

Multiracial Activism around Reproductive Rights in America from the Second Wave of Feminism

Sabina Josephine Peck

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Do not let the academy strip the soul out of your work. You have to resist that force of depersonalisation, because it does not serve the feminist project at all. Don't let them de-soul you, don't let them do it. Cos not only will it not serve the larger movement, but it won't even serve you.

This study, then, is dedicated to feminists and other women who are struggling against their own de-soulment by oppressive institutions everywhere.

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between reproductive rights activism and white feminists' efforts to work multiracially between the years 1977-1989. It charts a shift from strategies that focused on white women's 'outreach' and 'recruitment' to those that were more concerned with coalition-building and anti-racism work. The second part of the thesis considers the ways that white feminists have interpreted right-wing threats, both to reproductive rights and to their own ability to shape feminist narratives – and, in turn, how those interpretations affected their efforts to work multiracially.

This thesis examines four major case studies: the 1977 National Women's Conference, the Reproductive Rights National Network (active c.1978-1984), the Marches for Women's Lives in 1986 and 1989, and the *In Defense of Roe* conference held in 1989. It draws on oral history interviews and archival research to identify several overarching themes that have characterised white women's efforts towards multiracial activism: networks, education, racially autonomous spaces, and narrative creation.

The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it departs from existing scholarship which broadly portrays multiracial organizing (particularly in 'mainstream' feminist organizations) as having failed. It explores what successful multiracial activism might look like when looking beyond traditional norms of defining 'success'. It argues that taking a longer-term view is more useful when examining 'successes' of multiracial activism: short-term failures sometimes served to lay foundations for future success. Secondly, this thesis moves away from narratives of the second wave which portray white feminists as, for the most part, uninterested in working across racial lines. This thesis demonstrates that many white women *did* want to work multiracially – but that their strategies, priorities and motivations shifted throughout the period.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AAWO | Alliance Against Women's Oppression |
| ACLU | American Civil Liberties Union |
| ARAW | Abortion Rights Action Week |
| CARASA | Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse |
| CFFC | Catholics for a Free Choice |
| IDOR | In Defense of Roe conference |
| IWY | International Women's Year |
| NAF | National Abortion Federation |
| NARAL | National Abortion Rights Action League |
| NBWHP | National Black Women's Health Project |
| NCBW | National Political Congress of Black Women |
| NOW | National Organization for Women |
| PPFA | Planned Parenthood (Federation of America) |
| R2N2/RRNN | Reproductive Rights National Network |
| RCAR/RCRC | Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights/Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights |
| RRCF | (Ms Foundation's) Reproductive Rights Coalition Fund |
| WARN | Women of All Red Nations |
| WOCPP | (RCAR's) Women of Color Partnership Program |
| WORC | Women Organized for Reproductive Choice |
| WSP | Women Strike for Peace |

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Introduction

On January 21st, 2017, half a million people congregated in Washington DC – while millions more participated in simultaneous events across the globe – to participate in the largest co-ordinated protest in US history - the Women’s March on Washington.¹ Marchers advocated for a broad agenda, backing a wide-range of policies around women’s rights that centred around ending violence, ensuring reproductive rights, LGBTQIA rights, workers’ rights, civil rights, disability rights and environmental justice. Fundamental to the organizers’ principles of unity was creating ‘a society in which women – including Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, disabled women, Muslim women, lesbian queer and trans women – are free and able to care for and nurture their families, however they are formed, in safe and healthy environments free from structural impediments’.² The national organizing team and board were, themselves, racially diverse, and the list of speakers reflected the diversity that the unity statements lauded.³ These fundamental principles, coupled with media coverage that presented the event with images of diversity, seemed to convincingly iterate that the women’s movement was, and is, racially diverse, intersectional, and inclusive.

These representations of the March paint an incomplete picture. Though racial equality was central to organizer’s conceptions of the event, discussions and tensions based on race were clear and, at times, fraught. Even before the March, the *New York Times* claimed that the ‘Women’s March on Washington Opens Contentious Dialogues About Race’.⁴ The article features Jennifer Willis, a white woman from South Carolina, who cancelled her trip to participate in the March after she read a Facebook post from ShiShi Rose, a black activist in Brooklyn. Rose said that white women should be ‘listening more, talking less

¹ ‘The March’, *Women’s March Website* <<<https://www.womensmarch.com/march>>> [accessed 9 April 2018].

² ‘Unity Principles’, *Women’s March Website* <<https://www.womensmarch.com/mission>> [accessed 9 April 2018]

³ ‘Women’s March Board’, *Women’s March Website* <<https://www.womensmarch.com/team/>> [Last Accessed: 9th April 2018]; ‘Speakers’, *Women’s March Website* <<https://www.womensmarch.com/speakers>> [Last Accessed: 9th April 2018]

⁴ Farah Stockman, ‘Women’s March on Washington Opens Contentious Dialogues About Race’, *The New York Times*, 9 January 2017

[...] reading our books and understanding the roots of racism and white supremacy'.⁵ These remarks 'rubbed Ms. Willis the wrong way' - she said:

This is a women's march. We're supposed to be allies in equal pay, marriage, adoption. Why is it now about, "White women don't understand black women?"⁶

Neither Rose's call for white women to engage with racial inequality within feminism and society more broadly, nor Willis' belief that gender solidarity should trump racial differences, were new phenomena. The 'contentious dialogues' that the *New York Times* describes were not 'opened' by the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Instead, they are part of a longer history of efforts towards multiracial participation in (the) feminist movement(s), often characterised by a focus on women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. This thesis explores moments of multiracial organizing in reproductive rights activism during the period 1977-1989. It examines how, when and why attempts at multiracial feminist organizing succeeded or failed during the late 1970s and 1980s. In particular, it traces the impact and success of white women's efforts to forge multiracial organizations, relationships and spaces, and their reasons behind doing so. The case studies in this thesis highlight events or groups which differed in size, geographical location, scope, demographics and social location. The organizers of all of these groups shared one commonality, though – they wanted to work multiracially. Their impetuses, strategies, priorities and desired outcomes were varied and variable, however – and it is these nuances that this thesis traces and seeks to understand.

What is multiracial activism, and how did it develop during the Second Wave?

This thesis will demonstrate that a desire to work multiracially was central to many feminists during this period, but that their understandings of what and how multiracial activism could and should be varied significantly. Though this thesis focuses mainly on the efforts and changing attitudes of white women, I do not suggest that white women alone drove efforts to work multiracially and that women of colour held no agency in this matter. On the contrary, the primary

⁵ ShiShi Rose, quoted in Stockman

⁶ Jennifer Willis, quoted in Stockman

purpose of this thesis is to explore how and why white women's activism changed, and was changed, by their efforts to work multiracially – and how those changes affected diverse women's abilities and desires to work across racial lines. This thesis is split into two parts: the first part considers *how* efforts towards multiracial activism changed by charting a shift from recruitment policies to coalition-based strategies, and the second part explores *why* white women wanted to create a multiracial feminism, with a focus on feminists' reactions to a rising political and religious right wing.

Efforts by white women to work across racial lines did not originate in the second wave. They have been explored in scholarship surrounding suffrage, the birth control movement, and women's associations, such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). This prior scholarship indicates several recurring themes in the history of women's multiracial activism in the USA. First, white women's relationships with women of colour have long been shaped by their inability or reluctance to understand and deal with their racial privilege and the ways that it shaped their activism. Helen Laville suggests that, before the early 1960s, relationships between white women and African American women were indicative of and shaped by 'a tradition of segregation, formal and informal patterns of racial exclusion, and a widespread refusal on the part of white women to acknowledge shared identity and purpose with African American women'.⁷ White women's primary focus on gender and neglect of racial analyses sometimes led to decision-making that was beneficial to white women, but alienated or excluded women of colour.⁸

⁷ Helen Laville, *Organized White Women and the Challenge of Racial Integration, 1945-1965*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 9, 5. Laville argues that white women's associations frequently depended on the homogeneity of their membership and their disengagement from examining their own racial and class privilege. This blinkered approach to addressing their own privileges meant that white women could not 'serve as agents of improved race relations' by facilitating integration (p. 6, 16). Similarly, Carole McCann explains, 'Racism was evident not so much in the intentions of whites as in the racial dynamics undergirding the organising and implementing of these projects' (See: Carole R. McCann, *Birth Control Politics in the United States, 1916-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 169). The dynamics of multiracial relationships were affected by the dynamics of race more broadly within society.

⁸ For example, the angry response of some white suffrage activists to the Fifteenth Amendment demonstrated 'their defense of their own interests as white middle-class women [...and thus] exposed the tenuous and superficial nature of their relationship to the [...] campaign for Black equality' (See: Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 76.).

The extent to which racist strategies were consciously used by suffrage activists has been debated by scholars, with scholars such as Ann Gordon and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn suggesting that many white women consciously or actively wanted to exclude black women from woman

Secondly, previous scholarship demonstrates the importance of highlighting racially autonomous activism when considering the dynamics and impetuses of women's multiracial interactions.⁹ It demonstrates that identifying the activism of women of colour within these spaces helps to ensure that studies of multiracial relationships consider the agency of women of colour rather than presuming that white women hold all the power.¹⁰ As such, this

suffrage. See Ann D. Gordon, 'Woman Suffrage (Not Universal Suffrage) by Federal Amendment', in *Votes for Women! The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation*, ed. by Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (Knoxville, TN: University Press of Tennessee, 1995); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, 'African American Women and the Woman Suffrage Movement', in *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Suffrage Movement*, ed. by Marjorie Julian Spruill Wheeler (Troutdale, OR: NewSage Press, 1995). See also: Aileen Krador, *The Ideas of the Women Suffrage Movement in the United States, 1890-1920* (New York: Norton, 1982); Marjorie Julian Spruill, 'Race, Reform and Reaction at the Turn of the Century: Southern Suffragists, the NAWSA, and the "Southern Strategy" in Context', in *Votes for Women*, ed. by Jean H. Baker (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Similarly, Margaret Sanger's decision to align the birth control movement with eugenicists may have been rooted in a desire to legitimise the movement, but ultimately alienated women of colour who were disproportionately affected by the classist and racist rhetoric and actions of eugenicists. Various scholars have discussed the shift of the birth control movement towards eugenics. Early scholarship that has focused on the links between the birth control movement and eugenics have tended to cast women of colour as victims only. Paramount to this narrative is the tendency for scholarship to neglect the opinions, attitudes or activism of women of colour, and/or to ignore race completely. For example, Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman, 1976), discusses the emergence of a 'birth control' movement as a social movement phenomenon, but neglects to critically analyse race as a factor in the movement except as in terms of eugenics and 'race suicide'. Later scholars, like Carole McCann and Johanna Schoen (Johanna Schoen, *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare, Gender and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005),) have located the racism faced by African-American women in the birth control movement as part of a longer tradition of racial oppression, rather than presenting the birth control movement itself as an inherently racist movement.

⁹ I use the term 'racially autonomous' when referring to activism and organizing by groups that *consciously* decided to work or caucus in separate racial spaces for a variety of reasons. This includes instances where women of colour decide to caucus within white-dominated spaces, and when events or groups were closed to particular racial groups. I do not consider white women working in white spaces as automatically working in 'racially autonomous' spaces; their separate organizing must be conscious rather than by default. Finally, I sometimes use 'racially autonomous spaces' when referring to spaces of heterogeneous women of colour. This is not to homogenise diverse groups of women of colour; instead, it reflects the ways in which they sometimes chose to organize themselves.

¹⁰ Jessie Rodrique critiques the traditional narrative of the birth control movement for neglecting the agency and activism of black women who were involved. She claims that it 'perceives white interest in black fertility and their inclusion of blacks in the movement as motivated by racism. While indeed some of white motivation might have been racist, by leaving black involvement out [of the] analysis, we are left solely with a theory of white initiative and domination'. (See: Jessie M. Rodrique, 'The Afro-American Community and the Birth Control Movement, 1918-1942' (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1991), p. 17). Laville's scholarship also demonstrates the importance of identifying how black women's racially autonomous activism has affected multiracial work; the transformation of the YWCA from a segregated association to a 'genuinely interracial organisation' which 'embrace[d] racial justice as a central mission' relied upon the strength and influence of the many black women who were members of separate African-American branches of the association. (See: Helen Laville, "'If the Time Is Not Ripe, Then It Is Your Job to Ripen the Time!": The Transformation of the YWCA in the USA from Segregated Association to Interracial Organisation, 1930-1965', *Women's History*

thesis builds on prior scholarship to argue that white women's approaches towards multiracialism were fundamentally shaped by the actions of women of colour operating both with and separately from white women.

Finally, extant scholarship debates the degree to which white women sought to work multiracially, the strategies that they used, and the extent of their success. Broadly, scholars suggest that, while white women and women of colour may have shared ideologies or ideals to a point, ultimately sustained activism across race did not work – thus, to them, indicating failure.¹¹ These scholars have debated the significance of a top-down approach to multiracial work versus a grassroots one and conclude that white women often favoured top-down approaches.¹² This thesis builds on these foundations to demonstrate how white women active in the late 1970s and early 1980s also advocated a top-down, recruitment-based approach to multiracial organizing.

Scholarship considering the second wave has demonstrated that white feminists' efforts to organize multiracially were frequently hindered by their inability or unwillingness to examine their own white privilege. Feminists tended to imagine gender oppression as transcending racial difference, and advocated a shared sisterhood, which frequently turned out to be exclusionary. Benita Roth sums this up by stating:

Most white feminists did not adhere to the idea of a universalist sisterhood in order to exclude women of color; on the contrary, white women's liberation groups desperately wanted women of color to join them. But gender universalism did lead to the neglect of issues raised by racial/ethnic feminists regarding racist domination. By asserting the universalist nature of gender oppression, white women's liberationists would actually focus politically on what Black and Chicana feminists saw as exclusionary political goals.¹³

Review, 15.3 (2006), p. 361)

¹¹ Carole McCann, for example, identifies areas in the birth control movement where some (usually middle-class) black women shared ideologies with white birth controllers. Though these shared ideas offered points of agreement, McCann suggests that they 'failed' as they did not create sustained multiracial birth control groups. See McCann, pp. 7-8

¹² Jessie Rodrique suggests that this failure was due to her focus on national, rather than grassroots activism (p. 21). Laville's study contributes to discussions around the efficacy of top-down attempts at multiracial reform; she argues that it was achieved by national directive rather than grassroots action for the YWCA. White women who supported an interracial agenda advocated a 'recruitment' approach, aiming to draw African-American women into their existing groups. For example, the National Student Council was 'the YWCA's most ideologically committed interracial division' and 'began recruiting amongst African-American students from 1909'. See Laville, 'The Transformation of the YWCA', p. 364

¹³ Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 195-6; See also

The ideal of an ‘integrationist’ approach to multiracial social organizing – that is, one where women of colour were integrated *into* existing white women’s organizations – was also preceded by social movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Activist and scholar Wini Breines identifies civil rights and New Left organizers at this time as idealistic and as having high expectations of (and, to an extent, achieving) interracial solidarity and integration.¹⁴ However, this organizational integrationism largely disintegrated by the late 1960s. Instead, the rise of identity politics, characterised by movements such as Black Power, the feminist second wave, and gay liberation, meant that social activism came to focus on personal identities and increasing separation. Breines identifies moments such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s decision to expel white members in 1966 as dashing the integrationist ideal of 1960s liberal social activists and demonstrated a growing sense of racial differences within social groups.¹⁵ Identity became something both to organize around and a way to exclude people. Second-wave feminists sought to organize around a shared singular identity of womanhood which was, in itself, based on white, middle-class norms of ‘universalism’ which failed to take an intersectional approach to identity.¹⁶

This altered social movement context affected the ways in which different groups of women organized. For many white feminist groups, that meant seeking to create a racially inclusive movement based on a shared gender identity. As a result, their early attempts to organize multiracially were frequently framed as efforts at recruitment, in which they tried to draw women of colour into their existing white-dominated feminist groups. However, many women of colour understood the need for an intersectional approach to activism based on

the introduction in Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge : Taylor & Francis, 2005), for a reflection of her experiences as a white woman trying to understand race during the second wave, and an analysis of the reasons that white women could not ‘see what was going on around us: in other words, we lacked an awareness of how our positions in society were constructed in relation to those of women – and men – of color’ (p. 9)

¹⁴ Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 4

¹⁵ Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*, p. 14

¹⁶ For more on the rise of identity politics in the late 1960s, see: Linda Alcoff (ed.), *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Joshua Gamson, ‘The Dilemma of Identity Politics’, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds.) (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Susan Hekman, *Private Selves, Public Identities: Reconsidering Identity Politics* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2004).

their identities that were shaped by an intersectional analysis of society.¹⁷ Women of colour struggled to reconcile their intersectional approach with a social movement context which advocated organizing around either race *or* gender. As a result, women of colour often tended to work in what Kimberly Springer has called the cracks of other social movements which focused primarily on racial or gender unity.¹⁸

These differing priorities surrounding identity politics meant that the various racialised feminisms of the second wave developed and evolved distinctly. Importantly, though, this distinct organizing did not mean that women did not *want* to work across racial lines, but it did mean that racial lines were clearly defined, which could make multiracial organizing difficult. Some feminists perceived fundamental differences between white women's approach to organizing and women of colour's approaches to organizing (though neither of these groups were homogenous or followed any one specific approach). Many feminists assumed that 'white' feminism was focussed around theoretical or theory-based feminism, and pragmatic issue-based organizing was the realm of women of colour. These assumptions reaffirmed the essentialist racial binary (of black/white) by assigning the respective associations of practical or issue-based/theoretical, and thus served to perpetuate the tendency for women to organize in racially autonomous groups – or, at least, to delineate between white feminism and the feminism(s) of women of colour. This racial binary can, and did, prove problematic to activists seeking to work across racial boundaries around reproductive rights: the homogenisation of all women of colour, and the neglect of differences between groups that an essentialist binary created, contributed to misunderstandings around race and to stereotypes that were detrimental to the creation of positive cross-race relationships. This is particularly notable in activism around abortion rights and reproductive rights;

¹⁷ The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the early 1990s to describe 'the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed'. Essentially, an intersectional approach is one that acknowledges that a person's or group's place in society is affected by different levels of power based on their varying identities, including race, class and gender. See: Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Politics and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (1993)

¹⁸ See: Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 2; Kimberly Springer, 'The Interstitial Politics of Black Feminist Organizations', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 1.3 (2001)

women of colour perceived white feminists as too preoccupied with abortion rights and theories of oppression, which impeded their ability to work around practical issues that disproportionately affected women of colour, such as sterilization abuse and unaffordable abortions.¹⁹ It was necessary, then, for white women to acknowledge and engage with the practical issues that women of colour organized around in order to create multiracial coalitions. Indeed, a major reason that recruitment strategies seemed to fail was that white women assumed that women of colour would want to organize around the theoretical and specific (and thus, sometimes exclusionary) issues that white women tackled, without accounting for the desires of women of colour. By contrast, coalition strategies frequently forced white women to consider the issues most pertinent to women of colour. As such, one of the most effective or successful ways for women to organize within multiracial coalitions was around practical issues.²⁰

If earlier accounts emphasised all white, middle-class feminism, more recent literature has complicated the picture by identifying and exploring the important roles of women of colour in the second wave, and their interactions and relationships with white women.²¹ Becky Thompson, for example, highlights three main areas of feminist organizing by women of colour in the 1970s: in women's caucuses within existing mixed-gender organizations, in or alongside white-dominated organizations, and in racially autonomous feminist groups. It was the latter, according to Thompson, that opened up a space for coalition building by the late 1970s.²² Sherna Berger Gluck also identifies moments of

¹⁹ For more on the shift from 'abortion rights' to 'reproductive rights', see Marlene Gerber Fried, *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990)

²⁰ See, Stephanie Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008) particularly the introduction; Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Premilla Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem': Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing", in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008)

²¹ See, for example, Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*; Becky Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*; Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States*; Rosalyn Baxandall, 'Re-Visioning the Women's Liberation Movement Narrative: Early Second Wave African American Feminists', *Feminist Studies*, 27.1 (2001),

²² Becky Thompson, 'Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave

multiracial activism and coalition, but suggests that cross-race coalitions were occurring at a grassroots level from the early 1970s.²³ Scholarly exploration of the role that antiracist white women played in efforts to work multiracially during the second wave has been undertaken by Becky Thompson and Say Burgin. Thompson defines multiracial feminism as ‘the liberation movement spearheaded by women of color [...which] included the emergence of a small but important group of antiracist white women’.²⁴ Both Thompson and Burgin focus on radical white feminists who viewed their activism as part of a wider international and anti-imperial set of organizing principles, and adopted political analyses which acknowledged the interconnectedness of race, gender and class and refused to prioritise gender.²⁵ They undermine the notion that white women during the second wave of feminism were uninterested in working around issues of race and across racial lines. These interpretations complicate existing narratives of the second wave, which initially painted a picture of an all-white, middle-class movement and acknowledged the feminisms of women of colour as emerging as a reaction to white feminism.²⁶

Feminism’, *Feminist Studies*, 28.2 (2002), p. 338, 340

²³ Sherna Berger Gluck, ‘Whose Feminism, Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) US Women’s Movement(S)’, in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class and Gender*, ed. by Nancy A. Naples (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 52-54

²⁴ Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*, p. 128

²⁵ Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*, p. 128; See also: Say Burgin, ‘White Women, Anti-Imperialist Feminism and the Story of Race within the US Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Women’s History Review*, 25.5 (2016),

²⁶ Scholarship which shaped the initial dominant narrative of the second wave of feminism being primarily about middle-class white women (notably housewives and students) includes: Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, ‘Second Wave Feminism’, in *A Companion to American Women’s History*, ed. by Nancy A. Hewitt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Jo Freeman, ‘The Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 78.4 (1973); Steven M. Beuchler, *Women’s Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Kathleen C. Berkeley, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 1999); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000); Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Carol Hanisch, ‘Struggles over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement’, in *Leadership and Social Movements*, ed. by Colin Barker, Alan Johnson, and Michael Lavalette (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), bell hooks has contributed to this discussion by stating that ‘white women have led every movement toward feminist revolution in American society, [but] their dominance is less a sign of black female disinterest in feminist struggle than an indication that the politics of colonialization and racial imperialism have made it historically impossible for black women in the United States to lead a women’s movement. See: bell hooks, *Ain’t I A Woman* (New York and London: South End Press, 1981),

This thesis builds upon and expands the work of these scholars. Their discussions of the emergence of simultaneous feminisms creates a historiographical space in which multiracial activism might be more easily identified.²⁷ I develop Thompson and Burgin's discussions of white feminism by identifying and exploring efforts made by white women in more traditional or institutional feminist spaces to create, facilitate, or be involved with multiracial organizing in either integrated organizations or in multiracial coalitions. While many white feminists in the mainstream lacked an intersectional analysis of their work in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I argue that this does not necessarily indicate that they did not *want* to work multiracially – but that their working practises made it difficult for them to do so. For this reason, I nuance Gluck's assertions about cross-race coalition-building. Though I do not dispute the existence of these coalitions in the early 1970s, I argue that most white women active in mainstream feminist organizations did not consider coalition building their preferred strategy towards multiracial activity. This was largely a result of their non-intersectional analysis of their work. Gluck provides examples of early coalitions – for example, demonstrating around forced sterilization of Chicanas in LA, and fundraising and support for the legal defence of women of colour – that are indicative of community-based activism. However, I argue that these examples represent the exception rather than the norm in the first part of the decade. Coalition-building efforts (as opposed to recruitment strategies) among the mainstream feminist movement became evident a decade later.

Multiracial Activism and Reproductive Rights

This thesis bridges important scholarship that considers race and feminism – particularly the ways in which feminists tried to work across race – and that

²⁷ On the emergence of simultaneous feminisms: Kevin Gaines, Wini Breines, Becky Thompson and others identify the foundations of Black Feminism in the civil rights and Black Power struggles and thus simultaneous to or even preceding the emergence of 'white feminism'. See: Kevin Gaines, 'From Center to Margin: Internationalism and the Origins of Black Feminism', in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, New Americanists (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2002); Winifred Breines, 'Struggling to Connect: White and Black Feminism in the Movement Years', *Contexts*, 6.1 (2007); Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*. See also Thompson's 'Toward a Comparative Feminist Movement' timeline on pages 377-381 of *A Promise and a Way of Life*. Benita Roth acknowledges the effects of both a hyper-masculine Black Power movement and an exclusionary white feminist movement in the formation of the emerging Black Feminist movement, see: Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, ch. 3.

which considers race and reproductive rights activism. The scholarship surrounding race and reproductive rights tends to perpetuate the notion of a bifurcated feminist movement along the lines of race. It mirrors the dominant historiographical narrative of the second wave of feminism more generally. That is, this scholarship asserts that the movement was an all-white effort that focussed around abortion rights, which then developed into a more broad-based agenda when women of colour joined the movement – but that white women rarely, if ever, worked with women of colour to tackle practical issues.²⁸ While more recent scholarship by Jennifer Nelson, Jael Silliman et al, and Rebecca Kluchin (among others) demonstrates that a racially diverse range of women were active around reproductive rights from an early stage, the question of multiracial organizing - either between white women and women of colour, or within heterogeneous groups of women of colour - remains largely unexplored within historiography.²⁹ This thesis, then, contributes to the rich and evolving

²⁸ Scholarship that tends to explore white women's health activism, including reproductive/abortion rights activism, in terms of the mainstream white feminist movement includes: Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990* (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Laura Kaplan, *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction and Women's Health in the Second Wave* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

²⁹ Reproductive rights concerns were paramount to the activism of many women of colour. See: Jael Miriam Silliman, *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 2004); Rebecca M. Kluchin, *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950 - 1980* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2011); Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Jennifer Nelson, "'All This That Has Happened to Me Shouldn't Happen to Nobody Else': Loretta Ross and the Women of Color Reproductive Freedom Movement of the 1980s', *Journal of Women's History*, 22.3 (2010), pp. 136–60; Nelson, Jennifer, "'Abortions Under Community Control": Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction Among New York City's Young Lords', *Journal of Women's History*, 13.1 (2001), See also: Rickie Solinger, *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Fried, *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom*; Simone M. Caron, 'Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960s: Genocide or Power Politics?', *Journal of Social History*, 31.3 (1998); Loretta Ross, 'African American Women and Abortion', in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press, 1998)

While African-American women's experiences are most commonly expressed in this scholarship, there are also several examples of scholarship that considers the position of other women of colour around reproductive rights. Nelson, for example, identified reproductive rights activism in the context of a mixed-gender, Chicano/a nationalist organization, the Young Lords Party of New York (YLP). See Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*, p. 114. Other examples of articles written about non-African-American women of colour's reproductive rights include, but are not restricted to: Jane Lawrence, 'The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women', *American Indian Quarterly*, 24.3 (2000); D. Marie Ralstin-Lewis, 'The Continuing Struggle Against Genocide: Indigenous Women's Reproductive Rights', *Wicazo Sa Review*, 20.1 (2005); Nelson, Jennifer; Elena R. Gutiérrez,

literatures about the second wave, and contributes to filling this historiographical gap.

By centring on activism that was either focused on reproductive rights, or in which discussions of reproductive rights were a significant element, this thesis draws out some of the nuances of attempting to work multiracially around the topic of bodily autonomy, which many white women perceived to be a universal issue that transcended race. In both the pre- and post-*Roe* period, white women (particularly those in mainstream organizations such as the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and NOW) who organized around reproduction focused primarily on abortion rights and the supposition that women should have the right to suppress their own fertility. Many women of colour, however, understood reproductive rights organizing as raced. This was a legacy of the reproductive rights injustices that women of colour and poor women faced that had not affected middle-class white women. Women of colour often organized around practical ‘survival’ issues within a broader reproductive rights agenda, which included work around welfare rights, housing and sterilization abuse; they wanted the right to have and raise children in a fair society, as well as the right to *not* have children. These different understandings of reproductive rights could, and did, act as obstacles to multiracial organizing. This was compounded by the attitudes of some white feminists who believed that their success in *Roe v. Wade* indicated the fulfilment of their reproductive rights goals. As a result, many women of colour believed that white women were not sympathetic to the issues that they faced – which constituted a further challenge to multiracial organizing around reproductive rights.

‘Successful’ and ‘Failed’ Multiracial Activism

Importantly, this thesis seeks to problematise notions of what constitutes ‘successful’ multiracial organizing during the later feminist second wave. It interrogates notions of ‘success’ advanced by both women active in the second wave and in the historiography of the period. Loretta Ross – a prominent

‘Policing Pregnant Pilgrims: Situating the Sterilization Abuse of Mexican Origin Women in Los Angeles County’, in *Women, Health and Nation: Canada and the United States since 1945*, ed. by Molly Ladd-Taylor, Georgina Feldberg, and Alison Li (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003),

African-American health activist, and central figure in this thesis – claimed in an interview that ‘what we define as success, and what is judged by history [as success] are two different things’.³⁰ For many white-dominated groups that operated as part of the ‘hegemonic’ second wave of feminism, the multiracial ideal was to achieve ideologically-coherent, long-term, racially diverse organizations that overcame racial differences in order to struggle against sexism.³¹ Many women of colour, however, preferred to organize autonomously and to come together in coalition with white feminists in particular instances and junctures to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. In many ways, the historiography of race relations in the feminist second wave has reflected this history. Most scholarship surrounding the second wave either neglects to consider feminist efforts to work across race, or suggests that it failed.³² I argue that this is because the established dominant narrative of what constitutes success has been shaped by the ideals created and perpetuated during the second wave by white, middle-class mainstream feminists – those who have frequently been labelled ‘Liberal feminists’ in scholarship surrounding the second wave.³³ In this thesis I question these narratives and consider what ‘multiracial activism’ might look like if it is not framed within the narrow perimeters of this dominant narrative. I aim to question the usefulness of this idea of multiracial ‘success’, and argue that short, transitory moments of alliance and coalition between women of different races could signify multiracial activism that is both useful and effective, even if they were not long-term.

As a result, the binary of success/failure loses usefulness in my discussion of multiracial feminist activism in this thesis. An absolutist notion of ‘success’ neglects the differing objectives of the diverse women who worked in

³⁰ Loretta Ross, Interview with Author, 2016, p. 64

³¹ ‘Hegemonic feminism’ refers to a whitewashed feminism, in which a race and class analysis is ignored or de-emphasised in favour of a narrow agenda around sexism and achieving equality with men. See, Thompson, ‘Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism’, p. 337; Gluck, p. 33-34

³² Scholarship that suggests that efforts to work multiracially either failed or struggled to achieve anything includes Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*; Breines, ‘Struggling to Connect: White and Black Feminism in the Movement Years’; Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*,

³³ See, for example, Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), especially chapter 3. See pp. 357-8 for a discussion of women of colour and Liberal feminism; Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to ‘Post-Feminism’* (Edinburgh: Univ. Press, 1999) and Beuchler. Benita Roth describes the different terms used in this characterisation of the mainstream of the second wave as white and middle-class in her book – see p. 2.

or for multiracial organizations or coalitions. In this thesis, I argue that our understanding of success and failure in efforts towards multiracialism should be nuanced, acknowledging them as variable and not necessarily mutually exclusive. Amy Farrell has begun to complicate the notion of a binary of ‘successful’ and ‘failed’ multiracial feminist organizing. She critiques earlier historiography that suggests that all white women’s organizations were ‘inattentive to differences and complexities’ and suggests that it implies an assumption that:

all second-wave feminist activists and organizations would have been “successful” if only they had acknowledged differences, hybrid identities, and contradictory impulses. Yet [...] issues of diversity, complexity and bridge-building were at the heart of their endeavors. The fact that they were only sometimes successful – and often failed – speaks not to their indifference but rather to the difficulty of creating and sustaining feminist, progressive movements.³⁴

‘Successful’ multiracial organizing, according to Farrell, was not guaranteed even when white women worked hard to facilitate multiracial organizing and moved beyond the notion of a shared sisterhood to acknowledge and even celebrate difference. This thesis develops Farrell’s assertion by arguing that white feminists’ shift to including issues of diversity and bridge-building into their understanding and practise of feminism could, and did, make ‘successful’ multiracial activism more likely, though not guaranteed. White feminists tried to create spaces in which activism across racial lines was feasible, and as such, their aforementioned shifts in understanding and practise made multiracial activism, and efforts towards it, *more* successful.

