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TAKING THE WHITE GLOVES OFF:
WOMEN STRIKE for PEACE AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN'S ACTIVIST IDENTITIES
IN THE UNITED STATES, 1961-1980

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the
Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the U.S., 1961-1980

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This study revises the standard narrative of 1960s political and social history by arguing that Women Strike for Peace, an organization that used maternalist rhetoric to protest nuclear weapons testing and the arms race with the Soviet Union, was an integral part of the New Left, challenging the chilling effect of McCarthyism on free speech and political protest and playing a significant role in the movements for racial equality and economic justice and against the Vietnam War. Demographically, WSPers had much in common with the frustrated housewives of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. Politically, however, the challenges they posed to Cold War politics as usual as well as their commitment to direct action protest aligned them with Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. Like their younger counterparts, WSPers developed non-hierarchical structures and a consensus-based approach to decision-making while designing grassroots organizing campaigns. This study also explores the sometimes competing, sometimes overlapping claims of maternalist and feminist rationales for women's social movement activism

before, during, and after the heyday of the women's liberation movement by focusing on changing uses of and attitudes towards motherhood as a source of political legitimacy and authority. Unlike earlier scholars who have portrayed WSP as being distinct from and even in opposition to the women's movement of the 1960s and '70s, I argue that the two were intertwined and mutually influential, not at odds. Both groups believed in the power of sisterhood and the special benefits and pleasures of working in a single-sex context, while also insisting women's voices had to be part of broader political and policy debates. Finally, I argue that their efforts to forge new activist identities for American women while juggling the demands of public and private life and trying to achieve personal fulfillment, was the first salvo in a contentious and continuing debate over the significance of motherhood as a political identity, the relationship of motherhood and feminism, and the role women who are mothers can and should play in politics and public life.

Dedication

In loving memory of my mother,
Mary Estepa

and my friend,
Lina Newhouser

and for the mothers who are my sisters:
Lizzie, Barbara, Abigail, Mary Helen, Joan, and Nora

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Eynon did me a great service when he gave me permission to use his oral histories of 1960s activists in Ann Arbor.

I had a dream team of a dissertation committee. Their comments, questions, suggestions, and challenges made this a better work and me a better historian. But that's just the beginning of their impact on my life. Fabulous teachers, scholars, and mentors all, they provided me with models of how to pursue a successful academic career while remaining engaged with "real world" issues and even finding time for less lofty pursuits like watching *Mad Men*. I might not have made it through and past my first year of graduate school if not for Steven Lawson. As a mid-life career changer, I wondered more than once if leaving a job I had loved for the new challenge of graduate school was a huge mistake. In his course on twentieth century historiography, Steven convinced me that maybe I did have what it took to be a historian and his office door was always open when I needed someone to talk to. He is a true *mensh*. . . and an excellent copy-editor. I first began thinking about Women Strike for Peace in relation to the New Left and the women's liberation movement in Linda Gordon's graduate seminar on social movements at NYU. Linda saw potential in my first stabs at the topic and her support of the project has meant the world to me. During the writing process, I relied on her knowledge of and insight into the movements of the sixties and social movements generally to challenge my assumptions and catch my mistakes. I discovered what a skillful editor Sue Cobble is while working with her on the *International Labor and Working-Class History* journal. She manages to combine remarkable attention to detail with the ability to cut to the heart of an argument's strengths and weaknesses. I'm especially grateful to Sue for pushing me to re-think how the subjects of this work fit into the larger sweep of progressive women's

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INTRODUCTION

Women Strike for Peace (WSP) was founded in 1961 by a group of women—predominately white, middle-class and middle-aged mothers—to protest the arms race and nuclear testing and to raise public awareness about the dangers inherent in nuclear proliferation. By the mid-60s, WSP had redirected its energies to opposing the Vietnam War. Members demonstrated, lobbied, provided counseling and support for draft resisters, and sent delegations to Vietnam to meet with Vietnamese women and to negotiate the release of American POWs. They also participated in all the national coalitions and mobilizations against the war. After the Vietnam peace accords were signed, many WSPers returned to their original cause: opposing the proliferation of advanced weapons systems and nuclear power plants. Others took elements of WSP's agenda and political style into new arenas: the women's movement, environmentalism, or opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America. Their children grown, some went back to school or embarked on new careers but, as Rohna Shoul of Voice of Women-New England (VOW-NE) declared in 1998, "they all retain the same passion for social justice, but are pursuing it in different forms."¹

When WSPers are mentioned at all in histories of the 1960s, it is usually as "mainstream" or "liberal" supporters of the anti-war movement.² But WSP was more than a liberal peace group. A close examination of their activities and rhetoric shows that WSPers held more radical views and played a more wide-ranging and complex role in the

¹ VOW-NE was a WSP affiliate. Rohna Shoul to Mary McGrory, November 20, 1998. VOW-NE Papers (unprocessed), SC.

² Those who place WSP in the "liberal camp" of the antiwar movement and sixties protest more generally include Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement in the Vietnam Era*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990) and Terry A. Anderson, *The Movement and The Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

social movements of the 1960s and beyond than the standard interpretation would suggest. Beginning in the mid-sixties, WSP grew increasingly concerned with questions of economic and racial justice (especially the plight of poor women and children), and began to understand peace as a domestic as well as a foreign policy issue. WSPers started to address the overt violence of police brutality, crime and urban unrest and also to see poverty and racism as forms of violence against the spirit. Indeed, they came to believe that racism was fueling the war—racism against the Vietnamese and racism against black and Latino Americans that caused them to be disproportionately represented in the troops sent to fight (and die) in Southeast Asia. And they saw the growing cost of the war as undermining the government's ability to provide its citizens with the kind of social services and quality of life envisioned by President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society programs. This re-visioning of WSP's mission and goals had a notable impact on the organization's political identity and activist style. Where WSP had initially focused its attention on reaching white, middle-class, middle-aged women like themselves, by the late sixties, the group had begun to build coalitions with draft resisters, welfare mothers and black nationalists and attempted to build sympathy for those groups within its traditional base.

This transformation of Women Strike for Peace—from a narrowly focused, single-issue group into an organization with a broad agenda addressing issues of economic and racial justice as part of the larger "Movement" for change that developed during the 1960s—has gone largely unremarked in the historiography. Scholars have generally located WSP within the history of American peace activism or as part of the transitional generation of women activists who were "harbingers" of second-wave

feminism.³ Even Amy Swerdlow's *Women Strike for Peace*, the one historical monograph on the group, written by an active participant, focuses primarily on the group's early years and devotes little attention to its growing concern with questions of economic and racial justice and the impact this had on the organization's sense of mission and activist identity.⁴

By demonstrating the integral role WSP played in 1960s social movements and tracing its legacy into the seventies, eighties, and beyond, this study complicates the standard interpretations of mothers' movements, second wave feminism, and the New Left. Studying WSP as part of the broader social movements of the time forces us to re-think both the standard chronologies of the New Left and second wave feminism and the criteria we use to identify their participants.⁵ Demographically, many of WSP's founders belonged to the same cohort as the white, middle-class, stay-at-home mothers

³ For WSP's place in the history of American peace activism, see DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal and The Peace Reform in American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) and Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993). For its role in the opposition to the Vietnam War, see Tom Wells, *The War Within* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest against the War in Vietnam* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984). For WSP's relationship to second wave feminism, see Alonso, Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000) and Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003).

⁴ Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993). Swerdlow was a member of WSP and played an active, even leadership role in the group, including a stint as the editor of its national newsletter. She approaches her subject as a participant-observer as well as a scholar. Her work focuses on WSP's antinuclear and antiwar activism and devotes little attention to its engagement with domestic issues. Her account trails off in the early 1970s, before the U.S. had withdrawn its troops from Vietnam and just as WSP was beginning to actively participate in feminist coalitions. She leaves the impression that WSP ceased to exist after the war, offering no discussion of the group's contribution to the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and the resurgence of women's peace activism in the 1980s.

⁵ Like Van Gosse, I reject the notion that the New Left was a movement of "white youth alone." Like Fair Play for Cuba, WSP drew members from "both sides of the dividing line between Cold War liberalism and everything to its left" and created a "civic persona" that stood "outside partisan politics" committed not to a specific ideology but to "truth-telling." I agree with Gosse that part of what makes the New Left "truly 'new' is not *who* is included, as individuals, organizations or social groups, but the structural form this left takes—its pluralist, informal and highly sectoralized or ad hoc character" (emphasis mine). See Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of a New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993).

described by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*: highly educated women who, as young adults during the years after World War II, set aside academic and career ambitions in order to marry, raise families, and “live the dream.”⁶ But unlike Friedan’s bored and frustrated housewives, who hid their intellectual ambitions, filled their days with golf and bridge and allayed their anxieties with pills and alcohol, WSPers devoted their spare time and energy to challenging both the Cold War consensus and the marginalization of women in government and politics.⁷

While Swerdlow’s book both inspired and served as a foundation for this work, my approach to WSP and my interpretation of its significance departs from hers in important ways. For one, I argue that WSP was part of the New Left, not an antecedent or counterpoint. Too often, scholars understand the New Left in generational, rather than political, terms. They depict the New Left as synonymous with the student movement and particularly Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—comprising young people and making the college campus its base of operations.⁸ In fact, in the United States, the term “New Left” was originally used to identify a progressive third way that rejected both the

⁶ Use of the phrase “living the dream” to describe this lifestyle comes from Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women’s Oral History* (Lincoln, NE.: iUniverse, Inc., 1993/2002)

⁷ Although Friedan has been critiqued (and rightly so) for using a small minority of American women to represent the whole and for ignoring evidence that did not support her argument (including her own political activism and professional success), the testimony offered in interviews, letters to the author, and letters to the editor of media outlets from readers across the country suggests that *The Feminine Mystique* did capture the lived experience of many thousands of American women. Betty Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963). For critical assessments, see Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 229-262 and Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1998). For contemporary readers’ responses, see Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

⁸ See, for example, Anderson, *The Movement and The Sixties*, Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), James Miller, “*Democracy Is in the Streets*”: *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), and Douglas C. Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

doctrinaire nature of the Old Left and its class-based analysis, as well as the fervent anticommunism of Cold War liberals.⁹ The New Left rejected both Soviet totalitarianism and U.S. imperialism. It was also critical of what it viewed as the hypocrisy of U.S. policies at home and abroad; while the nation claimed to embody the values of freedom, justice, and equality, black Americans were denied basic citizenship rights and the open debate of important issues had been squelched by red-baiting and black-listing. Young people were not the only ones who, during the early sixties, began chipping away at the Cold War consensus. As historian Van Gosse has written, “it is highly problematic to make age, whiteness, and student status the defining characteristics of the New Left; however unintended, the consequence is to put those white youth at the center of the narrative, with other movements at the margins.” Gosse argues that “too many key activists...were over thirty, or even fifty, to permit us to equate the New Left solely with a ‘youth revolt.’ The typical local leader of the antiwar or Civil Rights movements was a middle-aged woman or a Protestant minister, not a college student.”¹⁰ Many of the middle-aged women he refers to belonged to WSP.

If the focus on youth had not dominated the early New Left narratives, it might have been noted that WSP was founded at the dawn of the sixties, along with SDS and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and shared many of the values

⁹ The term “New Left” was coined in Britain in the late 1950s by activists and intellectuals who broke with the Communist Party. They were instrumental in starting the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which critiqued the arms policies of the Soviet Union and the NATO countries and served as an important inspiration for WSP.

¹⁰ Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 5. See also: Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in Roy Rosenzweig and Jean-Christophe Agnew, eds., *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 277-302 and Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*.

that set those organizations apart from earlier leftist and civil rights groups.¹¹ WSP, like SDS and SNCC, was founded in opposition to Cold War politics as usual. Like their student counterparts, WSPers developed non-hierarchical structures and favored a consensus-based approach to decision-making. All three groups were committed to grassroots organizing, direct action and what became known as “participatory democracy.” WSP’s Statement of Purpose declared that, “In these days of super-organizations, we feel the individual has virtually ceased to participate directly in support of his views,” a sentiment that would have fit comfortably in the Port Huron Statement, the founding document of SDS.¹²

Swerdlow’s book focuses on WSP’s linkage of “traditional motherhood” and “radical politics,” an important juxtaposition that challenges common assumptions about women and activism. But a more common juxtaposition—between sixties counter-culturalism and New Left politics—has, in my view, prevented scholars from viewing WSP as part of the New Left. Political radicalism and cultural radicalism are frequently presented as having a transparent relationship in writings about the sixties. Because much of the younger generation of New Leftists was “in flight from both the nuclear family and the gender conventions of their day,” as historian Alice Echols has observed, it has been difficult to see a group of women who publicized their adherence to those gender

¹¹ It is also significant that a middle-aged African American woman, Ella Baker, was crucial to the formation of SNCC and the development of its bottom-up, anti-bureaucratic, consensus-based politics. For Baker’s influence on SNCC and the younger generation of civil rights activists, see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹² Swerdlow, 18-19. Port Huron called for “the establishment of a democracy of individual participation.” For an excellent discussion of the significance of the Port Huron Statement to the development of New Left ideology and political practices, see Miller, “*Democracy Is in the Streets*”: *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. The text of the statement appears on pages 329-374.

conventions as part of the Movement, whatever their stands on the issues of the day.¹³

But while young New Left activists, like proponents of the counterculture, experimented with drugs and “free love” and rejected the consumerist nature of American culture, they confronted and attempted to transform existing political and economic institutions, rather than escape from them.¹⁴ And despite WSP’s exploitation of language and symbols associated with maternalism, their understanding of motherhood as an identity that demanded a public, political role was far from traditional. Furthermore, although most histories of the period fail to note it, contemporary media accounts and organizational records show that WSP members participated in all the coalitions and major events of the late sixties and early seventies identified with the New Left, from the mass mobilizations against the war in Washington, D.C. to the protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Finally, its commitment to a non-hierarchical structure, consensus-based decision-making, direct action and participatory democracy meant that WSP’s political style had much more in common with that of New Left and the women’s liberation movement than the mainstream liberal peace movement or the Old Left.

¹³ Alice Echols, “‘We Gotta Get Out of This Place’: Notes Toward a Remapping of the Sixties.” *Socialist Review* 22 (April 1992), 22. In this essay, Echols argues that women’s activism in general and the women’s liberation movement in particular have been marginalized in sixties’ narratives. Not only their generational location and gender politics, but the fact that they were women, helps explain why WSPers are so largely ignored in the historiography, given the fact that older male activists who were no more “countercultural” than they (David Dellinger, Michael Harrington, Rev. William Sloan Coffin, Dr. Benjamin Spock and the Berrigan brothers, for example) are much more frequently mentioned. It is notable that almost all surveys of the antiwar movement and sixties activism generally have been written by men, while all surveys of the women’s liberation movement have been written by women.

¹⁴ Members of both groups valued community, explored their sexuality outside of marriage, experimented with drugs, and refused to be constrained by nine-to-five jobs, the politicos, as New Left activists were sometimes called, still chose to focus on the future rather than live in the moment. Their commitment to transforming society was a form of ambition; they were willing to discipline themselves, make sacrifices and delay gratification in order to achieve their political goals. Hippies, in contrast, tended to follow the admonitions of Timothy Leary to “Tune in, turn on, drop out” and Baba Ram Dass to “Be here now”; they wanted to live in and for the moment, pursued pleasure and immediate gratification, and believed in social transformation through personal fulfillment. (Dass, formerly Richard Alpert, was a psychiatrist at Harvard when introduced to LSD by Timothy Leary, a colleague at the university. This was a life-changing experience that turned him into a spiritual seeker and proponent of yoga, meditation, and vegetarianism.) See Ram Dass, *Be Here Now* (Santa Fe: Hanuman Foundation, 1971).

Swerdlow suggests that in spite of “a decade of political struggle against the gendered uses of power, and a sense of personal efficacy and female solidarity based on working in a separatist movement” it took the critique of young radical feminists beginning in 1968 to get WSPers to “question and reexamine the female role in the family as well as in national and international politics.”¹⁵ In contrast, I argue that there were feminist elements to WSP long before the women’s liberation movement took off. Although it was not a feminist organization per se, there were both individual feminists within WSP and ways in which WSP prefigured and influenced the women’s liberation movement. These include its rejection of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and official leaders; its reliance on local, grassroots initiatives and organizers who shared experiences and provided mutual support primarily through conferences and newsletters; its emphasis on women’s experiences as sources of knowledge and expertise; its refusal to rely on the opinions of male “experts”; and its struggle to accommodate diversity and difference while maintaining solidarity and sisterhood.

Furthermore, a critique of male domination was implicit in many of WSP’s choices and actions, beginning with its founding as an autonomous women’s organization. WSP was initiated by a group of women who were disenchanted with male leadership—in government, in their communities, and in existing peace organizations. As founder Dagmar Wilson explained, “In the face of male ‘logic,’ which seems to us utterly illogical, it was time for women to speak out.”¹⁶ Although many WSPers seemed to accept the notion that women have different values and priorities than men (a view rejected by some radical feminists of the late sixties and early seventies, but compatible

¹⁵ Swerdlow, 5.

¹⁶ Swerdlow, 17. This is not to say that autonomous women’s organizations are by definition “feminist.”

with the cultural feminism of the late 1970s and 1980s), WSPers did not believe those differences relegated men and women to separate spheres of activity. They began to break down the walls that divided male responsibilities from female responsibilities, public concerns from private concerns, the political from the personal. While Wilson did not see WSP as part of the women's liberation movement, she did believe "it was a good way to demonstrate our own power and show that women were an essential part of our social structure and had a right to be heard."¹⁷ Philadelphia WSP leader Ethel Taylor said she realized in retrospect that the twice-weekly meetings at her dining room table "were certainly consciousness-raising."¹⁸ This perspective is supported by Swerdlow's statement that, "the most exciting ingredient in WSP, and a constant source of energy and empowerment, was the community of women working together, receiving and giving the kind of support and respect they had not experienced in male-led organizations for social change."¹⁹ The group's egalitarian and participatory structure would be embraced by younger women's liberation activists even as they rejected WSP's maternalist rhetoric for lacking feminist consciousness.

In unraveling the feminist implications of WSP's activism, I rely on the work of sociologist Patricia Chuchryk. Chuchryk distinguishes between women's organizations with "feminist intentions" and those with "feminist consequences," an analytic distinction that enables her to see working-class women's organizations focused on issues of economic survival, women's peace and human rights organizations with maternalist

¹⁷ Quoted in Judith Porter Adams, *Peacework: Oral Histories of Women Peace Activists* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 195.

¹⁸ Ethel Taylor, *We Made a Difference: My Personal Journey with Women Strike for Peace* (Philadelphia: Camino Books, Inc., 1998), 2.

¹⁹ Swerdlow, 72. Swerdlow does not consider WSP a feminist organization but she does agree that its members posed a challenge to the "feminine mystique" version of women's domestic life in the early 1960s.

underpinnings, as well as overtly feminist organizations addressing issues of women's rights and freedoms as part of an ideological continuum. Even though the latter category is the only one that has "feminist intentions," Chuchryk argues that all three varieties can have "feminist consequences" if they lead to women's empowerment, which in turn challenges male domination. Within a national context, these three types of women's organizations often share interests and goals even if their motivations differ, and they frequently interact and influence each other even if they do not see themselves as partners.²⁰ I argue that WSP had feminist consequences both for its members and for the movements with which it was involved, particularly the anti-war movement, although this was not generally recognized by the younger generation of women's liberation activists motivated by "feminist intentions."²¹ In retrospect, however, it is clear that WSP was part of a web of women's activism during the 1960s and beyond that includes female "politicos" of the New Left, women's liberation activists, liberal feminists, women active in the civil rights and welfare rights movements, and working-class women who were neighborhood activists. Different combinations of these groups shared goals, worked in coalition, challenged each other's assumptions and influenced each other's politics.²² At

²⁰ Patricia Chuchryk, "Protest, Politics, and Personal Life: The Emergence of Feminism in a Military Dictatorship, Chile 1973-1983" (PhD diss. York University, 1984)

²¹ By the mid-sixties, WSP had developed a large and loyal constituency of women willing and able to commit both time and money to the group's activities. This power base meant that during the Vietnam War years, WSP was always able to secure a place of influence on the otherwise male-dominated steering committees of national anti-war coalitions and major demonstrations. It also guaranteed them the independence to continue organizing their own projects and issuing their own statements without having to win the support or agreement of male colleagues.

²² Patricia Chuchryk, "The Role of Women's Organizations in the Chilean Transition to Democracy" in Jane Jaquette, editor, *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989). To study feminism as one part of a broader spectrum of women's movements is a common approach among scholars of Latin American women's activism. See also: Sonia E. Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transitional Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Alvarez, et.al., "Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms" *Signs* 28 (Winter 2003), 537-579; Jo

the same time, individual participants had complex identities that reflected a range of political concerns and commitments. As Leslie Cagan, a member of the younger generation of women activists put it, “I felt and acted as if I were several different people all at once...I felt I was a ‘politico’ *and* a feminist”...It was still real confusing being an anti-war activist on Tuesday, a Black Panther support[er] on Thursday, organizer for the Venceremos Brigade on Friday and a feminist on Saturday.”²³ Theories of intersectionality can be fruitfully applied to women’s activist identities during this period of multiple political commitments, some of which grew out of aspects of identity—gender, race, ethnicity, class and, yes, motherhood. While observers might associate individual activists primarily with one issue or organization, this did not necessarily reflect the complexity of their politics. Internally a variety of beliefs and commitments that others might see as separable were in fact interwoven and integral to an individual’s political identity.²⁴ Just because a woman’s primary public affiliation was with a peace or

Fisher, *Out of the Shadows* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993) ; Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991). Some recent scholarship on U.S. feminism has recognized that by focusing only on those with clearly or exclusively feminist “intent” the standard narrative of U.S. second wave feminism has ignored important contributions to women’s empowerment by women of color, working-class women of all races, and women of the radical left. See, for example, Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Stephanie Gilmore, ed. *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second Wave Feminism in the United States* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Sherna Berger Gluck, “Whose Feminism? Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) U.S. Women’s Movement(s)” in Nancy Naples, ed. *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31-56; Priscilla Nadasen, “Expanding the Boundaries of the Women’s Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights” *Feminist Studies* 28 (Summer 2002), 271-301; Becky Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 28 (Summer 2002), 337-355.

²³ Leslie Cagan, “Something New Emerges: The Growth of a Socialist Feminist” in Dick Cluster, editor, *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 225-258.

²⁴ My thinking on this has been shaped by Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 2008) and “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought.” *Signs* 14 (Summer 1989), 745-773; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, eds. *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Sherna Berger Gluck, “Whose Feminism? Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) U.S. Women’s Movement(s).” In *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender*, ed.

civil rights organization did not mean she was not a feminist and just because a woman's primary affiliation was with a feminist group did not mean she was unconcerned with issues of race and class or that she was indifferent to the war in Vietnam. As Cagan's quote shows, some women activists felt equally committed to a number of different organizations and issues at the same time. This was true of WSPers as well as Cagan's younger cohort of New Left women.

Just as WSP is routinely marginalized in narratives of sixties social movements, it is also rarely mentioned in either contemporary accounts or histories of second wave feminism. When it is, it makes its final appearance early on—at the Jeannette Rankin Brigade action in Washington, D.C. in 1968. This women's anti-war protest is presented as the moment when feminism trumps maternalism as the wellspring of women's activism.²⁵ WSP is portrayed less as a precursor to the women's liberation movement than an impediment to it. But later events demonstrate that WSP-like mothers' movements would have an enduring appeal—for feminists and non-feminists alike. Even women whose primary activist identity was “feminist” rather than “maternalist,” often found that the experience of motherhood and the practical needs and limitations it created

Nancy Naples (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31-56; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), 251-274; and Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women in Kimberle Crenshaw, et. al., eds. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 357-383 and the memoirs of women activists of the period, especially Cagan, “Something New Emerges”; Jane Lazarre, *The Mother Knot* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); and the essays in Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, *The Feminist Memoir Project*.

²⁵ Ruth Rosen gives WSP its due as “a formidable and effective political group” and acknowledges that it became a “straw woman” for radical feminists but never mentions it again after her account of the JRB action. Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 201-203. Alice Echols makes the significant point that the JRB action underscored conflicts between the radical and socialist (or “politico”) wings of the Women's Liberation Movement as well as the generational divide between WSPers and younger feminists. Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). I argue that there was significant overlap between the political agendas and organizing strategies of WSP and the younger socialist feminists.

(that is, the material conditions produced by the responsibilities of parenting) had a direct influence on the issues they chose to work on and the groups they chose to work with.²⁶ Motherhood and maternalism played key roles in the formation of coalitions between middle-class women and poor women, white women and women of color. This was true of WSP in relation to the welfare rights movement and the Poor People's Campaign in the late 1960s. But it was also true of the younger generation of Second Wave feminists in their organizing around issues of daycare, reproductive rights and non-sexist education for children.²⁷ In the 1980s, both feminist *and* maternalist rhetoric inspired and were, in turn, deployed by participants in a new surge of women's peace activism, in which veterans of WSP and of women's liberation, as well as women too young to have participated in either, came together to oppose the threat of nuclear weapons and power plants. Although drawing heavily on cultural feminism and lesbian-feminist networks, the new women's peace movement also incorporated the rhetoric of maternalism and mother-activists were well represented at women's peace camps and in affinity groups of anti-nuclear protesters.

Despite its reliance on maternalist rhetoric, WSP's agenda and its demographic composition challenge the standard interpretation of mothers' movements. Many scholars argue that mothers' movements are most likely to be organized by poor and working-

²⁶ See Jo Reger, "Motherhood and the Construction of Feminist Identities: Variations in a Women's Movement Organization." *Sociological Inquiry* 71 (Winter 2001), 85-110.

²⁷ Multiple essays in *The Feminist Memoir Project* discuss tensions between mothers and women with no children within women's liberation groups, and identify issues and projects that enabled the authors both to fuse their feminism with their concerns for children, and to work with women of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Another example comes from feminist historian Sara M. Evans, who notes that while working as a community organizer in a poor white community in Durham, North Carolina, "My pregnancy was an immediate link to the women I worked with." She also recalls that because most members of her women's group had, or were about to have, children, they started a childcare cooperative, a pre-school, and a children's book publishing collective as well as participating in campaigns to get local employers to provide daycare. "Several younger women split off to form their own CR group because they found our focus on childhood socialization not 'relevant' to their immediate interests." Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 11-13 and 240 (fn10).

class women who accept traditional gender roles and don't see themselves as political but are moved to activism by subsistence issues and/or the need to protect the life, health, and well-being of their families and local communities.²⁸ In other words, they protest their inability to fulfill their responsibilities as mothers due to impediments beyond the control of the individual woman or family. While WSPers did perceive the arms race and nuclear testing as posing an imminent threat to the life and health of their children, the fact that these were issues of national and international import and that the majority of WSPers were highly educated, middle-class women who had prior histories of political involvement suggests that the appeal of motherist politics is not determined solely by socio-economic factors or limited to particular demographic cohorts.

As the findings of a 1962 survey of WSP participants demonstrate, the group's maternalist rhetoric was more often the projection of a cultural ideal than an accurate description of its members. Far from being typical housewives, the study found that sixty-five percent of the respondents held a B.A. or higher degree at a time when only six percent of women 25 and older in the general population had achieved comparable levels of education. It was true that the overwhelming majority of the respondents were mothers and only five percent of the group had never been married. But the majority of respondents did not see motherhood as the focal point of their political identity. When asked what kinds of women were attracted to WSP, only five percent gave "mothers" as their reply. The majority (fifty-six percent) answered that it was "intellectual, civic-

²⁸ This argument was first made in Temma Kaplan's classic article, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." *Signs* 7 (Spring 1982), 545-66 and further developed in her book *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Kaplan's approach has been widely influential among social scientists as well as historians. See, for example, Nancy Naples, *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

minded humanists” to whom the group most appealed. Likewise, when asked to identify the experience that had inspired their commitment to peace work, only five percent said that it was having a child. In spite of the maternalist rhetoric that increasingly infused WSP’s campaigns, very few of these early participants identified motherhood as either the inspiration or motivation for their activism. Instead they cited humanist values and intellectual experiences. More than fifty percent said that it was reading a book, seeing a movie or participating in a discussion in school or church—not becoming a mother—that sparked their passion for the issues of war and peace.²⁹ These findings and the fact that a significant number of WSP’s founders had been involved in other peace groups like the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), as well as other activist organizations, indicate that they were not political naives.³⁰ Although they accepted and even encouraged their portrayal in the media as “formerly docile homemakers [who] became enraged citizens,” especially

²⁹ Elise Boulding, “Who Are These Women: A Progress Report on a Study of Women Strike for Peace,” 1963. WSP Papers, A.1 Box 2, SCPC. The survey was sponsored by the Conflict Resolution Center at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Boulding was both a social scientist and long-time peace activist whose study was motivated by her own curiosity about WSP. She identified 14,000 women who were on the mailing lists of 45 WSP affiliates around the country and sent a questionnaire to every eighth name on the lists, ending up with a total 1,770. She received replies from 279.

³⁰ My interpretation of WSP’s maternal rhetoric as strategically motivated by the desire to win sympathy and respectability for a controversial position and to defuse red-baiting builds on work by historians of U.S. women’s activism in the 1950s including Dee Garrison, “‘Our Skirts Gave Them Courage’: The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-61,” Deborah A. Gerson, “‘Is Family Devotion Now Subversive?’ Familialism Against McCarthy,” and Ruth Feldstein, “‘I Wanted the Whole World to See’ Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till,” all in Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver* and on the work of feminist scholars of recent Latin American women’s movements, especially Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, including Jo Fisher, *Out of the Shadows*, Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1994), and Diana Taylor, “Making a Spectacle: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” in Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diana Taylor, editors, *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 182-197. Right-wing women have also successfully exploited maternalist rhetoric to advance a partisan political agenda. See, for example, Maria de los Angeles Crummett, “El Poder Feminino: The Mobilization of Women Against Socialism in Chile” *Latin American Perspectives* 4 (Fall 1977), 103-113, Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and articles on right-wing women in Jetter, et.al.

in the early years, comparatively few WSPers appear to have fit that description literally.³¹

Like *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the Argentinean mothers who attempted to hold their government accountable for their children's disappearance during that country's "dirty war" of the 1970s, Women Strike for Peace had both practical and strategic reasons for organizing as women and as mothers. WSP was formed in 1961 in the context of the Cold War, at the height of the arms race, and at the tail end of the McCarthy era—a repressive era, though certainly not comparable in its brutality to Argentina's dirty war. Practically, since the majority of the women were not primary breadwinners for their families, they could make time during the day for the "business" of activism—meetings, phone calls, the writing of press releases and stuffing of envelopes. Strategically, the women knew that the political context of McCarthyism (its gender politics as well as its anti-communism) made an appeal for peace from mothers, housewives, "the woman next door" less threatening than an appeal from women who presented themselves as concerned citizens or political activists. Appearing to accept the domestic Cold War imperative that motherhood and child-rearing were an American woman's most (if not only) important contribution to civic life and national security counter-balanced their attacks on the arms race, which could be (and often were) interpreted as un-American.³² They were concerned from the first with reaching the

³¹ This is how Kaplan describes the women of the Love Canal Homeowners Association, a group of working-class housewives who formed their organization after discovering that toxic waste buried under their homes was responsible for the remarkably high rate of childhood illnesses and women's miscarriages in their neighborhood. *Crazy for Democracy*, 3.

³² See, for example, Adlai Stevenson, "A Purpose for Modern Woman," excerpted from "Commencement Address, Smith College, 1955," available online at <http://www.h-net.org/~hst203/documents/stevenson.html>. Stevenson, the perennial "liberal" presidential candidate during the 1950s, told the graduates of an elite women's college that American "women, especially educated women, have a unique opportunity to influence us, man and boy, and to play a direct part in the

widest possible audience and went quickly from presenting themselves as a diverse coalition of different kinds of women to a group of housewives and mothers. In an early document titled “Who Are These Women?—You Ask,” WSP’s founders focused primarily on their wide-ranging professional identities, introducing themselves as “teachers, writers, social workers, artists, secretaries, executives, saleswomen.” Near the end, they added, “most of us are also wives and mothers...First of all we are human beings.”³³ Just a few months later, a report on their first lobbying day in Washington, D.C. referred to the participants exclusively as “housewives and mothers” and argued that it was their shared identity as nurturers that made them a force to be reckoned with: “Have you ever seen the mother animal protecting her young? The meekest ones become lionesses.”³⁴ By comparing themselves to female animals, the early WSPers implied that there was something inherent, biological, and inevitable about their opposition to nuclear testing and the arms race. But identifying specifically with the lioness also opened the door for a more feminist interpretation—that these women were strong, angry, fierce, and determined to achieve their goals.

unfolding drama of our free society.” WSP seemed to take him at his word, except for the part where he argued that this important work could be done “in the living-room with a baby in your lap or in the kitchen with a can opener in your hand.” WSPers, like their younger counterparts in the social movements of the 1960s, believed that to have real influence, it was frequently necessary to “take it to the streets.” For insight into how other American women of the time responded to the glorification of the housewife-mother role, see Harvey, *The Fifties*; Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique* and Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*.

³³ Swerdlow, 19.

³⁴ *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (undated), Women Strike for Peace National Organization Folder, Tamiment Collection. In their literature, WSPers referred to themselves as “angry women” on a regular basis throughout the 1960s and ‘70s—as did many proponents of women’s liberation. The WSPers clearly did not see themselves as “passive suppliants (sic) begging for favors,” although this is how they were described by members of one women’s liberation group. See Radical Women’s Group, “Burial of Weeping Womanhood” in Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, editors, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

More recently, Conservative politician Sarah Palin’s coining of the term “mama grizzly,” demonstrates that this kind of rhetoric continues to be seen as an effective appeal to “ordinary” American women across the ideological spectrum.

In addition, WSP's initial commitment to being non-ideological and non-partisan stemmed from both sincere conviction and political savvy. WSPers believed that peace could and should be a mass movement, uniting people in spite of differences in partisan affiliation, because of their conviction that saving the planet was more important than any other issue. (And *this* was a traditional maternalist belief—that women had a special responsibility for preserving and sustaining life and would put that above all other concerns.) But at the same time, WSP's claim that it stood outside the ideological debates of its era was a strategic response to the Cold War context in which the organization developed, an attempt to avoid the destructive rounds of red-baiting and purging that were destroying the unity and effectiveness of other peace organizations like SANE and WILPF.³⁵

The overwhelming majority of WSPers *were* mothers and emphasizing their motherhood was an effective way to appeal to a broad audience. They were not, however, always “housewives” in the sense of being full-time homemakers. Dagmar Wilson was a professional illustrator but claimed nonetheless that it was legitimate for her to call herself a housewife because she did her artwork at home.³⁶ Moreover, even those who did participate in the paid labor force were generally not the sole or primary breadwinners for their families and tended to have some flexibility in their hours and activities. WSPers

³⁵ For the impact of McCarthyism on other peace groups, see DeBenedetti, *Peace Reform*; and Alonso's *Peace as a Women's Issue* as well as her article, “Mayhem and Moderation: Women Peace Activists During the McCarthy Era” in Meyerowitz, *Note June Cleaver*, 128-150. A number of WSP's members were called before HUAC but the organization recognized the committee's action as an attempt to undermine their effectiveness and refused to be cowed. See Swerdlow, chapter 5.

³⁶ Ruth Rosen found numerous examples of professional women in the 1950s and early '60s who downplayed, camouflaged, or out and out lied about their working lives, claiming “mother” or “housewife” as their primary identity to avoid criticism and blame at a time when working mothers were seen as undermining the American way of life and held responsible for juvenile delinquency. Rosen, *The World Split Open*. For an in-depth analysis of the gender politics of the Cold War era, especially in regard to marriage and family life, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

believed that there was an additional political benefit attached to claiming “housewife” status, beyond the non-threatening image it conveyed. They thought it made them more free than their husbands to take controversial positions and challenge the status quo, that they were somehow “outside” the system and able to see it clearly and critique it honestly in a way that career-oriented men were not.

WSPers would be criticized by many feminists, beginning with Betty Friedan, for linking their activism to the identities of wife and mother rather than claiming the gender-neutral category of “citizen” though, in fact, they did both, often saying in their literature that they acted as mothers *and* citizens. Thus, WSPers saw themselves acting on behalf of their families, but also independently of them. In the early sixties, some WSPers challenged the common policy of media outlets to identify married women by their husbands’ first as well as last names (e.g. Mrs. Christopher Wilson as opposed to Mrs. Dagmar Wilson) and rejected the frequent suggestion that they should give up their political work because it might harm their husbands’ careers. Interestingly, many WSP husbands appear to have been emotionally supportive of their wives, but not politically active themselves, suggesting a novel twist on the traditional gendered division of labor. For many of these couples, political participation—beyond voting—appears to have been seen as part of the woman’s sphere of activity. The husbands’ responsibilities as breadwinners meant they lacked the time and/or feared professional repercussions should they publicly espouse controversial views.³⁷

³⁷ WSP founder Folly Fodor refused to give *The Washington Post* her husband’s first name for purposes of identification “because it’s me doing it, not my husband.” Swerdlow, 65. They did not succeed in changing the general policy, becoming instead the exception that proves the rule. To take one example from 1968, the *Washington Post* identified a delegation of women antiwar activists as “Mrs. Martin Luther King, wife of the Negro civil rights leader; Dagmar Wilson, founder of Women Strike for Peace; Mrs. J. Preston Irwin, a Republican National Committeewoman from Cleveland, and Mrs. Ernest Gruening, wife of the Alaskan Senator.” Richard Harwood and Elizabeth Shelton, “Antiwar Women March on Capitol,” *Washington Post*,

This dissertation also sheds light on the internal processes of social movements, especially the ways in which participants' beliefs are changed by their activist experiences and how they then, in turn, push their organizations and colleagues in new directions. While most scholars depict WSP's politics as relatively stable throughout its history, it was actually in a continual process of development and transformation. Over the course of the sixties and into the seventies, the group broadened its agenda, became increasingly militant in its actions, and reached out to new coalition partners representing a diversity of issues and demographics. WSP suffered through and often benefitted from roiling internal debates over goals and strategies, tense interactions among local activists with different constituencies, and arguments over conflicting local and national priorities. WSP committed itself early on to growing the antinuclear and later the antiwar movement through education and outreach; it believed in the necessity, within the American political system, of winning hearts and minds. To that end, the women deployed maternalist rhetoric and conservative, feminine attire to keep from alienating those who did not already share their opinions. But, as the war dragged on and increasingly horrific weapons were deployed by the U.S. military against the Vietnamese for ends that seemed to them wrong-headed at best and immoral at worst, many WSPers felt compelled to participate in militant direct action, including campaigns of civil disobedience. The tension between following the dictates of conscience and maintaining an image that would not alienate the "general public" became increasingly difficult for members to resolve. This reflects a larger truth about the social movements of the sixties

January 16, 1968, A1. Cora Weiss, a WSP leader in New York recalled that, "reporters or neighbors asked if our husbands' reputations could withstand our peace and justice work...No one wondered whether a man's work was harmful to children or survival or [that it] affected his wife's success." Adams, *Peacework*, 41.

and social movements in general: they were continually evolving—and frequently dividing—in response to their successes and failures, changes in the political context in which they worked, the addition of new members and loss of those with “institutional memory,” as well as through interaction with other movements and activists who may or may not have shared their specific goals but were also engaged in efforts to transform the larger society.³⁸

These tensions and transformations point to the diversity within WSP, in terms of political beliefs and experiences as well as age and lifestyle, something that has received scant attention until now. I highlight it, primarily through detailed portraits of several WSP affiliates—in Washington, D.C., Ann Arbor, Michigan, Boston, Massachusetts and its suburbs, and Chicago, Illinois. Although this is a national study, delving deeply into a number of the local contexts within and against which WSPers worked effectively illustrates the sources of both the women’s sense of solidarity and the group’s internal divisions. It is also crucial to identify—by race, class, or ethnicity—those WSPers who did not share the majority’s white middle-class identity. Doing so not only suggests that WSP was more diverse than previously portrayed, but more importantly avoids the pitfall of erasing the contributions of those working-class women and women of color who did participate. Because WSP developed alongside and often in conversation with movements for civil rights, against poverty at home and imperialism abroad, the women were frequently pushed, from within and without, to recognize the privileges and comforts that they accrued through their whiteness and relative affluence. By the late

³⁸ Variations on this theme, particularly the way activists are further radicalized by what they observe, learn, and experience through their participation in a social movement, have been documented by a number of historians and social scientists. See, for example: Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*; and Fisher, *Out of the Shadows*.

sixties, WSPers had not only become aware of their contradictions, they consciously strategized on how they could deploy their privileged status on behalf of the causes they supported.³⁹ Women of color (most notably, Coretta Scott King, Clarie Collins Harvey, and Grace Lee Boggs), though few in number, were enormously influential in this process. Although WSP was never very successful at achieving widespread racial and class diversity among its own membership, it did become effective at coalition-building with poor women and women of color, particularly around the issue of redirecting federal resources away from the military industrial-complex and toward education, health, housing, and welfare.

This dissertation comprises seven chapters and an afterword. Chapter One discusses WSP's founding, paying particular attention to the Cold War context that inspired it, what it drew from earlier women's movements, and the personal and political backgrounds of the group of Washington, D.C. women who initiated it. It also addresses the gender and racial assumptions of the white middle-class in the U.S. during the early sixties and the ways WSP alternately reified and challenged them. Chapter Two analyzes WSP's early actions on the international, national, and local levels through close readings

³⁹ This approach stands in contrast to that of some younger radicals who believed it necessary to reject, to the degree possible, the benefits of their middle-class upbringings and college educations as well as the privileges of whiteness. In the early sixties, organizers for SNCC and ERAP (SDS's community organizing program in Northern cities) lived among the poor, earning tiny stipends. Later in the sixties, Cathy Wilkerson of the revolutionary vanguardist Weatherman, wrote to WSP that she and others who shared her politics had not rejected the comforts of middle-class life as had them taken away because of their critique of American society. "We came to live and experience the more direct oppression which faces most people—esp. young people," she explained. "We didn't have enough to eat; we came to wear other people's worn-out clothes; we were often ill. We not only lost protection of the courts and the police, but began to come under their direct attack; we found it was hard to find and hold a job, and so on. We came to bear a resentment against those who still had them because it became very clear that those who maintained them did so by collaborating with our vicious power structure in oppressing and exploiting so many millions of our brothers and sisters." *Memo* April-May 1969, 23. Although WSPers would also experience the loss of police of protection and active harassment by police departments, the FBI, and other governmental agencies, most remained financially comfortable. As an organization and individually, they sought to share their wealth—through financial contributions and by providing full-time activists with food, clothing, and places to stay. For WSPers, caretaking was a form of activism—a way to build, support, and grow the larger Movement.

of a 1962 trip to Geneva, Switzerland in which WSPers, acting as mothers and citizen diplomats, attempted to influence international disarmament talks and of the grassroots education and outreach projects of the Ann Arbor affiliate, which linked the dangers of nuclear war to the more insidious threats to children's health posed by fallout from above ground nuclear testing. The third chapter examines WSP's efforts to overcome the chilling effect of McCarthyism on political protest with its strategic use of maternalist imagery during HUAC hearings on alleged communist influence within the organization.

Chapter Four chronicles the events and debates that lead WSP to shift its focus from nuclear weapons and the arms race to the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. It shows how developing relationships with African American women at home and members of the Vietnamese Women's Union abroad plays a key role in broadening WSP's understanding of sisterhood and the responsibilities of mothers. Chapter Five depicts WSP's growing militancy as it begins to work in coalition with other antiwar constituencies, particularly draft resisters, focusing specifically on the activities of Voice of Women-New England, an affiliate in the Boston area. It analyzes the roles that gender and generational politics played in shaping the anti-war movement, as well as the role that anti-war politics played in launching the women's liberation movement and throwing into relief the sometimes divergent interests of middle-aged and young adult women in the Movement. Set against the backdrop of the dramatic events of 1968, the sixth chapter discusses WSP's struggle to remain respectable in the eyes of mainstream Americans, while supporting draft resistance, welfare rights, and the Poor People's Campaign. Where maternalist rhetoric, feminine attire and whiteness had once provided WSPers with a degree of protection from the police, conservative media

outlets, and anticommunist zealots, by the late sixties the women began to find themselves on the receiving end of police brutality, right-wing harassment, and scrutiny and infiltration by agents of the government. The seventh chapter analyzes the relationship between feminism and maternalism through conflicts that arose between WSP and the women's liberation movement during the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as the splits that developed within the feminist movement over issues including whether or not to work with the male left and whether or not to have children. In the Afterword, I look at the ways in which WSP was transformed by the end of the war, the women's liberation movement, and continuing debates over the degree to which men and women are "different," while also evaluating WSPers' work within and influence on antinuclear, environmental, and women's activism in the post-Vietnam era. Finally, I analyze the continuing appeal of maternalist rhetoric and mother's movements in light of WSP's experience.

Chapter 1: Mothers of the Sixties

For those who feared that conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union would lead to nuclear war, 1961 was a particularly tense year. A meeting between U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in June had done nothing to allay their mutual distrust. Instead, it motivated Kennedy to ask Congress to add more than \$3 billion to the military budget and more than \$200 million to the budget for fallout shelters. Khrushchev responded by beginning construction of the Berlin Wall, physically dividing East Germany from the West, and announcing that the Soviets would resume atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons after a four-year moratorium. This led Kennedy to announce a resumption of underground nuclear testing in the United States.¹

In response to this series of events, Dagmar Wilson, a 45-year-old children's book illustrator and mother of three in Washington, D.C., initiated a series of conversations that led to the formation of a new antinuclear group called Women Strike for Peace. Although an active member of the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy (SANE), Wilson was frustrated by the group's lack of passion and spontaneity. It was not responding with sufficient urgency to the Berlin crisis and the resumption of nuclear testing, events she viewed as potentially the first steps toward nuclear war. Then, in September, Bertrand Russell, the English philosopher, was arrested for blocking traffic in London's Trafalgar Square to protest the nuclear threat. "He let it be known that having tried through normal channels to alert the world to the extreme danger we were in, pitting ourselves against each other with these destructive new weapons, he felt it necessary to

¹ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 47. Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

make a gesture,” Wilson recalled. “I was impressed by that.”² Wilson felt compelled to make a comparable gesture. She called a male friend at SANE to ask if the organization was going to do anything in support of Russell. When her friend made it clear that SANE was doing nothing, Wilson told him that she felt “like chartering a plane and filling it with women to picket the jail [where Russell was being held].”³ After discussions with friends, she settled on a different and even more dramatic action—a one-day strike of American women to protest the arms race.

Wilson would later credit her husband Christopher with giving her the idea to start a protest movement of women. Noticing his wife’s disgruntlement at the lack of seriousness with which government officials, the SANE leadership, and even their own circle of friends were taking her concerns about the nuclear threat, Christopher Wilson said, “Well, women are very good at getting their way when they make up their minds to do something.” This was a back-handed compliment, to be sure, given the fact that the phrase “getting their way,” is often associated with pouting children whose tactics include pouting, stamping their feet, and holding their breath until they turn blue. What Dagmar Wilson heard was that women needed to get organized. The next day, she began calling women friends and acquaintances. She found that most of them were equally frightened about the looming nuclear threat and equally disdainful of the government’s response to it. “We women thought that the fallout shelter idea was an inane, insane, and unsuitable response to the world situation and spelled disaster,” Wilson recalled.⁴ As one

² Quoted in Judith Porter Adams. *Peacework: Oral Histories of Women Peace Activists*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 194.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wilson quoted in Adams, 195. Fallout shelters and the government’s civil defense plans were targets of women’s protest actions even prior to the founding of WSP. See Dee Garrison, “‘Our Skirts Gave Them

of her friends wrote a few days later, “During the day ... we go about our business pretending that the threat of annihilation doesn’t exist. At night we dream of The Bomb falling.”⁵ Even women who had not been politically active in the past told Wilson that they would be willing to do something about this life-and-death issue.

WSP’s development straddled two very different political and cultural periods in the history of the United States and the history of American women. Its initial campaign was organized at a time when the cultural ideal of American womanhood was the devoted mother and happy housewife. At the same time, the broad anticommunist consensus that permeated the politics of the era meant that any critique of government policy or push for social reform was met with suspicion. WSPers, by taking their demand for an end to the arms race to the streets, the White House, the Capitol, the United Nations, and The Hague, challenged the popular notion that a woman’s place was in the home. At the same time, their projection of a traditionally feminine image through their style of dress, choice of visual symbols, and talk of mother love was effective at disarming conservative critics, including the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).⁶ Despite their mainstream style, WSP’s campaign for peace was also a campaign for civil liberties and citizen participation and against government infallibility and secrecy. Along with a few other groups founded around the same time and committed to major social and political reforms—the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Students for a

Courage” and *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

⁵ Eleanor Garst, “Draft of Letter to Accompany Leaflet,” September 22, 1961. WSP Papers, Series A.1 Box 2, SCPC.

⁶ Amy Swerdlow, “Ladies Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC,” *Feminist Studies* 8:3 (Autumn 1982), 493-520.

Democratic Society (SDS), and Fair Play for Cuba (FPC)—WSPers argued that blind obedience and supporting “my country right or wrong” was un-American. Dissent and open debate was the true essence of patriotism. This stance helped usher in what became known as the New Left.

WSP helped create the New Left and was also transformed by it. Over the course of the 1960s, as public demonstrations for a variety of causes became more common, the women’s activist style became increasingly dramatic and their message increasingly radical. They went from marching silently in front of the White House and respectfully lobbying Congress to pounding on the doors of the Pentagon with their shoes and lying down in the street in front of the corporate headquarters of IT&T. Their reform agenda also changed—from ending the arms race and nuclear testing to a broader transformation of American society that addressed economic inequality, racism, and imperialism.

Just as WSPers straddled two political and cultural eras, they also straddled two traditions of American women’s activism—maternalism and feminism. Like female activists of the Progressive era, they paradoxically relied on qualities and characteristics traditionally associated with womanhood, motherhood, and housewifery to rationalize their entrance onto the public stage. They similarly claimed that inhabiting a position outside the corridors of power had preserved in them a moral clarity and lack of self-interest sorely needed by the (male) world of policy-making and politicking. Like the club women of the early twentieth century, WSPers defined themselves as citizens as well as wives and mothers.⁷ Like Jane Addams and other adherents of “civic

⁷ Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). On black club women and their activism during this period, see Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999).

housekeeping,” WSPers believed that the values, priorities, and skills involved in the traditionally female job of running a household were directly applicable to running the state. As a group of Boston-area women wrote their neighbors during the run-up to WSP’s first protest action,

[We can’t], in writing to our representatives in government, offer any foolproof proposal for averting nuclear disaster or solving international disputes. But we can—as we do at home—plead for patience, for a cooling-off period, for a willingness to give up stubborn positions and seek new and imaginative solutions. We can—as we do among squabbling teenagers—beg for more cooperation in seeking areas of mutual agreement and less competition in raising mutual threats.”

Like many early WSP missives, this one contained a double-edged message, praising (albeit humbly) the homespun common sense of the mother-housewife while subtly skewering (male) world leaders by comparing them to selfish and ill-behaved children.⁸

For these reasons, WSPers’ public activism was both an extension of their role as mothers and a departure from it. Although many WSPers seemed to accept the notion that women have different values and priorities than men, WSPers did not believe those differences relegated men and women to separate spheres of activity. Like Addams, they initially found it necessary to maintain at least an appearance of conforming to an “old ideal of womanhood” in order to pursue their political interests.⁹ By inserting themselves into national and international policy debates, they began to break down the walls that divided male responsibilities from female responsibilities, public concerns from private concerns, the political from the personal.

⁸ October 27, 1961 letter from Mrs. Mark Howe, et. al. VOW-NE Papers (unprocessed), SC.

⁹ Allen Davis, *American Heroine*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 28.

WSP's founding pre-dated the events that most historians consider the initial stirrings of the second wave of American feminism. The group's motivation was not feminist in that it was not a movement for women's equality or liberation. As Dagmar Wilson said, "We were women working for the good of humanity." Nevertheless, as Wilson explained, "In the face of male 'logic,' which seems to us utterly illogical, it was time for women to speak out."¹⁰ Wilson believed that women going on strike from work both within the home and outside it, "was a good way to demonstrate our own power and show that women were an essential part of our social structure and had a right to be heard."¹¹

The women who started WSP had a complex relationship to the gendered division of labor as practiced by white middle-class Americans during the 1950s and early '60s. Many of them had come of age before and during World War II and some had filled traditionally male industrial jobs during the war. For example, Pat Cody, of East Bay Women for Peace in Northern California, had worked as an electrician in a shipyard "to make money to go to graduate school."¹² A majority of WSPers were "middle class women who were trained in the professions," according to New York activist Cora Weiss.¹³ Entering young adulthood prior to the age of the "feminine mystique," many of these women had been encouraged by their families to attend college and pursue advanced degrees. But most gave up work outside the home, or cut back to part-time involvement, once they had children—either because it was what women did or because they felt that they had no choice. Massachusetts social worker Rohna Shoul struggled to

¹⁰ Swerdlow, 17.

¹¹ Quoted in Adams, *Peacework*, 195.

¹² Pat and Fred Cody, *Cody's Books: The Life and Times of a Berkeley Bookstore, 1956-1977*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), xx-xxi.

¹³ Weiss quoted in Adams, *Peacework*, 40.

continue working at least part-time after having children. She thought she could have it all, by which she meant: “Be the kind of [working] person you trained to be, be a mother, and take care of your domestic responsibilities.” But she and the other women in her suburban community, “really became full-time moms even though most of us were college educated or we had graduate degrees. We had professions but we stayed home and part of the reason for this was the Newton [Massachusetts] school system.” The town’s schools sent children home for lunch, had frequent half days, and offered no after-school programs, making it impossible for mothers with young children to go out for more than a couple of hours at a time, unless they had a full-time housekeeper.¹⁴

Others, feminists by any definition, found ways to combine careers and family life. Bella Abzug, a founder of the New York City WSP branch, had attended Columbia Law School after being rejected by Harvard because she was a woman.¹⁵ She married and had two daughters while continuing to work as a lawyer and political activist. Her husband, Martin, she wrote, always supported her desire to be a working mother. He “courted me in an unconventional manner,” Abzug wrote. “He typed my term papers while I studied in the library, and before we married we had long discussions about who would do what. It was agreed that I would work at my legal career even after we had children... Our informal understanding of [and] respect for each other's work has endured throughout our marriage.”¹⁶ Abzug went on to serve in Congress, was among the founders of several feminist organizations including the National Women’s Political

¹⁴ Rohna Shoul videotaped interview, January 30, 2002, VOW-NE Oral History Project, SC.

¹⁵ Cora Weiss had also wanted to be a lawyer. At the University of Wisconsin’s law school where “out of a class of 100 students there was virtually one black, one Native American, and one woman,” she met the man who would become her husband. “It was unthinkable that a woman would compete with her husband in the same field in those years,” Weiss recalled. “If you married a lawyer, you didn’t become a lawyer.” Weiss became a social worker instead. Adams, *Peacework*, 38-39.

¹⁶ Jewish Women's Archive. "Bella Abzug: An Unconventional Courtship." <http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/abzug/courtship.html> > (last accessed July 18, 2007)

Caucus, and presided over the First National Women's Conference in 1977. Donna Allen, who led a delegation to the Soviet embassy in Washington during the November 1, 1961 strike, had done graduate work in economics and published her first book while having and raising four children. After her husband, Russ, completed his military service, he followed her lead and decided to get a Master's degree in economics and industrial relations because, Donna Allen later wrote, "this was the work I was ... so involved in and he did not have at that time a particular other specialty interest." They went to graduate school together, took the same courses and cared for their first child "by taking turns going to classes and taking notes for the other one, except at exam times when we hired a sitter." After getting her Master's, Allen spent a couple of years working for the National Labor Bureau in Chicago. She recalled being galled by a newspaper article about her work which contained "the usual stereotypes like 'followed husband,' whereas the reverse was actually the truth: he got into the labor field because of me, not vice versa."¹⁷

Still others lived lives close to the stereotype of the stay-at-home mom: keeping house, shuttling children to school and husbands to the commuter train, participating in the PTA. For them, WSP opened up a new world that transformed their sense of self. One Little Rock housewife/activist explained how involvement in WSP changed her life in this way: "When I told my husband at the end of the day, 'So I said to the mayor,' it was a lot more exciting than, 'So I said to the butcher.'" ¹⁸ Ethel Taylor, who became a key WSP organizer in Philadelphia, had never worked because, as she put it, "I didn't

¹⁷ Donna Allen, *Donna Allen: A Life of Communication as Political Participation in Democracy through People Speaking for Themselves* (unpublished manuscript), 14. Donna Allen Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SHSW.

¹⁸ Swerdlow, 127.

have to.” After realizing that she spent so much time cleaning her house that she was “polishing the polish,” she “looked around for an alternate activity” and began a career of volunteerism and political action.¹⁹

As in Taylor’s case, the role of political actor became an integral part of many WSPers’ identities. For these women, involvement in WSP became a full-time job that required them to leave their husbands and children for days and even weeks at a time to go to meetings, conferences, protest actions and fact-finding missions abroad. By putting so much time into their political work, rather than satisfying their husbands’ and children’s demands, many WSP women were challenging societal expectations of middle-class motherhood.²⁰ Although not all WSPers pursued the kinds of professional careers that Betty Friedan advocated as an antidote to the “feminine mystique,” many made a life’s work out of their activism.²¹ Lorraine Gordon, a New York City WSP and mother of two, later wrote, “If you ask me, did I have a job in those days? Yes, I had a job, nonpaying. My kitchen was an office where women came to organize.”²²

The diverse range of experiences that characterized women who were attracted to WSP helps us to understand the organization’s complexity and its internal contradictions. The group included lawyers and economists, “professional volunteers,” and stay-at-home

¹⁹ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xvi.

²⁰ Julia Wrigley identifies a similar “ironic situation” in Boston’s antibusing movement of the 1970s. The working-class housewives who dominated that campaign “were active in the names of their children, but their political involvement took them away from their families,” Wrigley writes. “The blurring of lines between personal and political responsibilities eased the conflict, as activism was viewed as an extension of the maternal role.” Wrigley, “From Housewives to Activists: Women and the Division of Political Labor in the Boston Antibusing Movement” in *No Middle Ground, Women and Radical Protest*, ed. Kathleen Blee (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 264.

²¹ For a sociologist’s analysis of activism as a “life career” for women, especially those not in the paid labor force, see Rhoda Lois Blumberg, “White Mothers as Civil Rights Activists: The Interweave of Family and Movement Roles” in Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg, editors, *Women and Social Protest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 166-179.

²² Lorraine Gordon and Barry Singer. *Alive at the Village Vanguard: My Life in and out of Jazz Time*. (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), 141.

mothers with no previous history of activism or paid labor. Some did get involved because they were mothers who hated that their children were growing up in the shadow of the bomb, forced to dive under their desks during school air raid drills. For others, those with prior histories of political activism, maternalist rhetoric was an organizing tool, a way to reach out to women who hadn't given much thought to the arms race or the impact of nuclear testing on the environment, but who might become concerned if they saw a direct impact on their families. And there were those whose activist identities were forged when political convictions and the experience of mothering met and merged. A small percentage were childless, but believed that a women's movement for peace provided opportunities for women's leadership and public influence that a male-dominated movement did not.²³

The group of five Washington, D.C. women brought together by Dagmar Wilson to organize a women's protest against the nuclear threat initially envisioned Women Strike for Peace as a one-day event. "We just want to speak out once, loudly, to tell our elected representatives that they are not properly representing us by continuing the arms race and increasing the threat of total destruction."²⁴ One of the five, Eleanor Garst, drafted a letter or "call" they could send to friends and acquaintances around the country.

²³ A similar dynamic animated the Depression-era organizing of housewives discussed by Annelise Orleck in her article, "'We Are that Mythical Thing Called the Public': Militant Housewives During the Great Depression." *Feminist Studies* 19:1 (Spring 1993), 147-172. Although Orleck follows Temma Kaplan's argument regarding the impetus for activism among women who are neither workers nor feminists, writing that her subjects were women who "accepted the sexual division of labor but who found the Depression made it impossible for them to fulfill their responsibilities to the home without leaving it," she also points out that "the key organizers of the housewives' movement were all labor leaders prior to the Depression." While many rank-and-file members of the housewives' movement were no doubt motivated primarily, if not exclusively, by immediate concerns about feeding their families and warding off eviction, its broader economic analysis, strategy, and tactics were largely shaped by women who had prior experience as workers and organizers. See also Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." *Signs* 7 (Spring 1982), 545-66.

²⁴ Ironically, the idea for the strike was suggested by a man—Lawrence Scott, a longtime peace activist.

Garst, a twice-divorced mother of two, worked as a community organizer and freelance writer. Although far from a stereotypical fifties housewife herself, Garst's letter incorporated the kind of maternalist rhetoric that WSP became known for during its early years. "We believe that it is the special responsibility of women—who bear the children and nurture the race," she wrote, "to demand for their families a better future than sudden death." She mentioned that the Strike leaflet was being distributed at "churches, bridge clubs, group meetings." She emphasized the informal (and ephemeral) nature of the plan: "We don't want any chairmen (sic), boards, committees, mechanics to get bogged down in." She also attempted to ward off Cold War era anxiety about "getting involved" by adding: "We're not asking you to sign anything, join anything." And, in spite of the dire nature of the subject at hand, Garst also managed to insert a bit of the optimism and self-satisfaction that colored much of middle-class American life in the postwar years. "The human experiment has been a good experiment," she wrote. "We have learned how to end hunger and poverty, how to travel in space. Must it all end now, because we have not learned how to resolve our quarrels with each other?"²⁵ Garst's "call" struck a nerve. Information about the proposed strike passed from friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, community to community. On November 1, 1961, women in sixty cities participated in some form of protest action or public outreach related to the dangers of nuclear testing.

²⁵ Ibid. Intellectual historian Richard H. Pells has described Americans of the 1950s as "outwardly serene and inwardly distraught." Garst's letter captures this apparent contradiction. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1985). Garst's statement that the problems of hunger and poverty had been "solved" also demonstrates the founders' assumption that all American women were, like them, living in relative economic comfort. This, in turn, accounts for their belief that mothers could be easily convinced that protecting their children from nuclear annihilation should be their chief priority.

WSP mythology holds that 50,000 participated in the Strike, although newspaper coverage of the events suggests a significantly smaller number.²⁶

Given that the “strike” activities were organized and publicized in just twelve weeks, prior to the existence of the Internet, e-mail, or cell phones, at a historical moment when challenging government policy, particularly in the arenas of international relations and national defense, was widely viewed as communist-sympathizing, even the lowest estimate of 12,000 would have been an impressive turnout. Many of the women who participated said they did so because they were so moved by the spirit and language of Garst’s letter. Pat Cody got the leaflet from another mother at her daughter’s nursery school. Already “worried about where our country was headed ... I looked at my new baby and reflected: what is the point of taking such good care, getting the regular check-up at the pediatrician, if I do not also try to take care of what the outside world can bring?” For many of the women who participated, the events were transformative. Lorraine Gordon, who would become a leader of the New York City branch of WSP, went to the United Nations on November 1, after seeing a flier about the strike. “I discovered a lot of women, all strangers to me, women I’d never seen before,” she recalled. “... I marched around with them.” After returning home that night, Gordon called Dagmar Wilson, whose phone number was on the strike literature. “I said to her, ‘I have your flier and I want to do something. I want to help. I like what you say here. It’s

²⁶ The 50,000 figure appears frequently in WSP’s literature, beginning with a letter to women known to have participated in the November 1 strike. It listed 67 cities and towns where actions were known to have taken place. As often happens, the organizers of the event came to a different conclusion regarding the number of participants than other sources. To take one example, *The New York Times* reported that between 300 and 800 women took part in Washington, D.C., while the organizers claimed between 750 and 1500. “300 Women Protest Here Against Nuclear Testing,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1961, 5. “Report to Women Around the United States of America on the Women’s Strike for Peace,” November, 1961. WSP Papers M83-327, Box 1, 1961 Folder, SCPC. In her history of WSP, Amy Swerdlow estimated that about 12,000 women participated. Swerdlow, 247, *f.n.*1.

important to me.’ ... I was so impressed with her and her cry to women—to mothers—to get out there, something is wrong in this world, do something about it!” she wrote later.²⁷

For Philadelphia strike organizer Ethel Taylor, “It was like an electric current running through the country ... this couldn’t just be a one-day action; it would have to go on.”²⁸ “We were truly amazed at the response we got,” echoed Pat Cody, who helped organize the strike day events in Berkeley. “We truly touched the spirits of many people, and the lethargy of the years of fear-engendered passivity fell away. At the evening meeting we’d advertised, there was standing room only and a consensus that we could not disband: we must continue our efforts.”²⁹ As the Washington, D.C. group noted, “The typical reaction, here and everywhere is ‘Thank Heaven! At last there is something *I can do to speak out for humanity!*’”³⁰

Garst’s “call” introduced many of the rhetorical elements that characterized the early WSP and proved responsible for the group’s first successes as well as its initial limitations. The tone is personal, conversational, and emotional in its approach—a letter rather than a leaflet. Readers like Pat Cody and Lorraine Gordon, who did not have a pre-existing relationship with Wilson or Garst, were able to empathize with their message, as women and as mothers. While hitting a traditionally maternalist note—reminding women of their responsibility for the nurturance of the race and suggesting that nuclear escalation could prevent them from being able to fulfill that responsibility—the letter also acknowledged that many women worked outside the home and that their responsibilities as citizens were not limited to raising children. The letter characterized the strike’s

²⁷ Gordon and Singer, 141.

²⁸ Quoted in Adams, 13.

²⁹ Cody, 55.

³⁰ October, 1961 flyer, WSP Papers, SCPC.

organizers as “ordinary people, not experts”—which is how Garst and Wilson envisioned the women they wanted to reach. The message was that any woman who responded to the call was joining a movement of equals (a key element of developing theories of participatory democracy). She would be acting out of both emotion (love of children and nature) and common sense (“We solve nothing by killing off the whole human race”), rather than a pre-existing ideological framework or access to special knowledge. It made clear that getting media coverage was a priority equal to that of reaching public officials. (“We will get the ear of the press and government ... we will see that TV, press and radio are notified in time to give adequate coverage.”)³¹

The discussions and writings that developed and promoted the November 1 strike suggest that the planners were reaching out to all women, not just mothers. Early WSPers appear to have believed strongly that there was strength in numbers. For Donna Allen, “the number of people one could reach ... measured the extent of one’s success in having an influence on political decisions.”³² In an effort to attract the broadest possible constituency, they initially promoted themselves as a group whose members had diverse backgrounds and interests. For that reason, the original call invited both housewives and women who worked outside the home to participate.³³

It didn’t take the founders long to drop the references to career women and humanistic values from their literature. As WSP transformed from a network of ad hoc groups organizing one-time events to an organization with a national identity and long-term agenda, it began to rely increasingly on language and symbols associated with

³¹ Garst, “Draft of Letter.”

³² Allen, 13.

³³ Quoted in Swerdlow, 19.

maternalism.³⁴ They accepted and even encouraged their portrayal in the media as “formerly docile homemakers [who] became enraged citizens,” especially in the early years, even though comparatively few WSPers appear to have fit that description literally because it appeared to help their cause.³⁵ A significant number of WSP’s founders had been active in peace groups like SANE and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), as well as other activist organizations, indicating that they were not political naives that journalists enjoyed portraying. And while the majority of the group’s early members appear to have accepted that mothers were responsible for the day-to-day work of child-rearing not all did, as the cases of Bella Abzug and Donna Allen demonstrate. But downplaying the professional and activist experiences of so many of its members helped WSP attract positive (if sometimes patronizing) attention from the media, deflect the potential criticism of some Cold Warriors, and made them appear both credible and non-threatening to much of the general public.

Because WSP’s founders wanted to win the widest possible hearing for their views at a time when publicly criticizing the arms race was still likely to result in accusations of subversion, the women took great pains to make their critique of government policy sound like good common sense. The early WSPers, as Garst’s call made clear, set out to insert what they identified as a “non-ideological” critique of the

³⁴ In their literature, WSPers referred to themselves as “angry women” on a regular basis throughout the 1960s and ‘70s—as did many proponents of women’s liberation. The WSPers clearly did not see themselves as “passive suppliants (sic) begging for favors,” although this is how they were described by members of one women’s liberation group. See Radical Women’s Group, “Burial of Weeping Womanhood” in Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, editors, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

³⁵ This is how Kaplan describes the women of the Love Canal Homeowners Association, a group of working-class housewives who formed their organization after discovering that toxic waste buried under their homes was responsible for the remarkably high rate of childhood illnesses and women’s miscarriages in their neighborhood. Although it is not a particularly accurate description of most early WSPers, it does characterize how they initially wanted to be perceived. *Crazy for Democracy*, 3.

arms race with the Soviet Union into a political debate dominated by red-baiting. Garst downplayed the significance of political differences between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in this way: “Democracy and Communism have deep basic conflicts. So do Democrats and Republicans, husbands and wives, parents and children. We solve nothing by killing off the whole human race. Freedom will not survive unless people survive, in an uncontaminated world.”³⁶ They did not believe “better dead than red.” Unlike WILPF and SANE, WSP refused to either question members about their political affiliations or to purge those who had been identified by others as Communists or fellow travelers.

At the same time, the call also emphasized that true democracy requires active citizen involvement. Without specifically mentioning the chilling effect of McCarthyism on social activism, Garst wrote, “We believe a lot of people across the country feel just as we do—but thinking they’re alone, do not speak out.” At the same time, it reassured those who might fear guilt by association with the reminder, “We’re not asking anyone to sign anything, join anything.”³⁷ Years later, Donna Allen articulated the problem facing WSP and other groups that were trying to ignite public debate on controversial issues during this period:

I knew that there were very few communists in the U.S. and that all were known to the F.B.I., who followed, harassed, and, with the aid of the media, exposed them to neighbors, employers, and other associates. I knew that people labeled as communist or suspected communists could not hold union office or public office, or sometimes not even their jobs ... I saw that although communists were not a threat to Americans, the fear of one’s name appearing in one of these media stories about communism was a threat. I saw this threat keeping many of my friends from communicating by speaking, writing, or associating in organizations—in short, from exercising their First Amendment right to participate in the political decision-making of democratic self-government ... Those who continued to write and speak ... who expressed views

³⁶ Garst, “Draft of Letter.”

³⁷ Ibid.

that were different from the media-approved views on almost any subject in those days were commonly met with, ‘What are you, some kind of communist?’³⁸

Many of the founding WSPers shared Allen’s frustration with the level of grassroots political participation in the United States. In particular, they saw it hampering the pro-peace and anti-nuclear causes. The founders of WSP had seen SANE and WILPF tear themselves apart through redbaiting, infighting, and political purges. One of their criticisms of SANE’s leadership was that it buckled under outside pressure to expel Communists from the organization.³⁹ At the same time, WSPers understood that fear of being labeled “Un-American” might prevent people who sympathized with their concerns from taking a public stand. Given the political context of the early 1960s (its gender politics as well as its anti-communism), they realized that an appeal for peace from “ordinary” women—especially mothers, housewives, “the woman next door”—was less threatening than an appeal from women who presented themselves as concerned citizens,

³⁸ Allen, 14. This frustration was a key factor in the development of the New Left; see, for another example, the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964. Robert Cohen and Reginald E. Zelnick, eds. *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Robert Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jo Freeman, *At Berkeley in the Sixties: The Education of an Activist, 1961-1965*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Mark Kitchell, dir. *Berkeley in the Sixties*, 2002.

