

ARTICLE

“Pastor was Trapped”: Queer Scandal and Contestations Over Christian Anti-Vice Reform

Katie M. Hemphill* 

University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA

*Corresponding author. E-mail: khemphill@email.arizona.edu

Abstract:

In November 1915, popular Baltimore minister and anti-vice reformer Kenneth G. Murray became enmeshed in scandal after he allegedly attempted to engage in sex with another man at the Y.M.C.A. The revelation of Murray’s alleged queerness became a flashpoint in ongoing contestations over anti-vice reform and the legitimacy of using state power to enforce Christian morality. In the hands of his political opponents, most notably H.L. Mencken, Murray’s apparent homosexuality became a tool for vindicating long-standing assertions that men who campaigned for state-enforced morality were hypocritical and motivated in their activism by sexual and gendered pathologies. In tracing print reactions to Murray’s public exposure, this essay argues that homosexuality proved to be a powerful political weapon against progressive anti-vice campaigning like Murray’s because it was capable of reconciling competing stereotypes of religiously motivated anti-vice reformers as simultaneously overly sexual and impotent, feminized and pathologically masculine. The Murray scandal also opened the door for critiques of muscular Christianity, which made it an early example of how the sexual diagnosis of religious figures and reformers could be used to discredit social and religious activism.

Keywords: anti-vice reform; LGBT history; muscular Christianity; H.L. Mencken; Progressive Era

The scandal that ended Reverend Kenneth G. Murray’s ministerial career began on November 23, 1915, in a dormitory room at Baltimore’s Central Branch Y.M.C.A building. Murray, the pastor of the Fayette Street Methodist Episcopal Church, was a well-known figure in Baltimore. Although he had arrived in the city from rural western Maryland less than a decade earlier, he had become a popular and active minister who rose through the ranks of local reformist circles to become a leader in anti-vice campaigns. In his capacity as a board member for the Baltimore Society for the Suppression of Vice and the secretary of the city’s Ministerial Union, he had spent years lobbying for the closure of brothels and disreputable saloons in the neighborhood around his church. In the fall of 1915, he and his compatriots in the anti-vice movement seemed on the verge of

realizing their moral vision. They had witnessed the closure of the last of Baltimore's tolerated brothels in September. With the red-light districts finally crushed, Murray and his allies in the anti-vice movement looked forward to ushering in a new era of revivalism in the city.

Murray would not be around to see it. Shortly after his visit to the Y.M.C.A on that Tuesday before Thanksgiving, "disclosures of a revolting and unprintable character" began to circulate about his alleged conduct with men at the institution.¹ Within weeks, the Methodist Church would defrock him, and Baltimore's grand jury would indict him on assault charges related to "a serious indiscretion" with a young man.² Murray was forced to flee the city along with his wife and daughter in order to avoid arrest, but the scandal that surrounded him lingered long after his departure. For years after Murray left Baltimore, his name was so associated with homosexuality that one local writing about Oscar Wilde gestured to Wilde's sexuality by describing him as "another Rev. Kenneth G. Murray."³

Breaking as it did at the very moment when Baltimore reformers were succeeding in injecting Christian moralism and opposition to vice into Maryland politics, the Murray scandal transcended what might otherwise be a sad personal story and became a flashpoint in ongoing contestations over religiously motivated anti-vice campaigning. As the work of scholars Kevin P. Murphy and Suzanna Krivulskaya has demonstrated, insinuations of homosexuality were powerful political weapons in the early twentieth century.⁴ Murray's critics, most notably famed Baltimore journalist Henry Louis Mencken, seized on the allegations of Murray's sexual improprieties with men to attack his reformist cause and his particular brand of Christianity. They used Murray's exposure not only to reinforce their claims that anti-vice "crusaders" were hypocrites, but also to validate their insistence that reformers were driven in their activism by sexual and gendered pathologies. Homosexuality served to reconcile what might otherwise be contradictory stereotypes of campaigners against prostitution, namely that they were hypersexual in ways associated with masculine excess and feminized to the point of being nearly unsexed. Ultimately, secular critics of anti-vice reform used Murray's exposure to position themselves as rational arbiters of the proper use of state power, in contrast to the unhealthy masculinity or feminine irrationality of evangelical men. The Murray scandal thus became part of a broader phenomenon in which the sexual diagnosis of progressive and religious reformist figures became an important means of discrediting them and forestalling their efforts at social change.⁵

Waging and Contesting the Vice Crusade

In the years before scandal brought an abrupt end to his career, Murray had enjoyed a storied career in Baltimore. A former Methodist circuit preacher in rural Maryland, Murray became interested in anti-vice activism following his move to Maryland's largest city and his subsequent assignment to the pastorship of the Fayette Street Methodist Episcopal Church. At the time of Murray's arrival in 1912, the neighborhood around the Fayette Street M.E. Church had deteriorated since the parish's construction nearly eighty years earlier. Changing land use patterns in downtown Baltimore and efforts to consolidate vice in the area around the Western District Police Station had gradually pushed dozens of brothels, houses of assignation, "low" saloons, and sketchy furnished room houses into the blocks around the church.⁶ By the 1910s, Murray's parish sat squarely in the middle of a vice district that attracted hundreds of male visitors on busy nights.⁷

Tasked with revitalizing Fayette Street M.E., Murray, who had spent a summer in college ministering to the denizens of New York's Bowery District as a volunteer with the

Y.M.C.A, rekindled his youthful passion for outreach to “fallen” women and “wayward” men.⁸ In addition to fulfilling his preaching duties, Murray became a kind of social worker for the neighborhood around his church. He became well known for his attempts to convince residents of the vice districts—including sex workers—to reform their ways, marry, and embrace the kind of committed, heterosexual family life that he believed undergirded a moral society. He also campaigned for local police to stop long-standing practices of tolerating commercial sex establishments in the Western District.

Murray’s efforts to reform his neighborhood and eradicate prostitution in its bounds won him the notice of the local press, and, soon after, of Dr. Howard A. Kelly. Kelly, a pioneering Johns Hopkins gynecologist and devout evangelical Christian, made a side career of street preaching to sex workers and campaigning locally and nationally against the “social evil.” Although his activism against virtually every form of vice—drinking, gambling, and prostitution—was strongly motivated by his religious and moral convictions, his scientific knowledge and medical acumen gave him an additional layer of credibility within more secular circles. Kelly soon became a kind of mentor to Murray, and the two became a formidable team in local anti-vice efforts. Under Kelly’s tutelage, Murray soon rose within the ranks of Baltimore’s Comstock-inspired Society for the Suppression of Vice and the city’s Ministerial Union. The two even opened a home for women who wished to extricate themselves from sex work.⁹

Together, Murray and Kelly helped to usher in a frenetic period of campaigning against brothels and disreputable houses, one that drew its political force from both their personal doggedness and a national wave of concern about prostitution. As numerous historians of commercial sex have noted, women’s growing presence in the waged workforce and in urban public space in the first decades of the twentieth century prompted a slew of anxieties about prostitution and the alleged trafficking of women. As white slavery scares swept popular media, federal law enforcement and urban officials began to scrutinize red-light districts.¹⁰ Meanwhile, cities around the country witnessed campaigns against vice led by evangelical Christian reformers and women’s groups who sought to eliminate prostitution in order to protect women from sexual exploitation and preserve the moral and physical health of urban residents. Kelly and Murray’s anti-vice activism focused on drawing together diverse constituencies to pressure local and state officeholders to adopt abolitionist approaches to the sex trade. Kelly, with Murray at his side, hosted a number of lavish events where he lobbied prominent Marylanders, including police commissioners, medical men, and local religious leaders, to sign pledges to protect Baltimore against vice.¹¹