Questions of desire and emotion are essential in this discussion. Many white women strongly desired relationships, or ‘love’, between all women based on their gender. Sara Ahmed discusses the ways in which love, or ideas about love, have shaped individuals’ politics and political action. She notes the narrative that love ‘allows cohesion through the naming of the nation or ‘political community’ as a shared object of love.³⁵ Love becomes crucial to the promise of cohesion within multiculturalism; it becomes the ‘shared characteristic’ required

³⁴ Amy Farrell, ‘Attentive to Difference: Ms Magazine, Coalition Building and Sisterhood’, in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 48–62, (p. 49-50)

³⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 135

to keep the nation together'.³⁶ She quotes Bhiku Parekh at length, who states that

A multicultural society cannot be stable and last long without developing a common sense of belonging. The sense of belonging [within a multicultural community] cannot be ethnic and based on shared cultural, ethnic and other characteristics [...] but must be political and based on a shared commitment to the political community. [...] Members] are committed to each other because they are all in their own different ways committed to a common historical community. They do and should matter to each other because they are bonded together by the ties of common interest and attachment.³⁷

If we substitute 'community' in this passage for 'feminist group', the centrality of love to the white feminist ideal of multiracial organizing is clear. White women bought into the sense of belonging across race on the basis of a shared commitment to feminism and womanhood, and believed that women of colour should share that commitment and thus create relationships and shared 'love'. Some women of colour, on the other hand, understood multiracial activism to be founded in desperation rather than love; Loretta Ross stated that

coalitions are usually not built out of love or desires for unity. Coalitions are usually built out of desperation. We can't see any other way to accomplish our objectives unless we unite with someone who we really don't trust – sometimes don't understand – but we know they are necessary for our cause. This is the mathematical integration of coalition and movement building. We have to understand that we don't start out loving and trusting each other. The most we have to build on is that we need each other.³⁸

The idea of love, and desires for unity, were mainly iterated by white women. Sarita Srivastava helps to clarify *why* many white feminists had these desires. She identifies 'colonial and contemporary representations of virtue, honesty, and benevolence have been a historical foundation of whiteness, bourgeoisie respectability, and femininity'.³⁹ Simply put, many white, middle-class feminists' ideas of being a 'good feminist' were based in the idea of being good, non-racist people, which was in turn informed by their experiences of their particular social location.

³⁶ Ahmed, p. 135

³⁷ Bhiku Parekh, quoted in Ahmed, p. 135

³⁸ Loretta Ross, 'Building a Movement Against Racism' (30th April 1988) in 'Loretta Ross Papers', Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Box 27, Folder 4

³⁹ Sarita Srivastava, "'You're Calling Me a Racist?'" The Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism', *Signs*, 31.1 (2005), p. 30

It is possible, then, to see why the perceived failure of multiracial activism was so affecting for white women – it not only indicated an immediate disappointment, but it also threatened their sense of what it was to be a good feminist and their notions of what feminism was. Wini Breines, a radical feminist active in the late second wave, recalls the anger, frustration and sense of loss felt by many white activists when their idealistic desire of building a universal feminist identity that included women of all races did not come to fruition. She writes of ‘grieving for lost interracial connections among women’, asserting that the questions of race still brings up ‘anger, sadness, frustration, confusion, guilt, regret, dismay, and even rage’ for many white feminist veterans.⁴⁰ The legacy of racial tension in the USA, coupled with the typically different socio-economic locations of women of different races, meant that breaking down racial boundaries to create the type of multiracial feminist movement that many white women idealised seemed unfeasible. Multiracialism then, as initially conceptualised by many white women, had failed.

I aim to problematise the existing binary of success and failure by transcending these popular conceptions of failure that were established by white women, and endeavour to move beyond focusing purely on divisions and fractures between women. Stephanie Gilmore asserts that an examination of how white feminists and feminists of colour could devise ways of working together based on their differences rather than idealism and universalism is vital.⁴¹ Gilmore does not deny that tensions and fractures existed; she writes that

feminists forged numerous cross-movement coalitions across differences of race, class, sexual identity... and other real distinctions in lived experiences. In many cases, the relationships in these alliances were tenuous and difficult. Most were not sustained, many fell apart, and some did not achieve their articulated goals.⁴²

This does not necessarily indicate failure, though. I argue that ‘success’ in multiracial activism did not necessarily indicate ‘long term’ - though many white feminists initially sought long-term organizing. Instead, by imagining multiracial

⁴⁰ Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*, pp. 14-15

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁴² Stephanie Gilmore, ‘Thinking about Feminist Coalitions’, in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 14

activism as transitory and pragmatic, I build upon Gilmore's suggestions to reassess how 'successful' multiracial activism may have been, and argue that short-term moments of organizing can and should be considered (at least partially) successful.

This thesis draws on other notable scholars who have identified moments of successful women's activism across race. Premilla Nadasen, Benita Roth and Sherna Berger Gluck suggest that multiracial organizing was most likely to succeed when it was based on pragmatic responses to practical problems, rather than shaped around theoretical or ideological frameworks.⁴³ Gluck suggests that 'the hallmark of so much of the activism of working-class and poor women has not been their articulated gender or race or class analyses, but rather their activities growing out of immediate needs'.⁴⁴ Activities, events and organizations that acknowledged and sought to meet these immediate needs of oppressed women in multiracial relationships were more likely to work effectively. Similarly, Benita Roth has commented that attempts to create a lasting and cohesive 'universalist' ideological and theoretical feminism that transcended racial boundaries largely failed. Creating cross-race coalitions around theories, rather than practical or pragmatic immediate circumstance, was challenging due to the disparate experiences and identities of women of different races. Indeed, Roth suggests that efforts to work collaboratively in multiracial settings frequently demonstrated that the only common ground that women activists of different races found was 'just how impossible it would be for them to work closely together'.⁴⁵

Roth's assertion of multiracial failure is, I believe, too simplistic. This thesis, alongside the work of other scholars, demonstrates that multiracial activism was not impossible. Premilla Nadasen explores the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) as an example of successful multiracial organizing but primarily discusses practical issues rather than identity politics. She suggests that multiracial organizing did not demonstrate a transcendence of race or an ignoring of racial identity, but an opportunity for women of different

⁴³ See: Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem": Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing', p. 191; Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 201; Gluck, p. 33

⁴⁴ Gluck, p. 33

⁴⁵ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 207

racism to work together in efforts to achieve practical gains for themselves and their communities. It worked, she suggests, because it was an 'issue-based movement' rather than an 'abstract and artificial alliance based on gender'.⁴⁶ Acknowledging race as an element of identity alongside gender allowed NWRO activists to work multiracially and highlights the importance of taking an intersectional approach to multiracial coalition-building.

Acknowledging, Highlighting and Celebrating Difference

Finally, this thesis helps to bridge the historiographical gap between the second- and third-waves of feminism in the USA.⁴⁷ Broadly, the second wave has been portrayed as homogenous, strict and rigid, dominated by middle-class white women who perceived feminism as a singular identity that people needed to alter themselves to fit. The third wave of feminism, broadly considered to have emerged in the 1990s among women who came of adult age in the preceding decade, has been presented as emerging as a critical response to the inadequacies of the second wave. Discourses of 'difference, deconstructing and de-centering' became central to the theoretical paradigms of third-wave feminists. These discourses, argue Susan Archer Mann and Douglas Huffman, did not 'seek to undermine the feminist movement, but rather to refigure and enhance it to make it more diverse and inclusive'.⁴⁸ This thesis demonstrates some of the practical work that activists in the late second wave did while grappling with changing notions of what feminism was and their efforts to shape these shifting narratives. It explores some ways that second-wave feminists negotiated, dealt with, and enabled the shift to the third wave. It demonstrates

⁴⁶ Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem": Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing', p. 192

⁴⁷ While there has been an abundance of scholarship which discusses the relationship between the third wave and the second wave and discusses the continuities and contrasts between them, there has been little scholarship which has discussed the feminist activism of the later 1980s and the on-the-ground responses to, and efforts towards, changing feminist ideologies. For scholarship on the relationship between the second and third waves of feminism, see: Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman, 'The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave', *Science & Society*, 69.1 (2005),; Rebecca Walker, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995),; Michelle Sidler, 'Living in McJobdom: Third Wave Feminism and Class Inequity', in *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997),; Lynn S. Chancer, *Reconcilable Differences: Confronting Beauty, Pornography, and the Future of Feminism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998),

⁴⁸ Archer Mann and Huffman, p. 57

how some white feminists' understanding of feminism developed from an 'either/or' approach – for example, the idea that feminists could either work on anti-racism *or* towards gender equality/against the Right wing – to an 'and' approach, in which feminists began to recognise the importance and benefits of acknowledging and celebrating racial difference when trying to organize multiracially.⁴⁹ In short, 'recruitment' strategies reflected the criticisms that the second wave faced of being rigid, preoccupied with ideas of 'sisterhood' and unwilling to acknowledge or de-emphasize differences between women. 'Coalition' approaches allowed, and often required, women to engage with their differences, and even celebrate them.

Coalition building was, according to Roth, inherently difficult; to transcend racial barriers requires 'the recognition of inequality, the negotiation of real, experiential difference, *and* acknowledgment of common cause'.⁵⁰ These difficulties meant that coalitions and collaborations were often short-lived, and did not develop into lasting relationships. However, the idea of coalitions is integral to a broader understanding of what multiracial organizing might look like. It allows for an acknowledgment of the importance of racial autonomy and forces scholars to acknowledge and explore the different needs, desires and expectations of groups and individuals within the coalition. Essentially, multiracial coalitions, as opposed to multiracial organizations, allowed activists to work across racial lines while still honouring established identities and political investments.⁵¹ Indeed, in her assessment of the Welfare Rights Movement, Premilla Nadasen suggests that 'a racial consciousness did not preclude the possibility of working within an interracial setting, and organizing in a multiracial setting did not mean a movement devoid of an analysis of race'.⁵² Organizing multiracially as feminists while maintaining a clear sense of racial ideologies and difference was possible, then – but challenging.

Racially autonomous spaces were fundamentally important to the development of multiracial coalitions because they forced feminists –

⁴⁹ Gloria Steinem, 'Foreword', and Rebecca Walker, 'Introduction', in Rebecca Walker, p. xv, p.xxxv

⁵⁰ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 220

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221

⁵² Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem": Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing', p. 191

particularly white feminists – to face up to the differences experienced by women of different races. In racially autonomous spaces, women of colour could and did create opportunities to actively and collectively critique white women's feminism and dismantle the hegemony of whiteness within mainstream feminism. In doing so, they helped to show white women that multiracial activism could only work when they engaged in antiracism self-education and work alongside and as part of their gender work. Multiracial coalitions, they demonstrated, could only work if and when white women came to understand and celebrate differences between women of different races. In addition, racially autonomous spaces provided platforms from which women of colour could rally together to more powerfully and meaningfully engage with white-dominated groups, which were often large, wealthy and powerful. Put simply, racially autonomous groups allowed women of colour to consolidate their power as a constituency. This, in turn, provided them with more leverage when dealing with white feminist groups.

Racially autonomous groups might, on the face of it, seem fundamentally contradictory to the feasibility or possibility of multiracial organizing. However, Becky Thompson asserts that these racially autonomous caucus groups and organizations were imperative for the later creation of cross-race relations and coalition efforts, and describes them as a 'significant characteristic' of the multiracial feminist movement that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵³ Benita Roth also explicitly discusses racially autonomous feminist organizing. She describes the social movement context of the 1960s and 70s as 'competitive', which forced social activists to simultaneously organize in close proximity with each other *and* try to find the most efficient and effective ways of organizing with limited human and material resources. As such, movements and organizations developed an ethos of 'organizing one's own' as an efficient, and the most authentic, style of activism. This ethos, Roth argues, provided the 'crucial ideological component that kept feminists in distinct racial/ethnic organizations'.⁵⁴ This notion of 'organizing one's own', she suggests, explains what she has called the 'dearth of coalition activity' across race during the

⁵³ Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*, p. 128-9

⁵⁴ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 181

second wave.⁵⁵ At the same time, however, she emphasizes the interlinked nature of different racial feminisms, stating that their simultaneous emergence, placed alongside cross-racial relationships and communications networks and shared notions of liberation, necessitated an understanding of racially autonomous feminisms as developing ‘in some degree in interaction with one another’.⁵⁶ For Thompson, then, and to some extent Roth, the emergence of racially autonomous feminisms was fundamentally important for laying foundations for multiracial coalitions. Rather than seeing racially autonomous spaces or organizing as mutually exclusive to coalition building, I contend that they were necessary and important precursors to coalition efforts – and thus multiracial organizing.

Acknowledging and celebrating racial difference contradicted some white feminists’ desire for unity based on gender. The early approach of most organizations discussed in this thesis demonstrates that many white women prioritised ‘universal sisterhood’ over efforts to engage with and organize around race. This undermined their chances of being able to work across race effectively. A move towards trying to understand and celebrate racial differences between women meant that white feminists had to abandon their idea of a ‘one size fits all’ female identity on which to base ‘sisterhood’. This marks an important moment in the shift from the dominant narrative that has characterised the second wave to the major narrative surrounding the third wave – which more fully includes intersectionality and difference. Notably, this thesis might help scholars to understand how and why this perceived change in feminist strategies and attitudes occurred. I posit that the shifts that I have identified and explored in this thesis are indicative of, and might have helped to cause, the theoretical and practical shifts from ideologies associated with the second wave to the third wave.

⁵⁵ Benita Roth, “Organizing One’s Own” as Good Politics’, in *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, ed. by Nella Van Dyke and Holly J. McCammon (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 100

⁵⁶ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 18

Methodology and Oral Histories

The research for this project has been based primarily in archival materials and oral histories. My research methods have complemented and informed each other; I have used archival materials to both inform and shape the questions that I have asked during oral history interviews, and I have used the conversations arising from oral history interviews to guide my archival research. As such, these two methodologies have complemented and corroborated each other. Importantly, I did not seek to evaluate the ‘validity’ of oral history testimonies against archival material.⁵⁷ I aim to emphasise the value that both archival research and oral history testimonies bring to this thesis, and the different types of information that these methodologies privilege. Oral history testimonies, for example, provide an opportunity to reflect on events, groups and individuals as simultaneously part of the bigger picture of social movements, and a way to discover personal anecdotes and experiences from women active at the grassroots, which may not have been recorded in written archives. Written archives, on the other hand, often feature materials that organizations and individuals sought to make public, and so can be informative about the ways that groups sought to represent themselves – as well as providing specific details and facts that can be harder to ascertain in personal testimonies.

I interviewed a total of nine women who had been active during and since the second wave of feminism. They were Loretta Ross, Frances Kissling, Sarah Schulman, Marjorie Fine, Marilyn Katz, Meredith Tax, Karen Stamm, Marlene Fried and Byllye Avery. These interviews were mostly held face-to-face in a variety of settings and locations in the USA, but two interviews were held over the telephone while I was in the UK (those with Ross and Avery). I held all of the interviews between March and November 2016. I asked all participants the same final question (“In your opinion, did your/your organization’s/your

⁵⁷ Susan Geiger asserts that ‘most of us have learned to regard information [...] found in archives, libraries, classrooms and universities as “reliable”. These are the repositories of knowledge against which we have been taught to measure any “new” information we might collect or discover. If we insist that the validity of women’s oral accounts must be [...] evaluated against existing knowledge [...], we are *not* following a feminist methodology in our oral history work with women. [...] Why isn’t the written word [...] tested against women’s oral testimonies, instead of the other way around?’. See Susan Geiger, ‘What’s So Feminist About Women’s Oral History?’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 2.1 (1990), p. 174

event's efforts towards multiracial organizing succeed or fail?"), but otherwise initial questions were written based on my prior knowledge of the participant's activism. I chose to make the interviews semi-structured, and for the most part, conversation developed naturally and follow-up questions that I asked were informed by participants' initial responses. I chose this approach as it allowed space for participants to tell me what *they* thought was most important or relevant, and provided the opportunity for them to steer the interview in particular ways. Susan Geiger's work on feminist oral history methodologies informed my decisions about the structure and content of my interviews. As she has noted:

Women's oral histories are not inherently feminist nor is the telling necessarily a feminist act. Moreover, the gathering of oral histories [...] cannot be considered, automatically, a feminist research method.⁵⁸

Instead, Geiger suggests that both the objectives and methodologies of the oral history approach must be feminist. They must try to acknowledge and account for voices that are marginalised or obstructed, but not to use the markers of marginality and representativeness as major conceptual organizers in themselves. That is, they perceive the participant as a whole, with valuable and interesting contributions other than those regarding their marginality or oppression.⁵⁹ By ensuring that the women I interviewed were able to steer our conversations, and by taking a reactive approach to follow-up questions, I endeavoured to minimise the risk that I – and, by extension, the interviews – would focus only on the participants as representatives of their activism. Instead, my approach and methodology has been shaped by Julie Stephen's assertion that an oral history methodology is most valuable because the participant speaks both for themselves and as representatives of their community – their words have a 'both-at-once' characteristic. This means that there is space for individual reflection and stories within a larger cultural script, which may otherwise serve to universalise particular communities by (re)asserting dominant narratives.⁶⁰ This 'both-at-once' characteristic can serve to acknowledge the dominant understanding of a group or period, while also

⁵⁸ Geiger, pp. 169-170

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173

⁶⁰ Julie Stephens, 'Our Remembered Selves: Oral History and Feminist Memory', *Oral History*, 38.1 (2010), p. 85

providing evidence of specific personal experiences or a framework through which to question the universality of that dominant understanding or narrative. Essentially, my oral history interviews were based on the premise that the participants were individuals with distinct experiences, but that they were also representative of and could comment upon the wider communities that they were a part of.

This approach necessitated a strong focus on individual agency and choice before, during and after the interview process. The Oral History Society's ethical guidelines state that '[researchers have] a duty to treat participants as intelligent beings, able to make their own decisions on how the information they provide can be used, shared and made public (through informed consent)'.⁶¹ For my own interviews, I decided that a feminist oral history should place primary agency in the hands of the participant, and that informed consent should extend to a right to amendment. As such, I returned all transcriptions to participants for their review and to allow them to make any amendments or place any embargoes on the transcript. As a result, the final transcripts that have been used in this thesis have been subjected to amendments by the participants. Participants were aware of this process in advance of the interview, and it was noted on both the information sheet and consent form that they read and signed beforehand. My approach, then, was centred in efforts to highlight participants' individuality and agency in creating historical narratives, and sought to move away from the notion that oral histories are important mainly to 'empower' participants and 'allow' oppressed peoples voices to be heard. This narrative can quickly become what Gluck and Patai have described as allowing 'the potential for appropriation hiding behind the comforting rationale of empowerment'.⁶² Given the participants' expertise, direct experience of my research topic, and history of feminist activism through which they sought to empower themselves and other women, the notion that my research could or would empower them seems ludicrous. The structures of my interviews, coupled with my conscious efforts to ensure that I respected and responded to

⁶¹ Oral History Society, 'Ethical Considerations', *Oral History Society Website* <<http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.php>>,

⁶² *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 2

participants' individual agency, contributed to my efforts to ensure a fair and equal power balance between myself and participants.

Finally, and importantly, the racial (im)balance of the interview participants should be noted. Of the women that I interviewed, seven were white (Kissling, Schulman, Fine, Katz, Tax, Stamm and Fried), and two were African-American (Ross and Avery). The reason for this racial imbalance is mostly related to my mobilisation strategy. Through my initial research, I identified a number of women to contact based on their activism within the second wave of feminism, and particularly the roles that they played in the events and organizations that I was interested in. I contacted them online by email (or, in one case, Twitter). I initially set up interviews with Loretta Ross, Frances Kissling and Sarah Schulman. I anticipated that they might suggest other contacts to interview – and indeed, I was then put into contact with the other six participants through personal connections. For example, Fran Kissling gave me the details of Meredith Tax and Karen Stamm, who then put me in touch with Marlene Fried. Notably, most of the white women that I interviewed with were keen to share their extended personal networks with me, and suggested further contacts, who were predominantly white women. I gained Byllye Avery's contact details from Loretta Ross. As a result, I allowed my recruitment strategy to be influenced by pre-existing networks of women which were, in themselves, shaped by the (often racially informed) networking strategies of these activists during and after the second wave.

The oral history interviews that I facilitated, then, were fundamentally shaped by networks that were forged and maintained during the feminist second wave. As this thesis discusses in part one, the creation of networks was foundational to efforts to create multiracial spaces and facilitate multiracial organizing, but activists frequently found it more comfortable to access and organize within their own, frequently racially autonomous networks. A lack of pre-existing networks between white women and women of colour, I argue, created challenges for women seeking to work multiracially during the 1970s and 80s. The direct effect that this had on my oral history interviews has clearly shaped my research – my thesis focuses broadly on the efforts of white women

– which indicates the ways in which past networks continue to shape the historical narratives that we can and do write today.⁶³

Chapter Summaries

This thesis is split into two main parts, each with three chapters. The first part of this thesis uses three case studies to examine the feminists' shifting strategies towards creating multiracial relationships and spaces. It identifies the early part of the period that this thesis covers as characterised by 'recruitment' strategies – that is, efforts by white women to recruit women of colour into their existing organizations through 'outreach' in order to diversify them and create multiracial organizations. In the early 1980s, though, many white feminists – particularly more radical or Leftist feminists – began to shift their strategies towards creating multiracial spaces to one that advocated multiracial coalitions in which pre-existing racially autonomous feminist groups joined together for particular events or around particular issues or agendas. This latter form of organizing necessitated many white women to face, tackle, and attempt to 'unlearn' their personal and organizational racism. For many women of colour, white women 'unlearning racism', which in the context of reproductive rights meant understanding the nuanced ways that racial diversity affected experiences of reproductive healthcare and wellbeing, was a prerequisite to organizing multiracially and creating multiracial coalitions. Multiracial coalitions were only feasible when they were appealing and beneficial to all parties involved. In 'recruitment' strategies, many white women sought to attract women of colour into their ranks so as to have 'diverse' organizations and so that their feminist agenda was strengthened by the full participation of women of colour. These strategies were rarely effective, as many women of colour believed they did not stand to gain from joining white women's organizations. Coalitions, however, provided opportunities for women of colour and white women to set the agenda so that it suited and provided benefits for both.

The three chapters in part one focus on different organizations, events or organizing efforts, of different geographical locations, sizes, and constituencies of women. They operate as a platform for identifying and exploring the shift in

⁶³ For further information about the oral history participants, see appendix 1.

feminist strategies towards multiracial organizing. Despite their differences, a number of specific themes emerge throughout the attempts to organize multiracially in all three case studies. These include a focus on education as a way to facilitate multiracial work, an emphasis on networks both as a way to create multiracial spaces and as a potential outcome of multiracial organizing, and the importance of racially autonomous spaces to facilitate ongoing multiracial cooperation.

Chapter one considers the state meetings and conferences that preceded the 1977 National Women's Conference. These meetings attracted tens of thousands of women to a series of state meetings that were commissioned and partially financed by the federal government. They culminated in a National Women's Conference of 20,000 women held in Houston, Texas. This chapter focuses on the recruitment and diversity strategies of the state meetings of Alaska and California, as well as the process for selecting 'delegates-at-large'. It draws heavily on reports of state meetings written by members of the government-appointed state coordinating committees, as well as both private and public letters and memorandums, and documents written by International Women's Year Commissions at both the federal and state levels. By exploring documents that were created by women working for and within formal organizations and in response to a federal commission, this chapter demonstrates a national impetus at a governmental level for women of different races to work together. The source base also facilitates an exploration into the benefits and challenges of a highly bureaucratic approach to multiracial organizing. It demonstrates the ways in which rigid structures towards recruitment, 'outreach' and diversity could simultaneously provide opportunities for interactions and organizing across race, and work to exclude women – frequently women of colour and poor women – who did not engage with this federally-commissions bureaucracy. Ultimately, this case study demonstrates (white) women's structured recruitment efforts to create a multiracial event, and the extent to which they succeeded or failed.

Chapter two will consider the actions and strategies of the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2). Established in the late 1970s, R2N2 was a national grassroots network which sought to mobilise a mass base of women

around a broad reproductive rights agenda. The network dissolved in late 1984 or early 1985 after tensions surrounding race and racism within the network came to a head. Within this chapter, I explore three major events or campaigns of the network: Abortion Rights Action Week, a week of mobilization around the country to raise awareness of and defend abortion rights; a Population Control Slideshow that R2N2 created in collaboration with a Native American women's group; and the network's final conferences, at which point fissures in the organization caused by racial tension developed into irreparable splits. By examining and analysing organizational papers alongside oral history testimonies, this chapter will trace the shifting strategies that R2N2 took towards creating multiracial spaces and organizing. Ultimately, during its existence, R2N2 shifted from a 'recruitment' approach to a 'coalition' approach, and an in-depth exploration of meeting minutes, mailings, correspondence and conference reports help to demonstrate the internal dialogues that contributed to, and reacted to, this shift. Oral history testimonies also provide an insight into the thoughts and feelings of the women working in the network, and the ways in which they shaped the organizing that they were able and willing to do.

Part one ends with a consideration of the *In Defense of Roe* conference, organized by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Reproductive Freedom Project and the Women of Color Partnership Program of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights (RCAR). Held in Washington D.C. in April 1989, it was significantly smaller in scale than either of the two previous case studies, with around 140 women in attendance. The delegation at *In Defense of Roe* was distinctive for its high proportion of women of colour, and was conceptualised as a platform for dialogue, bridge-building and education across racial lines. Notably, this event was only ever conceptualised as an individual event – albeit one that drew on past events and networks and would inform future organizing – rather than part of a longer series of events, campaigns or sustained activism by a single organization. As a result, while this chapter draws on organizational papers such as conference reports, evaluations and administrative documents, they are frequently small selections from a number of different collections. This broad base indicates the coalition-style approach to organizing that the *In Defense of Roe* facilitators favoured. This source base simultaneously demonstrates the commitment to multiracial work and the aims and objectives

of the varying organizers and attendees, and provides evidence of the responses of participants through conference evaluation forms. In addition, it uses both public and private correspondence to identify the efforts that conference organizers made to create and develop existing networks. The networks that conference organizers created in the years preceding *In Defense of Roe* were fundamentally important to the coalition work that the conference participants did and promoted. Analysis of private correspondence alongside personal testimonies in this chapter highlights the importance of personal connections and relationships in the development of these (and other) networks.

The second part of this thesis examines one of the major reasons *why* many feminists – particularly white feminists – wanted to organize multiracially: the rising religious and political Right. By the late 1970s, the inextricable links between the Republican Right, the secular New Right and fundamentalist Christian ideals became clear and were represented by Ronald Reagan's administration, a strong antifeminist backlash that included powerful and popular groups such as the Eagle Forum and Moral Majority, and the gradual erosion of the rights won in *Roe v. Wade* through a series of court cases and amendments. The part explores the ways in which this provided an impetus for some women to try to unite in the face of these threats – or at least appear to be united - and how that affected their desire and ability to organize multiracially. In particular, it considers the ways in which feminists have sought to represent themselves, and their organizing, in specific ways to combat against the Right-wing and antifeminist backlash. Mirroring the shift from 'recruitment' to 'coalition' strategies, the responses of feminists to the rising Right shifted during this period. In the earlier stages, many white feminists responded to Right-wing threats by attempting to portray feminism as united, which prompted a rhetorical and theoretical commitment to multiracial organizing. Included in this was a desire to remain in control of the narratives created around feminism and American womanhood more broadly. Later in the period, the threat of the Right prompted changes in the working practise of some white feminist groups to facilitate multiracial organizing that would be useful in itself as a way to combat the rising Right.

As in the first part, the events discussed in chapters four to six varied in size and demographics, but several shared themes emerge; firstly, the importance (to white women) of controlling narratives surrounding feminism as a way to protect the movement against the Right, and secondly, the relationship between what many white feminists saw as doing ‘anti-racist’ work and ‘defensive’ work. Both of these themes illuminate a shift in feminist attitudes and strategies over the period. In the late 1970s, many white women perceived controlling feminist narratives as a way to defend feminism, while a decade later they imagined that controlling narratives would help to steer the feminist movement and ensure best practise in terms of working across race in the future. Similarly, white feminists believed that ‘anti-racist’ work and ‘defensive’ work were competing demands on their time during the late 1970s, while they later understood antiracist work as a prerequisite for defending against the Right – the two were mutually reinforcing.

Chapter four builds on and extends my analysis from chapter one by exploring the importance of the Right wing in organizing for the National Women’s Conference in Houston – and vice versa. The Houston Conference was highlighted in contemporary media – and continues to be portrayed in historiography – as a battleground between feminists and antifeminists. The importance of the media in shaping attitudes towards, and action within the conference is reiterated in my source base for this chapter, which overwhelmingly draws on newspapers, magazines and press releases. The widespread media coverage of this event helps to demonstrate the centrality of representation to this chapter – and to the second part of the thesis more broadly. By exploring various media responses to the conference, this chapter highlights the ways in which public narratives about feminism and womanhood were affected by ideas of splits, divisions and ‘catfights’ among American women as a result of political affiliations. This chapter also explores feminists’ responses to this media coverage by examining their own efforts to control narrative creation through press releases, correspondence and media coverage in feminist publications. In addition, by exploring the state meeting reports for states such as Mississippi and New York, this chapter assessed the extent to which right-wing presence at state meetings seemed to be a ‘threat’ to IWY organizers. This chapter suggests that this threat, coupled with the media

preoccupation with splits and divisions simultaneously prompted conference organizers to emphasise unity and sisterhood at the conference and meant that they neglected to engage fully with the needs and desires of many women of colour – thus creating obstacles to multiracial organizing.

