

**The impact of British public opinion on women's relationships
with American GIs in Gloucestershire 1942-1946**

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Abstract

The main focus of this study is to determine the impact of public opinion on women's relationships with American GIs in Gloucestershire 1942-1946. This involves understanding the scope of the relationships that were had and how race determined the way women who fraternised with US troops were portrayed to the public. Its primary aim is to provide new understanding of a subject that is under researched in Gloucestershire. Much attention has been given to the presence and impact of American soldiers in the Britain during the Second World War. However, no study has directly focused on Gloucestershire. This thesis also aims to understand if public opinion regarding women's relationships with American soldiers impacted their sexual agency. Two main methods are used, the textual analysis of primary sources and the use of oral history accounts.

The research reveals that sexual relationships with American soldiers added to the existing apprehension that surrounded female sexuality. Many local women had relationships with American soldiers, which aggravated some members of the public and the local authorities, especially if the soldier was black. Young working-class girls and women were particularly singled out for their immoral behaviour towards the US troops. The research also reveals that women in Gloucestershire expressed indifference and defiance towards the often-disapproving public opinion and control mechanisms implemented to influence the sexual agency of women. This thesis contributes to women's history in Gloucestershire, uncovering a period of the county's history that until now has not been researched.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis provides an examination of how women's agency can be identified in their response to sexual mores, with particular reference to American soldiers stationed in Gloucestershire during the Second World War. The thesis encompasses the arrival of American soldiers into the county in 1942 through to 1946 when most women who had married American soldiers emigrated to the States. By analysing contemporary newspaper reports, as well as using oral history testimonies, this thesis demonstrates that women's responses to expectations and control mechanisms implemented to influence their sexuality varied greatly across the county. This thesis argues that a woman's response depended on a complex interplay of gender, race, class and age.

Geographically, this thesis focuses on Gloucestershire, a county in the South West of England as it is not only the author's home county, but also had a large presence of both white and black American troops during the war. There can be several strengths for focusing on a local study. The first is that by using primary sources, it allows the author to gain a rich understanding of the area at the time. It can highlight the political, social, and economic factors operating in the area. This allows the author to understand the opinions and reactions towards women's sexual behaviour. Secondly, an emphasis on a local study provides a wide range of women's responses to expectations placed upon their sexuality which can emerge more clearly than if the study was focused on a larger area. Thirdly, focusing on a local study allows women's experiences to be compared in a wider geographical context.

However, local studies present some challenges. For example, the variety of primary sources can be limited. There may be fewer participants willing to take part in oral history interviews and other valuable primary sources such as diaries and letters may only exist in small quantities

if at all. This can force the author into relying heavily on other sources such as local newspaper reports, giving limited perspective of women's opinions and reactions towards constraints placed upon their behaviour.

Between 1942 and 1946, two million US servicemen were stationed or had passed through Britain.¹ By the end of April 1944 out of the 1,422,276 American soldiers stationed in Britain, 72,534 were in Gloucestershire.² These men were spread out across the county with the highest concentration in Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Forest of Dean. The large number of American troops stationed all over the county meant that local women encountered both white and black GIs. These encounters soon led to platonic and romantic relationships. Female sexuality was intricately linked with sexual morality and this link was exaggerated by the presence of US troops during the war. The behaviour of women who fraternised with American soldiers was closely monitored by members of the public and attitudes towards these women depended on their age and social class. Sonya O. Rose argues that public opinion on female sexual behaviour was determined by the characteristics of what made a 'good British citizen' as women engaging in immoral behaviour were perceived as antithetical to the wartime spirit.³ Similarly, Wendy Webster through her studies on the experiences of black people in World War II, has used 'sexual patriotism' to demonstrate the expectations public opinion placed on women's sexual behaviour during the war. Webster shows that this was particularly evident in attitudes towards interracial relationships which generally faced hostility and required women to avoid sexual relationships with men that were not native-born Britons.⁴

¹ Barbara G. Friedman, *From the Battlefield to the Bridal Suite: Media Coverage of British War Brides 1942-1946*, (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007), p. 1.

² David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996). p. 111.

³ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 71.

⁴ Wendy Webster, *Mixing it: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 17-18.

Throughout the war it is estimated that there were around 240,000 Black GIs stationed in Britain.⁵ The US army that arrived into Britain in 1942 was a racially segregated army. America's black population, particularly in the Southern states were segregated via the Jim Crow laws, a system of 'organi[s]ed repression, political disenfranchisement and economic marginali[s]ation.'⁶ Similar to their situation at home, African American soldiers were kept apart from their white counterparts by being billeted in separate camps and attending separate army clubs.⁷ Black GIs were mainly employed in the service units of the American army and as Gloucestershire was home to the Head Quarters of the Services of Supply, the county accommodated many black GIs. These men were stationed in camps at Cheltenham, Ashchurch, Gloucester and the Forest of Dean, as well as in small towns such as Chipping Campden. Most people in Britain had never met a black person; therefore, these African American soldiers would have been the first black people most Gloucestershire residents would have encountered.

Women who had relationships with black American soldiers were deemed immoral and degraded. Rose suggests that ordinary women who associated with them were portrayed in newspapers as 'especially immoral or degraded' with news reports, thus 'magnify[ing] the apprehension about women's sexual morality.'⁸ Interracial mixing was seen as a sexual perversion and miscegenation was feared. In his study Gavin Schaffer argues that a deep-rooted belief of 'white supremacy' and preventing the deterioration of British 'racial stock' was evident in contemporary thinking and many people perceived there to be significant physical

⁵ Lucy Bland, *Britain's 'brown babies'* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2019), p.14.

⁶ David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Books, 2016). p. 467-468.

⁷ Ibid, p. 468.

⁸ Rose., *Which People's War?* p. 78.

differences between white and black people.⁹ Contemporary racial beliefs about black people, often saw them portrayed as childlike and unable to control their lust. Therefore, in inter-racial relationships, black men could either be seen as the aggressors, in which case white women needed protecting, or women could be seen as taking advantage of the black man's innocence and therefore perceived as sexual predators with perverse morals.

It is within this dynamic that this thesis examines how women navigated their own agency in terms of the extent of their fraternisation with American troops. Women's sexual lives and choices were largely regulated by society and the choices a woman made regarding romantic partners or marriage could influence her societal and familial reputation. Yet during the war, women were bombarded by the mass media with messages advising how they should look, to how they should conduct themselves around members of the opposite sex. For example, articles in magazines such as *Woman's Own* instructed women to use medicated face cream to protect their 'delicate complexions' from harsh factory conditions.¹⁰ Women were advised to make themselves available to servicemen in order to maintain morale, yet they were also expected to exercise sexual restraint and self-denial for the benefit of the nation and to display good citizenship.

Women were also expected to engage in a variety of war work. Penny Summerfield argues that forcing women into job roles that were once seen as the domain of men destabilised the traditional gender norm, making women appear more masculine and more likely to engage in acts of immorality, such as casual, pre-marital sex.¹¹ The expectations placed upon women to

⁹ Gavin Schaffer, 'Fighting Racism: Black Soldiers and Workers in Britain during the Second World War', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 28 (2010), p. 258.

¹⁰ 'What women are doing and saying', *Women's Own*, 30 January 1942, Primary Source, cited in Friedman., *Battlefront to the Bridal Suite*, p. 38.

¹¹ Penny Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century', *The International History Review*, 19 (1997), pp. 2-15.

conduct masculine war work, yet retain their femininity meant that there was a blurring of lines regarding what was deemed as acceptable behaviour of women.

To understand the pressures and choices these women faced, this thesis borrows from one theoretical approach, gender theory. Gender theory provides a framework in which to understand how women's behaviour was controlled by contemporary ideas on race, class, and sexuality. Governments and authoritative organisations such as the church were trying to influence and control women's sexuality. However, women's conduct was also monitored through unofficial methods such as gossip and innuendo. The feminist critique of the concept of 'separate spheres' is also a useful lens in which to view this thesis. This is because control of female sexuality was also exercised by the general public and a woman's family. John Horne has used the separate spheres concept to explain 'paternal authority' over the family and argues that gender spheres are used by states to control and protect the domestic place of women in the home.¹² However, the use of this concept implies that society fell into two distinct categories. Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot argues that 'spheres and sexes intersected and overlapped' with boundaries being vague.¹³ This is especially true during wartime with women breaking the traditional gender norms through conscripted war work, but also explains the apprehension that society displayed towards women exercising sexual agency.

During the war, many women moved away from their childhood home in order to conduct vital war work. Therefore, women were experiencing a sense of anonymity and financial independence for the first time. This emancipation meant that women had a new freedom from

¹² John Horne, 'Masculinity in politics and war in the age of nation-states and world wars, 1850-1950', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 34.

¹³ Genevieve Fraisse, Michelle Perrot and Georges Duby, *A History of Women in the West. IV, Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, 2nd edn. (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 321.

parental and societal control. The separate spheres concept can be used to understand that measures put in place in the public and private sphere were done as a reaction to the threat of current order of society. Examples of this come from Norman Longmate's influential work *The G.I.'s: The Americans in Britain, 1942-1945*, in which he suggests that female agency was determined by public pressures, as the threat of becoming a GI 'wallflower' was enough to dissuade women from entering into relationships with black GIs or even entertaining them at dances.¹⁴ However more recent research such as that of Wendy Webster argues that even though women were reminded that encounters with black GIs should be 'friendly but brief', women's desire for non-native-born Britons meant that they did not abide by this.¹⁵

There already exists a great body of literature about relationships between British women and American soldiers during the Second World War. However, no such study has focused exclusively on the county of Gloucestershire. Therefore, this thesis takes the national themes identified in existing literature to discern how unique or similar the situation was in Gloucestershire. Most of the breakthrough and key existing pieces of literature, such as the work by Norman Longmate and Graham Smith, were published in the 1980s and 1990s. These extensive studies are useful as they provide an overall account of American soldiers in Britain. Similarly, David Reynolds' 1996 study *Rich Relations* has been an invaluable resource and argues that women's relationships with the GIs should be understood in the context of the war. Reynolds argues that the American soldiers offered escapism from the strain of war.¹⁶ Despite their usefulness only a few chapters in these vast studies are devoted to women's experiences, instead they are broad and tend to focus on the overall experience of the American male.

¹⁴ Norman Longmate, *The G.I.'s: The Americans in Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 132.

¹⁵ Webster, *Mixing it*, p. 199.

¹⁶ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 269-270.

Around the same time, women started to publish their memoirs, describing their experiences as GI brides. The focus on women's experiences with American servicemen was the result of the growing interest in women's history which emerged out of the feminist movement of the late 1960s to the early 1970s. These extensive studies and personal memoirs are particularly useful to the thesis as they use first-hand accounts of women away from a previously male-centric dominated arena. However, the information given is reliant on their memories and their interpretation of events and therefore accuracy has to be considered. These memoirs are also written by women who focus on their life history, so again their experiences of associating with American troops is often very brief, especially as at the time of publication the women's husbands may still be alive or they were aware of their intended audience.

However more recent studies have started to emerge which focus on the experience of African American soldiers. Neil Wynn's 1993 study *The Afro-American and The Second World War* focuses on the experience of the black male. Similarly, David Olusoga's 2016 study *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, focuses on the history of Britain's black population including the African American soldiers that were stationed in Britain. In *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, Sonya O. Rose determines how relationships with the Americans were viewed by the British public, but she focuses on the public reaction to women's relationships with black US troops. Rose examines the type of language that was used in newspaper reports to describe how young women who were having sexual relationships with black Americans provoked an intense debate on the morals of women. In understanding the experiences of non-native British people Wendy Webster in *Mixing it: Diversity in World War Two Britain*, highlights the contrast in the public message between inter-racial mixing and the government's private thinking. Through coining the term 'Sexual Patriotism', Webster shows what popular opinion demanded from women in their relationships

with men of enemy and allied nationalities. Women were expected to avoid relationships with men that were not British or not white.¹⁷ Lucy Bland's study *Britain's 'Brown Babies'* focuses on the life of the children born to white British mothers and African American soldiers during the Second World War. However, Bland highlights the experience of British women who had sexual relationships with black GIs and subsequently fell pregnant. Throughout the book Bland shows how some women were forced by their family and their church to give up their child, whilst some women who kept their mixed-race child were disowned by their family and ostracised from their community. Bland has identified that women responded to these pressures in a variety of ways by making difficult decisions in a complex period.

This thesis uses a wide range of source material. Contextual analysis of reports and editorials in local newspapers such as the *Gloucestershire Echo*, the *Gloucester Citizen* and the *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Graphic* are used. The 'Letters to editors' sections from these newspapers were particularly useful for providing reactions from a variety of people from different social classes and personal circumstances, providing a spectrum of disgust or support for women's behaviour with American troops. It also gave some women a platform to defend their reactions towards public opinion, which was especially the case amongst local women who had married American soldiers. However, reports and editorials are not completely neutral and are carefully constructed for their intended audience. Rose argues that newspapers are a selective description of an event or series of events and are the authors own interpretation.¹⁸ As a result, newspapers do not present a neutral and unmediated view of their subjects.¹⁹ Despite this, the press is an important source for assessing the public and political culture of

¹⁷ Webster, *Mixing it*, p. 199.

¹⁸ Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the time.²⁰ Therefore, the press contributed to shaping public opinion by reinforcing sexual mores anchored in popular opinion and present in Government policy.

Similarly, Mass Observation, a private survey organisation founded in 1937 should be used with caution when determining public opinion. Claire Langhammer highlights that those who volunteered to write in diary or directive form were a ‘distinctive group of people’ as they believed their own thoughts to be worth recording.²¹ Volunteers were predominantly from lower middle-class and upper working-class backgrounds, therefore not a complete representation of British society.²² For this reason, Mass Observation presents an alternate view on society rather than a dominant perspective.

This thesis also makes use of personal narratives and oral history interviews. One issue arising in using oral history as a method is that it relies on the participants memory. Therefore, one needs to consider the validity of the data as memories can be easily distorted, especially if the memory is from a long time ago. Peter Freidlander argues that ‘memory is a treacherous thing’ as it relies on the ability of one to recall instances that can be misinterpreted, recalled incorrectly or incompletely.²³ However, memory is not just about the past but the process of how something is recalled. When someone is asked to recall something, they are recalling their own interpretation. Paul Thompson argues that for us to learn something ‘we have first to comprehend it’.²⁴ This suggests that the individual must process within themselves what is happening. A person’s understanding of something is subjective and deeply personal and can

²⁰ Rose, *Which People’s War*, p. 25.

²¹ Claire Langhammer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). p.xvi.

²² *Ibid.* p. xvii.

²³ Peter Friedlander, ‘Theory, Method and Oral History’ in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 2nd edn., (Lanham: Altamira Press, 1996), p. 158.

²⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd edn, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 129.

largely depend on what they have currently experienced up until that point. Friedlander furthers this by suggesting that the structure of memory is related to the structure of perception, which in turn is deep rooted in ‘culture, education and experience’.²⁵ Therefore, memory is the way in which a person recalls something in relation to their intrinsic beliefs and their lives experiences up to that time. This could mean that something that appeared to be a momentous life event when the individual was younger, now once recalled at a much later stage, may not have the same significance, and could be influenced by changing culture and more life experiences. On the other hand, nostalgia and exaggeration could be interpreted as evidence of significance, and possibly even agency through memory.

Another issue surrounding oral history is the accuracy of its data compared to the accuracy of data from empirical sources. Few historians argue that information from empirical data is far more accurate than the recalling of an event. Lynn Abrams suggests that this issue originated from when ‘historical research was dominated by the document’ as oral history was not an ‘objective, social-scientific methodology’ that could be ‘rigorously tested’.²⁶ Abrams argues that oral history is no less accurate than the written document. For example, minute taking in a meeting is also based on memory of what was said and therefore will contain a ‘frankness of observation missing’ from the ‘contrived ‘neutrality’ of the minute-taker’.²⁷ Friedlander on the other hand, points out that memory does not provide the ‘pinpoint accuracy’ found in documentary evidence.²⁸ However, empirical evidence can also be unreliable as although it may be a contemporary source, there is still bias and subjectivity as the author had a purpose for constructing and recording the information. Traditional empirical evidence often misses out the more personal, intimate, and emotive aspects of history, particularly when it comes to less

²⁵ Friedlander, ‘Theory, Method and Oral History’ in *Oral History*, p. 155.

²⁶ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd edn, (London: Routledge, 2016). p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 80.

²⁸ Friedlander, ‘Theory, Method and Oral History’ in *Oral History*, p. 154.

represented voices. Unlike contemporary sources, oral history allows historians to challenge a source during its construction, something that is impossible to do when interpreting a written source. Oral sources are no different to other documents as all types of historical sources are in some way constructed via short-term or long-term memory. Therefore, it is in-fact the perception of the author of the source that historians interpret, be it written or spoken.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the author conducted fewer interviews than originally anticipated. Requests for interview participants prior to the national lockdowns were posted on local history social media sites. Through reaching out to various social history sites and societies, 3 women were willing to be interviewed. Two participants were born in 1942, so information of the American soldiers had been passed down to them from friends and family. The second interview conducted was with Cathy Febery, who was born in Cheltenham in the early 1920s and had first-hand experience of the Americans. The Gloucestershire Archives and the University of Gloucestershire collections also had a library of oral history transcripts that, although conducted for different projects, had some relevant material.

Many people who responded to my requests for information shared memories with me through way of a private message and many wished to remain anonymous. Similarly, one of the women interviewed for this thesis also wished to remain anonymous. Therefore, where used, these participants and any names of family members in their information have not been identified. All those who took part in an interview were required to sign a consent form and were told of the intent of the interview and how the information they provided would be used.

This thesis examines the various ways women responded to numerous pressures placed upon their actions and behaviour. This study is the first of this kind as it focuses on women in

Gloucestershire. The nature of a local study will allow this thesis to focus more clearly on women's experiences. By building on existing themes found in current literature, this thesis understands that women's responses towards pressures placed upon their sexual behaviour, were incredibly diverse and depended on a complex interplay of gender, race, class and age.

Chapter 2: Types of Relationships

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the types of relationships that were formed between women in Gloucestershire and American soldiers. A variety of relationships were established, some motivated by necessity and some born out of desire and love. Local newspapers attempted to dissuade women from entering into serious relationships with American soldiers. Despite this many women in the county married American soldiers, therefore this chapter examines the experiences of local GI brides. Towards the end of the war, Brides' clubs were created to educate GI brides on life in America and provided them with a network of other women in the same situation. As the local press encouraged women to attend these meetings, this chapter examines the public response to these clubs.

However, not all marriages between British women and American soldiers were successful. Women who returned home often reinforced widely held beliefs that these marriages had been conducted in haste. Many women were perceived as unpatriotic for abandoning their country and for not choosing a British man as their husband. Therefore, this chapter will examine the experiences of local GI brides whose marriages resulted in divorce or separation. As well as romantic relationships, friendships were also formed between women and American GIs. Local women were sometimes categorised by American soldiers into those that would have sex with them and those that would not. Many women refused the advances of US troops and in some cases, this resulted in reported incidents of sexual violence. This chapter demonstrates that the race of the American soldier determined how women who reported incidents of sexual violence were treated in court and portrayed in the media.

2.2 Wartime Unimaginables: Motivations for fraternising with American troops

During the war American GIs had become so popular with British women that a prevalent wartime joke emerged; ‘Heard about the new utility knickers? One Yank – and they’re off.’²⁹ However, for British women, the arrival of the Americans was a completely unique experience. Former GI bride, Pamela Winfield explained that the arrival of the Americans was a ‘phenomenon that will never happen again, unless men come down from Mars.’³⁰ The Americans arrived at a war-torn Britain tired from bombing and rationing, British people were exhausted from war work and enduring long separations from loved ones. Therefore, the arrival of US troops was a novelty and as one Red Cross worker from Norwich summed up, they ‘brought with them colour, romance, warmth – and a tremendous hospitality to our dark, shadowed island’.³¹ Most British women would only have encountered an American on their cinema screens. June Barrie, who was to become a film star herself, recalled that ‘it was as if the cinema had come to life. They were so handsome and well-groomed and *clean*.’³² Cathy from Cheltenham recalled ‘they weren’t a bad looking lot... oh some of them were more like film stars and I used to think oh...’³³ The fact that the GIs came from exotic sounding places such as California, Florida, New Orleans and Malibu added to the allure.³⁴

American soldiers were paid five times more than their British counterpart. For example, in June 1942 a private in the British Army was paid fourteen shillings a week, whereas a private in the US Army received £3 8s 9d. Likewise, a British sergeant was paid £2 2s a week, compared with his US equivalent who got £5 7s 2d.³⁵ David Reynolds argues that women were

²⁹ John Costello, *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1985). pp. 319-320.

