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UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

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# **The University of Vermont History Review**



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*The UVM History Review* is an annual publication of the University of Vermont History Department. It seeks to publish scholarly essays written by UVM students and alumni.

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201 Wheeler House  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<i>Letter from the Editor</i> .....	4
<i>Kicking Vietnam Syndrome: Reagan, Afghanistan, and the Evil Empire</i> Philip Bern .....	5
<i>The Appelmann Affair: World War One-Era Prejudice in the Pages of Burlington's Press</i> Michael Carter .....	30
<i>The Student Divestment Movement at the University of Vermont: A True Rejection of Capitalism?</i> Michael Harrity .....	59
<i>Putting the "X" in Sex: Permissive Society in X Films and the Press of Swinging London</i> Jocelyn Rockhold .....	81
<i>From Mrs. Lieutenant to Airgram 341: Military Wives' Participation in the Women's Liberation and Anti-War Movements during the Vietnam War</i> Brooke Talbott .....	107
<i>2023 Phi Alpha Theta Inductees, UVM Chapter, Alpha Alpha Psi</i> ...	133
<i>Author Biographies</i> .....	136
<i>Editor Biographies</i> .....	139



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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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*Dear readers,*

I am pleased to present to you the thirty-third issue of the *University of Vermont History Review*. This annual journal showcases exceptional historical research and writing from undergraduate and graduate students.

Although unintentional on the part of this volume's authors and editors, each of the following essays center on public reactions to historical developments. Subjects include popular responses to: the outcome of the Vietnam War, international hostilities during World War One, the movement to divest from Apartheid South Africa, the "permissive society" of 1960s Britain, and American social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. All five authors skillfully analyze collective reactions to changing societal conditions, and the manners in which these responses further altered their social landscapes. Together, the selected papers illustrate the complexities of historical change, and the chain reaction of events that it often entails.

As Executive Editor, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the talented and hardworking members of this year's editorial board. Their dedicated efforts to select and edit essays for publication make the *History Review* possible. My sincere gratitude also goes to the authors for committing their time and labor to the revision process in order to create the polished articles contained in this issue. The authors and editors deserve additional praise for working on an unusually short schedule, completing in three months a process that typically takes more than twice that amount of time.

I also wish to extend special thanks to Professor Melanie Gustafson for her consistent guidance and support as this volume's faculty advisor. Thank you as well to Shari Dike for overseeing the financial matters that are necessary to the creation and publication of this journal. Last but not least, my gratitude goes to photographer Dan Higgins for providing this year's cover image.

I hope you enjoy the 2022–2023 *UVM History Review*,  
Patrick Sullivan, 27 May 202

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## Kicking Vietnam Syndrome: Reagan, Afghanistan, and the Evil Empire

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*Philip Bern*

Zbigniew Brzezinski just could not resist. In a 1998 interview with a French magazine, he gloated: “the day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter: ‘We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its own Vietnam War.’”<sup>1</sup> He was no doubt prepared and eager to counter the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After all, President Carter had signed a secret memo authorizing aid to Islamic fundamentalist rebels of the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul on July 3rd, 1979, six months before the Soviets invaded to topple President Hafizullah Amin and restore stability by installing their own preferred leader. However, though predicting a grand opportunity presented by the invasion, Brzezinski had no idea the degree to which the plan to harass Soviet troops by arming and aiding Islamic rebels would end up exploding in scope under President Reagan. Operation Cyclone, as it was called, would end up becoming the most expensive CIA operation ever undertaken.<sup>2</sup> It remains curiously absent from national consciousness about American intervention during the Cold War, despite arguably being the United States’ most successful foreign intervention in terms of accomplishing its (dangerously shortsighted) goals. Not only would it change the face of the Middle East forever, but it also led to a paradigm shift

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), 15–21 January 1998, 76.

<sup>2</sup> Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, “The Oily Americans,” *Time*, 13 May 2003, archived from the original on 4 December 2008.

in American foreign policy from détente to active rollback of communism.<sup>3</sup>

The US would attempt to trap the USSR in their own Vietnam, while in the process exorcising its own demons left over from the militarily and economically disastrous foreign policies of the Johnson and Nixon administrations. So many questions are still left to be asked about Operation Cyclone. Why was there no significant anti-Afghanistan intervention movement in the United States, even while there were concurrent protests against intervention in Central America? What was different about Afghanistan that made it seem so much more justified, or less worthy of attention? What was the relationship like between Congress and the CIA during the period, and how did the CIA regain its clout after its humiliation in the 70s? Most importantly, how did the Soviet War in Afghanistan fuel the Reagan doctrine of rollback against the “evil empire” and garner wide support for intervention in a way which had not been seen since Vietnam and made foreign intervention acceptable once again to the American people? This essay argues that the answers to these questions are impossible to understand without viewing them through the frame of the Vietnam War, because almost everyone involved at the time saw it through such a lens. The War in Afghanistan was widely understood by the media and policymakers as a “Soviet Vietnam,” which not only justified American aid to fundamentalist rebels but reshaped recent historical memory to make foreign intervention once again seem morally permissible.

Before one can get to Afghanistan, it is necessary to explore the specter of Vietnam still haunting the American psyche by the late 70s. For an analysis of “Vietnam Syndrome,” this essay turns to Brendan McQuade’s 2014 article in *The American*

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *Rollback!: Right-wing Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020), 65.

*Journal of Cultural Sociology*, “‘The Vietnam Syndrome’ and the end of the post-Sixties era: Tropes and Hegemony in History and Policy.” This paper sees the Vietnam War as a decisive turning point in hegemonic world politics and traces the Vietnam trope in cultural memory as it influences American society throughout the 70s. Clearly, the defeat in Vietnam discredited the United States on the international stage, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of direct military force among restive peripheries as well as deepening the country’s economic crisis by driving stagflation.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it led to a de-emphasis in the CIA on foreign intervention and covert affairs. Addressing the social and psychological impacts of the war on American consciousness, McQuade writes that “the ‘Vietnam’ trope captured and organized the anxieties of American military officials and policymakers who confronted this transformed world. In the 1980s and 1990s, the ‘Vietnam trope’ provided the cultural logic for the eventual rehabilitation of US military power.”<sup>5</sup>

‘Vietnam Syndrome’ itself has an unclear definition, as it has been used for various purposes to serve various interests, mirroring how the legacy of Vietnam was shaped by contemporary pressures. The term was first used by Senator Frank Church to refer to a pattern of deceiving Congress by the intelligence community.<sup>6</sup> Although it functioned for some as a realistic reflection of America’s failures and oversteps, eventually it became a condemnation of the post-Vietnam reluctance on the part of the American government to engage in foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Brendan McQuade, “‘The Vietnam Syndrome’ and the End of the Post-‘Sixties’ Era: Tropes and Hegemony in History and Policy,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 1 (February 2014): 33–65; here 41.

<sup>5</sup> McQuade, “‘The Vietnam Syndrome’ and the End of the Post-‘Sixties’ Era,” 37.

<sup>6</sup> McQuade, “‘The Vietnam Syndrome’ and the End of the Post-‘Sixties’ Era,” 45.



interventions. This was the case during Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign against Jimmy Carter in which he made a speech proclaiming that:

For too long, we have lived with the Vietnam Syndrome ... it is time we recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause. A small country newly free from colonial rule sought out help in establishing self-rule and the means of self-defense against a totalitarian neighbor bent on conquest ... There is a lesson for all of us in Vietnam. If we are forced to fight, we must have the means and the determination to prevail or we will not have what it takes to secure the peace.<sup>7</sup>

Later in this same speech, Reagan directly blames Carter for giving in to this post-Vietnam reluctance by refusing to do enough about Afghanistan, even though by this point in 1980 *The Washington Post* had already revealed that the US was supplying weapons to Afghan insurgents.<sup>8</sup> By the time of Reagan's election, 'Vietnam Syndrome' and the legacy of Vietnam itself had become less of a reconciliation with a national mistake and more of a challenge to be overcome in order to rehabilitate the United States' hegemonic power.<sup>9</sup> Similar to Germany during the ill-fated Weimar Republic just after the First World War and into the Nazi period, there was a concerted effort to rewrite the results of

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago," transcript of speech delivered at Chicago, 18 August 1980, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-veterans-foreign-wars-convention-chicago>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Getler, "U.S. Reportedly is Supplying Weapons to Afghan Insurgents: Afghan Rebel Forces Reportedly Getting U.S. Arms Assistance," *The Washington Post*, 15 February 1980, 2.

<sup>9</sup> See: Kyle Giovannini, "The Vietnam Syndrome and Its Effects on the U.S. Public and Foreign and Domestic Policy Decisions during the Post-Vietnam Era between 1975-1991," thesis, Boise State University, 2020.

the War as an American example of the “stab-in-the-back” myth, where Vietnam was not lost by military overreach, but by the meddling of the domestic antiwar movement and acquiescent liberals in congress. The general perspective on the American military’s error in deploying to Vietnam became less about its direct consequences to the Vietnamese people, the American economy, and American veterans, and more about its damage to America’s international reputation and its eagerness to project its military and economic power abroad. If in the US during the mid to late 70s ‘Vietnam’ became a shorthand signifier for all aspects of perceived decline, then the key to Reagan’s “morning in America” was to overcome Vietnam Syndrome. In the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he found the justification for just that.<sup>10</sup>

There are surprisingly few comprehensive studies of the United States’ interference in Afghanistan. Of the attempts to wrestle with this topic post-September 11th, 2001, Steve Coll’s 2004 book *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Ladin, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* is one of the most far reaching. The title is a bit of a misnomer, given that in early February 1979, the *Washington Post* published eyewitness accounts that at least two thousand Afghan rebels were being trained at former Pakistani Army bases. According to the testimony, this occurred months before Carter signed a directive formalizing support to the rebels who would become known as Mujahideen, using Pakistan’s President Zia and his Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as an intermediary so as to provide plausible deniability.<sup>11</sup> The first American media reference conflating the situation in Afghanistan to Vietnam was in a May 10, 1979 article, seven months before

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<sup>10</sup> Mcquade, “‘The Vietnam Syndrome’ and the End of the Post-‘Sixties’ Era,” 44.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Niesewand, “Guerrillas Train in Pakistan to Oust Afghan Government,” *The Washington Post*, 2 February 1979, 1.

the invasion, entitled “Afghanistan: Moscow’s Vietnam?” in which the author writes:

Diplomats here take it for granted that only Soviet economic, military, political, and diplomatic support keeps the year-old Afghan government in power against the assault of Islamic-oriented insurgents ... Even Soviet diplomats here now make the comparison with Vietnam.<sup>12</sup>

Here, the author shows how months before the invasion or Carter’s secret directive, both American and Soviet policymakers were viewing the Afghanistan situation through the lens of Vietnam, driving home the logistical nightmare that propping up the Amin government was becoming for the Soviets.

In documents only declassified in 2019, Brzezinski’s memoranda to Carter reveals the anxieties present among American decision makers immediately following the Soviet invasion. In it, he writes that “While it could become a Soviet Vietnam, the initial effects of the intervention are likely to be adverse to us ... Soviet ‘decisiveness’ will be contrasted with our restraint, which will no longer be labeled as prudent but increasingly as timid.”<sup>13</sup> Later, in a section labeled “A Soviet Vietnam?” Brzezinski states that “we should not be too sanguine about Afghanistan becoming a Soviet Vietnam” because of the lack of organization and foreign support among the militias,

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan C Randal, “Afghanistan: Moscow’s Vietnam?: Moscow Sends Top Generals, Pours in Arms and Advisers to Help Fight Rebels Moscow Pours in Aid to Bolster Beleaguered Afghans,” *The Washington Post*, 10 May 1979, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 550.

which North Vietnam had.<sup>14</sup> Under the section “What is to be done?,” he suggests money and arms shipments to the rebels as well as allying with Islamic countries in a joint propaganda campaign.<sup>15</sup> It is easy to see how the fear of being seen as “timid” under the bipolar logic of the Cold War led the US to seize the opportunity of giving the Soviets their own Vietnam, recognizing the necessity to subject the Communists to both moral and strategic humiliation on the world stage.

Although the Brzezynski documents revealing early Carter aid to Afghan rebels were only declassified in 2019, forty years after their creation, they reveal the context behind geopolitical developments during the period from Reagan’s inauguration in 1981 until the ramping up of military aid in the spring of 1985. They show the relationship between the CIA and the Pakistani ISI in training and arming the Afghan Mujahideen, and General Zia’s role in promoting religious jihad as a strategy. One of the ways that the US maintained a thin semblance of secrecy during this period was by exporting arms that were exclusively Soviet-made to Pakistan, where it would then be distributed to the rebels. This provided a measure of plausible deniability for the Americans, which was useful in minimizing blowback and preventing escalation to direct conflict with the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Coll discusses the growing alliance between Reagan and the Saudi Royal Family, in which Saudi Arabia agreed to effectively double American funds to the Mujahideen by matching CIA aid dollar-for-dollar. The Saudi connection’s consequences are more thoroughly laid out in political scientist

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<sup>14</sup> Hanhimäki and Westad, *The Cold War*, 551.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” 26 December 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: the Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 104.

Peter Dale Scott's *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America* in which he describes how Saudi Arabia along with the ISI supported radical Salafi Islamism over the traditional moderate Sufism. When a national assembly was convened in 1980 to represent the Afghan opposition and called for "a loose federal structure, nonaligned foreign policy, and nonsectarian Islam," the ISI threatened to cut off the supply of American weapons unless a more radical and fundamentalist platform was adopted.<sup>17</sup>

Several developments in 1984 and 1985 led to a redoubled effort and a much more open stance by the Reagan Administration in arming the Mujahideen. While the Carter Administration and even the CIA at the start did not see much potential for Afghan rebels to do anything more than harass Soviet troops, a 1984 briefing to Reagan by CIA director William Casey showed the unexpected progress being made. Four years and two hundred million dollars (plus another two hundred million dollars from the Saudis) after the first weapons had been sent to the rebels, the CIA estimated that Mujahideen had killed around seventeen thousand Soviets and controlled sixty-two percent of the countryside. They had destroyed 350 aircraft, 2,750 tanks, and around 8,000 personnel vehicles.<sup>18</sup> It is this initial success which convinced Reagan to go all in on the Afghan rebels with National Security Decision Directive 166, a turning point in the war.

From here on out, there would not be a halfhearted attempt at secrecy by supplying the Mujahideen with Soviet-made rifles and other substandard weaponry. They would receive the latest and most high-tech American weapons, including C-4 explosives, long range sniper rifles, satellite-linked mortar devices, and anti-

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), 120.

<sup>18</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 104.

tank missiles. They also received a steady supply of satellite reconnaissance data on Soviet targets, which Pakistani General Muhamed Yousaf called “the most valuable intelligence provided by the Americans.”<sup>19</sup> NSDD 166 also called for a complete shift in stated policy aims, stating outright for the first time that “the ultimate goal of our policy is the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of its independent status.”<sup>20</sup> While the original Carter intelligence finding focused on “harassing” Soviet occupying forces, the new Reagan directive “used bold language to authorize stepped-up covert military aid to the Mujahideen and made it clear that the secret Afghan war had a new goal: to defeat Soviet troops in Afghanistan through covert action and encourage a Soviet withdrawal.”<sup>21</sup>

The lead-up to NSDD 166 and its consequences are described in a 2017 Russian-language article by Taisiya Rabush entitled “ОКАЗАНИЕ АДМИНИСТРАЦИЕЙ США НЕПРЯМОЙ ВОЕННОЙ ПОДДЕРЖКИ АФГАНСКИМ МОДЖАХЕДАМ В 1980-е ГОДЫ” or, “The Provision of Indirect Military Support by US Administration to the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s.” It includes information on how the United States went from hiding its assistance to Afghan opposition by supplying only Soviet or Soviet-made weapons to eventually giving Islamist fundamentalists several hundred American-made Stinger anti-air missile system. Included in the article is a mention of one significant moment during a 1981 ABC interview when President Reagan officially states that the United States not only had a “positive” attitude towards the idea of providing assistance to the Afghan opposition, but also “tends to

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<sup>19</sup> Steve Coll, “Anatomy of a Victory: CIA’s Covert Afghan War: \$2 Billion Program Reversed Tide for Rebels,” *The Washington Post*, 19 July 1992, 2.

<sup>20</sup> National Security Directive 166.

<sup>21</sup> Coll, “Anatomy of a Victory,” 2.



provide such assistance.”<sup>22</sup> As the rebels became more and more successful against the Soviets, the Reagan administration became much more open to the public about covert activities in Afghanistan. In terms of NSDD, Rabush quotes CIA officer Vincent Cannistraro as saying:

Before, there was no coordinated secret program, NSDD-166 is a turning point in the war ... If we evaluate the situation at the front before 1985, then we were dealing with stagnation. The only thing we could do was to promote a guerilla war. Everything changed with the advent of NSDD-166.<sup>23</sup>

The initial judgment of American intelligence that a Vietnam-style quagmire for the Soviets was unlikely slowly reversed, as they became more and more confident about the ability of the Afghan rebels to actually repel the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Their goals became more expansive, leading the CIA and Zia’s government to sponsor fundamentalist Jihad training camps and religious schools in Pakistan, through which tens of thousands of Muslim radicals from abroad came to study and then either fight for the Mujahideen or return to their home countries committed to the Jihad. Zia embraced the strategy of holy jihad, encouraging the financing and construction of madrassas, religious schools, along the Afghan border. With the aid of wealthy Saudi patrons, the number of religious schools in Pakistan went from nine hundred in 1971 to about eight thousand official and about

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<sup>22</sup> Taisiya Rabush, “The Provision of Indirect Military Support by US Administration to the Afghan Mujahideens in the 1980s,” translation provided by Yasemin Sesame Karabaçak, *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, Seriya 4, Istorii, Regionovedenie, Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia* 22 (1) (03) (2017): 77–87; here 81.

<sup>23</sup> Rabush, “The Provision of Indirect Military Support,” 83.

twenty-five thousand unofficial ones by 1988.<sup>24</sup> He believed, correctly, that Islamic fighters who accepted the precepts of jihad and martyrdom's glories would have a tangible fighting edge against Soviet conscripts. Zia told President Reagan that "Afghan youth will fight the Soviet Invasion with bare hands, if necessary."<sup>25</sup> The students of these madrassas, known as Talibs, were the basis of what would become the Taliban.<sup>26</sup>

One more major turning point in the war was the supplying of shoulder-mounted Stinger missiles to the Mujahideen. The CIA Islamabad station warned in a July assessment cable that the pace of Mujahideen attacks were slowing under the relentless Soviet helicopter attacks.<sup>27</sup> The Soviets enjoyed absolute airpower dominance against the Afghan rebels due to their fleet of Mi-24D Hind armored helicopter gunships which were used for devastating carpet bombing and strafing attacks.<sup>28</sup> Stinger missiles were American state-of-the-art portable, shoulder-fired weapons with an infrared tracking system impervious to the countermeasures taken by Soviet pilots. The Stingers proved to be incredibly effective in the hands of the Mujahideen against Soviet airpower. The first documented use of the Stingers in Afghanistan took down three Soviet gunships, all caught by a Sony camcorder on a video which would be screened

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<sup>24</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 89, citing an intelligence report presented to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1992.

<sup>25</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation," President Reagan and President Zia-ul-Haq, 7 December 1982, released by the Cold War International History Project.

<sup>26</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 243.

<sup>27</sup> Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and how They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 429.

<sup>28</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 136.

by Reagan at the White House.<sup>29</sup> Milton Bearden, the CIA officer in Pakistan overseeing the Afghan operation, cabled CIA headquarters to declare that Stingers had become the war's "most significant battlefield development."<sup>30</sup> Upon the rebels receiving heat-seeking stinger missiles and being trained at CIA camps in Pakistan, the Russians were forced to change their strategy of relying on low altitude bombing runs along the Pakistani border, allowing even more weapons and personnel to cross the border to Afghanistan to join the holy war.

Although devastatingly effective against the Soviets, the Stinger program would become a major headache for the United States after the war. Steve Coll estimates that between 2,000 and 2,500 Stingers were given to Afghan rebels during the war.<sup>31</sup> Many had gone to commanders associated with Anti-American radical Islamist leaders, and a few had already been sold on the black market to Iran by 1987, where they were seen being used by the Iranians during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>32</sup> This became such a concern that President George H.W. Bush enacted Operation MIAS, a covert program with funding of ten million dollars authorized by Congress to buy back Stinger missiles from anyone who possessed them, mostly local warlords. The going rate per missile ranged between 80,000 and 150,000 dollars with an authorized commission for Pakistani Intelligence who were handling most of the purchases.<sup>33</sup> By 1996 the CIA estimated that about six hundred Stingers were still at large.<sup>34</sup>

Peter Dale Scott also writes about the CIA-sponsored jihad indoctrination camps in Pakistan and the supply of Stinger

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<sup>29</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 137.

<sup>30</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 430.

<sup>31</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Giovannini, "The Vietnam Syndrome and Its Effects," 84.

<sup>33</sup> Giovannini, "The Vietnam Syndrome and Its Effects," 84.

<sup>34</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 28.

missiles to Afghan rebels as two of the biggest mistakes made by the Americans in the attempt to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. His book *The Road to 9/11* traces the origins of Al Qaeda and America's forever wars in the decisions made by entrenched power in the CIA, which he refers to as "deep politics." An important observation of Operation Cyclone and the intelligence community is how the split power structure operated within the CIA: plenty of CIA officers opposed the disastrous decisions made by director William Casey. Scott writes that these decisions "should be blamed on the existence of history-changing secret powers, enabling a small clique controlling the deep state to embark on a reckless course that knowledgeable experts, some of them with bureaucratic appointments, warned against at the time."<sup>35</sup> The CIA's Near East Division worried about the fact that introducing a made-in-the-USA weapon on the Afghan battlefield would hand the Soviets a propaganda victory and that the Stingers could be easily used as a terrorist weapon against passenger aircraft.<sup>36</sup> However, at the State Department's urging, the Stinger program was implemented to repulse Soviet helicopter attacks against the CIA's initial advice.<sup>37</sup>

Several mistakes made by the Americans in Afghanistan would haunt them after the war. The first, as discussed earlier, was backing radical Islamists instead of traditionalist Afghan nationalists. In 1981, the CIA, Saudi Intelligence, and the ISI created a foreign legion of jihadi Muslims who would be called "Arab Afghans" despite the fact that not all were Arabs and none were Afghan. After the war, many of these volunteers would bring back their military training and Islamist radicalism to their home countries, strengthening what would become the Al Qaeda network. This promotion of Saudi-influenced Wahhabi

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<sup>35</sup> Scott, *The Road to 9/11*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 137.

<sup>37</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 137.

fundamentalism did not only take place in training camps through which about one hundred foreign Muslim volunteers passed through a month, but through secular education as well. During the period of 1984 to 1993, the US Agency for International Development spent fifty-one million dollars on education programs in Afghanistan through the University of Nebraska-Omaha's Center for Afghanistan Studies.<sup>38</sup> Much of this money went to textbooks for Afghan children which taught the values of Islam and preparation for expelling the Russian invaders. In one first grade language book, letters are taught like this:

**Ti** is for Rifle (**tufang**). Javad obtains rifles for the Mujahideen.

**Jim** is for Jihad. Jihad is an obligation. My mom went to the Jihad.

**Dal** is for Religion (**din**). Our religion is Islam. The Russians are the enemies of the religion of Islam.

**Zhi** is for good news (**muzhdih**). The Mujahideen missiles rain down like dew on the Russians. My brother gave me good news that the Russians in our countries taste defeat.<sup>39</sup>

Another major miscalculation (in the long term, at least—it was successful in its short term goals) was the conscious decision to prolong the conflict in order to “destroy Gorbachev.” As early as the 1985 summit between Reagan and Soviet President Gorbachev, Secretary of State George Schultz showed interest in negotiating an Afghan settlement. The following

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<sup>38</sup> Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway, “From U.S., the ABC’s of Jihad: Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts,” *The Washington Post*, 23 March 2002, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Asmaie, F. M. M., *The Alphabet of Jehaad Literacy*, vol. 2 (Kabul, Afghanistan: Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahideen Education Center for Afghanistan, 1986), 5.

month, the State Department expressed a willingness to accept a UN-negotiated agreement which would require the US and Pakistan to cut off aid when the Soviets withdrew. This faction in the US government was defeated by hardliners who saw the war as a means to weaken and embarrass the Soviet Union. The “bleeders,” as Scott calls them, succeeded in sending the ISI several hundred Stinger missiles to give to the rebels. Many would never be given to the rebels by the ISI, and several were sold to Iran, while many others would turn up in connection with covert Islamist projects, including Osama Bin Laden’s.<sup>40</sup>

Beginning in 1985, CIA director William Casey encouraged Afghan rebels to begin striking targets within the USSR, a major escalation of the war. Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid writes that “In 1986 the secret services of the United States, Great Britain, and Pakistan agreed on a plan to launch guerilla attacks into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan ... meanwhile hundreds of Uzbek and Tajik Muslims clandestinely traveled to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to study in madrassas or to train as guerilla fighters so that they could join the Mujahideen.”<sup>41</sup> A 1987 article from the *Toronto Star* about the Afghan raids inside the USSR quotes the US Undersecretary of Defense apparently warning of further attacks by the rebels. He says “if the Soviet leaders persist in waging war against the Afghan people, the day may come when their allegation of a threat across the Soviet-Afghan border might have been turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.”<sup>42</sup> By this point in time, the consensus that the Americans were in it to win it had taken hold in a way that permitted reckless escalations which would have been unthinkable by the Carter administration and even by the CIA

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<sup>40</sup> Scott, *The Road to 9/11*, 130

<sup>41</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 43–44.

