

‘WORKED FOR THE SHEER LOVE OF IT’: WOMEN’S BELONGING AND ADVERSITY
IN THE BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE ART DEPARTMENT, 1941-1954

by

Brigitte Nicolette Oliver

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
History

Charlotte

2020

Approved by:

Dr. Aaron Shapiro

Dr. Karen Cox

Dr. Sonya Ramsey

©2020
Brigitte Nicolette Oliver
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

BRIGITTE NICOLETTE OLIVER. 'Worked for the Sheer Love of It': Women's Belonging and Adversity in the Black Mountain College Art Department, 1941-1954. (Under the direction of DR. AARON SHAPIRO)

In 1941 and 1944, two women arrived as art students at the progressive and experimental Black Mountain College in North Carolina. There, under the college's mission, experienced a progressive education model influenced by John Dewey. As they moved to serving as instructors, however, their treatment began to change. This thesis analyzes their experiences at Black Mountain College in the 1940s using the women's interviews conducted by researchers. Considering the more conservative societal and cultural atmosphere of the time, it studies how these influences found their way into the art department despite the college's overall resistance toward traditional ideals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the chair of my committee Dr. Aaron Shapiro for all the time spent chatting, editing, and sending comments. I would have never made it through this program or thesis without his guidance. I also owe a huge thank you to Dr. Sonya Ramsey and Dr. Karen Cox, my committee members, for their feedback, suggestions, and understanding of Education and the South.

I thank several people for the knowledge and passion they provided me: Heather South from the Western Regional Archives who guided me to the women highlighted in this thesis; Dr. Siu Challons-Lipton, my undergraduate advisor from Queens University of Charlotte, who sparked my interest in Black Mountain College; and Elizabeth Ross, my art instructor from Central Piedmont Community College, who allowed me to explore my interest of BMC and also took me in for several months while I did my internship credits. I appreciate my classmates at UNCC and friend Victor Gates for their brilliant aide and feedback.

I acknowledge my friends, especially Jacob Gray, Meli Dina, Jenny Santiago, Lindsey King, Heather Felts, and Hannah Caddell for listening to my doubts and achievements day and night. I send my love and appreciation to my parents, Larry and Nancy, and my brother Maxx for providing every kind of support imaginable over the last two years. I thank my best friends Kat Tomlinson and Nick DeMarsico for pushing me toward graduate school, and my teachers at CPCC, Mary Kilburn and Isaac Payne, for helping make it happen. I also thank all my friends through Airy Knoll Farm, including my former roommates Jen Withrow and Geoff Whitesides, for keeping me sane.

Thank you all for being with me through this.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE: THE ART INSTRUCTOR	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LIFE AS A STUDENT.....	15
CHAPTER 3: LIFE AS AN INSTRUCTOR.....	27
REFERENCES	49

PROLOGUE: THE ART INSTRUCTOR

In 2013, my undergraduate thesis advisor introduced me to an arts educator, Elizabeth Ross (born 1938). She has dedicated her entire adult life to North Carolinian arts communities, primarily at Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) in Charlotte, North Carolina. Though I was not aware of the massive impact Elizabeth's mentorship would have on me individually as a woman studying the arts or my thoughts on female arts education, Elizabeth is where my interest in Southern women artists truly began.

When I met Elizabeth, I was preparing to defend my art history thesis focusing on Robert Rauschenberg—an artist who attended the progressive Black Mountain College in Black Mountain, North Carolina in the late 1940s and who helped revolutionize the neo-Dadaist art movement in American culture in the 1950s and 1960s. I addressed how German artist and instructor Josef Albers' teaching style at Black Mountain College pushed Rauschenberg to become a well-known 20th century artist. My interest in Black Mountain College linked me to Elizabeth, who herself ran an arts program at CPCC inspired by Black Mountain College's art department. But my thesis advisor did not introduce me to Elizabeth to discuss Southern arts education and Black Mountain College. Instead, I was able to attend her art program located at her homestead in Middlebrook, Virginia. Since 2013, I have attended the art program every year and learned fascinating information about Elizabeth's struggles within a college art department since she began at CPCC in the early 1960s.

I asked her to provide more detail about being a female art instructor in mid-twentieth century North Carolina.¹ As a female art instructor, she remembered she had a much harder time

¹ Elizabeth Ross, phone correspondence with author, February 22, 2020.

being acknowledged within the art department, where many of her male colleagues received preferential treatment simply because they were male and thus, in her experience, the administration felt they had a better understanding of art. At the time, the department had nine full time arts staff, only three of whom were women. Elizabeth said clearly that the men in the department were opposed to what the women faculty wanted regarding the art department's development. Over the years that I have known her, Elizabeth has hinted at the struggle she has had with her colleagues about the structure of the art program at CPCC, but despite those challenges, I knew that Elizabeth cared. She loves her students, she loves art, and she loves teaching. Even into her 80s now, she continues to teach every week. Her love of teaching that has outweighed the institutional difficulties she faced is the inspiration for the subjects of this thesis.

When I started graduate school in 2018, I knew I wanted to continue writing about Black Mountain College's art department, but how would I write about an arts program in a History MA program? I explored the history of progressive art education in the South but ultimately returned to focus on Black Mountain College. With the help of archivist Heather South at the Western Regional Archives, we pinpointed two unmarried women who had been both students and instructors at Black Mountain College. While reading Mary "Molly" Gregory and Hazel Larsen Archer's interviews about their time at the school in the 1940s, I was reminded of Elizabeth's stories about the department at CPCC. It was then, while thinking of Elizabeth, that I decided to analyze their roles as both students and faculty within the male-dominated art program at Black Mountain College based on cultural, educational, and gender roles in the 1940s. This thesis examines the conundrum of women's inequality in the art department of a

progressive school—Black Mountain College---which promoted equality, and how they still managed, despite the difficulties, to work because of their “sheer love” of teaching.²

² Hazel Larsen Archer, “Interview with Hazel Larsen Archer,” interview by Walt Parks, *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, 34.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mary “Molly” Gregory (1914-2006) and Hazel Larsen Archer (1921-2001) both arrived at Black Mountain College in the 1940s as students. Gregory mastered woodworking and Archer photography. They immersed themselves in the culture at Black Mountain College as they studied their fields. In a 1972 interview with Mary Emma Harris, a Black Mountain College researcher, Karen Karnes (1925-2016), another female art instructor in the 1950s, said that the college was a “place where somebody would come for two years and really have a transition and begin working... and have somebody more skilled there [to guide the student].”³ She stated that students received “inspiration and instruction and guidance,” which Gregory and Archer continued when they took teaching positions at Black Mountain College following their education there.⁴

Scholarly works on Black Mountain College focus most on the well-known figures that either taught or learned at the school.⁵ Most notably, these books tell the story of the educational methods that Josef Albers (1888-1976), the art department head at the school from 1933-1948, and founder John Andrew Rice (1888-1968) implemented at Black Mountain College. As for the students, these stories focus on famous artists’ innovation of artistic ideas years after their schooling, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and John Cage. The story of students who

³ Karen Karnes, “Interview with Karen Karnes,” interview by Mary Emma Harris, *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, 6.

⁴ Karnes, who attended a summer session in 1948, will be analyzed in the same context of Archer and Gregory. However, because of their long involvement at the school, the focus is mainly on Archer and Gregory because of their vast amount of experience at Black Mountain College.

⁵ Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987). Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972). Katherine Chaddock Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities: John Andrew Rice of Black Mountain College* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

returned to teach, though, are less discussed--only mentioned occasionally in contemporary programs from the college and in publications and exhibitions curated by the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center in Asheville, North Carolina.⁶ This thesis expands on these brief explorations by studying Hazel Larsen Archer and Mary Gregory's teaching methods and their insights on art education to clarify progressive and non-progressive ways in which the college operated and the impact of Black Mountain College's progressive education model had on students.⁷

Though not marketed as an art school, it emphasized art as a fundamental subject for all students--including women and all races--to equality engage in balanced learning. Equality, in the case of Black Mountain College, meant education presented to all students the same, regardless of gender, race, etc. Education was accessible to all, and this education was progressive in nature. Progressivism strived for an improvement of the human condition by being individually proficient in many areas. As a progressive college, Black Mountain College used this idea for a cultivation of students' individual skills—therefore, all students who attended received equal opportunity no matter if their gender, race, or background.

⁶ These sources include the Black Mountain Bulletins sent out each year. These Bulletins are found in full on the North Carolina Digital Archives collection. The exhibitions include *Begin to See: The Photographers of Black Mountain College* (which highlights Hazel Larsen Archer) and *Remembering Black Mountain College* (which Archer, Gregory, and Karnes (later discussed in chapter 3 due to her limited time at Black Mountain College compared to Archer and Gregory) participated in. "Black Mountain College Bulletin: Announcements 1947-48." *Black Mountain College Bulletin*, 5, no. 3 (April 1947): 1-16. <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll44/id/616> "Black Mountain College Bulletin-Newsletter," *Black Mountain College*, January 1943, 1, no. 2, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll44/id/571>. "Black Mountain College Bulletin Newsletter" *Black Mountain College*, August 1944, 2, no. 8, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll44/id/763>. "Black Mountain College Bulletin Newsletter," *Black Mountain College*, December 1943, 2 #3, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll44/id/916/rec/24>.

⁷ I also consider Karen Karnes' perspective, but less so than Gregory and Archer's experiences at Black Mountain College, since they were much longer and confined to my era of focus. Karnes began teaching in 1953, while Albers, a key figure in this thesis, left the school in 1948.

