

AN ELEGY FOR CLARENCE P. OBERNDORF, M.D.* (1882-1954)

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A Pioneer in the History of American Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis

A towering obelisk was erected upon the Oberndorf Family Plot at the *Live Oak Cemetery* founded by *Congregation Mishkan Israel* in Selma, Alabama. Etched in stone upon one side of the monument is an epitaph:

“Son of Joseph and Augusta Oberndorf. In Loving memory, a man of sterling worth, honorable and noble, modest, almost to a fault; he will be remembered forever by his sorrowing family. Those who feel not the pain of parting, it is they who are left to mourn that suffer.”

The gravestone above the interred remains of the decedent reads: “Dr. Clarence Paul Oberndorf (February 16, 1882-May 30, 1954).”

His Last Year of Life

On June 5, 1953, Oby delivered his Presidential Address to the *American Psychopathological Association* in New York. His address was entitled “Selectivity and Option for Psychiatry.” A full transcript was published in the following April issue of the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (1954, pp. 754-758). Included was the ensuing passage:

“It would seem...that an institution such as the *Veterans Hospital* at Tuskegee, where an all Negro staff of psychiatrists and nurses administers treatment to an all Negro patient population, serves this particular group more efficiently than would

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* During his eventful life, our subject had been affectionately nick-named ‘Obey’ and/or ‘Oby’ (*i.e.*, the latter of which is hereafter used).

† Copyright (© 2015) by author who dedicates paper to the future pursuits of his young-

be possible with a white staff. On the other hand, I would be inclined to question the desirability of having an exclusively Negro student body with an exclusive Negro faculty such as operates the *Tuskegee Institute* which adjoins the *Veterans Hospital*. However, the *millennium* is far away and the most that can be expected or desired in central Alabama in the near future would a mixed faculty membership” (p. 756).

Oby’s quoted concerns were, perhaps, briefly attenuated by May 17, 1954 when Chief Judge Earl Warren announced the Supreme Court’s decision in the landmark constitutional case which became popularly known as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Less than 2-weeks afterwards, Oby passed away. In retrospect, the desegregation of Alabama’s psychiatric facilities was not ratified until the advent of the 3rd-millennial era in calendar year 2000. It was then that state government saw fit to officially expunge a series of racial discrimination and *anti-miscegenation* laws from its law books.

Post-mortem Meditations

One of the obituaries eulogizing Oby was written by Lawrence S. Kubie, M.D. (1896-1973) [hereafter ‘Kubie’].¹ He (1954, pp. 546-552) referenced an autobiographical account handwritten by the decedent that his surviving sister thereafter privately published (Oberndorf [1957]). Kubie (*op. cit.*), meanwhile plumbed the depths of his subject’s *psyche* with a perceptive linkage:

“...Then with a quiet suggestion of the reverence of Lillian [Eugenia] Smith, comes a tribute to the deep influence upon him [Oby] of a Negro wet-nurse and household -
est grandchild.

¹ Kubie, a graduate of *Johns Hopkins Medical School*, was no stranger to “Jim Crow”

servants, expressed in a dream” (p. 547).

Occasionally a single understated sentence conveys aspects of an otherwise nostalgic--- albeit painful---chapter in American history. The quoted allusion to *inter-racial suckling*² is in itself a rarity amongst the psychoanalytic literature throughout the 1st -half of the last century (Cambor, 1969, p. 90).

Prior to the *fin-de-siècle* generation of the 19th-century, unpasteurized *non-human* milk was often avoided as unhygienic in the South (Ginsburg, 2010, pp. 701 & 704). By the turn of the century, a colloquially-dubbed “Black Mammy” was usually stereotyped as a woman of African descent who nursed a child or children of other people. “Black-face” minstrels such as Al Jolson (Asa Yoelson *a/k/a* the “Jazz Singer”) and Eddie Cantor *a/k/a* Edward Israel Iskowitz) were vaudeville crooners who later portrayed adult Negro males before predominantly white audiences. Each entertainer begged, upon bended knee in a Dixie-styled dialect, that he “would give the world to be back in the arms” of the Black woman who had loved him or “walk a hundred miles for one of her smiles.”

Oby’s grammar-school classmates (*i.e.*, in their white public academy) were meanwhile obligated to sing a *quasi*-corrupted version of the lyrics of the defeated Confederacy’s former national anthem: “Three cheers for the bonnie flag that never lost a star” interrupted by the teacher’s emotionally-laden *caveat*: “They would have lost their best stars if they’d lost us.
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slang..

² In South America, the ‘Negra Hipólita’ has been idolized as the wet-nurse and nanny to continental hero Simón Bolívar. Gone were the days when Isabella Baumfra, born as an indentured Negress in *ante-bellum* North America, ultimately emancipated herself and traveled widely telling people the truth about slavery; hence her sobriquet: ‘Sojourner Truth.’ A recent chronicler of her life, remarked: “In response to the heckler’s suggestion that she bare her breasts during a speech, she reputedly said, ‘These breasts have suckled many white children, and the shame is not mine but yours’...” (Dann, 2009, p. 443).

Now you can go on singing!” (Oberndorf [1957, p. 9]).

The Trail-Blazing Trajectory of Lillian [Eugenia] Smith (1897-1966)

“I soon realized that no journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the world around us, it goes an equal distance into the world within” -Unsourced Quotation.