³⁰ Pamela Winfield, *Melancholy Baby: The Unplanned Consequences of the G.I.s’ Arrival in Europe for World War II* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Bergin & Garvey, 2000). p. xiii.

³¹ Original Source not provided but cited in Juliet Gardiner, ‘*Over Here*’: *The GIs in Wartime Britain*, (London: Collins & Brown Limited. 1992). p. 53.

³² Original Source not provided but cited in Gardiner., pp. 111-112.

³³ Interview with Kathleen Febery, 14th March 2020.

³⁴ Gardiner, ‘*Over Here*’, p. 109.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 62.

‘indirect beneficiaries’ of this as they would often receive silk stockings, chocolate and cigarettes as gifts.³⁶ Therefore women who associated with the American soldiers were often perceived to be gold diggers, selfishly using American men for their own gain. However, due to the monotony of the war many women could not be blamed for seizing these opportunities when they arose. One woman in Bristol could not understand what her friend saw in a ‘wooden’ GI until her friend disclosed that he was a former chef and worked in the kitchens at Clifton College which were the headquarters for Gen. Bradley’s 1st Army in 1943-44. He would take her to the College on dates where she would dine out on free steak, beef and other ‘wartime unimaginables.’³⁷ Cathy from Cheltenham described how she would think ‘why not, we’ve got no money’ when the Americans would offer to buy her a drink in the pub.³⁸ However, some women did not accept these gifts from the American servicemen because if they did, they would feel obliged to perform sexual favours at the end of the date. Cathy described how ‘you were almost too frightened to take it off him [‘]cause you thought he wanted something for it, it didn’t come as a gift.’ She added that ‘I used to keep thinking ohhh, I’d like that but not having to do that mind.’³⁹ This demonstrates that some young women felt obliged to perform sexual behaviours if they accepted gifts from American troops. Acceptance of these gifts, therefore, may also have acted as a measure of a woman’s morality, as those who accepted the gifts, even on face value, were perceived as loose and promiscuous, compared with those women who refused them.

³⁶ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996). p. 264.

³⁷ IWM 90/10/1, pt. 2, p. 66, cited in Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 264.

³⁸ Interview with Kathleen Febery, 14th March 2020.

³⁹ Interview with Kathleen Febery, 14th March 2020.

2.3 Cupid's Leap: GI Brides and The Other Great Sex Problem

It was not long after the arrival of the American troops that the first marriages with British women occurred. In February 1943 the first Anglo-American marriage in Cheltenham took place. A brief report featured on the back page of the *Gloucestershire Echo* described how the Irish bride who was stationed in Cheltenham with the Auxiliary Territorial Service 'wore a smart two-piece suit with matching hat and a fox fur' was given away by an officer of the US Army.⁴⁰ A few months later the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported that in mid-July seven out of eight marriages attended by the Cheltenham registrar of marriages involved American bridegrooms. Two of the brides were members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force whilst the remaining five were local girls.⁴¹ The *Cheltenham Chronicle* reported that between September 1943 and March 1944 nearly 200 American soldiers had been married at the Registrar Office or in local chapels and that one Cheltenham registrar had married as many as six couples in one morning. All aspects of the services were represented in the increase of marriages.⁴² In comparison to marriages with Allied troops, the *Gloucestershire Echo* estimated that 36 women in Gloucester were known to have married Canadian troops.⁴³ These numbers were low compared to marriages with American soldiers. The newspaper reports of Anglo-American weddings in places such as Gotherington, Forest of Dean, Dursley, Gloucester and Chipping Campden suggest that love matches between American soldiers and local women occurred all across the county.

⁴⁰ 'First American Soldier to Wed in Cheltenham Church', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 22 February 1943 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430222/038/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 11/08/2020].

⁴¹ 'Cupid's Dart', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 July 1943 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430724/032/0003> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 14/08/2020].

⁴² 'Men and Women in This Week's News: Cupid's Leap', *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Graphic*, 04 March 1944, p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000518/19440304/037/0004> Image © Reach plc> [accessed 08/11/2020].

⁴³ 'To-day's Gossip: Canadian Brides', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 22 September 1945 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19450922/031/0003> Image © Reach plc> [accessed 08/11/2020].

Many women married their American GI husbands simply because they were in love with them. However, women who married American servicemen were often portrayed as having ulterior motives and British and US authorities believed that some women had married US troops in order to gain 'free' passage to America. In order to prevent this, marriage checks were introduced. Jenel Virden argues that war brides had to confront resistance to their plans at every turn and that women were treated with suspicion. Therefore, marriage investigations threw immediate doubt on the 'morals and character' of any foreign women who met and married a GI.⁴⁴ For example the American Red Cross were secretly tasked with investigating a woman's character if there was a suspicion that marriage was intended for anything other than love. The US army were concerned that marriage would be an 'impediment to their soldiers' performance.⁴⁵ However marriage was a civil right and therefore preventing a marriage would be a violation of a soldier's civil liberties.⁴⁶ Therefore, the solution was to create a jungle of red tape to prevent hasty marriages. News of these regulations were communicated between the local churches. A letter sent from the Rural Dean of Cirencester to a vicar in Cirencester in July 1942, warned that the United States Authorities had issued instruction to the US Forces that any member wishing to get married will require a certificate from his Commanding Officer confirming that he was not already married.⁴⁷ This was to prevent churches conducting marriages between US servicemen and local girls from entering into quick marriages.

The British Foreign Office did not want to publish the US rules on foreign marriage for fear this would be deemed as obvious opposition to these marriages.⁴⁸ Therefore, as romantic

⁴⁴ Jenel Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois press, 1996). p. 39.

⁴⁵ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 209.

⁴⁶ Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 34.

⁴⁷ Rural Dean's letter relating to regulations for marriages of American Servicemen. 24 July 1942. Gloucester Archives P33/IN/4/2

⁴⁸ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 214.

relationships between British women and American soldiers started to become more serious, the press was used to report on issues regarding marriage rules.⁴⁹ For example in September 1942 the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported that America was going ‘to be heading for a romantic problem’ and that US Commanding Officers had the unenviable task of ‘endorsing’ weddings between American servicemen and British women. The *Echo* wrote that this was to be made even more difficult ‘when we look round and see the flutter which cupid is causing among Uncle Sam’s sons and the daughters of Gloucestershire.’ The story questioned the ‘position of the girls’ who followed ‘their “doughboys” sweethearts’ to the United States, casting doubt on whether British women would be able to obtain US citizenship.⁵⁰

Throughout the first year of the Americans being in Gloucestershire, reports such as these were a regular occurrence in the local papers. In October 1942 the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported on a meeting attended by the Diocesan Chancellors of England who discussed marriages between British women and American servicemen. This report stated that wives or prospective brides would not be allowed to accompany their husbands on their return to America. It forewarned women that wives would not gain automatic citizenship by virtue of marriage but instead would be subject to the general immigration and naturalisation rules.⁵¹ Gloucestershire women were once again warned in June 1943 by the *Tewkesbury Register and Gazette* which reported that marriages would only be allowed if permission was gained from the soldiers’ Commanding Officer three months in advance and a complete investigation of the applicant’s availability to

⁴⁹ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 214.

⁵⁰ ‘Soldier Romances’, ‘Cupid’s Flutter’ & ‘Nice Problem’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 17 September 1942 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19420917/039/0003> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 01/08/1942].

⁵¹ ‘Intermarriages’ & ‘Military Consent’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 09 October 1942 p.4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19421009/042/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 01/08/2020].

marry was made.⁵² Authoritative organisations would not openly communicate these regulations as they did not want to publicly agree with them.

Similarly, other regional newspapers across the UK reported comparable warnings. For example, the *Londonderry Sentinel* reported in April 1942 that the American Expeditionary Force discouraged marriages between American soldiers and Northern Irish women. The headline blared ‘No Allowances for Wives.’⁵³ *The People*, also reported in April 1942 that British women were risking ‘their future happiness’ if they married a member of the Allied Forces, leaving them ‘shattered when the war ends.’ The paper reported that relocating to a different country and potential differences in the standard of living in their husband’s country would cause a breakup of marriages between British women and Allied troops.⁵⁴ Therefore, like other regional and national newspapers, the local Gloucestershire press was used to convey and dissuade women from even attempting to get into a serious relationship with an American soldier, by implying that it would be impossible to marry them.

Many war brides’ faced opposition to their marriage proposal from their parents or family. Women under the age of twenty-one had to obtain parental approval to marry and many parents refused to grant their permission. There were many reasons why parents would not grant their approval. Most of the women who married an American would eventually make the journey across the Atlantic to the States. This meant that many parents faced the devastating prospect

⁵² ‘U.S. Soldiers and British Girls: Cannot Marry Without C.O.’s Permission’, *The Tewkesbury Register and Gazette*, 12 June 1943 p5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002217/19430612/103/0005> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 03/08/2020].

⁵³ ‘Advice for A.E.F. Boys: Not to Marry Here: Official Discouragement: No Allowances for Wives’, *Londonderry Sentinel*, 02 April 1942 p. 2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001480/19420402/024/0002> Image © Johnston Press plc> [accessed 08/08/2020].

⁵⁴ ‘Allies Warned “Don’t Marry British Girls”, War Weddings Peril’, *The People*, 19 April 1942 p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000729/19420419/064/0005> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 08/08/2020].

that they would never see their daughter, or grandchildren ever again. A single flight across the Atlantic cost around £175, a sea passage between £40 and £65, while the average weekly wage in Britain in 1940 was £4.10s⁵⁵ Despite parental opposition many prospective brides managed to bring their parents round to agreeing to the match, demonstrating the determination and commitments of these women. June Porter, a young GI bride from Gloucester aged seventeen, recalled the resistance of her family when she received a letter from an American GI asking to marry him; ‘My mother said, ‘No way.’ June described how she begged for a week with her mother and father saying ‘No way. You can’t go all that way. You’re too young.’ June admitted that ‘At the end of the week I had broken them down. One week.’⁵⁶ It is understandable the apprehension of parents and the devastating prospect of never seeing their daughter again. Yet the prospect of moving to another country so far away was as daunting as much as it was exciting. To prepare women for this, Brides’ Clubs were set up all over the country.

2.3.1 Mayflower: Brides’ Clubs

Brides’ Clubs were integral in bringing GI brides together and preparing them for life in a brand-new country. Virden argues that the desire not to be ‘different’ suggests that cultural assimilation had begun for some British war brides through these Red Cross programmes.⁵⁷ Cultural assimilation was recognised by the American Red Cross as crucial in preparing British war brides for their new life in America. As newly arriving immigrants, GI brides were eager to blend in quickly with their new families and communities. However, with limited knowledge of America and the unrealistic expectations of their new life garnered from Hollywood, this would have made the task of assimilation harder. By recognising the inadequacy in the bride’s

⁵⁵ Gardiner, ‘Over Here’, p. 140.

⁵⁶ Charles F. Kiley, ‘How to Stay Out of Trouble’, *Stars and Stripes*, 2 Apr. 1942, 2, cited in Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 42.

⁵⁷ Virden., *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 108.

knowledge, the American Red Cross Club created orientation classes to educate the women about life in the United States.

The first club to open in Britain was at Rainbow Corner, the American Red Cross Club in London in 1944. However, it was not until August 1945 that one opened in Gloucestershire. At a meeting in June 1945 the club director of the American Red Cross Club in Cheltenham stated that it had ‘always been part of our service to give help and advice to British girls who have married or who are going to marry American Servicemen’, and that ‘the greatest value of the club would be in bringing the girls together so that they could form friendships which they would find valuable when they went to their new homes.’⁵⁸

Initial responses from GI brides in Cheltenham to proposals for a club were disappointing. A gossip columnist in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* stated how ‘[u]nfortunately from Cheltenham less than half a dozen wives of U.S. Servicemen have accepted the invitation’ to attend the school.’ The columnist speculated that the small response was due to some women already feeling that they were already ‘acquainted with some aspects of American life’ through the cinema.⁵⁹ As a result, it was decided that due to the more promising response from Gloucester, a joint school named the Mayflower Club would be formed, and classes would be held at the Red Cross Club in Gloucester. Around 40 brides attended the first meeting, with ages of the women ranging from 18 to 23.⁶⁰ Attendance remained constant and in September 1945, the *Gloucester Citizen* reported in its column ‘Gloucester Day by Day: Views and Gossip for the

⁵⁸ ‘Gloucester Day by Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 07 June 1945 p.4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450607/072/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror>
[accessed 04/08/2020].

⁵⁹ ‘Women’s Gossip by Wynne’, *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Graphic*, 25 August 1945 p.4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000518/19450825/026/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror>
[accessed 04/08/2020].

⁶⁰ ‘Gloucester Day to Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 25 July 1945 p. 4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450725/068/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror>
[accessed 01/09/2020]

Tea Table' that the brides who had been attending the clubs came from Cheltenham and Lydney, Forest of Dean. The number of women who attended these clubs seems low, but this could be due to travel restrictions and limitations as not everyone could possibly get to a club. Women with young children may also not have been able to attend the clubs due to there being no form of childcare available to them.

The American Red Cross tried to make it the aim of the Brides' Hour to 'de-glamouri[s]e' the women's perceptions of America and 'to bridge the gap between what Hollywood shows America to be like, and what these women will really find when they got there.' One Gloucester GI bride described how she thought her life would be like 'the movies, with priscilla curtains. I thought that was what I was coming to. White priscilla curtains, the whole thing, white fence. We all had that picture, I think.'⁶¹ To do this clubs regularly had outside speakers who would discuss different aspects of American life or provide first-hand accounts from women who had gone to America and had come 'home' to visit. This was necessary as many GI brides and fiancées truly believed that their lives would be exactly like what they had seen in the movies. The *Gloucester Citizen* reported in September 1945 how a female speaker from the American Embassy had spoken to fiancées and brides of GIs at the American Red Cross Club in Gloucester about 'home life, cookery, housekeeping and childcare'. Almost every aspect of American life was spoken about including the US government and the differences between the State and Federal government. The speaker encouraged the audience to participate in non-political organisations as this would enable them to make friends and take part in community life.⁶² Twice a week orientation classes at the Gloucester branch would feature subjects such

⁶¹ Interview with June Porter, 22 June Apr, 1991, Edmunds, Washington, cited in, Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 107.

⁶² 'Gloucester Talk To Americans' Brides', *Gloucester Citizen*, 07 September 1945 p.4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450907/065/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror>
[accessed 04/08/2020].

as application for the transport, community life, family budgets, fashions, and a father's class to teach the care of babies. Discussions regarding life in America would form the first half of the sessions, with the second half allowing the women's' husbands to join where there would be refreshments and an American Army band.⁶³ The local press saw this as brides from Cheltenham and Gloucester 'being provided with an opportunity of learning about America' and '[t]his means of acquainting British women with conditions in their new homes is an excellent idea' and is a better way of conveying information than formal lectures.⁶⁴ There is no sense that the American Red Cross events were organised in a way that would put women off from attending these meetings. However, the reports in the local press may have made these events sound intimidating to young women, especially those who did not know any other women in their position.

2.3.2 Our Boy's Before GI Wives: GI Brides' protest

Frustration felt by many British GI brides surrounding misinformation regarding their passage to America reached a pinnacle from mid to late 1945. On October 11th, thousands of war brides staged a protest in London, demonstrating their frustration at the long delay in receiving passage to America. The protest lasted two to three days but the women were told they would have to wait until all American servicemen had been transported home. The anguish of the war brides was reported by the British press in unfavourably ways and presented the women as selfish for pressing for passage before many American servicemen had returned home. Local and national newspapers placed a negative spin on the war brides' intentions for protesting. At

⁶³ 'Gloucester Day by Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table', Gloucester Citizen, 07 June 1945 p.4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450607/072/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04/08/2020]., 'Gloucester Day to Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table', Gloucester Citizen, 10 July 1945 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450710/071/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 31/08/2020]

⁶⁴ 'To-day's Gossip: Brides' Hour & U.S. Homes', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 03 September 1945 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19450903/026/0003> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 03/09/2020].

a meeting at Caxton hall, Westminster on the first night of protesting, the brides made it vehemently clear that they did not want to displace returning soldiers but rather they were protesting ‘the official run-around’ they had been getting on information regarding their shipping.⁶⁵

The situation of many GI brides was becoming desperate as without their husbands, some were not only facing financial strain but due to a housing shortage in Britain, many were struggling to find places to live. Pregnant women also had cause for concern as more delays meant that it could be even longer until they travelled as women in their third trimester were banned from travelling on the bride ships and would be forced to have their baby in England. Other brides felt the elongated separation was a strain on marriages and would result in divorce.⁶⁶ One war bride who had married a Canadian soldier wrote to the *Gloucestershire Echo* urging the war brides to stop their ‘unnecessary bickering’, she explained that she had no home, no parents and had brought up her 19-month-old daughter by herself in other people’s homes whilst her husband had been in Europe for fourteen months. She explained that she had put in for repatriation nine months prior and had not heard anything. She added that she thought ‘it was up to us all to do what we can to be with our husbands, even if it means demonstrating. We should be repatriated with the least possible delay.’⁶⁷ Another Cheltenham bride argued that she did not expect the Merchant Navy to be put at the disposal of the brides, but that as young people know that ‘if you want anything you have to go to get it and keep after it.’⁶⁸ This support is a clear display of female agency. However, it also demonstrates that there was

⁶⁵ Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 58-63.

⁶⁷ ‘Letters to the Editor: Wives’ Demand’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 November 1945 p. 3 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19451120/033/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 08/11/2020].

⁶⁸ ‘Letters to the Editor: G.I. Wives’ One Aim’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 16 October 1945 p. 4 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451016/041/0004> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 08/11/2020].

perhaps an understanding amongst young women that they had to exert their agency if they wanted anything in life.

Not all GI brides were unanimous in voicing their anguish and a day after the first protests in London, the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported that GI brides in Cheltenham were disgusted at the demonstrations that had taken place in London and were not going to participate in the 'soap-box oratory of the "Get-us-across-to-America" movement.' The report claimed that whilst Cheltenham brides were 'not exactly pleased' with having to wait for passage to America, they were 'philosophical about' having to wait and were 'annoyed that any girl should put up a fight to get across to America' before the American servicemen were sent home.⁶⁹ However, one bride disagreed with this perception of Cheltenham brides and instead claimed that they 'are by no means philosophical about the declaration' made by the U.S. Embassy that they may not be able to join their husbands for 'weeks, months, possibly years.' She explained that whilst shipping priority should be given to US servicemen, something could be done to 'relieve the hardships of many wives whose husbands have already returned home.' She argued that for instance 'the wife who has recently lost her twin babies surely deserves transportation to join her husband without delay.' This woman's own husband was in hospital in America following leg injuries caused by an explosion whilst on active duty. She believed that it would have been understandable if she herself had taken part in the demonstration if it meant that she could have obtained passage for herself and her 10-month-old daughter who had only seen her father for five days.⁷⁰ Attitudes amongst frustrated brides in the country were echoed by wives in

⁶⁹ 'To-Day's Gossip: G.I. Brides', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 12 October 1945 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451012/023/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 08/11/2020].

⁷⁰ 'Letters to the Editors: Not so Philosophical', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 19 October 1945, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451019/040/0005> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/11/2020].

Gloucestershire. However, many other GI brides and members of the public did not agree with the protests and once again were seen as selfishly putting their needs before servicemen.

Members of the public who disapproved of the actions of some GI brides, thought they were unpatriotic for marrying and emigrating to America. For example, the fiancée of a British soldier wrote in October 1945 that women who do not have an American husband are not jealous of them and neither do they want to stop them from going to America, however what she did object to was ‘our boys being put aside to get them there.’ She claimed that ‘half the girls that married G.I.s will get an awful jolt’ when they arrived in America as they think they are ‘stepping into the lap of luxury, and will be rolling in money, with fur coats and cars to ride around in.’ She argued that they would need to consider that their husbands will need to work for their living just like British men and wondered:

... if I cause a riot at the War Office, if I should be lucky enough to get [her husband] home. I guess not. I forgot that G.I. wives must join their husbands at any price, regardless of whether our men come home or not.⁷¹

Guardsman wrote:

... [w]hile wishing a happy and prosperous future to those “Mrs. G.I.’S” so anxious to leave war-shattered England for the luxuries of the U.S.A., I should like to remind them

⁷¹ ‘Letters to the Editor; Our Boys Before G.I. Wives’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 19 October 1945, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451019/040/0005> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/11/2020].

that their fellow-countrymen were fighting hard for them for two years before their husbands were at war.⁷²

This shows that animosity towards GI brides often came from other women whose husbands were still abroad from serving in the armed forces.