In 1933, at Black Mountain College, founder John Andrew Rice implemented nineteenth and twentieth century education philosopher John Dewey's progressive education methods to create individual curricula for students. Dewey's influence on progressive education in the early twentieth century remained profound by mid-century. His philosophy used experience-based education, which encouraged a student to problem-solve using their surroundings and community. The moral and democratic ideas from the era were standard in Dewey's books on education, such as *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education*. Historians have examined Dewey's progressive educational practices implemented in the Progressive Era. David T. Hanson's *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education* discusses Dewey's ideas concerning curriculum. Hanson's primary argument is that Dewey's ideas were too radical and had a smaller impact than most believed. However, he states that making art is a "breeding" ground of thoughts to further critical thinking.⁸ Daniel M. Savage's *John Dewey's Liberalism: Individual, Community, and Self-Development* discusses the impact of education on the individual, which is a major theme of artists from Black Mountain College. Savage examines Dewey's emphasis on the development of self within a progressive curriculum.⁹

A biography of John Andrew Rice discusses his reasoning for starting the program based on John Dewey's philosophies and how he implemented those ideas. In *Visions and Vanities: John Andrew Rise of Black Mountain College*, Katherine Chaddock Reynolds gives an overview of his inspirations and how he set about improving higher education. The philosophy of Black Mountain College was taking the practicalities of John Dewey's ideas and applying them to all

⁸ David T. Hanson, *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

⁹ Daniel M. Savage, *John Dewey's Liberalism: Individual, Community, and Self-Development* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

types of academic subjects. And although the school was not solely an art school, by the 1940s many of the influential artists of the twentieth century were products of Black Mountain. This biography of John Rice addresses how he implemented progressive ideas in an institution, and how they impacted the school's culture. His curriculum design is stated as being "progressive curricular experimentation," which differed from other colleges that followed England and German methods of education.¹⁰ For example, though Josef Albers was German, the Bauhaus, where he previously was an instructor, had the same experience-based education. Rice chose him to run the art program due to both his disciplinarian and creative nature.¹¹ The information in this book is valuable for understanding the reasoning behind Rice's education plan that was based on John Dewey's work. Furthermore, Frank H. Farley and Ronald W. Nepurud's *The Foundations of Aesthetics, Art, and Art Education* contains essays explain the cultural value of aesthetic teachings and the benefits of art on life values and adult life. It furthers Dewey's educational philosophies by explaining the "nature of the relationships that exists between educator, information, and student," to improve "cognition and perception" through aesthetic and art.¹²

A 1943 *Bulletin* from Black Mountain College, which describes the curriculum of the entire school, speaks of the pragmatic values that Dewey stressed.¹³ The *Bulletin* states that through practical studies and "technical exercises" in drawing, color, and general design, students in art would gain the skills of "observation and imagination" and "workmanlike discipline."¹⁴ Rice hoped "artistic experience" would "support learning in any discipline." He also valued experimental learning, emotional, cultural, and social development, and democratic

¹⁰ Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities*, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² Frank H. Farley and Ronald W. Nepurud, *The Foundations of Aesthetics, Art, and Art Education* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 221.

¹³ This Bulletin was usually a quarterly publication for the college to give updates to students about the classes offered and topics of interest.

¹⁴ Black Mountain College Bulletin Catalogue, December 1943, 2, no. 3, 1.

input from both students and faculty.¹⁵ The hope of the school was to prepare students for life, not just for artistic and artisanal professions—to allow them to make informed decisions. Within the art department, he achieved this by hiring high-profile artists, such as Josef Albers, Anni Albers (1899-1994), Merce Cunningham (1919-2009), Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), and John Cage (1912-1992), who focused on self-discipline and design concepts to enhance observation, reflection, and imagination. The teachings and values from Black Mountain College influenced many of the most prominent artists of the latter half of the twentieth century, including Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Dorothea Rockburne, all of whom attended the school as students. Many of these artists spoke about how the school contributed to their skills and creative output later in life as professionals.

While scholars and the public have focused on prominent artists emerging from Black Mountain College, this thesis focuses on lesser known artists that emerged from the school. These artists, particularly Archer and Gregory, were not just experts in their fields, but also master educators who skillfully and passionately guided others to become well-rounded and creative. By analyzing women's roles in this era and place, I expose the passion these women had for their fields and how they both challenged and conformed to society's gendered expectations during the mid-twentieth century. These societal expectations include having little opportunity to reach their full potential because of opportunities given to men and negative societal views of women at the time.¹⁶ Unlike the perceived notion of southern women as housewives, southern belles, or merely women who only attended school to find a husband, career-driven women existed, and some existed at Black Mountain College. The methods used to

¹⁵ Reynolds, 2.

¹⁶ These negative views come in the form of arts versus craft-- wherein women educators at Black Mountain College were often assigned to crafts positions (seen as a lesser art form at the time, discussed further in chapter 3).

gain information about the experiences of these women focus mainly on direct, first-hand sources, such as oral histories and documents from the college, like bulletins, school records, and letters. Therefore, this thesis uses their own thoughts to describe what occurred at the college, which provides a more thorough picture of what occurred. This thesis adds to the historiography of Black Mountain College's educational methods, as well as adds understanding of Black Mountain College's place in progressive Southern art education.

Art education was limited, especially for women, in the United States for the first two centuries of the nation's existence. The approach to learning art was through apprenticeship or as an itinerant, self-taught, or private lessons for the wealthy. During the nineteenth century, members of wealthy, influential families, and a small number of less privileged Americans, traveled overseas to European art schools, underwent apprenticeships with artists, embarked on Grand Tours, or engaged in all three while also attending academies in the United States.

One of the few American art schools that existed in the nineteenth century was the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The Academy, like other institutions of higher learning, was primarily only accessible to the wealthy. Prominent nineteenth century American artists such as Thomas Eakins and Mary Cassatt attended the Academy.¹⁷ Both went to Europe to gain more experience in the arts. By 1876, Eakins returned to teach at the Academy, and with Fairman Rogers, a chairman of the Academy, transformed the curriculum using European methods. Eakins focused on the application of arts within an artistic or artisanal profession, and he provided the college with experience-based studies in anatomy, life, and cadaver modeling.¹⁸ These European methods became standard in American art education. Black Mountain College, and particularly the influence of Josef Albers focused more on design concepts with the

¹⁷ "Timeline," The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, <https://pafaarchives.omeka.net/timeline>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

experience-based studies of Dewey. Black Mountain College took a non-traditional approach to art education and its progressive way of teaching and learning art was cutting-edge for the time. It contributed to reforming art curriculum standards at many levels.

Histories of post-secondary art education remain limited given the focus on primary and secondary grade education rather than college and graduate level. However, Michael Day's "Influences of Discipline-based Art Education Within the Field of Art Education" and Carole Henry's "Reflections on Manuel Barkan's Contributions to Art Education" offer some insight. While they focus on elementary and secondary education, they explore the history of curriculum reform as well as the influence of art history, art criticism, and the role of the studio artist within the education system. They also address the impact of the above on the life of students to give them a wider understanding of the world through cultural education.¹⁹ This echoes the philosophy driving John Dewey and Black Mountain College: by teaching with pragmatic and democratic educational techniques, students are more likely to succeed in life because they are receiving a wider education and critical thinking skills. This thesis shows how this idea was implemented within the school and how it both succeeded and went somewhat astray.

Gregory and Archer's role in the history of art education and the history of Black Mountain College's implementation of progressive ideas is important because women's roles in art education remains understudied. Gregory and Archer attended Black Mountain College with the purpose of learning how to teach art.²⁰ Unlike other female students who were beginning their college education at Black Mountain College, Gregory and Archer had already completed

¹⁹ Michael Day, "Influences of Discipline-based Art Education Within the Field of Art Education." *Visual Arts Research* 23 (1997): 19-24. Carole Henry, "Reflections on Manuel Barkan's Contributions to Art Education," *Art Education* 55 (2002): 6-11.

²⁰ Mary Gregory Papers, "Application for Admission," State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC, USA. Hazel Larsen Papers, "Application for Admission," State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

Bachelor's programs. Elizabeth Ross, who helped inspire this thesis and who attended an MFA program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) in 1959, remembers that she only had a couple of options—UNCG and East Carolina University--to pursue an MFA.²¹ She chose the school based on where her husband was located at the time. In the 1940s, it made sense that women continued education at Black Mountain College because they could still pursue their higher education while apprenticeships in art were increasingly less common. But the school was not the best environment for women, because even though it emphasized women's learning, this was not necessarily executed in practice. As in Ross's case at CPCC, they had little voice about the development and structure of the art department. This thesis examines the limited opportunities women had at Black Mountain College and what forces prevented them from gaining more opportunities. These include budgetary concerns, debates over fine arts versus crafts in the art world, and 1940s gender roles. By first looking at the school's educational structure for students, especially female students, and then examining the faculty structure for women, this thesis argues that the cultural and social standards for female artists were rooted in gender inequality and discrimination. Black Mountain College offers a case study of 1940s standards and experiences in female art education because of its unique curriculum and supposed emphasis on equality.²²

Gregory and Archer were chosen for this thesis because fewer women than men taught at the college and even fewer students (statistically more women than men) came back to teach.

Their particular experiences help explain how the school taught self-exploration and

²¹ Black Mountain College did not offer an MFA program and also disbanded in 1957 two years after Ross started her MFA program at UNCG.

²² Gender was emphasized in the first line of the first school mission. Rice encouraged "men and women" to join, and emphasized people as a whole regardless of gender. "'Purpose of the College' Draft," *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/43601>.

individualism because they understand the college as both student and faculty member. Other women also taught at Black Mountain, including Anni Albers, Mary Caroline “M.C.” Richards, Dorothea Rockburne, Elaine de Kooning, Gwendolyn Lawrence, and Ruth Asawa.²³ But by examining Gregory and Archer’s teaching styles and educational ideas, the translation of a progressive education on students can be assessed and compared to their colleagues who were taught at formal institutions before becoming instructors. Unlike many other female students, Gregory and Archer had bachelor’s degrees when they enrolled at Black Mountain College. But they had the added experience of the progressive art program there, instilling experimentation and combining disciplines. Both stated that they drew their teaching method from Josef Albers and cited him as a major resource; however, they were unable to pursue the higher opportunities that their male colleagues could reach within the school.²⁴ This was especially the case for Gregory, who despite efforts to advance while improving her teaching method, stayed in one area the entire eight years she was at Black Mountain College while younger and less experienced male instructors came in to teach areas she was more than qualified to teach. The interviews with these women offer insightful views on education, including support and connection within the school community and significant progress as individuals.

Several scholarly works on women educators support these women’s views on education, as well as expand on the field. Margaret A. Nash and Lisa S. Romano’s “Citizenship for the College Girl: Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education for Women in the United States in the 1930s” argues that eugenics and citizenship education pushed more women to attend

²³ These women, however, were not students there, and thus not focused on.

²⁴ Mary Gregory, “Interview with Mary Gregory.” Interview by Mary Emma Harris. *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, 2. Hazel Larsen Archer, “Interview with Hazel Larsen Archer,” interview by Walt Parks, *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, 39.

college in the 1930s. This article supports the increasing number of women attending Black Mountain College from 1933-1957, providing context on why women attended college and what they learned from their education.²⁵

Anne Durst's *Women Educators in the Progressive Era: The Women Behind Dewey's Laboratory School* argues that four women's daily experiences at the Laboratory School--which began in 1896 and taught thought, pragmatism, and cooperation—were shaped by “individual freedom and collective well-being” of progressive education.²⁶ These ideas are reflected in the women educators at Black Mountain College after reading through their interviews. They all spoke about their individuality and the collective atmosphere at the school, which was a key part of the school's progressive education. Durst provides a useful outline for presenting several individual's ideas, and also furthers the women's perspective on education in a progressive school and how daily life took on the progressive ideal.²⁷

In addition to Durst's perspective, *Women Educators: Employees of Schools in Western World Countries*, an anthology about women's contributions to education edited by Patricia A. Schmuck, argues that women have received little attention with contributions to education. Though the book provides context to women educators in several different countries and focuses on elementary school, Schmuck's chapter, “Women School Employees in the United States,” outlines the history of women educators in the US. This is particularly helpful to my thesis because the history includes both the positive and negative attitudes toward gender equality in

²⁵ Margaret A. Nash and Lisa S. Romano, “Citizenship for the College Girl: Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education for Women in the United States in the 1930s,” *Teachers College Record* 114: 2 (2012).
PAGES?