³⁹ In 1960, the year before WSP’s founding, the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy was devastated by a split over whether to “purge” communists from the organization after it was accused of “harboring” communists by Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut. For the impact of McCarthyism on peace groups, see DeBenedetti, *The Peace Reform in American History*, chapter 7; Alonso’s *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, chapter 6, as well as her article, “Mayhem and Moderation: Women Peace Activists During the McCarthy Era” in Meyerowitz, *Note June Cleaver*, 128-150. A number of early WSPers, including Ethel Taylor, who had served on SANE’s national board, resigned in protest and were, as a result, ready and waiting for a new anti-nuclear organization when they received the Washington women’s call. For excellent in-depth discussions of blacklisting and the impact of being identified as a communist on life in the workplace, see Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1999) and Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980, rev. 1991). In spite of WSP’s efforts to appear non-ideological, fourteen members from the New York area were subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1962. The organization refused to be cowed by HUAC, standing behind the subpoenaed women. See Swerdlow, “Ladies Day at the Capitol” and *Women Strike for Peace*, chapter 5.

professionals, or political activists. At a time when black-listing was still a weapon in the anticommunist arsenal, women who were not primary breadwinners for their families also had less at stake should they be identified as “reds.” The essentialist ring of WSP’s early rhetoric was meant to spread the idea that women of “all...political persuasions” could, and should, be committed to ending the arms race and atomic testing. WSP’s initial commitment to being non-ideological and non-partisan stemmed from both sincere conviction and political savvy. Because they believed that saving the planet was more important than any other single issue, WSPers felt certain that the peace movement could and should be a mass movement, uniting women in spite of differences in partisan affiliation. (They also believed that all women would share this conviction.)

Their focus on motherhood was an organizing tool—a mechanism for connecting women who shared little beyond that identity. They believed the experience of motherhood was a political ice-breaker and that discussing their hopes and fears for their children would spark feelings of solidarity and a sense of shared interest. Ethel Taylor later compared Philadelphia WSP’s twice-weekly meetings around her dining room table where “we tossed about ideas for a strike against the powers that threatened our kids and the world” to the consciousness-raising sessions of the women’s liberation movement. Through these discussions, the women developed an intense commitment to each other as well as dedication to the cause. Because the group had to cover the expenses associated with their campaign—printing, stamps, and phone calls—Taylor placed an empty sugar bowl on the table at each meeting. One mother of two with no cash to spare “sold her blood to the Red Cross” so she could contribute; although “not everyone bled for the

cause,” as Taylor put it, others gave up small luxuries like regular trips to the beauty parlor in order to put something in the sugar bowl.⁴⁰

Many WSP activists also claimed that skills they had developed through years of raising children and running a household provided had made them experts in the areas of organizing, consensus-building, and peace-making. Even the mainstream media credited WSPers for their ability to keep the peace on a small scale. “How do you keep things so orderly?” a *New York Post* reporter asked Irma Zigas, a Long Island WSPer who was the lead marshal at a demonstration. “I have five children,” she replied. “I’m used to keeping things orderly at home.”⁴¹

In 1962, anthropologist Margaret Mead suggested that there was a specific parallel between peacework and housework. Although she did not mention WSP by name, she wrote in the women’s magazine *Redbook* that the peace activism of young mothers had a “special and hopeful significance.” Mead argued that, “Our hope today rests not on peace *winning* but on *peacekeeping*.” The latter term, “so simple and obvious an echo of woman’s work of housekeeping,” expressed her belief that achieving and maintaining peace “demands the patience, the fortitude and the endless, unremitting efforts that are so much more characteristic of a woman’s than a man’s role in society ... the smaller, endlessly repetitive tasks” that comprise domestic caretaking.⁴² WSPers shared this view and expressed it themselves, in slightly different language, before Mead’s article appeared: “Let us ... each day, snatch a moment from our own ‘dailyness’

⁴⁰ Taylor, 1.

⁴¹ Reprint of *New York Post* article by Carl J. Pelleck, n.d., in MEMO 6:3 (February 12, 1968), p.11. WSP Papers MSS 433 Box 2 Folder 1 SCPC.

⁴² Margaret Mead, “Peacekeeping,” *Redbook*, December, 1962.

and perform some small task that affects our own thinking and effectiveness, the orientation of our children, the climate of our community or the condition of another human being.”⁴³ WSP’s politics also foreshadowed Sara Ruddick’s theory that the practice of caring for children creates a particular way of thinking and set of values that can bridge the gap that too often exists between “private affection” and “public action.” For Ruddick, this “maternal thinking” has the potential to inform public policy by making the preservation and growth of all children a responsibility of government as well as parents. WSPers too came to make that connection and by the late 1960s were campaigning not only for an end to war but for a re-distribution of federal funds to guarantee that all children were well-fed, well-housed, well-clothed, and well-educated.⁴⁴

WSPers also valued the process that would become known as “participatory democracy” in New Left circles, an approach to civic involvement that was not exclusively female or maternal. WSP was founded within a year of the two main organizations identified with the New Left: the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), both founded in 1960. Although most WSPers were at least a generation older than most members of the new progressive student groups, they shared many of the same beliefs and values. All were committed to grassroots organizing, the active participation of citizens in self-governance (“let the people decide”), consensus-based approaches to decision-making, and direct action forms of protest. Like their more youthful counterparts, WSPers were trying to identify a progressive third way that rejected both the doctrinaire and hierarchical nature of the Old Left and the fervent anticommunism of Cold War liberals. WSP disassociated

⁴³ *Ann Arbor Women for Peace Monthly Bulletin*, September, 1962, 3.

⁴⁴ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*. (New York: Beacon Books, 1989).

itself from the mainstream peace movement in much the same way that SNCC declared its independence from the civil rights establishment and SDS split from its parent organization in the labor-oriented left. Wilson and the other founders consciously chose a less hierarchical structure than that of the Old Left or mainstream liberal peace groups like SANE. The lack of officers and membership lists allayed the fears of those who believed in the cause but hesitated to even sign a petition for fear of harassment by anticommunists. And the less bureaucracy, the greater freedom to act.

Early WSPers believed that by acting, they would inspire other women to act; they set out to “lead through participation” to use historian Temma Kaplan’s phrase.⁴⁵ In an interview with *The New York Times Magazine*, Dagmar Wilson made it clear that one of the things that set WSP apart from other peace groups was that they were not interested in preaching to the converted.⁴⁶ They didn’t think a demonstration was successful unless it was “a first demonstration for some of the women,” according to New York leader Cora Weiss.⁴⁷ While SNCC and SDS reached out to the literally disenfranchised (Blacks in the South and college students who were too young to vote) and those whose voices were rarely heard in public debates due to their poverty or lack of education, WSP reached out to a group that had access to the rights of citizenship and the privileges of a middle-class lifestyle. But WSPers believed that gender expectations had dissuaded the majority of American women from actively participating in public debates and that those women who did attempt to play a role were too often ignored or

⁴⁵ Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements*. (New York, Routledge, 1997), ix.

⁴⁶ Alvin Shuster, “Close Up of a ‘Peace Striker,’ ” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 6, 1962.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Adams, p.42.

patronized.⁴⁸ Although their goals were not overtly feminist, they did have a gendered analysis of power relations within American society and government.

Because their main concern, in the early sixties, was attracting “ordinary women” to the cause, WSPers, like other social activists of their generation, initially placed great stock in appearing “respectable.” They wanted to defy stereotypes of what “radicals” were expected to look like. To catch the eye and gain the ear of a mainstream, middle-class audience, they carried themselves decorously and dressed like ladies in skirts, hats, and white gloves.⁴⁹ Mickey Flacks, who was active in both WSP and SDS in Ann Arbor, Michigan while her husband Richard was a graduate student there, explained, “We strove very hard to be proper. If we had any kind of demonstration, we all dressed. Not fancy, but we didn’t want to be seen as some grubby, free group. We wanted to be looked at in the supermarket [as] another person to whom you could relate. We took great pains with that.”⁵⁰ Or, as Ethel Taylor put it, “We hoped our conventional attire would allow women seeing us in the news to identify with us, despite the fact that we were engaged in actions that were a tad unorthodox.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ For SNCC’s grassroots organizing efforts, see Carson, Ransby, and Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). In addition to its campus organizing, SDS members did community organizing among poor residents of northern cities in the mid-1960s. See Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets* and Jennifer Frost, *‘An Interracial Movement of the Poor’: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s*. (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

⁴⁹ For discussions of the reliance on respectability in other movements of the era, see Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward, “‘Dress Modestly, Neatly, as if You Were Going to Church ...’: Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Early Civil Rights Movement” in Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 69-100; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), chapter 5; and Garrison, “Our Skirts Gave Them Courage.”

⁵⁰ Mickey Flacks, interview by Bret Eynon, transcript, September 25, 1978, Contemporary History Project(CHP), BHL. The relationship between Ann Arbor WSP and SDS will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

⁵¹ Ethel Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 34.

In their initial efforts to win support, WSPers gravitated to activities that were controversial enough to attract media attention but not so controversial as to frighten or alienate middle-aged, middle-class Americans like themselves.⁵² Simply adopting the name “Women Strike for Peace” for their “un-organization” was a point of controversy—some prospective members believed the word strike, with its labor movement and Old Left associations, was an inauspicious choice for a group that wanted to attract women of different political persuasions and different classes. While “Women Strike for Peace” became the accepted name nationally, a number of local affiliates chose the less confrontational “Women for Peace.”⁵³ A 1962 flier tried to satisfy both camps by asking the question, “Who are the Women for Peace?” and answering, “We strike against death and destruction, for life and the future. When we leave our routine to walk in public—or when we refuse to accept negative, fatalistic solutions to world tensions, we’re ‘striking.’”⁵⁴ Ann Arbor was one of the local affiliates that chose to call its group Women for Peace. In the early 1960s, it was a solidly Republican town where, according to Mickey Flacks, “being in the Democratic Party was almost like being in some sort of third party.” Given the conservative nature of the local population, WSPers there “felt that Women’s Strike for Peace sounded too strident, and too militant.” Flacks was younger than most of the other women, was not a mother, and described her own politics

⁵² One question in Boulding’s survey asked WSPers to articulate the “fundamental purpose” of the organization. One-third of the respondents, the largest single group, said it was “educating and arousing the community.” Directly working for “peace and disarmament,” “changing U.S. foreign policy and/or the international machinery for solving conflicts,” and “stopping atomic testing” were chosen by smaller numbers of respondents. That so many women placed “arousing the community” ahead of actually achieving their goals helps explain why maintaining a “respectable” image was so important to them during the early years

⁵³ Swerdlow, 74. The Women for Peace moniker was most widely used in the Midwest (Ann Arbor, Chicago, Detroit) and on the West Coast (the San Francisco Bay area). Some affiliates, most notably the one in Los Angeles, chose to refer to themselves as WISP or Women’s International Strike for Peace to underscore their belief that women had to work together across national boundaries if peace was to be achieved.

⁵⁴ Women Strike for Peace flier, 1962, Women Strike for Peace National Organization Folder, TC.

at the time as “very much New York Jewish Left.” In spite of these differences, she respected and supported the WSP philosophy of finding a way to reach people where they were. “Effectiveness and communication with the larger community was the number one goal of these women,” she explained. “They did not want to alienate people. They wanted to convince them.”⁵⁵

Although they may have preferred to call it “walking,” picketing was acceptable to most WSPers as long as it was carried out in a dignified way and as long as the picketers were dressed in conservative, feminine attire. Civil disobedience, on the other hand, was something the women initially hesitated to embrace because they feared it would alienate the people whose support they most wanted to attract. In 1962, for example, a WSP delegation staged a legal demonstration at the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission Test Site in Mercury, Nevada. While there, they encountered a member of the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), a radical pacifist group, who was planning an act of civil disobedience. Years later, founding WSPer Eleanor Garst, recalled:

It was Doris Rudder who was able to persuade a CNVA girl not to commit civil disobedience until our non-violent walk at the test site had ended. WSP, she explained, wanted all women to join us; to do so, they had to identify with us; most of them dreaded nuclear testing too, but wouldn’t yet speak out and certainly rejected civil disobedience. The young woman waited, but later, when she was arrested, alone, we felt wretched. Were we wrong? we asked ourselves. Should we too have broken the law to show the depth of our concern? ⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Mickey Flacks interview, CHP.

⁵⁶ Eleanor Garst, “A Reminiscence,” *Memo*, April-May 1969, 13-14. Publication File, TC. In 1969, Rudder’s son Eugene, an army private stationed at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, was arrested on charges including violation of the Articles of War, for his role in organizing a GIs United Against the War in Vietnam meeting on base. “A Soldier Fights for Peace,” *Ibid.*, 12-13; “Pickets Seek Protester’s Release,” *Washington Post*, April 21, 1969, C12.

The conflict Garst describes between taking actions that expressed “depth of concern” and the desire to win mainstream support--between “issue and image” as long-time member Bernice Steele put it--would be a source of tension within WSP throughout its history.⁵⁷ During the organization’s early years, as Garst’s anecdote suggests, the balance tended to tip in favor of image.

The struggle was not only about a concern with appearances. A group that attempts to welcome participants with a range of views will inevitably have to debate where their shared beliefs begin and end. Many early WSPers did not see themselves as pacifists; although they opposed the development of nuclear weapons, they did not claim to be against all violence or, even, all wars. They were able to work together for a ban on nuclear weapons testing but would the achievement of such a ban mean that their dream of a peaceful world had been fulfilled? This question was broached by Barbara Deming, a committed pacifist active in WSP, CNVA, the War Resisters League, and the civil rights movement. In the wake of WSP’s appearance before HUAC in 1962, she published an open “Letter to WISP” in which she praised their steadfastness and courage in the face of the committee’s efforts to “divide and conquer” the women through red-baiting. However, Deming pointed out, on occasions when WSP members had been asked whether they were for unilateral disarmament, “some of us did flinch.” She reminded readers of WSP’s commitment to protect life and asked at what point WSPers would be “in favor of slaughtering children?” If they could not imagine taking such a position,

⁵⁷ Bernice Steele, quoted in transcript of “Washington WSP Retreat Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, October 5, 1968,” 38. WSP Papers, A.1 Box 2, SCPC.

Deming argued, they were in fact unilateralists. Were they just afraid to say so because taking that position would alienate some of their supporters?⁵⁸

Jeanne Bagby, one of the founding group of D.C. WSPers, agreed and wrote what she called, “A Militant Statement” and others signed on. In this piece, Bagby challenged other WSPers to re-think both their politics and their image. “Ladies,” she wrote, “we do not have time to be polite anymore.” She made her case:

Forty years ago our mothers and grandmothers went to jail jubilantly to get their right to vote—and assure ours. Today Negroes are risking jobs, schooling and lives for the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution. And yet we see women who are afraid to risk their comfort, their reputation or their husbands’ irritation for those rights guaranteed us by the Declaration of Independence—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... We do not think this movement will get what it wants until we are willing to go to jail... We would like to see silent women standing with signs for days outside the White House, as our mothers did for suffrage. We would like to see a militant Third Party with women and pacifist candidates for 1964. We would like to see hundreds of white women marching in Birmingham with their Negro sisters.⁵⁹

WSP did not make a group commitment to either pacifism or unilateralism, in spite of Deming and Bagby’s efforts. But this early promotion of civil disobedience—as a philosophy on Deming’s part and as a tactic on Bagby’s—within the organization influenced some WSPers to re-think the value of their respectable image and paved the way for future militant direct action campaigns.

This internal lobbying, by which a small group of WSPers attempted to convince the larger body of participants to commit themselves to a new position or specific type of

⁵⁸ Barbara Deming, “Letter to WISP” in *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader* ed. Jane Meyerding (Philadelphia, Pa.: New Society Publishers, 1984), 101-109. “WISP” stands for “Women’s International Strike for Peace,” an alternative to WSP adopted during the group’s first year by some participants, including Deming and Frances Herring, who sought to extend the group’s reach beyond the United States. Other members preferred to call the group “WFP” or “Women for Peace,” for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter 2. Except when referring to a local branch whose official name was “WISP” (e.g. Los Angeles) or “WFP” (Ann Arbor, Chicago, etc.), I use “WSP.”

⁵⁹ Jeanne Bagby, et.al. “A Militant Statement.” Ann Arbor Women for Peace Papers, BHL.

action suggests the kind of diversity and complexity that characterized WSP. Another was the fact that, as noted above, many WSPers worked outside the home in spite of the group's tendency to refer to its members as "mothers and housewives" in their literature. Barbara Deming, for example, was neither a mother nor a housewife. Although she did not publicize it within the peace movement until much later, Deming was a lesbian. Access to family money meant that she didn't need consistent paid employment; she was a full-time writer and activist. Although WSP was not her primary public affiliation, Deming attended a number of the group's conferences and demonstrations and referred to it as "our unorganization" in her "Letter to WISP." Her correspondence from the period demonstrates that she was involved in a number of behind-the-scenes efforts to push the group toward pacifism and civil disobedience.⁶⁰

There were other ways, however, in which WSP was less diverse than it claimed to be. While WSP's founders may have believed they represented the interests of all women, and especially mothers, their outreach campaigns tended to target highly educated white women with a pre-existing interest in public affairs and commitment to political participation—the same group that comprised the majority of their membership, according to the findings of the 1962 survey.⁶¹ Although the policy statement approved by attendees at WSP's first national conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan in June 1962 read, "We are women of all races, creeds, and political persuasions," WSP remained an overwhelmingly white organization. Ironically, given WSP's big tent rhetoric, the most

⁶⁰ Deming, "Letter to WISP" in Meyerding and Correspondence Files, Barbara Deming Papers, SL. Deming was more consistently active in pacifist groups, particularly CNVA and the War Resisters League (WRL) than in WSP.

⁶¹ "Lobbying Day Against Vietnam War," *Memo* v.4, n.7 (February 1966), 6. Publication File, TC. For example, the media outlets they most relied on to advertise their activities and positions during the early years included *The New York Times* and the liberal political magazines *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, rather than popular women's magazines.

heated debates at that first conference revolved around the stand the organization would take regarding the relationship between the campaign for disarmament and the civil rights movement.

A number of WSPers had become involved in the civil rights movement prior to 1962. Bagby wrote in her “Militant Statement” that she considered black women civil rights activists “sisters.” Yet, when a group of black women from a Detroit group called the Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb arrived at the conference, a debate ensued over whether they should be seated since they were not, technically, a WSP affiliate. This was not the Negro Committee’s first conflict with predominately-white WSP. In fact, the Negro Committee had formed after Detroit WSP’s white leadership had balked when the black women brought signs reading “Desegregation Not Disintegration” to a demonstration. Grace Lee Boggs, an anti-racism activist in Detroit who attended that protest, remembered a “white woman at a WSP march trying to rip up my sign calling for a struggle against racism and the bomb.”⁶² The white Detroiters felt that it was a mistake to combine the two issues, that it would dilute their message. The black women started their own local group, but still considered themselves part of the larger women’s peace movement. In March, the black women had written to Dagmar Wilson to outline their frustrated attempts to join WSP’s delegation to the Seventeen-Nation Disarmament Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. WSP’s impact, they wrote,

⁶² Grace Lee Boggs. *Living for Change*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 107. Lee Boggs, a Chinese American, married African American auto worker and activist James Boggs in 1953. Both became important figures in Detroit Left circles. James Boggs died in 1993, but Grace Lee Boggs continues to write and speak on questions of economic and racial justice and the problems facing American cities, especially Detroit.

would be infinitely strengthened by the inclusion of a Negro woman who speaks for the unity of the two struggles [of peace and civil rights]. It is common knowledge that everywhere in the world today people want to know first and foremost, of any American abroad, what she thinks of or is doing in regard to the situation of the Negro people in this country. We also believe that the more women are included in the peace delegation, the more American women will be represented, and therefore the more powerful will be the voice of the delegation. We therefore do not believe there should be any restriction of the number of delegates, white or colored ...⁶³

According to this letter, two New York WSPers who were handling logistics for the trip had told members of the Negro Committee that “there had been numerous calls from groups wanting to send representatives and that they had had to turn these down.” They were informed that “the women (just which women it was not clear) had decided to set a limit of 50 to the delegation.” When the Negro Committee’s representatives asked if any Negro women were to be included, they said they were initially told there would be three and later, six.⁶⁴ When they pressed the issue, they reported, one of the New Yorkers told them “that the delegation was going as a delegation for peace and that they did not want to appear as a hostile group or bring up any issues that would reflect [negatively] on their country.” The other New York representative said that WSP “didn’t want to ‘overbalance’ the group with Negroes” and “pleaded with us not to pursue the matter any further.” The Detroit women pointed out that their experiences with WSP on both the local and national level “have given us the distinct impression that the movement is being maintained as an elite social grouping.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Letter from Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb to Dagmar Wilson, March 24, 1962. WSP Papers, Box 1 Folder 7, SHSW.

⁶⁴ In the end, four black women, including Coretta Scott King served as members of the delegation.

⁶⁵ Ibid. This incident points to racial tension within WSP, as well as political conflict over whether the anti-nuclear movement would be strengthened or weakened by making a commitment to the cause of civil rights. It also appears to be an example of what political scientist Jo Freeman calls “the tyranny of structurelessness.” Based on her study of and personal experiences with the small groups of the women’s

When the white women of Detroit WSP did not invite representatives of the Negro Committee to join their delegation to the Ann Arbor conference, the black women saw a pattern. They decided to attend and demand recognition from the national body. Eleanor Garst, in her notes for a planned history of WSP, explained the perspective of Detroit's white WSPers. She wrote,

WSPs in Detroit had struggled with their consciences about mixing the two causes, peace and race. In every demonstration, the Indep. Com. carried signs reading "End Racism," while the women who started WSP felt that only peace signs should be carried; that to merge the two issues created confusion and alienated women (and men) who saw that peace was essential but did not yet see racism as a form of war. To this segment of the public, the word 'racism' was inflammatory; they did not recognize it in themselves or their society.⁶⁶

In a way, this statement harkens back to Garst's outreach letter for the November 1 strike, where she wrote that, "We have learned how to end hunger and poverty, how to travel in space." Middle-class Americans had not yet been shocked by the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, which chronicled the struggles of the urban and rural poor in a nation whose self-image was one of general prosperity.⁶⁷ But it seems unlikely that Garst, a community organizer in D.C.'s racially mixed, working-class Adams-Morgan neighborhood, could be so naïve. Perhaps, in addressing an audience unlikely to have direct experience of hunger or poverty, she chose to represent nuclear

liberation movement, Freeman argues that when organizations reject traditional hierarchical forms of leadership in an attempt to broaden participation and encourage democratic decision-making, they rarely succeed in eliminating elites and leaders. What tends to happen is that informal or self-selected leaders emerge, usually with the support of a friendship network, and are not accountable to the organization, since they were not elected and no formal mechanisms exist for challenging their authority. This kind of "un-organization" creates in-groups and out-groups. In WSP in 1962, the Negro Committee functioned as an "out group," that refused to accept the "in group's" leadership. Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" in Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 73-75; and Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), 119-129.

⁶⁶ Eleanor Garst, "Working Papers for Chapter I, II, III." WSP Papers M83-327, Box 1, SHSW.

⁶⁷ *The Other American* was published in 1962 by the MacMillan Publishing Company, New York.

war as the most dire threat they faced while also suggesting that it was within their power to prevent it.

Most of the women at the conference were puzzled by the controversy. Having taken WSP's rhetorical commitment to openness at face value, they did not understand, Garst noted, "why any woman should have to 'request' permission to attend, since the meeting was open as always; nor how such a request could have been denied, as apparently it had been; nor who had the power to deny such a request."⁶⁸ The minutes of the conference indicate that "after some discussion and a period of silence," it was agreed that the women from the Negro Committee be allowed to participate. In spite of this resolution, the mere fact that the black women's participation had to be debated (rather than simply welcomed), forced some white WSPers to question how truly inclusive their "un-organization" was.⁶⁹

Over time WSP would come to share the Negro Committee's view that racial equality and world peace were equally important, even indivisible, causes. But at this early stage in the group's development, many WSPers were wary of complicating their basic message. As noted earlier, the group's founders believed that all women shared an interest in and responsibility for preserving life and protecting children. In the early sixties, for these middle-class white women, atomic warfare (which promised sudden death) and nuclear testing (which promised slow death through the poisoning of the environment and, more specifically, the contamination of milk) were both dire and immediate threats to their children's safety and, by extension, the safety of all children in

⁶⁸ Garst, "Working Papers."

⁶⁹ "Report on The National Conference, June 8-10, 1962." WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC. Swerdlow, 90-93.

the United States and around the world. In short, they believed not only that all women were motivated to protect children but that all women would agree on what children most needed protection from. They believed that, regardless of race or class or partisan affiliation, once women were made aware of the nuclear threat they could be convinced to support WSP's basic demands: "that nuclear weapons tests be banned forever, that the arms race end, and that the world abolish all weapons of destruction."⁷⁰ Almost forty years later, Shirley Sapin, who attended the Ann Arbor conference as a representative of Voices of Women—New England, recalled how these assumptions were challenged during the discussion of the relationship between peace and civil rights:

One of the things that stood out that has never left my mind was when a black woman stood up and said, 'A pox on all of you. What difference does it make to my child whether or not there's nuclear testing and the milk contamination when none of you has brought up the issue of racism in this country? Nowhere have any of you talked about the racist factor that's demoralizing all of us, and affecting our black children.' And it was very poignant because in effect it helped many of us people there, white people, recognize that no effort had been made around the injustice and the racist society in which we were living.⁷¹

But not everyone at the conference was as quickly convinced as Sapin. This does not mean that white WSPers opposed equal rights for African Americans or supported racial segregation. As noted earlier, a number of them were actively involved in the civil rights movement as individuals. It was the question of how the two causes could or should be weighted on their activist agenda that was debated at virtually every WSP conference beginning with the very first. Because they believed the disarmament issue

⁷⁰ "Report on The National Conference, June 8-10, 1962."

⁷¹ Oral History Interview with Shirley Sapin, conducted by Rohna Shoul, October 2000 (audiotape). T-278, VOW-NE Records, SC. Sapin, a former Communist, was probably more sensitized to the issue of "white chauvinism" than many of the other white women at the conference. Garst's notes quote Grace Lee Boggs, a member of the Independent Committee, saying, "If we must continue living as we have lived—then let the bombs fall!" Garst also noted the audience's response: "Shock and disbelief showed on the faces of good-natured middle-class white women: Was it really this bad?" Garst, "Working Papers."

had universal appeal, many white WSPers were initially hesitant to take stands on other issues as an organization for fear that they would alienate women who would otherwise support their cause. “We had to fight within the national organization to get Women’s Strike for Peace [sic] to be concerned” with civil rights, Mickey Flacks recalled. The affiliate in Ann Arbor had been involved in a local campaign for a fair housing ordinance to end discrimination against black renters. It had also joined the picketing of the local Woolworth’s in support of the sit-ins for equal service at the retail chain’s lunch counters in the South. “We [in Ann Arbor] were a little worried the focus was too narrow,” Flacks said. “Women’s Strike for Peace at that time was just test ban, and then later nuclear disarmament ... They felt it would dilute their effort on the racist woman in Mississippi; we want her to support a test ban—if we take a position on civil rights we’ll lose her. People really felt that, they were concerned that the test ban treaty was a significant thing.”⁷²

Following this logic, in the fall of 1962, WSP chapters in the Mid-Atlantic region composed an “Open Letter to Women of Mississippi” in which they appealed “to all women and mothers in Mississippi to exert their wise and gentle influence in these days of crisis....”⁷³ The letter was most likely a response to the violent repression of a voter registration drive in the Mississippi Delta during which two SNCC workers were injured in a drive-by shooting and a number of black residents were beaten, arrested on trumped-up charges, and otherwise intimidated.⁷⁴ The bland wording, however, did not clarify the nature of the “crisis” or acknowledge who was responsible. By intimating that all women

⁷² Mickey Flacks interview, CHP.

⁷³ “Open Letter to Women of Mississippi from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. Women Strike for Peace” (October 2, 1962). WSP Papers Series A.3 Box 4, SCPC.

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussion of these events, see Payne, 153-157.

(regardless of race) were equally capable of exerting “influence” that could prevent further tragic events, WSPers avoided making a clear statement about the racist nature of the violence. They did not seem to recognize that refusing to make an organizational commitment to the civil rights movement could also alienate women they might otherwise attract, that their concern with not alienating white Southerners could lose them the support of black women and other women of color, as well as that of white anti-racists.⁷⁵

Although many white WSPers supported keeping the issues separate during the early sixties, arguing that “civil rights without disarmament won’t do any of us any good,” the black women who got involved in the organization tended to argue that the causes of international peace and domestic justice were naturally intertwined, and that without civil rights, “we don’t care whether there is peace or not.”⁷⁶ The view that the causes of peace and racial justice went hand-in-hand, that you could not achieve one without the other, was most consistently articulated within WSP by Coretta Scott King. Already active in WILPF when WSP was formed, King attended the 1962 Conference of the Seventeen-Nation Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, Switzerland at WSP’s invitation; she was one of four blacks in the fifty-woman delegation. When she returned,

⁷⁵ Barbara Deming noted that a similar debate took place during the summer of 1962 when CNVA organized an integrated “peace walk” through the South. “Most of those advising us felt that battle on the two issues simply could not be combined,” Deming wrote. “We should try to avoid talking about [integration]; we were there to talk about *peace*. And it would be folly to seek to associate ourselves too closely with the people down there who were struggling for integration. Many people would then shy away from us.” Deming added that she supposed this was “practical” advice but that it “depressed” her. Deming, “Southern Peace Walk: Two Issues or One?” in Meyerding, 89.

⁷⁶ Swedlow, 91-92. Black women who were active in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom shared this view, according to historian Joyce Blackwell: “Black women’s definition of peace and freedom differed somewhat from that of their white peace activist colleagues. For black women, peace and freedom were inseparable. They believed that no one could truly have peace until everyone was free, and only when people were free would everyone enjoy true peace.” Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace without Freedom: Race and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), xii.

The Southern Patriot declared King's participation "the first instance of an outstanding figure in the civil rights movement taking an active and leading part in the organized movement for world peace." For King, the two issues—civil rights and world peace—were inseparable:

As Negroes we've been too long concerned with just this question of civil rights. This is rather narrow, when there is a very real possibility that man will destroy himself with the weapons he has created. Peace concerns all human beings. I believe we can strengthen our own position in regard to civil rights if we can reach out from ourselves and lend our efforts to this matter that affects all mankind.⁷⁷

King, like the members of the Negro Committee, was ahead of many black civil rights activists as well as white peace activists in viewing the two causes as equally important and inextricably linked. Following a WSP demonstration at the White House in January, 1962, the local black newspaper editorialized that its female readers should leave such activities to white women and focus on their own struggle for a better life. In response to the "decided absence of colored women" at the WSP demonstration, the *Washington Afro-American* argued that this was how it should be. The article explained that

Colored women want peace, but they want the right to be able to enjoy it. They want the right to eat, and live in a decent home, and breathe free air. They want the right to have babies they can support. Most of those women picketing the White House have all these rights now. And they are most precious, most basic ... First things come first and it is submitted that the right to eat and have a roof over one's head comes first. This may be construed as narrow-minded, but saving the home comes before banning the bomb.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Mrs. Coretta King Leads Peace Effort," *The Southern Patriot* (May, 1962), 4.

⁷⁸ "Peace Pickets, An Unborn Baby," *Washington Afro-American*, January 20, 1967. WSP Papers M83-327 Box 1, Working Papers for Chapter 3 folder. "Minutes, Washington, [D.C.] WSP, January 17, 1962." WSP Papers A.1 Box 1, SCPC. WSPers, of course, didn't believe you could save the home without banning the bomb.

Enola Maxwell, a black community leader from the Bay Area, who became involved in WSP and WILPF in the mid-1960s, acknowledged that “Peace and civil rights were not always connected for me; most blacks got involved in civil rights way before peace work.” One reason for that was the role the military played in the economy of the black community. “In the South we didn’t worry too much about peace because the Army was an employment agency for black people,” Maxwell said. “It did break down a lot of barriers in discrimination, and it did provide better income and jobs.”⁷⁹ Not until Martin Luther King, Jr. began speaking out against the Vietnam War and drawing attention to the disproportionate number of young black men who were dying in combat, did Maxwell come to see that ending the war was, in fact, a civil rights project.

Gradually, white WSPers began making the same connections. In 1963, the group’s annual conference adopted a resolution stating that the goals of peace and civil rights were “inseparable,” just as Coretta Scott King had argued the year before. “As a movement working for an atmosphere of peaceful cooperation among nations, we support the movement for peaceful integration in our own nation,” the resolution read.⁸⁰ But aside from occasional announcements at meetings and in *Memo* that encouraged WSPers to donate money or supplies, write letters to the President, or attend demonstrations in support of civil rights, little effort appears to have been made to integrate the two issues as a matter of policy until the late 1960s.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Adams, *Peacework*, 110.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Marjorie Collins, “WSP Links Fights for Peace and Negro Rights.” *The National Guardian*, June 20, 1963, 7.

Chapter 2: Acting Globally, Acting Locally: WSPers as Community Organizers and Citizen Diplomats

On November 2, 1961, the organizers of Women Strike actions around the country awoke to find themselves the focal points of a tremendous amount of attention and interest—their names and faces appeared in newspapers national and local, letters and telegrams arrived in stacks, phones rang off the hook. “We were truly amazed at the response we got,” said Pat Cody, who helped organize the November 1 strike events in Berkeley, California. “We truly touched the spirits of many people, and the lethargy of the years of fear-engendered passivity fell away. At the evening meeting we’d advertised, there was standing room only and a consensus that we could not disband: we must continue our efforts.”¹ For Ethel Taylor, in Philadelphia, “It was like an electric current running through the country ... this couldn’t just be a one-day action; it would have to go on.”²

In Washington, Wilson, Garst and the others who had ignited this passion to act were thrilled, stunned, and overwhelmed. Women around the country were getting in touch with them to say: “We have found each other, all thousands of us who feel the same; now we must keep acting, together.” Garst’s reaction was, simply, “Oh no!” The Washington women and their families had been “impatiently awaiting the return of normalcy,” Garst wrote. They had committed themselves to organizing an event that would end, not a movement that would continue. Yet “wonderful ideas for action” were

¹ Cody, 55.

² Quoted in Adams, *Peacework*, 13.

suggested by thousands of women around the country who were seeking, if not a leader, at least “a contact point.”³

The issues of organizational structure and leadership posed a challenge for the Washington women right from the beginning. They believed SANE and WILPF were hampered by an institutional hardening of the arteries. Both groups had too many layers of bureaucracy to wade through in order to get a specific action off the ground and too many positions members had to accept or reject to fit in, the WSPers thought. And both SANE and WILPF had struggled unsuccessfully with anti-Communist pressures: just a year earlier SANE had responded to Senator Thomas Dodd’s charge that its New York Metropolitan area chapter had been infiltrated by communists by revoking the chapter’s charter and expelling twenty-two members who had invoked their Fifth Amendment rights when called to testify before the Senate’s Internal Security subcommittee. Dagmar Wilson, Secretary of the Washington, D.C. chapter at the time, resigned from her position and withdrew from the organization. Other early WSP activists had also left SANE to protest the purge. “Thousands of members resigned, feeling that the act was a perpetuation of Cold War attitudes, and a denial of civil liberties,” Garst explained.⁴

The Washington women were horrified by the SANE infighting, for pragmatic as well as philosophical reasons. They believed that red-baiting hampered free speech and citizen participation generally, and that it also had proved a very effective tool that Congressional hawks and anti-communists used to keep the peace movement small, ineffectual, and on the margins of public debate. If WSP was going to become institutionalized, they did not want it to become the kind of institution where one group

³ Eleanor Garst, *Women Strike for Peace: An Informal History of an Astonishing Movement* (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), Chapter 1. SHSW WSP M83-327, Box 1.

⁴ Ibid.

of members had the power or authority to eject another group of members. The solution, they thought, was not to have any official form of membership (no cards, no dues) and no Board of Directors. The Washington group would serve as the communication nexus—it would gather and disseminate information and ideas. But just as the “strike” had been organized in a decentralized way, with each local group of women deciding for themselves what form it would take in their community, so too would any more permanent iteration of the campaign. They hit on the idea of referring to WSP as a “non-organization” or “un-organization” and Garst noted that women around the country agreed that “it was marvelous to plan and carry through such action with no tight inhibiting formality or structure.”⁵ The “un-organization” approach had its flaws—when there is no formal leadership structure, an informal (and unaccountable) one often takes its place, as Jo Freeman would later argue about the equality-oriented and consensus-based small groups of the women’s liberation movement.⁶ The people with the greatest resources to devote to the cause (in terms of time, money, and contacts), those with a particular talent for writing or public speaking, or those with the greatest degree of confidence and self-assurance will often end up exerting a tremendous amount of influence on direction and policy development, as well as on who else participates. But the openness that WSP strove to achieve can also attract new constituencies (people who don’t consider themselves “joiners”), tap into new wells of creativity, and inspire “out of the box” thinking.

As Freeman and other students of the women’s liberation movement have noted, the struggle over leadership and its potential forms does not just take place *within*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.”

organizations. The state and institutions of civil society such as the press like to identify and deal with recognized (and recognizable) representatives of organizations or movements, rather than a rotating cast of individual representatives or collectives and steering committees with multiple members who claim equal importance and authority (or lack thereof). As early as the planning stage of the November 1 action, the Washington women felt pressured to choose a leader or have one chosen for them. A television network producing a feature on the Strike originally wanted to do a group interview with all the founding women in an attempt to recreate the meeting where they came up with the idea. But, as Garst recalled, this approach was soon set aside as “too impractical” and replaced with the idea of filming just Wilson, along with her family. The others were amenable if Wilson was willing because “if an ‘image’ was needed, [Dagmar] was ideal: with a handsome husband, three pretty daughters, a house in the ‘right’ area (Georgetown), her career as an illustrator of children’s books, and her heretofore apolitical life.”⁷ The description of Wilson’s life as “apolitical” in spite of her former position as Secretary of D.C. SANE suggests that Garst (and perhaps all the founders) had both identified what the media and the general public would want to hear and that she was not above employing a bit of what we now call “spin” to give it to them.

⁷ Ibid. The description of Wilson’s life as ‘apolitical’ in spite of her former position as Secretary in D.C. SANE suggests that Garst had both identified what the media and the general public would want to hear and that she was not above employing a bit of what we now call “spin” (or selective omission) to give it to them. Wilson herself contributed to this myth, telling reporters such as Alvin Shuster of the *New York Times* that, “I’ve never done anything like this before... [except] I once wrote a letter to the editor on the nuclear test issue.” Shuster, “Close-up of a ‘Peace Striker,’ *New York Times Magazine*, May 6, 1962, 64. This kind of “editing” one’s life and, especially, work experiences was common among active and ambitious American women during the 1950s and early ‘60s. Although Betty Friedan criticized Wilson for not publicizing her career, Friedan herself left out crucial elements of her work and activist experiences in *The Feminine Mystique* and interviews about the book as part of her strategy for reaching a wide audience. See Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*; for a more general discussion of this type of dissembling, see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*.

That none of the other D.C. founders provided “ideal” images comes through in other sections of Garst’s unpublished history of WSP’s early days. Margaret Russell, a teacher and librarian, had a “masculine” face, had not married until she was in her late-forties and had no children of her own (although she was known to be an enthusiastic stepmother to her husband’s grown children). Folly Fodor refused to give her husband’s name to interviewers so they would have to refer to her by her Christian name, rather than as “Mrs. Robert Fodor” if she was quoted. Jeanne Bagby was an early “hippie,” who dressed in purple sweaters and knee socks and carried her children around in a basket when they were small. As for Garst, she was a twice-divorced single mother who worked full time as a community organizer attempting to forestall “white flight” from the “changing” Adams-Morgan neighborhood. Her career as an artist aside, Wilson came the closest to fulfilling the late fifties/early sixties ideal of nuclear family wife and mother. And, as Wilson herself was quick to point out, she worked at home, available to her children during the day. None of the others quite fit the bill feminine respectability that they wanted the public to associate with their peace activism; all had made life choices that suggested incipient feminism, political progressivism, cultural bohemianism, or some combination thereof. Garst noted that the women also feared the potential negative repercussions of their actions: these ranged from social and professional ostracism to arrest and jail time. Wilson felt best positioned to take the risk. Her family was financially secure, her husband was an English citizen employed by his government at the British embassy, her daughters’ were almost grown, her work was done on a freelance basis and not dependent on staying in the good graces of any single employer.⁸

⁸ Ibid. For more on Wilson’s life, see Swerdlow and Adams.

Their first efforts to reach out to other women reflected the founding group's diversity in terms of occupation and lifestyle. A flyer announcing the activities planned for D.C. on strike day invited "women of any age" to participate and described the organizers as "mothers, housewives, working and professional women" who would be "leaving our jobs and housework for the men to take over." This initial vision was of a women's movement, not a mother's movement. Without going into detail, it captured something authentic about the diversity of the founding group and the way they had been brought together by their desire to "End the Arms Race, Not the Human Race." Several of the women had met in SANE; Garst and Russell were neighbors. But they were not all part of the same social circle; it was their mutual passion for the cause of disarmament that bonded them together. That they all agreed Wilson was the appropriate choice to be the public face of the movement suggests that the others knew that, given the domestic Cold War's cultural of conformity, they would not be recognized or accepted as "typical" or "ordinary" housewives. Wilson, in spite of a slight English accent and a successful career, was better suited to play that role and withstand public scrutiny. After all, what would the press make of Bagby's red diaper childhood,⁹ Garst's divorces, or Russell's late marriage? That Wilson was the right choice was quickly made clear by the enthusiastic reception she received from the media, other "strikers," and much of the general public. In newspaper articles and letters from supporters, she is described again and again as charming, attractive, petite and, even, "elfin" (in other words, small, cute, and unintimidating). Her faults were few: newspaper articles noted a "strong smoking habit," a certain political naiveté, and a refusal to accept the designation "WSP's leader" even as she fulfilled the responsibilities associated with it. Although she was quick-

⁹ The term "red diaper baby" refers to the child of Communists or fellow travelers

witted and unshakeable in her views under press scrutiny, she somehow managed to come across as demure and non-threatening, perhaps because she never hesitated to underscore her “amateur” status on the political stage. “I, who have been scared to speak in public, found myself addressing 500 women at the foot of the Washington Monument... I’ve never done anything like this before,” she assured the *New York Times*, six months after WSP was launched.¹⁰

Having settled, at least for the moment, on a loose, decentralized form of organization feeding in and out of a Washington hub with an unofficial leader who claimed not to speak for the group and who encouraged other participants to speak for themselves, the question of longer-term goals remained. Clearly, the women agreed that they wanted the United States and the Soviet Union to cease testing nuclear weapons and, ultimately, to disarm. How specific to get about ways to achieve this ultimate goal and whether there were intermediate goals worth pursuing was up for grabs. In the weeks immediately following November 1, 1961, strikers around the country spoke by phone, paid each other visits and organized regional meetings to discuss the question of, “Where do we go from here?” Frances Herring, a U.C. Berkeley professor, spent the last ten days of November on the East Coast, consulting with other WSPers about their “purpose.” What they agreed upon, she wrote in a memorandum sent to women around the country who had helped organize strike day actions, was “support for general and complete disarmament on a multilateral basis under effective international control—a policy already endorsed by both great powers. We will continue in existence until a disarmament program is so well under way as no longer to need our support. All our

¹⁰ “March for Peace” flyer (n.d.). WSP Papers MSS 433, Box 1 File 5, SHSW. Garst, “Informal History,” Chapter 1. Shuster, “Close-Up of a Peace Striker.”

other projects—protesting radioactivity in milk, or fallout shelters for defense, for example—will be clearly related to this overriding aim, and our actions and public statements will tie these projects firmly to the need for general and complete disarmament as the acceptable alternative.” This statement suggests that the women were still thinking of their movement as temporary, a response to a crisis situation. Herring recognizes an end point, and it is not even the achievement of complete disarmament: it is just getting the disarmament process “well under way.” In many of their early writings and speeches, WSPers positioned themselves as working in support of President Kennedy’s stated commitment to ending the arms race with the Soviet Union; their role was to encourage him to move more quickly by building support for his position among the public and its representatives in Congress. Once there was a public consensus in favor of disarmament, the women would feel their job was done.¹¹

On the national level, this meant that WSPers would monitor government actions and policies vis-à-vis the arms race and the nuclear threat and attempt to educate and influence the President, the Pentagon, and especially Congress vis-à-vis related issues. They would also reach out to women around the world, especially those in the Soviet Union and in the member nations of NATO, in an effort to use “woman power” to challenge what Wilson frequently referred to as the “masculine mind’s . . . abstract”

¹¹ Memorandum from Frances Herring, Women Strike for Peace Berkeley, Dec. 5, 1961, Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 6, BHL. Herring was one of sixty scientists and social scientists from around the world who had participated in the Oslo Conference against the Spread of Nuclear Weapons in May 1961. Organized by Linus and Ava Pauling, the conference produced a statement arguing that “no dispute can justify nuclear war” and that “the only future for the world is one in which war between nations is abandoned and disputes are resolved by recourse to law.” “Oslo Statement,” May 7, 1961. Linus Pauling and the International Peace Movement, Oregon State University, <http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/specialcollections/coll/pauling/peace/papers/peace2.004.1-statement-01-large.html> (last accessed July 14, 2010) Pauling, like Ethel Taylor, had resigned from SANE’s national board in protest of the Dodd-inspired purge; he became a fan of WSP and his wife Ava participated in many WSP actions.

approach to life and death issues. One of the most frequent bits of advice offered to WSPers from unsympathetic neighbors, politicians and writers of editorials and letters to the editor was that the women should be going after the real source of the problem, i.e. the Soviet Union. This criticism of WSP generally seemed to be articulated by patriots of the “America: love-it-or-leave-it” variety and ignored the fact that a citizens’ movement is more likely to have an impact on its own leaders than on those of an “enemy” nation. More importantly, it also refused to recognize that WSP had in fact made a point of identifying the U.S. and the U.S.S.R as equally responsible for the arms race from the beginning. During the November 1 strike WSPers visited the Soviet Embassy as well as American officials and sent letters to Mrs. Khrushchev as well as Mrs. Kennedy, asking that the first ladies of both countries join them in trying to convince their husbands to move toward disarmament. Frances Herring, who had many contacts in women’s organizations in other parts of the world, argued from the beginning that WSP should be WISP—the Women’s *International* Strike for Peace—and various efforts were made to coordinate international demonstrations during the first year of the movement. Most WSPers came to agree that a truly international campaign was untenable—it was hard enough to organize and build consensus nationally—but the belief that women shared common interests across geographic boundaries shaped WSP’s politics from the beginning. When it came to issues of war and peace many WSPers agreed with what Virginia Woolf had written in her essay *Three Guineas*, “As a woman, I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.”¹² WSP’s first loyalty was to the protection and preservation of human life, not the nation-state. Ironically, when the women did try to convince citizens or leaders of other countries to stand with them for disarmament and

¹² Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1938/2006), 109.

against nuclear testing, they were criticized by the same quarters that told them other countries were the problem.

One of WSP's most dramatic and controversial attempts to interrupt what they considered the business-as-usual mentality of male-dominated governments took place in April, 1962. Fifty WSPers met fifty-one European women in Geneva, Switzerland where they attempted to instill the (male) representatives to the Seventeen-Nation Disarmament Conference with a sense of urgency about their mission that would push them beyond the cautious, slow-moving, and mutually suspicious rhetoric that the women referred to as "the Cold War Long Playing Record." The "A" side featured Arthur Dean, chairman of the U.S. delegation, who responded to Dagmar Wilson's question regarding what the women could do to help move things along with, "Get the Russians to agree with us." The "B" side featured representatives of the Soviet Union and its eastern bloc allies responding to the same question with "Get the United States to agree with us."¹³

Before leaving for Geneva, Peggy Papp of New York explained that the women were making the trip "in a spirit of hope which may penetrate some of the gloom, doom, and pessimism surrounding the negotiations."¹⁴ Instead, the women's spirit of hope was severely tried by the pessimism that seemed to permeate the talks. Representatives of unallied and non-nuclear states declared that the U.S. and U.S.S.R had brought the proceedings to a stalemate. Mary Grooms, a suburban New York WSPer who wrote about the trip for *The Nation* magazine, reported that during a meeting with the women, the Ethiopian delegation declared, "There has been no negotiating. They make speeches to each other. No one has tried to find out just what the Soviet Union will accept."

¹³ Alice Pollard, "Courage of Convictions: Women Strike for Peace," Hanover (N.H.) Gazette (n.d.). WSP Papers MSS 433 Box 1 Folder 17, SHSW.

¹⁴ Press Release: Women's Peace Plane to Geneva, April 1, 1962. WSP Papers m83-327 Box 1, SHSW.

Grooms was surprised to hear from the non-nuclear powers that they were both more frightened of and frustrated with the Americans than the Soviets. “You started first,” the WSPers were told. “You are ahead. You should be the first to stop.” In her *Nation* piece, Grooms wrote, “The neutrals told us that America’s resumption of testing while they—the neutrals—were participating for the first time in disarmament talks would be viewed as a direct insult to them and as an indication that the United States had ‘nothing but contempt’ for the small nations and their peoples.”¹⁵

At least one U.S. participant thought that the WSPers themselves betrayed signs of contempt for both the “small nations” whose representatives they met and for the women from other countries who had joined them in Geneva. Virginia Naeve of Vermont, an art teacher and mother of four, was invited to join the Geneva trip nine days before the women were scheduled to leave because “they wanted a rural woman and one of low income.” WSPers were sometimes mocked and sometimes attacked for being “bourgeois.” While the majority of WSPers were comfortable and, in some cases wealthy, issues of money and class produced tension and conflict within the organization. Women who had to work or could not afford to pay for childcare were less available to participate in WSP activities. Because WSPers wanted to remain independent, they funded their own projects and raised money in a grassroots way, asking for donations from participants, supporters, and friends. This made it less likely that poor and working-class women could join in events on an equal footing. Particularly when it came to international travel, there was concern that only those women who could pay their own way would be included. Naeve’s invitation to Geneva demonstrates that WSPers were aware of the problem and were making at least token efforts to address it. Yet such token

¹⁵ Mary Grooms, “Give Us a Missile Base,” *The Nation*, May 5, 1962, 396.

efforts sometimes had unexpected repercussions. In an essay about the trip, Naeve wrote that she had “precisely” \$5.75 when she received the invitation and immediately sent out seventeen letters asking for donations to cover the airfare and “fourteen sent me money.” Perhaps because of her own financial straits, Naeve was very sensitive to and appreciative of instances of hospitality, generosity, and sacrifice and remarked on aspects of the trip that no one else mentioned.

At some of the missions we were wine and dined to excess, with the most unusual food, and liquor, and cigarettes. Yet with all this in front of us, some women pulled out their lousy American cigarettes and refused what was offered. They ate little in general and did not accept the hospitality with graciousness. They did not see the importance of these small kindnesses.

Naeve characterized the behavior of some of her fellow WSPs as “aloofness” and claimed that it was not conscious on their part. While the unwillingness to try new things could be interpreted as a simple lack of adventurousness, it might also have been viewed by the hosts as a subtle version of the “contempt” they saw in the American delegation’s refusal to compromise in negotiations.¹⁶

Naeve also expressed concern over the initial reception that the European women who came to the meeting received from the American WSPers. WSP’s plan for the visit was to meet with representatives of every delegation participating in the talks and to present Dean and Valerian Zorin, the Soviet representative to the United Nations, with the more than 50,000 signatures they had collected urging “general and complete disarmament.” The Europeans wanted all those present to write a joint statement that the entire group of 101 women would present to the Dean and Zorin, the co-chairs of the

¹⁶ Virginia Naeve, “Frontiers: Geneva Journey,” *Manas* vol. XV, n.20, May 16, 1962.

meeting. The discussions and disagreements led to frustration and tears, Naeve recalled. “Sadly enough,” she wrote, “it was the American women who could not see that to succeed we must be one and all. They thought that our petitions were more important. They did not want any demonstration when the positions were presented.” For Naeve the quality of the discussion which, ironically, had reached a kind of stalemate, changed when one of the British women said that “we must agree or what was the use of her having come so far.” To raise the money for the trip, she told the group, “she had stood on a crossroads with a small sign and shilling by shilling had waited until she had enough to come.” A Swedish woman said she had taken her life savings, which she had planned to use to buy a house, and used it to pay for herself and five German women to attend the meeting. As the stories of these sacrifices made it clear that the European women were as passionate about the cause of disarmament as the Americans, their proposals were given greater consideration and the entire group redoubled its efforts to reach consensus.¹⁷ In the end the women all agreed to a demonstration of a kind. The 101 women silently walked the two miles from downtown Geneva to the diplomats’ meeting place at the Palais des Nations. The guards at the gate refused to let them in and they waited, still silent, while word was sent to Dean and Zorin that the delegation wished to see them. Eventually they were led into a large conference room where they waited in silence for quite a while longer. When the two men finally entered the room, Alice Pollard heard a U.N. staff member whisper, “You don’t know what it means to see them sitting there together.”¹⁸ A Norwegian read a joint statement on behalf of all the women, who represented ten countries. Dagmar Wilson made a statement on behalf of the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Pollard, “Courage of Convictions.”

Americans and presented the petitions they had brought. There was no applause, no noise of any kind from the rest of the women. Instead, Virginia Naeve wrote, “We just sat in judgment of what power these two men had to destroy our planet and our children.”¹⁹

This encounter between an international delegation of women forming a united front with a single message and the heads of the American and Soviet delegations, two men who were rarely seen together, had the greatest symbolic value of any of the events in Geneva. But the most controversial and newsworthy development to come out of the four days of female diplomacy grew out of one woman’s determination to find out what the U.S. could do to win the trust of the Soviets and the unallied nations. During one of the many receptions for the WSPers, Mary Grooms approached a representative of the Soviet delegation at a reception and asked why his country was so suspicious of hers. The diplomat, Semyon Tsarapkin, replied,

Well—I’ll tell you. The Soviet Union has military establishments in three countries near the Soviet Union. The United States has military bases in thirty-three countries around the Soviet Union. Each year you spend more money for weapons and for more bases. How would you like it if we had bases in Canada and Mexico and Cuba? We lost twenty million people in the war. We don’t believe your words when you keep building more bases.²⁰

With the benefit of hindsight the most striking aspect of Tsarapkin’s answer is its foreshadowing of the Cuban Missile Crisis. But Grooms did not hear a veiled threat of future Soviet encroachment into the Western Hemisphere. For her, Tsarapkin’s comment suggested a way that WSP could end the stalemate at the disarmament talks and beat the diplomats at their own game. “If we women could talk our government into closing down

¹⁹ Naeve, “Geneva Journey.”

²⁰ Grooms, “Missile Base.”

some of those bases would that help?” Grooms asked Tsarapkin. The diplomat replied that if the U.S. would close just one of its bases, the Soviets would believe that Americans were really committed to the goal of disarmament.²¹

Following an extreme version of WSP spontaneity, Grooms immediately began an effort to insert the women directly into the diplomatic process. They took the proposal that the U.S. close a military base to Dean whose response was, “Go ask the President.”²² Dean might have thought he was ending the discussion right there, but his choice to pass the buck up the chain of command just gave the WSPers an opportunity to elaborate on their idea. They decided that rather than just asking for a base to be closed, they would ask for the opportunity to transform it. On April 5, the Associated Press reported that “Fifty American women decided today that they would ask President Kennedy to let them take over a military base near the Soviet Union so they could turn it into a cultural-exchange center.” The request was being sent to the President in a message “signed by Mrs. Dagmar Wilson, Mrs. Martin Luther King, and Mrs. Cyrus Eaton.”²³ During a press conference two weeks later, a reporter asked President Kennedy what he thought of the idea. Kennedy replied, “Well, I’ve never heard that proposal made by the Soviet Union.” In his remarks, Kennedy did not acknowledge WSP or the fact that the proposal had been reported in the press.²⁴ As Grooms wrote in her *Nation* article,

We women had probably made a shambles out of international protocol in our single-minded determination to bring reason into affairs of state . . . our “request” for a missile base—and our subsequent suggestion that the base be turned into an

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ “Women for Peace Ask Arms Base for Culture,” AP, Geneva, April 5, 1962. Published in *New York Times*, April 6, 1962, 4.

²⁴ “Transcript of President’s News Conference on Domestic and Foreign Affairs,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1962, 16.

international cultural center—were not intended to solve all the technical problems facing the men at Geneva. They were meant as a symbol—a symbol of faith in the coming of disarmament.²⁵

Kennedy, however, refused to accept WSP in the role of diplomatic intermediary and also rejected the notion that there was value in making a symbolic gesture. He reframed the proposal as requiring a quid pro quo: “We have never heard that they would agree to an effective test ban—an inspection system—if we would close down one base and my judgment is there’s no evidence for believing that they would.”²⁶ That kind of deal was never WSP’s intent (or that of Tsarapkin). What the WSPers wanted was to help the U.S. government improve its image in the rest of the world, especially with the unaligned nations of the Third World, and to eliminate one of the Soviets’ explanations (or excuses) for the lack of progress being made at the disarmament talks.

The Geneva trip had a major impact on WSP, both internally and on the way it was perceived by the public. The women who made the trip continued to promote an image of themselves as “ordinary” wives and mothers: one article based on interviews done at the airport upon their departure for Switzerland described them as “well-dressed, good-natured and obviously proud of what they were doing.”²⁷ Yet their dealings with Dean, Zorin, and the other diplomats exhibited a greater sense of confidence and willingness to take risks than their previous public performances. Many women attracted to WSP in the early sixties were already put off by what they perceived as the game-like nature of high politics and the lack of sufficient seriousness and urgency being applied to

²⁵ Grooms, “Missile Base,” 396.

²⁶ “Transcript of President’s News Conference.”

²⁷ Milton Bracker, “50 Women Striking for Peace Fly to Geneva to Present Views,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1962, 3.

the nuclear situation by world leaders, especially the Americans and Soviets. Their frustration only increased in Geneva in response to both the “long playing record” of mutual distrust and the reports by representatives of “lesser” powers that no real negotiating was taking place. In spite of their carefully constructed feminine image (photos from the trip depict the WSPers in suits, hats, pumps, and white gloves), the women displayed a new assertiveness, demanding a place for themselves and their perspective in the corridors of power. Thus Mary Grooms took on the role of diplomatic envoy, and Amy Swerdlow confronted Zorin as she describes below:

At a meeting with Zorin in which he blamed the United States for the nuclear impasse and refused to budge, I recall that I stood up and, pointing to my bulging abdomen (I was pregnant with my fourth child), demanded to know if the political stalemate was sufficient cause to endanger the health and possibly the life of the baby I was carrying, and the countless children yet to be born. I don’t remember his answer, but he seemed to be visibly shaken. I realize that it was not only the proliferation of strontium 90 and the contamination of milk by iodine 101 that I was challenging, but also the immorality and carelessness of the so-called socialist leaders, who claimed to rule not for profits but for the well-being of ordinary citizens. I remember that particular confrontation with a representative of Soviet power as one of the most significant moments of my life, not because I influenced Zorin—I certainly did not—but because in speaking truth to power, I experienced a moment of freedom from my own feelings of powerlessness as a woman and as a citizen.²⁸

This passage beautifully captures the transformative power of activism that many WSPers experienced through their participation in the group. It also suggests the way WSP promoted both maternalism and a burgeoning feminism. It is not surprising that, for many of the women, who had been raising children during the 1950s when the role of the stay-at-home wife and mother was glorified, the role of mother would be their comfort zone, in public as well as private. Those women who did pursue public careers

²⁸ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 195.

were often made to feel self-conscious, guilty, or ashamed for doing so. No less a liberal thinker than Adlai Stevenson told the graduates of Smith College in 1955 “that what you have learned and can learn will fit you for the primary task of making homes and whole human beings in whom the rational values of freedom, tolerance, charity and free inquiry can take root.”²⁹ Women had a contribution to make to public life and the great issues of the day, but they were to do it from the home and through their influence over their husband and children. So it is not surprising that many (though certainly not all) WSPers, like Swerdlow, found the confidence to speak their minds, to demonstrate publicly, to make spectacles of themselves—at least initially—by speaking for their children. But by entering the public sphere, by speaking out, they became more aware of and more dissatisfied with the way they had been marginalized as women, as citizens, and as mothers. They recognized that they each simultaneously inhabited the identity of woman, citizen, and in most cases, mother and could speak from any or all of those positions. They began to promote the responsibilities of citizenship as an integral part of motherhood. In the brief biography that accompanies Grooms’ article in the *Nation*, for example, she identified herself as a “suburban housewife and mother interested, as all mothers should be, in politics, civil rights, and all matters affecting the future of our children.”³⁰ In direct opposition to Stevenson, Grooms argues that a mother’s responsibility is not primarily to educate her children for citizenship but to use her own role as citizen to influence the larger society. And, while she is claiming to act as a

²⁹ Adlai Stevenson, "A Purpose for Modern Woman," Commencement Address, Smith College, June 6, 1955. Originally published in the *Women's Home Companion* (September 1955). Available online at <http://www.h-net.org/~hst203/documents/stevenson.html> (last accessed on July 9, 2011).

³⁰ Grooms, 395.

mother on behalf of her children, it is her own views on issues like peace and civil rights that will shape them.

The Geneva trip, and particularly the “give us a base” proposal, was also significant to WSP’s development because it highlighted some of the tensions and contradictions inherent in the group’s stated commitment to “un-organization,” “spontaneous action” and consensus-based decision making. The idea of asking the U.S. to close a military installation was not one that the women had brought to Geneva. It developed as a result of their conversations with the American and Soviet delegations and, especially, Grooms’ exchange with Tsarapkin. While this was a perfect example of what drew many participants to WSP—the opportunity to respond quickly to events as they unfolded—that kind of spontaneity was sometimes at odds with the idea of reaching decisions by consensus. In an evaluation of the trip, Hedy Turkenkopf of New Jersey raised concerns about what she considered violations of WSP’s process. In her memo, Turkenkopf wrote that before leaving for Geneva, the WSP delegation had agreed to some basic ground rules: that they would not criticize the U.S. while abroad; that they would offer no specific solutions; that they would remain non-political; and that they would not demonstrate. “We failed always to adhere to these decisions,” she pointed out. Turkenkopf considered the silent walk and vigil a demonstration but believed that the decision “was made by the group after long and thoughtful discussion among us, and was acted upon as a result of a group decision, which I believe even the reluctant ones among us are now happy about.” Not so the decision to ask President Kennedy for a base, at least as far as Turkenkopf was concerned. She considered the proposal both a kind of “solution” and a “political” one, at that. Even more important, Turkenkopf argued, the

women did not come to consensus about moving forward with the base idea in the way that they had about the silent walk. “The idea [for the base] was proposed at a moment of gaiety and exhilaration which came with the dramatic success of the silent vigil,” Turkenkopf wrote. “Although I was present, I did not feel it was seriously proposed or discussed or considered. I never imagined it would be acted upon.” She added that she was “surprised and aggrieved” to see the idea reported in the press.³¹

The base proposal was not sent out to WSP’s network of local contacts for responses before it was released to the press and suggested to the President. While press reports indicated that the idea came from the fifty women who went to Geneva, rather than WSP as a whole, according to Turkenkopf not even the Geneva group had reached consensus on pursuing the idea. Also of concern were the signatories to the letter to President Kennedy—Dagmar Wilson, Coretta Scott King, and Anne Eaton. These were three women whose names would catch the attention of the press and perhaps the President himself—Wilson, widely known as the founder of WSP; King, the wife of the most nationally well-known leader of the civil rights movement; and Eaton, wife of millionaire industrialist Cyrus Eaton who himself had a long-term interest in issues of peace and nuclear warfare.³² King and Eaton were hardly the “ordinary women” WSP liked to claim as its core, since their husbands were not only famous but notorious in

³¹ Hedy Turkenkopf, “Some Geneva Comments, April 10, 1962.” WSP Papers Box 2 Folder 7, SHSW.

³² Cyrus Eaton, a multimillionaire whose portfolio included holdings in coal, steel, iron ore, and railroads, sponsored the Pugwash conferences, which brought an international group of scientists (including representatives of both the U.S. and U.S.S.R.) together to discuss the impact of nuclear research and the weapons it had produced on human life and relations. His interest in promoting “peaceful coexistence” inspired Eaton to meet with Nikita Khrushchev. In spite of his capitalist credentials, he was attacked in some quarters for being “Khrushchev’s friend” and, hence, a less than completely patriotic America. His second wife Anne, who he married in 1957, was described as sharing his views “down to the last comma and period.” Anne Eaton was active in WSP and supported it financially. The Eatons received extensive press coverage. See, for example: “First Citizen of Pugwash,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1957, 6; “Cyrus Eaton, 73, Will Rewed Today,” *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 1957, 18; “Khrushchev Tells Eaton That Soviet wants Peace,” *New York Times*, Sep. 3, 1958, 1; Tim Henshaw, “Cyrus Eaton Wants to Live with Communism,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1960, B3.

some circles. An editorial in the *Alameda (CA.) Times-Star* about WSP's Geneva trip attempted to red-bait the women with references to Eaton's "peculiar ideas regarding Soviet Russia" and the degree to which King "has been thought at times to have been not utterly unfriendly to assistance from the Communists."³³ Because the Eatons and the Kings were such divisive figures (hailed in some circles and reviled in others) anything they signed was noteworthy but, as Turkenkopf pointed out, "we must be realistic enough to admit that this will undoubtedly lose us support, because of the implications associated with our movement on this account."³⁴ Although most WSPers would have undoubtedly rejected the premises of the *Times-Star* editorial,³⁵ Turkenkopf was surely not the only one who was concerned about the impact such editorials could have on public perceptions of WSP.

While there had been general agreement up to this point that local WSP groups were free to develop policies or plan actions appropriate to their local communities without seeking approval from the D.C. women or WSP at large, national activities were viewed a bit differently. Turkenkopf spoke for many when she wrote, "I feel that unless we establish some means of national representation for the policy-making machinery of WSP, we will diminish our effectiveness as a national movement. We can hardly expect California, Ohio, Illinois, etc. just to fall in line with directives from New York or even Washington unless they have a voice in the decisions. People from other sections of the

³³ "How Mmes. Eaton, King Injure US by A-Test Stand," *Alameda (CA) Times-Star* April 3, 1962. WSP Papers M83-237 Box 1 SHSW.

³⁴ Turkenkopf, "Some Geneva Comments."

³⁵ The editorial claimed that the Kings and Eatons were Communists, for example, and argued that "the people of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe . . . have only a veneer of civilization . . . [and] a tradition of force as arbiter of human fate, not reason and certainly not morality." "How Mmes Eaton, King Injure US."

country should also have the opportunity for leadership on a national basis.”³⁶ Although there were women from the South, Midwest, and West Coast on the Geneva trip, the majority (including Turkenkopf) were from the Northeast. Turkenkopf may have sensed that an “in group” was forming among the New York and D.C. WSPers and that these women had discussions and made plans without consulting the larger group. This would explain how the base proposal went from what Turkenkopf had perceived as a half-baked idea to an actual proposal presented to the President of the United States.

The lack of broad discussion and consensus behind the “give us a base” request does suggest the existence of an informal leadership network with Dagmar Wilson at its center (despite her demurrals). But the speed with which the proposal was publicized also had to do with a sense of urgency that grew out of logistical concerns. The Geneva delegates had already planned to stop off in Washington on their way home to “report” on their trip—to President Kennedy if possible and to other officials if not. The base proposal gave them something concrete and dramatic to bring to the table that was more likely to get the attention of the press (and the President) than a report of “stalemate continues despite our best efforts.” This is not to suggest that the proposal was solely a publicity stunt. Rather, it would suggest that WSP could play a real and significant role as an honest broker between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. and it would provide WSP an opportunity to broaden and strengthen its relationships with women from Europe and the Soviet Union. When the President refused to meet with the women’s delegation and acted as if he did not know what the reporter was talking about when the question of the base was raised at a press conference, the women’s hopes were dashed.

³⁶ Turkenkopf, “Some Geneva Comments.”

WSP had characterized the November 1 strike as being in support of the President's disarmament plans; they had not been protesting, they said, but had been trying to build awareness of the issue and support for the White House among the public and in Congress. When they returned to Washington on January 15, they were gratified by press reports that Kennedy had "heard them," even though he did not meet with them. After the Geneva trip, the WSPers were neither seen, heard, nor acknowledged in any way. To make the point that they were not going away members of the Geneva delegation, with support from some local D.C. WSPers, began a round-the-clock vigil at the White House. They walked back and forth in silence, a few at a time, carrying a sign that read, "17 Nations received us in Geneva We Wait to report to President Kennedy," and passing out leaflets to passersby. Photos of the WSPers picketing outside the White House fence are reminiscent of those of suffragists demanding the attention of President Wilson, with signs that read, "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty."³⁷ As one woman's letter to the *New York Times* stated, "We, who are the procreators of our future generations, have the right and duty to present our proposals to our Government and the governments of other countries who seem bent on the destruction of the human race. We do not insist that we know all; we do insist on being heard."³⁸ The author, Dorothy Ryan, echoes some of the anger and frustration of Amy Swerdlow's speech to Valerian Zorin; like Swerdlow and Grooms, she grounds her appeal in her status as a mother but also in the recognition that mothers are citizens with the right to make claims on their government. When these women felt that they were not being heard, they become a bit

³⁷ Examples can be viewed at the Library of Congress American Memory website: memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/aug28.html (last accessed July 7, 2010)

³⁸ Letter from Dorothy Ryan to the Editor, *New York Times*, April 21, 1962, 16.

more defiant in tone and militant in action, a little bit less the non-threatening housewife next door.

Meanwhile, in cities, suburbs, and small towns around the country, WSP groups were forming that saw themselves as independent entities as well as part of a national movement. The Washington women were glad to see that “the idea of non-organization had caught on: everyone wrote that it was marvelous to plan and carry through such action with no tight inhibiting formality or structure.”³⁹ At the same time, they did want to achieve some degree of unity and internal coherence so that strikers would feel like part of a national campaign, as well as a local group. As the Geneva trip demonstrated, independence and unity did not always complement each other and sometimes led to internal conflict. One vision of the role of local groups was outlined in Frances Herring’s memo, written just a month after the November 1 strike, in which she proposed that each local WSP “carry out a public peace action on the first day of every month; preferably followed by an evening meeting in which we greet each other, present speakers on relevant topics, and make further plans.”⁴⁰ Priorities for local groups in that scenario would be self-education and (un)organization building; strategic thinking; increasing public awareness; and taking direct action. Although they varied widely (and sometimes wildly) in terms of specifics, most local WSP affiliates did take on this range of responsibilities.

³⁹ Garst, *Women Strike for Peace: An Informal History*, Chapter 1.

⁴⁰ Memorandum from Frances Herring.