To what extent---if at all---may we contrast Oby’s life with that of the 1½-decade junior Lillian? While author Kubie may have reflected upon her almost palpable propensities in pondering the tender aspects of Oby’s Southern-oriented life, it is not known whether either knew one another. Kubie presumably associated Oby’s deep-felt bonds to a nurturing Negro wet-nurse to whom he had bonded during his infancy by inextricably linking the latter’s adult world with Lillian’s unyielding crusade against racially-oriented patterns of thought.

Lillian taught as a musically-educated young adult over a 3-year period in China. Neither Oby³ nor she, who outlived him by a dozen years, ever married. By way of contrast, she became a more fractious critic of white supremacy and racial segregation. Alien to her vocabulary were Asian and *sub*-continent caste gradations; so, too, were “Jim Crow” miscegenation criteria. For Oby, a ‘color’-blind’ *Veterans Hospital* in central Alabama, sadly, never became a reality.

Lillian wrote the acclaimed novel entitled *Strange Fruit* (1945) which was there-

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³ It seems odd, in retrospect, that psychiatrist Paul Goolker (1954) ended the first paragraph of his obituary, *pre*-dating Kubie’s last homage, as follows: “Dr. Oberndorf remained unmarried---an unusual status for a psychoanalyst---and undoubtedly this had multiple determinants. But not least among them was Dr. Oberndorf’s absorption in his chosen field and a jealous reservation of his time for it” (p. 318). One cannot help wondering about the extent, if any, to which Goolker may have been influenced by Oby’s paper entitled “Homosexuality.” It was read by him on May 3, 1921 at the Annual Meeting of the *Medical Society of the State of New York* just prior to his analysis by Freud in Vienna (Oberndorf, 1922).

after adapted as a Broadway play. In such works and her later best seller, *Killers of the Dream* (1949), she championed Sigmund Freud's theories about psychosexual stages, *id/ego/superego* divisions, unconscious drives and the ways in which humans shield themselves from them. Her compositions began with the subject of repressed childhood memories and inevitably concluded with an examination of racial segregation.⁴

The red "clay of Southern culture" beneath Lillian's literary feet was grounded in fictional Maxwell, Georgia. According to one of her biographers (Loveland), it was Kubie to whom Lillian invariably turned for an evaluation of her writing (pp. 126-127, 166-167 & 210-211). Such sentiments as she voiced left a lasting imprint upon her readers. So too did those of Kubie⁵ and Oby⁶ (referenced, in part, *infra*).

A Dry-Goods Enterprise in Pre-Secessionist Alabama

Joseph Oberndorf (1846-1893) had emigrated as a teen-aged lad, after the 1860 Federal *census* was tallied, to a little village [*i.e.*, Oxford *f/k/a* "Lick Skillet, Alabama"]

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⁴ Lillian faulted contemporary writers such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Ernest Hemingway, and especially William Faulkner. None of them "understood women or WOMAN," she declared. [Tennessee] Williams did not see women's "awful strength and blindness." Faulkner, she insisted did not understand women but "hated and disesteemed" them, with the result that his women characters were all "dreadful creatures" and "cartoons of women, nothing else" (*ibid.*, p. 180). Parenthetically, it is noted that [Tennessee] Williams---according to his public testimonials---collaborated in an analytic *dyad* with Dr. Kubie over a 1-year period (Paller, 2000).

⁵ Whether or not Kubie had a hand in attempting to adapt Lillian's *Strange Fruit* Broadway play for the stage remains an open question. As intimated in Kubie's aforementioned obituary about Oby, it is readily apparent from the archived communications between the former and her that they had long been literary confidants (Kubie, 1955). See also (Ginsburg, 2014) posted at <http://internationalpsychoanalysis.net/2014/05/25-before-and-beyond-lawrence-s-kubie-m-d-1896-1973>) entitled "Before and Beyond Lawrence S. Kubie, M.D. (1896-1973)."

⁶ Oby had served as editor of the undergraduate literary publication known as *The Cornell Era*.

per a contemporary map at the state's *Department of Archives and History*] situated in northern Alabama that was sacked by the Yankees after the *Battle of Chattanooga*.

According to Oby's posthumously published autobiographical sketch (Oberndorf [1957]), his father joined previously settled relatives from Bavaria [*i.e.*, elder brother Abraham and cousin Gustavus Oberndorf] who had opened "a small store" (p. 7) in Calhoun County at the intersection of wagon-trails in Oxford. *Fig. 1* (Lindley, 1998) discloses that their mercantile establishment fronted upon a main street that extended in a northerly-to-southerly direction---traversing a gap on the Choccolocco foothills of the surrounding Appalachian range toward Talladaga County. Paralleling the wagon-trail was a branch-line of the *Alabama and Tennessee Rivers Railroad*. Both surmounted the aforementioned gap to connect Oxford with the outside world.

Joseph's aforementioned kinfolk enlisted in Company H of the 10th Alabama Infantry Regiment on June 4, 1861. Meanwhile, Oby's future *père*, (*i.e.*, who had sailed at 13-years of age from Germany to join his immigrant kinfolk in Oxford) remained behind to mind the family store during their absences. After having served in the Confederate Army, the Oberndorf veterans received *Honorable Discharges*. As an adult, Oby's father and another partner co-founded a more elaborate emporium in Selma, Alabama (*Fig. 2*).

A Traumatized Early Childhood

Oby's mother, Augusta *née* Hammerstein Oberndorf (1855-1928), was the sister

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Upon an occasion when Oby met Freud at his family's vacation retreat in Europe, the latter related that the author Thomas Hardy "knew psychoanalysis" (Oberndorf, 1953, p. 182). Oby later wrote an essay entitled "The Psychoanalytic Insights of Nathaniel Hawthorne" (1942) and a couple of texts: *The Psychiatric Novels of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (1944) and *Which Way Out: Stories Based on the Experience of a Psychiatrist* (1948) [*i.e.*, an anthology of 11 quasi-autobiographical tales in which the hero (*i.e.*, Dr. Ben Ford) appears as a fictional version of the middle-aged Oby] as well as a work entitled *A History of Psychoanalysis in America* (1953).