²⁶ Anne Durst, *Women Educators in the Progressive Era: The Women Behind Dewey's Laboratory School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2010, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

the 1940s and 1950s, and supports my claim that Archer and Gregory were regarded as less important than the men teaching at Black Mountain College.²⁸

The Arts at Black Mountain College by Mary Emma Harris highlights factors that influenced the arts at Black Mountain College, and also contains information about the impact of the school on twentieth century art. The book touches on the creation of the college and the influences Dewey's theories had on the school's development.²⁹ The school came about because of the Progressive Movement, in which an idealized concept of a "successful reform" pushed society into a "new economic and spiritual order."³⁰ Harris claims that the college "reaffirmed the democratic, experimental spirit that had earlier characterized that Progressive Era," which had been demoralized by other schools establishing their educational programs with a conservative, socialist, and "totalitarian system."³¹ Martin Duberman's *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* is another book with observations by many students from Black Mountain College and discusses the dynamics of the college and its influence on individual students' independence.³² It argues that the relationships between students and faculty defined Black Mountain College. This thesis extends Duberman's work by showing the positive and negative influences the school had on its students. A significant source of information, this book argues that the school formed systematically through the progressive education movement rather than the common notion held by many scholars that it was thrown together quickly. This thesis adds analysis of teaching methods to Harris' argument, supplying a resource for the differences in male and female instructor teaching styles within the college. Duberman highlights

²⁸ Ibid., 40

²⁹ Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 2.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, 55.

perspectives from individuals affiliated with Black Mountain College. This thesis does the same, drawing on Gregory and Archer's experiences, memories, and observations to examine the role and experience of women at Black Mountain College.

Keira Roberson's University of North Carolina at Asheville undergraduate thesis "Socioeconomic Subordination and Misogyny in the Progressive Left: Women at Black Mountain College, 1933-1957" argues that the college's administration "often reinforced gender norms, neglected women's issues, and mistreated the female members of the community" through "wage gaps, dress codes, position titles, the community's approach to sexuality, and situations in which a female employee became the scapegoat."³³ This work differs from Roberson's thesis through in-depth discussion of teaching methods and assignments, arguing that they reflected the misogynistic administration.

Historiography about the workforce in America during the wartime and postwar era explain the changing roles women took on in the 1940s. Ronald Allen Goldberg and Mark Aldrich, both of whom have written about economic struggles in America in the 1940s and 1950s, discuss gaps in women's pay and the social reasons for them despite more women in the workforce after 1940. In Goldberg's *America in the Forties*, the chapter "Postwar America: Prosperity and Problems" argues that after the war Americans prospered economically and socially, but the process of improving the economy produced many struggles in the early postwar years. This thesis adds to Goldberg's chapter by focusing on both the school's and three women's economic situations, explaining that although America did prosper, many social issues hindered economic growth. Gender stereotypes placed limits on women's opportunities, therefore limiting their role in economics.

³³ Keira Roberson, "Socioeconomic Subordination and Misogyny in the Progressive Left: Women at Black Mountain College, 1933-1957" (Undergraduate Thesis, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 2018), 1.

Mark Aldrich's article "The Gender Gap in Earnings during World War II"³⁴ published in the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* argues that women's pay stayed minimal despite a misconception that it rose to the same amount as men in industrial careers prior to the Second World War. While Black Mountain College instructors were not pursuing industrial careers, the data in this article provides relevant labor analysis for women's pay rates. Some places, like Black Mountain College, had such limited resources during war time that they could barely pay their workers because the country was mobilized due to war, and this helps add context to this thesis. Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, argues that nostalgia helped spread the idea that the nuclear family was "perfect" and that all people experienced a good life as housewives and traditional families using examples from contemporary media of the time. In fact, though, this wasn't always the case and traditional families did not always mean children grew up well.³⁵ Coontz's book adds legitimacy to the idea that women aspired to be more than housewives and mothers during the era of Black Mountain College's existence. This thesis itself adds to Coontz's book because it shows several women who did not cling to this idea of a traditional family aspiration. This historiography about life in the 1940s provides context for the policies, methods, and structures within Black Mountain College and social customs from the 1940s and 1950s.

Overall, the chapters within this thesis examines Gregory and Archer as students and as instructors in Black Mountain College's educational context. This information is drawn from primary sources such as Gregory and Archer's interviews about their time at Black Mountain

³⁴ Mark Aldrich, "The Gender Gap in Earnings during World War II: New Evidence," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 42 (1989): 415-29.

³⁵ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 5.

College, their student records, and faculty and meeting notes.³⁶ The next chapter explains their experiences as students and investigates whether Black Mountain College improved their professional life as the college claimed progressive education would. The final chapter explores the school's inner workings and how its operation contributed to women's inequality in the 1940s and in the art educational world.

³⁶ Their interviews were conducted in the 1970s. This was during second-wave feminism, and perhaps some of their comments on Black Mountain College may be misremembered or influenced by life experience and feminist reforms. This is why a large amount of attention is on their college applications in Chapter 2, because it provides insight to what they were thinking and feeling at the time of their arrival at Black Mountain College. This thesis does argue, though subtly, that Gregory and Archer were in fact early feminists because of their teaching methods and thoughts and feelings regarding their involvement at Black Mountain College. As a disclaimer, they were north-eastern women who spent a majority of their 20s and 30s at Black Mountain College in a rural southern town. Their northern background is likely to have influenced their feminist thoughts.

CHAPTER 2: LIFE AS A STUDENT

Student experience at Black Mountain College reveals women's roles at the college during the 1940s. The goal of this chapter is to explore this history and place it in the context of the art world and cultural standards of the era. More former male students gained future traction in the art world than female students. One factor that must be considered is how the Second World War changed school demographics from the early 1940s, when a majority of students were women, to the late 1940s, when the GI Bill allowed more men to attend college.³⁷ Why, when women were the majority at the school, did they have less renown in later years? How does this reflect the 1940s and 1950's values and cultural climate academically? This chapter argues that despite the open and creative environment, the school hindered some personal and professional experiences for women due to their marital status, their limited choices in career goals, and the state of the country and art world at the time of their attendance.³⁸ It reveals their inner world and career desires.

The history of Black Mountain College is important to take into consideration when speaking about the role of women at the school. John Andrew Rice, a former professor at progressive Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, was dismissed from the university because of disagreements on academic practices with president of Rollins, Hamilton Holt.³⁹ This termination led Rice to open Black Mountain College in 1933 in the mountains of North Carolina in Black Mountain, North Carolina near Asheville. Its proximity near this larger town,

³⁷ The GI Bill, or the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided World War II veterans with benefit funds. Many men used the funds for college education.

³⁸ Black Mountain College Bulletin, January 1943, 1, no. 2, 2.

³⁹ "Letter, Hamilton Holt to John Andrew Rice, 1933," *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/40032>.

already an arts community, meant Black Mountain College was close enough to allow students opportunities offered by the nearby large town. However, its rural setting gave the students and faculty ample freedom to be creatively free and also achieve the goal of a self-sustaining program. While Black Mountain, North Carolina had a conservative bent and the townspeople often regarded Black Mountain College poorly because of its acceptance of diverse array of people, it was able to operate without much interference from the town because of its rural location near Lake Eden.⁴⁰

The purpose of the college was to allow students to gain “creative consciousness” which meant an “inner freedom in judgment and action.” Through experiencing many different areas of study, students could apply various methods to problem solve more effectively. In the first line of his purpose statement for the college, Rice encouraged “men and women” to join, and emphasized people as a whole regardless of gender.⁴¹ The ultimate goal led to a person’s acquisition of “some ability in handling the material of the intellectual world, and more important still, handling themselves in relation to other people.”⁴² The education was meant to round an individual. One purpose of this chapter is to examine what occurred when Gregory and Archer attended the school with this progressive model.

⁴⁰ Much of the concern the townspeople spoke against was the college’s acceptance of “homosexuals” and African-Americans. A woman named Alma Stone was the first African-American to attend in the summer of 1944, and artist Jacob Lawrence taught during the summer of 1946, while his wife took classes. Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 7. “Black Mountain College: Innovation in Art, Education, and Lifestyle—African-Americans at Black Mountain College” *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed December 17, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/exhibits/show/bmc/1940s-josef-albers-years/african-americans-at-black-mou>.

⁴¹ “‘Purpose of the College’ Draft,” by John Rice.

⁴² *Ibid.*

For the purposes of this thesis the story begins in the early 1940s, with Gregory's arrival in 1941 and Archer's in 1944.⁴³ Male enrollment decreased during the war. As one example, the student body had 67 students in its 1943-1944 school year, with 15 of those men (two of whom were on leave to participate in the Armed Forces).⁴⁴ The faculty totaled 18 members (five of whom were on leave), where only three were women—Molly Gregory in Woodworking, Anni Albers in Textile Design, and Gertrude Elise Straus in Violin.⁴⁵

To accommodate these 67 students, the college ran mainly on student tuition and on the work program, which helped make the campus self-sustainable. Students and faculty farmed on the premises and helped build facilities, while students also worked in the kitchens and assisted administration. This meant there were various programs at the college that did not need outside help. The work program allowed students to “engage in planning, building or farming, or doing office or library work.”⁴⁶ By participating in the work program, the students learned skills through experience and developed “good workmanship.”⁴⁷ Molly Gregory noted in one of her interviews that the work program caused “everything [to] fall in line from there on in.”⁴⁸ This meant the school was able to run self-sustainably, with students engaged in required responsibilities outside of class.⁴⁹

⁴³ Most of the observations of Gregory and Archer come from years after their time at the school, influenced by continued life experience, the benefit of hindsight of their time at Black Mountain College, and the understanding of art's effect on Black Mountain College. These observations therefore do not directly explain the atmosphere of the school exactly, but by situating their reflections in the context of student records, a wider picture of women's experience from the time appears.

⁴⁴ Black Mountain College Bulletin, August 1944, 2, no. 8, 7.

⁴⁵ Black Mountain College Bulletin, December 1943, 2, no. 3, 10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁸ Gregory Interview, 4.

⁴⁹ There are other work program colleges in the South at the time, including Berea College and Warren Wilson College. For the purposes of this thesis, only Black Mountain College work program and its effects on students is analyzed because of Black Mountain College's significance to art movements in later years.

