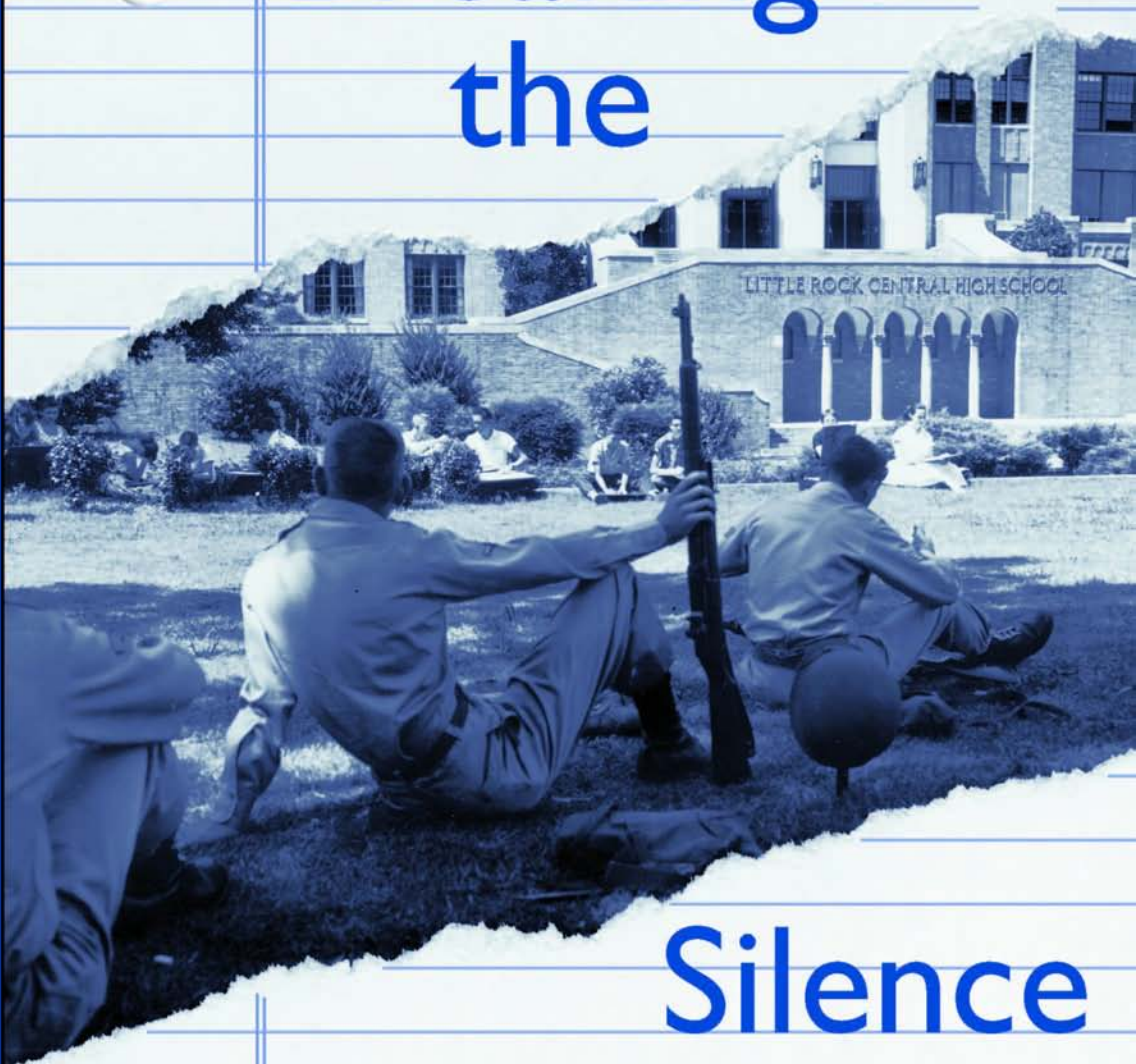


Breaking the



Silence

Little Rock's Women's Emergency Committee
to Open Our Schools, 1958–1963

Sara Alderman Murphy
Edited by Patrick C. Murphy II

**Breaking
the
Silence**

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to Open Our Schools, 1958–1963

By Sara Alderman Murphy
Edited by Patrick C. Murphy II

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For Sean, Ryan, Emily, and Robert . . .
Much love, Shoo Shoo

Contents

Illustrations	viii	
Preface	ix	
Foreword	xi	
Introduction	xiii	
1 / Adolphine Fletcher Terry	1	
2 / Little Rock in the 1950s	27	
3 / Crisis at Central High	43	
4 / Call Out the Women	67	
5 / Breaking the Silence	91	
6 / Barefooted and Pregnant	115	
7 / A Question of Conscience	135	
8 / Stop This Outrageous Purge	157	
9 / A Community Divided	181	
10 / To the Ladies, God Bless 'Em	205	
11 / They Would Bow Their Heads	223	
12 / Panel of American Women	237	
Epilogue	255	
Notes	259	
Bibliography	287	
Index	293	

Illustrations

The following illustrations appear after page 134.

1. Adolphine Fletcher Terry.
2. 101st Airborne near Central High.
3. 101st Airborne at Central High.
4. Orval Faubus, July 1958.
5. Vivion Brewer.
6. WEC advertisements.
7. WEC leaders, September 1958.
8. Steering Committee of the WEC, September 1958.
9. Rep. Tom E. Tyler.
10. STOP school-board candidates.
11. STOP, Mothers League, and WEC advertisements.
12. WEC officers, October 1961.
13. Leaders of the disbanded WEC, December 1963.
14. Sara Murphy, November 1962.
15. Panel of American Women.

