

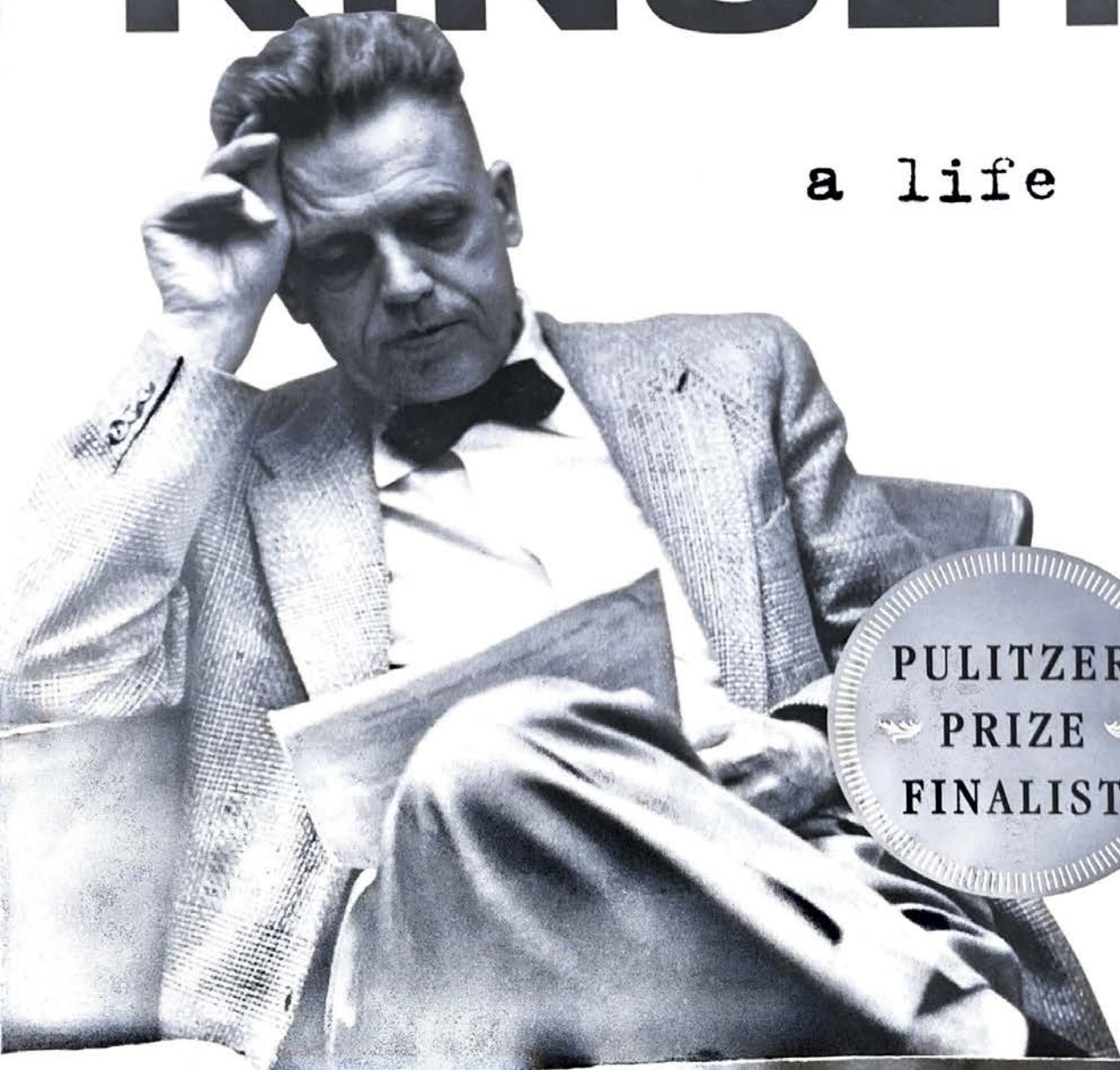
"A fascinating account of a fantastic American."