For the school to operate, community had top priority. Community developed the individuals, which in turn helped them accomplish individual goals. The institution aimed to give all students an “equal chance to find their place,” because the community-run environment provided little distinction between students: they all shared the same amount of responsibility and it was part of their role as a student to do the necessary work to sustain the campus.⁵⁰

Black Mountain College’s educational structure provided students a progressive interdisciplinary education. This type of education taught students to look at evidence and problem-solve based on reasoning, collaboration with peers, and their own observations.⁵¹ The academic level of study was equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts degree, and once their courses were completed, they were able to apply to graduate schools if that was their intention.⁵² The programs themselves were unique to the individual student; they created their own path after course experimentation.

The College itself allowed students to explore courses that reflected their personal interests when first arriving. This meant that no set of specific classes were required except to enroll in preliminary classes to discover their interests. The student was encouraged not to register for classes the first week, but to spend time “visiting class, talking with teachers and students, and finding out the best thing for him to do.”⁵³ Students worked with a faculty advisor (chosen by the student) to plan their courses after their first year. Because it was an interdisciplinary school, a student could pursue many areas.⁵⁴ Students were encouraged to take

⁵⁰ Black Mountain College Bulletin, December 1943, vol. 2, nos. 3 and 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

⁵² Ibid., 9.

⁵³ ““Organization and Procedure at Black Mountain College” by John Rice, ca. 1933-1939 (6 pages),” *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/40041>.

⁵⁴ The academic disciplines included History, Government, Economics, Sociology and Anthropology, Psychology, Philosophy, English and American Literature, Foreign Languages, Mathematics, Physics and

multiple areas of study to become well-rounded citizens and as they worked towards a bachelor's degree. Students first began as "juniors," and made their way up to "senior" level.⁵⁵ The junior level allowed students to explore their interests. For the senior level, a course plan needed to be created and approved with a faculty advisor. A student needed to pass examinations to show competence in the area they wanted to study. Their record of study was also taken into consideration.⁵⁶

Gregory graduated in 1936 from progressive Bennington College in Vermont while Archer graduated in 1944 from Milwaukee State Teacher's College through the University of Wisconsin. This gave them a more thorough view of the education received at Black Mountain College because they were not learning their subject material for the first time. But at the same time, it limited their ability to speak on how effective the school was for a new college student. To understand their previously acquired abilities and how Black Mountain College allowed improvement artistically, a history of their studies prior to Black Mountain is required.

When Gregory began at Black Mountain College, she already spent five years teaching at a secondary school in Massachusetts.⁵⁷ Gregory's transcript from Bennington shows a full roster of sculpture classes, which gained her a bachelor of arts in sculpture. Major projects in sculpture, including wood carving and modeling, show her initial interest in wood. She took life drawing, design, and painting at Black Mountain College to cultivate her art skills after her bachelor's degree. Gregory heard about Black Mountain College from her Bennington College roommate Ruthie Bailey, whose brother David Bailey attended.⁵⁸

Chemistry, Art, Architecture, Writing, Dramatics, and Music. Black Mountain College Bulletin Catalogue, December 1943, Vol 2: 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷ "Mary Gregory," Black Mountain College Project, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Biographies/GregoryMary/GregoryMaryBIO.htm>.

⁵⁸ Gregory, Interview, 3.

In her application to Black Mountain College, Gregory said her interest in attending the school lay in gaining a better knowledge of art and teaching. The opportunity to be a part of a community also guided her decision. She hoped to teach sculpture. To achieve this, she applied to be an apprentice teacher at Black Mountain College, which she received because of her previous experience teaching sculpture. During her apprenticeship, she took over the woodshop on campus and taught woodworking classes. She left Black Mountain College in 1947 to manage a woodshop in Vermont where she was also a designer. By 1953, she had set up her own woodworking business and also taught at primary schools until her retirement.⁵⁹

Gregory stated she had some issues with the classes at Black Mountain College because of her previous education. Gregory said that she felt too advanced for Albers' design classes because of her training at Bennington, and felt the class was designed more for younger or inexperienced students who needed to learn basics.⁶⁰ At the time, there were few MFA art programs in North Carolina, so Black Mountain College provided another source for learning about and studying art. In Gregory's case, she felt more suited toward teaching than continued learning. The classes she took seemed to help her learn new teaching methods more than improving her artistic skills. She did, however, learn woodworking techniques through trial and error via the work program.

A large part of Gregory's time at Black Mountain College was spent in the work program. Gregory described first-hand what the work program was like for her and other students. She worked on one area of the campus called the Jalowetz house. Because she already had some skills in building, she helped complete the house, which had only been framed and partially sided when she arrived at Black Mountain College. She stated several mistakes were

⁵⁹ "Mary Gregory," Black Mountain College Project.

⁶⁰ Gregory, Interview, 4.

made by everyone on that project, but because of her previously acquired abilities in building, she could help correct some of them. One mishap involving another student had to do with laying the “roof in cupgrease,” rather than asphalt cement.⁶¹ The students learned practical skills during the program, and Gregory felt she improved with building while completing the house in the work program.

During Gregory’s time as a student at Black Mountain College, another student ran the work program. But the individual was forced to leave due to the Second World War and Gregory took over the work program for some time later in 1942. Throughout her time at the college, Gregory stated that different people ran the program, and she often did it in “spots.”⁶² She stated she “was the one they could [rely on]” to run the program because she knew how to do it and she was a skilled craftsman even as a student.⁶³ But a major reason she stated for being placed as the head of the work program was because she was “single and not given to going home.”⁶⁴ Her unmarried status gave her more reason to continue at the school because she had few other options within North Carolina and little money to travel. Gregory’s words suggest that she ran the work program simply because the school knew she would stay a longer period of time than most.

Hazel Larsen Archer began at Black Mountain College by taking summer courses in 1944 while attending the University of Wisconsin. After that summer, she enrolled again in 1945 and studied under art department head Josef Albers for several years. She became the first full-time photography instructor in 1949 and left in 1953. After, she did freelance photography, and

⁶¹ Gregory, Interview, 33.

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.

in 1963 became director of adult education at the Tucson Museum of Art in Tucson, Arizona. She stayed in education the rest of her life.⁶⁵

Archer inquired about the summer sessions at Black Mountain College and was accepted into the art program in June of 1944.⁶⁶ To help pay for the sessions, she asked about working to help pay her room and board, which was a fee of \$320.00.⁶⁷ The school replied on May 23, 1944 that there were no provisions, but scholarship assistance was available, which helped her considerably throughout her time at Black Mountain College.⁶⁸

Archer applied stating that her favorite medium to work with was oil paint and that she had interests in art education, design, color, drawing, painting, art theory, and textile design to supplement her previous art courses.⁶⁹ Black Mountain College cultivated her interest in photography. Archer applied fully to the academic program on September 14, 1944. She stated that her intention and goal at Black Mountain College was to obtain a “well-rounded education, not concentrated in one field.”⁷⁰ While there, she explored her interests and ended up mastering photography, becoming the full-time photography instructor in 1949. Her main interest coming into the program, though, was teaching arts and crafts, while also wanting to “gain [a] relationship between study and play and living and working with others.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ David Vaughn. *Hazel Larsen Archer: Black Mountain College Photographer* (North Carolina: Black Mountain Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Gregory Application for Admission, April 1941, Series 506.3, Box 3, Folder 12, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC, 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Correspondence from Anne Mangold to Mary Gregory, April 9, 1941, Series 506.3, Box 3, Folder 12, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

⁶⁹ Archer Application for Admission, May 1944, Series 506.3, Box 4, Folder 1, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC, 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

In her letters to and from the school, she emphasized American values. She described herself as coming from a good home, and that despite a mobility disability, she was quite able on her own.⁷² Teachers, including Josef Albers who mentored her throughout her time there, also wrote a letter home to her father Chris Larsen (who provided Archer financial assistance) giving him a progress report of how well Archer did in her work study in the administrative office and in her classes with him.⁷³ The fact that Albers wrote progress reports to Archer's father provides an interesting dynamic into how women were treated. While Gregory paid for the school through the teacher apprentice program, it seems that Archer's father also contributed to her tuition. Despite the school's progressive mission, Albers made it a point to inform him of her progress.⁷⁴

The day-to-day life at Black Mountain College was just as much about the classes and work program as it was about community. Susan Weil, who attended Black Mountain College as a student in the late 1940s, reflected on the atmosphere at the school in a June 2014 interview with for the Columbia Center for Oral History. She initially wanted to attend because Josef Albers taught there, much like how Albers drew in Gregory and Archer. She stated that their day-to-day life had many more elements to it than just the schoolwork. It included the work program and discussion of intellectual subjects at mealtimes.⁷⁵

We had our studies, and we did our work for our classes and stuff. But we had a working farm and students were all part of making the school run. You had to have your community assignments... [The] place was full of people, eyes wide, trying to understand

⁷² Archer Application for Admission, 3.

⁷³ Correspondence from Josef Albers to Chris Larsen, June 6, 1946, Series 506.3, Box 4, Folder 1, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

⁷⁴ This highlights patriarchal elements in the school's leadership. Today, such information is not shared with parents as it would violate student privacy rights.

⁷⁵ Susan Weil, "Oral History with Susan Weil," interview with Mary Marshall Clark, Columbia Center for Oral History, January 24, 2014, <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/artist/oral-history/susan-weil>.

everything about possibilities. I always thought that the most important thing at Black Mountain was not the classes you went to, but in the evening when you'd sit in the dining hall and you'd talk.⁷⁶

Weil's experience was much the same as Gregory and Archer's experience at Black Mountain College as students. Gregory mentioned that students and staff typically had those mealtime discussions, and that, though informal, they contributed to the learning experience at Black Mountain College.⁷⁷

When asked about if men and women were treated differently, though, Weil said "Maybe, but I didn't focus on that."⁷⁸ Many students have stated that Albers, though a mentor to many and often the reason students were drawn to Black Mountain College, had an intense relationship with students. Weil recounted that Albers gave heavy criticism to his students, and while in the classroom—because they were not artists yet—they were to listen to him. Gregory and Archer both noted this behavior, as well.⁷⁹ Weil stated that her former husband, neo-Dadaist artist Robert Rauschenberg, also received as much criticism from Albers in the classroom. Weil attributed any undisciplined behavior she might have had to her age, though. "And you know, he had all these rules and everything, and you had to do everything his way. I was still a teenager, so I was not good at accepting being told what to do all the time."⁸⁰ He treated all students, male and female, this way. Gregory stated that she felt "inhibited" by Albers' teaching, because she felt he was more suited toward beginners.⁸¹ She attributed this more toward her advanced abilities than to her being female.

⁷⁶ Weil, Interview, 25.

⁷⁷ Gregory, Interview, 20.

⁷⁸ Weil, Interview, 35.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸¹ Gregory, Interview, 4.

