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‘Women Wouldn’t Sit at Bars if They Knew How They Looked’: Victory Girls, Women’s Intemperance, and Feminine Incursions, Buffalo 1944

On February 23, 1944, the *Buffalo Courier-Express* ran an article on page 18 recounting the Buffalo Police Department’s closure of a disorderly house on downtown’s West Tupper Street the night prior. According to the article, the raid was a direct response to a warning issued by the U.S. military that it would assume jurisdiction in the city if swift action was not taken to address vice conditions considered detrimental to the health of locally stationed servicemen. Reportedly, “several” sailors who patronized the venue had contracted venereal disease as a result of their visit. The military threatened to act if Buffalo police could not cope with the situation.[1]

The alarmist article did not limit its concern to one disorderly house. The West Tupper Street anecdote quickly segued to the topic of a perceived public menace: the all-American “victory girl.” The article framed the problem by citing a year-old report that characterized Buffalo as having the second-highest venereal disease rate increase among U.S. cities of comparable size. It went on to paraphrase unnamed local officials who called the problem “deplorable,” particularly as it affected members of the armed forces, war workers, and teenage girls.[2] And without evidence or objectivity, it joined national public officials in placing blame squarely on the shoulders of sexually active women:

> Local authorities have expressed complete agreement with a recent report by Thomas Parsons, surgeon general, who declared that “prostitutes now form only a

[1] “Military Makes Threat of Vice Patrols Here,” *Buffalo Courier-Express*, February 23, 1944.
[2] Ibid.

> minor part of the problem in preventing the spread of venereal disease. Teen-age [sic] girls, many from good families, delude themselves that through immoral conduct they can improve the morale of our fighting forces. In Britain, where they have the same problem, these girls are called 'patriotutes.' In this country they'd been dubbed 'victory girls.' You could hardly find a more ironic title."[3]

In this one article, the nefarious victory girl entered into Buffalo's public consciousness, just as she had in numerous other U.S. communities besieged simultaneously by a perceived venereal disease threat and a changing social order. To public authorities in Buffalo and elsewhere, the disconcerting victory girl was causal of the former and emblematic of the latter; she became the patsy on whom the ills of society were blamed. To cope with the anxiety she provoked, officials in Buffalo undertook a brief but impassioned crusade to police her sexual activity. But neither their anxiety nor their response was limited to venereal disease or her real or imagined promiscuity, as other historians have argued. Disease was the catalyst for action, but it was not the real concern. At issue was women's independence and incursion into male spaces, and her deviance from gendered rules of morality that insisted she moderate her consumption of alcohol. Beneath the surface of this historical case lies a discourse expressive of discomfort with women's intemperance and a desire to reclaim bars for men.

The Buffalo Campaign

From the moment the *Courier-Express* sounded the alarm, the tone, tenor, and pace of reporting surrounding the perceived danger of venereal disease in Buffalo intensified. What had been, just days before, relegated to the inner pages of one newspaper became a front-page story. Soon, *The Buffalo Evening News* and *The Buffalo Criterion*, a leading local African-American publication, were covering the story as well. Across the board, the media was largely uncritical

[3] Ibid.

of the crusade. The *Courier-Express*, though, was particularly aggressive in its censure of women, appearing to serve as a mouthpiece for local law and health officials who publicly condemned and sought swift action against the victory girl.

Through March 1944, a moral panic thus ensued. A moral panic is heightened concern among a population in reaction to behaviors of a subset of that population perceived to be deviant (or "evil") and threatening to social order. Action against these "deviants" typically ensues. As sociologists Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda point out, the threat may be valid or imagined, but in either case, the called-for response is characteristically disproportionate to the reality of the situation. And in many cases, the vilified "deviants" are hapless scapegoats for some larger, intractable social problem. [4] Moral panics tend to be stoked by the media, which control what stories are considered newsworthy and with what angle those stories are presented. "In effect, the media *set an agenda* and impart to that agenda a certain *feeling-tone*," Goode and Ben-Yehuda argue. They 'frame' their stories in such a way that a particular way of thinking seems reasonable."[5]

In Buffalo, the moral panic in reaction to the supposed threat of the victory girl was characterized in the media by inflammatory language, biased reporting, and the subjective vilification of women. On the ground, it manifested in the arrest, detainment, and mandatory blood testing of women on the basis of their real or suspected extramarital sexual activity and venereal disease status. And it culminated in a proposal put forth by Buffalo Police

[4] Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Chichester, UK: 2009) 2-3.
[5] Ibid., 95.

Commissioner Charles E. Cannan and City Court Judge John L. Kelly calling for a city ordinance prohibiting women from freely consuming alcohol in public spaces.[6]

Over the course of several weeks, Police Commissioner Cannan and Judge Kelly aggressively solicited public support for a ban on women drinking at bars sited within taverns, unless escorted by a man. (Women drinking alcohol while seated at tables in taverns were considered less offensive to common decency.) The ordinance they proposed was based on a similar law passed in Chicago a year earlier that read:

> It shall be unlawful for any licensee, his manager, or any other person in charge of the licensed premises to serve alcoholic liquor to any female person for consumption on such premises unless she is seated at a table removed from any bar, counter or shelf or substitute therefor, or unless she is accompanied at such bar, counter, shelf, or substitute therefor by a male escort.[7]

Commissioner Cannan, Judge Kelly, and fellow advocates of the ordinance explicitly hoped a similar law in Buffalo would prevent women from infecting soldiers. Many of the ordinance's supporters also hoped it would impede women's ability to have sex autonomously, occupy "masculine" spaces, and exercise their right to consume alcohol freely. Local law enforcement, some tavern owners, and representatives of women's clubs, including the Democratic Club of 1,000 Women, Ladies Aid Society of the Working Boys' Home, Seton Guild of the Emergency Hospital, South Buffalo Ladies of Charity, Catholic Women's Saturday Afternoon Club, Mother's Club of Buffalo, Buffalo Women's City Club, and Business and Professional Women's Club, came out in strong support of the measure.[8]

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[6] "City Will Ask Legislation Banning Girls From Bars," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, February 29, 1944.
[7] "Mayor Kelly Seeks Explanation of 'Collection System' Charges," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 3, 1944, p. 13.
[8] "Women's Clubs Against Women 'Bar Drinkers.'" *Buffalo Criterion*, March 11, 1944, 3; "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads," p. 16.

While the crusade for the city ordinance waged in the media and behind closed doors, law enforcement acting under the guise of a vice campaign used what means they *did* have to violate the civil rights of women suspected of acting outside the boundaries of respectability. Police officers staked taverns, hotels, and other "pickup spots" suspected of being victory girl hangouts. They subjected women in nightlife districts to scrutiny and questioning in order to gauge their motives for being "out." They arrested on morals charges women engaging in or suspected of engaging in extramarital sex and women suspected of infection. And at least once, they resorted to spying on a couple in hotel rooms to catch them in the act of extramarital copulation. Officials force-tested women for venereal disease, and they often held them without bail until their results returned negative. In at least one case, a lawyer fought a woman's detainment on civil rights grounds, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the men caught fraternizing with these women were rarely accosted by police.

In the end, the proposed ordinance was never submitted to Buffalo Common Council for consideration. Regardless, Police Commissioner Cannan, Judge Kelly, and their fellow moral crusaders exhorted the community to publicly condemn the practice of women standing or sitting at bars as unbecoming of a lady. In other words, short of an ordinance, they sought to enact a measure of extralegal social policy that equated female intemperance with problematic sexuality and gender deviance.

The Victory Girl as a National Menace

The panic in Buffalo was not isolated. It was part of a nationwide, wartime campaign to repress prostitution and promiscuity in an effort to protect the health of men in the armed

services. In June 1941, the May Act was signed into law, making it a federal misdemeanor to engage in or aid and abet in acts of prostitution in the vicinity of military bases, training camps, and any other areas deemed vital to the welfare of the Army and/or Navy. The May Act also criminalized "lewdness" and "assignation" in the same protected areas, and state authorities were granted vague and broad power "to take such steps as they deem necessary to suppress the violation thereof."[9] In effect, the May Act equated extramarital sex with prostitution (and, by extension, the "promiscuous" woman with the prostitute). Further, it codified the surveillance of and intervention in the sex lives of consenting adults in the name of national security. And while the act was only invoked by name on occasion through the duration of the war, its existence speaks to the fear engendered by female sexuality and the moral context within which the events in Buffalo unfolded.

That the May Act was not often invoked does not mean that women around the country were not monitored during the war as they were in Buffalo. Federal officials from the Social Protection Division (SPD) and state and local authorities nationwide surveyed women on the streets and in social spaces for signs of sexual aggression, and if they found it, subjected the women to questioning and/or arrest. During the war, as the definition of crimes like prostitution, commercialized vice, sexual misconduct, disorderly conduct, and vagrancy expanded, many women found themselves within a suspect category of people.[10] For them, but not heterosexual men, the lines between prostitution and promiscuity, and reputable and disreputable blurred.

