within its power to resist the mob violence. They were forced to yield only due to the unmatchable ferocity of their opponents, not the weakness of their spirit. They mourn the loss of homes and family members while still strengthening spirits through the act of repairing their community, creating a moment of hope. What the *Toiler* writer described as dishonest and opportunistic image-cleansing, *Messenger* calls "a gleam of justice and of joy."

Owen powerfully concludes that in the face of being "[l]ashed by the fury of mobs, tormented by poverty, crushed by proscription and domination, weighted down by wanton narrowing of opportunity, […] the new Negro has that perseverance and determination which will secure for him the final triumph over race prejudice—even in America!" [35]. The phrase "New Negro" was popularized during the Harlem Renaissance, partially from the article by Owen and Randolph "The New Negro—What is He?" which appeared in *Messenger* in August 1920 [36]. This "New Negro" was a novel Black political identity which stood for "political, economic, and social" equality through an integrationist, yet militant, approach. In the political realm, it is full enfranchisement and representation by rejecting bourgeois party politics, opting instead for worker parties. In the economic realm, the "New Negro" seeks "full product of his toil" as a worker by joining or creating race-conscious unions [37]. In the social realm, he seeks "absolute and unequivocal" justice through education and self-defense [38]. Owen and Randolph articulated the "New Negro" in contrast to Marcus Garvey's separatist "Back to Africa" approach and Booker T. Washington's assimilationist approach, both of whom the *Messenger* attacked viciously. The "New Negro" movement is more or less what the Harlem Renaissance called itself at the time, and identified by the explicit "principles of racial uplift, race consciousness, self-determination, and even self-defense" [39].

Chandler Owen applies the "New Negro" archetype to his telling of the events:

> Then, too, … could be seen the fine intellectual specimen of Negro manhood, success and social triump, [*sic*] is the constant butt of attack from the whites because it is a competitor. Again, it has to carry the burdens of the race on its back because it is more conscious of proscriptions, forsees [*sic*] more clearly the wanton narrowing of opportunity, and, pricked with a

> thousand civilized desires, growing more intense and extensive, feels most keenly the burden of being *black things* in America. We study this type even more. Their faces are inexpressibly sad. They are recognized as the leaders; they are looked up to by the others; upon them is the responsibility for advice, for guidance. The force is at hand always, but this group must supply light, leadership, and information. […] Verily it is the New Negro who "has arrived with a stiffened back-bone, dauntless manhood, defiant eye, steady hand, and a will of iron" [40].

Owen depicts the "New Negro" as hyper-aware of the social and economic positions and serving as a pillar of his community in order to bring about change, the "writing on the wall for alleged white superiority in America." The "New Negro" is sober about the opportunities available for advancement and acceptance in society, and uses that awareness to actively pursue change through leadership and will. The "New Negro" is the figure that Chandler and Owen see themselves as and who they hope their readers will become. In placing the "New Negro" at Tulsa, Owen links his own political worldview with Tulsa and advocates for the usefulness of the "New Negro" model to combat white supremacy [41].

The *Crusader*'s comments on the Tulsa massacre are quite similar to *Messenger*'s in that they humanize both sides of the Tulsa race riot and tie the riot to an economic base. The *Crusader* had direct ties to the ABB, both of which were founded by Cyril V. Briggs [42]. The mainstream press circulated rumors that the Tulsa branch of the ABB was responsible for the riot, an allegation that the *Crusader* deflected by writing that "self-defence is certainly no crime in Negro eyes, and is left for the white Oklahoma authorities to prove. For ourselves, we neither deny it nor affirm it" [43]. Parallels are sure to be noted between Chandler Owen's narrative and that of an unnamed "Commander" of the

Tulsa post of the African Blood Brotherhood, writing in the July 1921 *Crusader*:

> When the white mob formed around the court house where Dick Rowland was confined, with the avowed purpose of lynching the Negro prisoner, a brutal challenge was thrown right into the face of the Negro population of Tulsa. And Tulsa Negroes took up the gage! A body of twenty-five colored men moved to the court house [*sic*] to protect Rowland and to uphold "law and order" [44].

Black Tulsans "taking up the gage" in the face of the "brutal challenge" emphasizes the community's ability to defend itself when attacked. Self-defense was crucial to the philosophy of the ABB, a self-described "peace-loving but protective organization of red-blooded Negroes" [45]. The ABB saw itself as using self-defense righteously to uphold "law and order," a phrase that the author certainly used with full knowledge of its irony towards the situation. Self-defense is also an explicit component of Chandler and Owen's "New Negro", but the ABB leader articulates self-defense in more extreme terms in regard to Tulsa in the July 1921 *Crusader*:

> The Negro fighters early took up good positions inside and behind railroad cars, and in hastily dug trenches, etc., etc., and were under cover most of the time. The whites, on the contrary, were attacking in the open and in idiotic mass formation until the little steel bullets sent tripping on their errand of death by determined Negro hands decided them that killing Negroes wasn't such a pleasant and easy job after all. They sought cover later, and did not dare to come against the Negro lines until the appearance of the militia put new courage into them. In the meantime, however, many scores of them were sent on the long journey [46].