Overall, the women students at Black Mountain College were on mostly equal terms as the men. The differences came after the Second World War when more men started attending and then slowly started making a name for themselves in major art communities like New York, including Weil's former husband, Rauschenberg. This was in part because of the GI Bill. After the Second World War, men returned and used the GI Bill's funds to pay for school, thus more men attended school and women turned back to the home. Patricia Albjerg Graham's "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education" notes that the number of women attending college by 1950 decreased from 40% to 31% compared to the beginning of the 1940s. Only 24% received degrees by 1950 whereas 41% earned a degree by 1940.⁸² The GI Bill reinforced stereotypical gender roles, allowing more men to attend school by 1950 and therefore limiting women's percentages of attending school and receiving degrees.

Gregory and Archer had several life situations in common. They both had previous experience in the arts, including bachelor's degrees, and were both unmarried with few other opportunities elsewhere.⁸³ They also attended the school to learn from Albers and had similar goals in mind when they attended Black Mountain College: to become instructors, though Gregory did find Albers' classes a hindrance when she had already displayed art. Her ultimate goal, however, at Black Mountain College, was to learn more teaching methods, though Gregory eventually left the school to apprentice in a wood shop, accepted because of her long time

⁸² Kathleen Frydl, *The GI Bill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Patricia Albjerg Graham, "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (1978): 759-773.

⁸³ At Black Mountain College, married women were allowed to teach, but often their husband accompanied them as teachers. Discrimination often barred female teachers from remaining in their profession after they married because of the male dominated administration. The discrimination on women having jobs influenced a stereotype that women typically only had job for "play" money rather than for self-sustaining income. PBS Online: Only A Teacher: Teaching Timeline. (n.d.). Retrieved November 26, 2020, from <https://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/timeline.html>.

experience in the woodshop at Black Mountain College. Archer stayed at Black Mountain College until 1953, then continued working in Black Mountain as a family portrait photographer, before moving to Tucson, Arizona to head the education department at the Tucson Museum of Art.⁸⁴ She married a former Black Mountain College student after leaving. Unmarried status affected women as instructors, but as students women were equal to men.⁸⁵ The women students trained, learned discipline, and had the same level of opportunity in the same capacity as male students. They were not regulated to certain forms of art as students and had more freedom in their ability to create and express ideas than they did as instructors, as discussed in the next chapter. Though the GI Bill changed the dynamic of the school as a whole, the major differences in treatment between men and women occurred at the professional level as instructors where Gregory and Archer experienced more direct inequality through unequal treatment and more limited opportunities.

⁸⁴ David Vaughn, *Hazel Larsen Archer: Black Mountain College Photographer*.

⁸⁵ Unmarried women were affected because of the stereotypes that women must supported by a husband.

CHAPTER 3: LIFE AS AN INSTRUCTOR

Black Mountain College prided itself on “scrutinizing the values of modern society and the frameworks through which people see themselves and their world; it must question convention and tradition.”⁸⁶ This suggests progressive ideals not only in education, but also social attitudes and customs. The college wished for a self-sustained, positive community in which students and faculty could express innovative and forward-thinking thoughts on society. The goal was for each student to have equal opportunity to learn and explore their interests no matter what their gender, race, or background. With the college’s promotion of a well-rounded education, students cultivated personal progress and gained individual problem-solving and communication skills. However, as Karnes stated, the school had a “different feel as faculty” than as students. The “different feel” reflects certain discrepancies in both the stature of “fine art and “crafts” with fine arts being more highly regarded and demanding higher pay, and also often resorted to traditional gender roles during the hiring practices.

While the roles of other diverse faculty are important, this chapter will focus specifically on the roles of women on the faculty and staff. Testimonies from instructors and analysis of Gregory’s Archer’s, and Karen Karnes’ experience emphasize a lack of women’s equality within the faculty. The women’s low salaries, poor treatment, and placement in the crafts (rather than fine arts) departments were products of the cultural atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s. Despite Black Mountain College’s progressive reputation, male dominance loomed over the instructional environment for the female instructors in the art department. Exploring the experience and inner worlds of these female instructors, particularly their desire for career and artistic opportunity,

⁸⁶ Karnes, Interview, 7.

helps disband southern stereotypes of white women as only housewives. They were women who moved from the north to the south, and therefore became southern women due to their longevity living in rural North Carolina.

Nuclear families dominated the American cultural landscape during the late 1940s and 1950s. Outside of domestic roles women had less opportunity for work than men after World War II. They faced stricter departmental rules than their male counterparts. Gregory, Archer, and another instructor, Karen Karnes, found fewer freedoms in the faculty environment at Black Mountain College than when they attended the school as students. The three shared experiences throughout the thirteen-year time frame between Gregory and Karnes' employment. This chapter examines their teaching methods and philosophy in comparison to Josef Albers. It explains how the school was set up instructionally along with the impact of financial troubles, a shift towards craft production, and the peculiarities the administration experienced.

Karen Karnes (1925-2016) graduated from New York's Brooklyn College in 1946 and learned to create pottery on the wheel in Italy and at Black Mountain College where she began taking summer courses in 1947.⁸⁷ In 1952, she and her husband David Weinrib became potters-in-residence at Black Mountain College. She stayed there until 1954, when she then moved to New York to work at an artist cooperative. In 1967, she moved back to North Carolina and began teaching pottery at Penland School of Crafts in Asheville, North Carolina.⁸⁸

The configuration of the art department administration at Black Mountain College offered little support for female instructors. Unlike a traditional college with checks and balances, the instructors ran an informal and democratic board where only they handled tuition

⁸⁷ Mark Shapiro, *A Chosen Path: The Ceramic Art of Karen Karnes* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 14.

⁸⁸ "Karen Karnes," The Marks Project, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.themarksproject.org/marks/karnes>.

and academic affairs, called the Board of Fellows. An advisory board existed, but rather than donors, intellectuals like Albert Einstein and John Dewey served on it. Therefore, little to no regulation meant freedom in operation and expenses. The Board of Fellows made decisions on instructors and finances, giving it effective control over faculty salaries throughout the school.⁸⁹

There were several ways to get hired at Black Mountain College. Often, the Board of Fellows would send potential faculty invitations teach summer or regular academic classes through the Board of Fellows. Others applied as students or as residents before receiving either a teacher apprenticeship or resident instructor position. From 1933 to 1948, many of the art instructors received invitations to teach by Josef Albers, who not only taught basic design, but also acted as the art department head and administrator. Though he developed a masterful curriculum and brought in many world-renowned artists to Black Mountain College, his management of the program contributed to many of the struggles female instructors faced.

Albers arrived at Black Mountain College in 1933 with an accomplished resume. He graduated from the Staatliches Bauhaus, an acclaimed design school in Dessau, Germany, and soon accepted an invitation by Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus, to teach their advanced design classes. Called “Werklehre,” translated from German as “factory teaching,” his design classes focused on mastering line, shape, color and texture to develop precision. It focused on mass production and graphic design, with little regard for emotion and personal expression.⁹⁰ When the Nazi party closed the Bauhaus in 1932 and Albers fled Germany to avoid persecution for his Jewish heritage, Rice, the founder of Black Mountain College, hired Albers

⁸⁹ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 6.

⁹⁰ Albers Foundation, “Teaching Form Through Practice,” <https://albersfoundation.org/teaching/josef-albers/texts/#>.

as a design instructor and department head the year the school opened in 1933.⁹¹ Albers used the same syllabus developed at the Bauhaus.

Albers taught in a straightforward and formulaic manner. He possessed confidence in both his teaching ability and the content he taught. In an interview with the Archives of American Art, former student at Black Mountain College Albert Lanier spoke of the atmosphere within Albers' classes, "Some regarded [Josef] Albers as a Fascist, a dictator, because he didn't react to or condone your feelings, 'I feel this and I feel that.'" He wasn't terribly concerned with what we felt. He was concerned with what we saw and that we learned to see.⁹²

Lanier provided little detail about what Albers' classroom handling looked like, but his description gives an idea of the expectations he held. Albers wanted his students to learn control over their observations and ideas. Gregory described in further detail Albers' method in her interview with Mary Emma Harris: "I think he makes everybody look at things... He's really excited about ideas." Both Lanier's and Gregory's remarks meant he praised students for their ideas and what they "saw" rather than their abilities.

Gregory spoke in detail about his teaching process in 1971, "He'd make you shut your eyes and really draw scissors, and then you'd look and see how you hadn't really understood how the scissors really worked."⁹³ In a 1968 interview, Albers said, "I would like to say what I have somewhat already said before, in my teaching which I did for about 40 years — and here again I had the biggest classes there were — I have not taught art. Instead of art I have taught

⁹¹ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 6.

⁹² Albert Lanier, "An Oral History Interview with Ruth Asawa and Albert Lanier," interview with Paul Karlstrom, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, June 21-July 5, 2002, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ruth-asawa-and-albert-lanier-12222#transcript>.

⁹³ Gregory, Interview, 6.

philosophy.”⁹⁴ The term Albers used to describe his teaching method shows this idea of “how the scissors really worked,” treating making art as a philosophical pursuit rather than just rendering forms. Therefore, he hoped students learned to absorb the fundamentals of an object at a glance. He further stated that his later translated to career environments.⁹⁵ Having the ability to observe a whole scene fully in an efficient meant one possessed the ability to solve problems more effectively.

Albert Lanier’s term “fascist” seems to oppose the democratic environment Black Mountain College promoted, but in Gregory’s description, Albers meant for students to gain observation skills and was in charge of the curriculum.⁹⁶ Gregory mentioned he rarely expressed constructive criticism, and emphasized his progressive ideas and theories. His critiques emphasized his progressive ideas and theories, and while he rarely assessed the structure or outcome of the artwork, he was “enthusiastic about things we saw.”⁹⁷ His approach to teaching extended to his role as an administrator based on Gregory’s interactions with him. Albers’s assurance in teaching “philosophy” expresses the precise, theoretical curriculum he developed, but also the view he held of himself.

Albers regarded design principles as the foundation of art because of its theoretical approach. A painting series of his, *Homage to the Square*, included advanced color theories and skill in paint mixing. Though presented as graduating colored squares inside one another to show the progression of one color to the next, this series holds what Albers thought of as intellectual based on his color theories. Crafts were typically considered only in terms of their everyday

⁹⁴ Josef Albers, “Oral history interview with Josef Albers,” interview with Sevim Fesci, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, June 22-July 5, 1968, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-josef-albers-11847#transcript>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Gregory, Interview, 9.

⁹⁷ Gregory recounted that Albers told students if their artwork “was a mess [or not]... He was mostly pretty constructive being enthusiastic about things we saw.” Ibid., 9.

functionality. At Black Mountain College, this meant that woodworking, weaving, and ceramics were considered less of an artform because of their basic and domestic use rather than consisting of sophisticated and intelligent concepts that painting, sculpture, drawing, and design held in someone like Albers' view.