Many GI brides were becoming the target of criticism and sarcasm and were seen as a 'good-time-girl'. One GI bride wrote that 'it seems that we are to become the target for people's criticism and sarcasm.'⁷³ Virden argues this was due to the negative press reception the brides were receiving and they were being viewed as women of questionable virtue.⁷⁴ For instance one woman writing to the *Gloucestershire Echo* was rather sarcastic in her approach, claiming that she would stage a demonstration of her own 'clamouring at the British Embassy' to get her British husband sent home after he had been serving abroad for several years. She argued that too many of the GI brides were complaining they were destitute and questioned if they had 'ever tried working for a living?' but 'let them mind lest they scratch the varnish off their finger-nails.'⁷⁵ This demonstrates that the brides' still exercised their support for the protest despite it prompting attacks on their sexual morality.

GI brides were quick to respond to this scathing attack on them as one wrote that she had been working since the age of fourteen, including the eighteen months that she had been married

⁷² 'Letters to the Editor: G.I. Wives To Admire', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 16 October 1945, p. 4 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19451016/047/0004> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 23 March 2021]

⁷³ 'Letters to the Editor: G.I. Wives One Aim', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 16 October 1945, p. 4 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19451016/047/0004> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 23 March 2021]

⁷⁴ Virden, *Goodbye piccadilly*, p. 60.

⁷⁵ 'Letters to the Editor: Americans' Brides', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 11 October 1945, p. 3 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451011/024/0003> Image © Reach PLC
[accessed 09/11/2020].

and argued that she does not wear nail varnish.⁷⁶ Another woman described how the ‘majority of people look upon G.I. brides as no good, but I am proud to be one.’⁷⁷ Joan G. McCraw wrote that if the woman had ‘investigated a little farther than the headlines of daily papers’ then she would find that many of the brides did work and ‘not all of them paint their nails.’ McCraw argued that these women should be ‘cheer[ed] on’ for fighting for their rights.⁷⁸ Some people felt this disgust was a result of jealousy for instance, a US Major’s wife argued that the criticism of GI brides is ‘jealousy on the part of girls who have’ not married American servicemen.⁷⁹ This shows that despite some negative opinion in Gloucestershire, GI brides’ in the county were proud to be GI brides and openly defended themselves and each other against attacks on their morality.

As early as December 1945 brides’ clubs around the country were starting to wind down. However, the Mayflower Club in Gloucester was still operating with more than a hundred members from Gloucester and the district. These women were still meeting once a week, attending lectures and films detailing different aspects of American life such as ‘religion, hospitals and clinics, civic affairs and franchise and American home life.’ Parties where ‘26 babies of Americans’ were to be entertained were also being planned.⁸⁰ By January 1946 the

⁷⁶ ‘Letters to the Editor: G.I. Wives’ One Aim’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 16 October 1945 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451016/041/0004> Image © Reach PLC [accessed 08/11/2020].

⁷⁷ ‘Letters to the Editor: Waiting and Working’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 18 October 1945, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19451018/030/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 23 March 2021]

⁷⁸ ‘Letters to the Editors: Right to Home Life’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 October 1945, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19451015/021/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/11/2020].

⁷⁹ ‘Letters to the Editor: Just Jealous’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 25 October 1945 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19451025/040/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 23 March 2021]

⁸⁰ ‘Gloucester Day By Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 27 December 1945 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19451227/066/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04/08/2020].

Mayflower Club had 133 members with a total of 40 babies.⁸¹ At the end of March, only 12 members remained and in April the Mayflower Club, ‘the headquarters of the local G.I. Wives’ had closed as many of the wives had started to make their journey across the Atlantic whilst only a dozen members remained waiting for their turn.⁸²

News about brides re-visiting their homes regularly featured in gossip columns, suggesting the press perceived it as of limited importance and intended only for a female audience. In 1947 the *Gloucester Citizen* reported that members of the Cinderford GI Brides’ Association, still going strong, had heard a talk given by a girl who had married an American serviceman and had returned from the US. The woman who was originally from Drybook, in the Forest of Dean, had been in Detroit since February 1946. The woman was asked many questions regarding the ‘food situation’ and was glad to report she was still happily married as she commented ‘there was plenty of everything.’ This must have been reassuring to the brides as ‘you only hear about the un-happy marriages.... not the happy ones like ours.’⁸³ Despite clubs only being open for a couple of years, they were incredibly important for the brides of American soldiers as they offered women a network and a community where they could all sympathise with one another situations. However, with the wind down of the clubs, the press started to focus on the marriages between American servicemen and British women that did not work out.

⁸¹ ‘Gloucester Day By Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 29 January 1945 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19460129/039/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 22/09/2020].

⁸² ‘To-day’s Gossip: More Departures’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 09 April 1946 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19460409/027/0003> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 22/09/2020] & ‘Gloucester Day By Day: Views and Gossip for the Tea Table’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 10 April 1946 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19460410/066/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 22/09/2020].

⁸³ ‘Forest G.I. Bride Likes America’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 26 July 1947 p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19470726/003/0001> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 06/08/2020].

2.4 G.I. Wife ‘Disgusted’: Local Girl Returns: Divorce between American GIs and Gloucestershire women

As marriages to American soldiers were believed to be hasty, many thought that they would not work. However, Norman Longmate argues that these suspicions were unfounded.⁸⁴ Virden agrees, adding that the rise in divorce was not only due to hasty marriages conducted at the start of the war between British couples, but also due to a backlog of cases in the court system since the passing of the new divorce legislation.⁸⁵ However, this did not stop national and local newspapers regularly printing stories of marriages between British women and American soldiers that ended in divorce. Stories of GI brides arriving in America, only to find themselves an ‘ex-wife’ were not uncommon.

In February 1946 the *Gloucester Citizen* reported how Eleanor Roosevelt had asked President Roosevelt to help the 200 women whose GI husbands were filing for divorce in America before their British wives had arrived from the UK. Eleanor Roosevelt argued that many of the husbands were giving the ‘flimsiest’ reasons for divorce and asked the American authorities whether these women could go to America to defend themselves or arrange for themselves to be legally represented.⁸⁶ Divorces hit the headlines again when in August 1946 the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported that out of 1,375 marriages between New Zealand girls and US troops, 254 had failed or were expected to be dissolved.⁸⁷ The number of divorces between American GIs and Gloucestershire women is unknown. Marriages between British women and

⁸⁴ Norman Longmate, *The G.I.'s: The Americans in Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975). p. 362.

⁸⁵ Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, pp. 27-28.

⁸⁶ ‘Mrs. Roosevelt Asked To Help G.I. Wives’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 11 February 1946, p. 6 < <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19460211/049/0006>

⁸⁷ ‘254 G.I. Marriages in New Zealand Fail’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 21 August 1946, p. 1 < <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19460821/025/0001>

US troops had little impact on British divorce statistics. However, divorces filed in the US would not have appeared in British divorce statistics, therefore UK divorce statistics are not a reliable source in determining how many Anglo-American marriages ended in divorce.

There were many reasons that marriages to American soldiers failed. One reason is that couples who got married after a short period of courting did not really know each other. Virden argues that wartime marriages often occurred between ‘virtual strangers.’⁸⁸ Wartime conditions did not allow couples to spend time getting to know each other. For example, Eunice Day, a GI bride from Cheltenham had only lived with her husband for two months before he was sent to France.⁸⁹ Longmate suggests that many women became disappointed not just in America itself but also their husbands. For example, one woman from Winchcombe, a small town outside of Cheltenham, recalled how at 18, there were no English boys around when she had met her husband at a dance. She was attracted to him physically and ‘being immature did not look further than his physical appearance.’ She described that her homesickness in addition to her husband getting heavily into debt and being ‘the biggest liar’ she had ever met, as well as having a small child and not being ‘mature enough to cope with the situation’ made her come back home.⁹⁰ Others arrived in America to find that their GI husband had exaggerated the truth about his home or family business. For instance, a helper at the Red Cross Club in Cheltenham recalled how one GI boasted to his fiancée that his family had a racing stable, only for his comrades to spill later that his racing stable was a pigeon loft and that he and his father had six racing pigeons which had never won a race. Another Cheltenham girl was caught out when she married a GI who claimed his father had string of posh restaurants in New York. The woman

⁸⁸ Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁹ ‘G.I. Wife ‘Disgusted’: Local Girl Returns’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 05 February 1946 p5
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19460205/031/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 04/11/2020].

⁹⁰ Former brides contributed material, cited in, Longmate, *The G.I. 's*, pp. 363-364.

came home after she found that his restaurants were peanut stands outside baseball grounds, and she was expected to serve in one.⁹¹ Therefore due to maturity and wartime circumstances, many young women may have married without full awareness of what they had entered into, whilst some US servicemen, took advantage of the women's naivety by exaggerating their life in America.

On arrival in the States, many GI brides had to move into her husband's family home with people she had never met before. In some instances, if the GI bride had arrived in America before her husband had been sent home, she found herself living with her in-laws. This was a frightening situation, and some women did not get on with their mother-in-law. For example, 21-year-old Eunice Day from Cheltenham who found herself in this situation, returned home to Gloucestershire after she became 'disillusioned and disgusted' with the treatment she received from her husband's relatives. Eunice, who had married her GI husband in January 1944 and was originally 'full of hope for a happy future', now professed that she hated Americans. Eunice described how her husband's family did not allow her to go out on her own and she was made to do all the housework and look after her sister-in-law's children. All her actions were regarded by the family as suspicious, and she was constantly questioned by them. After only two weeks of being in America, Eunice tried to secure passage back to England. Her husband, who was on his way back from Europe, had failed to respond to all her correspondence and so she returned to Gloucestershire not knowing if her husband was going to start divorce proceedings. Eunice's mother stated how her daughter, used to enjoy going out to the cinema and dancing but now no longer liked to go out 'in case people say things about her.'⁹² This case is particularly telling in the way the woman was frightened with how others

⁹¹ Former brides contributed material, cited in, Longmate, *The G.I.'s*, p. 361.

⁹² 'G.I. Wife 'Disgusted': Local Girl Returns', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 05 February 1946 p5
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/b1/0000320/19460205/031/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 04/11/2020].

perceived her and feared she would be taunted for being an American GI bride whose marriage had potentially failed. This demonstrates that animosity towards women who returned from America after a failed marriage existed in Gloucestershire. This was most likely due to the perception that by marrying a non-British soldier and moving to another country, some British women had betrayed the men who had fought for their country and their freedom.

Unhappy stories of divorce quickly gained publicity in national and local newspapers. Longmate argues that stories about returning brides were always more newsworthy than those who had a happy marriage.⁹³ This was possibly due to these stories making for more interesting reading and gossip but also strengthened the belief that these marriages were doomed to fail. For example, Isabel Stalcup, a 22-year-old munitions factory worker from Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, was attempting to sue her ex-GI husband for full custody of their 18-month-old son. Isabel, a ‘pretty...English war bride’ had met her 26-year-old husband in Gloucester and married in Cheltenham in July 1944. Isabel explained that she wanted to return to England to ‘begin life all over again.’ However, under American law she could not file for divorce until she had been resident in the States for one year. In September that same year, her father-in-law had offered her money to go back to England and leave her son in America, which she refused. Isabel sobbed in court describing that ‘[t]hey know I’m all alone and have no friends here...That’s why I’m treated this way.’⁹⁴ This story was reported in newspapers across the country, validating the belief that marriages between American soldiers and British women were made in haste and would not last. Interestingly local newspaper reports did not focus the

⁹³ Longmate, *The G.I. 's*, p. 363.

⁹⁴ ‘Local G.I. Bride Will Not Give Up Son’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 12 September 1946, p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19460912/018/0001> image © Reach PLC> [accessed 22/11/2020]. ‘G.I.’s Bride Refuses to Give Up son’, *The Hull Daily Mail*, 12 September 1946, p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000324/19460912/021/0001> image © Reach PLC> [accessed 22/11/2020]. ‘G.I. Bride Wed in Cheltenham Sues Husband’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 30 August 1946, p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19460830/009/0001> image © Reach PLC> [accessed 19/11/2020].

blame of failed marriages on women. Instead, blame was attributed more to either the American soldier, the unwelcoming behaviour of his family or American culture being too difficult to acclimatise too.

2.5 Those that didn't: Platonic Relationships

Not all women who met American GIs wanted to pursue a sexual relationship with them. Many women enjoyed a platonic relationship, and some sought to actively avoid any type of contact with American troops. Reynolds argues that female encounters with GIs were more social than sexual. If the relationships were sexual then the majority were fleeting romances and not passionate affairs. For example, one girl from Bournemouth who was in her late teens had a succession of wartime dances and dinners with foreign soldiers:

They came and went without tiresome farewells, and we did not wonder or worry too much about being stood up on a date. There was always a fresh face to take over, another whirl of gaiety before they, too, moved on.⁹⁵

However, many women soon found out that the American troops did not live up to their stereotypes. For example, one young woman from Gloucestershire believed that all the US troops were like those she had seen at the cinema until she started volunteering at an American Red Cross Club. She recalled how she soon discovered that the GIs did not fit the oversexed, overfed, and overpaid stereotype when she started to see Glen, a schoolteacher from Kentucky. She remarked that he only once bought her a cup of coffee and on a visit to the local Christmas pantomime she had to buy the tickets. Another 'tightwad', a post-office sorter from New York

⁹⁵ Avice Wilson, memoirs, IWM, p. 3, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 277.

accepted her parents' hospitality as his right.⁹⁶ This suggests some women did not take their relationship with American soldiers seriously and were just looking for fun. However, it also shows that some women were disappointed that some US soldiers did not live up to their stereotype. As a result, some women may have either wanted only a platonic relationship or no relationship with them at all.

Young women, however, were soon divided by American soldiers into two groups. Avice Wilson from Chippenham for instance recalled that 'the town girls began to be divided as Officers' girls, Serge[a]nt' girls and the others. They were sub-divided into those that did and those that didn't.' Avice added that to the surprise of many women being one of 'those that didn't' was no barrier to fun and enjoyment.⁹⁷ Similarly one former Land Girl in Gloucestershire remembered that when out walking with an American soldier, if they 'put the girl on the outside of their arm... by the road side they were easy, they would have sex with you, but if [they] put them on the inside you... would have a hard time with them.'⁹⁸ Many women remarked that American soldiers respected the barriers that were put up by some women as one British female journalist found, she wrote; 'once you put up the respectability sign you had no more trouble with the Americans than you had with the British.....I still had a perfectly wonderful social life. 'Yes' or 'no', you were still good for dinner and a movie and they always took you back home afterwards.'⁹⁹ This demonstrates that at least some women defined the boundaries of their sexual relationships with American soldiers and knew what they wanted from their relationships with them. However, it also shows that amongst American soldiers, women themselves were defined by their sexuality.

⁹⁶ Private Information, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 277-278.

⁹⁷ Avice Wilson, memoirs, IWM, p. 3, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 277.

⁹⁸ Interview with Margaret Carpenter, 4th December 2019.

⁹⁹ Avice Wilson, memoirs, IWM, p. 3, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 277.

2.6 Predator vs. Victim: Representations of women in rape cases

Despite women defining the boundaries of their sexual relationships, there were many reports where American soldiers refused to take ‘No!’ as an answer, leading to complaints from women of sexual violence. This section uses local press reports and US court martial records to determine how women’s actions were portrayed in reported incidents of sexual violence committed by American troops. Judgement of a woman’s actions depended on the race of the US soldier. If the man was white, the woman involved was most likely to be portrayed as a predator who it was believed had mis-led or enticed the American soldier, whereas if the soldier was black, then the woman was more likely to be portrayed as a victim who needed greater protection.

In the US Army, rape was a capital offence. The Visiting Forces Act 1942, enabled members of the American forces stationed in Britain to be tried and convicted under US Army law. The laws that governed the United States Army were known as the Articles of War and if found guilty of rape, under the 92nd Article of War the accused could face the death penalty or life imprisonment.¹⁰⁰ There were several recorded incidents of rape committed by American GIs in Gloucestershire. However not all of these were reported in the local press. Most of the reported cases tended to focus on the personal details of the woman involved and her actions leading up to, during and after the incident, rather than the actions of the American soldier.

The treatment of women in court and in newspaper stories was heavily influenced by the race of the American soldier. In her study, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*, Mary Louise Roberts argues that if the US soldier was white, the court was

¹⁰⁰ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988). pp. 183-184.

more likely to ‘assign the burden of sexual aggression’ to the woman and portray her as a prostitute and therefore her claims of resistance and attempts to identify the assailant were questioned.¹⁰¹ Whilst Roberts study is primarily based on American soldiers in France, their sexual experiences were similar in Britain. For example, in 1942 the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported on one incident where a white American GI had been found guilty of assaulting two women. He was dishonourably discharged and sentenced to prison. However, after hearing the evidence, the court decided to reduce his sentence as it was found that one of the women had accepted ‘a ride with the defendant voluntarily’ and that after being physically attacked, she got back into the car with him where he sexually assaulted her.¹⁰² The court blamed the woman for the attack because she got back into the car. The article is short and very little detail is given on whether the assault happened in the middle of nowhere, leaving the woman little choice but to get back into the car with the American soldier. This lack of context means contemporary readers of the report made their judgement about the woman’s actions based on face-value.

On the other hand, blame was not always attributed to the woman. For example, court martial records from July 1942 describe how an American Captain was accused of assaulting a young telephone operator on her way home from work in Gloucester. The woman claimed that the GI had dragged her across the street and attempted to assault her. She struggled against him and screamed for help, until a male member of the public came to her aid and tried to release her from him. Witnesses stated that they had seen the couple embracing prior to the incident with no sign of any struggle. The GI was found guilty of ‘prowl[ing] about the public streets...seeking “dates” with any woman who would accept his company.’ The Court believed

¹⁰¹ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 207.

¹⁰² ‘U.S. Soldier’s Offences at Cheltenham’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 08 October 1942 p.4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19421008/061/0004>
Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 09 June 2020].

the girl had consented to being escorted yet ‘repented her indiscretion or became frightened at the portents of the situation.’¹⁰³ This is different from other cases reported in the local press as the young woman was seen as the victim and the white American soldier as the predator. Despite this, the woman was still considered by the court as being partially responsible due to her actions prior to the attack. The court heard one witness describe the young woman as ‘... a girl of tender years – a high school girl.’ It was decided that she was too young to be fully in control of her situation and assumed that she had repented her actions, yet the woman had only agreed to be accompanied home, not to be accosted. This case is unusual as the white GI was found guilty; however, he was also ‘wanted’ for other offences, therefore this guilty verdict may have been a way of getting him discharged. Despite this verdict, the woman’s decision to walk home with him is questioned and seen as the reason for him assaulting her.

In cases where the US soldier was an African American, a woman’s rape claim was rarely doubted. Roberts argues that ‘racism trumped sexism’ as women were seen as a ‘blameless victim of a savage lust’ who would never wilfully choose to have sexual relations with a black man.¹⁰⁴ For example, in July 1944 court martial records described how a schoolteacher was dragged off her bicycle by two black American soldiers and sexually assaulted near Tetbury, Gloucestershire. The court explained that the woman’s mental condition was too fragile for her to attend the trial and a letter from a psychiatrist who had examined the woman after the attack stated that she did not wish to see the American soldiers hung. Both GIs pleaded not guilty stating that the woman did not forcibly resist them, whilst a witness to the attack was unable to identify the two offending soldiers. Both American soldiers had had previous convictions, one for absence without leave and one for gambling. The court considered the fact that the woman

¹⁰³ Board of Review ETO 25, 29 September 1942, *ETO board of review. Branch office of the Judge Advocate General Volume 1 B.R. (ETO) including CM ETO 24 – CM ETO 439 (1942-1943). Opinions CM ETO 24 CM ETO 835 Vol. 1-2*, p. 13-28, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/ETO-BOR_Vol-1.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, p. 207.

did not forcibly resist but agreed that ‘it would be impossible under the circumstances to regard it as consent.’¹⁰⁵ The GIs were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Interestingly, the incident was not reported in the local press, which may have been due heavy press censorship. However, Reynolds states that press reports regarding rape could not be censored due to provisions in the Visiting Forces Act.¹⁰⁶ Despite no press coverage, local inhabitants heard about the incident and one ‘gentleman farmer’ who owned a local hotel complained on the back of the attack that the presence of black troops nearby caused a ‘state of ‘terror and alarm’...in the vicinity.’ This was investigated by a British Liaison Officer who concluded that there was no issue with the behaviour and the discipline of the black troops.¹⁰⁷ Therefore the lack of local press coverage may have been deliberate to stop a panic amongst locals. What is clear from the case, however, was that there was no doubt of any question regarding the woman’s actions prior to the alleged incident. Unlike reported incidents of British women being raped by a white American soldier, this woman’s actions, morals, and personal life were not called into question.