Chapter five reiterates this central theme of representation by examining the Marches for Women's Lives in 1986 and 1989. Organized by the National Organization for Women (NOW), these marches drew thousands of women to Washington DC to march in support of abortion rights and other reproductive rights agendas. The chapter traces the shift in strategies between the 1986 and 1989 marches and the ways in which it changed representations of race in NOW, and within feminism more broadly. In 1986, the march seemingly represented a 'sea of white', which was indicative of the way that NOW's membership and following was perceived by many feminists – as predominantly white and middle class. While many women of colour *did* attend the 1986 march, they were so dispersed among the crowd that they presented no real visual impact. In 1989, though, women of colour congregated at the front of the march in order to more clearly represent the racial diversity at the march itself. I argue that a major impetus for this shift in strategies was the dramatic increase in right-wing anti-abortion violence, and the threat of the impending *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* decision which highlighted the disproportionate effects of diminishing abortion rights on women of colour and poor women. The reasoning behind demonstrating the presence of women of colour at the march was twofold; first, it represented feminism as united across race to the public – and to the Right, and second, it aimed to encourage more women of colour to organize alongside (though not necessarily within) the mainstream white women's movement. Loretta Ross, the head of the women of colour programme for NOW, was responsible for this major shift – and so my source base for this chapter reflects this. I rely heavily on oral history interviews, letters and reports from Ross to gain a sense of how and why she saw this strategic move as necessary. I then use media sources – including articles and press releases – to demonstrate explicitly how NOW wanted to be represented and the extent to which they achieved this.

The final chapter of this thesis returns to the *In Defense of Roe* conference to demonstrate the differing ways that the Right posed a threat to

white women and to women of colour who were involved with organizing and participating in the conference. It focuses on the notion that coalition-building and multiracial work was a prerequisite for defending against the right-wing. As such, this chapter argues that *In Defense of Roe* differed from events discussed in previous chapters as organizers focused on using inclusive, multiracial working practises from the beginning – which was partially in response to Right-wing threats. It discusses the varying ways that different women sought to represent the conference as a model for future organizing, and the extent to which threats of the Right were perceived by organizers as a hindrance to planning for the future or an impetus for it. This chapter uses a conference report and a conference video as examples of outward-facing forms of self-representation for the groups involved in organizing the conference, and draws extensively on private correspondence between Pat Tyson and Lynn Paltrow, the women who were responsible for both the report and video. By doing so, I explore the internal dialogues and (often fractious) debates surrounding how and why the conference should be represented in various ways.

Language and Clarifications

Finally, it is useful to provide some clarifications and justifications for the language that I have chosen to use in this thesis. This thesis broadly equates anti-feminists as being anti-abortion, though the two are clearly not interdependent; Gina Denton asserts that anti-abortion women ‘should be recognised as part of the diverse range of voices that contributed to feminist discourses during this period’ and represent a version of feminism that resonated with welfare rights activists’ arguments surrounding motherhood and equality.⁶⁴ This thesis, however, does not differentiate between anti-abortion and anti-feminist activists for two reasons; firstly, the majority of antifeminists *did* take a ‘pro-life’ stance, even if not all anti-abortion women were antifeminists, and secondly, many feminists active during the late second wave conflated antifeminism with anti-abortion activism. As I primarily discuss the

⁶⁴ Georgina Denton, ‘Motherhood and Protest in the United States since the Sixties’ (University of Leeds, 2014), p. 269

Right-wing in the context of how feminists responded to it, it is reasonable that I also conflate the two.

The usefulness of the ‘wave’ narrative when tracing the history of feminism has been debated by multiple scholars, particularly since the emergence of the ‘third wave’. They have problematised the ways in which the wave narrative has served to hide or minimise the contributions and efforts of feminists of colour who frequently operated ‘between the waves’ to tackle gendered and racial inequalities. Critics of the wave narrative also comment on its tendency to downplay elements of continuity among feminist organizing and implies periods of inactivity.⁶⁵ Clearly, this thesis focuses on a period not traditionally associated with the ‘second-wave’. However, it aims to demonstrate a sense of continuity of feminist activism that originated in what might be considered some of the fundamental themes of the second wave; bodily autonomy and reproductive rights, a focus on identity politics, and notions of ‘sisterhood’. My use of the term ‘second-wave’, then, comes from the understanding that feminist activism from the 1960s to the late 1980s was distinctive in the ways that feminism, womanhood and identity began to be perceived, both by feminists and by broader society. Equally, this thesis makes it clear that feminist activism during this period was not monolithic; feminists, organizations and groups evolved and developed during the period, and created fertile ground for the discussions of identity, difference and individualism that has come to characterise the third wave.

Similarly, in this thesis I frequently refer to white women and women of colour. This does not mean that I suggest that either white women or women of colour represent homogenous groups. Accordingly, I understand multiracial activism as any activism which consciously includes women of different races, but does not necessarily include white women. I also stress that not all women

⁶⁵ Scholarship that debates the ‘wave narrative’ includes, but is not limited to: Kimberly Springer, ‘Third Wave Black Feminism?’, *Signs*, 27.4 (2002); Catherine Harnois, ‘Re-Presenting Feminisms: Past, Present and Future’, *NWSA Journal*, 20.1 (2008); Nancy Hewitt, ‘Introduction’, in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of US Feminism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Leela Fernandes, ‘Unsettling “Third Wave Feminism”: Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect’, in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of US Feminism*, ed. by Nancy Hewitt (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Chamberlain, ‘Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism’, *Social Movement Studies*, 14.4 (2015); Amber E. Kinser, ‘Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism’, *NWSA Journal*, 16.3 (2004),

of colour are or were African-American women, and so seek to move away from the Black/white binary that has frequently characterised scholarship around race in the US. Indeed, in most of the case studies discussed in this thesis, women of colour were quick to highlight their heterogeneity, emphasising their distinctive experiences, understandings of feminism and approaches to organizing. As such, I use specific terminology when referring to particular racial or ethnic groups. However, I also frequently refer to 'women of colour' as a group distinct to that of 'white women'. Though I recognise that this, in some ways, might serve to perpetuate the essentialist Black/white binary, or to delineate between white feminism and the feminism(s) of women of colour, my use of the term has two bases. Firstly, since the second wave, many groups of women of colour of different races have identified and worked around a shared identity based on shared racial oppressions and an anti-imperial attitude towards race. So, many women of colour categorised themselves as 'women of colour' in addition to their specific racial or ethnic group. Secondly, some white feminists during the second wave imagined women of colour as a homogenous group, and so approached women of colour for multiracial organizing efforts without acknowledging their specific experiences as a member of a particular racial group. In some cases, then, my use of the term 'women of colour' reflects contemporary white feminists' understandings of race and as such the ways in which this affected their attempts to organize around race. Finally, I use the term 'white feminists' frequently to refer not to all feminists who were white, but to white women who organized primarily in white-dominated, 'mainstream' feminist organizations, who did not necessarily see antiracist work as a foundation for their feminist organizing (though, as this thesis suggests, many of these women did come to understand the importance of multiracial work, even if it did not come to be foundational to their own activism in practice). Loretta Ross has emphasised the importance of 'writing along the continuum', by which she means to 'nuance how both progressive white women and progressive women of colour fought against racism, even [...] at the beginning of the women's movement'.⁶⁶ In this thesis I do not seek to suggest that *all* white women were ignorant of racial privilege and did not consider antiracism organizing as central to their work, nor do I want to imply that *no* women of

⁶⁶ Ross, 'Interview with Author'

colour were involved in feminism during its early stages.⁶⁷ As such, I do not seek to homogenise groups of women of any racial group but do use some generalised language for concision and out of necessity.

⁶⁷ Indeed, progressive white women who sought to centre antiracism in their feminist organizing have been considered by Say Burgin and Becky Thompson (see: Say Burgin, 'The Workshop as Work: White Anti-Racist Organising in 1960s, 70s and 80s US Social Movements' (University of Leeds, 2013); Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*,). Loretta Ross has drawn attention to African-American woman Rev. Pauli Murray, who co-wrote the NOW Statement of Purpose during its founding, and Aileen Hernandez, who was NOW's third president. Women of colour have participated in 'mainstream' feminist groups, then, from an early stage in varying capacities.

Part One: From Recruitment to Coalition

The most difficult stage of unlearning racism is looking internally and taking responsibility for one's self (individually or organizationally). [...] The tendency will be to skip this stage and go directly on to coalition building. This is a mistake. Internal awareness is an essential prerequisite to effective coalition building so that we don't repeat the errors of the past when working with women of color. It is critical to realise that white women cannot effectively combat racism out of their distress about being white. White women must begin by acknowledging their role and privileges in a racist society. Once this form of internalized oppression is challenged, then when white women reach out to women of color they come with confidence in their commitment to anti-racist work.

[...]

Coalition building is the fourth step and is the actual process of cooperation with women of color that begins making fundamental changes in our organization.

[...]

The final stage of unlearning racism is the actual building of a multi-cultural organization, which is not only multi-cultural and multi-racial in number, but also in nature.

Loretta Ross

'NOW and Women of Color' (1987)¹

Coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there. They're not looking for a coalition; they're looking for a home! [...] In a coalition you have to give, and it's different from your home. You can't stay there all the time. You go to the coalition for a few hours and then you go back and take your bottle wherever it is, and then you go back and coalesce some more.

Bernice Johnson Reagan,

'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century' (1981)²

¹ Loretta Ross, *NOW and Women of Color* (16th September 1988) p. 2, with excerpts from Ellen O'Neill and Nancy Okerlund, *Anti-Racism Continuum* (1986) in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 4 [Hereafter 'Ross Papers']

² Bernice Johnson Reagan, 'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century', in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. by Barbara Smith (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 359

Introduction

“We Have Had It”: From Recruitment and Outreach to Coalition and Collaboration

In 1981, feminists of colour Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, in their ground-breaking radical women of colour anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, that:

We have had it with the word “outreach” referring to our joining racist white women’s organizations. The question keeps coming up - where exactly, then, is *in*? It smells white to us. We have had it.³

For many white women active around reproductive rights in the 1970s and early 1980s, the act of outreach was the default approach to creating multiracial spaces. ‘Outreach’, in this context, usually meant white women reaching out to and attempting to recruit women of colour into their existing feminist spaces. Moraga and Anzaldúa suggest that the term and the doing of ‘outreach’ was inherently white, or associated with the middle-class, white feminism that dominated the mainstream. Indeed, many efforts towards multiracialism before *This Bridge Called My Back* was released followed this same pattern of outreach or recruitment. That is not to say that *Bridge* itself was what prompted change, or that it was even a catalyst; instead, it was representative of a social movement context in which women of colour’s activism was becoming more and more visible to both the mainstream feminist movement and wider society.⁴ This visibility, and the recognition that it demanded, meant that many white women’s groups were forced to acknowledge and understand that working multiracially could not just mean working ‘as normal’ but with women of colour in their organizations, too. Rose Morgan, a woman of colour, commented:

it is apparent to me that most white women feel that if we, as women of color, want to participate in feminist politics, we should join their

³ *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. by Cherríe Moraga and Toni Cade Bambara (New York, NY: Kitchen Table, 1983), p. 61

⁴ Women of colour were active in feminist activism before this period in many ways. Becky Thompson’s book, *A Promise and a Way of Life*, includes an excellent comparative timeline between ‘multiracial feminism’ and ‘normative feminism’ (see pp.375-381). As such, she demonstrates the activism that women of colour were doing around feminist issues in the 1960s and 1970s. She highlights, among other examples, the foundation of the National Welfare Rights Organization, Hijas de Cuauhtemoc, Women of All Red Nations and the Organizations of Pan Asian Women. This historical moment of the early 1980s represents a point at which women of colours’ feminist activism was becoming more visible and acknowledged by white, middle-class women in the mainstream feminist movement.

organizations. However, it is equally apparent to me that by and large, women of color do not agree that joining organizations that are predominantly white in number, even if their line is progressive, is the best use of their energy.⁵

Feminists, then, needed to seek out and establish different ways of doing multiracial organizing – through building coalitions and networks with racially diverse groups of women. By 1990, Loretta Ross reflected that ‘most Black women believe in inter-racial coalitions, not inter-racial organizations’.⁶ This section will examine the varying strategies that some white feminists used in attempts to forge multiracial relationships and develop multiracial spaces. It will trace a shift from the late 1970s to the late 1980s and explore the way that the idealised notion of multiracial activism shifted, as well as how different feminist groups embraced these changes and tried to incorporate them into their ideologies and working practices. To do so, it will examine three case studies; the National Women’s Conference held in Houston in November 1977; the work and final conferences of the Reproductive Rights National Network in the early- to mid-1980s; and the In Defense of Roe Conference in 1989. These three case studies are not explicitly linked to one another – although there was undoubtedly crossover among those active in them – nor are they events that specifically triggered or caused the specific strategies and changes in approaches. Instead, they are indicative of a broader shift in feminist consciousness towards multiracial activism. I use them as a platform for examining and exploring this shift and the ideas and practices behind it.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many groups of white feminists – both radical and liberal – fundamentally changed their strategies for multiracial organizing. Before the early 1980s there was an emphasis on a ‘recruitment strategy’ towards multiracial work. This was based on the recruitment of women of colour into white-dominated feminist spaces and organizations. By the end of the 1980s, however, more women (particularly white radical feminists) favoured building multiracial coalitions of different autonomous groups, working together across racial lines – or, a ‘coalition strategy’. This shift was important for several

⁵ Rose Morgan, ‘Building an Anti-Racist/Multi-Racial Women’s Movement’, *Taking Control*, (Spring 1984) p. 3, in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, M94-205,

⁶ Loretta Ross, ‘Raising Our Voices’, in *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom*, ed. by Marlene Gerber Fried (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 1990), pp.142-3

reasons; it fundamentally changed the ways in which many feminists imagined and envisaged multiracial activism, and it prompted a change in attitudes towards what ‘successful’ multiracial groups, organizing or events might look like.

Much of the historiography of the later second wave of feminism, and particularly that that tries to trace efforts to work across race, tends to focus on either the ‘recruitment’ strategy or the ‘coalition’ strategy. My approach, on the other hand, suggests that both strategies were used and that the period saw a shift from the former to the latter. It builds on scholars who have challenged the view that the second wave was characterised by one single strategy or approach towards multiracial organizing. Winifred Breines, for example, wrote that

white and black feminism developed on parallel tracks [...] But socialist feminists persevered, in part because of their deep desire for an inclusive women’s movement. [...] They learned that in order to be inclusive, they had to lose some of their ideals, to construct relationships based on who they were and not on who they wanted to be or wanted others to be. [...] Only by the end of the 1970s did white and black feminists move back toward one another, testing whether ground existed for trust and coalitions.⁷

While Breines’s understanding of a shift in strategies over time is similar to my own, both her chronological framing and her attribution of responsibility differs from mine. She implies that efforts towards multiracial organizing were driven by the desires of socialist feminists (read: white feminists), rather than by any mutual understanding or desire. In contrast this thesis, while focusing primarily on white-dominated organizations, will argue that efforts to forge multiracial relationships were only effective when all parties were in favour of creating such links. It will suggest that both white women and women of colour had roles to play in the shift from recruitment to coalition and in the eventual creation of coalitions themselves. Women of colour did not enter into coalitions, alliances or relationships simply because white feminists wanted them to; unpacking their own interests and desires in these coalitions is fundamentally important in efforts to understand how, when, and why multiracial feminist efforts succeeded or failed.

⁷ Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*, p. 4

It is important to recognise that the priorities and desires of different groups of women varied significantly. As a result, even when coalition-building did occur, it was not necessarily the case that all the members of the coalition were involved for the same reason. Suzanne Staggenborg suggests that a balance between environmental opportunities and threats (that is, other social movements or groups; political actions; legislation etc.) and resource availability provide the impetus for forming coalitions. She posits that

Movement organizations that are less concerned with organizational maintenance might join coalitions to take full advantage of environmental opportunities or [...] fight against environmental threats. On the other hand, organizations that are more preoccupied with organizational *maintenance* might also form coalitions when such cooperation allows them to conserve resources and engage in a broader range of strategies and tactics than would otherwise be possible.⁸

These different reasons for being in a coalition can be identified in the attitudes of the activists discussed in this thesis. Many white feminists who sought to create multiracial coalitions wanted to do so in order to engage with a broader agenda, while feminists of colour tended to engage with coalition-building in more short-term ways to gain or conserve resources. Working within coalitions, even when they were fraught, also provided scope to present a 'united front' against outsider threats. In part two, I will examine how women of colour and white women worked together in coalition to protect women's rights against the rising political and religious Right, discussing how these coalitions helped them to 'fight against environmental threats'.

The 'recruitment' strategy that white-dominated groups drew on earlier in the 1970s tended to focus on attracting women of colour into existing organizations or networks. For the most part, this involved little substantive change to their existing working practises. This strategy tended to downplay or ignore racial difference, choosing instead to focus on issues or objectives that women of different races ostensibly had in common. Recruitment strategies were frequently rooted in the notion of trying to 'create an empowered sisterhood through erasing [women's] differences'.⁹ Women following a

⁸ Suzanne Staggenborg, 'Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles', *Social Problems*, 33.5 (1986), pp.380, 382

⁹ Chela Sandoval and Gloria Anzaldúa, 'Feminism and Racism: A Report on the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference', in *Making Face, Making Soul/Hacienda Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation,

'recruitment' strategy often did not fully acknowledge and engage with the differences in lived experience of women of different races. This meant that these racial differences were left undiscussed, and tensions were left to build, and sometimes reached breaking point. Loretta Ross and Byllye Avery, two African-American women who were active in reproductive rights activism, referred to this type of politics as a 'seat at the table' strategy; that is, women of colour were given a seat at the table, but no choice over the menu, and thus no power. Ross and Avery saw their jobs not as to 'colorize a white women's agenda' but to 'create [their] own menu, [their] own agenda'.¹⁰ Similarly, Rose Morgan stated that 'the problem of working in white women's organizations is one of who is going to determine the policies; implement structures, contribute any resources – in short, who will have the power'.¹¹ Coalition work would, ideally, give women of colour a chance to dictate their own 'menu'. A 'coalition' strategy sought to acknowledge and engage with racial difference by recognising the importance of separate, self-determined or autonomous spaces or organizations for people of different races. Identity politics, and racial difference, became something to celebrate and embrace, rather than to shy away from. Coalition-based strategies sought to create links and short-term connections between autonomous groups, understanding that each group or individual could then come to the table from a position of power and support. Importantly, coalition strategies relied on white women relinquishing control over feminist organizing and working to support women of colour, rather than to guide or lead them. Benita Roth provides an example of an early coalition in Boston, in which white women joined with women of colour in a 'Coalition for Women's Safety'. Their participation was explicitly within a supportive role, and former Combahee River Collective member Margo Okazawa-Rey 'felt that the way that white women provided support, and *not* leadership, was "a pretty wonderful model" for joint ethnic/racial feminist organizing'.¹²

1990)

¹⁰ Phone interview between Sabina Peck and Loretta Ross (9th March 2016) 35:26, p. 12 of 73 [Hereafter: Ross, Interview with Author]

¹¹ Rose Morgan, 'Building an Anti-Racist/Multi-Racial Women's Movement', *Taking Control*, (Spring 1984) p. 2, in 'Marlene Fried Papers',

¹² Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 221

Identity Politics and Multiracial Organizing

Joan W. Scott, writing in 1988, iterates the importance of acknowledging different identities in struggles towards equality. Equality, she suggests, includes and depends on the existence of difference; she stated that 'if individuals or groups were identical or the same there would be no need to ask for equality'.¹³ Feminists that subscribed to a 'recruitment' strategy to achieve multiracial groups often assumed an equality between women of different races based on their shared gendered discrimination. This assumed equality frequently meant that diverse identity politics were ignored by the recruiting organization. This led to insensitivities and thoughtlessness surrounding difference in race and racial identity, and ultimately to the failure of most of these attempts towards multiracialism. Creating multiracial activism, then, relied on providing space for women's different identities and embracing these differences. Coalition building came to serve that purpose.

Myra Marx Feree and Silke Roth, in examining a 1989 strike of day-care workers in West Berlin, use the term *inclusive solidarity* to describe what I refer to as coalition strategies and explore the place of identity politics within them. They state:

Inclusive solidarity does not place one movement, organization, or social group in the position of defining the issues or identities that matter. Because multiple forms of oppression exist, and "common identity" is a political fiction. [...] Recognition of this complexity is a political decision, one that leads away from the search for a comfortable "home" in a social movement composed of those with whom one imagines one shares "everything" to a more complex politics of coalition building. Coalition building emerges from the points of contact between diverse individuals, identities and movements. Hence, coalition politics demands social movement interaction and relies on the active bridge-building labor of participants.¹⁴

This statement encompasses many of the facets of coalition-building as a strategy for multiracial organizing that I explore in this section. The idea that a coalition-based strategy would create a space in which women of different races and backgrounds could work together on issues while simultaneously maintaining and honouring their different identities and political priorities has

¹³ Joan W. Scott, 'Deconstructive Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), p. 44

¹⁴ Myra Marx Feree and Silke Roth, 'Gender, Class and the Interaction between Social Movements: A Strike of West Berlin Day Workers', *Gender and Society*, 12.6 (1998), p. 629

been discussed by Benita Roth. She suggests that, because forming new, multiracial identities was not a goal for members of multiracial coalitions, they provided a more effective space for activism.¹⁵ Providing an equal platform for women to discuss issues, while still ensuring that their own priorities were being met, was fundamentally important in coalition-building efforts.

Indeed, one of the reasons that some white-dominated feminist groups were reluctant or slow to develop a racial analysis of their work was this fear that introducing the 'race issue' into their agenda would dilute what they thought of as their primary work. Andrea Estepa identified this sentiment amongst some members of Women Strike for Peace, who 'were initially hesitant to take stands on other issues, such as civil rights, as an organization for fear that it would alienate women who would otherwise support their cause'.¹⁶ Referring to the challenges of NOW's efforts to recruit more women of colour into their ranks, Loretta Ross stated that 'the process of empowering women of color is often viewed as taking place at the expense of white women'.¹⁷ Finally, Benita Roth identifies this same issue, stating that coalition building across racial lines was risky, as it 'can come at the expense of internal resources of time and energy aimed at mobilizing one's own base'.¹⁸ Roth also challenges the notion that white feminists' lack of engagement with racial issues was unconscious and due to their relatively privileged positions as white and middle class. She argues that a racial consciousness was central to the emergence of white feminism, and that the neglect of racial issues was 'at least sometimes conscious and strategic'.¹⁹

While a reluctance to develop a racial analysis has been most visible among white-dominated feminist groups, this reticence to jeopardize particular issues has been evident among various different racial groups. White women who organized around abortion did not want to risk the rights they had already won by broadening their agenda; black women felt unable to join the 'white'

¹⁵ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 221-2

¹⁶ Andrea Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and "the Movement", 1967-73', in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second Wave Feminism*, ed. by Gilmore, Stephanie (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 91

¹⁷ 'Memo: NOW and Women of Color Draft' (4th August 1988) in SSC, Loretta Ross Papers, Box 13, Folder 17

¹⁸ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 220

¹⁹ Benita Roth, "'Organizing One's Own" as Good Politics', p. 114

feminist movement without undermining their struggles for racial justice; Chicanas were characterised as either *loyalistas* (women loyal to the Chicano movement) or *femenistas* (women who were criticised for being ‘anglicized’ through the feminist movement), and Native American women feared that their efforts towards sovereignty would be damaged by building feminist relationships across race.²⁰

Benita Roth has suggested that this desire to ‘organize one’s own’ ultimately meant that many second wave feminists on the Left were ‘dismissive of coalition formation’, choosing instead to organize with women of their own ethnic or racial communities.²¹ This choice, she said, was ‘not the result of strategic decision making, but resulted from activists holding to a set of ideological directives about how to do politics the right way’.²² In this case, Roth argues, the ‘right’ way, or ethos, for second-wave feminist work, was to organize within their own racial groups. I argue that most second wave feminists – including white feminists – were interested in pursuing multiracial relationships and organizing, but coalition-building as a strategy had not yet reached the feminist mainstream. Roth’s analysis is based on an earlier period than my own; she examines the traditional ‘second wave’ period of the 1960s and 1970s, whereas my analysis is based on the later 1970s and 1980s. What Roth characterises as a dismissal of coalition work, I understand as the early stages of feminist strategizing around multiracial work and foundation-laying for future coalition building. The understanding of the importance of distinct identity politics, and desires to work multiracially existed simultaneously, but many feminist groups had yet to develop a working strategy that could reconcile the two.

²⁰ White women’s concern about ‘diluting’ their own agendas has been discussed further in Roth, “‘Organizing One’s Own’ as Good Politics”, p. 108 and Echols, pp.369-77 highlights discussions by white early second wave feminists around whether they should forge relationships with women of colour. For some examples of scholarship that considers black women’s difficulties in ‘choosing’ between women’s liberation and black liberation movements, see: Caron; Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations 1968-1980*; Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, particularly ‘Chapter 3: The Vanguard Centre: Intramovement Experience and the Emergence of Black Feminism’; For Chicana women: Gluck, p. 47; For Native American women: Andrea Smith, ‘Native American Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change’, *Feminist Studies*, 31.1 (2005), p. 117, 120

²¹ Roth, “‘Organizing One’s Own’ as Good Politics”, p. 105

²² *Ibid.*, p. 106

These fears that organizing across race could damage organizing around one's 'own' issues was real and pervasive, but did not preclude attempts to organize multiracially. What it did mean, though, was that women had to develop and understand their particular situations through both a raced and gendered lens if they wanted to create multiracial relationships. Understanding the reservations and concerns of women from other racial groups was key to creating this. By understanding their positions in society, and the issues that they organized around as intersectional, women of all races (but particularly white women) needed to apply a racial analysis to their own work – which provided a more stable foundation for multiracial organizing.

Racially Autonomous Spaces

Analysing the role of and attitudes towards racially autonomous spaces is fundamentally important when tracing the narrative of recruitment to coalition. These spaces took different forms and were created for different reasons – but all have a significant part to play in women's continued efforts toward multiracial organizing. As the following chapters make clear, racially autonomous spaces were used in a variety of ways: during the National Women's Conference State Meeting in Alaska, for example, women of colour created an impromptu caucus to ensure that their voices were heard. This strategy was repeated at the National Conference itself to critique the superficial statement on minority women that the National Commission had developed.²³ At the Reproductive Rights National Network final conference participants split into their respective racial groups at a moment of crisis, when discussions about internal racism peaked and threatened to dismantle the network. Racially autonomous spaces at *In Defense of Roe*, however, were powerful arenas where women could 'recharge their batteries' in addition to participating in discussions across racial lines.²⁴ In all of these case studies, the formation of racially autonomous spaces meant that women could consolidate knowledge and understanding in a more comfortable organizing context, which laid a stronger foundation for future education and networking across racial lines.

²³ See chapter 6 for further information on the National Conference at Houston, and the ways that autonomous racial spaces operated within it.

²⁴ Ngina Lythcott, quoted in Lynn Paltrow, 'Report on the Conference: In Defense of Roe' (1989) p. 83, in 'Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCAR/RCRC) Papers', Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, M93-025, Box 7, Folder 1

Shared Issues across Race

Stephanie Gilmore's edited collection, *Feminist Coalitions*, explores how, why and when feminists forged coalitions during the second wave of feminism in thirteen essays.²⁵ The various contributors consider coalitions across divides of race, class and sexuality among others, and ultimately seek to identify points of unity throughout the second wave, rather than discourses of separatism. In many cases, the scholars in this collection identify a topic or theme that provided a platform for coalitions across race. Andrea Estapa, for example, has examined how anti-war activism helped unite black and white women. Initially, the white-dominated Women Strike for Peace (WSP) hoped to strategically use motherhood as a way to bring women together and to forge relationships, but it was their later emphasis on understanding peace as a 'domestic as well as a foreign policy concern' that paved the way toward a more racially diverse alliance.²⁶ The white women who were most active in the organization broadened their agenda to include issues such as providing food, clothing and shelter in poor neighbourhoods with the hope that they could get poor women to 'share their view that military spending was largely responsible for domestic poverty' and thus become involved in their anti-war agenda.²⁷ Ultimately, for WSP, their decisions to work multiracially were based in their desire to achieve their end goal of achieving peace, rather than in a desire simply to create multiracial relationships. Their strategies to create a multiracial coalition shifted to those that were more attractive to women of colour and poor women, but their ultimate aim remained the same.

Both Tamar Carroll and Premilla Nadasen discuss the ways in which shared class-experiences – e.g. housing, poverty and welfare – created spaces for multiracial organizing. Carroll explores the history of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW), based in Brooklyn, New York. A programme of action to meet their shared needs, including installing traffic lights at dangerous intersections, providing shelter for victims of domestic violence and developing a free, two-year college programme, targeted specific issues that

²⁵ See: Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*,

²⁶ Estapa, p. 93

²⁷ Estapa, p. 93

affected both poor white women and poor women of colour. The NCNW were able to 'stick it out' through claims of racism within the organization, because 'the good outweighed the bad', rather than through any significant desire to create effective multiracial working relationships.²⁸ Nadasen, on the other hand, explores the development of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). An analysis of race and a 'commitment to organizing across the color line' were, she states, central to the organization's ethos.²⁹ She suggests that the NWRO's successes in combatting welfare issues were a result of their multiracial, racialised analysis towards welfare, rather than in spite of them. Both Carroll and Nadasen highlight the importance of shared practical issues to pave the way towards multiracial coalition-building, though Nadasen prioritises the theoretical approaches of NWRO members to race, while Carroll suggests that the practical approaches of the NCNW were most effective. Part one of this thesis will establish the extent to which issues that disproportionately affected women of colour were taken seriously by the middle-class white women within the movement, and how far this was rhetorical or impacted their racial analysis. I argue that earlier attempts towards multiracial organizing – the 'recruitment' attempts - paid lip service to practical issues that could provide a platform for racially diverse coalitions, but it was not until the early- to mid-1980s that this rhetoric began to impact white organizations' racial and gendered analyses. This emphasis on building racial analyses within feminist groups and using them as a basis for multiracial work was a touchstone for coalition strategies.

The multiracial coalitions that these scholars describe, then, were often incidental or secondary to another priority. However, I argue that creating multiracial relationships was a main priority to many organizers in these case studies. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, some white feminists selected topics or themes to organize around that would, they believed, more easily facilitate multiracial activism. In the late 1970s, some white feminists paid lip service to these topics to recruit women of colour into their organizations – demonstrating that creating multiracial relationships was a high enough priority that white

²⁸ Tamar Carroll, 'Unlikely Allies: Forging a Multiracial, Class-Based Women's Movement in 1970s Brooklyn', in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 202

²⁹ Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem": Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing', p. 191

feminist groups would change their aims or strategies to facilitate them. By the mid- to late-1980s, white feminists began to use their multiracial relationships as a way to shape their strategy creation. Instead of white feminists suggesting that they would change their goals to facilitate multiracial relationships, then, they began to use their multiracial relationships as a foundation on which to develop their goals and aims.

Education and Networking

In August 1988, Mark Caplan, a founding director of the Legislative Education Action Program which had ‘become a model for [...] progressive coalition building’, prepared a document that detailed the ‘Ten Elements of Successful Coalition Building’.³⁰ Among these ten elements were the necessity of having past good working relationships, the need for well-respected leadership of the coalition, and an effective and structured decision-making process that treated all members of the coalition equally. He expressed the importance that

Leadership is sensitive to the issue of shared decision-making and will treat each member and constituency as equal partners. This is very important for developing trust and a sense of ownership. The coalition should not be seen as a “child” o[ff] one organization but perceived to be owned by as many member organizations as possible.³¹

Caplan compiled this document in 1988 - the very end of the time period that this thesis considers. It reflects, then, some of the elements that many groups of feminists had discovered through trial and error in their efforts to create multiracial coalitions. Caplan’s insistence on the importance of equal power relationships between the different members of a coalition was understood by feminist groups when they shifted from a focus on recruitment to one of coalition-building. What Caplan neglected to include in his list, though, were recommendations of strategies to achieve the equal power relationships that he saw as so fundamentally important to coalition building. The late 1970s and the 1980s saw feminists work to generate and develop these strategies. I highlight two of the most important and pervasive themes in the development of these strategies – first, the role of education, and second, the importance of networks.