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[9] Marilyn E Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), p. 167-168.
[10] Ibid, 134.

The crusade in Buffalo is also part of the larger wartime story Marilyn Hegarty refers to as the state's manipulation of women's sexuality:

> Archival records contain a complex story of thousands of women who supported the war effort not only by providing labor power but also by providing morale-maintaining services to the military such as attending dances at military bases and servicemen's clubs. Inevitably, the latter sexualized services raised public and private fears regarding the present and future impact of the wartime disruption of the gender system. At a time when the state had initiated a campaign to protect the nation from prostitutes carrying venereal diseases, female sexuality seemed particularly dangerous.[11]

In other words, the government demonized women's sexual activity and portrayed their bodies as diseased when the sex was of their own accord; simultaneously, it cultivated and employed women's sexualized allure when it served the war cause. In a similar fashion, the state encouraged women to fulfill masculine labor roles when it realized their contributions were vital to the war effort but emphasized the temporary nature of their service. It also bemoaned women's occupation of masculine spaces (like bars) and masculine activities (like sex and drinking) as too far a deviation from normative gender order. These were the contradictions playing out behind the scenes as the panic in Buffalo intensified.

Gender Roles, Redefined

During World War II, many women assumed roles in the labor economy previously held exclusively by men. The massive production demands of war, coupled with the shunting of much of the country's able-bodied young men to the Pacific and Europe, created a labor shortage that the government called on women to alleviate. In her close reading and analysis of World War II propaganda, Maureen Honey found evidence of "a dramatic reassessment of women's role in

[11] Ibid, 1-2.

American life." Suddenly, women were assuming, in droves, well-paid industrial, manufacturing, and administrative jobs traditionally "thought to require 'masculine' abilities and attitudes."[12]

It is tempting to view the cultural icon that emerged from this phenomenon, Rosie the Riveter, as indicative of a widespread acceptance of feminist ideals during World War II. It must be kept in mind, however, that the underlying gender politics and the social implications of those politics were not categorically female positive. As Honey points out, the novelty of women working in "masculine" capacities necessitated a government-led campaign to reconfigure popular representations of (white) women as a means of overcoming psychological and social barriers to women's entry into the wartime workforce. The campaign portrayed women as powerful workers capable of performing masculine labor to convince the American public "that traditional prejudices against working women were inaccurate and destructive to the nation's welfare."[13] The result, Honey contends, was an "overall improvement in the image of women."[14]

That said, propagandists "had to work within a familiar set of values and myths in order to gain the attention of an audience operating in a capitalist society."[15] They could not depart egregiously from existing notions of women's "natural" maternal attributes and predilection for domesticity (which is not to say they wanted to, only that they could not and be effective propagandists). This adherence to traditional gender stereotypes had the effect of undermining the campaign's more empowering aspects. Honey argues that "the concept of war work as heroic national service, equivalent to male service overseas, fed into the belief that this was a temporary

[12] Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984, p. 1.
[13] Ibid, p. 47.
[14] Ibid, p. 184.
[15] Ibid, p. 212.

disruption of peacetime routines, that women's 'real' place was in the home." The propaganda's insistence that women subordinate their personal concerns for the needs of the country "masked the very real benefits women enjoyed from their employment in lucrative industries and occupations normally closed to them."[16]

As the war progressed, media attention turned toward the question of what society would look like come victory. It is clear that Americans were anxious over women's newfound place in public life. A desire for peacetime normalcy, manifested in a longing for the comforts of home and hearth, was palpable, further diluting the progressive benefits of women's en masse entry into the workforce. In 1944, with the end of the war in sight, "women became the chief heralders of peace":

> The desire for rest, tranquility, and comfort fed easily into the depiction of women in a traditional helping role, and they were idealized as healers who would salve men's wounds while nurturing the generation that would harvest the rich fruit of postwar prosperity.[17]

As a result, women's portrayal in wartime media as tough, domestic soldiers in the fight for liberty never strayed far from traditional concepts of femininity and women's roles as defenders of American values and virtue. The idea that women were self-sacrificing, nurturing, and righteous, and that they ought to do anything and everything to protect the American nuclear family was comforting to a public under wartime duress.[18] A self-actualized woman who valued career and leisure, and exercised self-indulgent autonomy—epitomized by the financially independent, sexually active, intemperate female bar patron—contradicted the feminine ideal.

[16] Ibid, p. 54.
[17] Ibid, p. 216.
[18] Ibid.

She was a threat to national cultural unity and peacetime normalcy as the public understood and desired it.

Sexuality, Gender Order, Temperance and the Buffalo Campaign

In Buffalo, the victory girl campaign was about more than venereal disease. In effect, moral entrepreneurs in the police department, judiciary, and media were waging a crusade against women's freedom to pursue autonomous lives inclusive of sexual pleasure and alcohol consumption. When we consider gender politics of the era, it is clear that the campaign by Buffalo public officials to restrict women's access to drinking establishments was an effort to 1) curtail their premarital and extramarital sexual activity, 2) reassert gender divisions and preserve homosocial masculine spaces, and 3) to compel women to conform to prescribed rules of feminine temperance. And it was all unfolding against a background of fear that World War II and its effects on society were threatening Americans' "traditional" way of life.

Historians like Marilyn Hegarty and Amanda Littauer have made similar arguments about wartime victory girl campaigns waged in urban centers and rural communities across the country. They have elucidated the government's contradictory messaging and policies regarding women's sexuality and have demonstrated that the vilification of the victory girl was reflective of the widely held fear that the war would dismantle traditional values and gender roles. The government and society-at-large agreed that women—more specifically, women's bodies—were essential to the war effort, both as defense industry workers and alluring, morale-boosting companions to soldiers via the USO. At the same time, the persistence of venereal disease among servicemen nationwide rendered the body of "promiscuous" females diseased and disordered,

and women's entry into high-paying jobs and traditionally masculine spaces like defense plants were seen as threatening to the breadwinning husband ideal. The media propagated these competing notions, sometimes at the behest of the government, with the effect of inflaming anxieties already compounded by the war.[19]

What sets Buffalo's campaign against victory girls apart from the histories uncovered by Hegarty, Littauer, and other is that it was not driven solely by a desire to control sexual impropriety. Unlike most other communities contending with a victory girl "problem," leaders in Buffalo attempted, rather aggressively, to not only police women perceived as promiscuous but also to ban women of all classes, races, and reputations from standing or sitting at bars within taverns, saloons, nightclubs, and other venues that served alcohol. Even as other American communities sought to repress promiscuity, rarely did they go to the extreme of instituting a law restricting women's freedom that broadly.[20]

Notably, the campaign in Buffalo coincided with an alcohol-focused discourse and a concurrent prohibition movement, suggesting it was also motivated by the desire to curtail intemperance. More specifically, I argue that the drive to ban women from drinking at bars in Buffalo was as much an effort to mitigate women's intemperance as it was to curtail venereal disease, police women's sexuality, and reassert traditional delineations of gendered spaces.

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[19] For more on wartime repression of prostitution, competing strands of discourse surrounding female sexuality in the media, the campaign to mark as deviant the female body, and wartime sexual and gender anxieties as a prelude to the return to the cult of domesticity in the 1950s, see Amanda E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University, 2008). For more on victory girls and other sexually active women and girls as inadvertent agents of social change, see Amanda H. Littauer, *Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion Before the Sixties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

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Indeed, much of the rhetoric surrounding the Buffalo campaign was in line with the sentiments espoused by dry activists since the 1930s, which points to influence if not causation.

Reasserting Traditional Gender Divisions

That at least some segments of Buffalo's population were anxious about women's increasing visibility in the public sphere can be gleaned from the pages of local newspapers in the weeks leading up to the call for the ban. A fear-mongering article in *The Buffalo Evening News* reported that femininity was a "war casualty" in Britain due to the high number of British women working full time for the war effort. The article lamented that "women who work like men tend to live like men," and it decried British female factory workers who "congregate in local pubs" and keep pace with men "pint for pint."[21] For its part, *the Courier-Express* devoted a front-page story to a discussion of "the six million American women [that] have swapped aprons for slacks to turn out the deadly weapons of war," and the unsettling uncertainty surrounding the role they would play in a postwar economy:

> Surveys have been made, books written, and hundreds of speeches delivered on the subject. Politicians, educators, social workers, labor leaders, industrialists, and ordinary husbands look upon the feminine industrial worker as the big question mark of the postwar era.[22]

According to the article, a woman's ability to both work outside the home and be a "good" wife and mother was considered "probably the most hotly contested point" in the national discussion.[23]

[21] "Femininity War Casualty in Britain." *Buffalo Evening News*, January 28, 1944.
[22] "Plant Women Differ About Future Roles," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, February 13, 1944, p. 1.
[23] Ibid, p. 10.