Preface

Sara Alderman Murphy, my mother, passed away on April 15, 1995, after battling cancer the last sixteen months of her life. Although she courageously continued to work on this manuscript through radiation treatments and chemotherapy as late as January of that year, her illness ultimately prevented her from completing the book as she had hoped.

Her ongoing commitment and support of early childhood education, her advocacy on issues affecting women, and her work with Betty Bumpers in Peace Links were natural extensions of her involvement with the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools and as a woman in the civil rights movement. I was privileged to have had the opportunity to work side by side with my mother on a number of research projects after she retired, and I am proud to have had some small role in helping complete this work. I also want to thank Victor Ray, who is part of this story, for his invaluable assistance and advice with the final editing.

I am extremely grateful to the many people who agreed to be interviewed for this book. My mother once commented that it is interesting how everyone's version puts itself at the center of the stage—but the stage is big enough for everyone. The important thing is for people to know that *women* were the leaders in getting the schools reopened and in changing attitudes. Certainly by standing up and letting themselves be heard, they were able to change the course of history.

History is a delicately woven fabric. What one person does hangs together only because of what others move in and do. It does not take away from the original design, but enriches and enlarges it and gives it more meaning. It is important for people to see that what they do at one stage opens the way for yet another phase, which builds on the sturdy foundation of what has gone before. My mother liked to quote Betty Bumpers's observation that once women started

pursuing matters they felt strongly about, “it felt so good they never wanted to sit down again.” Sara Murphy found her calling in Little Rock in 1958, and truly she never wanted to sit down again. I am proud of her and of the legacy she left for all of us.

Patrick C. Murphy II

Foreword

This excerpt from the end of Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* was read at Sara Murphy's funeral service at her request. She had read this passage at her friend Esther Brown's funeral in Kansas City some twenty-five years earlier:

So it goes: violence and nonviolence; factual arguments and gobbledygook; quiet protest and noisy mob. Terrorism flares up in one town while the neighboring town is developing a courageous concern; sudden insights light up public opinion, foul words blur the situation, one act of heroism stirs the heart, one cruel incident pierces the conscience—then apathy creeps back, until another incident occurs.

If only we could afford this zigzagging walk into the future! But each day the slowness becomes more dangerous. What will quicken us? What will illumine our minds? What can be said or done that will compel us to slough off inertia and complacency and take our stand for the human being against his unnumbered enemies? If only we could see the brokenness in each of us and the necessity for relationships; if we could rise up against the killers of the dream. But, sometimes, that killer of dreams is in us and we do not know how to rid ourselves of it.

Once, long ago, a little crazy hypothesis was thrown across a dark sky and left there. And people could never forget it. Religions were built by its light, poets' minds shone in its brightness, political systems used its warmth to draw men closer together, and science examined it cautiously and "proved" it to be the essence of sanity, the seed of human growth. It may be only a bedtime story that men told themselves in their loneliness; it may be a lie; this sanctity of the human being, this importance of man the individual, this right of the child to grow, but when it is proved so, there will no longer be an earth to witness the lie's triumph and no men here to mourn the loss of their dream.

So we stand: tied to the past and clutching at the stars!
Only by an agonizing pull of our dream can we wrench ourselves from such fixating stuff and climb into the unknown. But we have always done it and we can do it again. We have the means, the technics, we have the knowledge and insight and courage. All have synchronized for the first time in history. Do we have the desire? That is a question that each of us must answer for himself.

Introduction

White women in the South have always been a little subversive. Perched on the pedestals where men placed them as long as they performed well in their half-person roles, they had a commanding view of the social landscape. It was not a pretty picture.

As Lillian Smith wrote in 1949, Southern white women saw bargains struck by their husbands to keep themselves at the top of a structure that condoned lynchings, while Jim Crow laws and segregated schools kept blacks in the cotton fields and the kitchens. Alliances were built with hate-mongering politicians and fundamentalist preachers to keep poor whites blaming blacks and other minorities for their own low status. And the wives of the men in power were treated like children who were too retarded to keep their own checkbooks or to be heard. Many of them were often put down and occasionally abused.

World War II brought a rising awareness of both the capacity of women to be more than housewives and of the rights of blacks to be more than second-class citizens. The Swedish author Gunnar Myrdal tied together the denial of rights to blacks and the earlier legal treatment of women and children as chattel. In his 1944 book *An American Dilemma*, which influenced the *Brown* decision a decade later, Myrdal wrote that “When a legal status had to be found for the imported Negro servants in the seventeenth century, the nearest and most natural analogy was the status of women and children.” The earlier common law, which could invoke the Ninth Commandment in linking together women, servants, mules, and other property, provided the underpinning for the preindustrial paternalism that denied rights first to women and later to blacks. Myrdal predicted, citing a study done by his wife, Alva, that while barriers for blacks were much stronger than those for women, these would give way before a change came in the barriers for women, which he claimed were more “eternally inexorable.”¹

By the late 1940s, Lillian Smith gave shape and substance to the idea that segregation distorted and warped relationships between men and women as well as between blacks and whites in the South. Smith declared that many white women knew they were being used to prop up a system badly in need of dismantling when men placed them on pedestals of “sacred womanhood.” However, a pedestal is a cold and lonely place, and Smith observed that the women “left it when no one was looking and explored a bit,” adding that this was happening as far back as in her mother’s day.