³⁰ *The New Majority: Toward a Popular Progressive Politics*, ed. by Stanley B. Greenberg and Theda Skocpol (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 315

³¹ Marc Caplan, *Ten Elements of Successful Coalition Building* (August 1988) pp.1-2 in SSC, Loretta Ross Papers, Box 48

Sociologists Nella Van Dyke and Holly J. McCammon have explained the importance of education in efforts to form coalitions. They suggest that any coalition – formal or informal – must allow for the exchange of information between its member groups to develop an agreed-upon framing of the issues they are working for. Developing these frameworks through communication and information exchange is, they suggest, a ‘fundamental task that coalitions must accomplish’.³² Not only was education a prerequisite for effective multiracial organizing, multiracial relationships in themselves were often educational. Nadasen describes the education that women organizing for welfare rights gained. She quotes Lillian Craig, a white welfare recipient, and states that ‘as poor white women and poor women of color began to work together, they remarked how educational the experience of cross-race organizing was for them’ and that Craig realised that she ‘began to get to know them [Black women] ... and because [they] was just plain folks, we soon discovered that we all were just plain folks’.³³ In this case, education across race lines served to demonstrate the similarities that these women shared on the basis of class. This thesis explores how education between white women and women of colour was about learning about women’s differences, and not assuming a universal sisterhood based on gender alone.

Education was a vital way to create multiracial organizations, events or activities in each of the case studies in this section. This education took two main forms: external and internal. External education was when women wanted to or were expected to pass knowledge and understanding between each other. The flow of this education was seen in several directions; from white women to women of colour, from women of colour to white women, and between the particular groups themselves. Internal education, on the other hand, was when women (particularly white women) did self-analysis to try to tackle their internalised and institutional racisms.

³² *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, ed. by Nella Van Dyke and Holly J. McCammon (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xiv

³³ Nadasen, “‘Welfare’s a Green Problem’: Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing”, p. 183; Tamar Carroll also notes the importance of education as a way for women to understand their similarities across racial boundaries, highlighting interracial college programs as a major site for this education and learning. See Carroll, p. 203

Many women saw educating and being educated across racial lines as a fundamental precondition to multiracial organizing of any kind. It took a number of forms and fulfilled a number of functions. White women, for example, wanted to learn from women of colour about the particular reproductive rights issues that they faced. Learning and understanding them, they believed, could lead to the broadening of the feminist movement's agenda to include more than what was just pertinent to white women. The extent to which women of colour wanted to do this education for white women was varied and changeable. Rose Morgan, for example, wondered whether multiracial organizing would be made feasible by women of colour serving 'on advisory committees for white women's organizations to help them in directing their internal and external programs, to educate and to challenge about racism', while other women of colour believed that white women needed to take responsibility for educating themselves about racism.³⁴ Conversely, white women often sought to 'teach' women of colour about reproductive rights issues that they perceived as particularly pertinent to women of colour. Finally, at a number of events and within particular networks, many women of colour wanted to teach and learn about reproductive rights across their own racial differences. These attempts towards education, their reception and their effectiveness were central to the different strategies used to build multiracial activism.

The growing emphasis on internal education and self-analysis throughout the period was a vital constituent of the shift in strategies and attitudes towards multiracial organizing. Efforts to recognise and self-educate about internalised and institutional racism had been discussed throughout the second wave, but action among white women was only really seen in more radical, progressive groups.³⁵ In 1968, for example, Pam Allen (later Chude Pam Allen) wrote and delivered a paper entitled 'Memo to my White Sisters in Our Struggles to Realize Our Full Humanity' to the group New York Radical Women. In it, she grappled with the difficult realities of seeking commonalities between the middle-class white women of the feminist movement and poor black women. She wrote that:

³⁴ Rose Morgan, 'Building an Anti-Racist/Multi-Racial Women's Movement', *Taking Control*, (Spring 1984) p. 2, in 'Marlene Fried Papers',

³⁵ Van Dyke and McCammon, xiv; For more on white women's antiracist organizing, see Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*,

To think in terms of relating to poor black women and to the women of the third world, we must first face the issue of racism in ourselves. We must face it and accept its existence in all of us and learn how to deal with it first in ourselves and then in our white sisters of all classes [...] we can never enter into alliances with other women if we continue to define our goals in middle-class, materialistic terms.³⁶

Allen, then, advocates self-analysis and introspective education as a means of more fully understanding and targeting internalised racism. This internal education was both personal – individuals were expected to examine and combat their own racism – and organizational – groups and organizations were encouraged to educate themselves about the particular ways in which their race affected their organizing and activist culture. Say Burgin emphasises the importance of pre-existing grassroots networks as she suggests that efforts towards self-analysis around racism occurred more frequently through grassroots means than through a coherent or sustained national effort.³⁷

This idea of self-analysis and internal self-education was not brand new. White women and women of colour had histories of exploring themselves and their communities as a form of self-care and of activism. Consciousness-raising, for example, was a cornerstone of the women's liberation movement from the beginning, and is inherently linked to the women's health movement and reproductive rights activism. Women came together in small groups to discuss their lives and the different ways in which they were oppressed. They educated each other, and they were encouraged to analyse themselves and their understandings of oppression to develop their feminist understanding. However, consciousness-raising groups were frequently filled by middle-class, white feminists – which meant that many white women were not able to hear the outcomes of women of colours' self-analysis and their understandings of oppression.

That is not to say that women of colour did not also do this same self-analysis and education. By the early 1980s many black women were involved in re-evaluation counselling (RC). Loretta Ross, of the National Black Women's Health Project and the National Women's Health Network described RC as 'a

³⁶ Pam Allen, 'Memo to My White Sisters in Our Struggle to Realize Our Full Humanity', p. 1 (January 1968), quoted in Burgin, 'The Workshop as Work: White Anti-Racist Organising in 1960s, 70s and 80s US Social Movements', p. 249

³⁷ Burgin, 'The Workshop as Work: White Anti-Racist Organising in 1960s, 70s and 80s US Social Movements', p. 274

peer-based support mechanism for women to tell their stories and get support from each other. Kinda like an evolved form of consciousness-raising [...] and its main focus was on internalised oppression'.³⁸ Unlike the self-education and analysis that was advocated for white women, though, RC was designed so that women of colour could analyse and discuss the oppressions they had experienced to empower them to move forward in their activism.

These different types of education were seen as necessary precursors to developing effective multiracial work. It is possible to identify efforts towards this education both explicitly and implicitly throughout the time period, and this thesis will examine the dynamics of who instigated education and learning, what its function was, and whether the outcomes met envisaged goals. Of course, this education could not, and did not, occur in a vacuum. One of the ways that feminists tried to both gain and provide education was through networks. They used both pre-existing networks to share knowledge and education, and strived to create new networks through which to gain knowledge and also to attempt to pass it on to others. Networks and network creation, then, were central to multiracial education strategies and thus to social movement creation.

Sociological scholarship strongly suggests that networks are fundamentally important in recruiting individuals into social movements and activism. Individuals are most likely to become involved in social movements if they already know somebody who is involved, and therefore friends, relatives and peers are the most effective recruiters into social movements and organizations.³⁹ Networks – both individual and organizational – were crucial in efforts to recruit more women into the feminist movement. When attempting to recruit women of colour into white-dominated organizations, white feminists often capitalised on personal links they had with women of colour, and encouraged them to do further outreach to recruit other women of colour. This was based on the presupposition that women of colour would have stronger personal networks and relationships with other women of colour, but could thus

³⁸ Ross, Interview with Author

³⁹ Catherine Corrigan-Brown and David Meyer, 'The Pre-History of a Coalition: The Role of Social Ties in Win Without War', in *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, ed. by Nella Van Dyke and Holly J. McCammon (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 7; See also Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993),

negate the need for women in mainstream organizations to forge those relationships across race themselves. For example, Maria Bevacqua discusses the importance of Black women's personal networks to the success of the multiracial DC Rape Crisis Center during the 1980s. Its founders, she wrote, were 'politically minded white women who understood that the participation of women of color was crucial to the life of the center' because of 'the ability of activist women of colour to take information about rape and about the center to the grassroots level and make the issue relevant to women in the community'.⁴⁰ In addition, personal network creation was fundamentally important to creating coalitions. When attempting to build coalitions, feminists saw network and relationship building across race as a prerequisite. In some cases of coalition building, white women and women of colour attempted to create relationships across racial boundaries beforehand as a foundation for their coalition work. Many white women pursuing recruitment strategies, on the other hand, assumed that the multiracial work that they desired would lead to relationships and networks across race; networks would be a result of multiracial activism, rather than a necessary prerequisite.

Mary Ann Clawson highlights the importance of social networks in mobilization and social movement activism. She states that:

Social movements do not commonly emerge as aggregations of previously unconnected strangers; rather they build on pre-existing networks of acquaintanceship, whether informal or organizationally based, that allow for rapid communication, social bonding, and mutual accountability [...] An implicit corollary to this is that the more movements can rely on pre-existing networks, the more spontaneous and self-motivating they will be and the less they will need to depend on infusions of external resources for their inception and functioning.⁴¹

A lack of formal or informal pre-existing ties and networks between white women and women of colour meant that multiracial organizing was more difficult than organizing within established racial groups, according to Clawson. This model of organizing that drew substantially on pre-existing networks presented significant limitations to multiracial organizing in a social movement

⁴⁰ Maria Bevacqua, 'Reconsidering Violence Against Women: Coalition Politics in the Antirape Movement', in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 173

⁴¹ Mary Ann Clawson, 'Review: Looking for Feminism: Racial Dynamics and Generational Investments in the Second Wave', *Feminist Studies*, 34.4 (2008), p. 542

context that was stratified by race and class. Similarly, sociologists Turner and Killian asserted that social or collective action occurs as a result of intersecting personal networks and relationships.⁴² Building on this, Benita Roth writes that pre-existing networks put women in ‘face-to-face contact with one another; they gave incipient feminists access to communications organs [...] – an important “precondition” for feminist emergence’, and that ‘because of being in different social locations, feminists in different racial/ethnic communities were differently situated vis-à-vis the political landscape that confronted them’.⁴³ Estelle Freedman, writing in 1979, makes this point even more strongly when discussing early twentieth-century feminism, arguing that women’s friendship and kinship networks provided a platform for the development of a separate political space, based on gender, for women to develop as feminists. Rather than being negative, Freedman suggests that this use of networks to create separatist social movements was a powerful strategy.⁴⁴

Pre-existing networks between women, then, paved the way for building social movements among particular social groups. As a result, the lack of pre-existing networks between women of different races was a fundamental stumbling block in efforts towards creating a multiracial feminism or feminist activity. This section will explore some of the ways in which women sought to create new multiracial networks to remedy the lack of pre-existing ones as a strategy to develop multiracial activism, and how they drew on existing networks to facilitate this. It will also explore if, how and why women used or drew on their multiracial work to create networks for future coalition building. By attempting to replicate pre-existing networks in the organizing or recruitment phases of events, organizers sought to create more solid foundations to support the work that they endeavoured to do across race. While the ways that these networks were conceptualised, formed and facilitated differed throughout the period as notions about strategies shifted, the preoccupation with either creating networks or drawing upon and building extant networks was consistent.

⁴² Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, *Collective Behaviour* (Pearson Education Canada, 1987), p. 31

⁴³ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 16

⁴⁴ Estelle Freedman, ‘Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930’, *Feminist Studies*, 5.3 (1979), p. 514

Ch. 1: The National Women's Conference

From its inception, the 1977 National Women's Conference held in Houston, Texas, was imagined by participants and the media as a 'rainbow' of women - a conference which represented and celebrated the diversity of all women in the USA. Historians have described the conference as an 'explosive moment', a 'turning point', and a signal 'that feminists would no longer tolerate the tradition of inequality'.⁴⁵ For many scholars, the Houston Conference marks a significant moment in the history of feminism more broadly in the United States, and more specifically in the historical narratives surrounding multiracial feminist activism. Sherna Berger Gluck has called the Houston Conference 'pivotal' in making the gender-focussed activism of women of colour, and by extension the notion of multiple feminisms and multiracial feminist cooperation and coalition, visible to the larger movement.⁴⁶ The conference attracted over 20,000 women – of whom 35% were women of colour - and thousands more attended State Meetings in the previous months to help develop a National Plan of Action to inform the government of the state of womanhood in the USA. This chapter focuses on the organizers' approaches to coordinating the conference by examining several of the State Meetings, while chapter four will more fully discuss the conference itself. State meeting organizers understood the importance of their outreach efforts, as it was in the State Meetings that the delegates for Houston were picked. Ensuring racial diversity and representation, then, was rooted in the organizing for the State Meetings.

Despite the State Meetings and conference's original purpose - to create a National Plan of Action to present to the President surrounding women's rights, expectations and desires – the power of Houston seems to have been in the ability of racially diverse participants to forge relationships. Most contemporary responses to the Conference enthused about the diversity and sense of 'sisterhood' that the Conference promoted. A letter from Helena van

⁴⁵ Leslie R. Wolfe and Jennifer Tucker, 'Feminism Lives: Building a Multicultural Women's Movement in the United States', in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*, ed. by Amrita Basu (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), p. 446; Flora Davis, p. 360; Stephanie Gilmore, 'Strange Bedfellows: Building Feminist Coalitions around Sex Work in the 1970s', in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of Second Wave Feminism*, ed. by Nancy Hewitt (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), p. 260

⁴⁶ Gluck, p. 32

Raan to *Off Our Backs* magazine called Houston ‘a moment when many women took many opportunities to bridge the many gaps that separate us...and it was a moment necessary to keep us alive and fighting’.⁴⁷ The diversity of the Conference, then, and the opportunities that it was seen to create for organizing across race, was perceived as a foundational element to the Conference.

The multiracial nature of the delegation at Houston was deliberate and pre-planned; both state and national organizers sought to recruit women and facilitate the various events in a way that would ensure high participation of women of colour. Women of colour were disproportionately represented among the delegates - they made up thirty-five percent of the delegates when they represented only around seventeen percent of the population.⁴⁸ Their numbers, claims Flora Davis, ensured them a strong voice.⁴⁹ Not only that, but the Conference procedures were structured in such a way so as to ensure that ‘vast and diverse voices had a say in the way progress should develop’.⁵⁰ The Conference and State Meetings were facilitated according to *Robert’s Rules of Order*.⁵¹ This strict parliamentary procedure was meant to both lend legitimacy for the official and government-initiated events, and to ensure that the democratically-elected delegation was appropriately represented through a rigid institutional framework which was broadly understood at a governmental level. In an opening speech, Bella Abzug urged the women to overcome their

⁴⁷Letter from Helena van Raan (‘Spreading the Word’), *Off Our Backs* (February 1978) p. 24 in ‘Off Our Backs Papers’ (Leeds), Brotherton Library Special Collection, Feminist Archive North, [Hereafter OOB Papers]

⁴⁸ Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), p. 306; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States* (US Census Bureau, February 2005) <<https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.pdf>> [accessed 23 November 2015], p. 115

⁴⁹ Flora Davis, p. 361

⁵⁰ Kristin Kalsem and Verna L. William, ‘Social Justice Feminism’, *UCLA Women’s Law Journal*, 18.131 (2010), p. 167

⁵¹ *Roberts Rules of Order* is a widely-used manual of parliamentary procedure in the USA. It was used at the National Women’s Conference as it was “designed to get a lot done by a large body in a short time. Speeches were limited to two minutes. Debate could be closed by majority vote. The chair could decide whether voting was to be by voice, standing, or the count of tellers, depending on the closeness, but roll-call votes had been ruled out. [...] Under the regulations, the Commission’s decisions on the credentialing of delegates and the agenda were also binding on the body, having been published for public comment and amended before the Conference.” from Caroline Bird, ‘Houston Day by Day’, in *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women’s Conference*, by National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 141

differences in order to make the Conference 'the beginning stage of our quest to make democracy what it should be'.⁵²

Racial diversity was fundamentally important to the conception and experience of the National Women's Conference. Efforts to create this diversity were deliberate, sustained, and highly bureaucratic. They were established by the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year (IWY Commission), chaired by Abzug, who were tasked with organizing the conference. The IWY Commission was a multiracial group that had been appointed and restructured by Presidents Ford and Carter respectively. They were tasked with creating a delegation that reflected the full diversity of ages, races, ethnicities and religions of American women. Indeed, the public law that authorized the conference - PL94-167, or 'Bella's Bill', so named after Abzug, - passed in December 1975, stated that 'the Conference shall be composed of [...] members of the general public, with special emphasis on the representation of low-income women, members of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups, and women of all ages'.⁵³ A multiracial delegation was not just desired at the National Women's Conference, then; it was mandated in its founding document. Organizers understood facilitating State Meetings as the best way to achieve this diversity.

The IWY commission drew inspiration from groups that had attempted to audit the national situation for American women in the past. Abzug originally responded to President Ford's establishment of the IWY commission with feminists and allies in the Women's Action Alliance (WAA), who voiced their concerns that a commission that was organized and funded by the federal government would not adequately represent the needs of women at a grassroots level. She, alongside the WAA, had previously tried to survey the state of womanhood in the USA and had made connections with over seventy women's groups from racially, economically and geographically diverse communities. As a result, it created a multiracial network. The organization was criticised for internalised racism, however - Cynthia Harrison claims that the

⁵² Speech by Bella Abzug, 'National Women's Conference 1977 Documentary', 1977
<http://texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013_02597> [accessed 23 November 2015],

⁵³ 94th Congress, An Act to Direct the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1975, to Organize and Convene a National Women's Conference, and for Other Purposes, 1975, p. 1

WAA was unable to overcome criticisms of racism due to its recruitment strategy, and that it ultimately lost popularity and was quashed by the IWY commission.⁵⁴ Abzug went on to chair the IWY commission, taking with her the both the desire for multiracial organizing and a proclivity for recruitment strategies. These became evident in the working practises of both the National Commission and State Meeting organizers.

The Commission used a two-pronged approach to create a diverse delegation. The public law stated that the main Conference must be preceded by preparatory State Meetings which would select representatives to attend the conference in accordance with the diversity criteria that it set.⁵⁵ This, then, was the primary means of recruiting delegates for the conference, and ensuring racial diversity. The secondary strategy that the Commission utilised was to appoint delegates-at-large to the Conference, who would serve to ‘fill the gaps’ that had been left by the state-elected attendees. Both of these approaches worked on the presupposition that white women would be overrepresented at the conference and State Meetings, and that organizers would need to make special efforts to draw women of colour into a predominantly white space. The State Meetings were the first opportunity for organizers to attempt this.

“We Don’t Have Enough Indians”: Recruitment and Outreach for the State Meetings

The first step towards organizing the State Meetings was the appointment of a local coordinating committee for each state by the IWY Commission.⁵⁶ In April 1977, a month before the first State Meeting was due to be held, Bella Abzug explained the importance of State Meeting committees’ roles, their duties, and how their actions fit into the wider objectives of the Conference. The coordinating committee was expected to create a *nominating* committee of five people - of whom three needed to be part of the existing coordinating committee. The nominating committee was responsible for creating a balanced list of nominations for that state’s delegation for Houston, and had to be diverse

⁵⁴ Cynthia Harrison, ‘Creating a National Feminist Agenda: Coalition Building in the 1970s’, in *Feminist Coalitions*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 24

⁵⁵ Public Law 94-167, p. 2

⁵⁶ The highly bureaucratic nature of this event meant that there were several layers of committees and groups involved in the organization of the conference and of the State Meetings. Please see fig. 1 (Appendix 2) for an illustrative diagram of the varying committees.

and representative of the women in that state. It was up to the individual committees how they achieved racially diverse nominations, but Abzug counselled them that the list needed to be sensitive to the diversity criteria set out in Bella's Bill. To do so, she said, might necessitate them using outreach and publicity programmes. The nominating committees had to provide a number of nominees, but also had to anticipate nominations that would come from the floor during the State Meeting itself.⁵⁷ This task, then, was not only highly bureaucratic and subject to the whims of individual state coordinating committees - and by extension, nominating committees - but also left some of the nominations procedure to guesswork. If, for example, the nominating committee produced a list with fewer nominations on than that state had allocated delegates, nominations from the floor on the day of the State Meeting would have to match or exceed the remaining allocated spaces. In this way, the nominating committee had to anticipate the attendance of the State Meeting, and the willingness of the participants to nominate potential delegates from the floor. Their relative flexibility and freedom, paired with a rigid framework that promised a lot, led to some discontent with the nominations process and the eventual delegations that were selected.

The nominating committee for Massachusetts, for example, wrote a statement bemoaning the 'narrowness of representation' on the coordinating committee.⁵⁸ They stated that there was only token representation of racial minorities, and that the racial and ethnic diversity that Massachusetts was famous for was not reflected in the coordinating committee itself. The nominating committee concluded that it was 'improbable that we, as presently constituted, [would] be able to successfully bridge the gaps between ourselves and the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-economic sisters in our communities'.⁵⁹ A similar critique of the Massachusetts coordinating committee was communicated by a woman - Doris - at the regional meeting in the Western

⁵⁷ Letter from Bella Abzug to IWY State Coordinating Committee Chairs and Nominating Committee Chairs, Subject: Nominations Procedures for State Meetings (April 26th, 1977) p. 1-4, in 'Massachusetts Coordinating Committee for the International Women's Year Conference Papers', Boston, MA, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, 78-M227-78-M210, Carton 1, Folder 2

⁵⁸ Statement regarding diversity of the Massachusetts Coordinating Committee (undated), in 'MA Coordinating Committee Papers', Carton 1, Folder 2

⁵⁹ 'Statement regarding diversity of the Massachusetts Coordinating Committee' (undated), in 'MA Coordinating Committee Papers', Carton 1, Folder 2

Massachusetts district. Doris recommended that 'a more concrete effort be made to include Third World Women in the preplanning of local, district, state or federal conferences for women'.⁶⁰ As a woman of colour, Doris felt excluded from the early stages of planning of the National Women's Conference and the State Meetings, which then affected the ways in which she experienced and understood the conference thereafter.

A problem with such a bureaucratic approach was that the committees that ended up being in charge of ensuring diversity usually came from a coordinating committee which was not necessarily diverse itself. According to the Massachusetts nominating committee, this was particularly true in terms of class; while there was *some* representation of racial minorities, all the coordinating committees were middle-class women. This meant that attempts to reach underrepresented women, such as working-class women or women of colour, fell to a *further* committee. The outreach committees were encouraged to reach out to and submit names of 'minority' women to be potential nominees for the Conference, or indeed, to diversify the coordinating committees themselves. The standard forms that nominating committees used tried to assess the demographics of nominees by asking their age, religious preference, and race. Though the various committees – as well as Bella's Bill – stated their commitment to reaching low-income women, the nominations form did not include a question about income or class.⁶¹ This suggests that racial, age and religious diversity might have been prioritised over class diversity – potentially because it would provide the most obviously and visibly diverse delegations in the eyes of the media, and therefore, the public.

Doris's recommendation to the Western Massachusetts regional meeting of the coordinating committee included several suggestions for the inclusion of women of colour in the preplanning stages of the Conference. She suggested using radio networks and broadcasts, approaching the Urban League, and communicating with black or Spanish churches for 'communication to, and the

⁶⁰ 'Recommendation Form' by Doris Brodie, (undated, c. 25th June 1977) in 'MA Coordinating Committee Papers', Carton 1, Folder 1

⁶¹ Nomination Form for Election as Representative (Undated, c. Spring 1977) in 'International Women's Year State Reports', College Park, MD, National Archives at College Park, A1 38065-AB, Container 207, Folder 1: New York

recruitment of Third World Women's involvement'.⁶² Similarly, in April 1977, Gisela Taber sent a memorandum outlining potential avenues for outreach for the upcoming State Meetings. Taber, the Northwest Coordinator for the IWY Commission, was responsible for creating and managing the coordinating committees in fourteen North-western states, from Alaska through to Missouri.⁶³ Her memorandum drew on outreach examples from several states, and encouraged coordinating committees to take practical action to engage with minority communities. Using a personal approach, for example, had worked in Washington State, when women had travelled to rural meetings and encouraged involvement. Likewise, Colorado had seen success in appealing to 'non-organization people' by placing posters in bars and laundromats. In addition, they held a state-wide day of recruitment to the State Meeting in supermarkets. Taber encouraged state coordinating committees to capitalise on their existing capabilities and publicise the meeting through existing networks, and suggested holding smaller, regional meetings before the State Meeting, in order to cast the net wide and recruit as many women from as many places as possible.⁶⁴ The message from Abzug and the IWY Commission that outreach was the primary way to recruit women of colour was heard loud and clear at all levels of the bureaucratic chain of command.

Members of the national IWY Commission also took more direct approaches towards recruiting specific women of colour to State Meetings, and by extension, as potential nominees for Houston. In early June 1977, Bella Abzug sent letters directly to fourteen Asian women around the country who were active in Asian-American organizations. In these letters, she requested the help of those individuals and their organizations to ensure that Asian women, and their 'special concerns', were represented and expressed at both the state and national levels. Abzug encouraged them to do all that was in their power to inform Asian women of the dates and places of their respective State Meetings.⁶⁵ Abzug's actions demonstrated the importance of racial diversity to

⁶² 'Recommendation Form' by Doris Brodie (undated, c. 25th June 1977), in 'MA Coordinating Committee Papers', Carton 1, Folder 1

⁶³ Gisela Taber and Anne Kilgannon, Interview, 2008
<<http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Taber.pdf>> [accessed 26 April 2017],

⁶⁴ Memorandum to Hilary Whittaker from Gisela Taber, 'Outreach in the Northwest' (April 15th, 1977) p. 1 in 'Bella Abzug Papers', NY, New York City, Columbia University, MS#0005, Box 974, Folder 2

⁶⁵ Form Letter from Bella Abzug (2nd June 1977) p. 2, in 'National Commission on the

the Commission, as she targeted women based specifically on their race and their ability to recruit others within their racial groups. This explicitly targeted outreach remained an important priority for both the IWY commission and to many states' coordinating committees. Two states in particular - Alaska and California - are useful in examining how and why this outreach was so central.

Alaska and California are notable examples for a few reasons. Firstly, they represent States from either end of the spectrum in terms of prior feminist organizing and activism; in Alaska, 46% of the State Meeting attendees had never attended a women's meeting before, and 35% belonged to only one organization - but not all were active in that organization.⁶⁶ A survey taken at a San Diego meeting ahead of the California State Meeting, on the other hand, suggested that a significant majority of participants were affiliated with feminist organizations.⁶⁷ Of course, the women willing to attend the State Meetings were a self-selecting group who might have been more likely to attend or be a part of feminist groups than women who did not attend the State Meetings.

Nevertheless, California has been historically known as a hub of feminist activism alongside the Northeast of the USA. Alaska, on the other hand, has not been celebrated for feminist activism in the same way. By examining these two different states with their different audiences, and exploring how they 'did' their recruitment, it is possible to see that many of the recruitment strategies and issues faced were the same.

A further reason to consider Alaska and California is that their efforts at outreach have been largely disregarded in the existing (though admittedly scarce) secondary literature. Shelah Gilbert Leader and Patricia Rusch Hyatt briefly discuss recruitment efforts in Alabama, Kentucky, Illinois, Nevada, Puerto Rico, North Dakota, Colorado, Maine, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New Mexico, West Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Oklahoma, Utah and Wisconsin, suggesting that each state's efforts reflected their own particular geographic, economic and social challenges, but that they were united by the same goal: 'to

Observance of International Women's Year Papers', College Park, MD, National Archives at College Park, A1 38065-I, Executive Director's Office, Signature File; 1975-1978, RG0220, Container 86, Folder 2 [Hereafter NCOIWY Papers]

⁶⁶ Tay Thomas, Alaska State Meeting Report, Some Summaries of Information, p. 1, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska

⁶⁷ Mary Lindenstien Walshok, 'Report on San Diego's Survey for International Women's Year' in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5

reach ordinary women who may never have participated in a meeting by, for, and about women's lives and concerns'.⁶⁸ Similarly, Marjorie Spruill has noted the outreach efforts in a number of different states, acknowledging some of the difficulties faced by women seeking to do outreach - that advertising was expensive, and that conservative forces could stand in the way of the State Meeting organizers. Common strategies for what Leader and Hyatt have entitled 'Attracting Participants' and what Spruill calls 'outreach' included, they suggest, sending letters to different groups and organizations around the country, printing publicity materials in multiple languages, and holding pre-State Meeting mini-conferences. California and Alaska shared some of these strategies – activists in Alaska, for example, sent letters and commissioned radio advertisements, and Californian women held mini-conferences before the State Meeting. Spruill briefly mentions California's recruitment efforts as including bilingual teams of women who actively went into the fields to attract Spanish speaking agricultural workers.⁶⁹ Alaska and California are useful, then, as examples of typical outreach efforts in diverse settings. Examining these two states in more detail also provides a deeper understanding of a fundamental aspect of outreach that Leader and Hyatt disregard in their analysis - the creation of personal and grassroots networks.

Alaska

The women involved with organizing the State Meeting in Alaska faced unique challenges. Alaska is the largest state in the union, and spans 586,400 square miles - equal to one-fifth of the continental USA. Alaskan women seeking to attend the State Meeting in Anchorage had to rely heavily on air travel, which was costly. In a letter to Elizabeth Athanasakos, the Presiding Officer for the National Commission, members of the Alaskan Coordinating Committee complained that they 'face[d] an almost overpowering task of fulfilling the goals set by [the IWY] Commission in terms of geographical representation, as well as special concern for the rural women and racial minorities'.⁷⁰ The Alaskan

⁶⁸ Shelah Gilbert Leader and Patricia Rusch Hyatt, *American Women on the Move: The Inside Story of the National Women's Conference, 1977* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 66

⁶⁹ Marjorie Julian Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* (New York London Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 143

⁷⁰ Letter from Unknown to Elizabeth Athanasakos (c. January 1977) p. 1, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska, Tay Thomas, Alaska State

Coordinating Committee was, in itself, initially object of these difficulties - the group had 'a poor geographical and ethnic balance to begin with'.⁷¹ Eventually, the Committee was restructured to be more diverse, and, headed by Tay Thomas, they worked throughout the planning process to include women from rural areas - particularly Native Alaskan women.

