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Minerva

An Undergraduate History Journal

This is the tenth edition of *Minerva*, a journal collecting the strongest fourth-year seminar papers from Brantford and Waterloo campuses at Wilfrid Laurier University.

These excellent essays cover a diverse range of topics from the emergence of "ecological consciousness" to the "landscape of British feminism" to the "The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and resistance to it" to "queer society, culture, and activism" in Canada. This is the last year in the program where all history majors are required to complete both research and reading seminars in their fourth year.

As our program evolves, so too will *Minerva*. What remains constant is the hard work and creative thinking that students demonstrate in their excellent work.

Congratulations to our authors!



Hugo Steiner-Prag (1880-1945), Design for a Book Illustration with an Owl, c. 1900s. Wikimedia Commons.

Did you know?

The owl either represented or accompanied Athena, the goddess of wisdom in ancient Greek mythology, or Minerva in ancient Rome. The "owl of Athena" or "owl of Minerva" ever since have been used as symbols of knowledge, acuity, and wisdom.

Rosemarie Forsberg "Printed Liberation: The Role of Queer Magazines in Canadian Gay Liberation, 1964-1992,"
HI480: Research Seminar on Canada in the 20th Century with Dr. Neylan

INTRODUCTION

In 1971, a queer individual named Allan Oxside wrote a letter to the queer magazine *The Body Politic* disclosing his recent coming out of the closet. In this letter entitled "Homo-Oxside In A Closet," Oxside described his disappointment with being an openly gay man and the lack of acceptance he received from other queer individuals. In an open letter responding to Oxside written by the Gay Alliance Toward Equality, the author expressed:

The way we see it, Allan, no matter how fancy you decorate it, no closet is good enough for our brothers and sisters. So don't go back in. Join GATE and the Gay Liberation Movement and help us create an alternative to the anti-gay 'gay world.' You won't find instant happiness, but you will find gays who are trying to relate to themselves as more than sexual objects.¹

Advocating for staying out of the closet and joining the gay liberation movement was one of a variety of purposes for queer magazines in Canada.

Queer magazines have served various purposes for queer individuals, communities, and the overall gay liberation movement. These magazines strived to entertain, educate, strengthen community ties, and advocate for social causes. The formation of a gay Canadian press in 1964 was crucial in advancing the gay liberation movement in Canada. Through analysis of the Toronto-based magazines *TWO*, *The Body Politic*, and *Rites*, it is evident that queer publications played a significant role in the gay liberation movement from the mid-1960s until the 1990s. They acted as a platform for queer individuals to express their political demands for equality for queer Canadians, while also aiding in the construction of queer communities and a national queer culture. Through articles, editorials, and letters, these periodicals reveal the lived experiences of queer people existing in a predominantly heterosexual society and, specifically, how queer individuals and communities have overcome the challenges created by systemically homophobic institutions. Queer publications demonstrate the ways that queer individuals and communities have created a queer subculture that encompasses social spaces, events, community support, and an inclusive group identity. Additionally, queer magazines illustrate the advocacy of the queer community in social and political movements, especially the gay liberation movement. Nevertheless, while one of the aims of queer publications was to create a safe space for queer people, these publications were framed by a narrow definition of queer people that primarily accounted for gay men and lesbians who are often white, middle-class, able-bodied, and located in urban cities. Thus, many queer individuals were excluded from the intended readership of queer publications since they did not see themselves reflected in the magazine's content. Due to the social norms of Canada from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s, the non-queer community often reacted to these publications in discriminatory and hostile ways. However, queer magazines were critical for queer Canadians in that they provided a sense of normalcy despite the homophobia and heterosexism of the broader public and mainstream media.

METHODOLOGY & TERMINOLOGY

This paper will take an intersectional approach to account for how identities such as gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, and location were accounted for within queer publications. It will question who was included within the definition of "queer," as historically this has only considered gay men and lesbians who were often white, able-bodied, and middle-class. The paper will also employ a media analysis to examine the role of queer publications in the gay liberation movement and what they tell us about queer society, culture, and activism. Language is an important part of both the queer identity and the queer community. The term "queer" will be used to describe both

¹ GATE, "Open Letter to Allan Oxside," *The Body Politic*, November-December, 1971, 3.

LGBTQ+ individuals and the community. Although this has historically been a derogatory term, it has been reclaimed positively in recent years to encompass the community's diversity.

QUEER LIBERATION IN CANADA

The gay liberation movement was a social movement beginning in the mid-1960s in Canada and the United States that urged queer individuals and communities to seek radical action to fight against oppression through activism, community building, and visibility. Gay and lesbian liberation in Canada can be characterized by the changing of the self-image of one who assumes the homophobic and heterosexist beliefs and perceptions of the queer community to one that rejects these notions. According to Tom Warner, "Lesbian and gay liberation has militantly rejected notions of gays and lesbians as sick, sinful, criminal, abnormal, deviant, strange, or pathetic. It has condemned the pathologizing of homosexuality and the social oppression of gays and lesbians."² In addition to confronting individual cases of homophobia and heterosexism, gay liberation involved fighting against the system. For queer people to be liberated, influences of power such as the law, the church, the medical system, and the media needed to be confronted to stop their harassment, discrimination, and influential attitudes.³ Thus, the gay liberation movement relied on the work of queer individuals, communities, and organizations to further its agenda of increasing social, legal, political, and economic rights for queer people.

As a social and political movement, queer publications played a significant role in informing, promoting, and responding to the gay liberation movement. These publications published articles on the themes of bodily autonomy for queer individuals, the end of institutional homophobic and heterosexism, and ultimately gave a voice to the voiceless.⁴

ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Queer publications in the form of periodicals or magazines can be considered a piece of alternative media. The term alternative media is used to describe grassroots media that does not fall into the category of mainstream, state-defined, public media. Used by grassroots organizations and activists, alternative media has thus been characterized by their left-wing, often radical perspectives on social, political, and cultural issues.⁵ The queer community has adopted many forms and genres of alternative media including radio, television, film, theatre, art, and zines, but the publication of periodicals has been especially important for gay liberation. Alternative media has played a prominent role in social movements since it is an accessible format where groups can assume leadership of their publications and counteract the dominant narrative of the mainstream media. For example, the emergence of feminist, Indigenous, and ethnic periodicals gave minority groups a platform they otherwise may not have attained in mainstream media.⁶ Alternative media was thus fundamental within the queer community because it helped queer individuals rally support for queer activism while counteracting homophobic and heterosexist depictions of the queer community found in mainstream media.

HISTORY OF QUEER MAGAZINES IN CANADA

Pre-dating the formation of a Canadian gay press in 1964, news about the queer community existed in sensationalized reports within tabloids and the press. These included reports on morality offences such as "gross indecency" which negatively depicted the queer community as delinquent and morally corrupt and built upon homophobic perceptions of queer people.⁷ Beginning in the late 1950s, early queer publications existed predominantly within heterosexual mainstream media. Queer material appeared in gossip columns, often using code to discretely speak to the queer community. Columnists such as "Masque" and "Mother Goose" wrote about local gay organizations and activities in tabloid columns and are some of the only written evidence of queer publications preceding the rise of the Canadian gay press.⁸ The emergence of publications targeted specifically toward queer people occurred simultaneously with the birth of homophile organizations.

² Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 8.

³ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 8.

⁴ Stephanie Chambers et al., *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, First edition (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2017), 108.

⁵ Kirsten Kozolanka, David Skinner, and Patricia Mazepa, *Alternative Media in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 66.

⁶ Kozolanka, Skinner, and Mazepa, *Alternative Media in Canada*, 87.

⁷ Chambers et al., *Any Other Way*, 108.

⁸ Chambers et al., *Any Other Way*, 108.

Tabloid magazines *GAY* and *TWO: The Homosexual Viewpoint in Canada* were launched in 1964 and became the first explicitly queer publications in Canada. *GAY* was intended to be an informal, entertainment magazine that included photographs, an advice column, reports on Toronto's gay community, and advertisements for local gay establishments.⁹ *GAY* intended to become an international tabloid with a readership reaching queer communities in the United States, but it would be short-lived, only lasting until issue 15. Due to the conviction and imprisonment of magazine directors Robert Marsden and Gerald Thomas Burkhardt for relations with underage boys, *GAY* ceased publication in 1966.¹⁰ Following the discontinuation of *GAY* and *TWO*, additional queer magazines were created to fill the demand for queer content. As Tom Warner explains, "the need to provide news, information, and analyses from liberated gay and lesbian perspectives, and to counteract the still largely negative presentations of the mainstream media, led lesbian and gay activists to begin publishing magazines and periodicals of their own."¹¹ Thus, *The Body Politic* and *Rites* emerged in the subsequent periods to promote queer liberation, entertainment, and education.

TWO, *The Body Politic*, and *Rites* were disseminated to readers through paid subscription services or could be purchased in gay bookstores such as Glad Day Bookshop, or university bookstores. Due to the taboo nature of queer magazines, readers were often secretive about their purchases and preferred purchasing their copies through the mail.¹² Through an examination of queer magazines from 1964 to 1992, notable themes emerge, including the criminalization of homosexuals, the portrayal of homosexuals as predators, and the emergence of gay pride. Throughout this twenty-eight-year window, it is apparent that the magazines adapted to reflect the social, cultural, and political landscape in which they were produced. This is particularly apparent in publications between the 1980s and 1990s when the AIDS epidemic impacted Canada's queer community. This transformation is evident in how queer sexual health evolved from a minor theme in publications of the 1970s to an integral part of the magazine's content in the 1980s and 1990s.

TWO: THE HOMOSEXUAL VIEWPOINT IN CANADA

The establishment of queer magazines pre-dates the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 with the Toronto-based magazine *TWO: The Homosexual Viewpoint in Canada* being founded in 1964. Emerging shortly after the creation of *GAY*, the magazines competed with one another to establish a loyal queer readership. Rick Kerr of Gayboy Publishing created *TWO* as a reaction against articles and publications in the mainstream media that spread negative stereotypes about the queer community and sought to promote knowledge and an understanding of queer people for both the queer community and the general public. While *GAY* included a combination of informal editorials, photos, and advertisements, *TWO* largely published physique photography and local Toronto-based content, which set the magazines apart.¹³ It was available as a single issue for 75 cents or an 8-dollar year-long subscription that was mailed to the subscriber.¹⁴ In the first edition of *TWO*, the editors stated that the aim of their publication was a joint effort to promote the "homosexual viewpoint among the general public and to educate homosexuals as to their responsibilities as variants from the current moral and social standards."¹⁵ The majority of content in *TWO* was physique photography, which indicates that the targeted audience of the publication was gay men. These photos consisted of young, unclad, handsome men in sensual poses. Furthermore, the men photographed were all white with trim bodies, reinforcing the societal beauty standard for queer men. In addition to physique photography, *TWO* contained chapters of fiction books, book reviews, editorials, photos, and articles on the Toronto drag scene. *TWO* served to entertain readers by providing content that captivated a queer audience excluded from mainstream magazines. While *TWO* did not state it was only for men within the aims of the publication, it can be assumed that the intended readership was gay men who lived in Toronto due to the magazine's male-oriented content.

Many articles in *TWO* touched upon social issues that provide insight into the lives of the queer individual during the mid-1960s in Toronto. One of these issues was the idea that homosexuals could influence children and teenagers to become queer. Prevalent in the heterosexual community, this notion suggested that homosexuality

⁹ Donald W. McLeod, *A Brief History of GAY, Canada's First Gay Tabloid, 1964-1966* (Toronto: Homewood Books, 2003), 25.

¹⁰ McLeod, *A Brief History of GAY*, 72.

¹¹ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 172.

¹² Warner, *Never Going Back*, 172.

¹³ McLeod, *A Brief History of GAY*, 28.

¹⁴ "Our Aims and Policy," *TWO*, 1965, 2.

¹⁵ "TWO," *TWO*, 1964, 2.

was dangerous to young individuals who could be easily manipulated to stray against heteronormative norms. An article in *TWO* titled "The Teenager and Homosexuality" attempts to convince its readers that this theory that homosexuality is a dangerous influence on teenagers is simply untrue. The article explains that two or three decades ago, the word "homosexuality" was rarely heard or used in front of teenagers. It argues that teenagers, especially teenage boys of the 1960s are sophisticated for their age, as they have different attitudes towards sex and sexuality due to easier accessibility to knowledge, radio, television, and freedom.¹⁶ While teenaged boys' attitudes towards sex may be similar to those of their parents, it argues that "in most cases he not only knows what homosexuality is but knows some homosexuals. He may even have had a homosexual experience. Armed with this knowledge and experience, he then decides to accept or reject homosexuality as his way of life."¹⁷ This article suggests that *TWO* aimed to challenge and correct misconceptions about queer people through education. It also reveals that queer people were viewed as predatory by the heterosexual public since it was assumed that they could turn youth queer through their influence. While it is unlikely that this article was targeted toward the straight public due to *TWO*'s small readership, it sought to inform its readers of the falsity of this theory.

Religious persecution was a common occurrence for queer individuals living in a society where the church deemed homosexuality as sinful and immoral. A response to the liberalization and secularization of the 1960s was a conservative Christian movement which led to soaring memberships in Evangelical or Fundamentalist Christian churches. Many of these churches had radical positions on homosexuality because they saw same-sex relationships as going against Christian family values.¹⁸ On January 6, 1966, the Toronto newspaper *The Telegram* published an article titled "God Should Kill Perverts" to which it stated that the People's Church advocated for the execution of homosexuals.¹⁹ In a snarky response to Reverend Oswald J. Smith of the People's Church, *TWO* criticized the church's lack of "compassion and understanding" that Christians are told to practice. *TWO* proclaimed that "One cannot help but be reminded of Adolf Hitler's attitude toward the Jews, when Mr. Smith says "the death penalty is the only solution". We wonder what would happen if Mr. Smith suddenly discovered that homosexuals were a vast majority (instead of a supposed minority) and that they had decided that the Peoples Church was a perversion of true Christianity and that they should therefore be executed."²⁰ This humorous response to a disturbing statement signifies that despite homophobia from the church, queer individuals opposed religious discrimination by creating a dialogue to educate their readers on the beliefs of the church.

In addition to articles on social issues, *TWO* published articles and stories on queer culture in Toronto. A prominent part of Toronto's queer community was the city's drag scene, and since publisher Rick Kerr also owned "Toronto's original after-hours gay clubs" the Music Room and the Melody Room, *TWO* often publicized photos, articles, and promoted drag queens and their performances. Entertainment not only contributed to community building, but it also served as an escape for queer people to temporarily step away from their social and political activism. The article "Kamp Awards '65" was an overview of the drag award show "Kamp Awards '65." Referred to as "The Drag Event of the Year," awards were given for "Best Overall Entertainer," "Best Costume," and "Most Convincing Female Impersonator."²¹ This celebration of gender diversity and artistic expression is an example of community solidarity in Toronto as the queer community united to commemorate Toronto's top drag performers. For those who were unable to attend the ceremony, this article was written to recount the evening.

Advertisements in *TWO* also display queer culture in Toronto by providing its queer readership with products, events, and destinations where queer people would be welcomed and could find like-minded people. For instance, an advertisement promoting "The Regency Club," an after-hours gay club in Toronto shows the importance of a business that accommodated the queer community. "The Regency Club" included a pool, game rooms, and a café with live performances on the weekend. The advertisement explained that "the clientele leans towards the gay-girl set and the 'quietly married' who enjoy the excitement of an evening of dancing without the frantic pace of some of the other clubs."²² This advertisement thus accounted for queer individuals who sought the company of other queer people in a discrete manner, which highlights the importance of queer community and queer-inclusive establishments.

¹⁶ "The Teenager and Homosexuality," *TWO*, 1965, 5.

¹⁷ "The Teenager and Homosexuality," 6.

¹⁸ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 47.

¹⁹ "God Should Kill Perverts," *The Telegram*, Toronto ON, January 6, 1966.

²⁰ "God Should Kill Perverts – Church," *TWO*, May-June 1966, 3.

²¹ "Kamp Awards '65," *TWO*, 1965, 8-11.

²² "The Regency Club," *TWO*, 1965, 15.

Alongside articles on society and culture, *TWO* published advocacy pieces in response to different issues affecting the queer community in Toronto and throughout Canada. "A Report on an Incident Which, Could Not Possibly, (No Not Ever), Happen...But Did!" addressed a situation whereby a detective reported a man who was publicly in drag to his employer. The young man who frequented the bar while in drag was observed by a detective who discovered that the beautiful woman he was watching was a man in drag. The next day, the young man was called before the Public Transport Commission where he was told that a police officer had called them and notified them that he was a "transvestite" and a homosexual. In response to this incident, *TWO* stated that they wished to hear from the Police Department since this was a violation of the code of ethics.²³ *TWO* called for accountability of the Police Department and hence brought light to the situation by publishing the story in the magazine in hopes that queer people could be free to express their orientation or self-expression without being discriminated against by the law or within the workplace. In a piece about seeking treatment for homosexuality from 1966, the writers of *TWO* urged their readers that treatments such as psychiatric help or interventions within the prison system will not cure the individual.²⁴ The writers explained that "the ONLY HELP FOR THE HOMOSEXUAL lies in joining your nearest homosexual, or homophile organization, and lending your efforts to sweep away the darkness and prejudice that surrounds Homosexuality."²⁵ For those who were in the closet or experiencing internalized homophobia, this article promoted and advocated for self-acceptance and discouraged the need for queer people to seek "cures" for their homosexuality.

As an early queer publication, *TWO* served important roles in the gay liberation movement. Its articles, advertisements, and photos provided its readership with a sense of visibility since it indicated that there were other queer people in Toronto while providing queer writers with a platform to voice their experiences outside of mainstream media. It also served as a platform to educate and advocate for queer individuals on social issues, local queer news, and queer entertainment, which in turn fostered both a sense of advocacy and community among its queer readers. Since *TWO* was primarily intended for gay men, it was exclusionary for the rest of the queer community, especially for queer women. The article "What is a Downtown Butch" mocks butch lesbians which indicates that they were not a part of the magazine's intended readership.²⁶ Additionally, the lack of inclusivity towards bisexuals and transgender individuals may be indicative of the time period that the magazine was written in since they were commonly erased from the queer narrative.

Although we cannot be certain of *TWO*'s reader's social identities, due to the magazine's content being primarily photos of or stories on white men, it is assumed that the magazine did not account for a racially diverse readership. It is unlikely that the heterosexual public were common readers of *TWO*, but it did not stop the public from reacting by censoring queer content through obscenity laws. *TWO*'s inclusion of physique photography abided by the obscenity legislation as none of the photos included frontal nudity or sexual activity. However, in 1966, the Kamp Publishing Bookstore which sold copies of *TWO* was raided by the police morality bureau where it was charged with possession of "obscene" literature for purposes of distribution.²⁷ The censorship of *TWO* and the regulation of queer content ultimately contributed to the end of the publication in July of 1966 following its two years of publication.

THE BODY POLITIC

The Body Politic was established in Toronto in 1971 and sought to fill the void that *TWO* left in the queer community. As Canada's leading gay liberation magazine, *The Body Politic* explained for gay liberation:

The most important tactic is building well organized and well publicized actions such as demonstrations, public meetings and debates, conferences, pickets at anti-gay media establishments, etc. etc. These actions will carry a clear message to our brothers and sisters in the closet – you are not alone, gay is good, gay is proud! – and which are aimed at social institutions which not only reflect the prevailing anti-homosexual attitudes of society at large, but also have the power to physically oppress us and perpetuate these attitudes.²⁸

²³ "A Report on an Incident Which, Could Not Possibly, (No Not Ever), Happen...But Did!" *TWO*, January-February 1966, 34.

²⁴ "Treatment," *TWO*, July-August 1966, 6.

²⁵ "Treatment," 6.

²⁶ "What is a Downtown Butch," *TWO*, July-August 1966, 26.

²⁷ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1987), 249.

²⁸ "A Program for Gay Liberation," *The Body Politic*, November-December, 1971, 14.

Thus, *The Body Politic* aimed to unite the national queer community while providing a forum for individuals to express their opinions on topics relevant to gay liberation.²⁹

In the first edition of the magazine, it outlined its purpose and argued that the "Gay Community is what you make it," meaning that the hard work and dedication of its members is what unites the community. *The Body Politic's* three-fold purpose was to "inform the gay community about NEWS events involving the gay community, to provide a forum for individuals to express their views on sexual politics, to publish prose, poetry, book and film reviews, and graphics relevant to gay liberation."³⁰ *The Body Politic* had a mail subscription service for customers who wanted to be more discrete with their purchases while also being available for purchase at university bookstores at the University of Toronto, York University, McMaster University, and the University of Waterloo as well as at queer social organizations and queer bookstores.³¹ The availability of *The Body Politic* especially for young queer individuals indicates that they were the publication's main targeted audience since they were active participants in the gay liberation movement. *The Body Politic* published articles on current events, letters to the editor, political editorial pieces, advertisements, and entertainment pieces. As a queer magazine, *The Body Politic* also served to entertain. While the majority of the magazine's content aimed to educate or inform its readers, film and book reviews, poems, and works of fiction were included to provide entertainment.

Articles from *The Body Politic* inform us of the lived social experiences of the queer community in Canada from the early 1970s until the mid-1980s. For instance, the article "Toronto Civilian Park Patrol" from 1971 by Rombus Hube offers a glimpse into the criminalization of queer people in Toronto. This article addressed the arrest of two queer individuals in Philosophers Walk by plainclothes "Morality Officers" who charged the young men with gross indecency without any evidence or witnesses. In response to the unjust arrest of the queer men, Hube and the Community Homophile Association of Toronto began to patrol the park with a flashlight nightly from 11:00 pm to 2:00 a.m. to warn gay men who went to the park to "cruise" with one another that the police were present. Hube stated "Perhaps when we have liberated both the homosexual and the heterosexuals from their fear and guilt in respect to one another, there won't be any need for Homophile Organizations or Morality Squads. Meanwhile working for human liberation, even if it only means carrying a flashlight on Philosopher's Walk will be necessary."³² This reveals that the queer community experienced a constant state of fear since they were constantly surveilled by the police and were often charged with morality crimes. In the 1970s, the Toronto police viewed queer individuals as "criminal elements" with the Toronto Chief of Police stating that all homosexuals were "incipient criminals."³³ Nevertheless, fighting back against police surveillance became a leading cause in the gay liberation movement and was commonly discussed in *The Body Politic*.

Elections were critical for the queer community because the fate of the community rested on the federal and provincial governments. A federal election was held On October 30th, 1972, and "for the first time, homosexuals [were] sufficiently organized to have an impact on this electoral decision."³⁴ *The Body Politic* article "Read this! (Before You Vote)" laid out the platforms of each party and stated their positions on queer issues such as homosexuality and the criminal code, so that queer individuals could best pick the party that was the least discriminatory. Beginning with the Social Credit Party, *The Body Politic* argued that they had the most anti-homosexual platform since they stated that Bill C-150, the bill that legalized abortion and partially decriminalized homosexuality, was leading the nation to "its own destruction."³⁵ The Progressive Conservatives on the other hand believed that homosexuality should not be an issue dealt with in the Criminal Code, but rather it should be treated as a sickness through a psychological perspective unless the seduction of young people is involved.

Although the Liberal Party introduced Bill C-150 and the party was believed to be the best choice for queer voters, *The Body Politic* highlighted the beliefs of Justice Minister John Turner who stated that "homosexuals are sick and their conduct [is] morally and physically repugnant."³⁶ The only party that offered any positive sentiments towards the queer community was the New Democratic Party, which led *The Body Politic* to conclude that "the only

²⁹ "The Body Politic," *The Body Politic*, November-December, 1971, 2.

³⁰ "The Body Politic," 2.

³¹ "Where to Buy *The Body Politic*," *The Body Politic*, 1972, 15.

³² "Toronto Civilian Park Patrol," *The Body Politic*, November-December 1971, 9.

³³ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 39.

³⁴ Bob Wallace, "Read This (Before You Vote)," *The Body Politic*, 1972, 5.

³⁵ Wallace, "Read This," 5.