One of the most interesting and influential local groups formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan.⁴¹ In the early 1960s, this Midwestern city, although home to the University of Michigan's massive flagship campus, was known for its small-town conservative atmosphere. The Republican Party controlled municipal government. The university's scientific research programs played a key role in developing missile guidance systems with the support of contracts from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Cold War thinking was dominant; University President Harlan Hatcher acknowledged its influence on academic life in the school's 1958-1959 annual report where he wrote that "knowledge through research is the secret of our greatness" and that if knowledge production didn't continue at a rapid rate, the Soviet Union "would overtake, surpass, and master" the U.S. When Mickey Flacks, with her "Jewish Left" background arrived on campus in 1960, "there didn't seem to be anybody like [me] in Ann Arbor." There were pockets of progressivism both on campus and in town but they had not yet become visible to the larger community. A small group of students, both undergraduate and graduate, had formed a study group that would soon blossom into the founding chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. And, in spite of the wealth of military contracts, Michigan also boasted a new Center for Conflict Resolution, founded by Economics Professor Kenneth Boulding and his wife, Elise, a WILPF activist who also held a master's degree in sociology. The Bouldings were Quakers and deeply committed to nonviolent reconciliation; Kenneth's criticism of U.S. military policy had cost him a job at Princeton. In Ann Arbor, they served as role models and mentors for two emerging

⁴¹ Aside from the D.C. and the New York Metropolitan area branches, which were shaped by their respective proximities to the nation's capital and the United Nations and had an even greater than average density of highly educated and politically savvy members.

groups of activists: the SDS founders and the local Women for Peace. It is ironic that a conservative, pro-military “multiversity” would serve as the birth place not only of new cutting-edge weapons technology but also of two protest groups that would be among the earliest and most-outspoken opponents of the Vietnam War. But as Mickey Flacks’s husband Richard, a graduate student in social psychology who would become an SDS leader, believed that unlike New York, where “two percent constitutes a critical mass of support: you can spend your whole life there with other Trotskyites, or with other socialists, or with other Communists,” in Ann Arbor, “you *had* to associate with people who weren’t exactly on your wavelength because there weren’t enough of you otherwise to constitute anything real.” It was this effort to reach out across political differences that drew Mickey Flacks to WSP. “Here,” she said about Ann Arbor WFP, “were people who were different, but who I could relate to.”⁴²

In certain ways, Ann Arbor Women for Peace (AAWFP) was a microcosm of the national organization—it brought together women like Flacks who had grown up in the radical Left, women like Boulding whose commitment to peace and opposition to nuclear weapons had been developing for years in the context of Quaker meeting and organizations like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and women

⁴² For information on Ann Arbor in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I have relied on: Mickey Flacks, interview by Bret Eynon, transcript, September 25, 1978, CHP, BHL; Elise Boulding, interview by Bret Eynon and Ellen Fishman, November, 1978, CHP, BHL; Bret Neal Eynon, “Community, Democracy, and the Reconstruction of Political Life: The Civil Rights Influence on New Left Political Culture in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1958-1966” (PhD diss. New York University, 1993); James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir*. (New York: Random House, 1988). Information on the Bouldings comes from the Elise Boulding interview with Eynon and Fishman and Mary Lee Morrison, “Peace Profile: Elise Boulding,” *Peace Review* 12: 2 (2000), 337-343. Harlan Hatcher quoted in Miller, 25. Richard Flacks quoted in Miller, 160. Mickey Flacks’ quotes from interview with Bret Eynon, 1-2.

like Marcia Barrabee, a housewife and mother who had never before participated in any kind of protest action but was looking for a way to cope with the depression and anxiety she felt at the prospect of nuclear war. Some of the women, like Mickey Flacks and Casey Hayden, were in their twenties, young enough to have some experience in the emerging student movements around civil rights, peace, and anti-colonialism; both were married, though childless, and also active in SDS, primarily due to their husbands' leadership roles in that organization. Others were faculty members and faculty wives, like Elise Boulding, for whom the issues of the Cold War held professional as well as personal interest. But the majority was in their thirties and forties, stay-at-home mothers of young children who, like Marcia Barrabee, wondered if their children and their planet had a future and increasingly worried that they did not.⁴³

The Bouldings, the Flackses, and Tom and Casey Hayden played important roles in bridging Ann Arbor Women for Peace (AAWFP) and SDS in Ann Arbor (an organizational relationship that developed nationally after the two groups became early, vocal opponents of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam). The Bouldings' Quaker style of moral leadership influenced both groups; it was Elise Boulding who taught the AAWFP women how consensus-based decision-making worked and guided them through the process. The Bouldings also provided material support: Elise's position as Research Associate at the Center for Conflict Resolution enabled her to undertake a national survey of WSP participants that provided valuable information for the movement; the couple also made it possible for SDS to open an office, the Social Action

⁴³ This diverse membership comprised of young activists, professional women/academics, and housewives with little political experience was most common in college towns. For example East Bay WFP, which included Dr. Frances Herring, had a campus affiliate at Berkeley and Philadelphia WSP drew the support of a number of students from Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore. But nearly all WSP/WFP groups comprised a mix of seasoned activists and women new to politics, working women and stay-at-home mothers.

Center, by agreeing to buy the group a mimeograph machine if they found a space in which to put it. (To accommodate the gift, the Haydens moved into an apartment that came with a finished basement; although WFP usually met in members' homes, they did use the mimeograph machine to produce their newsletters.) The WFP women and the SDS students shared a number of political values and goals during the early sixties: both groups encouraged ordinary citizens to play an active role in the democratic process, both had rejected Cold War thinking and red-baiting, both opposed the use of nuclear weapons. SDS had a broader agenda initially, including an overt commitment to the civil rights movement, eradicating poverty and ending colonialism. "We were a little worried [their] focus was too narrow," Mickey Flacks said of the national WSP. SDS supported the test ban and nuclear disarmament and many of its members also belonged to the Student Peace Union, but SDSers didn't feel that issues of war and peace could or should be addressed in isolation from issues of social justice. Still, Flacks said, "The older women, Women for Peace, were always looked on with great admiration by the SDS leaders. They were like mothers. And there was no patronizing, no putting down in any way. They had more years of experience in this." Later in the sixties WFP/WSP and SDS would diverge over the issue of "reaching other people," Flacks said. In WFP/WSP, "there was a great concern for communicating to the community, for convincing people, not simply for showing our strength," she said. By the late sixties, SDS became more focused on showing its strength. Nevertheless, Flacks added, "The Ann Arbor women . . . were, in a way, the midwives of SDS." ⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Flacks interview with Bret Eynon.

When white SNCC staffer Casey Hayden moved to Ann Arbor in 1962 following her marriage to SDS leader Tom Hayden, she already had years of experience as a civil rights worker in the YWCA and SNCC. She “joined and loved” WFP, which she found to be “so like SNCC operationally” with its emphasis on building community and its willingness to work “with whoever would unite around our programs.” As historical sociologist Francesca Polletta points out, the lunch counter sit-ins that sparked the founding of SNCC, like the November 1 women’s strike, were described by participants as “spontaneous” with “no organizational tie-in of any kind, either local or national.” This did not mean, in either case, that the actions were spur-of-the-moment, or unplanned. Instead, Polletta writes, “spontaneous” in the New Left context meant “free of [the] caution, slow-moving consultation, and sheer timidity” that the black students disdained in adult civil rights groups and that the founding WSPers identified with SANE and WILPF. For SNCC, Polletta argues, “spontaneity” also meant “a joy in action and an unstoppable force”; it was the emotions and energy that protest unleashed, as much as the rightness of the cause, that “may have motivated students to engage in time-consuming and dangerous activism.” This is also a good explanation for why women around the country were determined to transform a one-time event into a continuing movement. “Fear-engendered passivity” had been replaced by the “electric current” of action and they preferred the latter. Although the Ann Arbor Women For Peace were generally older and more cautious than the average SNCC worker, even their self-conscious emphasis on projecting a respectable image was familiar to Hayden from her civil rights activism: as a college student in Austin, Texas she had walked picket lines in “a yellow

dress and high-heeled white pumps” and she was wearing white gloves when she was arrested for sitting in the “colored section” of a courtroom in Albany, Georgia.⁴⁵

For Barrabee, the path that led to her long-term active involvement in AAWFP began at around the same time that the Washington women held their first meeting. The events of Fall 1961, she reported, “changed my life so completely I can hardly remember what my life was like before then.” Like other early WSPers, Barrabee was deeply shaken when the Soviet Union resumed its nuclear testing program. Her initial response, she felt, was rational: she and her family would build a fallout shelter and stock it with food; the worst might happen, but they would be prepared. But as she began researching the potential impact of a nuclear attack, to figure out how to prepare, Barrabee came to a conclusion: “There was no place to hide.” She added, “I’ve never known such panic and chilling, paralyzing fear and profound depression.” Shortly afterwards, she received a phone call from “a longtime peace worker,” probably Elise Boulding, asking Barrabee to join a group of women in silent vigil in front of the county courthouse—a November 1 Women Strike action. In spite of her very real fear of nuclear warfare, Barrabee did not immediately agree. “I said I wouldn’t be caught dead standing on a street corner like that,” she recalled, “that I thought demonstrations did more harm than good because people figured you were exhibitionists or beatniks and paid no attention to what you were

⁴⁵ Casey Hayden, “Fields of Blue,” *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*, ed. Constance Curry, et.al. (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 333-375. Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 40-43. For a larger discussion of the uses of “respectability” in the civil rights movement, see Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward. “‘Dress modestly, neatly...as if you were going to church’: Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement” in *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 17-40.

saying.”⁴⁶ Instead, she offered to do something less militant and, in her view, more constructive: as an alternative to the public vigil, she would invite some women to her home for coffee and “to discuss ways in which we might be able as individuals to reverse the trends toward war.” Barrabee’s coffee klatch was mentioned in a letter to the local paper announcing the silent vigil; soon she was receiving “many phone calls from perfect strangers.” The vigil and the coffee hour were the events that launched AAWFP and for Barrabee, “All of a sudden, life was different. There were other women who felt as I did; we had found each other and out of our fears came a new determination to influence the decisions that suddenly seemed to have such a direct and threatening relationship to our lives.”⁴⁷

After November 1, Barrabee played a leading role in transforming the women who had responded to the initial call to action from participants in a one-time event to a group willing to make long-term commitments to each other and a cause. She wrote a local approximation of the memo that Frances Herring distributed nationally. It was dated December 12, 1961 and its contents suggested that the Ann Arbor women had barely paused for breath in the six weeks since their opening salvo. They had already organized “a series of informal meetings, a loosely styled organization, a steering committee, a group name, and the beginnings of real coordination with groups all over the nation.”

⁴⁶ This attitude was one the Washington women had encountered again and again. In 1961, prior to the strike, Eleanor Garst wrote, the only people who demonstrated were “a few Negro students, a few pacifists” and “the general public regarded them as cranks.” So deep was Cold War antipathy to protest distrust of anyone who criticized the government or capitalism in any way, that “even unions rarely picketed anything anymore. Demonstrations were something one read about occasionally in some far off country and they always seemed to be inspired and led by Communists.”

⁴⁷ Barrabee quoted in Jerome D. Frank, M.D. and Earl H. Nash, Ph.D, “Commitment to Peace Work—A Preliminary Study of Determinants and Sustainers of Behavior Change” (unpublished manuscript).BHL, Marcia Barrabee Papers Box 1 File 1964-2. Barrabee is not named in the actual study but an attached letter identifies the quotes above as hers.

One committee was compiling a list of practical steps individuals could take to register their opposition to nuclear testing and war; another had begun researching the impact of radioactivity, especially the dangers that it posed to the milk and food supply.⁴⁸

AAWFP was particularly representative of the “new alliances” that Boulding saw being formed in WSP groups around the country (and which were also characteristic of other New Left groups like SDS and SNCC, where red-diaper and NAACP babies joined forces with students who had largely apolitical backgrounds). In her survey of early WSP activists, Boulding found that “many of the women were old-time peace people, but a lot of them were new too . . . coming together from different backgrounds.” The fears of the Soviet Union and domestic red-baiting which had been successfully mobilized by American Cold Warriors to win broad public support for the arms race and to ensure that those who did not support it would, for the most part, remain silent were being undermined by a new and “overriding fear,” as Boulding described it, “for the human race itself.” Mothers like Barrabee, concerned with their children’s health and well-being, were especially vulnerable to this new fear. Boulding could have been referring specifically to Barrabee when she described this shift as “a moment, a mood, a release into speaking out, acting and going public. Out of the living room! There was a widespread sense of release into the public sphere.”⁴⁹

WSP’s structure, or lack thereof (participants, who refused to call themselves “members,” frequently referred to both the group itself and its working process with the

⁴⁸ Letter from Marcia Barrabee, et. al. to Dear Friends, Dec. 12, 1961. BHL, MB Papers, Box 1 Folder 6.

⁴⁹ Elise Boulding, interview by Bret Eynon and Ellen Fishman, transcript, November 1978, CHP. For student activists in SDS and SNCC, a similar call was “Out of the Classrooms and into the Streets.” This suggests another commonality among the New Left movements of the 1960—they were comprised of people who were rejecting the notion of having a “place” on the margins of the political process, whether due to race, age, or gender. These previously silenced, ignored, underrepresented groups were claiming a role and a voice in the decisions that affected their individual lives and American society as a whole.

term “unorganization”), was both a source and a product of the “new alliances” Boulding identified. The follow-your-instincts, seat-of-the-pants organizing style promoted by the D.C. founders appealed both to women new to public action and to activist women who had felt stymied by the hierarchical structures and ideological rigidity of political organizations and parties they had previously participated in. The rejection of standard organizational forms, and the absence of membership cards, officers, and bylaws, was also done in reaction to and defiance of red-baiting. But most significant, perhaps, was the women’s belief that the potential consequences of nuclear weapons and testing were so dire that opposition could be rallied across the political spectrum and that a nuclear test ban could only be achieved through massive public protest from left, right, and center. To put an end to the nuclear threat, WSP (and all Americans) had to get past the old Cold War divisions and animosities. The adjunct to WSP’s belief that everyone was welcome was their belief that everyone had something valuable to contribute. A further corollary was a commitment to pay heed to the perspectives of individuals and minorities. The majority would not be allowed to force the minority to join any action or statement with which it did not feel comfortable. Individuals could speak *as* WSPers but not *for* WSP. This is what Dagmar Wilson meant when she said, “We are all leaders,” in an effort to rebuff the media’s efforts to hang that title on her alone.

WSP was neither a top-down, nor a bottom-up, group; it was a from-anywhere-to-everywhere group, functioning horizontally rather than vertically. Nationally distributed newsletters contained pages of proposals for action from individual women who wrote in from communities as demographically distinct and far-flung as Buffalo, New York, Marion, Iowa and Santa Barbara, California. Some of these ideas were implemented

nationally, some by a few local groups, others by no one at all. WSP's internal practice of democracy grew from the belief that each individual had not only the right, but the responsibility, to participate not just in the group's actions but in the discussions that led to those actions. As Tori Harburg of AAWFP wrote of the Ann Arbor group's practice of consensus, "Each person must be listened to . . . [and] each individual must try, in a sense, to practice self-respect. That is, she must believe that her feelings and thoughts have as much potential worth to the group as anyone else's . . . She can and will do this if it is understood that her feelings and thoughts are expected and welcome."⁵⁰ This was WSP's version of the New Left practice that sociologist Wini Breines named "prefigurative politics," that is, attempting to live out in their own activities and relationships the changes that they were trying to bring to the larger society.⁵¹ The success of WSP's "new alliance" of women with different belief systems and varying degrees of prior political experience was a direct result of this willingness to listen to each other's ideas and opinions, to make each woman feel that her contribution was valued, whether she was one of "the already active, aware women" or one of those "women whose social contributions may not total three dozen homemade cookies for the annual bake sale."⁵²

Like most early WSPers, the Ann Arbor group put a great deal of effort into "educating and arousing the community." They sincerely believed that the United States was (or should be) governed "by the people, for the people" and, hence, that the key to achieving a non-nuclear future was to convince other Americans that the arms race did

⁵⁰ Tori Harburg, "An Introduction to the Gentle Art and Practice of Consensus." [n.d.] MB papers Box 1 Folder 1, BHL.

⁵¹ Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

⁵² "To Marcia from Tori brought by Hanne" [n.d.] MB papers, Box 1 Folder 2, BHL.

not make them more secure, it made them more vulnerable. In Ann Arbor, perhaps because a number of the women were academics or married to academics, they started by researching how to best reach their target audience: people in the “mid-ground position,” which the women defined as “neither determinedly ‘for peace’ nor so belligerent at Russians that they relish the thought of combat.”⁵³ A subcommittee began reviewing social science research on “attitude change.” Their first finding was that most pro-peace literature and speeches relied on “college” language: “We are often unaware of how unintelligible we are to perfectly sensible people who haven’t been to college.” AAWFP determined to speak the language of “people of AVERAGE education in our community” and also decided that they had to go to the public, rather than waiting for the public to come to them. With a flash of the kind of creative, outside-the-box thinking for which WSPers around the country would become known, the Ann Arbor women transformed a used van into a “Peacemobile.” A take-off on the model of the Bookmobile, which many public libraries used to get reading material to those who could not or would not visit a traditional library building, the Peacemobile was driven to community events and meeting places where the women could engage people other than the already converted. The AAWFP’s December 1962 newsletter noted that, “If you’ve been out for the home team, gone to the Farmer’s Market, or shopped on Main Street lately, you may have seen our Peacemobile, which has been operating busily this fall.” Through this effort, the women developed new insights and organizing skills that they then applied to other

⁵³ “Milestone: Historic First Minutes of a Meeting” (n.d.). BHL, MB Papers Box 1 Folder 3. In her 1962 survey of WSPers across the country, Elise Boulding found that one-third of the 279 respondents believed that “educating and arousing the community” was the group’s fundamental purpose, more than chose “stopping atomic testing” or “changing U.S. foreign policy.” The women, with their faith in “participatory democracy” no doubt believed that “arousing the community” would lead to the other changes they sought. Elise Boulding, “Who Are These Women? A Progress Report on a Study of Women Strike for Peace,” 1963, WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 2 SCPC.

venues: “We’ve learned ... that it’s good to have a focus, a particular subject, and have plenty of good conversation and literature on that—be it elections, Cuba, U.N., radiation, or whatever.”⁵⁴

The Peacemobile project demonstrated how much the attitudes of WSPers themselves had changed over the course of a year. In November 1961, Barrabee was far from the only potential WSP activist who believed that public demonstrations were ineffectual and that participating in one would be personally humiliating. The outreach model she was initially most comfortable with—inviting friends, neighbors, and acquaintances into her home for coffee or tea (or, as in the case of one Los Angeles WSP group, martinis)—was that of the women’s club or PTA. While this may indeed have been an effective way to get people talking about an issue, it limited both the number and types of people who were included (it was no way to reach the broad general public). And the tone of such an event was likely to be respectful—actual arguments or even debates were unlikely to break out. Initially, women like Barrabee wanted to control the circumstances under which they encountered new audiences and attempted to forestall criticism by acting within the confines of the domestic sphere, the accepted domain of women (and especially housewives and mothers) during this period. Writings by early WSPers are full of anecdotes about being told, almost always by a man or group of men, to “get back into the kitchen.”⁵⁵ While some of these stories may be apocryphal, they

⁵⁴ “Peacemobile,” *AAWFP Bulletin*, December 1962, 3.

⁵⁵ Chicago WSPers claimed that during 369 weekly anti-war vigils over the course of seven years, they heard a version of “Why don’t you go home and wash the dishes?” at least five thousand times. Donna Allen reported that in D.C., “On the picket line in front of the White House in the middle of the night, along came a man who brushed away my offer of a leaflet and snarled, ‘Get back to your kitchen.’” Eleanor Garst described a demonstration where “a troop of Boy Scouts ... kept jeering at us to go back to Russia; their graying Scout master seemed to find this a Cute Saying.” Although not the same as being sent back to the kitchen, it did express a similar desire to make the women disappear from sight. Shirley Lens and Lillian Hayward, “Women for Peace: Last Vigil,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 3, 1973, 12; Donna Allen, “Speech to

capture a real anxiety that many WSPers, particularly the ones with no previous history of activism, experienced over their right to occupy public space. The women seemed to believe, at least at first, that their right to participate in public debates would be challenged. The development of the Peacemobile project demonstrated that AAWFP members had developed a new degree of commitment to their cause, a new confidence in their ability to communicate their message, and a new willingness to risk being seen in a negative light. Most of all, it represents a newfound determination to act on their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

As Barrabee discovered, going public, or “taking it to the streets” in sixties parlance, also contributed to building solidarity, or “sisterhood” among the WSPers themselves. Although she refused to participate in the November 1 Ann Arbor vigil, Barrabee found herself “in charge” of the next one. “It became apparent to me,” Barrabee wrote, “that some things can only be said in this way—extraordinary events call for extraordinary actions—and the amazing thing was that the esprit we’d developed among ourselves made being part of a public spectacle an uplifting experience.”⁵⁶ Barrabee initially viewed participating in a “public spectacle” as harmful to both herself and the cause. To “make a spectacle of oneself” was to draw negative attention by doing something embarrassing, humiliating, or inappropriate. After participating in a demonstration, however, Barrabee found that expressing her beliefs publicly and

National Guardian 14th Anniversary Dinner,” November 16, 1962, WSP Papers Box 1, SHSW; Eleanor Garst, “A Moment of Cross-Fertilization,” April 1962 (unpublished manuscript), WSP Papers M83-327 Box 1, SHSW.

⁵⁶ Barrabee quoted in Frank and Nash, “Commitment to Peace Work.” As historian Anne Enke has pointed out in relationship to Second Wave Feminism, one of the ways women have challenged “day-to-day barriers that told them to ‘stay in their place’ ” was by contesting the ways public spaces were used to reinforce gender norms.” Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

confronting her fear of embarrassment in the company of like-minded women was exhilarating, a source of pride rather than shame.

Their public identification as wives and mothers and their sensitivity to domestic concerns and responsibilities was another source of strength for AAWFP and the larger movement. Because they saw women and, especially, housewives as their primary potential base among “ordinary people,” AAWFP (and WSPers around the country) were able to identify wedge issues that could be used to make what was, for some, the inconceivable devastation of nuclear warfare concrete and specific. This led them to take on environmental issues as well as issues of war and peace. As Herring pointed out in her early memo, Strike participants were already aware of the dangers nuclear fallout posed to cow’s milk. At least two cancer-causing agents, Strontium 90 and Iodine 131, discovered in radioactive fallout had made their way into people’s bodies through milk. The impact of these chemicals was expected to be especially dire in infants and children, increasing their likelihood of developing leukemia and thyroid cancer at a much higher rate than adults. Jeanne Bagby of the D.C. founding group, known as a health food nut before it was common or easy to go “organic,” began researching and monitoring the scientific literature and government policy positions on fallout. Based on the information she and like-minded WSPers gathered, women testified at local and national government hearings, lobbied their representatives, advocated for new approaches to milk processing that removed Strontium 90, and boycotted local milk companies that refused to invest in this new technology.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ “Clean Milk, Let the Cry Be Heard!” (undated flyer) SHSW Donna Allen Papers, Box 3, Folder 6; “Spread the Word About the Milk Boycott” (undated flyer) Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 4 BHL; WSP Committee on Radiation, “Statement of Fallout Policy Submitted for the Record of the June 3-5, 1963

In Ann Arbor, this pure food movement provided a vehicle for reaching women who “wince at talk about fallout” but are “very concerned about their children’s health.” In AAWFP, such women were known as “peanut butter ladies” in honor of the local mothers who routinely drove the seven miles to Ypsilanti, home of the closest health food store that sold organic peanut butter. Women who cared enough about what their children ate to make a special trip just to buy peanut butter, the WFPers believed, would probably care enough to boycott radioactive milk and, perhaps, demand an end to nuclear testing. The term “peanut butter ladies,” Mickey Flacks explained, represented “people we [could] talk to about their legitimate concerns related to what we were trying to do.” In the wake of the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson’s groundbreaking examination of the way insecticides and weed killers were infecting the environment, destroying plants and wildlife, AAWFP spoke to garden clubs: “They were into organic gardening, so we talked about how the fallout was poisonous,” Flacks said. By starting with food, and especially milk, AAWFP and other WSP chapters worked to convince women that preventing nuclear fallout was part of the project of raising healthy children. Opposing nuclear testing was not just about protecting children from a possible but not inevitable Armageddon, it was about fulfilling the most basic and daily tasks of motherhood: feeding one’s children and protecting their health.⁵⁸

As early as February, 1962, a “bulletin” from Washington WSPers to their list of national contacts described the possibility of further atomic testing as a “new step in the

Hearings on Fallout of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.” SHSW Donna Allen Papers Box 3 Folder 6; “Milestone: Historic First Minutes of a Meeting” (n.d.). BHL, MB Papers Box 1 Folder 3.

⁵⁸ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1962). Mickey Flacks interview with Bret Eynon. “Ann Arbor Women for Peace Reunion,” undated videotape, VOW-NE Collection, SC.

arms race *and* [a]new source of radiation dangers.”⁵⁹ WSPers addressed both these issues in their early public education, lobbying, and watchdog campaigns. In addition to organizing the milk boycott and meeting with dairy owners to push for better safety measures, they pressed lawmakers for stronger and clearer radiation safety guidelines. In testimony submitted to the congressional Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, WSP criticized the federal government for “falsely assuring the public of no health hazard [and] making guidelines infinitely adjustable so as to contain future increases, and . . . neglecting preparations for feasible countermeasures.” The women argued that “While scientists disagree on the levels of radiation causing diseases such as cancer . . . they are not disagreed that any additional radiation is likely to cause additional damage.” They urged Congress to place responsibility for guiding the public on radiation hazards to the U.S. Public Health Service, rather than the Atomic Energy Commission, the Pentagon, or any agency “determined to continue nuclear testing.”⁶⁰

Concerned that the American public was not receiving sufficient, or accurate, information regarding the health risks posed by atomic radiation, WSPers also began to promote and support scientific research in this area. One such effort, in tune with their strategy of focusing on children’s health to attract “apolitical” mothers to the cause, was the “Tooth Campaign.” Initiated by the Greater St. Louis Citizens Committee for Nuclear Information in conjunction with the Washington University School of Dentistry, the “Baby Tooth Survey” collected and studied children’s lost baby teeth as a way to determine the amount of Strontium 90 entering children’s bodies. Because Strontium 90’s

⁵⁹ Women Strike for Peace, “Washington WSP Bulleting to National Contacts,” February 15, 1962, p.1. WSP M83-327, Box 1, SHSW. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Women Strike for Peace, “Statement of Fallout Policy Submitted for the Record of the June 3-5, 1963 Hearings on Fallout of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, by the Committee on Radiation.” Donna Allen Papers, Box 3 Folder 6, SHSW.

chemical structure resembled that of calcium, once it entered the body it tended to collect in the calcium-absorbing bones and teeth. For this reason, it was believed that growing children would absorb Strontium 90 at a higher rate than adults. When the study began in 1958, teeth were collected only from children in the St. Louis metropolitan area. But, by 1963, local WSP chapters around the country helped to expand the survey by collecting and submitting the teeth of children from their communities.⁶¹

The Ann Arbor chapter made the “tooth project” a priority. Mickey Flacks described it as the perfect Women for Peace project. As “nice ladies and mothers,” they were able to win the cooperation of local dentists and the local newspaper editor. The AAWFP’s flair for public relations is clearly visible in an article about the campaign in the *Ann Arbor News*. The article described the group’s “loose tooth coffee hours” for mothers and a volunteer staff of “wobbly tooth watchers” in heated pursuit of children caught wiggling a prospective contribution to the campaign. Children were offered membership cards and buttons (“I gave my tooth to science”) in exchange for their participation. The study, which concluded in 1970, found that Strontium-90 levels in the baby teeth of children born between 1945 and 1965 had “risen 100-fold” and that the level of Strontium-90 rose and fell in correlation with atomic bomb tests.⁶²

⁶¹ The activist scientist Barry Commoner, who would run for the U.S. presidency in 1980 on the Citizens’ Party ticket, was one of the leaders of the tooth study. Walter Sullivan, “Babies Surveyed for Strontium 90,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1961, 2. Howard A. Fusk, M.D., “Explaining Radiation,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1960, 77. Ann Arbor Women for Peace, “Why Teeth?” [n.d.] Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 1, BHL. Darlene Chapin, “This Study Has Teeth in It,” *Ann Arbor News*, October 24, 1963. Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 1963-1, BHL. Flacks interview with Bret Eynon. For more information regarding discoveries of toxicity in the environment during this period, see Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶² Ann Arbor Women for Peace, “Why Teeth?” Darlene Chapin, “This Study Has Teeth in It,” *Ann Arbor News*, October 24, 1963. Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 1963-1, BHL. Flacks interview with Bret Eynon. Washington School of Dental Medicine website, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/dental/articles/babytooth.html> (last accessed May 29, 2009).

By linking nuclear testing to environmental degradation and threats to public health, particularly the health of babies and children, WSP began to challenge the state's definitions of security and safety. The federal government and American Cold Warriors generally argued that national security and the health and well-being of U.S. citizens depended upon nuclear weapons and testing. WSP argued the exact opposite: that nuclear weapons testing and the seemingly increasing likelihood of nuclear war were the real threat. Even the position that continued nuclear weapons research and production would forestall the actual use of such weapons and was, therefore, the "safe" course had to be reconsidered in light of the fact that nuclear testing itself could kill, maim, and sicken.⁶³

In addition to its local projects, AAWFP also made important contributions to building the national WSP. For its first year, Elise Boulding edited the national newsletter, then called the *Women's Peace Movement Bulletin: A Monthly Information Exchange for All Women's Peace Groups in Correspondence with Women Strike for Peace, Washington, D.C.* The masthead also noted that the publication was "issued from" Ann Arbor, emphasizing WSP's lack of one central location or headquarters and the horizontal nature of its information sharing. Boulding would later say that she had "a flair" for starting newsletters, having initiated a couple for Quaker communities, as well as the "International Peace Research Newsletter." There was clear demand for a WSP publication and it "was natural" that Boulding should take it on. This made Ann Arbor an early hub of WSP activity in spite of its small size. With reports, proposals, and questions

⁶³ Elise Boulding credited the linking of "babies' health with nuclear testing" by the women's peace movement with the growth of anti-nuclear activism and new challenges to Cold War orthodoxies in the early sixties. "Babies were being directly affected by fallout from testing, from a process that was supposedly created international security and national defense" and knowing this made it easier for people who had previously feared red-baiting to speak out against the arms race. Boulding interview by Eynon and Fishman, 4.

from affiliates all over the country passing through AAWFP, the Ann Arbor members became well-informed about local projects begun elsewhere and saw more clearly than others, perhaps, the need for and value of a national meeting of WSP affiliates.⁶⁴ The idea bounced from a conference for Midwest WSPers in Chicago to the Washington office and back to Ann Arbor, where the first WSP/WFP national conference was held from June 8 to June 10, 1962. The meeting was pulled together in less than two months, with the Ann Arbor women “offering bed, breakfast and transportation (local) to all delegates,” a total of eighty-five women from sixteen states and the District of Columbia. The delegates set out to create a “statement of purpose,” devise a national structure, debate issues and priorities, and discuss goals and activities for the year ahead.

The Ann Arbor conference was WSP’s Port Huron, but it came first and attracted a larger crowd. Both gatherings would be marked by New Left style “endless meetings” that “ran non-stop” for days with participants moving back and forth between “sub-groups, sub-sub-groups, and all-together groups”; and both produced statements of purpose that sought to identify new approaches to political action and introduce new political constituencies.⁶⁵ True to its “unorganized” form, WSP planned for the women

⁶⁴ The proposal for a national conference was first developed at a Midwest Women for Peace Conference in April, 1962. But Dagmar Wilson would later credit the Ann Arbor women for “the idea.” See “Report of Midwest Women for Peace Conference,” *Women’s Peace Movement Bulletin* Vol. 1, No. 5, May 19, 1962, 4. Wilson said that the conference or “WISPeree” was Ann Arbor’s idea during her testimony before HUAC in December, 1962.

⁶⁵ The Port Huron conference began shortly after the first WSP conference ended, running from June 11-13, and was also held in Michigan. There were fifty-nine participants, mostly young men, although a few young women and older male supporters/mentors also attended. For detailed description of the SDS meeting, see Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets* and Hayden, *Reunion*; for a reappraisal of the significance (or comparative lack thereof) of the Port Huron statement to the New Left, see Allen Smith, “Present at the Creation . . . and Other Myths: the Port Huron Statement and the Origins of the New Left,” *Peace and Change*, vol.25, no.3, July 2000, 339-362.

who arrived on Friday evening to come to consensus on an agenda for the rest of the weekend. When they agreed that the number of participants made this unwieldy, the women divided into two groups—one small working-group and one large discussion group. While the smaller group hammered out the agenda, the larger group discussed ideas for agenda items. The larger group then sent one representative to the smaller group to make sure that their priorities be taken into consideration. The small group's agenda was then brought to the larger group for approval. With the agenda set, another small group was formed to look at the statements of purpose of local groups and condense them into a proposed national statement to be presented to the whole group Saturday morning.

Before the women adjourned for the evening, Kathleen Aberle, a Brandeis anthropology professor and representative of Voices of Women-New England, raised the issue of the Independent Negro Committee's participation. Aberle told the room that four members of the Detroit group had not been allowed to register for the conference and "made a strong plea," as the conference minutes put it, for their inclusion. As a participant from Northern California reported to her local group, "when this tidy little bombshell hit the conference floor some lively discussion took place." Most of the attendees knew nothing about the previous tensions between the Negro Committee and the Detroit and New York WSP branches, which revolved primarily around the black women's desire to link peace and racial justice organizing. Nonetheless, conference participants "decided that whatever the dissident Detroit group wanted or had done and

whether or not the other group had acted rightly or wrongly—the desegregation plus bomb group should come to Ann Arbor.”⁶⁶

This was a fateful decision because it set the stage for the first direct and open discussion of race and racial tensions, as well as political conflicts, within the national WSP. This took place Saturday morning, after the Detroit women had arrived, as part of the larger conversation about what a WSP Statement of Purpose should say. The broad consensus was that the statement should be very inclusive regarding who the participants of Women Strike for Peace were (and who should join them), but very narrow in terms of any stated goals. There was general agreement about the first line: “We represent a resolute stand of women in the United States against the unprecedented threat to life from nuclear holocaust.” The focal point of disagreement and debate was what should come next. A number of local affiliates who had adopted their own statements had included a line that began “we welcome all women. . .” to underscore the group’s inclusiveness. As Elsa Knight Thompson, a broadcast journalist and the Public Affairs Director of KPFA, the San Francisco Bay Area’s politically progressive Pacifica radio station, observed, “That little ‘all’ became the most talked about word.” Because East Bay women (who lived in Berkeley, Oakland and surrounding towns), had been the target of red-baiting by some of the local press, they had elaborated on the meaning of “all” in their statement, which read: “We welcome as co-workers women of any country, race, creed, or political persuasion . . .”⁶⁷ Including this language signaled that the East Bay WSP affiliate intended to be an integrated group that did not discriminate on the basis of race or

⁶⁶ “Report on the National Conference, June 8-10,” Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1, NICH Folder, BHL. Elsa Knight Thompson, “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference.” Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, BHL.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

religion *and* that they would not reject or purge women who were or had been Communists or fellow travelers or who were accused of having associations on the Left. The local group in Los Angeles affiliate, known as LA WISP, argued that the issue of potential Communist infiltration had to be addressed head on, given the experiences of other peace groups:

Unlike Sane and Turn Toward Peace, WSP must not make the error of initiating its own purges. If there are communists or former communists in WSP, what difference does that make? We do not question one another about our religious beliefs or other matters of personal conscience. How can we justify political interrogation? If fear, mistrust, and hatred are ever to be lessened, it will be by courageous individuals who do not hate and fear and can get together to work out tolerable compromises.⁶⁸

The WSPers who traveled to Geneva had experienced some red-baiting but, according to Thompson, who identified herself as one of “the more politically sophisticated among us,” many of the women present were “surprised and disquieted” to hear that some sister WSPers had been attacked for being either communists or communist dupes. After what the minutes of the conference described as “considerable discussion” which “continued later,” the women did agree to specify that “all political persuasions” were welcome in WSP. Thompson was struck by the naiveté of some of the women present but also impressed with their willingness to discuss controversial issues “in a non-doctrinaire, forthright way, on their merits, with a quite startling simplicity and candor.”⁶⁹

That little “all” also brought the women back to the previous evening’s discussion of race relations within WSP and whether black women were truly “welcome” in the group. This discussion was even more fraught than the one about politics because while some women were willing to acknowledge concern about the potential negative

⁶⁸ Swerdlow, “Ladies Day at the Capitol,” 499.

⁶⁹ Knight Thompson, “Personal Impressions.”

repercussions of being open to communists, all the white women present favored integration—in WSP and in society at large. But many white WSPers appear to have supported keeping the issues separate because they believed “the main purpose of our movement should not be diluted or obscured.” As noted earlier, the group’s founders believed that all women shared an interest in and responsibility for preserving life and protecting children. In 1961, for these middle-class white women, atomic warfare (which promised sudden death) and nuclear testing (which promised slow death through the poisoning of the environment were both dire and immediate threats to their children’s safety and, by extension, the safety of all children in the United States and around the world. In short, they believed not only that all women were motivated to protect children but that all women would agree on what children most needed protection from. Because of what they perceived as the universal appeal of the disarmament issue, many white WSPers were initially hesitant to take stands as an organization on other issues, such as civil rights, for fear that it would alienate women who would otherwise support their cause. They did not seem to recognize that refusing to make an organizational commitment to the civil rights movement could also alienate women they might otherwise attract. These women argued that “civil rights without disarmament won’t do any of us any good.”⁷⁰

Moreover, at least one white woman at the conference said “she saw no reason why women who believed in segregation shouldn’t” participate in WSP. That it was not possible to simultaneously welcome “women of all races” and women who believed in segregation apparently did not occur to her. Consciously or unconsciously, many white WSPers seemed more concerned with not alienating southern white women than with

⁷⁰ Swerdlow, 91-92.

winning the support of black women. This helps explain why the Independent Negro Committee was “uncompromising” in its quest to get WSP to recognize the civil rights struggle as being of equal importance to the peace movement. The few black women who got involved in WSP in its early days tended to argue that the causes of international peace and domestic justice were naturally intertwined. Without equal rights *and* an end to segregation, as one member of the Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb put it, “we don’t care whether there is peace or not.”⁷¹ Knight Thompson characterized this discussion as “painful... in some ways and to some people” but also pointed out that she had “rarely seen people probing for the truth—their own truth, inside them, more honestly.”⁷² While the conference could not come to consensus on including civil rights or integration as a WSP goal in its statement, they did agree to specify that WSP was “women of all races, creeds, and political persuasions.”⁷³

One other controversial issue was raised at this first national WSP conference—that of imposing a more formal structure on the “un-organization.” Participants from the April Midwest meeting put forward a proposal for a national steering committee that would comprise twelve representatives from twelve different parts of the country, each one selected by local WSPs to represent their geographic region. This committee would meet at least three times a year and keep in close contact via phone calls and letters in between. The first round of discussions, according to the conference minutes was “inconclusive” and “no decision” was made. Conferees were advised to sleep on it and revisit the issue on Sunday. Thompson reported that she, three other visiting WSPers and their Ann Arbor hostess were up much of the night discussing it and realized that they all

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Knight Thompson, “Personal Impressions.”

⁷³ “Report on the National Conference, June 8-10”

had misgivings which they had not been able to articulate during the formal meeting. At the follow-up discussion on Sunday it became clear that no one was really comfortable with the steering committee idea: instead, Thompson wrote, “they appear to want maximum local autonomy coupled with a maximum flow of information and ideas on possible actions which can be more effective on a national scale.”⁷⁴

The end result was a slightly more formal version of what they had already been doing instinctively—“each local group... will designate or elect a person or persons whose function will be literally to convey information to and from” a subgroup of the Washington area women who would become known as the National Information Clearing House. They would produce a frequent publication that came to be called the “National Information Memo,” which was simply a compilation of reports, proposals for action, and issues for discussion submitted by the local groups. Long before the internet, these memos and the process by which they were created were a kind of paper-based precursor to the interactive blog. Each issue became a national conversation about issues of immediate importance to WSPers.

Toward the end of her report on the conference, the “politically sophisticated” Knight Thompson, proclaimed, “There is something new here.” She was struck by the women’s “brand of honesty and ... purity of intent,” qualities “long lacking in our public life.” What impressed her most was “that this group is not motivated by fear of death but by the will to affirm life—that it is truly peace and not simply the absence of war for which they are working.”⁷⁵ What demonstrated this to Knight Thompson was the degree of soul-searching the WSPers were willing to engage in as they grappled with the

⁷⁴ Knight Thompson, “Personal Impressions.”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

questions of who they were and what their goals should be. The discussions of “civil rights, racial segregation, economic justice, political equality and international friendship” that erupted over the three days were, in some ways, all about the same thing: “Could you have peace” without addressing them? This question continued to be discussed in the years to come and the women’s answer to it would change over time. The conference had adopted the Ann Arbor group’s approach to consensus: each woman must respect her own thoughts and feelings enough to express them; each woman must listen intently and with an open mind to the thoughts and feelings of others and through that honest exchange of views they would discover what they could and should do in a given situation. This was a key element of WSP’s version of prefigurative politics: practicing the kind of democratic process they would like to see take hold in national debates and international relations.

Chapter 3: “If Dagmar Wilson Is a Communist, So Am I”: WSPers Confront HUAC

WSP’s call for peace and a truly democratic decision-making process was out of step with the Cold War mentality shared by many U.S. officials and fellow citizens. The limited success of their efforts to educate both about the dangers of the arms race and the chilling effect of McCarthyism was underscored by the Cuban Missile Crisis. On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy announced to the American people that the Soviet Union was in the process of building a number of offensive missile sites in Cuba and that, in response, he had ordered an air and naval blockade on further deliveries of military equipment to the island from the U.S.S.R. In his remarks, Kennedy referred to the Cuban people as “captive” and “imprisoned,” and to Fidel Castro’s government, which had taken power in 1959 following the overthrow of the U.S.-supported regime of Fulgencio Batista, as having fallen “under foreign domination,” meaning the Soviet Union. As Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* noted in his analysis, “a critical moment in the Cold War was at hand,” as Kennedy “had decided on a direct confrontation with—and challenge to—the power of the Soviet Union.”¹ In his televised address, Kennedy characterized the construction of missile bases as “deliberate deception and offensive threats” on the part of the Soviets that could not be tolerated. Alluding to the ultimately

¹ “Text of Kennedy’s Address to Meet the Soviet Build-Up in Cuba,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1962, 18. For contemporary coverage of the crisis I have relied primarily on the *New York Times*. Especially significant because they are clearly works of analysis as well as reporting are: Anthony Lewis, “President Grave: Asserts Russians Lied and Put Hemisphere in Great Danger,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1962, 1 and James Reston, “Washington: Kennedy’s New Diplomacy in Cuba,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1962, 29. There is a hefty literature on the crisis. The books that were most helpful in terms of putting WSP’s response in context are: Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*. (New York: Vintage, 2009); Alice L. George, *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-70*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. (New York: Vintage, 1996).

unsuccessful efforts to appease Hitler, Kennedy stated, “The nineteen thirties taught us a clear lesson. Aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war.”² In this depiction, the Soviets, like the Nazis, were evil-doers bent on world domination. The United States, on the other hand, was taking a defensive stance, aiming to protect not only itself, but Cuba, and the rest of the Western Hemisphere. America, Kennedy said, speaking directly to the Cuban people, wanted nothing for Cuba but its freedom and had no wish “to impose any system upon you.”³ What Kennedy did not mention were his administration’s efforts to overthrow or eliminate Castro. These included the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 and a covert program known as Operation Mongoose which sought to undermine the Cuban economy and destabilize Castro’s government through the sabotage and destruction of key components of the island’s infrastructure and possibly, the assassination of Castro himself.⁴ Given these efforts, combined with the fact that the U.S. retained its own military base at Guantanamo Bay, as well as several other bases very close to Soviet territory, Kennedy’s claim to a totally defensive position in response to unwarranted Soviet aggression seems disingenuous at best. While both contemporary observers and historians agree that Khrushchev’s actions in Cuba were provocative and meant to test Kennedy’s mettle as an opponent in the arms race, experts also agree that had the Cuban missile bases been completed and stocked, the power balance between the U.S. and U.S.S.R would have remained largely unchanged.

² “Text of Kennedy’s Address to Meet the Soviet Build-Up in Cuba.”

³ Ibid. Kennedy noted that his speech was being broadcast in Cuba “by special radio facilities.”

⁴ George, 12.

But what was most disturbing to American peace activists in Kennedy's speech was the way he interpreted the Soviet actions in Cuba as the opening salvo in a conflict that could very easily turn nuclear. As Kennedy warned,

We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the course of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth, but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced . . . The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender, or submission.⁵

The president's suggestion that worldwide nuclear war was indeed a possibility at this juncture was both shocking and horrifying to many Americans. As the *Times's* James Reston pointed out, Kennedy had bypassed standard diplomatic approaches: he essentially acted alone without consulting allies, the United Nations, or even Congress. Neither did he quietly offer Khrushchev a graceful way to resolve the conflict out of the limelight. Instead, Kennedy spoke to a handful of trusted advisers, who talked him down from his initial impulse to bomb the sites of the new bases or, alternatively, to invade Cuba. Other interested parties were informed, rather than consulted, about the decision to blockade the island. As Reston observed:

The President was confronted with a power play; he was being tested by Khrushchev in the most direct and challenging way; and he responded with a power play; he answered the test in a way that would not have been possible had he consulted with the allies and the United Nations . . .⁶

From WSP's perspective, this was very much the old, masculine way of doing things. Reston's language suggests the gamesmanship and refusal to negotiate that these

⁵ "Text of Kennedy's Address."

⁶ Reston, "Kennedy's New Diplomacy."

women associated with the “long-playing record” they had heard in Geneva.

Furthermore, they believed the only solution was to move all decision-making related to the nuclear threat under the auspices of the United Nations. Kennedy’s decision to bypass international opinion and keep the conflict in the personal “us vs. them” realm of the arms race seemed foolhardy and intransigent to WSP. The Cuban situation reignited the fears that had motivated women to take action almost exactly a year earlier. Part of WSP’s *raison d’être* was the belief held by participants in the original strike day that they needed a vehicle for mobilizing quickly in response to a crisis. The fear remained, but instead of being accompanied by feelings of helplessness and despair, it now sparked immediate action. Once again, the Washington women reached out to their contacts around the country. Acknowledging that these were “nightmare days” when “no one of us can speak for any other,” they urged their sister WSPers to take the opportunity—“perhaps our last”—to speak out for mankind and, especially, for children. They urged everyone who could do so to come to Washington for a demonstration on Saturday, October 27.⁷

WSP urged its members to speak out against the president’s unilateral decision in their local communities and enclosed an information sheet, written in Q&A form, entitled “What do Women Strikers Think Now?” to help them debate supporters of the blockade. The influence of the diplomats they met in Geneva can be read between the lines, particularly in the way WSPers seek to encourage their critics to look at the crisis through the eyes of Soviets and Cubans. While acknowledging that the bases in Cuba were “provocative,” WSPers should also point out that NATO bases in Turkey and Italy were

⁷ Washington WSP Steering Committee to “WSPers and Friends,” October 25, 1962, WSP Papers, Box 1, SHSW.

equally “provocative” from a Soviet perspective. If asked, “Aren’t the NATO bases defensive?” WSPers were encouraged to reply, “Our government claims they are, as the Cuban government claims their bases are needed to protect themselves against invasion.” If asked whether they believed America had a right to protect itself, WSPers were encouraged to answer in the affirmative, but to add, “Nuclear destruction of our country and the Soviet Union would not accomplish this . . . War no longer offers protection for anyone.” If asked about the U.S. citizen’s responsibility to support the president’s decisions in this matter, WSPers were to argue that “Decisions that may end our children’s lives should be taken only in consultation with all the people.”⁸

The latter might not have been a winning strategy from WSP’s perspective, given what appeared to be widespread support among the American people for Kennedy’s approach. But WSPers believed that many minds would change given access to more information, a range of views, and a truly open and wide-ranging debate. All the points made on the information sheet point to the values, priorities, and rhetorical gambits WSP had developed over the course of the preceding year: they framed war and nuclear weapons not as means of protecting the nation, but forces that the American people (and the human race) needed to be protected from; they claimed the role of protector for themselves, women and mothers, rather than the president and military leaders; they rejected the “us vs. them” rationale of the arms race and encouraged Americans to look at the issue from the perspective of the Soviets and the Cubans, who acted on their own fears; they underscored the need for citizen involvement in national and international

⁸ Ibid.

decision-making, for “participatory democracy,” rejecting the idea that the “best and the brightest” could be trusted to always make the right decisions.

Internally, the sense of urgency that had motivated tens of thousands of women to take to the streets the previous year set off an immediate round of meetings and phone calls that lasted “far into the night.”⁹ Plans were made for the October 27 march in Washington in conjunction with the Student Peace Union and for more local actions that could be organized quickly. At noon on the day after Kennedy announced the blockade, hundreds of women, “twenty-five men and several small children, some wheeled in baby carriages” walked in a circle around the main plaza at the United Nations, carrying signs that read “Peace or Perish” and “Long Live the U.N.”¹⁰ In Ann Arbor, that same day, AAWFP organized a demonstration of townspeople in front of the downtown County Building that was joined by a group of students marching from their own rally on campus. Mickey Flacks recalled that the student march was surrounded and harassed by a group of student counter-demonstrators who “were grabbing signs out of our hands, and it was very scary.”¹¹ On Friday in Los Angeles, more than three hundred women and children marched around a downtown plaza “under the watchful eye of the police,” and then sent telegrams to Kennedy urging him to end the crisis through negotiation rather than political action. A group of LA WISPers left the demonstration “immediately for Washington by plane, train, car and bus to seek an audience with President Kennedy” and participate in the Saturday demonstration.¹² In spite of these and many other public

⁹ “WSPers and Friends.”

¹⁰ “Women March to Demand that Cuban Crisis Be Settled Within the U.N.” *New York Times*, October 24, 1962, 24.

¹¹ Flacks interview with Bret Eynon.

¹² “Women’s Unit Here Stages Peace March,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1962, 5.

actions around the country over the course of that week, WSPers worried that their “voices raised for calm and considered action . . . were unlikely to be heard” as counter-demonstrators like those in Ann Arbor attacked them as “reds” and “traitors” and called on the president to bomb Cuba.

On Friday, October 26, many peace activists, including Dagmar Wilson, attended a fundraising luncheon in New York for H. Stuart Hughes, a Harvard professor who was running for the Senate from Massachusetts as a peace candidate, with the support of the local WSP affiliate, Voices of Women—New England (VOW-NE). The Cuban crisis was at the forefront of everyone’s mind and, according to one WSPer in attendance, “rumors that the U.S. would invade Cuba—perhaps that very weekend—spread from table to table.”¹³ In Washington, plans for the Saturday demonstration continued in spite of fears that it might be too late to convince the president to step back from the precipice. While some of their friends left town in search of a safer place than the nation’s capitol to wait for whatever was to come next, the Washington WSPers agreed that “it would be better to die on the job, urging negotiation, than merely to flee.”¹⁴ On Saturday, they were joined by sister WSPers from at least a dozen states, as well as busloads of college students from across the nation. About 1500 people were counted at the demonstration’s highpoint; according to the *New York Times*, “young persons predominated, but there was a substantial sprinkling of middle-aged and elderly women wearing lapel cards of membership (sic) in Women’s (sic) Strike for Peace.”¹⁵

¹³ Marjory Collins, “Crisis Weekend,” *Peace Concern*, v.1 n.13, November 2, 1962, 3. Marcia Barrabee papers, Box 1 Folder 1962-5, BHL.

¹⁴ “WSPers and Friends.”

¹⁵ Cabell Phillips, “Pickets Parade at White House,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1962, 1.

Instead of going home after the march, most of the participants headed to a public meeting to discuss next steps. There, the independent journalist I.F. Stone grimly announced that he still believed an invasion would take place before the end of the weekend. This was not what the audience wanted or expected to hear—a stunned silence was interrupted by a woman’s anguished voice. “You’re not talking peace,” she screamed at Stone. “Give us something positive! You’re not for peace!” Others burst into tears. Mickey Flacks, who had driven all night from Ann Arbor to attend the demonstration said, “We really believed it was about to come to an end.” Dagmar Wilson and Homer Jack of SANE left for a previously scheduled appointment with a White House aide. About fifty others stayed behind to brainstorm what else they could do with Eleanor Garst facilitating the discussion. A group of students proposed a civil disobedience action at the White House at 11:00 that night and went off to plan and publicize it. Some WSPers suggested that a group of mothers fly to Cuba immediately to sit in at the missile bases “to offer themselves as hostages to the world, daring either side to do anything.” They went off to find a plane to charter and raise the funds to pay for it. The rest of the group decided to call influential leaders around the world, including the Pope, to encourage them to use their influence with the principals. The despair they had felt during the larger meeting was tempered by the hope that they could still do something to prevent disaster. “On the one hand,” Flacks said, “we felt the world was coming to an end, on the other hand we felt we could do all this. We could call the Pope and we could charter a plane, and there were things that could be done, that would mean something.”¹⁶ Around 10:00 p.m., news outlets reported that Khrushchev had agreed to withdraw the

¹⁶ Flacks interview with Bret Eynon.

missiles from Cuba. Kennedy was still refusing to negotiate until he saw proof that the building of bases was halted, but the worst of the crisis was over.

The next day, Sunday, there was another demonstration at the United Nations, the largest yet, with between eight and ten thousand people participating to send the message that they would not be satisfied until a peaceful settlement had been reached. A few WSPers carried umbrellas that read “Peace Is Our Only Shelter” and other marchers waved signs declaring, “We oppose all bases and all blockades.” Once again counter-demonstrators appeared, destroying peace signs and hollering, “Communists, go back to Russia!” For WSP, the events of October 1962 offered a bittersweet lesson. For, while “the voices calling for peaceful solutions (in the U.S.) are now many times as numerous as they a year ago,” they “were still not nearly strong enough to effect a real change in policy.”¹⁷ WSPers also discovered that in spite of their efforts to be even-handed in their criticisms of the arms race and to hold both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. accountable for bringing the world to what they perceived to be the brink of destruction, their stand against nuclear war was interpreted by more Americans than they would like as communist-sympathizing.

Just a few weeks after the Cuban crisis was resolved, on November 16, 1962, D.C. WSPer Donna Allen gave a speech at a dinner marking the fourteenth anniversary of the independent but left-leaning *National Guardian* newspaper. Like WSP, the *National Guardian* promoted itself as neither communist nor anti-communist in orientation; unlike WSP, the publication, founded in 1948 by supporters of Progressive Henry Wallace’s presidential campaign, staked out a clear left-of-center position. It ran articles that attacked HUAC and McCarthyism and supported activism on behalf of labor,

¹⁷“WSPers and Friends.”

civil rights, civil liberties, and peace. Among its contributors were WSP participants Barbara Deming and Marjory Collins. In a carefully worded statement, Allen acknowledged that “no other publication has given [WSP] as complete coverage as the *National Guardian*” and added, “We would like to hug you for it, but we can’t because this would appear to mean we had adopted your political views.” Speaking for herself, Allen said, “I happen to be a *Guardian* subscriber from the first issue.” But, she continued, “the woman who stands next to me in WSP happens not to want to have it in the same room with her.” And, she added, “There can be no peace movement that does not have room for both of us.” Allen restated WSP’s commitment to build the broadest possible constituency for peace: “We can do no good if we are outcast socially. We do not want to be called Reds—or any other name intended to be derogatory. We also do not want to be called McCarthyites, because we are not. As a movement, WSP cannot, and we do not want to, practice any kind of exclusion. We must, and we want to, practice *inclusion*. . . No peace dove can fly if either its left wing or its right wing is cut off. We have been urged, by turns, to do both.” She then concluded, “WSP perhaps alone in the peace movement is trying to solve the difficult problem of inclusiveness. You know the alternative to success—possible nuclear annihilation. We hope you will help us be as *broad* as we can.”¹⁸

Whether the *Guardian* had asked WSP for a direct endorsement of its editorial policies is not clear. What is clear is that Allen found it necessary to make the case to a leftist audience that WSP’s “big tent” philosophy was in the best interest of the peace movement (and, therefore, humanity). At the same time, by underscoring that WSPers

¹⁸ Donna Allen, “Speech to National Guardian 14th Anniversary Dinner,” November 16, 1962, WSP Papers Box 1, SHSW.

were not “McCarthyites” and pointing out that WSP was “perhaps alone” in the peace movement in terms of its “inclusiveness,” she reminded *Guardian* supporters that WSP had not and would not purge Leftists from its ranks. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, both SANE and WILPF had struggled with pressures from within and without to take strong anti-Communist stands and had ultimately yielded to them, though in different ways and to different degrees. Whereas by 1960 SANE specifically denied Communist Party members from “any voice in deciding the Committee’s policies or programs,”¹⁹ in the 1950s WILPF encouraged its local branches, some of which were divided by red-baiting and anticommunist paranoia, to work to convince potential “subversives” that WILPF’s philosophy and policies were superior to those of the CP.²⁰ Allen, like other WSPers aware of the destructive impact the Red Scare continued to have on social movement groups, believed that freedom of speech and association were basic American values. They also knew that WSP’s survival depended on not succumbing to anticommunist anxiety while also continuing to attract the participation of women who were not of the Left and might be wary of associating with women who were. At the same time, as Allen’s reference to the *Guardian*’s extensive and positive coverage of WSP suggests, the women also knew that they were more likely to win support from the Left than the Right. In its efforts to resist pressure from both sides of the ideological spectrum, WSP followed what was essentially a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in regard

¹⁹ Robbie Lieberman. *The Strangest Dream: Communism, Anticommunism and the U.S. Peace Movement, 1945-1963*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 148. As Lieberman points out, several of SANE’s founders and leaders, including Norman Thomas, Norman Cousins, and Homer Jacks shared long-held anti-Communist views and had expressed concern about SANE’s being infiltrated from the organization’s founding. But it was Senator Thomas Dodd’s call for investigations into subversion in the anti-nuclear movement that pushed the SANE board to formally articulate this position. And it was her opposition to the “Standards” that motivated Dagmar Wilson to resign as secretary of the local D.C. chapter of SANE.

²⁰ Harriet Hyman Alonso. *Peace as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights*. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 182-185.

to the presence of Communists or former Communists in its ranks. Any woman who supported the causes of world peace and the cessation of nuclear testing and weapons production was welcome. A woman's other beliefs or associations—political, religious, social—were deemed immaterial to WSP's project.

Shortly after Allen's *National Guardian* speech, about a dozen women associated with Women Strike were subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). This should not have come as a complete surprise given earlier attempts to paint the group as a Communist front, and the women's activism during the Cuban crisis was viewed in some circles as avowedly unpatriotic. Yet, unlike SANE and WILPF, both of which were divided internally over how to handle allegations of Communist infiltration and how to deal with members who were or had been members of the party, WSP was prepared to present a united front in support of its policy of welcoming everyone. WSPers, rather than becoming defensive in the face of red-baiting, went on the offensive. The majority of the women who were subpoenaed were from the New York Metropolitan area and the New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut branches quickly sent a letter to WSP contacts around the country expressing their "strong indignation." The letter did not address the allegations of "communist infiltration" but, instead, called the scheduled hearings an "attempt to frighten us and divert our attention from the most important issue women have ever faced—the preservation of life in the nuclear age." In addition, the WSP women implied that the subpoenas were motivated by the larger political agenda of the Committee members: "It is interesting to note that the majority of the members of HUAC vote consistently against all peace legislation." They framed the investigation not as an attack on Communism (however unwarranted) but as

an attack on the peace movement and, more specifically, an attempt to use divide-and-conquer tactics to undermine WSP.²¹ According to the New York area WSPers, it was the HUAC members and their Cold War orthodoxy that threatened the country, not a group of women who were struggling to eliminate the nuclear threat. “We submit that it is not we women who should be ‘investigated,’” they wrote, “but those who, with the cool logic of madness, attempt to reconcile us to complete destruction.” Well aware of how red-baiting had harmed SANE and WILPF, the New York area chapters made a plea for national unity among all WSPers. The letter was signed by the New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut branches, not by the women who had been subpoenaed. They used the terms “we” and “us” throughout, suggesting that all WSP women were included in and would be affected by the HUAC hearings. “The investigation will not divide us,” they stated.²²

When Senator Thomas J. Dodd targeted SANE during a 1960 Senate Internal Subcommittee investigation of “subversion” within the nuclear test ban movement, SANE’s liberal anticommunist co-chair Norman Cousins attempted to negotiate with Dodd behind the scenes. Cousins acknowledged that SANE had communists among its members and pledged that the national board would take care of the problem; he asked Dodd to refrain from publicly attacking the organization until after a planned rally at Madison Square Garden.²³ WSP, on the other hand, made no attempts to negotiate with HUAC or to keep the subpoenas quiet. They did not follow SANE’s example, which was

²¹ As Robbie Lieberman points out, in the post-World War II era, American leaders largely believed that the nation’s security rested on military preparedness; they argued that calls for peace both at home and abroad were motivated by a desire to strengthen the Soviet position in the Cold War by making the U.S. more vulnerable to attack. See Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*.

²² “Dear Friend: The Peace Movement Is Under Attack,” Dec. 2, 1962. WSP Papers, Box 1, Folder 10, SHSW.

²³ Lieberman, 147.

essentially to offer up scapegoats in an attempt to protect the reputation of the organization as a whole. Instead, following a strategy of one-for-all and all-for-one, WSP claimed to possess both moral authority and common sense, vis-à-vis HUAC. Furthermore, it publicized the subpoenas, suggesting that they had nothing to fear. A statement from the national office declared, “It is not we women who should be ‘investigated’ but those who, with the cool logic of madness, attempt to reconcile us to complete destruction. Our ‘crime’ is to cry aloud that nuclear war must not be permitted, and we shall continue to cry aloud with all our strength.”²⁴ Conservative critics of WSP had accused the women of being “naïve” and “emotional,” gender-specific terms that implied that women were temperamentally unsuited to participate in debates about high politics and international relations, that they were too idealistic for the world of *realpolitik*. WSP rebutted this argument by associating “logic” (they sometimes used the term “male logic”) with “madness”: self-defense through more and more deadly weapons might seem “logical” on the surface, the women suggested, but when one thought realistically about the human and environmental destruction that could be wrecked by a “push button,” the “madness” of the arms race became clear.

Armed with faith in the righteousness of their cause and their thousands of contacts around the country, WSP women went on the offensive, asking supporters to write to Congress and the president to protest the hearings. They pointed out that on at least two occasions (one involving the National Council of Churches and one involving California teachers), HUAC had been successfully pressured to cancel scheduled hearings. The Committee did not cancel the hearings; instead, it called a few more witnesses, including Dagmar Wilson. It is worth noting that both the Senate investigation

²⁴ “Dear Friend: The Peace Movement Is Under Attack.”

of SANE and the House investigation of WSP set their sights specifically on the New York branches of the two groups. New York was apparently viewed as a particular hotbed of subversion, perhaps because it was the home to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and Alger Hiss, all convicted of espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union. It could also have been because New York was known for its substantial Jewish population, and there was an undeniable link between anticommunism and anti-Semitism in some quarters during this period.²⁵

If HUAC had remained focused solely on the New York women, none of whom was particularly well-known nationally, the outcry among WSPers at the grassroots might not have been as passionate or as widespread. But when the Committee subpoenaed Wilson, a woman with no history of Communist Party activity or associations, a woman who, despite her own demurrals to the contrary, many WSPers considered their leader, it convinced the rank-and-file across the country that the New York Metro women were right—the hearings were not an attack on communism, but on WSP and the cause of peace.

²⁵ It has long been argued that the Rosenbergs would not have received the death penalty had they not been Jewish. In the minds of some Americans at the time, all Jews were Communists and all Communists were Jews. For a nuanced discussion of the relationship between anti-semitism and anti-communism and Jewish responses to “McCarthyite anticommunism” during the 1940s and 1950s, see Victor Navasky, *Naming Names*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980, 1991), Chapter Five. Vivian Gornick, the daughter of New York Jewish Communists, wrote that until researching her book on American Communism, she “secretly . . . had always believed along with J. Edgar Hoover that the Communists were all New York Jews of Eastern European origin. . . I discovered that in fact . . . they really were every kind of American: white, black, rich, poor, Jew, Gentile, American-born, foreign-born . . .” Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism*. New York: Basic Books, 1977, 23. While observing the HUAC hearings on WSP, George Lincoln Rockwell, then head of the American Nazi Party, was reported to have said, “It looks like every Jew in Brooklyn is here.” Robert E. Light, “Women for Peace Too Sharp for HUAC at Smear Hearings.” *National Guardian*, v.15, n.1, December 20, 1962, 1.

In typical WSP style, proposals for action were requested and letters, phone calls, and memos criss-crossed the country. Whatever their feelings about communism, women who had participated in WSP were proud of that association. They did not view WSP as something they had joined, but something they had made. They had a sense of ownership of their “movement” and a sense of identification with each other and especially with Wilson, not because she “ran” WSP, but because she had set it in motion. In their letters to HUAC members, WSPers from around the country echoed the sentiments of Carrie Joffee Taylor of La Jolla, California who wrote, “If Dagmar Wilson is a communist—so am I. . . The only point I really want to make in this letter is that Dagmar Wilson is the symbol for more people than you, or Mrs. Wilson herself, might suspect. Our voice is small now, but it is getting louder all the time and the HCUA will have to expand its operations considerably if it wants to stamp us out. Call us communists, call us fools, call us what you will—we refuse to be pawns any longer in this deadly game of chess. We want you to hear us—we want you to listen to us—and we won’t stop talking until you do.” Joffee Taylor added a personal note to Wilson on a carbon copy she sent to Washington which read, “You are a wonderful woman—and I have wanted to tell you so long before this. You were one of the first to arouse me from a state of abject despair, to make me realize that I, too, am a citizen with an opinion—and a voice which must be heard. Thank you, Mrs. Wilson, with all my heart, for turning your thoughts into action, for waking us up and giving us hope.”²⁶ For many participants, WSP—and Wilson—represented not just a cause they believed in but a personal transformation that made their lives better. They had gone from passive to active,

²⁶ Letter from Carrie Joffee Taylor, La Jolla, Ca. Dec. 1962. WSP Papers Box 2 Folder 7 SHSW.

helpless to hopeful, and had “begun to feel their power.”²⁷ Having “found their voice” and claimed the right to have an opinion, they would not be silenced again. Instead WSPers who had not been called before the Committee demanded the right to be heard. Hundreds of them agreed with Joffe Taylor’s assessment that “if Dagmar Wilson is a communist—so am I,” and volunteered to travel to Washington at their own expense to appear before the Committee.

The suggestion to “turn the tables” on HUAC by volunteering to appear rather than waiting to be called was made almost simultaneously by three different women in three different cities. A letter from the national office explaining the rationale for this unorthodox approach shows that WSPers were anything but naïve. They were very conscious of the fact that their true audience was the press and the public, rather than HUAC itself, and thought about how this approach would “play” in the media. The willingness of women other than those subpoenaed to testify, they recognized, would put “the committee on the spot: If they allow all these women to testify, they’re providing us with a platform; if they don’t, it makes a good news story.” They would be demonstrating to the public that they had nothing to fear and nothing to hide and, at the same time, they would be giving reporters “an opportunity to ‘show up’ this committee which, we’re told, is . . . much disliked by the press.” Conscious as ever of the image they wanted to project, they wrote that “we don’t have to draw you a picture of the effect that can be made by a hearing room packed with sweet and dignified mothers and children.” The impact of this tableau would not only be to send the message that such

²⁷ Shuster, *op.cit.*

women could not possibly be subversives, it could also “end the devastating power of the Committee to silence protest—by subtly making it a laughing stock .”²⁸

WSPers went into the hearings with multiple goals. First, they wanted to maintain and build the peace and anti-nuclear movements. A big part of this effort was changing the image of protest and dissent from “un-American” to American, from unacceptable to acceptable, from dangerous to safe. Second, they wanted to preserve their own ability to organize women who did not necessarily see themselves as “political” into WSP and to continue growing their own “un-organization.” If HUAC succeeded in tagging WSP or even a few individual WSPers as “subversive,” the group’s ability to continue attracting “ordinary” women would be severely compromised. It could also lead to the kind of internal strife that had divided SANE and WILPF, leading to membership loss and lack of unity. Third, they wanted to promote their version of the New Left concept of participatory democracy. While WSP’s primary goals at the time were to end the arms race and nuclear testing, their statement of purpose also addressed this broader issue: “We cherish the right and accept the responsibility of the individual in a democratic society to act and influence the course of government.” WSPers viewed HUAC’s mission as inhibiting the individual citizen’s ability to act and influence her government. Their decision to take on (and attempt to take down) HUAC was a logical extension of their belief in open debate and every citizen’s right to develop and express an opinion on the affairs of the day. The national office’s call for support of the subpoenaed WSPers deftly connected the different elements of the group’s anti-HUAC offensive: “The aim of the House Un-American Activities Committee is undoubtedly to tarnish the WSP ‘image’—to intimidate women who might become active—to stifle public debate. This we can’t

²⁸ “Dear WSPers: Let’s Turn the Tables.” WSP Papers, Box 1 SHSW.

allow, because what we're doing is far more important.”²⁹ Their goals are clear: to protect WSP's ability to continue its work on behalf of humanity and the environment; to continue bringing new women into the movement; and to enable a more open civil society. The letter also captures the women's own sense of confidence and empowerment. Their commitment to their cause is unshakable, as is their faith in their ability to get things done. They would not be sent back “to the kitchen” in the words of Donna Allen's harasser; they would not stop talking, as Carol Joffe Taylor said in her letter to HUAC, until they were heard.

WSP has been criticized by some feminists for promoting the idea that woman's primary role and responsibility is motherhood and for emphasizing the ways women are different from men rather than the ways in which they are similar. At a time when American women were beginning a new campaign to demand equality with men in previously male-dominated spheres, struggling to be seen as something other than or more than mothers, WSPers seemed a bit too comfortable with a 1950s sitcom version of femininity. While WSPers certainly valued and perhaps even glorified motherhood, they rejected the notion that motherhood precluded women from involving themselves in other endeavors and that it required imprisonment in the home. As later feminists would do on behalf of issues like workplace daycare and public breastfeeding, WSPers challenged the notion that the masculine is universal and that women entering the public sphere had to adapt themselves to pre-existing standards of public behavior. WSPers challenged the idea that either their gender or status as mothers made them unqualified or under-qualified for political participation. As Dagmar Wilson told Amy Swerdlow, “My idea in emphasizing the housewife rather than the professional was that I thought the housewife

²⁹ Ibid.

was a downgraded person, and that we, as housewives, had as much right to an opinion and that we deserved as much consideration as anyone else.”³⁰ WSPers demanded that the masculine world of government and international relations accommodate the feminine and the maternal. This was demonstrated most vividly by their behavior during the HUAC hearings.