**TO ALL INDEBTED TO
A. OBERNDORF,
OXFORD ALA.**

My friends & customers whose accounts were due the 1st, of this month are respectfully requested to give me an early call, & make payments, I shall start for a new supply of Goods by the first of February next & must therefore collect with dispatch to have money to make purchases.

Those indebted to me in notes or accounts which were due the 1st, of January 1859, will find them in the hands of the Officer if not paid before the 1st of February next. Oxford Jan. 4th 1860

A. OBERNDORF,

JAN. 5, 1860

Jacksonville Republican 5 January 1860

New Goods In Oxford

The attention of the citizens of Oxford and vicinity, and of the county generally, is respectfully invited to the advertisement of the reception of New Goods, by Mr. A. Oberndorf.

His stock has been purchased exclusively in southern cities, is very extensive and well assorted, and his prices are said to compare favorably with any other house.

We have had some orders filled by Mr. O., and were well pleased both with the quality and prices of his goods, and can therefore, safely commend him to others whose convenience it may suit to trade at that point.

Jacksonville Republican 29 March 1860

FIG.1

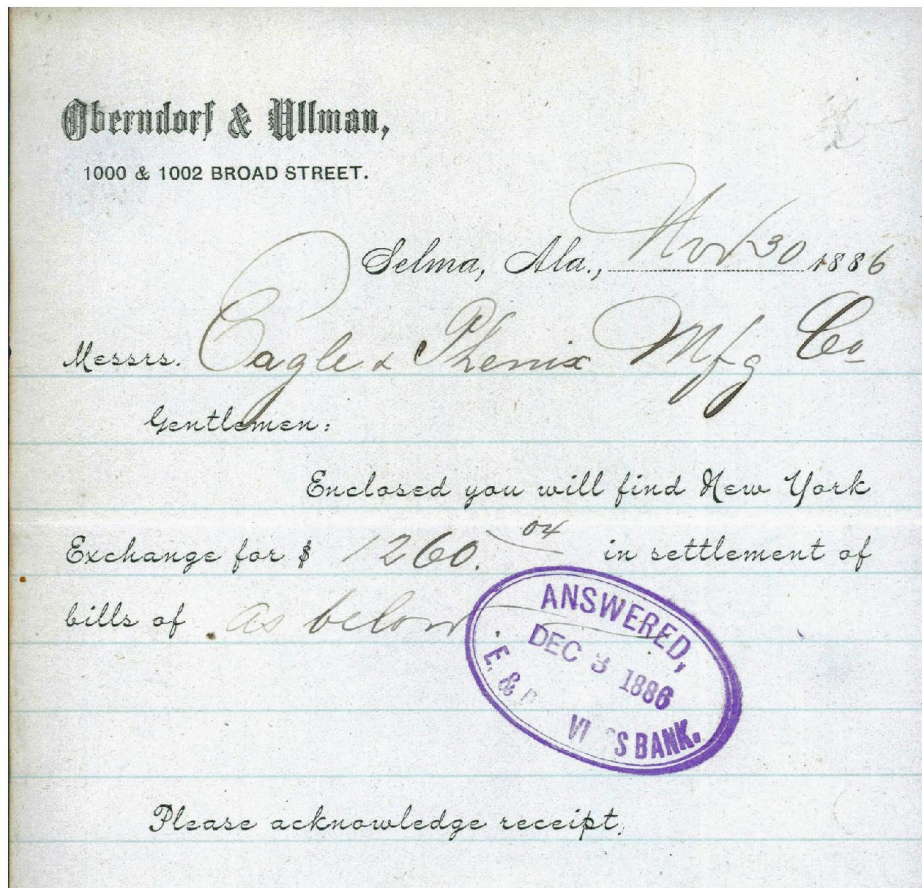


FIG. 2

of Oscar Hammerstein (1847-1919).⁷ She had migrated in 1864 from Germany to New York City and then to Selma, Alabama, where her husband Joseph---by then---had become a prosperous merchant and settled his family. Shoenfeld (1955), in another obituary, re-echoed the severe trauma that new-born Oby withstood as follows:

“[that]...because of the difficulties his mother had experienced in five previous pregnancies, it was thought advisable for her to be under the care of an obstetrician in New York City. As soon as she was able to travel, she returned to Selma, Alabama, with her infant...[who] was extremely ill” (p. 210).

Remorsefully, perhaps, Kubie (*op. cit.*) himself observed that Oby noted “with factual objectivity the influence on his life of the obstetrical injuries to his skull which had left scars with which we were familiar through all of the years in which we knew