Albers was self-assured about his contribution to education, which extended to his administrative role in the art department. Though he had expressed surprise over Walter Gropius inviting him to teach at the Bauhaus in the 1920s, by the 1940s, he understood the importance of his roles within an art department.⁹⁸ He exhibited the same self-assurance and hierarchical approach as an administrator as he did as an instructor. Therefore, his administrative approach contributed to diminished roles for female faculty, setting them apart. Studying Gregory's treatment by Albers during her tenure in the woodshop from 1941 to 1948 reveals this administrative atmosphere.

Gregory joined the faculty of Black Mountain College in 1942, a year after she arrived as a student. Her reflections with Mary Emma Harris in 1971 highlight the treatment of the female faculty members during Black Mountain College's existence. Gregory taught at Black Mountain for over seven years. In that time, she received little pay, stayed in the woodshop—a crafts department when she had a degree in sculpture—and watched many other guest instructors teach within the fine arts despite her advanced qualifications.

Gregory attended Black Mountain College on a teacher apprenticeship. As the Second World War approached, tuition expenses, the major source of income for the school, dropped because of a smaller student body.⁹⁹ By teaching, she bypassed tuition, but received no

⁹⁸ Albers, Interview.

⁹⁹ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 67.

compensation.¹⁰⁰ By 1942 Gregory assumed the woodshop master, but only because the Second World War forced a twenty-year-old student, Robert Bliss, who had set up the shop, to drop out of the college to enlist.¹⁰¹

Woodworking, weaving, and ceramics carry the label “craft,” equivalent to skilled labor. In the hierarchy of artforms, woodworking is a craft, a lesser artform than design, painting, drawing, and sculpture. Once regarded as a high art in previous centuries, the Industrial Revolution contributed to a shift in its importance. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, higher volumes of pottery, fiber, and wooden goods were more easily accessible due to industrialization. Less need for skilled laborers meant less importance of handmade pottery, fiber goods, and wooden goods like furniture. The higher arts included painting, sculpture, drawing, and design, which by the twentieth century required theoretical backgrounds. Though Gregory held the credentials to teach sculpture, Albers kept her in the woodworking shop throughout her seven year employment. Gregory reflected on her experience, noting that she felt she could never match up to Albers.¹⁰² She believed he taught in a more thoughtful way than she and that he had more “gift” at teaching than she did.¹⁰³ For her to continue holding such a view of Albers for a quarter of a century shows the environment in which she taught. Staying within a crafts position, one that began as a student-run studio led by a teenager, limited her reach and abilities as an instructor.¹⁰⁴

By distinguishing crafts and fine arts, Black Mountain College thus ran on a rank system of fine arts and crafts. This often translated to a salary structure that meant less pay for women

¹⁰⁰ Gregory, Interview, 2.

¹⁰¹ “Mary Gregory,” Black Mountain College Project, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Biographies/GregoryMary/GregoryMaryBIO.htm>.

¹⁰² Gregory, Interview, 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Marilyn Bauer, “Interview with Marilyn Bauer,” interview by Mary Emma Harris, *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, 51.

and a contrast in authority between tenured instructors and guest instructors. Gregory stated in her interview with Harris that “there shouldn’t be a difference in rank” between teachers.¹⁰⁵ Even at Black Mountain College, unequal pay limited the female instructors.¹⁰⁶ Anni Albers, the weaving instructor and wife of Josef Albers, made considerably less a year than Albers himself, who, according to faculty minutes in March 1937, made \$1000 compared to Anni Albers’ \$200 for the school year.¹⁰⁷ Questions about job security caused uncertainty. Gregory explained to Harris, “The thing that was wrong—or at least made it difficult—was that there wasn’t enough money to provide any measure of security. So that if you wanted to resign, you couldn’t afford to get home. And if you got fired, they would have to pay you to fire you.”¹⁰⁸ This forced instructors like Gregory to stay at Black Mountain College for years. She had little money to move away, but by staying, she also supported her own studio practice. Gregory had peers who saw benefit in keeping a studio practice, which for some helped them to stay at Black Mountain College. “I didn’t want to teach all my life... [but] I wanted to be able to make things, and I didn’t have any money.”¹⁰⁹ She found positivity in making, which to her outweighed the little compensation and work in a career she no longer wanted—the access to the equipment, materials, and space benefitted her in developing a practice. Many instructors felt the environment contributed to their work because they were able to make.

Though the college received donations over the years and tuition paid many of the school’s expenses, the faculty-run administration contributed to funding and budgetary

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ The wage gap had several stereotypical assumptions to it—that women were only using the money from work as “play” money or just supplementary to men’s salaries. This affected how single women were paid throughout the early to mid-twentieth century.

¹⁰⁷ Albers was also the head of the department, which may have increased his salary. Faculty Meeting Minutes, March 27, 1936, Series 506.1, Box 1, Folder 1, Black Mountain College Records Minutes and Attendant Papers, 1933-1956, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, Asheville, NC.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, Interview, 34.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

difficulties.¹¹⁰ Gregory said, “They didn’t have trustees so that the faculty was its own administrator. I don’t think we were very good administrators.”¹¹¹ The consequences of this caused issues in hiring and maintaining faculty. Gregory and Karnes’ experiences as faculty members supports Gregory’s observation. Karnes spent time with both Josef Albers and Mary Gregory as a student in the 1947 summer session. Both Albers and Gregory had left Black Mountain by the time Karnes accepted a Potters-In-Residence position with her husband in 1952, five years before the school closed. Some financial improvement occurred over the years—by 1946 the art department received \$100. This, however, occurred because men arrived back from war and used their GI Bills to pay for college. But Karnes mentioned continuing budget concerns for maintaining faculty during her employment in 1953.¹¹²

As Black Mountain College had limited funding, Karen Karnes also found odd business practices in the job environment. When Karnes arrived in the early 1950s, she and her husband supported the ceramics studio financially themselves. She described the experience in her interview with Mary Emma Harris in 1972:

But what our arrangement was with the school... not for the summer... in the summer, I guess, we were paid and we were regular faculty, but then after that what it was that we ran the studio and paid for materials, and any expenses for the shop we paid. And then we could sell our work, and we sort of were supposed to be carrying the expenses of the studio from the sale of the work. And then they gave us, you know, living and an apartment and food.¹¹³

Karnes expressed this faculty arrangement as normal for instructors. The school paid instructors mainly through living arrangement and studio use rather than salary. However, she experienced

¹¹⁰ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 67.

¹¹¹ Karnes, Interview, 33.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

¹¹³ Karnes, Interview, 9.

similar treatment despite her husband being in the same position. This emphasizes inequality in the running of the studios for someone like Gregory. Gregory never married, meaning she held the woodshop expenses by herself with little inside or outside help. As a single woman faculty member, Gregory felt she had little money to move elsewhere.

When asked for suggestions on providing a better working environment for instructors if Black Mountain College opened again, Gregory told Harris in 1971: “I think it would have to be done carefully the next time because when I think it comes to hiring and firing yourselves, that’s a pretty complicated thing and doesn’t work very well.”¹¹⁴ To Gregory, inadequate departmental funds meant less opportunity to keep long-term faculty members, as the instructors themselves handled many of the expenses for the students. This left more stress on them professionally, leading to more limited professional growth. Having visiting artists teach rather than keeping its own full staff caused even less room for growth professionally. Since “big names” in the art world came in on invitation to teach certain classes and give lectures on the fine art side of the arts spectrum, long term instructors like Gregory experienced less development in their teaching abilities, contributing to a negative self-view. A multi-tiered structure developed within the arts and crafts faculty.

In the mid to late 1940s, especially after the Second World War, Albers brought in a variety of artists to teach workshops and lecture about creating art, such as John Cage. Bringing in these artists meant the furthering of creative thought and individualized production of ideas, but also had limiting influences on the other instructors.

Albers had the ability to place instructors in different studios the school offered and even invite artists to teach at the school, giving them opportunities to teach the higher arts. John Cage

¹¹⁴ Gregory, Interview, 33.

accepted an invitation to teach. By the time he arrived at Black Mountain College, Cage and Gregory shared a similar college and teaching background. Having graduated from Pomona College in Los Angeles and briefly teaching art at the Chicago School of Design, he accepted a position to teach music composition at the college. This was a higher position than what Gregory received in the seven years she taught at Black Mountain College, even though Gregory and Cage were around the same age and had similar credentials. Josef Albers influenced her career negatively. She stayed within the same department rather than being able to branch out to sculpture, where she had gained expertise. Despite her training and experience, Albers limited Gregory's professional growth, as she was not able to teach the higher degrees of fine art that the male visiting instructors with similar experience were.

Cage spoke about his education, stating, “[Richard Buhlig, a composer,] agreed to teach me the [music] composition [in New York], because I showed him the music I was writing. And then the time came when he said he couldn't teach me anymore. He thought my work should be published.”¹¹⁵ His self-assurance also contrasts with Gregory and Karnes, with similar direct language and self-praise that Albers gave himself. He stated in the same interview that he suggested to Albers that Willem de Kooning, a Dutch expressionist painter, teach at Black Mountain College. “I knew he was different, because I didn't particularly like de Kooning's work. Since I didn't, and since I felt close to Albers, I thought [de Kooning] would be just the right person [to teach at Black Mountain College]. I think Albers was grateful for that idea.” By “close,” Cage seemed to think of himself as an equal to Albers in decision making processes. While Gregory, two years younger than Cage, stated she “was not like [Albers]... I learned a

¹¹⁵ Richard Buhlig (1880-1952) was a German pianist. John Cage, “Oral history interview with John Cage,” interview with Paul Cummings, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, May 2, 1974, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-john-cage-12442#transcript>.

tremendous amount from him, but I'm not like him, and I couldn't be like him."¹¹⁶ She separated herself from Albers, while Cage felt pride for suggesting a certain teacher who Albers liked.

Having experienced the school during many of its popular years, Gregory saw many of these "big name" artists in not only fine arts, but also dance and music, come in to teach. This included Willem de Kooning, who taught painting despite little to no teaching experience. Merce Cunningham of New York taught dance, the architect and former director Bauhaus director Walter Gropius taught architecture and Robert Motherwell taught painting. All had some amount of influence in the art world, and all taught the fine arts at Black Mountain College. Some stayed only for a week to a month, but others for years. Gregory believed that the visiting artists "succeeded... in getting a group of students and faculty to use their heads creatively." However, Gregory personally found that Black Mountain College's contribution to the art world was of little significance as only a few students such as pop artists Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Jasper Johns found themselves as large names in the art world. She put more emphasis on teaching "a point of view" that one could "live creatively and also make all sorts of things creatively just by the way you looked at life and the way you lived it."¹¹⁷ When she said the guest instructors and lecturers incited creativity, she praised them highly because she cultivated creativity and enriched everybody's lives.¹¹⁸

Gregory encouraged independence, self-expression, and self-confidence as her main educational ideals. She recommended that other instructors "teach according to who you are and what one is."¹¹⁹ She hoped others would develop their own sense of instruction to best reach the students. Gregory stated that with the "best intentions" she made herself available for the

¹¹⁶ Harris, 9.