Notions of geographical diversity and racial or ethnic diversity seem to have been intrinsically linked in the minds of the Alaskan co-ordinating committee. Five-hundred participants completed an evaluation form and were asked to respond to questions about both their ethnicity and their geographical location. In the summary report, the section on 'race' included details of who had responded as White, Black, Native or Indian, urban or sub-urban, and rural.⁷² The fact that the organizers grouped together the information about ethnicity and geographical location under the broader term 'race' is telling about how the Co-ordinating Committee conceptualised women from different areas and regions of Alaska; while they may have shared an ethnicity, their geographical otherness amounted to racial otherness in the minds of the meeting organizers and planners. Thus, when advocating for racial diversity in Alaska, the organizers conflated racial diversity with geographical diversity. The 1980 census data for Alaska casts some light on why this might be so; two-thirds of the Alaskan population lived in Anchorage, of whom 85% were white. In rural areas, only 66% of the population was white. In addition, while most groups of people of colour were most populous in Anchorage, American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts (all grouped as 'native women' for the purpose of the State Meeting) were far more likely to live in rural areas. Of these populations, only 15%, 11% and 19% respectively lived in Anchorage.⁷³ To reach native women, then, the Alaska State Meeting organizers had to reach

Meeting Report, Supplementary Materials

⁷¹ Tay Thomas, Alaska State Meeting Report, Commentary and Minutes of the State Meeting (26th June 1977), p. 40, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska

⁷² Tay Thomas, Alaska State Meeting Report, Evaluation Section, 'Some Summaries of Information', p. 1 in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska

⁷³ US Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census, 'Characteristics of the Population, Chapter B: General Population Characteristics, Part 3: Alaska', in *1980 Census of Population*, 1982 <<http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/cen/histpdfs/1980char.pdf>>, p. 15

out beyond Anchorage. Recruiting for a multiracial delegation went hand in hand with recruiting for a geographically diverse delegation.

The Alaskan Co-ordinating Committee had just over four months to organize the State Meeting, and from the beginning they emphasised the importance of prioritising outreach to all the different geographical regions of Alaska. In an early letter to the members of the State Coordinating Committee, Tay Thomas suggested that the 'key' to the State Meeting's success would rest on the shoulders of the various rural subcommittees - particularly their outreach work. She said that,

if each and every one of us does our share, and keeps our over-all goal in mind - - [the State Meeting will include] the participation of women representing all geographic areas, ethnic backgrounds, races, ages, income groups, occupations, beliefs, etc.⁷⁴

Retrospectively, Thomas mused over whether the State Meeting had been a success, and she concluded that it had been, based on the turnout of women from rural and outlying areas. She wrote that, from the beginning of the planning process:

we knew our chief target would have to be the women from small towns and Native villages, and we weren't sure whether we could attract them or not.⁷⁵

Expecting everybody to 'do their share' of outreach, and having specific areas and demographics to 'target', clearly suggests that the use of recruitment was integral to creating diversity at the State Meeting itself, and so, by extension, in the Alaskan delegation that would be sent to Houston.

The use of personal connections, and the conscious construction of a grassroots network was a major part of the Alaskan State Committee's outreach programme. At the end of January 1977, the Coordinating Committee sent letters to several women across Alaska who were identified as potential contacts in their geographical area. The letters asked if they would help create a national grassroots network which would be 'the means whereby we, the

⁷⁴ Letter from Tay Thomas to Alaska Coordinating Committee Members, 'Alaska International Women's Year Planning Committee' (December 23rd, 1976) p. 1, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska

⁷⁵ Alaska State Meeting Report, p. 35 in 'International Women's Year State Reports',

Coordinating Committee, will be able to obtain the necessary input for the Women's State Meeting'.⁷⁶ The recipients of these letters were asked to identify women in their area who would be interested in attending the State Meeting, and strongly encouraged them to identify a 'broad representation' of people, explicitly highlighting the need for participants with diverse attitudes and of different ages, political stances and races.⁷⁷ By creating a network of local women in regional committees, the State coordinating committee effectively contracted out the job of recruitment to women better placed to both identify the particular needs of, and to encourage participation from, their local and regional communities. This strategy worked; in the evaluation of the State Meeting, Thomas claimed that the word-of-mouth advertising was more effective than any other strategy, particularly in small towns and villages where small, regional meetings were held. These were so successful, in fact, that the State coordinating committee was inundated with pre-registration forms from rural areas prior to the meeting - so much so that they cancelled their plans to advertise the State Meeting via special radio and TV broadcasts that targeted these areas.⁷⁸

This creation of a grassroots network that was based on personal relationships and communication was a form of active recruitment. The nature and format of the State Meeting, as well as the short time frame in which it was organized in such a geographically vast space, meant that the organizers sought to use outreach to attract women into their event, rather than co-creating an event or meeting alongside minority women. Organizers wanted to recruit hard-to-access women - those living rurally, or minority women such as Black women and Native Alaskans. To do so, the (mostly white) State Coordinating Committee invited women to the State Meeting who, they anticipated, would create the diversity that was mandated by Bella's Bill. One Native Alaskan woman communicated this sense of being brought into the white organizer's meeting, rather than being part of its growth. She said, 'we cannot imitate you people, you Caucasians [...] we just step occasionally into your world, and then

⁷⁶ Tay Thomas, Alaska State Meeting Report, Supplementary Materials, Form Letter from Tay Thomas to Potential Volunteers (January 31st, 1977), 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 38-9

back into ours'.⁷⁹ By portraying the State Meeting as part of the white women's world, which Native Alaskan women occasionally stepped into, the Native women felt as though they had been recruited to diversify a white women's event, rather than that the event was intrinsically their own.

Native women represented only nine percent of the delegates at the Alaska State Meeting. On the first evening of the conference, those in attendance created a Native Women's caucus. This caucus was semi-racially autonomous; it was restricted to Native Women, but the women who attended were heterogenous in their tribal identities and cultures. Tay Thomas, the white woman who wrote Alaska's state report, emphasised the significance of the Native caucus; she said that 'twenty-five years earlier the Eskimos, Aleuts, Athabaskan and Tlinkit Indians were still age-old warring enemies [...] On Friday night, they were sitting side by side'.⁸⁰ For Thomas, then, the significance of this racially autonomous space was as a demonstration of the way that 'sisterhood' could unite women across differences of identity – which might precede the unity of women across race. Similarly, Thomas wrote that 'It was almost impossible for me to distinguish between those Athabaskans and Eskimo women or the Tlinkit Indians sitting near them. To me, they all look like sisters, despite their different cultures and way of life'.⁸¹ Thomas reiterated the notion of sisterhood as negating or transcending racial and ethnic differences, portraying Native Women as one homogenous group.

The following day, delegates to the meeting had the opportunity to attend various workshops. One, entitled 'Native Women in Changing Alaska', was moderated by a group of Native women. This was not a racially autonomous space – it was open to any delegate – and was an informal opportunity for women (particularly Native women) to speak out on any issues that they wished. Thomas, discussing the workshop in the state report, said that

the verbal comments were extremely favorable. One woman, a Caucasian who has worked in some of the villages for over 25 years, related later that she almost cried as she listened to the large number

⁷⁹ Kay Brown, 'Raising Alaska's Consciousness', *Alaska Advocate* (May 12, 1977) p. 7 in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3

⁸⁰ Tay Thomas, Alaska State Meeting Report (January 31st, 1977) p. 14, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 193, Folder 3: Alaska.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14

of Native women get up to speak. This display of assurance, ability and Native solidarity was beyond her wildest dreams and hopes.⁸²

Notably, Thomas framed the success of the workshop on Native Women around the hopes and expectations of a white woman. This is indicative of the way that many white women judged the activism of women of colour within white contexts – it was assessed according to white women’s own priorities rather than by engaging with the desires of women of colour. Thomas, as the writer of the State Meeting report, was responsible for creating the narrative around racially autonomous spaces at this meeting, and framed it primarily around their relationships to white women and the white women’s movement.

Beverly Everett, a white Iowan woman and National IWY Commissioner, also framed the Native women’s caucus in this way. She described the caucus and workshop as ‘highly successful from the view of those on the inner circle and those considered non-native women’.⁸³ Everett’s judgement of the ‘success’ of these racially autonomous spaces were as much based on white women’s interpretation of them than the Native women that they were about. Everett also commended the personal networks that were used for recruitment, suggesting that they ‘assured a good outreach and inclusion of native women’.⁸⁴ For Everett, it seems that the mere presence of Native women demonstrated the success of the outreach program, whereas the Native women themselves, in this case, appear to have perceived multiracial success as a scenario in which they were not simply ‘stepping into’ the white woman’s world.

California

Just as in Alaska, the geography of California was a problem for the Californian IWY State coordinating committee. Feedback from the State Meeting suggested that it would have been better to have two meetings; one in the north and one in the south of the state. This, the feedback suggested, would have improved both attendance and the outreach.⁸⁵ Unlike in Alaska, though, outreach was framed almost entirely around racial and ethnic diversity, rather than geographical

⁸² Ibid., p. 29

⁸³ Beverly Everett, ‘Report on Alaska IWY Meeting May 6, 7, 8, 1977’, p. 3, in ‘Abzug Papers’, Box 974, Folder 14,

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 3

⁸⁵ ‘Comments from Evaluations and Letters by Executive Coordinating and Other Committee Members and Chairs’, (Unknown, c. June 1977) p. 81, in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 194, Folder 5: California, State Report, (ed. Suzanne Paizis)

diversity. Despite this focus on outreach for racial diversity, the State Meeting itself was criticised as being undermined by racism, both among the delegates and within the State Coordinating Committee itself.

The State Coordinating Committee was jointly chaired by Dorothy Tucker and Pat Digiorgio, African-American and white women respectively. The subcommittees disproportionately and overwhelmingly represented women of colour; of the 26 individuals that were elected to three main subcommittees, only two of them were white. The committee membership breakdown explicitly listed each individual's race, and a special note at the bottom of the page noted that 'only 2 are Non-Minority women' [emphasis original].⁸⁶ The State Committee was clearly committed to creating and publicising racial diversity in its membership. Conversely, the Coordinating Committee Executive – who were elected by the IWY National Commission, rather than by those within California - was predominantly white women, with three white women, one Hispanic woman and one Black woman.⁸⁷ One person's feedback about the organization of the State Meeting was that 'racism was the bottom line in the relationships within the Coordinating Committee'.⁸⁸ The dynamics of race and racial representation on the committee became so fraught that Aileen Hernandez, an African-American woman and former President of NOW, resigned from her position on the committee.⁸⁹ She stated that she could not 'in good conscience support what [she] view[ed] as another autocratically controlled conference'.⁹⁰ She asserted that women from minority groups were underrepresented, and that 'although many people have made recommendations and suggested approaches, a very small group of women is in apparent "control" of the State Meeting'.⁹¹ She suggests that it was non-minority women from urban areas that were controlling the organization of the State Meeting. Clearly, simply putting a

⁸⁶ 'Breakdown of IWY Nominating Committee, Elections Committee, and Credentials Committee', *California State Report* (Unknown, c. January 1977) p. 2, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁸⁹ Notably, Hernandez's frustration with white-dominated organizations and structures did not originate from her experiences with the IWY State Meetings. She had resigned from her Presidency of NOW in 1971, and ultimately left the organization in the late 1970s, because she perceived NOW members as being unwilling to engage with racial inequities.

⁹⁰ Letter from Aileen Hernandez to Bella Abzug (April 10th, 1977) in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

racially diverse group of women together in a room did not necessarily make for easy or effective multiracial feminist organizing. I argue that the process of creating these groups through recruitment and outreach did not alter established racialised power dynamics, and thus was a primary factor in why these groups were accused of being permeated with racism and failed.

Efforts towards outreach among the Californian Coordinating Committee were sustained, thorough and bureaucratic. Early in the planning process - in February 1977 - several outreach committees were formed, and two women were hired to work on outreach for 'minority groups' - one each in northern and southern California. At the same time, chairs of the Outreach Committee requested a staff person to oversee outreach and conference accommodations for disabled women, but this request was not met.⁹² Notably, some of the most visible dissatisfaction at the California State Meeting was in response to a lack of facilities for disabled women. The fact that two staff people were hired to facilitate outreach to minority groups (namely groups of women of colour) but that the Outreach Committee did not insist upon an outreach staffperson for disabled women suggests that attracting women of colour was a higher priority to the Committee than other minority groups.

The strategies that the Outreach Committee used also highlight this emphasis on women of colour as being the primary target for outreach. Letters and promotional materials were sent to various different community and women's organizations, several of which were aimed towards specific groups of women of colour. The Committee also worked with women around the state to organize mini-conferences in their local communities. Seven of these events were held in April and May 1977, and they outlined tailored outreach to particular groups. At the Irvine mini-conference, for instance, members of the Outreach Committee and local women initiated a special outreach program that was designed to reach 'reservation, rural, and northern and southern California American Indian Women'.⁹³ Kogee Thomas, the coordinator of the Outreach Committee for Irvine in Southern California, sent out a letter to her colleagues at the University of California asking for contact details of minority organizations

⁹² 'Outreach Committee' Document (date unknown), p. 95, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California, State Report

⁹³ Ibid.

and individuals in Southern California. She wrote that, 'one of the IWY foremost concerns in our outreach program is an effort to involve underrepresentative [sic] and isolated women with a special emphasis on low-income women, numbers of diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups, and women of all ages'.⁹⁴ Thomas clearly highlighted the requirement for diversity of class, race, religion and age. However, in a media release advertising the mini-conference, the only mention of diversity was in relation to the invited panel, which 'represent[ed] all ethnic groups in the area'.⁹⁵ Once again, this highlighting of ethnicity suggests that racial diversity was a higher priority to the Irvine Outreach Committee than other demonstrations of diversity.

The special outreach programme for the Irvine mini-conference was developed by Outreach Committee members and Native American women from both northern and southern California. This group called itself the California Coalition for Indian Women, and stated that 'Native American women do not have traditional political role models and therefore the Coalition sees itself as the first resort for political contacts and awareness in the political process'.⁹⁶ Native American women were a growing constituency in California; between 1970 and 1980, there was a 118% increase in the Native American population, bringing the total population to 198,000.⁹⁷ The Coalition saw itself as fulfilling a guiding or supportive role and function for - but not on behalf of - Native American women in California. They saw themselves both as a mouthpiece through which Native American women could be heard by the State Committee and as a bridge between the two. Despite the word 'Coalition' in their name, this multiracial group of women was formed as a result of targeted recruitment following Thomas' call for names and addresses of minority women. At the workshop, however, the focus on recruitment had waned; instead, facilitators concentrated on preparing and consolidating a report on the issues that faced Native American women in California to present at both the State Meeting and at the National Conference (though it is unclear whether it was presented at

⁹⁴ Letter from Kogee Thomas to Colleagues (9th March 1977) p. 99, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

⁹⁵ Media Release, p. 153, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California, State Report,

⁹⁶ American Indian Outreach Program, p. 152, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

⁹⁷ Robert Lindsey, 'California Becomes Melting Pot of 1980's', *The New York Times*, 23 August 1981,

Houston). For many organizers, then, the value of Native American women's presence was in their capacity to educate policy-makers about the problems they faced, rather than their participation itself. Indeed, one of the main criticisms of the outreach workshop targeting Native American women was that there were not *enough* American Indian women there. This was reiterated at both the Irvine mini-conference and at the State Meeting itself, where participant feedback suggested that Caucasian women were overrepresented.⁹⁸ Native women represented 8% of attendees at the Irvine mini-conference, which attendees perceived as too few, even though Native Women represented less than one percent of Irvine's population.⁹⁹ In this case, while outreach efforts seem to have worked in terms of getting a disproportionately high number of Native women into the room, participants (both Native Americans and white women) did not consider it successful, as they still perceived Native women as underrepresented.

Discussions about Native women's participation and representation at the State Meeting were exacerbated during the nominations for the delegation for Houston. Billie Masters, a Native American woman who had been nominated from the floor, was left off the ballot, which prompted anger and disruption amongst the delegates. Later, Sally Martinez, one of the State Meeting organizers, denied that this omission was the fault of the Nominating Committee and that Masters' nomination form had not been submitted. She said that the form

[was] not in our file. We would have no reason in the world to throw that out, especially as we don't have enough Indians.¹⁰⁰

It seems clear that, for Martinez, the potential value of Billie Master's contribution to the IWY delegation was in her race, and that she could make up numbers of Native American women. This rhetoric is reflective of Abzug's letter

⁹⁸ American Indian Outreach Program, p. 152, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California; International Women's Year Conference [Irvine Mini Conference] State Report, Feedback Sheet, p. 157 in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

⁹⁹ Dowell Myers and Julie Park, 'Appendix B: Racial Composition of Southern Californian Cities, 1980 to 2000', in *Racially Balanced Cities in Southern California, 1980-2000*, 2001 <http://popdynamics.usc.edu/pdf/2001_Myers-Park_Racially-Balanced-Cities.pdf> [accessed 19 June 2017],

¹⁰⁰ Kathleen Hendrix, "Inherent Tension" in Women's Meeting' *LA Times* (21st June 1977) p. 204, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

targeting Asian women to recruit – some women of colour were valued at the State Meetings purely for the visible diversity that they represented and could take to Houston, rather than for their own personal politics or organizing experience.

The workshop at the State Meeting with the largest reported number of participants was entitled 'Minority Women Organizing for Action'. The women that attended this workshop claimed that they felt that they 'were not full participants in the IWY conference'.¹⁰¹ Outreach in California, then, did not create the desired level of racial diversity, nor led to the effective inclusion of women of colour at the State Meeting. California did, however, send a 'balanced, representative delegation [...] which included women from varying backgrounds' to Houston.¹⁰² Ultimately, then, the California State Meeting succeeded in fulfilling the IWY mandate of creating a balanced delegation. However, a closer analysis of the outreach efforts in the run up to the State Meeting demonstrates that nominating a multiracial delegation did not necessarily indicate that the recruitment and outreach strategies implemented to create that diversity were successful. Indeed, in California, outreach efforts seem to have prompted frustration, highlighted tokenistic attitudes among organizers, and failed to create a cohesive, multiracial State Meeting.

Delegates at Large

The diversity mandate set in Bella's Bill was, in theory, meant to ensure a balanced slate of delegates that would be roughly proportional to the demographics of the USA at a national level. To insure against prejudice at the State level, however, the National Commission designated spaces as for delegates-at-large who would be selected directly by them. During the period in which most of the State Meetings were being held - May and June 1977 – the National Commission and Delegates-at-Large Committee discussed strategies for selecting delegates-at-large and what their primary objectives should be. Carmen Delgado Votaw, the chair of the Committee on Delegates-at-Large and Outreach, wrote to the Delegates-at-Large Committee in June 1977 to express

¹⁰¹ 'Summary Report of Facilitator Evaluations' in *California State Report* p. 160, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

¹⁰² 'Reflections' in *California State Report*, p. 218, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 194, Folder 5: California

her concerns. She noted that the most pressing decision was to ascertain how many delegates-at-large were needed, and suggested that they should make up twenty percent of the total elected body - 288 women. She also urged committee members to submit names of 'outstanding American women' for consideration as delegates. The most important element of recruitment for delegates-at-large, though, was Votaw's adamantness that they should fill the gaps left by the State Meeting elections.¹⁰³

Discussions over how these delegates-at-large would be selected were mixed and sometimes fraught. In her letter to the delegates-at-large committee, Votaw proposed that they use national population figures, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), to identify 'gaps' in the categories of race, ethnicity, age and economic status. She suggested that they only fill those gaps in relation to the *overall* delegate body as elected at the State Meetings, rather than assess the shortfalls of individual state delegations. She wrote, 'there will be no attempt to balance individual state delegations; only the national aggregate will be considered with regard to these particular categories'.¹⁰⁴ Alice Rossi, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, agreed with Votaw, stating that 'since elected delegates have come from states, delegates at large should meet the need for fuller representation on a national level' [emphasis original].¹⁰⁵ Rossi listed the three most important elements in selecting delegates-at-large; first, picking those who were involved with the IWY commission's work but had not been elected as a state delegate; second, leaders of political organizations which focussed explicitly on the improvement of the status of women; and third, 'outreach: [the] correction of composition of elected delegates against national demographic profile of women, supplementing if there is under-representation of low income, race/ethnicity, etc'.¹⁰⁶ Cecilia Preciado-Burciago explained her reason for supporting a national outlook on filling the demographic 'gaps' - she feared that appointing a second delegation for some states (that would constitute mostly minority women) would

¹⁰³ Memorandum from Carmen Delgado Votaw to Delegates-At-Large Committee Members (June 10th, 1977) p. 2-3, in 'NCOIWY Papers', Signature File: 1975-1978, RG0220: Temporary Committees, Commissions and Board, Container 86, Abzug Chronological, Folder 2: 5/77-6/77

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 2

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Alice Rossi to Carmen Votaw (30th May 1977) p. 1, in 'NCOIWY Papers', Signature File: 1975-1978, RG0220: Temporary Committees, Commissions and Board, Container 86, Abzug Chronological, Folder 2: 5/77-6/77

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 2

cause a 'second class citizenship' among the state delegates. As such, she advocated for the delegates-at-large to be a separate entity. She also acknowledged that some states would need only one or two delegates-at-large to become balanced, whereas others might need ten or fifteen.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the BLS could only provide demographic figures for a national level, not a state level.¹⁰⁸ Taking all these factors into account, Votaw surmised that filling the gaps in demographics according to national demographics would be easier, more effective, and ran less risk of alienating otherwise underrepresented women in their state delegations.

Despite these responses, at a meeting in August 1977 the Delegates-at-Large Committee voted to correct national imbalances of delegates by appointing delegates-at-large from states that elected unrepresentative delegations. As this meeting took place after the state delegations had been decided, the committee members were able to make informed decisions based on the existing delegates. They sought to rectify the imbalance that certain states like Utah and Mississippi had created. Utah's delegation was dominated by white, middle-class, Republican Mormons after a prominent Mormon women's group packed the State Meeting and the twenty-nine Mississippi delegates sent to Houston were all white.¹⁰⁹

These delegations, while condemned by the IWY commission and by other delegates at Houston for their blatant discrimination and imbalance, were not officially challenged by the IWY commission as there was no evidence of election fraud. However, a vote to condemn the election results in these states passed unanimously.¹¹⁰ This condemnation highlighted the importance of the delegates-at-large. The committee needed to successfully negotiate their desire for a balanced national delegation with the challenges they faced resulting from particular State Meeting outcomes and the availability of specific demographic data. This difficult negotiating impacted on the criteria that the committee used

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Cecilia Preciado-Burciaga to Carmen Delgado Votaw (June 6th, 1977) p. 1, in 'NCOIWY Papers', Executive Director's Office, Signature File: 1975-1978, RG0220: Temporary Committees, Commissions and Board, Container 86, Abzug Chronological, Folder 2: 5/77-6/77,
¹⁰⁸ 'Note To File' p. 1, in 'NCOIWY Papers', Executive Director's Office, Signature File: 1975-1978, RG0220: Temporary Committees, Commissions and Board, Container 86, Abzug Chronological, Folder 2: 5/77-6/77

¹⁰⁹ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 170-1; Gilbert Leader and Rusch Hyatt, p. 55

¹¹⁰ Gilbert Leader and Rusch Hyatt, p. 59

to select and recruit delegates-at-large. Specifically, it meant that the delegates-at-large committee had to cherry-pick specific delegates that would meet their needs in terms of creating diversity and balance. Unlike recruitment efforts at State Meetings where outreach committees tried to cast their nets wide to attract racially diverse participants, the selection of delegates-at-large allowed the IWY commission to be more specific and targeted in its recruitment.

Recruitment strategies, then, were clearly central to the IWY Commission, and the various State Committees, in trying to create multiracial spaces. The federally mandated diversity policy meant that outreach was a high priority for many (white) organizers – but as a result many white women appeared to value women of colour primarily as representatives for their race. Some women of colour felt as though they were simply stepping into existing white spaces, rather than as contributors to a multiracial agenda, and that white women in those spaces had not fully engaged with questions of race, power and agency. This meant that tensions about racism permeated many State Meetings. The next chapter will further explore the importance of white women acknowledging and engaging with their privilege as an impetus to move away from recruitment strategies, and towards a more inclusive, coalition-based approach to multiracial organizing.

Ch. 2: The Reproductive Rights National Network

From its conception, the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) envisaged itself as a broad-based grassroots network that brought together diverse women from groups that had not successfully worked together in the past.¹¹¹ By co-ordinating local women's groups who were active around reproductive rights, R2N2 hoped to both publicise and streamline local affiliates organizing around similar causes.¹¹² The Network, established informally in late 1977, and officially founded in 1979, provides a useful platform for tracing the shift from a focus on 'recruitment' to one of 'coalition'. Though it ultimately disbanded over racial tensions in early 1985, the evolution of the (predominantly white) network and its attitudes towards multiracial work is indicative of the particular shift in strategy that this thesis identifies. This chapter will explore the shift from a recruitment-based approach in the network's Abortion Rights Action Week events of 1979, to its later emphasis on collaboration, co-creation and (potentially) coalition in efforts to produce a slideshow on Population Control. Finally, it will examine the last conferences of the network to demonstrate the ways and extent to which these white women's organizing strategies changed during this period.

R2N2 was conceptualised in response to the 1977 Hyde Amendment, which cut off Medicaid funding for abortions and thus disproportionately affected poor women and women of colour.¹¹³ They were simultaneously responding to the increasingly visible New Right and to the transformation of abortion rights into a class issue following *Hyde*.¹¹⁴ Their long-term goal, according to Suzanne Staggenborg, was to 'develop an "offensive movement" that could fight for a

¹¹¹ 'Reproductive Rights National Network Papers', p. 2, Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, [Hereafter R2N2 Papers]

¹¹² Suzanne Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 110; 116

¹¹³ The Hyde Amendment was a 1977 amendment which prohibited the use of federal funds to pay for abortions, unless the woman's life was in danger, she had been raped, or was a victim to incest. It was based in the same 'right to privacy' that *Roe v. Wade* had been based on in 1973, asserting that the government should not be involved in, and therefore pay for, women's private decisions such as abortion. See more about the Hyde Amendment in the introduction to part two of this thesis.

¹¹⁴ Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict*, pp. 110-112; Nancy Stearns, 'Roe v. Wade: Our Struggle Continues', *Berkeley Women's Law Journal*, 4.1 (1988), pp. 6-7

more comprehensive set of demands'.¹¹⁵ R2N2 built this 'comprehensive' list over time. They began with a narrow agenda that focused primarily on gaining and maintaining abortion rights and critiquing sterilisation abuse, which grew to define reproductive rights activism more broadly in the hopes of attracting women from more diverse backgrounds. An early grant proposal, for instance, stated that 'a new form of organization with a multi-issue focus is needed if work on these issues is to combine a mass base with a women's rights perspective'.¹¹⁶ This multi-issue approach was a form of recruitment: by strategically casting their ideological net wide, R2N2 hoped to attract women with a diverse range of interests, and thus a racially diverse range of women. Indeed, in the first newsletter, Marilyn Katz, a founder of R2N2, wrote that '[its] success would only be realised if activists "develop a position and coalition that reflects our broadest interests and allies"'.¹¹⁷ The organization created a 'Bill of Reproductive Rights', later known as the 'Principles of Unity', which reiterated these values. Clearly, founders of R2N2 perceived a broad-based approach as fundamental to creating unity among diverse groups. R2N2 was able to put this approach into action in one of their earliest activities; the Abortion Rights Action Week.

Abortion Rights Action Week

On November 29th, 1978, around the same time that R2N2 was formally established as a national network, an 'Ad-Hoc Pro-Choice Meeting' was held in Washington, D.C. The participants were all white, and included representatives from several different feminist organizations which would later become part of R2N2.¹¹⁸ Pat Beyea, of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), highlighted the need for a major mobilization around reproductive rights to publicize the pro-choice movement, to strengthen the skills, networks and contacts of local reproductive rights groups, and to broaden the national base of support by

¹¹⁵ Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict*, p. 110

¹¹⁶ 'Grant Proposal: Reproductive Rights National Network' (c. 1980) p. 1 in 'R2N2 Papers (Smith)', Box 1, Folder 1; For more on R2N2's multi-issue approach, including an exploration of the ways that it contributed to its dissolution, see Suzanne Staggenborg, 'Can Feminist Organizations Be Effective?', in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, ed. by Marx Ferec, Myra and Patricia Yancey Martin (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995),

¹¹⁷ Kline, p. 93

¹¹⁸ Meredith Tax, Interview with Author, 2016

drawing more local groups into collaborating in the movement. They decided to mobilize in a 'multi-city demonstration effort throughout the country, probably in the Fall [of] 1979'.¹¹⁹ This meeting sparked the conception of the 'Fall Mobilization', or as it became known, Abortion Rights Action Week (ARAW).

ARAW took place over seven days at the end of October 1979. Over two hundred events took place in over eighty cities across the USA in an effort to promote grassroots and local organizing around reproductive rights and to regalanize the movement. Frances Kissling, the national co-ordinator for the week, remembers Abortion Rights Action Week as 'one of the first attempts [...] by the Left flank to actually organize, mobilize, have activities, be visible in more than pockets like New York and California, Chicago'.¹²⁰ The week, then, was not meant to just mobilize those women who were already active in the feminist movement. It was intended to recruit more women into the movement at the grassroots and expand local organizations. Organizers particularly wanted to attract women who were underrepresented in the movement - poor women, young women, and women of colour.¹²¹ By planning a broad-based series of events, the organizers hoped to attract a wide range of women. The agenda for the initial Ad-hoc Pro-Choice meeting that was held in November 1978 prioritised 'defin[ing] the relevant constituencies that were necessary to reach', and 'cultivat[ing] and attract[ing] new leaders, esp. minority women, minority men, [and] religious communities'.¹²² In 1978, then, the rhetoric surrounding ARAW as a multiracial event was grounded in recruitment and outreach approaches.

The Reproductive Rights National Network was central to the development and facilitation of ARAW. In March 1979, Leslie Cagan, a representative for R2N2, was the second name on the document proposing a basis of unity for Abortion Rights Action Week.¹²³ In an overview of the groups

¹¹⁹ Memorandum from Rochelle Korman, Deborah Jacobs and Judy Auster Miller to Participants in November 29th Pro-Choice Meeting at Stewart Mott's (December 18th, 1978) p. 3 in 'NARAL Additional Records', MA, Cambridge, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, MC714, Box 29, Folder 2

¹²⁰ Frances Kissling, Interview with Author, 2016,

¹²¹ Proposed Basis of Unity for the Fall Mobilization (March 12, 1979) p. 1, in 'NARAL Additional Records', Box 29, Folder 2,

¹²² Agenda for 11/29 Pro-Choice Meeting, 'Political Strategies' (undated, c. Nov. 1978) p. 1 in 'NARAL Additional Records', Box 29, Folder 2

¹²³ Annotated 'Proposed Basis of Unity' (March 12th, 1979) p. 1, in 'Saralee Hamilton Papers',

involved with co-organizing, R2N2 was one of the few that was unequivocally described as 'in'; ARAW activities were a top priority within their organizational work.¹²⁴ While they had no financial resources to contribute, they had 'lots of energy on local levels' and organizational strength in the North-East and the west coast.¹²⁵ By Summer 1979, Cagan regularly updated the membership of R2N2 on the progress of ARAW plans, and encouraged the network's participation in any way possible.¹²⁶ The links with R2N2 were clear; R2N2 took a leading role in organizing the week, and ARAW came to symbolise the core of R2N2's organizational agenda. A grant proposal from shortly after ARAW stated that in 'almost all cities [...] a R2N2 group has been active in pulling together a coalition. [...] After Abortion Rights Action Week, R2N2 groups will solidify the relationships with unions, minority organizations, and community groups which it worked with on the week's activities'.¹²⁷ R2N2 organizers saw building multiracial bonds during the week as a precursor to creating stronger relationships across race and long-term networks. A press release claimed that 'this week represents an important step forward in all of our work. We are turning our diversity into our strength, and this week [...] represents the potential we have as a unified movement'.¹²⁸ R2N2 saw ARAW as both a practical manifestation of their theoretical approach to diversity and unity, and as a springboard for future multiracial organizing.