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⁷ Kubie (1954) quoted Oby as having characterized his mother as the sister of “a man not unlike her famous brother [Oscar Hammerstein] ‘unpredictable, versatile and restless’ ...” [whom Oby further described] “as that tempestuous and gifted impresario...” (p. 547). He had earlier distinguished himself as an inventor, writer, editor, speculator, designer, promoter and showman (W. H. Harris & J. S. Levy, eds., 1975, p. 1185) who controlled a number of theatrical stages. The elder Hammerstein was an internationally recognized operatic *impresario* in charge of several American and European operatic venues. He had revitalized the predominantly European form of theatrical drama in America. When *Hammerstein’s* wife and mother of their four sons died, he traveled to Alabama and married a local woman, Malvina *née* Jacobi (Sheean, 1956, p. 35). The newlyweds continued their lives in Manhattan. Following Joseph Oberndorf’s subsequent death, the widowed Augusta---after an extended sojourn with the nearly 11-year old Oby and his siblings in Europe---finally relocated in New York City. After the sudden demise of Yiddish play-wright Jacob Grodin, her brother Oscar opened “the doors of the *Metropolitan Opera House*” [as its director] so that solace-seeking throngs who couldn’t be accommodated elsewhere could mourn “absolutely free of any cost for the night” (Kap-knew him” (p. 547). It is difficult to ponder the heartbreaking circumstances attending plan, 2007, p. 219).. It was among the many theatrical venues and establishments founded by Oby’s uncle. Another was *Hammerstein’s Roof Garden* where on September 2, 1909 ---a few days after the communal tribute honoring Grodin’s theatrical *œuvré*---the Freud/Jung/Ferenézi dinner took place. Also prominent among Oby’s intertwined Northern clan was Oscar Hammerstein 2nd (1895-1960), who refined a more distinctively American form of musical drama as lyricist and librettist for such musicals as *Carousel*, *Showboat*,

him” (p. 547). It is difficult to ponder the heartbreaking circumstances attending his mother’s long return journey home with her facially deformed new-born whose life hung in the balance as had two earlier offspring who failed to survive.⁸ In Oby’s words, he:

“...remained alive during my first year chiefly because of the devotion of a Negro wet nurse and a conscientious small-town doctor. The latter was sufficiently impressed with his puny patient’s tenacity to life to dub him Stonewall Jackson.”
(Oberndorf [1957, p. 8])

Yet, Oby managed to survive---against all expectations---and attended “the small public school in Selma called the Dallas Academy” that he had entered “at the age of six” (*ibid.*, [1957, p. 9]).

Familial Lamentations

Freud, as a result of dream interpretations he uncovered from his own self-analysis, came to weigh heavily the adult reverberations of death during his early infancy (Ginsburg, 2008, pp. 389-391; 1999a/2000, pp. 265-272 & pp. 104-117; 1999, pp. 63-68). For the Oberndorfs, the brief lives of son Jonas (February 12, 1880-February 15, 1880) and daughter Frances (June 28, 1876-January 16, 1882) must have likewise cast a harrowing pall amongst the surviving members of their family. Oby’s traumatic birth took place exactly a month after the demise of a 5½-year sibling.

Upon completing his public school education in New York City, Oby won a

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Oklahoma, South Pacific, Desert Song, The King and I and The Sound of Music.

⁸ See further obituary (Lehrman, 1954), which in part, stated: “During the delivery, on February 16, 1882, the infant’s skull was crushed by the forceps at the level of the ears. Necrosis of the bone on both sides followed and the wounds took nearly a year to heal, the scars remaining visible all of his life; indeed, during the first year of his life he was unable to lift his head” (p. 425).



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

competitive full-tuition scholarship to *Cornell University*. In reviewing entries in Oby's yearbook entitled *The 1904 Class Book* (p. 131), it remains apparent that he continued to reference himself as still rooted in the "Jim Crow" landscape of his earlier youth (*Fig. 3*). He graduated in 1904 when it was still possible to double register for the Medical School's two-year basic science *curriculum* in Ithaca. He then completed the remainder of the program in New York City and was awarded the *M.D.* degree in 1906. *Post-graduate* training led to Oby's specialization as a psychiatrist prior to his becoming Sigmund Freud's analysand in September of 1921.

Successive members of the extended Hammerstein clan had multiple contacts with public-relations consultant Edward L. Bernays. The adult Oby---a fellow *Cornell University* graduate like the latter---had several occasions not only to communicate with him; but also, indirectly *via* Anna Freud (*i.e.*, a 1st-cousin of the aforesaid Bernays). Chronicled elsewhere is data documenting episodic *intra*-familial rifts and rivalries among the twice-conjugally related Bernays/Freud constellations of lineal and collateral descendants (Ginsburg, 2012, pp. 350-356).

Sigmund Freud, Carl G. Jung and Sándor Ferenczi, joined by Abraham A. Brill as their guide, dined at *Hammerstein's Roof Garden* (*Fig. 4* & Clark, 1980, p. 266) on September 2, 1909.⁹ During the vaudeville program's intermission, Brill introduced his

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⁹ Molnar (2015) concluded that "Freud's anti-Americanism seems to revolve around two powerful pairs of opposites: ambition and humiliation, and envy and gratitude. He seems to have been tempted to give in, as it were, to the American way of life. Then he ridiculed and despised what had threatened to seduce him. He strove for money, wealth and fame, and independence, but he did not want to be beholden to those who could make this possible...But who were most successful in making money in America? Note the irony in Freud's words when he writes of a visit to the Hammerstein roof gardens in Manhattan and the 'vaudeville show on the roof of a skyscraper, *naturally* owned by an Austrian Jew, Hammerstein' (Freud, 2002, p. 305; my ital.). Freudian slip or wrong information---

table-companions to Trigant Burrow, a trainee under Swiss-born Adolf Meyer at the *Manhattan State Psychiatric Hospital*. Burrow was a physician with another doctorate in experimental psychology. Two years afterwards, Burrow communicated with Freud about analysis for himself and his wife. On November 6, 1913, Freud answered Burrow:

“Of course I remember you very well from the time of your first visit at *Hammerstein’s Roof Garden* until that of your contribution to the *International Zeitschrift*, and it will give me satisfaction to be able to assist you through an analysis...I would under no conditions analyse your wife at the same time as you; it would make the work extremely difficult for me. If she come to Vienna with you and wants an analysis, she can have it (cheaper) with one of our colleagues. Of course the reverse could be arranged I could analyse your wife and you yourself could go to someone else in Vienna, although you do not seem to have this in mind...”