¹¹⁷ Gregory, Interview, 36.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 37.

students while in the studio and outside the studio with open hours. She had a caring regard for her students.¹²⁰

Her philosophy for her students involved active self-exploration, which she participated in by giving individual attention and support. “I had the shop open certain hours, and people came and worked, and I took them kind of where they were.” She taught her students to make their own furniture and helped students interested in furniture design. This meant considering their individual needs. If one student needed furniture for their dorm, she helped them sturdy the object with her skills and knowledge in woodworking. If another designed furniture for artistic purposes, she taught them according to that interest. Based on need, she individualized her curriculum rather than instructing based on a universal one for all students. She once taught exercises, but “gave up fighting” with individualized methods using the same exercise for every student and took her students at their own interests. She hoped that this kind of attention would “make them their best.”¹²¹ Gregory took initiative as a resource for students to understand woodworking, but even then as she spoke about providing for the students, her language lacked the confidence Albers, as well as other teachers like John Cage showed.¹²²

Born in 1914, Gregory was near the same age as her students. “I was awfully close to their age, really... or I felt close to their age.” She felt like a peer rather than a knowledgeable resource. She felt, as Karnes described for her own teaching, “we didn’t fire them up, you know.”¹²³ Throughout her interview, Gregory self-reflects and struggled with phrasing. “In the first place I wasn’t... There was no sense in trying to be... I think I had enough sense to know that that was not my... I mean...” While reflecting on her experience in the 1970s, she

¹²⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹²¹ Gregory, Interview, 33.

¹²² Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 10.

¹²³ Karnes, Interview, 7.

questioned her own authority with students based on a her similar age and experience. This differs from Albers because of his experience and older age.

Archer spoke about her educational ideas and felt Black Mountain College revolutionized individualism.¹²⁴ As a former student, it seems this idea translated to her teaching methods. To revolutionize an individual, she said “this comes about when we sort get a picture of ourselves. And an awareness of what is going on around us.” This idea is similar to Albers’ educational method in which he taught his students an awareness of how objects worked. The women saw the way their colleagues taught and had an awareness of themselves. Gregory especially had an awareness about the environment in which she worked. But because of social customs of the 1940s, in which women had little freedom to express their insights openly, this awareness seemed to only appear in theory, according to her. Archer explained further that they were taught “not a measurement of ourselves and not a measurement of what’s going on around us, but only an awareness.”¹²⁵ The women were less able to challenge tradition because of their gender and the authority placed over them.

Archer, however, did recognize an “everyday movement” from the students. While the individuals faced constant change while attending the college, they embraced the novel ideas. Their interactions with themselves, their community, and their ideas constantly flowed and progressed with each passing day. Sometimes this meant less interest in the craft areas. Gregory implied that fewer students had interest in woodworking compared to the fine arts areas, and often came to her for practical projects like furniture for their dorm room.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Archer, Interview, 39.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁶ Gregory, Interview, 33.

Karnes had a similar experience as Gregory. As an instructor in pottery and ceramics, she worked with disinterested students in classroom environments. Though the summer of 1952 was, as she said, “lively” most students focused on painting, music and dance, taking class with instructors like John Cage and dancer Merce Cunningham.¹²⁷ “I don’t think we had any serious clay students there... I think the tone was more for painting and writing than for crafts at that time.” Like Gregory, Karnes also lacked confidence in herself, stating that “You know, maybe... we were not experienced teachers, and we didn’t fire them up, you know.”¹²⁸ This meant she thought the students found little intellectual capacity in her teaching style. She cited youth and inexperience for having fewer students than that of the more popular fields that summer.¹²⁹

Karnes, like Gregory, found her age influenced her teaching style. In that same interview she described the perspective of shop owners in Asheville, at the Southern Highland Guild, a program that promoted craft techniques in an era where industrialization produced objects and where Karnes and her husband sold their pottery. “I was probably one of the first contemporary people to come into the area, but very sympathetically received by the shop managers and sold as... just very, very good... very good.”¹³⁰ They brought in creativity and modernity. Unlike what most North Carolina residents had seen before, these ceramics, what Karnes called functional objects, were accepted by the shop-owners and sold without problem.¹³¹ To have such a disinterest in their art within the school community, but to have much more interest in their work by the local community shows that certain art forms were considered higher in rank than others at Black Mountain College. Not only did students lack of interest cause confidence issues,

¹²⁷ Karnes, Interview, 7.

¹²⁸ Gregory, Interview, 8.

¹²⁹ Karnes, Interview, 7.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹³¹ Ibid., 10.

but Black Mountain College's use of guest teachers undermined the authority of permanent faculty.

Karnes stated that while the school was open and fulfilling when she was there as a student, the environment of Black Mountain College had changed by the 1950s when she taught there.¹³² The students in the later years had shifted away from a focus on studio where they learned to “see” by doing—which meant having an active participation in the act of creating—to a philosophical one, where talk and writing about the arts outshined the work ethic. “We were very different from the style of Black Mountain... in those last years” because of this functioning studio framework. This differed from the previous years in which they “would go about [their] jobs and [work] really hard” at their school and art works, mastering the basics and focusing more on learning to, as Albers promoted, “see” line, texture, shape, and color within nature and materials.¹³³

Industrial society also contributed to Karnes' teaching methods. Karnes' project during her tenure “was to reassert and redefine the role of the unique or handmade object in industrial society, to establish high standards of craftsmanship, and create a market for handcrafts products.”¹³⁴ The college increasingly produced work to sell, marking a shift toward a different market rather than solely focusing on serving as an educational institution.¹³⁵ This differed from the previous experiences of students and faculty, who under Albers' administration learned individualization and problem-solving. Albers disliked ceramics and thus the school only established the department after he left for Yale University. Archer was also brought in to teach

¹³² Karnes, Interview, 7.

¹³³ Albers Foundation. “Teaching Form Through Practice.”

¹³⁴ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 191.

¹³⁵ The crafts had a different market than the fine arts, whereas fine arts were sold more exclusively to galleries, the crafts could be sold in larger market.

photography after Albers' resignation. Photography, like ceramics and woodwork, was regarded as a lesser art because of its mechanical nature.¹³⁶

Many of the ideas discussed in this chapter about female inequality occurred not just in the administrative atmosphere at Black Mountain College, but also as a result of career customs for women in the 1940s and 1950s. Census records show an increase in careers for women before, during, and after the Second World War. During the Second World War, women took up war manufacturing jobs, which increased their salary. Mark Aldrich's "The Gender Gap in Earnings during World War II: New Evidence" identifies the large increase of pay during the war. One woman earned only 20 cents per hour before the war as a waitress, but earned \$1.15 per hour at a bomber plant.¹³⁷ After the war, though, America prospered and many women, though not all, "reverted" to a prewar stay-at-home lifestyle due to public campaigns to pressure women back into domesticity.¹³⁸ Three million women "dropped out of the work force" after 1945 while their husbands made the household earnings.¹³⁹ Though the percentage of women in the work force in 1945 was higher than in 1940, this statistic dropped from 35 percent in 1945 to 29.6 percent in 1946. By 1950, the amount reached its 1945 percentage again, but many were in "traditional" female roles, like administration rather than their wartime manufacturing areas.¹⁴⁰

While Black Mountain College's financial situation suffered from having few male students during the war, its situation improved when men used GI Bill benefits to pay for school and the American economy prospered.¹⁴¹ However, instructor salaries remained low. Karnes'

¹³⁶ Ibid., 188.

¹³⁷ Mark Aldrich, "The Gender Gap in Earnings during World War II: New Evidence." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 42, no. 3 (1989): 415-29.

¹³⁸ Ronald Allen Goldberg and John Robert Greene, "Postwar America: Prosperity and Problems," in *America in the Forties*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 94-112.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴¹ The former servicemen received up to \$500 a year for college. Students like Robert Rauschenberg used the GI Bill to attend the school. Ibid., 100.

information about selling ceramics to have money shows how little they were paid, along with Gregory's reflection about having to stay at the school because she could not afford to move elsewhere.

Men like Josef Albers, Merce Cunningham, and John Cage moved to other places. Albers took a job at Yale University in 1950, and beforehand, while still at Black Mountain, he traveled to Mexico for months at a time. Merce Cunningham developed a dance troupe, and John Cage received recognition for his compositional piece *4'33"*. Gregory, who worked at Black Mountain College for years received little acknowledgement outside of Black Mountain College studies. Archer received the most through her photography publications.

Resistance from male faculty and within society at the time, especially after the war, contributed to women's inequality at Black Mountain College. Several societal issues kept the women at Black Mountain College from reaching their full potential. The social landscape within the 1940s and 1950s emphasized stereotypical roles for women, such as housewives and mothers. Coontz's *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* explores how the stereotypical role of women was not always the case for women in the 1940s. The idea that women should be tied to household duty perpetuated Black Mountain College's placement of them within crafts roles.

Because they filled the crafts positions, which was the less intellectual field according to the standards at the time, their ideas remained stagnant and were unable to develop. The men, however, prospered in their ideas and artwork. They gained recognition for their work because they were able to move away from Black Mountain to cities like New York. Artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly—all former students at Black Mountain College,

received critical acclaim in later years. Married women faced the social pressure of starting a family, providing and aiding their husbands, and housekeeping while their husbands worked.

Black Mountain College experienced its own specific, but similar issue within its administration. Female instructors often arrived at Black Mountain College with their husbands, with the exceptions of Gregory and Archer, who remained unmarried and experienced harsher treatment. Albers' own wife, Anni, also faced discriminatory practices based on her gender. Others like Karnes worked with their husbands in the same studios.

The issues came in the form of societal pressures that found their way into a liberal, progressive arts school. The largest contradictions in Black Mountain College's culture were the liberal but oppressive ideas within the faculty. These oppressive ideas, however, were formed by inexperienced leadership. Women may have prospered more, especially after the war when the economy grew. While Black Mountain College cultivated their creativity as students, the instructors had little control over where they could work. Female instructors still bypassed some social norms at the time, living in a liberal and modern school in which ideas were shared. They fell not into a typical nuclear family role, but lived creatively. They continued a studio practice which followed them throughout their lives.