In the Buffalo media, men in leadership positions overwhelmingly favored women's abdication of their industrial roles at the war's end. No man given voice in the *Courier-Express* expressed an opposing viewpoint. A district representative for American Federation of Labor, for instance, called women "a hazard to wage rates"; Hugh Thompson, regional director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations was adamant that "a woman's place is in the home"; and a foreman from Buffalo armament manufacturer Curtiss-Wright reportedly told the women war workers under his watch that giving up their industrial jobs to returning servicemen "was the patriotic thing to do."[24] Average citizens expressed similar sentiments. A letter from a soldier to the editor of *The Buffalo Evening News* recommended a state-sponsored, post-war worker compensation plan that would make hiring and retaining female workers less attractive from a financial standpoint. He wanted "to prevent the women from filling the men's heritage of work." "Men without jobs are men without pride or future security," the letter-writer warned.[25]

Dissenting opinions came exclusively from women interviewed. Mrs. Frank E. Huggins (her first name lost to the ages per the patriarchal naming custom of the time), an administrative professional at Curtiss-Wright, opined that gender should not have been the basis on which jobs were awarded. She argued women needed avenues for financial independence: "Undoubtedly, many of these girls will lose their husbands in the war," she said. "There are countless others who will have to support themselves. If they are capable, I don't see why they shouldn't work in industry, as well as anywhere else."[26]

[24] Ibid, p. 1, 10.
[25] "Soldier Asks Guarantee of Future Employment." *Buffalo Evening News*, February 8, 1944, 14.
[26] "Plant Women Differ About Future Roles," 1, 10.

In her statement, Huggins alluded to the fact that a considerable number of women had been working in fields other than heavy industry for decades. But for many women, participation in the pre-war economy was restricted to "feminine," lower-paid occupations with little opportunity for advancement, like that of secretary, social worker, teacher, nurse, or store clerk. Moreover, women were expected to give up their careers once they married in order to devote their full attention to their homes and families.[27] The particular brand of anxiety captured by the media was not simply a matter of women working outside the home—that had precedent. It was a matter of women intruding on highly masculinized spaces, like factories, in large numbers. The press also captured public anxiety surrounding women's occupation of well-paid jobs that in the past were given to men. And they captured the widespread unease that women might choose to work outside the home even after the wartime exigency subsided. Women who worked and sought fulfillment beyond a husband and children posed, in the early 1940s, a serious threat to American values tied up in a nuclear family, breadwinning husband, and dutiful, temperate, self-sacrificing wife.

As if to drive home for readers the absurdity of women in "masculine" work environments, the *Courier-Express* juxtaposed the femininity of women war workers with the harsh conditions of the space they daily inhabited. A "canopy of noises"— "screeches," "ripping sounds," whirs, "clatter," and "shrill" whistles—filled Buffalo's factories and turned women from reputable ladies into "serious-faced" laborers who toiled away bent "over machines, turning and twisting strange objects." In this environment, the article implied, nothing was delicate or

[27] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 189.

ladylike; “there [was] no ‘Mrs.’ Or ‘Miss,’ just Grace, Helen, Mary, and Stella.”[28] Still, the article conceded, “local workers say they prefer factory work to housework because the former is companionable while the latter is ‘dull and lonely.’”[29] In this concession, the article spoke to a nuance of the uneasiness surrounding women’s intrusion into the masculine world: if women tasted the freedom and camaraderie of life outside the home and enjoyed it, then maybe they, as a group, were not the self-sacrificing paragons of domesticity and American values the public so desperately wanted them to be. Perhaps the war had permanently altered American life, and that proved discomforting to those who had hoped for a return to normalcy when the fighting ceased. Further, the idea of women and working-class men mingling in factories at war’s end—in effect, blurring the boundaries between traditional male and female spaces and creating the potential for sexually charged co-ed work environments—was an affront to traditional morals.[30]

Factories were not the only masculinized spaces under siege in the 1940s. Taverns were also subject to “infiltration” by women. In the nineteenth century, taverns had been the exclusive territory of men. At a time when home life was defined by the feminine, they functioned as a sort of homosocial reprieve.[31] Only “low-class” female proprietors and women of ill repute would have been present in public drinking establishments before the twentieth century. Starting in the 1890s, that strict gender division began to change, and the sight of a woman drinking outside the home became increasingly common.[32] But that did not mean women were permitted to drink

[28] "Plant Women Differ About Future Roles," p. 1.
[29] Ibid, p. 10.
[30] D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*. D’Emilio and Freedman describe concerns over young women’s erotic, premarital heterosexual relationships as opportunities for work outside the home increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thrusting women and men together, as never before, on “downtown sidewalks and streetcars, in office, department stores, restaurants, and factories, and in parks at lunch hour,” p. 194.
[31] Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) p. 14.
[32] Ibid, p. 7.

with the same freedom as men, nor was their tippling accepted without controversy or criticism. Indeed, before Prohibition, it was easiest for women to drink publicly without severe impunity in female-only spaces and in certain heterosocial environments, like family-friendly beer gardens, when accompanied by a man. In an attempt to retain their masculine identities, many drinking venues before, during, and after Prohibition restricted women's access as a matter of policy. At taverns and saloons where women weren't explicitly prohibited, they were often relegated to a separate side entrance and tables in a back "family" room.[33] In many cases, however, social dictum was enough to keep women of the middle- and upper-classes, those that subscribed to traditional moral codes, and those otherwise concerned about their reputations away from public, masculine drinking environments like taverns altogether. In the 1930s, Katherine (Kit) Keane regularly ducked behind Gabel's bar on Hertel Avenue in Buffalo on her way home from work. There, she would sneak a shot of whiskey from a sympathetic barkeep who served her from the backdoor. It was not socially permissible for her to enter the establishment if she wanted to avoid sullying her reputation, but that did not stop her from indulging her desire for a drink.[34]

The high unlikelihood that prohibiting women from consuming alcohol at bars within taverns would remedy a venereal disease problem suggests that Buffalo public authorities had ulterior motives in calling for the ban. When asked by the *Courier-Express* for his thoughts on the issue, a bartender in support of the ban did not offer any opinion on its anticipated effect on venereal disease but did say "that women wouldn't sit at bars if they knew how they looked."[35]

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[33] Christine Sismodo, *America Walks Into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 222.

[34] This anecdote comes from an oral history conducted by this author with her grandfather, Francis Hartney. Keane was his mother's sister.

[35] "Mayor Orders Police Heads to Co-operate in War on Vice." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 1, 1944, p. 5.

Given that tavern owners stood to lose money by restricting half the population's access to their establishments insinuates that something more important to them than finances—namely, a desire to reinstate exclusively homosocial tavern environments—was at play.

Historian Catherine Gilbert Murdock points to numerous primary sources that "reveal grudging male resignation over the loss of the male drinking culture." Men in the early twentieth century were exasperated by the audacity of women who dared "put a foot on the brass railing" of a bar," which had functioned as "a symbol of masculinity emancipate" before women got ahold of it.[36] According to Murdock, men's mourning for male-exclusive taverns is exemplified in the words of New York humorist Don Marquis, who wrote in 1935:

> The last barrier is down; the citadel has been stormed and taken. There is no longer any escape, no hiding place, no hole or corner, no burrow or catacomb, no nook amongst the ruins of civilization, where the hounded male may seek his fellow and strut his stuff, safe from the atmosphere and presence of femininity. A man might as well do his drinking at home, with his wife and daughters; and there never was any fun in that. It was merely—drinking! It was merely a satisfaction of the physical side of alcohol.[37]

Born in 1878, Don Marquis was of a generation of men who bore witness to the liberation of the American woman from the private sphere. He saw, in his lifetime, women enter the electorate and activist women agitate for a greater role in American politics. Some men of his generation considered the growing visibility of women and their influence on public affairs an affront to traditional masculine institutions. They lamented the "effeminization" of American culture and governance, and feared the degeneracy of the nation. Marquis captured these anxieties in the

[36] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, p. 166, 14.

[37] Don Marquis, *Her Foot Is on the Brass Rail* (New York: Marchbanks, 1935) p. 7, 9. As quoted in Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, p. 166.

above snippet. Evidently, as late as 1935, taverns were considered by some the final bastion guarding men from the insidious reach of women.[38]

Murdock suggests that during the late-nineteenth century masculinity crisis, when traditional markers of manhood were threatened by shifting economic and social forces, another "easily attainable badge of masculinity"—drinking—gained symbolic meaning.[39] This same phenomenon may have been operating in Buffalo in 1944 as more women earned higher wages and entered fields once reserved for men. If Buffalo tavern operators were of the same mindset as Marquis, then their support for removing women from bars begins to make sense. At stake was a traditional way of life, an emblem of masculinity, and a revered American institution.