Eric Bentley, who applied his experience as a theater critic to the spectacle of HUAC, writes that David Dellinger, Rennie Davis, and Tom Hayden, who were called before the Committee in October 1968, “exploit[ed] the committee room as a forum for their views, and, in effect, they imposed their own rules of procedure, since there was nothing the Committee could do to stop them from talking, let alone to ensure that their vocabulary, syntax, and tone should be what Congressmen regard as proper.”³¹ While he anoints the subpoenaed WSPers as the first of a new generation of HUAC witnesses who refused to mimic the customary responses of unfriendly witnesses (either defying the Committee by refusing to answer questions or cowering before it and “naming names”), Bentley does not acknowledge how fully WSPers, in 1961, took control of the committee room, violating not only the script, but the standards of decorum and behavior expected of witnesses.³² The press compared the atmosphere of the WSP hearings, which ran from December 11 to 13, to that of a daycare center or a rather large “ladies’ luncheon.” Five

³⁰ Quoted in Amy Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC.” *Feminist Studies* vol.8, no.3 (Autumn 1982), 510. This now classic article elaborated on Eric Bentley’s point that WSP’s rejection of what could be called the “broken record” of HUAC hearings landed a crucial blow at the increasingly irrelevant committee. WSP’s “feminine yet combative” style, writes Swerdlow, was “so ingenious in its exploitation of traditional domestic culture in support in the service of radical politics that it succeeded in doing permanent damage to the committee’s reputation.” (97). Also see Eric Bentley (ed.), *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books), 1971/ 2002.

³¹ Eric Bentley, *Thirty Years of Treason*, 952. Bentley also writes that Dagmar Wilson and the other WSP witnesses “spoiled everything [for HUAC] by answering the question and reversing the roles; playing cop to their robber, hero to their villain!” (951)

³² *Ibid.*

hundred women had come to Washington from eleven states to support the subpoenaed women and bear witness to the proceedings. Many of them brought their children along, perhaps because they had no one to leave them with but, more likely, to underscore the fact that, as a *Washington Post* headline put it: “Now They Are Subpoenaing Mothers.” Outside the hearing room, “a carriage was parked by one of the several women who had brought infants. The mothers kept pacifiers handy to quiet the babies when the chairman rapped for order.”³³ In effect, “The ladies had been using the Congress as a babysitter. Their young crawled in the aisles and noisily sucked their bottles during the whole proceedings.”³⁴ While newspaper photos of the proceedings do not suggest that the number of children present came anywhere near equaling the number of adults, they do show a number of women in the audience balancing babies and toddlers on their laps while juggling bottles, pacifiers, and blankets.

Even more disruptive was the way the women in the audience interacted with the witnesses. They demonstrated their support not only with their presence, but with applause, cheers, and the presentation of flowers. In effect, the women took control of the room. Rep. Clyde Doyle of California, who officially presided over the hearings, made an opening statement explaining the dangers that peace movements posed to democratic societies: “Peace propaganda and agitation have a disarming, mollifying, confusing, and weakening effect on those nations who are the intended victims of Communism.”³⁵ The audience did not respond to this or other similar statements. But,

³³ Light, “Women for Peace Too Sharp for HUAC...”

³⁴ Mary McGrory, “Nobody Controls Anybody,” *The Evening Star*, Dec. 14, 1962. WSP Papers Box 1 SHSW.

³⁵ “Communist Activities in the Peace Movement (Women Strike for Peace and Certain Other Groups),” Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-seventh Congress, Second Session, December 11-13. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963, 2065.

when Doyle stated, “The fact that Communists have infiltrated peace organizations does not mean that all members of them, or even a majority of them, are Communists or Communist sympathizers,” the women burst into applause.³⁶ Since WSP had denied and would continue to deny that it was an organization with members and, hence, that it could be infiltrated by anyone, the applause seems unwarranted. It was probably an expression of surprise and delight at hearing a member of HUAC acknowledge that peace activists were not by definition Communists that led the women to clap. On this one point, at least, the women and their interlocutors could agree. From the Committee’s perspective, it set up the underlying premise of the WSP hearings—rather than attack as un-American a group of mothers who had become quite popular with much (though certainly not all) of the press and public, HUAC would argue instead that the majority of WSPers were sincere, idealistic, naïve dupes of a small number of dangerous radicals from New York City, that hotbed of Communist activity. That there was a sexist element to these accusations of naiveté seems clear. Unlike the male-led SANE, which, once warned, could be trusted to police itself, the women of WSP had to be saved from themselves.

Doyle seemed equally surprised and delighted by the women’s response; he probably was not used to being applauded by the Committee’s witnesses and their supporters. At the end of his formal remarks, he added, “It was very pleasant to hear that applause; of course we must ask there be no applause for, or demonstration against, anything that is said in this room today.”³⁷ But it was too late for that. As Swerdlow recalled, “This spontaneous outburst cheered the women and set the tone for their active,

³⁶ Ibid., 2066.

³⁷ Ibid., 2067.

good-humored participation throughout the hearings.”³⁸ Shortly before the first WSP witness, Blanche Posner, was called to the stand, a note circulated around the room suggesting that all WSPers present should rise along with Posner, as an expression of their solidarity. They did so, in spite of Doyle’s warning against further demonstrations. The WSPers refused to abide by standard protocol or to recognize that Doyle, as presiding officer, had any authority to control their behavior. Throughout the hearings, columnist Mary McGrory noted, “The ladies themselves hissed, gasped, clapped entirely at will.”³⁹ The *National Guardian* reported that the WSPers “gave voice to their sentiments throughout the hearings. Frequently, they applauded the witnesses and laughed at the questions.”⁴⁰ Hanne Sonquist of Ann Arbor, who arrived at the Capitol in time for Dagmar Wilson’s testimony the morning of the third and final day of hearings, noted that “When we got to the House Office Bldg., we felt quite at home: it was the Ann Arbor conference *plus*. And the confidence in those familiar faces!”⁴¹ The children, the flowers, the laughter and applause, the hugs and tears, were simultaneously the means through which the women claimed ownership of the hearing room (they made themselves at home), and the symbolic representation of their version of participatory democracy.

For WSPers, to participate in elected government did not mean to vote and then sit back and observe elected officials at work; it meant expressing opinions and emotions and making sure that you were heard. As women, it also meant not accepting that the rules made by men and the tone set by men had to be followed. In certain ways, WSP’s

³⁸ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 109.

³⁹ Mary McGrory, “Peace Strike Explained: ‘Nobody Controls Anybody,’” *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 14, 1962.

⁴⁰ Robert Light, “Women for Peace Too Sharp. . .”

⁴¹ Hanne Sonquist, “HUAC and Women for Peace: An Ann Arborite Reports,” *AAWFP Monthly Bulletin*, Vol. II, No. 1 (January 1963), 7.

active participation in and running commentary on the HUAC hearings foreshadowed the behavior of feminists in the late 1960s during legislative hearings on issues like abortion and the birth control pill. Feminist activists who had not been invited to testify during those sessions would shout their questions and opinions from the audience, claiming to be the true experts on matters relating to their bodies, their health, and their lives. Similarly, WSPers believed they knew better than HUAC what motivated women to join the movement and whether it was vulnerable to “infiltration”; they also believed that mothers, more than Congressmen, were authorities on what the true cost of nuclear war would be. As Posner said during her testimony—speaking over the objections of her questioners when she embarked on what they considered a tangent—“I don’t know, sir, why I am here, but I know why you’re here—I think. . . because you don’t quite understand the nature of this movement. It is inspired and motivated by mothers’ love for their children. . . When they were putting their breakfast on the table, they saw not only Wheaties and milk, but strontium 90 and iodine 131. . . They feared for the health and life of their children. That is the only motivation. . . If you gentlemen have children or grandchildren, you should be grateful to the Women Strike for Peace. . . Every nuclear test has resulted in malformations, has resulted in stillbirths, has resulted in leukemia, has resulted in cancer, has resulted in the possibility of a nuclear holocaust.”⁴²

Over the course of three days of hearings, the subpoenaed WSPers responded to questions about their political beliefs and associations. Some acknowledged having been Communists in the past; some did not. Some took the Fifth Amendment; some took the First. This was in keeping with WSP’s claim that it was a network of individuals; not an organization with members and marching orders. All of them did challenge what they

⁴² “Communist Activities in the Peace Movement,” 2074.

considered the Committee members' mistaken notions regarding women, peace, and patriotism. Elizabeth Moos, accused of being a member of Communist front organizations as a college student in the 1930s and of joining the Party in 1943, told the Committee that it was "doing a terrible disservice to America and everyone in the entire world . . . when [you] try to attribute every act, every conscious act that is done for peace to the Communists. Are they the only ones? Do they want peace more than we do?"⁴³

The highlight of the hearings, for WSPers and veteran HUAC watchers alike, came on the final day when Dagmar Wilson was called to testify. Wilson, described by reporters as "attractive," "pert," and "beguiling," provided, according to Mary McGrory, "the coup de grace for the men in the battle of the sexes." Doyle made clear from the beginning that Wilson herself was not suspected of having Communist sympathies; she was being brought to task for what another Committee member, Rep. Donald Bruce of Indiana, called her "startling naiveness." Having decided among themselves that New York WSP was a Communist front, the Committee asked Wilson whether she, as presumed national leader of the group, was able to exercise control over that chapter (as opposed, we can assume, to Khrushchev). Her widely reported reply was that "Nobody is controlled by anybody in Women Strike for Peace. We're all leaders." This, McGrory pointed out, was hard for the Committee to swallow because "No man, of course, would ever deny being the leader of anything." When Alfred Nittle, the Committee counsel, suggested that it was, in fact, the New York group that was really running WSP, Wilson replied, "Heavens, women in the other cities would be mortified if you said that."⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., 2157.

⁴⁴ McGrory, "Peace Strike Explained."

Having failed at getting Wilson to tell them who was giving the peace ladies their marching orders, the Committee moved on. As described by McGrory,

Mr. Nittle pressed forward to the clutch question, one that would bring a man to his knees with patriotic protest. “Would you knowingly permit or encourage Communist Party members to occupy leadership positions in the Women Strike for Peace?”

“Well, my dear sir,” said Mrs. Wilson, “I have no control or desire to control those who wish to join. I hope everyone in the whole world joins; unless they do, then God help us.”

The ladies cheered.

“Would you knowingly permit or welcome Nazis or Fascists?” asked Mr. Nittle. Mrs. Wilson giggled and said, “If we could only get them on our side.”⁴⁵

In *Thirty Years of Treason*, Eric Bentley argues that this was the key exchange of the WSP hearings, the one that led to “the fall of HUAC’s Bastille.” According to Bentley, when suspected front groups said

they accepted Communists into membership of their organizations they would add that that was only because they were so broad-minded. So one pressed on and asked, Are you so broad-minded you accept Nazis? Then they said, Oh no, that was quite different and, bingo, one had them in the trap: they were, too, a front for Communism. Only Dagmar Wilson didn’t hedge. . . A woman with nothing to hide! A woman who disdained to conceal her views and openly declared them! Yes, she answered, she would accept Communists. Yes, she answered, she would accept Nazis if she could get ‘em. In the cause of peace, one needed them all, one needed everybody.⁴⁶

After the hearings were over, Rep. Tuck said he was “shocked to hear Mrs. Wilson state that she would encourage members of the Communist party to occupy positions of leadership in Women Strike for Peace.” Regarding her willingness to involve Nazis, he offered no comment.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bentley, 951.

While a few anticommunist commentators (including, ironically, a woman—Conservative writer Midge Decter—and an anti-nuclear activist—Homer Jack of SANE⁴⁷) and individuals who wrote letters to the editor agreed with Tuck, most of the voluminous response to the hearings declared Women Strike for Peace the winners of this particular battle. In the eyes of most observers, the WSP witnesses had succeeded in their goal of “subtly making [HUAC] a laughing stock,” but few recognized the serious and strategic underpinnings of their playing “straight man” in their performances before the Committee. Several of the exchanges between the subpoenaed women and their Congressional interlocutors read like a Capitol Hill version of the famous “Who’s on first?” comedy sketch with the women taking turns playing the Bud Abbott role of patient explicator while Rep. Doyle and Counsel Nittle stand in for the increasingly exasperated Lou Costello.⁴⁸ Take, for example, this exchange between Nittle and one of the WSP women as reported by *New York Times* columnist Russell Baker:

When Mrs. Iris Freed of Larchmont, N.Y., told him, “Women Strike for Peace is not an organization, it is a movement,” he whipped off his eyeglasses with a triumphant flourish of prosecutors about to produce the murder weapon. “Now, Mrs. Freed,” he purred, “that’s interesting. If a group isn’t an organization and has no members, how on earth does it function?” His only answer was a long burst of boisterous housewife laughter . . . Eventually, Mr. Nittle wound up, baffled and flustered, trying to defeat the ladies with their own logic. “Now if one were to call white black, would it still be white-uh-black?” he asked. “There’s no pertinence to that question,” Mrs. Freed replied, a schoolteacher dismissing a muddled student.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Midge Decter, “The Peace Ladies,” *Harper’s*, March 1963, 48-53 and Homer A. Jack, “The Will of the WISP versus the Humiliation of HUAC” (typescript). Donna Allen Papers M92-226, Box 3 Folder 4, SHSW.

⁴⁸ The classic Abbott & Costello routine about misunderstanding, miscommunication, and words with double meanings must be seen to be appreciated. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW_qa6swmOM (last accessed June 25, 2009)

⁴⁹ Russell Baker, “Observer,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1962, 6.

Similarly, Mary McGrory described Nittle as “being gently beaten with non sequiturs.”⁵⁰ But the women’s refusal to apply the terms “organization” or “member” to WSP and its participants was more than a question of semantics or an attempt to confuse or mislead the Committee. Although part of their motivation for rejecting traditional bureaucratic structures and hierarchies had been to avoid leaving a paper trail that HUAC could use against them, it was also a belief that the times, the issue, and the constituency they wished to mobilize called for a new kind of activist model. When WSPers said that they were a movement, not an organization, they meant that they were grassroots-based, bottom-up rather than top-down, a loose confederation of locally autonomous groups, believers in direct action and personal responsibility, and practitioners of discussion and consensus rather than majoritarian voting. And they believed this made them more, rather than less, effective and efficient than hierarchical groups.

Even sympathetic writers like Russell Baker laid the WSPers “victory” over HUAC not to their position on the issue at hand (refusing to put participants through an ideological litmus test), their unshakeable unity and mutual support (as opposed to scapegoating and purging the subpoenaed women), or their strategic and public relations skills. Instead Baker and a number of other male reporters told the story of the hearings through the tropes of the emasculating wife and the henpecked husband or the overbearing mother and brow-beaten son. A number of press accounts highlighted the Committee’s inability to control the women’s behavior and maintain order in the hearing room. Reporters used adjectives like “hapless,” “luckless,” “badgered,” and “weary” to describe the Congressmen and their counsel. Rep. Doyle’s “feeble warnings against demonstration” were received by the WSP-dominated audience with “the reception

⁵⁰ McGrory, “Peace Strike Explained.”

traditionally accorded a declaration of independence from henpecked husbands.” In relation to the WSP “mothers,” the questioners became “sons,” i.e. young boys. For example, Baker wrote, when Nittle “inadvertently accused one woman of [Communist] party membership she scolded him as a mother might scold an errant son for ‘unbecoming’ behavior.”⁵¹ Another sympathetic male reporter, Robert Light of the *National Guardian*, wrote that Blanche Posner, a retired teacher, “addressed the committee as she might have spoken to the boys at DeWitt Clinton High School.”⁵² Although Baker’s column makes clear that he thoroughly enjoyed seeing HUAC defeated by “the housewives of America,” it suggests that this was due more to the Congressmen’s weakness rather than the women’s unity, courage, organizing ability, and public relations savvy. The WSPers outnumbered, outtalked, and drowned out their ineffectual male opponents who, as Baker pointed out, were probably more than a little worried about being “liable to charges of being against housewives, children, peace . . . and flowers.”⁵³ The women may have “outsmarted” the Committee, but the press coverage suggested that they did so through the use of non sequiturs and circular logic rather than intelligence, skill, commitment, and integrity. That a sympathetic, even admiring, observer like Baker relied on language and images associated with the “castrating female” to describe WSP’s performance during the hearings suggests how few positive images of strong, independent women (and particularly wives and mothers) were part of the American public consciousness at the time.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Baker, “Observer.”

⁵² Robert Light, “Women for Peace Too Sharp for HUAC,” *National Guardian*, Dec.20, 1962, 20.

⁵³ Baker, “Observer.”

⁵⁴ Swerdlow argues that Baker “reveled in the victory of female common sense over male abstraction,” and doesn’t acknowledge the negative stereotyping that seeps into descriptions of the hearings, even though she quotes his line that the HUAC members looked “like men trapped in a bargain basement on sale day.” This suggests that the source of the men’s humiliation was being outnumbered and out of their element rather

Even some male allies, notably Homer Jack of SANE, patronized the WSPers and attempted to discredit them rather than applaud their victory. In a speech he gave a number of times and that was broadcast over New York City's Pacifica radio station, Jack noted that the WSP women had "thumbed their pretty, if collective, noses at HUAC . . . the women won—hands down. It is high time that the un-American activities of that committee were stymied, *if only by flower arrangements, good humor, and screeching children.*" He seemed to suggest that WSP's victory resulted from the superficial trappings of its performance rather than a set of beliefs and a process of strategic thinking. When he addressed the *content* of what the subpoenaed WSPers had said during the hearings, Jack turned critical. While he agreed that the government's effort to question the beliefs of members of voluntary citizen organizations was wrong, he disagreed with WSP on the appropriateness of organizations' investigating the beliefs of their own (and each other's) members. "Do we have a right—if not a duty, to comment on the policies of our brother—and sister—organizations in the peace field?" Jack asked. "I think we do." He went on to suggest that the WSP hearings might have left the American public with the impression that all peace groups welcomed Communists as members. SANE did not, he said, because "it is disastrous to open the door to allow possible Communist domination of an organization." Why was it necessary for SANE to underscore its differences with WSP over this issue at this juncture? It appears that Jack wanted "those Americans who may be shopping around, ready to enter the growing peace movement" to know that if they too feared "Communist domination," they should join SANE, rather than WSP. Towards the end of his remarks, Jack acknowledged that

than beaten at their own game on their own turf. It also projects an image of women fighting and competing in a frivolous way, rather than working together for an important cause. Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 118.

“infiltration” was not the problem it once was, given that “only a handful” of Communists appeared to be active in the United States and that while there were Communists and (mostly) former Communists in WSP, there was no evidence of their organizing as a special force within the group.⁵⁵ And there was no evidence of anxiety among WSPers at the grassroots level, as there had been in WILPF, about women who were or had been Communists taking too large a role in the activities of local affiliates. In a four-page single-spaced letter that took Jack to task for “damn[ing] with faint praise” what WSP had accomplished, La WISP member Kay Hardman argued against his implication that the women’s peace movement could be easily infiltrated and dominated. WSP was not “ready to turn to jelly whenever a firmer substance comes along,” Hardman wrote. Since WSP lacked “adequate [bureaucratic] machinery to manipulate, control, and tinker with,” she concluded, SANE was a much more likely target.⁵⁶

Perhaps the only man to fully recognize and credit WSP’s achievement at the time was Frank Wilkinson, himself a HUAC victim, who spent nine months in federal prison for contempt of Congress after refusing to tell the Committee whether he was a Communist, citing his rights under the First Amendment. At the time of his conviction, he told reporters, “We will not save free speech if we are not prepared to go to jail in its defense.” After his release, Wilkinson founded the National Committee Against Repressive Legislation and campaigned for HUAC’s abolition.⁵⁷ In a letter addressed to “Magnificent Women,” Wilkinson praised WSP for having “dealt HUAC its greatest set back.” He recognized that their approach to the hearings had “made peace and civil

⁵⁵ Homer Jack, “The Will of the WISP.”

⁵⁶ Letter to Homer Jack from Kay Hardman, January 6, 1963. Barbara Deming Papers, Box 39 Folder 766, SC.

⁵⁷ Rick Lyman, “Frank Wilkinson, Defiant Figure of Red Scare, Dies at 91,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2006, C15.

liberties indivisible.” Wilkinson noted that Congress would vote on HUAC’s future in a few weeks, adding that with WSP’s leadership, he believed a majority could be convinced to abolish the committee. “We urgently need your special gifts of imagination to think through just how this is to be done.” He concluded: “No one that I know of is qualified to give you the praise you deserve.” Although others recognized that WSP had hurt the Committee, Wilkinson is perhaps the only contemporary observer who recognized *how* they did it—through imaginative political thinking and by linking the increasingly popular cause of peace to the less popular cause of civil liberties.⁵⁸

Although WSP continued to be accused in some quarters of providing cover for Communists, the impact of the hearings on the group was largely positive. Not only did the women receive a tremendous amount of publicity, most of it favorable, they also developed a bond and sense of group identification beyond that which had previously been established. The experience of being misrepresented and attacked made WSPers around the country feel an obligation to stand up and be counted. The feeling that the

⁵⁸ Letter to Eleanor Garst, et. al. from Frank Wilkinson Dec. 14, 1962. WSP Papers Box 1 SHSW. Although WSP certainly made a major contribution to the undermining of HUAC’s credibility, the committee was not done with chasing suspected “subversives”; it was not even done investigating WSP. Before it was replaced by the House Committee on Internal Security in 1968, HUAC subpoenaed Dagmar Wilson a second time, along with Donna Allen and *National Guardian* publisher Russell Nixon. The three were called to appear before the committee in December, 1964, almost exactly two years after the original WSP hearings, because they had petitioned the State Department to allow Kaoru Yasui, a law professor at the Imperial University of Tokyo and a leader of the Japanese *Gensuikyo* (or “ban the bomb”) movement, into the U.S. for a lecture tour. Although Yasui was granted a visa, HUAC was not happy with this decision, perhaps because *Gensuikyo* drew most of its support from Japan’s leftist parties. When they discovered that the hearings were going to be closed to the public, Wilson, Allen, and Nixon refused to appear on the grounds that “the closed session had violated their freedom of speech because it deprived them of the opportunity to deny publicly any implication that they had been involved in subversive activities.”⁵⁸ A lengthy round of court battles followed with the three initially convicted of contempt of Congress, a verdict that was reversed on appeal. Bentley, 951; Fred P. Graham, “3 Win Reversals in Contempt Cases,” *New York Times*, Aug.3, 1966, 12; “Sentence Suspended in HUAC Cases,” *Memo* v.3 n.21, June 1965, 5; “Dagmar and Donna Cleared of Charges,” *Memo* v. 4 n.7 (Feb.1966), 6. For more on Yasui and *Gensuikyo*, see Wittner.

women who had been subpoenaed, particularly Dagmar Wilson, represented all WSPers and that any one of them could have been called (without cause) to testify, enhanced their feelings of mutual commitment and sisterhood. The hearings were also significant because the circumstances required WSPers to organize not only for the cause of peace, but on their own behalf. Their honesty, their commitment to their cause, their degree of political savvy and their legitimacy as political actors had all been called into question by HUAC.

At the end of their first year of activism, the need to prove that they (and their cause) had to be taken seriously motivated WSPers to re-commit themselves to the movement. By the end of their second year, one of their major goals—the signing of a nuclear test ban treaty between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R—was achieved.

The test ban had been a goal of WSP from the beginning. President Kennedy appeared to be sympathetic to their position. But the seemingly endless off-again, on-again negotiations between the Kennedy administration and Khrushchev that WSPers witnessed firsthand in Geneva soon became disheartening. They initially focused their lobbying efforts on Congress, aware that the president was facing pressure from conservative anti-communists and hawks. While they presented themselves at first as acting in support of the president's pro-peace efforts, Kennedy's continued refusal to meet with WSP representatives, combined with a lack of concrete action to support his anti-nuclear rhetoric, caused WSPers to lose faith, as did his decision to blockade Cuba during the missile crisis. On January 15, 1962, in their first major national action since the strike, thousands of WSPers gathered in Washington to lobby their congressional

representatives and “walk” back and forth in front of the White House to protest the nuclear threat. Undeterred by a pouring rain, the women marched for several hours, carrying signs whose messages gradually washed away, and dropped “soggy, ink-streaked letters” to the president into the equally soggy cardboard box that a White House guard used to collect them. Although Kennedy did not meet with any WSP representatives, they took heart in the fact that he later acknowledged their presence in response to a reporter’s question. The president said that he had seen “the ladies” through his window and that he “understood what they were attempting to say and, therefore, I considered that their message was received.” He added that the “most disappointing event” of his first year in office was that he had not been able to achieve a test ban treaty.⁵⁹

Dagmar Wilson and other prominent WSP women continued to request audiences with Kennedy, most fervently upon their return from Geneva, but were consistently put off by aides. McGeorge Bundy, the president’s special assistant for national security affairs, instructed subordinates to send responses such as, “The President regrets he will not be able to see you and the members of your group” and “If the President should desire to meet with your group, I will let you know promptly.”⁶⁰ The White House’s treatment of WSP lacked warmth, both literally and figuratively, in comparison to its treatment of prominent male peace activists. In spite of political disagreements on issues around the arms race, Kennedy joked with scientist/activist Linus Pauling at a dinner for American Nobel prize winners and wrote cordial notes to Norman Thomas, a perennial presidential candidate on the Socialist ticket as well as a founder of SANE. When college

⁵⁹ Kennedy quoted in Marjorie Hunter, “President Responds to Pickets for Peace,” *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1962, 1. Swerdlow, 84-85.

⁶⁰ Wittner, 372.

students from around the country staged a White House demonstration in February 1962 similar to, yet smaller than, the one organized by WSP the month before, the president sent them a five-gallon urn of coffee and invited a small group in to meet with some of his top advisers, including Bundy, special counsel Ted Sorensen, and special science adviser Jerome Wiesner.⁶¹ While the women were ignored by the President and rebuffed by his aides when they tried to serve as foreign policy advisers and liaisons after their trip to Geneva, the Harvard students who organized a demonstration were invited to write a memo to the National Security Council with their ideas about slowing down the arms race while SANE's Norman Cousins both advised the President on the Test Ban Treaty and played a secret but official diplomatic role, even meeting with Khrushchev in Moscow.⁶² By the spring of 1963, Dagmar Wilson was so frustrated by the President's high-handed treatment that she remarked to Cousins, somewhat snidely, that Kennedy "has given us no sign of welcome, preferring—apparently—the society of Cuban exiles, 50-mile hikers, and boy scouts . . . It is hard to support a leader . . . who retreats beyond the office doors of aides who are often defensive or hostile."⁶³ She even began to express her doubts publicly, telling a reporter that "We're not able to get the straight word from the President on what his disarmament policy is. He's obviously trying to be popular with everyone by not offending anyone."⁶⁴ It is difficult not to attribute WSP's marginalization vis-à-vis the Kennedy administration, at least in part, to gender

⁶¹ "1,400 College Students Converge on Washington to Picket for Peace," *New York Times*, February 17, 1962, 1; Wittner, 374. The student demonstration was organized by Tocsin, a Harvard-Radcliffe peace group whose program had something in common with WSP, in its commitment "not to take positions but to expedite whatever projects its members wanted to undertake" and its efforts to be "evenhanded" by picketing the Soviet Mission to the U.N. as well as the White House in support of the test ban. Gitlin, 87, 90. Mickey Flacks recalled that the students debated whether drinking the coffee was "selling out" but did accept it in the end. Flacks interview with Brett Eynon.

⁶² Wittner, 374, 425.

⁶³ Wittner, 372.

⁶⁴ Marjorie Hunter, "Women Besiege Capitol, Demanding a Test Ban," *New York Times*, May 8, 1963, 17.

discrimination and the dominant influence of an “old (and young) boys’ network,” with roots at Kennedy’s alma mater, Harvard University. Mickey Flacks, who participated in the student demonstration at the White House, recalled that Harvard students “felt it was their professors who were now running the country, so they could just call them up and go see them, which they often did.”⁶⁵ Although some of these students thought the President’s advisers treated them with “barely concealed condescension,” at least they got in the White House door. Access did not necessarily lead to impact, however, at least as far as Todd Gitlin, one of the leaders of Tocsin, the Harvard-Radcliffe peace group, was concerned. “We had apprenticed to insiders,” Gitlin wrote, “fine-tuned our expertise, made the right friends, tried to influence the right people, spoken their language—now where were the signs that knowledge meant power?”⁶⁶

Domestic imagery and maternalist rhetoric had worked well for WSP when it sought media coverage and attempted to mobilize large numbers of “ordinary women.” It was less effective when they attempted to gain access to the world of high politics. WSP was hardly lacking in “expertise,” with academics like Frances Herring, Donna Allen, and Elise Boulding; lawyers like Bella Abzug; and journalists like Elsa Knight Thompson and Ruth Gage-Colby, to name just a few formidable women active in its ranks. Although they did not go to Harvard (which did not admit women in their day), these were extremely intelligent, highly educated professional women who would certainly have been able to hold their own with the “best and the brightest” of Kennedy’s

⁶⁵ Mickey Flacks interview by Bret Eynon.

⁶⁶ Gitlin, 95.

advisers.⁶⁷ But while the president and his circle were able to look at young men like Gitlin and see not just students, but the future leaders of the nation, when they looked at WSPers, they saw them one-dimensionally, as mothers and housewives. The women's educations, intellects, and careers were invisible. Perhaps the women had themselves to blame, given how WSP frequently downplayed and even hid its members educational and professional achievements behind maternal rhetoric. Kennedy did not take WSPers seriously as citizen diplomats, but he did appear to feel comfortable using their image and example to mobilize female support when he thought it would be useful. For example, when he redoubled his efforts to get a test ban treaty that would be acceptable to both the Soviets and the U.S. Congress in the summer of 1963, Kennedy seemed to reference WSP on several occasions although he never mentioned the group by name. His American University commencement address on achieving world peace included a few lines that could have been lifted from WSP literature. For example, the president expressed a desire for "the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, and the kind that enables men and nations to grow, and to hope, and build a better life for their children" and acknowledged what Americans and Soviets shared as members of the human race: "we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures."⁶⁸ Later the same week, Kennedy invited the editors of the country's most popular women's magazines to the White House for a group interview. In

⁶⁷ Bella Abzug, for example, wanted to go to Harvard Law School but was not even allowed to apply because it did not accept women. She went to Columbia instead, where she was one of the editors of the *Law Review* in spite of being one of only seven women in a class of 120.

⁶⁸ John F. Kennedy, "American University Commencement Address," Delivered June 10, 1963. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkamericanuniversityaddress.html> (accessed August 3, 2009). Kennedy had spoken about his concern for children privately with friends and advisers during the Cuba crisis, but not during his public statements. Lawrence Wittner, the leading historian of disarmament activism around the world, called this address "the most remarkable speech by a U.S. president in the Cold War era."

his comments, the president exhorted women to become active in the antinuclear movement: "I have said that control of arms is a mission that we undertake particularly for our children and our grandchildren, and that they have no lobby in Washington. No one is better qualified to represent their interests than the mothers and grandmothers of America." Kennedy expressed concern about the strength of those opposed to the test ban and so urged "women to get into whatever groups they feel reflects their judgment as to how things ought to be done . . . it is very helpful to have a significant group of women working for peace in their communities."⁶⁹ At this point, Kennedy was concerned that the test ban had become identified as a "liberal" cause and that, as a result, there would not be enough support in the Senate for ratification even if he and Khrushchev reached an agreement on terms. McGeorge Bundy told Norman Cousins and a few other activists that "the kind of persuasion we need [at this phase of the campaign] has to come from people who are not readily identified with causes."⁷⁰ Ironically, WSP, which began as an attempt to mobilize just that kind of woman, had become identified with causes and, in spite of avoiding a narrow ideological or partisan affiliation, was viewed by the White House as a liberal or even, radical, movement. So the President went over WSP's head to speak directly to the kind of women who, two years into the movement, had still not gotten involved. And yet, he seemed to be encouraging them to act. As Dagmar Wilson noted, "[The president] has not exactly told them to join WSP, but he has told them to join something, to inform themselves . . . I am not suggesting that he would not have said the same two years ago had he been asked. The point is that the questions are being

⁶⁹ Quoted in Swerdlow, 95-96.

⁷⁰ Wittner, 426-427

asked, and we can take some credit for that.”⁷¹ By not mentioning WSP by name, by forcing the women to *take* credit for their impact, rather than giving it to them, Kennedy was simultaneously acknowledging and denying their influence on him and on the test ban movement.

It is difficult to determine how much credit to give WSP for the ultimate adoption of the test ban. But it is clear that the women played a significant role in keeping the issue in the public eye, educating their communities, winning the support of both voters and members of Congress, and keeping up pressure on Kennedy when he seemed to be backing away from the issue.⁷² They also challenged the legitimacy and widespread acceptance of the “Better Dead than Red” perspective among government officials and fellow citizens. During Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on the ratification of the test ban treaty, the testimony of WSPers, which focused on the “health, safety, and survival of the world’s children,” was countered by that of conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, who also claimed to speak for the next generation. “I appear here as a mother,” Schlafly stated, “who is eager to see that her five small children have the opportunity to grow up in a free and independent America, and because I do not want my children to suffer the fate of children in Cuba, China, and the twenty captive nations.”⁷³ Schlafly seemed to suggest that an end to above-ground nuclear testing by both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. would somehow result in a Communist takeover of the former, even though the treaty did not address disarmament or limit the use of nuclear weapons in war. She did

⁷¹ Quoted in Swerdlow, 96.

⁷² Jerome Wiesner, Kennedy’s chief adviser on science and technology, who later served as president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, believed that WSP, SANE, and Linus Pauling should be credited with moving the president to a pro-test ban position, that they were more influential than pro-arms control voices within the government. Andrew Hamilton, “M.I.T.: March 4 Revisited Amid Political Turmoil,” *Science* Vol. 167, No.3924 (March 13, 1970), 1476.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 94.

not address the kind of destruction that would be wrought by a nuclear war, nor the ways in which fallout could damage human health. Schlafly saw the choice that Americans faced in the Cold War era not as one between life and death, as WSP framed it, but between freedom and captivity. She did not acknowledge that the price of her definition of freedom might be death, nor whether she would want her children to pay that price. The question of what one should be willing to sacrifice for freedom had been raised by a member of AAWFP a few months earlier. Elizabeth Converse had argued that Americans needed to “start from the proposition that without life there is no liberty at all [to] gain a more realistic view of the price of liberty when purchased with human life . . . do we mean to tell our children that because their liberty seems to be threatened they are safer dead?” In the nuclear age, the loss of life that could result in a war for freedom meant “that no practical choices for the survivors can make up for the loss of choices on the part of the slain,” Converse wrote. “In this case a war for liberty can only diminish liberty.”⁷⁴

In the end, the Senate voted to ratify the treaty by a huge margin. A *New York Times* editorial called it, “A Victory for Peace.”⁷⁵ WSPers agreed. In Washington, they personally delivered boutonnieres to every senator who had voted yes. In New York, WSPers brought flowers to the U.N. for Ambassador Adlai Stevenson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. In other cities, there were motorcades and marches through the streets.⁷⁶ AAWFP reported that they were “rejoicing at the attainment of our first goal,” while “recognizing that it is a limited one.”⁷⁷ In October, a memo from four members of the Washington local group announced that WSP was at a “crossroads.” The group’s

⁷⁴ “Letter to the Bulletin” from Elizabeth Converse, March 11, 1963. Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 5, BHL.

⁷⁵ “A Victory for Peace,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1963, 42.

⁷⁶ “News from Washington WSP,” *AAWFP Monthly Bulletin* v.2, n.8, October 1963, 5; Swerdlow, 94-95.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

“initial frenzied activity” had been replaced by “a slower one, but one which we can better maintain, and at less distress to our families.” Although WSPers could take pride in what they had “achieved and helped to achieve,” including the test ban, they had to recognize that “Peace is still a long way off, and we must settle down for the long haul.”⁷⁸

The question of what that would entail was on many WSPers minds. To stay active and remain relevant over the long haul required reassessing issues raised and decisions made during the first two years, including structural questions regarding leadership, decision-making, and the group’s demographic composition. It would also mean redefining goals and objectives. As the sixties progressed, the nation would struggle with the repercussions of a president’s assassination, the use of both police and vigilante violence to terrorize civil rights activists, and the replacement of the abstractions of the arms race with the deployment of the U.S. military in Vietnam. With young Americans dying in Mississippi and the Mekong Delta, WSP’s answer to “What next?” would be, “civil rights” and “Vietnam.”

⁷⁸ *National Information Memo*, v.2, n.7, October 3, 1963, 1.

Chapter 4: A Militant Spirit Emerges: WSP, Civil Rights, and Vietnam, 1963-65

Reporting on WSP's second annual conference for the *National Guardian* in June, 1963, Marjory Collins, a Vermont-based writer active in both the peace and civil rights movements, noted the emergence of an "increasing militant spirit" among the one hundred attendees. This did not mean that "thousands of women were about to lie down on the Pentagon steps and get arrested," Collins wrote, "but plenty of surprises could be expected."¹ Collins's analysis was prescient. WSP's public image, agenda for change, and activist style transformed dramatically over the course of the mid-1960s, and hints of those imminent changes can be found in Collins's article, the conference minutes, and follow-up correspondence between women who attended the conference and women who did not. Although it would happen gradually, over the next four years WSP transformed itself from a narrowly focused, single-issue group that acted autonomously, into an organization with a broad agenda addressing issues of economic and racial justice as well as war and peace that worked in coalition with other groups that shared its goals. Increasingly, WSPers saw themselves as part of the larger "Movement" against inequality and injustice.²

¹ Marjory Collins, "WSP links fights for peace and Negro rights," *National Guardian*, June 20, 1962, 7.

² I use the term "the Movement" as it was used colloquially from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s to refer to an identification shared by a loose confederation of individuals and organizations who opposed segregation supported equal rights for African-Americans and other minorities, opposed the Vietnam War and U.S. imperialism, believed that the government needed to do more to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of poor Americans, and generally questioned "mainstream" American values. In this approach, I follow other scholars of the era, including Sara M. Evans and Terry H. Anderson. As Evans explains, "There was no way to join; you simply announced, or felt yourself to be part of the movement—usually through some act like joining a protest march. Almost a mystical term, 'the movement' implied an experience, a sense of community, and common purpose." Anderson describes the Movement as a "kaleidoscope of activity" that comprised "all activists for social change." I would clarify this characterization by adding that these activists shared a progressive or New Left perspective. The conservative Young Americans for Freedom, for example, were also activists for social change, but they

By the time they convened their sixth annual conference in June, 1967, WSPers would indeed have “surprised” government officials, journalists, the general public, members of their families, and even themselves with a series of increasingly militant (and unladylike) actions. They pounded their shoes on the doors of the Pentagon (to protest being locked out of the building when they sought a meeting with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara) and sat down in the street in front of the White House (when told there would be a cap on the number of women who could picket the President’s residence). These mostly white, middle-class, and middle-aged women began to ally themselves with young, white New Leftists and poor women of color as they redefined what they meant by peace. On the one hand, the WSP’s activism begot more (and more radical) activism.³ On the other hand, a series of shocking events, including the assassination of President Kennedy; the escalation of the Vietnam War and expanding opposition to it; the growth of the civil rights movement and its violent reception at the hands of white racists; and a series of deadly riots in the nation’s biggest (northern) cities suggested that peace was a domestic as well as an international issue and that nuclear weapons were not the only ones that needed to be stopped.

Discussions at the 1963 suggested that some WSPers were already questioning the group’s priorities and beginning to think more expansively about how they defined

would not be considered (nor would they have considered themselves) part of the Movement. Evans, *Personal Politics* and Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*.

³ This is a pattern that has been noted by a number of social movement scholars: engagement with one social issue will frequently lead participants to become interested in other social issues and what they observe and learn about the society in which they live through challenging one form of injustice will often lead them to a larger re-examination of their values and world-view. This is particularly true for those who had little or no prior personal experience of injustice or oppression. During the 1960s, young, white Northerners who went to Mississippi for Freedom Summer and young men who participated in the draft resistance movement experienced the same process of growing radicalization that many WSPers did, according to scholars of those movements. See McAdams, *Freedom Summer* and Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*.

“peace,” about the types of protest actions they were willing to take in pursuit of that goal, and about why a group that claimed to comprise “women of all races, creeds and political persuasions” was so overwhelmingly white and what they could do to address that imbalance.

As it had the previous year, WSP’s commitment to the civil rights struggle and to bringing black women into the peace movement “came up,” as Collins put it, on the first day of the conference. While participants in the 1962 meeting in Ann Arbor had agreed that WSPers could and, no doubt, would participate in civil rights work as individuals, they ultimately decided that the “main purpose of our movement should not be diluted or obscured” by making an organizational commitment to the goal of racial equality. Discussions at the 1963 meeting suggested a slight but significant shift in attitude. As Collins reported, the previous year’s stance was deemed “no longer adequate.” For one thing, “virtually all” of the women in attendance were already actively supporting the civil rights movement; for another, a number of WSP affiliates had begun participating in local civil rights campaigns. AAWFP, for example, had been active in the struggle to end housing discrimination in Ann Arbor and Voices of Women-New England had participated in a variety of efforts aimed at desegregating the Boston area’s public schools and otherwise improving the quality of educational opportunities available to local black children. If, as it appeared, the overwhelming majority of WSPers were on the side of civil rights as individuals, why shouldn’t WSP reflect that by making an organizational commitment to the cause? To those who had previously expressed concern about “diluting” the WSP message or draining resources from its peace work, a woman asked, “Why would it take more energy to protest [segregation] in the name of

WSP than as individuals?” Some WSPers were also starting to question whether the fact that they had not made an organizational commitment to civil rights was hampering efforts to include and represent “women of all races.” A delegate from Philadelphia expressed concern about the racial composition of the conferees: “Why don’t I see a single Negro face here?” she asked. “There must be something radically wrong.” Finally, two influential speakers, the pacifist Barbara Deming and WSP founder Dagmar Wilson, each made the case that the causes of peace and civil rights were inseparable. “We are one and the same,” Wilson proclaimed. “We are both protesting power.”⁴

The conference then produced the following statement:

As women dedicated to bringing about a world where every child may live and grow in peace and dignity, we identify ourselves with the heroic effort of Negro citizens to achieve this goal. As a movement working for an atmosphere of peaceful cooperation among nations, we support the movement for peaceful integration in our own nation. Our goals are inseparable; the movement for civil rights is part of the movement for a world of peace, freedom and justice to which we have dedicated ourselves.⁵

The conferees did not go as far as they might have: they did not add a commitment to civil rights and racial equality to WSP’s overall mission statement. But, by recognizing a relationship between eliminating war on the one hand, and freedom and justice on the other, they had begun to articulate a more expansive definition of peace, one that went beyond seeing peace as the opposite of war or as something that could be achieved solely by ending the international arms race, banning nuclear weapons, or beating swords into

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Minutes of Second Annual Conference of Women Strike for Peace-Women for Peace,” National Information MEMO vol.2, no.2. June 28, 1963. Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1, BHL.

plowshares. WSPers were beginning to see peace as a domestic as well as foreign policy issue.⁶

During its first eighteen months, WSP had focused primarily on war in the abstract; they had devoted their attention to forestalling the threat of nuclear warfare. At the 1963 conference, they began to discuss their responsibility to take stands on so-called “conventional” wars, specifically, the war in Vietnam. Vietnam appeared on the conference agenda in the form of a proposed resolution from the Rochester, New York affiliate that WSP call for the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accords.⁷ The

⁶ Other women’s groups were ahead of WSP in linking issues of domestic justice with international peace. The Congress of American Women (CAW), a “left feminist” organization, many of whose members had ties to the CPUSA or the Progressive Party, made a similar case during its short life (1946-1950). CAW was strongly pro-labor and anti-racist as well as feminist in its orientation and, like WSP, opposed the escalation of the Cold War and the deployment of atomic weapons. In spite of its similarities to WSP, Amy Swerdlow writes that “WSP literature and internal documents revealed no mention of CAW, and I had no personal recollection of ever hearing it mentioned at the dozens of local and national WSP meetings that I attended.” Some former CAW members did participate in WSP: the historian and activist Gerda Lerner and Elizabeth Moos, one of the women called before HUAC in 1962, for example. Oddly, although Swerdlow refers to both Lerner and Moos in her article on CAW, she does mention their association with WSP. Amy Swerdlow, “The Congress of American Women: Left-Feminist Peace Politics in the Cold War” in *U.S. History as Women’s History*, eds. Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 296-312. Jacqueline Castledine writes that women of the Popular Front-era American Labor Party insisted that “race issues were not peripheral but central to the issue of international peace, and that peace could not be achieved without addressing ‘the Negro question.’” A decade later, the Progressive Party and Henry Wallace’s political campaign also promoted the belief that “positive peace was defined by the presence of justice.” Castledine points out that a number of Progressive Party women joined WSP, bringing with them a prior commitment to linking campaigns for peace and social justice. Jacqueline Castledine, “Quieting the Chorus: Progressive Women’s Race and Peace Politics in Postwar New York” in *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement*, eds. Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 51-79. The African-American women of Sojourners for Truth and Freedom, like the black women who participated in WSP and WILPF, saw an “inextricable link between racial equality and permanent world peace.” Jacqueline Castledine, “‘In a Solid Bond of Unity’: Anti-colonial Feminism in the Cold War Era,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol.20, No.4 (Winter 2008), 57.

⁷ This international agreement was supposed to allow for a peaceful transition from French colonial rule to Vietnamese independence. To end the guerilla war against the French, the accords called for a cease fire and established the partition between North and South Vietnam (with the Vietnamese rebels agreeing to withdraw to the North, the French remaining in the South and gradually withdrawing their forces). The accords also held that portion of Vietnam could join a military alliance and that no new military forces or equipment or foreign military bases could be introduced. Although the United States participated in the talks that led to the accords, the U.S. refused to “endorse” them. However, the American delegate, Walter Bedell Smith, said the U.S. would “refrain” from threatening or using force in such a way as to interfere with the stipulations of the agreement. For a more detailed discussion of the Geneva talks, see Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* and Herring, *America’s Longest War*.

minutes document that while some WSPers felt that “unilateral U.S. military action and atrocities in Vietnam demand we speak out,” others argued that WSP had “no background to speak on Vietnam specifically.” Some thought it would be wrong to take a position on Vietnam without addressing “U.S. policies in other tension areas,” while others believed that WSP should stay out of the nitty-gritty of specific foreign policy debates altogether.⁸ Once again, the question of how WSP defined “peace” came to the fore: very few WSPers were pacifists, opposed to all wars as a matter of principle.⁹ Many WSPers had lived through World War II and believed that it had been necessary and morally right to fight against Hitler and fascism. But that was before the construction of nuclear weapons. In the post-World War II era, many WSPers believed that any military conflict in which the U.S. and/or the U.S.S.R became involved could lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons and that that was reason enough to oppose U.S. military intervention in Vietnam or anywhere. Others felt that they needed more specific grounds upon which to stake their opposition, if they were going to take a stand. The consensus appeared to be that the conferees were not ready to take on Vietnam, but neither were they comfortable ignoring it. What everyone could agree upon was that they had a responsibility to learn more about any military conflict in which the U.S. became involved.

⁸ During the 1962 election season, WSP had placed an ad in the *New York Times* asking voters who were “worried about radioactive fallout, the continuing arms race. . . and ‘hot spots’ like Berlin, Viet Nam, and Cuba that could erupt into nuclear war” to sign a declaration to Congressional candidates stating their support for nuclear disarmament. “Are You a Silent American?” (Display Ad 102), *New York Times*, October 15, 1962, 25.

⁹ “Minutes of Second Annual Conference.”

Regarding Vietnam, the conference produced a statement that would be sent to local groups for discussion and comment—the first step toward developing a position. It read, in part:

Many of us have been shocked to learn of the terrible cost in human life and suffering which is today taking place in Vietnam. There are other areas of dangerous tension in the world, but Vietnam is the only place in which our own armed forces are actually engaged. We therefore feel a special responsibility to inform ourselves and others on the dangers and horrors of this particular situation. As we have alerted the public of our country to the dangers of radiation, so we must now alert it to the possibility that this undeclared war may escalate into nuclear conflict, and to the specific ways in which basic human morality is being violated by attacks on civilian populations—women and children.¹⁰

The statement ended with a demand that the U.S. government, in this and all other international conflicts, “seek solutions within the framework of the United Nations and other international agreements.”¹¹

This statement is clearly a compromise between those WSPers who had already come to oppose U.S. involvement in Vietnam and foresaw a bad situation becoming even worse and those who, while generally not proponents of violence as a means of conflict resolution (particularly when civilians, and especially women and children, suffered as a result), were not prepared to say that the U.S. had no right to be there or to demand that the U.S. withdraw. The former group depicted the conflict as terrible, horrifying, and immoral, but the latter group’s unwillingness to directly condemn U.S. involvement meant that the statement was essentially toothless. No protest actions were promised or even proposed. But, following WSP’s policy of political inclusiveness, local groups and individual members were encouraged to act as their consciences dictated: “The final decision was that foreign policy should be discussed and studied in local groups which

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

would be free to take any action they pleased.”¹² Acting immediately on this freedom, twenty-two of the conferees, who identified themselves as writing from the conference but speaking only for themselves, sent a telegram to President Kennedy in which they stated that they were “appalled at the cost in human life and suffering which is today resulting in Vietnam from our nation’s unilateral use of military force in an undeclared war of a particularly ugly kind.”¹³ Some local groups began mounting public protests without waiting for a national consensus. East Bay Women for Peace, for example, held weekly Sunday afternoon vigils at Berkeley’s City Hall and on the U.C. Berkeley campus featuring signs with messages including, “Bring the 20,000 advisers back from Vietnam.” But even in that highly-educated, politically aware community, the response was often puzzlement. “People would look at our signs and ask, ‘Vietnam? Where’s that?’” Pat Cody recalled.¹⁴

The other conference discussion of significance to WSP’s long-term development concerned a question of means rather than ends. Hitting what Collins described as a “new and militant note,” a group of six WSPers, led by Jeanne Bagby, argued that acts of non-violent civil disobedience were the next logical step in the organization’s activist trajectory. A statement by the six, which was read to the conference, said, in part:

We do not think this movement will amount to anything until we achieve the depth of commitment shown recently by the Southern Negroes. . . until we are willing to go to jail. . . We do not have time to be polite anymore. We must cease urging and pressing our government and begin demanding.¹⁵

¹² Collins, “WSP links fights. . .”

¹³ “Minutes of Second Annual Conference.”

¹⁴ Cody quoted in Dorothy Bryant, “Cody’s Books Co-Founder Leads an Activist’s Life,” *The Berkeley Daily Planet*, December 9, 2003. <http://www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/issue/2003-12-09/article/17906?status=301> (last accessed on July 9, 2010).

¹⁵ This is the same “Militant Statement” mentioned in Chapter 1. Jeanne Bagby, et.al. “A Militant Statement.” Ann Arbor Women for Peace Papers, BHL. Collins, “WSP links fights. . .”

When the possibility of civil disobedience had been raised among WSPers in the past, the consensus had been that such radical action did not fit their carefully constructed image as “housewives next door.” The concern most widely expressed was that such extreme militancy was not ordinary, but extraordinary, and could alienate the constituency they most wanted to attract—“typical” American wives and mothers. And for those women who had been uncomfortable about carrying a protest sign or referring to themselves as “strikers” just two years earlier, the image of “thousands of women . . . storm[ing] the U.S. Senate” (a suggestion of Bagby, et.al.) was not one they could picture. But Barbara Deming, who led a workshop on the theory and practice of civil disobedience and had herself been arrested during civil rights demonstrations in the South, suggested that WSP had already begun to challenge government authority and business-as-usual, most notably with its performance during the HUAC hearings. “You developed your own techniques . . . using flowers and children,” Deming pointed out, “and I bet if the chairman had asked you to leave the room, not a single woman would have budged an inch.”¹⁶ Deming was right—with their crying babies and frequent eruptions of laughter and applause, WSPers had thrown aside decorum and propriety, practically daring the Congressional committee to clear the room of observers.

And Deming was not the only WSPer with a prior history of civil disobedience. For example, Mary Sharmat of New York City had refused to participate in local civil defense drills in 1959 (along with her young son) and 1960 (with a group of five hundred that she helped organize). Although Sharmat was not arrested on either occasion, other

¹⁶ Ibid. The “Militant Statement” was inspired by Deming’s “Letter to WISP,” originally published in *Liberation* magazine in April 1963, but Deming did not sign it. Although Deming did participate in WSP activities like this conference, it was not her primary activist affiliation. She was more deeply involved in and committed to the pacifist CNVA during the early 1960s.

civil defense protesters were. Her action presaged WSP, as did the image she presented. “For the occasion,” Sharmat wrote later, “I wore a black and white checkered cotton suit with matching red accessories. Jimmy wore a new blue linen outfit that looked adorable. When arrested, we would appear our very best. Newspapers could never identify us as ‘beatniks.’”¹⁷ Clearly, Sharmat believed, perhaps correctly, that even the potentially negative impression associated with breaking the law could be offset by the right outfit. She thought, as many other WSPers did during the group’s early years, that people who dressed conservatively would be given the benefit of the doubt and the opportunity to state their case, no matter how radical their actions. Still, the majority of the conferees were not ready to self-consciously commit themselves to non-violent civil disobedience (in the style of Gandhi and King) as a guiding principle. Neither were they comfortable closing the door on the possibility, thereby alienating those women who thought it might become necessary. As with its statement on Vietnam, the conference was not willing to take an absolute position on civil disobedience. The consensus, as reported in the minutes, was that “we have room in our movement for individuals to do civil disobedience.” Once again, local “study and exploration” of the issue was encouraged.

¹⁷ “Mary Sharmat’s Statement Regarding Her Civil Defense Protest.” *PBS: American Experience: Race for the Bomb*. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/filmmore/reference/primary/sharmat.html> (last accessed February 8, 2010). In this piece, Sharmat addresses the relationship between radical action and respectable appearance during the early sixties. She points out that one of the twenty-eight people arrested at the 1960 protest was a woman who refused to dress “as if going to business” and wore shorts and sneakers instead. Sharmat claims that the police had been instructed to arrest those who looked “disreputable” since they were not capable of arresting the entire crowd. Dee Garrison uses Sharmat’s case to demonstrate how, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, opposition to the arms race and civil defense went from being a position held by a small group of committed pacifists to one that achieved widespread support among non-pacifists with no prior history of radical political commitments. Garrison, ““Our Skirts Gave Them Courage.””

To that end, a list of relevant books was included with the report on Deming's workshop.¹⁸

The fact that the conference had achieved a fragile consensus on Vietnam, civil rights, and civil disobedience did not mean that WSPers were done debating those issues. Evidence of how truly controversial they were can be found in the number of organizational and personal communications that return to the issues over the summer and fall of 1963. The conflict over the "new directions" in which WSP seemed to be headed spoke to a recurring tension over whether the group should take actions that expressed their "depth of concern," as Eleanor Garst phrased it, or whether their policies should be shaped primarily by their desire to win mainstream support. This tug-of-war between "issue and image" as long-time D.C. area member Bernice Steele put it, reflected an internal debate over WSP's mission.¹⁹ Was WSP primarily committed to creating opportunities for direct action by its members? Or was it more focused on community organizing through outreach and educational programs?²⁰ The founders were clearly motivated by the desire to take direct action—that's what motivated the original one-day strike. But the response to that action from women all over the country suggested that WSP had an opportunity to build new and broad-based support for the anti-nuclear

¹⁸ "Minutes of Second Annual Conference."

¹⁹ Eleanor Garst, "A Reminiscence," *Memo*, April-May 1969, 13-14. Publication File, TC; Bernice Steele, quoted in transcript of "Washington WSP Retreat Meeting at Folly Fodor's. Saturday, October 5, 1968," 38. WSP Papers, A.1 Box 2, SCPC.

²⁰ All social movements, in order to be successful, must incorporate both types of activity, but usually they are divided among different organizations with different foci. For examples, two examinations of the draft resistance movement in Boston during the Vietnam War argue that the two main local organizations, the Resistance and the Boston Draft Counseling Group, in spite of sharing similar goals, split over whether to prioritize outreach (BDCG) or dramatic acts like draft card turn-ins or burnings (Resistance). This distinction did not only affect how the two groups spent their time, money, and energy, it impacted personal style—like WSPers, BDCGers dressed relatively conservatively because they didn't want to alienate their main constituency ("average" working-class men or college students), while Resisters, having already rejected "the system" and risked arrest and jail time, felt little need to fit in or please the mainstream and adopted a more flamboyant "hippie" or countercultural style. See Thorne, *Resisting the Draft* and Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*.

cause among a large and largely untapped constituency: women, many of them housewives and stay-at-home mothers, with no prior history of political activity beyond voting. Those who opposed the “new militancy” seemed to base their position less on personal political beliefs or self-interest than their understanding of what WSP was and what it could and should be in the future.

Lyla Hoffman of Long Island and Ethel Taylor of Philadelphia voiced their concerns in lengthy statements that were distributed to WSPers in the July 8, 1963 “Issues for Discussion” newsletter. Hoffman was one of the women subpoenaed to appear before HUAC. In her testimony, she stated that she had not been a member of the Communist Party for more than five years, implying that she had been a member in the more distant past. In spite of (or perhaps because of), her radical background, Hoffman argued that it was a “mistake” for WSP to begin “taking stands, political and moral, on any and every injustice and trouble spot plaguing our world today; and [placing] increased emphasis on the techniques of radical pacifism, non-violent action, etc. as a solution to more effective peace work.” Hoffman stated that WSP had “filled a void” in the peace movement by providing “ordinary women” with a vehicle through which they could “express their strong feelings about survival in ways that are meaningful to them, ways which are understandable to the American public, and hopefully, ways which will influence other women.” Clearly some WSPers had come to believe that practicing civil disobedience *was* the best way “to express their strong feelings about survival.” The problem from Hoffman’s perspective was that such militant activity would not be “understandable” to the general public and would, therefore, alienate rather than win over “other women.” She writes that the “new directions pressed at Urbana” suggest

disappointment in some quarters that despite WSP's "remarkable" growth, it had not become the "huge" movement they had hoped for. The women who were interested in taking on new issues and developing new strategies were, in Hoffman's view, trying to grow the movement by attempting to "speak for and lead everyone." WSP's potential for growth seems to be Hoffman's main concern as well, but she argues that only by continuing "our present policy, our present program" (her emphasis) would WSP be able to continue attracting new members. The heart of Hoffman's argument was not that it was a mistake to try to expand WSP's following, but rather that re-thinking its core constituency and core principles was the wrong way to go about it. She makes this point clearly in the last sentence of her statement, when she argues that WSP will continue to grow only "if we stick to our basic Ann Arbor policies—policies which exclude no one of good will, policies which exclude no one of limited desires or understanding from working for peace."²¹

Hoffman's underlying assumption is that WSP's continued growth depended on attracting more of the same kind of woman rather than trying to appeal to new constituencies and to view the Urbana proposals as "closing the door" on the group's original target audience, rather than viewing it as potentially opening the door to women who were un- or under-represented in WSP up to that point. Her Communist past and future involvement in the Council on Interracial Books for Children suggest that Hoffman was personally committed to racial equality and interracial activism. However, the post-World War II demonization of the Left in the United States and her own experience of being called before HUAC as part of the Committee's investigation of "Communist

²¹ Lyla Hoffman, "A Personal Reaction to Reports on the Urbana Conference," National Information Clearing House Issues for Discussion #1, July 8, 1963, 1-2. Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 NICH 1963 Folder, BHL

activities in the peace movement” may have convinced her that WSP’s continued credibility and potential growth could be damaged by taking on civil rights, civil disobedience, and, especially Vietnam.²²

Writing from the opposing perspective, a group of San Francisco members argued that supporting the movement for racial equality was not only the right thing to do but also the more effective way to expand support for WSP and disarmament. Their statement read, in part:

Do we need the support and activity of Negro women in our work for disarmament and peace? We certainly do! Without an active, deep concern for civil rights in our own communities, we cannot expect to succeed in the difficult task of achieving enough broad support for peace and disarmament. Without such a concern on our part, Negro women might well question whether we are sincerely interested in peace with people abroad, when we are indifferent to the fate of millions of our own citizens, who face chronic unemployment, discrimination, and violence in Birmingham, Jackson, and, alas, in our own hometowns.²³

Instead of seeing the expansion of WSP’s agenda as a threat to the group’s growth and credibility, the San Francisco group viewed it as exactly the opposite: a way to attract a

²² Ironically, WSPers who had been Communists or fellow travelers in the past were often the ones who opposed taking positions or forming alliances that might be perceived as “radical” or foment red-baiting. In her article on the left-wing Congress of American Women, Amy Swerdlow recalls that, within WSP, “occasionally women who had left the CPUSA would warn us in ominous whispers to avoid visits to Soviet-controlled international peace meetings and not to affiliate with women’s organizations directed by the pro-Soviet Left because such contacts could lead to political suicide.” Amy Swerdlow, “The Congress of American Women.” This interpretation is further supported by a similar concern in the lives of other sixties activists with left-wing pasts, such as Betty Friedan. As Daniel Horowitz argues in his biography of her, Friedan downplayed her work as a labor journalist in the 1940s at least in part due to fears that the association would have a negative impact on the reception of *The Feminine Mystique* and her feminist activism. Instead of acknowledging the labor feminism of her youth, Friedan attributed her “political consciousness” to a more recent development, “disillusionment with her life as a suburban housewife.” Horowitz, *Betty Friedan*, 2. Swerdlow has written that her own parents were Communists but that she herself, at the time of WSP’s founding, was “totally alienated from politics, scornful of Cold War liberalism, McCarthyism, and the Old Left.” WSP appealed to her as a mother concerned about “the threat of radioactive fallout in my children’s milk” and because it was “nonideological, pragmatic, and politically creative.” Swerdlow, “A Child of the Old, Old Left” in *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left*, eds. Judy Kaplan and Linn Shapiro (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 253-254.

²³ Alice Hamburg, et.al., “Proposal for a Women for Peace Delegation to the State of Mississippi.” Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 NICH 1963 Folder, BHL

new constituency who had not yet been won over by the group's anti-nuclear message. By linking peace to civil rights, WSP would not only be redirecting some of its own time, energy, and influence to the cause of racial equality, it would also be making the case that those already active in the "Negro movement" should be adding peace to *their* agenda. Another strategic element of the San Francisco women's case was that the extension of voting rights to black Southerners would break "the grip chauvinistic and militaristic politicians have on over government" and, therefore, be a boon to the cause of nuclear disarmament.²⁴ In its December, 1962 newsletter, AAWFP had pointed out that as far as peace concerns went, "some of the least sympathetic and most powerful Congressmen come from the South" and also comprised the main opposition to civil rights legislation.²⁵ By joining forces or, at least, supporting each other, these WSPers argued, the peace and civil rights movements would be able to advance both their causes with greater force and speed.

Where the San Franciscans saw WSP and the civil rights movement as natural allies with shared values and mutual enemies, Hoffman and Ethel Taylor appeared to see the civil rights struggle as a competitor for the nation's attention and its own members' commitment and energy. For many middle-class white women initially attracted to WSP, atomic warfare and nuclear testing were perceived as both dire and urgent threats to their children's safety and, by extension, the safety of all children in the United States and around the world. They believed that all women, regardless of race or class or partisan affiliation, once they were made aware of these threats, could be convinced to support WSP's basic demands "that nuclear weapons tests be banned forever, that the arms race

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Peace and the South," AAWFP Newsletter, December 1962, 4. Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL.

end, and that the world abolish all weapons of destruction.”²⁶ The growth of the civil rights movement suggested something else: that for “average” black women, other threats loomed larger in their lives and the lives of their children. In their post-conference statements, both Hoffman and Taylor appear to accept that WSP could not hope to compete for black women’s support. As Taylor wrote, “The Civil Rights people cannot work simultaneously for both [causes] because they have this tremendous job to do first.”

²⁷ Hoffman, however, downplayed the arduous nature of civil rights organizing in the face of entrenched (and often violent) resistance. She wrote that “the Negro movement is rolling to victory because millions were emotionally and intellectually convinced of the justice of their cause and were simply waiting for the right spark to set them off.

However, we poor peaceniks could set off sparks or bonfires and still find no one ready and waiting. (WE HAVE TO DEVELOP A FOLLOWING, not spark one).”²⁸ Not only does this statement gloss over the arduous nature of the civil rights *struggle*, it also ignores the fact that many early WSPers had, in fact, been “ready and waiting” for a women’s anti-nuclear movement to come along.

At the heart of both Hoffman’s and Taylor’s pieces is a sense of anxiety over WSP’s members losing their sense of urgency about *their* cause. Taylor argued that WSPers should understand that civil rights activists could not allow themselves to be distracted from their primary objective because “so it is with us (or don’t we believe what we say about the terribly real dangers of fallout).” To Taylor, the interest some of the

²⁶ “Report on The National Conference, June 8-10, 1962.” WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

²⁷ Ethel Taylor, “A Personal Reaction to the Urbana Conference.” National Information Clearing House Issues for Discussion #1, 2-3.

²⁸ Hoffman, “A Personal Reaction. . .” The challenges and dangers inherent in civil rights organizing in the early sixties have been widely documented in both personal and scholarly accounts. See, for example, Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell, 1992) and Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*.

women exhibited in taking on civil rights suggested that they no longer believed that the nuclear threat constituted an “emergency” or they would not consider dividing their time between two causes. Unlike the San Franciscans, Taylor did not believe that an investment of WSP energy in civil rights would be reciprocated. “It has been said,” of black women, “that after they get their rights, then they will join our movement. If that happens, it will be marvelous, but it will happen or not happen depending upon whether we are powerful enough to attract them or if they are really so motivated, not because we helped them or didn’t help them.”²⁹

Perhaps Taylor was right not to expect a crude quid pro quo, but the San Francisco women suggested something more subtle and sophisticated in their push for a WSP-civil rights coalition: that through working for civil rights, WSPers would win the trust (and gain the ears) of a constituency they, so far, had had limited success reaching. While Taylor and Hoffman argued that WSP should look for new members among the untapped source of apolitical (white) women who were not already devoting time to activism, the San Francisco women argued that black women in the civil rights movement were predisposed towards WSP’s goals and could be convinced to work for both causes simultaneously if WSPers were willing to do so.

The debate that took place in the pages of “Issues for Discussion” addressed two aspects of social movement organizing—defining an issue and identifying a constituency. Each component has an ideal and a practical aspect and advocates on both sides of the “civil rights” question within WSP addressed the “right” thing to do as both a moral and a pragmatic matter. Those who argued against having WSP move in new directions were afraid of alienating current and potential members, but they also worried about

²⁹ Taylor, “A Personal Reaction. . .”

abandoning their original goal of ending the arms race and preventing nuclear war in favor of what appeared to be more immediate concerns. What if taking on the civil rights movement at home and the ground war in Vietnam resulted in WSPers being less vigilant on the nuclear issue, particularly with the Test Ban treaty within reach? From that perspective, the summer of 1963 was a particularly bad time to risk losing either numbers or momentum. The women who expressed reservations about expanding WSP's portfolio to include civil rights also feared a one-way, rather than a reciprocal, relationship—with WSPers redirecting their energies towards civil rights without winning the active commitment of civil rights activists for peace. Where Hoffman and Taylor's position was weak, however, was in arguing that peace and civil rights could not successfully be worked on together and, particularly, that black women committed to civil rights would not be willing to take on peace. The black women who had participated in WSP up to this point, from the Negro Committee in Detroit to Coretta Scott King, had already demonstrated that there were black civil rights activists who believed the two issues were linked and were already speaking out to that effect.³⁰

Another example of this approach was Clarie Collins Harvey, a black businesswoman and civic leader in Jackson, Mississippi whose efforts mirrored and then merged with those of the mostly white, northern WSPers. As Dagmar Wilson's conscience was pricked by the news that Bertrand Russell had been arrested for an act of civil disobedience in protest of the nuclear threat, Harvey's was touched by the arrests

³⁰ A year earlier, Barbara Deming reported in a letter to CNVA colleagues that the civil rights organizer Ella Baker, who had worked with the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference before helping to found SNCC, had recently given a speech "at which she said that they had to think of the fight for civil rights, for civil liberties, and for peace as all tied in together." Letter from Barbara Deming to Neil and Brad, CNVA NYC, May 16, 1962, 3. Barbara Deming Papers, SC. For more on Baker's politics and activist career, see Ransby, *Ella Baker*.

and subsequent harsh treatment of the Freedom Riders who refused to abide by Jim Crow laws requiring racially segregated seating on buses and in bus stations. Harvey attended a hearing on May 26, 1961 for a group of Freedom Riders arrested in Jackson and noticed that some of the young women were shivering. When the Riders refused to pay their fines or post bail, Harvey decided to send warm clothes to the jail that night. The following Sunday, she sent out a call for additional donations to help sustain the Riders through their incarceration. At the time, the new direct action organizations like CORE and SNCC had not yet established a foothold in Jackson and, as Harvey put it, “There were many blacks so brainwashed that they . . . wouldn’t have any part of the civil rights struggle, and wouldn’t have any part of you because you were associated with it.”³¹

Three months before Wilson reached out to acquaintances who might join her in protesting the nuclear threat, Harvey used a similar strategy to rally support for the Freedom Riders. Using her respectable image as a middle-class married woman, local business owner, and church-going Christian, Harvey reached out to others like her, making special note of their identity as mothers. “You can’t just work in your home rearing good children without having some concern about the people in the larger community,” she argued; women and mothers had a caretaking responsibility that went far beyond their own homes and families.³² As Harvey saw it, Womanpower Unlimited

³¹ Harvey quoted in John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 98.

³² Tiyi M. Morris, “Black Women’s Civil Rights Activism in Mississippi: The Story of Womanpower Unlimited” (PhD diss. Purdue University, 2002), 115. Morris argues that Harvey was initially motivated to support the Freedom Riders by “a mother’s instinct—to help these activists in a practical way that would sustain them in their ensuing struggle.” (63) Although not a biological mother, as a respected female elder, and through her activism, Harvey played a maternal role in her community. For the significance of women like Harvey to the survival of the black community in the U.S., see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*. Other examples of women who adopted a maternal role in their communities as part of their activism during this period can be found in Nancy Naples, *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty*. (New York: Routledge, 1998).

would provide a structure through which Jackson's women could support the civil rights struggle and work "for peace among the people of a given community, nation and in the world."³³

Although initially a black women's organization, Womanpower soon sought the participation of "white women who had the courage of their convictions who would be willing to work with us in fellowship and grow together."³⁴ Then, in 1962, Harvey joined the WSP delegation to Geneva and remained active in the group for years to come—representing the women at the World Without the Bomb conference in Accra, Ghana that same year, attending the group's national meetings, and working with individual WSPers to build northern awareness of and support for the southern movement. Through her efforts, Womanpower became an important point of intersection for women in the peace and civil rights movements that enabled coalition building and the sharing of information and resources.³⁵ Harvey and Womanpower Unlimited began their activist journey with an emphasis on civil rights, but would quickly come to see peace between neighbors and peace between nations as mutually constitutive.

³³ Morris, 65.

³⁴ Ibid, 80.

³⁵ For more on Harvey and Womanpower United's efforts to bridge the peace and civil rights movements, see Morris. On Harvey's participation in the Accra conference, see "From Clarie Harvey," *Women's Peace Movement Bulletin*, vol.1, no.8, 1962, 11, Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL. After they met in Geneva, Harvey worked with white WSPer Virginia Naeve to found The Box Project, whose mission is "to encourage families and individuals living in rural poverty in America to become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty by offering them friendship, education, and material aid." (The Box Project continues to this day; see: <http://www.familiesonlinemagazine.com/community-theboxproject.html>, last accessed March 10, 2010.) Harvey's relationship with WSPer Fay Honey Knopp (another Geneva delegate) led the latter to participate in the Wednesdays in Mississippi Project, through which "Northern women of different races and faiths traveled to Mississippi to develop relationships with their southern peers and to create bridges of understanding across regional, racial, and class lines." See: <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/WIMS/> and http://www.wiltonfriends.org/pages/newslet/Arboretum%2006_02.pdf (both sites last accessed March 10, 2010).