³⁶ Wallace, "Read This," 5.

party which assumes a stance favourable to the homosexual community is the NDP. All others are either blatantly hostile or paternalistic in the most negative sense imaginable."³⁷ Thus, this article sheds light on the experiences of queer individuals in a political system that ultimately discriminates against them.

The formation of queer organizations, communities, and spaces was an integral part of gay liberation. Organizing outside of large cities took place throughout Canada and began to challenge isolation in rural communities as well as the predominantly white, male queer organizations.³⁸ The emergence of a unified queer community was one of the aims of *The Body Politic*. For queer individuals, especially those in rural areas outside of metropolitan cities, advertisements and the classified section in *The Body Politic* created a system for individuals or groups to meet one another for friendships, romantic or sexual relationships, or community gatherings.³⁹ The classified section also contained advertisements for queer individuals who required support from other queer individuals. For example, one advertisement from Toronto stated "PLEASE HELP. I need a place to live as I can no longer live at home. I am 19, male, warm, friendly, and very easy to get along with. I can't afford much but will try to help out as best I can. If you think you could help out a fellow gay that would be greatly appreciated."⁴⁰ For queer individuals, especially those who were young and did not have accepting family or peers, *The Body Politic* acted as a support network. The section "The Network" in the magazine listed community groups and services for gay men and lesbians throughout Canada to ensure that all queer individuals had resources and support. Advertisements for community groups and services such as the Lesbian Support Group in the Yukon, the Alberta Lesbian and Gay Rights Association, and Brethren/Mennonite Council for Gay Concerns in Manitoba display that *The Body Politic* sought to provide individuals with ways to join a unified queer community outside of the queer hubs of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver.⁴¹

Advertisements in *The Body Politic* additionally reveal aspects of queer culture and consumerism. The magazine began without including commercial advertisements but by its fourth issue, the collective accepted advertisements. Rick Bébout, one of the leading writers and collective members of the publication explained that ads were necessary to keep the magazine afloat and the publication of issues more frequent. The collective was selective in what advertisements to include, clarifying that "We shall not accept ads we consider representative of businesses which promote sexism, or whose ads are exploitative in appearance."⁴² The majority of the advertisements were from Toronto-based queer-owned businesses such as D'Arby Interiors which offered a "gay discount" for 10% off and Brandt Meats & Delicatessen in the Church Street neighbourhood.⁴³ There were also advertisements for travel agents, nightclubs, bars, queer-friendly vacation destinations, clothing boutiques, local theatres, and bookshops that sold queer publications. Bébout added "It would take to the mid 1980s for *The Body Politic* to look like what most people think of as a gay mag: full of bars, beef, and poppers. In all its 15 years the paper saw very few big corporate ads, mostly for booze and none for long."⁴⁴ Advertisements in *The Body Politic* offer insight into the consumer culture of queer individuals. Since many queer individuals wanted to support businesses that had similar values to them, these businesses were primarily queer-owned, or supported gay liberation. These advertisements further illustrate how *The Body Politic* served as a platform to entertain the queer community, as it featured advertisements for queer-friendly establishments.

Since *The Body Politic* was a gay liberation publication, articles on activism were numerous. One of the most significant advocacy pieces was "WE DEMAND" from 1971 which listed ten demands from the queer community to the federal government. These requests included the removal of the terms "gross indecency" and "indecent" acts from the Criminal Code, a uniform age of consent for all female and male homosexual and heterosexual acts, the omission of references to homosexuality in the Immigration Act, equal rights of employment and promotion at all government levels for homosexuals, and all of the legal rights for homosexuals that currently existed for heterosexuals.⁴⁵ *The Body Politic* utilized various activism strategies within the publication, including

³⁷ Wallace, "Read This," 22.

³⁸ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 165.

³⁹ "Classified," *The Body Politic*, February 1978, 22.

⁴⁰ "Classified," 22.

⁴¹ "Network in Canada," *The Body Politic*, February 1987, 12-14.

⁴² Rick Bébout, *On the Origins of The Body Politic: The Genealogy, Conception, Birth, Coming out, Baby Steps (& Babies) of Canada's Most Vital Voice of Gay Liberation 1971-1987*. Online Book, 2000.

⁴³ "Darby Interiors" and "Brandt Meats & Delicatessen," *The Body Politic*, February 1987, 7.

⁴⁴ Rick Bébout, *On the Origins of The Body Politic*.

⁴⁵ Brian Waite and Cheri DeNovo, "WE DEMAND," *The Body Politic*, November-December 1971, 4-7.

educating readers, stating public demands, and instructing the queer community to write letters to government officials. For example, in the article “Our Enemies are Organizing” from 1978, *The Body Politic* informed its readers that conservative groups were trying to prevent sexual orientation from being added to the Ontario Human Rights Code. They urged the readers that to make a difference, one must “Write a letter. Tell the government you support the addition of ‘sexual orientation’ to the Ontario Human Rights Code. Make a financial contribution to the Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario – the province-wide organization lobbying now at Queen’s Park for your rights.”⁴⁶ This suggests that social change was only attainable through the dedication and collaboration of the queer community which would facilitate queer liberation.

The Body Politic was intended as a publication for all members of the queer community. For the queer community, many felt that it encapsulated the diversity of the queer experience with one reader explaining that “Yours is the first gay publication that I have seen that satisfies all gay people: male, female, old, young, black, white – all people.”⁴⁷ The readership of *The Body Politic* likely included racialized individuals, but within the magazine’s content, there was little to no reference to ethnic minorities or Indigenous peoples. Compared to its predecessors, *The Body Politic*’s inclusion of queer women was a progressive development in queer publications since it published articles specifically for lesbians. While *The Body Politic* was Toronto-based and featured local content, it accounted for queer people throughout the country and internationally. The article “Survival in the Territories” from 1978 gave Roy, a gay man from the Northwest Territories, a platform to share his experiences being a queer person in an environment that was isolated from other queer individuals.⁴⁸ This allowed readers to understand that queer experiences differed based on location, especially for those in rural areas. *The Body Politic* additionally had a narrow definition of queer that primarily accounted for gay men and lesbians, although an advertisement for a seminar at the Association for Canadian Transsexuals asserts that transgender individuals were included under the queer umbrella.⁴⁹

In issue 39 of *The Body Politic* published in December 1977, the article “Men Loving Boys Loving Men” by Gerald Hannon was released and caused significant backlash among the heterosexual public as well as the queer community. The article examined the lives of pedophile men and covered themes of child sexuality and homosexuality which upset the heterosexual public and validated the stereotype that gay men were child molesters.⁵⁰ On December 30, 1977, *The Body Politic* offices were raided by the Metropolitan Toronto Police who had entered with a warrant that authorized the officers to look for records, invoices, or documents that would give evidence to charges under Section 164 of the Criminal Code of Canada, the “use of the mails for the purpose of transmitting or delivering anything that is obscene, indecent, immoral or scurrilous.”⁵¹ On January 5, 1978, President Ken Popert, Secretary Edward Jackson and Treasurer Gerald Hannon of the Pink Triangle Press were charged under sections 159 and 164 of the Criminal Code.⁵² While the raid on *The Body Politic* showed the heterosexual public’s views toward the magazine’s content, the magazine persevered until it ceased publication in 1987.

As the most prominent queer magazine during the gay liberation movement, *The Body Politic* played a significant role in advocating for systemic change for the queer community. In addition to empowering gay men, *The Body Politic* made space for lesbians which ultimately united gay liberation and women’s liberation. Lesbian liberation began to flourish in the late 1970s and early 1980s as lesbians began to create their own organizations and community groups separate from gay men’s and women’s organizations.⁵³ Queer women also began to intersect with the feminist movement since issues of queer women overlapped with the aims of the feminist movement, including violence against women, reproductive rights, and equal pay in the workforce. In 1978 when notorious homophobe and singer Anita Bryant came to Toronto as part of her “Save The Children” campaign, feminists and queer individuals united to protest her presence. As women and as mothers, lesbians explained that they were also concerned about the fate of their children the same way that feminists did which unified the fight

⁴⁶ “Our Enemies are Organizing,” *The Body Politic*, February 1978, 5.

⁴⁷ Doug Wellquist, “Community Forum,” *The Body Politic*, 1972, 17.

⁴⁸ “Survival in the Territories,” *The Body Politic*, February 1978, 3.

⁴⁹ “Transsexual Seminar,” *The Body Politic*, 1972, 11.

⁵⁰ Ed Jackson and Stan Persky, *Flaunting It! A Decade of Gay Journalism from The Body Politic* (Vancouver, BC: New Star Books, 1982), 5.

⁵¹ “TBP Raided & Charged,” *The Body Politic*, February 1978, 8.

⁵² Section 159: an unconstitutional offence that prohibits engaging in anal intercourse, except by a husband and a wife or two persons who are both 18 years or older, provided that the act is consensual and takes place in private, which means not in a public place and not in the presence of others (justice.gc.ca). “TBP Raided & Charged,” 8.

⁵³ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 173.

against Bryant's Christian, conservative campaign against queer people.⁵⁴ The article "Women, Gays and Youth Unite in Protest – Bigots Import Bryant" expressed that the protest against Anita Bryant was the largest unification of lesbian and heterosexual feminists. Since the gay rights movement was predominately male-oriented, *The Body Politic* stated that "To anyone familiar with the progress of the gay movement, the presence of so many women among the organizers of the event and in the audience was overwhelming."⁵⁵ Sharing articles on the collaboration of lesbians and feminists showed the readers of *The Body Politic* that alliances between gay liberation activists and other social movements with a similar cause were beneficial for enhancing the gay liberation cause.

rites

Rites was a Toronto-based magazine that ran from 1984 to 1992. It was dedicated to gay and lesbian liberation and aimed to provide an open forum to discuss news and culture relevant to the queer community. It was published by Rites Publishing and available to readers through paid subscription or purchased at retail stores. In their first publication, they listed the magazine's mission as liberation, progressive social change, and equal participation of men and women. *Rites* stated:

We can gain much support and insight from working together. We have both similar and different experiences and concerns. We have both been made into 'outsiders' in a society where only heterosexuality is the norm. We need to support each other and work together on issues of common concern. We will also support issues and concerns that are specific to lesbians or gay men. Lesbians not only face oppression for loving women, but also for being women in a male-dominated world.⁵⁶

In addition to equal involvement between queer men and women, *Rites* also sought to be a platform for queer individuals who experienced other forms of oppression such as race, class, and age.⁵⁷ *Rites* largely published articles related to gay liberation, Canadian and international gay news, and editorial pieces as well as the ongoing AIDS crisis that profoundly impacted the queer community.

The devastation to the queer community caused by the AIDS epidemic created the need for AIDS awareness within queer organizations and queer publications. Public anxiety and misconceptions about the virus spread by the mainstream media's perpetuation of the "gay virus" led to intensified discrimination towards the community.⁵⁸ Thus, *Rites* disseminated articles to educate and disprove stereotypes about AIDS. One way that *Rites* did so was by personifying those impacted by the virus, such as the article "Peter Evans – Evans Left Legacy of Struggle Against Ignorance" which was a profile of Peters, a young man who was public about his struggle with AIDS. When asked how people have reacted to his AIDS, he explained:

When I was first diagnosed and out of hospital I went through a period where I was protected because most people didn't know what it was. Then the press went through an irresponsible period. The headlines were ridiculous... It's important to be able to identify with someone with AIDS. It's easier for them to accept. A lot of people don't want to listen because it's a gay oriented disease. Some think it only happens to gays so who cares? People don't want to know the truth.⁵⁹

By giving Evans a platform to share his experiences with AIDS, queer individuals could be educated on AIDS and could help create a community consciousness that could lead to an organized response to AIDS.

The policing of queer individuals continued well after *The Body Politics'* article "Toronto Civilian Park Patrol" in 1971, especially due to the AIDS crisis. In *Rites*, the article "The Police are Still With Us" from 1984 reveals that the surveillance of queer people has intensified due to the increased visibility of the queer population. Examples of prejudiced police practices included a raid of over 150 police officers at the four primary steam baths in Toronto where officers harassed patrons and arrested more than 300 men on bawdyhouse offence charges.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ "Women, Gays and Youth Unite in Protest – Bigots Import Bryant," *The Body Politic*, February 1978, 7.

⁵⁵ "Women, Gays and Youth Unite in Protest," 6.

⁵⁶ "Rites: Dedicated to the Struggles and the Joys," *Rites*, 1984, 4.

⁵⁷ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 173.

⁵⁸ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 162.

⁵⁹ "Evans Left Legacy After Struggle Against Ignorance," *Rites*, 1984, 9.

⁶⁰ Gary Kinsman, "The Police are Still With Us," *Rites*, 1984, 10-11.

Furthermore, an intensification of police entrapments in bathrooms occurred in 1983 and migrated to smaller cities in Ontario, such as Orillia and Welland. The heightened police surveillance, especially centering on bathrooms was likely due to the stereotypes against the queer community in the media. Gary Kinsman suggested that “the extension of the police campaign across the province may be related to the sharing of information and strategy at provincial meetings of chiefs of police, and the impact of media frames used to portray homosexuality and washroom sex in one area informing police activity in another.”⁶¹ When read with previous articles on the policing of the queer community, it is evident that surveillance continued and worsened due to homophobic and heterosexist stigmas perpetuated through the mainstream media. This article provides insight into the social experiences of queer individuals living under discriminatory police control.

Culture and community building were important topics in *Rites*. The article “Year of Lesbian and Gay Action” discusses the International Year of Lesbian and Gay Action in 1984 and the achievements of the queer community. The article expressed the importance of queer community building in Canada, but also internationally by announcing “WE ARE EVERYWHERE! And EVERYWHERE expresses a rainbow of diversity in many different places and situations around the globe.”⁶² *Rites* also focused on community building for lesbians since queer culture was predominantly tailored toward gay men. The article “Lesbianics” discusses the lesbian lifestyle, explaining that terms such as “cruising”, “tricking,” and “one-night stands” do not mean much to lesbians, since more accurately, commitment, love, and emotionality are terms relevant to the lesbian experience.⁶³ Writing about the culture of queer women sets *Rites* apart from other queer publications since the experiences of queer women were often overshadowed by those of gay men. *Rites* often promoted cultural events to unite as well as entertain the queer community, such as one promotion for the Lesbian Dance Committee in Toronto. This advertisement explained that dances specifically for lesbians were important because these events had music that queer women preferred, the dances were accessible to women who used wheelchairs, and women could be in the comfort of other queer women.⁶⁴ By promoting events for queer women who were often excluded from the events of queer men, *Rites* understood that events with a safe, lesbian-positive environment were essential for queer community building and enhancing the lesbian culture.

Community activism for AIDS began in early 1983 with organizations emerging in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Queer individuals in smaller cities relied on the work of queer activists to organize clinics, resource centres, and AIDS support groups.⁶⁵ Since *Rites* was a gay liberation magazine, it published numerous articles on queer advocacy. There were multiple pieces discussing AIDS rallies and protests, such as one article on an anti-quarantine demonstration in Vancouver where a crowd of 200 protesters rallied in protest to a law that would force those who had tested positive with AIDS to be quarantined.⁶⁶ Another article titled “Fighting the Epidemic and its Allies” explored the international rally for World AIDS Day which was a global reminder of the epidemic, those impacted by it, and the viruses allies.⁶⁷ The acknowledgement of queer activists and their dedication to AIDS advocacy indicates that *Rites* increased public awareness of AIDS while also criticizing the government’s lack of support in the epidemic.

Rites was an important publication for queer liberation in that it served to inform its readers, inspire action, and build solidarity among the queer community. It sought to be a voice for gay liberation and sought for queer people to possess the same rights and existence as heterosexuals. Their open forum for discussions on social, political, cultural, and sexual ideas and experiences permitted advocacy for gay liberation and intersection among other struggles for freedom, such as the women’s liberation movement.⁶⁸ *Rites* was also active in the women’s liberation movement as they understood that feminism and lesbianism were intertwined. They stated that “our liberation movements share common roots and enemies with feminism. We hope to provide a forum for discussion of the differences between and among our various movements which can be resolved in a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity.”⁶⁹ *Rites* created a platform that included all queer individuals to end the struggle against

⁶¹ Kinsman, “The Police are Still With Us, 10-11.

⁶² Gary Kinsman and Sharon Stone, “Year of Lesbian and Gay Action,” *Rites*, 1984, 2.

⁶³ Coreen Douglas, “Lesbianics,” *Rites*, 1984, 16.

⁶⁴ The Lesbian Dance Committee, “Lesbians Dance Just Ask The LDC,” *Rites*, October 1988, 9.

⁶⁵ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 164.

⁶⁶ Dan Guinan, “Anti-Quarantine Demo,” *Rites*, November-December 1987, 6.

⁶⁷ “Fighting the Epidemic and its Allies,” *Rites* November-December 1987, 6.

⁶⁸ “*Rites*: Dedicated to the Struggles and the Joys,” 4.

⁶⁹ “International Women’s Day 1984,” *Rites*, 1984, 12-13.

homophobia and heterosexism. Their audience targeted queer individuals in rural and urban Canada as well as outside of the country, men and women, and racialized individuals. This inclusivity distinguishes *Rites* from other queer publications because of its intersectional approach. Hence, the heterosexual public did not respond negatively to *Rites* and ultimately disregarded it.

CONCLUSION

Following the end of *Rites* in 1992, queer magazines continued throughout Canada and were transformed into digital platforms following the rise of the internet. Nevertheless, queer magazines were key to Canada's gay liberation movement from the mid-1960s until the early 1990s. Toronto-based magazines *TWO*, *The Body Politic*, and *Rites* acted as a platform for queer individuals to express their political demands for equality, spread national news on queer issues, and helped construct queer communities and a national queer culture. These magazines illuminate queer experiences in Canada through their articles, editorials, and letters which reveal the experiences of queer people living in a predominantly heterosexual society. Additionally, the publications reveal the ways that queer individuals and communities have overcome the challenges created by systemic homophobia and heterosexism. Through an examination of *TWO*, *The Body Politic*, and *Rites*, it is evident that queer individuals and communities have created a queer subculture that encompassed social spaces, events, and community support due to their exclusion from the mainstream heterosexual culture. Furthermore, queer magazines illustrate the advocacy of the queer community in social and political movements, especially the gay liberation movement. It is evident that over the thirty years of queer publishing, the definition of who is considered queer has widened over time. However, these publications were still written with a narrow definition of queer people that primarily accounted for gay men and lesbians who were often white, middle-class, able-bodied, and located in urban cities which excluded many queer individuals. Due to homophobic and heterosexist social norms perpetuated by discriminatory stereotypes, reactions to queer magazines from the public were often met with criticism and backlash. Notwithstanding, queer magazines were fundamental for facilitating liberation and pride for queer individuals such as Allan Oxside and are thus a valuable primary source for understanding queer Canadian history.

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Are those who plan evil so sure that God will not make the earth swallow them up, that punishment will not come on them from some unimagined direction

- *Quran, 16:45*

"Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God, and ... we will obey God by resisting"

- *Resolution 7, approved by Camden, Indiana abolitionists, November 17, 1850*

The quest for justice is an innate part of the human experience. Yet the search for justice and the actions needed to achieve justice differ in every place and time. In nineteenth-century settler North America, the foremost struggle for justice was undoubtedly the movement to abolish slavery: abolitionism. For centuries, enslaved people and their free allies slowly built an emancipatory movement which, although not achieving full freedom, resulted in the eventual abolition of slavery during the Civil War. However, this simplistic narrative



Owl Head, Moche (Loma Negra); c. 390–45, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wikimedia commons

obscures more than it reveals, with many contemporary North Americans understanding emancipation teleologically. Rather than being a pre-destined state of affairs, enslaved people and their abolitionist allies only won emancipation after continuous and arduous struggle.

Ultimately, for any social movement to succeed, there must always be a catalyst, a point from which a movement leaps from unstable momentum onto success. While the Civil War is undoubtedly a major moment in the struggle for emancipation, another pivotal event in the history of abolitionism is the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law (FSL). The extreme heavy-handedness of this law shocked contemporaries and launched the abolitionist struggle into a new direction. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and resistance to it was thus an extremely consequential moment within the history of abolitionism as it garnered acceptance for abolitionist theory, although not necessarily membership, throughout American society and, in so doing, significantly grew abolitionists' influence over northern society, while the extremity of the law necessitated and propelled the direct action school of thought into the mainstream of abolitionism, irrevocably altering the ideological makeup of the movement and allowing for it to broaden its front and accept increasingly radical anti-slavery direct action.

While abolitionism throughout American history changed significantly as it encountered new challenges and opportunities, its historiography, too, has evolved to increasingly focus on the work and centrality of Black Americans. In the early 20th century, historians largely wrote off and saw abolitionists as deranged lunatics who disintegrated the union out of their own selfish and misguided interests. Avery Craven's suggestion in 1936 that abolitionists "if living today, could profitably consult a psychiatrist" was par for the course.¹ The field began to shift significantly in the 1960s within the context of the civil rights movement. If any one monograph or historian is indicative of this shift, it is Benjamin Quarles and his 1969 *Black Abolitionists*. Quarles was one of the leading scholars in reframing abolitionism from a white-centric movement to one centred on free Black Americans. Quarles creates this focus on Black abolitionists by highlighting their engagement through patronizing the *Liberator*, a major abolitionist paper, their creation of Black abolitionist societies and their centrality in the Underground Railroad.² While Quarles does showcase that enslaved people played a role in abolitionism, he largely presents them as objects which the abolitionist movement reacted to.³

It was not until the 1990s that scholars began dealing with enslaved peoples themselves, understanding them and their actions as not just influencing abolitionism but as abolitionist actions in and of themselves. Merton Lynn Dillon, in his 1990 *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and their Allies*, looks at the various ways that enslaved people throughout American history sought to achieve their emancipation. He contends that enslaved people were inherently an abolitionist people and the largest impediment to their freedom was not their unwillingness to rebel but rather the unwillingness of non-enslaved people to take up their cause.⁴ Further, free Black people were also an inherently abolitionist people as they had the closest connections to the enslaved and their mere existence as free was, in many ways, radical.⁵ Dillon ultimately places enslaved people at the centre of the abolitionist struggle, saying that by escaping their bondage, they both proved to northerners their desire to be free while also significantly impacting the function of slavery as an institution.⁶

In the 2010s, Manisha Sinha in *The Slave's Cause* continued to develop this framework. In the opening of her book, she explicitly states that she "rejects [the] conventional divisions between slave resistance and anti-slavery activism."⁷ While Sinha builds upon the previous scholarship in regards to outright violent slave revolt and free Black abolitionist organizing, she also showcases the lesser-known forms of activism enslaved people engaged in, such as their involvement in petitioning during the Revolutionary War in an attempt to force that war into becoming a war about abolition—as enslaved people would later do with the Civil War.⁸

¹ Avery Craven, "Coming of the War between the States an Interpretation," *The Journal of Southern History* 2, no. 3 (August 1936): 303–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2191911>, 312–313.

² Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 20, 28, 145.

³ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 143.

⁴ Merton L. Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies 1619-1865* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 2, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 1.