Mitigating Women's Intemperance

By the 1940s, censure of imbibing women had many decades of precedent in the United States. Its roots were multifaceted, and its expression over the years was nuanced. In Chicago during the first years of the twentieth century, refined women from the mid- and upper-echelons of society "evoked alarm by disrupting conventions of female respectability and challenging the notion that men alone could pursue sensuous pleasure in public."[40] In "Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture: Gender and Public Space in Fin-de-Siècle Chicago," Emily A. Remus recounts the outcry that erupted when "respectable" women began drinking publicly and visibly at drug store counters, women's club meetings, and tea rooms.[41] The difference between

[38] For more on fin de siècle masculinity and American politics, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
[39] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, p. 15.
[40] Remus, "Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture," p. 753.
[41] Ibid.

the turn-of-the-century situation in Chicago and the decades-later situation in Buffalo was the fact that Chicago women consumed alcohol in decidedly feminine spaces (in some cases, female-only spaces), making their public intemperance easier for society to swallow. Under these conditions, they helped quell critics who accused them of putting pleasure before familial obligation. Ultimately, Chicago women won the right to drink moderately in the company of other women and from a proscribed menu of "feminine" drinks—wine, liqueurs, and cocktails—without automatic loss of reputation.[42] Drinking hard liquor and beer in the company of strange men had yet to be an accepted practice. By the 1940s, however, their daughters were appearing in co-ed barrooms in greater numbers and with less concern about reputation—often to the dismay of older generations.

What connections can be drawn between the situation in Chicago, where respectable women won the right to indulge in refined forms of public drinking, and the situation in Buffalo, where young women pursued their right to drink socially with unfamiliar men? In both cases, "broader apprehensions about the changing place of…women in urban life" led to backlash. Remus argues that Chicago club women's agitation for a greater voice in city politics catalyzed condemnation of the publicly intemperate ladies and fueled the Chicago anti-tippling campaign.[43] In 1944, women in Buffalo were similarly demonstrating interest in amassing more equitable political rights. Nary a week before the *Courier-Express* published its front-page article announcing the proposed ban of women from city bars, it reported that former suffragist Anna Kelton Wiley, chair of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, was in Buffalo to advocate for

[42] Ibid, p. 763, 772.
[43] Ibid, p. 775.

a federal Equal Rights Amendment.[44] That same day, it reported that Buffalo-born-and-raised U.S. Representative Winifred Stanley, who represented New York State at-large in Congress, urged that an Equal Rights Amendment be brought to the House floor for debate.[45] The amendment, the *Courier-Express* reported, "would remove all distinctions between men and women in exercise of public functions and in employment" and "would eliminate every restriction on women in business, and, in short, would give them the same status as men."[46] Politically, women were posing a threat to the status quo.

The opprobrium concerning female intemperance thus had greater political significance then it would seem at first blush. According to historian Christine Sismodo, during Prohibition, "the young woman holding a cocktail in one hand and a 'torch of freedom' (Lucky Strike cigarette) in the other, came to symbolize the changing role of women in the early twentieth century," and by extension, the nascent renegotiation of the American family.[47] Remus similarly politicizes the act of women's drinking, arguing that it was an intrusion into the public realm previously occupied by men and men alone.[48] The drinking women thus represented change; she was a threat to a certain way of life.

Temperance Activism in the 1930s and 40s

Gender was a factor not only in alcohol's consumption but also its repression. In the early 1800s, women in the United States took up the cause of temperance in response to the notion that

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[44] "Equal Rights Advocate Speaks at Council Dinner." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, February 16, 1944, p. 8.
[45] "Miss Stanley Seeking Action on 'Equal Rights' Amendment." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, February 16, 1944, p. 5.
[46] The first quote comes from "Would Give Women More Privileges." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, January 25, 1944, p. 18. The second quote comes from "Miss Stanley Seeking Action on 'Equal Rights' Amendment," p. 5.
[47] Sismodo, Christine, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p. 222.
[48] Remus, "Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture," p. 753.

excessive male inebriation was to blame for widespread domestic abuse, poverty, abandonment, prostitution, venereal disease, and other issues directly concerning the home and family. In the 1830s and 1840s, influential men's temperance societies had formed female auxiliary groups that in some cases even came to represent majorities of their total memberships.[49] As the years marched on, women took to increasingly aggressive forms of temperance activism, which culminated in 1873 with the Women's Crusade, "when hundreds of thousands of women, in a paroxysm of activity and prayer, closed thirty thousand saloons and initiated a generation of female leadership in the temperance movement."[50] Their crusade helped solidify temperance as a women's issue and empower women in politics. It also spawned the creation of the all-female Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), whose political victories in the nineteenth and twentieth century were instrumental to the enactment of Prohibition.

The conventional narrative would have you believe that the temperance movement lost all steam with the end of Prohibition. In her social history of alcohol, temperance, and women's rights, for example, Murdock compresses 60 years of WCTU history post-repeal into *three* sentences.[51] Despite her beguiling brevity, one of those sentences concedes that by 1951 the WCTU boasted more women members than it had at any point prior to 1920, subtly evincing the fact that dry activism did not simply dissipate with the repeal of the 18th amendment. On the contrary, Americans, in not insignificant numbers, abstained from alcohol or at least believed that alcohol consumption was detrimental to society and deserving of regulation. In local-option elections throughout the 1930s, perhaps as many as 7,000 towns and counties voted to go dry as

[49] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 16-17.
[50] Ibid., 18.
[51] Ibid, 156.

a result.[52] Meanwhile, the WCTU along with the Anti-Saloon League, Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition Party, and scores of smaller temperance associations were still active and gaining members, despite the setback of repeal.[53] In 1944, the WCTU reported national membership of approximately 400,000—a gain of 12,052 members over the previous year.[54]

As the country careened toward war in the late 1930s, leadership in many of these organizations recognized the opportunity to push their controversial agendas on a country besieged by crisis, as they had during World War I. They justified their renewed campaigns, in large part, by arguing that vice conditions in communities near military camps and wartime production plants (like Buffalo) threatened the moral and physical wellbeing of the soldiers and defense workers.[55] In the late 1930s and early 1940s, their clamor and local-option electoral victories were sufficient to prompt one *New York Times* writer to ask if the country was on the brink of a dry renaissance.[56]

The WCTU, in particular, was anxious to leverage the war even before the United States entered into formal hostilities. In 1939, just weeks after Germany invaded Poland, a speaker at a WCTU meeting in a first-ring suburb of Buffalo implicated the organization's wartime designs: "In these days of so much war talk, we think of the word 'enlistment.' We too are at war against alcohol and women must enlist."[57] That same year, leaders at the WCTU national convention in Rochester, New York, (just 75 miles from Buffalo) called the return of Prohibition a certainty. In

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[52] "Says Prohibition Is on Way Back." *New York Times*, September 28, 1939, 26.
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[54] "WCTU Members Total 400,000." *New York Times*, November 4, 1944, p. 20.
[55] "Drys Launch Campaign." *New York Times*, February 5, 1942, p. 10.
[56] "Dry Renaissance?" *New York Times*, August 9, 1940, p. 14.
[57] Speech before a meeting of the Kenmore installation of the Erie County Women's Christian Temperance Union, Kenmore United Methodist Church, Kenmore, New York, September 20, 1939.

her keynote address, national WCTU president Ida B. Wise Smith urged delegates to push dry reforms locally and to hold politicians and law enforcement accountable for prosecuting violators of existing liquor laws. Smith further warned, rather portentously, that liquor industry propaganda was beginning to target American women and that all commercialized vice could be traced back to alcohol consumption.[58] By 1943, Smith announced a "new crusade to bring back total abstinence" to the United States.[59]

The juggernaut New York State WCTU, which had "dominated lobbying for state prohibition and enforcement laws" earlier in the century, was also particularly active and influential in the World Wat II temperance renaissance.[60] After the war broke, its leaders called first on state legislators and later on Congress to ban the sale of alcohol "at every mobilization camp, cantonment, Army and Navy station, and any place where young men are in training for defense work." The WCTU also asked for a law "forbidding the sale of liquor at any time to men in uniform of the United States" on the grounds that alcohol impairs judgment and precision of movement.[61] At the helm of the campaign was Mamie Colvin (a.k.a., Mrs. D. Leigh Colvin), an outspoken force in the temperance movement who had run as the Prohibition Party candidate for lieutenant governor of New York in 1918 and, later, as the first woman candidate for Congress from New York State. In 1939, she was, concurrently, president of the New York State WCTU and vice president of the national WCTU. She served both offices until taking office as national WCTU president in 1945.