The language the author chooses reveals a good deal about how he thinks about Black self-defense. The act of defending through killing is emphatic in this article. The objective of self-defense is to create a situation where aggressors do "not dare to come against the Negro lines." Similar to Owen's account, it is only the military superiority of combined white forces, not a lack of Black resolve, that led to whites being able to advance. "Determined Negro hands" on their weapons, making fortifications and taking "good positions" form the basis of a war narrative. Where Chandler Owen emphasizes the moral and intellectual icon of the "New Negro," the ABB leader emphasizes the defensive components of "New Negro" resolve in militaristic terms. There is not necessarily a clean distinction between the two and the writers' difference is more a matter of form than of substance, but the writers' divergent interpretations of what a "New Negro" is can be attributed to their differing politics. While *Messenger* pursued a path of respectable intellectualism, while *Crusader* was building the ABB.

The ABB Commander goes beyond humanizing the Tulsa victims, instead sanctifying them, writing: "Certainly, the Negro heroes who fought to the death at Tulsa, in defence [*sic*] of Negro honor and manhood and the helpless women and children behind the lines, have gained Valhalla and have been recognized fit inmates for whatever Paradise exists upon the other side" [47]. To the Tulsa post leader, who was likely in proximity to the Tulsa massacre, it is "the defence [*sic*] of Negro honor" that brings one blessings in the afterlife. There was indeed cosmological significance to defending one's community.

Conclusion

Newspapers signal to their audiences which historical facts are important and what meaning should be drawn from any particular assemblage of facts. For this reason, newspapers indicate internal realities of their writers as well as their readership. Each of the selected

writers observed the events of the Tulsa race massacre through the context of their distinct ideologies. It is not incidental that each of these writers also found the same set of events to conveniently reaffirm their own previously-held political sensibilities. For the *Toiler*, the Tulsa massacre displayed the brutality of racial capitalism. For the Black-led magazines, it demonstrated that and the enhancement of a radical Black identity. For the *Messenger*, that identity is characterized by the "New Negro" persona, while for *Crusader*, that identity is characterized by armed resistance on the terms of the African Blood Brotherhood. Racial lenses, in addition to political ideology, both served as primary vessels of meaning-creation in the immediate aftermath of the massacre.

A comprehensive account of the Tulsa race massacre must include a look at the creation of historical memory at the national scale. These radical writers never saw the Tulsa race massacre as an isolated, local event, but an event of national political importance with deeper social and economic causes. Critiquing leftists' contemporaneous signification of the Tulsa race massacre allows the reader to see the world of 1921 through the writers' eyes, but qualified by an additional century of historical perspective. Additionally, this critique adds nuance to historical discussions on the legacy of race and racism, radical organizing, and the Tulsa race massacre itself.

Endnotes

[1] Special thanks to Professor Jasper Conner for his guidance with this research.

[2]Chris M. Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3-8.

[3] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy*, 3-8.

[4] Joshua D. Mackey, "Breaking a Century of Silence: A Historiography of the Tulsa Race Riot," *Fairmount Folio: Journal of History* 19 (May 13, 2019), https://journals.wichita.edu/index.php/ff/article/view/228.

[5] James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (Houghton Mifflin, 2002). 41-45.

[6] Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013).

[7] Chris M. Messer, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 4 (2011): 1217–32.

[8] Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2007). The details of the internal conflicts on the left are beyond the purview of this paper. Palmer provides a comprehensive account of the history of the left and would add context to this analysis.

[9] Philip S. Foner, "1919: the Red Summer, the Red Scare, and the Split in the Socialist Party," in *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 288-311.

[10] Foner, "The Socialist Party and Black Americans, 1901-1904," in *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II*, 94-127.

[11] Chris M. Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot: Crafting a Legacy*, 13-14, 70.
[12] Chris M. Messer, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 4 (2011): 1217–32; Joshua D. Mackey, "Breaking a Century of Silence: A Historiography of the Tulsa Race Riot," *Fairmount Folio: Journal of History* 19 (May 13, 2019); James S. Hirsch, R*iot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (Houghton Mifflin, 2002).
[13] Philip S. Foner, "1919: the Red Summer, the Red Scare, and the Split in the Socialist Party," in *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 288-311.
[14] Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 305.
[15]"Civil War in Tulsa, Okla. .: Orgy of Crime Leaves Scores Dead and Hundreds of Burned Homes," *Toiler*, June 11, 1921, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88078683/.
[16] Ohio Historical Society, "About the Toiler (Cleveland, Ohio) 1919-1922," Chronicling America, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/item/sn88078683/.
[17] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy*, 1-9.
[18] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy*, 4-6.
[19] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy*, 7-8.
[20] E.T. Allison, "The Economic Basis of the Tulsa Riot," *The Toiler*, June 18, 1921, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88078683/.
[21] E.T. Allison, "The Economic Basis of the Tulsa Riot," *The Toiler*, June 18, 1921, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88078683/.
[22] Philip S. Foner, "1919: the Red Summer, the Red Scare, and the Split in the Socialist Party," in *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 288-311.