⁸ Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 51; For Sinha's engagement with scholarship regarding slave revolts such as the German Coast rebellion and Nat Turner's revolt see: Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 59, 211. For Sinha showcasing Black organizing see: Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 204. *The Slave's Cause* is a treasure trove for information regarding abolitionism and was crafted extremely well. The book is a great example of the degree to which scholarship has come in both emphasizing the interracial nature of abolition but also firmly placing Black Americans at its centre. *The Slave's Cause* thus repeatedly

From the late 2010s until the present (early 2020s), historians have increasingly focused on resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law and the general radicalization of abolitionism throughout the 1850s. R.J.M Blackett, in his 2018 *The Captive's Quest for Freedom*, for instance, dedicates the entire monograph to analyzing abolitionist organizing in the north-south border states, showcasing how resistance to the fugitive slave law looked at the grassroots level. In line with the rest of the historiographical tradition, Blackett showcases how Black Americans, through their flight from slavery and centrality in Underground Railroad organizing, played the keystone role in the abolitionist fight. A major contribution by Blackett is the focus on Black usage and mobilization of the crowd for abolitionist means.⁹ Whereas Blackett focuses directly on resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Kellie Carter Jackson, in her 2019 *Force and Freedom*, takes a broader look at the 1850s, studying violent direct action in abolitionism and the snowballing of radical ideas during the decade. While scholars throughout this historiographical tradition, specifically since the 1990s, have addressed violence within abolitionism, few, if any, have taken it as seriously a subject of inquiry as Carter Jackson. She openly rebukes the overwhelming trend within abolitionist historiography of understanding violence as an aberration or an unfortunate necessity. Instead of this school of thought, Carter Jackson posits a radically new understanding of political violence in abolitionism, arguing that not only was it *not* an aberration, but that abolitionist political violence, which she argues was largely derived from Black schools of thought and *defensive* in nature, was central to the eventual overthrow of slavery.¹⁰

Jesse Olsavsky, in his 2022 *The Most Absolute Abolition*, continues this scholarly investigation into the radicalization of abolitionism primarily by studying the vigilance committees, which served as the radical base for abolitionist organizing. One of Olsavsky's major contributions to this historiography is the extent to which he centres fugitives/refugees in the abolitionist movement. While most of the historiography since the 1990s has mentioned that self-emancipated enslaved people contributed to abolitionism, few have addressed that idea as seriously as Olsavsky has here. Olsavsky repeatedly stresses that fugitives often acted as the teachers of the abolitionist movement, with their knowledge helping abolitionists further develop their ideas and critiques of slavery.¹¹ Another significant contribution is his focus on the vigilance committees. While virtually all of the historiography has placed vigilance committees at the centre of the Underground Railroad, Olsavsky is the first to present a quasi-ethnography of how these groups functioned and how they influenced abolitionism as a whole. Olsavsky argues that the vigilance committees were the beating heart of abolitionism, that the people most involved and dedicated to the cause were vigilance committee members and thus represented a movement within a movement: the vanguard of radical abolitionist thought.¹²

An incredibly interesting and novel development in the scholarship from the 2010s onward is the reconsideration of language with respect to neutrality. While scholars in the past tended to avoid borrowing terminology from abolitionists themselves, Sinha, for instance, openly appropriates abolitionist's terminology into her historical analysis. For instance, she repeatedly refers to the structural influence and power of slavery as "the slave power," the same term used by abolitionists.¹³ However, as Sinha was one of the pioneers in this terminological shift, she often uses these abolitionist loanwords covertly in a way that allows for scholarly deniability as to whether she is speaking in her own voice or from the perspective of the abolitionists. Carter Jackson, however, is much less apologetic for her vocabulary. While still presenting a solid and thorough work of objective scholarship, she makes it clear that using abolitionist vocabulary does not render a historian biased. For example, speaking on the challenges to abolitionist orthodoxy, Carter Jackson states, "the pervasiveness of the *Slave Power* increased the militancy of black Americans, which in turn influenced white Northerners."¹⁴ Carter Jackson thus utilizes abolitionist terminology not in the voice of abolitionists but rather as a historically accurate and academically appropriate way to convey the reality of 1850s America. Olsavsky also uses abolitionist phraseology in his scholarship, saying, for instance, "[vigilance] members learned how slavery functioned

emphasizes independent Black organizing and that Black Americans, both free and enslaved, were the radical base of abolitionism. For more on Sinha centring Black voices and actions see: Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 42-43, 58, 195, 197, 213, 323, 538.

⁹ Richard J.M Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 73.

¹⁰ Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 81, 117, 136, 158.

¹¹ Jesse Olsavsky, *The Most Absolute Abolition Runaways, Vigilance Committees, and the Rise of Revolutionary Abolitionism, 1835-1861* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2022), 6, 49.

¹² *Ibid*, 5, 88-89.

¹³ Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 465.

¹⁴ Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 96. Capitalization of "slave power" and "northerners" is a reflection of Carter Jackson's style, not this author's.

from fugitives, and both they and fugitives began writing incisive critiques of the *Slave Power's* economy."¹⁵ Thus, contemporary scholarship rejects the past understanding of abolitionist terminology as hyperbolic or sensationalist and instead judges it as an accurate, although symbolically laden, description of a disproportionately powerful institution.

Aside from historiographical developments, the question remains: what is abolitionism, and what were the developments leading to the FSL? Historians understand abolitionism as a movement largely confined to the American era proper —i.e. post-revolution— and subdivided into two waves. The first wave occurred from the late eighteenth century through the first two decades of the nineteenth century. While the northern states *did* abandon slavery as a result of this first wave, historians, such as Quarles, still argue that the wave had many shortcomings, such as the fact that it did not generate a significant and prolonged anti-slavery consciousness.¹⁶ In other words, this wave of abolitionism largely failed because it did not generate significant moral outrage and national reflection against the nation's injustices; rather, it achieved emancipation for expediency's sake. This moral failure is also reflected in the character of this abolitionist wave as it sought gradual and compensated emancipation.¹⁷ Of course, this is a generalization; there were still many radical and anti-racist leaders within first-wave abolitionism, such as Bishop Richard Allen, who stressed the need to deal with slavery immediately or else America may be engulfed in carnage for this injustice.¹⁸

Also important to note is that the question of fugitive slaves, the very issue which would explode in the 1850s, was already creating tensions amid first-wave abolitionism. As Stanley Harrold argues in his 2010 *Border War*, the border region where the two "sections" —the northern and the southern states— met was, since the inception of the American Republic, a place of immense polarization and conflict, primarily over the issue of fugitive slaves. Harrold showcases the example of John Davis, a man who had escaped from enslavement but whose enslaver recaptured him via armed slave catchers.¹⁹ Events such as the Davis case compelled Congress to create legislation seeking to clarify the government's stance on rendition —the re-enslaving of those who had emancipated themselves by fleeing to the north— and to strengthen the enforcement mechanisms of rendition. The result was the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law, which formalized how enslavers could reclaim formerly enslaved people through the court system; the law also allowed enslavers to "sue for up to \$500 anyone who interfered with rendition."²⁰

It is within this context that second-wave abolitionism emerged in the late 1820s. Unlike the first wave's emphasis on gradualism and compensation, historians characterize abolitionists during the second wave as overwhelmingly subscribed to immediatism and non-compensation.²¹ Until 1850, non-violent/resistant "moral suasion" was the dominant school of thought within abolitionism, and the foremost leader of this school was William Lloyd Garrison, who founded the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) and *The Liberator* Newspaper, both based in Boston.²² Historians typically placed the start of second-wave abolitionism at Garrison's founding of *The Liberator* in 1830. However, historians have recently dialed the date of the first wave back to 1827, with the founding of the Black-run *Freedom's Journal* as a better starting point as it is the first major articulation of second-wave ideology.²³

While non-violence was, undoubtedly, a major school of thought within second-wave abolitionism, there were many other articulations of and visions for abolitionism. One rival school of thought was the direct action school. The earliest articulation of this school of thought comes in 1829 from David Walker when he argued that enslaved people should violently rise up against their enslavers while free Black people should support and

¹⁵ Olsavsky, *Most Absolute*, 13.

¹⁶ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 13.

¹⁷ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 10-11.

¹⁸ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2008), 105, 113.

¹⁹ Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 22-23; the story has been simplified for expediency. Davis' enslaver had actually accidentally emancipated Davis on a legal technicality, something which Davis became aware of from abolitionists who helped him escape. His recapture was thus a deeper legal issue than is presented here as by the letter of the law, not just natural law, this was a kidnapping. These nuances have been left out of this paper as the debate between kidnapping and unlawful rendition is not within the paper's scope.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

²¹ Immediatism was the belief that slavery should be abolished *immediately* rather than gradually; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York, New York: Atheneum, 1974), 5; Quarles, *Black Abolitionist*, 14.

²² Moral suasion was, as it suggests, a strategy which sought to eliminate slavery by convincing enslavers, through appeals to their conscience, to abandon slavery.

²³ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 85; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 201-203.

encourage this course of action.²⁴ While the intellectual articulation of radical direct action was under-represented for roughly 15 years after Walker, instances of direct action showcase that Walker was not the only adherent to this school of thought. For instance, in 1836, during a court case regarding fugitive slaves, Black Americans rushed into the courtroom and helped the two alleged “fugitives” on trial escape by bringing them to a coach waiting outside.²⁵ While this is not quite the direct action advocated by Walker, it is nonetheless an expression of the direct action school and an action which the moral suasion school denounced, as exemplified in Garrison's response that “resistance to the legal authorities we never hesitate to disapprove.”²⁶ Abolitionist orthodoxy in the 1830s thus condemned working in an extralegal fashion and instead focused on working within the bounds of the law while still condemning those laws as immoral.

In the 1840s, both abolitionism as a movement and the issue of fugitive slaves in American society underwent significant changes.²⁷ Regarding abolitionism, the movement became much more diverse and sectarian, with many groups splintering from one another. However, mainstream abolitionism was still firmly in the grasp of the moral suasion school.²⁸ In regards to fugitive slaves, the issue continued to escalate unabated: enslaved people continued escaping, and enslavers continued to be outraged at the perceived lack of legal support for their “property rights.” However, in 1842, the Supreme Court, in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, strongly affirmed the power of slavery throughout America.²⁹ Historian Paul Finkelman describes the five major implications and effects of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*: firstly, the ruling reaffirmed the constitutionality of the 1793 FSL; secondly, it declared northern “liberty laws” —laws designed to give free Black northerners protections against southern kidnapping on the pretext of “fugitive recapture”—illegal; thirdly, it ruled that enslavers could recapture fugitives without following 1793 FSL stipulations so long as there was no breach of the peace; fourthly, State officials should, but could not be forced to, enforce 1793 FSL; finally, the case declared that no alleged fugitive was entitled to due process.³⁰ In other words, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* effectively allowed enslavers and slave-catchers to operate in both the North and South while declaring the existing protections against kidnapping illegal. In response, abolitionist lawyers crafted newly refined liberty laws, finding loopholes in the ruling to continue making enforcement of the 1793 FSL as difficult as possible.³¹

This continued rejection of the 1793 FSL by many northern states pushed enslavers to pressure their congressional representatives to craft new legislation, giving stronger legal tools for enslavers to recapture formerly enslaved people who had emancipated themselves. This is exactly what occurred with the 1850 FSL. The law, part of the larger “Compromise of 1850,” went to extreme lengths to assert enslaver rights. The law denied alleged “fugitives:” the right to testify, to habeas corpus and to a trial by jury. The law also had serious stipulations regarding free people as well: the law carried a six-year prison sentence for anyone convicted of helping “fugitives” escape while also giving federal authorities the power to forcefully deputize any citizen, thus creating a situation in which the federal government may, at a whim, compel anybody to aid in returning escaped formerly enslaved people.³²

The new FSL sent shockwaves throughout the North, and many were outraged by its draconian nature. Abolitionists were, however, able to snatch some victory from the jaws of defeat. While in every respect, the 1850 FSL was an attack against Black Americans and abolitionism, abolitionists were able to use the extreme nature of the law to show northern audiences proof of claims it had been making for decades. Since the 1830s, abolitionists had made two major claims. Firstly, slavery as an institution held an undue and disproportionate amount of power in America, so much so that *slavery influenced the law* rather than the *the law influenced slavery*, an idea they accurately termed the “slave power.” Secondly, slavery was not an issue only for the south but rather that the entirety of America was affected and, in the words of abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, many northerners’ “interests are

²⁴ Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 145, 148.

²⁵ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Blind No More: African American Resistance, Free-Soil Politics, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2019), 32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁷ This paper uses “fugitive,” “self-emancipated formerly enslaved person,” and “refugee” interchangeably.

²⁸ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 42-44; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 261-264.

²⁹ Harrold, *Border War*, 76-77; Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 37.

³⁰ Paul Finkelman, *Supreme Injustice: Slavery in the Nation's Highest Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 142.

³¹ Wells, *Blind*, 67.

³² Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 501; Carter-Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 50-51.

closely intertwined with the pernicious system."³³ Even as late as 1848, abolitionist Rev. Theodore Parker, in a speech to the American Anti-slavery Society, decried the northern belief in slavery as a southern problem, saying: "we are told, [the north has] no business with slavery. No business with it when northern citizens are lying in the jails of Charleston [...] when slavery denies the right of petition [...] and makes laws which we must obey?"³⁴ The national character of slavery was thus a central tenet of abolitionism, which was, until 1850, far from a mainstream belief.

While abolitionism never became a position held by most Americans in the antebellum, the FSL itself still had a strong propagandistic effect in favour of abolitionism. One notable example is the acclaimed writer Ralph Waldo Emerson, who attributed his "conversion to abolitionism" to the extreme nature of the FSL.³⁵ Another group affected by the FSL were the abolitionist-adjacent Free Soilers. Prior to the FSL, the free soilers were unconcerned with abolition nationally; the group felt comfortable with the constitution and slavery so long as they could prevent it in their own states and organized a political party, the Free Soil Party, to advocate for this non-extension. The FSL, however, forced free soilers to reconsider the scope of slavery and the constitution itself, for now the federal government may compel free soil citizens to work on behalf of slavery, an idea they abhorred.³⁶ In one sermon, a free soil pastor proclaimed that the new law "will enslave you and me as well as the black man—It will make slaves of us all. [...] talk not of the free states! There are none such now!"³⁷ Thus, even though many free soilers were still unconvinced of abolitionism, the FSL gave abolitionist ideas a newfound currency amongst the group, showcasing the general spread of abolitionism's influence and that abolitionist ideas and theory began to dictate public discourse.

This newfound influence was not lost on abolitionists either. Writing in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, abolitionist Jermain Wesley Loguen noted that since the FSL, he noticed a significant shift around slavery across the north. What was once a topic given little or no consideration in day-to-day life, Loguen now observes that it was a novel time in which "the public ear [is now] so ready and willing to hear on American slavery."³⁸ In 1851, speaking at an anti-slavery convention, George Thompson also observed that whereas abolitionists were once derided and mocked, they were now "fast gaining the respect of the people."³⁹ An article from the *New York Independent*, republished in *the Liberator*, also in 1851, echoes the sentiments of these abolitionists, saying, "every attempt to execute that law impresses more deeply upon the public mind the conviction that [the FSL] is an outrage upon every principle of justice and humanity."⁴⁰ Thus, while abolitionists did not necessarily celebrate such an extreme and unjust law, they understood that the law worked to legitimize abolitionist arguments and theory.

Although this intellectual legitimization represented newfound clout for abolitionist theory, it still marked a dangerous and unjust transition for American society. Within a month of Congress enacting the FSL, enslavers took advantage, and the judiciary in New York City approved a request for the rendition of James Hamlet. Hamlet was quickly arrested and placed securely in prison until he could be re-enslaved. Fortunately, the local Black community gathered eight hundred dollars and bought Hamlet's freedom.⁴¹ This case, however, highlights two key aspects of the FSL: firstly, Black Americans were the targets of the law and thus most threatened by it and secondly, Black Americans and the self-emancipated formerly enslaved, through organizing, were the ground-zero of resistance against the law.

That Black Americans were most deeply affected by the FSL is little surprise, yet it is important to note that it was not just Black people *directly* targeted by the law who would become victims of it. As Blackett showcases in *The Captive's Quest*, fugitive slaves, out of both necessity and comfort, became "full-fledged member[s] of [the] community" where they found refuge.⁴² For instance, Stephen Bennet, the victim of arrest under the FSL, had, in the words of Blackett, "lived in the city nearly four years, married, and started a family."⁴³ The people arrested under the FSL were thus not just numbers; to many, they were friends or family. When law enforcement arrested and many

³³ Lydia Maria Child, "Anti-Slavery Catechism." Newburyport, MA, 1839, quoted in, Thomas Adams Upchurch, *Abolition Movement* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2011), 131.

³⁴ "Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society," *Liberator*, May 19, 1848.

³⁵ Wells, *Blind*, 68.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 88.

³⁷ William C Whitcomb, *A Discourse on the Recapture of Fugitive Slaves* (Boston, 1850), 5, quoted in, Wells, *Blind*, 73.

³⁸ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 21, 1851, quoted in, Jackson-Carter, *Force and Freedom*, 67.

³⁹ George Thompson to Anne Warren Weston, March 7, 1851, Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, quoted in, Wells, *Blind*, 73-74.

⁴⁰ "The Fugitive Slave Law Illustrated," *Liberator*, September 26, 1851.

⁴¹ Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 504.

⁴² Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 73.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

times re-enslaved people under the FSL, it not only robbed one person of their humanity but also created deep tears and trauma within Black communities.

It is thus no surprise that Black Americans were quick to organize during and after the passage of the FSL. On October 2, 1850, less than a month after the FSL's passage, Black New Yorkers gathered to discuss their outrage over the FSL. They pledged support for preferential non-violence or, in other words, a reluctance but acceptance to use violence when necessary.⁴⁴ The acceptance of direct action by Black communities was nothing new; what was, however, new, was that their direct action was now at the centre of debates within abolitionism due to the spotlight given by the FSL.⁴⁵ This explicit clarification by Black communities on the acceptance of direct action to defend their communities against the FSL was also not confined to New York City. In another meeting in a town north of Buffalo, the Black community "pledged to resist [fugitive rendition] 'even to death'" while another community in Maine announced their intention to fight back "at whatever cost or risk" was needed.⁴⁶ Importantly, all these cases occurred within the first month of the FSL's existence. Black Americans knew immediately that this law necessitated not only a continuation of a direct-action tradition but a reaffirmation and acceptance by the whole community that direct action was now a foundational element of resisting slavery in the north. As Kellie Carter-Jackson states, "the law essentially required black Americans to become political and active in their own defense [...] leading to higher levels of black militancy."⁴⁷ While the 1793 FSL and its strengthening in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* had already made Black Americans vulnerable, the degree to which the 1850 FSL sided with enslavers *on the national stage* made it clear to Black communities across the north that their relationship with slavery had entered a new phase.

This militancy was not just rhetoric but manifested itself in how Black communities, particularly those close to the southern border, organized themselves. After the FSL, Black communities formalized and strengthened protocols for warning their community of incoming slave catchers.⁴⁸ Upon sounding the alarm, many community members would organize into a crowd meant to protect alleged "fugitives" or, if enslavers had already taken them to jail, the crowd would march down to where the "fugitive" was being held.⁴⁹ When combining the reaffirmation of violence, if necessary, with the political mobilization of the Black crowd, it is little surprise that many confrontations with enslavers and slave catchers ended in violent resistance.

Black Americans made this ideological commitment manifest repeatedly when enslavers attempted to carry out the FSL. In one instance, an enslaver from Missouri sought to cross the state border into Sparta, Illinois and re-enslave a self-emancipated formerly enslaved person he had held under bondage who was hiding there. When the Black community in which the formerly enslaved lived heard of this plot, they quickly armed themselves and organized, confronting the enslaver on the outskirts of town and forcing him to abandon his plans.⁵⁰ However, the best-known case of local direct-action resistance occurred in Christiana, Pennsylvania, in 1851. The Christiana resistance was a result of enslaver Edward Gorsuch attempting to re-enslave a group of self-emancipated formerly enslaved people. When Gorsuch arrived at the house of William Parker, who was providing refuge to the formerly enslaved in question, Gorsuch, accompanied by a federal Marshal, demanded to be let inside, a demand Parker obviously refused. Meanwhile, Parker's wife had sent the community's signal alerting them to the presence of an enslaver. Shortly after, a group of roughly 80 armed men and women, overwhelmingly Black, confronted Gorsuch. In the ensuing defence, the group killed Gorsuch while the formerly enslaved were able to flee to Canada.⁵¹ This moment of direct action resistance and its ensuing trial went on to become a national flashpoint between pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces, with the trial itself being a microcosm of that debate.⁵²

The case of the Christiana resistance highlights the significant effect local Black direct action resistance had on abolitionism. Due to the FSL, and as a result of the clarification that enslavers were privileged by the law, Black Americans had to reinforce their commitment to direct action when necessary while also developing communal protocols of rapid deployment in order to carry out such direct action in a meaningful and effective manner. Simultaneously, the FSL had also shaken the foundation of abolitionism to such a degree that the law disrupted the

⁴⁴ Harrold, *Border War*, 150.

⁴⁵ Carter-Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 53.

⁴⁶ Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 18.

⁴⁷ Carter-Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 49.

⁴⁸ Wells, *Blind*, 93.

⁴⁹ Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 73, 357.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵¹ Carter-Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 55-57; Harrold, *Border War*, 153.

⁵² Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 511.

ideological inertia of moral suasion, allowing competing schools of thought to enter the conversation. Faced with an increasingly powerful and hostile slave power, when instances of Black direct action occurred, abolitionists were forced to either tell Black Americans to reject direct action and thus, in effect, allow the institution of slavery's encroachment into free states or accept the necessity of direct action in these cases or at the least accept that direct action was a better alternative to re-enslavement. Many abolitionists chose the latter and, in so doing, inaugurated the direct-action school of thought into the abolitionist mainstream. Although a convert to the direct-action school by 1850, Frederick Douglass put the moral dilemma abolitionists had to struggle with succinctly saying, "if it [is] wrong in them to fight, it can never be right in any case to fight."⁵³ Even staunch Garrisonian pacifist Marius R. Robinson declared, "[any alleged fugitives] who choose to reside among us, trusting to themselves and us for protection, shall have that protection."⁵⁴

It is important to note that this does not mean people like Robinson became staunch direct actionists. Rather, the acceptance of violence in certain scenarios by Robinson and his like showcases the increasing legitimacy and adoption of certain direct action ideas into the abolitionist mainstream broadly and the moral suasionist school of thought in particular. Thus, while some moral suasionists still denounced all aspects of direct action, resistance to the FSL mainstreamed these ideas within the moral suasion school.

The curation of the *Liberator* showcases this internal tension well. In the September 26, 1851 issue, in the wake of the Christiana resistance, the *Liberator* republished articles from various abolitionist papers adhering to the moral suasion school, all taking slightly different stances on the event. An article originally from the *New York Independent*, for instance, denounced the action, saying it "went directly contrary to the advice given in this journal."⁵⁵ Conversely, an article from the *Worcester Spy* did not condone the resistance but focused on the ills of slavery which caused it.⁵⁶ While an article from the *N.Y. Tribune* firmly stated that the resistance at Christiana was justified on the grounds that any human has a natural right to defend their life "to the last."⁵⁷ The inclusion of these three differing views in the *Liberator* thus showcases the continued diversity of thought within the moral suasion school. Further, they also showcase the mechanics of ideological influence, and how the growth of the direct action schools' stature looked from the ground level. It was *not* that all moral suasionists abandoned non-resistance entirely, although some did; rather, this influence spread due to events forcing many moral suasionists, such as those writing for the *Worcester Spy* and the *N.Y. Tribune*, to adopt aspects of direct actionist thought.

While confrontations against enslavers by Black communities like Christiana were the frontlines of direct action after the FSL within abolitionism proper, the law mainstreamed other forms of direct action as well, primarily jailhouse rescues in which people would storm a courthouse to free an alleged fugitive during trial.⁵⁸ It is again important to remember that the significance of jailhouse rescues was not that they were a new phenomenon but that they became a popular, recurring and highly visible liberatory method by abolitionists after the FSL. In February of 1851, less than six months after the passage of the FSL, Boston authorities arrested Shadrach Minkins, a formerly enslaved person, sending him directly to the courthouse to carry out his rendition. However, the Black community quickly organized and went to the courthouse, promptly rushed in, and helped Minkins escape and flee to Canada, where he later settled.⁵⁹ What made the escape of Minkins so significant is that it set the tone of how far Black communities and their abolitionist allies would go in not *just* confrontations against slave catchers but *also* against the judicial institutions by which enslavers legally re-enslaved the self-emancipated. Since the Minkins escape was also the first post-FSL jailhouse rescue, it became the blueprint that abolitionists would attempt to emulate. However, the Minkins escape also alerted law enforcement as to what to expect and, thus, how to defend the rights of enslavers better.

Later, in 1851, a similar situation as Minkins occurred when Thomas Sims, another self-emancipated formerly enslaved person, was arrested and brought to court. Whereas with Minkins, there was little, if any, security detail assigned to the courthouse and trial, in the Sims trial, law enforcement was determined to uphold the law of the land. As Frederick Douglass saw it, "the government, however, [had] their plans too."⁶⁰ In order to prevent

⁵³ Frederick Douglass, "Freedom's Battle at Christiana," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 25, 1851.