Newspapers did not report on every incident of rape; yet in March 1944 national and local newspapers featured the story of how a 16-year-old woman from Bishops Cleeve, Gloucestershire, was raped by two African American soldiers after returning home from a dance in the village. On 6th March the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported front page that the black GIs had physically assaulted a white American soldier who was accompanying the young woman on her way home.¹⁰⁸ According to the European Theatre of Operations Court Martial

¹⁰⁵ Board of Review ETO 5805, 30 March 1945, *ETO board of review. Branch office of the Judge Advocate General Volume 16 B.R. (ETO) including CM ETO 5803 – CM ETO 6333 (1945). Opinions CM ETO 5420 CM ETO 6333 Vol. 15-16, p. 7-14*, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/ETO-BOR_Vol-16.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 236.

¹⁰⁷ Report, ‘Investigation and action in Westonbirt’, FO 954/30B. Avon papers, PRO, cited in, Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, p.130.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Alleged Attack on Girl at Cleeve’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 06 March 1944 p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440306/017/0001> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 11 June 2020].

records the two black soldiers had followed the young woman and her partner through the village late at night. The young woman and her American partner stopped near a gate to talk when he was physically assaulted and became unconscious. The young woman was then dragged up a lane where she was raped by two men. Apart from remembering that the men were 'big built fellows', she could not identify either of the two black soldiers that had attacked her and was not confident that the two black Americans she had seen in the village were the ones that had attacked her. Similarly, the white American was also not certain that the two men who attacked him were the ones he had seen in the village. The young woman had run back to her house and was examined by a local nurse who noted that there was 'nothing abnormal' found. That night a light snowfall had fallen and near the scene of the crime footprints had been found. The footprints showed that the shoes had studs in the heel of the shoes. The police went to the American camp nearby and with the Commanding Officer searched the tents for boots with studs, which they found and removed. The next morning when dressing private Willie Smith could not find his shoes and when reported the military policeman took him in and read him his rights. Eliga Brinson was also read his rights and was found to be hiding mud-stained clothing under his bed. The court decided that both soldiers were guilty of rape and were sentenced to death by hanging.¹⁰⁹

Newspapers across the country reported on the case and a Home Intelligence report recorded that this had 'aroused strong local protests on grounds of colour discrimination.'¹¹⁰ Letters from Gloucestershire residents to the local papers also contested the issuing of the death

¹⁰⁹ Board of Review ETO 2686, 28-29 April 1944, *ETO board of review. Branch office of the Judge Advocate General Volume 7 B.R. (ETO) including CM ETO 2452 – CM ETO 3153 (1944). Opinions CM ETO 2452 CM ETO 3153 Vol. 7-8, p. 295-312*, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/ETO-BOR_Vol-7.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Information Home Intelligence Weekly Report, 08 June 1944 No. 192. <<http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465679983472/>> [accessed 06 July 1944].

penalty. For example, one resident wrote ‘No one can view the crime of rape without anger, disgust and loathing, yet one would urge many punishments other than death. It would be a splendid gesture to English feelings if the American authorities reviewed the sentences and altered them.’¹¹¹ Webster argues that most Britons disagreed with the death penalty sentence because it smacked of colour discrimination, which was un-British.¹¹² In May 1944 the *Gloucestershire Echo* published several letters from locals who opposed the verdict of death sentence for these two black GIs because they believed it was awarded on racism rather than the crime. For example, shop stewards from Smiths & Sons, a prominent company in the village that made watch and aircraft instruments and where the young woman was employed, had been approached by ‘workpeople with requests to take some action to obtain commutation of the death sentence to one of imprisonment. There is in the factory and in the village very strong feeling against such a severe sentence in the case of these men.’ The letter continued that ‘It is the almost unanimous opinion that this severe sentence, when compared with the sentences of imprisonment passed on white American soldiers for similar offences suggest a racial discrimination.’¹¹³

This case is interesting because the two black GIs could not be accurately identified yet they were still found guilty and sentenced to death. In this instance, racism has ‘trumped’ sexism because if the two suspected soldiers had been white, the young woman’s moral character, home life and previous associations with American soldiers would have been discussed in local press reports that covered the incident. Instead, the death penalty that had been given to the

¹¹¹ ‘Letters to the Editor: Clemency Urged’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 May 1944, p. 3 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440510/028/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 19/03/2021].

¹¹² Wendy Webster, *Mixing it: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). p. 214.

¹¹³ ‘Letters to the Editor: Workers’ Appeal’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 05 May 1944, p. 3 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440505/027/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 19/03/2021].

two black GIs, became the focus of intense public debate. There seems to be no evidence of doubt from the public that the two men were guilty, but many locals petitioned to reduce it to life imprisonment. Interestingly there was no public outcry for the need to protect young women or debates regarding female morality, which would likely to have happened if the GIs had been white.

However, Wendy Webster's evidence contradicts Roberts' hypothesis that racism trumped sexism and instead argues that rape cases involving black soldiers were 'eclipsed by the associations of the 'good-time girl' with loose morals.'¹¹⁴ This is demonstrated in the extraordinary case that occurred near Bath in May 1944 when Leroy Henry, an African American truck driver, was accused of raping a 33-year-old British mother of two in a field near her home. Henry was arrested after being identified by the woman a few days after and confessed the following day, admitting rape at knifepoint. He was tried, found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.¹¹⁵ The sentencing caused great uproar amongst the general public. An editorial published in the *Daily Mirror* requested clemency, by arguing that they had received large amounts of letters regarding the 'uneasiness at this man having to pay the extreme penalty' and urged if 'justice could, in suitable cases, be tempered with mercy, and not least in cases where coloured men are the offenders.'¹¹⁶ The *Mirror's* coverage of the case caused a plethora of protest and the public turned on the woman, around 200 locals signed a petition insinuating that the woman had loose morals and regularly associated with black GIs, whilst another petition was sent to Eisenhower with the mayor of Bath's signature and 33,000 Bath locals.¹¹⁷ The ETO's assistant staff judge advocate overturned the guilty verdict and

¹¹⁴ Webster, *Mixing it*, p. 213.

¹¹⁵ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 234.

¹¹⁶ 'Clemency', *Daily Mirror*, 02 June 1944 p.3

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000560/19440602/029/0003> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 10 June 2020].

¹¹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 30 May and 2 June 1944, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 235.

concluded that Henry's confession had been given under duress. He also considered that the woman's conduct was questionable, and it was determined that she was a prostitute, who on this occasion had increased her prices, which Henry had refused to pay. The ETO decided to reverse the conviction and Henry was back at work by the end of June 1944. Here, the public outcry over the death sentencing and the woman's questionable reputation forced a reversing of the verdict.

This case is especially unusual as public pressure forced the guilty verdict to be overturned. The sexual morals of the woman became the main reason for overturning the case. In addition to the petition signed by locals confirming the woman was known to have loose morals, the enormous petition sent to General Eisenhower, meant that the intricacies of the case became focused on the woman's local reputation and her being a prostitute. By implying that this woman was a prostitute, however, there was an assumption that she could not be sexually assaulted. As the woman frequently engaged in immoral behaviour, any evidence she had given against Henry was also believed to be suspect. Despite this challenging Roberts' argument that racism trumped sexism, this case is an exception as this is the only time that a woman's sexual morality forced a guilty verdict or rape to be overturned for an African American soldier.

2.7 Conclusion

One of the main themes that has emerged from this chapter is that in a large majority of relationships formed with US soldiers, women often acted indifferently or defied public opinion. This is shown particularly in the examples of the GI brides. Those attempting to marry an American soldier had to navigate the red tape that the American Army implemented to prevent these marriages. However, one of the most prominent examples of Gloucestershire GI brides exercising their agency was in their public support of the brides protest march in London.

Despite it not being clear if any brides from Gloucestershire attended the protest, brides from the county voiced their support of the protest in local newspapers, often in response to hostile opinions that labelled the women as selfish and unpatriotic.

This chapter has also demonstrated that women exercised their agency by defining the boundaries of their sexual relationships with American soldiers. Women in Gloucestershire had to make their choices in a difficult context. Despite sexual desire being the motivating factor for some women to fraternise with American soldiers, others chose to have relationships with US troops out of material necessity. On the other hand, some women exercised restraint and actively resisted temptation. This was particularly clear when some women believed they would be expected to have sex with the American soldier if they accepted their gifts, even if they wanted or needed them.

However, this chapter has shown that views of women also depended on the race of the American soldier. Reported incidents of rape across the county demonstrate that if the soldier was white, then the woman involved was portrayed in the local media as possessing questionable morals and her actions during the incident were used to make the soldier appear innocent and the woman predatory. However, if the soldier was African American, then the woman was portrayed as a victim who needed protection from black men, who, as contemporary attitudes believed, could not control their sexual desires. Therefore, racial ideology and contemporary beliefs of white supremacy impacted the portrayal of women in reported incidents of sexual violence.

**Chapter 3: Not a chance, they much prefer the black Yanks: Gloucestershire women
and black American soldiers**

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationships women in Gloucestershire had with black American soldiers and how local authorities and the general public reacted to them. These relationships prompted various methods of control in order to influence the behaviour of women. To do this, the chapter determines the characteristics that made African American troops desirable, before understanding the consequences of interracial mixing to both women and black servicemen. This chapter identifies that it was the behaviour of young women that particularly worried local officials. Therefore, this chapter examines the behaviour of young women amongst African American troops and how stricter methods of control were used to influence their behaviour. This chapter identifies that women demonstrated agency over their sexuality by responding to these measures in a variety of ways, such as defiance and desire.

3.2 Initial Impressions

From mid-1942 African American troops started arriving in Gloucestershire and were stationed all around the county, with the highest concentration in Tewkesbury, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham. For many inhabitants in Gloucestershire, these African American soldiers were the first black people they had met. However, they were generally welcomed and in November 1942 the Mayor of Cheltenham urged locals to invite all Americans into their own homes for Thanksgiving writing ‘...it would be appropriate for us all to make a special effort to show hospitality to our American friends in our district’.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ ‘Letters to the Editor: Thanksgiving Day Hospitality’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 21 November 1942 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19421121/035/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 23/01/2021].

There is little recorded evidence of first impressions of black soldiers in Gloucestershire. However, for many Britons, their first impressions were based upon stereotypes generated by popular culture and imperial and colonial legacies. Graham Smith argues that many British people sympathised with the racist American view and expected black people to be like their movie image; ‘ignorant servants, lazy janitors, superstitious toilet attendants... and Uncle Tom roles of every description’.¹¹⁹ The Mass Observation Race Directive in June 1939 asked observers what came to mind when they thought of ‘Negroes’. One observer wrote ‘I like negroes; I find they have a peculiar wistful charm which one associates more with animals than humans...’.¹²⁰ The British also sympathised with the African American for being an underdog in their Army and were perceived as childlike and possessing very little control of their own actions. Black men who had been placed in a situation where even a white man would struggle to control his actions, could not be blamed for his subsequent behaviour, but a woman could.¹²¹ Therefore racist stereotypes and sexual myths created a framework in which white women who fraternised with the black Americans were judged.

Black soldiers gained a favourable reputation amongst the British and many commented on how much more polite and better behaved they were than their white counterparts. One canteen worker from Hull described how she preferred serving black GIs because they were ‘always so courteous and have a very natural charm that most whites miss.’¹²² Another woman from Wiltshire described how everybody adored the black GIs, ‘...all the girls go to their dances, but nobody likes the white Americans. They swagger about as if they were the only people

¹¹⁹ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988). p. 33.

¹²⁰ D2054, Mass Observation Race Directive June 1939 <<https://www-massobservation-and-digital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-2054/0>> [accessed 03/02/2021].

¹²¹ Sonya O. Rose, ‘Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain’, *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998). p. 1158.

¹²² Original source not provided, cited in, Juliet Gardiner, *‘Over Here’: The GIs in Wartime Britain*, (London: Collins & Brown Limited. 1992). p. 152.

fighting this war, they all get so drunk and look so untidy while the negroes are very polite, much smarter and everybody's pets.'¹²³

This situation in Gloucestershire was similar, for example, a white member of Britain's SOE was posted to Hatherop Castle, near Cirencester in Gloucestershire. When he enquired as to what the local girls were like he was told '.... not a chance, they much prefer the black Yanks.'¹²⁴ Similarly a black Sergeant who wrote to a Forest of Dean newspaper noted his surprise at the 'complete non-existence of racial discrimination.' He remarked that the 'charming, intelligent English girls' behaved as if it were an honour to be escorted to a dance by an African American GI or a privilege to have them for tea on a Sunday afternoon.¹²⁵ Therefore like women in the rest of Britain, women in Gloucestershire were exerting defiance towards the white American soldiers as in some cases they would refuse to socialise with them. Instead choosing to fraternise with black soldiers because they preferred their company.

Lucy Bland argues that the main attraction of black GIs was not sexual but instead linked to black American culture which focused on dance and music. One of the main recreational activities during the 1920s through to the 1940s was dancing. Many women bought into the stereotype that black men were fun-loving, good dancers who you could have a good time with. These cultural stereotypes acted as an allure to British women because as Bland suggests, having a good time in a non-romantic sense was exactly what young women wanted, especially

¹²³ Rowe, report, 8 March 1943, copy in NA RG 332 ETO AG CGC, 250.1: SOS, Primary source cited in David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996). p. 303.

¹²⁴ Information from Don Miles, cited in, June R. Lewis, *The Cotswold's At War* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1992). p. 188.

¹²⁵ Letter from a black Sergeant in Forest Newspaper, quoted in Humphrey Phelps, *The Forest of Dean in Wartime* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995). p. 110, cited in, Wynn, Neil A., 'Race War': Black American GIs and West Indians in Britain During The Second World War, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 24 (2006), p. 324-346.

those whose husbands were away in the forces.¹²⁶ Therefore some women sought purely platonic relationships with African American soldiers as it provided them a form of escapism from wartime conditions. Many women in Gloucestershire attended dances with white American soldiers, however there is little evidence regarding women who attended dances with black US troops. One woman from Cranham, near Cheltenham remembered black GIs in her village, but did not socialise with them.¹²⁷ The other women interviewed for this thesis could not recall African American soldiers in the county. Therefore, despite the presence of black GIs in the county, some women in Gloucestershire may never have encountered them. However, the evidence also suggests that if women did see black Americans, some women chose not to socialise with them. This may have been because they believed the racial stereotypes themselves or were kept away from them by control mechanisms put in place, such as segregated nights.

3.3 Black and White nights: Problematic interracial relationships

Dancing and cinema-going were the two main social pursuits of young people during the war. For example, in 1940 there was one billion cinema admissions increasing to 1.58 billion in 1944, this equated to forty cinema tickets a year for each member of the population. A then 15-year-old woman explained that ‘queueing was an ideal way to strike up an acquaintance and sever it if necessary, as one reached the top of the line.’¹²⁸ Likewise dances provided not only a huge morale boost, but also an opportunity for young women to dress up and engage with members of the opposite sex. Both arenas were ideal places to meet American soldiers, but dance halls were where most young women met US servicemen. Peggy Payne a laundrette worker from Wooten-Under-Edge near Stroud in Gloucestershire recalled how they had a lot

¹²⁶ Lucy Bland, *Britain's 'brown babies'* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2019). p. 429.

¹²⁷ The respondent wishes to remain anonymous, Information given to author, 20th December 2020.

¹²⁸ Avice Wilson, memoirs, IWM, p. 1, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 263.

of US soldiers stationed near them. She recalled how it ‘was a good laugh at the Saturday night dances in Wooten Town Hall’ where they would teach them the Palais Glide.¹²⁹ Many establishments that had large halls provided held these events such as the Cheltenham Town Hall, which provided their main hall to the American Red Cross for a monthly dance.¹³⁰ These dances along with the ‘big band sound’ of Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey and Glen Miller provided unique and incredible escapism.¹³¹

Some members of the British public thought dancing was an unacceptable form of socialising. Judy Giles argues that working-class female sexuality was ‘organised around public space’ describing how the street, the cinema and the dance hall were perceived as dangerous places where working-class women were seen as both ‘predator and victim’.¹³² For example, one male Mass Observer from Scotland wrote in 1944 that a woman going dancing is ‘tantamount to saying she gets on her back.’¹³³ However, this was an unusual opinion and in general, dancing was seen as an appropriate form of socialising with members of the opposite sex. For example, Cathy from Cheltenham remembered how dancing was ‘ok’, but that her mother always warned her that she should come straight back home, ‘no lingering.’¹³⁴ Similarly Joyce Burrell, who worked for the Bank of England and was evacuated to Gloucestershire, remembered how she would go to dances but was placed under strict curfew by her accommodation and recalled that there was an unwritten rule that the women staying there could attend dances but were not allowed to bring boyfriends back. Joyce recalled ‘you were expected to behave yourself and

¹²⁹ Information from Peggy Payne, cited in, Lewis, *Cotswold's At War*, p. 190.

¹³⁰ Town Improvement and Spa Committee Minutes, 17th September 1943, p. 497
<<https://www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/research/cbcm1943.pdf>>

¹³¹ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 264.

¹³² Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1995). p. 105.

¹³³ Mass Observation Directive April 1944, Respondent 1393 <<https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1393/197>>

¹³⁴ Interview with Kathleen Febery, 14th March 2020.

you didn't ever bring anybody back in.'¹³⁵ It seems therefore that social activities such as dancing were closely tied with female sexuality. Young women were able to exercise a degree of agency in being able to attend the dances but attempts to control their sexuality by parents or owners of accommodation where young women were billeted were made.

Despite dancing being an acceptable form of socialising, dancing with black American troops could have consequences for both the white woman and the black soldier. Interactions between white women and African American soldiers were closely monitored by white GIs. Friendly behaviour towards black troops could have consequences for a woman's social standing amongst the white Americans. One American Lieutenant wrote:

...one thing I noticed here which I don't like is the fact that the English don't draw any color line... the English must be pretty ignorant. I can't see how a white girl could associate with a negro.¹³⁶

Those caught fraternising with black troops ran the risk of becoming a permanent wallflower at white dances.¹³⁷ There is no evidence of this happening in Gloucestershire, however incidents of this nature took place in other areas of the country. For example, a factory worker who attended a dance hall near Glasgow commented that 'if you danced with coloured Americans, you were blacklisted by the white ones. They kept a list at the camp of these girls and passed it to the new troops coming in.'¹³⁸ Even the town a woman came from could tarnish her reputation amongst white Americans if black troops were stationed nearby. For example, a

¹³⁵ Interview with Joyce Burrell 09 March 1999. Gloucestershire Archive D8497/1/83 Track 21.

¹³⁶ Quote in Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (2011), p. 169, cited in, David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Books, 2016). p. 478.

¹³⁷ Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, p. 203.

¹³⁸ Original source not provided, cited in, Gardiner, 'Over Here', p. 156.

woman who was working for the Admiralty in Bath recalled asking a GI ‘why a group of pleasant girls were sitting alone, ignored, when so many men had no partners.’ They came, he explained ‘from a village where the blacks went.’¹³⁹ One First Lieutenant stationed near Wellingborough, Northampton, was vehement on the subject:

I’ve seen nice-looking English girls out with American negro soldiers as black as spades. I have not only seen negro boys dancing with white girls, but we have actually seen them standing in doorways *kissing them goodnight*.¹⁴⁰

Women therefore may have felt forced to disengage with black soldiers due to the threat of social ostracism.

The sight of a black man with a white woman had the potential to evoke extreme reactions. One GI wrote ‘Every time so far that we have seen a nigger with a white girl we have run him away. I would like to shoot the whole bunch of them.’¹⁴¹ In some cases these extreme reactions became acts of violence with rumours circulating of black soldiers being castrated or stabbed. In Bristol in December 1942, there was a series of fighting and stabbings when white Southern GIs attempted to stamp out relationships between black GIs and local white women.¹⁴² Similarly, in 1944, race riots broke out when all GIs were banned from places of entertainment in Manchester for a fortnight after a black sailor and a white girl were spotted kissing.¹⁴³ The US authorities believed the violence to be justified as General Eisenhower defended the behaviour of his white troops, suggesting that these outbursts were because English girls did

¹³⁹ Norman Longmate, *The G.I.'s: The Americans in Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975). p. 132.

¹⁴⁰ Original source not provided, cited in, Gardiner, ‘*Over Here*’, p. 156.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Rice, *Creating Memorials*, p. 169, cited in, Olusoga, *Black and British*, p. 478.

¹⁴² Olusoga, *Black and British*, p. 480.