<sup>42</sup> “Afghan Guerrillas Said Taking the War into Soviet Union: [ME2 Edition],” *Toronto Star*, 2 February 1987, A4.



before 1985, and which would have catastrophic consequences in the years to come.

The most popular American pop-culture adaption of the conflict is the best-selling book, and later movie starring Tom Hanks, is *Charlie Wilson's War* by former CBS journalist, George Crile. Crile describes the conflicts between Congress and the intelligence community during the course of the Afghanistan operation. Focusing on Charlie Wilson, the hard-partying Democratic Congressman from Texas, the book details Wilson's budding relationship with Pakistani strongman President Zia. The book details how Wilson fell for the Mujahideen cause, triggering him to come into conflict with the CIA due to the sheer amount of money and aid Wilson was attempting to secure for the rebels while attempting to dictate the exact weapons he wanted them to buy. Wilson was on the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, which gave him enormous power in terms of discretionary spending, and he was well known as "a congressman with power who talked dirty, and who wasn't afraid to say he wanted to kill Russians and get even for Vietnam."<sup>43</sup> Congressman Wilson was a liberal on women's rights, abortion, social security, and minority rights, but was the biggest hawk in Congress on Afghanistan and repeatedly secured more and more aid to the Mujahideen.

The receptibility of liberals to hawkish foreign policy during the 80s is demonstrated in President Carter's 1980 Address to the Nation on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which he ends by saying "with the support of the American people and working with other nations, we will deter aggression, we will protect our nation's security, and we will preserve the peace. The

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<sup>43</sup> George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Covert Operation That Changed the History of Our Times* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 9.

United States will meet its responsibility.”<sup>44</sup> The Soviet invasion gave the United States the ability to assume the moral high ground and justify intervention in a way which had not been possible since Vietnam. Because the war in Afghanistan was blatant aggression and was seen as the “Soviet Vietnam” it functioned as the hinge upon which the United States was able to kick Vietnam Syndrome and unite the two parties in support of foreign intervention in a way that none of the Central American wars were able to fully do. Surely, this fills the missing link between the end of Vietnam and the almost unanimous vote by the US to invade Afghanistan in 2001.

The war in Afghanistan and its steady escalation of intervention by the United States rehabilitated the image and power, not to mention budget, of the CIA, which had been discredited after disastrous actions not only in Vietnam, but worldwide—a phenomenon revealed by the Church Committee in 1975. The CIA slowly pushed for more and more funding and power. As an example, when members came into conflict with Charlie Wilson, it was because he not only was throwing money at them in a conspicuous way which drew attention, but because he specified exactly which anti-air weapons he wanted: the Swiss-made Oerlikons. For the CIA, who were still at this point in the war committed to a strategy of plausible deniability, this was a source of tension, but their role and budget kept growing even as the United States dropped any pretension of deniability. This had a lasting role on the domestic political sphere. According to Crile,

Opposition to CIA secret warfare was seen as a core principle the Democratic Party wanted to be identified

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<sup>44</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,” 4 January 1980, Washington DC, transcript, UCSB, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-the-soviet-invasion-afghanistan>.

with ... at a time when the Contras could not get a dime from congress, Wilson had managed to turn the CIA's cautious bleeding campaign in Afghanistan into a half-a-billion-dollars-a-year operation that dwarfed any prior agency effort. For all practical purposes, Wilson had hijacked a U.S. foreign policy and was busy transforming it into the first winner-take-all contest with the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

What began as a small-scale aid program to Afghan rebels to counter Soviet influence in the region had very quickly exploded into a massive program of cooperation with Pakistani intelligence to provide fundamentalist religious indoctrination and to provide high tech weapons that were intended for use directly against Soviet troops. Congress secretly allocated about 470 million dollars in funding for Afghan covert action in 1986, and upped that to 630 million dollars in 1987, along with matching funds from Saudi Arabia.<sup>46</sup> Total American allocations to Operation Cyclone from 1979 to 1989 were over two billion dollars, making it one of the most expensive and longest running operations in CIA history.<sup>47</sup> Its bipartisan support and lack of opposition during the time or a contemporary reckoning remains a confounding question.

There are plenty of secondhand sources to learn about the facts of the American intervention in the Soviet-Afghan War, and the mistakes made which harbored consequences of an unimaginable scale. But with their focus on the secret actions and dynamics between intelligence agencies, they neglect the story at home and why so many Americans either supported intervention,

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<sup>45</sup> Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, 374.

<sup>46</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 137.

<sup>47</sup> See: Peter A. Pentz, "The Mujahidin Middleman: Pakistan's Role in the Afghan Crisis and the International Rule of Non-Intervention," *Penn State International Law Review* (1988).

or at the very least were not opposed to arming Islamic fundamentalist militias halfway across the world. Knowing what we know now about how the Mujahideen training camps spawned the Taliban and Al Qaeda, why did none of this arouse American opposition to the program, especially only a decade after the peak of the anti-war movement and during a time when many protested intervention in Central and South America? The power and influence of historical memory regarding American attitudes towards Afghanistan is incredibly important to answer this question. There had only been six and a half years in between the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Certainly, the Vietnam trope was much more influential in shaping both policy and public opinion regarding the invasion than is given credit for.

One indication of the extent of this unexplored phenomenon is just how many contemporary observers and even policymakers measured the risks and rewards of intervening in the Afghan conflict against the experience of America in Vietnam. One research inquiry on ProQuest for newspapers and books containing both “Afghanistan” and “Vietnam” in the title published from the start of the Soviet invasion until their withdrawal on February 15, 1989, returned 1,291 hits. This does not even account for comparison of the Soviet situation in Vietnam even before the invasion, as covered earlier. Interestingly, a large number of these articles take on the comparison by denying the analogy of the Afghan invasion as Russia’s Vietnam. Instead, they make the argument that the invasion of Afghanistan is substantially worse than the American war in Vietnam, effectively justifying intervention while cleansing the sins of America’s past. One *Christian Science Monitor* letter to the editor from 1988 entitled “Afghanistan doesn’t spell Vietnam” states that: “Historical record defies such an analogy ... South Vietnam was a sovereign country attacked

by guerillas who were aided by North Vietnam ... The Soviets fight alone in Afghanistan, and seek to keep it from its right to self-determination ... The Soviets are not merely at war with the mujahideen but with the people of Afghanistan.”<sup>48</sup> Implicit in this is an assertion that compared to Afghanistan, Vietnam was a justifiable war to defend self-determination. A 1984 newspaper article, “Afghanistan- No Vietnam analogy?” states that the Afghans are “up against an enemy who not only understands them but who is not bound by the same rules that America chose to use in Vietnam.”<sup>49</sup> Compared to the Soviets, the United States played by the rules in Vietnam and suffered because of their adherence to a strict moral code. An article in the 1988 volume of *Policy Review*, “Afghanistan is not the Soviet’s Vietnam,” begins with the abstract:

There is little sense in equating the Soviet War in Afghanistan with the American War in Vietnam. Only at the most superficial levels are there any correspondence. At any level of substance, of purpose, of policy, of performance, there are the stark contrasts between a war conducted by a free and open society governed under law with the consent of the governed, and one prosecuted by a closed slave society governed by men who flaunt their disdain for law and who deny that human beings are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dimitri Thomas and Rowland Hill, “LETTERS: AFGHANISTAN DOESN’T SPELL VIETNAM,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 January 1988.

<sup>49</sup> Patrick L. Townsend, “Afghanistan--no Vietnam Analogy?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 September 1984.

<sup>50</sup> L. Braddock, “AFGHANISTAN IS NOT THE SOVIET’S VIETNAM,” *Policy Review* 45, (0, 1988): 42–51; here 42.

Even when denying the analogy, these writers are still engaging within the framework of the Vietnam trope in a way that justifies intervention in Afghanistan and rehabilitates the war in Vietnam. Utah Senator Orrin Hatch wrote an opinion piece published in the *New York Times* in November of 1985 under the title “Don’t Forget the Afghans.” In it, he says that comparisons between Vietnam and Afghanistan may be “superficially true,” but, unlike Vietnam, “the Afghan horror story has not penetrated our consciousness. It has not entered our lives. This is the key difference between Afghanistan and Vietnam.” After accusing the USSR of perpetrating a genocide in the region, he implores readers of the *Times* that “a far greater effort must be made to assist the freedom fighters in their public-information campaign ... Mujahideen liaison offices should be established in cities such as New York, Paris and Tokyo to help raise money for the resistance fighters and to tell their story to the world.”<sup>51</sup> Senator Hatch, while arguing that Afghanistan is even worse than Vietnam, uses that as a call to action for more support for the rebels. If you were against the war in Vietnam, or so the argument goes, you should be just as or even more outraged by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Another *New York Times* article, this one from 1986, uses the same strategy equating Vietnam with Afghanistan to garner support for intervention and aid to the Mujahideen from those who would have been against the Vietnam War. Entitled: “The Overlooked War in Afghanistan: Where Are the Leftist Critics?” the author, who purports to have been an active member of the anti-war movement during Vietnam, lays out an argument for why even anti-imperialist or far left Americans should support further intervention in Afghanistan. If Vietnam was worth

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<sup>51</sup> Orrin G. Hatch, “Don’t Forget the Afghans: [OP-ED],” *New York Times*, 22 November 1985, 35.



opposing, and the Soviet invasion is their version of a Vietnam, then anti-war American citizens have a moral imperative to support the US government in its actions opposing the Soviets in Afghanistan, or so the logic went. Reassuring Americans wary of supporting what seemed to them like just more covert actions and foreign interference, the author writes:

No international issue is free of contamination by great power struggles, but this should not divert our attention from a necessary focus on the suffering of the victims. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan deserves the strong support of Americans who care about peace, self-determination, and human rights. Yet all too many Americans on the left remain mute about Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup>

The expansive reach of the Vietnam trope in the American psyche was flipped around at the Soviets, in effect, taking the war in Vietnam off the conscience of Americans and throwing it right at the USSR. Whether an American was pro-war in Vietnam or an anti-war protestor, the specter of Vietnam was invoked to justify intervention in Afghanistan either way. American policymakers and citizens alike viewed the invasion through the lens of Vietnam. Citizens viewed it through the moral dimensions of Vietnam: either it was bad like Vietnam was, or it was worse, and Vietnam was not so bad in retrospect. Either way, intervention was the end result of that logic. Policymakers viewed the invasion through the tactical and strategic dimensions of Vietnam: early on, it did not seem like a Vietnam. But the potential was there, if only the rebels were organized and supplied. Something that the secondary sources completely miss

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<sup>52</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, "The 'Overlooked' War in Afghanistan: Where are Leftist Critics?" *New York Times*, 17 October 1986, 39.

is the influence on a deep level of Vietnam and Vietnam Syndrome on both American citizens and policymakers. If Vietnam was so destructive to the fabric of America, and the opportunity presented itself to give the Soviet Union its own Vietnam while flipping the script and giving America the strategic and moral high ground, then how could any action taken in pursuit of this goal *not* be justified?

Far from being an isolated covert action thousands of miles from Washington, Operation Cyclone holds the key to understanding the Reagan doctrine which altered American foreign policy immensely, leaving neoconservative ideology dominant for decades. Jeane Kirkpatrick, who later became Reagan's foreign policy advisor and then ambassador to the United Nations, wrote an influential article published around one month before the Soviet invasion titled "Dictatorships and Double Standards." In it, she criticizes Carter's human rights-centered foreign policy, and argues that supporting traditional right-wing autocrats is much preferable to allowing communist governments to come to power, because according to her they have much more of a chance of evolving into democracies. She writes that

Generally speaking, traditional autocrats tolerate social inequities, brutality, and poverty, while revolutionary autocracies create them. Traditional autocrats leave in place existing allocations of wealth, power, status, and other resources which in most traditional societies favor an affluent few and maintain masses in poverty ... Because the miseries of traditional life are familiar, they are bearable to ordinary people ... such societies create no refugees.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, "DICTATORSHIPS AND DOUBLE STANDARDS," *Commentary* 68, no. 4 (11, 1979): 14.

This provided the intellectual reasoning for the Reagan policy of supporting right wing traditionalists to roll back communism of which Afghanistan was the shining example of. Nowhere else during the Cold War had the United States directly targeted Soviet troops like in Afghanistan.

Reagan's entire foreign policy was centered on portraying anti-communist forces, no matter how unsavory, as "good" compared to the Soviet "evil empire." Sean Wilentz's book *The Age of Reagan* traces how the failures of the Carter years set the stage for the anticommunist destruction of the 80s. Beginning with Reagan's primary campaign against Ford in 1976, Wilentz traces how the strategy of Détente and somewhat warming relations with the Soviets was overtaken by Reagan and his strategy of "we win, they lose." Reagan was keenly aware of the national feeling of decline, inseparable from "Vietnam Syndrome" and was committed to overcoming it by uniting a diverse coalition against a supposedly resurgent and imminently threatening Soviet Union. Typical of sources covering a broad political history of the Reagan years, he offers at most three pages worth of material on Afghanistan in a 560-page book. The widespread understating of the importance of the American intervention in the Soviet-Afghan War is such a travesty because, at two billion dollars total over the course of twelve years, it is the most expensive and longest running covert action program in American history.<sup>54</sup> It is also likely the most successful in achieving its stated goals, and likely the most catastrophic in its consequences.

How could there be so little opposition to policies which in hindsight appear so reckless, dangerous, and misguided? Again and again, when other Reagan-era wars faced public controversy

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<sup>54</sup> Barlett and Steele, "The Oily Americans."

and congressional opposition, Afghanistan remained virtually untouched, despite the billions of dollars, anti-aircraft weaponry, and religious and military training facilities supplied to Islamic fundamentalists. Historical memory plays a massive role in explaining the American response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Vietnam trope was intimately connected to the Soviets in Afghanistan, even before the invasion. The Vietnam connection imbued it with a level of meaning, morally and strategically, that other conflicts during the time just did not have. Because of the importance of Vietnam to the American psyche, any amount of money and any number of risky decisions seemed justified as the cost to give the Soviet Union its own ‘Vietnam.’

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## The Appelmann Affair: World War One-Era Prejudice in the Pages of Burlington's Press

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*Michael Carter*

### *Introduction and Literature Review*

In April of 1916, a Vermont newspaper published an odd and vaguely accusatory article in its Thursday evening edition.<sup>1</sup> *The Burlington Daily News* claimed that an Allied government had recently come into the possession of some correspondence between the Berlin-based academic and politician Paul Rohrbach and the head of the University of Vermont German Department Anton H. Appelmann. Printing in full what appeared to be Rohrbach's responses to written questions posed by Appelmann, the topics discussed ranged from ruminations on the attitude of German-Americans towards the increasing military preparedness of the United States government, to the roles of Germany, the United States, and Japan should the war grow to encompass more conflict in the Pacific Ocean region. The article contends that Rohrbach is "an authority on Far Eastern questions," and ends with something of an editorial challenge to Dr. Appelmann: "We note that Mr. Appelmann is greatly desirous to break into our politics. He is a German reservist... The *News* would like to know why he is taking a great interest in the Far Eastern question, regarding particularly the question as it affects the United States."<sup>2</sup> Without stating it outright, the editors of this Vermont paper raised the specter of anti-American sentiment and activity on the part of this German national, and allegations of espionage

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<sup>1</sup> First and foremost, many thanks are due to Prof. Melanie Gustafson and the students of HST-271A for providing the environment that allowed for the inspiration and guidance of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> "Sees German Aid to Japan Against U.S.," *Burlington Daily News*, 20 April 1916, 3.

would not be far behind. As America barreled down the path towards war in 1916 and 1917, the pressure on Appelmann—both local and national—would grow, and just what to do about the “Appelmann Affair” would roil and divide Vermont’s university and its largest city. This paper argues that the ways in which these issues and debates played out in the pages of the local Burlington press reveal a glimpse at the society and culture of the time, and what it meant for people to be an “American” not only in Vermont, but across the country.

The Anton Appelmann controversy has been noted in the standard histories of the state of Vermont, the city of Burlington, and of the University of Vermont, although typically meriting only a passing mention.<sup>3</sup> One of the goals of this paper is to expand on those tantalizing glimpses by mining newspapers as primary sources materials. The advent of digitization has made these archives much more readily available. This paper aims to fill some of the narrative gaps in our knowledge of the Appelmann Affair by closely examining how it was reported in two daily Burlington newspapers: the *Burlington Free Press* and the *Burlington Daily News*. In some sense, this article may serve as a miniscule introduction to editorial culture in a small city. It will be noted that the *Daily News* typically took a more combative, populist stance, as opposed to the more staid *Free Press*. A running comparison of the two papers as the controversy plays out across their pages showcases some of the pressures and prejudices of the time. Though primarily a granular narrative of the specific events connected to Dr. Appelmann and UVM, this essay also seeks to draw in some broader analysis and research to

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<sup>3</sup> Characteristic is a reference that simply reads “a professor of German at the University of Vermont, Anton Hermann Appelmann, resigned his faculty post under pressure,” with no more mention made in the rest of the text. See P. Jeffrey Potash, Gene Sessions, and Michael Sherman, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* (Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society, 2004), 394.

place this localized affair within a wider, national context. Material on the general attitude and outlook of the United States during the war years is examined to ground this discussion.<sup>4</sup> Research that discusses anti-German attitudes in this period provides important insights into why Americans were so eager to view their neighbors of German extraction with suspicion and hostility.<sup>5</sup> As this paper is primarily a regional study of how these national trends impacted a specific community, similar material relating to other individual cities or states has also been examined.<sup>6</sup> Through this methodology it is hoped that this study

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<sup>4</sup> See for example William J. Breen, *Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984); John Milton Cooper, Jr., "The Shock of Recognition: The Impact of World War I on America," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 76, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 567–584; Jennifer Keene, *The United States and the First World War* (Harlow, England: Longman Press, 2000); Celia Kingsbury, *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, rev. 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See such works as Mark Ellis and Panikos Panayi, "German Minorities in World War I: A Comparative Study of Britain and the USA," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 1994): 238–259; Chad Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016); John Koster, "Hating the 'Hun' at Home," *American History* (August 2016): 58–65; Walter Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–25.

<sup>6</sup> See the work of Christopher Gibbs, *The Great Silent Majority: Missouri's Resistance to World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988); Mark Kuss, "Hey Man! Watch Your Language: Treatment of Germans and German Americans in New Orleans During World War I," *Louisiana History: The Journey of the Louisiana Historical Association* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 178–198; Zachary Smith, "Tom Watson and Resistance to Federal War Policies in Georgia during World War I," *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 2 (May 2012): 293–326.

can reveal what local manifestations of anti-German prejudice tell us about how national and international issues and ideologies impacted a small community, and what role the press played in disseminating ideas of belonging and exclusion. In seeing how local issues become nationalized in the pages of the press, it can be shown how active and influential nativist and “America First” style groups or ideologies were in small American communities, revealing fault-lines and fall out.

*Burlington and Anton Appelmann*

In the words of historian Vincent E. Feeney, early twentieth-century Burlington emerged as the “commercial, financial, manufacturing, sporting, and entertainment center” of Vermont.<sup>7</sup> Railroads connected the “Queen City” to Boston and New York, and the city’s locals intermingled with tourists, entertainers and business people from throughout the East Coast and beyond.<sup>8</sup> By the turn of the century, Burlington could boast of its own hospital, the state’s university, and a slew of manufacturing interests along its bustling waterfront.<sup>9</sup> By the 1860s, an influx of Roman Catholic Irish and French Canadian immigrants was doing much to change the ethnic and religious makeup of the city.<sup>10</sup> As sociologist Elin Anderson would write, the notion that early twentieth-century Burlington was a “Yankee Town” was merely a myth.<sup>11</sup> The changing nature of the city was reflected in its politics by the first decade of the twentieth century: James

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<sup>7</sup> Vincent E. Feeney, *Burlington: A History of Vermont’s Queen City* (Bennington, VT: Images From the Past, 2015), 137.

<sup>8</sup> Feeney, *Burlington*, 127.

<sup>9</sup> Feeney, *Burlington*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> Feeney, *Burlington*, 150.

<sup>11</sup> Elin L. Anderson, *We Americans: A Study of Cleavage in an American City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 16.



Edmund Burke, a man of Irish heritage who found success running as a Democrat and as a member of a variety of third parties, would be elected mayor in 1903.<sup>12</sup> Despite the dynamic nature of Burlington early in the new century, the pressures of wartime would bring some old prejudices to light. One of the most prominent targets of this ire would be Professor Anton H. Appelman.

Anton Appelman was thirty-two years old in 1916.<sup>13</sup> A native of Germany, Appelman was educated in that country before coming to the United States in 1912. His reasons for coming to America evince a spirit of cooperation between the two countries. As an employee of the Prussian Department of Education, the German government sent him as part of a teaching exchange system to the public high schools of Boston; while in that city he also served as an occasional lecturer at Harvard. When there was a vacancy in the German department at UVM in early 1913, Appelman found employment there as a professor of German for the academic year of 1913–1914. At the end of that year, Appelman was recalled to Germany, where he planned to petition the government for an extension of his permission to teach in America. He happened to arrive in Berlin just as World War One broke, and spent a short time employed in a clerical position with Dr. Paul Rohrbach; correspondence between these two men would be the catalyst of the future controversy. While in Germany he was also required to register as a member of the German military reserve, though he received the consent of both civil and military authorities to return to America to teach in September of 1914. As Germany was now a combatant nation in

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<sup>12</sup> Feeney, *Burlington*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> The biographical information about Dr. Appelman in this paragraph is taken from the Majority Report of the UVM Alumni Association as printed in the *Burlington Free Press*. See “German Professor is Exonerated in Alumni Report,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 15 February 1917, 2.

a brewing global conflict, the German Ambassador advised Appelmann to make no public political statements. The University of Vermont continued to offer Appelmann employment, and he taught again in the academic years of 1914–1915 and 1915–1916. As has been shown, it was in 1916 that accusations of disloyalty were first leveled at Dr. Appelmann by the press.

If Dr. Appelmann was disloyal to his adopted homeland of America he had an odd way of showing it. Just a few days after the aforementioned *Daily News* article hit the stands, the *Vermont Cynic*, the student news publication of the University of Vermont, reported that Appelmann had been elected to membership in the National Educational Association of the United States. Only three other members of the UVM faculty were members of this organization at that time, chief among them President Guy Potter Benton.<sup>14</sup> If Appelmann were truly anti-American, he seemed to have no qualms about accepting entry in an American organization with distinguished American colleagues. Viewed in this light, the implications that the *Daily News* was proffering seem grossly unfair, though sadly not uncommon in American attitudes of the time.

### *Prejudicial Attitudes*

The anti-German bias that was at least implicit in the reporting of the *Daily News* was not unique to Vermont. Nativism was nothing new for the American body politic, and the fear that the dominant Anglo-Saxon social and cultural milieu was under threat by waves of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe had been

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<sup>14</sup> “Dr. Appelmann Receives Educational Honor,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 29 April 1916, 7.

commonplace well before the beginning of World War One.<sup>15</sup> For many years, Germans in particular had been associated in the minds of some prejudicial Americans as being highly engaged in socialist or anarchist plots against the government. As the pressures of the war years compounded, the American image of the conflict was, to a large extent, shaped by British propagandists, keen to ensure that the American public never forgot the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine in 1915.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the official German responses to American concerns about its submarine campaign were ham-fisted at best did little to dissuade the growing American unease with all things German.<sup>17</sup>

The American figure who personified the growing national reaction against perceived unassimilated immigrant communities—and German communities in particular—was former president Theodore Roosevelt, who in recent years had made a name for himself as the leading critic of “hyphenism.”<sup>18</sup> As early as 1915, when he gave a speech on Columbus Day to the Catholic fraternal group the Knights of Columbus, Roosevelt proclaimed that “there is no place here for the hyphenated American... and the sooner he returns to the country of his allegiance, the better.”<sup>19</sup> Still well over a year before the United States became involved in World War One, he could be heard proclaiming “Let us say to the immigrant not that we hope he will

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<sup>15</sup> Zachary Smith, *Age of Fear: Othering and American Identity During World War I* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer D. Keene, *The United States and the First World War* (Harlow, England: Longman Press, 2000), 14–15.

<sup>17</sup> Chad R. Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016), 106.

<sup>18</sup> Walter D. Kamphoefner, “Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I,” *Journal of Austrian-American History* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–25, esp. 1.

<sup>19</sup> “Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated,” *New York Times*, 13 October 1915, 1.

learn English, but that he has got to learn it. Let the immigrant who does not learn it go back.”<sup>20</sup> It was therefore fully within the character of his recent public statements when he later thundered at a speech in Detroit that “professional German Americans” preaching pacifism were making the nation prey to foreign foes. “The politico-racial hyphen is the breeder of moral treason” he declared.<sup>21</sup>

This very same speech of Roosevelt that decried perceived disloyalty and pacifistic tendencies would unleash fear and scandal onto the landscape of the conservative Green Mountain state. Colonel Roosevelt had seen a report that raised his rhetorical ire: “There has come into my possession a copy of a letter written... to a German, Prof. Appelmann, of the University of Vermont...”<sup>22</sup> Going into the content of the letter with great detail, Roosevelt contended that the letter “unquestionably expressed the attitude of militaristic Germany in endeavoring to use... that portion of the professional ‘German-American’ element of this country which is disloyal...” In Roosevelt’s eyes there was a cabal of seditious Americans seeking to join the German American community with that of the “professional pacifists” to “leave the United States helpless against possible aggressors – a movement which is traitorous to this republic.”<sup>23</sup> The perceived importance of this speech on the part of newspaper editors can be gleaned by the fact that some editors printed it in full, taking up five full columns: an entire page of print. Appelmann thus found his name thrust into the

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<sup>20</sup> “Guests of Mrs. Astor,” *The Montclair Times* [Montclair, NJ], 5 February 1916, 7.