[23] Jasper Conner (William & Mary Ph.D. Candidate in History) in discussion with the author, April 29, 2022.
[24] "Tulsa—Oklahoma," *The Liberator*, July 1921, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/culture/pubs/liberator/.
[25] "Tulsa—Oklahoma," *The Liberator*, July 1921, 26, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/culture/pubs/liberator/.
[26] *The Liberator*, July 1921, 7.
[27] Fred Carroll, "Enter the 'New Crowd' Journalists" in *Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 41-66, https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctt1ws7w6f.5.
[28] Carroll, *Race News*, 46-51.
[29] "Labor's Race Relation Commissions," *The Messenger*, July 1921, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056822.
[30] Chandler Owen, "Tulsa," *The Messenger*, July 1921, 218, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056822.
[31] Chandler Owen, "Tulsa," *The Messenger*, July 1921, 218, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056822.
[32] Baldwin, *Escape from New York*, 62.
[33] Claude McKay, "If We Must Die," quoted in Owen, "Tulsa," T*he Messenger*, July 1921, 218.
[34] Owen, "Tulsa."
[35] Owen, "Tulsa," *The Messenger*, July 1921, 220.
[36] Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph, "The New Negro—What is He?," *The Messenger*, 73-74, August 1920, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056822.
[37] Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph, "The New Negro—What is He?," *The Messenger*, 73, August 1920, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056822.

[38] Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph, "The New Negro—What is He?," *The Messenger*, 73-74, August 1920, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056822.
[39] Davarian L. Baldwin, "Introduction: New Negroes Forging a New World," in *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1–27.
[40] Owen, "Tulsa," 219.
[41] It should be noted that both *Messenger*'s and *Crusader*'s versions of the "New Negro" were identities exclusive to men.
[42] Carroll, *Race News*, 47-48.
[43] Commander of the Tulsa Post of the African Blood Brotherhood [pseud.], "The Tulsa Riot," *The Crusader*, July 1921, 6, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/crusader/index.htm.
[44] Commander of the Tulsa Post of the African Blood Brotherhood [pseud.], "The Tulsa Riot," *The Crusader*, July 1921, 5.
[45] Cyril V. Briggs, "The Tulsa Riot and the African Blood Brotherhood," *The Crusader*, July 1921, 11.
[46] Commander of the Tulsa Post of the African Blood Brotherhood [pseud.], "The Tulsa Riot," *The Crusader*, July 1921, 5-6.
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The Eaton Affair:
The Role of Washington Society in Early Antebellum Politics

"The dissensions and quarrels of the Jackson party among themselves are developing with astonishing rapidity, the rank corruption and baseness of which that party is composed … It seems to use that, from henceforth, no honest, patriotic man, can allow himself to be considered a friend of Jacksonism." – New England Weekly Review, April 18, 1831

In 1831, John Henry Eaton resigned his post as Secretary of War. Days later, he published a pamphlet titled *Candid Appeal to the American Public, in reply to Messrs., Ingahm, Branch, and Berrien, on the Dissolution of the Late Cabinet*, in which he responded to the two years of scandal and outrage surrounding him and his wife. "To [the American public] it must appear ridiculous, that statesmen and Cabinet counsellors have thought it necessary to disturb them with matters so trifling," Secretary Eaton wrote, "but even these have been rendered of some importance, as developing the motives of men, and accounting for events of higher importance." [1]

The Eaton Affair, or Petticoat Affair, as it is often called, was the scandal and political fallout stemming from the appointment of John Eaton to Andrew Jackson's cabinet and his marriage to Margaret Eaton in 1828. For two years, it eclipsed all other matters within Washington D.C. It was the topic of conversation at every gattinger—social and political, public and private, male and female. Every major newspaper discussed and debated it, both in and outside of D.C. In his autobiography, President Martin Van Buren described the affair as "in no proper sense political" and "kept alive by the bitterest character…a plague to social intercourse, destructive in my instances of private friendship, deranging public business and for a season, at least, disparaging the character of the government."

As this quote from Van Buren reflects, one should be hesitant to dismiss the story of Margaret Eaton's time in Washington as an insignificant battle between women over the rules of elite society. The "Eaton-imbroglio," as Van buren termed it, brought down an entire cabinet, instigating a vice-presidential resignation for the first time in American history. [2]

Historians often understand the Eaton Affair as two simultaneous, often conflicting battles which imploded in ways few could expect. There was the politically motivated battle between cabinet officials, each trying to secure their power in a post-Jackson political landscape. Historian Kristen Wood described the actions of the cabinet officials involved as pursuing "their political goals by taking sides on the question of Margaret Eaton's sexual behavior." [3] Then there was the battle between women, rooted in contrasting understandings of virtue, class and society. These women, cognizant of the changing Washington society, were eager to use their social capital to save whatever little political power they had. This was the battle that shaped and intensified the Eaton Affair and its legacy; as Charleen Boyer Lewis explained, "Washington women wielded their social power so effectively that the executive branch simply failed to function." [4]

The group of women that spearheaded the snubbing of Margret Eaton, and thus the dissolution of the Jackson cabinet, are often described as a monolith—all members of the same elite Washington society. Most current scholarship fails to differentiate between the women involved, suggesting that their actions can be understood as a collective group with no individual ambitions or rationales. For many of the women, like the wives of Cabinet members Samuel Ingham, John Branch and John Berrien, the Eaton Affair marks their primary, if only, point of significance in political history. However, this group consisted of a diverse collection of women with a variety of perspectives, anxieties, and motivations.

Some had been in DC since the days of Jefferson and Madison and were friends with the likes of Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams. Others were new to the world of Washington, far removed from the political culture of the revolutionary era and early republic. This essay will look at two of these women—Margaret Bayard Smith and Emily Tennesee Donelson—in order to better understand the complicated and nuanced role of Washington society in early Antebellum politics. Their lives and writings reflect the significant ways in which Washington society changed during the first two years of the Jackson administration. The Eaton Affair shaped the way that society functioned internally and, therefore, how it influenced politics. For some women, these changes stripped them of their influence entirely; for other women, their roles and power were transformed but not depleted.