⁵⁴ "Protection for the Fugitive," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 16, 1850., quoted in, Harrold, *Border War*, 149.

⁵⁵ "The Fugitive Slave Law Illustrated," *Liberator*, September 26, 1851.

⁵⁶ "The Christiana Affray," *Liberator*, September 26, 1851.

⁵⁷ "The Affray at Christiana," *Liberator*, September 26, 1851.

⁵⁸ Harrold, *Border War*, 100-101.

⁵⁹ Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 67; Jackson-Carter, *Force and Freedom*, 70

⁶⁰ Frederick Douglass, "Thomas Simms Consigned to Slavery," *The North Star*, April 17, 1851.

another high-profile escape, the judiciary adopted several measures. Firstly, the court had previously installed bars on their windows to prevent escapes via jumping out of the courthouse. Secondly, the federal government surrounded the courthouse with armed troops, and thirdly, law enforcement closed the court doors using chains.⁶¹ Due to these measures, the crowd which mobilized in order to attempt an escape failed, not because of an *unwillingness* to use force but because of the overwhelming force of the slave power.

The struggle between abolitionists and the pro-slavery courts continued throughout the 1850s. Another case of a successful rescue was in October of 1851 when Black Americans and abolitionist allies rescued William Henry, also known simply as “Jerry,” in the midst of a fugitive slave trial and helped him reach safety from the FSL in Canada.⁶² But if the Minkins escape was the prototypical success story for abolitionists, the trial of Anthony Burns became the ultimate expression of the FSL’s enforcement.

In 1854, Boston law enforcement arrested Anthony Burns, another self-emancipated formerly enslaved person. By this time, the playbook of abolitionist jailhouse rescues was well known, and pro-slavery politicians, such as the incumbent President Pierce, felt obligated to enforce the re-enslavement of the self-emancipated. In a pharaonic show of force, President Pierce dispatched two thousand active duty military men armed with artillery to ensure the re-enslavement of Burns. The rendition of Burns thus became a flashpoint of anti-slavery sentiment, with thousands of people in Boston protesting his rendition, while the extent of federal force floored many.⁶³ The *Liberator*, in the days leading to the rendition, described the atmosphere of Boston as having “never been so convulsed, through all the ramifications of society,” and Rev. Theodore Parker decried that “Boston is in a state of siege today. We are living under military rule, in order that we may serve the spirit of slavery.”⁶⁴

Interestingly, these examples of jailhouse rescues and renditions showcase the increasing centrality of direct action within abolitionism. As mentioned, cases of jailhouse rescues pre-FSL were few and far between, but in the span of four years after the FSL, they had become so popular that the Federal government both understood that there was an abolitionist playbook for such rescues and, further, felt so threatened by them that the government could justify the deployment of *thousands* of active duty military members to pre-empt any attempts at employing direct action. It is important to note that both confrontations and jailhouse rescues were ultimately a form of *immediate* defence. While they served to de-legitimize the FSL and protect Black northerners, these actions did not defend enslaved people themselves or undermine the institution of slavery directly, they only mitigated its effects. This mainstreaming of direct action within abolitionism was transformative. As mentioned, the moral-suasion school until 1850 was still by far the dominant school of thought within abolitionism, but as the slave power rapidly expanded in the 1850s, it was becoming clear to many abolitionists that a broadening of the abolitionist struggle was increasingly necessary.

However, the debate over how to appropriately address slavery did not begin after the FSL but was rather indicative of a larger instability and angst plaguing abolitionists throughout the 1840s. One manifestation of the frustrations at the lack of abolitionist gains is through the growth of political abolitionism. Garrisonian abolitionism staunchly rejected any formal political involvement as a strategy. In this articulation of abolitionist tactics, Garrisonians saw the compromising nature of politics as undermining their pledge to never work with enslavers and believed that it was the goal of the abolitionists to sway political discourse rather than to actively engage in it.⁶⁵ By 1840, however, the Garrisonian, non-political moral suasionist philosophy had made little gains but had simultaneously attracted many violent reprisals. Frustrated with these developments and Garrison's insistence on what they deemed “distractions” —women's rights and anti-clerical positions— many abolitionists decided to chart a new course and founded the Liberty Party, marking the first major schism in abolitionism.⁶⁶ Importantly, however, these political abolitionists were still moral suasionists as they still believed in non-violent resistance and in ending slavery by convincing Americans to abandon the institution. Nevertheless, their break with Garrisonian orthodoxy signals frustration with the development of abolitionism and its lack of success.

⁶¹ Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 508; Wells, *Blind*, 84.

⁶² Jackson-Carter, *Force and Freedom*, 63-65.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 71-73; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 517.

⁶⁴ “Another Sims case in Boston—slave hunting defended at the point of the bayonet—civil liberty prostrate before military despotism Massachusetts in chains. And her subjugation absolute—the days of 1776 returned,” *Liberator*, June 2, 1854; Theodore Parker, “Theodore Parker's Sermon,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, June 10, 1854.

⁶⁵ Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 465.

⁶⁶ Olsavsky, *Most Absolute*, 73

However, the emergence of political abolitionism did not heal the frustrations with abolitionist methods and success. Throughout the 1840s, moral suasionists, both political and non-political, started to admit weaknesses in their program and had to reckon with the fact that their ideology up to that point was very limited in how it could *actually* defend against or undermine slavery. As early as 1842, abolitionist Gerrit Smith, founding member of the Liberty Party, decried that “although much has been gained by the bold positions that abolitionists have taken, much also has been lost by [abolitionists] timidly hesitating to take other positions, which, if bolder, are not less truthful or advantageous.”⁶⁷ While Smith seemingly acknowledges the limited front moral suasion can fight on, his conclusion is still that enslaved people should not employ violent direct action under any circumstance, but instead, abolitionists should go south and give compasses to help them escape.⁶⁸ While enslaved people emancipating themselves by fleeing to the north is undoubtedly a form of direct action—the form of direct action which allowed for the fugitive issue to exist in the first place—it was not inherently confrontational or violent form of direct action and was thus still palatable to moral suasionists. Smith acknowledges the slow pace of abolitionist progress and advocates for more radical tactics but ultimately believes that once enslaved people *peacefully* escape bondage, all other forms of direct action are off the table. Similarly, in 1843, Garrison advocated against the enslaved applying violent direct action, claiming that non-violence is a divine decree, but, like Smith, encouraged enslaved people to escape.⁶⁹ These tactical suggestions, however, betray a growing sense of activism fatigue within the moral suasion school. The two thus attempt to remedy this fatigue with Smith telling his audience that they must broaden the abolitionist front with new and radical strategies, while Garrison stresses ideological discipline and not straying from the path of non-violence.

This activist fatigue continued to grow unabated throughout the 1840s. In 1847, in an attempt to assuage feelings of restlessness and despair at the lack of concrete abolitionist success, Wendell Phillips compared the abolitionist struggle to the biblical trek toward the promised land, saying that “forty-seven years in the wilderness were necessary to make the Egyptian slave, a fit soldier for Joshua to lead and a fit subject for David and Solomon to govern.”⁷⁰ It does not take a theologian to realize that one does not compare themselves to the Israelites wandering the desert if things are going well. By comparing abolitionism to the Israelite journey to the promised land, Phillips is agreeing with concerns that abolitionism had made little progress. While his usage of this story does connote an optimistic outlook, it nonetheless necessitates an acceptance that abolitionism had failed, thus far, to make significant gains.

Similarly, the restlessness at abolitionist tactics and progress compelled Rev. Theodore Parker in 1848 to reaffirm the importance that abolitionists remain unwaveringly committed to non-violence and instead use the “weapons of love.” Much like Phillips, however, Parker also subtly acknowledges the restlessness surrounding the lack of progress in the movement, adding that they can “afford to be calm, and to abide [their] time;” in other words, he stresses patience. Parker does not argue to have patience on the grounds that abolitionists have won many successes; instead, he argues on the grounds that non-violence wins adherents the “sympathy of God” and thus implicitly success.⁷¹ It is thus an appeal to faith rather than concrete results; it is an attempt to assuage concerns that abolitionism is not making any real change by telling people that remaining non-violent will eventually bring victory.

This implicit and explicit fear, espoused by Garrison and Parker, of non-violence losing its sway over some abolitionists, was not without warrant. Although Garrison and Parker's comments are indicative of mainstream abolitionism in the 1840s, the direct action school, while being actively suppressed by rebukes within abolitionism, was beginning to gain adherents. The most radical representative of the direct action school was Henry Highland

⁶⁷ Gerrit Smith, “From the Friend of Man. Address of the Anti-Slavery Convention of the State of New-York Held in Peterboro’, January 19th, 1842, to the Slaves in the U. States of America,” *Liberator*, February 11, 1842, quoted in, Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 154-155.

⁶⁸ Gerrit Smith, “From the Friend of Man, *Liberator*, February 11, 1842, quoted in, Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 156, 158.

⁶⁹ William Lloyd Garrison, “Address to the Slaves of the United States,” *Liberator*, June 2, 1843, quoted in, Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 170, 177.

⁷⁰ Wendell Phillips, “Reformers,” *The North Star*, December 3, 1847.

⁷¹ “Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *Liberator*, May 19, 1848; admittedly, this may be the editor’s comment on the speech. The article, on the second page of this issue, at times seemingly directly quotes Parker but then at other times the editor seems to be commenting on the speech with no clear distinction as to who is speaking.

Garnet, who, in his 1843 *Address to the Slaves of the United States of America*, directly called for enslaved people to revolt and declared that “no oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance.”⁷² Importantly, Black Americans were the champions and main converts of this relatively underground school of thought throughout the 1840s. For instance, Nathaniel E. Johnson in 1842 argued that enslaved people are justified in violent resistance “if escape can be accomplished in no other way.”⁷³ Even Frederick Douglass, a popular moral suasionist, was undergoing a shift in perspective. As Carter-Jackson argues, Douglass’ stance on direct action began to shift in 1843, despite his critique of Garnet’s speech the same year, after being attacked by an anti-abolitionist mob. This experience forced him to reflect on how anyone can defend themselves against violence if the only tool available is a persuasive vocabulary. This internal reflection ultimately led him further toward a full acceptance of direct action. Indicative of this shift is his comment to Sojourner Truth in 1847 that “slavery can only end in blood” and in 1849 declaring that “slaveholders [...] have forfeited even the right to live.”⁷⁴ Douglass’s conversion to the direct action school prior to the FSL underscores the foundational strength the school had going into the tumultuous decade of the 1850s. While it was still not accepted as a legitimate and mainstream belief system, it was not a negligible part of abolitionism. On the eve of the 1850 FSL, the direct action school had thus intellectually articulated theory as well as leaders of abolitionism in their ranks.

While the direct action school was undoubtedly growing during the 1840s, what ultimately helped allow the school to emerge as a mainstream and viable alternative to moral suasion after the FSL was the school’s underground maturation during the 1840s coupled with high-frequency, high-profile direct actions. The existence of the direct action school in the 1840s meant that this school had time to develop and strengthen its case while still largely underground and unaccepted in the mainstream of abolitionism. As shown in the case of Frederick Douglass, the school did start to win adherents throughout the 1840s, but they were still few and far between. However, with the advent of the FSL and the necessity of more radical resistance, the direct actionists finally had a soapbox. During the school’s incubation phase in the 1840s, there were few notable cases of direct action, and thus, it was largely engaging in an abstract debate. With the FSL and the subsequent resistance, the direct-actionists now had real-time examples with which to argue their case. In other words, knowingly or unknowingly, most abolitionists until 1850 had not seriously wrestled with the limitations and moral failing of strict adherence to moral suasion and consciously or unconsciously privileged the purity of abstract ideals over the material conditions of enslaved people and “fugitives.” Wendell Phillips best exemplifies this in his comment that “if we never free a slave, we have at least freed ourselves in the effort to emancipate our brother.”⁷⁵ With events like Christiana, the Jailhouse rescues and the forceful renditions, it thus became increasingly difficult for moral suasionists to reconcile their abstract, non-resistant beliefs with their desire to help the enslaved and the self-emancipated.

To summarize, the mainstreaming of the direct action school of thought after the FSL occurred due to three critical elements. Firstly, there had been a growing itch for abolitionists to adopt novel strategies in order to achieve greater victories against slavery. Secondly, the direct action school of thought did not appear after the FSL but rather had undergone a rebirth nearly a decade prior, which allowed the school to mature and develop its arguments further and thus be prepared when the FSL catapulted the issue to the fore of abolitionist debate. Thirdly, and most importantly, Black Americans led the charge by engaging in repeated instances of direct action, which kept the *question* of direct action at the forefront of abolitionists’ minds, allowing it to occupy a consistent space in abolitionist debate, unlike in the 1840s. However, the implications and significance of this ontological shift in abolitionism did not stop with direct actions against the FSL. The mainstreaming of the direct action school of thought within abolitionism created a new epistemological framework for determining how and where the limits of anti-slavery action lay and, in so doing, legitimized new justifications for accelerating and broadening the anti-slavery fight of which resistance against the FSL represented only the first step. The first real opportunity to expand the abolitionist struggle using direct action came in 1854 after the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This law created the new territories of Kansas and Nebraska and was, supposedly, a compromise between pro-slavery southerners who wished to see an expansion of slavery westward and free soilers and abolitionists who strongly opposed such an expansion. Legislators decided that it was wrong for

⁷² David Walker, *Walker’s Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life. And Also Garnet’s Address to the Slaves of the United States of America* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 96.

⁷³ Nathaniel E. Johnson, “Rights of a Fugitive Slave,” *New-York Evangelist*, February 24, 1842, quoted in, Stanley, *Rise of*, 165.

⁷⁴ Carter-Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 43-44.

⁷⁵ Wendell Phillips, quoted in, Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 53.

the government to decide such a divisive issue, and instead, the settlers of the new territories should decide for themselves if they would allow or deny slavery.

However, pro and anti-slavery forces alike mobilized, sending settlers into the territory in order to boost support for their position. Nobody went further in dedication to their cause than the abolitionist John Brown. Brown led the charge for organizing anti-slavery militias in the state, mirroring, and largely in response to, the growing militancy of pro-slavery forces.⁷⁶ The resulting conflict was the bloodiest event in the fight against slavery until the Civil War. Between 1854 and Kansas' decision to become free in 1856, fighting between the sides killed 55 people.⁷⁷ Just as direct action against the FSL required abolitionists to reflect on the importance of ideological purity, "Bleeding Kansas," too, did the same. Abolitionists were, after all, well aware of the extent to which pro-slavery forces were willing to commit violence in the name of their cause. For example, David Atchison, a Democratic senator from Missouri, was not against the idea of "[killing] every Goddamned abolitionist in the district."⁷⁸ Further, during the local elections in 1854, pro-slavery forces engaged in election intimidation, resulting in what the *Liberator* described as "a spurious legislature."⁷⁹

Many abolitionists, thus, understood the necessity of preventing the spread of slavery by any means. Consequently, prominent abolitionists, many of whom were previously staunch adherents of the moral suasion school, such as Gerrit Smith and Wendell Phillips, donated toward the acquisition of rifles for anti-slavery militias loosely led by Brown.⁸⁰ Phillips legitimized and justified his vocal support of the free-state militias by calling on America's Puritan heritage. "Do you suppose," Phillips stated at a dinner for the Pilgrim Society in Plymouth, "that if Elder Brewster could come up from his grave today, he would be contented with the congregational church in the five points of Calvin? No, sir; he would add to his creed [...] the thousand Sharp's Rifles, addressed "Kansas" and labeled "books."⁸¹

However, the best example of Kansas's radicalizing potential is the case of Charles Stearns, who settled in Kansas to support the free-state movement and wrote to the *Liberator*. In the December 21, 1855 issue of the *Liberator*, Stearns, in a letter dated December 3, speaks about the tense atmosphere and says that the free-state community is "armed to the teeth" in order to counter any threats from a nearby pro-slavery militia numbering up to 300 men. However, Stearns emphasizes that "being a non-resistant, I take no part in the world, like preparations, but attend my business, just as if nothing was occurring" but qualified this statement with an admission that "I am fearful, that if a fight should occur, I should not be able to standby, and see our men shot without seizing a rifle, and pulling its trigger."⁸² Stearns thus presents himself as a principled non-resistant who sympathizes with violence used in self-defence.

However, in the January 4th issue, in a letter dated December 7, only four days after his initial letter, Stearns declares that his "non-resistance has at length yielded." He describes how, after a pro-slavery militia killed a community member, he could no longer sit on the sidelines or cling to his abstract notions of non-violence. Seeing the reality of how the slave power maintained and expanded itself changed Stearns completely. Stearns even went beyond accepting violence in immediate self-defence and adopted a position even more radical than Douglass' assertion that slaveholders forfeit their right to live. In a postscript to his letter, Stearns writes that: "I told you that I had given up my non-resistance. I was mistaken; non-resistance simply forbids the taking of the life of a human being. God never made these fiends—they are the devil's spawn, and are to be killed as you would kill lions and tigers. I have always said I would shoot a wild beast. If I shoot these infernal Missourians, it will be on the same principle."⁸³ While an extreme example, Stearns' transformation is nonetheless a microcosm of how the unveiling of the slave power throughout the 1850s, and during Bleeding Kansas in particular, gave credibility to and grew the base of the direct action school of thought.

Although Stearns' experiences with the slave power in Kansas were very direct, this same phenomenon was occurring to abolitionism writ large. Much like Stearns, abolitionism at the time of Bleeding Kansas had largely come to accept a qualified non-resistance stance—that violence should be avoided but is justified in cases of *immediate*

⁷⁶ Harrold, *Border War*, 165.

⁷⁷ Carter-Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 81.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 84.

⁷⁹ Harrold, *Border War*, 165; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 545; "The Bloodshed and Burnings in Kansas," *Liberator*, December 14, 1855.

⁸⁰ Harrold, *Border War*, 166.

⁸¹ Wendell Phillips, "Speech of Wendell Phillips, ESQ," *Liberator*, December 28, 1855.

⁸² Charles Stearns, "Letter From Kansas," *Liberator*, December 21, 1855.

⁸³ Charles Stearns, "The Civil War in Kansas," *Liberator*, January 4, 1856.

defence, such as jailhouse rescues and confrontations in regards to abolitionism, and picking up a rifle to protect his settler community in regards to Stearns. However, due to the extreme length the slave power was willing to go to solidify slavery's expansion into Kansas, qualified-moral-suasionist abolitionists like Stearns and Phillips accepted the necessity of violent direct action to *defend* against the *extension* of slavery.⁸⁴ Thus, Bleeding Kansas was another victory for the direct action school of thought. Much like resistance to the FSL, abolitionists largely deemed the solutions and tactics proposed by the moral suasion school as ineffective and unable to defend against the excesses of slavery. Although the Kansas militias were undoubtedly an acceleration of the confrontation against slavery, neither the Kansas militias nor the FSL resistance sought to change the dynamics of slavery as it existed or use direct action as a means of defending the dignity and natural rights of enslaved people in the south.

The shift toward defending the natural rights of enslaved people directly, however, came later in 1859 when John Brown launched a raid into Harpers Ferry, Virginia, hoping to loot weapons from a federal armoury and distribute them amongst enslaved people, sparking a nationwide slave revolt. Similarly to Bleeding Kansas, abolitionists responded in different ways to Brown's raid. Harriet Tubman, who had known about the raid before its occurrence, supported it and initially agreed to participate but pulled out for unspecified reasons.⁸⁵ Frederick Douglass, while very close with Brown, ultimately rejected a proposal to join the raid not out of moral protest but out of the belief that the raid was little more than suicide.⁸⁶ Most surprising, however, was Garrison's reaction to the raid. Rather than outwardly condemn Brown's raid, Garrison did apologia for it implying that Brown was more justified in using violence than the Founding Fathers had been.⁸⁷ After his execution, Garrison even published a poem dedicated to Brown in the *Liberator*.⁸⁸

The response to Brown's raid thus shows the extent to which the direct-action school of abolitionism had come to influence the movement. When, in 1843, Henry Highland Garnet gave his speech calling for slave insurrection, he was met roundly with condemnation from his fellow abolitionists. But, nine years after the FSL had catapulted the direct-action school into the mainstream of abolitionism, beginning an incremental acceptance of increasingly radical direct action, even the poster child for moral suasion, William Lloyd Garrison, was now not just defending the actions of prior slave revolts, as he had often done in the past, but was now accepting the actions of any *future* slave revolt proclaiming that "rather than see men wearing their chains in a cowardly and servile spirit, I would, as an advocate of peace, much rather see them breaking the head of the tyrant with their chains."⁸⁹ Garrison was thus acknowledging a new era in abolitionism, a more direct and confrontational phase unlike the past. While Garrison was known for being flexible in his non-resistance and never fully condemning slave revolts, this was not the same political atmosphere as when, twenty-eight years prior, he had told enslavers that Nat Turner revolted due to their own cruelty.⁹⁰ Now, abolitionism had, by and large, embraced direct action and, unbeknownst to them, would soon radicalize the north during wartime and allow for the enslaved to launch the largest slave revolt the world would ever see.

The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, a law designed by enslavers to curtail abolitionism, ultimately did the exact opposite. Prior to the FSL, the vast majority of Americans in the north were thoroughly unconvinced by the social theory proposed by abolitionists. Many Americans rejected the idea that slavery had a disproportionate amount of power over the American state and understood slavery as a southern issue. While the FSL was undoubtedly dangerous for both Black Americans and abolitionism as a whole, the extremity of the law showcased that abolitionist social theory had legs to stand on and, in so doing, grew abolitionism's proselytizing ability and general influence over American society. Beyond its propagandistic effects, the FSL was also such an overreach and power grab by the enslaver class that it forced Free Black communities into a position of reaffirming and doubling down on their willingness to confront enslavers who encroached on their communal sovereignty with violence, manifest in events like the resistance at Christiana. In the jailhouse rescues, abolitionists, led by Black Americans, also showed

⁸⁴ Stearns did, however, veer into an extreme by dehumanizing and animalizing the foot soldiers of slavery. Even other radical direct actionists such as Douglass, in his claim that slaveholders forfeit their right to live never fully dehumanized or animalized the personifications of the slave power, but saw them as humans who are the embodiment of evil and depravity.

⁸⁵ Jackson-Carter, *Force and Freedom*, 113.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 118.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 130.

⁸⁸ Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 563.

⁸⁹ William Lloyd Garrison, "Speech of WM. Lloyd Garrison, At the Meeting in Tremont Temple, Dec. 2d, Relating to the Execution of John Brown.," *Liberator*, December 16, 1859.

⁹⁰ William Lloyd Garrison, "The Insurrection," *Liberator*, September 3, 1831

their willingness to not only confront encroaching enslavers but also to use direct action against legal institutions carrying out the re-enslavement of the self-emancipated. The high frequency and high profile status of these actions against jailhouses and courts thus kept the question of direct action relevant in abolitionist circles.

This constant foregrounding of direct action, whether the actions were successful or not, fundamentally changed abolitionism due to its combination with two other pre-existing factors. Firstly, abolitionism in the 1840s, dominated by the moral suasionist school of thought, was experiencing activist fatigue and tactical stagnation. Secondly, throughout the 1840s, the direct-action school of thought underwent a rebirth and, throughout the decade, matured and refined its arguments while slowly winning over adherents like Frederick Douglass. The convergence of these three processes produced an ontological and epistemological transformation of abolitionism as it mainstreamed the direct action school of thought into a viable and legitimate school within the movement. This profound shift had deep implications beyond resistance to the FSL. Now that the way of *approaching* issues such as where to place ethical boundaries in the abolitionist struggle had changed, abolitionists were now able to justify new and increasingly radical direct action, such as the militias in Kansas and John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry.