The political pressure that Murray, Kelly, and the Ministerial Union exerted on public officials helped to bring the vice issue to the forefront of Maryland politics. In 1912, Maryland elected a reformist Republican governor, Phillips Lee Goldsborough, who appointed an independent commission to study prostitution in the state.¹² To Kelly’s and Murray’s dismay, the Maryland Vice Commission’s members “professed no moral aim” at the start of their undertaking; they saw themselves as objective observers undertaking a scientific study of the phenomenon of prostitution.¹³ Still, it would not be long before the middle-class vice commissioners’ own moral horror at what they observed of urban sexual culture would combine with pressure by anti-vice activists to sway them toward an abolitionist position. Citing sex establishments’ role in spreading venereal disease and exploiting vulnerable women, the Maryland Vice Commission recommended in 1915 that all brothels be closed.¹⁴

The commission's recommendation marked a significant victory for Murray, Kelly, and their allies, but it was not an uncontested one. Even as abolition became popular with politicians and religious leaders, it met with significant opposition from large segments of the urban population. Unsurprisingly, keepers and patrons of bawdy houses resented anti-vice efforts and complained that Murray, "that old crank of a minister living down the block who watches everything," disrupted their business. "Police would not be near so bad if it were not for that damn fool," one woman remarked in 1914, citing the common belief among the keepers of bawdy and assignation houses that it was the actions of a small number of anti-vice activists that pressured reluctant officials into crackdowns.¹⁵ This belief was not without merit. When the Maryland Vice Commission surveyed police officers and "representative men of Baltimore" about their opinions toward prostitution, it found that both groups were largely unsympathetic to abolition.¹⁶ Anecdotal data from street-level police revealed that many officers resented anti-vice reformers' meddling in their policing methods and longed to return to the days of segregated and regulated vice.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of professional men surveyed by the MVC, including 72 percent of doctors and 81 percent of lawyers, agreed with the police that segregating brothels was preferable to attempting to suppress them.¹⁸

Among men who opposed abolition, the most common argument was that it was impractical to think that prostitution could ever be eradicated. Closing brothels would only drive vice underground or scatter it throughout the city. Furthermore, they argued that eliminating red-light districts would jeopardize the ability of police and the courts to regulate the conduct of persons in disorderly houses and endanger respectable women and children by exposing them to sexual conduct.¹⁹ Baltimore's grand jury concurred. In the months after the MVC released its recommendation that the Baltimore Police shutter the city's brothels, the grand jury issued its own report criticizing the state-run Police Board and local "moralists." The jury advocated for segregation.²⁰

Opposition to the progressive vice crusade was never particularly organized, which is likely why it has received less attention from historians than the campaigns to rid cities of red-light districts. In Baltimore, however, supporters of segregated vice found a vocal champion in satirist and journalist H.L. Mencken. Mencken, who cut his teeth as a young reporter on Baltimore's police beat, took a great interest in campaigns to reform policing and eradicate gambling, liquor, and prostitution in the city.²¹ Mencken was not one to deny that prostitution brought with it distasteful social problems, but he regarded efforts to abolish vice as governmental overreaches and affronts to personal freedom. He also disdained the men who campaigned against prostitution, especially for religious or moralistic reasons. As he explained, "The man who concerns himself with his neighbors' morals may be perfectly honest, and he may also be pious and worthy, but as for me, I don't like him."²²

When he was granted his own column, "The Free Lance," in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* in 1911, Mencken devoted much of his space to excoriating progressive reform efforts and lampooning reformers like Kelly and Murray as "tedious windjammers."²³ Mencken's writings set a tone for critiques of the "vice crusade" among Baltimoreans, who penned letters to the editors of local papers and even wrote and published a play satirizing the Society for the Suppression of Vice.²⁴ Though widespread public support for segregation was not enough to overcome the political tides that had turned against commercial sex—police closed the last of Baltimore's known brothels in September of 1915—it ensured that Murray and his allies remained controversial figures even as they triumphed in their campaign against prostitution.

“Charges of a Serious Nature”

It was in this context of deep political contestations over Baltimore’s changing sexual landscape that news of Murray’s alleged sexual improprieties broke publicly.²⁵ Piecing together what, precisely, happened to Murray on that November night at the Y.M.C.A. is difficult given the limitations of extant sources, but the general outlines of the story are apparent from newspaper and court records. Murray had for several years been involved in the social and educational life of Baltimore’s Central Branch Y.M.C.A., where he regularly taught Bible study classes.²⁶ During Murray’s visits to the institution, he made a habit of socializing with residents of the dormitories, who were mainly young, professional men who had come to the city in search of employment and found the Y.M.C.A. an affordable and safe housing option. Whatever attention Murray lavished on these men was apparently unwelcomed, as one would later describe Murray’s conduct toward him as “obnoxious.”²⁷ Murray’s behavior proved disruptive enough that it prompted conversations among the residents and officers of the institution about what might be done to stop it. The men came up with a plan not dissimilar to one that would be employed by the navy only a few years later to root out queer men at a Y.M.C.A. in Newport, Rhode Island: they would use a decoy to trap Murray.²⁸

The men enacted their plan on an evening that Murray was expected at the institution for a meeting of the Ministerial Union. Olin Dorsey Williams, an eighteen-year-old dormitory resident, allowed Murray into his room. Carol M. Sax, a thirty-five-year-old interior designer who was also a resident of the dormitory, had already secreted himself in a wardrobe, as had Marvin H. Markle, the Y.M.C.A.’s physical director.²⁹ The two watched Murray’s and Williams’s interactions until Murray allegedly initiated sexual contact with Williams and—it was implied—performed oral sex on him.³⁰ They sprung out of the wardrobe to catch Murray *in flagrante delicto*. It is unclear whether the men intended to involve other authorities in their “trap” or whether they intended to quietly blackmail Murray into quitting the institution, but it is clear that they hoped to secure his withdrawal from public life in Baltimore.

They were successful. By the next morning, Murray had removed himself from his parsonage and sought refuge at a local sanitarium.³¹ His failure to appear for his annual Thanksgiving sermon drew attention to his sudden absence and prompted rumors in the press that he was seeking treatment for nervous exhaustion complicated by stomach ailments. Just days later, most of Baltimore’s major newspapers had gotten wind of the actual reason for his disappearance. Headlines proclaiming that Murray had been “trapped” appeared in virtually all of the city’s major papers by December 1. The articles that accompanied these headlines were mostly short and buried toward the back of their respective issues, and most relied on the euphemistic language of “serious charges” or “indiscretion” to describe the allegations against Murray.³² Only Baltimore’s German language paper, the *Deutsche Correspondent*, revealed that Murray was alleged to have committed an “immoral assault on a male youth” (*unsittlichen Angriffs auf einen Jüngling*).³³ It is possible that the sparseness of the papers’ coverage was out of respect for the fact that Murray had been an influential minister, but their vague language did little to protect his public reputation. Sodomy and homosexuality were so closely associated with the language of the unspeakable that the newspapers’ euphemisms and silences themselves revealed the nature of Murray’s offense.³⁴

Once news of Murray’s “indiscretion” broke, tides turned quickly against him. Local police, anticipating public outrage, moved swiftly to bring criminal charges against Murray. They had experience in such matters; since the summer of 1914, the Baltimore

Police had made a practice of sending plain-clothes officers to patrol downtown streets, including those surrounding the Y.M.C.A., in search of men looking to solicit sex from other men.³⁵ Seeking to levy charges against Murray, whom many officers already disliked for his meddling in the workings of their department, was a natural extension of the broader police campaign to stamp out “perversity.” On the orders of Marshal Robert Carter, police scoured the city for witnesses on the same night the news broke of Murray’s conduct. By December, police had located Williams, Sax, and Markle, and Marshal Carter himself had forwarded evidence against Murray to the city’s grand jury. The jury returned an indictment for assault on December 17, although the *capias* warrant against Murray was never served. At that point, he had already fled Baltimore.³⁶