<sup>21</sup> “T.R. Attacks Ford, Wilson and Pacifists,” *New York Sun*, 20 May 1916, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *St. Albans Weekly Messenger*, 25 May 1916, 10

<sup>23</sup> “Americanism and Preparedness for Peace,” *The Times* [Harbor Beach, MI], 2 June 1916, 7.

public discourse by a former President; the fallout would not be long in coming.

### *The Affair Begins*

Replying to a press inquiry for his own reaction, Appelmann stated that Roosevelt's interpretation of the letter was "evidently based on fragmentary information." He went on to state his belief that "Germany welcomes a strong and prosperous American nation, with which she desires peaceful relationship."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps stung by the criticism, Appelmann would go on to make a public appearance and give public remarks addressing the issue further. At the German Hall on Crowley Street in Burlington, the Goethe Lodge, no. 252 of the German Order of Harugari, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with dancing, "appropriate exercises" and a supper for 200 guests. Dr. Appelmann used this occasion to offer an address in which he stated "it is because of our love for the Stars and Stripes that we want peace, and America first, last and always is our vow."<sup>25</sup> He continued by saying that "I for myself refute with equal force" the allegations raised against him by the *New York Times* and others, "material which the same paper refuses to let me see." The professor wanted to make it clear that what he desired was "peace between those two countries, a square deal for ourselves since we have proven to be good and faithful citizens... and a really neutral, big, and flourishing America." He ended his speech with a toast: "America and Germany at peace forever."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "T.R. Points at Prof. Appelmann," *St. Albans Daily Messenger*, 23 May 1916, 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Barre Daily Times*, 15 May 1916.

<sup>26</sup> Quotations from "America First and Always," *The Burlington Free Press*, 15 May 1916, 9.

Despite these wholesome words and his staunch protestations of loyalty, the words of Roosevelt and the suspicion surrounding his character that had been publicly raised by the press continued to haunt Dr. Appelmann. A lightning bolt struck later in the summer: “PROF. A.H. APPELMANN TO BE INVESTIGATED” screamed the headline of the *Burlington Daily News*, the bold title fully dominating the page. It so happened that the University of Vermont Alumni Association had held their annual meeting, and they were much disturbed by the “sinister suspicions” his “anti-American Activities” had raised against the good name of the university.<sup>27</sup> As it turned out, Charles E. Lamb, an alumnus on the committee and a member of the UVM class of 1893, was a member of the Military Training Camp Association and the National Security League. The latter organization, founded to lobby for the interests of national defense policy, would, in the words of historian David M. Kennedy have “shifted its attention by war’s end to a broad range of conservative concerns, especially internal security and the dangers of ‘hyphenated Americanism.’”<sup>28</sup> The usage of that term alone is enough to signal that the perspectives and prejudices of Mr. Lamb would be in keeping with those of Colonel Roosevelt. Kennedy quotes the educational director of the National Security League who declared that “the melting pot has not melted... there are vast communities of the Nation thinking today not in terms of America, but in terms of Old World prejudices, theories, and animosities... in the bottom of the melting pot there lie heaps of unfused metal.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Prof. A. H. Appelmann to be Investigated,” *Burlington Daily News*, 27 June 1916, 1.

<sup>28</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, rev. 2004), 67.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Kennedy, *Over Here*, 67.

It appears that the UVM Alumni Association viewed Prof. Appelmann as being down in that heap. Its resolution states that “several American publications of the best repute, and Colonel Roosevelt” had found it necessary to call out the “anti-American” activities of Prof. Appelmann which had caused “sinister suspicions” to be cast on the “good name of the University and one of its professors.” To this point, the Alumni deemed it necessary to appoint a committee of five “to investigate the activities of Professor Appelmann and report its findings, as soon as practicable” to the Association President, who was then to be tasked with bringing the findings before the University’s Board of Trustees.<sup>30</sup> The more measured *Burlington Free Press* seemed to take a somewhat aloof tone in its reportage of this event, mentioning that the Alumni meeting “proved something out of the ordinary” because of the “introduction and unanimous passage” of the resolution. It was noted that “there was a record attendance at the meeting and also at the alumni breakfast which followed.”<sup>31</sup> The *Daily News* asserts that this record attendance was a result of the excitement caused by this resolution, and that “there was loud clapping when Mr. Lamb finished reading it.”<sup>32</sup>

Prof. Appelmann continued to have the support of some in Burlington. The day after news broke about the Alumni Association’s planned investigation, the Vermont Commons Club, “at which several alumni and faculty members were present,” unanimously passed a resolution of its own which expressed “its entire confidence and trust in Dr. Appelmann and extends to him its support and good will.”<sup>33</sup> This good will was not extended by the editorial staff of the *Daily News* who first

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<sup>30</sup> “Prof. A. H. Appelmann to be Investigated,” 1.

<sup>31</sup> “Alumni Day at the College on the Hill,” *Burlington Free Press*, 28 June 1916, 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Prof. A. H. Appelmann to be Investigated,” 1.

<sup>33</sup> “Expresses Confidence,” *Burlington Free Press*, 28 June 1916, 9.

broke the story. “At last Mr. Appelman is likely to be investigated regarding his activities beyond his regular duties in the University” gloated the paper. Claiming full credit for the now nationally notorious suspicions being heaped on Appelman, the paper raised the stakes by stating “it is high time that Appelman... should be curbed or dismissed from the University.”<sup>34</sup> A competing editorial appearing the same day in the *Free Press* showcased the view of the opposing side: “We shall be surprised from what we know of Prof. Appelman... if all question [sic] concerning his attitude during the present European war does not fully disappear when the facts are known.” This editorial reveals that the university authorities remained satisfied by his explanations, and makes a point that Appelman had foregone opportunities for advancement at other institutions because of “his loyalty to the University of Vermont and his love for Vermont and Burlington.”<sup>35</sup> Differing views of Dr. Appelman and the perceived values personified by the opposing sides in this nationalizing debate seemed like they stood ready to tear the town apart.

The level of emotion evinced by both sides in this debate and the strong feelings of suspicion and anger that “super-patriotic” Americans so easily felt toward Germans in this period was both a product of this particular moment and a result of long-simmering attitudes and trends. Immigrants were viewed as having divided loyalties, retaining a separate identity within the United States from so called “mainstream” Americans. When persistent nativism coalesced with over-zealous German propaganda, politicians and the press were conditioned to believe scurrilous rumors about German infiltration and attempted

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<sup>34</sup> “Investigation for Appelman,” *Burlington Daily News*, 28 June 1916, 4.

<sup>35</sup> “A Question of Loyalty and Patriotism,” *Burlington Free Press*, 28 June 1916, 4.



subversion of the body politic.<sup>36</sup> It is in this spirit that even little Burlington, Vermont, was swept on a wave of emotion regarding the status and loyalty of its arguably most famous German resident.

Despite all of the external pressure he was likely facing due to what the *Free Press* characterized as “charges of pernicious pro-German activity,” Prof. Appelmann continued to go about his work as usual and intended to teach summer sessions. The investigatory committee for its part was dragging its feet on appointing its membership. One has to assume that the university wanted nothing more than for this issue to be dropped.<sup>37</sup> The *Daily News* was happy to keep fanning the flames however: a few days later they ran another bold front-page headline, declaring that Alumni Association president Ralph A. Stewart of the class of 1893 had chosen the members of the investigative committee, a group that consisted of three Vermonters and one member each from New York and Massachusetts. Three of the members were lawyers, one a newspaper editor, and the last a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.<sup>38</sup> The *Free Press* did not deign to report on this development.

Other Vermont papers besides those in Burlington made note of the Appelmann case, and some provided more or less nuanced commentary and appraisal of the situation. The *Bennington Banner* stated that “the professor should not be curbed or dismissed from service for freedom in expressing his opinions” unless those opinions are found to be “un-American or

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Ellis and Panikos Panayi, “German Minorities in World War I: A Comparative Study of Britain and the USA,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 1994): 238–259, esp. 240.

<sup>37</sup> “University Notes,” *Burlington Free Press*, 1 July 1916, 8.

<sup>38</sup> “U.V.M. Alumni Committee to Investigate Activities of Prof. A.H. Appelmann,” *Burlington Daily News*, 6 July 1916, 1.

traitorous.” What is more, the Bennington paper continued: “it is conceivable that a man might be a German sympathizer and well-wisher and still be a good American and a competent college instructor.” An editorial like this goes to show that the loudest national and local voices calling for the most uncharitable interpretation of a situation were not the only ones contributing to the debate. The editorial closed by saying “we should be fair and open-minded in this matter.”<sup>39</sup>

### *National Attention and University Politics*

National publications were also adjudicating this matter, notably *The Outlook*, a New York City magazine that focused on social and political issues, and on whose editorial board Theodore Roosevelt had sat.<sup>40</sup> That outlet had published a letter from UVM President Guy Potter Benton in defense of Appelmann and the university’s handling of the issue. Responding to previous criticism, Benton stated that there should be no curtailing of a foreigner’s right to engage in private correspondence with friends from his homeland, even if that correspondence reflected the personal political opinions of those writing. What is more, President Benton defended Appelmann personally, referring to him as “a scholarly investigator, an inspiring, popular teacher, and a gentleman of refinement and character... he has not uttered one word in the presence of his students or before the larger public, that could be questioned by any right minded-citizen.”<sup>41</sup> He concluded by asking that “in the American spirit of fair play...

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<sup>39</sup> Untitled article, *The Bennington Evening Banner*, 6 July 1916, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Hazel Dicken Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 253.

<sup>41</sup> “In Defense of Professor Appelmann,” *The Outlook*, 14 June 1916, 337–338.

this man of unusual ability be given the benefit of doubts which are altogether in his favor.”<sup>42</sup>

One angle of President Benton’s continual propping up of Appelmann throughout the controversy that must be outlined is the tenuous support Benton commanded from his colleagues at UVM. Guy Potter Benton had been selected as UVM’s President in 1911, having previously headed Miami University in Ohio. He was selected for his administrative credentials, in the hopes that he could streamline and modernize UVM as it was desired it should “become more completely a state university.”<sup>43</sup> Many of the faculty old guard resisted and resented an outsider being imposed upon them. Furthermore, in a turn of phrase that might send shivers down the spine of contemporary academics, his operating style as president of UVM was that of the owner of a business. Viewing the faculty as his employees, he issued a set of bylaws dealing with university governance over their heads and without their approval.<sup>44</sup> A strict Methodist, he stated in an address to the campus community that “I will not serve on a teaching body with any man who uses intoxicating liquors in any form whatsoever.”<sup>45</sup> Though his evident defense of academic freedom in the Appelmann affair is laudable, there were grave reservations with his personality and leadership among campus constituencies, and to some extent the whole controversy can also be interpreted through that lens.

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<sup>42</sup> “In Defense of Professor Appelmann,” 338.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Smallwood, *The University of Vermont Presidents: Two Centuries of Leadership* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, 1997), 41.

<sup>44</sup> T.D. Seymour Bassett, “A Small University With Ivy League Aspirations, 1895-1940: Overview,” in *The University of Vermont: The First Two Hundred Years*, ed. Robert V. Daniels (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1991): 197–206, esp. 199–200.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Smallwood, *The University of Vermont Presidents*, 42.

In any case, the sense of “fair play” that President Benton so ardently hoped for from the media did not extend beyond a printing of his letter for the purposes of refuting it. *The Outlook* called the correspondence that began the whole fiasco an “invitation to sedition.” It contended that “the pernicious activities of a number of a considerable body of German propagandists... have been such as to fairly give rise to the question” of Prof. Appelmann’s loyalty. It raised the question of his employment at a state university: was he serving the German government at the expense of the government which employed him?<sup>46</sup> The article goes on to state that unnamed “responsible men connected with the University” not only thought there was other correspondence to be found, but that Appelmann had been sent to America by Germany for a “definite purpose.” Not altogether successfully, the author of the article made an attempt at objectivity by stating “we do not say that this allegation is true; it may be mere rumor.” The article closed by ominously stating that “the matter has reached the point when not merely the reputation of Dr. Appelmann, but the reputation of the University of Vermont is at stake.”<sup>47</sup> In case *The Outlook* did not have the requisite circulation in Burlington to get its point across, the *Burlington Daily News* published the lion’s share of this exchange in the pages of their issue of 14 July.<sup>48</sup> Not to be upstaged, the *Free Press* printed an editorial of its own, which called the reasoning of *The Outlook* and the *Daily News* “so weak that it is worth considering only as illustrating the lengths to which ‘long distance’ factionalism can sometimes be carried.” With a caustic bit of business, the paper goes on to say that “the fact that in the

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<sup>46</sup> “The Appelmann Case,” *The Outlook*, 12 July 1916, 568.

<sup>47</sup> “The Appelmann Case,” 569.

<sup>48</sup> “The Appelmann Case,” *Burlington Daily News* 14 July 1916, 5.

University of Vermont the German language is taught by a real live German professor can do no harm, to say the least.”<sup>49</sup>

### *Inquiry*

The formal Alumni inquiry into the behavior and alleged anti-American activities of Professor Appelmann began on Monday, 17 July 1916 at 11:30 in the morning; it had been scheduled to begin an hour earlier, but one of the committee members was delayed by a late train. The meeting was held in a library room at UVM’s Medical College building. The committee voted to exclude the public from this initial meeting, though Prof. Appelmann was allowed to give a statement on his own behalf. Material presented as evidence in the hearing included the contested correspondence as well as magazine articles and reportage deemed relevant to the case.<sup>50</sup> Dean J.L. Hills of the UVM College of Agriculture, who had been named as Prof. Appelmann’s advisor in the matter, was the only other person—aside from the stenographer, the accused and the committee itself—allowed to be present at the hearing. The committee met for over six hours, with the press eagerly waiting outside. Prof. Appelmann, for his part, was willing to talk, but UVM President Benton had asked no one to speak until the report was finalized.<sup>51</sup> Henry B. Shaw, the committee chairman, indicated that he was the sole agent responsible for speaking to the press, and that it would likely be at least a month until news was forthcoming. Scratching for tidbits, a reporter remarked to Dean Hills that Appelmann “seemed to be very popular.” “Oh, extremely so” was

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<sup>49</sup> “The Appelmann Case Again,” *Burlington Free Press*, 15 July 1916, 4.

<sup>50</sup> “Prof. Appelmann Inquiry Private Decided Today,” *Burlington Daily News*, 17 July 1916, 6.

<sup>51</sup> “Hearings Will Be Square,” *Burlington Free Press*, 18 July 1916, 8.

the reply, but UVM remained circumspect with its statements, hoping that the hearing could be viewed as fair and impartial.<sup>52</sup>

An interesting piece of later reportage tells us why the committee felt that Dr. Appelmann needed Dean Hills as his “advisor”: “Professor Appelmann speaks and understands English well, but the committee thought an advisor might help in case an idiom was used that he would need to think twice about before making his reply.”<sup>53</sup> Surely this was a condescending “concession” for this esteemed linguist and scholar. In any case, the committee wrapped up its initial business by 12:15 in the afternoon of 18 July 1916. A record of Dr. Appelmann’s replies to queries was kept to serve as his statement in the case, this serving as his only reply and defense. Adjourning, the investigatory committee planned to reconvene at the Brattleboro home of one of its members, newspaper editor Merton C. Robbins, on 28 July. Relations between Appelmann and the committee were “entirely cordial” during both sessions: it is curious that the *Daily News* did not deign to mention this, or indeed, any of the happenings of the second session at all.<sup>54</sup>

Around this time, President Benton of UVM sent a letter of appreciation to the editors of the *Rutland Herald*, who had published an editorial defending Appelmann. Admiring their “spirit of fair play,” President Benton went on to laud Dr. Appelmann’s achievements, calling him a “scholarly man and an inspiring teacher of the highest character.” He closed by musing that “I have always supposed that in our country we held with tenacity to the principle that a man is innocent until he is proven guilty...”<sup>55</sup> Showing that editorial opinion in Vermont was by no

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<sup>52</sup> “Hearings Will Be Square,” 8.

<sup>53</sup> “Hearing Adjourned,” *Burlington Free Press*, 19 July 1916, 6.

<sup>54</sup> “Hearing Adjourned,” 6.

<sup>55</sup> “The Prof. Appelmann Tempest in a Teapot,” *Rutland Herald*, 21 July 1916, 4.

means constrained to the inflammatory posturing of the *Daily News*, the *Herald* summed up its understanding of the situation by opining that “The whole Appelmann business as it looks from this distance is a very petty affair.”<sup>56</sup>

Other voices aside from the *Daily News* voiced skepticism about Appelmann, or at least in how the proceedings of the inquiry were transpiring. An editorial from the *Northfield News*, republished in the *St. Albans Daily Messenger*, stated that as UVM was a public institution, “by all rights the people should be informed what is being done by those having this investigation in charge.” Be this a true dispute over process or evidence of a deeper bias can only be a matter of speculation, but it does go to show that the whole state’s media was divided on the topic, not just the press in Burlington.<sup>57</sup>

The *Daily News* published on its front page on 14 August 1916 what it seemed to hope would be something of a bombshell: a letter, first intercepted and published by the *New York Times*, written by Appelmann to Rohrbach that referenced the controversy at hand and his feelings on the inquiry. Based on the level of public opprobrium leveled by some elements of the press at Appelmann, his feelings on the matter seem not only justified, but also calm and collected. Bemoaning the fact that his private opinions and correspondence had become grist for the public outrage mill, Appelmann indicated that due to the controversy he “received the craziest kind of messages.” He did have positive words to say about President Guy Potter Benton, characterizing him as a “really neutral American, an independent thinker, and an honest judge” who defended academic freedom, which was “often emphasized and so rarely guaranteed here,” a lament that will be familiar to anyone in the academy even more than a

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<sup>56</sup> “The Prof. Appelmann Tempest in a Teapot,” 4.

<sup>57</sup> “The Appelmann Case,” *St. Albans Daily Messenger*, 27 July 1916, 3.

century later.<sup>58</sup> Appelmann gave an astute appraisal of the situation in stating that “the troublemaking press has made great capital out of this affair in connection with the present political situation” and he candidly remarked that as he was not an American citizen, he felt it unfair to expect him to put America above Germany in his thinking and affections. He also intriguingly posited that his letters had been intercepted and published by British agents working in America, likely as an attempted propaganda coup to build up American resolve for war with Germany.<sup>59</sup>

Granting an interview to the *Daily News* soon after the publication of the intercepted correspondence, Appelmann admitted to the substance of the letters, but also claimed that their translation was inaccurate and that copies of the originals along with the correct translations had been sent to the investigatory committee. Appelmann scolded the *Daily News*, and expressed frustration that they only ever published material in part, not allowing him the chance to be given a “fair deal.” Appelmann expressed the frustrations of an academic, in that people were focusing only on one portion of his total thought and writing as opposed to his wider body of published work. He proclaimed that “if all my letters and publications were to be published at one and the same time, even the most pro-Ally critic would say that they showed more of pro-Americanism than of pro-Germanism.” He readily expressed to his biggest and most consistent media critic that he felt the whole matter was “perfectly absurd.”<sup>60</sup>

### *Lull and War*

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<sup>58</sup> “Letters in Appelmann Case Made Public in the New York Times,” *Burlington Daily News*, 14 August 1916, 1.

<sup>59</sup> “Letters in Appelmann Case Made Public in the New York Times,” 8.

<sup>60</sup> “Interview From Prof. Appelmann,” *Burlington Daily News*, 16 August 1916, 8.



Perfectly absurd the matter may have been, and after several months of wrangling in the court of public opinion and in the pages of the press, the whole affair seems to have left the discourse of Burlington after the summer of 1916. Appellmann's name is seldom mentioned in local papers for the remainder of the year, and when it is, it usually is to signify his presence as a local luminary at prominent public events such as the laying of a cornerstone for a new Catholic high school downtown.<sup>61</sup> Mentions of his name and activities seem to revert back to their pre-scandal norm: we hear of his presence at a meeting of the Deutscher Verein at UVM's Grassmount, where he gave an address on the less than controversial topic of "Holidays in Germany During the Winter Months," followed by refreshments and a lively discussion on current events by one Rose Levin of the class of 1918.<sup>62</sup> His academic work and writing proceeded apace, with *Fritz auf Ferein* being published by Scribner's, and his "new reader of the direct reform method," *Ein Tristiges Lesebuch* being prepared for publication.<sup>63</sup> As far as the public arena was concerned, the affair seemed to disappear as quickly as it arose. With the committee tasked with his investigation taking their time with their deliberations, and with the state and nation focused on the political news of an election year, perhaps it was thought that more pressing issues required the public's attention. The campaign of 1916 was bitter and closely fought, with Republican Charles Evans Hughes hitting incumbent Democrat Woodrow Wilson on labor issues and his perceived softness towards the defense of American rights overseas. Wilson for his part shamelessly used the issues of loyalty and "Americanism" as

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<sup>61</sup> "Laying a Cornerstone," *Burlington Free Press* 2 October 1916, 9.

<sup>62</sup> "University Notes," *Burlington Free Press* 3 November 1916, 9.

<sup>63</sup> "Prof. Appellmann Publishes German Text-books," *Vermont Cynic* 11 November, 1916.

dominant themes in his own campaigning.<sup>64</sup> Though Appelmann himself faded from the headlines as the town awaited the investigative committee's report, the controversies that the affair embodied were readily evident in the national discourse.

Wilson's eventual reelection certainly did nothing to calm the environment, and events would move beyond Appelmann's control even before the Alumni committee could publish its findings. On 9 January 1917, the German military command made the decision to launch its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. Germany's recent victories against Russia on the Eastern Front and a grim determination to take greater risks in the pursuit of a final, total victory underlay its government's decision.<sup>65</sup> With this policy of the German High Command becoming public on 31 January 1917, all ships, regardless of nationality, would be considered fair game for German submarines if they entered the defined war zone.<sup>66</sup> American reaction was swift: in response to the reaffirmation of the unlimited submarine warfare policy, Woodrow Wilson announced to Congress that the United States would sever its diplomatic relations with Germany.<sup>67</sup>

On the same day that the *Free Press* announced the collapse of German-American relations, it reported that Dr. Anton Appelmann submitted a letter of resignation to University of Vermont President Guy Potter Benton. President Benton, who had thus far maintained a public attitude of total adherence to the principles of academic freedom in regards to Appelmann's case, had apparently met a line he would not cross: so long as relations

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<sup>64</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Jörn Leonhard, *Pandora's Box: A History of the First World War* (Cambridge MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 550.

<sup>66</sup> Keene, *The United States and the First World War*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> "President Asks Other Neutrals to Follow Lead of U.S. in Breaking Off Relations With Germany," *Burlington Free Press*, 5 February 1917, 1.

between America and Germany remained friendly, Appelmann had his support. With the situation changed, Benton's stance was that "the University of Vermont must place loyalty to its country above all personal matters and on such a high plane that it could not be questioned."<sup>68</sup> Appelmann offered his resignation, and it was accepted. In his letter of resignation, Appelmann stated that the "step is taken by me with extreme sadness, but it seems the only honorable course open to me." He wrote that "I have tried to be faithful to my Fatherland without abuse of the hospitality so generously shown by this country. I am not conscious of any improper action toward the government of the United States." He concluded that he left the University "without malice, and with the hope that someday I may be permitted to return to its service."<sup>69</sup>

### *The Report and the Board*

With Appelmann's resignation submitted, it appeared the affair may have reached its end. However, the feeling changed soon thereafter when the findings of the Alumni investigation into the un-American activities of Anton Appelmann was finally released on 14 February 1917. Its conclusion was nearly unanimous: the only whiff of any untoward activities by Appelmann was the letter which had been intercepted and published by the *New York Times* in April of 1916. The majority of the committee felt the letter had been sufficiently explained and discounted. The majority stated that "any claim of any other anti-American activity there might be rests wholly upon suspicion and is supported by no evidence whatsoever."<sup>70</sup> The findings of the

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<sup>68</sup> "Prof. Appelmann Resigns," *Burlington Free Press*, 5 February 1917, 5.

<sup>69</sup> "Prof. Appelmann Resigns," 5.

<sup>70</sup> "German Professor is Exonerated in Alumni Report," *Burlington Free Press*, 15 February 1917, 2.

report were laid before the executive committee of the University of Vermont's Board of Trustees, along with Dr. Appelmann's letter of resignation. It was decided Appelmann's position should be referred to the full board, and President Benton seemed willing to reconsider Appelmann's employment; indeed he desired that he retain his position as department chair until the Board made its ultimate decision. In addition, a petition signed by two hundred current students of the UVM College of Arts and Sciences defending Appelmann and imploring the Board not to accept his resignation was submitted.<sup>71</sup>

As was indicated however, the Alumni findings were not unanimous. A minority report of one, namely Committee Chairman Henry B. Shaw, stated that it believed Dr. Appelmann was indeed "an official German agent in this country" and furthermore, that he was merely one part of an "organized spy system whose headquarters are in Berlin."<sup>72</sup> It is surely by now no surprise that this was the angle given primary emphasis by the editors of the *Burlington Daily News*, who maintained that they were convinced of Appelmann's guilt. Mr. Shaw continued to profess that he believed "that Dr. Appelmann's status in this country... was something different than he stated before the committee..." In essence, Shaw found it unbelievable that a German citizen residing in the United States could not be communicating with "the efficient German government, in the exigencies of war."<sup>73</sup> The *Daily News* even ran a miffed little piece stating that the student petition in support of Appelmann was merely "to express their appreciation of Mr. Appelmann as a man, and a professor" and that it "in no way passes upon the

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<sup>71</sup> "German Professor is Exonerated in Alumni Report," 1.

<sup>72</sup> "Appelmann Official Agent of Germany?" *Burlington Daily News*, 14 February 1917, 1.