Efforts towards multiracial activism for Abortion Rights Action Week were located at two different levels: efforts by the main organizers and within the steering committee, and efforts at a local level. In April, the steering committee announced that there were ten positions for representatives of organizations on the committee - but stressed that four of those slots were to be reserved for minority groups.¹²⁹ Discussions over how to attract these minority groups were

Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Box 2, Folder 17

¹²⁴ Questionnaire filled in by R2N2 representative (Undated), in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', New York, NY, The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive, Box 1, Folder 11

¹²⁵ National Abortion Rights Action Week, Steering Committee Meeting Minutes (May 16th, 1979) in 'NARAL Additional Records', Box 29, Folder 3

¹²⁶ Letter/Report from Leslie Cagan to Reproductive Rights National Network (19th July 1979) pp. 3-5 in 'Saralee Hamilton Papers', Box 5, Folder 3

¹²⁷ Grant Proposal: Reproductive Rights National Network (c. 1980) p. 5, in 'R2N2 Papers (Smith)', Box 1, Folder 1

¹²⁸ R2N2 Press Release, (17th October 1979) p. 1, in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', Box 1, Folder 10

¹²⁹ Abortion Rights Action Week Mobilization Meeting Minutes (18th April 1979) in 'NARAL Additional Records', Box 29, Folder 2

ongoing, and the following month the committee concluded that educating women of colour was the 'biggest job'. They decided that emphasising topics such as sterilization, Medicaid issues and lack of education and resources would attract women of colour and poor women, and used speak-outs and an outreach letter to do so.¹³⁰ Like R2N2 more broadly, the ARAW steering committee understood these issues as particularly pertinent to women of colour, and so hoped that they would attract racially diverse women. Calls for more minority groups on the steering committee were made again in the June meeting, and advocacy for a special committee for women of colour continued through until September – merely six weeks prior to the event.¹³¹ While the steering committee repeatedly paid lip service to attracting women of colour, it is unclear what practical efforts they made to develop those relationships.

The steering committee did, however, encourage local groups organizing for ARAW to actively reach out and create diverse relationships. They published a booklet which was disseminated to local groups as a guide for ARAW involvement. This organizing manual included goals for the week, ideas about potential activities, and a list of particular 'target groups': working women, students, minority women and homemakers.¹³² The same booklet had a section entitled 'How to Reach Groups and Individuals Who Will Participate' which encouraged groups to draw on their extended networks to both increase participation and to draw on diverse women's expertise. The organizers' desire to publicise the event to specific constituencies and to do effective outreach is clear. Similar to outreach efforts ahead of the IWY State Meetings, the coordinators of ARAW encouraged a series of meetings in advance of the main week in order to drum up support and enthusiasm. They suggested a preliminary meeting of those most active in abortion rights work to prepare to recruit participants for a subsequent larger planning meeting. At the preliminary meeting, participants were encouraged to:

¹³⁰ Abortion Rights Action Week Steering Committee minutes (16th May 1979) p. 5, in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', Box 1, Folder 11

¹³¹ Abortion Rights Action Week Steering Committee Meeting Minutes (25th June 1979) p. 3, in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', Box 1, Folder 8; Abortion Rights Action Week Steering Committee Meeting Minutes [handwritten] (10th September 1979) p. 7, in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', Box 1, Folder 9

¹³² Organizing Manual for Abortion Rights Action Week (undated, c. Spring 1979) p. 6, in 'NARAL Additional Records', Box 29, Folder 3

Send each person on your list a copy of the Abortion Rights Action Week brochure, a copy of the Call to Action, a short letter inviting them to send one or more representatives [...] a week to ten days later, call all those on your list who haven't responded. If the person you speak with can't make an immediate commitment to send someone, find out when that commitment can be made. [...] offer, if possible, to send a speaker to discuss Abortion Rights Action Week with their group.¹³³

Local groups, then, were encouraged to put a lot of time, effort, resources and persistence into recruiting women to participate. The National Coordinating Office suggested that local groups and activists form committees to attend the planning meeting. The first committee suggested was an Outreach Committee, which would promote involvement of people in the 'targeted constituencies' list. Women who were 'well known in the community [and] who ha[d] good contacts in the targeted groups' were prioritised in making up this committee.¹³⁴ The importance of networking and personal relationships to outreach for ARAW was clear.

The booklet also provided information about where to reach women from these different targeted groups, and emphasised the need to make special efforts to reach out to demographics that were unrepresented or underrepresented at the preliminary and planning meetings. Women of colour were, according to the organizing manual, to be found in community organizations, civil rights organizations, 'Third World' organizations and student groups. The Outreach Committee members were encouraged to contact these types of groups, as well as to leaflet within neighbourhoods and communities of colour and to call on individual contacts. After reaching out, the organizing manual suggested that the Outreach Committee be prepared to ask potential participants from the different target groups to take relevant or appropriate actions. Working women in labour unions, for example, could be asked to run a lunch-hour seminar on abortion rights and health insurance for women workers, and homemakers in women's groups could visit a legislator at his home to discuss pending legislation on abortion rights.¹³⁵ The manual, however, made no suggestions about what actions women of colour might be asked to take, despite them being one of the named targeted groups for outreach. This

¹³³ Organizing Manual for Abortion Rights Action Week (undated, c. Spring 1979) p. 7, in 'NARAL Additional Records', Box 29, Folder 3

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

suggests that the National Coordinating Office wanted to ensure racial diversity, but were not sure about what practical actions might be relevant to women of colour and what they would be willing or able to do. Similarly, the ARAW steering committee seemed unsure about how to attract women of colour in the first place. They produced brochures targeted at all the other designated target groups – working women, students and homemakers – which detailed the importance of ARAW to those groups and encouraged them to participate.¹³⁶ However, they did not produce one aimed at women of colour. This suggests that the committee wanted to attract women of colour to the events, but did not know how to. It appears that ARAW organizers were not sure what the purpose of racial diversity would be in practical organizing terms; their theoretical focus on multiracialism inhibited their ability to consider its practical ramifications if and when it was achieved, and stopped them from learning about and engaging with the issues that women of colour were organizing around.

For many local groups, ARAW was a form of outreach. In a list of local activities published prior to the week, postcard drives, tabling, leafleting and topical forums were the most popular and were organized in almost every participating city.¹³⁷ This outreach had the primary objective of raising awareness of the potential threats to abortion rights, but also served to encourage more participation in the movement more broadly and in local organizations more specifically. In some cases, this outreach was very specifically aimed at creating a dialogue across race and using abortion rights as a platform for doing so. April Lacy, for example, wrote to Dorothy Height on behalf of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) – a predominantly white, mainstream abortion rights organization. She invited Height as a guest of honour in her capacity as President of the National Council of Negro Women to an exclusive breakfast in Washington D.C. as part of the week's activities. RCAR, and Lacy, wrote that they were

very anxious to have you attend this breakfast as the abortion rights issue affects black women far more than the black community realises.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Marlene Gerber Fried, Interview with Author, 2016,

¹³⁷ Summary of Local Events (Undated, c. October 1979) pp. 1-21, in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', Box 1, Folder 10

¹³⁸ Letter from April Lacy to Dorothy Height (5th October 1979) p. 1, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers',

This letter demonstrates two points; first, that Lacy saw ARAW as a platform for RCAR to reach out and create links across race, and second, that some of these efforts remained short-sighted and paternalistic. While RCAR were not actively trying to recruit Height to their organization, their rhetoric – suggesting that the black community did not understand the importance of abortion rights to black women – implies that they thought that black women needed to be educated, and that inviting Height to the breakfast might prompt this education. Height's presence at the ARAW breakfast was valuable to RCAR, then, because she represented a link to the black community – she was valued as a representative of the black community, as much as for her personal insights or contributions to the week. The paternalistic assumption that white-dominated groups understood the issues faced by women of colour better than they did and could provide solutions – was one of the fundamental flaws of their recruitment approach. Though this example discusses RCAR rather than R2N2, it is indicative of the ARAW steering committee's rhetoric more broadly.

Local ARAW organizing can also demonstrate the challenges that a recruitment strategy created. Marilyn Katz was a white woman who co-founded R2N2 and an active member in the Chicago R2N2 local affiliate group Women Organized for Reproductive Choice (WORC). She updated the national network on WORC's programme plans, their attitude towards the event and outreach efforts. In Chicago, she wrote, R2N2 groups were working in a two-tiered way; they produced and disseminated literature publicising the event and raising awareness of reproductive rights issues, and planned events in conjunction with minority and labour groups on reproductive rights in the workplace, conducting forums in 'Third World communities'.¹³⁹ They were also, she said, working with mainstream groups such as NOW, NARAL and RCAR. In Chicago, then, preparing for the Abortion Rights Action Week prompted coalition work across race. This type of coalition was an early example of what came to be seen as the ideal by R2N2, and later was seen as one of the most successful ways to develop multiracial activism. Katz recalled that their work was based in personal

Box 7, Folder 50

¹³⁹ Letter from Marilyn Katz to RRNN Folks (31st July 1979) p. 1, in 'Saralee Hamilton Papers', Box 5, Folder 3

relationships and links with other organizations. She remembered that R2N2 created

alliances with black women's groups [...] and put forth for the first time, [...] or for the first time within this complex of women's organizations, an anti-racist perspective and filter on what reproductive choice really was.¹⁴⁰

For Katz, an antiracist perspective was fundamentally important in creating these cross-race alliances. Indeed, it was this development of an antiracist framework which facilitated the shift from recruitment to coalition for many white women.

In spite of WORC's efforts, multiracial local organizing in Chicago for ARAW collapsed before the week itself. Wendy Kline explains that efforts to create coalitions including WORC, women of colour groups, and mainstream feminist organizations were 'disastrous'.¹⁴¹ The staffperson from NOW emphasised that she had no interest in working in coalitions, and demonstrated a dismissive attitude towards the involvement and recruitment of minority groups and women of colour. She didn't agree that pamphlets should be printed in Spanish, for example, and eschewed the broader reproductive rights agenda that R2N2 and other organizations sought, insisting on the words 'Keep Abortion Safe and Legal' on fliers rather than acknowledging the broad range of reproductive rights issues. WORC's efforts to smooth tensions in the coalition angered the women of colour present, who criticised R2N2 for 'selling out' their reproductive rights perspective. As a result, the National Association of Black Feminists walked out of the coalition.¹⁴² The initial successes of multiracial organizing, in this instance, followed by its dissolution demonstrates that multiracial coalitions could work in certain circumstances, but that a refusal to take into account the needs of women of colour made those coalitions fail. Multiracial coalitions only worked if everyone came to the table from a place of power, rather than any one organization or type of organization dominating. This was something that many women in R2N2 realised in the following years when members were encouraged to consider and tackle their own internalised racism.

¹⁴⁰ Marilyn Katz, Interview with Author, 2016,

¹⁴¹ Kline, p. 94

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 92

“We’re trying to be all in this together”: Self-Analysis and Education

Leaders of R2N2 understood from an early stage that multiracial relationships were more likely to thrive when forged through coalition work than through recruitment. When discussing their plans for 1980, R2N2 leaders hoped for an expansion in membership, and that the local chapters of their networks would expand significantly, too. As part of this expansion, they hoped

to increase the Third World representation in local group membership, although past experience indicates that the greatest success in such organizing occurs through working in tandem with Third World organizations.¹⁴³

It is possible, here, to see the tension between the ‘recruitment’ and ‘coalition’ strategies. What R2N2 leaders *desired* was to see more women of colour involved in their own organization; they wanted to recruit women of colour to join them. However, they had experienced the ‘coalition’ strategy towards multiracial organizing, and understood that it was an approach that was more likely to succeed - even though it was not necessarily their ideal approach to multiracial organizing. This tension between different expectations and outcomes is indicative of broader assumptions made by white women about what ‘successful’ multiracial organizing looked like – that is, their existing work, with additional women of colour – and their struggle to navigate the tension between the strategies that they were used to and those that they saw to work.

Marjorie Fine was the head of R2N2 from 1980 to 1984 and oversaw some of the most profound changes in R2N2’s strategies towards building multiracial relationships. She remembers R2N2’s approach to multiracial reproductive rights organizing as shaped by a theoretical framework of intersectionality that placed socio-economic security at the centre of their work. They used a number of different practical tactics to use this theory in a way that ‘lifted up women from all different backgrounds’.¹⁴⁴ Margie recalled that R2N2

templated the materials, we worked in different neighbourhoods which were much more diverse, where we’d do that work. We did more activist stuff, we did more demonstrations that were in public, we lifted up women’s

¹⁴³ ‘Grant Proposal: Reproductive Rights National Network’ (c. 1980) p. 13 in ‘R2N2 Papers (Smith)’, Box 1, Folder 1

¹⁴⁴ Marjorie Fine, Interview with Author, 2016,

stories that were from various backgrounds, and things. [...] We balanced all those things [with their theoretical base], and we identified race as a major impediment for women getting ahead.¹⁴⁵

Throughout its existence, R2N2 grappled with the difficulties of working multiracially and of how to reconcile their preconceived notion of multiracial work with the actual best practise of it. This grappling manifested itself both in theoretical self-evaluation among members and in practical efforts to create those platforms for multiracial work.

As early as January 1980, the R2N2 steering committee encouraged members to think about the theoretical and psychological effects of attempting to work multiracially. Leslie Cagan and Marla Erlan wrote to R2N2 members about the ‘deep gap’ between their theory and their practice. They stated that:

Moralistic “shoulds” have not been at all helpful in closing that gap...saying that we “should” have third world women in our organizations [...] has often led to guilt feelings, confusions over how to focus work, and a lack of creativity. We are still left with the question of how to translate a political perspective into a meaningful practise without falling into the paralyzing and limiting traps of moralisms and should. [...] One result of this is the perpetuation of the all too familiar “we-they” split.¹⁴⁶

Cagan and Erlan were aware of the difficulties of putting their theoretical understandings of multiracial organizing into practise. In the same letter, they acknowledged that they, as part of the broader feminist movement, had often disregarded the complexities of the reproductive rights issues that were raised by women of colour. They stated that while their political perspective, their literature and their speeches were almost always based in an understanding of intersectionality and multiple oppressions, they had ‘found it almost impossible to programmatically take up these connections’.¹⁴⁷ The evolution of R2N2, then, rested on it working to develop a practical and sustained approach to multiracial action that was based in intersectionality in practise – which underpins coalition-based approaches.

¹⁴⁵ Fine, Interview with Author

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Leslie Cagan and Marla Erlan to Reproductive Rights National Network and Friends (30th January 1980) p. 1 in ‘R2N2 Papers (Smith)’, Box 1, Folder 1

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 2

Cagan and Erlan were committed to a 'coalition' approach to multiracial organizing, then - at least theoretically. However, they encouraged R2N2 members to 'build that all-inclusive women's liberation movement', suggesting that their ideal multiracial scenario was one in which women of colour actively joined the existing (predominantly white) feminist group.¹⁴⁸ Of course, the shift from 'recruitment' to 'coalition' was not necessarily as clear-cut or obvious at the time. Margie Fine recalled that there was a

consciousness about, how do we all be one big group? But we were a coalition, it was a big coalition, it had to bring in other organizations [...] So, I think there was both of those things, both we're trying to be all in this together, and okay, what are the different organizations that are already going on.¹⁴⁹

Rather than acknowledging a clear split between the different strategies, Fine remembers both strategies as being simultaneously relevant to R2N2's organizing. She said that, while R2N2 never stopped doing outreach, the organization was never in stasis and that it continually changed. She was continually aware of the ways in which those changes might allow for engagement with a broad range of groups. Essentially, Fine remembers R2N2's strategy for forging multiracial relationships as somewhere between that of recruitment and coalition; while having racial diversity within R2N2 itself was desirable, efforts to identify shared interests across multiple groups to create engagement and collaboration were also important. Rather than tell participants in other groups to 'leave that group you're working with and come join this', Fine says R2N2 wanted to create multiracial links between different organizations.¹⁵⁰

R2N2's exploration of internal racism was informed by the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) – an organization that was a 'big force in the creation of R2N2'.¹⁵¹ Marlene Fried, an R2N2 founder, described both organizations as subscribing to an anti-racist agenda which was informed by knowledge of race and racial issues.¹⁵² The two

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Leslie Cagan and Marla Erlan to Reproductive Rights National Network and Friends (30th January 1980) p. 5 in 'R2N2 Papers (Smith)',

¹⁴⁹ Fine, Interview with Author

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁵¹ Fried, 'Interview with Author'

¹⁵² Ibid.

organizations shared resources, office space, and ideological approaches. One of the first documents published by R2N2 – their principles of unity – were originally proposed by CARASA. Their shared ideologies and approaches are important when considering the shift from recruitment to coalition; in 1981, CARASA engaged in active self-analysis around race and internalised racism – something that many women of colour had been calling for. CARASA stated that

Our proposed [self-analysis] work is based on the assumption that as an overwhelmingly white organization we must examine our own reasons why we have not gotten more involved in projects and work with women of color and this requires working on our own racism. Not in a guilt provoking way but in a way designed to get us past paralysis into active work. [...] We want to know about work that is ongoing so that we can join it if we think we want to include it in our own perspectives.¹⁵³

This change in approach – from recruiting women of colour into work that white women were already doing to one that advocated learning about, understanding and supporting women of colour’s work – epitomises the broader shift that this thesis discusses. By late 1980, R2N2 members had the opportunity to put their new approach and analysis into action by collaborating on a population control slideshow.

“Maybe the first step is put education on our agendas”: the Population Control Slideshow

R2N2 understood from an early stage that attempting to work multiracially was frequently fraught with difficulty. The lessons they learned from ARAW and from their efforts to educate themselves about their internalised racism prompted them to approach multiracial activism differently; they sought to support women of colour within coalitions and with equal power relationships. In November 1980, at the national R2N2 conference in Chicago, an opportunity to put this new understanding presented itself. Members of Women of All Red Nations (WARN), a Native American feminist group, delivered a presentation on sterilization abuse to the network in which they described Native American women as ‘the poorest people in the richest country in the world’.¹⁵⁴ They

¹⁵³ ‘Proposed Work: Women of Color’ (Undated, c. October 1981) p. 5 in ‘R2N2 Papers (Smith)’, Box 3, Folder 9

¹⁵⁴ ‘R2N2 Chicago Conference’ *CARASA News* 4:9 (November 1980) p. 3, in ‘R2N2 Papers (Smith)’, p. 2, Box 3, Folder 6

wanted to develop and disseminate their work on sterilization in order to inform other Native Women of the risks to their health, as well as to raise awareness of sterilization abuse more broadly, but lacked the funding and resources to do so. After seeing WARN's presentation, R2N2 pledged to develop an ongoing campaign around Native American sterilization abuse and genocide, to develop educational materials alongside WARN, and to plan and help fund taking the slideshow on an educational tour.¹⁵⁵

Like many other groups of women of colour, Native American women felt excluded from the broader abortion rights movement. It was difficult for many Native women to defend abortion rights and simultaneously speak out against coercive sterilization – particularly when voluntary sterilization was a contraceptive of choice for many white women. WARN's Pat Bellinger explained at an R2N2 meeting that Native women felt they could not explicitly support abortion rights without playing into the government's hands and implicitly supporting population control policies.¹⁵⁶ Native American women were profoundly affected by coercive sterilization through population control policies; more than 40% of Native women of childbearing age had been sterilized by the Indian Health Service by the 1970s. Women had been 'coerced, through misinformation or threats, to undergo unnecessary and permanent sterilization' and 'unofficial reports stated that entire communities no longer had any fecund women due to this practice'.¹⁵⁷ For members of WARN, then, the population control question had reached crisis point, which prompted them to approach R2N2 to deliver the presentation in the first place.

Pat Rush and Carole Travers facilitated the project for R2N2. They envisaged an idealised coalition between R2N2 and WARN for the production and dissemination of this population control slideshow. It would enable R2N2 to expand and diversify their membership and network, and WARN to gain access to resources, funds, and a more public platform from R2N2. Rush and Travis' vision of the working relationship between R2N2 and WARN was more akin to

¹⁵⁵ 'R2N2 Chicago Conference' *CARASA News* 4:9 (November 1980) p. 4, in 'R2N2 Papers (Smith)', p. 2, Box 3, Folder 6

¹⁵⁶ 'Fall Mobilization Steering Committee (25th June 1979) p. 4, in 'Leslie Cagan Papers', Box 1, Folder 8

¹⁵⁷ Native American Women Health Education Resource Centre report, in 'Native American Women's Health Education Resource Centre Papers', Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, 11L,

the coalition strategy that emerged during the 1980s than the recruitment efforts of the previous decade. Travis wrote that R2N2 adopted the project as part of ongoing efforts to recognise and highlight struggles faced by women of colour both within the US and globally. Her approach to organizing drew on the lessons learned from ARAW and members' self-analysis: she wrote that 'our program is being developed with Native American women, not controlled by us'.¹⁵⁸ Rush and Travis saw R2N2 as taking a supportive role in a project led and shaped by WARN. Margie Fine, the director of R2N2 at the time, stated that the two organizations were initially 'meeting in the middle [...] since WARN was working on many things, and we were working with those rights'.¹⁵⁹ Before long, though, R2N2 adopted the project as their own, with WARN contributing to specific sections only. By May of 1981, Rush and Travis had decided to broaden the scope of the slideshow to discuss environmental factors, eugenics and Malthusian theory, and worldwide population control issues. WARN members contributed only to the 'Native peoples' section, which comprised of ten minutes out of the planned forty-minute presentation.¹⁶⁰ The joint work between R2N2 and WARN diminished. Rather than WARN taking a lead on the whole programme, their participation was limited to just one section of the project. Marlene Fried stated that

I don't know how much WARN actually was involved in the creation of it. And maybe that actually was one of the sticking points. My memory is that it was made by two people in Chicago.¹⁶¹

Travis and Rush were these two Chicagoans. Fried, then, reiterates that R2N2 took more control than WARN. WARN's relegation reinforced the unequal power relationships within the multiracial working group; though Travis and Rush stated that they wanted the relationship between them and WARN to be equal, in practise it was not. Even though the slideshow showed promise of being an effective multiracial coalition, ultimately R2N2 controlled the content of

¹⁵⁸ Minutes from the R2N2 National Conference (New York: March 27-29th, 1981) p. 4-5, in 'R2N2 Papers (Smith)', Box 1, Folder 4

¹⁵⁹ Fine, Interview with Author

¹⁶⁰ Letter to R2N2 members from Carole Travis and Pat Rush (May 16th, 1981) p. 2, in 'Reproductive Rights National Network Records, 1970-1982', Durham, NC, Duke University, Rubenstein Library, Box 1

¹⁶¹ Fried, 'Interview with Author'

the presentation and the extent of WARN's involvement, demonstrating a power disparity within the alliance.

The response of R2N2 members to the slideshow is telling of broader attitudes towards race and reproductive rights at the time. Karen Stamm communicated the potential value of using the topic of sterilization to form coalitions. She wrote that

S-1771¹⁶² presents wonderful opportunities for coalition work with just those groups we have been trying to reach: welfare rights, Native Americans, minority groups [...] It is not clear who should have the burden of organizing a coalition.¹⁶³

She went on to theorise about how and when to develop those coalitions:

1. Maybe the first step is to put education on our agendas.
2. Second step would be actively seeking out those people who would be targets and evaluating coalition strength, ie. is the organizational wherewithall [sic] present to focus an effective coalition? If there is not, I suggest we continue pushing others to incorporate opposition to [coercive sterilization] into their agendas, and re-evaluate again a few months later.¹⁶⁴

For Stamm, then, the issue of sterilization abuse and population control represented an ideal platform for R2N2 to develop the relationships across race that they had been seeking. However, she emphasised the need for R2N2 to take responsibility for educating themselves about race and to ascertain whether a coalition would be feasible and beneficial for prospective participants. This marks a different approach to Rush and Travis who, in the process of being educated about population control, steered the project in a direction that was more beneficial to R2N2 and thus took more control over the relationship.

Other R2N2 members responded critically to the way that race was represented in the slideshow. Jill Benderly claimed, 'I don't agree with the "white skin privilege" line. Unfortunately, the Puerto Rico and Native sections [of the presentation] seem to uphold that line'.¹⁶⁵ Another woman suggested that the 'detailed history on Puerto Rican and Native Americans took away from impact

¹⁶² S-1771 was a proposed bill to 'Establish National Population Policy'. It was aimed to attain 'balance' between different population characteristics, and linked questions of 'overpopulation', poverty and national security. It failed to pass in October 1981.

¹⁶³ Letter to R2N2 from Karen Stamm (Undated, c. 1981), in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Jill Benderly to Pat Rush and Carol Travis (29th November 1981) p. 4, in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

of what was/is happening', that it was not up to R2N2 to produce a slideshow on colonialism, and that Rush and Travis should 'have something on how difficult it is for white women to be sterilized – by choice'.¹⁶⁶ These members privileged discussing and defending the needs and experiences of white women over highlighting the experiences of women of colour. In particular, they prioritised discussing population control as a *gendered* issue rather than a racial one: Benderly commented that 'I think the slide show needs to pose the question "Why are women the prime immediate targets of pop. control/sterilization abuse?"', while Stephanie Roth commented that 'the show almost seems to de-emphasize the fact that women are victims of sterilization abuse for the most part'.¹⁶⁷ By downplaying the importance of race to the problem of population control, some R2N2 members perpetuated the notion of unity around sisterhood that had proven to be exclusionary and to have hindered multiracial activism – particularly coalition building – in the past.

Finally, R2N2 members considered how useful the slideshow was as a tool in their organizing. The slideshow project was simultaneously an example of R2N2's approach to organizing and a tool through which R2N2 members hoped to facilitate future multiracial activism. Some women, such as Sheila Medina and Badgie Rawkin, thought that the most powerful sections of the slideshow were those on women of colour, and requested that more information be made available to more fully educate the audience about women of colour to promote action.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, several women criticised the guilt-inducing tone of the slideshow, and suggested that this negative approach would not encourage the audience to take up anti-racist work.¹⁶⁹ The value of the slideshow, then, was measured both by the opportunity it provided for an attempt at multiracial coalition-building, and by the extent to which it would help to facilitate future anti-racist and multiracial organizing. Assessing the

¹⁶⁶ Unsigned letter to Carol T. and Pat R (undated, c. 1981) p. 1-3, in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Jill Benderley to Pat Rush and Carol Travis (29th November 1981) p. 4, in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1; Letter from Stephanie Roth to Pat Rush and Carol Travers (20th November 1981) p. 2 in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

¹⁶⁸ Sheila Medina, 'Notes on Slideshow' (undated, c. late 1981), in in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1; Badgie Rawkin, 'Suggestions for Slide Show' (Undated, c. late 1981), in in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Jill Benderley to Pat Rush and Carol Travis (29th November 1981) p. 4, in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1; Letter from Marie Jackson to Pat Rush and Carol Travers (10th January 1982) p. 1, in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

usefulness of the slideshow did, in some ways, mask the racial dynamics involved in the facilitation of the project itself.

Ultimately, R2N2's attempts towards multiracial work in creating the slideshow is telling of the organization's attempts to shift away from recruitment strategies and towards efforts in which women of colour led the project. Pat Rush and Carol Travis clearly drew on ideas of self-analysis from the preceding two years and used them to frame their approach theoretically. However, their practice continued to place white women in implicit leadership roles and characterised relationships with women of colour as a resource to be drawn upon, rather than as equal, equitable or mutually beneficial partnerships. The slideshow, then, represents a developing and evolving approach towards multiracial organizing strategies, and particularly towards the creation of effective coalitions.

R2N2's Final Conferences

The point at which R2N2 began to explicitly consider anti-racism a fundamental part of its reproductive rights agenda also marks the beginning of the end of the network. In late 1981, there was no 'official' R2N2 stance on racism, internally or externally.¹⁷⁰ Three years later, the network's stance on racism came to be one of its defining features – not least because it prompted its dissolution. By early 1985, R2N2 had experienced eighteen months of increasing tensions, debates, and declining membership. This gradual decline culminated in a disastrous final conference in November 1984, ironically entitled 'Beyond Rhetoric: The Realities of Multi-racial Organizing'. At this conference, racial tensions came to the fore and the fissures within the network developed into irreparable splits. The national network officially disbanded in early 1985.

Race, and race relations, were foundations of R2N2's national conferences from an early stage. The 1983 conference, held in New York, was entitled, 'Combatting Racism: Strengthening Local Work'. Organizers wanted their approaches to organizing the conference to reflect the anti-racist values that they hoped to develop and espouse at the conference itself. As such, they made funds available to groups of disadvantaged and low-income women so

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Jill Benderley to Pat Rush and Carol Travis (29th November 1981) p. 3, in 'R2N2 Records (Rubenstein)', Box 1

that they could attend the conference.¹⁷¹ Importantly, this ‘outreach’ strategy was not established to draw women of colour into the network; instead, it was a strategy of resource-sharing to try to include a diverse group of women. This marked a shift in R2N2 policy; the funding available for low-income groups in earlier conferences was used as a way of ‘organizing groups into the network’.¹⁷²

The 1983 conference demonstrates R2N2’s growing awareness of the need to include anti-racism work to create effective multiracial relationships. Earlier that year, four women – Margie Fine, Marlene Fried, Delores Nolan and Patsy Parker – suggested that R2N2 members should be encouraged to actively take up anti-racist work, and that the committee should develop an anti-racist organizing packet. In addition to this, they suggested the 1983 conference should hold a major plenary session on developing anti-racist strategy.¹⁷³ Accordingly, the conference featured a public panel entitled ‘Building an Anti-Racist/Multi-Racial Women’s Movement’, which brought together a multiracial group of activists to discuss the following questions:

Should women of color and white women work separately, in coalitions, or in the same organizations? Why or why not? What are the barriers, past and present? What are possible steps forward in bringing different parts of the women’s movement together and building an anti-racist/multi-racial movement?¹⁷⁴

White women in R2N2 recognised that they needed to discuss navigating multiracial organizing alongside women of colour, rather than simply assuming that they, as white women, understood the best ways to act. The questions raised demonstrate that R2N2 were becoming more open to multiracial work in a variety of forms – as separate entities, as coalitions, and within unified organizations. The 1983 conference was both an example of multiracial organizing, and a way for R2N2 to strategize for future multiracial work.