The factors limiting the culture at Black Mountain College included guest instructors, poor school and studio economics, and ambiguous democratic structures due to inexperienced staff. Albers's poor management skills contributed to Gregory and Archer remaining stagnant despite their progressive education experience beforehand. Their discussion on educational ideas focused on individualization and self-exploration. However, Gregory stated that as a student, she found herself frustrated because of her already advanced awareness of the art techniques taught in her courses. "I was inhibited almost beyond belief... I believe Albers was better at teaching

beginners than people who were fairly along.”¹⁴² The same inhibition occurred in her teaching, where she stayed within the same crafts department despite her interest and qualifications in sculpture, architecture, and design.¹⁴³

Black Mountain College, however, provided opportunity for women to live creatively. The positives within the community came with the individualized attention and contributed to a community of like-minded individuals. Oftentimes, ideas passed around the community settings and students and faculty conversed equally within the dining hall and outside of classes. Gregory’s placement in the woodshop afforded many students a skilled instructor to teach them proper methods of their choosing in an understanding and open environment. Karnes also helped and taught everyone willing to learn. Archer, with her experiences in photography and study under Albers, became the first full-time photography instructor and made sure students received the same awareness that she herself learned as a student.

Guest lecturers kept female instructors from prospering, although they also provided students a more diverse education. Robert Rauschenberg cited John Cage and Willem de Kooning as some of his greatest resources. Albers sparked Rauschenberg’s creativity despite their complicated relationship,. Albers seemed to have a complicated relationship with many students, but he was a mentor to many, including Gregory and Archer.

The women at Black Mountain College cared for their students, making sure they had the resources they needed for any endeavor they started. This differed from Albers, who in his administrative role and strict theories about color and design, spent more effort in making sure the students were doing the correct technique. But, still, he praised his students and provided a creative environment for students despite the administrative flaws at Black Mountain College.

¹⁴² Gregory, Interview, 4.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 4.

Equality again meant equal opportunity for all students no matter their gender, race, or background.

Despite the adversity that women, especially Gregory and Archer, faced at Black Mountain College, they showed agency in their belonging. Unlike the perceived notion of southern women as housewives, southern belles, or merely women who attended school to find a husband, they were career-driven women in search of creativity. Their unique experiences contribute to scholarship on southern women because of their hard-work and emphasis on education. They fought against gender inequality as early feminists at an institution that promoted equality by ensuring their students learned and advanced their careers and artistic practice. Gregory and Archer were progressives for their time. They made sure all of their students had an equal opportunity to learn skills. They were master teachers because of the focus they had on their students. Their own education at Black Mountain College, where they learned individualization and self-exploration, afforded Gregory and Archer these opportunities to use approaches they learned as students in their teaching and guidance to their own students. They hoped to help students explore ways in which their vision could become real and tangible, with the goal that the students had less inhibition and more ways to find their creative self.

Despite the hardships Archer and Gregory experienced at Black Mountain College, they stayed for years. Archer explained why in her interview, stating, “both student and faculty worked for what we call the sheer love of it.”¹⁴⁴ As students and as instructors, Gregory and Archer’s experience at Black Mountain College is summed up with those words from Archer.

¹⁴⁴ Archer, interview, 34.

They cared about their own work as students, and they also cared tremendously about their students' achievements.

When my teacher Elizabeth Ross talks about teaching, she exudes love for not only art itself, but for her students. Cultivating equality—by helping students with whatever they needed like Gregory did for her workshop students—is what Ross does at her arts program in Virginia. She provides what students need for creative equality. I have experienced that first hand in her program through working with materials that I was not familiar with and being provided resources because she made it a priority to give her students the resources they need to be successful. She used Black Mountain College as a basis for the art program because it gives her students experience in equal opportunity and knowledge on supporting a community.

Instructors like Gregory, Archer, and Karnes, despite the challenges they faced, hoped to give their students what they could to allow the creative freedom Black Mountain College promoted. This thesis explored the reality of women's inequality in a college that promoted equality, and how they still managed, despite the difficulties with the administration, to work positively for their students because of their "sheer love" of teaching.¹⁴⁵ The education Gregory and Archer received at Black Mountain College as students cultivated their ability.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

REFERENCES

Primary Materials

- Albers Foundation. "Teaching Form Through Practice." Accessed November 4, 2019.
<https://albersfoundation.org/teaching/josef-albers/texts/#>.
- Albers, Josef. "Bulletin 2, 1934: Concerning Art Instruction." *Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center Collection*.
<http://cdm15733.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15733coll6/id/203>
- Albers, Josef. "Oral history interview with Josef Albers." Interview with Sevim Fesci. *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, June 22-July 5, 1968, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-josef-albers-11847#transcript>.
- Archer Application for Admission, May 1944, Series 506.3, Box 4, Folder 1, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.
- Archer, Hazel Larsen. "Interview with Hazel Larsen Archer." Interview by Walt Parks. *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.
- Bauer, Marilyn. "Interview with Marilyn Bauer." Interview by Mary Emma Harris. *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.
- "Black Mountain College Bulletin: Announcements 1947-48." *Black Mountain College Bulletin* 5, no. 3 (April 1947): 1-16,
<http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll44/id/616>.
- "Black Mountain College Bulletin-Newsletter," *Black Mountain College*, January 1943, 1, no. 2, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll44/id/571>.
- "Black Mountain College Bulletin Newsletter" *Black Mountain College*, August 1944, 2, no. 8, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll44/id/763>.
- "Black Mountain College Bulletin Newsletter," *Black Mountain College*, December 1943, 2 #3, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll44/id/916/rec/24>.
- Cage, John. "Oral history interview with John Cage," Interview with Paul Cummings. *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, May 2, 1974, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-john-cage-12442#transcript>.

Correspondence from Anne Mangold to Mary Gregory, April 9, 1941, Series 506.3, Box 3, Folder 12, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

Correspondence from Josef Albers to Chris Larsen, June 6, 1946, Series 506.3, Box 4, Folder 1, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

Faculty Meeting Minutes, March 27, 1936, Series 506.1, Box 1, Folder 1, Black Mountain College Records Minutes and Attendant Papers, 1933-1956, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, Asheville, NC.

Gregory Application for Admission, April 1941, Series 506.3, Box 3, Folder 12, Black Mountain College Records Student Files, State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

Gregory, Mary. "Interview with Mary Gregory." Interview by Mary Emma Harris. *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.

Karnes, Karen. "Oral History Interview with Karen Karnes," Interview with Mark Shapiro, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, August 9-10, 2005. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-karen-karnes-12096#transcript>.

Karnes, Karen. "Oral History Interview with Karen Karnes," Interview with Mary Emma Harris *Black Mountain College Research Papers*, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.

Lanier, Albert. "An Oral History Interview with Ruth Asawa and Albert Lanier." Interview with Paul Karlstrom, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, June 21-July 5, 2002, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ruth-asawa-and-albert-lanier-12222#transcript>.

"Letter, Hamilton Holt to John Andrew Rice, 1933." *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/40032>.

"Organization and Procedure at Black Mountain College" by John Rice, ca. 1933-1939 (6 pages)," *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/40041>.

"Purpose of the College" Draft," *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/43601>.

Weil, Susan. "Oral History with Susan Weil." Interview with Mary Marshall Clark, Columbia Center for Oral History, January 24, 2014, <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/artist/oral-history/susan-weil>.

Secondary Materials

"Black Mountain College: Innovation in Art, Education, and Lifestyle—African-Americans at Black Mountain College." *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed December 17, 2020, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/exhibits/show/bmc/1940s-josef-albers-years/african-americans-at-black-mou>.

Black Mountain College Project. "Mary Gregory." Biographies. Accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.blackmountaincollegeproject.org/Biographies/GregoryMary/GregoryMaryBIO.htm>.

Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Day, Michael. "Influences of Discipline-based Art Education Within the Field of Art Education." *Visual Arts Research* 23, no. 2 (1997): 19-24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20715910>.

Duberman, Martin. *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

Durst, Anne. *Women Educators in the Progressive Era: The Women Behind Dewey's Laboratory School*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

Farley, Frank H., and Ronald W. Nepurud. *The Foundations of Aesthetics, Art, and Art Education*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988.

Frydl, Kathleen. *The GI Bill*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Goldberg, Ronald Allen and John Robert Greene. "Postwar America: Prosperity and Problems." In *America in the Forties*, 94-112. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nsxb.10.

Graham, Patricia Albjerg. "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education." *Signs* 3, no. 4 (1978): 759-73. Accessed July 14, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/3173112. 766.

Grantham, Dewey. *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*. University of Tennessee Press, 1983.

- Hansen, David T. *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Harris, Mary Emma, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987.
- Harris, Mary Emma. "Remembering Black Mountain College." North Carolina: Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, 1996.
- Harrison, Charles and Paul Wood, ed. *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
- Hausman, Jerome J. "Art Education in Higher Education: A Personal View." *Visual Arts Research* 35, no. 1 (2009): 106-13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20715491>.
- Henry, Carole. "Reflections on Manuel Barkan's Contributions to Art Education." *Art Education* 55, no. 6 (2002): 6-11. doi:10.2307/3193973.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*. New York: Vintage Books, 1955.
- "Karen Karnes." The Marks Project. Accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.themarksproject.org/marks/karnes>.
- Katz, Vincent, Martin Brody, Robert Creeley, and Kevin Power. *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.
- Meyer, Adolph H., *The Development of Education in the Twentieth Century*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Education Series, 1939.
- Nash, Margaret S., and Lisa S. Romero. "'Citizenship for the College Girl': Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education for Women in the United States in the 1930s." *Teachers College Record* 114, no. 2 (January 1, 2012). <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ998997&authtype=shib&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- PBS Online: Only A Teacher: Teaching Timeline. (n.d.). Retrieved November 26, 2020, from <https://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/timeline.html>.
- Reynolds, Katherine Chaddock. *Visions and Vanities: John Andrew Rice of Black Mountain College*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.
- Roberson, Keira. "Socioeconomic Subordination and Misogyny in the Progressive Left: Women at Black Mountain College, 1933-1957." Undergraduate Thesis, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 2018.

- Rodgers, Daniel. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1998.
- Rose, Barbara, ed. *Readings in American Art 1900-1975*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975.
- Savage, Daniel M. *John Dewey's Liberalism: Individual, Community, and Self-Development*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.
- Schmuck, Patricia A. *Women Educators: Employees of Schools in Western World Countries*. New York: New York City Press, 1987.
- Shapiro, Mark. *A Chosen Path: The Ceramic Art of Karen Karnes*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Smith, Anne Chesky, and Heather South. *Images of America: Black Mountain College*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014.
- "*The Arts at Black Mountain College*." MIT Press. Accessed November 26, 2019.
<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/arts-black-mountain-college>.
- "Timeline." The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. <https://pafaarchives.omeka.net/timeline>.
- Tomkins, Calvin. *Lives of the Artists*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008.
- Vaughn, David. *Hazel Larsen Archer: Black Mountain College Photographer*. North Carolina: Black Mountain Press, 2006.