At the same time, white “peaceniks” like Deming and Collins had begun working on civil rights without abandoning the anti-nuclear cause and WSP chapters like the one in Ann Arbor had gotten involved in local racial justice campaigns without lessening their commitment to campaigns against the arms race. Deming, for one, was more concerned about the possibility of whites leaving the civil rights struggle for peace work. In a 1962 letter to friends in CNVA, she wrote that at the recent SNCC conference, “a student from Texas reported so many students becoming interested in peace that it was sometimes difficult to interest them in the civil rights struggle. (This was at the U of T, where the integration movement has involved a large number of white students.)”³⁶ In that same letter, Deming quoted Carl Braden, the white southern anti-racist activist, as saying, “It’s my contention that people who are advanced are advanced in many ways, see many things that other people don’t see—see that peace, integration, and civil liberties, and eventually some action in the economic field are all necessary.”³⁷ Braden’s comment was insightful, even prescient, in pointing out how 1960s progressive activists, in their efforts to counter the chilling effect of the Cold War, were almost forced to take on multiple issues in order to achieve any of their goals.

McCarthyites had long linked domestic and foreign policy issues and viewed Americans who spoke out for an end to the arms race or in favor of racial integration or “Fair Play for Cuba” as equally deep in the pockets of Soviet leaders. WSP itself had

³⁶ Deming to Neil and Brad, 3.

³⁷ Ibid. Braden had just served a year in prison for refusing to testify before HUAC. He and his wife Anne Braden had been arrested in Kentucky on charges of incitement to riot when they attempted to combat residential segregation in Louisville by buying a house in a white neighborhood and then re-selling it to a black family. They went on to work for the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), an organization that promoted civil rights and integration, and edited its newsletter, *The Southern Patriot*. For more on the Bradens, see Anne Braden, *The Wall Between* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999) and Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

been making the link between peace and civil liberties since its founding, and SDS's Port Huron Statement discussed the Bomb, the economy, and Jim Crow. As the sixties progressed, New Leftists would find it increasingly difficult to disentangle racist practices at home from imperialist endeavors abroad, the failures of the "warfare state" (as SDS called it) from those of the welfare state, the goal of peace abroad from that of justice at home.³⁸ In their efforts to limit WSP to a single-issue focus, Hoffman and Taylor were backward-looking, while Deming, Collins, and the Bay area WSPers were forward-thinking. As Dagmar Wilson pointed out in a letter to Deming in October 1963, "We realize that the two movements are different aspects of the same problem and that eventually the two will meet and merge."³⁹ But aside from occasional announcements at meetings and in *Memo* that encouraged WSPers to donate money or supplies, write letters to the President, or attend demonstrations in support of civil rights, little effort appears to have been made to integrate the two issues as a matter of national policy until the mid-1960s. In the end, it was the war in Vietnam that got the majority of WSPers to recognize the "essential oneness of peace."⁴⁰

A number of WSPers had first become aware of the U.S. role in Vietnam in the fall of 1962, when the group's national newsletter reported on a lengthy communication it had received from the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) in Hanoi. Speaking to WSPers as fellow wives and mothers, the Vietnamese women asked their American counterparts to use their influence to help bring an end to "terroristic raids" by U.S. forces against Vietnamese civilians. Long before such details were routinely reported in

³⁸ For more on the intersection of Cold War thinking and domestic politics see, for example, Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*, and Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets*.

³⁹ Letter from Dagmar Wilson to Barbara Deming, October 15, 1963. Barbara Deming Papers, SC.

⁴⁰ "Report on Second National Consultative Conference," *Memo* v.6, n.5 (May/June 1968), 4. Publication File, TC.

the American news media, the VWU described for WSPers the way “U.S. troops have sent planes to drop noxious chemicals to destroy crops and vegetations, burnt thousands of houses and plundered hundreds of tons of the people’s paddy, thus rendering the South Vietnamese homeless so as to herd them into disguised concentration camps dubbed ‘strategic hamlets.’” But while the WSP editors expressed grief and sympathy for the suffering of the Vietnamese, they acknowledged that, “the facts of the situation in divided Viet Nam need clarification for many of us”; in other words, WSP was not ready to take a position on its government’s policy.⁴¹ Some WSPers viewed expressing opposition to the U.S. role in Vietnam as an expression of a particular ideology, rather than a simple pro-peace stance and believed that, as such, it would violate the group’s commitment to being open to all women, regardless of political persuasion. As Carol Urner of Portland, Oregon wrote in an October 1963 edition of “Issues for Discussion,” “I realize that WSP includes women who have strong sympathies with the Viet Cong position in the civil war. I hope we still include women who understand the rationale of the U.S. position, even while they decry the violence into which it has led us, and the support of a corrupt undemocratic regime.”⁴² For others, there was no separating the U.S. position from the violence it had wrought. A direct response to Urner from Madeline Duckles of Berkeley was distributed the next month. The U.S. government’s “rationale,” Duckles wrote, was “nothing less than that ends justify the means.” Since its beginnings, WSP had stood not only for peace, but for participatory democracy. If the U.S. “position” on Vietnam was to prevent a Communist leadership from being elected, whatever the cost, Duckles

⁴¹ “News from Abroad,” *Women’s Peace Movement Bulletin* v.1 n. 8, Sept. 20, 1962, 13. Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL.

⁴² Carol Urner, “Re: Vietnam,” *NICH Issues for Discussion* #5, Oct. 22, 1963, Marcia Barrabee Papers Box 1, BHL.

continued, “So much for the self-determination of peoples. . . If we are going to talk about brotherhood and justice, we cannot ignore the cries for help from women like ourselves, in Vietnam . . . [who] our government is oppressing. If we cannot protest when our government ceases to act like a democracy, if we cannot ‘speak truth to power,’ who will speak for us?”⁴³

The question of “self-determination” linked the issues of civil rights at home and intervention in Vietnam and cut to the heart of WSP’s own philosophy regarding the essential nature of citizen participation in policy-making. The women’s activism was predicated on their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society to help shape government policy and to speak for themselves when the government wasn’t speaking for them. If that government denied voting rights to African Americans and punished those who sought those rights with beatings and imprisonment, where did that leave WSP’s approach to activism? And if the U.S. government was willing to use military force to prevent tiny Vietnam from possibly becoming a Communist state, what hope did WSP have of ameliorating the arms race with the Soviet Union?

By January 1964, anxiety over Vietnam had begun to permeate WSP’s publications. Shortly after Lyndon Johnson became president of the United States, following Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, he made it clear to his aides that he did not want to be seen as weak on Communism. He would tell his biographer Doris Kearns that in his mind, “nothing was worse” than “the thought of being responsible for America’s losing a war to the Communists.” He worried that he “would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser, and we would both find it

⁴³ Madeline Duckles, *Issues for Discussion #6*, Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL.

impossible to accomplish anything for anyone anywhere on the entire globe.”⁴⁴ WSPers feared a major escalation was in the offing: “The US is at a crossroads: either total commitment or negotiations and withdrawal of our military,” reported the Washington women. “Total commitment would be like another Korea, only worse—more likely to be nuclearized, more likely to escalate, more certain, because of the terrain, to fail.”⁴⁵ These extreme positions were part of the debate in Congress and on the presidential campaign trail. Republican Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater was one of several voices in Congress calling for air strikes against North Vietnam. By May, WSPers around the country were being urged to “wage a determined campaign” to get Senators Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska, the most vocal proponents of U.S. withdrawal, “on TV all over the country.” The overt purpose of this effort was to educate the American people, since the administration’s position was “expressed daily in the newspaper” and opposing viewpoints deserved equal time. But Washington WSP suggested that it agreed with the senators’ position: “We must bring back American boys from Vietnam; we are fighting an illegal and dirty war, engaging in a unilateral aggression. We must stop the war.”⁴⁶

One event appears to have pushed WSPers around the country to make opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam a priority. Although they had begun writing and calling the White House and Congress to oppose “direct” U.S. intervention beginning in 1964, and their annual convention that year had approved a nationwide action to focus attention on Vietnam, many WSPers still remained focused on nuclear issues, particularly the

⁴⁴ Johnson quoted in Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 106.

⁴⁵ *National Information Memo* v.2 no.16, Jan. 31, 1964, 1. WSP Papers, Box 2 Folder 1, SHSW.

⁴⁶ “From Washington, D.C. Committee on Vietnam,” *NICH Proposals for Action* Vol.2 No. 23, May 25, 1964, 1. WSP Papers, Box 2 File 2 SHSW.

health dangers associated with fallout.⁴⁷ But Vietnam jumped to the top of WSP's activist agenda on February 7, 1965, when "Telephone calls [began], from one worried housewife to another, breaking the family unity of a typical Sunday afternoon [because]: 'Sec. McNamara has a press conference scheduled on TV; we have bombed North Vietnam!'"⁴⁸ Although the administration claimed the act was in retaliation for a recent guerilla attack against American installations in the South and was not a "signal for a general expansion" of the fighting, WSPers were neither convinced nor consoled.⁴⁹ They saw the bombing as a major step forward in the "grinding march toward full-scale war" and committed themselves to stopping it.⁵⁰ For some of the women, the bombing was comparable to the Cuban Missile Crisis and required an equally urgent response. In their minds, the existence of the bomb meant that conventional warfare could turn, very quickly, into a nuclear nightmare. This meant that it was no longer possible to argue that the situation in Vietnam was a distraction from WSP's main purpose—the prevention of nuclear warfare. Whatever an individual member might think about the political and ideological aspects of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, it had become a nuclear danger zone and WSP had a responsibility to speak out against further escalation. As Dagmar Wilson

⁴⁷ *National Information Memo* v.2 n. 24 (July 1964.) SHSW Box 2. As Ohio WSPer Doris Sargent wrote at the end of 1963, "While doing something about Vietnam is fine. . . A recent case of leukemia to a dear little girl points up the need to me for more intensive concentration on exact reports—and forceful ones—on amounts of fallout in different areas. . . We must make this thing horrifying enough to impress even the most military or defense-minded." *National Information Memo* v.2 n.10 (Nov 8, 1963), 4.

⁴⁸ "Report on Vietnam Lobby," *Memo* v.3 n.13 Feb. 19, 1965, 2.

⁴⁹ Tom Wicker, "Capital Is Tense but President Asserts Nation Still Opposes Widening of War," *New York Times*, February 8, 1965, 1.

⁵⁰ "Report on Vietnam Lobby." At this time, according to a Gallup poll, the majority of Americans—64 percent—believed that the U.S. should continue its current policy in Vietnam; only 18 percent favored pulling U.S. forces out of Southeast Asia. For the reasoning behind the war's escalation, from the administration's perspective, see McNamara, *In Retrospect*, chapter 7.

wrote in a letter to the president's wife, Lady Bird Johnson, "We are convinced that any war in this nuclear age, especially one allowed to escalate, is an all-encompassing risk."⁵¹

The Washington group called an emergency meeting the night of the announcement "to think and plan and think and plan."⁵² A lobbying day on Vietnam, when the D.C. WSPers would deliver "proxies," or printed messages, from women all over the country opposing escalation, was already in the works. After McNamara's press conference, the response was almost overwhelming. As the Washington women reported in the next issue of *Memo*:

Proxies are coming in from states we've never had contact with before. There are proxies clipped from MEMO. There are proxies printed and mimeographed by local WISP groups. There are proxies typed and carbon copies. There are handwritten proxies. One ladies auxiliary of a San Francisco trade union sent a proxy stamped with a union seal... We are filled with a desperate sense of responsibility to all of these people. We must see to it that their voices are heard in Washington. . . ⁵³

For several days, women remained in the Washington WSP office past midnight, sorting the proxies by state and putting them in shopping bags for delivery to the appropriate senators. They wrote and mimeographed press releases targeting local newspapers with Washington bureaus, arguing that "it is their responsibility to cover our Lobby . . . since many of their readers are involved and will want to hear about it." Before the week was out, hundreds of women from nearby states had come to meet with their representatives, help deliver the proxies, and picket the White House.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Letter from Dagmar Wilson to Mrs. Lyndon Johnson, February 12, 1965. WSP Papers, Box 2 Folder 8, SHSW.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Over the next few months, as the war escalated, WSPers escalated their activities in response. In histories of the antiwar movement, WSP usually gets short shrift. When it is mentioned, the group is most commonly described as “liberal” or “mainstream,” terms which may capture certain truths about the lives of many women who participated in WSP but which also erase the many occasions on which its members acted radically for their time and in advance of others in the antiwar movement.⁵⁵ On March 15, less than two weeks after the U.S. began the sustained bombing campaign known as Operation Rolling Thunder, Alice Herz, 82, a founding member of Detroit WSP and longtime member of WILPF, set herself on fire on one of her city’s street corners, in solidarity with the Vietnamese Buddhist monks who practiced self-immolation to protest the brutality of the oppressive South Vietnamese regime.⁵⁶ The self-immolation of another American, Norman Morrison, has received much more attention in both the popular media and the scholarly literature of Vietnam War protest, although Herz’s act preceded his by more than seven months. There are a number of possible explanations for the different receptions these two martyrs for peace received: Morrison, at 32, was a husband

⁵⁵ In the rhetoric of contemporary extremists like the members of Weatherman and the later declension narratives of the 1960s advanced by Todd Gitlin on the Left and David Horowitz and Peter Collier on the Right, the terms “radical” and “revolutionary” become synonymous with “violent.” WSP’s rejection of violent forms of protest and its desire to not alienate “ordinary” Americans from the antiwar movement appear to be more responsible for its “mainstream” label than its rhetoric or actions, which became increasingly militant from the mid-60s through the end of the war. See Gitlin, *The Sixties* and Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the Sixties* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 1989). For a more original and nuanced discussion of the role of violence in the “death” of the New Left, see Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵⁶ Passers-by put out the flames. Herz suffered from second and third degree burns, was taken to the hospital by ambulance, and did not die until ten days later. She told the firefighter who accompanied her to the hospital that she “did it to protest the arms race all over the world. I wanted to burn myself like the monks in Vietnam did.” David R. Jones, “Woman, 82, Sets Herself Afire In Street as Protest on Vietnam.” *New York Times*, March 18, 1965, 3. According to McNamara, Johnson decided to go ahead with a sustained bombing campaign of Vietnam on February 19, although the strikes did begin until March 2. The decision was not made public at the time. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 173-174. The debate within the administration over the pros and cons of this strategy are discussed in Herring, 129-134.

and father in his prime with much to live for, while Herz, an elderly widow with an adult daughter, was nearing the end of her life, anyway; Herz was alone when she set herself afire, while Morrison, to the shock of witnesses, was accompanied by his year-old daughter; Herz's death came as Americans were just becoming aware of Vietnam, whereas by the time of Morrison's death the war was being more closely followed by the media and the general public; finally, and perhaps most significantly, Herz set herself afire on an ordinary street corner in a Midwestern city, while Morrison chose to immolate himself at the entrance to the Pentagon, within view of Secretary McNamara's office windows.

What Morrison and Herz shared was the degree to which they were preoccupied and disturbed by the war. Herz had come to the U.S. in 1943 as a refugee from Nazi Germany and friends said that she "had devoted her life to the effort that what happened under Hitler should never happen again. Every new bombing in Viet Nam, every fresh atrocity in Alabama, had revived the tragedy of World War II for her."⁵⁷ In a note that she carried in her purse on the day she set herself aflame, Herz wrote, "I am not doing this out of despair, but out of hope for mankind." Seeing the U.S. bombings of North Vietnam as a frightening step in the direction of nuclear war, she wanted to call Americans' attention to the potentially dire consequences of the undeclared war in the faraway country many of them were not yet aware of. "Yours is the responsibility to decide if this world shall be a good place to live for all human beings or if it should blow itself up to oblivion," she concluded.⁵⁸ As Methodist Minister Henry Hitt Crane, a longtime friend of Herz remarked, "It has been said that greater love hath no person than

⁵⁷ "Alice Herz," *Memo* vol.3 no.16 March 31, 1965, 5. WSP Papers Box 1 Folder 19, SHSW.

⁵⁸ Herz quoted in Mary Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam: American Peace Activists and the War* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press), 1998, 2.

that she will give her life for another. Mrs. Herz was so deeply grieved at the almost universal use of violence, hatred, and human suffering that she sought in a superlative gesture to impress the world.”⁵⁹ Herz’s daughter, Helga, told the *New York Times* that her mother’s act was “an attempt to stir action” and “call attention to the gravity of the situation” in Vietnam.⁶⁰ Herz was one of those WSPers who linked the struggles for racial equality and an end to colonialism to the cause of peace; her funeral was attended by civil rights heroine Rosa Parks and Congressman John Conyers, as well as WSPers from around the country. Ruth Gage-Colby eulogized her friend and comrade, saying, “Our beloved friend gave her life in flames in the hope of saving humanity from nuclear fire. Let us always remember that her death was a testament to LIFE.”⁶¹

Self-immolation was not a common form of protest in the United States and newspaper coverage of Herz’s act suggested that most Americans would wonder whether the elderly Herz was in her right mind.⁶² WSP, although it did not encourage others to follow Herz’s example, did view the Detroit woman as a committed and courageous advocate for peace. She was the subject of numerous poems and articles distributed throughout the group’s national network. WSPers tried to use her death “to rouse the sleepers” as one commemorative poem read.⁶³ Although Herz’s self-immolation did not have as great an impact on the American psyche as she might have wished, it is possible that her act influenced Morrison. His wife, Anne Morrison Welsh, recalled that, “The

⁵⁹ “Alice Herz,” *Memo*.

⁶⁰ Jones, “Woman, 82, Sets Herself Afire. . .”

⁶¹ “In Memoriam—Alice Herz 1882-1965,” *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter* v.II n.3, April 1965, 1. BHL.

⁶² *The New York Times* quoted Herz’s daughter as saying that her mother had not acted out of “mental derangement” and her minister concluding that “this was not the work of a crackpot.” Jones, “Woman, 82, Sets Herself Afire. . .”

⁶³ “To the Students of Wayne State University for the March on Washington, April 17, 1965,” *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, vol.2 no. 3, April 1965, 3. BHL.

only time I remember self-immolation being specifically mentioned in our home was when a very elderly Quaker woman in Detroit named Alice Herz did it earlier in 1965. It didn't get a whole lot of press. The only thing I remember reading was that she said, 'I want to do as the Buddhist monks did.' I don't remember our having more than one small conversation about it."⁶⁴ Whether or not Herz was a direct influence on Morrison, he was at least aware that another American had followed the example of the Buddhist monks and that she "didn't get a whole lot of press." Perhaps this is why Morrison, already aware that talking to friends, writing letters to the editor, and lobbying his Congressman was having little or no impact on public opinion or public policy, chose the Pentagon—the seat of American military might and strategic thinking—as the site of his final protest, rather than his hometown of Baltimore. If he burned to death in front of the Pentagon, attention would be paid.⁶⁵

At the time of Herz's final act of protest, WSP had already chosen March 20 as a national day of outcry against the war, with local affiliates organizing demonstrations in their communities and gathering signatures on petitions demanding a ceasefire and peace negotiations. Many of these actions recognized Herz and her ultimate sacrifice. In her hometown of Detroit, five hundred WSPers carried signs that read "Alice Herz is with Us." They were attacked, verbally and physically, by a group of counter-demonstrators

⁶⁴ Morrison Welsh quoted in Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*. (New York: Viking, 2003), 153-154. An article on Norman Morrison, based on interviews with friends and acquaintances, that appeared in the *New York Times* a week after his death reported that he "had often discussed the Buddhist self-immolations in Vietnam" and that he had "asked aloud if self-immolation affirmed or denied life." John Corry, "Death of a Quaker: His Friends See a Lesson," *The New York Times*, November 2, 1965, 2.

⁶⁵ Morrison's death received front page coverage in newspapers across the country, including *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. For the details of Morrison's death and the public response, see *Ibid.*; "War Critic Burns Himself to Death Outside Pentagon," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1965, 1; Corry, "Death of a Quaker"; Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 1-5.

from the John Birch Society.⁶⁶ Herz received greater and more sympathetic attention in Vietnam, where her self-immolation was understood as an act of empathy and solidarity. The *Vietnam Courier*, a North Vietnamese paper, published a special supplement detailing Herz's act and its significance. Her self-immolation, the paper editorialized, showed that Americans themselves were aware that the war was a "blemish" on their reputation in the world. The supplement included an open letter from the Vietnamese Women's Union to American women, praising Herz for calling attention to a war which "stains the honor and tradition of the freedom and equality-loving American people."⁶⁷ Although the VWU had already been corresponding with WSP for several years, Herz's protest led the Vietnamese women to feel even greater interest and trust in their American counterparts. This would help WSP gain early and wide-ranging access to Vietnam and its people through correspondence, visits, and invitations to international meetings.

WSPers were involved in another antiwar first that March: the "teach in" on Vietnam at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The close ties between AAWFP and the campus community were clearly visible during early antiwar protests. In February, while Washington WSPers were frantically lobbying Congress in response to the "retaliatory" bombing in North Vietnam, the Ann Arbor group organized a local demonstration that called for an end to U.S. military involvement there. WILPF and three student political groups co-sponsored the event and two faculty members—Kenneth Boulding and Philosophy Professor Frithjof Bergmann—were the main speakers. The

⁶⁶ "Around the Nation: March 20th Vietnam Protests," *Memo* vol. 3 no. 16, March 31, 1965, 2.

⁶⁷ In addition, silent vigils were held in Herz's memory throughout Vietnam and a street was named after her in Hanoi. Hershberger, 3 and 24. Morrison's death received a similar outpouring of gratitude and honorifics in Vietnam. His wife recounted that on a visit to Vietnam more than thirty years after Morrison's death, everyone she met knew who he was, even young people who hadn't been born until after the war. Appy, *Patriots*.

two men incorporated their knowledge of history, economics, and international relations in their remarks, making the event much more than a “run-of-the-mill ‘peace rally’” according to an editorial in the campus newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*. The two “orators,” as the *Daily* called them, “combined to offer the crowd a complete presentation of basic arguments regarding US presence in Asia and a clear pointer to the solution of the Southeast Asia crisis—relations and negotiations with Communist China.”⁶⁸ After the formal program was finished, according to AAWFP, “the rally turned into a kind of town meeting, when several of the onlookers asked to be allowed to speak to the group.”⁶⁹ The interplay of expert knowledge and personal opinion, formal presentations and open discussion which marked this rally would also characterize the teach-in the following month. That AAWFP both “sparked and assisted” in organizing the hugely influential teach-in was clear to their fellow WSPers, if largely unrecognized elsewhere.⁷⁰

The Michigan teach-in, the first of more than a hundred such events at colleges and universities around the country, was born of the realization on the part of a group of faculty members, including Boulding and Bergmann, that they had “the responsibility to use their training as thinking people and the right to speak out on public issues which had, quite simply, become questions of life and death for that civilization which they were spending their lives studying.”⁷¹ Initially, a small group of professors had called upon the faculty to stage a one-day strike to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam. As employees of a public institution, they faced virulent attacks from conservative members of the state legislature who suggested that faculty members with so much sympathy for

⁶⁸ “Vietnam Rally,” *AAWFP Monthly Bulletin*, vol. IV no.2, March 1965, 2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “Around the Nation.”

⁷¹ “The Great Campus Awakening,” *Memo* vol.4 no.1, August 20, 1965, 4.

the Vietnamese should leave for Hanoi immediately. More temperate opposition within and outside the university suggested that it was unfair to students to deprive them of a day of classes. A compromise was reached: instead of refraining from teaching for a day, faculty members would spend a day teaching about Vietnam and do it in a way that would not be disruptive for students who wanted to attend their regular classes. The professors sent an invitation to the university community explaining that because they were “deeply worried” about the war in Vietnam, they wanted students to join them in an effort “to find new alternatives before irreparable actions occur.”⁷² From 8 p.m. on March 24 until 8 a.m. March 25, Michigan students would be able to attend a series of lectures, discussions, debates, and film screenings exploring the Vietnam question from a wide range of perspectives (including that of the State Department, which sent a couple of representatives to argue the administration’s position).

AAWFP was involved “from the very beginning,” helping to conceptualize the event during dinner table discussions with faculty husbands and at meetings of the organizing committee. They tracked down and invited speakers, wrote and distributed leaflets, licked stamps and addressed envelopes and, over the course of a long and exhilarating night, “functioned as the ‘ladies’ auxiliary” in providing coffee and doughnuts.”⁷³ The women were present when “a bomb threat cleared the buildings temporarily” and when, during a midnight outdoor session, “a group of hecklers” threw snowballs and shouted “Drop the bomb!” at Teach-in participants—reminders that Cold War thinking was alive and well on the Michigan campus.⁷⁴ AAWFP was also the only

⁷² Lucy Gadlin and Jeanne Jackson. “The Teach-in,” *AAWFP Monthly Newsletter*, Vol. IV No. 3, April 1965, 2. Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL.

⁷³ “Great Campus Awakening.”

⁷⁴ Gadlin and Jackson.

community-based group invited to send a speaker to the early morning rally that marked the end of the teach-in. Their representative, Nancy Gendell, gave a speech that captured WSP's concerns of the moment, linking the Vietnam crisis to the civil rights struggle, as well as broader questions of responsible citizenship and participatory democracy:

Never forget that a society where people refuse to accept their individual responsibility to govern themselves, and refuse to call their government to task for unjust and immoral acts wrongly taken in the name of democracy is a sick and degraded society
 . . . Just as our whole society is dehumanized by the brutalization in the South, so our whole country, now and in the future, has been irreparably injured by this hideously immoral war. We must never accept that which we know to be wrong. It is our duty to know and question and protest when necessary what our government does in our name.⁷⁵

AAWFP related to campus activists, especially the founders of SDS, as comrades, supporters and mentors. As Mickey Flacks recalled, "The older women, Women for Peace, were always looked on with great admiration by the SDS leaders. They were like mothers. And there was no patronizing, no putting down in anyway. They had more years of experience in this."⁷⁶ In the spring of 1965 the relationship between WSP and the burgeoning student movement went national. As Kirkpatrick Sales notes in his history of SDS, it was in the aftermath of the first bombings of North Vietnam that, "Overnight the campuses became active."⁷⁷ The first significant student protests against the war were, like WSP's prioritization of the Vietnam conflict, motivated by a sense that the administration had crossed a line. Like WSP, SDSers had been discussing and debating Vietnam for some time but were divided by ideological differences (some opposed U.S.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁶ Mickey Flacks interview by Bret Eynon.

⁷⁷ Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS*. (New York: Random House, 1973), 173.

involvement, some actively supported the Viet Cong and/or North Vietnam, some were concerned about the impact of a draft in the event of an expanded ground war). Then, in December of 1964, SDS leaders invited the investigative journalist I.F. Stone to address a national meeting of the group. After Stone's explication of how the U.S. had gotten into Vietnam and why it should get out, the idea that SDS should do *something* was reinvigorated. After a lengthy debate, attendees agreed that SDS would organize a march on Washington to protest U.S. involvement. The call was as broad in its appeal and as free of ideological positioning as even the most conservative WSPer could want. "SDS advocates that the United States get out of Vietnam for the following reasons," it read. "A) war hurts the Vietnamese people; b) war hurts the American people; c) SDS is concerned about Vietnamese and American people."⁷⁸ Scheduled for April 17, this would be the first major national protest against the war, making SDS itself a focus of national attention. Although Sale claims that the adult peace organizations, including WSP, "started hovering around SDS clamoring for joint sponsorship,"⁷⁹ others characterize those interactions quite differently. Tom Wells, in his history of the antiwar movement, says that "SDS sent out letters inviting all progressive political organizations to join the march" and that "most hedged." He continues:

America's prominent peace groups—SANE, Student Peace Union, WILPF, Turn Toward Peace, CNVA, War Resisters League, Fellowship of Reconciliation—simply ignored the bid to protest their government's violence in Vietnam. They were irritated that SDS had assumed sole sponsorship and failed to offer alternative U.S. policies in Vietnam. Most disturbing, its non-exclusionary policy meant that communists would be on the scene; amid continuing Cold War fever at home, the antiwar groups perceived, cavorting with communists would be the peace movement's "kiss of death."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid, 171.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 174.

⁸⁰ Tom Wells, *The War Within*, 17.

WSP is not included in Wells's list because it immediately and enthusiastically agreed to co-sponsor the march. Like SDS, WSP was non-exclusionary and unlike the old-school peace groups, it did not view SDS as unwelcome competition or a threat. SDS's decision to call the march without consulting the elder statesmen of the established peace movement reflected the kind of spontaneity and enthusiasm that gave birth to WSP and that the women were eager to support. Mickey Flacks's recollections of the behind-the-scenes politics support Wells's interpretation. The April 17 march, she says, was "co-sponsored by Women Strike for Peace. No other peace group would have anything to do with it. SANE and SPU, they were all nuclear. Vietnam was something different, and they were not involved with it. But Women's Strike for Peace was." WSP and SDS were alike, Flacks notes, in that "there was no witch-hunting" in either group, unlike many of the established peace groups which "were much more a product of the fifties and maintained that witch-hunting attitude."⁸¹ Some of the established peace groups refused to endorse the march because it was open to all; some initially endorsed it and then reneged when they discovered that other participating groups included the DuBois Clubs (communist youth groups) and the May 2nd Movement (an offshoot of the Maoist Progressive Labor Party). Although WSP was not the only adult group to support the march, it was the most enthusiastic and unwavering in its support.⁸²

⁸¹ Mickey Flacks interview with Bret Eynon.

⁸² In its coverage of the march the following day, *The New York Times* noted that the demonstration had been "initiated" by SDS and supported by "several civil rights organizations, Women Strike for Peace, and other groups." That WSP was singled out in this way suggests both that it played a more significant role in the demonstration than other adult groups and that the minor role it plays in most histories of the antiwar movement does not reflect its contemporary significance. Both before and during the Vietnam years, WSP's activities frequently appeared on the front page of the *Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major newspapers. "15,000 White House Pickets Denounce Vietnam War," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1965,

In the lead up to the march, WSPers acted like proud mothers. To Dagmar Wilson, the SDSers were “courageous young citizens who are refusing to participate in America’s inhumane war on the Vietnamese people.” She urged WSPers to “exert themselves to the utmost” to make the march “one of monumental proportions.”⁸³ Local affiliates publicized the march in their newsletters and organized buses and carpools to transport themselves and their neighbors to Washington. New York/New Jersey/Connecticut WSP declared, “The Success of This March IS Our Responsibility.” SDS had chosen April 17 as the march date because it coincided with the spring break of many colleges. It was also the day before Easter, which made it inconvenient for many women who had holiday plans with their families. WSP organizers met this problem head-on, arguing that “there is no better way to celebrate Easter and Passover than in a great moral outcry against the war.” Furthermore, there was no need to leave their families behind: “Husbands and children must march with us.” For the first time, WSPers saw that their respectable image might be placed in service of others less well-known or well-regarded than they were in mainstream America. They believed the addition of “thousands of adult voices” to those of the students would amplify the demonstration’s impact on the President and Congress.⁸⁴ Afterwards, WSP declared the march “an unprecedented success,”⁸⁵ both in terms of size and the “orderly and serious” nature of the event.⁸⁶ That WSP had accomplished its goal of mobilizing significant adult support was recognized by SDS. In a letter to Dagmar Wilson, the organization’s

1. As is usually the case with mass demonstrations, the number of people who participated was disputed. In their coverage of the event, WSP’s national and local publications estimated the turnout was 25,000.

⁸³ “A Call from Dagmar Wilson,” *MEMO*, Vol.3, No. 16 (March 31, 1965), 12.

⁸⁴ “March on Washington,” *NY/NJ/CT WSP Newsletter*, Emergency Issue/April 1965, 3.

⁸⁵ “Gruening Asks Vietnam Talks,” *Memo*, vol.3 no.17, April 19, 1965, 3.

⁸⁶ “March in Washington to End the War in Vietnam—April 17, 1965,” *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, vol.III, no.3, April 1965, 4.

National Secretary Clark Kissinger thanked the women for their “great contribution,” adding, “It was certainly clear to us who organized the March that Women Strike is the organization that really turned out the bodies when [it came] to adult organizations.”⁸⁷

Apart from the “massive” size of the event,⁸⁸ what was most impressive and inspiring to some of the WSPers in attendance was how “the indivisibility of peace and freedom were highlighted throughout the day’s program”: James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had endorsed the march, Bob Moses of SNCC was one of the event’s main speakers, and “lively, integrated groups from Alabama and Mississippi chanted peace and civil rights songs, and many signs stressed both issues.” Just three years after refusing to allow the Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb to carry signs reading, “Desegregation, Not Disintegration,” at local WSP demonstrations, the Detroit group now described the linking of the two issues as “a beautiful sight.”⁸⁹ In 1965, SDS, SNCC, and WSP were all beginning to argue that racism at home and imperialism abroad were intertwined: both were sources of violence and oppression, both devalued human lives, both made a mockery of America’s rhetorical commitment to freedom and equality. (That the extreme right-wing of American politics was also making this connection was evidenced by a small counter-demonstration

⁸⁷ Letter from C. Clark Kissinger to Mrs. Dagmar Wilson, June 5, 1965. National Office Correspondence File, WSP Papers SCPC. Kissinger also invited Wilson to the upcoming annual SDS convention for further discussions of the antiwar campaign and mentioned that he expected to see her at a SANE rally the following week. These comments suggest an ongoing, collegial relationship between the two groups.

⁸⁸ Somewhere between 15,000 and 25,000 people participated, depending on whom you believed. See FN 77.

⁸⁹ “March in Washington. . .,” *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*. WSP in general had become actively supportive of SNCC’s work over the course of the previous year: the National Steering Committee had pledged its support for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s demand to be seated at the 1964 Democratic National Convention; the Washington branch had “adopted” a full-time SNCC field worker in Mississippi, contributing \$40 a month to cover her expenses; a few individual WSPers, like New York’s Cora Weiss, opened their homes to SNCC workers in need of r&r. See “Circle of Forty,” June 1964, Donna Allen Papers, Box 1 File 10, SHSW; “WSP Steering Committee Meeting of August, 1964. . .,” Donna Allen Papers, Box 1, File 10, SHSW; “Cora Weiss” in Adams, *Peacework*, 39.

sponsored by the American Nazi Party.⁹⁰) Speaking for SDS, Paul Booth told the *New York Times* that the student group was “really not just a peace group. We are working on domestic problems—civil rights, poverty, university reform. We feel passionately and angrily about things in America, and we feel that the war in Asia will destroy what we’re trying to do here.”⁹¹ In the closing speech of the rally, SDS President Paul Potter argued that there would be no satisfactory resolution to the civil rights struggle or the war in Vietnam until the American “system” was changed. He called for the building of a new multi-issue social movement that recognized “Vietnam and all its horror as but a symptom of a deeper malaise.”⁹² With its increasingly active involvement in and support of civil rights activism, WSP was beginning to develop a similar analysis. In a piece entitled, “Saigon and Selma,” Carol Wollin of Ann Arbor argued that peace in Vietnam was not an end in itself: “[it] is necessary for a full flowering of civil rights activity, is needed to underwrite a war on poverty as well as the other aspects of the Great Society. Seeing the basic connection between these issues can provide a basis for civil rights leaders to take a stand on the war Vietnam and peace leaders to support a march on Montgomery, Ala.” Wollin also suggested that war abroad leads to repression of dissent at home, noting that “McCarthyism flourished during the Korean conflict” and that this was “no accident.”⁹³

WSPers who had survived the HUAC hearings were likely to agree with Wollin’s analysis. The potential for a new surge of anticommunist feeling with concordant backlash against the peace movement was evidenced by the Nazi presence at the April 17

⁹⁰ Ibid; “15,000 White House Pickets. . .,” *New York Times*.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Quoted in Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 25.

⁹³ Carol Wollin, “To the Editor: Saigon and Selma,” *AAWFP Monthly Bulletin*, Vol. IV, No. 3, April 1965, 4.

demonstration. Nevertheless, a few weeks later, WSPers Mary Clarke of Los Angeles and Lorraine Gordon of New York accepted an invitation to visit the Soviet Union for a celebration marking the twentieth anniversary of the allied victory in the Second World War. From the beginning, WSP had directed their anti-nuclear message at Moscow as well as Washington. During the disarmament talks in Geneva, for example, WSPers harangued the Soviet representative with fervor comparable to that which they directed at their own government. And in July, 1962, after much debate and in spite of some serious internal opposition, a WSP delegation visited the U.S.S.R at the invitation of the Soviet Women's Committee.⁹⁴ Over the years, as part of their effort to build an international movement of women who would place the preservation of life above a knee-jerk nationalism, they developed and maintained friendly relations with a number of Soviet women through correspondence and visits to the Soviet Embassy, the Soviet mission in New York, and the United Nations. These relationships resulted in Clarke and Gordon being invited to the Moscow celebration. As Gordon put it, "We represented our country, whether America liked it or not."⁹⁵

Although Gordon acknowledged that she and Clarke "had a ball," being "wined and dined and entertained" alongside generals and government officials from around the world, the trip also had a serious political objective. Clarke and Gordon hoped their Soviet connections might gain them entrée to North Vietnam, to meet with Vietnamese women and gain firsthand knowledge of the war and the role of the U.S. military.⁹⁶ The

⁹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the 1962 trip and WSP's relationship to the Soviet women, see Swerdlow, 198-203. Women who opposed the visit argued that if they accepted, WSP's credibility as an independent, even-handed group would be damaged, providing new ammunition for their red-baiting critics. Others worried that their ability to criticize Soviet policies they disagreed with would be undermined.

⁹⁵ Gordon, 155.

⁹⁶ Although Swerdlow writes that Clarke and Gordon "decided, on their own initiative, to contact representatives of Vietnam to discuss the war" and were then "invited" to visit Hanoi (214), Gordon, in her

two women visited the North Vietnamese mission in Moscow and, according to Gordon, were greeted “skeptically.”⁹⁷ They had to return several times before they got to meet with a North Vietnamese official who, suspicious of their motives, quizzed them about the nature of their proposed visit. In the end, he agreed to help them, at least in part, Gordon thought, because of the non-threatening image they projected: “We were not hippies, we were two middle-class American women—mothers! How could we possibly be spies?”⁹⁸

Thus, two WSPers became the first American civilians to visit North Vietnam during the war. After receiving word that their trip had been approved, Clarke and Gordon left Moscow for Siberia, where they caught a plane for China. They spent two days touring Beijing before heading to the China-Vietnam border, where they were to get a flight to Hanoi. Every day for several days, they were told their plane could not take off. When they finally reached Hanoi, they found out that the delay was the result of U.S. bombing, which made it unsafe to fly. Waiting for them when they arrived were about a dozen Vietnamese women, bearing flowers. They were driven to a private home that reminded Gordon of a D.C. townhouse and fed a gourmet meal. The V.I.P. treatment continued the next day when a tailor arrived to fit them for summer dresses, so they

memoir, recalls that after she and Clarke decided to accept the invitation to Moscow “Women Strike for Peace weighed in. There was a group of North Vietnamese women we had made contact with, who were looking to end the war. Let’s stretch this visit a little further, we all now said. Let’s see if Mary and Lorraine can get to North Vietnam. . . . Many strategy sessions were now held.” (Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard*, 152.) In spite of WSP’s enthusiasm for independent and spontaneous action, I find it difficult to believe that Clarke and Gordon would embark on such a potentially dangerous mission on the spur of the moment, without anyone else knowing where they were going and what they were doing. While the two women might have wanted to provide WSP with plausible deniability upon their return by claiming it was their idea alone (since a trip to Vietnam might have been considered treasonous and there could have been serious legal ramifications as a result), it seems more likely that they would have discussed the plan with at least a few of their WSP sisters, especially since they did not inform their families of their plan.

⁹⁷ Gordon, 153.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 154. Mary Hershberger suggests that the North Vietnamese welcomed and trusted the WSPers because of their respect and admiration for Alice Herz. Hershberger, 3.

wouldn't swelter in the winter clothing they had been wearing since Moscow. In their new custom-made outfits, Clarke and Gordon toured bomb shelters and saw bomb craters. They met with Vietnamese victims of bombing and torture.⁹⁹ They visited a hospital where they saw children who had been napalmed. Clarke imagined how she would feel if such a thing happened to her own children and felt newly committed to the antiwar movement.¹⁰⁰ For Gordon, too, seeing war "up close" for the first time, made her wish there was something she could do to stop it.¹⁰¹ The Vietnamese women welcomed Clarke and Gordon as friends and comrades rather than representatives of an enemy state and showed them the devastating impact of the U.S. bombings without blaming the American women for it. This played an important part in intensifying WSP's commitment to do whatever it could to get the U.S. out of Vietnam. Before leaving, Clarke and Gordon and the Vietnamese women began planning a larger meeting that would bring women from both their countries together for further discussion of strategies to end the war. They tentatively chose Jakarta, Indonesia, a neutral location that would be easily accessible to the Vietnamese women.¹⁰² "It was relatively easy for us Americans to

⁹⁹ Ibid., 158. In these years prior to the My Lai Massacre, WSPers were often accused of exaggerating or being overly credulous regarding Vietnamese charges of torture and abuse at the hands of Americans. But at about the same time as Clarke and Gordon's visit to Vietnam, *Memo* published excerpts from a letter that a Chicago WSPer had received from the son of a friend who was serving on the frontlines. He reported: "The going here is pretty rough and all the dirty fighting isn't on one side—a week ago our platoon leader brought in three prisoners—I was part of the group that brought them in—they set up a questioning station and someone from Intelligence was doing the questioning—this was the first time I saw anything like this and found out that we use some dirty methods too—this guy from Intelligence had all three lined up—one was a woman—he stripped her down to the waist and stripped the two men all the way—he had a little gadget I thought was a walkie talkie or something—he stuck one end of this wire to the lady's chest and it was a kind of electric shock because she got a real bad burn. From what she was screaming my buddy and I could figure she didn't know anything—then they took the same wire and tried it on the lady's husband and her brother but on their lower parts." Over the course of the war, WSP would receive many communications that this from disillusioned G.I.s and Vietnam veterans who supported their work. "Letter from a Soldier," *Memo* v.3 n.21 June 1965, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Hershberger, 4.

¹⁰¹ Gordon, 158.

¹⁰² Ibid.; Hershberger, 4.

go anywhere in the world to meet with [the Vietnamese],” Clarke explained. “But it was more difficult for them, so we wanted them to suggest a location that they found convenient.”¹⁰³

Clarke and Gordon did not publicize their trip to Vietnam even after their safe return to the U.S. In a *Memo* article outlining the proposed meeting with Vietnamese women in Jakarta, they lied about where the plan had been hatched. They wrote that after presenting their request to meet with Vietnamese women to the North Vietnamese Embassy and the office of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Moscow, six women from North Vietnam and two women from South Vietnam (representing the NLF) traveled to Moscow to meet with them.¹⁰⁴ The secrecy was due to fear of repercussions from the U.S. government. “It was illegal to be in North Vietnam,” Gordon wrote. “I [could] have had my passport taken away; I might have even gone to jail.”¹⁰⁵

In spite of the fact that few people were aware of the trip, Clarke and Gordon’s visit to Vietnam marked the beginning of a more passionate commitment to the antiwar cause on WSP’s part. Planning for the Jakarta meeting coincided with the Johnson administration’s announcement that the U.S. presence in Vietnam would expand from an “advisory” to a “combat” role and that the number of American troops on the ground would be increased dramatically as a result.¹⁰⁶ WSPers began developing a passionate

¹⁰³ Hershberger, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Although this description of events was apparently accepted at the time, in hindsight, it is hard to believe that no one questioned the ease with which eight women from both sections of Vietnam, during wartime, could travel internationally on extremely short notice.

¹⁰⁵ Gordon, 159. About two dozen Americans who visited North Vietnam after Gordon and Clarke had their passports revoked or confiscated by the State Department. Hershberger discusses their cases in *Traveling to Vietnam*.

¹⁰⁶ Although the American public wasn’t given all the details at the time, McNamara writes that Johnson and his advisors spent much of June and July debating whether (and how much) to increase U.S. ground forces in South Vietnam. General William Westmoreland had requested that the number of American troops on the ground be increased from 82,000 to 175,000 by the end of 1965 and, by the end of July,

rationale for their opposition to the war that built on their early maternalist, anti-nuclear rhetoric while also introducing new elements such as a critique of American imperialism and its relationship to racism, poverty, and political repression at home. Clarke and Gordon suggested that the Jakarta meeting “might well be a turning point in a situation that could erupt into nuclear war.”¹⁰⁷ Vietnam, like Cuba, was a hot spot in the Cold War and the gradual but steady escalation of U.S. involvement and the continual introduction of newly horrific weaponry such as napalm (which clung to and burned the skin of its victims) and phosphorous bombs (which started fires that were extremely difficult to put out, destroying buildings and crops, as well as burning human flesh) led the women to fear an inexorable movement toward the deployment of nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

Clarke and Gordon also alluded to the potential power of international solidarity among women who experienced and understood the human costs of war in a visceral way unclouded by political imperatives, one-upmanship, vengeance, or the male ego. They wrote that the “fate” of American women was “tied to that of the Vietnamese women.” They noted that the Vietnamese women they met, “whose country is being ravaged by full-scale war and who suffer the horrors of daily bombings, napalm and noxious gas attacks; whose children are being killed, schools and hospitals leveled to the ground—these women asked that we bring you their love and gratitude for WSP’s great concern and activities on their behalf and for our common goal PEACE.”¹⁰⁸ The “strikers” of 1961 had hoped to spark not just an American, but an international, movement of women for peace that would include women from the Eastern and unaligned blocs as well as

Johnson was convinced that he had no choice but to authorize this dramatic expansion of U.S. involvement in the ground war. *In Retrospect*, 193-206.

¹⁰⁷ Mary Clarke and Lorraine Gordon, “Vietnamese—WSP’s Plan Meeting,” Memo Vol. 3, No. 21, June 1965, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Western allies. They would stand together as citizens of the world, challenging and, at times, opposing their governments on behalf of a goal (saving the earth from nuclear destruction) that dwarfed national interests. In 1965, WSPers and the women of Vietnam reached out to each other, not as representatives of “enemy” nations but as women and mothers who shared a commitment to prevent further deaths, destruction, and environmental devastation. In this case, of course, the North Vietnamese and NLF women were motivated by nationalist sentiments—their goal was not just to end the war, but to achieve political independence and self-determination for a reunified Vietnam. Meanwhile, as the number of U.S. troops on the ground in South Vietnam doubled, WSPers were being forced to see the war not just as unnecessary, or immoral, or a potentially nuclear conflict, but as a direct, personal, and immediate threat to the lives and well-being of their own children. They started to face the very real possibility that the Vietnam conflict could lead to their own sons killing or being killed. They had felt sorry for and guilty about the suffering of Vietnamese women who were losing their husbands and children in the war but now, as reports of American casualties began to appear in the press, WSPers began to empathize in a new way and to add a new plank to their antiwar platform—SOS, or Save Our Sons. They began to identify with the Vietnamese women not only in terms of shared gender identity but as women who were being separated from the men in their lives and, especially, as mothers whose children’s lives were at risk.

Although the idea of meeting with the “enemy’s” women would seem to fit naturally into WSP’s efforts to “internationalize” their movement, some WSPers expressed strong opposition to the Jakarta plan. AAWFP, whose opinion was well-respected throughout WSP due to its commitment to open discussion and achieving

consensus, was extremely critical of the idea. After devoting two meetings to discussing the Jakarta proposal, the Ann Arbor women deemed the plan “inadequate and unacceptable.” At previous WSP conferences, Ann Arbor had argued in favor of the group taking an antiwar position on “moral grounds.” In a memo to their sisters, the Ann Arborites seemed to suggest that by meeting with representatives of North Vietnam and the NLF, but no South Vietnamese loyalists, they would appear to be taking sides in the conflict and opening themselves to “accusations of gullibility.” They also disapproved of Jakarta as the location for such a meeting because Indonesia had withdrawn from the United Nations which WSP had heretofore viewed as an essential player in the peace process.¹⁰⁹ AAWFP asked:

Is the lack of representation of factions in Vietnam because other factions are unwilling to meet at such a conference, or unable to, or unacceptable to the NLF and North Vietnam? Is Indonesia the site because no other country will host such a meeting, or because this is the only country to which the Vietnamese delegation is willing to go? ¹¹⁰

Clearly, the Ann Arbor women were concerned that the meeting would serve primarily as a propaganda vehicle for the NLF and North Vietnamese, rather than a truly open, free-wheeling discussion addressing both sides of the conflict and all possible approaches to resolving in it. Likewise, they believed that a meeting between American and Vietnamese women should also include American women who were not in WSP or the broader peace movement, women who were undecided about the efficacy of U.S. involvement or who supported the government position. It was important, AAWFP argued, that the

¹⁰⁹ Indonesia briefly withdrew from the U.N. in 1965 to protest the seating of the newly created nation of Malaysia, which Indonesia did not recognize, on the U.N. Security Council. The decision had nothing to do with the war in Vietnam. Frances Livingstone, “Withdrawal from the United Nations: Indonesia,” *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Apr., 1965), 637-646.

¹¹⁰ AAWFP *Monthly Bulletin*, Vol. IV, No. 5 (June-July 1965), 2.

Vietnamese not be given the impression that all, or most, of the American people opposed or even questioned their government's rationale for being in Vietnam. Ann Arbor suggested that the U.S. delegation comprise "women of national stature in such fields as government, international law, Southeast Asian history, economics, etc. whose appeal would be to the nation as a whole and who may, at the same time, have greater access to our government."¹¹¹ The inclusion of such experts would give the event the appearance of a formal fact-finding mission, rather than an informal sharing of experiences, concerns, and opinions. Such women would be less vulnerable to accusations of naiveté or credulity than the average WSPer and their perspectives might reach policymakers and the general public in a way that those of perceived "peaceniks" or "pinkos" might not. The Ann Arbor group, always concerned with reaching out to and winning support from their more conservative neighbors, doubted that the information and contacts to be garnered from the proposed Jakarta trip would help with that task. Whatever insights the American women brought back from a meeting with representatives of the North Vietnamese and the NLF could too easily be written off as propaganda.

Shirley Lens, a leader of the Chicago Women for Peace group, wrote to AAWFP to express her support for their position. "If this is to be a whitewash job, I am against it," Lens wrote. "I don't want any meetings if we can't ask 'embarrassing questions' . . . [about such things as] their real relationship with China." She also agreed that Jakarta was a poor choice of location, given the "animosity" felt towards Indonesia in the U.S. as a result of its having "walk[ed] out" of the United Nations. Lens also thought that Clarke and Gordon had made "a bad move" in negotiating dates and locations with the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Vietnamese before reporting back to their sister WSPers, leaving too little time for adequate internal discussion and planning. But, in spite of her reservations and criticisms, Lens was considering making the trip. She had visited Saigon the previous year with her husband Sidney Lens, a labor leader and political activist who wrote widely on both domestic politics and U.S. foreign policy and had recently published a book critiquing America's reliance on anticommunism as the key rationale for its foreign policy decisions. The Vietnam situation was "so bad" that Lens felt it was "imperative to do something." In conclusion, she wrote the Ann Arbor women, "I feel so frustrated and guess am looking for any straw to which to cling. The populace here is so apathetic; . . . this idea of face saving is so childish; this idea of if we kill enough people they will see the light. . . We have been busy leafleting, etc. but how much of that can we do."¹¹²

Proponents of the trip included Frances W. Herring who, as a professor of government and politics at the University of California at Berkeley, was exactly the kind of "expert" the Ann Arbor women hoped would participate in the meeting. Herring had been an advocate of internationalizing WSP and its mission from the group's founding and had used her personal and professional contacts and travels to publicize and build support for WSP outside the U.S. She argued that the nation was at a "critical juncture" in Vietnam and that "politicians . . . seem unable to break the chains of party loyalties, and our President seems unable to break out of his established course in Southeast Asia." But "ordinary citizens need not feel bound by these chains" and WSPers, by meeting with women from North Vietnam and the NLF, could "express the loyalty of people to people

¹¹² Letter to AAWFP from Shirley Lens, Chicago, June 22, 1965, Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 1965, BHL.

The Sidney Lens book was titled *The Futile Crusade: Anti-Communism as American Credo* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964).

across national boundaries.”¹¹³ In a separate letter to AAWFP, Herring responded point-by-point to the Ann Arbor Women’s concerns (noting that she was envisioning many of their “dear faces” as she wrote). Regarding the lack of participation of South Vietnamese loyalists, Herring argued that “not only would it be tantamount to inviting our own State Department to sit in on the meeting, but the NLF women could not safely return to their own country after such an encounter.”¹¹⁴ A recent coup had brought two military leaders, General Nguyen Van Thieu and General Nguyen Cao Ky, to the head of the South Vietnamese regime, as chief of state and prime minister respectively. Ky, in one of his first official acts, closed all of Saigon’s Vietnamese language newspapers, making it clear that he did not value freedom of speech and was not interested in hearing opposing viewpoints. He told a British reporter that Hitler was the man he most admired and that “We need four or five Hitlers in Vietnam.”¹¹⁵ William Bundy, the assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs at the time, said that the Ky-Thieu government “seemed to all us the bottom of the barrel, absolutely the bottom of the barrel.”¹¹⁶

Herring was not exaggerating when she suggested that NLF women would be placing their lives in danger if they identified themselves to allies of the Saigon regime. Furthermore, Herring pointed out, Saigon and the territory under its control was the area about which Americans received the most information—from both government sources and journalists. It was the North Vietnamese and NLF perspective that was largely unheard. “We should not let the impossibility of meeting with all factions prevent our

¹¹³ Frances W. Herring, “One View of the Purposes of the Jakarta Meeting,” June 1965. Marcia Barrabee Papers, Box 1 Folder 1965, BHL.

¹¹⁴ “Dear Ann Arbor Women,” June 26 1965, Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL.

¹¹⁵ Ky quoted in McNamara, 186.

¹¹⁶ Bundy quoted in Herring, 137.

meeting with those who are willing to talk to us,” she wrote.¹¹⁷ Regarding opposition to Jakarta as the site for the meeting, Herring asserted that while it might not be the only place willing to host such an encounter, it was a place where possible pressure from the U.S. to interfere with or prevent the meeting would hold no sway. Furthermore, Herring argued, being in Jakarta would provide WSPers with the opportunity to “seek information and probe the sentiment for healing the U.N. breach, for working together to build a U.N. with universal membership.”¹¹⁸

Whether Herring’s analysis convinced all the trip’s opponents that going to Jakarta was the right thing to do at the time is difficult to determine. The Washington group’s June newsletter reported that in spite of “some opposition,” there was “sufficient enthusiasm to indicate that the meeting will most likely take place.”¹¹⁹ In the end, the trip’s proponents did win the day: ten American women (seven WSPers, including Lens, Clarke, and Herring, and three representatives of civil rights and student groups) made the journey to Indonesia in mid-July.¹²⁰ Although national and international fundraising was undertaken to offset the cost of the trip for individual travelers, Champaign-Urbana was prescient in predicting that only the “largest and richest groups” would be represented. In the end, all the WSPers who participated in the trip came from Washington, D.C., Chicago, and California. Although finances may have been a factor that limited participation, given the speed with which the trip was organized (less than

¹¹⁷ “Dear Ann Arbor Women.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ “WSP Plans Peaceful Confrontation with Vietnamese Women,” *The Washington WSPer*, June 1965, 1.

¹²⁰ The other WSP representatives were Aline Fugh Berman, a Chinese-American who, with her husband Daniel Berman, was among the organizers the nationally televised Washington, D.C. teach-in; WSP founder Margaret Russell and Washington WSP member Bernice Steele, both also from D.C.; and Phyllis Schmidt, a WSPer and Democratic party activist from Long Beach, Ca. The non-WSP participants were the white civil rights lawyer Beverly Axelrod, from San Francisco, Ca.; the black civil rights activist Esther Jackson from Compton, Ca.; and Nanci Gitlin, of Ann Arbor, Mi., who represented SDS and college women.

two months passed between Clarke and Gordon's return from Hanoi and the group's departure for Jakarta), the distance involved, and the controversial nature of the meeting, it seems likely that only a small number of WSPers were willing and able to attend.

The fact that the trip took place during children's summer vacations made it an especially bad time for many WSPers. Lorraine Gordon did not participate, for example, feeling unable to leave her family so soon after her Moscow/Hanoi adventure. Gordon had hesitated before accepting the invitation to Moscow because, as she told Mary Clarke before they set off, "I have two children and a husband who doesn't know how to take care of kids too well."¹²¹ She thought twice again, before leaving Moscow for Hanoi, because of "My kids, my two girls. I'd already been away from them far too long." After talking to Clark and doing some soul searching, Gordon convinced herself to go. The opportunity to see the impact of the war firsthand and to make WSP's first personal, face-to-face contact with Vietnamese women was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that could make a real difference to the antiwar movement. Her children, she decided, would "grow up fine. They'll understand later. Someday they'll be proud of their mother."¹²² When she returned home, she found a husband who was furious that she had been gone so long, and two daughters who had been crying, "Mommy, Mommy, where's Mommy?" every day since she left for Moscow. To leave them again so soon was impossible.¹²³

This tension between the public demands made on WSPers as activist mothers and the private demands made on them by their own children pervaded the lives of most WSPers as they struggled to achieve what became known later in the century as "work-life balance." For many of these women, involvement in WSP became a full-time job that

¹²¹ Gordon, 152.

¹²² Ibid., 155.

¹²³ Ibid., 160.

required them to leave their husbands and children for days and even weeks at a time to go to meetings, conferences, protest actions and fact-finding missions abroad. By putting so much time into their political work, rather than satisfying their husbands' and children's demands, Gordon and many others were challenging societal expectations of middle-class motherhood. They would no doubt have agreed with Betty Friedan that "marriage and motherhood are an essential part of life, but not the whole of it."¹²⁴ Even those WSPers who did not embark on foreign travel struggled to balance and sometimes to integrate their private caretaking and public organizing roles. Many reported racing home from meetings and demonstrations to meet the school bus or, alternately, dragging their children along to picket lines or putting them to work stuffing envelopes or cranking the mimeograph machine.

Sometimes the relationship between their activism and motherhood was almost seamless, as when a pregnant Amy Swerdlow had pointed to her "bulging abdomen" during a meeting with Soviet ambassador Zorin in Geneva and "demanded to know if the political stalemate [between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.] was sufficient cause to endanger the health and possibly the life of the baby I was carrying and the countless children yet to be born."¹²⁵ Other times, it was a delicate balancing act. Cora Weiss of New York said that during her years of intense involvement with WSP, she was "forever with a baby on one hip, or both, going to meetings and demonstrations. I remember bringing boxes of crackers or bagels to keep the kids quiet, until they could join in and lick stamps, too. I was always racing away from meetings at 3 o'clock to pick them up from school."¹²⁶ Sometimes the tasks of childcare and political activism could be combined; other times

¹²⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 376.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 195.

¹²⁶ Cora Weiss in Adams, *Peacework*, 40.

Weiss's sense of responsibility to one pulled her away from the other. But both vocations—mother and activist—made constant demands on her time and energy that she had to meet.

For some of the most active WSPers, the two roles did, at times, come into conflict. Lorraine Gordon, for example, cut back on her WSP activities after her return from Moscow and Hanoi. Because she and Clarke were the only members of the group in a position to arrange and make such a trip, which she viewed as a unique opportunity, Gordon convinced herself that it was the right thing to do in spite of her misgivings about leaving her children for an extended period. Furthermore, the trip to Hanoi was risky—there were the physical dangers of entering a warzone and the possibility of being arrested and jailed should U.S. officials find out about it. Finally, she had kept the fact that Vietnam was her ultimate destination a secret from her family and could not tell them exactly when she would return. “Where were you?” her husband had greeted her at the airport, clearly furious. After that experience, she decided there would be no more long trips away from her family and that being with her children had to become her top priority. “I refused to leave my family again,” Gordon wrote. “I decided that I had done my thing. I had to stay home. I had to take care of my girls.”¹²⁷

Even Dagmar Wilson, who was the voice and face of WSP for many both within and outside the movement, was forced to withdraw from the group for long stretches. In her case, activism not only took her away from her family, it interfered with her work as a freelance illustrator and deprived her family of income that helped sustain a comfortable quality of life. During the early sixties, WSP took over Wilson's life. At the same time that she was away from home more, her loss of income meant that she had to

¹²⁷ Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard*, 160.

fire her part-time housekeeper. As Wilson told some fellow WSPers, “We used to have a very smoothly running household; now it’s hit-or-miss all the time. Our standard of living has gone down.”¹²⁸ By putting so much time into their political work, Wilson, Weiss, Gordon, and many other WSP women were challenging societal expectations of middle-class motherhood. Although this elicited feelings of guilt from some of the women, few were willing to withdraw completely from political work despite the pressures.

The degree to which WSP leaders challenged and transcended societal expectations of white middle-class mothers, despite the maternalist framing of their activism, can be better understood if we look at them in relation to their contemporary Viola Liuzzo. Liuzzo, a Detroit mother of five, a white woman committed to the cause of racial equality, had been murdered just a few months before Clarke and Gordon went to Hanoi, during the dramatic Selma-to-Montgomery march for civil rights. Shortly after her death, which was widely covered and debated in the national media, the women’s magazine *Ladies Home Journal* commissioned a survey and convened a focus group to explore how American wives and mothers felt about Liuzzo as a mother and an activist. The findings were published in an article by Lyn Tornabene entitled, “Murder in Alabama: American Wives Think Viola Liuzzo Should Have Stayed Home.” The central question posed in the survey and the focus group was whether a mother had the right to leave her family to fight (and perhaps die) for a social cause. The response from almost all the participants in the focus group as well as the majority of the women surveyed was a resounding, “No.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Quoted in Swerdlow, 58.

¹²⁹ Lyn Tornabene, “Murder in Alabama” in Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *“Bad” Mothers: The Politics of Blame in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 275-279. More than 55 percent of the respondents said that mothers did not have that right.

The focus group's responses included, "She had no right being down there"; "She should have stayed home and minded her own business"; and "I don't feel I have the right to endanger myself and leave my children motherless."¹³⁰ Permeating their comments is the belief that a mother's responsibility to care for her children supersedes any other interests, concerns, or commitments. The mother's primary role in her children's lives is narrowly defined as that of a hands-on caretaker.

The women surveyed were asked to set aside their personal opinions about the civil rights movement when determining their responses, but their opinions of Liuzzo were clearly shaped by the belief that civil rights was a *black* issue or perhaps a *Southern* issue, but certainly not something that had anything to do with the lives of a white woman from a Northern state. As one respondent put it, "I personally don't feel that anyone from any other area ought to travel to get involved in these [civil rights] demonstrations. If they're in your area and you feel very strongly about the issue, I can see getting involved. . . ." Another member of the all-white focus group wondered if the participants would feel differently about the issue if they (or Liuzzo, for that matter) were "colored." Another woman responded, "If this were for my children you mean? Definitely." When the moderator of the focus group asked whether there were any causes that the women could imagine getting involved in, most agreed with the mother who said, "I'd march in the street to campaign for a traffic light, because I'd rather take a chance on my getting hit than my child getting hit on the way to school. But if my

¹³⁰ Tornabene, 273-274.

children weren't involved--no."¹³¹ In short, the women seemed to agree, a mother's motto vis-a-vis social action, should be, "Think locally, act locally."¹³²

What would these women, who had criticized Liuzzo for traveling to another state to support fellow citizens in their struggle to obtain the constitutional right to vote have thought about Gordon and Clarke traveling halfway around the world to visit a war zone? It is easy to imagine them offering the same criticisms of the WSPers that they did of Liuzzo: that the women should have minded their own business and had no right to put themselves at risk when they had children at home. Criticism of the WSPers might have been even more vitriolic. Clarke and Gordon, after all, left not only their homes, but their homeland for enemy territory where they met and socialized with representatives of enemy forces.

Mary Stanton, who wrote a book about Liuzzo, was 18 in 1965. What most struck Stanton about Liuzzo at that time was how independent she was, that she clearly had a "sense of personal freedom." Stanton wrote, "Mrs. Liuzzo gave me hope that a woman could hold on to a personal identity. That husband and children did not have to absorb a woman's life totally. That she could keep something for herself."¹³³ Although she does not use the word, Stanton is identifying Liuzzo as a feminist in this passage.

What Stanton admired in Liuzzo were the very same qualities that so upset, and in some

¹³¹ Ibid, 275-276.

¹³² The attitudes and concerns expressed by the women in the *Ladies Home Journal* focus group, support historian Elaine Tyler May's theory of "domestic containment" during the Cold War years. Searching for safety and security in the wake of the Second World War and in light of the possibility of an atomic World War III Americans, May argues, made home and family the focus of public policy, personal behavior, and political values. "A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation," May writes. Furthermore, focusing on achieving security for the immediate family, through reliance on "unrealistic but reassuring civil defense strategies," such as basement bomb shelters, meant that even nuclear war became a domestic issue. May, *Homeward Bound*. WSPers rejected this approach, arguing that the only way to protect their children from nuclear war was to prevent it from taking place.

¹³³ Stanton, *From Selma to Sorrow*, 6.

cases outraged, the women in the *Journal*'s focus group.¹³⁴ Liuzzo and other white women in the civil rights movement, along with WSPers like Clarke and Gordon, had a more expansive understanding of a mother's role and a more wide-reaching vision of what their children needed (and needed protection from) than the majority of American women at the time, if we go by the responses to the *Ladies Home Journal* survey. They retained a sense of individual identity and personal responsibility beyond the roles of "wife" and "mother" and acted independently of and, sometimes in opposition to, the needs and desires of their husbands and children. WSPers frequently expressed frustration and irritation at being asked how their husbands felt about their activities—especially those involving travel, picketing, and civil disobedience. When Madeline Duckles of Berkeley returned from a trip to Vietnam in the late sixties, a newspaper columnist told her that she should "be more concerned about her husband's career," suggesting that Mr. Duckles would be held accountable for her actions. In other words, Madeline Duckles should have considered the possibility that her trip would have a negative impact on her husband; furthermore, the journalist implied that if she had taken him into consideration, she would not have gone to Vietnam. This, in spite of the fact, that Duckles had been working for peace and justice since her college days. "It was what I wanted to do with my life and time," she said.¹³⁵ Rohna Shoul of Voices of Women-NE, sent a letter of complaint to a local television station about a piece they broadcast after

¹³⁴ Stanton's surprise at, and admiration for, the fact that Liuzzo's life was not totally absorbed by her husband and children echoes Betty Friedan's argument in *The Feminine Mystique* that middle-class (white) American women in the early 1960s were so constrained by gender roles that they were not allowed to be human; they could only be women. Though neither Liuzzo nor most WSPers rejected the roles of wife and mother, they challenged the constraints that many of their peers accepted as part and parcel of those roles.

¹³⁵ Madeline Duckles in Adams, *Peacework*, 162.

interviewing a group of Boston-area women upon their return from a demonstration at the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam war. She wrote:

. . . the most significant points were naturally sacrificed for the more “homey” angle (i.e. how did your husbands feel, etc.,) instead of the more relevant matter that a number of us were elected city and town committee members (Democratic) and intended to work actively through the party in our efforts to stop the Vietnam War. It always seems more colorful to picture women who participate in this type of movement as well-meaning housewives who drop the dishes, babies, aprons, kiss their husbands and go forth to demonstrate. Although many of us do the above, along with this domestic-paraphernalia are left half-written books, unfinished theses, suspended careers, and a variety of professional ambitions.¹³⁶

WSP had tried to use the image of its members as “well-meaning housewives” to advance its own ends, which included attracting media coverage, appealing to previously apolitical women, and defusing red-baiting. But individual WSPers like Shoul frequently chafed at not being recognized as independent actors whose activism was grounded in intellectual ability, political savvy, and “real world” experience as well as maternal sentiments. In her letter, Shoul acknowledges that most WSPers were indeed mothers and housewives but presses to have them seen as more than that.

When Viola Liuzzo got into her car in Detroit and drove to Alabama, she too was acting as more than a housewife and mother. She had started college two years earlier and was strongly influenced by Thoreau’s writings on civil disobedience and Plato’s writings on Socrates, particularly the idea that “No one who either knows or believes that there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course when he might choose the better.” By all accounts, Liuzzo was aware of her privileged position as a white woman, perhaps, in part, because her best

¹³⁶ Letter from Rohna Shoul to Robert Caulfield, Director of the 24th Hour, WHDH-TV Boston, February 19, 1967. VOW-NE Papers, Box1 Folder 38, SC.

friend was black and the two women raised their children together. That friend, Sarah Evans, said Liuzzo once told her, “We’re all created equal yet they’ll give me more justice than they’ll give you. That’s not right. You keep a better house than me.”¹³⁷ Like Martin Luther King, Jr., Liuzzo believed that people should be judged by the “content of their character” rather than the color of their skin and she wanted to instill that same belief in her children. Liuzzo’s daughter Mary recalled that she and her siblings “were always taught a respect for life, so it was no surprise when my mother got involved in the struggle for civil rights—for *human* rights.”¹³⁸ After they participated in a local sympathy march for the Selma victims, Liuzzo told Mary, then 18, “See, it’s everyone’s fight.”¹³⁹

Liuzzo fits the profile of white mothers involved in the civil rights movement developed by sociologist Rhoda Blumberg:

Motherhood, women’s most positively sanctioned role, has usually been characterized as a domestic one. But, as maternal concerns have brought women into other humanistic causes, so did it impel many civil rights activists to seek interracial contacts for their children and a less racist society. These women saw the family as linked to community and society. Most of them considered their ideological commitments to motherhood and to the cause of racial justice complementary and reinforcing rather than conflicting.¹⁴⁰

Although Liuzzo never claimed that she was acting as a mother on behalf of her children when she went to Selma, she clearly believed that her children would benefit from living in a less racist society and for having a mother who chose “the better course of action.”

Similarly, the women of WSP saw their commitment to peace and environmental

¹³⁷ Stanton, *From Selma to Sorrow*

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 139.

¹⁴⁰ Rhoda Lois Blumberg, “White Mothers as Civil Rights Activists: The Interweave of Family and Movement Roles,” 166-179 in *Women and Social Protest*, eds. Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 168.

protection, even when it lead to activities that kept them from making dinner or picking their children up from school, as “ideologically compatible” (to use Blumberg’s term) with their philosophy of motherhood. For WSPers, the dangers of playing in traffic were hardly comparable to the dangers posed by the Bomb and nuclear fallout. When they, and Liuzzo, left home, it was in order “to save it.”¹⁴¹ These women’s definition of home comprised the entire nation, the entire planet. The discussion in the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal* helps us understand why mothers who are activists so often use their motherhood as the rationale for their activism, even when it is not their sole or primary inspiration. By claiming that they are acting, at least in part, to save their children from clear and present dangers, WSPers appeared rational and unselfish and, indeed, right and appropriate, to those who believed a mother’s public life should be limited to demands for a street light on the corner. Although their beliefs took them farther afield, WSPers too said they were acting to save their children’s lives. The critiques of Viola Liuzzo suggest why they continued to wield this rhetoric even as the first iterations of a new feminist analysis were being put forth.¹⁴² Liuzzo never claimed to be acting for her children; she simply said she was “no longer able to sit by” as “just a spectator” while others suffered and died for a cause she believed in. For that, she was deemed “selfish” by the readers of the *Ladies Home Journal*.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the documents that came out of the Jakarta meeting used motherhood to link the concerns of American and Vietnamese women. In

¹⁴¹ Swerdlow, 8.