As it became clear that Murray’s indiscretion had the potential to erupt into scandal, Murray’s colleagues in the church and the anti-vice movement moved to distance themselves from him. In keeping with what Suzanna Krivulskaya has described as twentieth-century Protestant denominations’ pattern of ostracizing any clergy implicated in homosexual behavior, the Baltimore Methodist Episcopal Conference publicly denounced Murray. Rev. Dr. W.W. Barnes of the West Baltimore district of the conference gave several interviews to local newspapers in which he assured readers that Murray had resigned his pastorate shortly after the incident at the Y.M.C.A. and that the church had taken “positive and decisive action against him.”³⁷ At its meeting the following March, the conference’s executive committee voted to remove Murray under charges “without any discussion of the case whatever.”³⁸ Meanwhile, Howard A. Kelly gave a public speech in which he denied having any recent contact with Murray or sheltering him at his hospital. In his characteristic blending of the language of faith and science, Kelly proclaimed that Murray was “suffering from a mental disorder” and that he had “fallen a victim to the wiles of the great enemy.” Although Kelly expressed his hope that Murray might still be saved through prayer and repentance, he told the press that Murray’s loss was ultimately a gain for the anti-vice movement, as “a hypocrite in the camp is the greatest possible foe to any moral cause.” Kelly proclaimed that Murray’s “defection” would only strengthen the moral crusade he had once championed, as those remaining in the anti-vice movement would “gladly assume the additional burdens and will gladly gird themselves for a yet more strenuous conflict with the old enemy.”³⁹ Privately, however, Kelly was far more pessimistic about the potential for a scandal to delegitimize efforts at moral reform. Kelly wrote in his diary, “Exposures like that of K.G.M. produce impress[ions] on public wh[ich] tends to discount all work for purification.”⁴⁰

Kelly had good reason to be concerned about the political impact of Murray’s public humiliation. Murray’s was actually the third in a line of scandals to have plagued Baltimore’s anti-vice movement in a period of just over a year and a half. In the spring of 1914, Murray’s colleague and the Baltimore Society for the Suppression of Vice’s former counsel, Samuel E. Pentz, was prosecuted for obtaining money by false pretenses by attempting to extort several local saloonkeepers in exchange for police immunity. Although Pentz was acquitted of the charges, he was disgraced by the allegations and ultimately disbarred for unethical conduct.⁴¹ Only a month before Murray’s exposure, William N. Finley, a Baltimore church worker and Bible school organizer, had been sentenced to four years in prison for embezzling over \$15,000 from the Chattel Loan Association during his term as its manager.⁴² These scandals had quickly become weapons in the hands of critics of evangelical moral reform movements, who saw in them an opportunity to validate their long-standing characterizations of anti-vice reformers as disingenuous and hypocritical. Prior to these exposures, H.L. Mencken had often accused religious reformers of hypocrisy, only to be challenged by readers who

demanded to know how he was able to see inside the minds and hearts of men he did not know in order to establish that their private motives and characters were at odds with their public proclamations.⁴³ In the downfalls of Pentz and Finley, Mencken and his allies had found an easy answer, as well as a handy shorthand means of deriding anti-vice activism.⁴⁴

Murray's exposure, following hot on the heels of the others, seemed only to confirm that corruption in the anti-vice movement's leadership was not exceptional, but systemic. When Howard A. Kelly claimed in the aftermath of Murray's exposure that "occasional serious defections" were to be expected from time to time in any large civic improvement movement, "Augustus," the author of a letter to the editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, replied, "Yes, 'from time to time,' but as the group is not very large so far as the loudest shouters are concerned, do these serious defections not occur rather 'fast and furious'?"⁴⁵ For him and other critics of anti-vice reform, there appeared to be a relationship between the outward urgency of reformer's moral fervor and the wickedness of their own private conduct.

While Murray's scandal was only one of a handful involving purported hypocrisy by leaders of the anti-vice movement, its queer dimensions gave it comparatively greater weight. Augustus noted that Pentz and Finley's offenses "were mercifully financial 'defections' while the Murray case is vastly more grave."⁴⁶ That a prominent campaigner against sexual vice stood accused of any kind of illicit sexual conduct was notable, but the fact that the conduct in question involved another man attracted much attention from a public that had previously encountered news of homosexuality mainly in the context of European sex scandals.⁴⁷ In the month following Murray's exposure, the *Baltimore Sun* alone received eight letters to the editor about Murray, some scolding the paper for not covering the case in more detail and others grappling with the ethics of covering it at all. Initially, many of these letters were sympathetic to Murray even when their authors explicitly disagreed with both his religion and his politics. Adopting a medicalized narrative of homosexuality as mental illness, the letter writers questioned the tactics that were used to expose and publicly shame Murray. Was it honorable or humane for men at the Y.M.C.A. to employ "Hawkshaw" undercover tactics—notably, the same tactics that Murray and other anti-vice activists used in their own investigations—to trap Murray?⁴⁸ Hadn't Murray's accusers, in their quest to expose the vice of hypocrisy, indulged in the greater vice of cruelty by humiliating Murray and, by extension, his wife and daughter? Was it reasonable to delight in the exposure of a man whose conduct clearly marked him as "not sane"?⁴⁹ Many editorialists had harsher words for the "Christian" men responsible for the trap than for Murray himself. "It would be hard to find a man outside the pale of the church or the Young Men's Christian Association who would have played the part of stool pigeon in such a case," one wrote. "I hold no brief for Dr. Murray or his kind, but I do believe in human kindness and that is what those Young Men's Christian Association officials seem to possess very little of."⁵⁰

Queer Scandal and the Discrediting of Christian Anti-Vice Reform

It was not long, however, before the tone of the letters shifted to schadenfreude as critics of anti-vice reform saw the opportunity to use Murray's public shame to discredit anti-vice reformers' ongoing efforts to expand state authority over moral matters. In late December 1915, a letter writer signing themselves "Subscriber" wrote to the *Baltimore Sun* mocking Howard A. Kelly and the Maryland Vice Commission's proposal that a Board of Morals

be created to oversee the moral health of the city and censor motion pictures whose content could prove ruinous to youth. Subscriber feigned agreement with the proposal, writing that his only objection was that it did not go far enough. "Let us have a specific law for everything and everybody, to regulate every human need in love, hate, envy, greed; to regulate everything, except the pernicious activities of the self-appointed sex experts," he wrote. He added wryly, "When the new 'Board of Morals' is created I would humbly suggest that a married man, say the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Murray, is appointed its president."⁵¹ Murray functioned in Subscriber's letter as an exemplar of men who embraced a notion of moral and sexual purity that their own desires ran afoul of and confirmed as unattainable.

Dozens of similar references to Murray would persist in Baltimore newspapers—especially in letters to the editor—for well over a decade after Murray's exposure. Despite local newsrooms burying the story of Murray's transgression in their back pages, local commenters trusted that city residents would be conversant with the scandal and its supposed lessons about the rectitude of evangelical reformers even years after the fact. Between 1915 and 1929 (the last known date of reference) Murray's name appeared in dozens of letters mocking reformist causes as diverse as the censorship of art and film, the banning of Sunday baseball, and the prohibition or limitation of alcohol sales.⁵² Probably much to the relief of Howard A. Kelly and other anti-vice reformers, Mencken was slow to weigh in on the scandal, as his vocal support for Germany during World War I lost him his "Free Lance" column only two days after Murray's alleged transgression.⁵³ When his reputation rebounded after the war, however, Mencken ensured continued public memory of Murray's scandal by referencing it in his 1920s commentaries about muscular Christianity and urban reform.

The lasting cultural and political resonance of the Murray scandal owed not just to the novelty of the queer allegations that propelled it, but also to those allegations' power to confirm a number of existing assumptions and stereotypes—many of which were contradictory on their face—about anti-vice reformers. One of these stereotypes was the notion that anti-vice reformers' interest in the happenings of red-light districts was driven less by moral concern than by their own prurience and hypersexuality. Mencken was among the most vocal proponents of this interpretation. Between 1912 and 1914, Mencken made a habit of describing anti-vice reformers as "snouters who live by inflaming the rich pornographer" and men bent on fostering "the general obsession with sex, sex and nothing but sex" with their lurid descriptions of red-light districts.⁵⁴ Murray, whom Mencken called a "mountebank," was among the moralists that Mencken specifically identified as being driven by his own libidinousness.⁵⁵ In recollecting a sermon he had watched Murray give on the happenings in West Baltimore's brothels, Mencken described Murray as perverse in his obsession with "exciting anecdotes" and lurid descriptions of his tours through sex establishments. "Upon certain physiological details he dwelt with camp-meeting gusto, rolling his eyes and smacking his lips," Mencken wrote. "I have never witnessed a more completely depraved and appalling performance."⁵⁶ The description implied a parallel between religious and sexual fervor, one that cast evangelical anti-vice reformers' quest to expose vice as a fundamentally voyeuristic and licentious endeavor.