¹⁴³ Gardiner, ‘*Over Here*’, p. 155.

not understand the consequences of their relationships with black troops. In a letter to Washington in September 1942, he wrote:

To most English people, including the village girls – even those of perfectly fine character – the negro soldier is just another man, rather fascinating because he is unique in their experience, a jolly good fellow and with money to spend. Our own white soldiers, seeing a girl walk down the street with a negro, frequently see themselves as protectors of the weaker sex and believe it necessary to intervene to the extent of using force, to let her know what she's doing.¹⁴⁴

Reactions from white GIs to women fraternising with black soldiers in Gloucestershire were not too dissimilar. One white American stationed at Ashchurch, Tewkesbury, wrote in September 1942:

Negro troops have the girls coming down to camp and call[ing] for them. If anything will make [a] Southern's blood run hot it is to see this happen.... If it keeps on going as it is, we will have a nice negro lynching down here and then things will be better.¹⁴⁵

Despite this comment, white GI attitudes were not uniform. Another white American soldier stationed at the same base wrote in September 1942:

the negro problem has been very poorly handled here by our officers.... Rather than lessen the friction between the white and colored troops our officers have, through their

¹⁴⁴ Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers – the unsung Heroes of World War II* (2005), pp. 91-2, cited in, Oluosoga, *Black and British*, p. 480.

¹⁴⁵ ETO-1, Supplementary, 2 November 1942, Sta. K, NA RG 330/94, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 313.

actions & statements, definitely increased the friction...[and] managed to give official sanction to the anti-Negro group in my outfit....¹⁴⁶

David Reynolds adds that only ten percent on the Ashchurch base were southerners, and the first man probably came from north of the Mason-Dixon line.¹⁴⁷

These incidents were rarely reported in the press. The *Gloucestershire Echo* reported how the reactions of some American troops were making it hard for members of the public to offer hospitality to the black troops. The report also stated that the British government were becoming increasingly concerned of the threat that inter-racial relationships posed to the stability of Anglo-American relations.¹⁴⁸ There was considerable concern that white American troops would take their bad impressions of British women home, harming their reputation. Many were already writing home to inform their friends and family of the situation. For example, a Corporal stationed in Cheltenham wrote:

...the niggers – believe it or not – the English seem to actually prefer them to the white boys. Especially the girls – not that I give a hang for them anyhow, but it is disgusting, to say the least.... That is enough to make me inclined to look down on the English in general to start with.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 313.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ 'Britain Has No Race Prejudice', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 May 1944 p.4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440510/043/0004> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 27/01/2021].

¹⁴⁹ Special report, 'Colored troops', 16-31 August 1943, 1 September 1943, ASW 291.2, RG 107, NA; morale report 15-31 August 1943, APO 871, 353.8, RG 107, NA, cited in, Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, p. 133.

At the War Office, Sir James Grigg, the Secretary of State for War took the view that of all the problems he associated with the presence of black GIs, 'the question of the association of British women with coloured troops was regarded as the most difficult of solution'. Its importance, he wrote, lay in its possible repercussions on American opinion about Britain 'in a way that will not arouse resentment in the United States'.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, women's relationships with black soldiers became an issue of international political and diplomatic importance.

Local councils had to determine how to extend hospitality to black troops without angering the white American GIs or bringing them into contact with single British women. Neil Wynn describes how either officially or unofficially, many facilities in Britain became segregated. This was seen in Tewkesbury where white troops could visit the town on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday and black troops on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. In Cinderford, Forest of Dean, black troops were banned as 'it was all whites there' and so had to frequent other leisure venues in nearby towns such as Coleford.¹⁵¹ Areas where black and white troops were stationed together were separated. One woman in Tewkesbury recalled how the black troops were kept to some extent out of sight. She wrote in 1994 how:

...we only ever saw white troops at the canteen, the coloured Americans had a separate camp on the other side of Northway Lane, near the Northway Hotel – which was used by the American officers as a social centre – and were housed in the usual army huts, not the semi-permanent type as on the main camp....The coloured boys had to be housed separately because the racial tension was terrible at the time between them and the whites. There were so many fights and arguments, especially in the public houses,

¹⁵⁰ ETO HQ, "Policy on Negroes," 16 July 1942, cited in, Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 217.

¹⁵¹ Wynn, 'Race War', pp. 324-346.

that eventually they were not allowed in Tewkesbury at the same time, referred to locally as ‘black’ and ‘white’ days.¹⁵²

Similarly in January 1944 the American Red Cross Club opened a separate club for black Americans in the lower high street of Cheltenham. The local newspaper placed adverts for volunteers and reported how an entire family in Churchdown, Gloucester had all volunteered. The mother who had helped in the Information Department had enrolled her daughter in the same section.¹⁵³ Some women, therefore were not afraid to participate in voluntary war work that involved them engaging with black troops as this was perhaps seen as acceptable. However, the risk of a violent attack due to fraternising with African American soldiers in a social space, added further complications to the decision making of the women involved.

3.4 Girls out of Control: Young women and African American Soldiers

Despite a large proportion of Britons disagreeing with American attitudes towards racial segregation and some even publicly denouncing it, attitudes towards inter-racial relationships were still problematic. For example, one woman wrote:

marriage between white and coloured people should, I think, be discouraged because between our races & the negroes there are physical differences the mixed marriage is so often a failure and the offspring of inferior quality.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Letter from Miss Day, Miss Norah Day’s Archive (1994), cited in, John Dixon, ‘ “Somewhere in England”: G.I.’S in Tewkesbury, 1943-45’, *Tewkesbury Historical Society Bulletin*, (no.5, 1996). p. 24.

¹⁵³ ‘Women’s Gossip by Wynne: ‘Wellington’s Ghost & Volunteers Wanted’, *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*, 29 January 1944 p. 4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000518/19440129/038/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 29/01/2021].

¹⁵⁴ D1656, Mass Observation Race Directive June 1939 <<https://www.massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1656/0?SessionExpired=True>> [accessed 03/02/2021].

Similarly, a male student wrote at the time that ‘[i]nter-marriage should be forbidden by law as marriage between white and black results in the white race deteriorating.’¹⁵⁵ Gavin Schaffer argues that a deep-rooted belief of ‘white supremacy’ and preventing the deterioration of British ‘racial stock’ was evident in contemporary thinking and this was reflected in people’s perceptions that there were in existence significant physical differences between white and black people.¹⁵⁶

A Home Intelligence report from August 1942 detailed how adverse comment was starting to gain traction with girls who “‘walk out” with coloured troops.’ The report went on to describe how criticism was directed towards the girls rather than the troops and that despite the actions of ‘certain types of girls’ the manners of the black GIs were ‘extremely pleasing’.¹⁵⁷ The criticism from the general public therefore, seemed to be directed towards the ‘wrong type’ of woman certainly from the second half of 1942 as favourable responses about black troops outweighed unfavourable responses by two to one. From mid-1943 to the end of 1944 however, this was the exact reverse, with most of the unfavourable comments relating to sex.¹⁵⁸ Smith argues that it is almost possible to pin-point when the British stopped viewing relationships that black troops had with local women with equanimity but suggests that this happened around March or April 1943. This timing is significant as not only was it around this time that white American soldiers began to place pressure upon interracial relationships, but it was also when mixed-race children were beginning to be born to white British mothers and African American fathers.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ D4123, Mass Observation Race Directive June 1939 <<https://www.massobservation-ami-digital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1423/18>> [accessed 03/02/2021].

¹⁵⁶ Gavin Schaffer, ‘Fighting Racism: Black Soldiers and Workers in Britain during the Second World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 28 (2010). p. 258.

¹⁵⁷ No. 246, Ministry of Information Home Intelligence Weekly Report Copy, 17th August 1942 <<http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-2/idm140465669635072/>> [accessed 16/01/2021].

¹⁵⁸ Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, p. 202.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, p. 202.

For some people, the fascination with black GIs was beyond comprehension and those who felt like this believed that women who fraternised with the African American troops had the lowest of morals. Sonya O. Rose argues that inter-racial sex was thought of as a sexual perversion, a term that was used at the time to describe the patrons of a club in Soho as consisting of ‘women in male attire, effeminate men and coloured men accompanied by white women.’ Therefore, increasing reports of women having sex with African Americans were intensifying the concerns surrounding women’s morality.¹⁶⁰ An ex-Army Officer, living in Cheltenham described in October 1946 how whilst on leave in Durban he had been asked by English South African ladies if ‘it could possibly be true that certain types of British girls in the U.K. were actually to be seen walking around with American negroes. To the [English] South African such behaviour is incredible and is regarded as the lowest form of perversion and decadence.’¹⁶¹ Another letter written in October 1946 by correspondent; ‘Britain Discoloured’ questioned whether those who spoke ‘glibly of equality between the coloured or black man or women would be very pleased if their sons, daughters, or sisters decided to marry one!’ The writer went on to confess that they were ‘baffled by the behaviour of the English girls’ and could not:

...imagine any other country in the world where they behave so cheaply towards men of other nations. The manner in which they ran after the various Allied, Dominion, and many other troops from overseas sickened me. Admittedly, they were, in most cases, women of the lower classes, but when some transferred their attentions to the negroes,

¹⁶⁰ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). p. 78.

¹⁶¹ ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 08 October 1946 p. 5
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19461008/037/0005> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 27/01/2021].

I thought that was the last straw, a view which is shared by the Americans themselves.¹⁶²

A week later 'Britain Discoloured' complained of how girls in Gloucestershire would wait in a queue outside an American Red Cross Club while white American soldiers walked up and down the line picking out their partners. The girls who were:

...[n]ot content with men of their own colour... diverted their attentions to negroes... I feel that any large-scale programme in this country [ought] really to educate the masses is years overdue... Personally I have seen and heard enough to justify my remaining a bachelor to the end of my days.¹⁶³

Interestingly a large majority of letters that were published in the local papers and expressed racial prejudice towards interracial relationships were written by local men. The letters demonstrate that women who fraternised with black soldiers were perceived as having something fundamentally wrong with them. Despite this, young women in the county persisted in fraternising with African American soldiers. This may have been because women were acting in defiance to the attitudes of white GIs and some local people. But these women may have had only platonic motives and assumed that as their intentions were not romantic, then this was socially acceptable.

¹⁶² 'Letters to the Editor: Colour Lesson', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 October 1946 p4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19461010/048/0005> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 27/01/2021].

¹⁶³ 'Letters to the Editor; 'Women Cheapened Themselves', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 17 October 1946 p. 4-5
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19461017/047/0004?browse=true> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 27/01/2021].

It was young girls who associated with black American troops who could particularly provoke the fiercest reactions amongst the general public. One man living three miles outside of Bristol wrote that he was crossing the Downs one afternoon when he:

...came across little groups of negroes sitting on the grass playing poker with girls aged about 14-16 years of age. As I looked at the girls' tawdry finery [and their] lipstick, and listen to their excited, cackling laughter, I felt profoundly uneasy & wished that the local police could have interfered.¹⁶⁴

A middle-class woman in Bristol also complained that from her house, she could see girls aged between 12 and 15 waiting outside the barracks and houses of black American soldiers for over an hour at a time. The woman exclaimed that she was annoyed that neither policemen or policewomen did anything to 'rescue' the young women and felt strongly that a colour bar should be put in place to prevent 'a crop of half-castes' being born.¹⁶⁵ This shows that young women who fraternised with black troops were typecast as 'good-time girls' not just because of their behaviour with the troops, but also by their age and their appearance.

Both national and local newspapers published sensational headlines which invoked disgust and horror. This was particularly the case when the soldiers involved were black. For instance, in August 1943 *The Spectator* featured an outcry from one member of the public:

There is no doubt that girls today are laying themselves out to attract these men, especially overseas troops, and coloured men in particular, who do not understand the

¹⁶⁴ Diarist 5128 <https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Diarist-5128/44> 07 September 1942.

¹⁶⁵ Diarist 5128 <https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Diarist-5128/66> 20 January 1943.

fact that white girls are ready and anxious to give themselves as they undoubtedly do, for money and to have a good time ... frequently girls of thirteen and fourteen have attached themselves to coloured soldiers.¹⁶⁶

The national outcry was similar to the reaction in Gloucestershire. For example, in July 1945 the *Gloucester Citizen* reported how a 16-year-old appeared at the Gloucester juvenile court on the grounds that she was 'in need of care and protection'. The headline read 'Local Girl "Out of Control"'. The young woman had been seen in the company of white and black soldiers late at night and was 'absolutely beyond the control of her step-father and mother.' The court sent her to a Borstal institution on the grounds that 'the girl was exposed to moral danger.'¹⁶⁷ Both newspaper reports demonstrate that young women were portrayed in the media as wild and beyond any form of control. The black soldiers that they had been fraternising with were seen as their victims being easily led by these girls who only wanted them for their money and a good time.

Young women who were seen as out control because they fraternised with African American troops could be placed under special surveillance. Younger girls could be apprehended under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 if the police believed that the girls were in grave moral danger or in need of care and protection. This meant the authorities could place a child under the guidance of a probation officer or taken from their parents and sent to an Approved School. Rose argues that young women had more chance of being taken to a juvenile court if the soldier they had been associating with was black.¹⁶⁸ In July 1944 three 16-year-old women

¹⁶⁶ *Spectator*, 6 August 1943, cited in, Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, p. 203.

¹⁶⁷ 'Local Girl "Out Of Control', *Gloucester Citizen*, 10 July 1945 p. 5

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450710/080/0005> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 31/01/2021].

¹⁶⁸ Sonya O. Rose, 'Girls and GIs: Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19 (1997), p. 157.

were sent to a Borstal institution for two years after they had absconded for 27 days from the Longfords Approved school in Nailsworth, Stroud and being found in a black American camp after causing ‘trouble’ there. When questioned one of the young women said that they did not stop at the camp but slept in tents and were given food by the soldiers. The *Gloucester Citizen* reported how one of the women who had absconded was constantly running away from her work at the approved school and had repeatedly been a ‘nuisance by making contacts with boys at a mill and getting cigarettes and notes from them.’ Another young woman was labelled as ‘one of the chief offenders’ as she had been causing ‘trouble by attracting coloured soldiers to the school.’ The magistrates justified their decision to send them to Borstal because ‘they had had their chance at Longfords and had failed to take advantage of it.’¹⁶⁹ This shows that parents of young women were partially blamed, but it was the behaviour of the young women themselves that county authorities believed needed to be controlled. Young women who were found on black army camps were punished for being in the camp, not the soldier who had let them onto the camps or who had been in the women’s company.¹⁷⁰ Approved Schools were a way to influence the behaviour of young women. Reports such as these published in the local press may have acted as a deterrent to other young women and prevented them from fraternising with black American troops.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that it was young women’s behaviour around black American soldiers that provoked the most concern in the county. The local authorities in Gloucestershire used force to control the behaviour of young women and were often seen as the sole perpetrator in

¹⁶⁹ ‘Absconded, Found At Camp: Girls Sent to Borstal At Nailsworth’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 02 August 1944 p. 4 < <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19440802/032/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 31/01/2021].

¹⁷⁰ ‘Butcher’s 37 Rationing Offences: Woman Sentenced’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 14 June 1944 p. 4 < <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440614/053/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 08/05/2021].

pursuing some form of sexual relationship with black GIs. The local authorities may have believed they were protecting the young women and by sending them to an Approved School were acting in their best interests. However, sensationalised headlines and stories were used in the local press to incite panic around the behaviour of young women.

It is clear from the evidence that negative attitudes towards interracial relationships existed in Gloucestershire. It is interesting that many of the letters that were published in the local press complaining about young women's behaviour with black American soldiers were from men. This suggests that perhaps men in the county had more of a concern than women. Despite these negative attitudes, women still fraternised with black American GIs. The British public tended to disagree with the American perception of black inferiority and often publicly condemned the use of a colour bar. Therefore, the choice of young women to continue to fraternise with black soldiers may have been out of desire but could also have been deliberately in defiance not just of the attitudes of some local people but also white Americans.

African American soldiers were stationed all around the county in camps separated from their white counterparts. This meant that in some cases, black troops were the only Americans in the area and therefore the only US soldiers that young women would have socialised with. Social expectations regarding inter-racial relationships may not have reached these small hamlets and villages and so young women may have had relationships with black Americans without facing any condemnation. Therefore, women in Gloucestershire acted both out of desire and defiance when it came to fraternising with African American soldiers.

Chapter 4: Observations on Immorality

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the sexual relationships that young women had with American soldiers were of a particular concern to the general public and local authorities in Gloucestershire. During the Second World War immorality became inextricably linked with female sexuality. Young women's behaviour, whilst in the company of US troops was heavily scrutinised. National and local newspaper reports were dominated by discussions on a rise in immorality amongst young women. For example, in March 1943 an all-male conference discussed how an increase in 'moral laxity' was due to the huge presence of American troops in cities and towns.¹⁷¹ Various methods in Gloucestershire were introduced that attempted to influence and control the behaviour of young women who fraternised with US troops and men in general. This chapter demonstrates that young women exercised sexual agency by expressing indifference and defiance to the methods of influence and continued to fraternise with American soldiers throughout the war.

4.2 Disorderly Conduct in the Streets

During the war mid-teen promiscuity became a concern to the general public. For example, in December 1943 a letter sent to the *Gloucester Citizen* described how the author was 'amazed at the rowdy behaviour of young girls and boys, aged between 14 to 19, in the streets at night.' They wrote, 'from about 8 p.m. onwards [Gloucester] is like a rough playground' with 'youths career[ing] up and down' and make[ing] love by cuddling.'¹⁷² This letter demonstrates that

¹ Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here': The GIs in Wartime Britain*, (London: Collins & Brown Limited. 1992). pp. 120-121.

¹⁷² 'Other People's Views: Disorderly Conduct In The Streets', *Gloucester Citizen*, 14 December 1943 p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19431214/016/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021].

there was a concern over the behaviour of both young women and men. However, this section examines why there was more of a public focus on women.

Some blamed the arrival of American troops for the perceived lowering of female sexual morals. For example, one housewife from Warwickshire wrote:

When I was a girl, we weren't let out alone with a man unless we were engaged. Today they don't care what they do. I've seen those Americans in our hedge with young girls of 15 and 16... I don't know what people are coming to – it's all these Yanks and their ideas.¹⁷³

It is not clear if the situation was the same in Gloucestershire, however British soldiers serving abroad expressed disgust at hearing about the behaviour of local girls amongst US troops. For example, in January 1945 Harry Gibb, a British soldier from Gloucestershire described his disgust towards the American troops. He wrote:

I'm not surprised to know that England is in the same state as most other countries in the matter of 'casual relationships'... what sickens me is to have an American describe to me what a time he had with English girls, for all the world as though he were paying me a compliment. Almost all Englishmen who have been out any length of time feel pretty thoroughly rotten about English women who have taken to Americans.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Mass Observation Directive, April 1944, Respondent 1022 <<https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1022/20>

¹⁷⁴ Letters from Harry Gibbs to Vona Ellis, Gloucestershire Archives D5814/1 08 January 1945.

Harry continued that his disgust came from the ‘conception that... amongst the English abroad of England as little better than an American brothel incenses me...’¹⁷⁵ Similarly a Captain from Cheltenham stationed in the Mediterranean wrote to the *Cheltenham Chronicle* in July 1944 that judging by the pictures ‘all the pretty girls in Cheltenham are marrying the Americans.’¹⁷⁶ This shows that there was a concern about the behaviour of American soldiers and there was a fear that young women were being enticed into participating in immoral behaviour with them.

Links between young women drinking and associating with American troops started to appear in the local newspapers. Some viewed young women who attended pubs as an act of immorality due to the underlying belief that female pub-going was linked to prostitution and therefore these women were responsible for spreading venereal disease. A widowed housewife from London argued that ‘all this drinking weakens [young people’s] morals.’¹⁷⁷ In October 1943 the *Tewkesbury Register and Gazette* exclaimed in a headline that a 21-year-old woman from Leamington was the ‘Sort of Girl Tewkesbury doesn’t want’ after she had been fined for being drunk and disorderly in public. The young woman, who had met an American soldier and had visited Tewkesbury with him for a short period was then found late at night with him in the streets of Worcester after she had gone to visit some friends there. She was crying and had only one shoe on, she was also very drunk and used ‘obscene language.’ The young woman told the bench that her and a friend had met two Americans and they would not stop buying them ‘beer and stuff.’¹⁷⁸ Similarly, in December 1943 the *Cheltenham Chronicle* reported how Evelyn Freeman was fined £1 for failing to produce her identity card. The article included a comment

¹⁷⁵ Letters from Harry Gibbs to Vona Ellis, Gloucestershire Archives D5814/1 08 January 1945.

¹⁷⁶ ‘To-Day’s Gossip: Cupid’s Raid’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 08 July 1944, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19440708/021/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/11/2020].

¹⁷⁷ Mass Observation, respondent 1015, April 1944, <<https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1015/147> >

¹⁷⁸ ‘The Sort of Girl Tewkesbury Doesn’t Want’, *The Tewkesbury Register and Agricultural Gazette*, 09 October 1943, p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002217/19431009/008/0001> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021].

from a Superintendent that the woman was ‘often seen in the company of American soldiers’ and that she had previously been fined for being drunk and disorderly.¹⁷⁹ The newspapers association of the young women’s drinking and their involvement with American troops implies that that these women were seen as ‘good-time girls’ with questionable morals. The report exclaimed quite clearly that this is not the type of woman Tewkesbury want in their towns. This reinforced to other women and the public that this was not acceptable behaviour of a woman.