<sup>73</sup> "German Professor is Exonerated in Alumni Report," 1.

merits or demerits of the professor's anti-Americanism."<sup>74</sup> It appeared that the anti-German argument in Burlington was to some degree grasping at straws in their reading of the situation. In the meantime, with the situation for him perhaps stabilizing somewhat, it was reported that Appelmenn did not have immediate plans to return home, and was even seeking to begin the process of naturalization as an American citizen.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, it was announced by UVM that they intended to have Dr. Appelmenn teach summer school later that year.<sup>76</sup>

Appelmenn's ultimate fate now rested with the UVM Board of Trustees, and they appeared in no great rush to adjudicate his case. Appelmenn found himself stuck in a legal and social limbo, and expressed his frustrations in a letter to a friend (somehow acquired by the *Daily News*): "at present my situation here is so bad that even my life is in danger as I have been informed by the people who know. I wish just as sincerely as anyone that a clear decision might be reached; the sooner the better..."<sup>77</sup> With America by early April now formally at war with Germany, it could be easily surmised that Appelmenn was feeling intense pressure which was going unreported in the pages of the press. The university trustees likely felt this pressure as well: despite Appelmenn's popularity, the support of President Benton, and the exoneration of him by the Alumni Board, the trustees accepted his resignation "in view of the present deplorable conditions" that existed between the United States and Germany. With America now at war, Appelmenn's presence had become both embarrassing and untenable for the University.

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<sup>74</sup> "Students Like Dr. Appelmenn, Says Petition," *Burlington Daily News*, 14 February 1917, 1.

<sup>75</sup> "Professor Appelmenn," *Burlington Free Press*, 16 February 1917, 9.

<sup>76</sup> "Summer School Plans Out," *Burlington Free Press*, 28 February 1917, 5.

<sup>77</sup> "Dr. Appelmenn Declares His Life Endangered," *Burlington Daily News*, 10 April 1917, 1.

Among the Board member voices speaking in opposition to Appelmann was future UVM president Guy W. Bailey who “thought the record disclosed that Dr. Appelmann had been guilty of indiscretions which the majority report should have noted with censure.”<sup>78</sup> The trustees did grant Appelmann the ability to finish up the academic year at the institution in the hopes that it “would not interfere with the course for students.”<sup>79</sup>

### *The End of the Affair*

The endgame was now at hand for Appelmann’s connection with the University of Vermont, though there were still twists and turns along the way. The Trustees voted around commencement time in 1917 to reappoint Appelmann to the vacant position of Professor of German, in essence reversing their previous stance on accepting his termination. What was not public at the time, and would not be known widely until much later, was that President Benton had since decided that he so strongly desired that Appelmann stay that he threatened to resign himself if the Board didn’t back down.<sup>80</sup> A few days later, chaos reigned at the annual meeting of the UVM Alumni Association, meeting in the University Chapel. A motion was made to reject the Alumni majority report that had exonerated Appelmann, and to adopt the minority report of Shaw as the official stance of the UVM Alumni, regardless of how it would have been viewed as a slap

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in T.D. Seymour Bassett, “Guy Bailey and the University of Vermont,” in *The University of Vermont: The First Two Hundred Years*, ed. Robert V. Daniels (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1991): 206–219, esp. 210.

<sup>79</sup> “Exoneration of Prof. Appelmann,” *Burlington Free Press*, 14 April 1917, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Bassett, “A Small University With Ivy League Aspirations, 1895-1940: Overview,” 201.

against the Trustees. Indeed, many members jumped up to second the motion. If it weren't for the unusual timing of the meeting, taking place just a few days after commencement, the motion may have been carried. As it turned out, members of the recently graduated class of 1917 were not only able to attend, but were still in town, and they ensured that the motion was defeated. The margin was razor thin however: only six votes.<sup>81</sup> Political pressure against Appelmann's role at the University was becoming unbearable. It is however interesting to make note of the extant and evident generation gap regarding opinion over the German professor: older alumni were keen to remove him, whereas more recent graduates (who presumably had spent time with and knew him better) seemed to be much more prone to support him.

When the Army Signal Corps selected UVM as a training camp site for its personnel later in the year, it was required that Appelmann receive a government permit in order to continue his teaching. An initial hearing on the matter was conducted by the United States Marshall A. P. Carpenter, and this event was the catalyst for all of the old controversies to again rear their heads. Around this time, Appelmann was informed by the State Department that they had obtained permission for him to return to Germany if he so desired. He made a trip in person to Washington, D.C. to discuss the issue with department officials. During the course of the meetings it was told to him that the government had grown tired with the continuing controversy regarding his presence in the United States. No charges were made against him, and it was understood that vis-a-vis the American government he held a "clean slate." However, it was also imparted to him in less than uncertain terms that it would be best for him to fully resign to save the university and the

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<sup>81</sup> "Warm Meeting of Alumni," *Burlington Free Press*, 26 June 1917, 6.

government from any further difficulty. Perhaps himself wearied with the constant pressures he was likely feeling, Appelmann did finally sever his relationship with the university.<sup>82</sup> He immediately sought to make arrangements to work with interred American prisoners of war who were being held in Germany, believing that his knowledge of the English language and of American culture would be beneficial in this regard.<sup>83</sup>

What is most striking about the end of Appelmann's tenure at UVM was how little it was discussed. Word was received in Burlington on 3 December 1917 that Appelmann had sailed to Germany from Halifax. After this, he disappears from the Vermont newspaper record.<sup>84</sup> If the situation regarding his final departure seems somewhat clipped and abbreviated, it is only a reflection of the relative paucity of reportage regarding Appelmann that was printed at this time. With the country now firmly on a war footing, and with the controversy having lulled for some time, perhaps Vermont was ready to move on from the situation just as Appelmann was. Of Appelmann's later life, little can be discerned from the newspaper record. After the war's end, he served as a civilian liaison officer between the United States and Germany in American occupied Coblenz. He did return to America, spending time in New York where he was head of a concern called the German Health Resorts Bureau. Appelmann died in the German town of Osnabrück on 19 November 1929 at the age of forty-five.<sup>85</sup>

This obscure ending for a talented and popular professor is a sad testament to the power of community prejudice. Dr.

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<sup>82</sup> "Appelmann Leaves the University," *Burlington Free Press*, 13 November 1917, 1.

<sup>83</sup> "Appelmann Leaves the University," 1.

<sup>84</sup> "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, 3 December 1917, 8.

<sup>85</sup> "Dr. A.H. Appelmann is Dead in Germany," *New York Times*, 20 November 1929, 28.



Appelmann only ever seemed to evince excitement and passion for his research, his teaching, and his institution, but the harsh attitudes towards ethnic minority communities in the build-up to America's involvement in the First World War saw many in his previously supportive environment turn on him. The popular press played a large role in fanning these flames: national figures who knew little about the situation on the ground were able to fulminate against Appelmann from a distance, while local media used the inflammatory allegations lodged against him as grist for the mill of their headlines and circulation. Appelmann's academic family was not able to save him: despite a supportive UVM president, internal university politics and the pressures of a more radical national environment made his position exhausting and ultimately untenable. Ultimately, the whole affair illustrates the tenor and consequences of World War One-era discourse on a regional scale; such stories in individual communities across the country contributed to the formation of a generalized national attitude. The ways in which local media reported on an issue influenced other stakeholders in the locality, garnering in turn national attention and scrutiny. Dr. Appelmann's career and situation does much to illustrate the interconnected nature of media power and public discourse in America in the early twentieth century, and illuminates how even the happenings of a small city like Burlington, Vermont, could become integrated in a wider, consequential discourse.

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## The Student Divestment Movement at the University of Vermont: A True Rejection of Capitalism?

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*Michael Harrity*

“When there’s snow up to there, we’re going to be here,” said Anna Ball, a sophomore at the University of Vermont, pointing three feet high on one of the makeshift walls of the school’s shantytown.<sup>1</sup> Anna was a leader of the Apartheid Negation Congress (ANC), which helped organize the divestment from Apartheid movement on campus. UVM’s Shantytown, which was dubbed “Crossroads” by student organizers, was erected on October 12, 1985 as a place for students to learn about and support the divestment movement.



Figure 1: Picture of “Crossroads,” UVM’s rendition of a shantytown, University of Vermont Archives.

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Schoch, “UVM Decides Again Against Divestment,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 13 October 1985.

It withstood criticism, vandalism, and arson for nearly two months until the Board of Trustees voted for full divestiture.<sup>2</sup> Crossroads was one prong in a multifaceted effort to persuade the University of Vermont to fully divest from American companies that were doing business in Apartheid South Africa.

In a period that is often clouded by Reagan-era conservatism—lower taxes, military spending, and economic deregulation filled the political discourse—Ball and her fellow activists pushed against the grain. But how did they get there? How did Ball and her friends in the ANC decide it was time to build what the *Burlington Free Press* called a “ramshackle collection of scrap-lumber huts.”<sup>3</sup> What were the circumstances that persuaded the University of Vermont Board of Trustees to vote for full divestiture? How much impact did the student movement have? This paper will answer these questions in three sections. First, it will trace the origins of the overall divestment from Apartheid movement and the movement at UVM. It will show how Marry Berry’s visit to UVM in late January of 1985 was a catalyst for renewed student activism on campus. Second, the arguments for and against divestment will be outlined. This section will focus heavily on the conversation that was happening on campus at UVM. It will give insight into the complications of the issue and show how the pro-divestment arguments were rooted in morality. Finally, this paper will show how the persistence of protesters kept the issue in the spotlight and compelled President Coor and the Board of Trustees to address it. While the ultimate divestiture plan can be marked as a compromise between economic and moral interests, the student and faculty protestors played a critical role in pushing divestment over the finish line.

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<sup>2</sup> Schoch, “UVM Decides Again Against Divestment.”

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Schoch, “Shanty Town Symbolizes UVM Divestment Protest,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 15 October 1985.

## Historiography

Extensive literature on the Student Divestment from Apartheid movement is fairly limited. Scholarship has touched on the subject, but there is not a sufficient analysis of the movement. In his book, *Loosing The Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years*, Robert Massie gives a comprehensive historical overview of the time period.<sup>4</sup> He tracks the parallels between South Africa and the United States and gives an assessment of the relationship between the two countries. Massie also explores the policymaking of the Apartheid Government, the American Civil Rights Movement, and the rise of Desmond Tutu in America. While this book provides an excellent summary of the time period, it lacks the specificity needed to adequately evaluate the divestment movement. Articles like Mangaliso's "South Africa: Corporate Social Responsibility and the Sullivan Principles" show how America was able to tie economic interests with political ones. It helped display how Americans evolved their thinking to use economic forces to undermine the "moral legitimacy" of the White Apartheid government.<sup>5</sup> While Mangaliso touches on ideas that helped fuel the divestment movement, his limited focus on the Sullivan Principles prevents him from showing the true importance of the divestment movement as its own entity.

Perhaps the best framing of the Student Divestment movement is given in Bradford Martin's *The Other Eighties*. In this book, Martin endeavors to tell the story of the 1980s without mentioning Ronald Reagan. In doing this, he examines "the less-

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Mzamo Mangaliso, "South Africa: Corporate Social Responsibility and the Sullivan Principles," *Journal of Black Studies* 75, no. 3 (1997): 219–238.

told story of Americans who opposed the decade's prevailing political tides.”<sup>6</sup> His argument focuses on the “opposition to Reagan conservatism” and labels the divestment movement as “an underpublicized resurgence of student activism.”<sup>7</sup> Martin is right to frame the divestment movement in this manner. It was clearly an oppositional movement and its successes cannot be ignored. Student activism persuaded many elite institutions to divest holdings from companies doing business in South Africa. The impact of this diversion of hundreds of millions of dollars should not be underestimated in the ultimate demise of Apartheid. That being said, Martin is a little quick to give student activists all of the credit. As this case study of the University of Vermont will show, divestment was a complicated issue that schools weighed carefully. Martin paints divestment as a clear moral choice by educational institutions that directly conflicted with their economic interests. In actuality, many of the negative economic consequences were overstated. This suggests that divestment was not as fervent of a rejection of neo-conservatism and capitalism as Martin indicates. This paper contends that if the economic ramifications had been more stringent, then UVM—and by extension other schools like it—may have never divested at all.

### *Divestment's Precursors*

It is difficult to contextualize the 1980s student divestment movement without first recognizing the parallels between South Africa and the United States. After his first year as the U.S. ambassador to the Union of South Africa, Waldemar J. Gallman reported to Washington that “South Africans have turned to me

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<sup>6</sup> Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), X.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, *The Other Eighties*, XI.

and said: ‘You can understand our race problem. You have the same problem in the United States.’”<sup>8</sup> The similarities between the United States and South Africa were not hard to identify. Both countries had formal systems of oppression against a specific racial class or classes. The difference lies in the aspirational ideals of both countries.

The United States, which was founded by an assortment of European immigrants, took time to foster ambitious principles of “freedom” and “equality.” The Civil Rights Movement was successful in highlighting the appalling hypocrisy of this vision. It drew on long-held cultural values and understandings of national identity to show that our nation’s ideals should be applicable to all. Before long, political leaders were discussing this duplicity and calling for change. In June of 1963, John F. Kennedy offered a moving speech and proposed legislation that would later become the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Addressing the nation from the Oval Office, John F. Kennedy said “We preach freedom around the world, and mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and more importantly to each other, that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes ... Now the time has come for the nation to fulfill its promise.”<sup>9</sup> After securing political freedom and equality with the passage of critical Civil Rights legislation in the mid-1960s, the liberal movement lost momentum.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked a rise in neo-conservatism. Kennedy’s vision of championing freedom at home and overseas was soon left in the rearview mirror. The Reagan Administration implemented a foreign policy doctrine that differed significantly from Kennedy and President Carter’s

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together: African Americans and Apartheid, 1945-1960* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 141.

humanitarian approach. Jean Kirkpatrick rose to prominence in the Reagan Administration largely by fiercely criticizing the Carter Administration's approach to autocratic regimes.<sup>10</sup> In her essay "Dictatorships and Double Standards," Kirkpatrick argued that America should be wary of toppling autocratic governments like the ones in Iran and Nicaragua, assuming that they are friendly to American interests. She argued that both Somoza in Nicaragua and the Shah in Iran were "Traditional rulers of semi-traditional societies."<sup>11</sup> She continued by saying that both were "Positively friendly to the U.S." and they both "regularly" supported American economic interests.<sup>12</sup> While her essay did not specifically pertain to South Africa, the message was clear: if autocratic regimes upheld American economic and political interests, they should be supported by Washington. This doctrine provided a clear blueprint for the Pretorian government to follow.

As Reagan took office in 1980, he followed Kirkpatrick's doctrine closely. Primarily concerned with Soviet expansion into southern Africa, Reagan seemed content to accept the lip service that Apartheid was being reformed.<sup>13</sup> His knowledge beyond that in South Africa was fairly limited. Chester Arthur Crocker, a foreign policy scholar who served in the Reagan Administration noted that "All Reagan knows about southern Africa is that he's on the side of the whites."<sup>14</sup> Reagan confirmed this sentiment early in his first term. On March 4, 1980 he told a reporter that South Africa was a strong ally in the war against Communism: "Can we abandon a country that has stood by us in every war we have fought? ... If we're going to sit down at a table and negotiate

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," *Commentary Magazine* (1979) 37–45.

<sup>11</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 485.

<sup>12</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 485.

<sup>13</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 485.

<sup>14</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 485.

with the Russians, surely, we can keep the door open and continue to negotiate with a friendly nation like South Africa.”<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, Reagan was a popular figure in the Pretorian government. Apartheid government leaders rejoiced when Reagan was re-elected 1984.<sup>16</sup>

Reagan’s seemingly heartless apathy towards the atrocities occurring in Apartheid South Africa did not originally concern the vast majority of Americans. Culturally, Americans were prioritizing individualism and consumerism. These values extended to American youth. Mike Davis summarizes these cultural priorities well in his book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*: “Across the spectrum of runaway youth consumerism and the impossible fantasies of personal potency and immunity, youth of all classes and colors are grasping at undeferred gratification—even if it paves the way to self-assured destruction.”<sup>17</sup> Davis was discussing youth specifically in Los Angeles, but his assertion can be broadened to college students in Vermont: students were materialistic and individualistic.

On January 31, 1985, Marry Frances Berry, a former member of the United States Civil Rights Commission, gave a keynote speech at the University of Vermont to kick off the school’s celebration of Black History Month. Berry did not mince her words. She argued that progress had stalled since the Civil Rights era and in some ways, it had regressed: “Trying to achieve liberty and justice remains more elusive this year than it has been at any time since the beginning of the civil rights movement.”<sup>18</sup> In many ways this regression was not the students’ fault. She

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<sup>15</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 485–486.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, *The Other Eighties*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Davis, *The City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Books, 1990), 315.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine Clarke, “Racial Equality Needs More Emphasis Says Berry,” *UVM Record* 3, no. 11, 28 February 1985.



called out the Reagan Administration for making the situation in South Africa worse.<sup>19</sup> But Berry challenged the students to expect more from themselves: “Your generation has benefited from the struggles of other people, so you have felt it not necessary to do it yourselves ... but you’ve got to do it yourselves.”<sup>20</sup> To Berry, challenging the Apartheid regime was a good place to start. Apartheid South Africa was a good place to exercise moral clarity because there was little ambiguity to it: Apartheid was clearly wrong. Therefore, as Berry put it, “Anything you do to give sanction or approval [to Apartheid] is wrong.”<sup>21</sup> Berry called on UVM students to get off of the sideline and begin to do the work. If change would not happen in Washington, it needed to start somewhere else.

Berry was not alone in this thinking. The idea to dismantle the Apartheid government through economic means started with a man named Leon Sullivan. Sullivan became the first black man to serve on the board of a major corporation when he joined General Motors in 1971. During his time on the board, Sullivan became a strong anti-Apartheid activist. On a trip to South Africa in the summer of 1975, Sullivan was advised by community leaders that advocating for total divestment was a bad idea because it “would not have 100 percent success and is therefore a meaningless gesture.”<sup>22</sup>

Adam Klein, the general secretary of the Garment Workers Union of South Africa, followed up on this advice in a letter to Sullivan. He counseled that “Rather than encourage the withdrawal of American capital from South Africa, you could

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<sup>19</sup> David B. Jamieson, “Activist Berry Reclaims Lost Ground,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 7 February 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Jamieson, “Activist Berry Reclaims Lost Ground.”

<sup>21</sup> Alex Nemerov, “South African Investment Policy Ethical Coor Says,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 7 February 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 387–388.

take a positive stance and call for American companies in South Africa to recognize the same working conditions as they employ in America.”<sup>23</sup> By focusing on working conditions, Sullivan hoped to garner enough support to call attention to the issue of Apartheid. As Sullivan recalled later, “There was nothing else I could think of to get a handle on it. The churches couldn’t do it. The schools couldn’t do it, because they were part of apartheid. The government couldn’t do it, because they *were* apartheid.”<sup>24</sup> Sullivan was skeptical that international pressure could be successful, so he turned his attention to economic pressure: “I had to get my hand on something that could begin the process of change.”<sup>25</sup> Sullivan’s work resulted in the “Statement of Principles of U.S. Firms with Affiliates in the Republic of South Africa,” known colloquially as the Sullivan Principles, which called upon U.S. multinational corporations to implement non-segregation in the workplace, equal pay and fair employment practices for all employees, and improve the quality of employees lives outside of work.<sup>26</sup> Sullivan’s work paid off. He succeeded in convincing a dozen powerful American companies to sign onto the principles, including Ford, General Motors, and IBM.<sup>27</sup>

The Sullivan Principles were a step in the right direction, but still collected many criticisms. Anti-Apartheid groups called the principles “an exercise in triviality.”<sup>28</sup> George House and Jennifer Davis at the American Committee on Africa argued that even if the principles were implemented, they could not compensate for the enormous material support that American corporations provided the Pretorian government. Without a

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<sup>23</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 388.

<sup>24</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 388.

<sup>25</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 388.

<sup>26</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 408.

<sup>27</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 409.

<sup>28</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 408.

demand for black political rights or a promise to negotiate with black trade unions, U.S. corporations would continue to prop up the Apartheid government's rule.<sup>29</sup> These criticisms, along with the fact that U.S. corporations only accounted for one percent of the black workforce in South Africa, meant that the tangible impact of the Sullivan Principles was fairly limited.<sup>30</sup> The symbolic impact, however, was real. The disputes within corporations over the decision to endorse the Sullivan Principles shifted the meaning of corporate responsibility in the United States. What was once considered a radical move, approving the Sullivan Principles "became accepted as a reasonable middle ground between doing nothing and actively divesting."<sup>31</sup> The Sullivan Principles represented a shift in what corporate responsibility meant. As the Reagan Administration remained paralyzed in its resistance to the Apartheid Government, U.S. corporations began to shoulder some more social responsibility.

This incremental approach was not working in the way that Berry or other anti-Apartheid leaders had hoped. To take a true moral stand against Apartheid meant full divestment. Within a few weeks of Berry's call to action, University of Vermont President Lattie Coor announced that he was going to reopen the University Investment Action Committee (UIAC). This committee was originally started in 1979 to examine the University's investments in Apartheid. It was composed of students, faculty, trustees, and one representative from Coor's office. The 1979 report advised the school to solely invest in companies that followed the Sullivan Principles. After Berry's call to action, Coor reopened the committee and charged them with reassessing the 1979 decision.

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<sup>29</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 409.

<sup>30</sup> Mangaliso, "South Africa," 223.

<sup>31</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 530.

## *The Pros and Cons*

Despite Coor's amenability to reopening the UIAC committee, he was dismissive of divestment. He defended the original UIAC decision of only investing in companies that openly supported the Sullivan principles. After what Coor called "an extensive examination of all the questions," they ultimately came to the right conclusion.<sup>32</sup> Coor continued by saying that "We would have very little, if any, effect other than a symbolic one in simply selling the shares we held in those American corporations."<sup>33</sup> After all, "our holdings are miniscule."<sup>34</sup> William Bright, a faculty member of both the 1979 and 1985 UIAC committee, thought differently: "In 1979 we saw the Principles as something to adopt instead of divestiture, but these principles are really just stop gap measures, and will never get rid of apartheid."<sup>35</sup> The differences between Coor and Bright's beliefs largely track what both sides of the argument believed. The anti-divestment supporters were certainly not condoning Apartheid or its practices, but they were skeptical that UVM—a rural state school thousands of miles from the shores of South Africa—had any ability to enact real political change.

In an editorial in the *Vermont Cynic* on April 11, 1985, student Stephen Wilson summarized this skepticism well. In his opinion, Wilson identified three reasons why he opposed divestment. First, Wilson argued that American divestment was a controversial subject in South Africa itself. He pointed to Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a leader of a large black political organization in South Africa, as a figure who had denounced

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<sup>32</sup> Nemerov, "South African Investment Policy Ethical Coor Says."

<sup>33</sup> Nemerov, "South African Investment Policy Ethical Coor Says."

<sup>34</sup> Nemerov, "South African Investment Policy Ethical Coor Says."

<sup>35</sup> Eric Lipton, "Solid Education will boost U.S. edge, says IBM executive," *The Vermont Cynic*, 7 March 1985.

divestment.<sup>36</sup> Wilson openly wondered why we should support divestment when there was not widespread agreement on it in South Africa. He also argued that economic sanctions had been largely ineffective in South Africa up until that point. And finally, Wilson argued that full U.S. divestment would lead to a loss of more than 120,000 jobs.<sup>37</sup> Overall, Wilson's point was simple: controversial issues with ambiguous outcomes should not be grounds for moral pontificating. Gary Owens, a first-year student, shared this opinion in a *Cynic* poll on April 18, 1985: "It's capitalism ... we're not going to fix all the problems in the world."<sup>38</sup> This argument circles the point that seemed to be on everyone's mind. Should these issues not be resolved in the political sphere? Student Association (SA) Senator David MacLaughlin raised these same concerns when he argued that the SA should not discuss issues "which belong in the U.S. Senate."<sup>39</sup> The pro-divestment supporters channeled Mary Frances Berry's words and wanted to refute that exact point. With Reagan following the Kirkpatrick doctrine, it seemed necessary to act outside of normal political channels. Reagan's steadfast support of the Apartheid government proved to divestment supporters that action must come from beyond political channels. If politicians chose to ignore moral calamities, divestment supporters argued that something else needed to fill the void.

In an article contending that the Student Association should examine the issue of Apartheid, the *Vermont Cynic* Editorial Board summarized the opinions of the pro-divestment supporters well. They gave two reasons why the Student

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Wilson, "South African divestment not a good decision now," *The Vermont Cynic*, 11 April 1985.

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, "South African divestment not a good decision now."

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, "South African divestment not a good decision now."

<sup>39</sup> The Editorial Board, "South African question warrants SA Discussion," *The Vermont Cynic*, 28 March 1985.

Association should examine the issue. In the article, they refuted any claim that students were not impacted by the issue and that they cannot have an impact: “By calling on the University Administration to actively pursue divestment the S.A. Senate is stating that it is opposed to the racist policies and does not want students’ tuition money spent on companies that support South African Apartheid.”<sup>40</sup> This was not simply a tuition argument either. The Editorial Board argued that the mere act of publicly condemning Apartheid was in of itself important: “Having one more person or group going on record regarding an issue, if only symbolic, lets our elected officials, University Officials, faculty, and fellow students know that the issue must be addressed.”<sup>41</sup> While the SA Senate wrestled with their role on the issue of Apartheid, the UIAC held open hearings to weigh student opinions.