Other critics of anti-vice reform concurred with Mencken's assessment that reformers were overly motivated by sex; indeed, many went so far as to argue that reformers only attempted to control the behavior of others—or harness the power of the state to do so—because they could not control themselves. W.S. McGuire argued in the *Baltimore Sun* that the "loud mouthpieces of the moral uplift" were unfit to regulate anyone because they

could not even regulate their own impulses. “The most blatant of the booze fighters,” McGuire complained, “are those who did not know how to appreciate a privilege and made beasts of themselves, and now like the dog in the manger they do not want any one to have the privilege of having a drink.”⁵⁷ Another writer who was frustrated with attempts by moral reformers to censor nude art expressed doubt that anyone besides a pervert would interest himself in the business of preventing the exhibition of nudes. “It really seems inconceivable that a person should possess a mind so perverted and narrow as to see evil in the representation of the nude in art,” he wrote. “Verily, ‘to the pure all things are pure,’ and vice-versa.”⁵⁸ In the estimation of critics of anti-vice reform, moral reformers’ obsession with sexuality and tendency to see obscenity everywhere was symptomatic of their own licentiousness and defects of character. The revelation that Murray had sought out sex with another man reinforced this impression, as homosexuality was often regarded as an aggressively perverse, pathological form of sexual expression. Indeed, Murray was portrayed in the press as a sexual predator whose unconstrained lusts drove him to pursue unwilling “youths” at the Y.M.C.A. (that two of the men were actually in their thirties and Williams was legally an adult mattered little to the press).⁵⁹

At the same time that the Murray scandal seemingly confirmed that moral reform was a pathological manifestation of prurience, it also reconciled the stereotype of the vice reformer as hypersexual with another, competing stereotype: the anti-vice reformer as lacking a natural sex instinct. This stereotype applied equally to male and female reformers and was rooted in their tendency to challenge conventional dogmas about “sexual necessity.” For much of the nineteenth century, a not insignificant number of Americans had embraced the idea that men were entitled to a degree of sexual license because they required regular sexual release for their health. Indeed, this notion provided one of the primary intellectual justifications for maintaining segregated red-light districts in cities. Tolerated brothels were said to satisfy the natural demands of men even as they protected chaste and “virtuous” women from men’s lusts.⁶⁰ Anti-vice reformers challenged both idea that sexual release was necessary for men’s health and the sexual double standard at the heart of such a view. Many reformers adopted what Murray called “the common sense and good health viewpoint” that sexual continence was both practical and desirable for both sexes.⁶¹ The MVC echoed this perspective when it concluded in its report, “the researches of the most advanced physiologists and biologists, together with the practical testimony of the leading clinical physicians, show that sexual intercourse is not necessary to the moral or physical health of any normally constituted man or woman.”⁶²

Reformers’ tendency to deny that humans of either sex required sexual release put them at odds with the views of many urban men. For much of the nineteenth century, seeking out the services of sex workers and enjoying sexual license had been an important part of urban working men’s masculinist cultures, along with drinking, gambling, and participating in rough sport. Men whom scholars have alternately described as “jolly fellows,” “sporting men,” and “underworld primitives” understood exercising sexual access to women as hallmarks of their masculinity and virility.⁶³ Although members of the professional classes were less apt to make patronizing sex workers a core element of their masculine public personas, they too visited brothels and defended the existence of tolerated red-light districts on the basis that they served men’s irrepressible need for sexual release. One physician who supported segregated vice explained his support in these terms, saying, “Until supermen and superwomen arise, prostitution will go on somewhere.”⁶⁴ Challenges to long-standing assumptions about male sexual

necessity—and, by extension, to the idea that men were entitled to sexual access to women—struck many Baltimoreans as both illogical and dangerously radical in its upending of older gender hierarchies.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, political opponents responded by suggesting that denials of sexual necessity were rooted in reformers' own sexual deficiencies. In the years before the Murray scandal, critics of efforts to close red-light districts took to characterizing social purity crusaders as either lacking in "normal" sexual desire or otherwise incapable of consummating relationships with the opposite sex. One keeper of a furnished room house who resented the efforts of anti-vice agents to close establishments like hers told a female undercover investigator that "the only people who object are the women who can't get a man themselves."⁶⁵ Similarly, several police officers who complained about the Police Board forcing them to close brothels and furnished room houses attributed their superiors' zest for morals policing to their impotence or lack of desire for women. One officer griped to an undercover MVC agent in 1914, "Between the Police Board and that damn son of a bitch — — — [probably Robert Marshal Carter] who is too old to appreciate a woman—a person don't know what he is about."⁶⁶ The anonymous officer implied that Carter desired to deny other men the pleasures of prostitution because he himself was too advanced in age to care about sex. Another officer who was similarly frustrated by the Police Board commented that he "would fix old — — — up so he would like women again if they would send him around to him he would use a ten inch nail."⁶⁷ While his meaning is somewhat ambiguous, the quote is possibly a reference to his commander's supposed impotence and the officer's intention to "fix" it by using a nail to prop up his flaccid penis. Many of the police officers interviewed were careful to distance themselves from the reformist projects of their much-loathed superiors by making it clear that they were red-blooded men who liked to "have a good time" with girls.⁶⁸ The implication was that efforts to shut down red-light districts were led by men who lacked a comparable sexual interest in women.

On the surface, the idea that anti-vice reformers lacked sexual desire was not easily reconciled with the stereotype that their activism was rooted in libidinousness. However, the public exposure and indictment of Murray went a long way toward affirming both critiques. Even as Murray's supposedly aggressive overtures to Y.M.C.A. residents suggested a strong sexual drive, they also affirmed that his sexual impulses were "unnaturally" directed away from women. The implication that Murray had played the so-called passive role in the sexual exchange by fellating Williams was particularly significant in this context, as it likely prompted contemporaries to consider that Murray might be queer rather than merely opportunistic in his choice of sexual object. As the work of George Chauncey has demonstrated, the presumed overlap between sexual and gender "inversion" in the early twentieth century meant that men who penetrated other men were not necessarily regarded as queer because they retained the "masculine" sexual role. By the same token, men who assumed the "feminine" role of being penetrated were often regarded as sexually perverse.⁶⁹ Murray was thus an amalgam of stereotypes of anti-vice reformers: he was libidinous, but not in the way that was regarded as "normal" for his sex, and his abnormality fueled his attempts to eradicate the pleasures that red-light districts provided to heterosexual men.

As Murray's alleged homosexuality lent credence to his critics' assertions that anti-vice reformers were driven by their own sexual perversity, it also bolstered long-standing claims that reform efforts were marred by feminine irrationality. Baltimore's most ardent anti-vice reformers, Murray included, thought of themselves as manly crusaders against licentiousness, but they faced an uphill battle in convincing their critics that they were

suitably masculine for the harsh world of urban politics. Reformers' concern with public morality, their emphasis on restraining sexual urges that many people deemed natural for men, and their distaste for drink and rowdy leisure culture placed them within an older tradition of restrained, evangelical manhood that had fallen out of fashion. Granted, their brand of Christian masculinity had never sat well with large subsets of urban youth and workingmen, but its Victorian sentimentalism seemed even more quaint and feminized in the face of a growing emphasis on "strenuous" manhood.⁷⁰ As historian Kevin Murphy noted in his study of masculinity and progressive politics, "Social thinkers and critics attacked unrestrained idealism and sentimentalism as detached from, and potentially harmful to, the vital, practical, and masculine spirit of modern America."⁷¹ Men who emphasized the realm of the spiritual and the importance of *refraining* from certain behaviors risked appearing out of step with contemporary versions of manhood that prioritized men of action shaping the world through bold and decisive deeds.