Unbeknownst---perhaps to Burrow---Jung was distancing himself from Freud, had resigned as signed as director of the *Jahrbuch* and withdrawn his name from the masthead of the *Zeitschrift* on October 27, 1913. Meanwhile, Burrow chose further analysis under Jung in Zurich rather than Freud in Vienna.

A So-called ‘Threshold’ Dream with an Alabama Accent in Vienna

“One of the few interpretations which Freud made some thirty years later, when I was under analysis with him for five months, was that I had unconsciously been under the

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it is quite fitting that Freud called Hammerstein an *Austrian Jew*, even in he was in fact a German one. The implicit conclusion is: In Freud’s view, Austrian Jews---like himself---can outdo the Americans any time---*if they want*. For this, however, they would have to sacrifice their old values on the altar of the ‘mightiest God,’ the dollar” (p. 329).

influence of two fathers. In the dream, I was on the driver's seat of an old-fashioned country wagon drawn by a white horse and a black horse. From this Freud made the inference that my life had unconsciously been under the influence of two fathers, a white father Joe, and a black father Joe, our Negro coachman who had been a slave but taught me many things besides currying a horse and riding bareback"

--C. P. Oberndorf ([1958], p. 9).

In September of 1921, the main figure in this commentary appeared at *Berggasse 19* in Vienna for his first appointment with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He, along with a small coterie of psychiatric colleagues, was to become one of Freud's so-called "pupil-patients" while undergoing a personal didactic analyses with him. All of the others had likewise been regularly residing in New York City. Unlike Oby's northern compatriots, he had primarily been nurtured and raised beneath the Mason-Dixon line.

The dream which Oby presumably related to Freud for his interpretation at the outset of their analyst-analysand *dyad* became the subject of commentary by---amongst others---June Dobbs Butts (1977),¹⁰ *to wit*:

"When Sigmund Freud was coming to international prominence, shortly after World War I, a young physician who had grown up in the South named Clarence Oberndorf was one of the first to travel to Vienna seeking to become a psycho-analyzed. Being Jewish like Freud and of European extraction, Oberndorf felt sufficiently at home with Freud, indeed even conducting his analysis in German

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¹⁰ Although Butts referenced the autobiography Oby was known to have written, she failed to cite it---plausibly---because it hadn't been privately published until 1958. According to Oby, Freud concluded "*that I had unconsciously been under the influence of two fathers...a white father Joe, and a black father Joe, our Negro coachman.*" Retrospectively, as Oby put it, Freud thought that he had unconsciously compared his white father's

to wish to introduce Freud's method of treating emotional illness to America. Unfortunately, they fell into a dispute over Freud's interpretation of one of Oberndorf's initial dreams. The dream which Oberndorf presented was that he was 'in the driver's seat of an old-fashioned country wagon drawn by a white horse and a black horse' with both horses pulling in opposite directions, he could not control the wagon and was in peril of being torn apart. Freud interpreted this dream as indicating that Oberndorf had an unresolved conflict between competing forces. On the one hand there was his biologically real mother whom society esteemed but whom he found to be personally withdrawn as a Mother; on the other hand there was his caretaker since birth, a black Mammy whom society devalued as a woman but whom he found to be personally warm and invaluable as a mother figure. Oberndorf disagreed with Freud, and even left this interesting detail out of his autobiography; to this extent he had picked up some of the sexual schizophrenia of his native land. Thus, a method of treatment which was designed to help people rid themselves of emotional illness and psychic blind

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affluent "station in life" (as an 'up-by-the-bootstraps Horatio Alger') *vis-à-vis* the Negro 2nd-father's "lot in life" (as a former slave). Oby, during his 1st decade of life, apparently idolized each of them. By way of contrast, Butts's parental configuration focused merely upon Oby's "black Mammy" caretaker since birth" (p. 59). In a parallel context, *cf.* Stewart (2009) wherein the author focuses upon William Faulkner's dedication "To 'MAMMY' CALLIE BARR CLARK 1840-1940" [by] "Her white children [who] bless her." Some literary scholars have intimated that she substituted as a composite 'double' for certain of those amidst Faulkner's own immediate family's clan whom he fictionally portrayed in *Go Down Moses*. Faulkner was seen as having transformed 'MAMMY' into a "second mother rather than as a servant." He disguised her amongst his *dramatis personae*, as "the woman who had been the only mother he, Edmonds [*i.e.*, Faulkner's *alter ego*], ever knew, who had raised him, fed him from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child, who had surrounded him always with care for his personal body and for his spirit too, teaching him his manners, behavior" (p. 10).

spots was refused by a worthy disciple, because of the interlocking forces of sex and race, American style” (pp. 58-59).

Frank J. Sulloway (2007), for example, focused upon “just one clinical example ...to give a sense as to what psychoanalytic interpretations by Freud were often like” (p. 67). Apart from *post*-dating Oby’s first consultation in Vienna (*i.e.*, “around 1923 or 1924”) by 2-3 years, he¹¹ asserted:

“Like all candidates for training under Freud...came in prepared with a dream. The dream involved driving in a carriage with a black horse and a white horse. Because Oberndorf came from the southern part of the United States, Freud interpreted the dream to mean that Oberndorf had an inhibition about whether he should marry a white woman or a black woman. Oberndorf and Freud haggled over the meaning of this dream for a couple of months until Freud just got fed up with Oberndorf’s ‘resistances’ and brought the analysis to an end. If one goes back through all of Freud’s case histories, one finds a similar pattern of patients reporting how astonished they were at the seemingly arbitrary conclusions Freud reached, and how Freud stubbornly resisted objections to his own formulaic psychoanalytic interpretations...” (*ibid.*).