Adamant voices like that of sophomore Katie Gluck arose at the first UIAC meeting on March 28, 1985. She testified that “As a university, we claim to enhance culture. Divestment is an important symbol to show our opposition to an unethical system.”<sup>42</sup> Senior Tory Riley agreed and argued that UVM should not be a part of “a vehicle of exploitation.”<sup>43</sup> Not all of the voices, however, were supportive of divestment. Allan Paul argued that “There is repression all over the world. You could say that we shouldn’t buy stock in Pepsi because they sell it in the Soviet Union.”<sup>44</sup> Riley plainly replied, “We have to start somewhere.”<sup>45</sup> These quotes show how American-centric the argument was at

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<sup>40</sup> The Editorial Board, “South African question warrants SA Discussion.”

<sup>41</sup> The Editorial Board, “South African question warrants SA Discussion.”

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Seff, “UIAC weighs testimony on investment in South Africa,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 28 March 1985.

<sup>43</sup> Seff, “UIAC weighs testimony on investment in South Africa.”

<sup>44</sup> Seff, “UIAC weighs testimony on investment in South Africa.”

<sup>45</sup> Seff, “UIAC weighs testimony on investment in South Africa.”

UVM. Riley and Gluck both centered America's role in dismantling oppression.<sup>46</sup>

Despite these strong divestment voices, Apartheid remained a relatively niche issue. Interest in UIAC meetings was fairly limited. In another *Vermont Cynic* article titled "UVM Student reaction to S. Africa needs a jolt," the Editorial Board called out students for not being more invested. While protests at other colleges around the country erupted, including a blockade that garnered national attention at Columbia University, University of Vermont students were seemingly lacking passion: "Sadly, the visceral feeling of outrage that has enveloped other college students seems utterly lost here at UVM."<sup>47</sup> UIAC meetings were typically only attended by a "mere handful" of students.<sup>48</sup> The Editorial Board was especially disappointed by this low attendance: "When only 12 show up, the only conclusion that the trustees can make is that it's business-as-usual in South Africa, with no one making them accountable for helping prop up the brutal oppression in that country."<sup>49</sup> Things changed when UVM students returned from summer vacation in the fall of 1985.

### *Divestment's Endurance*

Starting at Convocation in August, the University's celebration of new student arrivals on campus, students and faculty carried two black coffins. The *Cynic* described the coffins as "symbolic of the deaths caused by apartheid."<sup>50</sup> The protests came in response to

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<sup>46</sup> Seff, "UIAC weighs testimony on investment in South Africa."

<sup>47</sup> The Editorial Board, "UVM student reaction to S. Africa needs a jolt," *The Vermont Cynic*, 11 April 1985.

<sup>48</sup> The Editorial Board, "UVM student reaction to S. Africa needs a jolt."

<sup>49</sup> The Editorial Board, "UVM student reaction to S. Africa needs a jolt."

<sup>50</sup> Alexandra Rochefort, "Convocation opens new year amidst student protest," *The Vermont Cynic*, 5 September 1985.

the final UIAC report, which had been released on August 20th. The report stated that “U.S. corporations with operations in South Africa that subscribe to the Sullivan principles do by their corporate practices deprive persons in their employ of fundamental human rights.”<sup>51</sup> Because of this “deprivation,” the committee formally recommended to the school that it should divest its holdings from companies that do business in South Africa within six months.<sup>52</sup> This report set the stage for “Perhaps the most scrutinized trustees’ meeting in UVM’s history” on September 7, 1985.<sup>53</sup> At the Board meeting, several people testified in support of divestment. Nao Mnumzana, a United Nations representative from the African National Congress, flew from New York City to call for support for divestment. In a stirring speech, he refuted the claim that divestment would hurt black people. He compared this argument to that of slave owners in the American South who claimed that “liberated slaves might lack food and housing.”<sup>54</sup> Undeterred by these testimonies and the hundreds of student protesters that surrounded the meeting at Patrick Gymnasium, the Board of Trustees voted against divestment by a tally of twelve to eleven. The critical deciding vote was President Coor, who abstained.<sup>55</sup> In an interview with the *Vermont Cynic* right before the vote, Coor reiterated his thought process: “My own sense is that it is a somewhat oblique

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<sup>51</sup> “Report on South Africa,” *Report on South Africa* (Burlington, VT: The University of Vermont, 1985).

<sup>52</sup> “Report on South Africa.”

<sup>53</sup> Rochefort, “Convocation opens new year amidst student protest.”

<sup>54</sup> Roddy O’Neil Cleary, “UVM Trustees Should Listen to Concerned Students,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 12 September 1985.

<sup>55</sup> Deborah Schoch, “Coor to Vote Yes to UVM Divestiture,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 13 September 1985.



relationship, and that the greater significance is in the symbolic, yet significant act (of divestment).”<sup>56</sup>

The vote against divestment energized the student body in a way that it had not been before. The backlash was severe and swift. D. Bethuel Jamieson, a black student at UVM, was disappointed but not surprised by the vote: “The Board of Trustees made a wise decision to turn the other cheek in dealing with South Africa. To have voted in favor of divestment would have been a shame and a lie. The trustees have made it painfully clear that I intend to remain a stranger in this community.”<sup>57</sup> Mnumzana was similarly disappointed. He argued that the board “aligned itself with a dwindling minority” and that the trustees were “blinded by myopic self-interest.”<sup>58</sup> Within days Coor changed his tune. On September 12, President Coor announced that he would support divestiture, provided that it be done on a longer timeline. He suggested a plan that would allow full divestment in eighteen to twenty-four months. He elaborated on his reasoning for the extended timeframe:

To sever all of our ties immediately, without trying to seize the moment, joining with other universities and shareholders to seek to have businesses set as a condition of their presence in South Africa a commitment by the South African government to end apartheid is to relinquish one of the few tools we have at our disposal for effecting change.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel Seff, “Pres. Coor Contemplates Divestiture,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 5 September 1985.

<sup>57</sup> D. Bethuel Jamieson, “UVM’s Decision not to divest rooted in curriculum’s anti-black bias,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 12 September 1985.

<sup>58</sup> Roddy O’Neil Cleary, “UVM Trustees Should Listen to Concerned Students,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 12 September 1985.

<sup>59</sup> Schoch, “Coor to Vote Yes to UVM Divestiture.”

Coor believed that a slower divestment would allow UVM to better leverage its holdings with other institutions to magnify its impact. Students were less than pleased with his compromise. Frequent protests were organized throughout the next month. From sit-ins in President Coor's office, to marches down South Prospect street, UVM students were steadfast in their belief that a full and rapid divestment was needed.<sup>60</sup>



Figure 2: Student protest in President Lattie Coor's office on September 24, 1985, University of Vermont Archives.

As the students continued their unwavering support of divestment, Coor and the Board of Trustees began to assess what the real economic ramifications of divestment would be. In an interview with the *Associated Press* in April of 1985, Columbia University's treasurer and Executive Vice President for Finance, Anthony Knerr broke down the dilemma: "The Decision whether to divest is really a three-legged stool: what are the financial

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<sup>60</sup> Schoch, "Coor to Vote Yes to UVM Divestiture."

consequences, what are the political ramifications of the decision, and what do the trustees feel a school like Columbia should or shouldn't be doing with questions of social policy."<sup>61</sup> By the fall of 1985, research started to show that divestment was not necessarily the economic anchor that it was often painted to be. A study conducted by David Hauck, a senior analyst at a leading nonprofit in Washington, D.C., released a report called "Impact of South Africa-Related Divestment." Hauck's study concluded that a school with a relatively modest endowment, less than fifty million dollars, "could fairly readily adopt a South African Free portfolio—particularly a school with relatively modest investment goals."<sup>62</sup> University of Vermont's endowment in the fall of 1985 was forty-four million dollars. And with seven million invested in multinational corporations doing business in South Africa, the economics did not look as dire as it once did.

After the Board of Trustees voted again against divestment on October 12, this time by a vote of twelve to nine, student passions again erupted. The plan proposed was one that followed Coor's eighteen-month timeline: the two votes that flipped from the September meeting supported the six-month timeline.<sup>63</sup> On the day of the failed vote, leaders of the ANC constructed "Crossroads," UVM's rendition of a shantytown. Student Jay Weedon described his support of Crossroads: "The Board hasn't simply refused to hear; they've actively blocked all of our channels."<sup>64</sup> This vote marked a shift in how the protests

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<sup>61</sup> The Associated Press, "Divestment Can be an Economic Dilemma for Colleges," *The Burlington Free Press*, 26 April 1985.

<sup>62</sup> The Associated Press, "Divestment Can be an Economic Dilemma for Colleges."

<sup>63</sup> Daniel Seff, "Divestment meeting assumes heavy proportions," *The Vermont Cynic*, 5 September 1985.

<sup>64</sup> Amy Schlegel, "Civil Disobedience provokes arrest of six students," *The Vermont Cynic*, 24 October 1985.

were conducted on campus. Prior to the October 12 vote, much of the debate had remained cordial. Coor was even praised by the *Burlington Free Press* for his leadership. It credited his decision to make the UIAC as a reason for why UVM had avoided the disruptions that students at Columbia and other schools were causing.<sup>65</sup>

In conjunction with Crossroads, the ANC planned another sit-in at President Coor's office. What was peaceful just a couple weeks before, turned turbulent. Thirteen students created a physical barrier blocking anyone from entering Coor's Office. The scuffle that ensued led to the arrests of eleven people, including three faculty members, seven UVM students, and one non-student.<sup>66</sup> One faculty member was charged with a felony for assaulting a police officer.<sup>67</sup> Several days after that demonstration, protesters created a physical barrier and blocked the entrance of an Economics 296 class. The class was scheduled to hear Jack Burke, an executive at IBM, speak. IBM was one of the companies that UVM was invested in that was doing business in South Africa. This obstruction was met with severe condemnation from the Dean of Students Keith Miser, who had been previously supportive of the protests: "There is a difference between dissent and discussion. Teaching is what this university is about. Their action was completely unacceptable and inappropriate. I am very angry."<sup>68</sup>

The anti-divestment forces did not escape culpability either. The ANC started Crossroads as a place where academic discourse could thrive, and where all opinions were welcome. The

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<sup>65</sup> Roddy O'Neil Cleary, "UVM Trustees Should Listen to Concerned Students," *The Burlington Free Press*, 12 September 1985.

<sup>66</sup> Amy Schlegel, "Emotions Flare as Felony is Debated," *The Vermont Cynic*, 7 November 1985.

<sup>67</sup> Schlegel, "Emotions Flare as Felony is Debated."

<sup>68</sup> Schlegel, "Emotions Flare as Felony is Debated."

title of “Crossroads” was implemented to highlight the collaborative nature of the community. Despite this call for synergetic discourse, the thirty-five students who resided there (many leaving to shower, and sleep) from its construction, faced significant backlash. Crossroads was frequently subjected to egg throwing, firecrackers, and urination. The Lambda Iota Fraternity incorporated vandalizing the community as part of their hazing rituals. In early November of 1985, arsonists set three of the constructed shacks on fire.<sup>69</sup>

Following this degradation on campus, Coor knew that the Board of Trustees needed to consider a compromise that all sides could live with. On November 21, 1985 Coor announced a plan that would do just that: “After two months of active pursuit of this matter, I have concluded that collective university action using joint shareholder initiatives cannot and will not be effective, at least in the foreseeable future.”<sup>70</sup> His plan called for the New York investment firm that managed the university’s endowment to have discretion over divestment. The new proposal mandated that the school be fully divested in eighteen months. Coor argued that this plan allowed divestment to be conducted in “an orderly and financially prudent fashion, minimizing adverse financial consequences to our portfolio.”<sup>71</sup> Coor’s plan passed at the final Board of Trustees meeting of the year on December 7, 1985.

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>69</sup> Amy Schlegel, “Protesting the Protestors: Threats and arson don’t faze shantytown’s inhabitants,” *The Vermont Cynic*, 29 October 1985.

<sup>70</sup> Alexandra De Rochefort, “Coor offers a ‘modified’ plan for divestment within 18 months” *The Vermont Cynic*, 21 November 1985.

<sup>71</sup> Rochefort, “Coor offers a ‘modified’ plan for divestment within 18 months.”

The Student Divestment from Apartheid movement was a direct challenge to Reagan-era conservatism. This essay has used the University of Vermont as a case study to show how the movement should be contextualized in history. It has shown that the movement was rooted in moral principles that originated in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Mary Frances Berry challenged UVM students to expect more from themselves and fight for the change they wanted to see. This paper next outlined the major arguments for and against Apartheid divestment. The article showed that the pro-divestment supporters shaped much of their contentions around moral purity, whereas the anti-divestment supporters shaped their argument around practicality.

Finally, this essay showed how the no-vote on October 12 marked a shift in how the student-driven protests were conducted. After a second vote against divestment, students knew that an escalation was needed to fully capture the attention of the administration. Previous attempts through legitimate discourse—the UIAC, peaceful protests, and editorials—were all proven ineffective. Students resorted to more potent forms of protest and attempted to force the administration’s hand. Coor and his allies on the Board knew that resolution was needed to lower the temperatures on campus. In a heated political environment, Coor managed to thread the needle to at least partially satisfy all constituents. His plan which called for divestment in eighteen months was labeled by one ANC member as only a “partial victory,” but it succeeded in closing the issue. Without the persistent effort displayed by both students and faculty in favor of divestment, it is unlikely that divestment would have happened. That being said, the economics of the issue should not be ignored. By allowing other schools to lead the way, UVM was able to see the financial implications of divestment. Once Coor and the Board of Trustees saw that the financial implications were

not dire, they were able to take the moral high ground and condemn Apartheid through divestment.

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## Putting the “X” in Sex: Permissive Society in X Films and the Press of Swinging London

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Jocelyn Rockhold

In an article appearing in *The Guardian* on May 29th, 1969, the bishop of Lichfield, Arthur Stretton Reeve, expressed anger and fear towards the proliferation of films certified as “X.”<sup>1</sup> Reeve was worried about “the high proportion of X certificate films now being shown and the increasing rate of abortions and vandalism.”<sup>2</sup> His words clearly associated the X certificate film with general permissiveness, including abortion, vandalism, and premarital sex. The article in *The Guardian* was published near the conclusion of the 1960s, a decade regarded in popular memory as a “permissive society.”

This essay aims to further complicate the notion of the purported permissive society through a study of popular X films of the Swinging London period, arguing these films reflect growing anxiety, tension, and discomfort about permissiveness in a contentious decade. To provide evidence, this paper shall examine the films *Alfie* (1966), *Blowup* (1966), and *Performance* (1970) as case studies, looking for plotlines or scenes that engage with the characteristics of a permissive society. The analysis will also consider articles in national newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Observer* to gauge the reaction of the press to the aforementioned films. An examination of the press may reveal additional insight into the perception of permissiveness in Britain.

The selected films were chosen due to their popularity at the time of their release and the availability of censor records

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<sup>1</sup> “‘X’ Films Attacked by Bishop,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 29 May 1969, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/185427142/citation/460A4DBA98194AC6PQ/1>.

<sup>2</sup> “‘X’ Films Attacked by Bishop.”



from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), known in the sixties as the British Board of Film Censors. Each film is also set roughly in the same era, sometimes referred to as “Swinging London.” The films let the viewer experience the era in three very different ways, ranging from the viewpoint of a Cockney chauffeur navigating sexual relationships, from a David Bailey-esque photographer engaged in a murder mystery, and from an East End London gangster who stumbles into the den of a drug-fueled, androgynous rock star. While this essay hopes to assess the content of these films based on how they were presented to British audiences at the time, it is essential to note the films were viewed in their contemporary forms. Where possible, based on contemporaneous censor reports that recommended the cutting or editing of specific scenes, this essay aims to avoid discussion of scenes that were not in the film roll shown to British audiences at the time of release.

Ultimately, this essay will show that despite the supposed evolution of the “permissive society,” X films and the reaction of the press reflected a general concern with permissiveness, often associating it with vapidness, trauma, violence, drugs, genderbending, and mental decline. These films, though radical at the time in their depictions of sex, demonstrate a period of competing morals. The conservatism so often associated with the fifties did not suddenly disappear with the turn into 1960 and was still prevalent in cultural productions, but this conservatism was consistently challenged by emergent sexual mores and legal reform. There has been little recent scholarship on permissive society as seen through the X film and even less so concerning the relationship between permissiveness, X films, and the press. This essay hopes to contribute to an avenue of research that still has plenty of possible exploration. However, one must first locate the concept of permissiveness and the X film within a larger historiographical narrative.

## *Defining and Historicizing Permissive Society*

Before analysis begins, defining the term “permissive society” and situating it in current scholarship is crucial. Social and cultural historian Frank Mort notes permissive society is a “slippery term that conceals as much as it reveals,” but it does have some core definitional aspects.<sup>3</sup> In an opinion poll conducted in Britain in 1970, permissiveness was defined as “greater freedom from old customs and outdated moral codes, sexual freedom, decline of marriage as an institution, less [sic] restrictions on private conduct, [and] liberalisation of drug laws.”<sup>4</sup> The poll was answered by a group of approximately six hundred people ranging in age from sixteen to forty-four; notably, all respondees with the exception of one person anticipated permissiveness to increase in future decades.<sup>5</sup> The poll’s definition of permissiveness prioritized issues of sex, privacy, and morality.

Now that a workable definition has been established, permissive society must be located in history. Histories of permissive society in Britain often reference legal reform in the long sixties. These legal relaxations usually pinpoint the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 as an essential moment, as it granted a legal basis for materials considered obscene to be published for artistic merit.<sup>6</sup> Along with this came the widespread release of the novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* to the British public in 1960 and

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*, Illustrated edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Collins, *The Beatles and Sixties Britain*, New edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, *The Beatles and Sixties Britain*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 1st edition (Harlow, England ; New York: Routledge, 2005), 117.

the film *Victim* in 1961. Additionally, the second half of the sixties in Britain would see the Abortion Act, the National Health Service (Family Planning Act), and the Sexual Offences Act, all finalized in 1967. These three reforms allowed for an increase in access to abortion with some restrictions, the provision of birth control pills to even unmarried women, and the legalization of homosexual acts in private between men over the age of twenty-one.<sup>7</sup> The final major legal change often referenced in scholarship about permissive society in the British sixties was the Divorce Reform Act of 1969, which allowed marriages to dissolve without a “fault” such as adultery.<sup>8</sup> Significant scientific progress also occurred in the decade as the oral contraceptive pill Enovid was available through the National Health Service to married women (or women to whom pregnancy would be a severe medical risk) in 1961, with access extended to unmarried women in 1967.<sup>9</sup>

Over the last forty or so years, historians have grappled with the supposed existence of a permissive society in 1960s Britain. Some claim that while sexual change did occur, conservative morals were still prevalent, and therefore society was not wholly permissive. Others argue the conglomeration of new legal freedoms, cultural changes, and scientific progression did lead to a “sexual revolution,” one that reflected a society that was quite permissive, especially when compared to the earlier Victorian era. As scholar Helena Mills correctly finds, “histories

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<sup>7</sup> Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975*, 1st edition (Oxford New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 290.

<sup>8</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, 290.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Rusterholz, *Women’s Medicine: Sex, Family Planning and British Female Doctors in Transnational Perspective, 1920–70*, 1st edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 12.

of the British 1960s often still remain polarised between these two camps.”<sup>10</sup>

Arthur Marwick is the historian best associated with interpretations that consider the sixties to be a uniquely permissive time.<sup>11</sup> Many consider Marwick to have a Whiggish account of the sixties, so recent historians have worked to complicate his depiction of a permissive society. Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, two essential historians of sexuality, conclude that recollections of sixties Britain typically put too much of an emphasis on the sexual revolution, as they indicate privacy was still prevalent in the sexual lives of many Britons.<sup>12</sup> In his book *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*, historian Frank Mort attributes changes in the sexual landscape to a broader period, asserting the permissive society of the 1960s was still influenced by morals of the Victorian period.<sup>13</sup> Caroline Rusterholz through a study of Brook Advisory Centres “provides further evidence against the idea of the 1960s as a permissive moment of sexual liberation” by contending different locales, such as Birmingham and London, experienced permissiveness in ways that were quite different from each other.<sup>14</sup> Marcus Collins suggests in *The Beatles and Sixties*

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<sup>10</sup> Helena Mills, “Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women’s Memories of 1960s Youth,” *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 4 (1 October 2016): 464, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2016.1206822>.

<sup>11</sup> See Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (London: Bloomsbury Reader, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918–1963* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 384–385.

<sup>13</sup> Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Caroline Rusterholz, “Youth Sexuality, Responsibility, and the Opening of the Brook Advisory Centres in London and Birmingham in the 1960s,”

*Britain* that “people perceived a permissive society as coming into being from the 1960s onwards, but they disapproved of most of its manifestations and legislative reforms.”<sup>15</sup>

Other scholars such as Hera Cook reclaim a view closer to that of Marwick, as Fisher and Szepter call her unashamedly “whiggish.”<sup>16</sup> Cook argues the use of female-controlled contraceptives such as the pill radically changed sex in the decade, as women previously had to rely on male-controlled forms or the diaphragm, which was not that popular.<sup>17</sup> Though she does not engage directly with the topic of permissive society in her book *The Long Sexual Revolution*, Cook definitively claims there was something unique about sex in the sixties, particularly for young, heterosexual women.

Overall, most historians advocate for a nuanced take on the “permissive society” of 1960s Britain. Most would say the decade was not entirely permissive and was still influenced by conservative morals, but other scholars would still argue that the period was unique, especially in regard to the sexual lives of women. Additionally, permissive society could be a reality for some and not for others. For example, Rusterholz suggests that locale and class greatly impacted the ability of women to obtain birth control.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Origin of the X Film*

The X film did not come into the limelight as a result of a permissive society, but rather as a reaction to a conservative one.

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*Journal of British Studies* 61, no. 2 (April 2022),  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2021.188>.

<sup>15</sup> Collins, *The Beatles and Sixties Britain*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Fisher and Szepter, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Rusterholz, *Women's Medicine*, 215.

As of 1950, films released in Britain were categorized as “U” (Universal, suitable for all), “A” (Adult, adult companion required), and “H” (Horror, advising but not requiring any viewer to be sixteen or older).<sup>19</sup> In 1950, the Wheare Committee released a report suggesting the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) needed to re-evaluate the efficacy of its movie rating system.<sup>20</sup> Many felt the BBFC “did not necessarily have the public’s moral interests at heart” and instead catered to the whims of the film industry.<sup>21</sup>

In reaction to the Wheare Committee report, the BBFC adjusted its categorization system in 1951, replacing the “H” level with the “X” certificate, a rating that required, rather than advised, a viewer to be the age of sixteen or older.<sup>22</sup> While the “X” certificate was at first a reaction to conservative concerns about youth viewing obscene materials in film, in the sixties it would become almost a novelty, as many X films became an important part of the cinema and the cultural experience of Britons.<sup>23</sup>

In the same year the “X” certificate was introduced, John Trevelyan joined the BBFC.<sup>24</sup> Trevelyan would become the BBFC secretary in 1958, later working alongside BBFC presidents Lord Morrison of Lambeth (1960–1965) and Lord

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<sup>19</sup> “BFI Screenonline: BBFC Classifications,” *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 12 December 2022, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/592611/index.html>.

<sup>20</sup> “BFI Screenonline: Wheare Report, The (1950),” *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 12 December 2022, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/592670/index.html>.

<sup>21</sup> “BFI Screenonline: Wheare Report, The (1950).”

<sup>22</sup> “BFI Screenonline: Wheare Report, The (1950).”

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society: British Cinema and Theatre, 1955-1965* (Oxford : New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 58.

<sup>24</sup> “Trevelyan, John (1903–1986), Film Censor,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 12 December 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/67828>.

Harlech (1965–1985). They would assign a film's rating primarily based on depictions of violence and sex.<sup>25</sup> In the early sixties, about one hundred X features were released per year.<sup>26</sup> Trevelyan, in an article that detailed concern from John Davis of the Rank Organisation on the increasing amount of X films, suggested "it has more to do with a trend towards more serious, socially sensitive films which, at the moment, take sex as an important subject for investigation."<sup>27</sup> Notably, the referenced article was titled "Whatever happened to the nice films," indicating the contentious reputation of the X film.

In *Censorship and the Permissive Society: British Cinema and Theatre, 1955-1965*, Anthony Aldgate illustrates the relationship between censorship and X films. Aldgate has portrayed Trevelyan as a censor sensitive to his time period, writing "he continued to place his faith in the immediate benefits to be gleaned from promoting 'new wave' films as the means of rehabilitating X-rated cinema."<sup>28</sup> It seems as though Trevelyan's tenure in the BBFC, combined with changing sexual mores of the sixties, directly led to the proliferation of the X film. It is possible that without Trevelyan, British film of the sixties would have looked very different. He is an extremely influential figure to the cinema in the supposed permissive society.

Scholarship detailing the X film, censorship, and permissive society is relatively sparse. Aldgate's seminal

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<sup>25</sup> "Trevelyan, John (1903–1986)."

<sup>26</sup> John O'Callaghan, "Certificate X," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 21 September 1963, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/184913910/citation/F3B4C7ABA64446BFPQ/1>.

<sup>27</sup> Simon Hoggart, "Whatever Happened to the Nice Films?," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 26 September 1968, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/185373064/citation/66B9188992C445BBPQ/1>.

<sup>28</sup> Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society*, 62.

*Censorship and the Permissive Society* was published in 1995, with little scholarship produced in the following decades. Most recently in *Pepsi and the Pill: Motherhood, Politics and Film in Britain and France, 1958–1969*, Melissa Oliver-Powell examines British cinema of the 1960s through a critical film theory framework. Powell primarily focuses on Swinging London films including *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *Darling* (1965), and *Prudence and the Pill* (1968), concluding many films of the period looked at the permissive society through an ambivalent eye and “continue[d] to pay a heavy debt of conservatism in their unequivocal punishment of libertinage.”<sup>29</sup> Oliver-Powell, a scholar of film theory rather than history, indicates the interdisciplinary nature of this topic.