Additionally, male anti-vice reformers had long contended with strong associations between evangelical progressivism and feminized activism. Not only did the demographics of many evangelical congregations skew female, but women were among the most vocal champions of nineteenth-century campaigns to cleanse cities of sexual immorality. Murray's Baltimore Society for the Suppression of Vice, though led by male officers, drew much of its grassroots support from female community members, including social workers, physicians, and woman suffrage advocates who used the urgency of purifying the city as a powerful argument for allowing women the right to vote. Many of the men involved in the anti-vice movement in Baltimore supported campaigns for woman suffrage, and they gave speeches before women's groups in which they excoriated men for their role in promoting sexual immorality and called for an end to the sexual double standard. During a period when any people still embraced the idea that political activism was men's rightful domain, male progressives' close partnerships with women's groups made them vulnerable to being characterized as feminized and unmanly. At the same time, their political causes were constantly at risk of being dismissed as "women's issues," a label that located them—in the eyes of critics, at least—outside of the sphere of "serious" politics.⁷²

Leaders of the Baltimore Society for the Suppression of Vice strove to distance themselves from allegations that they were feminized by framing their religious faith and activism within the tradition of muscular Christianity. Murray had a long history of embracing a masculinist vision of Christianity and social purity reform that emphasized men's leadership within their churches and communities. He directed much of his public ministry toward local men's groups, and he worked hard to make his church more attractive to male congregants. Although Murray himself was not a picture of muscular manhood—he was short, of slight build, and notoriously bookish—he adopted the visual and linguistic trappings of martial masculinity in his ministry. When he took over the South Baltimore Station Methodist Church in 1905, Murray founded junior and senior brotherhoods that invited men and boys to participate in fraternal bonding and public displays of robust Christian manhood. During a large, much-publicized anniversary celebration held at the church in 1911, 175 brothers processed to the altar—decorated for the occasion with an electrically lit Crusader's Cross—by marching in military fashion behind a cross pennant, waving American and Christian flags, and singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee." After bestowing armor to boys in leadership positions within the brotherhood, Murray gave a sermon entitled "The Church's Appeal to Men."⁷³ The centering of male congregants and the combination of religious, patriotic, and militaristic imagery at the celebration reflected Murray's desire to position evangelical Christianity as tough,

masculine, and suited to a modern age of strenuous politics and military mobilization. It also reflected his broader tendency to frame Christian reform as a holy “crusade” or “war” against vice that required men to act in defense of their neighborhoods and families.⁷⁴ Notably, the original reason for Murray’s visit to the Y.M.C.A. on the day that he was exposed was a meeting to discuss his Ministerial Union’s plan to bring muscular Christian icon Billy Sunday to Baltimore.⁷⁵

As an additional strategy to counter allegations that they were soft-nosed sentimentalists, Baltimore’s anti-vice reformers framed their campaigns against brothels using the language of public health and social science, disciplines associated with masculine rationality. They argued that their efforts to shut down red-light districts were not simply moral or religious quests, but practical measures to preserve the health of the city and save taxpayers money by eliminating sources of disease and misery. Here, the Baltimore Society for the Suppression of Vice benefited from the participation of academics and medical men like Howard A. Kelly and Donald Hooker, who could supply rudimentary statistics about rates of venereal infections in Baltimore and the health of sex workers to justify their interventions in red-light districts. The Society for the Suppression of Vice employed John C. Rose as its chief statistician, and Murray and other members of the group framed their public talks around data and anecdotal evidence about poverty and morality that they claimed to have gathered through their excursions to brothel district or through their “social survey[s].”⁷⁶

Despite their best efforts, Murray and other members of the Society for the Suppression of Vice still found themselves parodied by political opponents who insisted that their social scientific approaches were nothing more than a clumsy pretense to cloak the moral fretting at the core of their movement. In 1913, Baltimore physician and advocate of segregated vice Joshua Rosett penned *The Quandary*, a play that satirized the efforts of the Baltimore Society for the Suppression of Vice. Among the more comical characters in the play is Mr. Coleman, the group’s statistician, who was likely meant to be a loose amalgam of Murray and John C. Rose. Coleman’s most notable characteristic is his inability to understand statistics or their implications, despite invoking them constantly. In one pivotal scene, he insists that Miss Higgins, a girl who disappeared from her family home a decade prior to seek refuge in a house of ill-fame, is dead and buried in a potters’ field. When asked by Mr. Hunter, an ally of the society, if he can furnish any proof for this startling claim, Coleman replies, “The surest proof, Mr. Hunter—statistical proof! Our statistics clearly show that the average life of a fallen woman as such is five years [...] Five years to a day! it is now ten years since the Higgins girl has run off.”⁷⁷ Later in the play, when Coleman again references questionable statistics, Mrs. Hunter, the rational core of the play, rebukes him by exclaiming, “Oh, your statistics again! There ought to be some name for people who are hysterical over statistics.”⁷⁸ References to the feminized affliction of hysteria to describe male reformers’ fascination with statistics implied that their claims to masculine rationality were false. Their mania for the trappings of scientific legitimacy was merely another reflection of their inherent femininity and irrationality.

Other public critics of anti-vice reform and advocates of secularism used similarly gendered language to feminize their opponents and to dismiss their ideas as unrealistic. Among keepers of brothels and furnished room houses in Baltimore, the most commonly used term to describe anti-vice reformers was “cranks,” a word that implied both iconoclasm and mental instability. H.L. Mencken and other men who criticized the Society for the Suppression of Vice were in the habit of contrasting their own supposedly pragmatic and rational understandings of the prostitution issue with the religious sentimentality and impracticality that characterized reformers’ approaches. Mencken

insisted, for instance, that prostitution was “not a mere bugaboo, to be sent fleeing by wind music, but a highly material fact, and what is more, a fact that seems firmly rooted in ineradicable human weakness.”⁷⁹ To deny the necessity of red-light districts was to deny the fundamental facts of human nature in favor of indulging in moralistic fantasy. What Mencken would later refer to as “the bilge of idealism” was, in his eyes, neutered and pointless.⁸⁰ “Whatever progress is ever made in reducing the evils of prostitution,” Mencken wrote, “will be made by men who have intellectual courage enough to admit openly that the facts of life are such and so, and who do not waste their time figuring out how much nicer the world would be if human beings were not as they are.”⁸¹ Even those who disagreed that prostitution was necessarily a “fact of life” concurred that reformers needed to dispense with their “holier-than-thou” attitudes and “open their minds a little to the light of facts.” Decrying reformers’ tendency to act from a place of evangelical moralizing and sentimentality, one writer to the *Evening Sun* remarked that reformers needed to “deal with men in a frank and open manner, not from the religious, but from the common-sense and good-health viewpoint.”⁸²

Given homosexuality’s association with both gender inversion and non-procreative sexuality, Murray’s overtures to Olin D. Williams seemingly confirmed his political opponent’s repeated insistences that male anti-vice reformers were, at their core, feminized and impotent. At the same time, it reinforced what critics of progressivism had long implied was the suspicious nature of reformer’s idealism. As Kevin P. Murphy has argued, overlapping discourses that characterized homosexuals and progressive reformers as sharing the common tendency to be impractical helped to forge an “inextricable link between sentimentalism—and even idealism—and homosexuality.”⁸³ Murray’s public shaming for attempting to engage in sex with another man, taking place as it did in the very moment that link was crystalizing, paved the way for broader critiques of religious men who attempted to harness the power of the state to enact radical social change.