Late in its life, abolitionism thus learned that struggles for justice require different tactics to match the level of oppression that they seek to confront. Historians must thus ultimately judge Garrisonian non-violence as a failure. Pacific non-violence was ultimately unable to successfully confront the southern slave power and its flagrant injustices. It was not until the FSL and the resistance to it legitimized the direct-action school of thought that abolitionism was able to break free from its strategic malaise, and begin to hand the institution of slavery its first defeats. As the moral successes and failures of abolition show, Garrisonian-esque thought was a commendable vision for dealing with the age's evils without the taking of more lives; but the unwillingness to accurately and seriously analyze the oppression at hand and the idolatrous adherence to their ideology nearly ended not with moral uplift but with disastrous defeat.

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Relief plaque with face of an owl hieroglyph, Sculptor's model, Wikimedia commons

Ashley McRae-Gauvin, "Campaigning for Change: Unraveling the First Wave of Feminism in Victorian England,"

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The landscape of British feminism in the latter half of the nineteenth century defies simple categorization. While the term "feminism" would not officially be used until the end of the nineteenth century, historians such as Barbara Caine have applied this label to a diverse array of women who were not only engaged in political activism, but those whose writings and personal narratives contributed significantly to the feminist discourse of the time.¹ The emergence of what is now recognized as the first wave of feminism in Victorian

England was marked by a mixture of voices, each stemming from distinct political backgrounds and different strategies for advancing women's rights. Central to this era were figures like Josephine Butler, Frances Power Cobbe, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy, whose contributions resonated across campaigns aimed at challenging oppressive legislation. In this essay, I will trace the events of Josephine Butler's campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, Frances Power Cobbe's contributions to the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy's campaign to enact the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. By examining the intersecting objectives of Butler, Cobbe, and Wolstenholme-Elmy in these campaigns within the context of feminism, this essay will highlight the differences among these women, while arguing that a shared

¹ Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

commitment existed among them to alleviate harms felt by women, whether it was economic exclusion, physical abuse, and emotional oppression.

This essay will trace these events in chronological order, highlighting the changes to women's legal rights and the support these campaigns gained over the span of roughly two decades following the enactment of the first Contagious Diseases Act in 1864, leading up to its eventual repeal in 1886. It is important to contextualize the significance of repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts by examining the milestones achieved through public debate and other successful advocacy campaigns in between. This includes the passage of key legislative measures such as the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, which marked significant advancements in recognizing married women's rights to their property and earnings, and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, which addressed critical issues surrounding marital separation and women's legal protections from physical abuse.

This essay will begin with providing context for the status of women and the emergence of feminism just before the Victorian era began and the start of mid-nineteenth century England. During this period, women's position in society was largely based on religious teachings which placed them subservient to men, while also charging them with a duty to uphold and oversee religious moral values instilled in society.² Additionally, women did not have the vote until 1918, and only gained the same voting rights as men in 1928.³ Women were severely restricted from participating in public life in many ways, including but not limited to, legal access to their own wages and property upon marriage, the right to divorce their husbands if their husbands were found guilty of assault, and they did not receive the same civil liberties as their male counterparts, all of which will be the focus for this research paper.

Before the industrial revolution, women played a large role in the family economy, however, as waged work became increasingly more prevalent, the moral teaching that they were empowered with was limited to the family and the home.⁴ On this, Philippa Levine has noted that this played a large role in the creation of the separate spheres ideology of the nineteenth century, which raised problems for working-class women.⁵ Indeed, many homes were not able to adhere to the separate spheres ideology of the wife staying home while the husband worked, however, the ideology itself was "highly effective in ordering people's values according to its precepts."⁶ As will be demonstrated in this essay, many of the women who fought for women's rights did not completely reject the separate spheres ideology, and instead utilized the idea along with the religious belief of women's superiority as vital tools to create change.

The term "the Victorian female civilising mission," coined by Jenny Daggars, adequately describes what many middle-class women in Victorian Britain participated in.⁷ Indeed, evangelical fervor was "inextricably linked with philanthropy and 'first wave' feminism in the female civilising mission."⁸ Victorian evangelical fervor has been credited with William Wilberforce's manifesto of 1797, which prescribed women's place in society at home and endowed them with superior moral qualities, and as those whose "Christian piety and civilising values associated with spiritual womanhood would prevail over the ruthlessness of the wider [public] world."⁹ Wilberforce himself was a part of an Anglican evangelical group known as the Clapham sect, with Hannah More being the only woman who was part of the inner circle.¹⁰ Their messages were popularized in the Victorian era, and they believed that society needed saving from "moral collapse."¹¹ Barbara Caine has argued that Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft "need to be seen as forerunners of mid-Victorian feminism,"¹² and both the evangelical writings of More and the radicalness of Wollstonecraft no doubt influenced Josephine Butler and Elizabeth Wolstenholme.

Both Wollstonecraft and More advocated for women's access to education in the last decade of the eighteenth century, with More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* recognizing that "it is a

² Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1989), 8.

³ Joel Barnes, "The British Women's Suffrage Movement and the Ancient Constitution, 1867-1909," *Historical Research: The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 91, no. 253 (2018): 527.

⁴ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 8.

⁵ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Jenny Daggars, "The Victorian Female Civilising Mission and Women's Aspirations Towards Priesthood in the Church of England," *Women's History Review* 10, no. 4 (2001): 651.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 652.

¹⁰ Gail Lewis, *Forming Nation, Framing Welfare* (United States: Routledge, 1998), 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 19.

singular injustice which is often exercised towards women," that which women receive "a most defective Education."¹³ Historian Claire Grogan has compared Wollstonecraft and More, noting that while they both wished to see women obtain an education, their views differed because More emphasized the differences between men and women while Wollstonecraft saw no difference in intellectual capabilities.¹⁴ Grogan has also argued that despite scholars' attempts to find commonalities between More and Wollstonecraft, this approach "over-simplifies and misrepresents the sophistication of the views actually presented."¹⁵ Certainly, this paper will highlight the different approaches to the feminist movement and different beliefs among Josephine Butler, Frances Power Cobbe, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme, however, it is not my intention to oversimplify their efforts in demonstrating a shared aim to reduce harm among women throughout their campaigns. If anything, the ability of these women to work together on various campaigns despite holding a different set of values and beliefs demonstrates the bipartisanship of Victorian feminism.

Josephine Butler, Frances Power Cobbe, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme were all a part of larger efforts among middle-class women who sought to help the poor, and philanthropy was at the center of the mission. It has been noted that although charity involved full support for the poor, philanthropy involved a "particular strategy for regulating poverty and combating 'pauperism.'"¹⁶ Organizations created to help combat poverty saw middle-class women establish ways to enter the public sphere, which began to blur the imaginary lines of private spheres and public spheres.¹⁷ While working-class women were leaving their home regardless of society's value placed on women remaining at home, the separate sphere ideology was undeniably a "class- and gender- based project."¹⁸ As this paper will demonstrate, Butler, Wolstenholme, and Cobbe were all concerned with the extra layer of vulnerability that working-class women faced with regards to women's unfair treatment in Victorian society under the law.

Although the feminist movement in the Victorian era consisted of many separate campaigns, many of the feminists had come from the Langham Place Circle or had worked with each other in some capacity, with each campaign playing an important role in the larger aim of the women's movement.¹⁹ It is the Langham Place Circle, named for its location in London, where organized feminist activity began in nineteenth century England.²⁰ Established by Barbara Leigh Smith (later Barbara Bodichon) and Bessie Rayner Parkes, the Langham Place Circle began by establishing the first Married Women's Property Campaign in 1855 as well as the *English Woman's Journal* in 1858.²¹ While the movement was largely led by women in the middle classes, Levine Philippa has warned that it would be disingenuous to assume that these women only campaigned with their own interests in mind:

The debate around protective legislation in England suggests a division not so much between middle-class women, as between socialist women and working women; for while socialists applauded the principle of state intervention in employment practices, many working women sided with its bourgeois opponents, if not always for the same reasons.²²

As this paper will demonstrate, the women who led the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, the campaigns for the Married Women's Property Acts, and the campaign for the Matrimonial Causes Act were all deeply concerned with how working-class women were more vulnerable to physical or economic harm under the provisions of the law.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed several changes to the legal status of British women that were both liberating and restraining. The introduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864, 1866, and 1869 are primary examples of how women did not enjoy the same liberties as men during this period. By 1869 serious opposition to them was established with Josephine Butler leading the opposition outside of Parliament.²³ The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 gave officers in 11 military stations, garrisons, and seaport towns the power to

¹³ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education Vol. I*, (London: T. Cadell Jun, and W. Davies: 1799), 1.

¹⁴ Claire Grogan, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More: Politics, Feminism and Modern Critics," *Lumen (Edmonton, Alta.)* 13, (1994): 100.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Forming Nation*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ Sheila Herstein, "The Langham Place Circle and Feminist Periodicals of the 1860s," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, no. 1 (1993): 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 10.

²³ Margaret Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886," *Albion (Boone)* 10, no. 1 (1978): 14-15.

apprehend any woman suspected of being a prostitute, which could be followed by a voluntary "surgical examination of prostitutes supposed to be infected, for their detention in certified hospitals during a limited period, and for the punishment of brothel keepers who knowingly harboured diseased prostitutes."²⁴ The 1866 Act was revised to include mandatory examination, subsequent hospital detainment of any woman who had an infectious disease, or imprisonment if they refused, and in 1869 the Act expanded the jurisdiction to cover more towns.²⁵ What is important to consider is that officers were given the authority to arrest any woman whom they suspected of being a prostitute, with the definition of what was considered to be a prostitute not made clear in the acts themselves. Margaret Hamilton notes that William Fowler, who represented the opposition to the acts within parliament in the early 1870s, explicitly stated his concerns over the fact that proof of prostitution was not needed and that the acts themselves did not contain a definition.²⁶

While these acts were justified as part of protecting the British armed forces from venereal diseases and thus protecting the nation, they only applied to women and not the male solicitors. By 1869, the Contagious Diseases Act was expanded upon to include more districts under jurisdiction, and like the two previous acts, was passed secretly, without parliamentary or public debate.²⁷ Furthermore, and as stated previously, the definition of prostitute was not clear within these Acts, as they were described as women "who solicited men openly or frequented public brothels, music halls, or other public places frequented by women who were believed to prostitute themselves to various men."²⁸ As a result, working-class women in general were vulnerable since they were often coming home late at night from their jobs.²⁹ Under provisions of the Act, if a woman denied being a prostitute, she would have to face a magistrate. The other option was to face surgical examination to ensure she did not have a venereal disease.³⁰ Therefore, many women voluntarily submitted themselves to humiliating examinations to avoid the public humiliation and harm to their respectability that going before a magistrate would cause.

John Stuart Mill, who is regarded as "the hero of the nineteenth century women's movements," appeared in parliament before the Royal Commission on the Administration to the Contagious Diseases, and similarly expressed these concerns:

I think it is exceedingly degrading to the women subjected to it, not in the same degree to men; therefore there is more reason that if it is applied at all it should be applied to men as well as women, or if not to both, rather to men than to women. Men are not lowered in their own eyes as much by exposure of their persons, besides which it is not a painful operation in the case of a man, which I believe in the case of a woman it often is, and they very much detest it.³¹

Therefore, inside the walls of parliament there was recognition of the double standard when it came to protecting one's virtue, with damage to a woman's virtue being at a higher risk of public humiliation than that of a man's during the Victorian era. Thus, these Acts were oppressive to many of the women within the districts where the law was enforced.

While John Stuart Mill has been regarded as a respected feminist during the Victorian era, Cobbe and Butler did not view him as their leader. Historian Barbara Caine has criticized his famous work, *The Subjection of Women* for its limitations, noting that "he devoted minimal attention to women in any capacity other than that of a wife," and the "situations of daughters and sisters, of single women living either alone or under a paternal roof, were matters which Mill totally ignored."³² Further criticism from Caine illuminates why Cobbe's and Butler's views would differ from Mill's because she mentioned that while Cobbe and Butler emphasized differences among men

²⁴ Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), vol. XIX (1871). "Report of Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts," p. 3.

²⁵ Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), vol. XIX (1871). "Report of Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts," p. 3.

²⁶ Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886," 17.

²⁷ F.B. Smith, "The Contagious Diseases Acts Reconsidered." *Social History of Medicine: The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 2 (1990): 198.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁹ Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886," 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ Barbara Caine, "John Stuart Mill and the English Women's Movement," *Historical Studies (Melbourne)* 18, No. 70 (1978): 52..

³² John Stuart Mill, *The Evidence of John Stuart Mill Taken before the Royal Commission of 1870, on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 and 1869: Reprinted Verbatim from the Blue Book* (London: National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1871), 8.

and women, such as women's inherent moral superiority making them more suited for certain public roles, Mill believed that the more women were exposed to the public, the more competent they would become.³³

Josephine Butler, shaped by her father's involvement in the 1832 Reform Act, the anti-slavery movement, and his radical liberalism in general, grew deeply concerned about the infringement of civil liberties that the Contagious Diseases Acts committed. Butler described her decision to take up the cause to campaign for the repeal of these Acts because of a "group of medical men" who approached her for her assistance and who, as Butler recalled, recognized that "these women must find representatives of their own sex to protest against and to claim a practical repentance from the Parliament and Government which had flung this insult in their face."³⁴ Butler would go on to give speeches, write letters, and oversee the overall opposition to gain public support outside of parliament while focusing her efforts on morality and liberalism, and pointed to the Magna Carta to argue that these laws violated the Constitution.³⁵ In her memoir, Butler dedicated an entire chapter to the Magna Carta, noting that while the Contagious Diseases Acts deserved to be examined from a medical and statistical point of view, the moral side was "the most important."³⁶ Butler emphasized the clause that stated "No freeman shall be taken, or imprisoned ... nor will se pass upon him ... unless by the lawful judgment of his peers..." to argue that the Contagious Diseases Acts had violated the Magna Carta since women who were accused went before a magistrate without a jury of their peers.³⁷

Butler's memoir reveals both her concern over the harm the acts caused, as well as her feminist approach being rooted in her commitment to Evangelical Anglicanism and Liberalism:

Lonely and friendless and poor, is she in no danger of a false accusation from malice or from error, especially since one clause of the Act particularly marks out homeless girls as just subjects for its operation? And what has she, if accused, to rely on, under God, except that of which this law has deprived her, the appeal to be tried 'by God and my country, by which she is understood to claim to be tried by a jury, and to have all the judicial means of defence to which the law entitles her.'³⁸

Butler's dedication to liberalism can also be traced back to her joining the Vigilance Association for the Defence of Personal Rights in 1871. Butler and Wolstenholme were both secretaries for the committee, with one article published on behalf of the association in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* calling attention to the Lord Chancellor's announcement that coroners were allowed to order an examination of a woman in order to obtain evidence. On this, the committee argued that "by this declaration the women of these realms are deprived of the personal security which has been hitherto held to be the birthright of Englishmen..."³⁹ Butler and Wolstenholme's involvement in this committee also illustrates Wolstenholme's commitment to equal rights between men and women and their shared interest in liberalism.

Butler's entry into feminism however, differs from some of her contemporaries because in the late 1860s when she formally took up the cause to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, she did not believe that women should organize by themselves without the help of men.⁴⁰ Indeed, Barbara Caine has noted that while Cobbe entered feminist activism through female contacts that she had met through her philanthropic activities in Bristol, Butler remained committed to working alongside men until she led the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. However, the Ladies' National Association still worked alongside the men's National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.⁴¹ Moreover, Caine has noted that even though the Ladies' Association created a network of female support for Butler, her greatest supporter was her husband, George Butler.⁴² Just four years before George passed away in 1890, he had been seriously ill, to which Butler decided she would "never again be absent from him for more than a few hours, if possible."⁴³

³³ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 38.

³⁴ Josephine Elizabeth Grey Butler, "Women's Revolt," in *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir*, ed. George and Lucy Johnson (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Company Limited, 1909).

³⁵ Butler, "Appeal to Magana Charta," in *An Autobiographical Memoir*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Butler, "Appeal to Magna Charta."

³⁹ Elizabeth C. Wolstenholme and Lydia E. Becker, "A Grave Question For Englishwomen," *Women's Suffrage Journal*, October 2, 1871, 105.

⁴⁰ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 169.

⁴¹ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 169-170.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴³ Josephine Butler, *Recollections of George Butler* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, n.d.), 446.

By 1869, Josephine Butler made public her disapproval of these Acts and formally established the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts with Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy.⁴⁴ In an article published in the *Daily News*, The Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts wrote:

When condemned, the sentence is as follows: To have her person outraged by the periodical inspection of a surgeon, through a period of twelve months; or, resisting that, to be imprisoned, with or without hard labour – first for a month, next for three months – such imprisonment to be continuously renewed through her whole life unless she submit periodically to the brutal requirements of this law.⁴⁵

The article goes on further to critique the lack of evidence needed to apprehend women, using Butler's liberal rhetoric, including terms such as "personal security" and "civil liberty."⁴⁶ It is worth noting that Elizabeth Wolstenholme is among the women listed as one of the signatures as well as a member of the committee. Furthermore, the *Daily News* had approximately 150,000 readers at this time and Butler herself alleged that two thousand of the signatures she gained in favour of repealing the acts were due to the article.⁴⁷

The *Daily News* article reveals and confirms Butler's own memoir in terms of the concern for the harm that these Acts caused, as well as her reasons for campaigning to repeal them. For example, the article notes, "We hold that we are bound, before rushing into the experiment of legalising a revolting vice, to try to deal with the causes of the evil, and we dare to believe that with wiser teaching and more capable legislation those causes would not be beyond control."⁴⁸ This demonstrates that Butler and the Association did not approve of the life of a prostitute, and that these Acts contributed to the legalisation and regulation of sex work. Moreover, that the article emphasized "wiser teaching" for women who were considered fallen, illustrates Butler's belief that it was her moral and religious obligation to protect them as well as those who were mistakenly apprehended.

Although Butler campaigned successfully for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts through petitioning, gaining signatures and support, as well as the many publications under her name, she also spent a great deal of time with prostitutes themselves in correctional facilities, hospitals, refuges, and prisons. She personally took in women who were dying, and eventually opened a 'House of Rest' for them.⁴⁹ The "House of Rest," as recalled by Butler, was a shelter that Butler and her husband opened in both Winchester and Liverpool, and housed "poor girls and young women who were recognised as failures, morally and physically," along with some who were "sick," or "rejected by hospitals as incurable."⁵⁰ Indeed, Butler's concerns for the wellbeing of women from the poorer classes went beyond political activism, with philanthropy and charity also being a central part of her life. Butler, Wolstenholme, and Cobbe worked together at times, and shared similar concerns over women's suffering due to unjust laws, but they also had different opinions on political and religious matters. For example, Butler and Cobbe similarly emphasized the differences between men and women to tackle oppression, and both of them exemplified women whose philanthropic work focused on the plight of women.⁵¹ Cobbe herself wrote her in her autobiography, "I do not think that this resolve has any necessary connection with theories concerning the equality of the sexes; and I am sure that a great deal of our force has been wasted on discussions such as: 'Why has there never been a female Shakespeare?'"⁵² However, unlike Butler, Cobbe's political support was for the Tories, and she did not share the same level of devotion to religious teachings as Butler did. This was due to the loss of her mother, which saw her lose faith in early adulthood. After a period of agnosticism and religious study, Cobbe decided to refuse the teachings of morality within the Old Testament and embrace the New Testament. It appears that Cobbe grounded herself with a "just and rational God whose moral law was evident to everyone through their own intuition."⁵³ Additionally, Cobbe's commitment to politics was not as strong as Butler's, and this was perhaps due to

⁴⁴ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 169.

⁴⁵ "The Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts," *Daily News* (London), December 31, 1869, 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886," 22.

⁴⁸ "The Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts," *Daily News* (London), December 31, 1869, 5.

⁴⁹ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 168.

⁵⁰ Butler, "Winchester," in *An Autobiographical Memoir*.

⁵¹ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 103-104, 107.

⁵² Francis Cobbe, "Claims of Women," in *Life of Frances Power Cobbe As Told By Herself* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Lim., 1904), 584.

⁵³ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 115-116.

her uneasy relationship with her father, one that also influenced her relationship with religion. Cobbe not only “rejected her father’s religious beliefs,” she was also less interested in federal politics beyond the fight for women’s rights.⁵⁴ Overall, although Butler and Cobbe both approached the women’s movement stressing differences between men and women and moral obligations to be philanthropic, Butler’s approach was heavily influenced by her faith and radical upbringing, whereas Cobbe’s rested solely within the context of her conservative upbringing and her devotion to philanthropy.

During the same year that Butler established The Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, there was also public debate over married women’s property rights, with both Butler and Elizabeth Wolstenholme working to pass a married women’s property bill.⁵⁵ Elizabeth Wolstenholme became the secretary of the Married Women’s Property Committee, where she, Butler, and other members presented a memorial with three hundred signatures to the Executive Council of the Social Science Association and asked them to take up the cause in Parliament.⁵⁶ John Stuart Mill was a male supporter, and compared married women to slaves in his seminal work, *The Subjection of Women*. On the subject of married women’s property, Mill felt that women “can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes *ipso facto* his,” arguing that “the wife’s position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries...”⁵⁷ In addition to married women’s property and women’s education, Wolstenholme was also concerned with women’s custody of children and campaigned for the Infant Custody Act of 1873.⁵⁸ Prior to the 1873 act, women were only allowed to petition for custody of their children if they were seven or younger since 1839.⁵⁹ The major changes within the Infant Custody Act of 1873 meant that the courts considered a child’s needs instead of what the needs of each parent were, and mothers were able to petition for custody of their children if they were under the age of 16.⁶⁰

Wolstenholme’s feminism lay in her secular ideas which at times pinned her against her contemporaries, Butler included. Unlike Cobbe and Butler, Wolstenholme emphasized equality between the sexes, and historian Laura Schwartz has noted that she “did not consider her own sex ‘superior’, but equal, and her unshakeable belief in this equality demanded of her, from her twenties, that she live a public life.”⁶¹ So radical during this period that she and her eventual husband Ben Elmy had a child before they were married and supported the Owenite idea of “free love,” only to finally marry in Quaker fashion to silence their critics.⁶² The Owenite Movement composed of Robert Owen, a British social reformer who led the movement in support of socialism in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶³ Once the Owenite movement ended in 1845, many of those involved went on to become Secularists, which essentially became the new title for those committed to challenging capitalism, gender inequality, and religion.⁶⁴ Among Wolstenholme’s critics was Butler, who completely denounced Elizabeth and Ben for their lifestyle, though they later reconciled.⁶⁵ However, Wolstenholme’s loudest critic was Lydia Becker, the treasurer for the Married Women’s Property Committee, who actually voted for her to be removed from the committee.⁶⁶ While the vote was unsuccessful, Becker also went as far as to propose checking the marriage registry to be sure that Wolstenholme had in fact married Ben Elmy.

Wolstenholme’s biographer has cautioned against a simplistic view of Wolstenholme’s beliefs, noting that while she did have close connections to socialists during this time, she remained committed to the liberalism that

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁵ Mary Lyndon Shanley, “Equal Rights and Spousal Friendship: The Married Women’s Property Act of 1870,” in *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895* (Princeton University Press: 1989), 52-53.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁷ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), 55.

⁵⁸ Maureen Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement: The Biography of an Insurgent Woman*. 1st ed. (United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2013), 123.

⁵⁹ UK Parliament, “Custody Rights and Domestic Violence,” UK Parliament, Accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/custodyrights>.

⁶⁰ UK Parliament, “Custody Rights and Domestic Violence.”

⁶¹ Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women’s Emancipation, England 1830-1914*, 1st ed. Vol. v. Gender in History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 18.

⁶² Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement*, 97-98.

⁶³ Douglas F. Dowd, “Robert Owen,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 1, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Owen>.