—Alan Wolfe, *The New Republic*

James H. Jones

ALFRED C. KINSEY

a life



PULITZER
PRIZE
FINALIST

"As his health declined, which it was doing, particularly his blood pressure and cardiac condition," Gebhard explained, "it was more difficult for him to function."²⁹

Kinsey both led and taught by example. Surrounded by devout followers who knew better than to question the sacred principle of individual variation, he was completely open. As an exhibitionist extraordinaire, Kinsey seldom passed up an opportunity to show off his genitals and demonstrate his various masturbatory techniques to staff members. One outsider, who was himself filmed masturbating, told an interviewer that Kinsey "had very large genitalia, and that means both penis and balls." The man added, "Several of the staff members used to say, 'Maybe that's why he whips the goddam thing out all the time to show you the urethra or to show the corona.' I mean he is not ashamed of what he has got."³⁰

While Dellenback could not remember shooting any homosexual activity involving his boss, he often filmed Kinsey, always from the chest down, engaged in masochistic masturbation. Once the camera started rolling, the world's foremost expert on human sexual behavior and a scientist who valued rationality above all other intellectual properties would insert an object into his urethra, tie a rope around his scrotum, and then simultaneously tug hard on the rope as he maneuvered the object deeper and deeper. During one filming session, Dellenback remembered Kinsey inserting a swizzle stick, the kind with a knob on the end, up his urethra. This particular occasion stood out in Dellenback's memory, perhaps, because it offered a perfect illustration of how Kinsey could make the bizarre seem rational. Ever the teacher, Kinsey paused just long enough to give Dellenback a brief anatomy lesson that explained why the knob posed a problem. "I remember vaguely Kinsey saying to me, 'you know, there's a little flap as you go partly up the urethra there you have to bypass, so you can't just jam the thing in,'" recalled Dellenback.³¹

Kinsey's object of choice, however, remained the item he had kept hidden under the floorboards in the attic of his boyhood home in South Orange. Mr. Y described seeing Kinsey in the late 1940s and early 1950s insert "a toothbrush with the brush end first." To facilitate entry, Mr. Y noted, "He [had] cut the urethra, too, sort of wide open."³² How many years of physical conditioning and psychic distress it had taken to reverse the ends of the toothbrush (i.e., to go from the handle to the bristles) can only be a matter for conjecture. Still, the fact that he was able to perform this feat offers an index of how far Kinsey's masochism had advanced. Explaining in purely physical terms why Kinsey gradually progressed to ever larger objects, a close friend observed, "You know how it is when you touch a sensitive part of your body; it gets a little tougher. Now all of a sudden it begins to take more stimulation to get the same effect, right?" Elab-

orating, the friend described how Kinsey developed from the boy who inserted straws in that basement in Hoboken into the adult who required much larger objects to obtain the desired results. "So after a while he had to use bigger objects, and he got into pipe cleaners and then larger pipe cleaners," the friend declared. "Then he got up to hard objects, round pencils and hexagonal pencils, then up to the handle of a toothbrush and then up to the brush end of a toothbrush in which he let the brush end stay in there and went like this [twirling his hands together in a back-and-forth motion] on the handle to twist it. This is the degree to which that thing grew."³³

Not that Kinsey's situation was unique. As his friend pointed out, the human body and mind quickly grow accustomed to pain. Consequently, the stimulus required to inflict the desired degree of pain has to be increased over time, as many masochists discover. By the time he had reached middle age, of course, Kinsey had learned this lesson with a vengeance. A friend recalled Kinsey warning, "Tell your sadomasochistic friends to observe great caution. The human body adjusts rapidly and the levels are capable of escalating rapidly."³⁴ Again, Kinsey was speaking from experience. On one occasion, when his inner demons plunged him to new depths of despair, Kinsey climbed into a bathtub, unfolded the blade of his pocketknife, and circumcised himself without benefit of anesthesia.³⁵ Although Dellenback denied capturing the incident on film, he confirmed that it happened. "No, I remember he [Kinsey] must have told me something about it," recalled Dellenback. "God, it must have been damn painful. It must have bled a hell of a lot."³⁶

Dellenback had no memory of filming Kinsey having sex with Clara, or for that matter with any other partner, male or female. His friends believed that his difficulties in achieving an erection explained his solo performances. Confirming Kinsey's problems, Dellenback declared, "I remember he had to go into the bathroom to work himself up."³⁷ Sympathetic, Gebhard observed, "It's hard enough, God knows, to function with lights and camera on you, and Kinsey would be the last person to want to 'fail.' So, I think he just didn't want to put himself to that test where it might not work out."³⁸

Yet Kinsey's declining health in no way diminished his capacity to watch others perform. If anything, the waning of his own sexual powers seemed to intensify his voyeurism. In addition to staff members and their spouses, Kinsey coaxed a variety of people not affiliated with the Institute to his attic. Indeed, he was good at not getting turned down. From their histories, he had a good idea of which individuals would be willing to cooperate, and he had no difficulty defending the scientific merits of filming. Every scientist needs data, Kinsey would explain, and the direct observa-

tion of biological phenomena is one of the most reliable ways to get it. Although self-serving, this argument was not specious. After all, the history of science is filled with discoveries that can be traced to direct observation, a fact that should not be forgotten in Kinsey's case, regardless of the prurient interest he brought to many areas of his research.