The Eaton Affair, 1828-1831

Margaret Eaton, born Maraget O'Neale, was the daughter of the owner of the Franklin House—a popular D.C. hotel in the early 19th century. She grew up surrounded by some of the most prominent figures in American politics and Washington society, including future senators, secretaries, and presidents. When she was seventeen years old, she married John Timberlake, a purser in the U.S. Navy. Twelve years later, Timberlake died while serving overseas; soon after, she married then-Senator and family friend, John Henry Eaton. The Eatons' marriage only heightened the gossip and rumors that had surrounded Margaret Eaton for years. She had garnered a reputation among elite Washington women that was indisputably negative. Historian John Marszalek argued that she "seemed to threaten proper womanhood." Proper womanhood, thus, was "to exemplify submissiveness, piety, purity, and domesticity." These are all traits that Margaret Eaton did not represent. It was her close relationships, and alleged affairs, with prominent and powerful men

that made her not only threatening to elite women, but also to high society at large. [5]

When Andrew Jackson announced his selections for cabinet positions, it was John Eaton's appointment to the War Department that amassed the most attention and criticism. Members of Jackson's own party urged him not to nominate Eaton, foreseeing the political and societal pushback that would ensue. Jackson, however, was adamant in his decision. Eaton was one of Jackson's oldest friends and closest advisors, and he would be a prominent member of any Jackson administration. After Jackson's inauguration, the women of Washington made a concerted effort to ignore and exclude Margaret Eaton in every instance. The wives of cabinet officials and politicians declined to return Eaton's courtesy calls and snubbed her at all social events she attended. They understood her to be a woman of low morale—someone who they, and their husbands, should stay away from, in the interest of preserving their own honor and the purity of Washington society.

The actions of these women only reinforced Jackson's determination to publicly support the Eatons. Frustrated, he once asked a fellow politician, "do you suppose that I have been sent here by the people to consult the ladies of Washington as to the proper persons to compose my cabinet?" Jackson's defense of John and Margaret Eaton was not only rooted in friendship with the couple, both of whom he considered family, but was also reflective of his general hatred for elite society, from which he had long been excluded. Unlike most early presidents, Jackson was raised with little formal education and no ties to the upper reaches of American politics. His meteoric rise to power has often been attributed to a changing electorate; Jackson's image as a populist candidate ended up being his strength, leading him to the White House, but it was also used against him in political battles. During the 1828 presidential campaign, supporters of John Quincy Adams ruthlessly attacked Jackson's own marriage to Rachel Donelson Jackson. Like the Eatons, many accused

the Jacksons of engaging in an adulterous affair prior to their marriage. Rachel Jackson died shortly before the inauguration, and it has been widely speculated that her death was related to the stress and constant scrutiny she endured throughout the campaign. Jackson saw the obvious parallels between the treatment of Margaret Eaton and his own wife, making him more inclined to defend the Eatons. He saw "attacks on Eaton not only as proxy political attacks on himself, but as grim reminders of the smears he and Rachel had suffered from political enemies" throughout the 1828 campaign. [6]

The social snubbing of Margaret Eaton quickly evolved into a political battle, creating a clear dividing line within Jackson's cabinet. The anti-Eaton faction was led by Vice President John C. Calhoun and his wife, Floride Calhoun. Calhoun had been Vice President in the Quincy Adams administration and, despite his differences with Jackson, had agreed to remain in this role. These political differences heightened during the Eaton Affair. Floride Calhoun is often depicted as the leader of the petticoat war and the architect of the societal humiliation of Margaret Eaton. The Calhouns' social circle included prominent politicians and journalists, including Margarety Bayard Smith and her husband Samuel Harrison Smith. The pro-Eaton faction was led by Jackson himself, along with then-Secretary of State Martin Van Buren. Van Buren, like Calhoun, was considered a possible successor to Jackson, who had stated that he only intended to remain in the role of president for one term. Much of the public discourse at the time, including newspaper coverage and communication between politicians, avoided discussing the actions and motivations of the women involved. Instead, they talked about the affair as a battle for succession between Calhoun and Van Buren. It was as though the actions of these women were directed by, and in service of, the men of Washington.

Margaret Bayard Smith and Emily Donelson were both members of the anti-Eaton faction, despite their differences. Margaret Bayard Smith

was an author and socialite, a member of Washington society since the days of Jefferson and Madison. Her letters, published years later by her nephew in a book titled *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, offer a view of a changing Washington. In it, she writes candidly about the Eatons' marriage and the Jackson cabinet, making obvious her personal interest in the treatment of Margaret Eaton by the Washington society of which she had long been a leader. Emily Donelson was the niece of Andrew Jackson; throughout the Eaton Affair, she filled the role of White House hostess and First Lady. Like her uncle, Donelson was new to the world of Washington, with few social ties or connections to the rest of society. She went against the wishes and interests of President Jackson, however, choosing instead to side with women like Floride Calhoun and Bayard Smith. For Donelson, the Eaton Affair cost her the position of White House hostess, the very role that had given her real social capital and prominence for the first time.