⁶⁴ Laura Schwartz, “Freethought, Free Love and Feminism: Secularist Debates on Marriage and Sexual Morality, England c.1850-1885,” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 5 (2010): 778-779.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁶ Schwartz, “Freethought, Free Love and Feminism,” 776.

she grew up with and only abandoned this belief in 1892.⁶⁷ In fact, Wolstenholme's views on the Contagious Diseases Acts were similar to that of Butler's because she despised the government intervention of the Acts and she saw it as an attack on personal liberties.⁶⁸ However, her secular beliefs made her the subject of great criticism, especially from her fellow female feminists who believed that only those who were religious could "truly be relied upon to support the women's cause."⁶⁹ In the face of heavy criticism from her contemporaries, Wolstenholme remained committed to personal growth without allowing her contemporaries' beliefs to become her own in order to advance the women's cause. Although she did marry to silence her critics, she never stopped challenging the patriarchal nature of society, especially within the confines of marriage. Wolstenholme's biographer describes her political beliefs as evolving, with radical liberalism marking her youth and evolving into an "evolutionary, humanitarian and secular creed" in her later life.⁷⁰

Wolstenholme is undeniably a unique case in the history of Victorian feminism due to her separation from the prevailing religious and societal norms of the time. Unlike many feminists who upheld the notion of women's moral superiority within the prescribed separate spheres ideology, Wolstenholme challenged these ideas. Although Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of the famous work, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, may now be viewed as a fundamental feminist and contributor to feminism in the West, many mid-Victorian feminists avoided any mention of her in their work because of the radical nature of her sexuality.⁷¹ Not only did Wolstenholme admire Wollstonecraft and subsequently receive criticism for it, Wolstenholme may be considered the Wollstonecraft of the twentieth century, for her name was relatively unknown within feminist scholarship until historian Mary Lyndon Shanley shed light on her contributions in the late 1980s. Maureen Wright, Wolstenholme's biographer, credits Shanley with recognizing Wolstenholme's contributions, explaining that she "grew increasingly surprised by the tireless labours of the 'unknown' woman from Congleton," in her research on feminism, marriage, and the law.⁷² By acknowledging Wolstenholme's contributions, Shanley's work not only reevaluated Victorian feminism but also highlighted the importance of continued scholarship on the subject, which paved the way for a fuller account of Wolstenholme's contributions to the feminist movement by Maureen Wright.

Like Butler, Wolstenholme's feminism was rooted in her own personal experiences. Wolstenholme's lack of access to an education, an education that Butler's parents encouraged, led Wolstenholme to rebel. Wolstenholme's parents did not support her obtaining an education, and once they died, her guardians also did not let her attend Bedford Women's College.⁷³ Wolstenholme did not believe in gender differences that made women morally superior, like Cobbe and Butler. Furthermore, her husband Ben Elmy was Vice President of the National Secular Society, and they both endorsed birth control and sex education for women.⁷⁴ Wolstenholme's support for birth control and sex education are additional examples of Wolstenholme's radical views during a time when piety was heavily guarded by the evangelical fervor of the period.

In the late 1860s, married women still did not have the same rights to their property as unmarried women, for once they were married, their property and income was under control of their husbands. In the same way that the repeal for the Contagious Diseases Acts was framed in a way to protect the poorer working classes who were more vulnerable, the Married Women's Property Act was similarly framed as a poor law within Parliament. Even Frances Power Cobbe, who influenced the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, critiqued the inequality between husbands and wives as well as the gap between the rich and poor, writing, "women of the richer class, with proper advisers, never come under the provisions of the common law, being carefully protected therefrom by an intricate system elaborated for the purpose by the courts of Equity, to which the victims of the Common Law have for years applied for redress."⁷⁵

The Married Women's Property Committee had its roots established in the 1850s, with Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's pamphlet, *A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women* (1854)

⁶⁷ Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement*, 17.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 24.

⁷² Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement*, 76.

⁷³ Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism*, 62.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁷⁵ Frances Power Cobbe, "Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors: Is the Classification Sound?" (Manchester: A. Ireland, 1869), reprinted from *Fraser's Magazine* (December 1868), 7.

marking a major turning point in the rise of organized feminist activity and of public concern over the issue of married women's property. Though unsuccessful in ensuring property rights for married women before the 1857 Divorce Act, Bodichon was an influential voice in the early years of the Langham Place Circle, of which Cobbe was also a member.⁷⁶ Indeed, scholarship has noted that Bodichon's work in initiating campaigns for women's rights "would make the following twenty years some of the richest in debate and reform."⁷⁷ Bodichon recognized early on that working class women faced "difficulty of keeping and using their own earnings," since wealthier fathers "still make what settlements they pleased, and appoint trustees for the protections of minors and such women..."⁷⁸ With the same view that Cobbe had, Bodichon recognized the unfair treatment of women losing their property upon marriage as well as the class element of it.

Wolstenholme took up the cause in 1868 for the *Married Women's Property Act* of 1870 and did the "groundwork for a parliamentary campaign to pass a married women's property bill" alongside Butler.⁷⁹ Interestingly, feminists were not encouraged to combine campaigns. This was so that those who supported the married women's property campaign, but believed the suffrage campaign to be too radical, could still remain supporters of married women's property rights.⁸⁰ This instruction came in a letter from Lydia Becker to Wolstenholme, which suggests Wolstenholme's ideas were too radical even for her colleagues. Nevertheless, this meant that Butler would devote most of her efforts towards repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts, Wolstenholme could do the same with the Married Women's Property Acts, and Cobbe could also focus her efforts on the Matrimonial Causes Act.

While the 1870 *Married Women's Property Act* addressed some concerns, it did not reflect the Wolstenholme's original intentions; covering only some of the property and earnings of married women, the Act neglected to consider married women to be *feme sole*.⁸¹ In an article published in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* in 1874, the committee's concerns are written:

The Married Women's Property Committee, however, though acquiescing in the passing of the Act, declined to accept it as even a temporary settlement of the question, and in their third annual report, wrote as follows :- 'Your committee object to the Act, first and chiefly, because instead of recognizing the one only true principle, the principle of justice and freedom, it retains the unjust and barbarous rule of the common law, the confiscation of a women's property by the act of marriage.'⁸²

Subsequently, Wolstenholme remained committed to amending the Act, and after the scandal unfolded surrounding her illegitimate pregnancy and subsequent marriage to Ben Elmy, she continued to influence the campaign and the passage of the more victorious *Married Women's Property Act* of 1882. Freethinkers like Wolstenholme saw religion as a chief cause of women's oppression, and Wolstenholme herself critiqued the patriarchal nature of Christian marriages.⁸³ Given Wolstenholme's personal views on marriage and the lack of equality between the sexes, it appears only natural that she would take up the cause for married women to have the same rights as unmarried women, and of course, men. Her own hesitation to marry Ben Elmy on the grounds that they believed in an equal partnership supports this as well. The 1870 Married Women's Property Act was not seen as a success by the women who campaigned for it, and Wolstenholme's own personal scandal forced her to take a step back to take care of her mental health and newborn. However, by 1875 Wolstenholme resumed her feminist activism, and her career was restored in order for her to continue campaigning.

While the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 was not regarded as a major victory, Mary Beth Combs' research on how British wives shifted their wealth from real property to personal property suggests that the Act made a larger impact than realized at the time. After the 1870 Act passed, women had rights to most of their personal property, as well as any earnings that came from a job that they worked separately from her husband.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Candida Ann Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (Routledge, 2002), 5.

⁷⁷ Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*, 1.

⁷⁸ Barbara Bodichon, *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women; Together with a Few Observations Thereon*, History of Women (London: J. Chapman, 1854), 14-15.

⁷⁹ Shanley, "Equal Rights and Spousal Friendship: The Married Women's Property Act of 1870," 52.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸² "The Property of Married Women," *Women's Suffrage Journal* V, no. 48 (1874): 29.

⁸³ Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism*, 136; Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement*, 98.

⁸⁴ Mary Beth Combs, "A Measure of Legal Independence": The 1870 Married Women's Property Act and the Portfolio Allocations of British Wives," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 4 (2005): 1033.

While the law still limited the ways that women were able to own and control their property, Comb distinguished her study groups as *the pre-1870 cohort* and *the post-1870 cohort* in order to examine the effects of the law.⁸⁵ Specifically, Combs examined the shopkeeping class, where she found that shopkeepers with daughters “made the types of investments that most certainly would remain in a daughter’s legal ownership,” which reflects “the desire of parents, daughters, and married women to hold property in the form of the asset over which married women had ownership rights.”⁸⁶ Moreover, Combs found that women who married before 1870 died with an average real property holding of £958 and £762 in personal property, however, those who married after 1870 died with only £435 in real property, with their personal prospering increasing to an average of £1,299.⁸⁷ Comb’s research, though limited to shopkeepers and those with the means to take precautions, still reflects the impact of the 1870 Act, which helped pave the way for the more victorious Married Women’s Property Act of 1882.

While Butler was still heavily involved in the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, and Wolstenholme herself was busy with the concerns of married women’s property rights, Cobbe spent the 1870s devoting much of her writing dedicated to women’s inability to separate from their husbands who assaulted them. There were several marriages acts throughout the nineteenth century, three of which this research concerns itself with: the *Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1857, the *Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1878, and the *Married Women’s Property Acts* of 1870 and 1882. Until the mid-nineteenth century, divorce cost upwards of £1000, meaning that it was virtually impossible for most of England to get divorced. Moreover, the laws concerning divorce were not equal, and women had no legal grounds to file for divorce, while men were permitted to only in cases of adultery.⁸⁸

Caroline Norton, an aristocrat and poet, found herself victim of these double standards in the 1830s, and fought to refuse her husband’s attempt to raise money against her own inheritance, and his taking of their children. She channeled these frustrations and used her voice and status in society to “transfer her allegiance from the silent, helpless classes to the articulate individuals who inspire social change.”⁸⁹ While Mary Poovey notes the limits to which Caroline Norton was working within, and that she did not ask for equal rights or equality when asking for divorce because she was simply asked for protection,⁹⁰ these efforts clearly resemble many women’s fears and want of protection. The establishment of the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes that was established in 1857 transferred divorce proceedings from Parliament to a court of law, brought down costs, and allowed women to file for divorce in special cases. Subsequently the court saw more than a third of the divorce applications in 1857 coming from women.⁹¹

The 1857 *Matrimonial Causes Act* paved the way for *An Act to amend the Matrimonial Causes Acts*, also known as the *Matrimonial Causes Act, 1878*. This was a vital and additional layer of protection concerning women’s lack of protection from not only physical harm within marriage, but emotional and economic harm as well. The 1878 Act also granted wives custody of children under the age of ten if her husband was convicted of assault.⁹² Frances Power Cobbe’s most famous essay, *Wife-Torture in England* influenced the passing of this act,⁹³ as she felt that the laws prior to this act on wife-beating were not enough. “It is hard enough to lead them to do so when the results will be an imprisonment to end in one month or in six, after which the husband will return to them full of fresh and more vindictive cruelty...”⁹⁴ While there were laws in place to punish husbands who beat their wives, Cobbe felt that this further endangered them if they were unable to live separately from them legally, as she noted the abuse of wives had become commonly told stories in Victorian newspapers. This law at last saw women obtain the right to legally separate from her husband if he is convicted of assaulting her, the right to obtain legal custody of their children under the age of ten, and see to it that “the husband shall pay to his wife such weekly sum as the Court of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1036.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1040.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1042.

⁸⁸ Dolores Freda, “Women and Parliamentary Divorce in England. From Wife-Sale to the Divorce Act of 1857,” *Právněhistorické Studie* 52, no. 2 (2022): 90.

⁸⁹ Mary Poovey, “Covered but Not Bound: Caroline Norton and the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act,” in *Uneven Developments*, 65 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

⁹⁰ Poovey, “Covered but Not Bound,” 69.

⁹¹ Freda, “Women and Parliamentary Divorce in England,” 92-93.

⁹² Lisa Surridge, “Dogs/Bodies, Women’s Bodies: Wives as Pets in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Domestic Violence,” *Victorian Review* 20, no. 1 (1994): 2.

⁹³ Alison Stone, “Introduction,” in *Frances Power Cobbe: Essential Writings of a Nineteenth-Century Feminist Philosopher*, 1st ed. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2022): 15-16.

⁹⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, “Wife-Torture in England,” *The Contemporary Review*, 1866-1900 32 (1878): 80.

magistrate may consider to be in accordance with his means, and with any means which the wife may have for her support..."⁹⁵ The last detail considered here provided economic protection to women in addition to physical protection, which was important during a time when many women had no choice but to depend on their husbands for financial support.

In Cobbe's memoir written later in her life, she writes, "whilst I and other happily circumstanced women, have had no immediate wrongs of our own to gall us, we should still have been very poor creatures had we not felt bitterly those of our less fortunate sisters, the robbed and trampled wives, the mothers whose children were torn from them at the bidding of a dead or living father, the daughters kept in ignorance and poverty while their brothers were educated in costly schools and fitted for honourable professions."⁹⁶ This supports her concern about domestic abuse that women faced, her moral obligation to advocate for them and to protect them from further assaults, as well as her acknowledgement of the harmful economic consequences of not being afforded an education.

As stated earlier, Cobbe's approach to the women's movement differed from Butler and Wolstenholme in several ways. Barbara Caine has observed that Cobbe was "not a great feminist activist," despite contributing to "almost every aspect of the nineteenth-century debate about the situation, the nature, and the rights of women."⁹⁷ This is in part due to the fact that she did not take on any leading roles within the campaigns. Because her power lay within her writing skills, Caine credits her as one who "carried the ideas of the movement to the world at large."⁹⁸ Cobbe was also a philanthropist throughout her life, and was active in antivivisection battles throughout the 1870s and 1880s.⁹⁹ Cobbe's writings reveal her wit and sense of humour, for she acknowledges that she has been described as someone "'who would sacrifice any number of men, women and children, sooner than that a few rabbits should be inconvenienced."¹⁰⁰ Cobbe's disdain for the students who practiced on animals in veterinarian schools parallels her criticism of the women who were treated poorly by doctors, and her work to help the passage of the 1878 *Matrimonial Causes Act* further demonstrates her aim to reduce physical harm against women.

In an essay from a book published by Josephine Butler in 1869, Cobbe's views on feminism reveal that while she supported women being in the domestic sphere, she also did not believe that domestic duties should be the one and only concern of women. In her essay, *The Final Cause of Woman*, Cobbe writes, "Let it be added, that the same persons who treat womanhood as if all its purpose were exhausted in the bringing of children into the world, are precisely those who fail most completely to understand the true sacredness and dignity of wifehood and motherhood..."¹⁰¹ She goes on to say that while the home is considered a "woman's proper kingdom," the idea around the lower classes of women being only concerned with "the cooking of dinners and mending of clothes" while women of higher ranks concern themselves with "amateur music and drawing, the art of ordering dinner, and the still sublime art of receiving company" is "assuredly, stupidly false."¹⁰² Cobbe felt that in order to successfully run a home, women would benefit from having a higher education, which similarly echoes Butler's sentiments on the matter.¹⁰³ It appears that education remained an important tool for women to escape oppression to all three women concerned here. Cobbe's approach left a lasting impression on the feminist movement and broader efforts for societal change. While she may not have assumed traditional leadership roles, her profound impact through writing, activism, and philanthropy contributed significantly to advancing the rights and well-being of women in Victorian England.

Four years following the *Matrimonial Causes Act*, Wolstenholme would finally see a more victorious law pass, the *Married Women's Property Act*, 1882. Her role as secretary of the Married Women's Property Committee was described by her biographer Maureen Wright as one who sought to "steer the organisation along the lines of guaranteeing for *all* married women the legal security of their property, hitherto only available to the wealthy via the means of equitable trusts."¹⁰⁴ Similar to Cobbe's and Butler's views, Wolstenholme recognized the unequal

⁹⁵ *Matrimonial Causes Act*, 1878.

⁹⁶ Francis Power Cobbe, "Claims of Women," in *Life of Frances Power Cobbe As Told By Herself* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Lim., 1904), 584.

⁹⁷ Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 104.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰⁰ Francis Power Cobbe, "Claims of Brutes," in *Life of Frances Power Cobbe As Told By Herself* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Lim., 1904), 615.

¹⁰¹ Frances Power Cobbe, "The Final Cause of Women," in *Woman's Work and Women's Culture: A Series of Essays*, by Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869), 9-10.

¹⁰² Cobbe, "The Final Cause of Women," 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement*, 78.

opportunities across both gender and class. Subsequently, Wolstenholme's contributions would include 100,000 signatures brought to parliament and over 35,000 pamphlets distributed.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, petitioning has been recognized as a vital avenue for women's political expression and participation.¹⁰⁶ This act would finally acknowledge married women's legal right to be "capable of holding property and of contracting as a feme sole."¹⁰⁷ On November 18th, the Married Women's Property Committee invited their subscribers to Willis's Rooms in London to read the final report and to "commemorate the passing of the *Married Women's Property Act*."¹⁰⁸ This gathering not only celebrated the successful passage of the Act but also demonstrated the collective achievement of advocating for women's rights in a society where such reforms were often met with resistance. Indeed, this marked the second triumph in terms of the scope of this research, marking a significant difference to the legal status of women in 1882 compared to 1864, when the first Contagious Diseases Act went into effect.

In the year following the enactment of the *Married Women's Property Act in 1882*, a pivotal moment unfolded with the Select Committee on Contagious Diseases Acts presenting parliament with an astounding two million signatures in favour of repealing these oppressive Acts.¹⁰⁹ This massive outpouring of support underscored the widespread discontent as well as Butler's successful mobilization against legislation that disproportionately targeted and harmed women, especially those from working-class backgrounds. The vulnerability of working-class women to these Acts was due to their daily travels to and from work in neighbourhoods where these laws were enforced rigorously. Butler's strategic efforts also resonated deeply with working-class men who were concerned about the well-being of their wives and daughters, recognizing the unjust and discriminatory nature of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

One significant outcome of Butler's advocacy was the removal of the mandatory medical examination in 1883, marking a crucial step towards repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts entirely. Thanks to Butler's campaign outside of Parliament, her efforts did not go unnoticed within, and the mandatory medical examination provision was removed in 1883, followed by a full repeal of the Acts in 1886 as they were deemed ineffective without that provision.¹¹⁰ Butler herself was present when the mandatory examination was removed from the Acts, and recalling her time spent in the Ladies' Gallery, she remembered how she felt:

I crept out of the House of Commons, where I was in the Ladies' Gallery, and joined those meetings for a few moments. It was a sight I shall never forget. At one meeting there were the poorest, most ragged and miserable women from the slums of Westminster on their knees before the God of hosts, with tears and groans pouring out the burden of their sad hearts. He alone knew what that burden was. There were mothers who had lost daughters; there were sad-hearted women; and side by side with these poor souls, dear to God as we are, there were ladies of high rank, in their splendid dresses—Christian ladies of the upper classes kneeling and also weeping.¹¹¹

While Butler was not able to lead this campaign inside of Parliament, this evidence from her memoir suggests that her presence in the Ladies' Gallery made her well-informed of how the campaign translated from the streets into Parliament. Moreover, her recollection of both the trauma and feelings of relief lends itself to the emotional and psychological harm that these Acts were responsible for as it cut across classes. In 1886 when the Acts were finally repealed, this not only meant that women who were under constant threat of being apprehended were now protected by their constitutional rights, but it was an additional layer of protection following the successes of the Married Women's Property Acts and the Matrimonial Causes Acts, which together reflect the changing attitudes towards women and their legal status.

In unraveling the first wave of feminism in Victorian England, the contributions of Josephine Butler, Frances Power Cobbe, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy stand out as transformative forces in challenging oppressive laws. These remarkable women navigated through diverse political backgrounds and strategies, yet their shared commitment to alleviating the hardships faced by women remained unwavering. Josephine Butler's relentless

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Miller, "The British Women's Suffrage Movement and the Practice of Petitioning, 1890-1914," *The Historical Journal* 64, no. 2 (2021): 333.

¹⁰⁷ *Married Women's Property Act*, 1882.

¹⁰⁸ "Married Women's Property Committee." *Women's Suffrage Journal* XIII, no. 154 (1882): 175.

¹⁰⁹ P. P. (Commons), vol. IX (1882), "Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Administration, Operation and Effect of the Contagious Diseases Acts, Minutes of Evidence Presented to the Committee," 595, Appendix 23.

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, "Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886," 26.

¹¹¹ Butler, "Repeal," in *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir*, 1909.

campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts exemplified her moral and faith-driven dedication to protecting the civil liberties and dignity of marginalized women. Her advocacy extended beyond rhetoric as she personally engaged with and provided support to women affected by these unjust laws. Frances Power Cobbe's focus on addressing domestic violence and advocating for legal protections for women within marriage marked her as a pioneering figure in women's rights. Her efforts, particularly in influencing the passage of the *Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1878 with her influential essay, *Wife-Torture in England*, underscored her moral obligation to reduce domestic abuse. Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy's secular feminist approach and advocacy for married women's property rights illustrates her commitment to gender equality and social justice for women. Her instrumental role in the passage of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 reflected her tireless efforts to empower women economically and legally.

Examining the reasons for Butler's, Cobbe's and Wolstenholme's advocacy reveals a variety of approaches, as well as alliances between them. Butler, drawing from her radical Liberal upbringing, her devotion to God, and her emphasis on gender differences made her uniquely positioned to lead the movement against the Contagious Diseases Acts. In contrast, Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy's secular approach brought unique perspectives to the movement; Wolstenholme's opposition to patriarchal norms when it came to marriage and education, and her support of Owenite ideas such as free love, challenged not only societal norms, but many feminists' views of the time as well. Cobbe, who was as much of a philanthropist as Butler, did not always emphasize religion within her work, however still remained religious in her own way, and supported widely accepted views of gender differences. Nevertheless, these women collectively supported each other's campaigns during the Victorian period and paved the way for significant advancements in women's rights. As a result, the repeal of oppressive laws, the recognition of women's property rights, and the legal protections against domestic abuse were the results of their activism.

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Elizabeth Spence, "The Subversive Science and 'A Fable for Tomorrow': The Legacy and Reception of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*," HI 497H: Research Seminar on Cold War America with Dr. Darren Mulloy

"No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves."¹ It was with this line in "A Fable for Tomorrow"—the opening chapter of her book *Silent Spring*—that Rachel Carson launched her analysis of the pesticide industry and its impact on the natural environment. Published on September 27, 1962, *Silent Spring* was Carson's fourth book. Always fascinated by the long history of the earth and its evolving life forms, she had made the decision to pursue a career in science during the 1930s, later becoming one of only a few women in marine biology with her studies at John Hopkins University. With a desire to understand the sea from a nonhuman perspective, she wrote her first book, *Under the Sea-Wind*. Her efforts to emphasize the nature of human relationships with other forms of life continued in her research on oceanography, which she would synthesize in 1951 with the publication of *The Sea Around Us*. This book, in combination with its best-selling successor, *The Edge of the Sea*, made Carson a household name. She understood that there was a need for writers who could interpret and report on the natural world for the broader American public, and with her clear explanations and poetic prose, she gradually began to fulfill this role.² While emerging as a trusted scientific voice, Carson was taking notice of sinister new trends in mankind's perception of his own power. Fearing that postwar technology was developing faster than humanity's sense of moral responsibility, she was compelled to use her talents against what she perceived to be the ultimate act of human hubris: the ignorant and indiscriminate use of toxic chemical pesticides. Writing to a friend, she determined that there would be no peace for her if she kept silent.³

Silent Spring was the product of Carson's unrest. First serialized in *The New Yorker* in three parts during June of 1962, Carson documented the history of interaction between living things and their surroundings, revealing the significant power that had been acquired by man to alter the nature of his world. The focus of her analysis was on the indiscriminate use of nonselective chemicals, with dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, or DDT, being a specific target for its widespread use in controlling insects. Arguing that these chemicals were incapable of distinguishing the "good" from the "bad," she classified them not as pesticides, but "biocides." By examining their impact on the soil, water, wildlife, and man himself—using research which she argued had been ignored in the era of industry—Carson called attention to these "elixirs of death" and the arrogance which underscored man's perceived "control of nature."⁴ *Silent Spring* was therefore not only an exposé of the dangers of DDT and other chemical pesticides, but a denunciation of the belief that nature was subservient to man.⁵ This anthropocentric logic was central in the postwar



¹ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 3.

² Mark H. Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13-15, 50-55, 95-99.

³ Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 327-328.

⁴ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 6-12, 37-39, 56, 100-103, 297.