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[58] "Says Prohibition Is on Way Back," 26.
[59] "New Crusade Opens Today to Bar Liquor." *New York Times*, December 3, 1943, 66.
[60] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 116.
[61] Elizabeth LaHines, "Seek Liquor Ban at Army Camps." *New York Times,* November 3, 1940, p. 64.

Colvin was supported in her efforts by lawyer and national WCTU legislative director Elizabeth Smart—another New York State resident. In her publicized appeal to Congress, Colvin hoped "to arouse men and women everywhere to the importance of protecting these boys, many of whom are away from home with its restraining influences for the first time."[62] Under her direction, WCTU members in New York State wrote their representatives in Congress calling for action on these and other demands such as instilling a wartime curfew for girls under 18.[63] Eventually, their influence, in concert with others, carried enough weight to merit two wartime dry bills before Congress: the Bryson Bill, calling for prohibition in the areas around war plants, and the Shepard-turned-O'Daniel Bill outlawing liquor in the vicinity of military bases.[64]

The New York State Liquor Authority was quick to recognize dry efforts to capitalize on the war. In its 1942 annual report to the governor and state legislature, the Liquor Authority warned "against the activities of groups who seek to make political capital of the war and pave the way for the return of prohibition."[65] In 1943—just seven months before the crusade to ban women in bars unfolded in Buffalo, and with two dry bills pending in Congress—the strength of the prohibition campaign was threatening enough to liquor interests and wet sensibilities to warrant a front-page story in *Variety* magazine capped by the alarm-raising banner headline "Dry Threat Scares Wets."[66] Calling the strength of the dry campaign "so great…that a vote in Congress right now on the liquor question would almost certainly bring about Prohibition," the article describes temperance activists ("bluenoses") as "far better organized for propaganda and

[62] Ibid.
[63] "Asks for Prohibition." *New York Times*, October 7, 1942, p. 27.
[64] "Dry Threat Scares Wets." *Variety*, June 23, 1943, p. 1.
[65] "Dry Groups Seen Capitalizing War." *New York Times*, April 4, 1942, p. 18.
[66] "Dry Threat Scares Wets," p. 1.

lobbying than the wet interests."[67] *Variety* went on to publicize the dry movement's strategic three-pronged attack:

> (1) To direct attention to the rise in juvenile delinquency and to blame it all one liquor.
>
> (2) To emphasize weekend absences from work and Monday morning sickness, with the charge that this is due to over-drinking in smoke-filled cabarets and nightclubs.
>
> (3) To make an 'effort' to protect 18-year-old draftees from 'liquor and prostitution' in the vicinity of military establishments.[68]

Readers, *Variety* admonished, had failed "to realize the potency and influence of the Women's [sic] Christian Temperance Union."[69]

In Upstate New York and the greater Buffalo area during World War II, support for temperance was equally palpable. In a 1944 letter to the editor of the *Buffalo Evening News*, a resident of Utica, New York, expounded that if the country were to collapse, it would not be at the hands of foreign enemies. Rather, he insisted, it would be due to "the decay of the foundations of our nation, the standards of our homes, what we teach our children through example, or by rotting and weakening ourselves both mentally and physically" thanks to "the liquor racket and the moral decay it has wrought upon our youth" in the years since the end of Prohibition.[70] There was also an active Erie County chapter of the WCTU based in Buffalo as well as smaller chapter-affiliated WCTU installations in communities throughout Buffalo's home county, Erie.[71] And some seventy-three miles away, the prestigious Chautauqua Institution

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] "Pegler View of Taverns Used as Point for Drys," *Buffalo Evening News*, February 19, 1944.
[71] It may be worth noting that the WCTU can trace its origins to neighboring Chautauqua County. In 1873, a massive women's protest against alcohol abuse started in Fredonia, New York, some 46 miles from Buffalo. The

annually hosted National WCTU Day, where no doubt Buffalo-area drys could be found engaging in temperance activism.[72]

The women who populated the Erie County chapter just prior and during World War II were not idle members; they held monthly meetings and sent delegates to the state WCTU conventions, taught temperance lessons in local churches, gave public speeches on the evils of alcohol, conducted community outreach activities (such as organizing concessions at the annual county fair in Hamburg), and wrote hundreds of letters and made phone calls to the media, state and federal public officials, and the voting public in support of the national and state WCTU platform.[73]

It is clear that members of the Erie County chapter were dialed in to the political agenda and directives issued by the national and state WCTU bodies. After returning home from one state convention, chapter president Ellen Saxton called getting the state plan before the locals as rapidly as possible her first order of business. "They have responded well," she reported in her annual address, "and the standards of efficiency show that everyone tried to live up to the plans as outlined by the state."[74] The New York State WCTU and its aggressive prohibition campaign was helmed at the time by Colvin, who was in personal contact with Erie county chapter leadership. In 1939 (and perhaps other years as well), she attended the annual address of the Erie

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following summer the women who participated in the protest reconvened for a meeting at the Chautauqua Institution, approximately 73 miles from Buffalo. There they planned for the national convention in Cleveland that gave rise to the WCTU in 1874. "Early History," Woman's Christian Temperance Union, accessed March 6, 2017, https://www.wctu.org/history.html.

[72] "Urges Dry Fight During War." *New York Times*, July 20, 1940, p. 30.

[73] Speech, Ellen A. Saxton, "Annual Address of the County President," Erie County Women's Christian Temperance Union, Buffalo, NY, September 7, 1939, box 1, folder 3, Mss. C80-2, Buffalo History Museum Research Library.

[74] Ibid.

County chapter president. While there, it seems safe to assume that she would have incited the local women to do their part.

A few weeks after Saxton's 1939 address, Erie chapter members made the short trip to Rochester, New York, where that year the national WCTU held its annual convention. There, they heard President Smith urge her temperate flock to vote for dry causes and support dry candidates in local elections. They heard her confidently declare the impending return of Prohibition. And they heard her warn that American women and youth were the latest victims of the devious liquor industry.[75] That same year, members of the Erie County chapter answered the charges issued by the national and state bodies by agitating for the closing of taverns and saloons before 3 a.m. and on Sundays. For their part, they attended a hearing on the issue before the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) board and distributed petitions in favor of early closure. The women collected somewhere in the vicinity of a thousand names in support of the cause.[76]

It was not unusual for Erie County chapter members to solicit grassroots support for temperance causes from their non-WCTU friends and neighbors. They were incited to do so by county-level WCTU leadership, who energetically called on them to enlist "fellow Christians," especially women, in the "war against alcohol."[77] Nor did members of the local chapter limit themselves to strictly dry issues; they also embraced anti-vice measures that could be tied to alcohol consumption like gambling and juvenile delinquency. In 1939, President Saxton urged the audience to defeat a state bill authorizing pari-mutuel ("off-track") wagering on horse races.

[75] "Say Prohibition Is Back," *New York Times*, September 28, 1939, p. 26.
[76] Saxton, "Annual Address of the County President," 1939.
[77] Speech before a meeting of the Kenmore installation of the Erie County Women's Christian Temperance Union, Kenmore United Methodist Church, Kenmore, New York, September 20, 1939, box 1, folder 3, Mss. C80-2, Buffalo History Museum Research Library.

Her recommendations for action included getting women in members' respective churches to vote against the bill and to "Stir up the men, too."[78]

There are notable ideological ligatures between the 1944 Buffalo campaign to restrict women's drinking habits and the concurrent temperance movement waged locally and nationally. These similarities suggest that the Buffalo campaign was influenced by temperance sentiments. In February 1944, Judge Kelly argued that restricting women's access to alcohol would help the war industry's growing absenteeism problem. Per the insights of an unnamed war plant official, Judge Kelly reported, the ban "would have a deterring effect on tavern parties that keep workers at home 'the morning after.'"[79] The absenteeism argument was also employed just a month prior by the WCTU and other temperance associations in support of a federal wartime ban on the manufacture, sale, or distribution of alcohol. In January, it was a major topic of debate at a House judiciary subcommittee hearing on bill HR 2082—a measure to outlaw alcoholic beverages for the duration of the war.