There are two sources that are vital to understanding the motives and anxieties of these two women. The first, previously mentioned, is *First Forty Years*, Bayard Smith's collections of writings and letters. The second is Pauline Wilcox Burke's *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*. Written by Donelson's granddaughter in 1941, the collection contains an abundance of private correspondence, writings, and family documents. Burke's account is the only published biography of Donelson. Both sources offer unparalleled, first-hand access to the inner workings of Washington society in the early republic and Antebellum era. They also, however, are limited to the perspectives of Bayard Smith and Donelson, respectively. This bias is crucial, especially when using their works as the foundation of an argument about Washington society as a whole.

Margaret Bayard Smith and the *First Forty Years of Washington Society*

Few people had the sort of perspective and understanding of the world of Washington D.C. in the early republic as Margaret Bayard Smith. She moved to Washington in 1800, shortly after her marriage to Samuel Harrison Smith, the editor of the *National Intelligencer*. The Smiths were brought to Washington under the patronage of Thomas Jefferson. Smith was a staunch Jeffersonian-Republican and Jefferson, newly elected, wanted an editor and newspaper that would support him throughout his presidency. Bayard Smith garnered social and political capital of her own through her extensive writings about the world into which she had entered. As her husband's newspaper grew in prominence and power, the couple became leaders of the Washington elite.

Bayard Smith's early writings reflect an absolute admiration of Jefferson as well as James and Dolley Madison, whom Bayard Smith remained close with throughout her time in Washington. In 1834, she published a biographical account of her friend and First Lady, Dolley Madison, for *The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans*. Bayard Smith's writing provides insight into not just Washington society, but into the struggles and complexities of early American politics. Historian Catherine Allgor explained, "as Margaret Bayard Smith evolved into a political animal, she also provided minute descriptions of a young governmental system struggling to make the political theory of republicanism into a working reality." Proximity to power allowed Bayard Smith to write about Washington and American politics not simply as an observer, but as a participant. She understood exactly how society functioned because she was involved in its founding. [7]

In 1829, Bayard Smith attended Andrew Jackson's inauguration. In the weeks leading up to the new administration, she observed several changes in society. On February 25th, she wrote to her husband: "I never witnessed such a dullness, nay gloom as that which pervades society. The party, who are withdrawing from office, sick and melancholy, will

not mix in society." Bayard Smith shared in the gloom and grief of the outgoing administration; she had long and close relationships with several of them, namely Secretary of State Henry Clay. On the topic of the incoming cabinet, she wrote: "I can only say the President's enemies are delighted and his friends grieved." This sentiment echoed how most anti-Jackson newspapers reacted to his cabinet. For Bayard Smith, these initial observations reflect a general skepticism and distrust of Andrew Jackson. They also reflect the larger cultural shift that accompanied the Jackson administration. Jeff Smith wrote, "Andrew Jackson's was the first presidency not rooted in either the founding generation of the eastern aristocracy—and this, like any displaced elite, was included to confuse its own loss of influence with the collapse of the social order." Bayard Smith's own apprehensions about the Jackson administration were directly related to the confusion of the "displaced elite." She no longer had the type of ties and relationships to those in power that she once did. This, above all else, comes through as a serious concern throughout her early 1829 musings and observations. [8]

Bayard Smith's infamous description of Jackson's inauguration further amplifies her anxieties about the changing nature of Washington. She wrote, "the majesty of the people had disappeared, and a rabble, a mob, of boys, negros, women, children, scrambling, fighting, romping. What a pity, what a pity!" The sights she saw at the Capitol—the people and their behavior—were far removed from the Washington she had come to know in her thirty years there. In her book, Parlor Politics, Allgor argues that, much to the dismay of Washington elite like Bayard Smith, "Andrew Jackson had brought democracy to the capitol," in the form of the "mob" at the inauguration and the inclusion of Eaton into the administration. While elite women like Bayard Smith could do little to deter the incursion of a new class into Washington, they could reject Margaret Eaton into their own social classes and circles. [9]

Bayard Smith's role in the Eaton Affair is unique in that neither she nor her husband had any tangible or professional stake in the outcome. Her husband was not a member of the Jackson administration, and his political future was not tied to that of John C. Calhoun nor Martin Van Buren. Despite this, Bayard Smith had a significant amount of capital to lose that was comparable to that of the elected officials who risked their careers and professional alliances.

Throughout her tenure in Washington, Bayard Smith's social capital was inextricably linked to her husband's professional power. As Allgor recounts, "she would prove to be a savvy political player, and later, when Samuel [Harrison Smith] fell out of favor with the Madison and Monroe White Houses, she would obtain jobs for him through her personal friendships with the ladies." While women were denied a role in the direct politicking of the early republic, their social relationships were immensely important to their husbands' professional lives. Bayard Smith capitalized on her social status to help her husband gain political prominence. This was not uncommon in early Washington society, as *First Forty Years* demonstrates. The Eaton Affair was, in many ways, a continuation of this tradition. Elite women believed that by excluding Margaret Eaton socially, John Eaton would lose his political position. While their actions certainly disrupted politics, they failed to bring down Eaton nor Jackson. [10]

In the spring of 1829, Bayard Smith wrote to her sister, Anna Maria Bayard Boyd, updating her on the "new lady" in Washington: "a stand, a *noble* stand, I may say, since it is taken against power and favoritism, has been made by the ladies of Washington, and not even the President's wishes, in favor of his dearest, personal friend, can influence them to violate the respect due to virtue, by visiting one, who has left her strait and narrow path." This is Bayard Smith's first mention of "virtue," which quickly became the heart of the debate of Margaret Eaton. Her comments also suggest a frustration with Jackson's "favoritism" and

close friendship with the Eatons. She criticizes the same type of preferential treatment that she once received from Jefferson, Madison, Clay and others. This contradiction is difficult to reconcile in Bayard Smith's writings but reveals her true anxieties about the changing dynamics of political power. It was not the people in power that concerned her, but rather their distance from and disinterest in the society that she understood and led. [11]