As was the case with its ability to reconcile competing sexual stereotypes of anti-vice reformers, the Murray scandal also proved useful in that it allowed critics of evangelical anti-vice reform movements to attack the gender expression of evangelicals on multiple fronts. By the 1920s, Mencken would begin to pivot from his earlier tendency to mock Christian idealists as effete in favor of using Murray to satirize and pathologize the overt masculinity of “muscular Christians.” This change in his approach to the scandal was no doubt motivated by broader shifts in American culture, including the rise of hyper-patriotic and militant Christian masculinities prior to World War I and the subsequent backlash against them in the years after the war.⁸⁴ Mencken, who had never been in favor of U.S. military intervention and who held muscular Christianity responsible for promoting jingoism, emerged as one of the masculinist Christian movement’s chief critics in the 1920s. It would be Mencken’s writing that ensured that memory of the Murray scandal endured even after the public lost interest in anti-prostitution campaigning. In essays and articles satirizing muscular forms of Christianity and what he understood to be the chief institution that promulgated them, the Y.M.C.A., Mencken took to repurposing the Murray scandal to reinforce that there was something disingenuous and pathological about bellicose Christian masculinity.

In 1920, for instance, Mencken wrote a column entitled “Star-Spangled Men,” in which he mocked fraternal and religious orders for their adoption of military-style uniforms and insignia during World War I and their overall hawkishness. Mencken specifically derided the Y.M.C.A. for its meddling in the conflict. “Whether or not the Y.M.C.A. has decorated its chocolate peddlers and soul-snatchers I do not know,” he wrote, adding, “Since the chief Y.M.C.A. lamassery [sic] in my town of Baltimore became the

scene of a homosexual scandal I have ceased to frequent evangelical society.”⁸⁵ Mencken’s sleight of hand in implying that the Y.M.C.A. was responsible for Murray’s conduct rather than for his exposure bolstered his next critique, which was that the martial pretensions of Y.M.C.A. men were a front that concealed what was ultimately a feminine cowardice and tepid commitment to service. Mencken claimed that Y.M.C.A. men “had a habit of being absent when the shells burst in air and doughboys craved chocolates and spiritual consolation.” He also implied that many of them were attracted to ministry work during the war because they wished to be exempt from actual military service, although he wryly conceded that “a few, at least, of the pale and oleaginous brethren must have gone into the Master’s work because they thirsted to save souls, and not simply because they desired to escape the trenches.” By referencing the Y.M.C.A. as a “scene” of homosexual scandal, Mencken reinforced the notion that the loudest advocates of militaristic, muscular Christianity were privately hypocrites bent on utilizing the rhetorical trappings of masculine toughness to hide their own passive effeminacy.

Mencken’s critiques were not limited to suggestions that there was something false about evangelical Christianity’s martial emphasis or its practitioners’ commitment to their faith. Mencken famously despised evangelicalism in general and the Y.M.C.A. in particular, and he found in the Murray scandal an opportunity to suggest that there was something inherently suspect about the fixation of muscular Christianity on the health of the male body. While Mencken’s critiques of muscular Christianity were no doubt driven by what he understood to be its role in motivating U.S. militarism, they were also shaped by his own negative experiences at the Y.M.C.A. When he was fourteen his father had encouraged him to join the West Baltimore branch so that he could visit its gymnasium and cure himself of what Mencken described as his “scholarly stoop.”⁸⁶ Mencken found that he hated both exercise and the institution’s particular brand of proselytization. As he wrote later in *Heathen Days*, “All that the Y.M.C.A.’s horse and rings really accomplished was to fill me with an ineradicable distaste, not only for Christian endeavor in all its forms, but also for every variety of calisthenics.”⁸⁷ Mencken’s distaste for evangelical religion would catapult him to national fame during the Scopes trial, after which point his references to Murray, while admittedly still few, became more frequent. By consistently mentioning Murray’s downfall when he discussed the Y.M.C.A., Mencken was able to suggest that muscular Christianity’s emphasis on developing masculine physical strength as a means of enhancing spiritual strength was a farce—a reflection not of rugged masculinity or piety, but rather of narcissistic and prurient interest in the male form.⁸⁸ As he wrote in his notebooks, “The muscular Christian of whom so much is heard from time to time often turns out on examination to be a homosexual.”⁸⁹

Conclusion

References to the Murray scandal by Mencken and other critics of anti-vice reform should be understood as early attempts to cast evangelical reformers in what is now a familiar subject position, one where they represent, as historian Kathryn Lofton wrote, “the ironic idealization of a ‘natural’ heterosexuality against the complexities of individual human desire.”⁹⁰ To his critics, Murray’s alleged sexual contact with men was a testament to the falseness of his moral ideology and to the futility of any effort to enforce morality in a world where even self-proclaimed moralists harbored inner weakness and hypocrisy. This portrayal of Murray as a hypocrite depended on the understanding that Murray’s alleged private conduct ran contrary to his public faith, to his support for heterosexual marriages

(including his own), and to his stated commitment to protecting youth from dangerous modes of sexual expression.

It is not clear that Murray himself understood his actions or his religion in this way. At the time when he was most actively involved in the ministry, evangelical Christianity had not yet taken to approaching homosexuality as a major moral problem; that understanding would come decades in the future.⁹¹ Although Murray did embrace a moral vision that centered heterosexual, marital unions, he had come up in a church that provided ample opportunities for same-sex intimacy. His particular brand of faith treated deep bonds between men as a potentially fruitful source of spiritual and moral development rather than something that clashed with a heterosexual moral imperative. Even after his exposure, Murray remained married to his wife, Jeanette, and he continued to identify as a Christian and frequent Y.M.C.A.s and Methodist churches around the country until his death in 1951.⁹² Mencken's comments about the homoeroticism of muscular Christianity, negative though he intended them, captured something about the queer potential of evangelical religion. That Mencken simultaneously treated same-sex intimacy as *de facto* evidence of the falseness of Murray's commitment to his faith even as he also characterized it as a natural outcropping of muscular Christianity was a tension he never fully resolved.

Despite this contradiction, Murray's queer scandal proved to be an effective weapon in the hands of his political opponents. Mencken, who would go on to become one of the nation's most prominent cultural commentators, understood his early attacks on Murray and other Baltimore reformers as pivotal to his development as a journalist and iconoclast. This was so much the case that he would lament in 1927, "I frankly miss the old bawdy show ... I long to see the great days of ... the Rev. Kenneth G. Murray restored."⁹³ Such nostalgia was not without cause. For Mencken and for other opponents of efforts to mobilize the progressive state to police morality, Murray's downfall had been a boon. Allegations that the publicly pious Murray was privately queer seemingly confirmed critics' insistence that religious moralists were hypocrites whose own lives served as powerful testaments to the futility of their attempts to perfect society. At the same time, the allegations created new possibilities for those critics to use sexual and gendered rhetoric to suggest that reformist idealism was itself a kind of perverse effeminacy, a folly that could hardly be overcome through the embrace of a muscular vision of Christianity that was itself sexually suspect. This rhetoric became so common and its meanings so well understood in Baltimore that Murray's name, devoid of further context, functioned as a legible shorthand for a host of arguments against moral reforms. It is perhaps unsurprising that Mencken commented of Murray years later, "I never pass the Y.M.C.A. without thinking of him sentimentally, and resolving to contribute \$10,000 the next time it has a drive."⁹⁴

Of course, critics of vice reform never entirely succeeded in discrediting their opponents or in staving off subsequent anti-vice activism. The culture wars over religion and science continued. The homophobia and masculinist ideas about politics that critics of vice reform helped to promote would, ironically, end up animating some of the most significant moral campaigns and moral panics of the twentieth century, including the Lavender Scare.⁹⁵ And yet, conflicts over religious anti-vice reform did help to entrench the idea that people who seek to inject morals into politics warrant deep skepticism, especially when they focus on controlling sexuality. The notion that loud insistences on sexual restraint mask inner turmoil over desires has become a cultural truism in many secular circles, and one that persists to this day.

Acknowledgments. Thanks to the University of Arizona History Department's Brown Bag group; the peer reviewers; Kathryn Lofton; and, most of all, my History 301 students for helping me to think through and improve this piece.