Many critics of young women’s sexual behaviour placed the blame on a lack of parental influence and control. Many families had been broken up during the war due to evacuation, compulsory war work and fathers or brothers being called up into the forces. Mothers could also now not only be expected to engage in the war effort working long hours but were also expected to maintain the home and raise children. Mothers were therefore often blamed for their daughter’s ‘immoral’ behaviour. A journalist from London wrote that the ‘ones who generally go on the loose are those with a bad[,] unsatisfactory home background.’¹⁸⁰ Residents in Gloucestershire also believed this to be true as one man at the end of 1942 wrote in disgust to the *Gloucestershire Echo* about a hostel in Cheltenham that employed young women to do housework. The correspondent complained how the young women spent all their time ‘hanging out of the windows, whistling and accosting every male who passes, in uniform or otherwise.’ The writer questioned who was responsible for these women aged between fourteen and sixteen for ‘being dressed in fashionable tweeds and so, on. To the accompaniment of yellow hair and made-up faces? Aren’t we in the throes of a grim war?’ and

¹⁷⁹ ‘Threshing Cavings Blaze In Dark: Car Without Lights’, *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Graphic*, 18 December 1943, p. 3 < <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000518/19431218/030/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021].

¹⁸⁰ Mass Observation Directive April 1944, Respondent 1039 <<https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1039/77>>

believed it was the responsibility of the parents to stop them from engaging in what they saw as immoral behaviour.¹⁸¹ Similarly in May 1944 the news of the rape of a 16-year-old woman whilst on her way home from a local dance in Bishops Cleeve, near Cheltenham, appeared in the local papers. The story prompted many letters from its readers, but one correspondent wrote ‘... now is the time for daughters and parents to realise what may be the consequence of a young woman being out late at night, whether accompanied or not’.¹⁸² Therefore, young women were seen as not fully accountable for their actions.

4.3 Perfectly Disgusting Disorderly Houses: Prostitution and Venereal Disease

Disapprobation of women engaging in prostitution was not directly discussed in the local papers, instead strong disapproval was expressed through the language of a woman’s morality such as if the woman was a mother and was neglecting her children. Sonya O. Rose argues that rhetoric concerning these women was primarily aimed at working-class women as there had always been a long-standing implicit association between working-class women and promiscuity and prostitution. Women who accepted gifts for sex were labelled as ‘gold diggers’, a term rising out of the inter-war period when understandings of female sex became more about female sexuality and an expression of marital love. But this term yet again had class and gender connotations as Rose further argues that the rise in consumerism and the attraction of single working-class women to the cinema, cosmetics, fashion, and department stores in the 1930s led to denigration, suspicion and contempt.¹⁸³ This caused apprehension amongst the bourgeoisie and elite who had long been moralising about working-class family

¹⁸¹ ‘Letters to the Editor: Young Girl Menace: Duty of Parents’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 December 1942 p.3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19421224/025/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 15 November 2020].

¹⁸² ‘Letters to the Editor: The Lesson’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 May 1944 p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440510/028/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 27/01/2021].

¹⁸³ Sonya O’Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). pp. 81-82.

life. Rose argues that this inevitably led to methods of influence and surveillance being primarily directed towards working-class women.¹⁸⁴

Young working-class women who consumed make-up and fashion were often associated with the label 'good-time-girl'. 'Good-time-girl' became the sweeping term for young women who were seen in the company of Allied troops and the term soon became used to describe young women engaging in casual prostitution. Incidents of casual prostitution were seldom reported in the local press however, it did happen. Women known as 'camp followers' would purposefully go to places where Americans were stationed. One woman recalled how two days before GIs arrived at a camp in Devon, 'swarms of strange girls and smart young women invaded the town.' This also happened in Gloucestershire as Norah Day, a former volunteer at the American camp in Ashchurch recalled 'prostitutes used to come from places as far away as Birmingham, by the late trains to Ashchurch, leaving again early in the morning. I saw some... as I was cycling to work at 5.0[0]am.. Not a pretty sight.'¹⁸⁵ The Services of Supply Provost Marshal in Cheltenham commented in February 1943: 'Even if a most efficient military police force is in operation, law enforcement is most difficult under blackout conditions.' The US Military authorities were concerned that most of these prostitutes were young women. In early 1943 the European Theatre of Operation's Provost Marshal General reported:

Most British women over 18 are in the Services or have work to do. The only ones who have little to do but play are the youngsters under 18. As a natural result, a great deal

¹⁸⁴ Rose, *Which People's War?*, p. 82.

¹⁸⁵ Miss Norah Day's Archive cited in John Dixon, "'Somewhere in England" G.I.'s in Tewkesbury 1943-45', *Tewkesbury Historical Society Bulletin*, 5 (1996), p. 22.

of our trouble has been caused through the association of our men with very young girls; a few cases have involved girls as young as 13.¹⁸⁶

Therefore, young women were understood to be more at risk from US troops than professional prostitutes but reports of casual prostitution is rare due to the difficulty of proving it. The police could only take action if it was proven that a woman was a 'common prostitute' and if she was observed by an officer to be loitering or soliciting to the annoyance of inhabitants and passers-by.¹⁸⁷ The police did take action against those operating and working in 'disorderly houses' and there were several reports in the local newspapers of brothels operating in Cheltenham.¹⁸⁸

Wartime restrictions placed strain on family life and business and in order to survive, a few women were forced to turn their business into brothels or start engaging in prostitution. The influx of American soldiers with a substantial disposable income and looking for women meant that some women participated in casual prostitution out of necessity. Brothels were usually run by women but even if a man was involved in the brothel's operation, it was the woman who was prosecuted. One example of this was the Linton's who in October 1943 were charged with managing a brothel in the centre of Cheltenham. Prior to the war, Mr and Mrs Linton operated an ordinary boarding house but during the war, they were turning civilians away in favour of married service personnel couples. According to the *Gloucestershire Echo*, there had been demand from American servicemen for accommodation 'to which they could take young women for a certain purpose and that was the purpose to which the defendants had, for some

¹⁸⁶ PM to SOS HQ, 12 February 1943, RG 332 ETO AG 250.1 SOS (1943-44) [Cheltenham]; PMG to JA, 26 February 1943, *ibid.*, AG 250.1 1943, vol. 2, cited in Reynolds, *Over Here*, p. 202.

¹⁸⁷ Letter written from Prostitute to Medical Personnel at Bovingdon Air base, London, cited in, Rose., *Which People's War?* pp. 81-82.

¹⁸⁸ 'Woman Fined £50', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 26 October 1943, p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19431026/040/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021]. 'Woman Sent to Prison', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 03 June 1943, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430603/043/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021].

time, put their premises.’ The house was placed under police observation for ten nights and as well as some GIs remaining in the property until the house was locked up, it was also found that some American soldiers were booking rooms in advance. When the police raided the building, they found US soldiers with women aged eighteen and nineteen. Mrs Linton claimed that the men had reassured her that the young women were their wives. However, during the ten nights of observation the police recorded the visits of 51 Americans and 34 women, with 27 Americans and 25 women remaining at the property after it had been locked up for the night. The police claimed that on entering the property, Mr Linton came up from the basement of the house, turned to his wife and said, ‘I told you that you would be caught’ and in court claimed that his wife ran the house and believed there was nothing wrong ‘in the conduct of the house.’ The case was dropped from Mr Linton, yet his wife ended up being charged with a £50 fine which if left unpaid, would have carried a three-month prison sentence.¹⁸⁹ Although the true motive of the Linton’s will never be known, their situation suggests that if business had dropped, the potential to operate a brothel was too tempting. This evidence also suggests that because only Mrs Linton was prosecuted, sex work was only perceived as a female business.

Many women were forced into prostitution because of the difficult circumstances they found themselves in due to wartime conditions. For example, Rose describes a letter she found hidden in her father’s diary. It was written by a prostitute and sent to the medical personnel at the US Army base at which her father was stationed. The woman wrote describing how she had resorted to prostitution as she had fallen on hard times after her husband who was a physician had died, leaving her penniless.¹⁹⁰ Similarly a 24 year-old RAF Clerk stationed in Cheltenham

¹⁸⁹ ‘Woman Fined £50’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 26 October 1943, p. 4 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19431026/040/0004> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 06/02/2021]. And ‘Woman Fined £50’, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 30 October 1943, p. 5 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000518/19431030/066/0005> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 06/02/2021].

¹⁹⁰ Rose., *Which People’s War?* p. V.

argued in April 1944 that women in poorly paid shop and office jobs, especially in larger towns, engaged in prostitution to augment their earnings enabling them to indulge in luxuries beyond their means or ordinary expectations.¹⁹¹ There seemed to exist a belief that women only engaged in causal prostitution to supplement their wage for fashion and cosmetics, when some women may have been doing it in order to survive.

In June 1944 the local press reported how Mrs Alice Lewis was sentenced to one month in prison for aiding and abetting in keeping a brothel in Cheltenham High-Street. During 14 nights of observation, 65 American and 22 British soldiers had entered the premises and upon entering the premises police found a US Officer, an American soldier and other Officers hiding behind a bedroom door. The owner of the premises of the brothel, Mrs Kathleen Gowing was fined £12 and a Mrs Adlam who was also summoned was bound over for two years. Lewis who was believed to have seven children and separated from her husband had, according to the police been ‘associating with American soldiers for a long time and accompanying them to low-class public houses.’ The previous April, Lewis had been sentenced to prison for three months for sheltering absentees from the US Army. Therefore, having separated from her husband and with a previous criminal record, her reputation was already thrown into question. Gowing, whose husband was away in the Navy, already had two children and was expecting another baby and was not sure if the father was her husband, or an American serviceman she had been ‘keeping company’ with. Lewis had moved in with Gowing to help her with her children but started to bring American soldiers back to the house. Adlam, who lived at the property and had a 6-month-old daughter told the magistrates that her husband was a prisoner of war in Germany. On reading the verdict of each woman, the chairman of the magistrates told Lewis that they

¹⁹¹ Mass Observation, Respondent 2529, April 1944 <<https://www.massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-2529/37>>

‘felt strongly that you could have had influence over these younger women and did not use it.’ Adlam was told that it was ‘deplorable that [she] should have behaved in this way when [her] husband [was] a prisoner in Germany. At this moment... that you should have let your husband down is a most miserable thing.’¹⁹² Interestingly this story suggests that it was believed that older women were again partially responsible for the actions of younger women. Therefore, older women were leading the younger women astray by not being a good role model, thus reducing the younger women’s agency in these situations.

Glaring headlines in news reports such as ‘Mother of 7 Children Sentenced’ and ‘Woman Sent to Prison’ along with the women’s ages, marital status and details of any children aimed to accentuate the immorality of the women’s actions. For example, in June 1943 the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported how Mrs Elsie McColm of Fairview Road, Cheltenham, was sent to prison for three months for ‘keeping a disorderly house.’ The report detailed how Miss Dorothy Mary Jane Harvey aged 27, Mrs Elsie May Evans aged 24 and a young woman aged 15 also lived at the property which had been under police observation for eight days. During the observations, 86 soldiers and civilians entered the building between 6 p.m. and 1 a.m. In one day alone 23 men had entered the property. When the police entered the house, the rooms were in complete darkness until they shone a torch exposing McColm and the three other women with two American troops and one English soldier in a downstairs room. The report went on to describe how McColm’s four children ranging in age from six and a half to thirteen months were sleeping in a room upstairs. The young women had three children between them with one 10-month-old, belonging to Harvey. Both women were bound over for one month

¹⁹² ‘Mother of 7 Children Sentenced’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 09 June 1944, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440609/032/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021]. and ‘Police Raid on House: Woman Fined’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 02 June 1944, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440602/034/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021].

with the magistrates commenting that this case was the ‘most squalid they had ever heard. The whole thing was perfectly disgusting.’¹⁹³ As well as being identified as prostitutes in local newspapers, they were also portrayed as bad mothers who had neglected their children. The news story also does not mention the occupation and location of the any of the women’s husbands yet gives the women’s titles. This was a contemporary formality; however, it gives us some understanding of whether they were married. For example, without further information it is assumed Miss Harvey was a young single mother. This immediately makes the reader question her morality when her actual situation may be completely different.

4.3.1 Venereal Disease: A Wartime Epidemic

Although prostitutes became synonymous with venereal disease (VD), in July 1943 at the Joint Committee on Venereal Disease the Metropolitan Police argued that the greatest source of infection was to be found among young, irresponsible ‘good-time girls’ and young women, rather than among the regular ‘professional type’.¹⁹⁴ One widowed housewife wrote in April 1944 that it was the young women ‘who worked the streets that [were] a great menace’ and wondered if it was the American soldiers claiming ‘he can go with any girl for a pair of silk stockings.’¹⁹⁵ Ernest Brown, the Minister of Health blamed the collapse of moral standards and an increase in promiscuity for the rise in sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁹⁶ However, in reality only fifty percent of the sexually active GIs overseas were using prophylactics and Jenel Virden argues that the average age of infected British woman was between 19 and 23 years old who

¹⁹³ ‘Woman Sent to Prison’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 03 June 1943, p. 3
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430603/043/0004> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 06/02/2021].

¹⁹⁴ Minutes of the Joint Committee on Venereal Disease, 2nd Meeting, 10 July 1943. MH 55/2325, at the PRO, Kew, cited in, Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 80.

¹⁹⁵ Mass Observation, Respondent 1015, April 1944, <<https://www.massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.glos.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Images/Directive-1015/147>>

¹⁹⁶ “‘Collapse of Morals’”, *Gloucester Citizen*, 30 June 1943, p. 6
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430630/052/0006> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 11/02/2021].

most likely became infected through a 'single act of exposure', not because she was working as a prostitute.¹⁹⁷ Between 1939 and 1942 cases of syphilis had increased amongst both sexes. However, it was the arrival of American Forces in 1942 that elevated VD to an epidemic proportion.¹⁹⁸ In 1943 within the first three months of US troops arriving in Britain, VD statistics had risen from twenty cases per thousand to almost sixty per thousand which was triple the rate of those troops still stationed in America.¹⁹⁹

In Gloucestershire, VD statistics were monitored at local level and local authorities became anxious as the figures gradually rose throughout the war. By July 1943 251 cases of VD had been treated in Gloucestershire, compared with 224 in 1941 and 185 in 1940. The *Tewkesbury Register and Gazette* reported how even though there had been an increase in the number of people attending treatment clinics, 'conditions in the county compare favourably with the country as a whole.'²⁰⁰ The increase in treated cases was gradual and in 1944, 297 cases had been treated, with a slight reduction in 1945 of 274.²⁰¹ Various methods of influence were attempted in order to reduce the number of VD cases. However, all these methods were focused on influencing the behaviour of young working-class women.

In 1942 Lord Bledisloe urged Gloucestershire County Council to do everything in their power to support the Ministry of Health in their campaign against VD. Bledisloe determined that the rise in cases in the county were due to 'neglect of the disease owing to misguided secrecy or

¹⁹⁷ Jenel Virden., *Good-bye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois press, 1996). p. 25.

¹⁹⁸ Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 25. & John Costello., *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1985). p.127.

¹⁹⁹ Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 25. & Costello, *Love, Sex and War*, p. 328.

²⁰⁰ 'Venereal Diseases', *The Tewkesbury Register and Gazette*, 17 July 1943 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002217/19430717/020/0002> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04 April 2020].

²⁰¹ 'Nursing Problems in County', *The Citizen*, 01 November 1946 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19461101/166/0009> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04 April 2020].

lack of early treatment'. Bledisloe argued that the authorities needed to do everything in their power to stop the spread of the disease, especially as there was now an added danger to the civilian population as more military camps had been established in the locality. By late November 1942 the Gloucestershire authorities stated that there were already mobile treatment units and clinics available in most areas of the county and additional budget was being made available to put on lectures and publish posters primarily aimed at young factory workers.²⁰²

Viriden argues it was the threat of the disease passing to the civilian population that led to a large VD campaign in 1943, which aimed to bring the topic of sex and sexually transmitted diseases into the open.²⁰³ In March of that year, the 'intensive' two-week campaign which saw mobile cinema vans touring local factories and lectures being given to the workers and young people at Youth Centres was launched in Gloucestershire. At a Public Health meeting, Mr R. R. Dobson, the former Headmaster of Cheltenham Grammar school and a well-respected local figure, told the committee that he was concerned that people were afraid of talking about the disease and felt that the use of posters would bring the matter more directly to the general public, raising concerns that a two-week campaign would only have a limited effect. Other committee members made it clear that they felt sex education should be taught in Youth Clubs and that parents should be given more guidance on how to approach these issues with their children. The Gloucestershire Public Health Committee decided that posters would be displayed in public lavatories, railway stations and air raid shelters with details about local VD clinics.²⁰⁴

²⁰² 'Social Hygiene Problem – Lord Bledisloe's Call to County', *Gloucester Journal*, 07 November 1942, p. 6 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000532/19421107/014/0006> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04 April 2020].

²⁰³ Viriden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, p. 25.

²⁰⁴ 'Glo'ster to Start Two Weeks' V.D. Campaign', *The Citizen*, 04 January 1943, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430104/037/0005> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04 April 2020].

In February 1943 the Ministry of Health posted advertisements detailing facts about VD in national and local newspapers. The first advert to be published was headed ‘Ten Plain Facts about Venereal Diseases’ detailing symptoms and offering advice such as:

Professional prostitutes are not the only source of infection. Any free and easy sex behaviour must mean a risk of infection and cannot be made safe clean living is the only way to escape infection – abstinence is not harmful.²⁰⁵

These publications continued throughout the war, focusing on different aspects of the disease, and becoming more visually terrifying. For example, one advert from July 1945 depicted a picture of a baby with the shadowy imprint of the letters ‘V.D.’ across its face. This attempted to illustrate the dangers of a mother suffering from VD to her unborn child.²⁰⁶ The campaign did have the desired effects as in June 1943 the Gloucestershire County Medical Officer noted that the number of people attending the clinics with a negative result was increasing.²⁰⁷ VD statistics for Gloucestershire after this were never made public and even the Gloucestershire Public Health Committee could not obtain them.²⁰⁸

Despite the success of the campaign, not everyone in the county agreed with its direct approach. One man from Gloucestershire complained that in addition to these measures, no

²⁰⁵ ‘Ten Plain Facts about Venereal Diseases’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 26 February 1943, p. 2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430226/078/0002> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 11/02/2021].

²⁰⁶ ‘V.D. – A Shadow on his Future?’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 18 July 1945, p. 6 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450718/100/0006> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04 April 2020].

²⁰⁷ ‘Sex Education for Children’, *Gloucester Journal*, 12 June 1943, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000532/19430612/007/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 11/02/2021].

²⁰⁸ Cheltenham Borough Council Records, Public Health Committee, 17 January 1944, p. 116-117 <<https://www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/research/cbcm1944.pdf> [accessed 12/02/2021].

guidance was given to young men and women ‘into a way of life which will assist them to resist temptation to sin!’²⁰⁹ Canon Goodliffe the Rector of Cheltenham, felt that the VD advertisements were a ‘bit tepid on the moral side.’ Along with a curfew, Goodliffe believed that more policewomen should be appointed.²¹⁰ This shows that some residents of Gloucestershire believed that non-marital and casual sex was a sin and that young people in particular needed educating on living a moral life rather than being educated on VD. By suggesting that more policewomen should be appointed, the Rector of Cheltenham made it clear that he believed that it was young women’s sexual morals that needed to be controlled. Therefore, whilst some residents deplored the immoral behaviour of young men and women, local church authorities placed more focus on the morals of women.

4.3.2 Bowden Hall

Another way that the authorities tried to influence young women’s behaviour was to send them to specialist homes. Young women suffering from VD were usually taken into the care of the state and sent to remand homes. One such example was St. Mary’s Lodge in Gloucester, which had been a home for eight years. This establishment which took women in who were in need of care and protection admitted 71 women and girls and 4 babies in 1944.²¹¹ The Home Office soon recognised an urgent need for accommodation for young women that were suffering from VD. Lack of specialists and facilities for treatment meant that a dedicated centre for this type of work was seen as essential. In June 1943 the Home Office and Gloucestershire’s Local Education Authorities agreed that as it had already been bought by the local council and sitting

²⁰⁹ ‘Letters to the Editor: Bold Call Needed’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 22 January 1943, p. 5 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430122/042/0005> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 11/02/2021].

²¹⁰ ‘Moral Problems of the War’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 October 1943, p. 3 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19431028/028/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 11/02/2021].