Efforts to understand race and multiracialism were not just outward-facing. There was a four-hour session entitled ‘Combatting Racism’, which

¹⁷¹ ‘Proposal for Funding of the 1983 R2N2 Annual Conference’ (Undated, c. Spring/Summer 1983) p. 1, in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Folder 15

¹⁷² R2N2 Report of Activities (Undated, c. September 1982) p. 8, in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Folder 9

¹⁷³ Proposal for Continuing R2N2’s Anti-Racist Work (1983), in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Folder 9

¹⁷⁴ ‘Proposal for Funding of the 1983 R2N2 Annual Conference’ (Undated, c. Spring/Summer 1983) p. 1, in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Folder 15

included a presentation on institutional and personal racism, and included group work on developing strategies for 'interrupting racism both in one's personal life and in one's political work'.¹⁷⁵ Conference organizers of R2N2 were cognizant of the need to identify and tackle internalised racism within the organization's broader membership as well as the leadership. Indeed, organizers saw the 1983 conference as an opportunity to improve their understanding of racism in their work and to learn from their experiences to develop an anti-racist agenda for the future. To do so, they asked respondents to 'address the degree to which each aspect of the conference incorporated an anti-racist [...] perspective' in their evaluation forms.¹⁷⁶

Despite these efforts to ensure that R2N2's work was grounded in an anti-racist approach, the 1983 conference prompted criticism on the basis of race. Maude Bollock and Glenda Dodson, representing an organization of lesbians of colour from Virginia, stated that R2N2's commitment to working on an anti-racist agenda was a deciding factor in their attendance. However, they found the 'Combatting Racism' plenary to be long and dull, without scope for proper discussion. The real catastrophe, however, occurred on the first day, and highlighted the extent of R2N2's shortcomings in tackling their own racism.

The conference organizers had arranged for a comedy skit on the history of birth control. The comedy troupe consisted of white woman, and the performance ultimately had to be stopped due to its insensitivity to racial difference. Women of colour reported that the skit had featured 'examples [that] were vividly racist mockeries of women of color – the first an image of a woman in furs committing infanticide, the second a [sic] image of a woman complete with mask, mariachis, music and mocked tribal dance practicing magic'.¹⁷⁷ Bollock and Dodson described the skit as 'steeped in racism and condescension of birth control methods still practised by many Third World womyn', and criticised the 'coordinators of R2N2 (who admittedly saw a tape of the garbage beforehand) [for being] unable to see the overt racism'.¹⁷⁸ Women

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Reproductive Rights National Network Conference Evaluation 1983 (1983) p. 1, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 9

¹⁷⁷ Alliance Against Women's Oppression, Summation of the AAWO Intervention at the R2N2 Conference (Undated, c. October 1983), p. 2, in 'Alliance Against Women's Oppression Papers', Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Box 4, Folder 2

¹⁷⁸ Maude Bollock and Glenda Dodson, 'Virginia's Mixed Views', *Taking Control* (Spring 1984)

of colour at the conference were offended both by the skit itself, and by the reaction of the white women present, who 'seemed more concerned with not hurting the performers' feelings than they were with addressing the issue of racism'.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, white women watching did nothing to stop the skit, and it was not until a woman of colour stepped in that it was halted. Marlene Fried recalls that:

[A]s one of the people who is watching this, I was just thinking, how could this be going on, why isn't someone stopping it? But I did not move to stop it, nor did any other white person. And finally, I think it was Vicki Alexander - a woman of colour stopped it. Why didn't all us white people who were supposed to be thinking about race, how come we just didn't do anything? [...] the fact that we did not was itself a profound problem and seemed to indicate that we were clueless about racism and not prioritizing dealing with it.¹⁸⁰

White women's non-intervention suggested to many women of colour in attendance that their attitudes towards anti-racist work were more rhetorical than practical. Bollock and Dodson observed that they 'thought they were dealing with the issue, but in fact many have had the language down but not the action'.¹⁸¹ Organizers from the Alliance Against Women's Oppression, a multiracial group of women of colour, stated that 'the dominant orientation was on the ideological level, focused on the issue of racism within the women's movement and not consistently connecting it to the question of anti-racist organizing around abortion or other R2 work'.¹⁸² This critique is one which can be identified repeatedly in the history of R2N2, and indeed, most white feminist organizing in the period. Indeed, Jennifer Nelson asserts that many white women who espoused the rhetoric of multiracial activism failed to critically engage with the different experiences and issues faced by women of colour on the basis of racial and class discrimination, and were unwilling to relinquish their own power.¹⁸³

in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Box 12

¹⁷⁹ Jennifer Lynch, 'Feminists Confer on Racial Gaps', *Columbia Daily Spectator*, 10 October 1983 <[¹⁸⁰ Fried, 'Interview with Author'](http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19831010-01.2.6&srpos=&div=none&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->> [accessed 23 June 2017],]</p>
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¹⁸¹ Maude Bollock and Glenda Dodson, 'Virginia's Mixed Views', p. 11

¹⁸² Alliance Against Women's Oppression, Summation of the AAWO Intervention at the R2N2 Conference (Undated, c. October 1983), p. 9, in 'AAWO Papers', Box 4, Folder 2

¹⁸³ Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*, p. 7

Other moments in the 1983 conference reiterate both R2N2's efforts to change their working practises and the blunders that they made in the process. Marlene Fried recalled an exercise in which the trainers at the conference put up signs labelled with different ethnic and racial identities. They asked delegates to stand under the designation that best described their identity, and Fried remembered that 'literally no-one [went] to stand under Caucasian'. Instead, they congregated under

some other identification – Italian, Jewish – because people so much did not want to embrace their white privilege [...] I think people just couldn't, because to acknowledge it was to say that you were part of the power structure, you were racist. Failure to acknowledge this was a real disaster.¹⁸⁴

The reluctance of R2N2's membership to engage with their white privilege was a stumbling block in their efforts to create multiracial coalitions. R2N2's focus on tackling racism was alienating for some white women in the network. In July 1984, the steering committee circulated a letter to its membership urgently requesting funds and input on a decision to restructure in order to continue the organization, which they considered to be in crisis. One of the causes for this crisis was the declining participation of white women, which the steering committee believed to be as a direct result of their 'commitment within the network to take up the issue of racism'.¹⁸⁵ As with the sterilization abuse slideshow, then, leaders and decision-makers in R2N2 seem to have embraced the importance of anti-racism work, but this did not necessarily trickle down to the rank and file of the network.

While the exercise demonstrated white women's reluctance to engage fully with anti-racist work, or to deny their role in institutional racism, it also prompted 'segregated' small group sessions that were loosely designated as consciousness-raising sessions. They were deemed important spaces by women of colour because they provided a 'safe space to talk'. Women of colour considered them necessary for two reasons; first, so that different women of colour had a 'time and place to get together and discuss', and second, because 'white women tend[ed] not to see themselves as a group'.¹⁸⁶ In the R2N2

¹⁸⁴ Fried, 'Interview with Author'

¹⁸⁵ Letter from R2N2 Steering Committee to R2N2 Membership (July 26th, 1984) p. 1, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 15

¹⁸⁶ Handwritten notes, 'TW Caucus Mtg', (8th October 1983), p. 2 in 'AAWO Papers', Box 4,

conference, then, women of colour hoped that racially autonomous spaces would simultaneously provide them with a space to discuss the kind of women's movement that they wanted to build, and prompt white women to engage with their own racialised experiences and privileges. If white women engaged in anti-racist self-examination in these spaces, they believed, it would enable more effective future organizing across race.

The Network renewed its commitment to organizing multiracially when planning the 1984 conference. In July, the steering committee outlined their ideas for the conference, including the date and location – but stated that the plans were being 'firmed up in coordination with the women of color task force' that had been established the previous year.¹⁸⁷ The steering committee – a multiracial group – demonstrated their desire to involve women of colour in decision-making. The conference itself appeared multiracial; of the forty attendees, over one-quarter were women of colour. However, the outcome of the conference demonstrated that R2N2's efforts to be inclusive did not had gone far enough.

Stephanie Poggi, a white woman at the conference, referred to the event as a 'serious turning-point for the network', and one that was an 'excruciatingly painful experience'.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, Cathy Christellar and Sally Wood, two white women from WORC reported that the conference was the 'singularly most painful weekend of collective failure [they] had ever lived through'.¹⁸⁹ The whole weekend focussed on race and combatting racism within both the network and the broader reproductive rights movement. The conference opened with a steering committee report which described efforts that the Network had made to make the committee itself more multiracial. This included writing a history of efforts within R2N2 to broaden and diversify the network. Generally, the statement suggested that R2N2 was committed to anti-racism from its conception, but also acknowledged that there had been stumbling blocks and

Folder 2

¹⁸⁷ Letter from R2N2 Steering Committee to R2N2 Membership (July 26th, 1984) p. 2, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 15

¹⁸⁸ Stephanie Poggi and others, Report from White Women on the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) Conference, 1984 (Undated, c. January 1985) p. 1, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 14

¹⁸⁹ Letter from Cathy Christellar and Sally Wood to WORC, Report from National Meeting, 1984 (Undated, c. Winter 1984) p. 1, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 14

mistakes made along the way. Those mistakes, the statement said, were 'important step[s] in beginning to address the political, personal and ideological questions relating to racism and the reproductive rights movement'.¹⁹⁰ Rather than apologising for the mistakes made by R2N2, the steering committee emphasised how they would use them as a learning tool, guided by the advice of women of colour in the network.

This process of acknowledging past mistakes and seeking education from women of colour to achieve multiracial organizing marked a turning point for the organization. It both represented a point at which white leaders of R2N2 stepped back and encouraged women of colour to take the lead in achieving and facilitating multiracial work in the network, and the point at which race and racial tensions split the network in two. Immediately after the statement was delivered, women at the conference split into a group of white women and a group of women of colour to reflect on the statement, R2N2's work, and on how to further develop R2N2's anti-racist stance. The discussions and resulting statements from these separate sessions are indicative of the tensions that ultimately led to R2N2's dissolution. In this case, racially autonomous caucusing represented a response to a moment of crisis. The group of white women discussed local organizing, including successes and failures in building multi-racial and anti-racist groups, as well as a general discussion of the political climate for their work. They did not realise until halfway through their meeting that they were not specifically addressing their role as white women within R2N2; they did not acknowledge their own racial identity or the ways in which their race affected their organizing.¹⁹¹ This difficulty in seeing or analysing their own white privilege stood in the way of creating effective multiracial coalitions.

The statement made by the group of women of colour was to the point and damning. They said:

Just listen carefully. We came here to work on reproductive rights issues. [...] We came here finding that we can't work on these issues, that we can't be who we are, and instead we spend all of our time

¹⁹⁰ Copy of the Presentation made by the Steering Committee to R2N2 Representatives at our National Meeting in November, 1984 (November 1984) p. 4, in 'National Women's Health Network (NWHN) Papers', Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Box 173, Folder 11

¹⁹¹ Stephanie Poggi and others, Report from White Women on the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) Conference, 1984 (Undated, c. January 1985) p. 3, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 14,

working on educating white women. Our position is that this is also our network [...] but we can no longer remain in an oppressive situation which amounts to working on racism as a separate issue rather than as an integral part of everything we do. [...] We do believe that multi-racial coalition is still possible. We hope you will use this experience to confront racism amongst yourselves which is the primary barrier to multi-racial organizing.¹⁹²

The women of colour at the conference called out white women for failing to prioritize racism in their discussions around everyday activism. The white women at the conference drafted a second statement on Saturday evening which stressed their responsibility to cope with their own racism, challenge each other and the need to reassess the structure and function of the network so that it worked at all levels as an anti-racist group. They said:

We know that the fight for reproductive freedom is not separate from the fight against racism. We recognize that our commitment to an anti-racist, multi-racial network must be reflected in our work on all levels – our structure as a network, our politics, and the direction of our organizing. Our good intentions are not enough; saying we don't mean to be racist doesn't mean that we are not racist. [...] The tasks for white women in the network are different from the tasks of women of color in the network and different from those of the network as a whole. It is the responsibility of white women to work with and challenge each other on our racism [...] not just in R2N2, but in our lives.¹⁹³

Once again, white women in R2N2 were emphasising their strong desire to work multiracially and to create an organizational atmosphere which was conducive to working across race with an anti-racist approach to reproductive rights activism. The white women's statement demonstrated their emerging understanding that the (often fundamentally) different identities and experiences of women in the network meant that they had different priorities and obligations. For the attending women of colour, though, this was too little and too late. They voted to leave R2N2 and create an autonomous women of colour network, while leaving the opportunity for future coalitions between the groups open. A group of white women met in the following January to discuss the future of R2N2, but ultimately decided that they did not want to continue as a racially autonomous group of white women. At this point, R2N2 officially dissolved as a national network.

¹⁹² Statement from the Women of Color Task Force (11th November 1984) in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 14

¹⁹³ Statement by White Women at R2N2 Conference (11th November 1984) p. 1 in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 14

In the months following the conference, several white women who had been members of R2N2 reflected on this final event and tried to make sense of what these tensions and difficulties meant in terms of multi-racial and anti-racist activism in the feminist movement. Elissa Clark, from Detroit, described the end of R2N2 as ‘a loss for the women’s liberation movement’.¹⁹⁴ Bonnie Gordon, a member of R2N2 from Austin, Texas, felt that it was

especially sad that R2N2 should be destroyed in debates over racism when it was clearly the only predominantly white group to ever attempt to deal with and cope with racism both internal, within the pro-choice movement, and external, in society as reflected in racist reproductive policies.¹⁹⁵

Gordon attributed the end of R2N2 to fundamentally different understandings and goals of white women and women of colour. Women of colour, she suggested, would have put up with the racism within the organization if they thought the Network was meeting a real need. Gordon suggested that ‘the primary political focus of the women of color task force is not reproductive rights in general but racism as it affects reproductive policies. This is reasonable certainly, but it can’t be the focus of R2N2’.¹⁹⁶ Gordon’s attitude, here, suggests that she believed that an anti-racist stance was secondary to a focus on reproductive rights organizing – implying that she did not believe that the two could mesh effectively. This notion that reproductive rights organizing and anti-racist organizing were separate entities was one that created a barrier for multiracial organizing, as women of colour understood white women, or their organizations, as paying lip service to combatting racism but considering it a lower priority than their ‘other’ work.

This was not to say, though, that Gordon did not recognise that white women needed to work on race. She believed that they should be responsible for dealing with their own racism, but did not believe ‘they [were] capable of self-educating and changing without help and understanding from women of color’.¹⁹⁷ After reading the statements written at the conference, she stated that ‘it is obvious that the white women are trying desperately to appease the

¹⁹⁴ Letter from Elissa Clarke to ‘Sisters’ (7th May 1985) in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Folder 15

¹⁹⁵ Letter from Bonnie Gordon to Marlene Fried et al, (15th May 1985) p. 2, in ‘Marlene Fried Papers’, Folder 15

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

women of color and not knowing how'.¹⁹⁸ Gordon's use of the term 'appease' is telling of the attitudes of many white women in R2N2; they felt as though they were acceding to the demands of women of colour by embracing progressive rhetoric and trying to apply an intersectional analysis and methodology to their organizing. Many white women – including Gordon – encouraged white women to draw upon women of colour for education and guidance. In this scenario, white women would have gained knowledge, understanding and support from women of colour, while not reciprocating that support by prioritising anti-racism work. Gordon's attitude towards multiracial work prioritised the needs of white women above women of colour. This fundamental inability to clearly see or understand internalised racism made multiracial work challenging for R2N2 leaders and membership.

R2N2's difficulties in negotiating the shift from recruitment to coalition strategies illustrate the multiplicity of factors that came into creating effective or successful multiracial activism. Many white women in R2N2 were committed to anti-racist work and tackling their own personal and organizational racism in theory, but it did not always translate into practice. Their rhetoric of internal education and of tackling internalised racism marks an important moment in the history of multiracial activism. Women of colour had been calling for white feminist organizations to tackle their own white privilege and racist attitudes. Only when they had done that could multiracial work succeed – whether in organizations, coalitions or alliances. Unfortunately, R2N2's self-analysis of internalised racism did not turn into effective practical action that could have ensured amicable working relationships across race. As a result, their efforts to forge and sustain successful multiracial relationships were fraught with difficulties and tension.

R2N2's story is not, however, one of total failure. It represents a changing social movement context in which white-dominated feminist groups were beginning to acknowledge, recognise, and understand the need for tackling their own institutional and personal racisms. White women's attitudes towards multiracial organizing were changing from the idea that white-dominated organizations could diversify themselves by 'doing' outreach and

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

recruiting women of colour, to one that acknowledged the need to make personal changes (both theoretical and practical) to make multiracial work feasible. This shift was fundamentally important in the evolution from recruitment and outreach to coalition and alliance-building. After the dissolution of the formal network, a number of white women from R2N2 formed an informal network which placed anti-racism as central to its existence.¹⁹⁹ R2N2's efforts, breakthroughs, tensions, difficulties and failures all contributed to developing a broader understanding of racial relations and racism within feminism – which in turn contributed to changes in the ways that multiracial work was attempted in the future.

¹⁹⁹ Stephanie Poggi and others, Report from White Women on the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) Conference, 1984 (Undated, c. January 1985) p. 3, in 'Marlene Fried Papers', Folder 14

Ch. 3: In Defense of Roe

On Friday 7th and Saturday 8th April, 1989, one hundred and forty women convened at the Quality Inn Hotel in Washington DC. Groups of women from 24 different states had travelled from across the country to attend the *In Defense of Roe* (IDOR) conference. The main priority of this conference, according to the organizers, was building multiracial-coalitions at the local level.²⁰⁰ Other conference objectives included developing a 'broadbased commitment to defend *Roe*, to develop new strategies to defend *Roe*, and to develop strategies to go beyond *Roe* to ensure reproductive rights for all women'.²⁰¹ For the coalition that organized the event – led by the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project, RCAR's Women of Color Partnership Program (WOCPP), and supported by NOW's Women of Color Programs – creating successful coalitions across race was a prerequisite to being able to effectively work towards reproductive rights.

Participants worked in small groups and heard from notable speakers in their efforts to identify the most important reproductive rights issues facing women at the grassroots and to communicate them to reproductive rights leaders. The focus on including grassroots women at IDOR meant that many women of colour participated alongside white women. Because the conference was created in a multiracial way from the beginning, it was not interpreted as women of colour entering a space controlled by white women as default. This was fundamentally important in the creation of multiracial coalitions.

The multiracial organizing committee wanted both to create a multiracial conference and to use the conference as a tool to promote the coalition strategy for future organizing. For them, establishing a multiracial organizing team was important from the start. Kate McGee of the ACLU wrote to Loretta Ross in January 1989, inviting her to be a member of the core planning committee. Her participation was crucial, according to McGee, because 'if this Conference [was] to meet its goal of including the previously excluded women's voices, it [the committee] must itself be a model of inclusion'.²⁰² For the planning committee of

²⁰⁰ Silliman, p. 44

²⁰¹ In Defense Of Roe Conference report, p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁰² Letter from Kate McGee to Loretta Ross (18th January 1989) p. 1 in 'Ross Papers', Box 34, Folder 11,

IDOR, then, the means of creating multiracial inclusivity needed to match the ends. The seven-person core planning committee for IDOR was diverse, both racially and organizationally. RCAR alone represented 31 abortion rights groups and religious organizations of different denominations. Representatives of a wide variety of different organizations all provided insight into how best to organize a multiracial event around reproductive rights.

RCAR's WOCPP provided a strong base from which the conference organizers developed their ideas. The project, developed in 1985 and co-ordinated by Judy Logan-White, aimed to 'set the stage for dialogue, and to begin to build bridges between minority women and the secular and religious community'.²⁰³ Its primary work was to bring together diverse women of colour to 'focus on strategies for improving RCAR's programs to be multiculturally inclusive [and] also address ways that the religious freedom and reproductive healthcare movements can involve people in color in their agendas and activities'.²⁰⁴ To do this, the WOCPP envisaged developing networks between local, state and national organizations with similar concerns as a strategy for 'mov[ing] the reproductive rights issue onto the agenda of women of color'.²⁰⁵ Reproductive rights education between communities of women of colour would create the foundation for these networks, and those networks in turn would educate more women of the need for reproductive rights organizing by women of colour. The *In Defense of Roe* conference has clear roots in the WOCPP. Both IDOR and the WOCPP emphasised the importance of women of colour being able to inform white women's agendas and shape the broader reproductive rights agenda, the necessity of racially autonomous spaces for women of colour within larger white organizations or spaces, and the value of creating and drawing on networks to facilitate multiracial organizing.

The IDOR committee drew on existing networks to ensure racial diversity at the conference. The conference itself also became a platform for considerable education and discussion across racial lines, which contributed to

²⁰³ Video 14, *Between Ourselves: A Black Women's Reproductive Rights Forum*, 1:14-2:08 (1986) in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', M2010-020

²⁰⁴ Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights Education Fund, *Options*, 12:2 (Spring 1985) back page, in 'Ross Papers', Box 35, Folder 1

²⁰⁵ Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights Women of Color Partnership Project Vision Statement (December 1985) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 35, Folder 3

developing participants' understandings and attitudes towards coalition building and the strategies that they could use to create effective multiracial coalitions. Importantly, organizers saw IDOR as an opportunity for women of colour to be in control of the agenda and thus inform white women on how to better approach multiracial work. This case-study demonstrates how this multiracial group understood coalition building as fundamentally important for future organizing around reproductive rights – and the extent to which education, networking and racially autonomous spaces played significant roles.

Drawing on and Building Networks

The process that the organizing committee used to reach participants was designed to create a diverse group. Rather than advertising the conference and trying to attract participants, the planning committee targeted 'activists and community organizers who have been successful in organizing for action within their communities, [and] who have not participated in [...] long term national strategizing on reproductive rights issues'.²⁰⁶ The committee initially had conflicting ideas about how to target these grassroots organizers. In a meeting on January 26th, 1989, the core planners wrote

Don't go after people by organizations – find them through the jobs that they do, other alternative means [and] known personal networks.²⁰⁷

However, at the next meeting on 10th February, the committee decided to prioritise their organizational networks over personal ones. They sent letters to the leaders of NARAL, the ACLU, the National Abortion Federation (NAF), Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), NOW, Planned Parenthood and several others. They invited the leaders to the conference, as well as encouraging some of them to identify and invite some of their 'best, most creative grassroots activists'.²⁰⁸ Leaders from NARAL, the ACLU, NOW, Planned Parenthood and RCAR – sometimes known as the 'big five' of abortion/reproductive rights organizations - were allocated five spaces each for additional participants, while the NAF were allocated two. For other groups, like CFFC, the invitation was

²⁰⁶ Conference Proposal, p. 1

²⁰⁷ Minutes from 26 January 1989 meeting (26th January 1989) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 34, Folder 11,

²⁰⁸ Minutes for In Defense of Roe Conference Meeting (10th February 1989) p. 2, in 'Ross Papers', Box 34, Folder 11; Conference proposal, p. 1,

extended only to the leader of the organization. The decision to rely on the networks of these 'mainstream' organizations might seem counterintuitive given the organizers' desire to attract grassroots activists who did not have a long history of national activism. However, as one of the primary objectives of the conference was to provide a platform for discussion and education between grassroots activists and leaders of large organizations, this approach may have been considered an efficient way to ensure a good mixture of those active at the top levels of organizations as well as at the grassroots.

Conference organizers applied several caveats to these invitations. In a letter to Kate Michelman from NARAL, for example, Janet Benshoof (of the ACLU) requested that Michelman identify the 'most imaginative grass roots activists' that she worked with, and added that, 'to the extent that women of color fit this bill, we hope that you will invite these individuals'.²⁰⁹ While stopping short of explicitly demanding that their nominated invitees be women of colour, these letters made it clear that racial diversity was a central aim. The committee also made scholarships available, and requested that endorsers of the conference (such as NOW and NARAL, etc.) both funded their own invited participants *and* contributed financially towards a scholarship fund.²¹⁰ By fully funding certain participants' attendance, the committee hoped to guarantee both class and race diversity.

When discussing recruitment tactics, Ross emphasised that it was 'really important to reach out to where women of colour were, versus where we thought they should be'.²¹¹ The organizers recognized a disparity between the spaces that they thought would be most conducive to effective work across race and bridge-building, and those in which women of colour were active and organizing at the time. The organizers recognised that 'many women, particularly women of color, would not be affiliated with national organizations and [they] would have to collect names by calling people and following-up', rather than simply send out a call for delegates as conferences more frequently did.²¹² Drawing on organizers' pre-existing networks of contacts – particularly

²⁰⁹ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Kate Michelman (15th February 1989) p. 1-2, in 'Ross Papers', Box 34, Folder 11

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

²¹¹ Ross, 'Interview with Author', p. 54

²¹² In Defense Of Roe Conference report, p. 5, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

those networks of women of colour, community organizers and working-class women - was an effective way of doing this.

Through these networks, the organizers hoped to reach participants already active at the community level, and particularly those who did not already have a record of working within larger national or institutional feminist spaces. Using existing organizational networks as a form of recruitment ensured that the people who attended the conference were representative of a diverse range of women, but shared similar goals. Loretta Ross's efforts to attract women to *In Defense of Roe* were indicative of this. By drawing on networks that she had created in her position of co-ordinator of NOW's Women of Color programs, she acted as a bridge between the large, white-dominated feminist organization and different constituencies of women of colour who worked at the grassroots level. Ross was a prominent figure in the reproductive justice movement among women of colour and a key member of the planning committee for IDOR. She was central in efforts to reach out to existing community activists and drew on her own networks that she had built whilst working with women of colour around reproductive rights throughout the 1980s.

Existing Networks: *Between Ourselves* and the National Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference

For Ross, *In Defense of Roe* seemed like a natural progression from a series of regional forums that she helped to organize in 1986-7 and a National Women of Colour and Reproductive Rights conference held at Howard University in 1987. The 'Between Ourselves' forums were held in Chicago, Atlanta, Washington DC, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Hartford, CT. Like *In Defense of Roe*, these forums and the conference were part-organized by RCAR's WOCPP, but the primary organizer was NOW, through their Women of Color Programs.

Ross launched NOW's Women of Color programs in December 1985 to encourage diversity at NOW's March for Women's Lives the following year. These programmes ensured that race, and the issue of racial diversity, became a significant talking point within NOW. Women in the National Organization for Women were beginning to recognise what women in more radical groups had established five years earlier – that special efforts towards racial diversity that went beyond strategies of recruitment were necessary to create the kind of

multiracial activism that they wanted. The planning for the Between Ourselves forums, and the subsequent conference, represented this emerging attitude.

NOW first established a National Committee on Minority Women in 1977, which aimed to eradicate racism and identify 'minority' NOW members. Its purpose was to 'insure th[at] the concerns and needs of minority women [were] fully represented in the program of NOW to elevate the status of all women to full equality'.²¹³ The formation of the Committee marked a new commitment to tackling racism within NOW. Sharon Parker, chair of the committee from 1977 to 1980, wrote to Dorothy Height from the National Council of Negro Women introducing the new committee and its aims. Their two major areas of concern, she wrote, were

Identifying and coalescing minority people within the organization with respect to making the whole organization more responsive to the needs and concerns of minority people; and reaching out to minority people in general with respect to furthering the philosophy of feminism and overcoming the dual problem of racism and sexism.²¹⁴

At this point, the National Committee was focussed on creating cohesive groups of women of colour within the organization and using those groups to educate white women about issues faced by women of colour, as well as educating women of colour about feminism. By 1983, the committee's name was changed to the Committee to Combat Racism, because 'NOW leadership felt the focus of the committee should be on the broader issue of combating racism and the need to educate the membership and public on the issue of racism'.²¹⁵ The focus of the education shifted in these years; in 1977, NOW wanted to learn from groups of women of colour within the organization, and by 1983 they wanted to teach the public (as well as their membership) about racism. Education remained central to NOW's strategies for reconciling racial tensions throughout this period and into Loretta Ross's tenure.

In 1985, NOW created the position of Director of Women of Color Programs for Ross. Ross took the position, though was sceptical about its

²¹³ NOW Minority Women's History (Undated, c. 1983), in 'Ross Papers', Box 24, Folder 5

²¹⁴ Letter from Sharon Parker to Dorothy Height (18th October 1977) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 24, Folder 5,

²¹⁵ NOW Minority Women's History (Undated, c. 1983), in 'Ross Papers', Box 24, Folder 5,

purpose. She recalled that when she was offered the job, she said to Molly Yard, a prominent staffer and future chair of NOW:

You all seem to think the job of the minority rights staff person is to recruit minority women into NOW. And frankly, I don't have that kind of power. Not only that, I don't have that ambition. I really don't know if I want to be the one bringing women of color into NOW. Frankly, I'm not sure if I want to be the woman of color in NOW, much less to be the bridge by which other women walk into NOW.²¹⁶

Ross perceived NOW's previous efforts at diversifying the organization as firmly rooted within traditional strategies of recruitment. This, she stated, had to change. Rather than trying to recruit more women of colour into NOW, Ross highlighted the importance of making NOW more attractive to women of colour so that the women of colour who did join remained part of the organization, rather than leaving again quickly. To do this, she stated that they

dropped both recruitment efforts and the word itself, because the word recruit implies that our agenda and efforts do not convince women of color to join us; they must be "recruited", much as the military needs to recruit a few good men. This sexist, militaristic term is alienating to women of color and should offend every woman who hears it.²¹⁷

Moving away from a 'recruitment' approach, then, was to move away from offensive assumptions about the priorities of women of colour and about NOW's organizational tactics. To this end, Ross's strategy of changing NOW's working practice, rather than assuming that women of colour would want to be involved, seems to have worked. The Between Ourselves conference marked a change in NOW's strategies to attract women of colour into the organization. By centring women of colour's participation in their national agenda, they discovered that 'women of color membership is up, and women of color do not have to be recruited (in the classic sense), but in fact, will attend those activities that are by, for and about them'.²¹⁸

It was in this context of trying to make NOW more attractive to women of colour that Ross helped to organize the Between Ourselves forums and conference. Ross invited all women of colour in NOW to attend these forums to

²¹⁶ Loretta Ross and Joyce Follett, Interview, 2004, Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, p. 185

²¹⁷ Loretta Ross, quoted in Jennifer Nelson, *More than Medicine: A History of the Feminist Women's Health Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), p. 188

²¹⁸ NOW Women of Color Programs, Conference Program (Undated, c.1987) p. 1, in 'NWHN Papers', Box 88, Folder 10

'identify [their] collective resources and to organize against the right-wing attacks on our reproductive rights'.²¹⁹ In addition, she invited women of colour active in large pro-choice organizations to attend. She told them to 'send women of color, if they're not the president [...] if they're in your shipping department, you need to have women of color speaking on behalf of your organization'.²²⁰ She wanted to create spaces where women of colour were a majority and could discuss 'how best to impact a reproductive rights movement that often neglected their needs and demands', and described the forums as part of local mobilizing for the NOW March for Women's Lives planned in 1989.²²¹ In some ways, then, the Between Ourselves forums were recruitment tools in themselves; by creating racially autonomous spaces for women of colour to discuss their own reproductive health issues within the larger institutional context of NOW, Ross hoped to create a network of women of colour that NOW could draw on for future organizing.