It is certainly true that films produced in the Swinging London period showcase discomfort with a changing society. Words from the press will add a secondary angle to see how Britons may have received these films, particularly regarding their sexual content. Below, this essay will expand on the arguments produced by scholars like Aldgate and Oliver-Powell.

*Alfie (1966) dir. Lewis Gilbert*

*Alfie* is one of, if not the most, quintessential Swinging London X films due in part to the presence of actor Michael Caine. In the film *Alfie* (1966), based on a play by Bill Naughton, protagonist Alfie Elkins is shown to conduct numerous sexual relationships with women, one relationship leading to the birth of a son and another leading to a kitchen abortion. At the beginning of the film, Alfie, a Cockney man, is depicted as confident, arrogant, and somewhat go-lucky. He doesn’t truly show empathy for others

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<sup>29</sup> Melissa Oliver-Powell, *Pepsi and the Pill: Motherhood, Politics and Film in Britain and France, 1958–1969*, 1st edition (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 129.



nor does he seem to have any ambitions for his life. His primary goal is his conquest of women, and he subsequently avoids taking any responsibility for how his conduct affects them.

While much work has been done to analyze *Alfie*, particularly in terms of masculinity and abortion, scholarship tends to obscure the meaning that can be gleaned from other relationships and events depicted in the film.<sup>30</sup> The viewer is invited to a chronological account of Alfie's sexual experiences; the film begins with Alfie having an encounter in his car with a married woman. Alfie also has an affair with Lily, the wife of a fellow patient in the tuberculosis ward, which ultimately results in a horrific and emotionally traumatizing abortion. The moral panic of adultery in the 1950s has translated to these scenes in *Alfie*.<sup>31</sup> Permissiveness, in this circumstance, has led to two wives cheating on their husbands, and the viewer can infer from the tone of the film that this is not a good thing.

Scholarship also rarely mentions Gilda, the woman with whom Alfie has an illegitimate child named Malcolm, though the character and her interactions with others in the film provide insight regarding attitudes toward marriage. Gilda is a working-class woman who constantly hopes for Alfie to love her but never receives his affection. An article in *The Observer* described her as "a waif-like little piece, anxious to please and thankful for small mercies."<sup>32</sup> When she is sitting outside after a grueling shift at the local brewer, Humphrey, a bus attendant who previously

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<sup>30</sup> See Oliver-Powell *Pepsi and the Pill* and S. A. Spence, "What's It All about, Alfie? Antisocial Males in the Early Films of Sir Michael Caine," *Medical Humanities* 30, no. 1 (1 June 2004): 27–31, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jmh.2003.000151>.

<sup>31</sup> Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*, 2nd edition (New York: Red Globe Press, 2012), 136–137.

<sup>32</sup> "Dollar Prince," *The Observer* (1901–2003), 27 March 1966, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/475812450/citation/E54D975814974FAAPQ/2>.

expressed an interest in marrying her, shows Gilda his mother's wedding ring. In response, Gilda remarks "they don't make rings like that today" and Humphrey quips back, "no, they made them to last in the old days." This quick exchange expresses attitudes toward marriage and divorce. According to Humphrey, marriages were sustained in the "old days," but the current society did not prioritize staying in a long-lasting marriage and was more prone to desire divorce. The conversation between Humphrey and Gilda suggests a change in attitudes around marriage, but the institution of marriage was still held in high regard in Britain. Just three years after the release of *Alfie*, the United Kingdom would see the passing of the Divorce Reform Act which allowed married couples to divorce based on a "breakdown of marriage," but this did not necessarily impact the desire of many Britons to marry.<sup>33</sup> Divorce rates certainly increased, but many people were still getting married. Hall states "the percentage of women in the population who married peaked in 1971 at 79.4 per cent [sic]."<sup>34</sup>

Gilda eventually ceases her sexual affair with Alfie for marriage to Humphrey, someone who could provide for both her and Malcolm. She doesn't necessarily have passion for Humphrey as she did for Alfie, but Gilda still finds comfort in the traditional function of marriage. Though there is an obvious assumption that *Alfie* suggests positive views of marriage, one could argue that the marriage between Humphrey and Gilda also shows a certain tolerance of permissiveness. After all, Humphrey agrees to marry Gilda and raise Malcolm as his own, suggesting that a "permissive" lifestyle is not always a death knell to a woman's ability to marry later on. Despite having a child after extramarital sex, Gilda is able to improve her life, but only after she falls back to the institution of marriage.

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<sup>33</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 121.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change*, 163.

In *Alfie*, permissiveness is intimately tied to nationality and class through the character Ruby, an independent, wealthy woman who on occasion has sex with Alfie at her lavish apartment. British women in *Alfie* are portrayed as longing for love, marriage, and motherhood, but Ruby, the sole non-British woman with whom Alfie has sexual relations, is characterized as promiscuous, free-spirited, and exotic. Alfie even goes so far as to suggest that her two late husbands died due to vigorous sex. Ruby is the picture of permissiveness, especially when compared to British women in the film such as Gilda. Later, Alfie's initial appreciation of Ruby's sexual experience morphs into disappointment, as Ruby is seen as too promiscuous even for the womanizer Alfie. Near the end of the film, he walks in to see her in bed with an unknown young man. Previously, Alfie saw her as sexually free, but he is now rejected by her in favor of a younger man with "long hair." This scene is perfectly representative of fears that new permissive youth cultures would push out the "old ways." A humorous article in *The Guardian* from Stanley Reynolds poked fun at the generational clash, writing "us kids today won't get sucked into that ghastly make-believe world. We're too smart to waste our time imitating the action of some celluloid tiger like Michael Caine doing all of that 'Alfie' dialogue with some bird who gets her best lines off the subtitles of a Czech Socialist realist film."<sup>35</sup>

Despite its extensive coverage in research by other scholars, the abortion depicted in *Alfie* still deserves attention. After one brief sexual encounter in which Lily, a married woman, admits that Alfie is only the second man with whom she has had sex, she becomes pregnant. She and Alfie elect to procure an

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<sup>35</sup> "STANLEY REYNOLDS : Brief Encounter," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 2 July 1966, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/185209606/citation/E54D975814974FAAPQ/9>.

illegal abortion. Alfie is directly confronted with his choices by viewing the aborted fetus in his home, though the viewer is not actually shown the act of abortion or the fetus. As Aldgate notes, this scene had already gone through an extensive censorship process for the stage version of *Alfie*, so the film carried over the same visual reservations from the theater.<sup>36</sup> Comments from Trevelyan in his recommended cut report stated, “these are strong scenes, but they will probably be acceptable in the context, since they do make a valid point against abortion.”<sup>37</sup>

Lily’s abortion received mention in most reviews of the film in the press. The papers usually referred to the abortion scene positively (however, one journalist called the scene “reminiscent of a Victorian melodrama”).<sup>38</sup> Another article from *The Guardian* would declare Alfie a success “in spite of its touchingly sensitive abortion scene.”<sup>39</sup> The abortion was a shocking moment, but as Trevelyan insinuated above, was allowed because it depicted Alfie’s visceral and emotional reaction to it. One journalist in a critique of Alfie’s frequent breaking of the fourth wall wrote that this directive choice made “explicit morals which would be better left unstated.”<sup>40</sup> The censor report written by Trevelyan of the

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<sup>36</sup> Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society*, 104–114.

<sup>37</sup> Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society*, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Tynan, “A Ram in Wolfs Clothing: FILMS,” *The Observer* (1901–2003), 27 March 1966, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/475823740/citation/E292D592374B4176PQ/3>.

<sup>39</sup> Ian Wright, “Review: THE FAMILY MAN at the Warner Theatre,” *The Guardian* (1959–2003), 17 December 1966, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/185149839/citation/F41F7A697B1B47EFPQ/2>.

<sup>40</sup> From Our Film Critic, “An Alfie Elkins Worth a Better Film,” *The Times*, 24 March 1966, The Times Digital Archive, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS270363256/TTDA?sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=c3158d1f>.

screenplay remarks *Alfie* contains “a basically moral theme, and if it is made with integrity, as I have every reason to think it will be, it should not give us much trouble.”<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the largest takeaway from *Alfie* is that the sixties bore a complicated battleground for permissiveness and conservative morals, particularly for those who were part of the working class. While the film is considered a pinnacle of Swinging London film, one that champions the conquest of “birds,” it still retains an older sense of the importance of both parenthood and moral relationships. Though *Alfie* is painted as a womanizer—the “eternal bounder, having it off with all-comers,” according to *The Observer*—the ultimate moral of the film is that this fast and loose lifestyle contributes to his sense of despair.<sup>42</sup> *Alfie* can have sex with numerous women but is met with the horror of abortion, a non-existent relationship with his biological son, and no life partner in the end. As the *Monthly Film Bulletin* mused, “*Alfie* is beginning to wonder—could he have had the wrong idea all along?”<sup>43</sup>

Oliver-Powell has rightly argued that *Alfie* ultimately shows a negative view of permissiveness as *Alfie*’s lifestyle is met with punishment in the form of abortion and loneliness, but it is fairly radical that a film depicting voracious sexuality was so popular with the masses.<sup>44</sup> *Alfie* was ground-breaking in its

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<sup>41</sup> BBFC, “*Alfie*,” *BBFC*, 14 August 2020, <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/education/case-studies/alfie>.

<sup>42</sup> “BRIEFING/WHERE & WHEN: Wild Life,” *The Observer* (1901- 2003), 1 May 1966, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/475781369/citation/E54D975814974FAAPQ/5>.

<sup>43</sup> “*Alfie*,” *Monthly Film Bulletin* (London: British Film Institute, 1 January 1966), <http://www.proquest.com/docview/1305826004/citation/D06A57B8C5C046CCPQ/12>.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver-Powell, *Pepsi and the Pill*, 113.

depictions of sex and abortion. An article in *The Observer* would state that in *Alfie*, “sex is treated with a practical candour rare in the British cinema.”<sup>45</sup> The film presented a stylized view of Swinging London, but in the end it portrayed Alfie as having an unsustainable and unfulfilling lifestyle, leading the audience to the conclusion that a permissive society only leads to a negative consequence. The press in its coverage of *Alfie* recognized this theme and lauded the film for its candor and ground-breaking subject matter.

*Blowup (1966) dir. Michelangelo Antonioni*

*Blowup*, directed by Italian Michelangelo Antonioni, is a mystery drama set in the dreary landscape of working-class London that was well-received by audiences and the press.<sup>46</sup> A nominee for the British Film Award *Best British Film* category, the film centers around Thomas, a fashion photographer who becomes increasingly concerned that he has somehow incidentally photographed the murder of a man in a park.<sup>47</sup> As an article in *The Observer* described, Thomas is a “smart fashion photographer mixed up with the asses who constitute Swinging London.”<sup>48</sup> The film tracks Thomas’s journey from a self-absorbed artist to a man who is questioning his own sanity, ending

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<sup>45</sup> Tynan, “A Ram in Wolfs Clothing.”

<sup>46</sup> Pamela Church Gibson, “From Up North to Up West? London on Screen 1965–1967,” *The London Journal* 31, no. 1 (1 July 2006): 104, <https://doi.org/10.1179/174963206X113124>.

<sup>47</sup> “Pour in Line for Best Film Award - ProQuest,” *The Guardian*, accessed 12 December 2022, <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.uvm.edu/docview/185191915/36A4926B8C554F2BPQ/1?accoun tid=14679>.

<sup>48</sup> “BRIEFING: Films,” *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 19 March 1967, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/475787376/citation/E25015AF633446F5PQ/6>.

the film with the iconic scene in which Thomas throws an imaginary tennis ball back to a group of mimes. Notably, *Blowup* was allowed to play on British screens without any cuts from the censor.

In *Blowup*, sex is a central feature of Thomas's career. The first sexualized act is depicted in a scene in which he photographs Veruschka, a famous German supermodel. The scene is not explicit, but Thomas sits on top of her to obtain a photo, exclaiming with every click of the camera as he kisses her suggestively on the neck between shots. Although the two do not complete sexual acts outside of Thomas kissing Veruschka on the neck, the scene is charged with sexual tension. At this moment, the line between art and sex is obscured; by combining sex and fashion photography, the film insinuates that sex is a primary feature of artistic expression in Swinging London, especially when considering the presence of Veruschka, a cultural icon.

The most famous scene of *Blowup*, featuring two young aspiring models played by Jane Birkin and Gillian Hills, is rather alarming. The two women are interested in participating in a photo shoot with Thomas. He instead quite literally wrestles the model played by Birkin out of her colorful, trendy clothes; she is at first resistant, hiding behind racks of clothing, but he eventually exposes both models. The romp ends as the three nakedly wrestle in the disarray of one of Thomas's photo set backdrops. One journalist referenced to the scene as "the much publicized three-cornered erotic tussle which makes a showy if not very relevant interlude in the middle."<sup>49</sup> An article in *The Guardian*, which described the film as one about "London's decadent *enfant dors*," commented on the creation of the scene, claiming that it took

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<sup>49</sup> John Russell Taylor, "Antonioni Builds on a Puzzle," *The Times*, 16 March 1967, The Times Digital Archive, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS201813104/TTDA?sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=b0d1f76f>.

three nights to film and that it usually “developed into a real party.”<sup>50</sup> This scene is not portrayed as sexual freedom but rather as a disconcerting exchange that features an experienced photographer taking advantage of two women. They never do end up taking any photos. Rather than depicting the interaction as one of playful sex, it leaves the viewer with a sense that Swinging London is associated with a grimmer industry, one that seeks to sexually exploit vulnerable women. This distressing moment is a visual representation of the growing concern for the protection of youth in the sixties.<sup>51</sup> Permissiveness, at least in *Blowup*, leads directly to the detriment of young women.

The fashion depicted in *Blowup* also offers an intriguing read into permissiveness. The women in the film are nearly all seen to be wearing shift dresses and stereotypically Swinging London colors. In a scene in which Thomas is photographing a few models, each dressed in a very swinging fashion, he treats the women as daft. After expressing anger at the quality of their modeling, Thomas instructs the models to close their eyes and he covertly escapes the shoot, leaving the women in limbo. *Blowup* uses fashion to propose a sense of vapidness in the swinging society. However, the costume designer for the film, Jocelyn Rickards, felt that the fashion in *Blowup* represented the idea that “women, having been freed by trousers and skirts, will never allow themselves to be constricted again.”<sup>52</sup> Her comment in *The Times* is at odds with what *Blowup* proposes. Critic Penelope

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<sup>50</sup> “Miscellany: AT LARGE,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 13 October 1966, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/185065313/citation/E25015AF633446F5PQ/3>.

<sup>51</sup> Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> “Monday Merry-Go-Round,” *The Times*, 22 August 1966, The Times Digital Archive, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS184773398/TTDA?sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=fc533986>.



Gilliat said the film “has skin-deep methods of exploring a skin-deep time, holding up model girls to ridicule for being inhuman when Antonioni has done nothing to establish them as people.”<sup>53</sup>

Most women in the film wear iconic sixties fashion but Jane, the woman that Thomas voyeuristically photographs in the park and who may be associated with the possible murder, is a firm exception. She wears clothing that leans conservative; her shirt is long-sleeved and her skirt hits her knees. She is the one woman in the film that Thomas seems to respect to a certain degree. Thomas quickly dismisses nearly all of the other women present in the film, yet he is drawn to Jane. However, Thomas again falls back to sex and refuses to show Jane the negatives of the photos taken in the park until she shows him her breasts. The interactions between Jane and Thomas are slightly puzzling at first. He is intrigued by this conservatively dressed woman who at first denies his advances and directly challenges him, but in the end, they nearly have sex before Jane has to leave and attend to urgent matters. Though Thomas appears to view Jane as someone more worthy of his time, at least compared to the other women in *Blowup*, he still cannot form a meaningful relationship with her.

Donnelly references *Blowup* in *Sixties Britain*, writing “whether [Antonioni’s] audience responded to depictions of a pot-smoking party in Chelsea, casual sex in the photographer’s studio and a guitar-smashing performance by the Yardbirds in quite the way he intended is another matter.”<sup>54</sup> However, it is quite clear that some of the audience, at least those associated with the press, easily noticed Antonioni’s message. As a journalist wrote in *The Guardian*, “the point of the film seems to

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<sup>53</sup> Penelope Gilliatt, “London Life- a Foreign View: FILMS,” *The Observer* (1901- 2003), 19 March 1967, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/475857579/citation/A4AFD4C8FBE740EFPQ/1>.

<sup>54</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 97.

be a condemnation of the photographer's empty life, fashion models all day, debauchery all night."<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* in its spotlight on *Blowup* wrote about the director's vision of Swinging London, claiming "Antonioni, like *Time* magazine, has been deceived" and criticizing his "risible or consciously perverse" depiction of the city in the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> While the film was nominated for and won a slew of awards including the coveted Palme d'Or, British journalists reviewing the film tended to emphasize its stereotypical depiction of Swinging London.<sup>57</sup> Someone named Leonard Suransky writing to *The Guardian* in 1967 associated the film with "the indescribable, the 'Swinging England' we live in."<sup>58</sup> This is important to note because it shows the Britons living in the sixties had a deep self-awareness of how they were portrayed, especially by Western countries like the USA and Italy, and they did not necessarily connect with these stereotypical portrayals.

Overall, the press reaction to *Blowup* lauded the artistic direction of the film, but there was some confusion as to how Antonioni's depiction of Swinging London should be received. The film "signalled a deeper sense of unease at mid-sixties

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Roud, "Blow-Up," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 16 March 1967, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/185240107/citation/96256A0801DE4F0APQ/1>.

<sup>56</sup> "Blow-Up," *Monthly Film Bulletin* (London: British Film Institute, 1 January 1967), <http://www.proquest.com/docview/1305821066/citation/7EC7E87C38394292PQ/1>; "TIME Magazine Cover: London - Apr. 15, 1966," TIME.com, accessed 13 December 2022, <https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19660415,00.html>.

<sup>57</sup> "Blow-Up - Awards - IMDb," *IMDb*, accessed 15 December 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060176/awards>.

<sup>58</sup> P. A. Forbes, "Grand Illusion," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 14 October 1967, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/185307823/citation/64CC3419FF5F4E18PQ/1>.

London permissiveness.”<sup>59</sup> Antonioni allegedly “expressed interest and even a qualified support for the freedom and iconoclasm of mod London,” but his film paints a very negative picture.<sup>60</sup> Thomas and his associations are vapid, empty, and lacking morals, which leads to Thomas’s overall sense of melancholy; he is not fulfilled, but rather suffers from a sense of derealization. Perhaps the term “blowup” is representative of the meaning of the film—if one takes a closer look at *Swinging London* and peers into its shadows, one will find a not-so-swinging reality underneath.

*Performance (1970) dir. Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg*

“Nothing is true. Everything is permitted,” muses Turner, the drug-fueled musician of *Performance* played by Mick Jagger. *Performance* pushes the temporal boundary of *Swinging London*, but there is good reason to include it in this analysis—the film was completed and ready for release in 1968, but would not be released until 1970, first in the USA and then later in Britain in 1971. *Performance* epitomizes many of the concerns that Britons had about permissiveness, as it contains a large amount of violence, sex (including homosexuality and group sex), drug usage, and the blurring of gender lines. The crime drama features gangster Chas, who after shooting and killing betting shop owner Maddocks, goes into hiding at the home of the promiscuous and wild musician Turner, played by Mick Jagger. Unsurprisingly, *Performance* faced many roadblocks before it was allowed in

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<sup>59</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 96.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Lev, “Blow-Up, *Swinging London*, and the Film Generation,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1989): 135, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/226989111/abstract/C2F5B5B3DCFB49F7PQ/1>.

British cinemas. It was famously alleged to have caused a film executive's wife to vomit upon viewing.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike *Alfie* and *Blowup*, sex and violence are intimately intertwined in *Performance*. David Malcolm writing for *The Guardian* claimed it was a “movie which is frank about sex and above all, it is a movie which admits and explores the correlation between sex and violence and power.”<sup>62</sup> Trevelyan and Harlech had concerns about this relationship. In a letter to Warner Bros, the duo stated the film would be categorized as “X” as long as a scene showing a forced head shaving—as it was “something that could be imitated by young people”—was removed. Trevelyan and Harlech were concerned by the idea of British youth imitating the gang violence depicted in *Performance*. They also requested the removal of another scene depicting the beating of Chas interspersed with violence (which “emphasizes the close relationship of sex and violence”) be removed.<sup>63</sup> In the latter scene, the report requested “all copulation shots be removed” for the film to receive an X certificate.<sup>64</sup>

Homosexuality is a major topic of the film. Harry Flowers, the gang leader in the film, is brutal, heinous, and is depicted as having homosexual tendencies. Some associated with the film expressed fear at the thought of being construed as

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<sup>61</sup> Lee Thomas-Mason, “How Mick Jagger Made People Vomit in the Film ‘Performance,’” *Far Out*, 25 January 2021, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/mick-jagger-performance-1970-film-vomit-story/>.

<sup>62</sup> “What a Performance: DEREK MALCOLM Discloses the Struggle behind The Screen to Get a Release for the Best British Film for Years,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 12 January 1971, <http://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/185427244/citation/326ADAB32A714F3DPQ/1>.

<sup>63</sup> BBFC, “Performance,” *BBFC*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/education/case-studies/performance>.

<sup>64</sup> BBFC, “Performance.”

homosexual. Johnny Shannon in an article titled “Nothing queer about Johnny Shannon” remarked that while he was not worried about playing a “wicked villain like Harry Flowers,” he was concerned that Flowers “keeps a fancy boy and reads some very odd magazines.”<sup>65</sup> Shannon was quite eager to reinforce his heterosexuality, later remarking the female nudity in *Performance* would be something for his young nephew to “look forward to when he’s 18.”<sup>66</sup> Despite the Wolfenden report and the passing of the Sexual Offences Act four years prior to the release of the article, Shannon still showed conservative fear of homosexuality. Many historians have pinpointed similar attitudes; though the release of the Wolfenden Report would occur in 1957, earlier versions of the Sexual Offences Act would fail in the early portion of the sixties, signaling a hesitance still felt by many Britons towards homosexuality.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this film is the association of gender-bending with Chas’s decline in mentality. In a fascinating sequence featuring Turner’s sexual partner Pherber in which a mirror is used to visually transpose various parts of Pherber’s body onto the body of Chas, including her breasts and face, gender is obscured. Pherber claims “I’ve got two angles. One man and one female.” The playful encounter soon turns uncomfortable and violent, with Chas haranguing Pherber as a degenerate and a pervert. Despite Chas’s apparent discomfort, Chas is later pictured trying on feminine clothing and a wig after he is dosed with magic mushrooms. Here, drug usage

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<sup>65</sup> “Nothing Queer about Johnny Shannon,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 23 January 1971, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/185458980/citation/5A10EDFD0A1246FCPQ/2>.

<sup>66</sup> “Nothing Queer about Johnny Shannon.”

<sup>67</sup> Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*, 144.

and sexual “perversion,” to use the words of Chas, are intertwined.

In the end, Chas, again dressed in feminine clothing, shoots and kills Turner. He has truly descended into a nearly insane state of being. After living with Pherber and Turner, who serve as archetypal symbols of the swinging city, Chas is ruined by permissiveness. Before he was a macho and intelligent gangster, but after being exposed to homosexuality, group sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll, he must flee the country with a fractured sense of identity.

The press declared the film as one that comments on permissiveness in general. Malcolm said *Performance* is a “moral, almost puritanical movie.”<sup>68</sup> An article in *The Times* shows Trevelyan apparently echoed this reading, as the article states “*Performance* had something to say about society and he was all for such films.”<sup>69</sup> Another article received the film as one that is “deeply moral, achieving to an extraordinary degree an understanding of both ways of life without implying approval of the other.”<sup>70</sup>

*Performance* is the most stylized out of all of the films discussed in this essay. Viewers obviously would see a world stretched to its extremes and recognize that the swinging city shown in the film is unlike reality, but the movie can still be interpreted in regard to permissive society. David Malcom noted in *The Guardian* that *Performance* is about “two half-worlds,

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<sup>68</sup> Malcolm, “Performing Right and Wrong.”

<sup>69</sup> “Film Censor Condemns Screen Violence,” *The Times*, 17 April 1971, The Times Digital Archive, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS17134737/TTDA?sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=43f3ea73>.

<sup>70</sup> “Men of Two Worlds John Russell Taylor,” *The Times*, 1 January 1971, The Times Digital Archive, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS235762721/TTDA?sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=89e9bab9>.

both completely divorced by everyday reality but real enough in their own terms to turn hair grey in an instant.”<sup>71</sup> Clearly, *Performance* is stylistic and chock full of violence, sex, and drugs, yet it takes a firm stance on permissive society, as Chas is a broken man at the end of the film. Even one of the co-directors, Nicolas Roeg, determined “the sources of power in men, sexual or otherwise, lead them to destruction.”<sup>72</sup> Like *Alfie* and *Blowup*, it is a cautionary film that provokes a sense of unease towards permissive morals.

### Conclusion

In an article published in *The Guardian* in 1969 about X films including *Victim* (1961) and *If...* (1968), English film producer Michael Relph was quoted as saying: “I’m as permissive as the next man. But there are times when I’ve had enough. We are becoming a nation of voyeurs. When the average boy takes his girl to the cinema, I’m sure he doesn’t try anything on in the back seats anymore. They just watch the screen.”<sup>73</sup> X Films and the press of the sixties indicate a self-aware anxiety towards a growing permissiveness in society. *Alfie*, *Blowup*, and *Performance*, though three very different films, reflect a message that cautions the audience to be wary of the way society is developing. Each of these films commented on the morality of the period, something that the press recognized and censor Trevelyan

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<sup>71</sup> Derek Malcolm, “Performing Right and Wrong: DEREK MALCOLM Reviews New Films,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 31 December 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/185413374/citation/251E9D4E4D614DA0PQ/1>.