These ladies went forth to commit a treason against a southern tradition set up by men who had betrayed their mothers, sometimes themselves, and many of the South’s children white and mixed, for three long centuries. It was truly a subversive affair. . . . Shyly, these first women sneaked down from their chilly places, did their little sabotage and sneaked up again, wrapping innocence around them like a lace shawl. They set secret time bombs and went back to their needlework, serenely awaiting the blast.

Meanwhile, the men “whipped up lynchings, organized Klans, burned crosses, aroused the poor and ignorant to wild excitement by an obscene, perverse imagery describing the ‘menace’ of Negro men . . . waiting to rape our women,” Smith wrote. “And not once did they dream their women did not believe their lies.”²

Smith said that the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) in the 1930s finally brought the insurrectionists together as church women, “but churches were forgotten when the women spoke their revolutionary words.”

They said calmly that they were not afraid of being raped; as for their sacredness, they could take care of it themselves; they did not need the chivalry of a lynching to protect them and did not want it. Not only that . . . , but they would do everything in their power to keep any Negro from being lynched.

With this brave declaration “they aroused the conscience of the South and whole country about lynching and they tore a big piece of this evil out of southern tradition.”³

Smith maintained that segregation was symbolic of the “tensions within and between human beings and of the walls that separate them from each other and from new ideas and experiences.” Her passionate insistence that it should be abolished altogether, so that both blacks and whites could “grow into wholeness,” put her at odds with some of the more moderate but highly respected writers in the white South (such as Hodding Carter, who called her a “strident old maid”).⁴ But her book provided a conceptual base that rang true for many Southern women. It encouraged them, including some in Little Rock, to trust their own instincts and experiences in challenging those who were willing to shut down institutions rather than integrate them.



My entry into the civil rights movement began in 1958. The year before, federal troops, and later a federalized National Guard, protected nine black children attending classes at Little Rock’s Central High School. But in 1958, Gov. Orval Faubus closed the city’s high schools to prevent further integration (during a special session of the state legislature in August 1956, he had been given the power to do just that). Mrs. D. D. Terry, the wife of a former congressman, called together a group of women who formed the Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC). During the following year, we organized some fifteen hundred women who began to exert their collective power to oppose the segregationist control of the state and the school system. Many wanted to remain anonymous because they feared that their husbands’ jobs would be lost. We were harassed by the White Citizens Council and were held in contempt by our own friends. We worked to prod the men into opposing what was happening. An American Association of University Women (AAUW) survey of business showed that the community was suffering from the economic impact of the school closings.

Our big chance came later in the year when segregationist members of the school board tried to purge a group of teachers for various reasons from the schools. A group of businessmen, egged on by the women, decided to recall the segregationist members of the

board and, with the WEC doing the organizational work, put together a group called Stop This Outrageous Purge (STOP). The opposition organized its own group, the Committee to Retain Our Segregated Schools (CROSS), and worked to recall our three members of the school board. STOP won that battle, and the schools were reopened the following year.

Three years later in 1962, I ran for the Little Rock School Board as the first woman integrationist candidate. The opposition, a moderate segregationist whom we had backed in an earlier campaign, called me a Communist and a “fire that had to be put out.” I received weird telephone calls, and there were some unpleasant incidents. I also lost the election.

But I was convinced that we could not go through the motions of school desegregation while at the same time trying to avoid it, that what we needed was a massive community reeducation effort. So in 1963 I organized a group called the Little Rock Panel of American Women; I consider this effort to be the most important thing I have done.

The panel was my chief outlet for staying involved. It consisted of about thirty women who represented different religious and racial groups in the community. The panel, a force in its time because it was so different from anything else, was made up of young mothers and housewives (not many of us had careers then) who talked informally about how prejudice had affected their lives and the lives of their children. Each group had a Catholic, a Jew, a black, sometimes another minority, and a white Protestant, who each spoke briefly, using personal anecdotes, and then answered questions from the audience. They asked all kinds of things from “Do you want your daughter to marry one?” to “Why don’t the Jews believe in Jesus?” We became very good at fielding questions.

The women spoke in churches and schools and before civic groups and helped them understand what the civil rights movement was all about. We learned a lot ourselves and helped to open up restaurants and communities where blacks had never before crossed over certain lines. It caused us to become more involved in political and community affairs. We elected people to the school board,

we started educational reform groups, and we worked in gubernatorial races.

From one of the black panelists, Gwen Riley, who was honest, witty, and together, I learned what it was really like as a young black mother. Her husband, Rev. Negail Riley, served as campus minister at Wesley Chapel at Philander Smith College, and he helped black college students get involved in the civil rights movement. I sat in Gwen's kitchen and listened to some of the leaders in the civil rights movement from across the South and heard the strategy planned for integrating the lunch counters at Woolworth's in downtown Little Rock.



I have made notes on this story for years, and I eventually narrowed the time frame for this book to the years surrounding the formation of the WEC in 1958 through the development of the Panel of American Women in the early 1960s. This story is about working for change as an ordinary woman. My premise is that ordinary women are most effective when they “bloom where they are planted.” They also increase their power when they band together and support each other. I think the organizing became a personal crusade for women. They had been kept silent, held down, put into stereotypes, and not listened to for so long that by the 1960s they were heady with their own power.

Most of the work I have done was with white middle-class women like myself. I understood where they were coming from, what their anxieties were, what the emptiness of their lives could be, and their enormous potential. This story about my involvement in two important movements is my own effort to share the piece of truth I know. Other women were more committed and brave than I, others were more out front and participated on a grander scale; but if I tried to tell their stories I would have to embellish on them, because I do not know what went on inside them as they made their stands. These women are a part of my story because of my profound admiration for them (and, occasionally, irritation and impatience with a few) as we worked together. My portraits of them will be as

I knew them. They were a remarkable bunch, all of them. For a small city, Little Rock had an incredible number of gifted, tough, courageous women at a time when there were few men who could meet that description. We were indeed bereft of male leadership. Governor Faubus could hardly be called a knight in shining armor, and there was a strangely silent white male-power structure for more than a year.