Notes

- 1 "Preacher is Deposed," *Baltimore American*, Dec. 2, 1915.
- 2 "Pastor was Trapped," *Baltimore News*, Dec. 2, 1915.
- 3 "Barring 'Fatty,'" *Evening Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Sept. 16, 1921.
- 4 Kevin Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, and the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Suzanna Krivulskaya, "Queer Rumors: Protestant Ministers, Unnatural Deeds, and Church Censure in the Twentieth-Century United States," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 31 (Winter 2021): 2–3.
- 5 Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 171–200. On the use of allegations of sexual impropriety to discredit religiously or spiritually motivated reformers, see Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998); R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Heaven's Bride: The Unprintable Life of Ida C. Craddock, American Mystic, Scholar, Sexologist, Martyr, and Madwoman* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
- 6 Katie M. Hemphill, *Bawdy City: Commercial Sex and Regulation in Baltimore, 1790–1915* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 241.
- 7 Maryland Vice Commission (MVC), Report, Vol. 1, 67. Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, Maryland.
- 8 "Personal," *Democratic Advocate* (Westminster, MD), July 1, 1893.
- 9 On Howard A. Kelly, see Audrey W. Davis, *Dr. Kelly of Hopkins: Surgeon, Scientist, Christian* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959).
- 10 The literature on Progressive Era campaigns against prostitution is vast. See, among others, Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Jessica R. Pliley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). For a Maryland-specific analysis of anxieties about women's labor and its connections to anti-prostitution activism, see Pamela S. Haag, "'Commerce in Souls': Vice, Virtue, and Women's Wage Work in Baltimore, 1900–1915," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 86 (Fall 1991): 292–303.
- 11 Kelly recalled hosting several outreach events at which Murray spoke in his personal diaries, and his entries often included the signatures of prominent citizens who agreed to join the anti-vice campaign. See, for example, Howard A. Kelly, Diaries, November–December, 1912, folder 1912.11, Alan Chesney Medical Archives, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD. "Finds Moral Crisis in City," *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 20, 1915; "Dr. Kelly Startles 'Em," *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 10, 1912.
- 12 On Crothers's campaign against Police Board Corruption, see Hemphill, *Bawdy City*, 274. On Goldsborough's anti-prostitution fight, see Matthew A. Crenson, *Baltimore: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 354–56.
- 13 Howard A. Kelly, Diaries, May–June, 1914, folder 1914.05. For more on the Maryland Vice Commission, see also Jayme Rae Hill, "From the Brothel to the Block: Politics and Prostitution in Baltimore during the Progressive Era" (MA thesis, University of Maryland, 2008), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304414195/abstract/8F8B1FC8BEBE439CPQ/1> (accessed Mar. 27, 2022).
- 14 MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, Vol. 1, 2. "Police Board to Meet," *Baltimore Sun*, Mar. 19, 1915.
- 15 MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, Vol. 3, 17.
- 16 MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, Vol. 1, 362.
- 17 MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, Vol. 1, 346–58.
- 18 MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, Vol. 1, 362–69.
- 19 MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, Vol. 1, 362–69.
- 20 "Grand Jury Favors Segregation of Vice," *Evening Sun*, May 7, 1915; "Dr. Kelly Evades It," *Baltimore Sun*, Aug. 26, 1913.
- 21 On Mencken's early career as a journalist, see Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, *Mencken: The American Iconoclast* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60–69. For selections of Mencken's commentary

on the vice movement, see H.L. Mencken, *A Saturnalia of Bunk: Selections from The Free Lance*, 1911–1915, ed. S.T. Joshi (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017).

22 H.L. Mencken to Judge Morris Soper, April 23, 1915. Morris A. Soper Papers, MS3121, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland.

23 “The Free Lance,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 23, 1913.

24 Joshua Rosett, *The Quandary: A Play in Three Acts* (Baltimore: Phoenix Press, 1913).

25 “Murray Now in Sanitarium,” *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 3, 1915.

26 “A Bible Conference,” *Christian Advocate* (New York), Dec. 24, 1908, 2147.

27 “Williams Not Compromised,” *Evening Sun*, Sept. 9, 1921. Newspapers did not bother to explain what made Murray’s conduct “obnoxious,” likely because they assumed that their readers would understand queerness itself to be objectionable. It is possible, however, that what made Murray “obnoxious” to Y.M.C.A. residents was less his alleged sexual interest in men than his personal characteristics. The Y.M.C.A. was a site of homosocial and homosexual possibility, and two of the men involved in exposing Murray remained bachelors for life.

28 “Pastor was Trapped,” *Baltimore News*, Dec. 2, 1915; “Former Pastor Presented,” *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 11, 1915. On the navy’s Newport investigation, see George Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (Winter 1985): 189–211; Lawrence R. Murphy, *Perverts by Official Order: The Campaign against Homosexuals by the United States Navy* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1988); John Donald Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same-Sex Relations and the YMCA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 161–74.

29 None of the men’s names were mentioned in newspaper articles about the case, but Williams, Sax, and Markle were listed as witnesses against Murray in the indictment levied against him for assault. Baltimore City Criminal Court (Criminal Papers), True Bill for Case 3476, State v. Kenneth G. Murray, MSA T495-183, box 166, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD.

30 Although newspapers published around the time of Murray’s exposure declined to state the exact nature of his offense, an article published in the *Sun* in 1921 noted that Murray’s conduct was of a type outlawed by the state’s Perverted Practices Act of 1916 (“State Drops Charges Against Clergyman,” *Evening Sun*, Sept. 8, 1921.). While the act technically outlawed any practices deemed to be perverse or “unnatural,” it was specifically aimed at criminalizing oral sex (*An Act to Add a New Section to Article 27 of the Code of Public General Laws of Maryland of 1916* [...], chapter 616, Laws of Maryland (1916): 1293–94).

31 “The Reverend K.G. Murray Ill,” *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 27, 1915; “Preacher is Deposed,” *Baltimore American*, Dec. 2, 1915. Protestant churches in the 1910s often talked of homosexuality as a medical problem or mental health issue rather than a spiritual problem, per se. Kathryn Lofton, “Queering Fundamentalism: John Balcom Shaw and the Sexuality of a Protestant Orthodoxy,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17 (Sept. 2008): 439–68. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0020>; Krivulskaya, “Queer Rumors: Protestant Ministers, Unnatural Deeds, and Church Censure in the Twentieth-Century United States,” 7.

32 “Knows Where He Is,” *Evening Sun*, Dec. 2, 1915; “Pastor was Trapped,” *Baltimore News*, Dec. 2, 1915.

33 “Will Zurückfahren,” *Der Deutsche Correspondent*, May 14, 1916. Thanks to Susan Crane and Lynx Tchernyshyov for their help with translation.

34 Harry G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

35 The arrests allegedly took place between June 1 and September 25. MVC, Report of the Maryland Vice Commission, vol. 1, 423–25.

36 “Will Zurückfahren,” *Der Deutsche Correspondent*, May 14, 1916.

37 “Knows Where He Is,” *Evening Sun*, Dec. 2, 1915. Krivulskaya, “Queer Rumors: Protestant Ministers, Unnatural Deeds, and Church Censure in the Twentieth-Century United States,” 3–9.

38 “Arranging the Appointments,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), Mar. 31, 1916.

39 “Not at Kelly Sanitarium,” *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 2, 1915.

40 Howard A. Kelly, Diaries, November–December, 1915, Series 12, folder 1915.11, Chesney Medical Archives.

41 “S.E. Pentz Faces Court,” *Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 8, 1914; “Attorney Pentz Freed,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 17, 1914; “S.E. Pentz Disbarred,” *Baltimore Sun*, May 30, 1915.

42 “W.N. Finley Presented,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 11, 1915; “Finley Given 4 Years,” *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 26, 1915.

43 Mr. Wegg, “Mr. Wegg is Greatly Shocked by Certain Doctrines and Habits of the Free Lance,” *Evening Sun*, Dec. 5, 1912; Mr Wegg, “Mr. Wegg Explains His Silence Regarding Late Doing at Havre De Grace,” *Evening Sun*, Dec. 9, 1912.