<sup>72</sup> “What a Performance.”

<sup>73</sup> Derek Malcolm, “The Survival Bureau,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 19 March 1969, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/185342489/citation/780B7A1EB7594A06PQ/1>.

appreciated. However, the fact that the BBFC allowed a growing amount of sex and violence in itself reflects a growing permissiveness, as censorship was not quite so heavy-handed as in previous decades and the BBFC allowed a working relationship with filmmakers.<sup>74</sup>

The X film of *Swinging London*, both within its existence and reception, represents a nuanced mix of conservative values and permissiveness. The sixties was certainly a decade caught in-between worlds, one foot in the fifties and the other reaching towards the seventies. This tone closely resembles the scholarship on permissive societies in the British sixties, echoing historians such as Fisher, Szreter, and Mort, who claim that permissive society still had deeply embedded threads of conservatism.

Plenty of film theory analyses of *Swinging London* films exist, yet little work has been done to situate X films in their historical contexts. Oliver-Powell notices “there is remarkably scant critical work on this area” and this has led to a mistaken tendency to assume a “largely polarized, moralizing, and adversarial discourse.”<sup>75</sup> A broader survey of X films in the 1960s, as well as reactions in the press to said films, would provide additional discovery to the history of permissive society in Britain. There are many different ways to further this research; for example, a comparative analysis of X films in the press in different locales could be used to study attitudes toward permissiveness in different areas, or one could compare coverage of X films in tabloids versus other periodicals. Another potential project could examine depictions of non-British women in British X films. For example, the character of Ruby could be used in a discussion of Americanization in the sixties, and other women, such as the French woman Elizabeth in *Prudence and the Pill*

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<sup>74</sup> See Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society*.

<sup>75</sup> Oliver-Powell, *Pepsi and the Pill*, 247.



(1968) could be representative of how Britain viewed permissive women from other countries.

This essay contributes to the growing body of scholars that confirm “permissive society” was not a homogeneous experience in the British sixties. Although the decade allowed for explorations of sex in the cinema via film, the overall message, which the press was keen to pick up on, remained one of fear and anxiety and not one of excitement about the swinging future.

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## **From *Mrs. Lieutenant* to Airgram 341: Military Wives' Participation in the Women's Liberation and Anti-War Movements during the Vietnam War**

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*Brooke Talbott*

In the middle of the twentieth century, the United States became embroiled in a conflict which would forever change the face of the nation. The Vietnam War impacted individuals across the country, from the men who were sent to fight in an unknown land to the families and friends who remained at home. From the outset of the war, military wives were thrust into an entirely new world, one in which they were required to act as two parents while still maintaining the persona of the perfect military wife. Largely unseen by the United States government, the public, and even the military, the experiences of these wives often slipped into oblivion. Military wives' experiences in relation to two major movements in particular have been entirely passed over. As the Vietnam War raged on across the sea, many military wives began to actively participate in the Women's Liberation and Anti-War movements which were gaining ground during the 1960s and 1970s. Although some forms of participation were clearer than others, military wives nevertheless began to create waves of change.

During the Vietnam War, the military family took on greater significance than in previous American wars. In the two centuries leading up to this point, provisions were not made for families within military communities.<sup>1</sup> Recruitment centered on young, unmarried men; any family quarters on a military garrison were reserved for senior officers. It was not until World War II that the military family began to be recognized as a real entity. Due to the full-scale mobilization of World War II, the federal

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<sup>1</sup> Roger W. Little, *Handbook of Military Institutions* (California: Sage Publications, 1971), 247.

government assumed limited fiscal responsibility for the changed standard of living which resulted from conscription.<sup>2</sup> This took the form of family allowances and limited medical care. After the war, the need for a permanent volunteer force led to more formal recognition for family provisions. A range of services were required for dependents, such as housing, primary and secondary schools, medical care, and social welfare agencies. By 1968, the military family was considered an essential component in personnel policy and management.<sup>3</sup> More than seventy-six percent of officers and forty-two percent of enlisted men were married at this time, adding about 1.6 million wives and 2.5 million children to the military community. Between 1952 and 1972, the percentage of married enlisted men in the Army rose from 29.7 to 52.6, with more than half of the total increase occurring after 1969.<sup>4</sup> The United States military was no longer a “bachelor military,” and wives were fast becoming an integral part of soldiers’ lives. As a result of this dramatic increase in the number of wives present within the military community, certain expectations and guidelines were put in place to ensure that their behavior fit the mold of the United States military.

Throughout the war, the proper behavior of military wives was paramount. So important was the role of the military wife that specific handbooks were published which detailed proper behavior. Released in 1966, *Mrs. Lieutenant* was just one of many such handbooks. Acting as a guide to military customs for women married to young officers, this handbook was created to answer questions which had arisen since the war began. Detailing

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<sup>2</sup> Little, *Handbook of Military Institutions*, 248.

<sup>3</sup> Little, *Handbook of Military Institutions*, 249.

<sup>4</sup> David R. Segal, Mady W. Segal, Robert F. Holz, Col Gary J. Norbo, Lt Richard S. Seeberg, and Col William L. Wubbena, Jr., “Trends in the Structure of Army Families,” *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* Vol 4., No. 1 (Spring 1976), 136.

customs relating to formal entertaining and formal living, this handbook assisted women in their transition from civilian to military life. According to the handbook, "If the wife is well informed as to what is expected of her, the probability is greater that the officer will have an easier and more successful career."<sup>5</sup> In other words, a well-behaved wife helped to ensure a husband's advancement within the ranks. Before the handbook even delves into its eleven different sections, the author reminds her readers to "...be proud of the fact that you are making an effort to contribute to the esprit de corps that is developed when we serve with the military forces of the United States as part of a happy, congenial and proud family."<sup>6</sup> A few paragraphs later, readers are literally told to "Play the game according to the rules and do not try to change them."<sup>7</sup> These pieces of advice, placed within the first few pages of the handbook, remind wives that their patriotic duty is to mold themselves into quintessential homemakers, and most importantly, to never deviate from military customs.

Following the intense introduction of *Mrs. Lieutenant*, readers find eleven separate sections which detail different aspects of formal military living. While topics of these sections range from social functions and dress to childcare and officers' wives' clubs, their purpose remains the same: to reinforce the idea that a woman's role as an officer's wife is almost as important as her husband's role within the military. The first section of the handbook, "Social Functions," details the expected behavior of

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Preston Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant* (Chuluota, Florida: Beau Lac Publishers, 1966), 4; For Army wives, see Nancy Shea, *The Army Wife* (New York: Harper, 1948); For Marine Corps wives, see Sally Hunter Jerome and Nancy Shea, *The Marine Corps Wife* (New York: Harper, 1955); For Navy wives, see Anne Briscoe Pye and Nancy Shea, *The Navy Wife* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 6.

wives when attending or hosting formal social functions. While the beginning of the section describes more general expectations, such as answering an invitation within twenty-four hours, the descriptions soon become much more gendered. For example, wives are advised not to shout at functions, but instead to "...try hard to be heard only by those to whom you are speaking," as "...a well-modulated voice is the key to many a front door."<sup>8</sup> This suggested behavior harkens back to the introduction of the handbook in that wives' behavior is expected to provide opportunities for the husbands.

The seventh section of the handbook, "Dress," further emphasizes the idea that the role of a military wife is to support her husband. For example, fashion "fads" which "...degrade your position as a lady, and the wife of an officer, should be avoided."<sup>9</sup> The reader is reminded that she is her husband's "lady" and is "...expected to attain the same respect that he does."<sup>10</sup> This section ultimately makes clear that the military wife's role as an armypiece is almost as important as her husband's role within the ranks. The ninth section, "Children," details the expectations surrounding the raising of children on bases. For example, wives are instructed never to raise their voices at their children, as children "...will be more apt to listen to a mother who is soft spoken and difficult to hear than to one who screams and hollers."<sup>11</sup> Yet again, this section points to the expectations placed on wives to remain as silent, obedient objects.

The tenth section, "Officer's Wives' Clubs," is referred to as one of the most important sections of the handbook. Wives are encouraged to join these clubs immediately upon arrival at their base. Unless wives have a legitimate reason to not participate, the

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<sup>8</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 54.

handbook encourages wives to "...actively participate and give of yourself and your time."<sup>12</sup> By doing so, wives will create direct and indirect benefits for themselves, and most importantly, their husbands. The final section of the handbook covers miscellaneous expectations. Wives are advised to "...never ask an officer to push a baby's carriage..." and to "...never make fun of or criticize your husband in public."<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that the majority of the handbook seems to encourage submissiveness, this last section does contain a note which advises wives to be "...as self-sufficient as possible," by learning how to drive or taking the bus to the local commissaries or exchanges.<sup>14</sup> Although this note does seemingly provide a layer of empowerment for these wives, the remainder of the handbook ultimately reveals the submissive behavior expected of them as women and as military wives.

The same decade in which *Mrs. Lieutenant* was released, the United States underwent drastic changes. Many of these changes were set off by Second Wave Feminism—a movement which would affect both female and male citizens. In the mid-twentieth century, the Women's Liberation Movement was joined by other social and political movements, most notably the Civil Rights Movement. According to many historians, including Rory Dicker, feminist activism is able to thrive when the cultural climate is conducive to reform.<sup>15</sup> Since the movement of Second Wave Feminism rose alongside the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements, the Women's Liberation Movement encountered a culture ready to fight for women's rights. By the time these movements began to gain ground, women and wives were

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<sup>12</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 59–60.

<sup>14</sup> Gross, *Mrs. Lieutenant*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Rory Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (California: Seal Press, 2008), 66.

beginning to reevaluate their roles at home and in society. A 1962 Gallup poll reported that ninety percent of housewives wanted their daughters to have better educations and marry later than they did.<sup>16</sup> The most famous documentation regarding the dissatisfaction of the white middle-class suburban housewife was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. Throughout her work, Friedan described the emptiness felt by the average American housewife, an individual who seemed to have everything she could possibly want. Friedan argued that housewives were bored and unhappy because of the cultural ideology of the "feminine mystique," the belief that women achieve fulfillment exclusively through domesticity.<sup>17</sup> As the world around them began to undergo significant social, cultural, and political changes, however, housewives were no longer satisfied with their traditional roles as homemakers, cooks, and seamstresses. By this point, the world of the "feminine mystique" was no longer viable for many women. Through this new atmosphere which validated the struggles of women and wives, women felt empowered to establish organizations to promote their rights.

In 1966, Betty Friedan and a group of women established the National Organization for women (NOW) to act as a nongovernmental watchdog group to advocate for women's rights.<sup>18</sup> Founded as the first women's rights organization after the suffrage movement, NOW was significant in that it made activism on behalf of women its exclusive priority. From the outset, NOW advocated for the rights of everyday working women. For example, NOW supported lawsuits filed by female flight attendants, who were forced to retire when they married or

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<sup>16</sup> Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 71.

turned thirty-two.<sup>19</sup> Male flight attendants were not subject to these guidelines, reinforcing the fact that the guidelines were discriminatory and promoted the maximization of profits by hiring young, lower-paid women to replace retirees.<sup>20</sup> As new women's organizations were being established, so too were Anti-War organizations. Women Strike for Peace was one such organization.

Established on November 1, 1960, Women Strike for Peace (WSP) was formed to protest the growing threat of nuclear weapons.<sup>21</sup> Created during a time in which activist organizations were largely composed of young adults from varying backgrounds, Women Strike for Peace was an unusual organization in that it was composed of mainly white, middle-class housewives in their mid-thirties to late forties. As the conflict in Vietnam began to escalate in the early 1960s, the organization started to turn its attention away from nuclear weapons and toward Vietnam. By 1964, the women of WSP were educating themselves on the history of political regimes in North and South Vietnam, as well as the French role in Vietnam, the 1954 Geneva Accords, and the history of the Diem regime.<sup>22</sup> As the conflict in Vietnam continued to intensify, President Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam in 1964. With this development, WSP members began to sense another global crisis with possible nuclear consequences. From 1964 to 1973, WSP carried out intense and consistent protests against the war. Members lobbied, picketed, marched on national holidays, conducted sit-ins in congressional offices, and chained themselves to the White House gate to make their message

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<sup>19</sup> Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 73.

<sup>21</sup> Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 129.



heard.<sup>23</sup> WSP also counseled young men on their legal rights regarding the Selective Service System and aided and abetted those who refused to register or serve.<sup>24</sup> By showing that a group of determined housewives could inspire change, WSP ultimately motivated military wives to do the same.

As the Women's Liberation and Anti-War movements swept across the country, many military wives found an unlikely outlet through which to vent their frustrations about the war and issues of gender inequality. GI Anti-War newspapers, first published in the 1960s, were underground publications created largely to give voice to Anti-War sentiment among military members. However, these newspapers also created a space for civilian women, mainly GI wives, to speak out about current issues. Wives wrote in to complain about issues, such as poor housing on military bases and the lack of job opportunities in military towns. These women also spoke out about how ideas from the Women's Liberation Movement intersected with Anti-War sentiment by critiquing both war and sexism.<sup>25</sup>

One newspaper which frequently featured the voices of GI wives was the *Fatigue Press*, published for GIs in Fort Hood, an Army post located near Killeen, Texas. According to the index of the July 1971 issue, the purpose of the paper was to "...counter the bullshit of the 'Armored Senile' and Killeen Daily Herald."<sup>26</sup> The May 1971 issue of *Fatigue Press* features an especially vivid account from a disgruntled military wife. This wife argues that the women who are forced to live with the "military machine" are affected by war in special ways.<sup>27</sup> According to this author, the

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<sup>23</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 130.

<sup>24</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 130.

<sup>25</sup> Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 193.

<sup>26</sup> *Fatigue Press* Iss. 31, 1 July 1971, 2, GI Press Project.

<sup>27</sup> "Women Against War," *Fatigue Press*, 1 May 1971, 8, GI Press Project.

Army brainwashes men against women because the Army is afraid that women "...might do something subversive, like regard a GI as a human being instead of an army issue robot, or influence him to do 'feminine' things like refusing to do push-ups until he vomits, finding bayonet training sickening, or feeling compassion for those he's ordered to kill."<sup>28</sup> In order to achieve this brainwashing, the author argues, the Army does its best to portray women as less than human beings from the start. During basic training, soldiers are told that "...if the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one."<sup>29</sup> The author also argues that the Army reinforces the myth that women are solely responsible for raising children and keeping the home. A WAC, or member of the Women's Army Corps, would be discharged for parenthood. However, a GI is "...lucky if he's not on the other side of the world from his children."<sup>30</sup> Wives were often forced to leave family and friends to live on an Army base where they knew only their husbands. This left a wife so closely bound to her husband that she could "...hardly get a traffic ticket without her husband being penalized."<sup>31</sup> While the heart-wrenching sentiments displayed by this military wife reveal the problematic aspects of life on a military base, they also reveal the growing empowerment which wives felt when it came to speaking out about injustice.

Despite the aforementioned issues, one of the greatest hardships which wives faced was the financial nature of military life. According to the same military wife, the United States could not afford to adequately pay each of its three and a half million soldiers.<sup>32</sup> As a result, military wives were forced to live on less

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<sup>28</sup> "Women Against War," 8.

<sup>29</sup> "Women Against War," 8.

<sup>30</sup> "Women Against War," 8.

<sup>31</sup> "Women Against War," 8.

<sup>32</sup> "Women Against War," 8.

than a third of what the federal government considered to be an adequate family budget. The author argues that this lack of adequate pay ultimately guaranteed that wives would ensure that their husbands did nothing to risk a pay forfeiture or loss of rank. In support of this financial claim, the author reveals that a one-bedroom “shack” costs seventy dollars per month, and came “...complete with leaky faucets, broken stairs, and dingy walls.”<sup>33</sup> Many wives were forced to work to supplement their husbands’ meager incomes. The scarcity of jobs in Killeen ultimately meant that wives would be stuck with jobs that only paid seventy-five cents to one dollar an hour. If the wife was a mother, she had to pay fifteen to twenty dollars per week for a babysitter, an extra expense which could drain most of her salary. This ultimately resulted in couples being forced to “...fight a constant battle just to stay alive.”<sup>34</sup> The author ends her article with an ominous reminder, stating that the Army forgets that nearly one third of the 1,000 Anti-War marchers in Killeen the previous May were women.<sup>35</sup> This article acts as a perfect example of the anger and dissatisfaction that many military wives felt during this time, and the lengths to which they were willing to go to fight for justice.

Aside from financial issues, the healthcare system within military communities was appalling. Already terrible for the GIs, healthcare was even worse for wives. For example, one woman in labor was told to go home because there was not enough room in the hospital. Abortions were not considered medical care. Despite these conditions, the reactions of wives reveal their willingness to support women’s issues. The December 1971 issue of *Bragg Briefs*, the GI newspaper published in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, details the efforts of a group of wives who fought to

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<sup>33</sup> “Women Against War,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> “G.I. Town Part 1,” *Fatigue Press*, 1 August 1971, 7, GI Press Project.

<sup>35</sup> “Women Against War,” 8.

improve healthcare conditions on their base.<sup>36</sup> This group of wives initially met to get to know one another and combat the loneliness that accompanies life on a military base. However, the women soon realized that they had many issues in common. One such issue was inadequate healthcare at Womack Army Hospital. At this point, medical care at Fort Bragg featured crowded, short-staffed clinics with long wait times. Once a woman was able to see a doctor, the diagnosis was usually a generic answer. The clinics receiving the most complaints were the Emergency Ward, Gynecology, and Pediatrics. In other words, the worst clinics were the ones which the wives needed most. As a result of these issues, the wives' group of Fort Bragg came up with a list of complaints to present to the "hospital brass."<sup>37</sup> Although the meeting was cordial, the wives felt as if they were being pacified. Despite the failure of the hospital to acknowledge the issues surrounding women's health, the fact that these women chose to fight for their rights to better healthcare points to the changing atmosphere of the time, one which was no doubt influenced by the Women's Liberation Movement.

Some wives utilized GI newspapers not only to draw attention to women's liberation and Anti-War issues, but also to call their fellow GI wives into action. *Bragg Briefs* frequently featured articles written by wives which did just that. In the February 1973 issue, a "Letter to G.I. Wives" was published in the "A Word to the Wives" section of the newspaper.<sup>38</sup> The letter informed its readers that wives were no longer "...the old go-alongs," but were "...citizens with constitutional rights."<sup>39</sup> It

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<sup>36</sup> "GI Wives Demand Better Health Care," *Bragg Briefs* Vol. 4, Iss. 8, 1 December 1971, 8, GI Press Project.

<sup>37</sup> "GI Wives Demand Better Health Care," 8.

<sup>38</sup> "A Letter to G.I. Wives," *Bragg Briefs* Vol. 6, Iss. 1, 1 February 1973, 3, GI Press Project.

<sup>39</sup> "A Letter to G.I. Wives," 3.

called on wives to resist the military's exploitation of human lives, stating the need to act as a collective force against a common enemy. Then, the letter provided a list of issues for the wives to fight against, such as poverty income, harassment of husbands, and Army hospitals. This article, published at the very end of U.S. involvement in the war, ultimately speaks to the empowerment which many wives gained.

GI newspapers also made clear that the Women's Liberation Movement not only contributed to women's empowerment, but also fed into the Anti-War Movement. Many Anti-War GIs and veterans considered women to be vital allies in the fight against the political system which created both the Vietnam War and domestic problems.<sup>40</sup> Pete Zastrow, a veteran who served one tour in Vietnam beginning in 1968, stated that women helped Anti-War GIs focus on "...vital issues that, while they weren't direct veterans' issues, were issues that veterans damn well ought to be interested in – child care, the rights of women."<sup>41</sup> Mike McCain, a veteran and member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) stated that women in VVAW "...taught us boys a whole lot. They were mostly our girlfriends who ended up being some of the most valuable, the most dedicated, the most active, the most disciplined people in the organization."<sup>42</sup> The opinions of these GIs and veterans are perhaps yet another example of the increasing level of empowerment which military wives gained during their fight for justice and equality.

Although GI newspapers were the most prevalent form of Anti-War newspaper publications during the war, a group of women living around Kadena Air Base on Okinawa created their own publication which speaks to the topics of Women's

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<sup>40</sup> Stur, *Beyond Combat*, 194.

<sup>41</sup> Stur, *Beyond Combat*, 195.

<sup>42</sup> Stur, *Beyond Combat*, 195.

Liberation and the Anti-War Movement. *Women's Voices*, first published in January 1972, was a single-issue publication created by and for women on Okinawa. The cover of the publication indicates that the focus of the newspaper is women's healthcare, reflecting the changing attitudes surrounding women's healthcare during the 1960s and 1970s. Before this period, the topics discussed in this publication were taboo. As a result, *Women's Voices* is a perfect reflection of the strides made by women, wives included, towards women's liberation. The first page of the publication features an advertisement for the "Women's House," a place where "...women can get together and talk about children, our husbands, our lives."<sup>43</sup> Although the advertisement does not provide a detailed description of the services provided by the Women's House, it does state that the Women's House is a place for dependents, servicewomen, and civilians to learn about their bodies as well as about how to take care of themselves. According to one woman, she started coming to the Women's House because it was "...the kind of place where women could come and try to figure out some of their problems without the fear of their husbands, or the military."<sup>44</sup> Through this short advertisement, readers quickly understand that both *Women's Voices* and the Women's House promoted women's rights, healthcare, and education, all of which are vital to successful women's liberation movements.

Within *Women's Voices*, the authors provide detailed education for women—a form of women's empowerment vital to the Women's Liberation Movement. For example, four entire pages are dedicated to the topic of birth control. The pages discuss the different forms of birth control available to women, beginning with the pill and ending with the withdrawal method.<sup>45</sup> In each

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<sup>43</sup> *Women's Voices* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1 January 1972, 2, GI Press Project.

<sup>44</sup> *Women's Voices*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Women's Voices*, 5–7a.

section, the publication explains the benefits and drawbacks to each method, dispelling any previous myths perpetuated by the public, namely husbands or boyfriends. The end of the section informs readers that it is possible to obtain birth control at the local Camp Kue hospital.

The second half of *Women's Voices* is dedicated to topics which many women might not have considered during this era. For example, a "Self Help" section details the various ways in which women should be aware of changes in their bodies.<sup>46</sup> In this section, readers find illustrated, step-by-step instructions for performing an at-home breast exam. This section, a far cry from *Mrs. Lieutenant*, helps ensure that women remain in touch with their bodies and put their own needs first. Following the "Self Help" section, readers find an instruction page for visiting the doctor.<sup>47</sup> The introduction to the page states that women "have to respect ourselves in order to make sure we are treated with care enough to maintain good health," promoting the idea of female empowerment.<sup>48</sup> The remainder of the page provides descriptions of what should happen during a proper appointment. For example, readers are encouraged to ensure that someone takes their medical histories.<sup>49</sup> Readers are also given descriptions for what should happen during external and internal examinations. By educating readers on proper medical appointments, *Women's Voices* ensures that they do not enter appointments unprepared. In this way, women are empowered to take charge of their bodies, a concept not largely promoted before this time.

For many military wives, the Women's Liberation Movement created changes within various sectors of everyday life, from health care, to childcare, to education. One of the most

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<sup>46</sup> *Women's Voices*, 11–13.

<sup>47</sup> *Women's Voices*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Women's Voices*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Women's Voices*, 16.

drastic changes occurred within the seemingly unbreakable bond of marriage. This change impacted one of the most dreaded topics among wives during this time: divorce. In her recently published work, *Dear John: Love and Loyalty in Wartime America*, Susan Carruthers analyzes how “Dear John” letters impact soldiers, starting with World War II and ending with present-day soldiers. Although the motives behind many Dear John letters sent during the Vietnam War are unclear, Carruthers hints that the rising Women’s Liberation Movement may have contributed.<sup>50</sup> During the 1960s, marriages faced rising pressures from the changing world which surrounded them. Second Wave Feminism encouraged women to prioritize education and professional goals before getting married, and sexual standards were altered with the release of the birth control pill in 1963.<sup>51</sup> As a result, many women began to reevaluate their relationships and desires. Despite this sexual revolution, women at home were encouraged to refrain from writing these now-infamous “Dear John” letters, as they would inevitably demoralize and crush the hopes of the soldiers on the receiving end. Consequently, advice columns for girlfriends and wives sprung up in local papers. One such column appeared in the December 14, 1969, edition of *The Sun*, advising girlfriends to “...cool down the letters gradually...” instead of ending things explicitly with one “Dear John” letter.<sup>52</sup> Readers were advised to “...save the cruel news...” until their boys had returned from Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> Despite these warnings, some wives and girlfriends chose to follow their hearts instead of the latest advice columns, sending the infamous letters anyway. These letters would create drastic impacts on the lives of not only the

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<sup>50</sup> Susan Carruthers, *Dear John: Love and Loyalty in Wartime America* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 46.

<sup>51</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 80.



soldiers on the receiving end, but on the wives and girlfriends composing them.