In contrast to earlier Freud scholars, Louis Breger (2009) lauded Freud for his

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¹¹ Paul Roazen (2000) wrote: “[Edward] Glover did know about one book about psychoanalysis in America, the early survey by Clarence Oberndorf, which Glover thought ‘very good’...” (p. 18). Tangentially, it is noted---according to a current bibliographical search ---that A. C. Dailey (1998) cited “Holmes and the Romantic Mind” in the *Duke Law Journal*, vol. 48 (p. 45, fn. 119) as the source for her assertion that Peter Gay (1988) credited Oberndorf’s *A History of Psychoanalysis in America (infra)* as his source in stating: “By the *Age of Enlightenment*, some perceptive students of human nature had recognized the existence of unconscious mentation” including Lichtenberg, Goethe, Schiller, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche” (pp. 127-128 & 770).

clinical acumen in analysing Abram Kardiner (*i.e.*, as articulated in his own 1977 autobiographical account cited below) over-lapping the same time-frame during which fellow analysand Oby was undergoing analysis with Freud:

“...the overall experience was very helpful, but Kardiner also noted that Freud’s interpretation of his ‘unconscious homosexuality’ put him ‘on a wild-goose chase for years for a problem that did not exist’...” (pp. 10-34).

As Breger (2009) had surmised, in another context, Freud

“...became ever more the analyst-authority, the one who knows w patient’s unconscious and, when he or she did not agree with his interpretations, took this as evidence of ‘resistance’...” (p. 100),

It seems futile in tracking the extent to which such 2nd or 3rd-handed versions fed-upon one another (Ginsburg, 1999a, pp. 63-78; Lohser & Newton, 1996, pp. 36-37). Kardiner (*op. cit.*, 1977) relished echoing his own convoluted replays of Oby’s ‘Black Mammy’ dream (p. 76). It is not known whether either of them ever became privy to the thrust of two pertinent letters written by Freud (1921 & 1922 *infra*) to Ernest Jones. They contained Freud’s pointed evaluations about Oby. How prescient, one may ask, may have Freud been in interpreting his analysand’s ‘threshold’ dream? Current psychoanalysts are reputedly more amenable to theorizing that treatment failures often have their roots in mishandling the critical opening phase.

An Unfruitful Summit

During August of 1929, Freud agreed to see Oby---who had served five terms as the elected Secretary of the *American Psychoanalytic Association*---in Berchtesgaden:

“After a few friendly words of initial greeting, Freud’s first question to me was,

‘And tell me what you really have against lay analysis? in a tone of annoyance and impatience. I tried to explain to him that the laws of New York forbade it, that the members in America thought a knowledge of the manifestations of organic illness necessary so that the physician might compare them to those due to psychological disturbance, that especially in America quacks and impostors, extremely ignorant of the elements of psychoanalysis, presumed to hold themselves out as analysts.’ Freud waived aside my replies with an abrupt ‘I know all that,’ turned, and walked very slowly toward his house” (Oberndorf, 1953, p. 182).

Further ‘New World’ Alienation

Excerpted from the diary compiled of an American analysand of Freud are transcribed segments from his August 15, 1935 session (S. Blanton, 1971):

“...Later, I got on the subject of America. On an earlier occasion, Freud had been critical of the country, referring to its poor education and culture. I cannot quote him exactly, but as nearly as I can remember it, he had said, ‘You Americans are like this. Garlic’s good, chocolate’s good---let’s put a little garlic on chocolate and eat it.’ I reminded him of this and then said, “I don’t think you are fair to Americans. You must remember that we are a democracy. The butler’s and baker’s sons go to college. In England and Europe, you have an aristocracy of brains who get higher education. But we are free, and we have a free idealism...I went on to speak of how our Supreme Court protects the rights of the citizens---citing the new trial being given the Negroes in the Scottsboro case. I mentioned how Cardoso had been unanimously recommended by the *New York Bar Association* for the Supreme Court---and that of the nine men in this most

powerful judicial body, two were Jews...” (pp. 78-79).

Blanton’s upbringing included “two adult negroes who had been with the family since slavery days” (M. G. Blanton, 1971b, p. 124).

Roazen (2000, *op. cit.*) ostensibly concluded that “Freud [*vis-à-vis* Oby in particular] did not appreciate the racial sensitivities of white Southerners; part of Freud’s devaluation of America was to view it as Indian territory that would one day become a Negro republic” (pp. 18-19).¹² Continuing with Roazen’s quoted rationale, his bibliography discloses that he attributed the sentence last cited to Franz Alexander (K. R. Eisler’s Interview, p. 181, n. 27). Also, see *Sigmund Freud Collection* (Box 112, 2 folders), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

A September 6, 1909 letter of Jung to his wife may seem of conjectural significance. He, Freud and Ferenczi were guests at the New England home of G. Stanley Hall, Ph.D. (*i.e.*, an advocate of eugenic breeding). “Two pitch-black Negroes in dinner jackets, the extreme of grotesque solemnity,” it read “perform as servants” (Rosenzweig, 1992, p. 79).¹³

Corresponding with Leonhard Blumgart, M.D. (*i.e.*, one of Oby’s colleagues) about his unexpected marriage, Freud (1922b) chided his vacationing analysand, *viz*:

“...But you Americans are peculiar people. None of you has ever found the right

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¹² Roazen (2000) wrote: “I later found out that Oberndorf had been one of Freud’s least favored patients. Freud had once dismissed him from treatment on the grounds that ‘he had no unconscious’...Such “ironic condemnation was almost the worse Freud could say about anyone. Freud got off to a bad start with Oberndorf, born in the South, by making an early tactless dream interpretation that linked race with Oberndorf having remained a bachelor...” (pp. 18-19).