¹⁴² Historians disagree about exactly when to date the beginning of what is commonly known as the second wave of feminism in the U.S. but some key events took place during WSP’s early years, including the establishment of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women at the end of 1961; the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963; the inclusion of women in the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and the distribution of Casey Hayden and Mary King’s “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo,” in 1965.

announcements and press releases prior to the trip, WSP referred to the meeting as a “peaceful confrontation.” This contradictory sounding statement was likely intended as both a jab at male political leaders who seemed to find it possible to resolve disagreements with other nations except by resorting to fire power and as signal to critical members and supporters, like the Ann Arbor women, that the American delegation was not in the thrall of their Vietnamese counterparts. The American women spent a week in Jakarta, meeting with their Vietnamese counterparts for nine or ten hours a day, discussing the history of Vietnam and of U.S. involvement there, the 1954 Geneva Accords and why they had not been followed, and prospects for U.S. withdrawal, reunification of the North and South, and political self-determination in the future. The talks, which also addressed more personal topics, such as the impact of the war on the Vietnamese women’s day-to-day lives, were characterized by the American women as having been “conducted in a friendly manner, [with] no hostile attitude, however slight . . . exhibited by anyone.”¹⁴³ The nine Vietnamese participants—six from the North and three NLF representatives from the South—were well-educated, professional women, most of whom were also mothers.¹⁴⁴ The U.S. women were moved by “tales of anguish” and “heart-rending personal tragedies.”¹⁴⁵ The head of the North Vietnamese delegation spoke of her concern for “the safety of her children who had just been evacuated from Hanoi to avoid possible bombings.” The doctor reported on her experience treating the victims of American bombings. The stories of the NLF women were even more

¹⁴³ “The Djakarta Conference—Impressions by Aline Berman,” *The Washington WSPer*, July-August, 1965, 3.

¹⁴⁴ The Vietnamese delegation included a doctor, a lawyer, a journalist, a professor, a teacher, and a student.

There were representatives of both the North and South women’s unions and of labor and student unions as well.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

upsetting—one had not seen her children, who lived in Saigon, for two years because her work with the Viet Cong required constant travel in the provinces; another had spent four years in jail and even though she had been released, she still rarely saw her husband, a member of the Viet Cong army, or her children. In spite of the obvious depth of her political commitment, she told the American women she would rather be “just a plain woman.”¹⁴⁶ These tales of family separation struck a chord with the WSPers, who knew that American women were in for much of the same with the escalated deployment of ground troops. The Vietnamese women also described their feelings of “betrayal” at the U.S. refusal to abide by the Geneva Accords and told the American women that they were being misinformed about the when, where, and how of the U.S. bombing campaign. The North Vietnamese women testified that they had been bombed “night and day” since the first attacks in February and that “clearly marked schools and hospitals” and a leper sanitarium had been hit, as well as roads, homes, and farms.¹⁴⁷ Women on both sides of the table agreed that the first step toward peace and the Vietnamese women’s ultimate goal of reunification was the implementation of the Geneva Accords.

On their last day together, the American and Vietnamese women signed and released a joint statement. It began, “Deeply concerned for the welfare of our families and children, we have met to find ways through which, as women, we can help to bring an end to the war in Vietnam.” More maternalist in tone than even WSP’s founding statement, this document suggested that the Vietnamese and American women were alike in, and linked by, their identity as mothers and that it was as mothers worried for their

¹⁴⁶ “WSPers Return from Jakarta,” *Memo* Vol.3, No.24 (July 31, 1965), 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. The Johnson administration kept the continued bombing of North Vietnam throughout the spring of 1965 a secret from the American public; although it was obvious to American witnesses like Clarke and Gordon, there was no official confirmation until Daniel Ellsberg leaked the “Pentagon Papers” to *The New York Times* in 1971.

children's futures that they opposed the war. The statement explicitly criticized the U.S. government for violating the 1954 Geneva Agreement and for expanding the war into North Vietnam. In calling for the U.S. to withdraw from Vietnam, the women refer back to the Geneva Agreement, reminding the Johnson administration and the American people of their broken commitment "to respect the sovereignty, the independence, and the unity and the territorial integrity of [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia], and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs." But they do not otherwise address Cold War politics, the question of whether the Hanoi government and/or the NLF were Communist or whether they were receiving aid from the Chinese government. In other words, they completely disregard the American rationale for maintaining and increasing its presence in the region, treating anxiety over containing Communism and, more specifically, China's sphere of influence, as irrelevant. As far as the women were concerned, there were only two issues that the U.S. should be concerned with: that it was violating an international agreement to which it was a signatory and that it was fomenting death and destruction. Their statement emphasizes the degree to which U.S. attacks had been focusing on civilian targets and made a strong maternalist plea:

This war carried on with American weapons and aircraft has caused thousands of Vietnamese casualties. In addition, it has made casualties of several thousands of American men and caused deep suffering for American wives and mothers. American mothers have not borne and brought up their sons to kill the innocent and to sacrifice themselves in an unjust cause.¹⁴⁸

Although the statement is attributed to both the Vietnamese and American women, this passage is clearly the voice of WSP, pleading with its own government. Again, the

¹⁴⁸ "WSPers Return from Djakarta."

American women are identifying with their Vietnamese counterparts—both groups are suffering the loss of husbands and sons. The American women do not want their men to die, but neither do they want them to kill the husbands, sons, brothers, and lovers of their Vietnamese sisters. When it comes to the deaths of American soldiers in Vietnam, WSP does not blame the Vietnamese—it blames its own government for prosecuting an “unjust” war. Although the passage strikes a pacifist note, arguing that they don’t want to see the men in their lives kill anymore than they want to see them be killed, it does not make a statement against war in general. Instead, the WSPers who signed this statement were, in effect, taking the side of the Vietnamese and NLF, accepting their position that the U.S. was wrongly intervening in a “domestic” struggle. Unlike the even-handed criticism of both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R that permeated WSP’s critiques of the Cold War, the arms race, and the development and testing of atomic and nuclear weapons, the women leveled responsibility at the U.S. and the U.S. alone for the war in Vietnam. They were rejecting the idea that, as Shirley Lens put it, “if we kill enough people they will see the light.” While playing the mother card more fervently than ever, WSP had entered a new phase of anger and disillusionment with the U.S. government that would inspire new allegiances and more militant tactics. It completed the group’s transformation from a narrowly focused, single-issue organization, to one with a broad agenda addressing issues of economic and racial justice as well as war and peace. Rather than a separate movement directed against nuclear proliferation, WSP was beginning to see itself as part of the larger “Movement” against inequality and injustice that developed during the late 1960s. Although they carried signs that read “Save Our Sons” at antiwar demonstrations, they were beginning to take the white gloves off.

Chapter 5: Taking the White Gloves Off

One WSPer who recognized that the politics of white-gloved respectability was beginning to outlive its usefulness by the mid-sixties was Ethel Taylor of Philadelphia. Although Taylor had been one of the opponents of expanding WSP's portfolio to include civil rights in 1963, by 1965, her attitude had changed. That August, she was one of a small number of WSPers who attended the Assembly of Unrepresented People (AUP), a conference of Americans involved in non-violent social movements planned by the historian and activist Staughton Lynd and group of pacifist activists. It brought together "not only those who have for so long been calling for an end to the Cold War, but also those whose protests focus on racial injustice, inquisition by Congressional committees, inequities in labor legislation, the mishandling of anti-poverty and welfare funds and the absence of democratic process on the local level." The call for the event was addressed to those who wished to "declare peace" and its signatories included several women associated with WSP: Donna Allen, Barbara Deming, and Norma Becker, a public schoolteacher who was a leading figure in New York City's antiwar circles. The organizers linked the denial of voting rights to blacks in the South to the fact that the war in Vietnam was "undeclared" and "all Americans are denied access to facts concerning the true military and political situation" there.¹

The conference, scheduled to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, also incorporated protest actions against the war at the White House and the Capitol. Although the organizers' intent was to

¹ "Call for an Assembly of Unrepresented People in Washington, D.C., August 6-9." Donna Allen Papers, Box 1 Folder 8, SHSW.

provide a forum for coalition-building among antiwar, civil rights, labor, and community activists, discussions of participants' shared interests took a backseat to arguments over competing priorities. Although civil rights activists, including representatives of SNCC and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party attended, they comprised a minority of the 2000 participants. Many of the workshops devolved into "arguments about emphasis and multi-issuism, the cultural and 'intellectual' barriers between white student antiwar activists and black civil rights workers, and interracial tensions," according to white antiracist activist Anne Braden. She concluded that "sitting down in the gates of the White House seemed more urgent" to many of the opponents of the Vietnam War than learning about and building long-term working relationships with the other attendees.² Taylor's recollections of the weekend support this view: she reported that the purpose of AUP's march on Congress "was to demonstrate that those legislators who supported and fed the war in Vietnam did not represent us—nor, we suspected, did they represent the majority of Americans."³

Taylor was among the conferees who marched to the Capitol, and she wore her usual picketing attire of "hat, gloves, and heels." Like most WSPers at that time, she believed that conventional dress and respectful interactions with politicians, the police, and the media were key to winning the hearts and minds of the majority of Americans. But this was not a WSP demonstration. Earlier in the week, on the floor of the House, Rep. Edwin E. Willis of Louisiana, the chair of HUAC at the time, warned his fellow legislators about the AUP, calling it a "highly disturbing movement. . . [that could] constitute a direct, conspiratorial challenge to our Government . . . border[ing] on a call

² Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 32-33.

³ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 33-34.

to sabotage.” The foundation for Willis’s accusations was the fact that AUP participants “refuse to cooperate with the U.S. government in the effort to save Vietnam from Communist enslavement.”⁴ Suspected saboteurs, however well-mannered and well-dressed, were not going to be allowed on Capitol grounds. A block away, the demonstrators were told, “Cross this street and you get arrested.”⁵ Taylor crossed the street and despite the conservative attire that the 49-year-old WSPer had thought “a real protection,” she was carted to jail in a police van. Upon arrival, Taylor waited quietly for an officer to come and help her negotiate the four-foot drop to the street. “A policeman came back to see what the hold-up was. I put out my gloved hand, but he had no intention of wasting chivalry on a criminal. He looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘Jump, sister!’ ” Taylor jumped.⁶

Taylor recalled later that at that moment she felt as if she were jumping into “an entirely new world.”⁷ This was true in terms of her own development as an activist and in regard to American society. As pacifist David Dellinger has argued, participating in civil disobedience and being arrested often has a transformative impact on an individual. “Something happens when people put their bodies on the line, or when they get arrested,” he said. “There’s a certain invisible barrier, psychologically, which is crossed, and things happen differently.”⁸ Having managed to do the previously unthinkable, Dellinger claimed, strengthens one’s commitment and resolve. This appears to have been true in Taylor’s case. But her transformation was also linked to major changes in the political and social landscape in the years since WSP was founded. President Kennedy had been

⁴ Congressional Record—House, Aug. 4, 1965, 18709.

⁵ Taylor in Adams, 12.

⁶ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 34.

⁷ Taylor in Adams, 12.

⁸ Dellinger quoted in Wells, *The War Within*, 176.

assassinated, the Vietnam War had escalated and opposition to it was gradually expanding, the civil rights movement had begun to be transformed by calls for “black power,” and Berkeley students had defied the university president, the local police, and the governor of California in pursuit of free speech. Public demonstrations were becoming more common. On one hand, a sense of “safety in numbers” made “taking it to the streets” more comfortable for many aggrieved citizens than when WSP held its first demonstrations; on the other, as the number of protesters and protest actions increased, politicians and police officers found them more threatening.

In response to increasing militance on the part of social activists and harsher reprisals from the authorities, WSPers like Taylor attempted to perform a difficult balancing act: to espouse militant views without alienating the mainstream; to march with hippies and yippies, while continuing to wear high heels; to put the privileges accorded to them as white, middle-class women to work on behalf of the disenfranchised. They used their respectability, their contacts, and their financial resources to support and attempt to protect draft resisters, women on welfare, and suffering children in both the U.S. and Vietnam. But the more WSPers allied themselves with those who could not rely on the protection of white skin and white gloves, or who rejected the trappings of middle-class respectability, the less effective those protections became for the WSPers themselves.⁹

The growing anger and frustration of young, initially idealistic, antiwar protesters in the face of the war’s escalation and their inability to stop it has been well documented, culminating in a declension narrative of a “good” sixties activism—a racially integrated, mixed gender movement committed to nonviolent protest—that devolved into a “bad”

⁹ I began developing this argument in my article, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and ‘the Movement’, 1967-73” in Stephanie Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second Wave Feminism in the U.S.* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 84-112.

sixties politics of rage, violence, and racial and gender separatism. WSPers too saw their politics transformed by anger and frustration, but because their increasing militance never (d)evolved into violence, their radicalization during the mid- to late-sixties has gone largely unremarked. In the annals of the antiwar movement, they are consistently described as “liberal,” in spite of their numerous acts of civil disobedience (which ranged from trespass to resisting arrest to tax refusal), active support of draft resistance, and travel to North Vietnam in violation of federal law.¹⁰ And, at a time when many white Americans were losing sympathy for the civil rights movement, “black power,” and the War on Poverty, Women Strike for Peace made support for those causes a priority on par with its anti-war work. They became less obsessed with projecting a matronly image—more and more of them leaving the hats and gloves at home and exchanging their knee-length dresses for mini-skirts and even slacks. But, somewhat ironically, their use of maternalist rhetoric expanded and intensified. WSP continued to identify itself as a mothers’ movement and used that identity to reach out to African American women raising their children on welfare and Vietnamese women whose children had been killed or injured by American bombs. Most of all they used it on behalf of the young American men who were about to be drafted or were refusing to serve; the ones who were already fighting or serving jail sentences for resisting; the ones who had already died in a war the women believed was unnecessary and unjust and, yes, even un-American.

¹⁰ Leaders of the antiwar movement were divided over the value and effectiveness of violent and/or disruptive behavior as acts of protest. But the view that those kinds of actions were more “radical” than more peaceful and staid demonstrations was fairly widely held during the late sixties. Sidney Peck, an organizer of some of the major, national anti-war demonstrations in Washington said, “One of the great political fallacies of the movement is to make a direct association between the choice of tactics and the degree of radical commitment to end the war and change the system.” Quoted in Wells, *The War Within*, 215.

“Not My Sons, Not Your Sons, Not Their Sons,” a popular WSP slogan during the Vietnam years, was powerful rhetoric, but it was more than that—many WSPers meant it quite literally. They had sons who had, or would, or could die in Vietnam. They didn’t want those sons to die but neither did they want those sons to kill. These women, who had protested the making and selling of toy guns were not going to stand silent while actual weapons were placed in the hands of young American men. As they had in their anti-nuclear campaign, they argued that they had a responsibility, as mothers, to protect their—and the world’s—children. A significant number of WSPers were in fact the mothers of draftees, soldiers, and resisters and this gave them special insights into the horrors of war and the inequities that plagued the Selective Service system. For the many that joined WSP during this period, having a draft-age son was in and of itself a radicalizing experience. For others it was receiving letters from Vietnam, attending draft board hearings, or visiting federal prisons that pushed them to new levels of militancy.

Although the women’s increased involvement in civil disobedience seemed to fly in the face of earlier efforts to avoid alienating their peers, it coexisted for many WSPers with their sense of themselves as caretakers and protectors—of the younger generation, the less fortunate, and the natural world. The women’s antiwar work was multi-faceted: they organized and participated in protest actions; supported the actions of other opponents of the war, especially draft resisters; aided Vietnamese victims of the war, especially children; and served as bridges between mainstream Americans and both the antiwar movement and the Vietnamese. They supported peace candidates, lobbied Congress and the White House, and distributed information and analysis to the public by producing and distributing leaflets, placing ads in newspapers and on billboards, writing

letters to the editors of local and national publications, appearing on radio and television broadcasts, and sponsoring public events including lectures, panel discussions, and film screenings. WSP also participated in the major national coalitions and demonstrations focused on ending the bombing and bringing American troops and advisers home. But most of their direct action was focused on two specific issues that enabled them to continue marshalling maternalist rhetoric and mobilizing housewives and mothers, even as their positions and style of protest became more radical: napalm and the draft.

The way WSPers combined the roles of activist and caretaker first became apparent in Northern California in 1966, when a coalition of local peace groups attempted to prevent the storage and shipment of napalm in their region. A round-the-clock vigil was organized in an attempt to prevent trucks from transporting the “particularly horrible”¹¹ weapon—a flammable gel that stuck to and burned human flesh—to barges at the Port Chicago naval base, its last stop before Vietnam. Hazel Grossman reported in *Memo* that members of the San Francisco and Berkeley chapters of Women for Peace had “brought cooked meals to the vigilers and stood their turn in the line” in spite of harassment from “loud-mouthed counter-vigilers.”¹² Grossman proudly pointed out that, six weeks into the action, almost half of those arrested for their participation had been women and that WFP had been singled out for praise by the lead organizer of the protests for having “provided the greatest support among peace organizations in the Bay Area.”¹³ In addition to their direct involvement in the vigil, the women also served as publicists, handing out literature to “women in shopping centers—telling them about the horrors of napalm,” explaining the goals of the vigil, and mobilizing shoppers to boycott Saran

¹¹ Donna Allen, quoted in Wells, *The War Within*, 84.

¹² Hazel Grossman, “Vigil to Stop Bombs and Napalm,” *Memo* vol.5, no.2 (September 1966), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Wrap. The plastic wrap, like napalm, was manufactured by Dow Chemical and the women played a key role in educating consumers about the link. “What makes [Saran Wrap] stick to food is what makes [napalm] stick to babies,” explained Cora Weiss.¹⁴ This vivid connection between a useful but benign household item and what WSPers considered a particularly cruel weapon was an effective way to get housewives to think about Vietnam and feel a degree of responsibility for U.S. actions there. The anti-napalm campaign also exemplified WSP’s big tent strategy—enabling women from a range of political beliefs, levels of commitment, and comfort zones to feel welcome within the group, necessary to advancing its general mission, and integral to every success. As Grossman pointed out, “Not everybody can leave their families and be arrested or even spend hours cooking and bringing food to places like Port Chicago, but they can inform the public of why people in the peace movement feel they must place their bodies in front of napalm trucks.”¹⁵

Their concern with the impact of napalm and phosphorous bombs on Vietnamese civilians, particularly children, led a number of WSPers to work with the Committee of Responsibility (COR), a group of doctors, clergyman, and concerned citizens that was established in 1966 to bring Vietnamese children injured by warfare to the United States for medical treatments unavailable in Vietnam. Madeline Duckles, a WSP leader in San Francisco also served as the Northern California chair of COR. “We had two goals,” Duckles said of COR. “One was to save as many children as we could. The other was to

¹⁴ Quoted in Wells, 85.

¹⁵ Grossman, “Vigil,” 14. WSPers around the country participated in the anti-napalm campaign and Dow boycott. See, for example, Douglas Robinson, “Dow Chemical Office Picketed for its Manufacture of Napalm,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1966, 2.

try to show the American people what the war was like.”¹⁶ As many WSP projects did, COR began by eliciting maternal and humanitarian concern for children, mobilizing those who were touched by the suffering of innocents to help. Once people were concerned with the impact of the war on children, activists like Duckles set out to build opposition to the war itself. “A great many people became involved initially for humanitarian reasons, for moral and ethical reasons, and many, many became politicized,” she said.¹⁷

The same multi-pronged approach used to oppose the use of napalm characterized WSP’s support of draft resistance and individual resisters. An organized movement to resist, undermine, and ultimately end the system by which American men were drafted into the military began to coalesce during the early months of 1967.¹⁸ In February, WSP linked the two issues in a demonstration at the Pentagon. The action was promoted as a “confrontation between the women of this country and the generals who send our sons to Vietnam.”¹⁹ A full-page ad in the *New York Times* inviting women to participate in the protest featured a large photograph of a keening Vietnamese woman cradling a bleeding toddler over the phrase, “Sorry About That.” The text of the ad read, in part:

What did we bomb today in Vietnam?

¹⁶ Quoted in Adams, *Peacework*, 161.

¹⁷ Ibid., 162.

¹⁸ Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 16. The key scholarly works on the draft resistance movement are Foley and Barrie Thorne, *Resisting the Draft*. Important contemporary and personal accounts include Michael Ferber and Staughton Lynd, *The Resistance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), Alice Lynd, ed. *We Won’t Go: Personal Accounts of War Objectors* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1968), Sherry Gershon Gottlieb, *Hell No We Won’t Go: Resisting the Draft During the Vietnam War* (New York: Viking, 1991), Jerry Elmer, *A Felon for Peace: The Memoir of a Vietnam-Era Draft Resister* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005). For women’s experiences and the problem of sexism, see also, Amy Swerdlow, “‘Not My Son, Not Your Son, Not Their Sons’: Mothers Against the Draft for Vietnam,” in Barbara L. Tischler, ed., *Sights on the Sixties* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 163-176; Dana Densmore, “A Year of Living Dangerously: 1968” in Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Snitow, *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, 71-89, Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, chapters 7 and 8.

¹⁹ “Pentagon Is Stormed by 2500 Women,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1967, 4.

A super-highway full of armored trucks?
 No, a narrow village road full of bicycles.
 Wiped out the village?
 Sorry about that.
 Was it the headquarters of the high command?
 Well, it was a two-story building. . . looked important.
 Oh, was it a schoolhouse?
 Sorry about that.²⁰

The text written in the voice of “the generals” captures WSP’s empathy for the Vietnamese and disgust at the actions of its own government. “We women,” it continues, “are more than ‘sorry.’ We will act to bring this barbarous war to an end.” They would demand that the government “stop appropriating our taxes for burning children and bombing villages” and “drafting our sons to kill and be killed.” The final line of the ad echoes the call for the original 1961 “strike for peace,” asking women to “Take one day from work—take one day from your children” in order to go to Washington to demonstrate and lobby.²¹

For weeks leading up to the February 15 action, WSPers attempted to get a meeting with Defense Secretary McNamara and were consistently refused. When between 2500 and 3000 women arrived at the Pentagon, they gathered under his office window, demanding to be heard. Initially, the demonstration followed a standard script: the women marched back and forth in front of one of the building’s entrances, waving signs that featured photographs of children burned by napalm and chanting, “Don’t Draft Our Sons to Burn and Destroy” and “Drop Rusk and McNamara, Not the Bomb.” According to *Memo*, the women were “jeered and laughed at by Pentagon employees and

²⁰ Women Strike for Peace, Display Ad Untitled, *New York Times*, January 27, 1967, 8.

²¹ Ibid.

unable to speak to anyone in authority”²² although some participants reported that while secretaries “giggled” at the scene, the men in uniform “just stared.”²³

Eventually, the WSPers stopped marching and stood before the entrance in a kind of face off with Pentagon personnel “gathered three deep,” before them. The women began shouting, “shame, shame, shame” at the officials²⁴ as an expression of “their indignation and revulsion at what this building represented and the people in it.”²⁵ Then, a group who had made it onto the stairs leading into the building decided to go in and demand that a Pentagon official meet with them. They “beckoned for others to follow”²⁶ and, according to newspaper accounts “stormed” the massive headquarters of U.S. military might.²⁷ When the women tried to push their way past the Pentagon police

²² “Pentagon Confrontation Generates Deeper Antiwar Momentum,” *Memo*, February 1967, vol. 5, no. 6, 5-6. It should be noted that the WSP action preceded a much more storied antiwar demonstration at the Pentagon later the same year. In October 1967, a much larger and more diverse gathering—including Yippies who attempted to levitate the building, pacifists who performed acts of civil disobedience, young women who stuck flowers in the rifles of National Guardsmen and asked them to “join us.” Tens of thousands of people participated—as many as 200,000 according to some accounts—and 683 people, including a number of WSPers, Dagmar Wilson among them, were arrested. Norman Mailer’s book-length account of the event, *The Armies of the Night*, won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. (Mailer was also among the arrested. Many saw this demonstration as a turning point in the antiwar movement—because of its size, because of the harsh reprisals suffered by participants, and because it was seen as something new: “the people confronting the military establishment,” as organizer Sidney Peck put it—as opposed to their elected officials. No one acknowledged that the latter had already been done by WSP, albeit on a smaller scale. See Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History*. (New York: Plume, 1968/1994). Peck quoted in Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 142.

²³ VOW-NE, “Report: Washington Trip—Feb. 15, 1967.” VOW-NE Papers, Box 1 Folder 27, SC.

²⁴ Letter from Rohna Shoul to Robert Caulfield, Director of the 24th Hour, WHDH-TV Boston, February 19, 1967. VOW-NE Papers, Box 1, Folder 38, SC.

²⁵ VOW-NE, “Report: Washington Trip.”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See, for example, “Pentagon Is Stormed by 2500 Women,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1967, 4; “Pentagon Bars Viet Picketers,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 16, 1967, A5; and Jean M. White, “2500 Women Protest Viet War at Pentagon,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 1967, 19. The media made WSP appear to be a more daunting opponent than the Vietnamese: depending on the account, the Pentagon was described as having been “invaded,” “besieged,” “charged,” or “stormed” by what the *Los Angeles Times* described as a “shopping bag brigade of women.” Many of the women were carrying shopping bags that read “Mothers Say Stop the War in Vietnam.” Although the action was largely framed as a protest by mothers, a number of younger women, including a delegation from Vassar College and a “mini-skirted woman of 18” were observed or interviewed by the authors of the articles above.

officers guarding the doors, they were locked out.²⁸ Those at the front of the line responded by taking their shoes off and pounding on the doors to vent their anger and frustration at not being heard. A dramatic act under any circumstances, the shoe-pounding would have been an especially resonant expression of defiance at the time, just a few years after Khrushchev's infamous (and perhaps apocryphal) banging of his shoe in response to criticism of the Soviet Union at the United Nations.²⁹ Half an hour later, the doors were re-opened on McNamara's order—whether this was a response to the shoe-banging, the women's refusal to leave in spite of the locked doors, or embarrassment at having the Pentagon's "open door policy" give way in the face of a few thousand women armed only with shoes and shopping bags is unclear. McNamara still refused to meet with the women himself but sent his assistant secretary for manpower to meet with a small group of WSPers in his stead. The delegation included the sister of an imprisoned draft resister and the mother of a marine who was killed while serving in Vietnam. Their testimony regarding the toll the war was taking on their families brought their sister WSPers to tears but appeared to have little impact on the Pentagon official in the room. His only response, they said, was "to observe coolly that our men were the best trained

²⁸ The decision to lock the doors was made by a guard, not a Pentagon official. Different accounts of the event offer different explanations for the lockout: 1) fear that the women would get hurt in the crush; 2) to prevent the women from demonstrating inside the Pentagon building, which was against Pentagon regulations; or 3) fear that the thirty guards on duty would be overwhelmed by the thousands of women. Although it was reported that some of the demonstrators snuck in a side door, leaving peace messages scrawled in lipstick on bathroom mirrors as evidence, the graffiti may have been produced by WSPers who went into the building to use the bathroom before the doors were locked. This possibility is suggested by the report of VOW-NE which stated that at the beginning of the demonstration, the Pentagon police were "extremely courteous in making suggestions—where to stand, where the restrooms were, etc. VOW-NE, "Report: Washington Trip."

²⁹ Although widely believed then and now, interviews with eyewitnesses of the Khrushchev incident have turned up differing and even contradictory accounts of what took place. Some say he banged his shoe, some say he took it off and brandished it, some say he didn't even take it off. The different versions of the story are recounted in William Taubman, "Did He Bang It? Nikita Khrushchev and the Shoe." *New York Times*, July 26, 2003. (Last accessed February 17, 2011.) http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/26/opinion/26iht-edtaubman_ed3.html.

and best equipped men of any war.”³⁰ The range of reactions they received over the course of their afternoon at the Pentagon—from giggles to blank-faced stares, from locked doors to the cool (and seemingly clueless) rationalizations of technocrats—reinforced WSP’s perception of the nation’s military leaders as impervious to the human cost of war as well as to the degree of passion and commitment felt by the growing community of antiwar activists.

A new expression of that passionate commitment—an organized movement of draft “resisters” and their supporters—was brought to public attention in April by actions in New York, Boston, and Northern California.³¹ On April 15, during the Spring Mobilization against the War, a national day of protest that saw tens of thousands of people participating in demonstrations on the East and West coasts,³² a group of 170 men, most of them Cornell University students, burned their draft cards during a rally in New York’s Central Park. That same day, a full page ad under the heading, “We Won’t Go,” with eighty-six signatures, ran in Harvard’s student newspaper, the *Crimson*. Earlier that month, a group of California men, calling themselves “The Resistance,” distributed a flyer in which they declared the war in Vietnam, “criminal” and argued that “to cooperate with conscription is to perpetuate its existence, without which the government could not

³⁰ “Pentagon Confrontation,” *Memo*.

³¹ Unlike draft “dodgers,” who fled the country, went underground, or sought deferments or classifications within the Selective Service System that postponed or eliminated the likelihood that they would be called to serve; or conscientious objectors, who refused military service based on pacifist beliefs but accepted assignments to alternative forms of community service; “resisters” practiced civil disobedience to express their opposition to the war in Vietnam and/or the government’s use of conscription. Like civil rights activists who defied the laws of segregation with the goal of ending the Jim Crow system of “separate but equal,” the resisters’ refused to serve, thereby courting arrest and imprisonment, with the ultimate aim of ending the draft and the war. Pro-war “hawks” tended to conflate these different categories, considering all those who refused or avoided the draft to be unpatriotic, “commies,” and “chickens”; antiwar activists tended to support all efforts to evade conscription but recognized that resisters had greater moral authority than “dodgers.”

³² WSP was one of the sponsors of “the Mobe” and Dagmar Wilson was the only female member of its steering committee, which was dominated by male “heavies” including pacifist leaders David Dellinger and A.J. Muste and civil rights leader Rev. Ralph Abernathy.

wage war.”³³ Strategically, their vision shared much with that of the WSPers who attempted to block napalm shipments. Both groups were trying to undermine the government’s ability to wage war by depriving it of needed materiel: bombs in the case of WSP; soldiers in the case of the Resistance. Michael S. Foley, a historian of the movement argues that draft resisters were “radicals, but . . . home-grown radicals who, despite their faults, represented long-standing American traditions of dissent.”³⁴ This description applies equally well to the members of WSP.

WSP began to focus attention on the draft as a specific issue of concern within the broader antiwar movement in March 1967.³⁵ That month’s issue of *Memo* featured a call from the New York affiliates to join them in organizing local campaigns to educate young men about the draft and their rights under the Selective Service System, while simultaneously attempting to build opposition to the draft and the war. For greatest impact, they would target this effort to the public schools. In many ways, this effort built on the group’s earlier experiences with protesting “duck and cover” drills. Relying upon their image as concerned mothers and their grassroots knowledge of what was and wasn’t being taught in local schools, as well as their contacts in PTAs, among teachers, and on local school boards, the women were able to frame the draft as an educational issue and offer a plan for a pedagogical response:

. . . good education in a democratic society requires that students be given both sides of controversial questions. . . before they are asked or required to serve in the army and kill in Vietnam, they should be apprised of the legal alternatives to conscription and to war. Since military recruitment takes place in the public high schools,

³³ Cornell was one of about two dozen campuses that had formed a “We Won’t Go” group during the 1966-67 academic year. Wells, *The War Within*, 124.

³⁴ Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 16.

³⁵ The National Council of SDS had adopted a resolution encouraging draft resistance in December 1966. Thorne, 55.

opportunities to pursue conscientious objection, and other legal alternatives to the draft, should be provided as well, to enable young men to make informed decisions on these life and death matters. As a background for these decisions, the public schools themselves have the major responsibility in a democratic society, for preparing pupils to discuss and understand non-military solutions to world problems, while their values and opinions are being formed. Therefore we are asking assemblies, films, required readings, literature dissemination, seminars for teachers, etc.³⁶

To guarantee that the message got out, the women were encouraged to organize “End the Draft” caravans to visit their local public high schools and distribute literature to students as they were entering and leaving the building.

With their use of the phrase, “End the Draft,” WSP had signed on to the resistance movement before resisters themselves made a public appeal for support.³⁷ Caravans were deployed in a number of cities, including New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. The experience was educational for the WSPers as well as the students. They attracted the most interest at vocational schools and schools with large black and Latino enrollments, where the majority of students did not expect to go to college and would thereby not be eligible for educational deferments. In New York, the women described turnout as “excellent” at two vocational schools but added that the students in a school with a middle-class, white enrollment were “uncooperative.” At one vocational school, the principal called the police to shut down the caravan and, while waiting for them to arrive, sent a teacher out to discourage students from talking to the WSPers because “they’ll just

³⁶ “Call for National Action on the Draft from New York WSP,” *Memo* March 1967 vol.5, no.7, 3.

³⁷ Throughout this chapter, I will make distinctions between different levels of participation in the draft resistance movement. I will apply the term “draft resister” only to those technically eligible to be drafted, i.e. young men. Members of draft resistance organizations, such as the Boston Draft Resistance Group, could be men or women of any age although the majority tended to be in their late teens and early twenties. I consider WSPers to be participants in the larger draft resistance movement which comprised antiwar and pacifist organizations, as well as individuals, who provided counseling and legal support, raised funds and provided material aid, demonstrated and performed acts of civil disobedience in opposition to the draft and in support of actual resisters.

get you into trouble and give the school a bad name.”³⁸ In Philadelphia, visits to four schools were cancelled “at the urgent request of principals who claimed that internal friction made such action potentially dangerous.”³⁹ The nature of that potential “friction” can be inferred from the experience of the Chicago caravan, where the “worst problem” faced was “harassment by students in some places.” Volunteers noted, “In a few of the all-white schools, the students attacked the people distributing leaflets. In some integrated schools we found the Negroes defended the teams against the harassment of the white students. In one of the Negro schools, they attacked the white members of the team but not the Negroes.”⁴⁰ That the conflicts they encountered were both political and racial in nature contributed to WSP’s emerging analysis of the war itself as racist, both because of its colonial nature and the disproportionate number of blacks and Latinos among American soldiers sent to the front. They also discovered that in spite of the fact that many of them were mothers of high schoolers themselves, WSPers were starting to be perceived as bad influences and outside agitators by some teachers and principals. Nevertheless, in the days following the caravans, the Chicago women discovered that “young men did call and visit the counselors they had recommended, confirming that the information they provided was needed and would have an impact. In conjunction with other resistance activists, WSPers around the country then organized a network of draft counseling centers and provided training for counselors.

Informing young men of their rights and potential options *vis-a-vis* the draft was a natural first step, but some WSPers were also interested in providing support for those who were choosing to refuse induction. In 1967, they wrote a “Women’s Statement of

³⁸ “Draft Caravans Visit City Schools,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1967, 9.

³⁹ “Anti-Draft Actions Increasing,” *Memo* May 1967, vol.5, no.9, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Conscience” that read, in part, “We believe that support of those who resist the draft is both moral and legal. We believe that it is not we, but those who send our sons to kill and be killed, who are committing crimes.”⁴¹ The implied critique of (male) military and government leaders and the explicit call that women, especially mothers, challenge their authority on behalf of their children, literal and figurative, echoes the group’s early antinuclear rhetoric. What is new is the specific focus on sons as the targets (or victims) of the draft and the implied acceptance of civil disobedience as a legitimate, indeed necessary, form of protest. The “Statement of Conscience” recognizes that in following this belief to its logical conclusion, the women might be risking arrest. If WSPers believed that the resisters “are courageous and morally justified in rejecting the war regardless of consequences,” they could “do no less.”⁴² At their annual conference that year, WSPers agreed that local affiliates should contact the Resistance groups in their communities to discuss how they could best contribute to the cause. Since antidraft activism was almost entirely local in nature and because the Boston area had one the largest (and most well-documented) local campaigns, it is instructive to look at the anti-draft activities of Voice of Women-New England (VOW-NE) to gain an understanding of what WSPers contributed to the movement and how they interacted with and supported draft resisters.

VOW-NE came together in much the same way as the founding group of WSPers in Washington, D.C., although their primary link was the Cambridge Quaker meeting, rather than SANE. The group was spearheaded by Elizabeth Boardman, a mother of five, whose political consciousness was raised during World War II, when her husband, a

⁴¹ “WSP Statement on Draft Resistance,” *Memo* February 12, 1968 vol.6 no.3, 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*

doctor and conscientious objector, was assigned to work in an internment camp in California. On the day that the news of the bombing of Hiroshima reached the camp, a Japanese nurse who had been helping Boardman care for her children confided that her children had been in Hiroshima, visiting their grandparents. “That was the end of their entire family in one blast,” Boardman recalled later. “That experience hit me hard and shaped a good deal of what I and my family have done since.”⁴³ Although in the popular imagination the Second World War is generally cast as the “good war,” in contrast to the “bad” Vietnam War, for many of those WSPers old enough to have been directly affected by it, World War II and its aftermath laid the foundation of their peace activism. They were outraged by the internment of Japanese Americans; one such woman, May Takayanagi, who later joined VOW, remembered being made to feel that “Pearl Harbor was all my fault.”⁴⁴ Their response to the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan was the same as their response to the Holocaust: “Never again.” From its first year, WSP participated in annual commemorations of the bombings of Japan, hoping to remind the American public of the human cost of atomic warfare.

The women were also deeply affected by the findings of the Nuremberg Trials and the role of the “good German” in enabling the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis. Louise Bruyn, a VOW-NE member who, like Boardman, was a Quaker, found it distressing that those Germans who didn’t do anything to resist Nazism “said either they didn’t know or they couldn’t do anything because of the kind of government they were living under.”⁴⁵ Later, she heard a speaker at a Vietnam teach-in say “that we [average

⁴³ Tom Long, “Obituary: Elizabeth Boardman,” *Boston Globe*, June 20, 1996.

⁴⁴ Shoul and Smith, “Newton Women Speak Out”

⁴⁵ Louise Bruyn, videotaped interview, 11/12/2001, VOW Oral History Project, SC.

Americans] were the ‘good Germans’ and we *were* and I didn’t want to be.”⁴⁶ Women like Bruyn, who went on to perform acts of civil disobedience, often cited “the Nuremberg principle of individual responsibility.” Beverly Farquharson, of San Jose, California, one of four “housewife terrorists” who were arrested when they sat down in front of a forklift in an attempt to physically block a shipment of napalm bombs from the Port of Santa Clara, said the women cited Nuremberg as the basis for their plea of “not guilty.” One of her co-defendants, Lisa Kalvelage, had grown up in Nazi Germany and emigrated to the U.S. as a war bride. “To get an exit visa to come to the U.S. to marry her soldier sweetheart,” Farquharson reported in *Memo*, “Kalvelage had to spend nine months convincing U.S. officials that she would oppose immoral acts of her government and she would never follow orders blindly again—although she was only a child and teenager during the war years.”⁴⁷ Kalvelage, who became a lifelong activist for peace and justice, took that pledge seriously and believed that Americans, in particular, should not rely on the kinds of excuses offered by German civilians for their complicity in the “final solution.” After becoming an American citizen, she said, “If you live in a democratic country where the government is you, you cannot say, ‘I followed orders.’ If you recognize that something is wrong, you have to speak out to set it straight.”⁴⁸ For

⁴⁶ Ibid. My italics.

⁴⁷ Beverly Farquharson, “The Housewife Terrorists,” *Memo* v.5 n.2 September 1966, 12. Tom Wicker of the *New York Times*, who had not yet come out against the war, later said that this anti-napalm protest “had a very profound impact on me” because the four housewives were “very ordinary women.” Quoted in Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America’s Hearts and Minds*. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2002), 44.

⁴⁸ Ellen Goodwin, “Activist’s March Against War Is Celebrated in Song,” *San Jose Mercury News*, May 24, 1986, 1C. Pete Seeger wrote a song in honor of Kalvelage from her point of view which includes the lines: “I also know what it is to be charged with mass guilt/Once in a lifetime is enough for me” and ends with Kalvelage telling her children that “they need not be silent/When they are asked, ‘Where was your mother, when. . . ?’” Pete Seeger, “My Name Is Lisa Kalvelage,” *Waist Deep in the Big Muddy and Other Love Songs*. (Sony Records, reissue 1994).

many WSPers, the use of napalm, which maimed and killed civilians, and the bombing of homes, schools, hospitals, and farmland, constituted war crimes and they refused to look the other way.

Women from Newton, a suburban town just outside Boston, started their own local chapter, just weeks after VOW-NE was founded. A number of them were married to research scientists, doctors, and public health professionals and so had access to expert knowledge of nuclear energy and its impact. VOW-Newton was founded, Louise Lown recalled, at a New Year's Eve party at her home "when everyone was talking about nuclear conflict."⁴⁹ Lown's husband Bernard, a cardiologist and the inventor of the defibrillator, had spent much of 1961 in a study group of medical professionals focused on understanding the impact of nuclear weapons and testing on human health.⁵⁰ This led him, at age 40, to embark on a second career: using the respect and recognition he received for his medical accomplishments as a platform from which to advocate against nuclear weapons. He became a founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility and then of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, a group that won the Noble Peace Prize in 1985. Peg McCarter's husband was a psychiatrist on the faculty of Harvard Medical School and knew one of the doctors who went to Japan to study the impact of the bombings on survivors.⁵¹ Several others were married to nuclear physicists whose work actually contributed to the development of the bomb.⁵² Because of their husbands' work, these women were unusually knowledgeable about the nuclear issue and

⁴⁹ Lown, VOW Oral History Project.

⁵⁰ This group published a series of ground-breaking articles on "The Medical Consequences of Nuclear War" in the spring of 1962. Bernard Lown, *Prescription for Survival: A Doctor's Journey to End Nuclear Madness* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishing, Inc., 2008), 13.

⁵¹ Quoted in Rohna Shoul and Anne Smith, *Newton Women Speak out for Peace* (videotape, n.d.), SC.

⁵² Lown, Shoul, and Stein, "A Tribute."

felt a heightened sense of responsibility for educating the public about it and preventing future catastrophes. There was also, perhaps, some guilt involved due to a sense of having benefitted from something that had been and continued to be so damaging to others. After Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* in 1971, his wife Patricia met with VOW to discuss “the problem of ‘careerism’ as it relates to war-making.” As Nancy Strong reported in the VOW-NE newsletter, the Ellsbergs were

painfully aware of the career satisfactions of working on sophisticated weaponry, of the comforts and prestige that accompany federal contracts, and of the ego gratification of exclusiveness—whether of getting information or giving counsel. Cocktails and station wagons . . . guava bombs and white phosphorous. *No one had to tell us—we were getting close to home.*⁵³

While women in this position did not reveal “secrets” like Ellsberg, they did use the special insights they gained into advanced weaponry through their relationships with experts to raise public awareness about the physical and psychological damage they caused.

Louise Lown once remarked that she and her husband led parallel lives for much of their marriage: while he traveled around the world, educating and organizing doctors, she kept the home fires burning and educated and organized women in her local community.⁵⁴ Parallels could also be found in their motivations for founding PSR and VOW. In a memoir about his peace work, Bernard Lown wrote that he believed “when

⁵³ Nancy Strong, “Visit from Pat Ellsberg,” *VOW-NE Newsletter* March 1972, 6. My italics.

⁵⁴ Louise Lown, VOW Oral History Project. Bernard Lown also recognized the tandem nature of their work. His thinking about what needed to be done to prevent a nuclear holocaust was shaped by “witness[ing] the political power of mothers with baby carriages.” The struggle had “two essential faces,” he wrote, “reaching out to decision makers and . . . public activism.” He addressed the former and his wife, the latter, which he described as “indispensable.” Lown, *Prescription*, 291.

doctors take the solemn oath to preserve health and protect life, they assume responsibility for the well-being of the human family.” For years, he had spent “every waking moment [trying] to contain the problem of sudden cardiac death, a condition that claimed an American life every ninety seconds.” Then, in 1961, “it dawned on me that the greatest threat to human survival was not cardiac but nuclear.”⁵⁵ Like many of the mothers in WSP/VOW, who viewed peace activism as part of the job of caring for the next generation, Bernard Lown felt opposing nuclear weapons was a professional imperative for doctors.⁵⁶

Although motherhood was not the initial or sole motivation of the Massachusetts women who founded VOW, Elizabeth Boardman did believe that having children played an important part in their development as activists. “We did for our own and realized that other kids’ needs were just as important as ours,” she explained.⁵⁷ During the early sixties, Boardman and her friends were “mommies concerned about radioactivity in their children’s milk.”⁵⁸ Even before WSP was founded, some of the future VOWers participated in a mothers’ protest against the presence of strontium 90 in milk, marching “around Boston Common with their baby carriages.”⁵⁹ For the November 1 strike, a

⁵⁵Ibid., 7.

⁵⁶ These two parallel streams of antinuclear concern—the maternal and the medical—were directly linked by Dr. Helen Caldicott, who took the helm of PSR in the 1970s. From that post, she reached out to mothers as well as doctors, arguing that “Women have always been the nurturers. A mother will die to save her child’s life, and disarmament is the ultimate parenting issue. We have to fight to make this world safe for our children.” Quoted in Lown, *Prescription*, 63.

⁵⁷ Strong, “Pat Ellsberg.” This is similar to the trajectory of the Argentinean women of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo who began their protests as a group of individuals seeking information about their own children and developed into an organization with a broad human rights agenda that made a collective demand on behalf of the Argentinean people for the return of all those who had been “disappeared” by the military. Fisher, *Out of the Shadows*, 118.

⁵⁸ Lucy Caldwell-Stair, “Fifteenth Anniversary of VOW,” *Newton Times*, Dec. 15, 1976.

⁵⁹ Louise Lown, Rohna Shoul, and Kay Stein, “A Tribute to Newton Peace Groups and Individuals.” VOW-NE Papers, Box 1 (unprocessed), SC. Lown, who the others characterized as the “catalyst” behind VOW-Newton, recalled in an oral history that before the group was founded, a number of the women “tried to leaflet . . . to tell people about what was happening. Marched our baby carriages about the Common with

group of them marched to the Watertown Weapons Arsenal, where a nuclear reactor was used for atomic and molecular research during the 1960s.⁶⁰ Interested in developing an organizational identity, and unaware that WSP was about to become more than the sponsor of a one-time action, the Massachusetts women reached out to Voice of Women, a Canadian group with an American affiliate in Ohio.⁶¹ Organized in 1960, VOW's founding and mission were very similar to WSP's. It began when Lotta Dempsey, a contributor to the *Toronto Star*, wrote a column pondering what women could do about the threat of nuclear war and asking those who were ready to act to contact her. Dempsey was bombarded with letters and phone calls from across Canada; a small group then met to establish a national organization, Voice of Women for Peace.⁶² The group's mission was:

To provide a means for women to exercise responsibility for the promotion of world peace and justice, through education of themselves and others to take an equal part in the democratic process of decision making; and to cooperate with women throughout the world to create the mutual respect and understanding necessary for the peaceful resolution of international conflict.⁶³

A representative of VOW-NE attended the first national WSP conference in 1962 and functioned as a local affiliate in all but name from then on. But, because they had come together both before and independently of WSP, the Massachusetts women kept their

signs, appealed to our Congress people to do something about it." Lown, interviewed on videotape, n.d. VOW Oral History Project, SC.

⁶⁰ "Army Materials Technology Laboratory (MTL) Watertown Arsenal," Global Security.org. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/watertown.htm> last accessed February 25, 2011.

⁶¹ VOW-NE was founded on November 25, 1961, at a meeting in Cambridge of women representing 15 communities in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Newton group was formed on January 19, 1962. Vow-Newton/Brookline and Friends Newsletter 1962, VOW-NE Papers, Box 1 Folder 19, SC.

⁶² "About VOW," Canadian Voice of Women for Peace website. <http://vowpeace.org/cms/About.aspx> last accessed February 25, 2011. For more about the work of Canadian VOW, see Frances Early, "'A Grandly Subversive Time': The Halifax Branch of the Voice of Women in the 1960s," in Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford, *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work, and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 253-280.

⁶³ "About VOW."

original name and regularly revisited the question of whether or not they were part of the U.S. group. They described themselves as “affiliated with WSP,” but continued to call themselves VOW-NE, even after VOW-USA disbanded in 1963.⁶⁴

The VOW women, particularly the Newton group, were not just middle-class, but upper middle-class. Their husbands were, for the most part, doctors, lawyers, academics, and businessmen. The women themselves had professional backgrounds—advanced degrees and work experience, primarily in the fields of education and social work. Unlike some fifties career women, the VOWers did not downplay these accomplishments; they celebrated them as an asset. One of their early projects, “Peace is Woman Talk,” sent members to speak on the nuclear issue before local community groups. The women’s biographies on the brochure advertising the program discussed their educational and career achievements as well as their families. Of the seven women mentioned, all were college graduates, five had masters’ degrees, one had a Ph.D. and another was working on her doctorate. Given these backgrounds, Rohna Shoul, who continued to work part-time on-and-off while her children were growing up, became frustrated with the media’s almost exclusive focus on what she called the “housewife angle,” when they covered WSP. As she wrote to the news director of a local television station in 1967, “It always seems more colorful to picture women who participate in this type of movement as well-meaning housewives who drop the dishes, babies, aprons, kiss their husbands and go forth to demonstrate. Although many of us do the above, along with this domestic-paraphernalia are left half-written books, unfinished theses, suspended careers, and a

⁶⁴ A reading of VOW-NE’s newsletters and minutes indicates that its relationship to national WSP paralleled that of other local WSP groups around the country, including regular financial contributions to support the national office and publication of *Memo*.

variety of professional ambitions.”⁶⁵ Anita Greenbaum, who was active in local Democratic Party politics as well as VOW, agreed that “volunteering wasn’t enough” for most of the women. When they found themselves unable to juggle career and family life, largely due to the fact that the Newton schools had frequent half-days and no after-school programs and sent children home for lunch, they found other ways to keep themselves busy and challenge themselves intellectually. For many, this started with the P.T.A. and the League of Women Voters; Shoul declared the latter “a haven for so many women who needed the intellectual stimulation they weren’t getting just staying home with their children” and “very sustaining for me.”⁶⁶ The gendered division of labor in their households gave them an opportunity to turn lemons into lemonade. Louise Lown believed that because “men dominated” existing political organizations, women needed “a voice of their own.” At the same time, “we felt we could appeal to the nurturing qualities of women in protecting their children.”⁶⁷

VOW-Newton was born at the intersection of a nascent feminist frustration with the limitations of full-time motherhood and the recognition that the role of “mother,” whatever its limitations, was an effective vehicle to mobilize women into opposing nuclear weapons and, later, the war in Vietnam. “We felt we could appeal to the nurturing qualities of women in protecting their children,” Lown said. And the fact that so many of them did not have jobs outside the home meant they had the time to respond to that appeal not only emotionally but with sustained action. Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique*, argued that the antidote to the housewife’s “problem that had no name,” was “a

⁶⁵ Letter from Rohna Shoul to Robert Caulfield, Director of *The 24th Hour*, WHDH-TV Boston, February 19, 1967. VOW-NE Papers, Box 1, Folder 38, SC.

⁶⁶ Rohna Shoul, videotaped interview, January 30, 2002, VOW Oral History Project, SC.

⁶⁷ Lown quoted in *Newton Women Speak out for Peace* (videotape), VOW Oral History Project, SC.

job that she can take seriously as part of a life plan, work in which she can grow as part of society.”⁶⁸ Although she initially used the word “job,” she added that what she really meant was meaningful work, whether paid or unpaid, “the lifelong commitment to an art or science, to politics or profession.”⁶⁹ For the Newton women, VOW played this role in their lives—it was challenging, fulfilling, and left them with a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.⁷⁰ Although many of the women “put in full-time almost,”⁷¹ in terms of the number of hours they devoted to their peace work, their “activist careers” were flexible enough to enable them to care for their children.⁷² Even more important, perhaps, it provided them with a community that supported and enabled both their mother-housewife role and their political engagement. As Lown explained, “We could count on each other to attend meetings, raise funds, prepare potluck suppers, share babysitters.”⁷³ Like the Ann Arbor group, and unlike the national WSP, the Massachusetts women had no problem, even in the early years, of working on local issues that they believed were compatible with, if not directly connected to, the antinuclear campaign. In Newton, VOW was involved in everything: the electoral campaigns of progressive candidates from H. Stuart Hughes in 1962 to Barney Frank in 1976; the founding of an alternative community newspaper in 1971; the opening of a non-profit “store,” known as the “Peace Boutique,” that sold politically correct merchandise (with

⁶⁸ Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 345.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁷⁰ Friedan noted that a true vocation, as opposed to a job, was not linked to a specific institution or locale or could be pursued in a variety of ways depending on one’s life circumstances: through paid labor, study, or volunteerism, full-time or part-time. This was true of many of the VOW women who carried their interests and skills back and forth between paid labor and voluntary activism.

⁷¹ Shoul, VOW Oral History Project.

⁷² Rhoda Lois Blumberg argues that social activism can play the role of a career in women’s lives and one that women can accommodate comfortably along with a “domestic career” as mother and housewife. Blumberg, “White Mothers as Civil Rights Activists.”

⁷³ Lown, VOW Oral History Project.

all proceeds donated to antiwar and civil rights projects) and provided a meeting place for like-minded souls across boundaries of gender and generation.

VOW-NE's involvement in the antidraft movement began, as it did for most "peace ladies" in 1967. A nationally coordinated campaign, called "Stop the Draft Week," was scheduled for October 16-20. In Boston, a rally against the draft on the Common attracted about 5,000 people, including members of VOW. After the speeches, the crowd marched to the Arlington Street Church, where almost 300 resisters either turned in or burned their draft cards.⁷⁴ Alice Aronow, the mother of a draft-age son, and others engaged hecklers in discussion of the issue, which "ameliorated" tensions between pro- and anti-war demonstrators.⁷⁵ As historian Michael S. Foley has pointed out, "the battle over citizenship and patriotism" that was foundational to political debates during the 1960s was especially intense when it came to the issue of the draft.⁷⁶ WSP/VOW, from its inception, promoted the belief that dissent was an act of patriotism. The "not in my name" sensibility that they associated with the Nuremberg findings further contributed to their willingness to challenge the government's Vietnam policy, to the point of supporting young men who were breaking the law. But, at the same time, the women saw part of their role *within* the antiwar movement as bridging the gulf between the committed and the unconverted, by attempting to keep lines of communication open with those who were on the other side and, especially, those who had not committed to a position. As they had with the issue of nuclear weaponry, they tried to convince and

⁷⁴ One woman, Nan Stone of New England Resistance, participated by burning the draft card of a male comrade. Foley points out that the male members of the group did not consider her a true "resister" because she could not be drafted, even though she had broken the Selective Service law, making herself subject to arrest. It was not until the FBI showed interest in questioning Stone that she was added to their master list of resisters. Foley, 122.

⁷⁵ "Minutes, VOW-NE Meeting, November 1, 1967," 2.

⁷⁶ Foley, 14.

convert, to bring new people into their camp. When it came to the draft, the older women went a step farther—attempting to defend and protect resisters and their supporters in the face of verbal and physical harassment and police brutality.

Women like Aronow took it upon themselves to explain to other adults that not only “hippies” and “freaks” opposed the war and that refusing the draft was neither unpatriotic nor cowardly, as pro-war advocates contended. While some VOW women participated in acts of civil disobedience themselves, others attended actions to serve as witnesses—speaking out and interfering when protestors were attacked, mistreated, or misrepresented. They took responsibility for communicating their version of events to their VOW sisters at meetings and in newsletters and to the larger community in interviews and letters to media outlets. Regarding October 16, for example, Jean Davis reported that participants experienced a shared sense of “sincere commitment, solemnity, and depth of feeling,” something that went unremarked in the mainstream media.⁷⁷

That the event received tremendous press coverage for a demonstration of its size, and put Boston on the national radar as a hotbed of resistance activism, was not due to VOW’s involvement, but rather the participation of a group of supportive older men of relative renown. These included a number of Harvard and M.I.T. professors and several New England ministers, most notably the outspoken Yale University chaplain, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin. Coffin himself had called NBC to frame the action as an event worthy of national attention. While his participation moved the NBC news anchor John Chancellor to comment that, “If men like this are beginning to say things like this, I guess we had all better start paying attention,” local Boston coverage cast a critical eye on the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1. At the following meeting, several women volunteered to serve as a “mother’s brigade” to “lend protection to demonstrators in danger of being beaten by hecklers, talk to hecklers and police in an effort to diffuse potentially violent confrontations.” Minutes, VOW-NE Meeting, December 6, 1967, 3.

burning of draft cards in one of the city's historic places.⁷⁸ Coffin and others, including baby expert Dr. Benjamin Spock, subsequently attempted to turn over the draft cards that had not been burned to an official of the Justice Department and spoke about it at the mass demonstration at the Pentagon on October 21. Draft refusal was grounded in strategic as well as moral principles—organizers believed that if enough men refused induction “an endless series of prosecutions . . . would swamp the tiny federal court system and undermine the Selective Service System.”⁷⁹ Although resisters argued that they were right to refuse to participate in what they considered to be an unjust draft system and an illegal and immoral war, they wanted to be indicted and prosecuted—that is why they turned in or burned their draft cards during public ceremonies before large numbers of witnesses. But, to Coffin's frustration, Assistant Deputy Attorney General John McDonagh refused to accept the briefcase containing the “evidence.” Coffin called him “derelict in his duty.” McDonagh later told reporters he had refused to accept the cards because the department did not want to create the impression that the resisters had “the right to turn these things back and in doing so to free themselves of the obligation of the draft.”⁸⁰ Coffin, Spock, Mitchell Goodman, Marcus Raskin, and Michael Ferber were eventually indicted on charges of conspiracy to violate federal draft law. The high-profile nature of the case of “the Boston Five, as they were known,” no doubt contributed to Boston becoming recognized as a key center of antidraft organizing—that, and the fact that Boston's many colleges and universities made it the home of thousands upon thousands of draft-age men.

⁷⁸ Warren Goldstein, *William Sloane Coffin Jr.: A Holy Impatience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 196-198.

⁷⁹ Foley, “Point of Ultimate Indignity,” 181.

⁸⁰ Goldstein, 200.

Boston also had two sometimes competing, sometimes cooperative anti-draft organizations: the Boston Draft Resistance Group (BDRG) and a local branch of the Resistance. The two groups differed in both style and substance. Members of BDRG saw themselves as grassroots organizers: “instead of aiming for dramatic confrontations that were sure to garner media (and government) attention,”⁸¹ they provided education and counseling, visited local draft boards to speak to draftees, and infiltrated pre-induction physicals to interrupt the disciplined and authoritative nature of military routine by “asking audacious, political questions, by making speeches and handing out leaflets, by refusing to obey instructions, by painting slogans and obscenities on their clothes and bodies.”⁸² For example, Alice Aronow’s son Victor, a resister and BDRG member, had reported for his physical with the words “Resist the Draft” written on both his undershirt and his chest.⁸³ The BDRG worked with those who were antiwar “out of self-interest,” as well as moral conviction, in the hope of broadening opposition to the war, especially in working-class and black and Latino neighborhoods. The Resistance, on the other hand, focused on encouraging and supporting draft refusal and ultimately “crippling the government’s ability to prosecute the war.”⁸⁴ Most members were resisters themselves and their participation in the group was, as Thorne describes it, “a full-time involvement and central identity for its members.”⁸⁵ If the Resistance had any “core activity” comparable to BDRG’s counseling sessions and draft board visits, it was “simply that members should be there, available for whatever crisis, event, or expedition, was at hand.

⁸¹ Foley, 50.

⁸² Thorne, 96.

⁸³ Aronow described these antics at a VOW-NE fundraiser for The Resistance and BDRG. “Supper Party for Resisters a Great Success,” *VOW-NE Newsletter* March 1968, p.3. BDRG’s comic yet defiant gestures echoed the spirit of Arlo Guthrie’s antidraft anthem, “Alice’s Restaurant.” (Reprise Records, 1967)

⁸⁴ Foley, 90.

⁸⁵ Thorne, 20.

Mass events, like draft card turn-ins, marches, and sanctuaries, required numbers and called for sheer physical presence.” The men of the Resistance considered themselves “brothers” and their office was a “crash pad,” where people slept and ate as well as worked. Thorne points out that there were cultural as well as political differences between the groups: the Resistance identified itself with the counterculture, wore their hair long and dressed flamboyantly, like hippies. BDRG members, because they wanted to organize people who did not necessarily see themselves as rebels, “tended to reject extreme hippie appearance and lifestyles as frivolous, indulgent, and isolating. The hair of male BDRG workers was relatively short and their dress tended to Levis and work shirts with little of the flair shown by some draft resisters.”⁸⁶

Although VOW-NE, like BDRG, was committed to reaching out to the non-converted, the women were becoming increasingly sympathetic to the use of civil disobedience as a vehicle for both expressing opposition to the war and for hampering the government’s ability to supply the necessary personnel and materiel to fight it. VOW’s first official contact with both groups was a meeting that member Hilda Schwartz had with their respective representatives in December to explore what kinds of support the women could offer the resisters. She reported that, “They outlined no very specific projects for VOW members, but generally they want: 1) active support in demonstrations, 2) a press release stating that VOW supports their movement, and 3) money.” Discussion ensued regarding whether the women could support the Resistance which Schwartz had described as “militant. . . their tactics are to disrupt by any means the work of the Selective Service.” Some members expressed concern about associating with protesters who performed “distasteful” acts, but others argued that “we should not refrain from

⁸⁶ Ibid., 83.

supporting the goals the resisters stand for just because of the poor judgment of a few.”⁸⁷

The VOWers were discovering, as Ethel Taylor had two years earlier, that it was no longer easy to commit fully to their antiwar beliefs while also maintaining the respectable image that had been both comfortable and successful for so long. The women adopted a compromise position on civil disobedience, which read: “VOW-NE never advocates, recommends nor encourages civil disobedience because we believe it to be a very serious act of individual conscience. We do, however, support those people, such as the draft resisters, who in their own conscience cannot take part in the Vietnam War.”⁸⁸ But, over time, a number of the women began to participate in acts of civil disobedience themselves.

As the Resistance and BDRG requested, VOW women attended demonstrations and donated funds, beginning with \$1000 raised at a dinner party for “middle-class types” in March 1968 that included home-cooked food, handmade decorations, and a performance of folk songs—all by VOW members. It also featured speeches by Michael Ferber of the Boston 5 and Victor Aronow. The evening provided an opportunity for “informal conversation between the draft resisters and their suburban supporters,” giving the older members of the audience a chance to gain insight into the day-to-day lives of the young men refusing induction. Victor Aronow described BDRG’s efforts to disrupt induction physicals, known as “Horror Shows,” and John Phillips discussed his experiences in prison for draft refusal.⁸⁹ For VOWers, the do-it-yourself nature of the event put both their political and housewifery skills on display and signaled that one

⁸⁷ “VOW-NE Minutes December 6, 1967,” 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁹ “Supper Party for Resisters a Great Success,” *VOW-NE Newsletter* March 1968, 3.

element of their support of the resistance movement was to provide “mothering” for the young men on the front lines.

Many resisters were alienated from their own families because of their politics, and were living a hand-to-mouth existence, working full-time for the cause while sleeping on floors, eating junk food, and harboring the knowledge that arrest and imprisonment could come at any time.⁹⁰ VOW was determined to support not only the cause, but “the boys,” by helping them find part-time jobs, cheap places to stay, and by preparing food for the Resistance’s Monday night dinners. As the newsletter reported, “A number of hard-working ‘full-time’ resisters have no parental support and small sources of income so that they really appreciate a good meal once a week.”⁹¹ Those meals, held in the basement of Arlington St. Church, the site of the October 1967 draft card turn-in, were part of New England Resistance’s effort to foster a sense of community and “brotherhood.” All resisters and supporters were invited and, “although the conversation almost always revolved around the war and protest against it, the event remained a social occasion where anyone might feel at home.”⁹²

But the dinners also became a sore point for many of the younger women in the movement who felt that the events forced them into traditional caretaking roles which they, unlike the older VOW women, had not signed on for. Dana Densmore, the daughter

⁹⁰ On the question of parental support or lack thereof, Foley writes, “Although parental reaction varied significantly from one resister to another, many resisters found themselves trying . . . to explain their actions to parents who either did not approve or did not understand. Some draft resisters did receive steady support from their parents, but others, hoping for comfort (if not validation) from their parents, found themselves confronted instead with ambivalence, disappointment, and sometimes hostility.” His survey of 310 BDRG and Resistance members found that 55 percent of their fathers as either disapproved or strongly disapproved of their resistance while 47 percent of their mothers disapproved, although none strongly disapproved. (163)

⁹¹ “VOW-NE Supports the New England Resistance,” *VOW-NE Newsletter* October 1968, 2.

⁹² Foley, 142.

of D.C. WSPer Donna Allen, who worked for a time with both the Resistance and BDRG, described the dinners as “exercises in self-laceration for the women. It went without saying that we cooked and cleaned up while the men bonded, strategized, and postured.”⁹³ Barrie Thorne wrote her doctoral dissertation on the Boston-area draft resistance movement from the perspective of a participant-observer in both the Resistance and BDRG. She noted that there was more of a gendered division of labor in the former than the latter, with women “generally in a secondary position, doing the ‘shitwork’ of typing in the office, ushering and hosting at draft card turn-ins, cooking the Monday night dinners.”⁹⁴ Significantly, neither Densmore nor Thorne (who were each present at a number of the dinners) nor Foley mention VOW’s involvement in preparing the meals or the presence of any of the older women at these events. But the dinners were mentioned regularly in VOW’s newsletter and minutes, as were the names of specific women who cooked for them.⁹⁵ There are at least three possible reasons for this erasure: one is the fact that the VOW women were not members of the Resistance organization per se, as some of the younger women were; a second is that the female respondents attended dinners that were not prepared by the VOW women; a third is that the dinners became such an important symbol of the younger women’s sense of “second class citizenship” within the antidraft movement that they were unwilling to acknowledge that not all women viewed them as such.

⁹³ Densmore, 73.

⁹⁴ Thorne, 361. In BDRG, women served as draft counselors and participated in protest actions as well as doing clerical tasks. The dynamic may have been different because not all of the men in BDRG were draft resisters themselves and hence did not necessarily share the sense of ownership of the movement and the degree of moral superiority that many Resistance men exhibited.

⁹⁵ See, for example, *VOW Annual Meeting Report*, May 22, 1968, 3; *VOW-NE Newsletter*, May-June 1968, 4; *VOW-NE Newsletter*, October 1968, 2. The VOW members most consistently named in relation to the Resistance dinners were Irene Johnson, Betty Woodman, and Dorothy Zeichner.

As Foley points out, the draft resistance movement “has long been perceived as the most exclusively male and one of the most sexist” of the 1960s. Participants in and historians of the women’s liberation movement have agreed with that characterization and argued that women’s sense of marginalization within that movement was a key motivator for the formation of autonomous women’s groups, beginning in 1967.⁹⁶ Because women could not be drafted, many male leaders of the movement felt that they were not entitled to an equal place at the table—it was men alone who had to make what could be a life-or-death decision regarding military service. It was men who faced futures in jail or in exile if they refused induction. So, it followed, women could not understand what was at stake and were not entitled to an equal role in leading the movement. The fact that women were deeply affected by the possible loss of husbands, sons, brothers, and lovers to death in combat, prison, or exile; could perform acts of civil disobedience in support of the movement which could lead to imprisonment; or could be forced to make other life-changing decisions or sacrifices in response to the draft status of the men in their lives was largely ignored. The older women of VOW/WSP were certainly motivated to take more radical stances and militant actions in opposition to the war because, in many cases, their own sons (and husbands/brothers/lovers) were at risk. Among the younger women, as Dana Densmore pointed out, even those who would not be going to jail faced having their lives “equally disrupted. We were preparing to go to Canada or Sweden with husbands who chose exile, preparing to postpone children or raise those we already had without the support of husbands who chose jail.”⁹⁷ Some women chose to help their husbands *avoid* getting drafted. Heather Booth, an activist in civil rights, New

⁹⁶ See Densmore, Echols, and Evans.

⁹⁷ Densmore, “Living Dangerously,” 73.

Left, and early women's liberation groups, married her husband Paul, an SDS leader, in 1967 and had their first child in 1968. At the time, Booth said, "my husband was going to be drafted, and there was going to be a punitive draft because he was an anti-war leader. One way to get out of the draft was to have a kid. We were only married three months before we had to face this decision--it's a pretty big decision." Booth recalls that period of her life as "a bit overwhelming. I was in school. I was in the Movement. I was working. We had no money."⁹⁸ Although she wanted to have children, she probably would not have gotten pregnant so early in her married life if it had not been the surest way to a draft deferral for her husband. So, although women did not generally face a "life or death" decision vis-à-vis the draft and the war, they did face jail, disruption of their lives and families, and loss of loved ones—events that would determine the trajectory of their lives long into the future.⁹⁹

Although Booth was a "founding mother" (or "founding sister") of the women's liberation movement in Chicago—as a member of the Westside Group, an early consciousness-raising group; the initiator of Jane, the abortion facilitator/provider; and a founder of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU)—she remained engaged in political work and personal relationships with men. Helping to keep her husband out of the military and out of jail was a high priority for Booth, as her decision regarding when to have her first child demonstrates. She worked in autonomous women's organizations and mixed gender groups and did not see marriage and motherhood as incompatible with

⁹⁸ CWLU Herstory Project. "Heather Booth: Living the Movement Life" edited by Gina Caneva from an interview conducted by Becky Kluchin. Last accessed February 15, 2011. <http://www.cwluherstory.org/heather-booth-living-the-movement-life.html>.

⁹⁹ The long-term impact of the war and its aftermath on American women is insightfully portrayed in Beverly Gologorsky's novel, *The Things We Do to Make it Home* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009).

feminist beliefs and activism.¹⁰⁰ Dana Densmore, on the other hand, followed a different path—towards separatism. After leaving the draft resistance movement, she helped start the Boston group, Cell 16, which was best known for promoting celibacy and self-defense training as keys to women’s independence and publishing the journal *No More Fun & Games*. Densmore wrote that women like her “became unable to ignore the contradictions between the assertions by their male comrades of belief in social justice and the men’s insistence that women occupy an inferior social caste.” But, unlike her, “most of these women [activists] maintained their allegiance to the [male-dominated] movements, seeking only greater equality within the organizations.” The women of Cell 16, on the other hand, insisted that “the women’s revolution was the first and only true revolution. Thus we withdrew our energies from other progressive movements, inviting the men to join us if they genuinely cared about social justice, but knowing it was we who would be the visionaries and leaders of that genuine revolution.”¹⁰¹

Densmore was correct in her analysis of the circumstances of women who stayed in groups like The Resistance and BDRG—they did have to devote a tremendous amount of time and energy to fighting for a position of equality within those organizations. In what Marian Mollin calls an “ironic historical twist,” men who rejected militarism and proclaimed that rejection not only with their words but with their personal style—long hair and loose, brightly colored, ragged clothing as opposed to crew cuts and well-cut, neatly pressed khaki uniforms—often felt a corresponding need to prove the masculine

¹⁰⁰ In an oral history interview, Booth recalled consulting friends from her women’s group about whether she should have a child given the likelihood of her husband being drafted otherwise. “They said, ‘Yes, you should really do this.’ And then when I had the baby, most of them just couldn’t deal,” Booth said. She added that, “The women’s movement really couldn’t absorb children at that point.” Quotes from “Heather Booth: Living the Movement.”