Over the course of the congressional hearing, lawyer, National WCTU Legislative Director (and New York State native) Elizabeth Smart presented to members of Congress witnesses who testified to the deleterious effects of weekend and pay day drinking sprees on war workers' attendance and job performance. Among them was food chemist Wilbur Dubois who surmised that excessive drinking daily caused 120,000 war workers absences. A second witness, executive secretary of the Alabama Temperance Alliance Earl Hotalen, attested that his state's significant absentee problem was reduced to normal levels as a result of many localities' decision

[78] Saxton, "Annual Address of the County President," 1939.
[79] "Commissioner Demands Daily Report by Aide," *Buffalo Evening News*, February 29, 1944.

to go dry in recent elections. The third witness was Mamie Colvin's equally fervent husband, Dr. D. Leigh Colvin, who had been a presidential nominee in 1936 on the Prohibition Party ticket. At the hearing, he spoke vehemently of the security threat alcohol posed, stating before the subcommittee "Whatever diminishes the efficiency of labor, lessens production, or causes stoppages of work postpones victory, causes unnecessary deaths of our boys, is an enemy of our country."[80]

The testimony of the national WCTU president, Ida Smith, under whom Mamie Colvin served as vice president, further tied Buffalo to the hearing. Of the threat of alcohol, Smith said:

> In all civilian areas, and particularly in and around defense plants, the present, largely unrestricted sale of alcoholic beverages has become a serious menace. By the computation of the Internal Revenue Bureau, approximately 375,000 retail outlets for the sale of alcoholic beverages of one kind or another are today a constant threat to efficiency, a counting potential source of sabotage through perverted thought, loose speech, and alcohol-inspired acts on the part of thousands who daily become intoxicated in these taverns, bar rooms, and places of liquor relaxation.[81]

In this statement, Smith painted a picture of a generic industrial American city, but she could very well be alluding to Buffalo, where such fears rang true among moral authorities. Notably, she referenced Charles S. Mattison, director of personnel at aircraft manufacturer Curtiss Wright Company of Buffalo in her testimony. As fodder for her argument Smith recounted Mattison's stated belief that "the question of the availability of liquor and beer in the vicinity of an aircraft plant engaged solely in the manufacture of military shipments is a very serious matter."[82] Perhaps Mattison was the unnamed war plant official whose opinion informed Judge Kelly's

[80] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee No. 4, *Ban on Alcoholic Beverages to Reduce Absenteeism and Speed War Effort.* 78th Cong., 2nd session, January 13, 1944, 2.
[81] Ibid., 25.
[82] Ibid., 26.

theory that banning women from drinking at bars would reduce Buffalo's defense industry absentee problem.

There is not, however, a smoking gun that points to the WCTU's direct involvement in the Buffalo campaign against women in bars. The discourse surrounding the campaign does, however, reflect a preoccupation on the part of officials and the public with drinking women. Further, the actions taken in Buffalo appear to be in line with the contemporaneous state and national WCTU crusade to protect soldiers, war workers, women, and children from the detriments of alcohol and eradicate vice around military camps and war factories. It also seems likely that the Erie County WCTU chapter would have taken a stance on a local issue with such strong ties to their cause. Given their previous activities, one could imagine them, at the very least, writing in to public officials or encouraging the middle-class, club-minded women they socialized with in church and at school functions to support the proposed ordinance. Unfortunately, the media makes no mention of WCTU involvement, and I have not uncovered WCTU records from 1944 to substantiate this theory. But a statement from President Saxton in her 1939 annual address gives me pause: "The best things in life are accomplished without noise. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union does not make a great deal of noise but it is at work somewhere at all times."[83] Perhaps further investigation will reveal and amplify their quiet work.

Policing the Promiscuous Woman Drinker

The *Courier-Express* helped propagate the idea that intemperate women were to blame for servicemen's contraction of venereal disease when it published without criticism an Erie

[83] Saxton, "Annual Address of the County President," 1939.

County Health Department official's claim that Buffalo had seen a serious uptick in venereal disease cases in1943, 83 percent of which "were contracted from girls in taverns."[84] The very wording of this assertion is indicative of bias, since it implies that women are the polluted vehicles from which innocent men catch disease while ignoring that a woman had to be infected by a man before she could infect another. The objective reader might also ask: how did the Health Department determine the source of infection? Did authorities simply ask servicemen where they contracted their disease? If that was the case, the datum should be treated as suspect, since it is hard to imagine a sexually active person outside of a monogamous relationship could confidently identify who passed to him an unseeable microbe. Further evidence that the reality of the venereal disease problem was disproportionate to the uproar is a statement eventually issued by Dr. I. Jay Brightman, director of the Buffalo Syphilis Control Bureau, "that Buffalo compares favorably with any large city in the matter of venereal disease…The picture is serious but not alarming."[85] Dr. Nelson G. Russell, chair of the Advisory Health Board, also believed the initial reports to be "exaggerated."[86] The situation also begs the question: who did the *Courier-Express* mean when it categorized "girls" as the source of infection? The press directly linked instances of infection only to specific houses of prostitution in the city. Yet, it extended blame to all women in taverns.[87]

Through March 1944, the *Courier-Express* continued its campaign to paint women as villains. When it discussed women at bars, they were generally referred to as "victory girls" who "picked up" or aggressively initiated the "pickups" that led to infection. Servicemen were

[84] "City Will Ask Legislation Banning Girls From Bars," p. 1.
[85] "Move to Ban Women at Bars Supported by Police Drive." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 5, 1944, p. 1-B, 2-B.
[86] "Hotels Named by V-Girls Face Loss of Licenses." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 7, 1944, p. 4.
[87] "City Will Ask Legislation Banning Girls From Bars," p. 1.

described as having "*suffered* venereal disease as a result of 'pickups' [emphasis added]."[88] The suffering of infected women or women who were detained by police without cause and subjected to invasive health testing, was never mentioned. Soldiers, moreover, were never described in derogatory, value-laden terms for their sexual proclivities, while females observed at bars were referred to as "loose women" whose "growing practice of…drinking at bars" was an "evil" that needed to be stamped out.[89] In one analogy, which likened a soldier incapacitated with venereal disease to a soldier "felled by an enemy bullet," women were implicitly compared to foreign enemies of war from whom servicemen needed protection.[90]

As a result of the newspaper's "exposé of the results of women drinking at bars," and the concern it incited, the police took organized, purposeful action against women—but not men.[91] In a single night of police raids in early March 1944, five women, only one of whom was under age 18, were arrested, "two in a Pearl St. tavern with soldiers, and three others in separate rooms of a West Huron St. hotel, each with a sailor." The women admitted to having met the men in nearby taverns. Notably, the women found in hotels rooms were not prostitutes; they were not charged with solicitation but with "outraging public decency," despite the fact that they were partaking in a private act.[92] Meanwhile, the primary transgression of the two women arrested in the tavern seems to have been admitting under questioning that they had been treated for venereal disease in the past. Nonetheless, in a move that amounts to a twentieth-century scarlet

[88] The first quote comes from "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 3, 1944, p. 16. The second quote comes from "Liquor Board Making Check on All Suspected Taverns." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 4, 1944, p. 1.
[89] Quoted terms come from "Liquor Board Making Check on All Suspected Taverns," p. 1 and "Vice Crusade Opens as Mayor, Civic Leaders Demand Cleanup." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 5, 1944, p. 12-B.
[90] "Bar Ordinance Action Meets Postponement." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 19, 1944, p. 9A.
[91] "Move to Ban Women at Bars Supported by Police Drive," p. 1-B.
[92] Ibid.

letter, the names of all five women were published in the *Courier-Express* as if they were common criminals, subjecting them to public embarrassment. Their military co-participants in vice were not only *not* named, they were not arrested.[93] In fact, for weeks, the only mention in the *Courier-Express* of males being arrested in connection with the vice crusade was a report on the arrest of two unnamed boys, 15 and 17, charged with disorderly conduct for purchasing alcohol at a tavern on Lovejoy Street—a legitimate police response to a clear violation of the law against underage drinking.[94] No man was arrested for sexual activity until March 16, when the newspaper reported on "the first recent case in which a man found with a woman had been jailed" for outraging public decency.[95] It is worth noting, however, that the man jailed was likely not a soldier, since the article does not identify him, as it had others. And given his name—Wahia Molamed—it is possible that that he was either a recent immigrant or not white. In any case, both factors—his civilian status and his racial or ethnic categorization by the arresting officers—may have had more to do with his detainment than the officers' notion of gender egalitarianism.[96]

On March 5, 1944, police arrested an 18-year-old woman—her name, like the five women before her, made public by the media—for outraging public decency after she was discovered in a hotel room with a soldier she met earlier that night at a tavern. The soldier was free to leave. The *Courier-Express* conceded that the promiscuous women targeted in the vice campaign, like this particular 18-year-old, were not prostitutes according to any official definition of the word. Quoting a national report *Techniques of Law Enforcement Against*

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[93] Ibid.
[94] "Liquor Dealers' Leader Facing Grand Jury Call." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 9, 1944, p. 6.
[95] "Records of Court Prepared for Study by Grand Jurors." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 16, 1944, p. 24.
[96] Ibid.