⁵ David Kinkela, "Green Revolutions in Conflict: Debating Silent Spring, Food, and Science during the Cold War," in *DDT and the American Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 109-110.

era, and the chemical industry had been both a chief author and beneficiary of the period's prosperity. Carson, however, was now telling her audience that this logic existed only for the convenience of man.⁶

Carson's efforts were aligned with principles of ecology, a scientific field slowly gaining prominence against the backdrop of the "hard" chemical sciences which dominated the period. The digestible manner through which she explained complex scientific principles to the broader American public quickly brought *Silent Spring* both popular attention and significant controversy, gaining widespread media attention and backlash from the chemical industry before it was even published by Houghton Mifflin in September. As one *New York Times* article noted in July of 1962, *Silent Spring* would now make for a "noisy summer."⁷ With both the unprecedented message and reach of her work, Carson and *Silent Spring* have been credited with awakening an environmental consciousness within the American public that sparked the environmental movement which developed into the following decade. While she would die not even two years after *Silent Spring* was published, Carson's impact and prospective legacy were already widely recognized. She would leave a significant void in the burgeoning pesticide debate, living to see her work gain significant traction but not long enough to witness the authority of industry in postwar America be challenged with significant developments such as the eventual ban on DDT in 1972.⁸ *Silent Spring*, however, was not merely a catalyst, or the beginning of a new era of ecological consciousness.

In "A Fable for Tomorrow," Carson paints a hypothetical picture for the future of life in America. Placing readers in a town in the heart of the country, she describes a scenario where all life seems to live in harmony with its surroundings. Slowly, however, this picture of beauty is overcome by a "strange blight." A "shadow of death" settles on the community, creating a strange stillness as livestock sicken and die, and the birds disappear. While Carson comforts her readers with the concluding note that no single community had faced this hypothetical scale of destruction, she reminds them that many were already suffering from a substantial number of the issues she described.⁹ It was also no coincidence that this story of the fall of pesticides upon a hypothetical American town possessed eerie similarities to another kind of man-made specter: radioactive fallout.¹⁰

In 1962, the climate of suspicion and intolerance which defined the Cold War era remained incredibly pervasive. Reigning paradigms for understanding humanity's place—or more specifically, the place of Americans—within complex ecosystems were entrenched within an ideology of postwar affluence which perpetuated the assumption that, just as the United States would dominate politically on the global stage, man should dominate over nature.¹¹ With her aims to write not just for a narrow scientific audience, but for the American public, Carson's inclusion of familiar nuclear rhetoric was nothing short of intentional. To successfully challenge this era of unchecked expansion and human destruction of the environment, she made strategic references to the atomic bomb and the effects of nuclear radiation, providing her readers with a controversial frame of reference to understand the threat of pesticides. At the same time, by analyzing the faults in the era's logic of American superiority, Carson capitalized on the seeds of discontent emerging within the U.S. alongside a growing awareness of the negative consequences of economic expansion.¹² Ultimately, Rachel Carson wrote and published *Silent Spring* at a time when the American public was becoming increasingly receptive to criticisms surrounding the consequences of postwar prosperity. Engaging with the nuances of her analysis and references to nuclear radiation, examinations of selected newspapers reveal that readers made sense of her work through their Cold War context, establishing *Silent Spring's* legacy as a pivotal text symbolic of an era in which reigning American thought processes would be increasingly challenged.

Extensive scholarly attention has been paid to the American environmental movement and its relationship to the broader counterculture of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Within such works, Rachel Carson is a symbolic actor representative of this era of significant sociopolitical change. While still recent history, the specific relationship between elements of this movement and the development of the Cold War has been the subject of continued academic interest. With this, scholars such as Thomas Robertson explore the impact of the Cold War not just as the

⁶ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 296-297.

⁷ John M. Lee, "'Silent Spring' is Now Noisy Summer: Pesticides Industry Up in Arms Over a New Book," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸ Kinkela, "Green Revolutions in Conflict," 114.

⁹ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1-3.

¹⁰ Craig Waddell, ed., *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 33-35.

¹¹ Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 373-374, 428-429.

¹² Michael B. Smith, "'Silence, Miss Carson!': Science, Gender, and the Reception of 'Silent Spring,'" *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 734-737, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178817>.

backdrop against which this movement unfolded, but as a significant ideological influence that dictated the manner in which environmentalism developed within the United States. In his article “‘This is the American Earth’: American Empire, the Cold War, and American Environmentalism,” Robertson does for postwar environmentalism what scholars such as Mary Dudziak have done for the American civil rights movement: show how the global context both constrained and enabled a new political movement. Using works like *This is the American Earth*, published by the Sierra Club in 1960, as well as Richard Grove’s 1994 book *Green Imperialism*, Robertson discusses the subtext of American imperialism which ran through Cold War-era environmentalist narratives.¹³

The idea that human activity might cause global natural disasters underscored Cold War environmentalism, and Robertson highlights how contemporary scientists began to tie American national security problems to those of the environment.¹⁴ Similarly, Jacob Darwin Hamblin’s *Arming Mother Nature: The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism*, published in 2013, discusses the weaponization of nature during this period to show how, driven initially by strategic imperatives, Cold War scientists began to grasp humanity’s power to alter the environment.¹⁵ While the place Rachel Carson holds in popular memory is largely tied to her role in starting the environmental movement, she has come to occupy a place within academic discourse surrounding the relationship of environmentalism to the Cold War.

With the environmental problems Carson warned readers of in *Silent Spring* remaining pervasive decades later, scholars have been encouraged to reflect on the impact of her message and the development of her legacy. Discussions of the criticism she received, primarily from the chemical industry, have situated Carson within the era’s climate of fear, revealing how critical responses were informed by concerns that American economic prosperity was being threatened by her attack on the use of pesticides. Mark H. Lytle’s 2007 work, *The Gentle Subversive Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement*, documents Carson’s antagonization of the farm block and the agricultural chemical industry—some of the most powerful interests in the nation during the postwar period.¹⁶ Building on the notion that discourse surrounding DDT was not only about nature and chemicals, David Kinkela’s chapter “Green Revolutions in Conflict: Debating Silent Spring, Food, and Science during the Cold War” in *DDT and the American Century*, published in 2011, stresses the global impact of DDT and the role of the Cold War in intensifying the pesticide debate post-*Silent Spring*.¹⁷

This paper builds on these avenues of scholarship to develop a narrative which stresses the impact of Carson’s Cold War context in determining both the initial public reception of *Silent Spring*, as well as the development of her legacy. Analysis of initial responses to her work will involve a concentrated analysis of *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and the *Chicago Tribune* from 1962 to 1964—the year of *Silent Spring*’s publication until Carson’s death. With aims to investigate the immediate reaction to Carson’s groundbreaking conclusions by an American public deeply entrenched within their Cold War context, these newspapers were selected for their reputable journalistic standards, wide readership, and vast geographical coverage. A broader examination of American newspapers will be conducted for the subsequent analysis of the persistence of Cold War rhetoric and ideology in shaping Carson’s legacy, with special attention being paid to articles published during anniversary years of both the book’s publication and her death. Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring* thus become a case study in understanding not only the significance of the Cold War climate of fear in shaping public perceptions of potential threats to American prosperity and global superiority, but also the subtle ways in which the turmoil of this era has continued to shape historical memory and the American consciousness.

INITIAL RECEPTION, 1962-1964

The Gentle Subversive versus the Chemical Industry

Carson had already established herself as a credible scientific voice with her earlier works, with *The Sea Around Us* and *The Edge of the Sea* becoming national bestsellers praised for their prose and clear explanations of scientific concepts. In newspaper articles responding to *Silent Spring* during the immediate period following its serialization in *The New Yorker*, Rachel Carson was introduced to readers first as the author of these prior

¹³ Thomas Robertson, “‘This is the American Earth’: American Empire, the Cold War, and American Environmentalism,” *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 4 (2008): 561-564, 583-584, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24916001>.

¹⁴ Robertson, “‘This is the American Earth,’” 571.

¹⁵ Jacob Darwin Hamblin, *Arming Mother Nature: The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-5, 108-115, 197-198, 215-216.

¹⁶ Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive*, 134-135.

¹⁷ Kinkela, “Green Revolutions in Conflict,” 106-110, 118-120, 124-127.

publications.¹⁸ Still, Carson was an outsider from the scientific establishment. As historian Linda Lear has said of the postwar period, science was god, and science was male. Chemists, at work in their remote laboratories to preserve the United States' technological and scientific superiority, were endowed with an almost divine wisdom.¹⁹ Conversely, Carson was both a woman and a biologist—a scientific field less respected during the age of technology. Despite these barriers, she had already been successful in writing not just for a narrow scientific audience, but for the American public. With *Silent Spring*, however, Carson's audience recognized that she was diverging from her previous scientific and literary path. As described in one *The New York Times* article published in July 1962, "The \$300,000,000 pesticides industry has been highly irritated by a quiet woman author whose previous works on science have been praised for the beauty and precision of the writing...In her latest work, however, Miss Carson is not so gentle."²⁰

The Boston Globe described her in a similar manner, stating that "she doesn't look anything like a person to write a book that would embroil the multi-million-dollar pesticides industry in heated controversy."²¹ While still acknowledging the depth of her research and the significance of her conclusions, Americans framed Carson as an unlikely voice to emerge in opposition to the scale of destruction that accompanied postwar development. A scientist writing for the "layman," she was seen as shy and feminine, yet also confident in her work. With the "fervor of an Ezekiel," she let the facts of her research speak for themselves, allowing the public to draw their own conclusions.²² For a majority of her readers, Carson became the unassuming crusader against the wealthy and powerful chemical industry. To her critics within the industry, however, she was the gentle subversive.

By the time *Silent Spring* was published, Carson's status as an outsider from the scientific establishment had become a distinct advantage.²³ The danger of agricultural chemicals had already raised controversy just a few years prior with the events largely remembered as "The Great Cranberry Scare of 1959," where concerns arose for the safety of cranberries due to a potential contamination with the herbicide aminotriazole. Carson watched these events and collected evidence for her "poison book," capitalizing on the distrust that was brewing beneath the surface of the unchallenged authority of the chemical industry.²⁴ With few questioning the integrity of her arguments or the severity of the issue of pesticides upon the book's release, the chemical industry turned to an *ad hominem* approach to mitigate their *Silent Spring* problem. While Carson's gender seemed only to foster her more docile image for the broader population, representatives from industry used a strongly gendered filter to raise the issue of her professional authority. Writing ecological sciences off as a feminine pursuit, they emphasized notions of scientific militarism and the inherent masculinity of Cold War technologies to frame her as an ecologist out of line with the nation's interests. Ecology, in other words, was the subversive science.²⁵

P. Rothberg, the president of the Montrose Chemical Corporation of California, claimed Carson wrote not as a scientist, but rather as "a fanatic defender of the cult of the balance of nature."²⁶ One article in *The New York Times* later responded to this claim, stating that "from the panic of chemical industries and the soothing officialese [sic] of Government bulletins, you would think that Rachel Carson had advocated a return to the wooden plow in *Silent Spring*."²⁷ Industry respondents stressed the international successes of these chemicals in global health matters and food production, attempting to reject the claim that they were dangerous at home while discrediting Carson in the process.²⁸ They argued that Carson failed to explain the extent to which the nation's population relied

¹⁸ Brooks Atkinson, "Critic at Large: Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' Is Called 'The Rights of Man' of Our Time," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1963, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁹ Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 310-311, 411.

²⁰ John M. Lee, "'Silent Spring' is Now Noisy Summer: Pesticides Industry Up in Arms Over a New Book," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²¹ Gay Pauley, "Furore Over Pesticides Doesn't Daunt Author: 'Book Had to be Written,'" *The Boston Globe*, September 30, 1962, Newspapers.com.

²² Brooks Atkinson, "Critic at Large: Rachel Carson's Articles on the Danger of Chemical Sprays Prove Effective," *The New York Times*, September 11, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Lorus Milne and Margery Milne, "There's Poison All Around Us Now: The Dangers in the Use of Pesticides are Vividly Pictured by Rachel Carson," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; James J. Doheny, "Voice of the People: 'Silent Spring,'" *Chicago Tribune*, November 20, 1962, Newspapers.com.

²³ Lear, *Rachel Carson*, 220, 428-431.

²⁴ Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive*, 144-145.

²⁵ Kinkela, "Green Revolutions in Conflict," 121.

²⁶ John M. Lee, "'Silent Spring' is Now Noisy Summer: Pesticides Industry Up in Arms Over a New Book," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁷ Brooks Atkinson, "Critic at Large: Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' Is Called 'The Rights of Man' of Our Time," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1963, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁸ Kinkela, "Green Revolutions in Conflict," 117-118.

on chemicals, making it clear that for her opponents, the evolving pesticide debate was a matter of progress, and Carson was unqualified to try and stop the development of American industry.²⁹ One article in *The Boston Globe* reported on this perspective, arguing that “dispassionate scientific evidence and passionate propaganda are two buckets of water that simply can’t be carried on one person’s shoulders.”³⁰ The consensus among her opponents was that this shy, gentle woman had involved herself in something she should not have—threatening the nation’s Cold War interests in the process.

While allusions to the Cold War climate were often more subtle in critical responses to *Silent Spring*, some attempts were made by the chemical industry to capitalize on contemporary anxieties more directly. With this, familiar rhetoric was used to tie Carson to the broader culture of Cold War subversion, positioning her work as a threat to the American—or capitalist—standard of living which made the country superior in this ongoing ideological conflict.³¹ One of the most clear manifestations of this criticism came with a particularly vivid response to Carson’s controversial opening chapter, “A Fable for Tomorrow.” Being fictional, this chapter specifically became a target for the disdain of the chemical industry. In October 1962, The Monsanto Company published “The Desolate Year” in their company magazine. As a parody of Carson’s work, Monsanto constructed an assault against Carson which integrated imagery of “the foreign invader” and the ruination of the United States by describing a world without pesticides:

The bugs were everywhere. Unseen. Unheard. Unbelievably universal. On or under every square foot of land, every square yard, every acre, and country, and state and region in the entire sweep of the United States...Genus by genus, species by species, sub-species by innumerable sub-species, the insects emerged...Man, too, sickened, and he died...What, at the end of such a year, would be the fate of the United States of America?³²

The threat of an outside invader did not just apply to communists. Bugs, too, were seen as a danger to the future prosperity of the nation. Insect control and the politics of the Cold War were therefore not far apart during the years following the publication of *Silent Spring*. American Cyanamid joined in this assault on Carson, publishing a series of magnified photos of insects in their winter 1963 edition of *The Cyanamid Magazine*. In an accompanying article, the corporation claimed that in the war between man and insects, Rachel Carson was suggesting they disarm.³³ The Velsicol Chemical Corporation went even further in their attack on Carson. They attempted to convince Houghton Mifflin not to publish the book at all, eventually threatening a libel suit against her “innuendoes.” They linked Carson to “food faddists” and other groups on the radical fringe, invoking imperatives of the Cold War to argue that the uninformed American public might call for the elimination of pesticides entirely, which would in turn reduce the nation’s supply of food to “East-curtain parity.”³⁴

The postwar consensus which dominated American society encouraged social and political conformity, uncritical patriotism, respect for governmental and community authority, and, importantly, an ideological commitment to a vague notion of an American way of life defined by material comfort and prosperity. As seen with the climate which accompanied the indiscriminate attacks on alleged “subversives” during the era of the Second Red Scare and McCarthyism, one did not have to be a Communist to come under suspicion as a subversive. With the Cold War offering new incentives to expand the nation’s chemical arsenal, her dissent against commonly accepted American values was, to her critics, an act of disloyalty.³⁵

By questioning the authority of “experts,” Carson had contributed to the development of a much more open and politically charged environment. As the public grappled with debates over her credibility and the facts of her research, one question remained pervasive in attempts to position *Silent Spring* against the reigning authority of industry: who speaks for science?³⁶ In 1963, Americans were provided with a visual which embodied this very

²⁹ Walter Sullivan, “Chemists Debate Pesticides Book: Industry Fears Public Will Turn Against Its Products,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Joseph Ator, “Scientist Disputes Insecticide Danger: Blames Furor on Chemical Users’ Neglect of Instructions,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 1962, Newspapers.com.

³⁰ Frederick J. Stare, “In Defense of Pesticides: Two Buckets of Water,” *The Boston Globe*, February 4, 1963, Newspapers.com.

³¹ Walter Sullivan, “Chemists Debate Pesticides Book: Industry Fears Public Will Turn Against Its Products,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³² N.A., “The Desolate Year,” *Monsanto Magazine*, October, 1962, International Society for Environmental Ethics.

³³ Kinkela, “Green Revolutions in Conflict,” 124-125.

³⁴ Smith, “‘Silence, Miss Carson!’ 736-737.

³⁵ Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive*, 134-137.

³⁶ Kinkela, “Green Revolutions in Conflict,” 119.

question. The Columbia Broadcasting System ran two reports entitled “The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson” as part of their *CBS Reports* program. Interviewing Carson as well as representatives from the chemical industry, the intention of the broadcast was to provide a “balanced” perspective which illuminated both sides of the pesticide debate.³⁷ In her opening statement, Carson makes no attempt to combat her subversive image, stating that chemicals were the “little recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of life.” Providing the opposing perspective, the report then turned to an interview with scientist Robert White Stevens of American Cyanamid, who called *Silent Spring* a “gross distortion of the actual facts,” arguing that “the real threat to the survival of man is not chemical but biological, in the shape of hoards of insects that denude our forests,” and “if man were to practice agriculture as Carson indicates, we would return to the dark ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth.”³⁸ *CBS Reports* made the pesticide debate two-dimensional, pitting these perspectives against each other in a struggle over scientific authority. Ultimately, spokesmen for the chemical industry assumed a position of progress and prosperity, attempting to leave Carson in the shadows as a nature-loving subversive.

Making Sense of the Unknown in Man’s War Against Nature

In the midst of a period shadowed by the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* emerged as a pivotal text, weaving the imminent fears of environmental catastrophe with the era’s prevailing dread of nuclear apocalypse. The environmental consciousness of the generation which witnessed the birth of the first Earth Day in 1970 was invariably shaped by the era’s Cold War anxieties, and despite her largely undisputed role in catalyzing the environmental movement, Carson did not invent these fears.³⁹ Through her groundbreaking work, she merely captured the zeitgeist of an era where the environmental movement and nuclear fears intersected, fostering a new perspective on conservation and the fragility of life on Earth.

Carson was conscious of the sociopolitical climate in which she would be releasing her work. The reaction of the chemical industry and their pervasive attempts to frame her as a rogue, hysterical subversive with little to no scientific foundation came as no surprise to her. Despite her appeals to avoid fanaticism, to compare her to the likes of the hatchet-wielding temperance advocate Carrie Nation was a means for her critics to capitalize on existing Cold War anxieties and discredit her work.⁴⁰ She remained calm in the face of such attacks, asserting the fact that she was simply a natural scientist pursuing the truth.⁴¹ As time would quickly show, a majority of the American public was quick to support Carson’s position. A consensus was forming around the fact that she had spoken out just in time—questioning an industry which had gone unchecked during the boom of postwar economic development. She was attempting to open the eyes of an increasingly receptive public to the absurdity of the fact that chemical pesticides had become commonplace in daily life.⁴² As evidence accumulated to support her argument that poisonous chemicals had been put into the hands of those ignorant of their potential for harm, responses to *Silent Spring* show a concerted effort was made to understand the nuances of her analysis.

Carson never argued for the complete elimination of chemical pesticides. Being a realist, and also recognizing the importance of these chemicals in controlling disease, she understood that these sprays would likely remain a permanent part of modern technology.⁴³ Her hope was that they would be used intelligently, and this message was widely understood in articles for *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Boston Globe*. The greatest source of panic was not coming from the rhetoric employed by Carson in her study of pesticides, but was instead from those with interests in the chemical industry. Unlike Carson, the individuals attempting to label her as a subversive crusader had financial motivations in ensuring the continued use of pesticides. This underlying dimension of the pesticide debate was not lost on the American public. As noted in one *NYT* article published in September of 1962, with such a large stake in present operations, the chemical industry could be counted on to

³⁷ Gary Kroll, “The ‘Silent Springs’ of Rachel Carson: Mass Media and the Origins of Modern Environmentalism,” *Public Understanding of Science* 10, no. 4 (2001): 416-420, <https://doi.org/info/doi/>.

³⁸ *CBS Reports*, “The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson,” April 3, 1963.

³⁹ Waddell, ed., *And No Birds Sing*, 36-37.

⁴⁰ Carrie Nation was a prominent figure in the temperance movement from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, known for her aggressive advocacy for prohibition and her use of hatchets to destroy saloons.

⁴¹ N.A., “Rachel Carson Dies of Cancer, ‘Silent Spring’ Author Was 56,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1964, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴² N.A., “Unsolicited, Unpaid-for Comment by Scientists About Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴³ Brooks Atkinson, “Critic at Large: Rachel Carson’s ‘Silent Spring’ Is Called ‘The Rights of Man’ of Our Time,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1963, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Curb Pesticides, Conservationist Says,” *The Boston Globe*, January 20, 1963, Newspapers.com.

spend even more money to tell Americans the “other side of the story.”⁴⁴ Unfortunately for them, many were convinced by Carson’s elegant prose and effective communication. Carson herself noted that in the letters she received, there was no reaction of panic, but rather a sense of firm determination to bring the abuses she reports in *Silent Spring* under control.⁴⁵

In keeping with aims for objective reporting, the newspapers studied ensured that both positions were presented in the ongoing pesticide debate. This fostered a back-and-forth which encouraged reader input as these groundbreaking events unfolded. The dissemination of research confirming her position—notably with the report by President John F. Kennedy’s Science Advisory Committee in 1963—began shortly after the controversy began, and acted as telling replies to the efforts made to discredit her scientific competence.⁴⁶ Still, it was also recognized that her book was only a beginning. As the reception to *Silent Spring* indicates, little was understood about the effects of pesticides outside of the scientific community. In combination with the confusion fostered by conflicting narratives, a significant element of *Silent Spring*’s initial reception became grounded in a familiar Cold War rhetoric through which Americans could make sense of this unknown chemical threat. More specifically, the scale of danger posed by this invisible killer was understood through comparisons with another: nuclear radiation.

Even in articles where spokespeople for the chemical industry conceded that the facts of Carson’s analysis were correct, they maintained a strong opposition to what they saw as her equating pesticides with nuclear war in threatening the “extinction of mankind.”⁴⁷ Regardless of whether or not she saw radiation as an opportunity for a comparison which might actually incite action, it is certain that the references to nuclear radiation throughout her book were no accident. *Silent Spring* was published only a month before the Cuban missile crisis, and a year before the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty.⁴⁸ The nation had been steeped in years of debate surrounding nuclear weapons, meaning the effects of fallout could serve effectively as a point of reference for Americans to understand the hazards of pesticides.⁴⁹ The first pollutant she mentioned by name in *Silent Spring* was not a pesticide, but strontium-90, a by-product of nuclear fission. Later, she compares the death of a Swedish farmer from pesticide poisoning to the Lucky Dragon No.5 incident, where a Japanese fishing boat and its crew were exposed to radioactive fallout from a United States hydrogen bomb test. Carson argued that in both scenarios, a poison drifting out of the sky carried a death sentence.⁵⁰

Critics accused her of exaggerating the effects of pesticides, viewing her references to nuclear radiation as indicative of her aims to foster hysteria without scientific evidence. Looking at the reception of her work, however, there is no indication that nuclear radiation was understood as anything but a reasonable tool for understanding the severity of the pesticide threat. Carson could hardly ignore the context in which she was writing her work, and references to radiation would prove effective in providing readers with a frame of reference. In her chapter “Elixirs of Death,” Carson opens with a question: “We are rightly appalled by the genetic effects of radiation; how then, can we be indifferent to the same effect in chemicals that we disseminate widely in our environment?”⁵¹ Many saw her book as a wake-up call, in part because of provocative questions such as these. Chemical pesticides were soon grouped alongside atomic bombs, pollution, and overpopulation as recognized weapons of extinction in Cold War America.⁵² It may be a more subtle or gradual death, but her desire was for the public—embroiled in debates surrounding nuclear bombs—to understand that pesticides were a threat that should be taken just as seriously. One reviewer in *The New York Times*, complimenting her prose, stated that if Carson were to shift her focus to

⁴⁴ Lorus Milne and Margery Milne, “There’s Poison All Around Us Now: The Dangers in the Use of Pesticides are Vividly Pictured by Rachel Carson,” *The New York Times*, September 23, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁵ N.A., “What’s the Reason Why: A Symposium by Best-Selling Authors,” *The New York Times*, December 2, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁶ N.A., “What One Woman Did,” *The Boston Globe*, May 17, 1963. Newspapers.com.