When I attended the first Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools meeting, I knew little about the history of the Terry mansion. Because it was no ordinary place, the house held a kind of mythic or symbolic power over me. As I walked up the front brick steps, across the spacious columned veranda, and through the front door, I sensed that the house itself was inextricably linked to the mission we were setting about.

The sadness of all our Southern pasts hung suspended like cobwebs in its rooms. By coming together as women, we could perhaps sweep them out of our lives and out of the life of our community. No one was more aware of the need to do that than was Adolphine Fletcher Terry, who because she lived there, was profoundly shaped by the house's past but recognized the need for the house—and all of Little Rock—to move toward a new era when it would symbolize something better. I felt fortunate to know these women, some of whom became my mentors as well as my friends, from all of whom I learned much more than I was able to teach. Their story needs to be told, and I can only tell it accurately by telling my own. The change for me was greater than for any we attempted to change.



Adolphine Fletcher Terry

In the summer of 1889, when she was seven years old, Adolphine Fletcher moved into the legendary white-columned Little Rock house that was to be her home until she died. It was the “state’s grandest mansion,” built in 1840 by Albert Pike, a man of great intellect and unbridled temperament, who wrote both poetry and prose, fought in duels and in two wars, practiced law, and edited a Whig newspaper.

John Gould Fletcher Jr., Adolphine’s younger brother and a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, described Pike as Arkansas’s “most eminent man,” with accomplishments that qualified him as a “Southern gentleman of the old school.” He emerged from the Civil War as a Confederate general and rose to be a national figure in the world of Free Masonry.¹

Pike was less highly thought of north of the Mason-Dixon line, where stories circulated about atrocities, including the scalping of Federal soldiers by Indian troops under his command. In fact, after the war, he was so unwelcome in New York (where he was called an uncivilized butcher) that he fled to Canada and later settled in Washington, D.C.²

Young John, however, was caught up in the wonder and romanticism of growing up in the mansion Pike had built: “It was from this house, with its ten lofty rooms, its wide hall with great folding doors, its six white columns, its green wooden-shuttered windows, its broad lawn dotted with oaks two hundred years old, vast locust and magnolia trees, that I learned what it was to have been a southerner of the aristocratic sort in the days before the Civil War. The flavor of the old South hung about that house and hangs about it still.”³

The splendor of her new home was somewhat offset for the imaginative and energetic Adolphine, however, by the fact that it was whispered around that the ghost of Mary Ann Hamilton Pike, the wife of the original owner, might still be roaming about. At bedtime, Adolphine, her brother John, and Cordelia, a black girl who lived with the family, would scamper cautiously together up the back stairway to an arched, curtained landing. From there, they raced in the dark, terrified, to their beds, hoping to avoid any encounters with the supernatural Mrs. Pike.⁴ John also reported, “it was said that the old lady’s ghost had been frequently seen in the library downstairs, rocking herself in a certain rocking chair.”⁵ Adolphine wrote later:

Naturally neither Cordelia, John nor I ever talked over these things among ourselves nor with the adults. . . . Instinctively we felt that the terror would become more real if it were discussed—and even worse you might be laughed at. But we were all affected by it. As grown-ups Cordelia and I have faced the situation together and John, who became a poet, made a record of his emotions in *Ghosts of an Old House*.⁶

Adolphine, curious as she grew older to know the real story, learned that prior to her marriage, Mrs. Pike had lost her entire family in a boating accident on the Arkansas River. A frail, beautiful woman, Mary might have recovered from that tragedy had her marriage to the “witty, brilliant, [and] difficult” Albert Pike not been such a rocky one.⁷

“She had this house to cope with and she had a baby every year because nobody had ever heard of birth control,” Adolphine wrote. Then she buried child after child—five of the eight boys and one of the two girls. Two died during what Adolphine called “the dreaded second summer, a period of life which, before the advent of modern methods for handling of milk, filled the cemeteries with infant graves.” Another older child fell into a pile of burning leaves, one drowned in the Arkansas River, Indians killed another during the Civil War, and her oldest daughter took her own life.⁸

Mary Pike got little support from her famous husband, who spent much of his time away.⁹ Even when he was home, their com-

munication left much to be desired. One day (so one of the stories older neighbors told Adolphine went) Albert Pike sent word to Mary to prepare a light supper for friends he was bringing home that night. When they arrived, she ushered them into the dining room where they were greeted with candles blazing everywhere but nothing else.¹⁰

General Pike left Little Rock permanently after the Civil War, taking his two daughters but not his wife, whom he left alone in the huge Little Rock home. He became editor of the *Memphis Appeal* for two years before moving north and later settling in Washington.¹¹

When her beloved daughter Isadore committed suicide in Memphis, Mary Pike was not notified. She read about it in the morning paper and screamed so loud that neighbors heard her several houses away. When her mind began to unravel toward the end of her life, one of the neighbors finally took her in.¹²

While extolling the accomplishments of her husband in his history of Arkansas, John Gould Fletcher dismissed Mary Pike as “a vivacious brunette . . . and, as it later developed, a woman of violent, ungovernable temper.”¹³ Both John and Adolphine recalled a childhood story of how an elderly Mrs. Pike once lashed out at a young black girl so strongly, the girl jumped out of an upstairs window and broke her leg.¹⁴ But Adolphine suggests that some of Mary Pike’s later irritability and inability to cope could have stemmed from both the loss of so many children and life with a “temperamental husband” who eventually left her.¹⁵ Adolphine also observed in another context that “the failure of a marriage was blamed on the woman.”¹⁶