²¹¹ ‘Moral Problems of the War’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 October 1943, p. 3 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19431028/028/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 11/02/2021].

empty, Bowden Hall in Gloucester would be used as an Approved School specifically specialising in treating VD in young women. This school was the first Approved School in the country to be run by the Local authorities and would be used to treat women aged between 15 and 19.²¹² Local residents were concerned that the school would be a ‘nuisance to the neighbourhood’ however, many large Gloucestershire companies clearly felt that the establishment of this school was in the interest of public health. Many made sizeable donations towards the opening of Bowden Hall, for example building company; Messrs. John Daniels & Co., Ltd of Churchdown donated £3,875 17s and 6d.²¹³

In November 1944 the school was officially opened and in its first six months 34 girls who were already in the care of the State had been sent to Bowden Hall. When interviewed by the *Gloucester Citizen* in May 1945, the school’s headmistress Mrs M.M. Jackson listed the reasons why the young women had been committed. These involved, misuse of their leisure time, over-indulgence, and a desire to copy what they had seen in films. Jackson went onto say that the girls’ love of cosmetics and silk-stockings coupled with the fact that many looked older than their true age meant that they could obtain drink in pubs which she inevitably believed led to ‘wrongdoing.’ Interestingly, Jackson only places partial blame on the young women and states that their home life was also to blame. Of the 34 women admitted, 17 were ‘in need of care and protection’, 6 had been ‘exposed to moral danger’, 5 ‘beyond parental care, 2 for breaking their probation and 5 for larceny. Jackson reasoned that most of these young women

²¹² ‘Bowden Hall’s Future: Upton Opposed to New Plan’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 15 July 1943, p. 2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430715/017/0002> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/02/2021] & ‘First home of its kind in Country’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 01 June 1943, p.7 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430601/059/0007> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 16 October 2019].

²¹³ ‘Bowden Hall’s Future: Upton Opposed to New Plan’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 15 July 1943, p. 2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430715/017/0002> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/02/2021] & ‘Tender Accepted’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 28 September 1943, p. 6 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430928/044/0006> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/02/2021].

had not had a 'very fair deal at the beginning' with 7 losing their mothers, 3 their fathers, 4 were illegitimate, the father of one was in the Forces and the parents of some of the other young women were separated or divorced.²¹⁴ Therefore the root cause of young women's delinquency was believed to manifest from their upbringing.

Once the school had opened the local papers reported on various incidents in which several young women had tried to escape. For example, in July 1945 it was reported that 17-year-old Mary Murray had admitted to absconding six times from Bowden Hall. Murray who had been committed to the school in January 1945 by the Lancashire Juvenile Court had first absconded with another young woman to Hereford nine days after arriving. She attempted to abscond again in March along with two other young women but was arrested in Bristol. One more attempt was made before her fourth try which saw her arrested in Liverpool, where she was found to be wearing the bedspreads belonging to the school which had been torn into pieces. Her fifth attempt found her near Barry, Wales, with eleven bars of American chocolate and in an 'extremely filthy condition'. Her final attempt was in July where she was subsequently re-arrested in Cardiff whilst in the company of two black American soldiers. As she had taken another young woman with her on several of her escapes, her influence at the school was deemed by the headmistress as 'bad and detrimental to the other girls and a 'danger to the community and to herself from risk of re-infection and deterioration in health due to cessation of treatment.'²¹⁵ Murray who appeared at Gloucester Magistrates Court was sent to a Borstal Institution for two years with the Bench ordering her to be committed to prison until a vacancy could be found for her at Borstal.

²¹⁴ 'Cosmetics, Silk Stockings, Send Girls Astray', *Gloucester Citizen*, 16 May 1945, p. 4
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450516/081/0004> Image © Trinity Mirror>
[accessed 03 April 2020].

²¹⁵ 'Absconded From Home Six Times', *Gloucester Citizen*, 30 July 1945, p. 3
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19450730/062/0003> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 09/02/2021].

Another incident reported in the *Gloucester Citizen* in December 1945 described how Betty Archer an 18-year-old patient from Brixton, London, had absconded from Bowden Hall three times. Archer had initially been committed from Chelsea Juvenile Court in September 1944 as being in need of care and protection and sent to Bowden that December. In May 1945 she absconded with four younger girls and was found in London. She absconded again in October and was found in Hucclecote, Gloucester dressed in Italian Prisoner-of-War clothes. In November she absconded once more with three young women and was found almost three weeks later. On her return to the school Archer had pleaded for another chance, however Jackson claimed that Archer was ‘defiant, and unrepentant and her attitude was detrimental to the other girls.’ It was also discovered in July 1945 that Archer had been writing to Italian Prisoners-of-War and as a result some Italians had visited the grounds, prompting Bowden Hall to establish nightly patrols of the grounds. As a result, the authorities believed she needed ‘firmer discipline’ that the school could not provide and thus was committed to a Borstal Institution for two years.²¹⁶

These incidents are clear examples of young women’s defiance towards the control that the local authorities attempted to exert over their sexual behaviour. These young women continually attempted to escape and engage in sexual relations with not only black soldiers but also prisoners of war. These young women may have been doing this out of sexual desire. However, they were not practicing sexual patriotism and therefore the state felt they needed to be controlled with force. Local authorities blamed the behaviour of young women on the influence of cinema and working-class consumerism. It is also interesting that responsibility for the young women’s behaviour was also placed upon their upbringing and their situation at

²¹⁶ ‘Reason for Patrol in School Grounds; Allegations in Gloucester Court’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 24 December 1945, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19451224/088/0005> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 09/02/2021].

home. This sympathetic reasoning makes one assume that the school would have been prepared to deal with the most extreme cases, but the examples of the two women who absconded from the school imply a different situation. These young women were sent to the school as they needed care and protection and were most likely in need of psychological support. Yet instead, they were seen as defiant troublemakers and it was deemed that a stricter form of education in the way of a juvenile detention centre was the most appropriate way of getting them to repent and learn to live a more moral life.

4.3.3 Reaching Danger Point: Defence Regulation 33B and Policewomen

In addition to educational and clinical treatment, the use of law enforcement was also seen as a necessity to influencing the behaviour of young women. One way of doing this was by using Defence Regulation 33B which would see any person forced to undergo medical treatment if they had infected two or more patients with VD. If the person named as the contact refused to attend an examination or undergo treatment, they could face a prison sentence. Despite this regulation encompassing men and women, it was the sexual behaviour of women that it tried to influence. For example, at a meeting in July 1943, the Gloucestershire County Council complained of the ineffectiveness of the regulation. MP for Cheltenham, E.L. Lipson argued that the regulation was not going to be successful as there would be many instances where one notification would be received but no action could be taken against these ‘public menace[s].’ Other council members were quick to catastrophise the dangers of such an ineffective law by urging for an amendment which would ‘enable action to be taken against girls who were a danger to the villages in which they lived’. One woman at the meeting expressed hope that the government would not be sent any recommendations for an amendment as if ‘they acted on

one person there was a risk of doing injustice to the perfectly innocent girl.²¹⁷ Similarly in December 1942 the Gloucester branch of the National Council of Women rejected the regulation based on ‘the dangerous encouragement it would give to secret informers to denounce “contacts” by whom they claim to have been infected.’²¹⁸ Therefore there was a fear that young girls could be used as scapegoats for the source of an infection, wrongfully being seen by the community as a ‘good-time-girl’ when in actual fact she was perfectly innocent.

As well as enforcing Defence Regulation 33B, it was also believed that a specialist female police force should be set up to deal specifically with the immoral behaviour of young women. It was believed that policewomen should be hired to ‘curb the activities of young street walkers’ as well as ‘interrogate women and girls, to order them off the streets.’²¹⁹ In Cheltenham. it was the Church and members of various women’s organisations that voiced the strongest support for these measures. For example, in October 1942 the Gloucestershire Federation of Women’s Institutes unanimously passed a resolution that the time had come to increase the number of women police in the county. One member who lived near an Allied army camp exclaimed that she was ‘horrified to see the number of young girls who hang about around the camp every night, often to a late hour.’ The members of the women’s organisations believed it was the young women and their parents who were to blame, not the troops.²²⁰ Canon Goodliffe, the Rector of Cheltenham also believed the root cause were young women and not the troops. In

²¹⁷ ‘Glo’shire Criticisms of 33 B’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 15 July 1943, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000325/19430715/033/0005?browse=true> Image © Trinity Mirror> [accessed 04 April 2020].

²¹⁸ ‘National Council of Women’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 04 December 1942, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19421204/060/0005> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 19/02/2021].

²¹⁹ ‘City clean up no job for women’, *Daily Mirror*, 13 January 1944, p. 5 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000560/19440113/049/0005> With thanks to Reach PLC> [accessed 21/02/2021].

²²⁰ Girls who “Hang Round Camps”, *The Tewkesbury Register and Gazette*, 24 October 1942, p. 1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002217/19421024/009/0001> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 19/02/2021].

January 1943, he made a plea demanding that ‘a certain class of young girls in Cheltenham’ needed to be controlled. Goodliffe deplored that the situation in Cheltenham was becoming a ‘public scandal’ and as far as ‘decent women in Cheltenham were concerned the position was reaching absolute danger point.’ He argued that ‘decent women are being continually accosted by members of the Allied Forces’ and believed this was due to the ‘totally erroneous impression given to the men by a particularly irresponsible element of young English girls.’ Goodliffe believed that Allied troops had been misled due to ‘our failure to control... the irresponsible amateur prostitute type of the age of 16.’²²¹ It is clear to see that the local church and women’s organisations believed themselves to be responsible for maintaining the morality of women in the county. These moral makers were attempting to control the behaviour of the young women as they felt it was their duty to protect them.

In January 1943, the immorality displayed by some young women in Cheltenham was causing the county to be subjected to ‘Acute Danger.’ The situation in Cheltenham had been likened to the situation in Bristol where young women had been seen hanging around the Docks waiting for sailors. Goodliffe exclaimed that he had hope for an increase in ‘supervision’ in Cheltenham where the ‘position was ‘specially acute... [after] an influx of undesirable elements’ and that ‘particularly expert police’ were needed to deal with them. One bank manager in Cheltenham arranged for the young women who worked for him to be taken home by bus as he feared for their safety in making their way home if they had been working late. Goodliffe argued that a ‘national danger point had been reached where all decent women were concerned.’²²² However, despite pleas from local women’s organisations and the Church, their request for

²²¹ ‘Need For Control of Young Girls’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 05 January 1943, p. 6 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19430105/054/0006> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 19/02/2021].

²²² ‘Deputation Pleads For More Women Police’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 06 January 1943, p. 7 <
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430106/073/0007> Image © Reach PLC>
[accessed 19/02/2021].

more policewomen in the county was rejected. In April 1943 it was decided that Gloucestershire would not be getting any policewomen as the Joint Committee felt that they would not be able to appoint enough policewomen to cover the whole of the county. Many members of the Gloucestershire Women's Voluntary Organisation felt this was unjustified as there had been an 'enormous rise' in illegitimacy and VD cases.²²³ Work in the county had already been conducted by policewomen who patrolled areas with male constables and would visit the homes of young women to warn their parents. However, these patrols and home visits would soon stop as women in the police force were having to leave their position when they were called up for compulsory war work.²²⁴ Therefore, in Cheltenham, young women were believed to be the source of the immorality and were placed solely responsible for the danger posed to other women in Cheltenham by the Allied troops who accosted them.

The evidence clearly suggests that a sexual double standard existed, and that the criminalisation of women's sexual behaviour persisted despite the nineteenth-century feminist campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Act and its eventual repeal.

4.4 'She is a problem. An urgent problem'²²⁵ – The 'immorality' of single mothers

The majority of single mothers during the war were young women, mainly because they were in their prime period of fertility. For instance, in Cheltenham some women as young as fifteen

²²³ 'Shortage of Women Police Officers', *Gloucester Citizen*, 07 April 1943, p. 7 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19430407/042/0007> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 19/02/2021].

²²⁴ 'Gloucestershire Police Chief's Advice', *The Tewkesbury Register and Gazette*, 10 April 1943, p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002217/19430410/071/0004> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 19/02/2021].

²²⁵ 'They Called it the City of Pretty Girls, But now it's The City of Broken Hearts', *Sunday Pictorial*, 09 December 1945, p. 11 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000844/19451209/052/0011?browse=true> With thanks to Reach PLC [accessed 15/11/2020].

were falling pregnant by American soldiers.²²⁶ Illegitimacy was seen as a slip in moral standards and unmarried mothers were heavily stigmatised in national and local newspapers. In 1945 the *Sunday Pictorial* featured an article written by Douglas Warth describing the situation in Nottingham. The article started with a dramatic introduction: ‘They told me about her in whispers. They mentioned no names and simply pointed her out as she pushed a pram shamefacedly through a narrow Nottingham Street.’ The article described how the single mother, with no one to look after her, had had a baby with an American soldier stationed near where she lived. Soon after the soldier was moved on and the woman had no idea where he was. The situation that this woman found herself in was common and as a result was labelled by Warth as a problem, an ‘urgent problem’ caused by a large number of American soldiers leaving ‘an alarming number of illegitimate children behind them.’²²⁷ A year before, the *Gloucester Journal* reported how a 26-year-old single mother had been sentenced to prison for two months as not only had she stolen a clock from her landlady, but she had also tricked her into thinking that the American soldier with whom she lived was her husband. The court told the young woman that she was ‘a really bad girl... and we must try and bring home to you that bad girls will have to suffer their wrong-do-ing.’²²⁸ In May 1944 the vicar of Tewkesbury labelled illegitimacy as a ‘National Evil’ and he ‘trembled for the future of the country.’²²⁹ Therefore, newspaper reports and the state used derogatory language to portray single women who had given birth to an illegitimate child after a relationship with an American soldier.

²²⁶ Comment posted on Days Gone By in Cheltenham

https://m.facebook.com/groups/243104989178394/permalink/1458012014354346/?anchor_composer=false&ref=content_filter Respondent who wishes to remain anonymous, 10th December 2019.

²²⁷ ‘They Called it the City of Pretty Girls, But now it’s The City of Broken Hearts’, *Sunday Pictorial*, 09 December 1945, p. 11

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000844/19451209/052/0011?browse=true> With thanks to Reach PLC> [accessed 15/11/2020].

²²⁸ ‘“Really Bad Girl”, Says Bench Prison Sentence in Gloucester’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 2 August 1944, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000532/19440812/006/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 06/02/2021].

²²⁹ ‘Tewkesbury Vicar on Moral Decadence’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 May 1944, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440515/037/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 25/02/2021].

Women were portrayed as a burden to the community and by getting pregnant had done something catastrophically wrong.

4.4.1 National Evil

To avoid the stigma, gossip, and hostility many women went to great lengths to conceal their pregnancy or the birth of their child. In February 1946, a 22-year-old woman from Cheltenham appeared in court after it had been discovered that she had concealed the birth of her two children and had kept the body of her first child for 19 months after the child had died. The woman, who through two different pregnancies had given birth to two children in 1944, hid their bodies at her home after they had died. It was concluded that the first child died due to ‘inattention at birth’, a cause of death could not be reached for the second child. The woman who was described by her landlord as ‘abnormally quiet and of an introspective type’ had become pregnant with her second child by an American soldier. The woman admitted how she had given birth to her first child at her home and did not tell her parents about it.²³⁰ This devastating example demonstrates how serious a situation the woman believed herself to be in and how detrimental and unforgiving the opinion of both the public and a woman’s family could be.

Reports throughout the war of a rise in immorality dominated the national and local press. However, this perceived rise in immorality was in fact a rise in illegitimacy. Before the war, any child conceived out of wedlock could be legitimised by the marriage of their parents. The war however, made it impossible for some children to be legitimised. David Reynolds argues that the number of births legitimised by their parent’s marriage fell to 37%, compared to 70%

²³⁰ ‘Girl for Trial: Kept Body of Baby for 19 Months – Court Allegation’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 February 1946, p. 4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19460215/035/0004?browse=true>> Image © Reach PLC > [accessed 15/11/2020].

before the war. Whilst there are no accurate records, *Life* magazine estimated that in Britain around 22,000 children were born out of wedlock to white US soldiers.²³¹ Gloucestershire also witnessed a rise in illegitimacy. In 1943 Cheltenham recorded 112 illegitimate births, increasing in 1944 to 155. This was a rate of 122 per 1000.²³² Similarly in May 1944 alone, of the 32 births registered in Tewkesbury in the previous quarter, 19 were illegitimate.²³³ In Gloucester one in every eight births between 1938 and 1945 were illegitimate. Interestingly the Gloucester City Medical Officer did not blame the rise of illegitimate births on the presence of foreign Allied troops, instead link it to a shift in population, disruption to family life and the ‘invariable effects of war on moral standards.’²³⁴ Many births may have been hidden from the statistics, such as the children who were born to women already married to another man. In these cases, the child’s parentage was often concealed.

Fear of pregnancy dominated young women’s perception of sex. Claire Langhammer argues that the fear of pregnancy was *the* key risk of sexual exchange for courting couples who lacked access to reliable contraception or legal abortion.²³⁵ For women the opprobrium placed upon the unmarried mother underlined intimate relations for women as there was a constant fear of ‘getting into trouble’ or ‘losing one’s head’.²³⁶ However, there was also a great deal of misunderstanding around how women got pregnant due to a lack of sex education. The consequences were young people coming of age during a socially disruptive time. For example,

²³¹ *Life* magazine 23 August 1948, p. 41, cited in Reynolds, *Over Here*, pp. 404-406.

²³² ‘Infant Death Rate Increase’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 31 July 1945, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19450731/035/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 25/02/2021].

²³³ ‘Tewkesbury Vicar on Moral Decadence’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 May 1944, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19440515/037/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 25/02/2021].

²³⁴ ‘Continuous Rise in Illegitimate Births: Gloucester Figures are Very High’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 22 May 1947, p. 8 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19470522/074/0008> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 16/11/2020].

²³⁵ Claire Langhammer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). p.142-143.

²³⁶ Langhammer., p. 47.

Cathy from Cheltenham recalled how innocent she was and even in her twenties could ‘honestly say with our hand up we didn’t know what sex was... never heard the word.’ She remembered ‘my sister and me always thought, I wonder how you have a baby. Wonder where it comes from can you imagine anybody being innocent like that.’²³⁷ Yet despite this lack of knowledge young women were constantly warned about the consequences of ‘getting into trouble’ and being sent away to a home for single mothers or even worse thrown out of the family home. Cathy recalled how her mother used to say ‘don’t you come home telling me about babies, I don’t want to hear nothing about babies.’ Cathy remembers how the consequence of ending up pregnant before you were married were:

...not very good.... Of course, a lot was put in homes, cause my mother would say don’t you dare come home if you’re pregnant... I think we were... in them days... a little frightened of parents.²³⁸

Therefore, whilst young women had very little knowledge of the act of sex itself, they knew enough that the consequences of it could be catastrophic to them.

The number of ‘Brown Babies’, a term that the African American press gave to mixed-race children born to black American soldiers and British and European women, is also unknown, again due to a lack of inaccurate records being kept at the time.²³⁹ However, post-war estimates ranged from 555 to 22,000 thousand. David Olusoga believes that the most reliable estimate was carried out by the black British civil rights organization, The League of Coloured Peoples’

²³⁷ Interview with Kathleen Febery 14/03/2020

²³⁸ Interview with Kathleen Febery 14/03/2020

²³⁹ Lucy Bland, ‘Interracial Relationships and the “Brown Baby Question”: black GIs, White Women, and Their Mixed-Race Offspring in World War II’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 26 (2017). p. 424.

which in 1946 estimated that the figure was 775.²⁴⁰ Lucy Bland suggests there were 2,000 ‘Brown Babies’ children born to African American troops and white British women. Despite the differences in estimates, these babies would have significantly increased Britain’s black population, especially in places where there was a higher concentration of black troops, such as Gloucestershire and East Anglia. This would have been noticeable in towns in these districts as these births could have increased the current black population by 20-28%.²⁴¹

Many people viewed a white woman giving birth to a mixed-race baby as her having made a terrible mistake, and some of the mothers of these babies felt the same.²⁴² Women who bore mixed-race children were heavily stigmatised and often condemned as sluts and subjected to name calling. Bland argues that the maternity of a woman who had had a mixed-race child was sexualised and demonised. One woman described the contemporary thinking; ‘this one has had a baby to a black man because that’s how people thought wasn’t it? all they see is if you’ve got a black baby, you’ve been with a black man.’²⁴³ There was very little sympathy given to the women who found themselves single mothers. Women were solely made responsible for their position. Barbara Cartland, the romantic novelist, recalled from her experience in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force as a moral welfare adviser that it was the white women who ran after the black troops, not vice versa. Speaking on the number of babies born to mixed-race couples she was prepared to bet:

...that if the truth were known it would prove in nearly every case the woman’s fault.