As a scientist, then, it was easy for Kinsey to justify filming sexual behavior. Politically, however, the risks were enormous. Public opinion would never have tolerated sexual filming, particularly of the kinds of behavior he preferred. However much he shouted "science," the public would have answered "pornography." Consequently, Kinsey exercised great caution in casting these sessions, selecting only those individuals whom he trusted to keep their mouths shut. All told, Dellenback filmed about twenty homosexual couples, ten heterosexual couples, and approximately twenty-five men and women engaged in masturbation.³⁹ As happened so often in the research, Kinsey managed to mix business with pleasure. Many of the homosexual sessions he filmed involved sadomasochism.

Glenway Wescott was one of the gay men who performed in Kinsey's attic. A strikingly handsome fellow, Wescott was an accomplished and much heralded writer of the "Lost Generation." He was one of many gay men who read *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and felt transformed by the event. Many years later, he recalled, "I thought at once that it was the most important book that had been written in my time insofar as potential good influence—and almost revolutionizing influence—because all my life I had seen the psychological ravages of the unfavorable situation of the homosexual." In 1949, the two men met for dinner with a group that included E. M. Forster during one of Kinsey's frequent visits to New York. "It was a delicious evening," beamed Wescott many years later.⁴⁰ Kinsey was at his best, regaling his dinner companions with an erudite discussion of the sexual differences between men and women.⁴¹ Indeed, Wescott was intrigued by this earnest scientist from the Midwest. "Kinsey is a strange man, with a handsome good sagacious face but with a haunted look—fatigue, concentration, and (surprising to me, if I interpret rightly) passionateness and indeed sensuality," Wescott confided to his diary. "With all his scientific conscientiousness, and pride of science, and faith in science," he continued, "he has the temperament of a reformer rather than a scientist: fierily against hypocrisy and repressive law of every sort, censorship, etc., and against Judaism and Catholicism and Irishy."⁴²

Soon the two became friends. Wescott took it upon himself to educate Kinsey in literature, a subject Kinsey knew very little about. Wescott also introduced Kinsey to Monroe Wheeler, his longtime lover, who agreed to be interviewed as well. Like Wescott, Wheeler was a godsend for Kinsey. As the director of exhibitions and publications at the Museum of Modern

BIOGRAPHY

"A masterly, disturbing biography." —Winifred Gallagher, *Washington Post Book World*

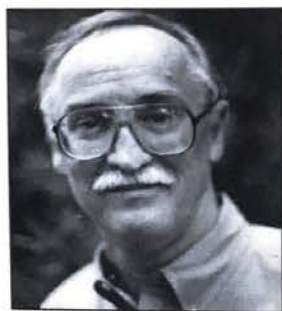
More than twenty-five years in the making, this Pulitzer Prize–finalist, groundbreaking biography caused great controversy when it was first published. Drawing on tens of thousands of letters gleaned from more than a dozen archives and scores of personal interviews (ranging from members of sexual subcultures who demanded anonymity to congressmen, university presidents, prize-winning scientists, and heads of foundations), James H. Jones shows that the image of the disinterested biologist cultivated by Alfred C. Kinsey was in fact a carefully crafted public persona. The Kinsey who emerges in these pages was a social reformer and a zealot who devoted his every waking hour to the destruction of sexual repression.

"Jones' figure of Kinsey the man will stick with you. . . . A magnificent picture of Kinsey the man and scientist." —Donald Newlove, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Jones's biography—forthright, scholarly, original, magisterial—constitutes an 'atom bomb' of its own. Its fall-out will be enduring." —Roy Porter, *The Times* (London)

"This volume remains the definitive biography of Alfred Kinsey. Jones's work is marked not only by its detail and intensity but also by its meticulous accuracy. Kinsey's monumental, pioneering research merits this monumental biography."

—Paul H. Gebhard, director emeritus, The Kinsey Institute, Indiana University



JAMES H. JONES received his Ph.D. from Indiana University and has held postdoctoral fellowships from Harvard University, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Rockefeller Foundation. He is the award-winning author of *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*. An independent scholar, Jones lives in San Francisco, California.

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