⁴⁷ Walter Sullivan, “Chemists Debate Pesticides Book: Industry Fears Public Will Turn Against Its Products,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁸ The Limited Test Ban Treaty, signed in 1963, was an international agreement aimed at restricting the testing of nuclear weapons. It prohibited nuclear testing in the atmosphere, outer space, and underwater, but allowed for underground nuclear tests to continue. The treaty was primarily motivated by growing concerns over the environmental and health risks associated with nuclear fallout from atmospheric testing. Signed by the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom, among others, the treaty marked an important step in efforts to mitigate the dangers of nuclear proliferation and reduce the threat of nuclear war. For more information, see Badash, Lawrence. *Scientists and the Development of Nuclear Weapons: From Fission to the Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1939-1963*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995.

⁴⁹ Waddell, ed., *And No Birds Sing*, 34-35.

⁵⁰ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 6-8, 229-234.

⁵¹ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 37.

⁵² Walter Sullivan, “Books of the Times: To Suit Ourselves,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Review of *Silent Spring*.

"cholesterol, tobacco cancer, radiation, nuclear fallout, and television commercials," those too would soon see action taken to mitigate their risks.⁵³ She was capitalizing on her Cold War context, becoming a symbolic leader against society's greatest ills during this period.

The significance of this context is revealed through her timely references to the threat of nuclear war; however, this is only one, more specific, dimension of her relationship to the Cold War. She was also appealing to a much broader "age of man" sentiment which was permeating American society, enlightening a larger segment of the population to the complexities of the modern world through science. Atomic bombs were certainly a part of these shifting attitudes, acting as perhaps the most pervasive example of the technology and destruction man was capable of creating. Ultimately, Carson was calling for a radical change in how Americans understood the environment and positioned themselves within the "balance of nature." In the 1963 *CBS Reports* program, "The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson," she argued against the scale of destruction humanity had become capable of:

We still talk in terms of conquest. We still haven't become mature enough to think of ourselves as only a tiny part of a vast and incredible universe. Man's attitude toward nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature...But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself.⁵⁴

As was recognized widely in responses to both her book and this broadcast, this generation, unlike all others before it, had the ability to make the world uninhabitable in one stroke.⁵⁵ *Silent Spring* thus became an exercise in questioning man's moral authority over the environment—a pursuit imbued with ideological undertones akin to the growing critiques of American exceptionalism. In "The Trope of War in Modern Environmentalism," Cheryll Glotfelty argues that *Silent Spring* instigated a new kind of war by applying Cold War language and concepts to man's "war against nature."⁵⁶ With this war metaphor, pesticides were the powerful weapons which mankind had deemed acceptable for use against undesirable weeds and insects, but which were now being turned against the people themselves. In their determination to control nature, Carson argued, human beings created a deadly irony: they were now posing a growing threat to all life on earth, including their own.⁵⁷

As reported in the *Chicago Tribune*, Carson had presented an alarming indictment—that pesticides could damage or kill humans as well as what many understood as the "lower orders."⁵⁸ Carson, a nature-lover, recognized the anthropocentrism of the postwar era, and demanded that Americans rethink their relationship with the environment. Analysis of *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Boston Globe* reveal that many did. With what some called "the poison book," Carson had shifted public opinion to accept that the "war" on insects was one in which man was poisoning himself.⁵⁹ Concerns surrounding the maintenance of U.S. superiority and the impact eliminating pesticides might have on American agriculture still fostered some tensions; however, these were largely mitigated with reminders that Carson had not argued for the barring of all chemicals and pesticides, but rather for their intelligent use.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the scale of the initial response to *Silent Spring*—as well as its consistent presence in best seller lists—gave Carson and her supporters reason to believe the tide of unchecked postwar development was turning. Demanding a quick change in Americans' distorted sense of proportion, her own account of the present was not entirely hopeless.⁶¹ Public responses demonstrate that *Silent Spring* was not just a spark in the burgeoning environmental movement, but also an important work which challenged reigning structures of authority and facilitated a shift in the broader Cold War American consciousness.

The Sage Prophet

Rachel Carson died on April 14, 1964—not even two years after *Silent Spring* was published. She had been privately battling breast cancer, and as her health deteriorated, the attacks and interest in her book only grew. With

⁵³ Charles Poore, "Books of the Times," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1963, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Review of John Fisher's *1815: An End and a Beginning*, with comparison to *Silent Spring*.

⁵⁴ *CBS Reports*, "The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson," April 3, 1963.

⁵⁵ Walter Sullivan, "Books of the Times," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁶ Waddell, ed., *And No Birds Sing*, 158-162.

⁵⁷ Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive*, 133.

⁵⁸ Robert Cromie, "Book Hits Free Use of Pesticides," *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1962, Newspapers.com.

⁵⁹ Fanny Butcher, "Let Not Man Poison the World Around Him," *Chicago Tribune*, September 30, 1962, Newspapers.com.

⁶⁰ N.A., "Curb Pesticides, Conservationist Says," *The Boston Globe*, January 20, 1963, Newspapers.com.

⁶¹ Lorus Milne and Margery Milne, "There's Poison All Around Us Now: The Dangers in the Use of Pesticides are Vividly Pictured by Rachel Carson," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

this came requests for interviews and speeches, as well as a number of awards. The *CBS Reports* broadcast was one of the few interviews she did not refuse during this period, as she realized the opportunity the program presented for her to reach an even wider segment of the American population.⁶² The U.S. was still deeply embroiled in the pesticide debate when news broke of Carson's death, and the fact that she had been suffering from cancer presented an unfortunate sense of irony which served to instill an even greater sense of urgency in the message she had preached in *Silent Spring*. Newspaper reports reveal an understanding that public opinion had shifted in her favour over the past two years, and would continue to do so after her death.⁶³ Described in one *NYT* article as "the essence of gentle scholarship," she had set off a nationally publicized struggle between the proponents and opponents of the widespread use of chemical pesticides and insecticides.⁶⁴ While she was alive for only a brief period after *Silent Spring's* publication, significant action was already being taken.

The groundbreaking nature of Carson's work was understood immediately. At the time of her death, she was already being described as one of the most influential women of the time.⁶⁵ The seeds of her legacy were therefore being sown very early, and her death only accelerated this process. There was already a sense of indebtedness to her for the awareness she had brought to the American public surrounding the threats of an invisible killer. One reporter for *The Boston Globe* described her as a "sage prophet" who had lived to see some of her predictions fulfilled, and who would always be remembered by the nation—especially with continued reports on the poisoning of the country's natural environment.⁶⁶ With recognition that her death had left a gaping hole in the pesticide debate, there was an intensified public appreciation for her work and the manner in which she was able to transform ecological awareness. As the nation grappled with the existential threats posed by atomic warfare and the specter of ecological degradation, *Silent Spring* provided a sobering reflection on the interconnectedness of human actions and the natural world. Ultimately, Carson's death not only solidified her status as a symbol of a burgeoning environmental consciousness emerging against the backdrop of the Cold War, but also underscored her role as a transformative figure challenging prevailing political and economic structures. In many respects, she had rejected traditional Cold War narratives to offer a compelling critique of humanity's relationship with the environment and to reshape perceptions of power and responsibility in a world gripped by geopolitical tensions. She was becoming a beacon of hope and inspiration, epitomizing the belief that a single book could disrupt deeply entrenched beliefs and catalyze a shift in societal attitudes.

LEGACY

Silent Spring in the Collective Memory

Silent Spring was both a product of its time, as well as a shaper of it.⁶⁷ As the public became more removed from the immediate context in which Carson wrote and published her work, less emphasis was placed on the nuances of her arguments. Instead, *Silent Spring* became a convenient symbol for works capable of catalyzing a dramatic shift in the broader American consciousness—or a standard against which subsequent works published during the Cold War era challenging reigning societal paradigms could be compared. The comparisons had begun early, first in the initial reception of *Silent Spring* as the media attempted to capture the significance of her work and its potential to change American thinking. A common association reported in various newspapers was between Carson's work and Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe wrote a story which captured the realities of slavery and fuelled the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement, and is credited with helping to lay the groundwork for the Civil War.⁶⁸ Called the "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* for bugs," *Silent Spring* was predicted to share this novel's societal influence and transformative power, igniting fervent debates and widespread public discourse.⁶⁹

As a must-read book deemed capable of transforming American society, it was as if *Silent Spring* had built on the legacy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to create a new framework for understanding pivotal Cold War texts. With

⁶² Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive*, 179-180.

⁶³ N.A., "Miss Carson, Pesticide Foe, Author, Dies: Cancer Victim Wrote 'Silent Spring,'" *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1964, Newspapers.com.

⁶⁴ N.A., "Rachel Carson Dies of Cancer, 'Silent Spring' Author Was 56," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1964, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁵ N.A., "Rachel Carson," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1964, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁶ N.A., "Continuing Reports of Fish, Fowl Poisonings Confirm the Dangers of Pesticides' Use—Nation Will Always Remember Rachel Carson," *The Boston Globe*, April 19, 1964, Newspapers.com.

⁶⁷ Waddell, ed., *And No Birds Sing*, 36.

⁶⁸ Barbara Hochman, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy, Childhood, and Fiction, 1851-1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 2-3.

⁶⁹ Irene Powers, "'Silent Spring' Spurs Two Public Discussions," *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1963, Newspapers.com.

Carson becoming a symbolic advocate of the threats plaguing Cold War America, *Silent Spring* provided a reference for the public to gauge the significance of other works published criticizing society's various ills. Paul R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, published in 1968, offers one example of scholarship which—in the minds of the public—fell under the same umbrella as Carson's critique of modern society. Ehrlich wrote of the dangers of overpopulation, sounding a warning of impending global crises such as famine and ecological collapse due to unsustainable population growth. His book resonated with the American public, reflecting anxieties about the capacity of the planet to support an exponentially increasing human population amidst the backdrop of Cold War competition and conflict. With this, readers added his book to a list of works alongside *Silent Spring* which, both thoughtful and alarmist, depicted mankind's struggle to live in an environment he was making unlivable.⁷⁰

Ehrlich received criticism similar to that of Carson, with some claiming his work was not scholarly, and others labelling it as an exaggeration of the dangers of overpopulation.⁷¹ In articles where *The Population Bomb* is compared to *Silent Spring*, however, the purpose was more often to contextualize the significance of Ehrlich's research and arguments alongside another influential work which challenged Cold War understandings of the threats against modern society. Together, Ehrlich and Carson's books were recommended to Americans hoping to grasp the environmental collapse they were facing.⁷²

Compared to both *The Population Bomb* and *Silent Spring* in a *The Fresno Bee* article in 1987, Jonathan Schell's 1982 work *The Fate of the Earth* also emerged as a "crucial event in the history of human thought."⁷³ Schell describes the consequences of nuclear war, reminding the American population of what they knew but wanted to forget: that nuclear weapons could threaten mankind with extinction. He explains the science underlying the nuclear age, as well as the ethics and philosophy emerging from it. While not directly related to the environmental movement Carson is credited as starting, *The Fate of the Earth* was compared to *Silent Spring* for being another one of a small number of books which "occasionally play a great part in opening the public mind to dimly perceived truths."⁷⁴ Schell's work is regarded as a key document in the nuclear disarmament movement, and its media reception was ultimately underscored by a sense of hope that it would receive the same amount of attention—especially by the government—as *Silent Spring* did. These books, along with many others, were representative of their Cold War context. Due to her success in spreading a message against the unrestricted use of chemical pesticides, Carson became emblematic of a level of influence that other pivotal works aimed to achieve when challenging the perceived ills of Cold War America.

A Convenient Shorthand

Comparisons to Rachel Carson have continued into the twenty-first century, with *Silent Spring* becoming a symbolic shorthand for reviewers aiming to stress the significance of a book, or its potential to encourage readers to question their opinions, values, and thought processes.⁷⁵ While historians such as Chad Montrie have challenged the commonly held perception that *Silent Spring* was a sole catalyst for the American environmental movement, Americans have continued to use Carson's work as a synecdoche for the sociopolitical turmoil which characterized the 1960s.⁷⁶ With this, she has remained a target for critics of the era's distrust of technology and unrestricted development. These attacks began shortly after the book's publication, with the ban on DDT in 1972 sparking a revitalized wave of disapproval which blamed Carson for a decision believed to be political, rather than scientific.⁷⁷ She was lumped together with others who protested elements of Cold War American society, a group referred to as the "disaster lobby" dominating an "age of unreason."⁷⁸ One *NYT* review of the 1973 book *The Disaster Lobby*:

⁷⁰ Kenneth McCaleb, "Conservation Analysis Quiet, Lucid," *Corpus Christi Times*, November 1, 1970, Newspapers.com.

⁷¹ William D. Snider, "Redefining 'Progress' in a New Era," *News and Record* (Greensboro), May 3, 1970, Newspapers.com.

⁷² Winifred R. Gauvreau, "Newest Environment Books Take Look at Pollution, Sonic Booms, Poverty," *Nevada State Journal*, March 15, 1970, Newspapers.com.

⁷³ Neil Spitzer, "'Silent Spring' Made a Difference," *The Fresno Bee*, September 25, 1987, Newspapers.com.

⁷⁴ N.A., "'Fate of the Earth' — White Paper for Our Age?" *The Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 10, 1982, Newspapers.com.

⁷⁵ Donna Seaman, "For Love of Nature: Considering 'Nature Wars' in the 50-Year Shadow of 'Silent Spring,'" *Chicago Tribune*, November 11, 2012, Newspapers.com.

⁷⁶ Chad Montrie, *The Myth of Silent Spring: Rethinking the Origins of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 6-10; Perry Parks, "Silent Spring, Loud Legacy: How Elite Media Helped Establish an Environmentalist Icon," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (2017): 1217-1220, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699017696882>.

⁷⁷ Samuel Rotrosen, "Why Are We Exterminating DDT?: Ban Called Political Instead of Scientific," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁸ Edwin Newman, "Attacking the 'Econuts': Have Doomsayers Gone Too Far?" *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1973, Newspapers.com.

Prophets of Ecological Doom and Other Absurdities, written by Melvin J. Grayson and Thomas R. Shepard, highlights the blame they place on *Silent Spring* in their argument that “from then on, it was downhill all the way—a disaster lobby of environmentalists, women’s libbers, anti-war freaks, black radicals, leftists, and other assorted weirdos—all out to discredit America and undermine free enterprise.”⁷⁹

Carson was blamed by another critic for “poisoning the spirit of the nation” with guilt, arguing that ecologists picked up where the “postwar A-bomb wailers” had left off.⁸⁰ As reported in 1973 in the *York Daily Record*, a professor at the University of California went as far as blaming the 10,000 malaria deaths that had occurred in Ceylon in 1968 on *Silent Spring*, claiming Carson had brought on a “crisis of ecology”—or a fanatical concern for ecology to be distinguished from the “ecology crisis.”⁸¹ While she had never argued that pesticides be completely eliminated, *Silent Spring* had become a convenient target used by those still angered by her disruption of the reigning order. All the negative consequences of the DDT ban could, in the minds of some, be drawn back to her challenging the Cold War supremacy of industry.

Beyond the controversy which has followed Carson, becoming a dynamic element of her legacy, reflections on the 1960s and growing tensions between science and the public have increasingly invoked *Silent Spring* as a symbolic turning point in not only environmentalism, but in dismantling American exceptionalism.⁸² Recognition of the significance of the Cold War context in shaping the pesticide debate and perceptions of *Silent Spring* has become more central in these discussions during the twenty-first century, or as society becomes further removed from the Cold War period. In one 2003 article in *The New York Times* entitled “Does Science Matter?” *Silent Spring* is used as a shorthand to capture the realization during the 1960s that science had a moral as well as a technical responsibility. With this, Carson is credited as contributing to a growing sense of intolerance towards “grand, technical fixes,” as well as one of fear towards the “potential consequences of unfettered science and technology in areas like genetic engineering, germ warfare, global warming, nuclear power and the proliferation of nuclear arms.”⁸³

Another 2012 article described that, by the summer of 1962, “her audience was primed for science-and-technology-related anxiety.” Referencing the known birth defects caused by the drug thalidomide, the events of the “cranberry scare,” as well as the fact that this generation of Americans had learned to “duck and cover” in anticipation of nuclear attack, Carson and *Silent Spring* are used to capture the perceived hysteria of the era. She had linked radioactive fallout with the indiscriminate use of pesticides, the “twin fears of the modern age,” and in doing so contributed to how an entire generation would view “progress.”⁸⁴ In one letter to the editor in the *Ukiah Daily Journal* discussing a potential GMO ban in 2004, *Silent Spring* is listed alongside the bomb and the Cold War more broadly as making an entire generation develop a mistrust of science and technology.⁸⁵ While undeniably influential, Rachel Carson was still only one person who was vocalizing concerns with the contemporary American culture of exceptionalism and unchecked economic growth. Yet, her legacy within historical memory has become intertwined with this era of the Cold War in which “progress” came to be seen not as a benefit, but, as an article in *The Hanford Sentinel* described, “a code word for the triumph of economics over the environment.”⁸⁶

Rachel Carson, the “Martyred Saint”

In 1970, James B. Ayres, a writer for *The Boston Globe*, stated that “the environmental movement found a martyred saint in Rachel Carson who died before the world woke up to the gravity of her warning that continued use of DDT and other pesticides could lead to a Silent Spring.”⁸⁷ As the Cold War crusader that she has become in popular memory, her legacy has developed with a sense of indebtedness to a figure who died before the effects of her work could be fully recognized. The 1972 ban on DDT did not eliminate the use of chemical pesticides altogether, and with the continued environmental devastation that has accompanied their use, the apocalyptic

⁷⁹ N.A., “Shorter Reviews: The Disaster Lobby,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸⁰ William F. Buckley, “Ecologists Poisoned Spirit of Our Nation with Guilt,” *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, June 7, 1974, Newspapers.com.

⁸¹ William F. Buckley, “The Need for More Drugs,” *York Daily Record*, July 18, 1973, Newspapers.com.

⁸² Fletcher Knebel, “The Greening of Fletcher Knebel,” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1974, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸³ William J. Broad and James Glanz, “Does Science Matter?” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2003, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Royte, “The Poisoned Earth: A New Biography of Rachel Carson, Who Warned against the Indiscriminate Use of Pesticides,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2012, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Eliza Griswold, “The Wild Life of ‘Silent Spring,’” *The New York Times*, September 23, 2012, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Robert Taylor, “Rachel Carson’s Heroism,” *The Boston Globe*, March 23, 1972, Newspapers.com.

⁸⁵ Robert Axt, “Letters from our Readers: No on Measure H,” *Ukiah Daily Journal*, February 17, 2004, Newspapers.com.

⁸⁶ N.A., “Bush-Clinton Contest Ignores Depression Generation,” *The Hanford Sentinel*, September 21, 1992, Newspapers.com.

⁸⁷ James B. Ayres, “Earth Day,” *The Boston Globe*, April 20, 1970, Newspapers.com.

future Carson envisioned in “A Fable for Tomorrow” has been employed by her supporters to stress the severe damage caused by man’s ongoing war with nature.⁸⁸ Reports on ecological disasters tied to the chemicals Carson warned the population of are written almost as an apology, conveying the sense that the woman who had risked being called a communist sympathizer would be disappointed that the world was only moving closer to her vision of the “shadow of death” that fell on the hypothetical American town.⁸⁹

With the stream of articles published during each decade anniversary of *Silent Spring’s* publication, a consensus has developed recognizing that Carson’s warnings have been heard and debated, but not heeded.⁹⁰ Ultimately, her name remains pervasive in any discussion of pesticides even decades after her death. *The Baltimore Sun*, reporting on the West Nile Virus in 2002, noted that a significant number of Americans were still referring to *Silent Spring* in debates over whether to spray disease-carrying mosquitoes. Recognized for warning the public of another insidious threat during a time when “the Cold War seemed about to erupt into nuclear holocaust,” Rachel Carson has become the martyr who dared to challenge the dangerous structures of Cold War American exceptionalism and economic prosperity.⁹¹

Conclusion

While a large majority of the American public was receptive to *Silent Spring* at the time of its publication, the criticism she received from the chemical industry and supporters of “progress”—in combination with ongoing failures to control environmental devastation at the hands of economic development— contributed to the perception that Carson, like many others, was a victim of Cold War anxieties and the fears surrounding the broader culture of subversion.⁹² Articles reflecting on the significance of her work are thus underscored with a sense of determined vindication for a woman who was underappreciated during the short period between *Silent Spring’s* publication and her death.

In 1962, *TIME* Magazine published a review of *Silent Spring* entitled “Pesticides: The Price for Progress.” The article began with a note on “A Fable for Tomorrow,” stating that “Miss Carson’s deadly white powder is not radioactive fallout, as many readers will at first assume.” It then proceeded to charge that Carson had taken up her pen in alarm and anger, having an emotional and inaccurate outburst which would alarm the “nontechnical public.”⁹³ Fifty years later, *TIME* writer Bryan Walsh took a much different position in an anniversary piece for *Silent Spring*. While claiming his predecessors were gentle in comparison to the reactions of chemical companies and other contemporary critics, Walsh’s article frames the anger of the era as hyperbolic and incredibly gendered. Criticism of Carson, he argues, “is a relic from an age devoted to better living through chemistry.”⁹⁴

During the initial years after *Silent Spring’s* publication, Rachel Carson’s critics pushed her to the left end of the political spectrum, attempting to reduce her to a remote corner of the radical fringe. Some pesticide companies were more explicit in claiming that Carson was in league with “sinister parties” whose goals were to further Soviet interest by undermining American agriculture and free enterprise.⁹⁵ Even if the word “communist” was not used, in 1962 it did not have to be—it was understood. Ultimately, the Cold War influenced both sides of the pesticide debate that accompanied the publication of *Silent Spring*, acting as the backdrop against which the American population made sense of her poetic indictment against not only the indiscriminate use of chemical pesticides, but the very way Americans made sense of their position in the world. *Silent Spring* shocked the nation, and has continued to influence reflections on environmental degradation and the sociopolitical turmoil of the Cold War. It is likely that it will continue to do so, with Carson reminding her readers that “in nature nothing exists alone.”⁹⁶

⁸⁸ Pete Dunne, “In the Natural State: Listen to the Birds; The Chance May Be Fleeting,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 1993, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Charles A. Radin, “A ‘Silent Spring’ Disaster in Michigan: Suit Settled a Decade after Feed Mix-up,” *The Boston Globe*, January 11, 1983, Newspapers.com; N.A., “Our Silent Autumn,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 2002, Newspapers.com; John L. Hess, “The Anniversary of ‘Silent Spring,’” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 5, 1982, Newspapers.com.

⁸⁹ Eliza Griswold, “The Wild Life of ‘Silent Spring,’” *The New York Times*, September 23, 2012, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁹⁰ H. Patricia Hynes, “‘Silent Spring’ Plus 30: Rachel Carson’s Warning Has Been Heard and Debated but Not Heeded,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, September 15, 1992, Newspapers.com.

⁹¹ Timothy B. Wheeler, “Debate on Pesticides Lingers,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 27, 2002, Newspapers.com.

⁹² Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive*, 65-66, 137-138, 144.

⁹³ N.A., “Pesticides: The Price for Progress,” *TIME Magazine*, September 28, 1962, The *TIME Magazine Vault*.

⁹⁴ Bryan Walsh, “How Silent Spring Became the First Shot in the War Over the Environment,” *TIME Magazine*, September 25, 2012, The *TIME Magazine Vault*.

⁹⁵ William Souder, *On a Farther Shore: The Life and Legacy of Rachel Carson* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 343-347.

⁹⁶ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 51.

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Juvenile Owl perching on Tree in the Ochoco National Forest, US Forest Service, Wikimedia commons