Women would queue outside the camps, they would not be turned away, they would

²⁴⁰ David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Books, 2016). pp. 483-485.

²⁴¹ Lucy Bland, *Britain’s ‘brown babies’* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2019). p. 3.

²⁴² Bland, *Britain’s ‘brown babies’* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2019). pp. 53-54.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

come down from London by train, and they defeated the Military Police by sheer numbers...²⁴⁴

Clearly all over the country there was a rise in illegitimacy. It is difficult to fathom the impact American troops stationed in Gloucestershire had on illegitimacy numbers. However, numbers reported in the local press showed it was a concern for the authorities who blamed the increase in illegitimacy on the lack of morality amongst young women.

4.4.2 How to Wed is a Mystery: Options following illegitimacy

Young women who bore the illegitimate children of American soldiers had few options available both during and after their pregnancy. As shown in Chapter 2, for an American soldier and a British woman to marry, they had to get approval from the GI's Commanding Officer. This could be difficult to obtain at the best of times but gaining this approval could be made impossible if the Commanding Officer knew the woman was pregnant. Norman Longmate argues that regardless of how generous Americans could be, both the US Army and the individual soldiers were usually as unhelpful as they could be when a baby was on the way.²⁴⁵ However, if it was difficult for a pregnant woman to marry her white GI boyfriend, it was even harder for a white British woman to marry a black American soldier. In Britain, although interracial marriage was legal, in America it was illegal in thirty of the forty-eight states. This meant that even if the mixed-race couple had married in Britain their marriage would be deemed illegal when they arrived in America. Some black GIs were warned that if they tried to marry their pregnant white British girlfriends, they could be charged with rape.²⁴⁶ One such

²⁴⁴ Barbara Cartland, *The Years of Opportunity*, cited in Costello, *Love, Sex and War*, p. 319.

²⁴⁵ Norman Longmate, *The G.I.'s: The Americans in Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975). p. 285.

²⁴⁶ Janet Baker, "'Lest We Forget': The Children We Left Behind" (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000), 42, cited in, Lucy Bland., *Interracial Relationships*, p. 430.

example is of a black GI who fathered a mixed-race child and wished to keep his new-born son, but after being identified to his Commanding Officer by the young woman's parents he was warned that if he maintained a relationship with the woman, he would be charged with rape. Another black GI who fathered a child was charged with rape 'and in the end he was literally handcuffed and shipped out.'²⁴⁷ Therefore, permission to marry was refused on grounds of race and if charged with rape could potentially be faced with a death sentence.

In some unfortunate but not uncommon cases, the woman could not marry the American GI to legitimise her pregnancy because he was already married. Many women were unaware that the GI they were having relations with had a wife back home and even if confronted there was no guarantee he would tell the truth. Pamela Winfield recalled that divorce was rarely considered, so if the woman knew that the GI they were with was married, very few would have continued their affair. In the 1940s religion also played a larger part in the state of a marriage and if the American soldier was Catholic, he would have believed his marriage was to be for life no matter how broken down it may have been. Therefore, any romantic relationship with a British girl would have been a wartime fling with no prospect of it ever becoming more serious.²⁴⁸ In July 1945 the Washington D.C. *Sunday Star* reported an unusual case in which William H. (Red) Thompson, an American soldier, met Norah Carpenter, a British woman, at a dance at the Cheltenham Town Hall in December 1942. Thompson claimed that he had told Norah he was already married but 'we tried to quit, but just couldn't.' Norah ended up pregnant with quadruplets and Thompson wanted to take Norah and his children back to America with him. However, Thompson's wife in America refused to divorce him on religious grounds leaving

²⁴⁷ Joe quoted in McGlade, *Daddy, Where Are You?*, p. 154, cited in, Lucy Bland, *Britain's 'brown babies'*, p. 46.

²⁴⁸ Pamela Winfield, *Bye Bye Baby: The Story of the Children the GIs Left Behind* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992). p. 7.

Norah in Cheltenham in limbo with very young children to take care of.²⁴⁹ Despite this, the *New York Times* reported in July 1945 that Norah and her three children flew to America to be with Thompson.²⁵⁰ Therefore, women had to be cautious entering into serious relationships with American soldiers. This may have made some women determined that they only wanted platonic relationships with them as they would never truly know the GI was married until it was perhaps too late.

If marriage was not possible then women may have resorted to having an abortion. During the 1940s abortion was not only illegal but expensive and dangerous.²⁵¹ As abortions were illegal there were very little mention of them in the local or national newspapers unless they accompanied an already immoral act, such as fraternising with black American soldiers. For instance, one report in the *Gloucester Citizen* headlined ‘Woman Kept Company With Coloured Man’ detailed how a 42-year-old married mother of three from Gloucestershire died following complications from an abortion after becoming pregnant by a black GI. This woman’s husband had been away for eighteen months serving in North Africa, the paper claimed she had been spotted by neighbours with a black soldier and had told a neighbour that a ‘black American had been to see her one Saturday evening.’²⁵² This is once again an example of how the race of the GI influenced the way a woman was perceived by the public. Whilst this story is about a woman dying of complications from an abortion, it is laced with a lack of

²⁴⁹ ‘Quad’s Father Prefers Briton But How To Wed Is A Mystery’, *The Sunday Star, Washington D.C.*, 08 July 1945, p. A-10 < <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1945-07-08/ed-1/seq-10/#date1=1945&sort=date&rows=20&words=Cheltenham&searchType=basic&sequence=0&index=16&state=&date2=1945&proxtext=Cheltenham&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=2> Library of Congress, Washington, DC> [accessed 12/04/2020].

²⁵⁰ ‘Taking Off From England For New York’, *New York Times*, 05th July 1945, p. 7 <<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1946/07/05/issue.html>> © 2021 The New York Times Company> [accessed 11/09/2021].

²⁵¹ Winfield, *Bye Bye Baby*, p. 4.

²⁵² ‘Woman Kept Company With Coloured Man’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 19 August 1944, p. 5 < <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000325/19440819/026/0005> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 22/11/2020].

sympathy and disapproval. It was inevitable and understandable that affairs such as this would occur, yet having an extra-marital affair was considered unpatriotic. This woman's husband had been away for a long time and she had three children to look after. These long separations inevitably led to marriage breakdowns and many women were deprived of the type of connection that they would have built with their spouses. But many women may also have had extra-marital affairs with an American soldier out of material necessity.

Some women were pressured into giving their child up for adoption. This pressure often came from immediate family, local church authorities and a mother and baby home. Mother and baby homes were first founded in 1871 and tended to be denominational.²⁵³ Women would be able to go to these 'homes', have the baby and then leave the child to be adopted. Places such as this existed all around the country, but accessibility depended on social class. For instance, one place in Malvern, Worcestershire, referred to by locals as 'the naughty girls' home' was expensive and so consequently only available to women who could afford it.²⁵⁴ Similarly in order to gain entry to the London Foundling Hospital the mother had to prove that she was of good social standing and had fallen on hard times.²⁵⁵ Women in the lower classes would be able to attend a 'home' run by nuns or other charities. These places were basic and worked with the adoption agencies. For example, in October 1943 Sister Jeffries, manager of St. Catherine's Home in Cheltenham described how not only did the home welcome expectant mothers who needed 'a haven of refuge', but their chief concern was the illegitimate children, 'the future citizen of their Empire – who arrived into this world unwanted and unloved.' She made a plea to the public as they were struggling to find 'happy home[s]' for all the illegitimate children in their care. Sister Jeffries reported that in the past year they had had 140 women stay

²⁵³ Lucy Bland, *Britain's 'brown babies'*, p. 46.

²⁵⁴ Winfield, *Bye Bye Baby*, pp. 7-8.

²⁵⁵ Winfield, *Bye Bye Baby*, p. 8.

at the home.²⁵⁶ By 1945 there was gathering momentum for more of these types of homes. In April that year the Cheltenham Maternity and Child Welfare Committee proposed establishing another hostel for unmarried mothers and their babies, however this was eventually decided against as cases in Cheltenham were so small.²⁵⁷ At the same time a large home in Stroud was being considered to provide temporary nursery accommodation ‘urgently needed’ for illegitimate children and short-stay cases.²⁵⁸ There seems to have been a heavily weighted assumption amongst those running the mother and baby homes, that the children were not only unwanted but also unloved. However, this was most likely not the case as in many examples, most women were pressured to give their child up.

Some women chose to keep their illegitimate child meaning she would become a single mother or left bringing the child up in her existing family unit. The decision to keep a mixed-race child was an incredibly brave decision. Wendy Webster argues that British liberalism did not extend to mixed-race children and many mothers who kept their babies faced hostility and stigma from the general public. For example, in 1946 *Time* magazine reported on one mother’s experience:

I am shunned by the whole village. The inspector for the national society for prevention of cruelty to children has told my friend to keep her children away from my house...as didn’t she know that I had two illegitimate coloured children? Is there anywhere I can go where my children will not get pushed around?²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ ‘Problem of the Unwanted Child: St. Catherine’s Home Plea’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 October 1943, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19431028/026/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 25/02/2021].

²⁵⁷ Cheltenham Borough Council Minutes, maternity and Child Welfare Committee 18 April 1945., p. 254-255. <https://www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/research/cbcm1945.pdf> [accessed 23/02/2021].

²⁵⁸ ‘Stanley Hall as Nursery’, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 March 1945, p. 3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19450315/027/0003> Image © Reach PLC> [accessed 25/02/2021].

²⁵⁹ *Time*, 11 March 1946, cited in, Wendy Webster, *Mixing it: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 219.

Another woman called Monica recalled how her mother, a single woman caring for her own child as well as all her younger siblings, was taunted with epithets and remembers how her mother was assaulted in the street:

I remember one time there was a lady from a couple of doors away, her and her mum never got on... I remember one day mum and me was sat on the gate where we lived and this lady came past and... hit my mum and she shouted in the street, "You nigger lover".²⁶⁰

Monica described how her mother had been pressured by her family and the local Catholic priest to give her up after she was born, but she refused. Many women could be disowned by their family if their lives made incredibly difficult. Monica described how her mother's life changed:

I think her life was virtually nearly over. She never went out for a long long time. She sort of stayed at home with me. Granddad... never trusted mum after that and she couldn't go very far, he kept a tight rein on her, I don't think she was probably wanting to go very far after that time because it was a lot of a scandal having a mixed-race child.²⁶¹

In Gloucestershire, mixed-race children were born to white mothers and Black American soldiers. However, there are no clear reports of women who kept or gave these children up for

²⁶⁰ Interview with Monica, 1 September 2014, cited in, Bland, *Britain's 'brown babies'*, p. 50.

²⁶¹ Interview with Monica, 1 September 2014, cited in, Bland, *Britain's 'brown babies'*, p. 44.

adoption. Despite this, the examples used show that some women around the country did keep their mixed-race children despite the social consequences that could follow. This clearly shows that some women expressed their agency by defying contemporary racial attitudes and social expectations placed upon mothers and the family.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that young women expressed their agency by defying contemporary attitudes that already existed and the control mechanisms that were put in place to influence their sexual behaviour. Young working-class women who fraternised with American soldiers were accused of using them for their money, even if the true motive had been sexual desire. Despite this, the evidence suggests that young women in Gloucestershire continued to fraternise with US troops.

Responsibility for the young women's behaviour was placed upon the parents or an unstable upbringing. Therefore, whilst young women exerted agency over their sexual behaviour, they were not made personally responsible for their actions. Despite this the young women were the targets for the methods of influence that national and local authorities implemented. This chapter has shown that this was because young women were easier to control by force than older women. Despite these restrictions placed upon young women, many still attempted to exert their agency over their sexual relationships. This is particularly shown in instances where young women absconded from the Approved Schools and continues to fraternise with not only American soldiers but also Prisoners of War. However, young women's agency was limited as further levels of force were used if the young woman continued to defy the state's control mechanisms.

For some young women, control over their sexual agency was a necessary means of survival. One of the significant findings of this chapter is that young women, whose husbands were abroad in the forces and left with young children, may have had no other option but to engage in prostitution or sexual relations with US troops in order to live. Yet female sexuality was inextricably bound with ideas of motherhood. Women in these situations who engaged in sexual relationships with American soldiers were portrayed as bad mothers. In these instances, women were not demonstrating defiance and indifference to public opinion or official rules because they wanted to, they were doing it because they had to.

Similarly, single women who found themselves pregnant with an American soldier's baby had to either keep the child, defying public opinion or were pressured to give the child up for adoption, reducing the woman's agency. Women who gave birth to mixed-race children after falling pregnant with an African American soldier faced the same decision. However, those who kept their child, not only exercised defiance towards public opinion on mixed-race children, but also resilience as they were often subjected to physical and verbal abuse throughout them bringing up the child. Despite there being little evidence of this happening in Gloucestershire, children in the county were fathered by both white and black American soldiers. Therefore, by examining what took place to women in other areas of Britain, an understanding of the lives of women in Gloucestershire can be made.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to understand how women's agency was affected by both public opinion and the methods of control implemented by local and national authorities to control the sexual behaviour of women who fraternised with American soldiers. The thesis questioned if the experience of women in Gloucestershire was similar to the experiences of women across the country in areas where there was a high concentration of American troops. In being a local study, this thesis has discovered that the behaviour of women and methods used to influence their behaviour in the county were not unique to Gloucestershire. Existing opinions and beliefs on women's sexuality were exaggerated by the atmosphere of war and the presence of American troops.

Whilst this thesis adds to the current existing literature, it is the first study which focuses on women's relationships with American soldiers in Gloucestershire. Therefore, it fills a significant gap in local historical knowledge and gives a voice to a lot of unheard experiences. It has also allowed a closer analysis of localised case studies. This thesis demonstrates that women's sexuality in Gloucestershire was subjected to the same level of apprehension as was demonstrated across the country. Therefore, almost identical methods of influence were implemented in cities and towns across Britain where there was also a large concentration of American troops.

This thesis has shown that women in Gloucestershire demonstrated their agency in a variety of ways. However, the most significant finding was that across all different types of relationships with American soldiers, women expressed defiance. This was most evident amongst young women. This thesis demonstrates that some young women consciously chose to ignore public

opinion and state control. Local newspapers often reported on incidents of young women being sent to Approved Schools for continuously fraternising with American soldiers and for suffering from VD. This thesis has shown that in several cases in Gloucestershire, young women defied this type of state control by absconding from the school and continuing to fraternise with white and black American soldiers. Other young women attending the school were forming and maintaining relationships with prisoners of war which went undetected for some time. This was a clear act of defiance and indifference towards the states attempt to control the sexual agency of the young women and the displays of sexual patriotism expected from them.

The GI brides were also another group of women that defied both public opinion on marriages to American soldiers and the US Army's controls placed around marriage. Women from across Gloucestershire married American servicemen and most often than not these types of relationships were love matches. Therefore, despite these obstacles, women were able to exercise their agency by being able to marry GIs. However, the agency of a white women wanting to become the wife of an American soldier was completely reduced, as if the soldier was black, then marriage was not allowed. It seems that women accepted this limitation (on their agency) as there were no records in Gloucestershire that suggest any marriage attempts were made between a black GI and a white woman. Therefore, a woman's agency regarding a marriage partner was restricted by the race of the intended husband.

However, one of the most interesting findings is that some women acted indifferently towards public opinion and state controls as a means of survival. Stories in the local newspapers regarding prostitution would often feature details of young women who were either a single mother or left to bring up young children whilst their husbands were away in the services. This

would have put pressure on the women to provide for their family and prostitution was perhaps seen as a necessary way to survive. Women in this situation were therefore attempting to gain control over their sexual agency by earning a living from it. However, in most cases it was done out of a necessity rather than an act of defiance born out of sexual desire.

This thesis has also shown that women who fraternised with African American soldiers demonstrated sexual agency. Despite there being little evidence of women fraternising with African American soldiers, women in the county undoubtedly encountered black troops as they were stationed all around the county. When the black GIs initially arrived in Gloucestershire, women who associated with them, may not have understood the racial tension that this could cause amongst white American soldiers. Therefore, at the beginning of the war, women who engaged in inter-racial relationships were doing so out of sexual desire. However, despite resistance to mixed-race relationships from the general public and white American soldiers growing throughout the war, women continued to fraternise with them. This shows that as well as expressing sexual desire, women also demonstrated defiance and indifference as the war progressed.

However, it was the behaviour of young women and their association with black American soldiers that was seen by local authorities and the public as immoral. Despite the threat of being sent to a correctional institution, young women persevered in fraternising with black US troops. This suggests that there may have been a variety of reasons why some young women persevered with inter-racial relationships. Not only would some of these relationships develop from sexual desire, but women may also have engaged in these relationships due to material necessity. Like white American soldiers, black US troops offered women escapism from wartime life and provide them with luxuries. Therefore, despite the possible threat to reputation

and use of force, some young women still exercised their sexual agency despite the US soldier's race.

The race of the American soldier could also place limitations upon a woman's agency in reported cases of sexual violence. If the American soldier involved was white, the woman was portrayed in the media and accused in court as being in control of her actions and had somehow enticed the soldier. However, if the soldier accused of rape was black, then the woman was portrayed as having had no control in the situation and was vulnerable. Therefore, the race of the US soldier determined how the women's agency in the incident was treated in court and in portrayed in national and local news stories.

It is difficult to determine if the defiance exercised by young women was a result of state controls not diffusing through to the community. Local and national newspapers reported on controls such as the implementation of Defence Regulation 33B and the red tape women had to navigate if they were intending on marrying an American soldier. Reports on meetings and debates held by local authorities and women's organisations were published, but rather than define a set of rules, the stories contained only opinions and concerns. Gloucestershire did have several local newspapers covering the entire county. These newspapers often repeated and published identical stories throughout the week. Therefore, the information regarding state control would have diffused through the county. On the other hand, whilst a large variety of newspapers were available, some young women may have had no interest in reading them. Therefore, making it difficult to determine if the state rules penetrated some circles of young women.

However, there were instances where women were unable to demonstrate any agency over what happened to their baby once it was born. This thesis has shown that in many cases women throughout their pregnancy were pressured from their family, the local church and a mother and baby home to give their child up for adoption when the baby was born. Despite this, some women who fell pregnant with an American soldier's baby chose to keep their child. Some women saw their parents raise their child; others who were already married often hid the baby's real parentage as their husbands. However, women who kept their child and raised them as a single mother had to exercise indifference to public opinion. This was particularly true if the child was mixed-race. These women who were often disowned by their family and physically and verbally assaulted in the streets had to demonstrate resilience. Therefore, women who fell pregnant outside of wedlock with a GI's baby had limitations placed over their agency. These limitations depended on the race of the woman's baby and the attitude of her family and the local church. The woman's personal circumstances would also have impacted her decision to keep the child as even though she may have wanted to keep her child, she may not have been able to do so.

However, this thesis has shown that not all women in Gloucestershire wanted to defy social and state rules. Women who did fraternise with American soldiers, but only had platonic relationships with soldiers demonstrated restraint and resisted temptation. This is another example of women exerting sexual agency as they were also defining the boundaries of their relationships with US troops. Women may also have been attempting to control their situation by maintain their social status and trying to remain honourable by refusing sex.

Although women in Gloucestershire exercised sexual agency in relationships with American soldiers, their experiences with the GIs did not liberate women or lead to the questioning of

sexual and racial mores. After the war women were expected to leave their wartime jobs and return to domestic duties in an austere and war-torn Britain. Claire Langhammer argues that due to a rise in affluence and welfare state security in the 1950s and 1960s, women did start exercising more sexual agency, allowing love rather than pragmatism to decide their marriage partners. Therefore, an advance in women's sexual agency did not happen because of the arrival of American troops but as a result of economic growth in the decades following the war.

Attitudes towards people of colour gradually worsened and opinions on inter-racial relationships and mixed marriages still reflected an element of white eugenics. After the war, the European Volunteer scheme published after the 1948 British Nationality Act allowed Commonwealth citizens to settle in Britain escalated existing fears of miscegenation. In 1958 only 13% of people approved of marriages between white women and black men and articles headlined 'Would you let your daughter marry a Negro?' were written in publications such as the *Picture Post*.²⁶² White women who had relationships with black men were still considered to be from the working-classes and cheap.²⁶³

Women had to make difficult decisions in a complex period and whilst it is impossible to know what the women were thinking, this thesis has shown some clear ideas of what they may have thought. Ultimately throughout the war, despite public opinion and methods of control attempted by the state, women in Gloucestershire were able to demonstrate agency in both their platonic and sexual relationships with American soldiers.

²⁶² Claire Langhammer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). p. 73-74 and 'Would you let your daughter marry a Negro?', *Picture Post*, 30 October 1954, p. 21-23, cited in Langhammer, *The English in Love*, p. 73.

²⁶³ *Ibid* p. 74.

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