Prostitution, the article said the women were "simply seeking a 'good time,'" and preferred "an evening with a serviceman." Buffalo Police Lieutenant Albert Valkwitch expounded:

> To some of these *crazy* young girls every man in uniform is a hero. And the money angle doesn't enter into their promiscuity. They know the soldiers don't have much money and are willing to spring for the drinks, and then in the flush of excitement think it is smart and patriotic to submit fully to their escorts [emphasis added].[97]

The *Courier-Express* thus admitted that these *women* (to call them girls is inaccurate, given that most of them were 18 years or older) were simply exercising their freedom to engage in sexual activity. They did not accept money for sexual services. In fact, women were often observed purchasing drinks *for* men, presumably with the money they earned in the wartime labor market. In this way, they starkly contrasted with "b-girls," who were paid by bar owners to solicit drinks from men.[98] To moral crusaders concerned with upholding the traditional American values encapsulated in the nuclear family, that picture was unsettling. They thus leveraged the venereal disease threat to legitimize the repression of women's freedoms when, in fact, they were actually "concerned by the promiscuous attitude" of drinking women.[99]

If the behavior of law enforcement and city officials is any indication, women in taverns were considered pariahs. Judge Kelly, who treated the women brought before him in court with a level of contempt generally reserved for hardened criminals, is a good example. A 24-year-old woman war worker, arrested for outraging public decency after she was discovered in a hotel room with a soldier, appeared before Judge Kelly in court. She admitted engaging in

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[97] "Police Ask Girl Quiz at Tavern Doors." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 6, 1944, p. 1.
[98] For more on B-girls, see Littauer, Amanda H., *Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion Before the Sixties*, 2015, chapter two.
[99] "Police Ask Girls Quiz at Tavern Doors." Buffalo Courier-Express, March 6, 1944, p.1.

promiscuous sexual activity and having been treated for venereal disease in the past. In the words of Judge Kelly, those things rendered her "not entitled to any consideration at all." During her court appearance, he proceeded to question her aggressively and accusatorily, as if she had been soliciting, despite evidence and an arrest charge to the contrary: "Where do you operate? How do you make your contacts?" he demanded. "I didn't. I was just drinking," was the woman's reply. [100]

Meanwhile, an article buried in section two of the same *Courier-Express* issue offered the perspective of professional hygienist Helen V. Kirby, who concluded that juvenile delinquency was the primary source of the problem. If correct, banning women from bars would have done little to curb the spread of venereal disease. And yet authorities counterintuitively proposed that women as a whole be stripped of their right to occupy public spaces as the first line of defense. Kirby also expressed concern that, of the relatively smaller number of teenage females who were infected, there were "many cases among 13 and even ten-year-old girls."[101] In another article, a *Courier-Express* reporter observed soldiers in taverns dating, buying drinks for, and otherwise acquainting themselves with girls young enough to wear bobby socks and carry schoolbooks with titles like *Algebra for Beginners*.[102] Ironically, the prospect of female children being raped—potentially by men in uniform—did not register with the police or the *Courier-Express* as a social problem in need of publicity or vocal condemnation.

Instead, the *Courier-Express* implied that another group of women were at fault for their daughters' and sons' forays into unseemly activities, which added a new layer of fault to

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[100] "Judge Kelly to Take Lead in Bar Ordinance Crusade," p. 5.
[101] "Social Disease Spreads Here Among Youths." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, February 29, 1944, p. 2-B.
[102] "Drinks Served Readily to Girls in Bobby Socks." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 5, 1944, p. 2-B.

women's vilification. If women spent less time at work or in taverns, children would have been better supervised and less susceptible to problem behavior or victimhood. Paraphrasing Captain Raymond J. Smith of the Buffalo Police Department, the newspaper reported that "the source of the juvenile delinquency problem is the young mother whose interest is centered on her war job instead of her family" and that it was "far more patriotic for the mother to care for her child than to work in a war plant."[103]

The president of the Buffalo Women's City Club also attributed vice conditions to absentee mothers, opining that "plants should see to it that there is someone at home with the children before they hire women for night work."[104] *Courier-Express* writer Kathleen Norris agreed that any time a woman spent outside the home, whether at work or in a bar, was detrimental to family stability and the wellbeing of American husbands and children. In one advice column, "Wife's Carless Conduct Worries Soldier Husband," Norris responded to a soldier's letter in which he decried his young wife for not writing him enough or with proper adoration while he was overseas. Instead, he accused her of frequenting taverns with an older, single female friend who had "plenty of money and…plenty of cocktails." He admitted to hating this friend and reported that he "can't sleep nights worrying about how the older girl will get hold of her and influence her." In response to the soldier's concerns, Norris chastised every woman with the audacity to seek fulfillment outside the home, issuing a dire warning:

> Today gives every wife an opportunity to be cruel or to be kind. She may either build not for the dignified, happy home life of the peaceful days to come, or she can snatch a little dangerous and ephemeral excitement and ruin her chances of ever finding real happiness as a wife.

[103] "Home Neglect Called Source of Vice Crime." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 12, 1944, p. 3-B.
[104] "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads," p. 16.

To seek personal pleasure, to pursue any degree of autonomy, was "careless," or so insinuated the headline the *Courier-Express* tacked on to Norris's column.[105] In a similarly maternal vein, the president of the Women's Civic Club of South Buffalo believed women ought to be willing to give up their right to patronize a bar in order to protect at-risk young people. To the *Courier-Express* she said, "I don't know to what extent bars are used by women, but if they are used to any great extent by young people, I think it would be a good move to have them closed to women."[106] When the opinions of these women and others like them are taken together, along with the glaring absence of strong dissenting voices, it is clear that the newspaper was promulgating in its pages the notion that women drinking in bars was deviant behavior, regardless of whether or not it led to sexual promiscuity or spread venereal disease, because it detracted from her commitment to home and family.

In fact, the vast majority of women interviewed in the media indicated that they favored the ban because they felt that it was inappropriate for women to be drinking at bars. Venereal disease was a non-issue. "In the past a woman would have been horrified to think of standing or sitting at a bar with men," the president of the Democratic Club of 1,000 Women and of the Ladies' Aid Society of the Working Boys' home lamented to the *Courier-Express*.[107] Mrs. Martin F. Huber, president of the Buffalo Council of the Parent-Teacher Association, also supported the ordinance, saying the act of standing or sitting at a bar "robs a woman of her

[105] Norris, Kathleen. "Wife's Careless Conduct Worries Soldier Husband." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 12, 1944, p. 5-D.
[106] "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads," p. 16.
[107] "Bar Ban Urged by Leaders of Women's Clubs." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 4, 1944, p. 4.

refinement." She insinuated that drinking immoderately in a heterosocial environment effectively demoted a daughter or wife from a respectable family to working-class level or worse.[108]

Club women, who almost certainly hailed from the middle and upper classes, opposed women's flagrant public drinking for good reason. During the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, women's supposed moral fortitude (characterized, in part, by abstention) was a cornerstone of their argument for greater political rights. When significant numbers of women during Prohibition came out in favor of repeal of eighteenth amendment and took up the habit of public drinking, that cornerstone was compromised. According to Murdock, "It should not be surprising that many women who came of age in politically in the first two decades of the twentieth century would continue to see liquor as the enemy of their sex…Women had argued for enfranchisement in the belief that they were more moral than men and thus would cleanse politics."[109] For Buffalo's politically active women, then, women's public, disreputable drinking may have been perceived as threatening to the (mythical) moral superiority that gave them weight in public affairs. It then makes sense that their decision to support the ban did not hinge on the likelihood of reducing venereal disease rates. Instead, their rationale for supporting the ban dripped with classism in an apparent attempt to distance themselves, as politically minded, reputable women, from the sort of women who allowed themselves to be seen at bars.

That temperance sentiments and WCTU activism may have had some influence on women's clubs' support of the proposed ordinance is not farfetched given the affinity the WCTU and women's clubs have long shared. In the 1920s, women voters overwhelming supported

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[108] "Padlocking Threat Voiced in Crusade Against Vice." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 2, 1944, p. 10.
[109] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, p. 131.