Whatever the reason, Adolphine’s childhood ghost had suffered more than her share of ordeals and was thought by the superstitious to have good reason to return to the scene of her earthly anguish. The ever-practical Adolphine felt compelled to explain that when the gas lights used in her childhood were replaced with electric lights that illuminated homes better, most ghosts, including that of Mary Pike, tended to disappear.¹⁷

The Pikes’ surviving daughter, Lilian, first rented the family home to the Arkansas Female College in 1871, and then fifteen years later sold it to Adolphine’s unmarried aunt, Loudovica Krause, who

continued to run a school there for three more years. When the school went under financially in 1889, Adolphine's father bought the house from her Aunt Lou, who left the night they moved in and was never heard from again. Although the family later learned that Loudovica Krause was living in eastern Texas, her humiliation at the school's failure apparently accounted for both her dramatic departure and the severing of family ties.¹⁸

Adolphine's father, John G. Fletcher, and a friend, Peter Hotze, returned to Little Rock after serving in the Civil War together to open Fletcher and Hotze, a general store. They expanded their business interests in 1867—a bumper year for cotton in Arkansas—when they bought up all the cotton for miles around. When they attempted to send it down the river to market at New Orleans, they found all the boats already loaded with other people's cotton. It was six weeks before the Fletcher-Hotze cotton could be moved south and, as luck would have it, during that time the price of cotton in New Orleans spiraled upward. The two men made twenty thousand dollars, a post-war fortune large enough to establish them as men of means and prominence.

Fletcher was a well-to-do banker and the mayor of Little Rock (he had also been the first sheriff of Pulaski County) by the time he married Adolphine Krause in 1876. They lived for a while in the Krause family residence above two stores at Cherry and Main Streets. Six years later, baby Adolphine arrived (unfortunately acquiring her mother's unwieldy Germanic name, a feminized version of Simon Adolph, the child's great-grandfather).

The family then moved into more spacious quarters, renting Senator Garland's home at Fourteenth and Scott Streets. When they were unable to purchase the senator's home, they decided to buy the school from Loudovica and restore it to the stately residence it had once been.¹⁹



Cordelia came to the Fletcher residence as a young child to live with her aunt, Mary Durham, in a small house in the backyard. When Durham became too ill to work and had to leave, Cordelia

became a “member of the household,” as Adolphine’s mother later described her to a census taker. She moved into the big house where she did small chores and helped keep track of the Fletcher children. Adolphine, two years younger than Cordelia (whom she called “her black sister”), later surmised that her mother’s fear that she and John might be kidnapped was at least one reason for Cordelia’s presence.

Cordelia stayed until she finished both high school and college, after which time she became a missionary to Africa before returning to teach at Little Rock.²⁰ Her high interest in education was undoubtedly intensified by growing up in the Fletcher household, although both she and Adolphine gave much of the credit to an unusual teacher named Charlotte Stephens.

Stephens first taught Cordelia in the segregated black Arsenal School, located across the street from the white Sherman School, which Adolphine attended, just a block from the mansion. Both schools were drab, unpainted wooden buildings that looked alike on the outside. They served as stark reminders of the high cost exacted from white as well as black children for maintaining segregation in an impoverished post-Civil War South. Adolphine later wrote that “our school was as devoid of educational frills as theirs.”²¹

Still, segregation itself was the caste system’s way of attempting to etch a sense of inferiority on black children’s minds. Charlotte Stephens, Little Rock’s first black school teacher, was a strong, confident person who worked to dispel that kind of feeling in her students. She encouraged Cordelia to become a teacher by telling her stories of how some blacks, including her own father, had helped other blacks overcome almost insurmountable difficulties in getting an education. The story about Charlotte’s father, Wallace Andrews, who was born a slave, was included in the two books Adolphine later wrote, *Cordelia: Member of the Household* and *Charlotte Stephens: Little Rock’s First Black Teacher*.

According to Adolphine’s accounts, prior to the Civil War, many Southern states had laws prohibiting the education of black slaves. In Arkansas, although there was no law against it, slaves could be severely punished if caught attempting to read and write. Wallace Andrews was taught as a child to read by his mistress, Mrs. Chester

Ashley, who, because she was white, was able to ignore the unwritten ban.

Andrews, as one of the few light-skinned, literate slaves around, rose to be butler in the Ashley household. He spent his off hours reading the Bible and preaching to other slaves in the evenings, activities heartily endorsed by the whites. They were not aware, however, that when Andrews held prayer meetings in his house, he also discussed with his fellow worshippers their potential for learning to read and write. "You cannot serve the Lord better than by using your mind," he would tell them. Resistance to slavery was growing, he said, and their lives would change when they were free. Some were afraid to listen to him and left, but he placed books on the chair seats for those who remained. He then told them to kneel before the chairs because nobody would stop them from praying. During prayer meeting he taught them to decipher the words on the printed pages in front of their lowered heads until they were reading on their own.²²

The Pike mansion was only a few blocks away from the Ashley home, and both Albert Pike and Adolphine's father had been slave owners before the Civil War. Her mother, however, was an artistic and well-read person who maintained an attitude of openness toward blacks and an interest in helping them do well. Her mother's early teachings, combined with the closeness she felt toward Cordelia, caused young Adolphine to question some of the prevailing white beliefs about blacks.