For the two years that the Eaton Affair dominated politics and the news, Bayard Smith wrote incessantly about Margaret Eaton and her relationships with those in power. She continually returned to the question of virtue and immorality, making an argument about Margaret Eaton's personal threat to Washington society. In 1831, she wrote: "I am very sorry that she committed herself, for the question in society is not so much about Mrs. E., as the principle, whether vice shall be countenanced. And she has placed herself in the sad predicament of acting in the affirmative to this important question." [12]

Bayard Smith retreated from Washington a few years after the dissolution of the cabinet. She wrote in 1831, "my ambition is, I think, conquered. I have philosophized myself out of its enthralling power. The shifting scenes I have gazed on for thirty years have convinced me of the emptiness and vanity, and unsatisfactory nature of the honors and pleasures." The personal change Bayard Smith identified in this comment—from a city that she viewed with "enthralling power" to one filled with "emptiness and vanity"—parallels a larger, societal change that she identifies throughout *First Forty Years*, concluding with the Eaton Affair. Her position as a long-standing member of the Washington elite no longer garnered the type of political power that it once had in the days of Jefferson and Madison. Without this influence, she felt "emptiness" in the city that had been her home for thirty years. [13]

First Forty Years fuels the argument that, following the Eaton Affair, Washington elite society lost its influence on the policies and politics of

the country. However, it is also an autobiographical account of Bayard Smith, shaped by her personal relationships and anxieties. For Bayard Smith, this loss of power was likely an accurate way to understand her motives during the Eaton Affair. However, Bayard Smith was in a unique position. She came into the Jackson administration with a notable amount of social and political power, but quickly after his election, began to lose it. It cannot, therefore, be taken on its own to explain how Washington society, in whole, changed during this period. Few of the women involved came into the Eaton Affair with the type of influence in society as Bayard Smith, and few lost as much.

Emily Donelson and The Eaton Affair Within the White House

Emily Tennessee Donelson was just twenty-one years old when she became White House hostess. Her husband, Andrew Jackson Donelson, was President Jackson's private secretary and a member of the so-called kitchen cabinet, "an informal group of advisers who maintained great influence over the President, particularly on matters of party and patronage." Jackson, a man distant from his family and an outsider in the world of Washington, relied on the young couple both personally and professionally. After their marriage, Andrew and Emily Donelson lived at the Hermitage, Jackson's Tennessee plantation. He treated the Donelsons as if they were his own children, which he never had. When Rachel Jackson died shortly after the election, Emily was the obvious choice to fill the role of First Lady. Unlike Bayard Smith, Jackson's inauguration marked the beginning of Donelson's long and complicated tenure in Washington society. [14]

It is significant that Emily Donelson and Andrew Jackson had vastly different upbringings and education experiences. Donelson was raised "in the heart of frontier aristocracy," with more of a formal education than most women of the day. Though she was still far removed from the world of Washington society that she entered in 1829, Donelson had a

greater understanding of and respect for such a world than her uncle. Jon Meacham, in *American Lion*, argued, "Emily began her life in national society in a curiously contradictory position. She owed her access to the grandeur of the White House to her family's connection to Andrew Jackson, but it was precisely that which somewhat embarrassed her." [15]

Whereas Donelson quickly adapted to her new surroundings, Jackson was famously hostile towards the elite class of Washingtonians. He often criticized his political enemies as being elitist, aristocratic, and anti-democratic. The feeling was mutual: "if this was to be the age of the common man, they were determined to show that this man, at least, was far too common." [16]

The Eaton Affair rapidly engulfed Donelson's time as White House hostess. Shortly after the inauguration, Donelson wrote to her sister, "the ladies here with one voice have determined not to visit [Margaret Eaton]. To please uncle, when we first came here we returned her call, she then talked of her intimacy with our family, and I have been so much disgusted with what I have seen of her that I shall not visit her again." These initial ruminations and observations mark the beginning of Donelson's involvement in the Eaton Affair; they also mark the beginning of the two-year tension between herself and Margaret Eaton. This tension was complicated by Jackson's close relationship with both John and Margaret Eaton, a relationship that Donelson likely felt envious of and threatened by. There were rumors, for example, that Jackson planned to ask Eaton to step in as White House hostess after Rachel Jackson died instead of Donelson. As she became more integrated into elite society, Donelson's public and private attitude toward Margaret Eaton took on more significance. [17]

The language that Donelson used when discussing Margaret Eaton is strikingly similar to that of Bayard Smith. Donelson maintained that her issue with Margaret Eaton had to do with virtue, character, and

personality, much like Bayard Smith. Martin Van Buren, in his autobiography, recalled a conversation with Donelson in which she "spoke of [Eaton] possessing a bad temper and meddlesome disposition". Van Buren assumed Donelson had come under the undue influence of the older women in Washington. John Eaton made a similar argument in the letters he sent directly to Donelson. "You are young and uninformed of the ways and of the malice and insincerity of the world," Eaton wrote. "These people care nothing about you. They are eternally haunting your house, and bringing you tales and rules, only that your uncle is in power, and they hope to give themselves consequence through the smiles they may pick up in your doors." [18]