Prohibition and women's clubs viewed Prohibition as "an essential" women's issue.[110] After repeal, their ties were not completely broken despite distancing on the part of women's club hoping to preserve their political relevance. In fact, the 1940 annual convention of the New York State WCTU featured speeches by leaders from the State Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Council of Women, at which they likely heard about the state WCTU concerns over wartime vice and its resolution to protect men in uniform from the dangers of social drinking.[111] And in 1943 at a meeting in New York City called to "develop a program of post-war cooperation," a cross-section of leaders of prominent women's organizations called "for a united front on the part of women to promote a better post-war world."[112] Among the select group of attendees were President Smith of the national WCTU, Ella Boole of the World's WCTU, and representatives from the Council of Women of the United States, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, United Council of Church Women, National League of Women Voters, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Council of Jewish Women, National and World Young Women's Christian Association, and General Federation of Women's Clubs. Convention attendees discussed, among other issues, absenteeism among women war workers. They were also urged by Boole to support the WCTU "in working for God and home," even if they couldn't support them in full-fledged Prohibition.[113] Perhaps because the proposed Buffalo ordinance targeted "the habitual bar-lounger, bar-drinking female," making it

[110] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 114-115.
[111] "Would Regulate Sale of Liquor to Troops." *New York Times*, September 29, 1940, 50.
[112] "Women Map Plans for Better World: National and World Leaders Agree That They Must Meet New Challenge After War." *New York Times*, October 28, 1943, 26.
[113] Ibid.

dry-minded without being explicitly in support of Prohibition, helps explains women's club representatives united in support of the measure.[114]

In the end, public authorities failed to pass the city ordinance. But the uproar combined with the threat of police intervention did manage to convince some tavern owners to enact the ban extralegally by instituting policies that excluded women to varying degrees and, in other cases, by questioning female patrons at tavern doors.[115] One such tavern owner boasted to Judge Kelly, who in turn boasted to the *Courier-Express*, that he removed the stools from his tavern to discourage women from loitering at the bar because, he believed, that "while men will stand at bars women won't." To Judge Kelly, a prominent figure with the power to sway local politics, enacting the ban via social regulation by making women feel unwelcome at bars was "a sensible idea."[116]

Hotel owners, too, employed tactics to limit women's sexual freedoms by requiring women with servicemen to produce proof of marriage before allowing them to check into a room.[117] In this way, Helen Z. M. Rodgers, then president of the Zonta Club of Buffalo, got her way. "I don't care for the idea of women sitting at a bar, but I do not like discriminatory laws against women," she told the *Courier-Express*. "Public opinion should be the factor to enforce a thing like that, not legislation."[118] The police, too, recognized that no standing law gave them authority to remove adult women from bars, but that did not stop one police lieutenant from articulating his and his colleagues' intention "to do all we can to discourage the activities of the

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[114] "Women's Clubs Against Women 'Bar Drinkers.'" *Buffalo Criterion*, March 11, 1944, 3; "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads," p. 16.
[115] "Police Ask Girl Quiz at Tavern Doors," p. 1, 4.
[116] "Mayor Orders Police Heads to Co-operate in War on Vice," p. 5
[117] "Police Ask Girl Quiz at Tavern Doors," p. 1.
[118] "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads," p. 16.

so-called 'victory girls.'"[119] Goode and Ben-Yehuda call this escalation of law enforcement indicative of a moral panic. In their research, they found that "police officers attempt to broaden the scope of law enforcement and often increase its intensity and justify punitive and overly zealous actions on the basis of the enormity of the threat the society faces."[120]

Denouement

The tenor of discussion in the *Courier-Express* about the ban began to shift around March 8, 1944, when Dr. Brightman began backtracking on his insistence that the venereal disease problem was cause for alarm: "We expected an increase of the diseases because of the tremendous social and emotional upheaval…We have observed that increase, but it is much less than it might have been and has been confined to the civilian population."[121] According to Brightman, venereal disease rates in the military were actually the lowest of any war in history, which he attributed to the military's proactivity. "They consider every case a major problem," he told the *Courier-Express* (a fact to which the female bar patrons harassed by Buffalo police could firmly attest).[122] At least one woman fought the legitimacy of her arrest in court, "claiming nothing occurred in public to substantiate the charge public decency was outraged."[123] Similarly, when the blood test results of three women arrested under suspicion of spreading venereal disease came back negative, law enforcement's efforts to curb women's behavior were further cramped.[124]

[119] "Liquor Board Making Check on All Suspected Taverns." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 4, 1944, p. 4.
[120] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, p. 25.
[121] "Blitz Is Urged on Rendezvous for Vice Here," p. 20.
[122] Ibid.
[123] "Movies in Taverns to Aid Crusade Against Disease." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 15, 1944, p. 20.
[124] "Illicit Operations Here Curtailed by Vice Quiz."

That is not to say that the campaign against female autonomy completely ended by March 8; it is only to say that other voices began to work their way into the conversation at that time. In fact, as late as March 13, 1944, the *Courier-Express* ran the headline "Many Oppose Bar Drinking by Women," which was a conclusion the newspaper reached after conducting a scientifically unsound survey of 30 "impartial" passersby in downtown Buffalo—of whom 24 reportedly supported the ban. Not surprisingly, given the ban's actual irrelevance to the venereal disease problem (despite the rhetoric espoused by moral crusaders), the survey did not ask participants if they thought the ban was necessary to curb the spread of disease among military men; they were asked simply if they thought women should be permitted to drink alcohol at bars. According to the article, only one participant—a woman—voiced opposition to the ban, arguing that a "girl can act like a lady regardless of whether she is drinking in the back room or at the bar" and questioning why an ordinance against misbehaving men was not also proposed.[125] She, however, was the exception. The majority of respondents' answers reflected the fact that the impetus to deny women the right to drink at bars arose from a desire to enforce traditional markers of respectability and strict gender divisions: "Those without escorts should not even care to sit at the bar," was one man's response. "When my grandmother was a young lady she wouldn't dare sit at the bar, and she visited beer gardens only with paps and mams," replied another man interviewed. "A woman seated at a bar gives a bad impression," said a woman respondent. "If she enjoys drinking, she should be content to sit at a table in a lady-like manner."

Indeed, much of the anxiety surrounding women's intemperance and their invasion of masculine spaces—bars included—was rooted in the fear that women were, in fact, *not* content

[125] "Many Oppose Bar Drinking by Women." *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 13, 1944, p. 9.

with the rigid feminine roles, gender boundaries, and maternal obligations society had been prescribing for generations.[126]

Conclusion

The 1944 campaign against women at bars in Buffalo was short-lived (having been confined, roughly, to between February 29 and April 2 of that year) but intense while it lasted. In that sense, it fulfills one of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's five criteria of a moral panic: volatility. The four remaining criteria—concern, hostility, consensus, and disproportion—were also arguably met by the events of 1944 and were generally engendered by the media and moralists speaking through the media.[127] Concern, for instance, can be read in the interviews of public officials who early on in the saga spoke of venereal disease as a dire threat to the U.S. military and the Buffalo community. This concern filtered down to private citizens. Church sermons and community group meetings addressed the perceived emergency, and, more measurably, the informal survey the *Courier-Express* conducted demonstrated overwhelming unease that women were patronizing bars in significant numbers.

Criterion three, hostility, was directed toward female tavern patrons considered to be both disease carriers and sexual aggressors. To a lesser extent, hostility surfaced against working women or any woman who spent too much time outside the home, to the perceived detriment of all the unsupervised young people partaking in "vice" activities. Moral entrepreneurs stereotyped

[126] Ibid.
[127] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, p. 37-43.

the autonomous woman as deviant and characterized her as the villain on whom perceived immorality could be blamed.

Consensus (the fourth criterion) among a significant segment of the community was explicitly stated by the *Courier-Express* when it published that its "exposé of vice and the spread of venereal disease among members of the armed forces brought a citywide demand for corrective measures including an ordinance prohibiting the serving of alcoholic drinks to unescorted women at bars."[128] Specifically, Police Commissioner Cannan and Judge Kelly came out early in favor of the ban, implicating victory girls as the menace that needed to be controlled. Soon, women's club and community organization leaders came on board,[129] as did rank-and-file police, who stepped up their enforcement efforts against women in taverns and hotels, and some tavern operators, who took measures to make women feel unwelcome in their establishments.

Lastly, disproportion, the fifth criterion, was a fact admitted to by contemporaries involved. Buffalo's mayor at the time, Joseph Kelly, referred to the uproar as hysteria, and Dr. Brightman eventually contradicted his earlier claims that venereal disease was a U.S. security threat spreading rapidly in Buffalo. He eventually admitted the diseases were largely confined to the civilian population and low, considering the stress of wartime. This suggests early reports and the conclusions public officials drew from them were exaggerated. The situation can also be interpreted as disproportionate in the sense that it generated dozens of news articles over the course of a handful of weeks, while more serious, contemporary problems—like the statutory

[128] "Illicit Operations Here Curtailed by Vice Quiz."
[129] "Ban on Women at Bars Favored by Club Heads," p. 16.

rape of female children, as evident by their contraction of venereal disease—did not warrant an exposé in the opinion of *Courier-Express* editors.

In addition to being a full-blown if short-lived moral panic, analysis of the campaign to ban women from drinking at bars in Buffalo makes an important intervention into the historiography of victory girls. Where other historians have seen the policing of women during wartime as primarily or even solely an effort to control sexual deviance, it is my conclusion that at least in Buffalo, and likely elsewhere, other factors were at play. Specifically, the campaign was as much about the evils of alcohol and the impropriety of female drinking in heterosocial environments as it was the evils of extramarital sex. Further research into temperance activities in communities where similar victory girl crusades unfolded could yield additional insight.

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