¹³ Hall’s 2nd wife was the Mansion’s hostess; she likely had her dining staff---while unmentioned by Jung---outfitted with white serving gloves then popular in America.

A History of
PSYCHOANALYSIS
IN AMERICA

by
C. P. OBERNDORF, M.D.

GRUNE & STRATTON

1953
New York

FIG. 5

attitude toward your women...”

Arguably, the gender-oriented rationales enunciated about sibling rivalries in “A Note Concerning the Male Aspects of Freud’s ‘In-law’ Entanglements” (Ginsburg, 2012, pp. 350-356) remain historically germane to him and assorted other figures in his extended family. When Freud married Martha Bernays, he perceived her brother Ely Bernays as a scoundrel (*schurke*). Sigmund had not attended the earlier wedding of his younger sister Anna to Martha’s aforementioned brother. The relationships of both couples were to become turbulent. Ely’s integrity as a conservator of Martha’s dowry from her uncle became a disputatious issue. His financial *largesse*, gained as an *émigré* to America, included support for a New York City orphanage housing destitute Jewish children. Ely’s limited support for European relatives, during World War I, became fodder for criticism, in the Freud family’s circles.

Freud’s nephew (*i.e.*, Edward L. Bernays) failed in his attempt to become his uncle’s *post*-World War I literary agent with American publishers. Such “fall-out” may have soured Freud about the Oberndorf/Hammerstein lineage whose scions, by extension, were traveling in the same privileged New York City circles as the younger Bernays (*i.e.*, then achieving acclaim as a public relations eminence of the day). In punctuating the context of the aged Freud’s attitude toward America, even after his fleeing to England, it is noted that when Blanton asked him on August 31, 1938: “Whether the regard and affection shown him in America made him feel differently toward us?” He answered “No.” (p. 103).¹⁴

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¹⁴ See M. G. Blanton (1971a) for context about her comments (pp. 5-6) and the bracketed explanatory note she inserted within the text in her deceased husband's diary, *viz.*: "He [Freud] has always expressed a certain antagonism against the United States and

Enduring Legacies

Among his many honors, Oby was elected President of *The American Psychoanalytic Association* in 1936. The obituary by Kubie (*op. cit.*) asserted mentioned that Oby had written "three books" (*Fig. 5*) and more than "120 scientific articles" (p. 564).¹⁵ It is evident that he also funded "a prize of \$1,000.00 for studies of the results of psychoanalytic therapy, and *symposia* on outcomes were held in Boston and Philadelphia" (Hale, 1995, p. 305; Oberndorf, Greenacre & Kubie, 1952, pp. 7-34).¹⁶ Other of Oberndorf's philanthropic endeavors were legion.¹⁷

Cultural Adaptations

"It is impossible for anyone to be born into a minority group, particularly a religious or

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physicians in general" (p. 103). Upon a few occasions, she and he husband had been social guest at his homes in Austria and England.

¹⁵ See references *infra* to sample an assortment of Oby's further published work.

¹⁶ In the prescient words of Hale (1995): "Oberndorf...warned his colleagues that the numerous and violent controversies in psychoanalytic groups...and the frequent attempts to introduce new systems' were the 'result of discomfiture and incertitude' about 'theory, methodology and results...Some of the 'high hopes regarding the wide scope and certainty of results with psychoanalytic therapy...have not been sustained.' The statistical treatment by other methods---about 60 percent recovered or improved, and rigorous psychoanalytic training seemed to make no appreciable difference in results. Oberndorf noted that especially in his early practice, he had treated patients successfully in very brief psychoanalysis. But deeper and lengthier analyses had come into fashion without

any investigation as to whether the results were better or permanent. Now, analyses were lasting from two to seven years, the latter ‘occurring, it is whispered, more often than is acknowledged.’ Psychoanalysts were treating more borderline and psychotic patients and many of these were kept out of hospitals and at productive work. Nevertheless, outcomes were disappointing.’ He proposed that after a patient had been in analyses for 2 or 3 years the case be reviewed by one or two consultants chosen by the analyst. Unless such an assessment became a standard procedure, vanity usually would preclude it...(p. 305).

¹⁷ See September 21, 1955 issue of *The Cornell Daily Sun* in which “a bequest of more than \$400,000.00 from the residuary estate of Dr. Clarence P. Oberndorf, a University graduate and the ‘dean of psychoanalysis in America’ will provide funds for the *racial one, without in some degree suffering from that chance of birth at the hands of the majority...By fortune of birth my heritage was Jewish...*”

-C. P. Oberndorf ([1958]. p. 17).

Otto Kernberg, M.D. (1996), in a colloquy with the co-authors of an international publication, was asked:

“...Is psychoanalysis as it is now practiced reductionist, elitist, too limited to those of European background? How should the treatment of minority patients émigrés, for example, differ (or should it) from the treatment of the middle and upper classes...?”

His informative response, footnoted *infra*,¹⁸ speaks for itself.