Adolphine recalled in her memoirs a visit that Molly, an older cousin who lived on a nearby plantation, made to their home when Adolphine was ten years old. Molly appeared at breakfast one morning visibly upset.

"We must call the police at once," Adolphine reported Molly as saying. "My diamond ring has been stolen off the night stand where I left it. I'm sure it must have been Fred who took it."

Fred was a trusted black teenager who worked for the Fletchers, and Mrs. Fletcher brushed aside Molly's assumption. "Fred would not have done something like that," she said. "Why don't you and Adolphine go look for it out in the part of the yard where you were yesterday?" Molly unhappily followed her younger cousin

outside to hunt for the ring. Suddenly Molly spotted it caught in a flounce on her full-skirted dress and shouted, "My ring—it's here on my dress!" She conveniently forgot she had minutes before accused Fred of taking it, but Adolphine remembered. Years later she was to write:

I had already come to recognize the fact that black people had very little chance to hold their own in an argument with a white person. I visualized what it would have done to Fred, a decent 17-year-old . . . if he had been taken off to jail . . . while we continued to search for the ring and perhaps never found it. . . . In all my life, I think I have never accused anybody of taking anything. I would rather lose a material thing, even if it had some financial value, than take the risk of accusing a person unjustly.²³

Adolphine, however, still clung to her share of the notions passed down through a segregated society when she enrolled as a student at Vassar College in 1898. She traveled by train with her father to Poughkeepsie, New York, and upon her arrival was overcome with homesickness, dissolving into tears when she saw the college. As only the second person from Arkansas to go to Vassar (the first, Blanche Martin, who was to become her best friend, helped tutor her for the entrance examination), she felt out of place and estranged. One evening in a heated dormitory discussion about lynching, Adolphine reverted to a Southern saying she had heard all her life, although, she carefully pointed out, not from her family.

"If a black man rapes a white woman, he deserves to be lynched," Adolphine exclaimed. A fellow student, Lucy Burns from Brooklyn, gave her a shocked look. "You don't really believe that revenge on one poor black wretch is more important than maintaining a system of law and order for the whole community, do you?" Burns asked. Adolphine wished she had been less quick to speak.

I knew she was right and it really has affected my entire life. It gave me an entirely different look, an adult look, at the situation which we faced here in the South. . . . I think that was

the beginning of my spiritual education and the beginning of wisdom, and learning not to accept a thing because everybody in the community was saying it.²⁴

Her homesickness soon dissolved, and she stayed at Vassar until she graduated, returning to Little Rock and the big house with broadened ideas and determination. “She came out of Vassar in 1902 ready to change the world and she kept trying until her dying day to do it,” an old friend and fellow conspirator, Judge Edwin Dunaway, declared.²⁵ Adolphine did not, however, avoid the social whirl during or after college when she returned to Little Rock. She became a debutante and served as a bridesmaid in at least ten of her friends’ weddings. She recalled her cousin’s wedding the summer before she finished Vassar at which she wore a white dress with pink ribbons and carried pink sweet peas. She was hanging greenery just before that wedding when she met her first boyfriend, whom she circumspetly referred to as Mr. Abbot, adding that he spoke French. Although she claimed not to be in love with him, Mr. Abbot did cause her to enroll in French at Vassar, which she flunked and had to make up. Adolphine left this advice for other inexperienced young women:

The experience of having a beau was a valuable thing. I began to learn a secret that all girls should learn early, and that is the secret of carrying on a conversation with a man, any man. Men love to talk about themselves. A girl may think they are interested in her, and perhaps they are to a certain extent, but they are much more interested in themselves. All a girl has to do is listen to any man, just turn him on and let him talk and he will have an enjoyable time.²⁶

Having mastered this lesson with Mr. Abbot, she parted company with him. The following year she put her energy into a two-woman campaign that she and her Vassar friend, Blanche Martin, were conducting to promote school consolidation in Arkansas. They wrote articles for small-town newspapers, made speeches, and lobbied. The two succeeded in getting consolidation on the state’s legislative agenda at a time when the state had five thousand school districts (consisting mostly of one-room schools that went through the eighth grade) and only thirty high schools.²⁷

When her father died in 1906, Adolphine inherited a large portion of downtown real estate, which made her a financially independent and powerful woman. She became engaged shortly before her father's death to David D. Terry, an affable, easygoing lawyer who was able to listen to her as well as to talk about himself. The blond, curly-haired Dave, whom she did not refer to as "Mr. Terry," took a year and a half of further graduate study at the University of Chicago. That and her mother's illness caused the engagement to be extended for four years. Her mother, who had developed cancer, insisted they not marry until after she died because she wanted Adolphine close by after John, on whom she doted, had upset her by dropping out of Harvard and going off to live in Europe. Also, she had postponed her own marriage to John Fletcher until her mother's death.

Six weeks after her mother died in 1909, Adolphine and Dave finally were married in the front parlor of the mansion. Only a handful of friends, relatives, and black servants who had previously worked for the family were present. Adolphine told younger family members later "there were more blacks than whites at my wedding."²⁸

She settled with her new husband in the mansion that had been her childhood home and somewhat reluctantly followed the custom of wearing black for a year to mourn the loss of her mother. She implied later that wearing brighter colors would have better reflected her own mood at the time. "Dave and I hit it off very well indeed," she wrote. "We really loved each other and in addition, we thought the same things were amusing."