The ways in which Van Buren and Eaton spoke to and wrote about Donelson reflect a much larger theme among the pro-Eaton faction. Van Buren and Eaton, along with Jackson, had a very specific, patriarchal view of the role of women in society. They understood it to be their job as men, even more so for Jackson and Eaton as southern men, to protect women, speak for them, and be "chivalrous protectors of female virtue array against self-interested connivers." Eaton, in writing to Donelson, assumed that he was saving her from the deception and control of women like Margaret Bayard Smith. Historian Mark Cheathem, writing about the motives of Donelson, explained that these men had "competing views of what constituted honorable conduct" and what made for a "true republican and southern gentleman." Jackson "demanded absolute acquiescence to his patriarchal authority, even from Emily." Donelson, in contrast, believed it was his duty to protect his family's honor; this meant listening to his wife, "whom he believed had authority in the social sphere." [19]

There were other significant distinctions between the pro- and anti-Eaton factions, which complicated Donelson's role even more. Kristen Wood argues that "the most prominent of Margaret Eaton's detractors came from families whose social pre-eminence was unquestioned." This

connection between class and virtue, according to Wood, shows that "morality—in general and women's moral agency in particular—constituted an inseparable element of social rank." [20] Donelson did not come from a family with the sort of social or monetary superiority that Bayard Smith, or other cabinet wives, had. Historians like March Cheathem have suggested that, in associating with the anti-Eaton women and using similar language of virtue and immorality, Donelson was attempting to secure a place in elite society into which she otherwise would not have been welcomed. In many ways, this reading of Donelson's motives is in line with Van Buren's and Eaton's–that she was a "young, impressionable, headstrong woman" who was "intent on fitting in with those more knowledgeable." [21]

While it is likely that Donelson was, in part, influenced by Bayard Smith and motivated by a desire to maintain a place in elite society, she also had significant agency and personal ambitions that played a role. Donelson has been described both by historians and people that knew her as stubborn, independent, and smart. She was also ambitious, constantly thinking about and planning for her husband's political future. She understood that her husband's political life was intimately tied to Jackson's, and that Jackson planned to only stay in Washington for one term. Therefore, it follows that Donelson would have looked to make connections and alliances with politicians and families other than her own. Bayard Smith offered an example of how important patronage and societal relationships were to political power in the early republic. Washington elite, Donelson included, incorrectly assumed that this pattern would continue into the Jackson-era. "When Jackson's own friends and supporters snubbed Margaret Eaton, their actions suggested that women's moral scruples should take precedence over men's political alliances in shaping Washington's social interactions." Despite the historical precedence, this assumption would prove to be incorrect in the case of the Eaton Affair. [22]

In the summer of 1830, tensions between Emily Donelson and Margaret Eaton reached a high; the Eatons declined an invitation to dine at the White House on account of the Donelson's "open hostility" and being "unwelcoming." In turn, Jackson invited the Eatons to join his family on a trip back to Tennessee, angering and embarrassing the Donelsons to the point that they refused to stay with the group. When Jackson and the Eatons returned to Washington, Emily Donelson stayed in Tennessee, temporarily relinquishing her role as White House hostess. [23]

Whereas Bayard Smith became disenchanted with Washington toward the end of the Eaton Affair, Donelson had the opposite reaction. In November, she wrote to her husband, urging him to stay in Washington and remain loyal to Jackson. She saw the same change in Washington occurring that Bayard Smith identified, but understood that it could work to her advantage. On the topic of her return, she wrote: "I would be willing were I to return to the city, to visit Mrs. E. sometime officially, this I do not think would be inconsistent as I have done it before." This concession that Donelson made, to visit Eaton "officially," was intimately related to her desire to have her husband succeed in politics. She agreed to return because she was concerned her husband might leave. It is reflective of her newfound understanding of how power and politics worked in Jacksonian-America. Proximity to power, through blood or proven loyalty, was much more important than a place in elite society, especially as elite society was quickly losing its allure and dominance. In July of 1831, Donelson returned to Washington. She once again took up the mantle of White House hostess, remaining in the role until her health began to deteriorate in 1834. [24]

Donelson, unlike Bayard Smith, was able to adapt to a changing Washington and its new expectations for women. Upon her return, her role within the White House fell more in line with Jackson's understanding of patriarchal republicanism and southern domesticity.

There are several possible explanations for Donelson's change in behavior after 1831. Allgor argues that Donelson "had spent no significant time in the city and thus had not availed [herself] of Washington's peculiar situation." Therefore, the transition of power into the private sphere was less jarring than it would have been to Bayard Smith. Donelson was also raised in the heart of the south; the new expectations for women in Washington were comparable to the traditional role of women on southern plantations. [25]

Donelson did not lose all her political power as a consequence of the Eaton Affair. This is an important distinction between her and Bayard Smith. She was able to return, and retain a certain level of respect and power; this was due to her familial relationship with Jackson and not, notably, due to her wealth or place in society. As Allgor writes, "the new vernacular gentility focused on family and valued propriety over public dignity, respectability over eminence, and private standards over political expediency." Patronage in the new Washington was rooted in family and loyalty, not in wealth, elitism, and aristocracy. Donelson still had power in this new society, Bayard Smith did not. [26]