The most famous senders of “Dear John” letters were the wives who divorced husbands imprisoned in Vietnam. Tangee Alvarez, the most documented of these wives, was married to Everett Alvarez, the longest-serving POW in Vietnam.<sup>54</sup> While Everett was in captivity, Tangee obtained a divorce and remarried in 1971, leaving Everett to learn the news from his mother. While Tangee’s motives for the divorce may have been caused by loneliness or desperation, readers can also assume that the rising sexual revolution empowered her to break from her husband. Some psychiatrists from the time argued that the “Dear John Syndrome” exhibited by servicemen’s wives and girlfriends stemmed from the unpopularity of the war.<sup>55</sup> Unlike previous wars, the war in Vietnam was thought by many to be “futile and stupid,” making it difficult for wives to remain committed.<sup>56</sup> While this could very well be true, Carruthers makes clear that there is no way to ascertain the validity of the psychiatrists’ claims. For the couples who remained married, life at home did not remain the same once the soldiers returned from Vietnam. Some men struggled to adjust to the independence their wives enjoyed during their absence.<sup>57</sup> While some wives were willing to return to their pre-war subordinate positions, many women refused to relinquish their newfound independence. No matter the circumstance, “Dear John” letters were one of many outcomes which stemmed from Women’s Liberation Movement, and created lasting impacts within marriages and relationships.

For the wives of prisoners of war, the Women’s Liberation and Anti-War Movements took hold in subtler ways.

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<sup>54</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 158.

<sup>55</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 175.

<sup>56</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 175.

<sup>57</sup> Carruthers, *Dear John*, 160.

During the war, the U.S. military discouraged these wives from speaking out, advising them to avoid the press in order to protect their husbands.<sup>58</sup> Some wives chose to defy these orders and spoke out anyway. In 1969, however, President Nixon made the POW issue more public, encouraging family members to speak out and be seen.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the League of Families of Prisoners and Missing in Action in Southeast Asia made its debut, claiming 2,700 family members and attaching itself to the Nixon administration. As the war continued and the league did nothing, however, 450 members broke off to join the POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release, a more activist organization. Valerie Kushner, a founding member of this organization, soon became headline news for her work to bring one POW home. On September 29, 1972, *Life* magazine featured a cover story on Kushner. The cover features a photo of Kushner's face with a large caption dominating the page: "P.O.W. Wife."<sup>60</sup> The nine-page article, titled "A campaign to get a husband home," details the efforts of Kushner to bring her husband, Army Capt. Harold Kushner, home from Vietnam. Although not initially obvious, readers sense that Kushner is somewhat of a women's liberation activist, as she steps outside of the expected role of housewife to fight for what she believes.

By simply looking at the photos and captions featured in the article, readers begin to understand that Valerie Kushner symbolized the archetypal elements of a women's liberation activist. The first page of the article features an image of Kushner sitting at a table, speaking to the all-male members of the local Kiwanis club. A corresponding caption features a quote from a club member, stating that Kushner "...has nice legs, but she's

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<sup>58</sup> Francine D'Amico and Laurie Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage: Women and the U.S. Military* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 127.

<sup>59</sup> "P.O.W. Wife," *Life Magazine*, 29 September 1972, 32.

<sup>60</sup> "P.O.W. Wife," 32.

been brainwashed.”<sup>61</sup> The fact that Kushner continued to fight in a male-dominated world, even though most of the men with whom she worked viewed her as an object, emphasizes her determination to be heard. Two pages later, readers find a photo of Kushner carrying two suitcases. The caption beneath reads “There’s no man around to help Valerie with her luggage, so she carries it herself.”<sup>62</sup> Whether this caption was intended to be demeaning or supportive, it ultimately shows Kushner’s independence and strength in the face of adversity. The final page of the article features a photo of Kushner carrying her son’s tricycle across the yard, with the caption “Valerie Kushner has tried to be both mother and father to her kids – and that includes the chore of lugging her son’s tricycle up from the street to her house.”<sup>63</sup> The image of the tricycle slung easily over Kushner’s back literally symbolizes the strength which Kushner possesses, a strength which is archetypal to an effective Women’s Liberation activist.

Similar to the photos, the article itself also provides some not-so-subtle examples of Kushner’s activism. For example, Kushner is described as a “...debate club star...” who could “...turn on a calculated quaver that brings her listeners to tears.”<sup>64</sup> Despite the negative connotations behind this statement, it ultimately reveals that Kushner possesses an intelligent mind, an unexpected characteristic for a housewife. Readers also learn that Kushner is an active campaigner for George McGovern, Nixon’s Democratic challenger, as she believes that McGovern is her last hope for her husband’s safe return. The article details Kushner’s activities of the past five years, noting that she traveled to Cambodia, Paris, and Budapest, and “...stalked the marble halls

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<sup>61</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 32.

<sup>62</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 34.

<sup>63</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 42.

<sup>64</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 34.

of Congress till her legs cramped.”<sup>65</sup> While this description of Kushner stalking the halls of Congress was most likely a jab at her, it nevertheless cements in readers’ minds that she is determined to succeed no matter how many men express their doubts. The final page of the article features testimony from Kushner herself. She informs readers that it always angers her when strangers gawk at her competence. She reveals that throughout her married life, she was the one who kept the books and bought stocks, and that she and her husband had their own independent spheres.<sup>66</sup> The article then describes Kushner as passing “...quickly over any signs of personal weakness...” and hiding her pain “...in some deep inner corner, behind a shield of tautly woven resolutions.”<sup>67</sup> In this statement, Valerie is described as the exact opposite of the typical American housewife who easily falls victim to tears and emotions. Instead, Kushner is described as a force to be reckoned with, a force which most likely inspired other wives of her generation.

Many women, like Kushner, were persistent in their push for activism. Beginning in the 1960s, a group of women on the other side of the country started a battle that would last for the duration of the war. Constructed in 1944, Naval Amphibious Base Coronado served as a social center and incubator for exceptional pilots and their families.<sup>68</sup> As the Navy’s dominance grew, the tight-knit Navy community followed suit, creating its own rules and regulations. These rules ultimately established a caste system in which an officer’s rank translated to his wife and family’s status within the community. Commanding officers and their

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<sup>65</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 35.

<sup>66</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 42.

<sup>67</sup> “P.O.W. Wife,” 42.

<sup>68</sup> Heath Hardage Lee, *The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women who Took on the U.S. Government to Bring their Husbands Home* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2019), 1–3.

wives sat at the top of this system; the men and women below them knew their place and obeyed the rules. During the Vietnam War, this idyllic California community was turned on its head. Pilots from Coronado were captured by North Vietnamese forces in droves, becoming prisoners of war or even missing in action. As more and more pilots were shot down, the United States government reassured the wives that they had the situation under control, and compelled the wives to remain silent. As time wore on, the wives of these pilots refused to listen to the government's requests for silence. Instead, these women fought to bring their husbands home, spending their days writing letters to U.S. government officials, organizing events to bring awareness to POW/MIA issues, and even traveling across oceans to meet with North Vietnamese representatives. The story of these wives began in Coronado, where a reluctant sorority of women would inspire change that would reverberate across the country.

As pilots began to be shot down over Vietnam, the inability of the State Department and Defense Department to compassionately handle grieving wives became abundantly clear. The wives and mothers of lost military men were not viewed as bereaved individuals in need of comfort. Instead, they were seen as a public relations nightmare, and liability for the POWs.<sup>69</sup> Aside from this negative portrayal of grieving wives, the friction between the State and Defense Departments also contributed to the lack of answers given to wives of POWs and MIAs. Instead of answering the wives' appeals for help, American bureaucrats within the two departments were more focused on political wars between one another. As a result, it was often extremely difficult for wives to obtain any information on their missing or imprisoned husbands. Forced to weave their way through a complex political environment while learning how to articulate

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<sup>69</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 26–27.

their grievances in a language almost entirely foreign, these wives were repeatedly reassured that the government knew exactly what was going on with their missing husbands. At the same time, military guidelines prevented wives from speaking with anyone outside of their immediate families about their husbands' personal history or military service.<sup>70</sup> Wives were not allowed to write to Communist leaders or heads of state to plead for their husbands' release. More than anything, the American government warned wives not to speak to the press, claiming that any information given to TV, newspapers, or radio might result in harm to their husbands. For a short time, POW and MIA wives accepted the words of their military and government without question.

When Lyndon B. John was inaugurated for the second time in January 1965, he promised the nation that Americans would be part of his "Great Society," in which every person would be a valued part of the national community.<sup>71</sup> Two groups were shut out of this Great Society: POW/MIAs and their wives. While husbands lived in prison cells in Vietnam, wives were trapped at home, unable to complete any sort of day-to-day financial household management without a signature from their husbands. Without these signatures, wives could not buy a car, manage a mortgage, rent an apartment, buy a house, or receive funds for basic financial needs.<sup>72</sup> By late 1966, POW and MIA wives began to grasp that they were at the bottom of the Johnson administration's priority list. President Johnson happily appeared in photos with these wives but refused to meet with them to discuss their concerns. During the same year, wives began to worry that the Third Geneva Convention, which guaranteed humane treatment to prisoners of war, was being ignored by their

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<sup>70</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 36–37.

husbands' captors.<sup>73</sup> In July 1966, their fears were confirmed, as the nation watched an infamous news broadcast of malnourished POWs being marched through the streets of Hanoi, beaten by the surrounding mob. Despite these horrific images, POW and MIA wives were still brushed aside in Washington. After months of keeping quiet and obeying the rules of their government, these wives began to act.

On October 7, 1966, thirteen Coronado wives entered the home of Sybil Stockdale to hold a luncheon. Unlike previous luncheons, the wives met specifically to discuss what was happening to their husbands, and to provide comfort to one another. By the end of the luncheon, the group of wives had decided to begin meeting on a regular basis.<sup>74</sup> Most of these POW and MIA wives would never be feminists à la Friedan. However, some would take a page from her book "...ditching the 'problem that has no name' for activism."<sup>75</sup> It was when their gender began to affect the outcome of their husbands' fates that these wives began to ignite a long, slow revolution. As time wore on, wives in Coronado and across the country persistently wrote letters to the State Department, asking for anyone within the department to come speak with them about what was happening in Vietnam.<sup>76</sup> Their letters were met with silence. Bob Boroughs, a Naval Intelligence worker at the Pentagon, was one of the first to pay attention to the wives' plight. Given that Boroughs had worked for the Navy for a significant amount of time, he knew of ways to work around their roadblocks. As a result, he came up with a solution that he thought would solve the wives' problems. The West Coast wives needed to organize formally, establishing a legal group with elected officers and bylaws. Once a legitimate

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<sup>73</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 46–51.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 64–65.

<sup>75</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 68–69.

<sup>76</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 93–94.

organization was established, the Pentagon and State Department would be forced to listen. In October 1967, the West Coast POW and MIA wives did just that, establishing the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War.

One year later, in October 1968, Sybil Stockdale finally broke the “keep quiet” rule, giving a public interview to the *San Diego Union*. Stockdale stated that “The North Vietnamese have shown me the only thing they respond to is world opinion. The world does not know of their negligence, and they should know!”<sup>77</sup> Sybil’s interview empowered other POW and MIA wives to share their stories and soon, other wives were speaking at public meetings, writing articles for newspapers and magazines, and giving television interviews. By the end of the year, the revolution which started in a living room in Coronado had spread to the East Coast. Nixon’s election in November 1968 created new hope for Stockdale and her fellow POW and MIA wives. Sybil was convinced that “Nixon’s the One!,” as his campaign slogan read.<sup>78</sup> Despite this confidence in the newly-elected president, Sybil coordinated a “telegram-in,” based on the sit-ins that were utilized by feminist and civil rights activists. Sybil urged wives to flood President Nixon with telegrams, creating a reminder that the POW/MIA issue should be at the top of his priority list. Nixon received more than two thousand telegrams. Realizing the power which these wives held, Nixon ensured that each telegram received a personal reply. He even took it one step further, sending representatives from his administration to speak to the wives in San Diego at the Naval Air Station Miramar Officers’ Club. In September 1969, Sybil and a delegation of five other National League members traveled to Paris to meet with North Vietnamese representatives.<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>77</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 120.

<sup>78</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 128–131.

<sup>79</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 143–166.



meeting with the North Vietnamese delegation lasted two and a half hours, resulting in no information of substance gained. However, an unintended consequence did emerge from the meeting: the publicity created from the wives' visit placed a spotlight on the POW/MIA issue. By this point, POW and MIA wives were heading toward a showdown in Washington, where they would be supported by a "posse of patriots:" Texas philanthropist Ross Perot, Kansas senator and decorated WWII veteran Bob Dole, Apollo 13 commander James A. Lovell, and even the Duke himself, John Wayne.

On May 1, 1970, military wives and their families descended on Washington for an Appeal for International Justice rally with the support of high-level politicians and celebrities behind them. Following an opening speech from Senator Dole, Sybil and her fellow wives spoke about their experiences with the POW/MIA plight.<sup>80</sup> The event was a huge success and resulted in the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia becoming incorporated later that month. On June 30, the wives opened the National League office in Washington at 1 Constitution Avenue.<sup>81</sup> By October, the League had to move to a larger office in downtown D.C.; they even had a "Bat Phone" installed with a direct line to Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security advisor. Two years later, it appeared that the war in Vietnam was finally coming to an end when Nixon ordered the bombing of Hanoi on December 18, 1972.<sup>82</sup> The bombing was exactly what the POW/MIAs and their families had been hoping for. On January 23, 1973, Nixon addressed the nation, announcing that a peace treaty had been signed in Paris and that a cease-fire would take effect on January 27. Most importantly, all prisoners of war would be released

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<sup>80</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 174–177.

<sup>81</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 182–197.

<sup>82</sup> Lee, *The League of Wives*, 231–235.

within sixty days. To the wives, Nixon truly had been “the One” to finally bring their husbands home. However, had it not been for the unwavering efforts of wives, like Sybil Stockdale, the POW issue might have remained unresolved. Although many of the POW/MIA wives did not consider themselves to be women’s liberation activists, their bravery and determination in the face of adversity prove otherwise.

The efforts of wives to promote women’s liberation made some significant headway toward the end of the war. On January 22, 1972, the Department of State issued Airgram 341, an updated policy on wives of Foreign Service employees. According to the Department of State, “A basic principle of American diplomatic practice has been that our style of diplomacy must be representative of our way of life.”<sup>83</sup> The Department then stated that in the years leading up to the release of this policy, rapid changes in American society had resulted in wider roles for women than were previously available. At this point, women had “...gained increasing recognition of their right to be treated as individuals and to have personal and career interests in addition to their more traditional roles as wife or mother.”<sup>84</sup> The Department ultimately acknowledged that in order to preserve their tradition of representation, they must adapt to the changing conditions surrounding American women. The “Policy on Wives of Foreign Service Employees” contains six short points; each point ultimately makes clear that Foreign Service wives were not obligated to take part in activities which were previously forced upon them. For example, the third point states that if a wife participates in a charitable activity, her participation “...must be

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<sup>83</sup> “341. Airgram From the Department of State to All Posts,” Department of State Office of the Historian, 22 January 1972,

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v02/d341>.

<sup>84</sup> “341. Airgram From the Department of State to All Posts.”

truly voluntary.”<sup>85</sup> The fourth point establishes the fact that rank and precedence “...does not grant any wife authority over, or responsibility for, the wives of other employees.”<sup>86</sup> This policy, released less than a decade after handbooks such as *Mrs. Lieutenant*, reveals the strides which were made by wives, girlfriends, and women in the name of women’s liberation.

Between the time the first American soldier set foot in Vietnam and the last prisoner of war returned home, military wives endured tragic, yet largely forgotten instances of grief and hardship. At times, military wives held the weight of their families, and seemingly the entire world, on their shoulders, and yet were expected to carry on as if nothing had changed. It was through these instances of hardship and grief that activists emerged, fighting for the Women’s Liberation and Anti-War Movements. Whether they were penning their grievances in GI newspapers or traveling across the globe to fight for their husbands’ freedom, military wives ultimately exhibited forms of strength and empowerment which had never been seen before. These military wives ultimately created a revolution in activism, allowing the Women’s Liberation and Anti-War movements to reach new heights. Despite any expectations placed on them by the United States military, the press, or the United States government, these women remained steadfast in their beliefs, and created changes in the role of the military wife which would be felt by every military wife who followed.

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<sup>85</sup> “341. Airgram From the Department of State to All Posts.”

<sup>86</sup> “341. Airgram From the Department of State to All Posts.”

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**2023 Phi Alpha Theta Inductees**  
**UVM Chapter, Alpha Alpha Psi**

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*Joseph H. Alexander*  
*Jane Read Brinley*  
*Michael R. Carter*  
*Elisabeth N. Champion*  
*Anna K. Clark*  
*Forrest Coleman DesLauriers*  
*Grace Clara Elston*  
*John Russell Evans*  
*Zoe SH Fay*  
*Meaghan Elizabeth Feeney*  
*Bridget Mary Grew*  
*Michael Warfield Harrity*  
*Meghan A. Hessler*  
*James Francis Hughes II*  
*Catherine M. Jones*  
*Shannon Boland Kaiser*  
*April Olivia Kilkenny*  
*Jacqueline Beth Kruse*  
*Simone E. Martorano*  
*Sophia M. Miller-Grande*  
*Wade James Mullin*  
*Casey Lynn Murphy*  
*Sophia Cope Nolan*  
*Juniper Minerva Devereaux Oxford*  
*Shira Natalie Palmer*  
*Margaret Elizabeth Pierce*  
*Iain Andrew Pless*  
*Sophie Jane Prager*  
*Caleb McCone Reilly*  
*Evelyn Dion Stearns*  
*Paige Trapnell*  
*Richard Matthew Witting*

**Phi Alpha Theta** is a national honor society founded in 1921. Its mission is to promote the study of history through the encouragement of research, good teaching, publication, and the exchange of learning and ideas among historians. There are 970 chapters nationwide and a membership of 400,000. A national biennial convention and thirty-five annual regional meetings held each spring provide a forum for undergraduate and graduate students to present papers and exchange ideas. In addition, over twenty-five scholarships and prizes are awarded annually to both undergraduate and graduate students. The society publishes *The Historian*, one of the most widely circulated scholarly historical journals published in the United States.

Our chapter at the University of Vermont, Alpha Alpha Psi, was chartered in 1982. Undergraduate students who have completed at least fifteen credit hours in History courses at UVM, with a 3.6 grade point average and an overall GPA of 3.4, are eligible for membership. History master's students are required to maintain a 3.75 GPA in their graduate studies.

Induction ceremonies are held annually in April. Continuing a tradition started in 2020, this year's inductees submitted portraits for a photo collage.



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## Author Biographies

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**Philip Bern** is a senior at UVM double majoring in History and Philosophy. He has specific interest in post-World War II economic history and Cold War covert activity. Originally from Northern New Jersey, his dedication to history sprung out of a lifelong engagement with Jewish culture and history. American Jewish history, especially in New York, is a favorite topic of his. In his free time, you can find him playing music around Burlington in his band, listening to music, or even better, reading music history. One day he intends to discover and let the world know what really happened to JFK. He is also mulling a presidential run as soon as possible.

**Michael Carter** is a proud native of Burlington, Vermont, who anticipates graduating with a Master's Degree in History from UVM in May of 2023. Michael's main area of interest is the experience of the United States of America and its people during the First World War, particularly as pertains to Vermont and Vermonsters. Throughout his time at UVM, Michael has mostly worked in the regional history of Burlington, including successfully defending a thesis entitled "With Every Means at Our Command: Burlington's Dead in World War I." Michael is also known to occasionally dabble in Late Antique and Medieval History, which he ascribes to his "day job" as a Catholic priest, having trained for that role by graduating with a Master of Divinity degree from Boston College. When not reading about the mud and blood of the trenches, Michael enjoys making strange art and watching strange movies with his friends.

**Michael Harrity** is a senior from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania studying Political Science and History. His academic interests include left-wing political ideology, student activism, and

political philosophy. Outside of the classroom, Michael works as a tutor in the Undergraduate Writing Center, competes on the UVM Club Tennis team, and is a member of Delta Upsilon International Fraternity. He enjoys spending time with his friends, singing in the car, and exploring new places. Michael is graduating this spring and hopes to pursue a career where he can uplift his community and make the world a better place.

**Jocelyn Rockhold** is a graduate student in the M.A. history program under the guidance of Dr. Paul Deslandes. Before matriculating to UVM, she graduated with her B.A. in English from the University of Denver, where she served as Editor-In-Chief for the literary magazine *Foothills* and wrote for the collegiate newspaper the *DU Clarion*. She is a scholar of twentieth-century Britain with a particular interest in permissive society and the cultural history of the 1960s. At UVM, she is currently a research assistant and editor for the Center for Community News and a graduate teaching assistant for Professor Susanna Schrafstetter. After she completes her master's degree, Jocelyn hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in history. When she isn't researching British cultural history, Jocelyn loves to read Sally Rooney and watch Denver Nuggets basketball.

**Brooke Talbott** is a graduate student in the Master of Arts in History program, and will graduate in May 2023. Born and raised in Wichita, Kansas, she earned a B.A. in History with minors in Women's Studies and Criminal Justice from Wichita State University. Her area of interest centers on 20th century American military history, particularly World War II and the Vietnam War. She spent the past year researching the experiences of American officers' wives in the Vietnam War era, conducting 93 oral history interviews with officers' wives. She spent the past semester interning with UVM's Special Collections, and working



as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. In her free time, Brooke can be found traveling, hiking, or enjoying a good book in the company of her cat, Daisy.

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## Editor Biographies

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**Patrick Sullivan** is a graduate student in his second year of the M.A. program in history. His main areas of interest include popular thought and national identity in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe. He graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2021 with a B.A. in history and a minor in German. During his past two years at UVM, he has had the pleasure to work as a staff assistant at the Miller Center for Holocaust Studies, a teaching assistant for Professors Sarah Osten and Sean Field, and a research assistant for Professor Paul Deslandes. Before serving as the Executive Editor of this year's *History Review*, Patrick sat on the editorial board of the publication's previous volume. He intends to defend a Master's thesis on the subject of German colonialism during the upcoming summer semester. Following graduation from UVM, he plans to complete a Master of Library Science program at Indiana University.

**Isabel Birney** is a graduate student finishing the second year of the Master of Arts in History program. In 2022 Isabel graduated with a B.A in History and a B.S in Music Education from UVM. With such broad scope of academic interests Isabel primarily studies the history of music education in the United States and the contributions that women and people of color made to the field. Isabel currently works as a coach on the Lawrence Debate Union at UVM and as a middle school band sectional tutor. Next year Isabel plans to make the transition from student to teacher complete and continue working at UVM for the Lawrence Debate Union and teaching students locally.

**Meghan Hessler** is a junior undergraduate from New Jersey, who will graduate in May 2024 with a B.A. in History, Sociology, and

Philosophy. She co-runs A Different Voice, the UVM philosophy club, and works as a tutor in the Undergraduate Writing Center. Meghan is passionate about prison abolition, and organizes with the FreeHer Campaign, seeking to end the incarceration of women and girls (at least) in the state of Vermont. Meghan's interests in history are, she admits, not very focused. She wishes that there was time to study everything, but right now she is particularly interested in the transnational history of the development of the modern school of criminology and penology. In her spare time, Meghan loves to cook, read, study Turkish, craft, and play games (her all-time favorites are Catan, mancala, and checkers). She also loves chihuahuas and would like to adopt one—or many—in the future.

**James Francis Hughes II** is a Graduate student in the field of History with a focus on modern European history, particularly the German-speaking lands from the late 19th century to present-day. In addition to attending school, he works at the Miller Center for Holocaust Studies library in Billings. Before deciding to further his education by pursuing a graduate degree at UVM, he studied history at UC Berkeley where he wrote a senior-thesis on 21st Century Far-Right German Politics (Surprising Western Support for Germany's Far-Right Alternative für Deutschland), and graduated with high honors. Currently, he is working on a research project which details the life of ex-Nazi Otto Strasser and his escape from Hitler's assassins after their 1930 split; the thesis primarily focuses on Strasser's political movement and goals after 1933. In James' spare time, he plays drums in numerous internationally touring grindcore and punk bands. His plan after graduating is to become a secondary-level educator in social studies (a high school history teacher).

**Juniper Oxford** is a second-year graduate student in UVM's M.A. history program, studying nineteenth and twentieth-century American history. In 2021, she graduated from Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a B.A. in History and a minor in Political Science. Her research interests include women in social movements, third parties and political discontent, trans and gender variant history, and LGBTQ history more broadly. Juniper is currently an intern for UVM Silver Special Collections and has also served as a graduate teaching assistant for Dr. Melanie Gustafson's *U.S. History Since 1865* and Dr. Andrew Buchanan's *Global Environmental History*. Her thesis is titled "Declarations of Womanhood: Trans Lives, Livelihoods, and Afterlives of American Women 1890-1954" and she is graduating this spring.

**Ian Price** is a first-year graduate student in the Department of History's Master's of Arts program with an interest in modern Central and Eastern European history. In 2020 he graduated from UCLA with honors, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. This year he is working on two research projects: one on the history of baseball in East Asia and the other on the history of Nazi economic discourse and propaganda in the 1930s. He has had the privilege this year to work as a Teaching Assistant for Professor Andrew Buchanan and hopes to TA again in the fall. Next year he will also be working with Professor Jonathan Huener on a thesis examining the Nazi colonial project in Eastern Europe. Besides history, Ian enjoys hiking, painting miniatures, and playing tabletop roleplaying games with family and friends.

**Michael Tobin** is a second-year masters student in history. He is interested in American political and social history at the turn of the 20th century with a particular focus in masculinity and gendered cultural identity. Michael is currently finishing his thesis on male intimacy and masculinity in Vermont between

1890 and 1940, looking closely at the relationship between normative (and non-normative) expressions of masculinity and the development of sexual identities on a local scale. Michael also works as graduate research assistant for Writing in the Disciplines at UVM. In his free time, Michael also enjoys movies, cooking, football, and a good magic trick.

**Nick Wendell** is a senior from New York. He majored in history and minored in studio art, and his passion is combining these two disciplines in the form of historical scenes and portraits. This spring he completed an honors thesis in which he wrote an essay and drew images related to the First World War. After graduation he plans to participate in a public history program in Massachusetts, although beyond that he cannot say.



The University of Vermont