Shortly after the birth of her first son, David, Adolphine Terry was recruited to chair a newly established juvenile court board. She became personally involved with the problem children she met, taking one of them, a girl whose sister worked in the city's red-light district, into her home for a while. She helped start an industrial school for girl juvenile offenders (one was already available for boys) and lured her friend Blanche Martin for the role of head administrator. When Martin resigned because of political appointments made to her staff by a governor neither of them liked, Terry also resigned as chair of the industrial school board. She continued, however, to chair the juvenile court board for nineteen years.²⁹

Two years later, her joy in the arrival of a daughter, whom she named Mary after her younger sister, was short lived. When the baby was a few days old Adolphine discovered that both of the child's legs had been broken before birth and that she suffered from a fragile bone structure that would continue to cause frequent and painful fractures. (Her sister later told younger family members that Adolphine cried for two years after Mary was born.) Terry took her daughter to several specialists over the country for ten years while Mary's bones continued to crack and she gradually became more crippled.

From her wheelchair, Mary became, like her mother, a strong, independent thinker and an ardent supporter of her mother's causes, but Adolphine struggled for a long while with the grief she felt over her daughter's imperfect physical condition. By writing a book, *Courage*, under the assumed name of Mary Lindsey, she was finally able to talk about it. After telling about the setbacks and accomplishments of her daughter, called "Anne" in the book, Terry wrote:

The peace which has come to me is, I think, partly the result of decisions I made long ago. When I resolved that I would accept Anne as she actually was, and give way to no more sorrowful day-dreaming about her, I pulled down a shade over what she might have been. Now if I should look behind the shade, the place would be empty. . . . I can see her as she is, and rejoice in her attainments without regret over the fact that she is, in certain ways, less well favored than other people.³⁰

When women were struggling to get the vote, Adolphine's sister, Mary, who was still single, served as president of the local suffragist group. Although limited in her activities by the attention her daughter required, Adolphine marched in more than one of the equal rights parades held in downtown Little Rock.³¹

Terry also held a "home meeting" for a White House "picketer," Jane Pincus, who was in Little Rock to address an "open air meeting" downtown on November 10, 1917. Pincus, who was to speak from an automobile decorated in National Women's Party banners, said in an interview: "The White House pickets merely walked up and down with such banners as will be shown on our car. . . . It

was the onlookers who blocked traffic. There was no disturbance except when the pickets were arrested. The arrests were illegal.”³²

Terry recalled much later that, despite the disclaimers Pincus made, suffragists “acted like complete hellions to get the vote. We of the ‘lady’ class had always been on a pedestal, . . . beauteous womanhood, all that kind of junk. The men had looked up to us, idolized us. They changed their attitude when we tied ourselves to telephone poles and did the most unseemly and unladylike things to attract attention to our cause.”³³

In the meantime, black women in Little Rock, while not a part of the local suffragist movement, were making a name for themselves as leaders in a different venture. A group of them had run such a highly successful hospitality program for black soldiers during World War I that the national Young Women’s Christian Association gave them forty thousand dollars in the early 1920s to start their own YWCA. Terry said that because the local white “Y” would not “touch it with a forty-foot pole,” three white women, of which she was one, were added as advisers. She agreed to serve, although she felt their appointments might be an affront to the black women, whom she considered capable of running their own program. It turned into a real learning experience for the white advisers. As a member of the newly formed Phyllis Wheatley YWCA board, Terry got to know black women who were “well educated and leaders in the community with plenty of ideas of their own.”

We got more out of the experience than we gave, because we made friends among these black women who since the Civil War had never been thought of as possible friends of ours, and who had lived in a world apart. They were the wives of professional men, and they provided us with an education. We, the daughters of Confederate veterans who had heard a great deal about the white side of the war, now learned of the suffering of the black population, before, during and after the war, and of all the lacks from which they still suffered.³⁴

Terry was concerned when a lynching whipped up a new wave of hatred of blacks at Little Rock in the spring of 1927, but she

downplayed its importance. She considered the whites who participated as a fringe element living in a world far removed from her own and felt Little Rock otherwise had made good progress in race relations.

Still, the lynching exposed a festering sore that was always just beneath the surface in the seemingly civilized way the segregated life of the city was ordered. And black leaders knew well that lynching was the acting out by a few of the broad and deep animosity many other whites felt. Most shocking and ominous to them was the fact that the burning of the lynching victim took place in the center of town, near a major black church, and that neither the police nor the sheriff's office tried to stop the lynchers.

The trouble began when the body of a white twelve-year-old girl, Floella McDonald, was found in the belfry of Little Rock's First Presbyterian Church, just two blocks from the Terry home. The black sexton was first jailed as the likeliest suspect, and then his fifteen-year-old son, Lonnie Dixon, was accused and confessed. A mob of several thousand stormed first the city jail and then the state penitentiary, demanding that the boy and his father, who was still being held, be turned over to them. Law enforcement officers, however, whisked them out of town. The mayor promised even before Lonnie was tried that he would be executed (he was executed on his sixteenth birthday). They had not, however, quelled the mob's thirst for a lynching.