The Battle to Succeed Jackson

The political battle over who would succeed Jackson is equally as important as the battle over the laws of Washington society in the legacy of the Eaton Affair. In December of 1831, the *Daily National Journal* published an article titled "The Van Buren Plot to Gain the Succession." The article makes no mention of Margaret Eaton, or any of the women involved in the dissolution of the Jackson cabinet. Instead, as the title suggests, it focuses on the "ulterior position" of Van Buren. The article reads, "It had for its object an event wholly subversive of the rights and liberties of the American people; and totally destructive of the spirit and intent of the Federal Constitution—that object was to secure to Andrew Jackson, the power to appoint his successor to the presidential chair." [27]

A similar argument was made within the pro-Eaton faction, instead pointing to John C. Calhoun as the one conspiring to gain succession. *Candid Appeal*, Eaton made the argument that the actions of Calhoun (along with Secretaries Ingham, Branch and Berrien) were motivated entirely by political ambition. He wrote, "their plan was that General Jackson should be president but for four years, and that Mr. Calhoun should succeed him…two of my colleagues, if not the third, were in on the secret, and using the influence and importance which office gave them and their families, to promote and further their grand design." [28]

The men of Washington deemed it a political battle from the start. Jacksonians had attributed the criticisms of Rachel Jackson in the 1828 election to his opponents' desire to keep control of the White House. At the start of the scandal, Jackson incorrectly assumed that the exclusion of Margaret Eaton was provoked by Henry Clay, one of Jackson's main political rivals. This assumption highlights contrast between the ways in which the men of Washington talked about the Eaton Affair and the ways in which women of Washington acted. The pro-Eaton faction neglected to talk about the role of women in amplifying the affair because they believed that women should be kept out of politics altogether. The anti-Eaton faction neglected to talk about women because they saw the social and political spheres as two entirely separate arenas. The laws of society, they held, should be left to be debated and decided by the women. [29]

For the women involved, the subtle but significant changes in society signaled the end of the Eaton Affair. For the men, the conclusion of the drama was much more explicit. If it was, as the newspapers of the era assumed, a battle over who would succeed Jackson, Martin Van Buren won, and John C. Calhoun lost. In the 1832 election, Van Buren replaced Calhoun on the Democratic ticket as the vice-presidential nominee. Four years later, he succeeded Jackson as the eighth president.

Margaret Bayard Smith is an emblem of the world that Catherine Allgor depicts in *Parlor Politics:* an early form of a republican government that, in many ways, was shaped by the women who ran Washington society. Often, in scholarship of the early republic, the era of parlor politics is associated with the Jackson administration, which marked the beginning of the Antebellum period. As Allgor explains, "after 1832 the political culture shifted toward the middle class, though only men gained a new voice in national affairs, with no outlet for female politicking (at least not rhetorically) in the private sphere." The Eaton Affair is a useful inflection point in mapping this transition for women's role in politics. It was the first moment of historical significance where women, as a collective group, were unable to sway the political process in the way that benefited their personal ambitions. That is not to say that the women involved in the Eaton Affair did not exercise paramount power. Their actions brought down an entire cabinet. However, it was Jackson and his loyalists who remained in power, not the husbands of the women who led the charge against Margaret Eaton. Those who "won" the Eaton Affair were those who stayed loyal to Jackson throughout the entirety of the scandal. [30]

Two distinct transformations to Washington society occurred during the first two years of the Jackson administration, one internal and one external. While Washington society as a group lost a certain amount of influence and power, it still was able to exercise profound control over the world of American politics. Internally, however, Washington society functioned in a completely different way and was made up of an entirely different demographic of people.

In the early republic, patronage and rank were paramount to power and inclusion in society. For Margaret Bayard Smith, the Eaton Affair fundamentally transformed the city that was her home for thirty years, and the society that she helped build. In this new Washington, neither her

years of experience, numerous social connections, nor wealth gave her any more power and respect than the women who were just arriving.

Emily Donelson offers a counterexample of someone who arrived in Washington with a certain understanding of how society functioned; this understanding, of course, was largely shaped by Margaret Bayard Smith's example. Given her unique pathway into an otherwise exclusive club, Donelson had no intention of changing or challenging the rules and norms in place. However, it was precisely that unique pathway that allowed her to stay, albeit in a transformed position, in Washington society after the Eaton Affair. Donelson had a connection to those in power through her familial relationship to the president and her husband's continuing loyalty to him. Also, she had rank in the form of her position as White House hostess. This outweighed the societal norms and the social relationships that had kept Bayard Smith in power for so many years.

Given how connected the inner workings of Washington society and American politics were in the early republic, it is reasonable that the internal transformation of society would have a profound impact on political life in the early Antebellum period. The stories, anxieties, and motivations of these two women exemplify this very significant transformation.

Endnotes

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[18] Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, 344; Eaton, as quoted in Burke, *Emily Donelson*, 184.
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[21] Mark Cheathem, *Old Hickory's Nephew: The Political and Private Struggles of Andrew Jackson Donelson*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 65.
[22] Meacham, *American Lion*, 64, 107; Burke, *Emily Donelson*, 185; Wood, "Gender and Power in the Eaton Affair," 259.
[23] Meacham, *American Lion*, 146, 150.
[24] Donelson, as quoted in Burke, *Emily Donelson*, 260.
[25] Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 231.
[26] Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 231.

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[29] Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 73; Wood, "Gender and Power in the Eaton Affair"
[30] Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 241.