¹⁰¹ Densmore, 85.

nature of themselves and their cause. As Mollin writes of male radical pacifists during the post-World War II period, including Vietnam, “Male activists actively promoted a definition of pacifist action that equated political militancy with a rough and rugged style of heroic manhood. In their hands, political protest became a way to defend and define their masculinity—a kind of direct action identity politics disturbingly similar to that promoted by the culture of militarism, which identified self-sacrifice and courage as the primary markers of manly citizenship.”¹⁰² Women might perform acts of courage and self-sacrifice, but they could not enter the “band of brothers” whose members were united both by their non-cooperation with the draft and the need to prove that their refusal was not an act of cowardice and, therefore, “unmanly.” The WSP/VOW women, who had their own organizational base and a history of performing “femininity” in order to disarm their opponents and potential critics, while simultaneously demanding a place for women in the male-dominated world of international relations, were likely to have found the internal contradictions that Mollin points out understandable. But for women like Densmore, who were promoting feminism by calling attention to the socially constructed nature of gender roles, any activities that shored up traditional notions of masculinity and femininity were anathema.¹⁰³

Women who continued working with male resisters could agree with Densmore about one thing: to be taken seriously by the men and have an influence on policy decisions within anti-draft organizations was a “continual struggle,” according to Nan

¹⁰² Marian Mollin, *Radical Pacifism in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁰³ The importance, to male radicals, of claiming masculinity and its privileges even as they critiqued other hierarchies of power was evident in the most militant Movement organizations of the 1960s and ‘70s including SDS, Weatherman, and the Black Panthers.

Stone of New England Resistance.¹⁰⁴ Ellen DuBois, a draft counselor for BDRG, believed that a few women within the group had significant responsibility and influence, but were kept from “advancing beyond a certain point. . . . There was something wrong at the top.”¹⁰⁵ Given that these groups had been founded by and for men, it was nearly impossible for women to achieve positions of true leadership. As Evie Goldfield said during a 1969 conference, “the decision of How Will I Respond to the Draft is not one that women can make. By the nature of the draft issue, women can only be supportive—they don’t have to make the choices. Some claim they don’t have a right to talk about it, because women don’t have to take the risks.”¹⁰⁶ Women joined and stayed, nevertheless, because they shared the men’s belief that draft resistance was the cutting edge of the antiwar movement. Some were also motivated by an attraction to the resisters themselves. The men were rebellious, heroic figures to many young women and, as in SDS, sexual relationships within the antidraft groups contributed to gender tensions.¹⁰⁷ Being in a relationship with one of the men could provide a woman with entrée to leadership circles and meetings where important decisions were made. But this was a source of frustration for women who were not in those kinds of relationships and sought recognition solely on the basis of the work and ideas they contributed. It was tremendously frustrating for Nan Stone to see a woman being paid attention to in meetings “because of who she was fucking.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Foley, “Point of Ultimate Indignity,” 183.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁰⁶ Thorne, 170.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of sexual and gender tensions within SDS, see Evans, *Personal Politics*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 184. As Foley points out, there were some women who found the gender tensions and marginalization within antidraft groups no worse than in other segments of the Left, or the larger society, for that matter. But even they suggested that a conscious effort had to be made to demand the men’s attention, which supports Densmore’s view. “[If] I was willing to put up with it then I got it; if I wasn’t willing to put up with it, then I didn’t get it, ‘it’ being abuse,” said Rosemary Poole of the Resistance. “God

WSP/VOW offered an alternative way for women who wanted to organize against the draft without either accepting a marginal role or constantly struggling to be heard. While many of their activities were “supportive” in nature, the women’s peace groups were autonomous and set their own agenda. In addition to “maternal” tasks like cooking for potlucks, they organized and ran their own draft counseling centers and participated in acts of civil disobedience aside from the burning of draft cards. Perhaps most importantly, they developed their own point of view and voice vis-à-vis the draft, as women, which they publicized through their own writings, speeches, and interviews. Although age and generational differences, along with degrees of feminist consciousness, are often presented as the factors that separated WSP from the women in groups like The Resistance and BDRG, this was not necessarily the case, and certainly not the entire story. WSP included wives and mothers in their early twenties and unmarried college students as well as the stereotypical middle-aged hausfrau. It provided a space where women could organize against the war and the draft *as women*, where the notion that the draft was not simply a men’s issue could be developed and acted upon, where concern for the impact of the draft on American men could be combined with a sense of solidarity with the women of Vietnam.

Foley acknowledges that women did have some options outside of male-run groups, including what he calls “suburban organizing” which, he says, “grew out of BDRG’s draft counseling and community-outreach approach to challenging the draft.” He writes that BDRG made suburban outreach a priority during the summer of 1968 and describes an off-shoot of this effort, Concord Area Resistance Summer (CARS), based in

knows there was a lot of sexism that went on right and left, but I didn’t feel I couldn’t do something about it.” Foley, “Ultimate Indignity,” 189.

Concord, Massachusetts. The leadership of the group was “largely women” who “did not have full-time jobs.” But he distinguishes CARS from WSP because it “did not seem to rely on the older women in the community for leadership; the only female names to appear in the few documents left behind by the organization are names of younger women.”¹⁰⁹ While it is true that WSP/VOW did BDRG-like draft counseling and education, their efforts were not limited to suburban locations nor were they the provenance solely of older women. In the Boston area, the Newton branch of VOW-NE fit that profile, but branches in Roxbury and Jamaica Plain, city neighborhoods with primarily poor and working-class residents, were founded in 1967 and 1968, at the height of the draft resistance movement. These branches attracted younger women and women of color concerned with the disproportionate number of young men from their communities being drafted. Although the majority of VOW/WSP members were middle-class white women, they were well aware of the fact that young men of color and poor whites were more likely to be drafted than their own sons. Their concern with the inequities of the Selective Service System was evident as early as the Draft Caravan project, which focused on urban areas and particularly targeted vocational high schools and schools with large numbers of black and Latino students. The draft thus reinvigorated efforts to bring poor women and women of color into WSP/VOW.

In Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco, among other cities, coalitions were built between the peace ladies and groups of women working for welfare rights and the desegregation of city schools. Ethel Taylor and other members of Philadelphia WSP, for example, began meeting with members of the local branch of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) in 1967. The white women had never been able to understand

¹⁰⁹ Foley, “Ultimate Indignity,” 191.

why more black women had not gotten involved in their anti-draft campaigns when “their sons were at the front of the line for being drafted.” They discovered that some black mothers saw the military as a vehicle that would enable their sons to access otherwise unattainable educational and job opportunities, rather than a death sentence. “If they were drafted they would receive training for a future job, and at the same time would avoid the real dangers of street gangs at home,” Taylor recalled. “It was a sad commentary on the hopes of poor mothers for their sons.”¹¹⁰ There was also concern in some segments of the black community that actively opposing the war would anger President Johnson and result in the withdrawal of his support for civil rights and anti-poverty measures.¹¹¹ Peggy Day, one of the organizers of the Roxbury VOW branch, said in February 1967 that she thought “the time has now come for Negroes to question the U.S. role in Vietnam. But many Negroes hesitate because they believe if they mess with peace, then the government will mess with civil rights.”¹¹²

As in the early days of WSP’s disarmament campaign, when white middle-class mothers who protested atomic testing could not imagine a more immediate threat to their children’s safety than contaminated milk and nuclear warfare, so too were many of them

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 27. Historian Gerald Gill’s findings demonstrate that Taylor’s perceptions did not apply to all black women: he notes that contemporary public opinion polls regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam found “more opposition than support” among black women and, “from early 1966 until the end of the war, what most galvanized black women to oppose the war was the escalating number of black troops killed in Vietnam.” This helps explain why some black women in communities such as Roxbury became involved in VOW-WSP. Gerald Gill, “From Maternal Pacificism to Revolutionary Solidarity: African-American Women’s Opposition to the Vietnam War” in Barbara L. Tischler (ed.), *Sights on the Sixties*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 177-195.

¹¹¹ Whether or not to actively involve their organizations in antiwar activism was debated by civil rights leaders and grassroots activists in a manner not unlike the way WSP debated whether or not to commit the group to civil rights activity. Although antiwar statements were made by individuals and actions were organized on an ad hoc basis in black communities around the country as early as 1965, most of the major civil rights organizations were slow to commit themselves to the antiwar movement for fear of alienating the Johnson administration. Martin Luther King, Jr., despite his commitment to nonviolence, did not make his ground-breaking speech on Vietnam until April, 1967, in large part because of the pressure he received from Johnson. For a detailed discussion of these debates, see Hall.

¹¹² “Responses to WSP February 15 Demonstration,” *VOW-NE Newsletter*, March 1967, 7.

unable, during the Vietnam War, to envision any worse hazard to their sons' health than being drafted. Mothers whose children faced the perils of poverty and racism on a daily basis had to protect their children from dangers much closer to home. This was underscored for Taylor when the son of a NWRO member was killed in a gang fight on a day when Philadelphia WSP and the NWRO activists had planned to hold a flea market to fund a trip to an anti-war demonstration in Washington.¹¹³ The Philadelphia branch was praised in *Memo* on several occasions for its success at mobilizing black women to turn out at both local and national WSP protests. Thanks in part to the Philadelphia model, WSP and the NWRO continued to co-sponsor campaigns and actions that linked war expenditures to economic deprivation into the 1970s. Taylor developed a new understanding of why low-income women had not joined WSP in large numbers and, in spite of her own successes at bridge-building, concluded that their involvement in peace work would continue to be limited. As Taylor saw it, this was because "the luxury of joining the two issues [of poverty and the Vietnam War] is one [the NWRO women] cannot afford—their need is too immediate—food and welfare increases."¹¹⁴

VOW-NE also supported local welfare rights campaigns in Boston—inviting representatives of the welfare mothers' group to their meetings, demonstrating and writing letters on their behalf, and donating money to support their efforts. But women in Roxbury were concerned enough about the impact of the draft that they formed their own neighborhood affiliate, which immediately organized a local draft counseling program. The Roxbury women were trained by representatives of BDRG and the relationship

¹¹³ Taylor, 27-28.

¹¹⁴ Ethel Taylor, "Keynote Address, WSP National Convention, October 1973." WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

between the two groups was reported in the BDRG newsletter. The article, written in the form of journal entries by BDRG staffers, describes Roxbury VOW as “a new group of young black and white mothers, mostly tired of the March-on-Washington approach to fundamental social change.” Because BDRG’s outreach to working-class communities had not been particularly effective, the staff had “high hopes” for the women’s potential but also worried about their level of commitment. At the first training session, the BDRG staff was won over: “Intelligent questions exploding all over. Determination evident.” The following week, three of the women visited the local draft board to gather names of men classified as 1-A. They spend part of their next training session “ransacking the phone book for addresses of 1-As. ‘Hey, I know him. Him, too. I went to school with that guy’ . . . Community people organizing on their own.” One woman brought her son, who was about to be shipped off to Vietnam, to the meeting. “I only wish you had been here last year,” he told them. The BDRG staff noted that the VOW women were “torn up” by his story but “still more determined” to prevent other young black men from sharing his fate. The BDRG staff concluded that they had “never trained a group like this” and meant that as a compliment.¹¹⁵ Through their interaction with the Roxbury women, the BDRGers moved from an attitude of wariness to one of respect for WSP/VOW. They learned something that coverage of WSP in the national press didn’t capture: the group’s greatest strength was the grassroots nature of its base and its decentralized organizational structure. Each affiliate had its own priorities, style, and demographic make-up.

To acknowledge that not all WSPers were middle-aged mothers and housewives is not to say that the group did not continue to rely on maternal imagery and rhetoric. In

¹¹⁵ All quotes in this paragraph are from Tim Wright, Dave Washburn, and Abby Rockefeller, “Roxbury Voice of Women.” *BDRG News*, March 1968, 4-5. VOW-NE would go on to open community-based draft counseling centers in Jamaica Plain and Newton.

Philadelphia, the women spoke of “adopting” local resisters and this meant much more than preparing food for potlucks: they defined their responsibilities to the young men as: “providing funds for housing, food and office expenses; criticizing, encouraging, and listening; raising money for court costs and fines.” They initiated and served as trustees of a bail and legal defense fund and attended “meetings where draft cards are returned, so as to provide moral and physical support.”¹¹⁶ In Boston, for members of the “mothers’ brigade,” that support sometimes meant witnessing police brutality and intervening on behalf of protesters. Irene Johnson of VOW-NE noted that when “large numbers of adults are present police brutality and violence are minimized. When only young people are present . . . they often suffer greatly at the hands of the police.” On one occasion, she found herself to be the only “adult” at a demonstration protesting the arrest of a young resister in spite of the fact that he had sought and been granted sanctuary at Arlington Street Church. When she saw an officer hitting a “prone, limp” young man over the head, she “reprimanded” him and “a look of astonishment came over his face upon seeing an older woman witnessing his action.” When she saw another young man being dragged to a paddy wagon, she followed him and loudly “protested the policemen’s roughness.” When Johnson refused to stay silent in the face of the violent treatment of the protesters, she said, “Several policemen told me to leave because I ‘might get hurt.’ ‘By whom?’ I asked.” Johnson interrupted some of the worst police attacks on protesters that day and perhaps undercut the sense of impunity with which the officers acted. In appearance, if not in spirit, Johnson represented the kind of citizen the police were “serving and protecting” with their assaults on disruptive, anti-patriotic hippies. Although she herself

¹¹⁶ ”Mothers Against the Draft; Or, How to Stop the War and Be a Good Jewish Mother,” *Memo* February 12, 1968 vol.6 no.3, 7.

was eventually dragged away, she noted that the police “reserved the striking and kicking for the young men and women.”¹¹⁷ Middle-aged WSPers like Johnson found that while they were no longer immune from arrest or harassment as they became more militant and confrontational, their age, gender, and appearance could still have a disarming effect. Police officers and other public officials were more likely to “hear” the protests of women who could have been their wives or mothers than those of young radicals with long hair and torn jeans.

The degree to which WSPers were able to simultaneously perform the roles of mediator, witness, and protester became especially clear during Stop the Draft week in December 1967. Inspired by an action in Berkeley in October, participants intended to shut down induction centers and draft boards through a variety of tactics, legal and illegal, including picket lines, rallies, and sit-ins. In New York, the women proudly declared themselves the “only adult group” to participate in *all* the events, including the efforts of students to shut down the Whitehall Induction Center in Lower Manhattan. They took part in planning sessions and tried, as they often did, “to act as a moderator between groups of differing philosophies.” They were at Whitehall every day, protesting but also “trying to calm and help wherever possible.” When young men turned in their draft cards at a Brooklyn church, WSPers “handed in ‘anti-draft cards’ or complicity statements.” On a day devoted to getting shows of support from non-draft eligible adults, WSP turned out more than 1,000 picketers, some of whom were arrested “along with Dr. Spock,” according to *Memo*. In response to a massive police presence at Whitehall, they

¹¹⁷ “Things You Can Do,” *VOW-NE Newsletter* May-June 1968, 6. Johnson was one of the more militant VOW members; in 1970 she burned a draft card in a demonstration of women who, like Nan Stone, were committed to violating federal law in support of male resisters, acting in ways that could lead to arrest and imprisonment. Photos of the participants suggest that Johnson was the oldest member of the group. Mollin, *Radical Pacifism*, 104.

held a press conference and participated in meetings with the mayor and police department, asking the authorities to “keep their cool” and publicizing the non-violent nature of the action.¹¹⁸

Irma Zigas of Long Island, head of WSP’s anti-draft committee, stood with Deputy Police Inspector Joe Fink, to make sure that the demonstration went smoothly. Zigas told the *New York Post* that Fink, who worked the East Village and was known for his “rapport with the Hippies,” was her “favorite cop.” Zigas’s role was to do what she could to make sure the protesters’ first amendment rights were respected; Fink’s was to make sure the picketing remained non-violent. That they had developed a comfortable working relationship was clear from a bit of dialogue quoted in the newspaper:

“Look over there,” Mrs. Zigas told the inspector. “There’s plenty of room now. Why don’t you move 100 or so people closer to the building?”
 “You know, Irma, you’re absolutely right,” Fink replied.¹¹⁹

Zigas claimed that she had honed her mediation skills and ability to “keep the peace” in her role as mother of five children. WSPers like Zigas, with their emphasis on keeping the lines of communication with police, politicians, and the general public open—even as they challenged police brutality, government policies, and citizen complacency—sometimes irritated younger radicals, who not only questioned authority, but hated authority figures. WSP had long prided itself on the good relationships it maintained with the police they encountered, especially in the nation’s capitol, site of so many protests over the years. In fact, when a professor at University of Wisconsin Law School asked WSP to participate in a study he was doing on tensions between anti-war protesters

¹¹⁸ “New York City Demo to End the Draft,” *Memo* February 12, 1968 vol.6 no.3, 9.

¹¹⁹ Carl J. Pellock, “The Protesters in Action,” *New York Post*, December 8, 1967.

and the police in the spring of 1967, Barbara Bick replied: "In the Washington area, WSP has never had any difficulty with the police. They have been most cooperative and have always accommodated our wishes."¹²⁰ The disillusioning experiences WSPers had had with the police up to this point had occurred during actions that were organized and dominated by members of other groups.

Although Zigas and Fink kept marchers and police officers calm at the legal picket line, those who planned to participate in civil disobedience were frustrated by barricades meant to keep them from entering the building or blocking the doors. Dr. Benjamin Spock was allowed through and immediately arrested. Less recognizable figures seeking to breach the barricades were treated less gently. The ability of the middle-aged mother to disarm the police was proven again when a group led by the writer and peace activist Grace Paley was charged by officers on horseback. Paley shouted at captain of the squad, "I demand that you stop this! This is an absolute outrage! Pull your men back!" The pacifist David McReynolds, who observed the scene, said the captain was "so *stunned* at seeing this housewife yelling at him that he pulled his men back." Arrests continued to be made, but with less aggression and violence.¹²¹ During the rest of the week, student-led actions received harsher treatment.

That even WSPers could "lose their cool" under certain circumstances was made clear on September 20, 1967. About 500 women had gathered in Washington, D.C. for a long-planned demonstration in support of draft resistance. They planned to march to Selective Service headquarters, where a small delegation would meet with General Hershey, and then march to the White House where they would rally and picket. A few

¹²⁰ Barbara Bick, "Letter to Ted Finman," March 7, 1967. WSP Papers, Series A.3 Box 10 SCPC.

¹²¹ Wells, *The War Within*, 217-218.

weeks before the action, the Department of the Interior issued an edict that restricted the number of people who could picket in front of the White House to 100 at a time. WSP organizers lobbied to have the order rescinded in time for their demonstration, but did not succeed. Undeterred, the women arrived as planned, carrying a black coffin that read, “Not My Sons, Not Your Sons, Not Their Sons,” and accompanied by a couple of young antiwar veterans who planned to speak to the women about their experiences. Helmeted police officers allowed 100 of them access to the sidewalk in front of the White House and herded the rest into a fenced-in holding area across the street. The women’s belief in free speech, free assembly, and the right of American citizens to criticize their government was as integral a part of their politics as their commitment to peace. Having picketed the White House many times before, they were indignant at being “herded” into pens, like animals.

Frustrated and angry, some of the women attempted to push their way out and eventually succeeded in trampling down part of the fence. As they ran to join the demonstration, the police tried to force them back by shoving, tackling, and swinging their nightsticks at the women. The WSPers pushed back. “At the height of the noisy fracas, about ten women were seen lying on the ground,” *The New York Times* reported the next day. “One had blood on her head.” The demonstrators then sat down in the middle of the street and blocked traffic to protest their treatment at the hands of the police. The two resisters were “mauled” by officers who charged the crowd with “sticks swinging and tempers blazing.” One VOW member, who described herself as a ‘nice, gray-haired, middle-aged lad[y],’ suggested that it was seeing the young men get “brutally clobbered” that led to the women’s push back against the police. “We became

‘Angry Women’ and were pushed and maltreated,” Rose Devore wrote in a letter to the *Boston Globe*.¹²² The young men were then taken to jail; two of the women were arrested as well, on charges of disorderly conduct.¹²³ The *Times* ran its coverage of the demonstration on the front page under the headline, “Women Fight Police Near White House.” Anyone who had followed WSP’s history to that point could not help but be shocked by the news. That a group who normally took such great pains to appear both respectable and respectful could have participated in what was variously described as a “fracas,” “clash,” and “wild melee” threatened to undermine the image of non-threatening woman next door that they had so carefully constructed over the previous six years.¹²⁴ During the days immediately following the White House demonstration, WSP’s Washington office was deluged with letters, phone calls, and telegrams from supporters and critics from around the country, asking the women who had participated to account for their uncharacteristically rowdy and, it appeared, violent behavior. Dagmar Wilson addressed this question two days later at the group’s sixth annual conference. “We didn’t plan to go out and fight policemen. They fought us,” she pointed out.¹²⁵ “We women have not changed—our goals are the same—it is the conditions under which we work that have changed,” she declared.¹²⁶

Despite Wilson’s demurrals, the White House demonstration brought national attention to the fact that 1967 marked a turning point in WSP’s development, beginning with the Pentagon protest and ending with “Stop the Draft” week. WSPers had become as

¹²² “Reports on National Conference of WSP,” *VOW-NE Newsletter*, November 1967, 6-7.

¹²³ “Women for Peace in Battle with Police,” *Memo* October 1967, 3.

¹²⁴ “Women Fight Police Near White House,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 1967, A1. See also: “Women for Peace in Battle at White House,” *Washington Post*, September 21, E1; *Memo*, v.5, n.10 (October 1967), 2. Publication File, TC, New York University and Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 177-180.

¹²⁵ “Minutes, WSP National Conference, September 22, 1967.” WSP Papers, Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

¹²⁶ Quoted in *Memo*, v.5, n.10 (October 1967), 11. Publication File, TC.

completely and passionately committed to ending the war as they had initially been to preventing nuclear holocaust. “We cannot talk about disarmament” anymore, Wilson announced, “we must stop the fighting”—in Vietnam and on the streets of the United States. Wilson herself had changed, perhaps more than anyone. The demure, lovely lady, who had managed to charm the press, fluster HUAC, and mobilize tens of thousands of “ordinary” American women, was among the angriest of all WSPers. She described her experience of the struggle with the police in her usual matter-of-fact yet slyly humorous way: “I didn’t feel hostile towards the cops,” she told the press. “I had no impulse for violence; I just quietly pushed the line that was pushing me. One of the policemen was pushing me in the stomach and he said, ‘How do you do, Mrs. Wilson?’ and I said, ‘How do you do?’ and went on pushing.”¹²⁷

But under her surface composure, Wilson was in a state of turmoil. She had returned from a trip to North Vietnam the night before the White House confrontation. While there, she witnessed American bombers at work and, as she told a *Washington Post* reporter, “I wanted to take up a gun and shoot back. I never thought I’d want to do that in my life.” She added that, “All one’s normal feelings of national loyalty go out the window. You have no idea who the enemy is—the enemy is war and violence . . .”¹²⁸ One of her companions on the trip, Ruth Krause of New Jersey, described her own “white hot anger” at the destruction wrecked by U.S. bombs. In *Memo*, Krause wrote of “feeling silly toting around a steel helmet until the day the scream of missiles and explosion of bombs are so close the walls shake and you smell the acrid odor of smoke.”¹²⁹ She also

¹²⁷ Judith Martin, “A Visit to Vietnam Stirs Impulse to ‘Strike Back’,” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 1967, B1

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ruth Krause, “The North Vietnam Trip,” *Memo*, October 1967, 7.

described her encounters with mothers and children—innocent civilians—whose lives were being destroyed: “a fourteen year old orphan trembles and stuffs her hands in her ears because she knows what bombs can do,” “a motherless six-year-old who keeps asking when his arm will grow back,” and a mother who returned from work after a bombing raid on Hanoi to find her house razed, her two children dead and her daughter-in-law and granddaughter wounded.¹³⁰ WSP now had its own eyewitnesses to the war; they were transformed by the experience and, in turn, helped transform the organization. In December, Wilson told another reporter that the early sixties world of the bomb, the arms race, and nuclear testing seemed “terribly simple, almost benign” in comparison to that of 1967. “To work for peace was no longer enough, she concluded: “There has to be some internal revolt of Americans.”¹³¹ It sounded like the widely admired leader of a “liberal” organization representing “the woman next door” was calling for revolution.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Robert C. Maynard, “A Peace Worker Reflects on the World’s Cruelty,” *The Washington Post*, Dec.21, 1967, A19.

Chapter 6: “The Multiple Crises Facing Our Nation”: WSP Fights the War at Home, 1967-68

In the wake of the 1967 demonstration at the White House and Dagmar Wilson’s conviction that peace would not come without an “internal revolt of Americans,” WSP honed its analysis of “the multiple crises facing our nation.”¹ Four years earlier, the women had begun broadening their definition of peace to include domestic as well as a foreign policy concerns; now they completed that process. Dozens of riots in American cities during the summers of 1966 and 1967, a sharp increase in violent crime in urban areas, the heightened militancy of the black power movement, and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s call for a Poor People’s Campaign inspired a new level of concern among WSPers for the poor and people of color. At the same time, their participation in the peace movement exposed them to incidents of police brutality and state repression. It was becoming routine for confrontations between protestors and authorities at antiwar demonstrations to end in beatings, injuries, and arrests. As they discovered at the White House demonstration, women, even nicely dressed, middle-aged women, were no longer immune from disciplinary action at the hands of the police.

These developments may explain why, at a time when many white middle- and upper-class Americans were losing sympathy for the civil rights movement, “black power,” and the War on Poverty, Women Strike for Peace placed those causes on par with its anti-war work.² In national and local steering committee meetings during the first half of 1968, the group identified racism and economics as factors that linked the

¹ Ibid.

² For more about the changing political climate, see Isserman and Kazin, chapter 10.

war in Vietnam to the war at home. In their “Statement on the Crisis in American Cities,” WSP members argued that,

Our foreign policies are an extension of our domestic policies. As long as we allow millions of American children to suffer the indignities of prejudice, racism and neglect...we will only be tackling half the problem in demanding an end to war...We must recognize the same source of oppression in the use of trained dogs or mace in Saigon, Mississippi, or Detroit.³

They also made the case that the causes of urban unrest were directly linked to the war budget. WSP needed to work not only for

an end to the Vietnam war, but sharp cuts in our military appropriations, our armaments, and armed forces, so that our country can begin to give its attention to the critical problems here at home: our decaying cities, our neglected schools, the problem of police brutality and racial injustice, the grinding poverty that blights the lives of one-fifth of our affluent society.⁴

At the same time, WSP members began to seriously discuss the fact that they were “primarily a white group” and to recognize a need to develop “close ties with the women of the black ghetto.”⁵ This was a departure from earlier assumptions that being “open” to non-white women was the same as being integrated and that non-white women would join because of their maternal concerns. Local efforts, like those in Philadelphia and Boston, to reach out to low-income women and women of color had sensitized white WSP organizers to some of the specific needs and priorities of those communities. Now the tendency for WSPers to say, simply, “women” when they were referring almost exclusively to white, middle-class, middle-aged women was supplanted by an effort to be more concrete and specific. They began to make distinctions between work in “our own

³ “WSP Statement on the Crisis in American Cities,” *Memo* v.6 n.3 (February 12, 1968), 14.

⁴ Betty Lankford and Eda Hallinan, Oakland Women for Peace, “Letter to National Convention,” (October 31, 1968). WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

⁵ “National Consultative Council Minutes,” January 17, 1968. WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 1, SCPC; “Around the Nation,” *Memo* v.6, n.1 (November 1967), 8. Publication File, TC.

communities” and efforts to support, involve, or build coalitions with “black women,” “welfare mothers,” “working-class women,” “union women,” “young women,” “our black and Puerto Rican citizens,” and “women in ghettos.”⁶ WSPers hoped that by supporting causes of immediate concern to poor black women, such as the burgeoning campaign for welfare rights, they would in turn win black women’s active support for WSP’s antiwar efforts.⁷ WSPers had come to understand that providing food, clothing, shelter, and a decent education for their children was the top priority for low-income mothers, but they also hoped to persuade poor women that military spending was largely responsible for domestic poverty. The war, according to WSP’s analysis, was diverting funds from social programs that could help poor women better provide for their families. Even more important, it was killing their sons.⁸

⁶ The transformation in WSP’s rhetoric was probably influenced, at least in part, by contemporary debates over integration vs. separatism in the civil rights and black power movements. Beginning in the mid-60s, black nationalists argued that they had to achieve their own liberation; whites who wanted to help the black cause were encouraged to educate and organize other whites around issues of their own racism. The triumph of this viewpoint was symbolized by the expulsion of white staffers from SNCC at the end of 1966. See Carson, *SNCC*; Mary King, *Freedom Song*. Women of color would later argue that the tendency of some middle-class white women to act as if they were speaking for all women when they were really speaking for themselves was one of the major flaws of second wave feminism. Scholarly works which problematize the category “woman” with an emphasis on racial differences include: Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Deborah K. King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” *Signs* 14 (Autumn 1988), 42-72; Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” *Signs* 14 (Summer 1989), 745-773; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), 251-274.

⁷ Welfare rights activists also sought WSP’s political and financial support for their campaigns, locally and nationally. See FN8 below.

⁸ During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the National Welfare Rights Organization regularly co-sponsored demonstrations with WSP and participated in broader antiwar coalitions, making similar claims. Guida West, in her history of the NWRO, refers to the women’s peace movement as a “political ally” of the welfare rights movement. The two groups shared “common cause” in their commitment to push the federal government’s budget priorities from “warfare to welfare.” Roxanne Jones, a WRO leader in Philadelphia during the early 1970, acknowledged the local WSP’s participation “with the welfare rights mothers in joint protests against the welfare policy makers in the state.” West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement: The Social Protest of Poor Women* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), 250. At the national level, Johnnie Tillman, chair of the NWRO during the same period, wrote that the two groups shared the goals of “ending the war in Asia and at home against the poor” and were also linked as “two of the most effective women’s organizations in this country.” Tillman also underscored one of the main differences between the groups—the class bases of their memberships—and suggested that part of WSP’s contribution to this coalition

In January, 1968, WSP publicized its commitment to broadening its agenda and building coalitions with groups outside the antiwar movement through its participation in the Jeannette Rankin Brigade. Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress and the only member of Congress to vote against U.S. involvement in both world wars, was, at 87, long retired from public life. But when invited to speak to a local peace group in Atlanta, her remarks—including the statement that if 10,000 American women were willing to go to jail to demonstrate their opposition to the war, they could end the war—were picked up by the Associated Press. When Vivian Hallinan, a longtime WILPF member in San Francisco, read Rankin's speech—which also addressed U.S. responsibility to fight poverty both at home and abroad—she saw it as a potential launching pad for a large and dramatic women's political protest.⁹ She contacted Rankin, who agreed to invite American women to join her in Washington on the opening day of the 1968 Congressional session to demand immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and reallocation of the “billions now spent for destroying lives to preserve and enrich the lives of our children, our fellow citizens, black and white, and the impoverished people of the world.”¹⁰ In an open letter to “All American Women,” Rankin, who began her career in politics as a suffrage campaigner, declared, “I believed then, as I do today, that women are the ones that must be concerned with the needs and development of the human

should be a financial one. Becoming a member of the NWRO at the “Friends” level, Tillmon concluded would be an “effective way” for WSP to strengthen the bonds between them: “To a poor people's organization it is true indication of people wanting to make a first step in helping.” (sic) Letter from Mrs. Johnnie Tillmon to Trudi Young, October 12, 1970. National Office Correspondence Files, WSP Papers, SCPC.

⁹ Warren Hinckle and Marianne Hinckle, “A History of the Rise of the Unusual Movement for Women Power in the United States, 1961-1968,” *Ramparts* February 1968, 24-31.

¹⁰ “A Call to Women to End the War in 1968,” *Memo* November 1967 vol.6 no.1, 5.

race.”¹¹ Dagmar Wilson agreed to sign on as a co-sponsor and local WSP chapters took responsibility for publicizing what became known as the Jeannette Rankin Brigade (JRB) and mobilizing women in their communities to participate.

What distinguished the JRB from other WSP-sponsored actions was not only the involvement of the former Congresswoman. It was envisioned, from the start, as an opportunity to reach out to those women who had, up to that point, largely been missing from WSP—representatives of the working-class and labor unions, church groups, and racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as younger women. To emphasize this point, the organizers devised an outreach campaign that included a series of newspaper ads built around photographs of various prominent women, designed to appeal to different constituencies. The ads shared the tagline, “Join me in Washington January 15.” In addition to Rankin and Wilson, the ads featured Mrs. John C. Bennett, wife of the president of Union Theological Seminary; Mrs. Harry Belafonte, wife of the entertainer and civil rights activist; and the writer Susan Sontag.¹² The desire to attract women who had not demonstrated before led the organizers to re-think the Rankin’s initial plan to call for mass civil disobedience. When Hallinan reached out to church women, they convinced her that she would not get 10,000 women to take that step. Instead, they argued, the JRB would be more effective if it was presented as the beginning of a campaign to elect antiwar candidates in the November elections.¹³ This dove-tailed nicely with an electoral campaign Bella Abzug was developing within WSP called “The

¹¹ “Brigade Formed to Confront Congress,” *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² The ads ran multiple times in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* during the first two weeks of January.

¹³ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 136.

Women's Vote Is a Peace Vote.”¹⁴ A compromise was reached to hold “a stately, dignified demonstration”¹⁵ that would avoid both violent confrontations and non-violent civil disobedience. The most recent major demonstration against the war, the October Mobilization at the Pentagon, ended in violent scuffles and mass arrests and had been depicted in the media as anarchic. In reaction, Hallinan said, the JRB wanted to show that “peace marchers aren’t just a bunch of nuts” and reassure women who would likely stay away if they thought they would end up getting beaten, trampled, or arrested.¹⁶

This decision felt like a step backward to some of the Brigade’s steering committee, notably Dagmar Wilson and Coretta Scott King, both of whom had become increasingly militant in their rhetoric and believed in the efficacy of civil disobedience, but they agreed to go along. Younger women who had come to the antiwar movement through SDS and the Resistance were less amenable and openly criticized the strategy before, during, and after the event. Tension between the more and less radical factions of the JRB mounted when the Capitol police announced that they would be enforcing an 1882 law forbidding demonstrations on Capitol grounds, which meant the women would have to address Congress from a park across the street. Next, the D.C. park and city police forces dragged their feet over granting permits to assemble at the new location and to march there from the starting point at Union Station. The *Washington Post* pointed out that this was the first time on record that the law had been invoked and summed up both the unfairness and the absurdity of these hard ball tactics with the line, “The JRB is trying

¹⁴ *Memo* November 1967 vol.6 no.1, 2.

¹⁵ Richard Harwood and Elizabeth Shelton, “Antiwar Women March on Capitol,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 1968, A1.

¹⁶ Carolyn Lewis, “Brigade Ponders Value of March,” *Washington Post*, January 17, 1968, D3.

to practice civil obedience, and it isn't easy."¹⁷ An indignant Rankin scoffed, "There is no reason why old ladies shouldn't be allowed to go into the Capitol."¹⁸ As they had when they were denied permission to march en masse in front of the White House the previous September, WSPers and their allies sought relief from the courts. But, when a request for an emergency injunction was denied, the organizers agreed to abide by the law.¹⁹

January 15 was cold and snowy. In spite of the inhospitable weather, about 5,000 women, many of them disgruntled by Congress's successful effort to keep them at bay, arrived at Union Station. As Barbara Deming reported, with more than a hint of a sarcasm,

A lot of new women turned up, apparently, and that was good. But a certain number of women turned up, too, who had been excited by the first publicity about what the brigade was to be, and they were very frustrated by the day. "How silent can you be?" one of them wanted to know—after we had all walked, yes, in silence, and—at police request—carrying no signs at all, and on the sidewalk, not down the street, and stopping at a very demure distance from Congress—there to listen meekly to Judy Collins sing.²⁰

As Deming's language suggests, in style if not substance, the JRB seemed like a throwback to WSP's earliest days, when maintaining an image of feminine respectability was a priority above all others, rather than a reflection of its more recent history of civil

¹⁷ Judith Martin, "Rankin Group Finds Law Hard to Obey," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1968, A19.

¹⁸ Marjorie Hunter, "5,000 Women Rally in Capital against War," *New York Times*, January 16, 1968, 3.

¹⁹ It took years for the Brigade's challenge to work its way through the courts. The law which was used to keep them off Capitol grounds, Section 193 (g) of title 40 of the U.S. Code, was found to be unconstitutional by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia in May, 1972 and that decision was upheld by the Supreme Court in November 1972. "Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Jeannette Rankin Brigade," *Memo* Vol.3, No.1, 22.

²⁰ Letter from Barbara Deming to "Mary darling," January 28, 1968. Barbara Deming Papers Box 41 Folder 799, SC. The initial call for the march read, "If we women are to encourage young men of draft age to resist the draft, an act against the present laws of our country. . . we should place ourselves in a similar state of jeopardy." Jeannette Rankin Brigade Flyer n.d., Donna Allen Papers Box 1 Folder13, SHSW.

disobedience and “melees” with the police. A lone demonstrator yelled, “On to the Capitol” as the women stood in two inches of snow listening to the singing and speeches. Although no one took her up on it, others certainly shared her desire to break through the decorum.²¹ Rankin was allowed to bring only a small delegation into the Capitol building to deliver the women’s petition, calling for an end to “the ruthless slaughter in Vietnam and the persistent neglect of human needs at home” to House Speaker John McCormack and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield during a meeting Wilson later described as “hardly . . . encouraging.”²²

Rankin said afterwards that the event’s impact would be on women, rather than Congress. The march did appear to achieve its goal of bringing “new women” out to protest, as evidenced by interviews in the *Post* with an 87-year-old white grandmother in a wheelchair; a black nurse from Philadelphia who had two sons and a son-in-law serving in Vietnam; and a Latina community organizer from Chicago.²³ But, if the JRB had organized a demonstration “safe” for first-timers, it had also succeeded in convincing more experienced activists that this type of non-confrontational event “though well-meant, was ultimately futile.”²⁴ A more positive analysis was promoted by Cora Weiss

²¹ The *Washington Post* reported that “It’s an open secret that Mrs. Wm. Sloan Coffin was kept from open rebellion by being handed one end of the protest banner to carry in the march.” Carolyn Lewis, “Brigade Ponders Value of March,” *The Washington Post*, January 17, 1968, D3. In a similar vein, Carol McEldowney of the Cleveland ERAP project told a breakaway group of young radicals that “Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King and Mrs. [Dagmar] Wilson had to promise to do nothing illegal so that church women would join the Brigade.” Dorothy McCardle, “It Was too Tame for the Radicals,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1968, C2.

²² Harwood and Shelton, “March on Capitol.”

²³ Judith Martin, “The Women March,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 1968, C1.

²⁴ Shulamith Firestone, “The Jeanette (sic) Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?” in *Notes from the First Year, Redstockings*. Although mainstream press coverage of the event suggested that the tensions between the event organizers and the “radical women” who attended the march and then broke away from the rest of the JRB at the conference that followed were due to internal disagreements over tactics, it was also a challenge to maternalist rhetoric from the initiators of the women’s liberation movement. I will discuss this aspect in the following chapter.

who called it an important “side step” from WSP’s trajectory of increasingly militant direct actions. She believed the JRB was radical in its effort to “really involve women of color” and make the explicit link “between poverty in this country and the obscene expenditure of funds to support the war in Vietnam.”²⁵

Three months later, with its “Statement on the Crisis in American Cities” WSP fused its effort to further diversify its membership with its new radical critique of the “power structure” that was preventing the U.S. from functioning as a true democracy. It is no coincidence that the “Crisis” statement was published in *Memo* in April 1968—the month that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. The *New York Times* described the immediate reaction to King’s murder as a combination of “dismay, shame, anger, and foreboding,” while Whitney Young, the executive director of the National Urban League, told the paper, “We fear for our country.” These were sentiments many WSPers shared, and the tragic and transformative impact of King’s death no doubt inspired their new focus on urban America, even though it is not mentioned directly in the text of their statement. For, even as the nation’s mainstream civil rights leadership urged those who were embittered by the assassination to remember and follow King’s own commitment to peaceful protest, more than 100 cities erupted in “civil violence.”²⁶ Some black nationalists, including former SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael, framed King’s shooting as evidence that non-violence had outlived its usefulness as a tool for achieving racial

²⁵ Adams, *Peacework*, 40.

⁷ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Dismay in Nation,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1968, 1.

²⁶ Michael B. Katz, “Why Don’t American Cities Burn Very Often?” *Journal of Urban History* vol.34, no.2 (January 2008), 185-208. Katz explains that he uses the term “civil violence” to describe the “burning, looting, sniping at police” that took place in the wake of the King assassination, as well as other similar upheavals both to “distinguish these events from “individual violence, terrorist violence, and criminal violence” and to “sidestep the politically charged debate over whether to refer to them as riots or rebellions by using a term that is less evaluative and more analytically precise.”(186) The events under discussion here contain elements of both rioting and rebellion but do not fit neatly in either category, so Katz’s phrase is a welcome alternative.

equality. “White America has declared war on black America,” Carmichael proclaimed the day after King’s death, adding that “retribution” was the warranted response. “Black people have to survive and the only way they will survive is by getting guns.”²⁷ For WSPers, the question was, “What can *we* do?” They viewed themselves as supporters and allies of the black movement, but realized that, as an overwhelmingly white group, they might not be seen that way. The women admired King’s non-violent activism on behalf of peace and human rights and understood his loss to be a major blow to the Movement. They also felt a more personal connection to his death. Coretta Scott King, after all, was a sister WSPer, who had joined them in Geneva in 1962 and spoken at small WSP events and large antiwar rallies regularly in the years since then. The women viewed King’s death through two different lenses—that of activists grieving the loss of a major leader and that of women empathizing with another woman over the loss of her husband, the father of her children. *Memo* announced that WSP’s memorial tribute to King would have “two facets”—a commitment to continuing his work and the gift of “our love and dedication” to his widow, a woman who, they believed, shared in “the wisdom and prophetic voice of her great husband.”²⁸

WSP’s response to King’s assassination was further complicated by its recent efforts to work with and learn from black women. While many whites responded to the vandalism, looting, and arson that broke out in black neighborhoods with flight from inner cities and calls for law and order, WSPers did not want to run from these problems.

²⁷ Ben A. Franklin, “Army Troops in Capital as Negroes Riot,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1968, 1.

²⁸ “Coretta King,” *Memo* May-June 1968 vol.6 no.5, 2. It should be noted that in the years immediately following her husband’s death, Coretta Scott King became increasingly harsh in her public criticisms of the Vietnam War calling it “the most crucial and evil war in the history of mankind” on one occasion and “inhumane and insane” on another. Gerald Gill, “From Maternal Pacifism to Revolutionary Solidarity: African American Women’s Opposition to the Vietnam War” in *Sights on the Sixties*, ed. Barbara L. Tischler, 177-195. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 180-181.

They believed they had a responsibility for resolving conflict between the races at a critical moment. A number of them sought to serve, whenever possible, as bridges, translators, and interlocutors who could offer support and sympathy to local black communities, while challenging whites to think deeply about the causes of black unrest and the best ways to respond. In D.C., they volunteered to staff the Center for Emergency Support, which had been organized the previous summer “by white citizens to provide medical, legal and relief services in case of rebellions and to propose alternate methods (to military)” to handle crisis situations. In Los Angeles, a coalition of black community leaders, including WSPer Althea Alexander, called for calm and organized a variety of peaceful actions comprising both mourning and protest. WSPer Mary Clarke attended the massive memorial service held at the Los Angeles Coliseum and was one of a handful of white leaders invited to sit on the stage with the black organizers. LA WISP (as the local branch was called) helped organize a variety of activities—including a forty-eight hour vigil and a memorial service—aimed at white Angelinos who wanted to express both their grief at King’s death and their solidarity with the black community. In the suburbs of Chicago and Boston, WSP affiliates loaded station wagons with food and other supplies for residents of neighborhoods where arson and vandalism had shut down stores.²⁹

In the Boston area, VOW-NE also urged its supporters and friends to beware of “the existence and threat of white racism” and to stand against it in both proactive and reactive ways. VOWers were encouraged to organize neighborhood meetings to discuss the assassination and its aftermath, to contact local and state officials to oppose bringing the National Guard into the city, to “be unrestrained in your own urgings for conciliatory

²⁹ “Around the Country,” *MEMO* May-June 1968 vol.6 no.5, 8-9.

moves such as black police in Roxbury,” and to call into talk shows so “the airwaves are not simply the transmitters of subtle forms of white racism, i.e. persuading listeners of the dangers in the violent black community and the need to deal forcefully with it.” Instead, “the supportive and compassionate role that could be played by the white community must be stressed”³⁰ Nationally, WSPers called on each other to reach out across lines of race and class—not just to mobilize new women in support of the antiwar cause, but to raise their own consciousness about the roles that racism and poverty played in American society.

If we can involve women from all walks of life in a genuine dialogue on these questions we can achieve temporary or permanent coalitions which will add strength and breadth to both the peace and the civil rights movements. We start, however, with ourselves. We must be sure we understand. If we do, we will communicate.³¹

This was not a time to back away from or simply suppress the expressions of anger and frustration emanating from black communities around the country, they thought. Instead, whites needed to make an effort to understand the causes of this strife and WSPers, in particular, needed to develop “constructive programs to ease tensions.”³²

VOW-NE had no choice but to engage with Boston’s black community immediately after the King assassination. In recognition of the significant contributions the new Boston chapters were making to the group, the VOW steering committee had decided, back in February, to hold its April meeting in the city—at the Roxbury YWCA,

³⁰ VOW-NE Announcement, April 5, 1968. VOW-NE Papers Box 1 Folder 29, SC.

³¹ “WSP Statement on the Crisis in American Cities.”

³² Ibid.

in the heart of the black community—and to invite Dagmar Wilson to speak.³³ The meeting was scheduled to take place just one week after the assassination. Although the level of unrest in Boston was minimal compared with that in other cities, the suburban VOWers were advised by fearful family members and friends to postpone or cancel the event. “It was a terrible dilemma,” Rohna Shoul said. “How could we not have that meeting and how would the women there feel about these white women from Newton not being willing to come into their community at that point?” Shoul was put in touch with a group of local men who had been serving as peacekeepers in their neighborhood. Her contact told her that his group would keep an eye on the VOW women during their visit. “They gave us a route to take and there would be men lining the area,” Shoul recalled. “We wouldn’t see them, but they would be there and they would make sure we got where we were going . . . They would be there to make sure that nothing happened to us.” The women drove to Roxbury in a convoy of cars, over their husbands’ objections. Their men “were not terribly excited about the idea but we did it” anyway, Shoul said. “We insisted we had to go and we did it.” The suburban VOWers traveled into and out of Roxbury without incident and the meeting “was very inspirational,” according to Shoul.³⁴

The Roxbury trip illustrates the commitment VOW/WSP made to building relationships with black women and keeping the lines of communication between their communities open at a moment of heightened racial tension. It is also an example of the small ways that members of VOW and WSP challenged sexist and racist assumptions, even as they were criticized by younger activists for being too accepting of (and comfortable within) existing social hierarchies. For a group of white women to challenge

³³ Minutes VOW-NE Meeting February 7, 1968, 1. VOW-NE Papers, SC.

³⁴ Videotaped Interview with Rohna Shoul, January 30, 2002, VOW Oral History Project, SC.

the authority and reject the protection of their (white) husbands and to instead entrust their safety to a group of black men who were strangers to them not only defied social and cultural expectations, it turned them on their heads. The symbolic power of this little act of subversion is heightened by the contemporary associations of black men—be they criminals or revolutionaries—with violence.

When WSPers committed themselves to continuing Martin Luther King's work, they spoke specifically of supporting the Poor People's Campaign. Conceived by King during the last year of his life, the campaign sought to bring poor people of different races and regions to Washington to confront the federal government on the issues of hunger, inadequate housing, poor schooling, lack of healthcare, and high unemployment in both urban and rural areas. After King's assassination, his staff at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) decided to go ahead with the plan, which included building an encampment for poor activists in the shadow of the Capitol. WSP announced early on that it "unequivocally" supported the effort. The women pledged to "bring our greatest commitment and zeal to organizing in our communities ... [we will] mobilize white community support behind a Mother's Lobby for Poor People's demands."³⁵ WSPers from around the country participated in a variety of support activities: raising money, lobbying, and helping to organize a Solidarity Day that brought 50,000 people to the Mall.

Some Washington area WSPers also spent time in Resurrection City, as the encampment was known, helping out in any way they could. A village of shacks housing several thousand people went up in May and was immediately plagued by heavy rains, muddy grounds, and internal dissension. The residents struggled with challenging living

³⁵ *Memo* v.6 n.5 (May/June 1968), 2, 4. Publication File, TC.

conditions while also lobbying, demonstrating and testifying around the District. As the *Washington Post* pointed out, the women of the campaign were particularly effective at making the daily struggles of living “without” painfully real for both government bureaucrats and middle-class observers whose support they sought. “For a woman,” as reporter Carolyn Lewis put it, “poverty is a daily intimate, an hour-by-hour confrontation with the empty cupboard, the shoeless child, the unheated shanty.”³⁶ For WSPers, hearing the stories of Resurrection City’s women was a consciousness-raising experience. When Dagmar Wilson recounted her experiences there at WSP’s next national conference, she acknowledged that,

This really changed the picture a bit for us peace ladies. Although we knew about poverty and we knew about racism, I don’t believe any of us *really* understood it until we were that close to it...my God, there are children being born here [in the U.S.] who are half-starved, because their mothers haven’t had a diet before they were born...How can it be that a country like ours can even tolerate this kind of thing?...It’s this basic inhumanity that was such a shock to me...³⁷

The most basic goal of the Poor People’s Campaign, according to SCLC Executive Director William Rutherford, was “to focus the attention of the nation and the world on poverty,” to enable people who were often invisible to their government and fellow citizens to be seen and heard.³⁸ While the campaign may have had limited success on a policy level, many Washingtonians were deeply affected by its message and Wilson was one of these.³⁹ Like her trip to Vietnam, Wilson’s experience at Resurrection City

³⁶ Carolyn Lewis, “Poverty is a Dirt Floor,” *Washington Post*, May 5, 1968, G1.

³⁷ Dagmar Wilson, “Keynote Address, November 9, 1968,” *Report of the Seventh Annual WSP Convention, November 8-11, 1968*. WSP Papers, Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

³⁸ Quoted in Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s to the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 474.

³⁹ This comes through clearly in the *Washington Post*’s almost daily coverage of the campaign during May and June, 1968.

inspired her to re-think WSP's mission. Children had to be protected not just from violence and war, but also from hunger and neglect. Challenging the nation's foreign policy was no longer enough; the women had to address domestic issues as well. And, on both fronts, the domestic and the international, the women needed to take a more radical approach to bringing about social change. "We've got to dig in," Wilson told the national gathering of "peace ladies," "and really work with the intention of affecting the power structure in our country, either changing it or removing it, whichever way it happens to turn out, or turning it upside-down."⁴⁰

Women in Chicago formulated a similar analysis in response to the police brutality they witnessed and experienced during the unrest following King's assassination and the protests at the Democratic National Convention in August. In late April, Anne Thureson took her two children to an antiwar demonstration of between 5000 and 8000 in the city's downtown. The plan was for protesters to march to the Civic Center Plaza, where the local WSP chapter had been holding weekly vigils for the past two years, and gather there for speeches. When they arrived, the plaza was roped off and the crowd denied entry. They were told that the grounds were being caulked, but reporters present found no workers or signs of work in progress on the square. Not unlike the WSPers who, frustrated at being prevented from picketing the White House eight months earlier, had broken through the barricades that penned them in, a group of Chicago marchers cut through the ropes that kept them out. About 250 made it onto the plaza and began an impromptu sit-in. The police—there were a thousand officers on the scene—moved in to remove them. Thureson, who remained in the street like most of the crowd, reported witnessing police officers, who had removed their badges and name plates so they could

⁴⁰ Ibid.

not be identified, mace, beat, and drag a number of participants who had done nothing to provoke such a violent response. A local newspaper photographer was attacked to prevent him from taking pictures, and “one cop volunteered that he’d like to march me and my kids and all the other ‘comrades’ into a quarry and fill it in,” Thureson wrote. Here was more evidence that the women’s political goals and new degree of militancy had come to outweigh other aspects of their identity, including gender, class, race, age and family role, in the eyes of some authority figures. Thureson, a white, middle-class woman with children, appeared to inspire as much anger in this police officer as any hippie he might have encountered.⁴¹

In the end, seventy protesters, including a thirteen-year-old boy, were arrested and twenty injured. “We in Chicago feel that what happened to us is very significant,” Thureson concluded. “Mayor Daley has promised the Democratic party that their August convention here will not be marred by any unrest. He obviously began this repression with the Convention in mind.”⁴² It appears that Thureson was right. In the aftermath of the damage, both physical and psychological, that the city suffered during the civil violence following King’s murder, and with the knowledge that the eyes of the nation would be on the city again in August, Mayor Daley had decided to clamp down on both “rioters” and “dissidents.” A commission that investigated complaints of police brutality

⁴¹ At the same demonstration, Thureson reported, a woman who attempted to intervene on behalf of a young man who she thought had been beaten and arrested without cause “had a cop draw a gun on her and say, ‘One word, lady, and I’ll kill you.’” Anne Thureson, “Around the Country—Chicago,” *MEMO* May-June 1968 vol.6 no.5, 8. Antiwar protesters had reason to believe that the Chicago police were capable of following through on such a threat. In response to the violent upheavals in some of Chicago’s black neighborhoods following the King assassination, Mayor Richard J. Daley ordered the police to “shoot to kill” arsonists and “shoot to maim or cripple” looters and later complained that they had not followed through. Edward Schreiber, “Shoot Arsonists: Daley,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 16, 1968. Others claimed that police officers had been attacked by protesters; when the police ordered them to drop their picket signs, some responded by throwing the signs at the officers. One woman was seen hitting an officer over the head with hers. Kusch, 39.

⁴² Thureson, “Chicago.”

at the April 27 event agreed with Thureson's interpretation, finding that the police "badly mishandled their task. Brutalizing demonstrators without provocation." But the ultimate responsibility—and blame—for the officers' "unprofessional" behavior was laid at the feet of the mayor and his aides who, the commission found, wanted to send the message that "these people have no right to demonstrate or express their views."⁴³ Some officers who worked the demonstration agreed that this had been the case. "The word through the food chain was that there was not going to be anymore 'Mr. Nice Guy' when dealing with protesters of any kind. I think that someone wanted to put the fear of God in any and all demonstrators, especially with the convention [coming] that summer," said one. "It was because of fire from above—the mayor's office," agreed another. "Our commanders got leaned on and they leaned on us, and there it is." Another admitted to being shocked when instructed that "each one of us had to make an arrest [on April 27]. I couldn't believe it. There was nobody bad there."⁴⁴

Some members of the Chicago police force, like the officer quoted above, were able to distinguish between the majority of peaceful protesters and the comparatively small number of agitators seeking to instigate violence at antiwar actions. But it seemed that the majority of the force, by the middle of 1968, had come to see demonstrators as an indistinguishable mass of trouble makers: "it was nothing but freaks, cowards, and bastards," as one officer put it.⁴⁵ While it was true that the force was "thinly spread,

⁴³ Quoted in Kusch, 40. The commission's findings were released under the title *Dissent and Disorder: A Report to the Citizens of Chicago on the April 27 Investigating Commission*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁵ The "freaks," as a rule, were gendered male by members of the then all-male Chicago police. Although participants and observers spoke specifically of the presence of women at the April 27 demonstration, none of the officers quoted by Kusch acknowledged them. Protesters were also repeatedly described in generational terms, as "kids." The presence of adults, particularly adult men, who, one assumes, would have to be fitted into a citizenship category such as "worker," "taxpayer," or "homeowner" was also not recognized by the police quoted by Kusch. This can be read as a defense of the officers' indiscriminate

overworked, stressed out” and under tremendous pressure from above to handle traditional criminal activity, while also coping with racial hostility and being expected to “shut down the movement,” many sincerely believed that they were under attack, that antiwar protesters were the enemy, that they were, in fact, at war. As Frank Kusch illustrates in his book *Battleground Chicago*, much of the antagonism that some police officers felt toward protesters was grounded in class-based resentments and generational differences. Through the eyes of many of the working-class, white ethnic, Chicago natives on the force, the antiwar movement was filled with spoiled, upper-class college kids, many of them “outside agitators” who were “pretending they were being oppressed like the blacks because some of them were subjected to the draft.”⁴⁶ While demonstrators who were gassed with mace and struck with billy clubs saw themselves as victims of police brutality, many of the officers believed they were acting in self-defense when they used violent means to suppress or “control” political dissidents. “It was like they thought

treatment of the marchers. One officer said he didn’t know how critics thought “we should have been able to tell these people apart; they didn’t look any different, they didn’t speak any different, dress any different, their signs said the same thing; they were trouble.” (49) Another officer agreed that the “bad ones and the normal kids—if you can call them normal—all looked the same.” (49) Even bystanders and journalists had themselves to blame when they suffered injuries at the hands of the police during demonstrations: “Bystanders should get the hell out of the way, but they just stand there and *let the crowd run over them*,” one officer explained. “The press, well those SOB’s, they like to move right into the thick of things, right into the area we are trying to clear, and *get themselves hurt*.” (40) Although the investigating commission found police officers responsible for violent attacks on bystanders and journalists as well as demonstrators on April 27, in this telling, the police are in no way culpable: the victims either “hurt themselves” or were hurt by “the crowd.” This reliance on the “they all look alike to us” defense may help explain why WSPers had little trouble with the police when they demonstrated independently of other groups, especially pre-1967—the point at which Chicago began to find the job of crowd control “increasingly difficult.” (49) A crowd of middle-aged women was treated one way, a crowd of “kids” was treated another. If middle-aged women were part of the crowd of kids, carrying the same signs and shouting the same slogans, they had to expect to receive the same treatment. The one time when an independent WSP demonstration turned violent, in September 1967 at the White House, the women, like the April 27 marchers in Chicago, challenged police authority by breaching the barricades that preventing them from reaching the intended site of their protest. The D.C. police, like their counterparts in Chicago, claimed that the WSPers “started” the conflict by breaking through a fence and entering territory that was off-limits. The women, like the protesters in Chicago, believed that they were illegally being denied their right to freedom of assembly on public grounds and that they “did not fight the police” as Dagmar Wilson put it, “the police fought them. See Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

we had a war going on against them, but it was them that had declared war on us,” one officer declared. “We were not the ones breaking windows and throwing bottles and tying up traffic and making it so that an honest man could not make a living because they were disrupting things all over the damn place,” said another.⁴⁷

Although Kusch does not devote much attention to this aspect of the conflict, it is clear from his interviews that cops and protestors also had conflicting definitions of citizenship and patriotism. In the minds of the majority of officers he spoke to, their job was to “protect and serve” the “honest man,” the “tax payer,” the “working man,” the “home owner.” The police did not believe that antiwar protesters belonged to any of these categories. By opposing the war, and challenging government policy on a number of other fronts, members of the Movement had effectively renounced the rights and privileges of citizenship in the eyes of many members of the Chicago force. As one officer put it, “When your country asks you to serve, you serve, and you don’t ask questions.”⁴⁸ Those who refused to serve, and even those who asked questions about why the U.S. was at war in Vietnam and whether the war was worth the cost were not viewed as “the loyal opposition.” They, almost as much as the Vietnamese, were the enemy.

In their discussions about how to respond to Mayor Daley’s campaign to eliminate dissent, Chicago WSPers agreed to “intensify our activities in light of current repressive measures, rather than be intimidated into slackening them.”⁴⁹ Two days before the official start of the Convention, the Chicago WSP branch mounted a demonstration of 300 women in front of the Conrad Hilton Hotel, where the platform committee was

⁴⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹ Arlen Wilson, “Chicago,” *Memo* v.6, n.6 (September 1968), 3.

meeting and most of the delegates were staying. The women carried signs featuring their proposed campaign planks: “Halt bombing [of Vietnam] immediately; Get US troops out of Vietnam and out of our Cities; Disarm police; Local control of local communities; Replace welfare with a guaranteed American income [an unmet demand of the Poor People’s Campaign]; end federal subsidies for the rich.” Cora Weiss, Who traveled from New York for the action, said that the women saw themselves as “guinea pigs . . . We did it to literally see what the police reaction was going to be.”⁵⁰ Although they were greeted by “solid ranks of blue-helmeted policemen . . . almost shoulder-to-shoulder, their riot gear very much in evidence,” Arlen Wilson, a local participant, reported in *Memo* that “all went well in spite of the oppressive atmosphere.”⁵¹ The same could not be said for confrontations between the police and protesters the rest of the week. Chicago WSPers played their maternal role—“helping to feed Yippies in the parks, getting kids out of jail, etc.”—and also joined some of the demonstrations that took place throughout the week where “many [Chicago WSPers] were harassed by the police, some hurt.”⁵² Although WSP, as an organization, had not endorsed the demonstrations planned for convention week by the Mobe, under the direction of David Dellinger and Yippee Jerry Rubin, some members from other parts of the country were in attendance, including Cora Weiss of New York and Anita Greenbaum of VOW-NE. Greenbaum had driven the seventeen hours from Boston to Chicago with her 19-year-old son. When they arrived, he went out to take photographs, while she stayed inside the Hilton, with three other VOWers, “taking care of people who were wounded because they were being beaten up” and cheering on

⁵⁰ Wells, *The War Within*, 277.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

the delegates when they “got out and marched” to protest the brutality of the police and “take no prisoners” attitude of Mayor Richard J. Daley.⁵³

In Chicago, as at the Whitehall Induction Center in New York during Stop the Draft week, WSPers acted as both demonstrators and caretakers. Although Chicago police officers did not specifically discuss the presence of women among the protestors and bystanders at either the April 27 march or the Democratic Convention, they had interactions with them, not only as members of the mass of demonstrators, but one-on-one as well. Most often, these occurred when an individual woman approached an officer to express concern or attempt to lodge a complaint after witnessing an act of police violence. For example, on Wednesday, August 28, a woman who was described as “well dressed” witnessed police officers beating a protestor who was already on the ground, unable to protect himself or fight back. She found a police captain nearby and complained to him about what she viewed as an unnecessary use of force. As she spoke to the captain, another officer “moved up from behind her and sprayed her in the face with mace. Police clubbed the woman to the ground and dragged her to a nearby paddy wagon.”⁵⁴

The woman in question was unidentified and may or may not have been a WSPer. But what she did was something many WSPers had done during demonstrations—not only in Chicago, but in New York, Boston, San Francisco and many other cities and towns—based on a sense responsibility to the young resisters and protestors who they

⁵³ Videotaped Interview with Anita Greenbaum, October 15, 2001, VOW-NE Oral History Project, SC. People—“demonstrators, reporters, McCarthy workers, doctors”—who had been clubbed by police officers in front of the hotel and across the street in Grant Park “began to stagger into the Hilton lobby, blood streaming from head and face wounds.” Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, 171. Demonstrators had been warned not to come to city hospitals if injured because police were staked out at the emergency rooms waiting to arrest them. Mark Kurlansky, *1968*, 282.

⁵⁴ Kusch, 104

saw bearing the brunt of punishment for expressing beliefs the older women shared. Sometimes the women's appearance—they were clearly neither “kids” nor “hippies” when seen individually and up close—could shock or shame an officer into refraining from further violence. In those instances, the older woman may have symbolized a critical yet loving mother, stepping in to remind the officer the difference between right and wrong. But more often, during the late sixties and early seventies, the WSPers and other women who challenged the authority of the police or questioned their judgment found they had lost their influence and moral authority. Police officers who believed they were at war and that demonstrators were the enemy were bound to see the WSPers efforts to shield younger protestors as providing aid and comfort to the wrong side. In the early sixties, when WSPers generally had cordial and mutually respectful relationships with the police, they had spoken of “protecting children” and the images they used to illustrate their literature were of young children, “innocents.” In the late sixties and early seventies, the children they were seeking to protect were the “enemy”—either Vietnamese youngsters maimed by napalm or older American “kids” that officers in Chicago referred to as “garbage,” “animals,” and worse. Not only were these “freaks” not entitled to police protection, they needed to be punished—for questioning the authority of the government, for not recognizing how privileged they were to be members of the middle and upper classes of the greatest and richest nation on earth, and for refusing to act like men (in ways large and small, from refusing to go to war to growing their hair long). When WSPers intervened in police activity at demonstrations, they were both refusing the (white) male protection to which they were entitled and claiming the role of protector for themselves. This challenged the officers' professional identity as enforcers

of the law and arbiters of right and wrong and also threatened to undermine their masculine authority. Kusch argues that many Chicago police officers “relish[ed] the opportunity to ‘spank’ a ‘spoiled generation,’ one that they both loathed and feared.” When WSPers and women like them interrupted this process, they were challenging patriarchal authority and potentially signaling the end of the era of “Father Knows Best” and “wait till your father gets home.”⁵⁵

For many of the Chicago women, Arlen Wilson reported, the events of 1968 exposed them to police brutality for the first time:

The extent to which some of our police (whose motto is “We Serve and Protect”) seemed to enjoy their work of clubbing every reachable head (newsmen, women, and bystanders included) came as a jolt to some of us...Our black and Puerto Rican citizens generally stayed back in their ghetto neighborhoods and out of the way

⁵⁵ Joshua Freeman analyzes the gender politics of a comparable interaction in his article on the “hardhat riots” of 1970, when construction workers brutally attacked antiwar protestors in New York City. “When a young female New York City official grabbed the jacket of a construction worker about to join three others in pummeling a student,” Freeman writes, “the worker responded: ‘If you wanted to be treated like an equal, we’ll treat you like one’ and proceeded with two other tradesmen to punch the woman, break her glasses, and bruise her ribs so badly that she was taken to the hospital.” Joshua B. Freeman, “Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations,” *Journal of Social History* Summer 1993, 725-744, 735. Freeman sees this attack on a professional woman by a group of working-class men as an expression of the men’s anxiety over the social changes being sought by women’s movement at a time when “The whole structure of patriarchy was seemingly at stake.” (735). While Freeman’s anecdote speaks to men’s fears about competition from women in the workplace and of having to answer to a woman superior, I see the police attacks on women as expressions of more personal anxieties over loss of authority within and control over the home and family. WSPers and other female protesters represented mothers, wives, and daughters. For women who represented the most significant and intimate hetero-social and -sexual relationships of a man’s life to side with his enemy, and reject not only his authority, but his version of masculinity was an indictment as well as a betrayal. The message, as in the hardhat story, is that women are not equal to men in the realm of violent confrontation. To demonstrate that women need the protection of the cop (or husband/father), they need to experience what it means to have his strength and power turned against them. But the fact that police officers found their violent attacks on these women to be literally unspeakable (they were never mentioned in otherwise detailed discussions of violent altercations with demonstrators), suggests they carried unresolved conflicts over their behavior. Were they troubled by the fact that they had to violate their own code of masculinity (“men protect women,” “boys don’t hit girls”) in order to save it (as American soldiers in Vietnam destroyed villages to save them)? Or was it the fact that women betrayed them by rejecting their masculine authority that they couldn’t bear to discuss?

during all this, doubtless to let us get a sample of “law and order” as they experience it.⁵⁶

This experience, Arlen Wilson concluded, was leading Chicago’s WSPers to a “re-evaluation of much of our entire system, and the reliance on armed force to perpetuate it.”⁵⁷ As they became frequent witnesses to and, increasingly, victims of harassment and repression, many of the women joined Dagmar Wilson and Arlen Wilson in questioning their relationship to the entire power structure of the country. Many had lost their earlier idealism about participatory democracy and the possibility of being able to effect social change through existing channels. The idea that the U.S. government was in Vietnam to prevent the establishment of a non-democratic regime—always questionable in WSP circles-- seemed like a bad joke by the fall of 1968. This attitude informed the cover of the September issue of *Memo*, which featured a photograph of the police beating demonstrators in Chicago under a quote attributed to the outgoing president, Lyndon Johnson: “Our foreign policy must be an extension of this nation’s domestic policy. Our safest guide to what we do abroad is a good look at what we are doing at home.” Clearly, in the eyes of a significant number of WSPers what was happening was the reverse—domestic policy was copying foreign policy. In the U.S., as in Vietnam, it seemed, the will of the people was being ignored.

This is not to say that all WSPers were radicalized to the same degree. Those who lived in or near large urban areas, who participated in mass demonstrations, or who visited Vietnam or met Vietnamese women at international conferences, were much more

⁵⁶Wilson, “Chicago.” Calvin Lockeridge, a local black community leader concurred with Arlen Wilson’s assessment. Of the convention protests, he said, “We feel basically that this is a white folks’ thing.” Quoted in Kusch, 53.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

likely to connect the war to the violence, poverty and racism at home that Dagmar Wilson and Arlen Wilson found so appalling. But since these were exactly the kinds of women who tended to dominate the national steering committee, contribute to the newsletter, and plan the demonstrations, the image WSP presented to the media and the general public definitely took on a more radical cast. Where WSP had once made a deliberate choice not to practice civil disobedience, its members were now being arrested on a regular basis for “trespassing” on government property during demonstrations. Where they had once claimed to be women of “all political persuasions,” they were now routinely taking positions that were identified by most of the American public with the radical left. Where they had once been a single-issue group focused on disarmament, they now promoted a multi-issue agenda equally concerned with “poverty, racism, [and] war.”⁵⁸ The media charted these developments with headlines like “Women for Peace in Battle at White House,” which suggested that maintaining matronly decorum had become the least of WSP’s concerns.⁵⁹

Internally, however, WSPers continued to debate “issue and image” and, more specifically, whether it was possible to bring their traditional white, middle-class constituency along as they articulated more overtly leftist positions. Discussions of broadening WSP’s agenda to include positions that could “be considered socialist” continued to arouse controversy. Articles in *Memo*, along with the minutes of national conferences and meetings of the national steering committee, from the late sixties and early seventies regularly incorporated language and discussed issues associated with the left. The minutes of the 1968 national conference announced that attendees had “adopted

⁵⁸ Sylvia Lichtenstein, quoted in transcript of “Washington WSP Retreat Meeting at Folly Fodor’s. Saturday, October 5, 1968,” 13. WSP Papers, Series A.1 Box 2, SCPC.

⁵⁹ *Washington Post*, September 21, 1967, E1.

a whole new perspective on the role of WSP in the coming year . . . our emphasis should be on the larger picture.” Although they would continue their work to end the war, the women would also begin “exposing to the American public the nature of the military industrial stranglehold on our foreign policy and the racist-repressive stranglehold on our domestic affairs.”⁶⁰ In her keynote address, Dagmar Wilson exhorted her audience to “dig in and really work with the intention of affecting the power structure in our country, either changing it or removing it.”⁶¹ Two years later, in 1970, the national steering committee adopted a resolution recommending to the WSP membership that, “the indivisibility of the struggle for human rights at home and for peace abroad be understood.”⁶²

Although their new resolve to address issues and problems “at home” did not lead WSPers to abandon their antiwar work, it did transform how they campaigned for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. They began to discuss the costs of war in new ways, not solely in terms of lives lost as they had in the mid-sixties when “Not My Sons, Not Your Sons, Not Their Sons” was their main slogan. Now they considered the domestic economic and social costs of a war economy. They did not abandon their young male allies, continuing to actively support draft resisters and dissident G.I.s while also beginning to work for amnesty for “all who refused to participate in or actively opposed the war.” They also served as liaisons between American P.O.W.s in Vietnam and their families in the U.S. But their outreach and lobbying became more focused on dollars and cents, constantly reminding the public and government officials about how much the war cost and other

⁶⁰ “Report of 7th Annual WSP National Conference Held in Winnetka, Ill., Nov. 8-11, 1968,” 1. WSP Papers, Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

⁶¹ Dagmar Wilson, “Keynote Address to the National Conference, November 9, 1968,” 5. WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 3, SCPC.