Four days later, a second mob converged on a retarded black man, John Carter, who was accused of having climbed on a wagon in which two white women were riding just outside of town. Reports of the wagon incident were hazy (there was no charge of rape), but what subsequently happened was quite clear. In a savage display of pent-up hatred, a group of white men hunted down Carter, made him stand on a car with a noose around his neck, and drove the car out from under him. They riddled him with some two hundred bullets and dragged his body behind a car into town as part of a horn-blowing, shrieking caravan of lynchers. At the edge of the black business district at Ninth and Broadway, the mob, which had grown considerably larger and included women, placed Carter's body on the streetcar tracks and burned it. A black woman who was

fifteen years old at the time recalled their “blood-curdling cries” and the fact that the mob chopped up the Bethel AME Church pews to build their fire. Another woman remembered “the flames leaping high into the sky; and the noise of the running, screaming mob.”³⁵

J. N. Heiskell, a lone voice of protest in the community, wrote in an *Arkansas Gazette* editorial that “the city of Little Rock suffered last night the shame of being delivered over to anarchy. Little Rock and Pulaski County must demand an accounting from the officers who have failed us.”³⁶

That was Little Rock’s last lynching. From 1882 until 1930, 294 persons had been lynched in Arkansas, 230 of whom were black. During the 1920s, 13 lynchings occurred in the state, and during the 1930s, only 2 took place. The lynching figures fell throughout the South, from 260 for 1922–33 to 49 for 1934–37.³⁷

Terry recalled that there had been only one other Little Rock lynching in the more than ninety years that she had lived in Little Rock. The first was in 1892 when she was ten years old. Of the 1927 event, she said, “A very small crowd took the man and all the people just fell back and the professional people, the police, the sheriff, nobody tried to save this Negro and he was lynched.” Dave Terry’s sister and her husband from Massachusetts were visiting Little Rock on their first trip south after their marriage when the 1927 lynching and burning occurred. The wild, sadistic noises from Ninth and Broadway and the flames reddening the sky could be heard and seen at Terry’s home, only eight blocks away. Terry and her visitors from the north stood on the lawn—ironically under magnolia trees, those symbols of gracious Southern living—to watch from a distance the horrible aftermath of Little Rock’s last lynching.³⁸

Terry believed the lynching was a spontaneous action of hate and was disconnected with any organization. She told interviewer John Pagan that “I’ve never found a record or has any lawyer ever told me about there being an organized Ku Klux Klan in Little Rock after the war.”

Actually, thousands had joined the Arkansas Ku Klux Klan when it was in its heyday during the early 1920s. Four years before the mob incident, a lawyer named James A. Comer, the Exalted

Cyclops of Little Rock Klan No. 1, had offered on behalf of the KKK to build a municipal auditorium for Little Rock if the Klan could hold its meetings there. The offer was declined. Edwin Dunaway recalled,

At that time, they [the Klan] had planned parades on Main Street. They'd go down Main Street with torches and robes and riding on horses and I can remember what a sight it was. They controlled politics in this county and in some parts of the state.³⁹

During the early 1920s, Dunaway's father, who was prosecuting attorney in Pulaski County, ran for Congress on an anti-KKK ticket and lost to Hartsell Ragon from Clarksville, the KKK candidate. Congressman Brooks Hays's father, Steele Hays, was also a losing candidate in that race.

Little Rock was the headquarters for the national Women's Klan, headed by Robbie Gill Comer, the wife of James Comer. Annie Griffey, a neighbor of Dunaway's family when they lived on Battery Street, was assistant superintendent of schools and belonged to the Women's Klan, whose headquarters was in a large home at Seventeenth and Main.⁴⁰

Terry had two other children, Sally and Bill, and adopted still another one, Joe. Bill, like his older brother, was a healthy child, but Sally developed mental and emotional disabilities that were to cause distress to her parents as Mary's physical handicap had already done.

Joe joined the family after fourteen-year-old Mary became attached to him while spending time in a Boston hospital. Joe was a baby then, a ward of the hospital, and he was suffering from a bad case of eczema on his face. Mary insisted that she take him home with her, and her mother, who could not refuse Mary anything, relented. When Dave Terry came to pick them up at the train station, he found Mary in her wheelchair, their three other children, and Adolphine holding a baby whose face was smeared with black salve. Even the good-natured Dave was a bit taken back, but he agreed that the baby, Joe, would become their fifth child.⁴¹



Terry cut her teeth in politics when her father ran for governor three times, and the fact that he lost each time did not diminish her love for it. According to her son Bill, she, rather than her husband, was the politician in the family: “She probably was the one who suggested that [my father] go into politics.” Dunaway said that Mr. Dave Terry was a “very fine man, a good solid citizen,” but agreed that he did not have the burning interest in political races that Adolphine had. With her help, however, he won five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where his father before him had served for ten years.

Dave Terry’s headquarters for his first congressional race in 1933 against Brooks Hays and Sam Rorex was in the old, run-down Southern Hotel, which Adolphine Terry and her sister, Mary Drennan, owned, at Markham and Main Streets. Dunaway recalled that he was there election night as the returns came in:

Terry was trailing Brooks Hays considerably. Everybody gave up and said he was beat. . . . Sam Rorex was scheduled to carry Yell County, a machine county, [for Hays]. . . . This was before air conditioning [and] it was hotter than the dickens. Everybody had gone home. Mr. Dave had gone home and gone to bed. Miss Adolphine and I were sitting in some cane bottom chairs out on Markham Street to get a little air. The phone rang inside and I . . . answered it and they wanted her. She went to the phone. . . . [T]he message was that Sam couldn’t make it and Mr. Terry . . . was going to get enough votes to be in the runoff with Brooks Hays. She called Mr. Dave and he put on his clothes, came back, started up the campaign again and won.⁴²

Adolphine made the ultimate political concession to help her husband’s second campaign for Congress by accepting the presidency of the local American Legion Auxiliary. In a humorous vein she wrote, “It was the last thing I wanted to do but I felt I would be repaid if I heard that the wife of one of Dave’s opponents bit herself when she read the news in the morning paper and gave herself hydrophobia.”

She also headed up the state American Legion Auxiliary’s committee on Americanism, a word that she said “was not popular with