- 44 See, for example, K.K.K., "Additions to the List of the Fighters Against Sunday Baseball," *Evening Sun*, Jan. 10, 1916.
- 45 Augustus, "'Serious Defections' Among the Moralists are Rather Frequent, Says This Writers, Who Makes a Dire Prediction," *Evening Sun*, Dec. 9, 1915.
- 46 Augustus, "'Serious Defections,'" *Evening Sun*, Dec. 9, 1915.
- 47 Baltimore newspapers covered European scandals like Oscar Wilde's prosecution and the Eulenberg affair but rarely covered local sodomy prosecutions. One exception took place only a year before Murray's exposure; newspapers covered the School Board trial of Frank A. Manny, a progressive education reformer and director of teacher training for the city of Baltimore who was accused of molesting multiple boys.
- 48 E.D. Hallock, "One Who Thinks that Christianity Means Humanity and Mercy," *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 23, 1915; Methodist Woman, "A Case in Which Publicity Was Cruel, Says a 'Methodist Woman,'" *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 8, 1915. At least one reader disagreed that the case was unworthy of press coverage: Taxpayer, "Lamentable Somnolence of the Sunpaper in Being 'Scooped' and Publishing News Two Weeks Later," *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 23, 1915.
- 49 Dr. Zechia Judd, "Thinks There Should Be No Prosecution in the Murray Case," *Evening Sun*, Dec. 13, 1915. Several letter writers seemingly anticipated arguments Judith N. Shklar would make decades later concerning the relative weights of cruelty and hypocrisy as vices. See Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 45–86.
- 50 Humanity, "What a Sinner Would Have Done," *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 4, 1915.
- 51 Subscriber, "Good Advice to Dr. Walker and a Prophecy of the Coming Millennium Under the 'Morals Commission,'" *Evening Sun*, Dec. 31, 1915.
- 52 See for a small selection K.K.K., "Additions to the List of the Fighters Against Sunday Baseball," *Evening Sun*, Jan. 10, 1916; "A Good Many Folks Would Like to Read the Full Particulars in the Vice Report, Including Names—And Many Would Not," *Evening Sun*, Nov. 14, 1916; "But Did You Ever Hear Anybody Sing 'Nearer, My God, to Thee,' in a Saloon, or Get Nearer to Him there?" *Baltimore Sun*, May 23, 1918; Sulphur, "His List of the Ten Greatest," *Baltimore Sun*, Mar. 11, 1920; Solomon, "The Amenities of Politics," *Evening Sun*, Nov. 3, 1921; "The Movies and the Ministry," *Evening Sun*, Feb. 15, 1922; W. Irvine Cross, "Law and Decadence," *Evening Sun*, Feb. 19, 1926; H.A.K., "Some Who Were Exonerated and Extolled by Pious Brethren," *Evening Sun*, July 12, 1929.
- 53 Rodgers, *Mencken: The American Iconoclast*, 141–44. Notably, Rodgers claims that the last "Free Lance" column appeared on October 23, but Mencken published a final column on November 25 ("The Free Lance," *Evening Sun*, Nov. 25, 1915).
- 54 H.L. Mencken, "The Free Lance," *Evening Sun*, Jan. 19, 1914.
- 55 Mencken, "The Police," *Evening Sun*, Aug. 19, 1929.
- 56 Mencken, "The Police." Mencken evoked older stereotypes of Methodist revivals and camp meetings as spaces of erotic and sexual possibility. See Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 16–17; Bruce Dorsey, "Making Men What They Should Be": Male Same-Sex Intimacy and Evangelical Religion in Early Nineteenth-Century New England," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24 (Sept. 2015): 345–77.
- 57 W.S. McGuire, "Agrees with Mr. Kilgour," *Baltimore Sun*, July 1, 1919.
- 58 Art, "The Moral Turks Forbid the Nude in Art," *Evening Sun*, June 26, 1917.
- 59 On Progressive Era anxieties around youth being coerced on corrupted by "predatory" older men, see Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 59–62.
- 60 Mencken, "The Free Lance," *Evening Sun*, Nov. 7, 1912.
- 61 Kenneth G. Murray, "The Reverend Kenneth G. Murray in Defense and Explanation of the Vice Crusade," *Evening Sun*, Nov. 6, 1912.
- 62 MVC Report, Vol. 1, 430. See also Edith Houghton Hooker, *The Laws of Sex* (Boston: R. G. Badger, 1921), 220.
- 63 Richard B. Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 229–32; Kevin F. White, *The First Sexual Revolution: The Emergence of Male Heterosexuality in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 7–8.
- 64 MVC Report, Vol. 1, 363.
- 65 MVC Report, Vol. 3, 23.
- 66 MVC Report, Vol. 1, 353.
- 67 MVC Report, Vol. 1, 354.
- 68 MVC Report, Vol. 1, 355.

- 69 George Chauncey, *Gay New York Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 71.
- 70 Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). See also Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization a Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917, Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 71 Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 172–73.
- 72 Adam Rome, “‘Political Hermaphrodites’: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America,” *Environmental History* 11 (July 2006): 440–63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/11.3.440>. On women’s activism in Baltimore, see Hopkins and the 19th Amendment: Activists in Suffrage and Health Reform, Chesney Archives, Baltimore, MD. <https://exhibits.library.jhu.edu/exhibits/show/hopkins19thamendment> (accessed Mar. 27, 2022).
- 73 “Pastor there Six Years,” *Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 24, 1911.
- 74 “Declares War in His Block,” *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 22, 1915; Kenneth G. Murray, “In Defense and Explanation of the Vice Crusade,” *Evening Sun*, Nov. 6, 1912.
- 75 “Want the Churches Open on Sundays,” *Baltimore American*, Nov. 24, 1915.
- 76 “Declares War in His Block,” *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 22, 1915.
- 77 Rosett, *The Quandary*, 51–52. Dennis P. Halpin, “Reforming Charm City: Grassroots Activism, Politics, and the Making of Modern Baltimore, 1877–1920” (PhD diss., Rutgers, 2012), 174–76.
- 78 Rosett, *The Quandary*, 142.
- 79 Mencken, “The Free Lance,” *Evening Sun*, Nov. 7, 1912.
- 80 Mencken, *Prejudices: Fifth Series* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926), 64.
- 81 Mencken, “The Free Lance,” *Evening Sun*, Nov. 7, 1912.
- 82 Gerald Dubonnet, “Reflections on the Vice Crusade,” *Evening Sun*, Nov. 4, 1912.
- 83 Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 173.
- 84 Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 195–208.
- 85 Mencken, “Star-Spangled Men,” *New Republic*, Sept. 29, 1920, reprinted in Mencken *Chrestomathy* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2012), 604. Mencken’s critique of the Y.M.C.A. is oft cited by scholars of muscular Christianity. Notably, however, the section of the quote that references “homosexual scandal” is usually omitted. See, for example, Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 204.
- 86 Mencken, *Heathen Days: Mencken’s Autobiography, 1890–1936* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 28.
- 87 Mencken, *Heathen Days*, 28.
- 88 Mencken, *Prejudices*, Third Series (New York: Knopf, 1922), 143.
- 89 Mencken, *Minority Report* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 164.
- 90 Lofton, “Queering Fundamentalism,” 2.
- 91 Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 2–3.
- 92 George Bartlett, “Murray’s One Man Who Fulfilled Urge to Travel around World,” *Tampa Bay Times*, Sept. 5, 1949, 21; “Kenneth Murray, Noted Traveler, Lecturer, Dies,” *Tampa Bay Times*, Nov. 14, 1951, 10.
- 93 Mencken, “Call to the Sanctified,” *Evening Sun*, Aug. 1, 1927.
- 94 Mencken, “Call to the Sanctified.”
- 95 Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 202–5. K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2012), 61–69.

Katie M. Hemphill is an Associate Professor of History and a faculty affiliate of the Institute for LGBT Studies at the University of Arizona. She is the author of *Bawdy City: Commercial Sex and Regulation in Baltimore, 1790–1915*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2020.