⁶² Evelyn Alloy, “To NCC July 11, 1970.” WSP Papers Series A.1 Box 1, SCPC.

ways that money could be spent. During the mid-1960s, their educational materials focused on the numbers of bodies—American and Vietnamese—killed or injured by the fighting; by the late sixties and early seventies, they emphasized instead the number of dollars lost to war. They used billboards and newspaper ads to spread messages like, “Vietnam . . . 49,000 dead, 100 billion dollars . . . Does that make sense?”⁶³ They also organized boycotts and tax refusal campaigns as part of a new strategy of “refusing to pay” for the war. WSPers and their supporters were encouraged to redirect the monies saved by those actions to organizations in their communities that were addressing local social problems that the government was not, once again linking domestic and foreign policy concerns.

With this new approach, WSP was still able to address middle-class women in their roles as housewives and mothers, arguing that the war was to blame for inflated prices of household goods and cuts to public education budgets. But it also enabled them to educate those women about poverty and the need for a more general redistribution of wealth. In a time of growing backlash against anti-poverty programs and welfare spending, WSP argued that it was military spending, not social programs, devouring the tax dollars of working Americans. “The decaying cities and suicidal cuts in social services can all be directly attributed to a war economy . . . In particular, we must challenge the concept that welfare is taking all the money away and let people see that the war . . . is siphoning off the life-blood of the community,” WSP National Coordinator Rita

⁶³ This particular message appeared on a billboard in the Boston suburb of Allston. See “Billboards for Peace,” VOW-NE Newsletter Summer 1970, 3. WSPers in other cities, including New York and Los Angeles, undertook similar campaigns.

Handman wrote to the membership in 1972.⁶⁴ In coalition with the NWRO during the early seventies, WSP organized a number of actions calling for cuts in military spending and a redirection of those funds to welfare, education, and public health.

The steering committee of VOW-NE began 1969 with an endorsement of a tax refusal campaign, focusing on the ten percent excise tax the federal government had imposed on telephone bills beginning in 1966. This tax was designed specifically to help underwrite the cost of the war and was referred to by people in the Movement as the war tax. A number of prominent antiwar activists, including the singer Joan Baez and the historian Howard Zinn, had publicly announced that they were withholding the tax when they paid their phone bills and encouraged others to follow suit.⁶⁵ This was the first time that VOW actively encouraged its members and friends to participate in an act of civil disobedience. The decision was made following what Washington WSPer Barbara Bick called, “one of the hardest, coldest, most depressed periods of our work.” The assassinations of King and Robert F. Kennedy, and the unsuccessful presidential campaign of peace candidate Eugene McCarthy “saddened and wearied us,” she wrote. The Paris peace talks, which initially filled the women with hope, quickly deadlocked, while bombing in Vietnam continued, leaving them “cynical and pessimistic.”⁶⁶

A number of WSPers, like many of their younger comrades, had begun to feel they had “exhausted the conventional channels of protest” and had to find new avenues

⁶⁴ Rita Handman, undated letter, 3. WSP Papers Series A.3 Box 13, SCPC.

⁶⁵ Zinn, a professor at Boston University, lived in Newton at the time and his wife Roslyn was a member of VOW-NE. VOW used their statement explaining their refusal to pay the war tax as a model for the organization’s literature on the subject. Minutes, VOW-NE Steering Committee Meeting, February 4, 1970. Baez went even further, refusing to pay 60% of her federal income taxes throughout the war years—the amount that she estimated went to support military spending. See, for example, “Joan Baez Again Refuses to Pay Part of Income Taxes,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1965, 35. As the VOW-NE women would later, Baez explained her action as a refusal to pay for war.

⁶⁶ Barbara Bick, “A Spring Thing,” *Memo* April-May 1969, 6.

for expressing their opposition. But while some young militants turned to violence in an effort to “bring the war home,” the women of VOW-NE sought non-violent ways to up the ante of their protest. As their Steering Committee explained,

we have decided that the right of conscientious refusal belongs to all of us, not just to those of draft age. Wars are fought with men and dollars. We have supported draft refusers. They have refused to fight. Our comparable act is to refuse to pay.⁶⁷

By doing so, they would make themselves vulnerable to prosecution and could face fines and imprisonment as resisters did. They would simultaneously deprive the federal government of war funds—a tangible way of expressing that they did not want this war to be fought in their name—and amplify the expression of their solidarity with draft resisters. Finally, by accumulating interest on the money withheld from the government in an escrow account and donating it to local institutions whose work they believed in, they would model what a redistribution of war spending to peace spending would look like. To this end, VOW member Sue Webster organized and administered the Roxbury War Tax Scholarship Fund, depositing the money in Boston’s Black Unity Bank. By June, seventy members had deposited nearly \$24,000.⁶⁸ In October, VOW announced that grants had been made to two “institutions of hope in the black community”: the Highland Park Free School and the Urban League’s Big Brother Fund.⁶⁹

VOW also built its own institution at the intersection of boycotts and fundraising. Called the Peace Boutique, this non-profit “store” and meeting-place opened in time for the 1968 Christmas shopping season. It was located in an empty storefront that had

⁶⁷ “Editor’s Note,” VOW-NE Newsletter, February 1970, 5.

⁶⁸ “Some Groovy Things to Do,” VOW-NE Newsletter May-June, 1970, 2.

⁶⁹ Untitled article, VOW-NE Newsletter, October 1970, 3.

previously served as the headquarters of the local McCarthy campaign. At holiday time, WSPers around the country had long promoted boycotts of war toys. The longer the war dragged on and the more aware they became of the deprivations suffered by the poor in the U.S., the less many of the women desired to celebrate the holidays in lavish fashion, handing over their money to corporations that might well be profiting from the war. Some chose to make donations to their favorite causes instead of buying gifts, others to give simple, inexpensive presents, focusing on arts and crafts and items they and their children could make at home. When the VOW husband who had rented space to the McCarthy campaign offered to let the women use it, they created a vehicle that would allow themselves and their neighbors to support causes they believed in while also providing “meaningful” gifts for their loved ones. They sold peace memorabilia (jewelry, posters, cards, t-shirts) created by and for Movement groups, along with crafts produced by poor people’s cooperatives in Mississippi, Mexico, and India; works by local artists; and books that expressed their values and politics. In doing so, they inspired residents of their community to take a politically correct approach to holiday gift-giving while also raising money for local antiwar and civil rights groups. This kind of funneling was especially valuable to groups like the Resistance, one of the recipients of the Boutique’s proceeds, whose extra-legal activities closed them off from mainstream sources of funding like foundation grants.⁷⁰

Boycotts also played an important part in WSP’s efforts to focus attention on the war economy. For those who felt that the organization was becoming too militant, taking on too many issues, and getting too far ahead of its original base—the “woman next

⁷⁰ The boutique also became an important meeting place and drop in center for local activists.

door”—boycotts provided a more comfortable form of protest and a better vehicle for mobilizing new support than direct action forms of civil disobedience. In 1971, Gladys Knobel, a WSP leader from the suburbs of Chicago, sent a memo to the national steering committee expressing concern at the degree to which WSP had become “submerged” in the larger Movement. She argued that, “Our activities and programs must appeal to women—to their special needs and feelings.” Knobel’s critique demonstrates that although the group’s national leadership had begun prioritizing coalition work while making decisive moves to the left, it had not brought the entire rank and file along with it. Because of WSP’s loose, bottom-up organizational structure, local affiliates were encouraged but not required to follow the national steering committee’s lead.⁷¹ Local groups had always functioned independently of the national office, which had been established more to facilitate communication among women from around the country than to provide them with specific marching orders. At the same time, WSP’s early non-ideological, big-tent approach had instilled members with the belief that partisan disagreements would not divide the organization as long as they all remained committed to disarmament (and, later, opposed to the Vietnam War). Local groups felt no obligation to follow the suggestions of national leaders. At the same time, neither the national steering committee nor the staff of the national office had the power (or desire) to “purge” members for non-compliance, so disagreements over agenda and strategy were debated continuously but rarely resolved.

⁷¹ The national steering committee was officially known as the National Consultative Council (NCC) and included regional representatives selected by local groups. All members of the NCC were considered equal, although some were undoubtedly more influential than others. There was, however, no official hierarchy--no national officers and no elections.

Knobel's group, for example, organized a local daylong boycott of all consumer goods called "Don't Buy War."⁷² Women were "not to shop and not to spend money on anything" for one day as "a symbol of protest against the war and the inflated economy." Knobel called this "a uniquely women's effort." Her group "tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully" to convince WSP's national office to make the boycott the basis of a national campaign. The North Shore chapter went ahead with it locally and declared the action a great success, involving thousands of women and garnering coverage in all the Chicago and suburban papers, as well as the national Huntley-Brinkley newscast.⁷³ Local chapters in other states organized similar boycotts, and some held weekly "Mourning Tuesdays" or "Mourning Thursdays." These actions were not meant to punish specific stores or corporations but rather "to bring the war home" non-violently by spending part of each week foregoing small luxuries that were often taken for granted, like shopping, dining at restaurants, or going to the movies. The time and money saved were to be devoted instead to reflection and antiwar work. These little sacrifices were tangible everyday reminders that the war continued. Some branches combined these boycott days with WSP's national Save Our Sons campaign, which invited women to send the President a photograph of a young man or boy they cared about with a note expressing their grief about the American men who had died and would continue to die in Southeast Asia.

These activities harkened back to WSP's early days, when the women used rhetoric about their fears for their own children to get other women to identify with them

⁷² The slogan echoes the title of a documentary that was popular in WSP circles in the early seventies entitled, *You Don't Have to Buy War, Mrs. Smith*. The film was produced by New York City Consumer Affairs Director Bess Myerson, a former Miss America (and the first Jewish woman to win that crown).

⁷³ Knobel, 4.

and, they hoped, join them in opposing nuclear weapons. They were, once again, standing outside supermarkets and town halls, talking with other women, and getting those who had never considered themselves political before to act. All a passerby had to do was sign a postcard and pull a photo out of her wallet to send with it. They knew some women would stop there, but that, for others it was a first step that would lead to life of political commitment. Even Barbara Bick, the longtime editor of *Memo* who frequently served as WSP's representative to New Left coalitions, let a hint of nostalgia for the group's early, "respectable" days enter a description of a 1969 demonstration in New York City:

There were no screaming Yippies, far-out politics, or violent confrontations in front of the Hotel Pierre in New York on January 15. Instead close to 1,000 women, women students, mothers with babies, 30s and 40s, grandmothers, working women and women of "leisure," elegantly mink-clad and old wool-coated, bright young mini-skirts and high boots beside the serious middle-of-the-knee contingent—all were doing that traditional circular sidewalk dance to let President-elect Nixon know that he could expect them to be around until he "cut out the bloody war."⁷⁴

What both this passage and Knobel's memo expressed was an enthusiasm for women of different ages, classes, and sartorial styles working together—apart from men. This belief in the political potential of sisterhood was something WSPers shared with the younger generation of women who were launching the radical feminist movement. Knobel lamented that WSP had failed to capitalize on this development, and argued that they had been spending too much time in the coed Mobe and draft resistance movements, instead of organizing their own gender-specific actions. Mickey Flacks, of Ann Arbor, also saw overlap between WSP and the women's liberation movement: "Women Strike for Peace was an unheralded precursor of the women's movement," she said. "It was a combination of caring passionately about what we set out to do and caring passionately

⁷⁴ "Cut Out the Bloody War!" *Memo*, January/February 1969, 14-15. Publication File, TC.

about each other.”⁷⁵ But were the kind of actions that Knobel promoted, which appealed to women in their roles as mothers and housewives, likely to appeal to those who were in the process of challenging traditional gender roles? Aside from being women who respected and supported each other, what did their movement have to offer their rebellious daughters? Was sisterhood without an explicitly feminist agenda “liberating”? At a time when a life of domesticity was seen by some as a site of oppression, a prison, a trap, could a mother even be a sister?

⁷⁵ The Mickey Flacks quote comes from an untitled, undated videotape of an Ann Arbor Women for Peace Reunion. VOW-NE Records, unprocessed materials, SL.

Chapter 7: Can a Mother Be a Sister? WSP and the Women's Liberation Movement

Over the course of the 1960s WSP had achieved something remarkable: it had survived. Women across a spectrum of political viewpoints, with a range of preferred strategies for achieving their goals had stuck with each other and the organization against a backdrop of rapid political and cultural changes and a series of national crises. They had shifted their focus of concern from opposition to nuclear weapons and testing to the Vietnam War and the economic disparities and racial inequality Americans faced at home. They adapted to changing times, took on new issues, experimented with new tactics and entered coalitions with new partners. In spite of these many challenges and tensions, WSP continued to function as a loosely structured coalition of grassroots women that maintained a strong presence on both the national and local levels.

This is not to say that the group was without internal conflict and upheaval—locally and nationally, WSPers engaged in debates and arguments over both image and ideology. How militant was too militant? How many different issues and commitments could they juggle? How should they deal with individuals who were too domineering or those who were not participating as much as they once did? How could they continue to attract new, younger members without alienating older ones? During the late sixties and early seventies, it was this last question that seemed to have the potential to undermine the group's cohesion and, ironically, its spirit of sisterhood.

In spite of its maternalist rhetoric, WSP had never been an organization solely of mothers. Although the majority of participants, like the majority of American women, had children, a significant number did not. And, while the media, particularly during the

group's early years, never tired of promoting the image of demonstrations of "women pushing baby carriages" and "housewives with picket signs," many WSPers were professionals whose skills and contacts played a major role in shaping and advancing the organization. While it is true that WSP provided the "ordinary women next door" the opportunity to do extraordinary things, it also provided career women a space in which their talents and leadership ability were welcomed, not challenged. It was also a setting where working mothers could link, rather than compartmentalize those two aspects of their identities and experience. During the postwar period, the cultural icon of the stay-at-home mom often made women who worked outside the home hide or feel ashamed of the amount of time and energy they devoted to work other than childcare. For example,

Alice Quaytman, a leftist political activist before, during, and after WWII, raised her family and worked as a child psychologist during the fifties. But when anyone asked what she did, she exclusively described herself as a "mother who works with children." Another mother, a salaried president of a national philanthropic organization who put in 80 hours a week, explained her full-time housekeeper and lengthy absences from home as the result of her "volunteer" work. Many suburban women worked full-time without pay, as part of the volunteer army that created libraries, schools, charities, and religious organizations that turned suburban developments into communities. This, they could brag about.¹

And that was outside the workplace. In their professions, women faced sex discrimination, what would later be called sexual harassment and a variety of daily humiliations that resulted from being ignored, patronized, or taken advantage of by male colleagues and superiors. Donna Allen, a Ph.D in economics, for example, watched her husband get job offers, even though she had been the better student. In WSP, on the other hand, her unique expertise made her a sought after writer and speaker who developed

¹ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 26.

position papers on how to create jobs that didn't rely on the existence of a military-industrial complex and how the Poor People's Campaign should frame its arguments for a fairer distribution of jobs and wealth.

Within WSP, some tensions did exist between who worked within the home and those who worked outside it. Housewives often wanted to meet during the day, while their children were at school, making it impossible for women with jobs to participate. Some turned their activism into a part-time job, which could make working women feel either that they could never contribute an adequate amount of time to the movement or to stretch themselves thin, trying to accomplish a comparable amount in much fewer hours. Shirley Lens, who managed to dominate the Chicago affiliate in spite of her full-time job as a teacher, could be found handling WSP correspondence on her lunch hour. On the other hand, some career women came to feel that their time and talents weren't appreciated enough. Bella Abzug, as a lawyer, was accustomed to the concept of billable hours and thought her sister WSPers didn't appreciate the fact that she was giving up money as well as time because of her devotion to the cause. "I made inroads into my earning capacity, and gave up my work in the Lawyers Guild," in order to devote more time to WSP, Abzug said. "I spent all my extracurricular time as a volunteer like everybody else, but for me it was a sacrifice."² Clearly, she felt her time was more valuable than that of women who would otherwise be spending time with their children or on housework.

The experiences of women like Abzug, Allen, and Lens became especially significant in the late sixties as young female activists, frustrated with having their concerns over male domination and sexism within groups like SDS and the Resistance

² Swerdlow, 146.

ignored or laughed at, began organizing autonomous women's activities—beginning with organizing their own sessions at conferences and participating in actions sponsored by existing women's groups like WSP, WILPF, and NOW and culminating in the founding of new, single-sex groups, that would become the foundation of the women's liberation movement. That at least some young New Left women, feeling alienated from and marginalized by male leadership of the antiwar movement would turn to WSP seems a logical next step. But, at the same time, for the younger generation of women activists envisioning a future for themselves beyond housewifery and motherhood, WSP's maternalist rhetoric could be a turn-off. As historian Ruth Rosen has observed, the women's liberation generation "felt particular hostility towards domestic life" based in part on the "unconscious resentments and . . . displaced ambitions" they attributed to their own mothers. Their anger at the limitations they associated with the housewife-mother role, in some cases, fueled antagonism toward WSP. At the same time, the participation of women like Abzug, Allen, and Lens who had sometimes seemed like outliers among the founding generation of WSPers, made the organization more appealing to potential newcomers.

Abzug, Allen, and Lens stood apart not because of their careers but because of their styles. Confident, sometimes overbearing, often impatient with the process of consensus, and quite comfortable in male corridors of power, they were criticized on various occasions for squelching debate, taking action without consulting the group, and being too political. Abzug believed there was a split within WSP between the moralists and the politicians. Swerdlow supports this analysis. "There were two factions," she said. "A lot of women came to WSP out of moralistic persuasions, like Dagmar Wilson. Bella

was a political person from the beginning.” At a meeting to plan their first post-strike action, the January 15, 1962 demonstration in Washington, Bella wanted to know, “What are you gonna ask for?” Swerdlow, who identified herself as part of the moralistic group, who believed “politics were dirty and we don’t want to be part of it,” recalled that before Abzug’s intervention, “It never occurred to anybody that we would lobby, that we would have any demands except, ‘Stop nuclear testing.’”³ Abzug believed it was “okay to show your emotion and come in as a mother and as a woman to say this is going to hurt my children, but it’s not good enough.” She argued that “in addition to showing outrage, despair, and other emotions, it was important to have a process in which we tried to influence change through existing procedures and by changing procedures.” From then on, lobbying was a routine and effective element of WSP’s activism.⁴

Some of the women refugees from the student left recognized that WSP supported strong women leaders as well as those who were passionate but less confident and thought the group would free them to be more vocal and active. It was especially comfortable for young women who were married and had begun to have children and felt that the groups they had joined as students were no longer a good fit given their new lifestyles. Nan Wiegersma, one of younger women who joined at this point, said that in spite of its reputation for being middle-aged and middle-class in orientation, she found WSP to be “more of the ‘60s” than it was given credit for, enabling her to continue working on the same issues, just in a different context.⁵ Similarly, Priscilla Long, who was active in the civil rights and antiwar movements before joining the Boston-area

³ Thom and Levine, 60-62.

⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁵ Alonso, *Peace as a Woman’s Issue*, 211.

socialist feminist group Bread and Roses, saw WSP as part of a spectrum of Movement groups that also included the Black Panthers.⁶

For others, WSP clearly represented an older generation. “I had contacts with Women’s Strike and I thought they were very prissy and too peaceful and uninteresting,” recalled Rosalyn Baxandall, who became active in the radical feminist groups New York Radical Women and Redstockings. “But I was involved with them. I went on their marches and things.”⁷ As Baxandall suggests, there was a period during the late sixties when some young women found that while collaborating with WSP was preferable to working with male antiwar activists, the group wasn’t their “style.” They were looking for something beyond a women’s antiwar group; they wanted to take on sexism directly, both within the Left and in the larger society. The extant feminist groups like NOW were too mainstream, work-within-the-system for the young radicals. They needed to create something new.

Many WSPers thought the burgeoning feminist movement would provide them with a new constituency eager to join an autonomous women’s organization with progressive politics, and were shocked by the degree to which the traditional gender roles many of them embodied alienated young feminists. Much to their surprise, given that some WSPers considered themselves radicals, a few considered themselves feminists, and a majority of them expected to be treated as allies and mentors by the younger

⁶ Priscilla Long, “We Called Ourselves Sisters,” in *Feminist Memoir Project*, 326. The juxtaposition is not as far-fetched as it might seem. East Bay Women for Peace co-sponsored some community events in Oakland with the Panthers and helped raise funds for its free breakfast program for children.

⁷ Baxandall oral history. The degree to which WSP was perceived as “prissy” probably varied based on the observer’s own politics, as well as geographic location: some local branches remained pretty staid through the later sixties and seventies, while others became quite militant. But that Baxandall’s assessment was shared by many members of the student left and counterculture was made clear to me by a staff member at one of the archives where I did research. He expressed interest in my subject, explaining that he had been an antiwar activist himself. His cohort was not particularly fond of the WSPers they knew. “We thought they were some tight-assed bitches,” he recalled.

women—they sometimes encountered real hostility instead of admiration or, at least, empathy.⁸ The antagonism first became apparent at the National Conference for New Politics in Chicago on Labor Day weekend 1967. Initially envisioned as a forum for creating a progressive third party alternative for the 1968 election, it devolved into a factionalized free-for-all. It is generally best remembered for the Black Caucus's demand that it be given 50 percent of the seats on all committees and 50 percent of the votes on all decisions.⁹ Although it made less of an impression on the room, a group of feminists had organized a workshop on women. They “hammered out a resolution” that “by today’s standards wasn’t very radical—equal pay for equal work, abortion demand” but seemed “very daring at the time.” When they submitted it they were told that the Resolutions Committee “already had one from women, and there could only be one,” according to Jo Freeman. “It had come from Women’s Strike for Peace [sic], whose distinguished representatives had not come to our workshop. The Resolutions Chair told us to combine

⁸ Initially, the women who were trying to fuse feminism and Left politics referred to themselves as “radical women”; New York Radical Women was the name of one of the early groups in this vein. But the term is not very helpful for distinguishing them from other women in the Movement, some of whom did not identify as feminist and some, like certain WSPers, that the “radical women” claimed to oppose. As Amy Swerdlow pointed out, many WSPers “had always thought of themselves as radical in terms of left-right politics.” For this reason, I prefer to the new strain as “women’s liberation,” a term claimed by one of the other early groups, the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union. This strain quickly divided into two tendencies: one that considered gender the primary contradiction and focused solely on toppling the patriarchy and another that while recognizing and opposing sexism also remained committed to overthrowing capitalism. Following Alice Echols, I will refer to the former as “radical feminists” and the latter as “socialist feminists” or, in the language of the time, “politicos.” Swerdlow quoted in Rosen, *World Split Open*, 203. Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*.

⁹ The journalist Andrew Kopkind, who regularly covered New Left politics and Movement actions began his article on the conference with the statement, “To be white and a radical in America this summer is to see horror and feel impotence.” He interpreted the demands of the Black Caucus as “trying to cope with the rhetoric of democracy while confronted with the reality of white domination.” Andrew Kopkind, “They’d Rather Be Left,” *New York Review of Books*, September 27, 1968. (available online at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1967/sep/28/theyd-rather-be-left/>; last accessed June 11, 2011). The WSPers present were divided on the issue. VOW-NE took a straw poll at its next meeting to see how its membership would have voted. The results were ten for, seven against, and six abstentions.

our resolutions. The fact that WSP's was about peace, not women, was not relevant."¹⁰

Another representative of the women's caucus met with representatives of WSP to try to forge a compromise; the WSPers agreed to include two points from the women's resolution. Freeman and Shulamith Firestone were "furious about the betrayal" and decided to submit the feminist resolution as a minority report. When the time came, the chairman of the plenary refused to call on them and pushed the WSP plank through. He further enraged Freeman and Firestone when he, according to Freeman, "patted Shulie on the head and said, 'Move on, little girl; we have more important issues to discuss than women's liberation.'"¹¹

WSP should not be held responsible for the NCNP's refusal to accept more than one resolution regarding women (in contrast, the Black Caucus had submitted thirteen and insisted they be voted on as a package) or the high-handed and patronizing treatment of the chair toward Freeman and Firestone. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the younger women WSP was complicit: it hadn't sent any representatives to the women's meeting nor incorporated the entire list of feminist demands in its resolution on women and peace. In the spirit of "if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem," WSP's failure to rally on their behalf appears to have left Freeman and Firestone with the impression that the peace women were anti-feminist and not to be trusted. It is difficult to determine what WSPers about these younger women and their feminist agenda; their documents regarding the NCNP focus almost exclusively on the debates over the Black Caucus's demands and the racial tensions that dominated the conference. In that way,

¹⁰ Jo Freeman, "On the Origin of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective," *Feminist Memoir Project*, 179. The essay was written in 1996; in 2011, "abortion on demand" would be perceived as both radical and daring if it appeared on a political platform in the U.S.

¹¹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 49.

WSPers did have something in come with the white men running the event; they didn't see "women's liberation" as being worthy of much attention in light of the racial strife that threatened to tear apart the antiwar movement and the New Left. But for Freeman, Firestone and a handful of others, the NCNP was "the genesis" of the women's liberation movement.¹²

Although a scattering of autonomous women's groups, whose members came primarily from activist backgrounds in civil rights, antiwar, and other New Left movements, had begun to form in the wake of the NCNP, they started off quietly, and worked in isolation, even from each. They made their existence known—to each other and to WSP—through the JRB. When Rankin, in an effort to put a positive spin on the impact of the demonstration that bore her name (and that many participants found to be a frustrating and ineffectual experience) said that "the impact of the march" would be on women rather than Congress, she was more right than she could possibly have known. Although largely unheralded at the time, the JRB had been chosen by organizers of the "embryonic" women's liberation movement,¹³ led by Freeman, Firestone and Pam Allen, as a forum for publicly launching a feminist critique of the women's peace movement. This brought the new feminist groups to the attention of women from all over the country. At the JRB, they got the attention they had failed to win at the NCNP. As Swerdlow points out,

The trains and busses returning the JRB women to New York hummed, not with the usual reports from Congressmen visited, but with heated debates about traditional sex roles, the meaning of woman power and women's liberation, and whether or not affluent young radical women had the right to push their demands forward when our sisters were dying in Vietnam.

¹² The term "genesis" is Jo Freeman's. Quoted in Echols, 49.

¹³ The use of the term "embryonic" in this context comes from Evans, "68 generation."

In histories of the modern women's movement, this is generally recognized as the moment when feminism trumped maternalism as the wellspring of U.S. women's activism.¹⁴ This event has primarily been interpreted from the perspective of the young radical feminists who attended the event "not to appeal to Congress, but to appeal to women not to appeal to Congress."¹⁵ The women's liberationists argued that WSP and its allies had been accepting and perpetuating women's roles "as wives, mothers, and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears."¹⁶ They then attempted to stage a coup that would bury WSP along with other symbols of what they called "weeping womanhood." Both contemporary and scholarly accounts view this as a generational and ideological victory for the young radicals.¹⁷ The counter-demonstration did succeed in attracting converts to the new movement and becoming an object of heated debate among those who were put off by the analysis as well as those who were sympathetic. But the standard interpretation presents both sides of this struggle as more monolithic, less diverse, and less internally divided than they in fact were. It also makes it difficult to understand and

¹⁴ Ruth Rosen gives WSP its due as "a formidable and effective political group" and acknowledges that it became a "straw woman" for radical feminists but never mentions it again after her account of the JRB action. Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 201-203. Alice Echols makes the significant point that the JRB action underscored conflicts between the radical and socialist (or "politico") wings of the Women's Liberation Movement as well as the generational divide between WSPers and younger feminists. Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). I argue that there was significant overlap between the political agendas and organizing strategies of WSP and the younger socialist feminists.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Firestone, "Rankin Brigade." In 1967, Firestone and Freeman had both been in the founding group of Chicago's women's liberation oriented West Side Group. When Firestone moved to New York shortly thereafter, she and Allen helped found NYRW. Founders of the group D.C. Women's Liberation, including Marilyn Webb, helped organize the JRB counter-demonstration.

¹⁷ Radical Women's Group, "Burial of Weeping Womanhood," *Dear Sisters*, 25.

explain the continuing appeal of mothers' movements in the wake of what many saw as a total victory for feminism as the lingua franca of all future women's activism.

It also ignores the many connections and intersections, both personal and political, between the initiators of the women's liberation movement and members of WSP. A number of young women identified with the civil rights movement, New Left, and women's liberation movement either participated in WSP at some point (Casey Hayden and Mickey Flacks in Ann Arbor and Jackie Goldberg, in Berkeley, where she became involved in the Free Speech Movement after being kicked off the quad for distributing WSP literature, among others) or had mothers or mentors who did (such as Dana Densmore, who acknowledged that her mother, Donna Allen, informed *her* that "Liberation for us!" was on the way—although she didn't identify Allen as a WSPer when she did so; Densmore's Cell 16 comrade Roxanne Dunbar also considered Allen a role model, "a true intellectual and revolutionary as I imagined Simone de Beauvoir"). Even Cathy Wilkerson of SDS, Weatherman, and D.C. Women's Liberation acknowledged WSP's centrality in the larger Movement when, in a letter to *Memo* in 1969, she attempted to get the older women to understand, if not approve, the growing militancy of the women in her circle. In her memoir, Wilkerson noted that prior to going underground, she "had packed all of my belongings in a truck, including my childhood teddy bear and my Cambodian fabric, and left it with an older woman who was a member of Women Strike for Peace."¹⁸ Each of these women who had a hand in launching the women's liberation movement had been positively influenced, supported, or mentored by

¹⁸ Swerdlow, 52; Hayden, "Fields of Blue" 348; Densmore, "A Year of Living Dangerously: 1968," 72; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 139; Cathy Wilkerson, "To WSP from SDS," *Memo* (April-May 1969), 23; Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007).

WSPers. Even those who ultimately rejected maternalism would not have identified the older women as “traditional” or “passive” as the JRB counter-protesters did. They were more likely to argue that WSP was one of the roots from which the women’s movement grew.

The version of events that portrays WSP as being toppled by the new movement also de-emphasizes the Brigade’s progressive agenda (which was to link opposition to the war to support for economic and racial justice at home, in an effort to build a coalition between women peace activists and women in the civil rights and labor movements) and the degree to which WSP had moved away from its early politics of respectability. Furthermore, it ignores the ways in which the relationship between WSP and the younger activists, like the relationship of maternalism to feminism, while oppositional in some ways was mutually influential in others.

This is not to say that legitimate differences of opinion between the younger women and the WSP/JRB cohort didn’t exist. The younger women, for the most part, did not believe that it was in the best interest of women and their empowerment to enter public debates as “mothers,” rather than as “women” or “citizens.” They argued against women organizing separately from men around issues that were not specifically women’s issues (peace as opposed to abortion rights, for example). The feminists also emphatically rejected the idea that women had any special affinity or responsibility for peace; this was most divisive issue between the two groups. But their counter-demonstration at the JRB, rather than clearly stating these objections, elided a critique of the American woman’s second-class status and the degree to which she was complicit in it with ideological

attacks on the JRB specifically and maternalist politics generally.¹⁹ Writings by members of New York Radical Women on and for the event suggest that the young radicals seemed more intent on eviscerating the cultural icon of the stay-at-home mom than with critiquing WSP's agenda, its role in the antiwar movement, or its perceived failure to create a real power bloc. It was the *idea* of women entering public debates as mothers and housewives that NYRW rejected. The result is that they failed to acknowledge that WSP's approach might have strategic benefits or that WSPers were attempting to instill those "traditional" roles with new meaning and authority.

At the radical women's "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" at Arlington National Cemetery, neither their effigy of "weeping womanhood" (a "larger-than-life dummy . . . complete with feminine getup, blank face, blonde curls, and candle . . . S&H green stamps, curlers, garters, and hairspray") nor their rhetorical descriptions of maternalist protestors accurately reflected the personas or politics of WSPers. Where in this depiction were the women who inserted themselves into debates among world leaders in Geneva, faced down HUAC, pounded their shoes on the door of the Pentagon demanding admittance, or broke through police barriers to picket in front of the White House? What the radical feminists failed to recognize was that while the majority of WSPers did accommodate rather than challenge the cultural assumption that women were primarily responsible for child-rearing, they rejected the idea that housework and childcare required all their time and energy. Instead of accepting a life sentence in a

¹⁹ For the record, the Brigade did not rely on maternalist rhetoric. It was promoted as a "women's," not a "mothers'" action. Nothing in either the Call for the action, or the petition submitted to Congress, invoked essentialist images. The banner at the head of the march read, "End the War in Vietnam and Social Crisis at Home." The only language specific to the JRB that the women's liberation cohort could point to as a basis for their critique was a line in Rankin's Open Letter describing the purpose of the event: "women are the ones that must be concerned with the needs and development of the human race." Rankin was not a mother herself and her beliefs regarding gender probably come closest to what became known in the seventies as cultural feminism—the idea that not only are women different from men, they're better.

“comfortable concentration camp,” WSPers used the respect and deference granted to mothers to break out of the private sphere and into public life. Furthermore, the WSP of 1968 was a far cry from the WSP of 1961—the passivity of the JRB march, designed to attract first-time protesters, especially church women, stood in stark contrast to other recent actions where the women had been vocal, confrontational, and defiant.

It was particularly ironic that the “Funeral Oration” delivered by Kathie Amatniek (later Kathie Sarachild) accused the “traditional woman” of being disturbed and frightened “to see other women, we women, asserting ourselves together, however precariously, in some kind of solidarity, instead of completely resenting each other, being embarrassed by each other, hating each other,” when it was the younger women who seemed to feel resentful of and embarrassed by the older women.²⁰ The younger women also appeared to be redirecting some of the anger they felt towards men and the men of the Left in particular onto the older women, who seemed too willing to devote their energies to “saving” their sons rather than to liberating themselves and their daughters.²¹ The young radicals’ refusal to “fight against war as the relatives of men”²² was, in part, an expression of their frustration with those relationships. The “Funeral Oration” devoted a lot of attention to the ways men used women’s desire for heterosexual connection to stifle them:

²⁰ Although WSP was hardly free of internal disagreements and conflicts, one thing the women did not lack were feelings of solidarity for each other and other women. As Ethel Taylor wrote, “I’ve never been part of a group—and I’ve been in a lot of them—where there was such a feeling of sisterhood. That is not to say that we don’t sometimes get furious at each other.” Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 14.

²¹ As Myra Marx Ferre and Beth B. Hess write, “Powerlessness makes it difficult to confront those who actually wield power and easier to displace it horizontally.” *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Four Decades of Change* (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1995).

²² Rosen, “The Day They Buried Traditional Womanhood.”

For some reason, man said to woman: you are less sexual when you participate in . . . other things, you are no longer attractive to me if you do so. I like you quiet and submissive. It makes me feel as if you don't love me, if you fail to let me do all the talking. . . if you actually have something to say yourself. . . When you confront the world outside the home—the world where I operate as an individual self as well as a husband and father—then for some reason, I feel you are a challenge to me and you become sexless and aggressive. If you turn me off too much, you know, I'll find myself another woman.²³

As the last sentence suggests, Amatniek and others believed that men had succeeded in keeping women in relatively powerless and dependent positions through a divide-and-conquer strategy—women competed against each other for male approval and the benefits that came with it, rather than uniting to challenge men's social dominance. Although this explains why curlers and hairspray were part of the burial ceremony, it seemed to have little to do with WSPers, the majority of whom had managed to sustain long marriages while also having “something to say” for themselves and routinely “confront[ing] the world outside the home.” It was also a jab at WSP's history of dressing in nice, feminine clothing for demonstrations, although they took care with their appearance not to attract men but to identify themselves with “ordinary” women.

It isn't until the end of the “Oration” that Amatniek clarifies her argument against essentialist thinking about gender:

If men fail to see that love, justice and equality are the solution, that domination and exploitation hurt everybody, then our species is truly doomed; for if domination and exploitation and aggression are inherent biological characteristics which cannot be overcome, then nuclear war is inevitable and we will have reached our evolutionary dead end by annihilating ourselves.²⁴

²³ Amatniek, “Funeral Oration.”

²⁴ Ibid.

The majority of WSPers would probably have agreed with this point. Although their claim that women had a special responsibility for the preservation of life was read by the young radicals as biological determinism, it could just as easily be understood as the result of social conditioning and/or personal experience. WSPers argued that if mothers felt responsible for their children's well-being, they had to take a stand when those children's lives were in danger—whether it was demanding for a stoplight at a busy intersection or against war and nuclear testing. Conversely, they believed that male leaders approached problems from a top-down rather than a bottom-up orientation which made it possible for them to lose sight of the value of individual human lives as they pursued power and dominance for their nations and, hence, themselves. If WSPers had thought men were biologically incapable of overcoming feelings of aggression, they would not have bothered lobbying Congress.²⁵

It is arguable that, in the long-run, this strategy has limited efficacy in the struggle for women's empowerment because, by privileging motherhood, it delegitimizes other choices, making it easy to denigrate and discriminate against women who don't have or want children. But, given the hold that Cold War thinking had over both domestic life and international relations, it is hard to imagine an overtly feminist group mobilizing the

²⁵ The problem with seeking women's empowerment through an approach like WSP's, Ruth Rosen argues, is that "By emphasizing mothers' moral superiority, moreover, motherist rhetoric tends to place women on pedestals, where, as feminists have long observed, women are worshipped but rarely granted equal rights." I would argue that WSP claimed "moral authority" rather than "moral superiority." In an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, the columnist Ross Douthat suggested that it is all but impossible for elected officials to maintain moral authority in the modern world because "the act of governing is inherently polarizing and inherently compromising . . . MLK's moral authority is unchallenged in part because — unlike his would-be heirs, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton — he never ran for any elective office." Similarly, WSP argued for its moral authority not based on the biology of motherhood but based on their outsider status, as women, in a country whose government and military leaders were almost exclusively men. Rosen, "The Day They Buried Traditional Womanhood." Douthat, "The Riddle of Moral Authority," blogpost, August 31, 2010, 2:50 p.m. [Newyorktimes.com](http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/31/the-riddle-of-moral-authority/) (<http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/31/the-riddle-of-moral-authority/>) Last accessed June 20, 2011.

numbers or garnering the positive attention that WSP did during the early 1960s. In effect, WSP used the Trojan horse of maternalism to make a feminist claim—that being a mother did not and should not mean having to forfeit either a life of action in the public sphere, or work beyond child-rearing and housekeeping. With a few exceptions, WSPers’ lives during the 1960s and ‘70s foreshadow those of feminists in the eighties and nineties who complained that until men took equal responsibility for childcare and housework “having it all meant doing it all.” But demonstrating that women were capable of “doing it all” was a step in the right direction in 1961, in that it demanded a place for women and, particularly, women who had children, in public life and public debates. For the younger generation of activists, involvement in the social movements of the 1960s had seemed to provide an alternative to—indeed, an escape from—domestic responsibilities and a hint of more egalitarian and companionate relationships with men than those of their mothers and fathers. WSP had provided thousands of women with a vehicle through which they could fulfill their ambitions to do meaningful work and make a difference, but to the women’s liberation generation, the presence of mothers and housewives within the Movement suggested that those roles were, perhaps, inescapable.

Amy Swerdlow, the only scholar to write about the JRB from the WSP perspective, claims that “much of what we heard [at the JRB] was new to us . . . and, although some WSPers were impatient with what they perceived as self-serving and strident demands for women’s equality at a time of national and international crisis, it left many of us with a great deal to think about.”²⁶ Surprisingly, Swerdlow does not argue against the younger women’s interpretation of WSP’s activities as having “condoned and

²⁶ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 140.

even enforced the gender hierarchy.”²⁷ Instead she suggests that the older women “were moved to question their own role and tactics.”²⁸ She makes it sound as if many WSPers accepted the validity of the attacks and credits the counter-demonstration with introducing the majority of WSPers to feminist thinking. Other older women at the JRB had a less sanguine response to the younger women’s attacks:

They felt insulted and outraged by these radical young feminists who seemed like so many undisciplined hippies. In the middle of a shooting war, how dare they promote their trivial feminist complaints? Who are these young women to condemn my life as a mother and activist? Wait till they have children!²⁹

One critique that Swerdlow accepted was that WSP had relied on influence rather than power—image of woman behind man, whispering in his ear. She writes that it wasn’t until 1970, due to the influence of the women’s liberation movement, that “the United States would not turn away from war if foreign policy remained the exclusive game of male elites” and began to demand “that women be included in all decision-making bodies concerned with issues of war and peace.”³⁰ This position fuses the feminist demand for equal with the maternalist recognition of gender difference by suggesting that women would, indeed, have different attitudes and interests than men in regards to war-making. It also ignores the fact that prior to 1970 WSPers had sought “decision-making” authority both within the antiwar movement and the local and federal branches of the government. WSPers had, in fact, sought and garnered power during the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 141

²⁹ Rosen, *World Split Open*, 202, based on interviews with Pat Cody, Mickey Flacks, and Gerda Lerner, as well as Swerdlow.

³⁰ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 141.

1960s, although the women's liberationists may not have approved of how they went about it and what they did with it when they got it.

For example, Dagmar Wilson and Cora Weiss both served on national mobilization steering committees, the groups that developed strategies for the antiwar movement and organized the major national demonstrations against the war. They were, to a degree, "token" women on these bodies. But their male colleagues were well aware of WSP's ability to mobilize bodies and raise dollars and this enabled the women make demands that placed their stamp on these mass actions, frequently frustrating male colleagues in the process. Even as many members of the organization became more willing to take the risks involved in performing acts of civil disobedience and challenging the authority of the police and agencies of the federal government, they remained true to their original goal of educating and organizing new constituencies of women. When, for example, Jerry Rubin and David Dellinger sought to turn the October 1967 march on the Pentagon into a confrontation with the military that would demand mass civil disobedience and likely result in violent reprisals, Wilson, on behalf of WSP, demanded guarantees that the illegal actions would account for only part of the demonstration and limited to specific times and locations. If she was going to appeal specifically to the women of the country to participate, she had to be confident that it would be safe for them to attend and to bring their children if they wanted or needed to. As Weiss once said, they did not consider a demonstration a success unless it was the first demonstration for some participants. While some in the movement, by the late sixties, felt that an action wasn't successful unless it "upped the ante" or moved, as Dellinger put it, from "protest to resistance," WSP believed that growing the number of Americans who were willing to

express opposition to the war was crucial to ending it. The women understood, and participated in, more militant strains of antiwar protest but they believed that there had to be room in the movement for varying degrees of commitment. Mothers who had no one else to take care of their children should be able to protest without making themselves vulnerable to arrest or serious injury.

WSPers had also sought power through running for office. While some young radicals viewed such working within the system with disdain, many WSPers believed that it would take either a pro-peace majority in Congress or a peace president in the White House to get the United States out of Vietnam.³¹ Although WSP strove to remain non-partisan, they would work for peace candidates, whatever their party affiliation. When there was no peace candidate to support, a WSPer would sometimes fill the void. They sought seats on local Democratic and Republican committees and draft boards, and to serve as delegates at the national party conventions, and to enter Congress. Elizabeth Boardman of VOW-NE ran for the Congressional seat in the Third District of Massachusetts in 1962 against long-time incumbent Philip J. Philbin, who another VOW member described as “impossible . . . a hawk if ever I saw one.”³² Elise Boulding ran for Congress from Ann Arbor as a write-in candidate in 1966 with the active support of local SDS leaders, including political scientist Richard Flacks who provided research on campaign strategy and policy issues. Boulding, like Boardman, ran primarily as a peace

³¹ As noted earlier, there were also WSPers who preferred to stay out of the electoral fray, believing that politics was a dirty business and direct involvement in it would undermine their moral authority. Ironically Boulding and Boardman were both Quakers who peace activism was very much informed by moral concerns. But they were also pragmatic enough to appreciate the value of electoral politics as a public forum for promoting their beliefs.

³² Gloria Negri, “Three Decades Later, War Soul Is Still on the Ramparts,” *Boston Globe*, August 3, 1992; Tom Long, “Elizabeth Boardman Obituary,” *Boston Globe*, June 20, 1996; Letter to Rohna Shoul from Rita, December 1999, VOW-NE Papers, Carton 1, unprocessed.

candidate, her platform focused on the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and support for the self-determination of the Vietnamese people, as well as a “strong drive to abolish poverty and discrimination in the United States.”³³ Both women referred to, but did not dwell on, their husbands and children in their campaign literature. Instead their campaign literature focused on their positions on the issues and activist backgrounds. Whether due to their gender, their politics or a combination of the two, neither Boulding nor Boardman won her race.³⁴

WSPers did not see one of its own elected to Congress until Bella Abzug won New York’s 19th District seat in 1970. The times, at last, were right for a woman and a peace candidate, particularly one that also spoke to the concerns of young people, minorities, and the poor. An outspoken feminist and civil rights lawyer as well as a WSP founder, Abzug was the perfect representative of the group’s late sixties fusion agenda, given her commitment to linking domestic and foreign policy concerns, feminism and maternalism. WSPers around the country, not only New Yorkers, worked for campaign and, once she was elected, claimed her as *their* voice in the House. Her campaign literature came straight from the WSP playbook of the era (which Abzug, of course, had helped develop). A flyer headed, “Bella Abzug will be your fighting Congresswoman,” read: “If our government would STOP spending our hard-earned dollars in Vietnam, we could spend the money to build more homes, more schools and better hospitals with more services.”³⁵ At a White House conference on children shortly after her election, she said,

³³ Mary Lee Morrison, *Elise Boulding: A Life in the Cause of Peace*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2005), 82-83. Campaign literature in Marcia Barrabee Papers, BHL.

³⁴ Philbin was eventually unseated by another peace candidate Robert Drinan, whose 1970 campaign benefitted greatly from the support of VOW-NE. A Catholic priest, Drinan was referred to by VOWers, after his election, as “our father who art in Congress.”

³⁵ Campaign Flyer: “Bella Abzug Will Be Your Fighting Congresswoman,” 1970. Bella Abzug Papers, Box 64, CU.

“If we are going to place children first, then we are going to have to place war last—and it’s about time.”³⁶ Within WSP Abzug was known to be perhaps the least “motherly” of them all. Shirley Margolin said that Abzug’s husband Martin “was the mother—Martin was there for her. Martin cooked! Martin cleaned! Martin got the girls’ first brassieres. Martin did everything!”³⁷ But when discussing her activist career, Abzug herself frequently referred back, with great pride, to WSP’s early years, when

we were the people who made that Senate pass the Comprehensive Partial Test Ban Treaty because they feared the mother’s role. . . . We’re the people who went into the streets before anybody went into the streets ten years ago and said, we’re not going to allow . . . our kids to be deformed because of nuclear testing that’s going to create the radioactive fallout which our kids [drink] when they get it in the milk.³⁸

Abzug saw herself as containing and representing two identities—the mother and also the independent woman. “I didn’t speak out of the mother culture,” she said. “I did speak about our children. I cared about that, but I also spoke about the rights that women had—that women had a right to peace, not only for the sake of the children.”³⁹ Yet, in spite of the fact that Abzug did not consider herself the “typical” WSPer and often felt that her contributions to the organization weren’t sufficiently recognized and appreciated, she referred regularly to her involvement in WSP and the fact that she was entering Congress as an activist who had long lobbied the body on the organization’s behalf. She was proud of her outsider status; even after she began her term she continued to criticize her

³⁶ “Statement by Representative-Elect Bella Abzug at White House Conference on Children,” December 17, 1970. Bella Abzug Papers, Box 140, CU.

³⁷ Margolin quoted in Suzanne Braun Levine and Mary Thom, *Bella Abzug: How One Tough Broad from the Bronx Fought Jim Crow and Joe McCarthy, Pissed Off Jimmy Carter, Battled for the Rights of Women and Workers, Rallied Against War and for the Planet, and Shook Up Politics Along the Way* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 38.

³⁸ Bella Abzug interviewed by J. Martin, February 1971, 13. Bella Abzug Papers, Box 63A, CU.

³⁹ Quoted in Levine and Thom, 63.

colleagues. “The political power structure in our country is dominated by a white middle-class, middle-aged male grouping,” she maintained, “who have been so weak that they’ve allowed the Pentagon and those people who profit from militarism to dominate their structure and their direction. They’re not independent or free.”⁴⁰ Abzug tried, and largely succeeded, to remain an activist while serving as an elected official. “I work inside and outside,” she said.⁴¹

To demonstrate her determination to stay in touch with “the people” on the outside, Abzug supplemented the standard Congressional swearing-in ceremony with a public one, out in the open air, in front of the Capitol. On her first day in office, January 8, 1971, WSP sponsored a kind of people’s inaugural to demonstrate their support for Abzug but also to show that they would hold her accountable for fulfilling her campaign promises. A flyer inviting women to participate in the event read: “The angry women who banged their shoes on the door of the Pentagon send their first woman to Congress. . . Stand with Bella on the Capitol steps as she takes her solemn oath to the people of the 19th CD and to the women of America to work for an end to the war and for the needs of the American people.”⁴² Washington WSPers started a “National Constituents for Bella Abzug” group designed to serve as a two-way intermediary between the Congresswoman and those who had supported her campaign, even if they couldn’t vote for her. “Bulletins and other communiqués will let you know what [Abzug] is doing and will suggest ways that you can be of help. The ideas that we receive in response will be relayed back to Bella and all of you,” they explained.⁴³ And Abzug, as she had when she was merely a

⁴⁰ Ibid, April 12, 1971.

⁴¹ Ibid., May 3, 1971.

⁴² Invitation n.d “Demonstrate with Bella Abzug,” WSP New York Organization file, TC.

⁴³ VOW-NE Newsletter May 1971, 4.

WSP member, pushed the women to get more involved in electoral politics. Speaking at WSP's tenth anniversary celebration, she argued that the way to change the nation's "power structure," was to replace the "tired, sick, old men" in Congress.⁴⁴

While this approach Abzug won the friendship and support of members of the early feminist establishment like *Ms.* magazine founder Gloria Steinem and writer-activist Robin Morgan as well as her sister-WSPers. It is less clear whether the younger radical feminists would consider her a true ally. Abzug, from her earliest days in WSP had been committed to using electoral politics and lobbying to achieve change. She was not a fan of civil disobedience: "I don't think an arrest is a sign of any great action," she said. Going to jail just kept activists off the street, preventing them from to other kinds of work. It was only effective if "truly massive."⁴⁵ In that way, she was less militant than some of the housewives the radicals viewed with disdain. Furthermore, Abzug rejected the strategy of working only on women's issues. "You just can't run on a women's program alone," she argued. "You have to give people a whole program so they'll know you're a total human being, if you're going to liberate yourself and others at the same time."⁴⁶

Abzug's personal story also provided a model for younger heterosexual women who, in the late sixties and early seventies, found themselves arguing with their male partners over "who washed the dishes, who made the plans, and who thought about making plans." Her relationship with her husband was, by all accounts, a loving and passionate marriage of equals. "She wasn't one of those big-ego women with a

⁴⁴ Barsha Plumer, "Report in the Tenth Anniversary Conference of WSP," VOW-NE Newsletter November 1971, 5.

⁴⁵ Abzug interview with Milton, May 3, 1971, Bella Abzug Papers, Box 63A, CU.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, n.d.

milquetoast guy; she adored him,” recalled writer and former *Ms.* editor Lettie Cottin Pogrebin. “Her affection for him was as readily apparent as his was for her.”⁴⁷ Abzug agreed, saying, “My reputation is that of an extremely independent woman, and I am. But I was dependent, clearly, on Martin.”⁴⁸ Their partnership flipped the script of other companionate relationships in the WSP universe in that it was the husband who tended the home fires while the wife worked late into the night and traveled for business. She was exceptional, although not unique, in her ability to resist the accepted wisdom of her time regarding gender roles: that it was impossible for a woman to both be a good mother and have a successful career. That, in fact, a good mother would not want a career beyond raising her children. Abzug refused to accept that she couldn’t have children and meaningful work outside the home. She said,

I wanted to be a lawyer. I was serious about it. I was in love and decided to get married. I was serious about that. I thought I would like to have children. I was serious about that. So I never felt I couldn’t have it all. I do not feel guilty. I did my best. Maybe it wasn’t *the* best.⁴⁹

What Abzug shared with other women of her generation was a reliance on individual and casual solutions to the systemic problems that made it difficult and in many cases prevented women from pursuing interests outside the home. American mothers, including the VOWers in Newton, Massachusetts whose local schools sent children home for lunch every day to New Yorkers like Swerdlow and Weiss who raced out of meetings and work sessions at two o’clock in order to be there when their children got out of school, had their ambitions thwarted by the organization and length of the school day and the dearth

⁴⁷ Thom and Levine, 245.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31. My italics.

of after-school and daycare programs. Fathers and older siblings picked up some of the slack; friends and neighbors pitched in. But these arrangements were unstable and unreliable. Women like Abzug, who could afford to, hired housekeepers and babysitters. Abzug's daughter Eve recalled being teased as a child for having a "black mother," because the neighborhood kids always saw her with the family housekeeper.⁵⁰ Women who had come of age in the civil rights movement and New Left did not believe in hiring poor women to do their dirty work; most could not have afforded to, in any case. At the same time, their feminist consciousness demanded a societal solution; the personal, in this case, as in many others, was indeed political.

At a time when the institutions of marriage and motherhood were being subjected to intense critical scrutiny by the very movement they were helping to build, women's liberationists who chose to have children had to find ways to fuse their interests as feminists with their concerns as mothers. Like Abzug, these women did not have emerge from "the mother culture" but, like the more maternally oriented WSPers, they had to find ways to make their activism ideologically compatible with their personal choices at a time when that possibility would not be self-evident to their peers. By focusing on issues such as daycare, education, and reproductive rights, they were able to forge political agendas and activist identities that were shaped as much by their experiences of motherhood as their feminist convictions. They also came to see, as WSP had, that they could use "mother's issues" and "children's issues" to rally together women who otherwise had little in common. In the end, the influence of the rhetoric of the "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" was limited and short-lived. Radical feminists who saw playing the mother card as a sign of weakness "didn't understand the power of organizing women

⁵⁰ Ibid., 35.

as mothers,” according to historian Gerda Lerner. “There’s nothing wrong with it. There’s nothing unfeminist about it . . . part of the occupation of women in their lifetime is to be mothers, most of them. Not all of them but most of them . . . it’s like saying we’re going to organize workers but we won’t go in the factory.”⁵¹ While some radical feminists, notably Shulamith Firestone, wanted to get women out of the baby-making factory altogether, most came to realize that the majority of women wanted to have children and were not going to forego that experience in order to pursue “liberation.”⁵² At the same time, while motherhood frequently heightened women’s sensitivity to gender discrimination and inequality, the experience of pregnancy reminded them of the ways men and women were, indeed, different.⁵³ By the late 1970s, the tide had turned and proponents of “cultural” feminism proudly proclaimed that women were in fact, very different from men; the problem was that their differences had been undervalued by a patriarchal culture. They “advanced the provocative thesis that men should reassess and adopt women’s experiential history of preserving, rather than destroying the race . . . to imitate men, their institutions and values was wrong-headed, and that ‘women’s values’ needed to transform the culture.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Gerda Lerner interviewed by Nancy MacLean, September 12-13, 2003, Madison, Wisconsin. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<http://www.smith.edu/library/libs/ssc/vof/transcripts/Lerner.pdf> (last accessed June 25, 2011).

⁵² In her book *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone argued that women would not be truly liberated until they ceded responsibility not only for child-rearing but also for child-bearing. Firestone called for the development of technological alternatives that would allow human beings to reproduce without forcing women to serve as incubators. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970).

⁵³ As Rosen points out, focusing on “women’s similarity with men meant ignoring important female biological differences, especially those associated with pregnancy and maternity.” When faced head-on, those differences raised questions about whether “equal” treatment was by definition “fair” treatment, particularly in the workplace. “The Day They Buried Traditional Womanhood,” 218.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

This feminist re-evaluation of the politics of difference was especially visible in the resurgence of anti-nuclear activism. WSP's founding issue was once again the number one issue for peace and environmental activism and once again women organized separately (as well as alongside) men, to express their unique perspective. In the 1980s, both feminist *and* maternalist rhetoric inspired and were, in turn, employed by participants in a new surge of women's peace activism. One early eighties slogan associated with the women's peace camp in Seneca, N.Y., "No to War and Yes to Life," echoed WSP's, "End the Arms Race, Not the Human Race." The assumption that women, whatever divides them, are united by a special concern with and responsibility for advancing the cause of preserving life and protecting the earth, linked the eighties movement to WSP. A line from the Resource Handbook distributed at the women's peace camp in Seneca, N.Y. read, "Women of all races, classes, religions, ethnic backgrounds and sexual preferences are encouraged and expected to apply," echoing WSP's 1961 call to action (although the WSPers did not think to include sexual preference on their list). Like WSP, the encampment claimed a space outside, or above, partisan politics, attracting, according to one participant, everything from republicans to anarchists.⁵⁵ As it had been for WSP's founders, the threat of nuclear war was an urgent matter for peace camp participants, instilling a need to *act*. As one woman put it (again echoing WSP's language), "Writing my Congressman is not enough."⁵⁶ The eighties movement picked many of the same targets as WSP, from the Pentagon to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Nevada test site; WSPers, too, had attempted to interrupt "business as usual" for the military, by staging actions at ports, induction centers, and draft board

⁵⁵ Mima Cataldo, et.al., eds., *The Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice: Images and Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 9 and 30.

⁵⁶ Holly Zox, quoted in Cataldo, 53.

offices.⁵⁷ Finally, women peace activists of both eras incorporated “feminine imagery” in their campaigns, to bring life and color to the drab corridors of male power. WSPers brought flowers and babies to Congressional hearing rooms and wore or carried paper doves as they picketed the White House; eighties activists wove colorful yarn through fences at military installations.

Although WSP as an organization no longer dominated the movement, hundreds of WSPers, including Ethel Taylor, Cora Weiss, and Rohna Shoul remained active and continued to play leadership roles. And, although middle-aged matrons no longer dominated the movement, their presence did add an air of legitimacy and respectability to what appeared, on the surface, to be a counter-cultural effort. As with WSP, the presence of mothers helped a controversial campaign reach a mainstream audience and win some support there. Mother’s Day actions were as popular in the eighties as they had been in the sixties. And the sight of a woman with “gray hair and wearing a skirt,” blocking the road to a nuclear facility could inspire other women to think, “That woman is laying down her life for her children” and summon the courage to join her.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ WSP had staged a “women’s pentagon action” in 1967. The 1980 Women’s Pentagon Action (WPA), where women placed cardboard tombstones on the Pentagon lawn, identifying victims of male violence, paralleled another WSP action, a 1972 “die-in” where 100 women identified as “a dead Vietnamese” or “a dead Cambodian” lay down in the street in front of ITT headquarters in New York City. WPA women formed a ring around the Pentagon in 1980; WSP women had formed a ring around Congress in 1972. Swerdlow, Chapter Six. For descriptions of the 1980 and 1981 Women’s Pentagon Actions, see Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, chapter 8 and Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, chapter 5.

⁵⁸ Pat Daane, an upper-middle-class mother of three, who organized an anti-nuclear affinity group of women from her church in Northern California, quoted in Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 149-150.

AFTERWORD

WSP remained a driving force in the antiwar movement until the Vietnamese peace accords went into effect in 1973. During the last years of U.S. military involvement, they continued their protests against the government and corporations that produced and profited from weaponry. They also worked for amnesty for those who refused to serve in the conflict, arguing that

no distinction should be made between draft resisters, military deserters, self-retired veterans, dishonorably discharged or less than honorably discharged. Amnesty should be granted to all who refused to participate in or actively opposed the war in Indochina. All of them chose not to serve or assist a government waging an illegal and immoral war. These men and women should be supported and commended for their courage and their civil rights should be restored. . . Resistance to the war is not a crime to be forgiven or forgotten. The crime is the slaughter in Indochina and this we must not forgive nor forget. The issue of amnesty must be a constant reminder to the American people that the criminals are not those who refused to be part of the war machine, not those in Canada and abroad, not those in the U.S. jails. Those truly responsible are and have been in the White House and in the Pentagon.¹

The women also used their connections in North Vietnam to facilitate the exchange of mail between POWs and their families and to hasten the release of POWs.

They also became more directly involved in the women's movement. Although their experience with the Jeannette Rankin Brigade alienated some WSPers from women's liberation, for others it was a consciousness-raising experience that inspired a re-thinking of WSP's use of traditional gender roles.² By 1970, most WSPers saw

¹ Mary Clarke and Roz Levine, "WSP for Universal Amnesty," *LA WISP* May 1973, 1. Bella Abzug introduced a bill that would grant complete and total amnesty to all manner of resisters in the House of Representatives. It did not become law. On his first day in office in January 1977, President Jimmy Carter granted a pardon to Vietnam resisters. Amnesty supporters felt this did not go far enough because a pardon suggests that a crime was committed but is being forgiven.

² Swerdlow, 140-41.

themselves as part of the women's movement and participated in actions like that year's Women's Strike for Equality. They redoubled their efforts to attract students and working women as well as housewives to the organization—in 1973 an "Airline Division" of WSP was founded by a group of stewardesses and ticket agents—with the slogan "Peace is a Women's Issue."³ But, in general, this was a less effective appeal in the seventies than it had been in the early sixties. WSP leaders like Ethel Taylor lobbied fervently to win a place for peace and disarmament on the agendas of feminist coalitions but found that these issues were either ignored or marginalized. For most active feminists, reproductive rights, ending discrimination in employment and education, and access to daycare were women's issues; peace was no longer central to their agenda.⁴

When the Vietnam peace accords went into effect in 1973, WSP "refus[ed] to fold up its tents and go away," as *The New York Times* put it.⁵ Once again, the conditions under which the group worked changed dramatically. Although some local groups, like VOW-NE and Ann Arbor Women for Peace, disbanded with the end of the war, others like those in Philadelphia, D.C., Berkeley, and Seattle kept going strong. In a way, WSP had come full circle. The women who remained involved returned to their original cause of advocating disarmament and opposed the development of new weapons of mass destruction, from the Trident submarine to the neutron bomb. Ironically, in spite of being an autonomous woman's organization, WSP played a less central role in the women's movement than they had in the Movement. The group's passionate opposition to the war in Vietnam, its development of a strong commitment to economic and racial justice, and

³ Nadine Brozan, "Women's Group Began as One Day Protest 4,215 Days Ago." *The New York Times*, May 16, 1973, 52.

⁴ Taylor, chapter 24; Brozan, "Women's Group Began as One Day Protest."

⁵ Brozan.

its willingness to play a supportive role in the struggles of draft resisters, welfare mothers, and others placed them at the hub of sixties radicalism, however uncomfortable younger activists might have been with what they saw as the older women's cultural conservatism. But WSP's insistence through the seventies that peace was a feminist issue did not fit comfortably in the mainstream women's movement, even when they attempted to couch the argument in economic terms (i.e. cutting the military budget would free up funding for more obvious feminist concerns like daycare, reproductive health care and education and job training for poor women), by the longtime association of women's peace activism with the stereotypical image of women as nurturers.⁶ Although WSPers did play an active role in some of the newer antinuclear coalitions—Elizabeth Boardman was one of the founders of the Clamshell Alliance, for example⁷—WSP's activist style, a combination of education and outreach, lobbying, and direct action didn't jibe with the prefigurative and countercultural approach of the women's peace encampments. But neither was WSP ready to relinquish the idea that women had a special responsibility for promoting peace—the most basic of its founding principles—in order to fit more comfortably into the liberal feminist landscape. WSP's inability to influence political (as opposed to cultural) feminists on what it believed to be the particular importance of disarmament was a source of continuing frustration through the late seventies and the eighties. When Ethel Taylor was appointed to the International Women's Year

⁶ This changed in the 1980s when a new international women's peace movement challenged the old ideological divisions, bringing together cultural feminists, lesbian separatists, eco-feminists, and maternalists in various combinations.

⁷ The Clamshell Alliance was formed in 1976 to oppose the use of nuclear energy, focusing initially on attempting to block the construction of a nuclear power plant in Seabrook, New Hampshire. Although the CA wasn't entirely successful, its efforts led to a scaling down of the project—one rather than two reactors was constructed and put into operation.

Commission (chaired by Bella Abzug) in 1977 she struggled over how to “project the issue of peace to such a gathering.” She identified herself as

an anti-militarism feminist who believes not only that women are entitled to equal pay with men, but are also entitled to equal say with men on the issues of war and peace. The fact that funds for continuous preparation for war cut deeply into funds needed to help women and children who depend on such aid should, I believe, unite the women’s movement and the women of the peace movement.⁸

In the end, the feminist movement did play a key role in WSP’s loss of members, influence, and prestige after 1975. This was partly for ideological reasons, but primarily for practical ones. The women’s movement created new opportunities for women at the same time that an economic recession made it difficult for even middle-class professionals to support a family of one salary. When the Vietnam War ended, Rohna Shoul pointed out, “our children grew up and we either went back to school to finish our educations that World War II disrupted or returned to professional careers that had been put on hold.”⁹ She and Louise Lown returned to full-time careers as social workers, leaving less time for activism. They did, however, get involved in a new Boston-area group, Social Workers for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament. Even women who had felt stymied by the role of full-time housewife recognized, in retrospect, that although it came with restrictions it also created opportunities. “Volunteering wasn’t enough for most of us,” said VOWer Anita Greenbaum. “But if everyone is doing paid work, who will do all the volunteer work? There are six or seven activists now.”¹⁰ Shoul noted that, “As middle-class women, we were very lucky. We didn’t have to work and we had the time to

⁸ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 108.

⁹ Rohna Shoul letter to Mary McGrory, November 20, 1998.

¹⁰ Lucy Caldwell-Stair, “Fifteenth Anniversary of VOW,” *Newton Times*, December 15, 1976.

make a difference. Our daughters are not so fortunate.”¹¹ They weren’t the only ones who tried to find ways to connect their paid labor to their politics, either through the type of job they took or the forming of professional networks that took stands on issues. Another former VOWer Davi Birnbaum got a job as co-director of the Cambridge Community Health Center, where she worked on women’s health issues. Birnbaum was one of many women, once associated with WSP, who shifted their emphasis from peace to overtly feminist concerns in the wake of the war. Birnbaum saw this as an evolution of, rather than a defection from, her earlier commitments. Speaking in 1976, she declared that “the women’s movement is the revolution and VOW inspired me this way.”¹²

In spite of the women’s movement’s transformative impact on U.S. society over the last half century, many women resist identifying themselves as feminists. Meanwhile, the concerned mother has remained a potent political symbol, effective for mobilizing large numbers of women (often across divides of race, class, and partisanship) and garnering public support for a variety of causes including, but not limited to, peace. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and, especially, the Million Mom March (MMM) are two examples of activist groups who have taken a page from WSP’s book. Like WSP, MMM (and the various local groups that supported it) attempted to argue that an issue identified with the political left (in this case, gun control) was, in fact, a non-partisan, commonsense issue: to be for life was to be against guns. Although second wave feminism didn’t succeed in undermining the moral authority of motherhood, it did embolden critics of mothers’ movements to raise questions about what constitutes a “real” or “ordinary” mother. The right of professional women to claim the motherhood

¹¹ Shoul letter to McCrory.

¹² Caldwell-Stair, “Fifteenth Anniversary.” The national WSP office closed in 1990. Local WSP branches continued to operate until 2000, when the D.C. and East Bay branches shut their doors.

mantel was challenged, particularly by the right-wing media. Mothers' movements have traditionally been portrayed (and portrayed themselves) as acting from the heart, not the head (no matter how much strategic thinking and political savvy went into their campaigns). Whereas in the sixties and seventies, it was feminists who critiqued WSP's maternal rhetoric, in 2000, it was the conservative media outlets Fox News and *The Weekly Standard* that attacked the Million Mom March, arguing that these women were not "ordinary" moms. Lead organizer Donna Dees-Thomases was unmasked as a public relations "pro" and sister-in-law of Clinton friend Susan Thomases. *The Weekly Standard* ran down a list of celebrity speakers at the event, identifying them by field of endeavor (actress, rock musician, talk show host, politician) but never mentioning that all were, in fact, mothers. Just as the Democratic Party had begun, in recent years, attempting to convince the vast middle of the American political spectrum that Republicans don't have a lock on "family values," the Million Mom March was, in part, a feminist effort to reclaim motherhood and to redefine "pro-life" as anti-gun rather than anti-abortion.¹³ Ironically, this issue pushed political conservatives to reject the notion of female essentialism, arguing that plenty of mothers were pro-gun, while political progressives used the apparent gender gap on gun control to revitalize the image of women as protectors of children and preservers of life. And, the umbrella designation "mothers against guns" was, again, a political identity that brought women together across divides of race and class.

¹³ For articulations of the argument that there was something essentially dishonest about the Million Mom March (in suggesting that all mothers were for gun control and that its organizers were representative of typical suburban mothers), see Sarah Wildman, "Women's Fib," *The New Republic* (May 29, 2000), 12, and Edmund Walsh, "Million Mom Mush" *The Weekly Standard* (May 29, 2000), 16. For an analysis of the relationship between pro-gun and pro-life politics, see Susan Faludi, "The Moms' Secret Weapon," *Newsweek* (May 15, 2000), 30.

Forces on the left and right have continued in their attempts to use motherhood to advance their political agendas into the twenty-first century. When Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq, protested the U.S. military invasion with language reminiscent of WSP's campaigns against the Vietnam War, she was accused of being "in bed with the radical left," by Fox's Bill O'Reilly, attempting to delegitimize her claim that maternal grief had motivated her activism.¹⁴ At the other end of the ideological spectrum, former Alaska governor Sarah Palin calls herself a "Mama Grizzly," and has her picture taken while carrying a shotgun in yet another effort to delink maternalism and pacifism. Cynthia Enloe, who studies women and militarism, argues that politicizing motherhood has limited effectiveness: "We want to make [women like Sheehan] the naïve mother, and if we hear that she is really politically conscious we start to doubt the authenticity of her maternal message," Enloe says.¹⁵ And while foregrounding their motherhood has won both Sheehan and Palin their share of detractors, it has also won them the support of women who claim to "relate" to them as mothers.

Half a century ago, WSPers evoked similar responses: their detractors called them "naïve," at best, "brainwashed," or "commies," at worst. But for many women with no prior activist experience, WSP provided a comfortable entry point to the realm of political action by framing activism as a natural outgrowth of caretaking, as opposed to a new and separate project whose demands might distract women from their families. More than forty years after radical feminists attempted to "bury" traditional womanhood in 1968, politicians on the left and right continue to view motherhood as an identity that can successfully mobilize women to take political action. And women seeking political power

¹⁴ Quoted in John Nichols, "Cindy Sheehan's Tragic Critics," *The Nation*, August 17, 2005.

¹⁵ Quoted in Karen Houppert, "Cindy Sheehan: Mother of a Movement?" *The Nation*, June 12, 2006.

or attempting to effect social change—from Senator Patty Murray, who ran for office not as a politician, but “a mom in tennis shoes,” to Cindy Sheehan, who used her anguish as a mother who had lost her son to broaden opposition to the war in Iraq, to Sarah Palin who continually reminded the American public that her being a “hockey mom” was as much a qualification for the vice-presidency as being governor of Alaska—still use their motherhood to claim moral authority, populist values, and a common-sense approach to problem-solving. The white gloves are gone, but WSP’s strategy of using maternal rhetoric and imagery to legitimize women’s claims for influence and authority in public life remains.

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