‘Gone With the Wind’

In a Chapter entitled “Psychoanalysis, Race, and Racism,” Cynthia Burack (2004) studied how early psychoanalytic thinkers in addition to Freud, such as Carl G. Jung (pp. 15-16), Wulf Sachs (p. 16) and Franz Fanon (pp. 30-31), perceived the psychic genesis of

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development of a new clinic for the psychiatric care of students” on the Ithaca *campus* (Fig. 6).

¹⁸ “...I have had experience in analyzing patients from different cultures and different

socioeconomic environments, and it seems to me that the analyst should become aware of the cultural background of the patient, and such awareness should color his interpretations, on the other hand, at a deep level we are all much more human than otherwise. If the analyst protects himself from the clichés in his culture about the other culture...the analyst should be able to recognize such differences if they exist and learn about the other culture as he analyzes what is going on with the patient. A simple example. The analyst sees a black patient in this culture. The black patient may feel inferiority with tremendous cultural and ideological backing. It is important for the white analyst to study that in terms of its cultural background and sort out from what is a more personal transference. Now, if the analyst come with the feeling of guilt and treats his black patient as special, the analyst if licked and the patient is licked. So the analyst has to step out of the cultural biases regarding blacks in the same way that the black patient will have to step out of his own bias regarding whites” (pp. 180-181).
white racism during the early stages of the 20th-century. A more contemporary

psychoanalyst---when queried about how a “Southern-raised *vis-à-vis* a Northern-raised” analysand’s outlook may differ---often raises the intractable ‘*Gone With the Wind*’ comparison. While the ‘Black Mammy’ stereotype may have been possibly alien to the middle-European Freud, it was not *terra incognita* for a generation of future psychoanalysts whose analysands became familiar with such ‘infant/Black Mammy’ relationships native to the American South.

Analogous to one of the issues at hand is Chapter 21 of *Psychoanalytic Technique Expanded: A Textbook of Psychoanalytic Treatment* authored by Vamik D. Volkan (2010). It is *sub*-titled “A Psychoanalytic Process from its Beginning to its Termination,” constituting Case #4 (pp. 231-239) under the heading: “Jennifer (‘The Analysis of a Southern Belle’). Unfortunately, as the aforementioned Burack and Volkan have averred, hardly any attention is afforded to victims of racial discrimination.

Dr. Ben Ford

Which Way Out: Stories Based on the Experience of a Psychiatrist (Oberndorf, 1948) is an anthology of 11 *semi*-autobiographical tales in which the hero (*i.e.*, Dr. Ben Ford) appears as a fictional version of the middle-aged Oby. “The Bottle of Champagne” features the hero as a neophyte graduate-physician abroad at the *Kraepelin Klinik* in Munich (*i.e.*, as had Oby). In “The Boarders,” a reader thereafter encounters the self-romanticized Oby as a resident physician fulfilling his responsibilities at a *State Hospital Service* back in the United States (*i.e.*, as had Oby). Narrated is another vignette, entitled “The Will.” It is the poignant story of a father and son and their reciprocal ambivalences toward one another. Unobtrusively portrayed under the guise of Oby’s *doppelgänger* is the timeless psychoanalytic paradox of a familial relationship and the power of the unconscious. Other episodes in Oby’s anthology of psychoanalytically-informed short stories may be as significant for what they’ve omitted as for what they’ve revealed to date about his *alter ego*.

Historical ‘Back-Lash’

To what extent, if any, will posterity judge the Freud/Oberndorf therapeutic dyad? Shall the continued regurgitation of “beyond the couch” gossip-mongering diminish Freud overtones of the Freud/Oberndorf/Kardiner/Frink *inter*-relationships have been elucidated elsewhere. Kardiner coincidentally thereafter co-authored with Lionel Ovesey, a psychoanalytically-informed study, entitled *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro* (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1962).

In a contrasting vein, Peter Gay (1988) characterized Freud’s attitude toward Oby in derisive terms:

“Clarence Oberndorf, an early enthusiast and long a dominant figure among American psychoanalysts, was to Freud’s mind, only ‘the worst’ among them. ‘He appears to be stupid or arrogant.’ Freud confessed to Ernest Jones in 1921 that Oberndorf baffled him: ‘Why should a man who was considered so brilliant and successful, have taken up psychoanalysis unless his head or his heart had some part in it’...” (pp. 564-565).

In a longer version of the same communication, Freud (1921a) remarked:

“Oberndorf...will never be admitted to the depths of analysis, yet he made an experience which will do him some good” (p. 458).

Future scholars studying about Oby’s contributions to psychoanalysis will undoubtedly become privy to currently restricted facets of Freud’s interactions with him. One such instance has been referenced “In a letter from Freud to me [Oby] concerning depersonalization, dated 25 June 1938” [*i.e.*, written 3-weeks after Freud fled Vienna] (Gay, *op. cit.*, p. 628). According to Oby, Freud further wrote to him: “The difference between our two concepts seems only to be that you assume the splitting (*Spaltungen*) in the super-ego, whereas I believe in ego-split” (Oberndorf, 1950, p. 4 *et seq.*).

Coda

When Oby (*op. cit.* [1958]) recounted the initial dream reported to Freud, it seems plausible that he may have over-romanticized his reminiscences. In retrospect, it seems unmistakable that he had always coveted the early nurturing provided by the Negro adults at his home in the Old South. As he observed toward the end of his life:

“Memories of these early years reside, or rest, or linger in [this] Southern atmosphere colored in both senses by the Negroes of the household, to whom one

habitually resorted for solace and advice in childhood troubles” (p. 9).

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