This did not, however, preclude the forums being important sites of work and organizing themselves. Ross remembers that the most important outcome of those forums was

the relationships. Just like the white girls had their little girls' network, those of us who did that work in the '80s, we formed our own little girls' network [...] A lot of stuff has emerged out of those networks we had established.²²²

To that end, it seems that the Between Ourselves forums, and the networks and relationships that they prompted, were useful precursors to *In Defense of Roe*. For Loretta Ross, the relationships that they created were vital to the continuation of the reproductive rights movement. In a speech at *In Defense of Roe*, she stated

I was very proud in 1987 to be an organizer of the first national conference that we as women of color ever held on women of color on reproductive rights. And all of y'all that was [t]here came back. I love it. I love it. With that conference, my goal was very simple. I wasn't trying to change the thrust and direction of the reproductive rights movement [...] I wasn't trying to say we were going to conquer the world. The goal of that very first conference was simply to get to know each other. And I think we did that. We came back just on a

²¹⁹ Letter from Loretta Ross to NOW Members (21st January 1986), in 'Additional NOW Records', Cambridge, MA, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, M666, Box 337, Folder 1,

²²⁰ Loretta Ross, quoted in Nelson, *More than Medicine*, p. 168

²²¹ Nelson, *More than Medicine*, p. 168

²²² Ross and Follett, p. 191

couple of phone calls knowing that we've taken our places in the movement.²²³

The Between Ourselves events played a fundamental role in the eyes of Ross. She believed that the conference marked an entrance into the reproductive rights movement for many women of colour. The networks that Between Ourselves participants created formed the foundation for future organizing by women of colour around reproductive rights, and so provided an easily accessible pool of women to call on for *In Defense of Roe*.

The Between Ourselves forums were designed by and for women of colour. Judy Logan-White, director of the WOCPP, explained that the forums' programmes had been carefully curated to ensure 'total ethnic representation', both in the planning of and in the participation of the forums.²²⁴ This was partially a result of Loretta Ross's efforts to draw women of colour towards the events. Ross recalled that very few women of colour groups were standing up explicitly and specifically for reproductive rights, and so she looked elsewhere to attract women of colour. She drew on the networks that she had created when she was the director of a rape crisis centre in Washington D.C. and had organized the first women of colour and violence conference in 1980. By approaching women of colour who worked in the violence against women movement and within domestic violence shelters, she was able to tap into communities of women of colour who already had a feminist consciousness but 'had not crossed the bridge to talking about reproductive rights'.²²⁵ Ross clearly understood the importance and efficacy of drawing on existing networks to create a desired constituency. She continued to use this strategy to draw together a delegation for the 1987 Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference that emerged directly from the Between Ourselves forums, and when seeking delegates for *In Defense of Roe*.

The different Between Ourselves forums and conference had varying levels of racial diversity. Each forum attracted diverse women of colour, but not all included white women. While white women's attendance was not prohibited, there were mixed reactions to their involvement and participation. At one of the

²²³ IDOR Conference Report, p. 55, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²²⁴ Letter from Judy Logan-White (28th June 1986), in 'Ross Papers', Box 35, Folder 4

²²⁵ Ross, 'Interview with Author',

regional forums, Loretta Ross addressed the participants about their decisions as organizers about whether to invite white women to the forums. She said

Another issue we considered was whether this meeting should be closed to women of color. We decided no, not yet, and I stress the yet. Cos we have first to build and grow our strength. Our relative isolation and vulnerability over our reproduction necessitates our working in broad coalitions, so our strength and numbers have time to develop. I must at this time acknowledge the white women who called and asked if they were allowed to attend. I was happy to answer 'yes', not only because they were welcome, but because we were being asked [...] The women's movement has come a long way when that question becomes a naturally occurring thought than an arrogant assumption.²²⁶

Ensuring that the forums were spaces for racial diversity – but acknowledging the potential for future racially autonomous organizing – indicates Ross's attitude towards multiracial coalition building. Her recognition that coalitions were useful to women of colour primarily to strengthen their own positions was one that many women of colour wanted to express to the 'mainstream' movement, and that many white organizations were just beginning to grasp. In the case of most of the Between Ourselves forums, this meant that organizers specifically reached out to women of colour, but did not exclude white women. This active recruitment of women of colour and acceptance of white women illuminates the type of audience organizers hoped to create, and by extension, the types of networks that they wanted to establish and develop.

Feedback forms from the Washington D.C. forum suggested that attitudes towards the racial diversity at the events varied. Unlike some of the other forums, no white women attended the D. C. event. One woman suggested that a representative from Planned Parenthood (a white dominated, 'mainstream' organization) would have been beneficial – but was quick to point out that there were local black members of Planned Parenthood who could have spoken. She also expressed a desire to see speakers of Hispanic, Chinese and South Asian backgrounds.²²⁷ For this woman, then, hearing from women of diverse racial backgrounds was important. Another woman expressed satisfaction that the event was exclusively attended by women of

²²⁶ Video 14, *Between Ourselves: A Black Women's Reproductive Rights Forum*, 4:16-5:09 (1986), in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', M2010-020

²²⁷ Washington D.C. Conference Evaluation Forms, in 'Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC/RCAR) Papers: Additions', Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, M93-146, Box 7, Folder 10

colour. She indicated that she found the forum 'excellent', writing that 'I really appreciate[d] the fact that this event was pure and void of whites'.²²⁸ For some women of colour who were present, then, the lack of white participation made the forum more powerful. In the Atlanta forum, on the other hand, white women felt welcomed; one woman wrote, 'as a white [woman] attending the conference I feel very good about it. I felt well accepted and that's nice'.²²⁹ Similarly, Ruth Poisson, who attended the San Francisco forum, identified herself as 'an Anglo-American' and chairperson of RCAR in California. She described the conference as 'informative, illuminating, and worth my time' and suggested that she learned much from the discussions that women of colour had. She wondered whether RCAR's work would change as a result of the conference, and emphasised the benefits of holding specific discussions between white organizations and women of colour to understand what changes they would and could make.²³⁰ Poisson's response to the forum reflects one of the main aims of Between Ourselves organizers – encouraging white women in white-dominated organizations to consider their personal and institutional racism, and learn from women of colour about how to make appropriate changes to their working practise.

While there was no single uniform attitude towards white women's participation in these forums, most participants at these forums – whether they supported white women's participation or not – shared a desire to create solidarity and raise awareness among and between different groups of women of colour. This sentiment was also evident in the three-day Between Ourselves conference held in May 1987 at Howard University in Washington DC. Organizers, including Ross, understood the necessity of coalitions for multiracial work; on the second day of the conference, there was a 'coalition building across race and class' workshop. A similar workshop entitled 'Bridging Cultures: Organizing Cross Culturally' had been proposed, but did not make it into the final programme. The former workshop's description read as follows:

Efforts to build coalitions between white women and women of color is the topic of this workshop. Panelists will discuss obstacles and successes and strategies of future efforts. [They] Also will discuss the

²²⁸ Washington D.C. Conference Evaluation Forms, in 'RCAR/RCRC Additions', Box 7, Folder 10

²²⁹ Atlanta Conference Evaluation Forms, in 'RCAR/RCRC Additions', Box 7, Folder 7

²³⁰ San Francisco Conference Evaluation Forms, in 'RCAR/RCRC Additions', Box 7, Folder 14

history of major women's organizations and their efforts to recruit women of color.²³¹

The question of coalition building occupied both a practical and a theoretical space in the minds of the organizers. When planning the conference, they organized the workshops into three main thematic 'tracks': a 'How-To' track, which considered practical or strategic approaches to organizing, including how to build effective networks; a 'Philosophical' track, which included educational and ideology-based discussions; and a 'NOW' track, which included panels on contemporary and historical efforts by NOW to create a broader base.²³² Workshops on 'Coalition Building' were included in every track. Clearly, discussions about building coalitions were integral to multiple areas of the conference.

The emphasis on coalition building did not mean that the conference was free of racial tensions, though. An article published in the Fall 1987 R2N2 newsletter considered the conference from a white woman's perspective. The author perceived that many women of colour found the conference helpful as a space to 'relieve working within and outside of what was identified as the "white women's movement"'.²³³ They identified unity among women of colour as a main theme of the day, and commented that it was their first experience of attending a women's conference as a racial minority. Writing on behalf of a group of white women who attended, the author noted that they were

struck by feeling deprived of our power and political leadership. While the conference was not hostile to white women, white women's issues and the role of white women simply weren't discussed.²³⁴

During the conference, white women were addressed by Byllye Avery, who encouraged them to support the efforts of women of colour and not to burden women of colour with their racism, or their white guilt. The author went on to suggest that NOW had taken steps to relieve the burden of women of colour by

²³¹ Between Ourselves Conference: Workshop Descriptions (1987), in 'NWHN Papers', Box 88, Folder 10,

²³² 'Tentative Workshop Issues for Women of Color Conference' (12th November 1986), in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 6

²³³ Shelly Mains, 'Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference', *Reproductive Rights Network Newsletter* (Fall 1987) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 5

²³⁴ Shelly Mains, 'Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference', *Reproductive Rights Network Newsletter* (Fall 1987) p. 6, in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 5

providing resources for the conference – and, indeed, NOW had provided the \$40,000 needed to organize the conference.²³⁵

Not all women of colour were as receptive to white women's participation, though. The marginalia on Loretta Ross' copy of the same article demonstrates an unnamed woman's frustration with the comments that they made. When the authors had expressed discomfort at being minorities within a women's conference and white women's issues having been left off the agenda, the anonymous woman noted that they acted 'as though W[omen] of C[olour] couldn't have and/or are not entitled to have a women's conference' and that 'this was our conference, so why should we be talking about them???'²³⁶ Her comment reflects broader frustrations with white women's attitudes towards women of colour's activism, and her notes suggest that she thought that white women frequently tried to make organizing spaces about themselves. It was this sentiment that needed to be tackled to create effective coalitions. White women needed to demonstrate their willingness to give up power and centrality to dispel the frustrations of women of colour, and to support them on their own terms.

These concerns were reinforced by the behaviour of some white women at the conference. Ellie Smeal, the president of NOW, was the only white woman who had been permitted to speak at the conference itself. Ross allowed Smeal to speak because NOW contributed a substantial sum of money to the conference. Kate Michelmas, the head of NARAL, was annoyed not to have been offered a speaker's position. Michelmas' frustration was indicative of what the unknown annotator had hinted at: the sense that white women should have a space to talk at any women's conference, irrespective of the nature of the conference. Ross rejected her request, asking 'why should you get the privilege of speaking to women of colour, when you haven't even made the changes within your organization to deserve the opportunity?'²³⁷ Clearly, Ross believed that conference participants had to earn their right to speak to or about women

²³⁵ Shelly Mains, 'Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference', *Reproductive Rights Network Newsletter* (Fall 1987) p. 6, in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 5; Ross, 'Interview with Author',

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6

²³⁷ Ross, 'Interview with Author',

of colour – and Michelman and NARAL had not done enough work to combat their own organizational racism to warrant that right.

Ellie Smeal's keynote address proved highly contentious. The night before the conference, Smeal called Ross asking her for guidance, and Ross gave her some talking points. Smeal then contacted her press director - a white woman named who was uninvolved with the conference - who wrote an alternative speech. When Smeal delivered that speech, it confirmed in the minds of many attending women of colour that white women simply could not understand or work with women of colour on their own agendas. Ross recalls that Smeal's speech 'didn't speak to the concerns of women of colour, it spoke to the white women's agenda, or what was perceived as the white women's agenda, that they were trying to bring women of colour into supporting'.²³⁸ Smeal's speech, then, harked back to the recruitment style of approach that white organizations had historically taken towards multiracial activism. Loretta Ross remembered her feelings of disappointment, and recalled that

I just hung my head in shame. Because she had the opportunity to hit a homerun. Instead she offended the whole damn conference. Y'know [...] that was one of my disappointments, [...] not listening to the people that you've hired, that are experts and end up taking somebody else's advice, that's kinda how they do it.²³⁹

Here, one of the fundamental tensions comes to light – the tendency of white women to assume knowledge or expertise on issues relating to women of colour. At best, this could have been considered a well-meaning but misjudged sense of superior knowledge or expertise; at worst, it might have been considered a form of feminist paternalism, in which white feminists presumed to speak for and know more about women of colour's issues than they did themselves. This tension, which proved difficult to overcome, represented one of the major issues around which white women's organizations were encouraged to work on through education and self-analysis.

Despite the claims that the article made about women of colour's unity at the conference, there were several examples of racial tensions amongst the women of colour who attended the forums and/or the conference. Because the conference was organized in a relatively short space of time, Ross drew on her

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

own personal and professional networks to attract speakers and participants. As a result, most of the speakers were African-American, which alienated some of the other women of colour who attended. In the Washington D.C. forum, for example, one attendee (who made no indication of her own ethnicity) wrote that 'the program says women of color and only African women were panellists, no Asians, Native Americans etc. I feel this was a serious error'.²⁴⁰ In addition, Ross recalled that there was some dissent from Latina women. At one point, for example, some Latina women grabbed the microphone and threatened to disrupt the proceedings, echoing earlier actions made by black women at white-dominated conferences. Ross suggests that this action was because

the majority of the people at the conference were black, because that's where most of the organizing was taking place in the communities [...] and so, we were seen as the oppressors, kind of thing. We were the ones in charge of the conference, the agenda, the majority, a disproportionate number of the speakers were black, as opposed to Native American, Asian American and Latina, and so the next movement whose turn it was, was the Latina's movement, and so they used our conference as a flexing point to – a time to flex.²⁴¹

While the Between Ourselves forums and conference were racially diverse, it's clear that African-American women dominated to an extent that caused some tension. This is at odds with the assertions of Shelley Mains, the white woman from R2N2 who attended the conference. Her perception of the conference as being characterised by a central theme of unity among women of colour despite racial, class and age difference seems to contradict Ross' example and the feedback from the delegate in Washington D.C. It is possible that white women's tendency to homogenise women of colour meant that Mains was blinkered to the possibility of dissent or tension between heterogenous groups of women of colour, while women of colour may have been more attuned to it. The incidents that Ross and the participant at the D.C. forum mentioned do seem to represent a minority of women's attitudes or experiences, though; most feedback sheets suggested that the events were spaces for women of colour to draw on their own specific experiences to build networks, express solidarity, and learn from one another.

²⁴⁰ Washington D.C. Conference Evaluation Forms, in 'RCAR/RCRC Additions', Box 7, Folder 10

²⁴¹ Ross and Follett, p. 191

The question of racially autonomous spaces and identities is key here. The forums and conferences were multiracial spaces, but it was not considered that the attending women of colour were one homogenous assembly. Black women did not attempt to speak for or about other groups of women of colour at the *Between Ourselves*. Indeed, the organizers made conscious efforts to ensure that women of different races were represented, heard, and could meet one another (though, as the Latina dissent demonstrates, this was not necessarily effective).²⁴² The plenary panel on the second day, for example, consisted of two Native American women, one Japanese American woman, one Puerto Rican woman, and two African-American women. Organizers did not assume that women of different races had shared experiences, but they hoped that sharing this space and discussion would create stronger networks and lay foundations for unity. The closing plenary session on the second day of the conference was entitled 'Building Our Unity' for this reason.²⁴³

The work that went into the *Between Ourselves* forums and conferences, and particularly the emphasis that was placed on network creation and education, laid both the practical and ideological foundations for the *In Defense of Roe* conference organized two years later. A few months after the *Between Ourselves* conference, Loretta Ross sent a letter to each attendee of the conference, which included a contact list of all attendees and speakers, and a separate contact sheet specifically including details of the women of color leaders within NOW. Ross encouraged the recipients of the letter to contact those leaders and get involved with NOW, or to raise any issues or concerns that they would like NOW to consider.²⁴⁴ This supports the suggestion that the *Between Ourselves* forums and conference were themselves a recruitment tool to encourage women of colour to participate within NOW's other activities. The networks created, though, were useful beyond NOW's recruitment strategy; they formed the foundation of Ross's invitations to *In Defense of Roe* and provided a pool of potential conference attendees who were engaged with both reproductive rights issues and with issues around racial equality within the

²⁴² NOW Women of Color Programs, Conference Program (Undated, c.1987) p. 1, in 'NWHN Papers', Box 88, Folder 10

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1, 3

²⁴⁴ Form Letter from Loretta Ross to 'Friend' (5th August 1987) p. 1, in 'NWHN Papers', Box 88, Folder 10

feminist movement. These were the women who, Ross believed, could create effective multiracial coalitions, and would provide a useful crossover between women of colour at the grassroots and mainstream organizations like NOW.

Bridge Building and Education

One of the main aims for *In Defense of Roe* was to create a space in which education between women of colour and white women who represented mainstream feminist organizations could occur. One of the strategies towards doing this was ‘bridge-building’. Loretta Ross has described her role in much of her social activism work as that of a bridge. She said that

a bridge is a device by which people standing on one side or the other cross over to their destination [...] that’s how I tended to see my role. I could see both sides of the bridge that I connected right but I was not there to call attention to myself or my needs, I was there so that people could cross over [...] to the other side of an understanding [...] [if] I exerted any influence, it was to persuade people to take their first step.²⁴⁵

The planning committee for *In Defense of Roe* also occupied a bridge position. They saw themselves as partially bridging the gap between many women of colour and community and grassroots organizers, and people active in the ‘big’ feminist or abortion/reproductive rights organizations. The conference served as a platform for this bridge work. Janet Benshoof suggested this to Susan Dickler in February 1989. Benshoof, working with the ACLU Reproductive Freedom project, contacted Dickler at the Ms Foundation to request funding for the conference. One of the selling points of the conference, Benshoof suggested, was that it ‘will provide an opportunity for national leadership to meet with and be informed by women of color and local organizers. It will provide women of color and local activists an opportunity to be informed about local strategies and about the implications of upcoming Supreme Court cases’.²⁴⁶ Notably, Benshoof framed the conference as a space where both local organizers and national leadership could *gain* knowledge from one another – not where they would be obliged to *provide* education. This distinction placed the onus on those who had to learn to seek out education, rather than emphasising the need for women of colour to educate white women. This indicated a fairer approach to education

²⁴⁵ Ross, ‘Interview with Author’,

²⁴⁶ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Susan Dinkler (1st February 1989) p. 4-5, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

across race that advocated personal responsibility for combatting racism. The conference committee saw bridging the gap between local organizers and national leadership - and so between women of colour and predominantly white leadership - as foundational to *In Defense of Roe*.

Despite the high hopes of the organizers and speakers at the conference, these bridge-building efforts were not fully realised. RCAR and ACLU organizers stated that some participants were disappointed that 'pro-choice leaders could not stay longer at the conference and they expressed concern that the leaders would not hear the suggestions for strategies that were developed and articulated at the conference'.²⁴⁷ Many participants from NOW and other mainstream organizations left before the end of the conference, as they had to prepare for the March for Women's Lives, which was scheduled for the next day. As a result, the rhetoric that portrayed the conference as a space to build bridges seemed to fall short of the actuality of the event; some women at the conference felt that it was difficult to forge relationships when leaders within the pro-choice movement appeared to prioritise their own event over communicating and creating relationships at *In Defense of Roe*. Their disappointment over the failure of bridge-building was fundamentally based in their lost opportunity to interact with and inform pro-choice leaders about how to more effectively work multiracially.

Some white women active in national organizations did, however, credit the conference with helping them to rethink strategies within their own organizations. Clearly, some of the education strategies had worked. Less than a fortnight after the conference, Ellen Carton, the executive director of New York State NARAL, wrote to the core planning committee. She explained that 'while it was clear that the conference was just a first step, there have already been positive ramifications at NARAL...the directors who had attended [the conference]...felt it important that NARAL learn from it'.²⁴⁸ It is not clear whether NARAL was able to create meaningful relationships across race at the conference itself (or, indeed, afterwards) but their subsequent efforts to take into account issues raised at the conference and to consider and address their

²⁴⁷ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Susan Dinkler (1st February 1989) p. 4-5, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1, p. 3

²⁴⁸ Letter to *In Defense of Roe* Participants (24th April 1989) p. 1, 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

own racism and prejudices was an important first step towards a coalition-based approach to multiracial organizing. One of the aims of the planners was to force mainstream groups of the pro-choice movement to 'address their own issues and reprioritize issues to include women of color'.²⁴⁹ Carton's response to the conference suggests that, for NARAL at least, IDOR prompted efforts towards these changes.

While it seems that efforts to educate national leaders of the 'mainstream' pro-choice movement may not have been fully successful, communication and learning across race did still occur. Migdalia Rivers, a Latina attendee, said that her 'learning during the conference was both intellectual and emotional. [She] not only learned from other Latina women, but from Black and White women as well'.²⁵⁰ She asserted that Black women were 'good role models for Latinas to watch closely'.²⁵¹ The communication and learning that did occur was often based on fulfilling emotional needs as well as sharing organizing strategies and tactics. Rivers said that she used specific communication and organizing techniques that she learned from participants in the Black women's caucus in her own organizing with adolescents and people with AIDS. While she did not specify exactly what these techniques were, she did report that the outcome of this technique that she learned from African-American women was 'wonderful' - clearly, she, and other women, benefitted from in learning from women of other races and backgrounds.²⁵²

This multiracial education and learning did not happen by chance. The organizers of *In Defense of Roe* deliberately planned the conference in a way that they hoped would be conducive to interaction and education across race, both structurally and in terms of the ideology and rhetoric that accompanied it. For example, organizers planned small group sessions with pre-allocated groups of women. These groups met three times over the course of the conference, including the majority of the first day, to develop collective strategies and to learn from one another. The groups were pre-assigned by the organizers, with the goal of having as much diversity as possible within each

²⁴⁹ In Defense Of Roe Conference report, p. 63, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁵⁰ Migdalia Rivers, 'A Puerto Rican American Women's Perspective' *Common Ground - Different Planes* (August 1989) p. 10, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 5, Folder 57

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

group. As well as racial diversity, the committee sought to represent age and class diversity within these groups. Most of these groups, the committee stated, 'had the benefit of difference as well as commonality'.²⁵³ This sense of celebrating differences as well as seeking similarities and shared understandings or experiences echoed the emphasis of the Between Ourselves events that women of colour were not a homogenous group. By recognising the differences between women of different races and appreciating them, rather than pretending that different groups of women were all the same, participants at *In Defense of Roe* could develop stronger and more realistic foundations for multiracial work based on mutual understanding and respect.

Each group was facilitated by a member of the planning committee. Dazon Dixon, an African-American reproductive rights advocate, said that 'it was surprising that several common themes emerged...despite the differences in ethnicity and backgrounds among participants...we all actually want just about the same things and I'm glad because I like commonality while I enjoy diversity'.²⁵⁴ *In Defense of Roe* acted as a space to communicate and learn across racial lines. The small group sessions were useful spaces for this education and communication. Reporting back to the larger group from these sessions, racially diverse women, including Dazon Dixon, Ninia Baehr and Mallika Dutt - African American, white and Asian American women respectively - described the discussions that had been had, the demands that had been made, and the desires that had been expressed. These ranged from the broad ('we want an end to oppression') to the specific ('I want free abortion on demand, I do not just want legal abortion, I want the repeal of all abortion laws') to demands that prompted laughter from the whole delegation ('we want paid parental leave. We had a debate about how much time was necessary - it ranged from twelve weeks to six years').²⁵⁵ The audience shared applause, laughter, and sounds of assent in response to these demands and statements.

These discourse across racial lines allowed connections to be made, as shared concerns and issues emerged and became clear. The fact that these

²⁵³ 'Small Groups' document (22nd August 1989) in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁵⁴ Dazon Dixon, quoted in IDOR Conference Report, p. 60, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁵⁵ National Association for Pregnant Women, *In Defense of Roe Video*, 1989, Vimeo <<https://vimeo.com/4873057>> [accessed 20 December 2016], Hereafter: 'IDOR Video'

connections were so surprising is indicative of how widespread the sentiment was that racial and class lines were rigid and divisive, despite previous efforts to create relationships across these boundaries. Byllye Avery, for example, exclaimed that 'this is the first time this has ever been done...we are history - the herstory - we are writing it right now'.²⁵⁶ This, perhaps, was because it was one of the first conferences that simultaneously explicitly focussed on reproductive rights issues and placed importance on diversity and multiracial communication. Identity politics that had previously been seen as divisive or insurmountable barriers became welcome and even celebrated. Participants realised that acknowledging and working with identity politics would be more conducive to effective organizing. Organizers of *In Defense of Roe* tried to create understandings and links based on diversity, rather than despite it.

Even before the conference, the core planning committee tried to create an atmosphere that was conducive to multiracial understanding and education. Their preliminary mailings to delegates included Kathryn Kolbert's article, 'Developing a Reproductive Rights Agenda for the 1990s'. Kolbert, a white woman, was a well-known and influential lawyer in ACLU who would go on to argue the landmark case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in the Supreme Court.²⁵⁷ Including the article would, organizers hoped, 'set a positive future oriented tone for the conference'.²⁵⁸ Kolbert's article stated that

the process [for developing a Reproductive Rights Agenda] must be as inclusive as possible, and the dialogue must be genuine...we need to hear from black women and understand the long history of their deprivation of reproductive freedom...Hispanic women can tell us about their experiences as the subjects of experiments with the pill...Native American women can describe their experience with sterilization abuse [...to develop] broader-based coalitions that reflect

²⁵⁶ Byllye Avery, quoted in IDOR Conference Report, p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁵⁷ *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* reaffirmed the Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade* that the state could not ban (most) abortions. However, it also broadened individual states' rights to regulate abortion before the point of viability, but only to preserve the life or health of the mother, not to limit access to abortion. It stated that states may not place 'undue burden' on women to prevent them accessing abortions, though it was not clear exactly what constituted 'undue burden'. See Alex McBride, 'Casey v. Planned Parenthood (1992)', *Supreme Court History: Expanding Civil Rights Landmark Cases*, 2006 <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark_casey.html>, for an accessible synopsis of the case and its outcome.

²⁵⁸ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Susan Dinkler (1st February 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

the diversity of women and a wide spectrum of reproductive experience will enable us to expand both our ranks and our cause.²⁵⁹

From the outset, then, inclusivity, communication and education at the conference were encouraged to the delegates. Kolbert's insistence that coalition-building was contingent on learning from different groups of women about the issues that specifically affected them indicated to the participants how the core organizing committee anticipated the work at *In Defense of Roe*.

Kolbert's approach was reflected by the organizers when delegates decided to create impromptu racially autonomous groups. They wrote that

Sometimes things don't always go as planned! On reflection and based in experience we discovered the need to create time for participants to caucus according to self identified interest groups.²⁶⁰

These 'self-identified interest groups' were racially autonomous groups, in which women discussed their particular reproductive rights issues and wrote statements expressing their positions on reproductive rights. These statements were then read out to the whole conference. Asian Pacific women, for example, discussed the need for bilingual information and sex education, as well as confronting the specific sexual objectification that they faced as military prostitutes, mail order brides, geishas, and victims of sex tourism, while the white lesbian caucus discussed the particular obstacles to motherhood that some lesbians faced, as well as their sense of invisibility within the reproductive rights movement. Representatives of the different caucus groups, who stood before the rest of the conference, lit candles, and 'spoke from their hearts and voice[d] the broadbased and deeply rooted commitment to reproductive freedom that exists [within their communities]'.²⁶¹ These unity statements, according to the author of the report, were not merely presented as statements, but also as strategies towards future unity and organizing.

These spaces were powerful as they were places where women could, as Nkenge Touré said, 'fill up at our cultural gas stations – [and] recharge our batteries' and 'revel in the rare opportunity to talk and meet with one another'.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Kathryn Kolbert, 'Developing a Reproductive Rights Agenda for the 1990s', in *Reproductive Laws for the 1990s*, ed. by Nadine Taub and Sherrill Cohen (Clifton, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 8-9

²⁶⁰ IDOR Conference Report, p. 78, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11

²⁶² Ngina Lythcott, quoted in Lynn Paltrow, 'Report on the Conference: In Defense of Roe'

Sherrilyn Ifill was only able to attend the final afternoon of the conference, but managed to join in with the Black women's caucus on the Saturday evening. Ifill recalled that it provoked 'tears [that] were cleansing, inspiring and unifying'; she stated that she had gained a 'clear idea of the kind of provocative and necessary dialogue this conference inspired'.²⁶³ Suki Ports, speaking on behalf of the Pan-Asian caucus, described working and coalescing at the conference as a 'great honor', and that the conference was the first opportunity that a diverse group of Asian-Pacific women had had to 'really get together and talk about abortion and reproductive rights'.²⁶⁴ Luz Alvarez Martinez, representing Latina women, wanted to 'recognise the strength that we as women from all backgrounds - all colors - represent here today and that we can be united'.²⁶⁵

These group sessions were fundamentally important in the development of coalitions. Byllye Avery encouraged participants to see themselves as representatives of their respective constituencies, and to analyse what was necessary to bring about change for them. The caucusing was, she stated, 'probably the most important work that we're going to be doing in this day and a half'.²⁶⁶ The individual women in the caucuses were, she said, 'the "parts"', and what they were doing was 'mak[ing] the glue that holds us together'.²⁶⁷ Coalitions, then, did not necessarily come naturally; each caucus had to work to ascertain what they needed to do to create the 'glue' that would allow them to work together effectively. The opportunity to work in racially autonomous spaces provided a chance to do that. The opportunity to meet within racially autonomous groups at IDOR, then, provided a safe space of solidarity, unity and recuperation from which to approach working in diverse multiracial settings and lay the foundations for potential future multiracial organizing.

(1989) p. 83, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; Lynn Paltrow, 'Report on the Conference: In Defense of Roe' (1989) p. 83, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1, p. 93
²⁶³ Sherrilyn Ifill, quoted in Lynn Paltrow, 'Report on the Conference: In Defense of Roe' (1989) p. 95, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶⁴ Suki Ports, quoted in Lynn Paltrow, 'Report on the Conference: In Defense of Roe' (1989) p. 12, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; Letter from Faith Evans to Pat Tyson (22nd/23rd June 1989) in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶⁵ Luz Alvarez Martinez, quoted in Lynn Paltrow, 'Report on the Conference: In Defense of Roe' (1989) p. 12, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶⁶ IDOR Conference Report, p. 78, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Education Strategies towards (future) Coalition Building

As well as creating *In Defense of Roe* as a multiracial event, conference organizers envisaged it as a platform for discussions around how to achieve multiracial coalition work in the future. These discussions were centred primarily around questions of education, representation and decision-making.

Learning from other activists - particularly from those who had had experience of coalition work or multiracial work - was seen as the foundation of future successful organizing across race. Ngina Lythcott, an African-American woman, suggested that spaces like the conference were the best places to learn how to build coalitions. She said that 'you're not going to get that from people who read books, you're going to get that from people that do it and struggle with it and are flexible enough to know how to go with the flow and when to stop whatever it is you're doing and deal with the problem that is around you'.²⁶⁸ Learning from those who had direct experience of the types of organizing that the conference organizers advocated was, according to Lythcott, the most effective way of learning how to do the types of activism that prompted multiracial organizing.

One of the most important roles that *In Defense of Roe* played was to provide an opportunity for women of colour to interrogate and dispute the role of white women in multiracial coalitions. In addition, they critiqued previous poor organizing strategies of white women, and thus prompting them to educate themselves about adopting strategies that were more conducive to effective coalition building. Lythcott made it clear that she felt that white women ought to play supportive roles rather than active ones. She believed that it was imperative that women in larger mainstream organizations needed to share their resources with poorer women, women of colour, and women working at the grassroots. She said that 'we ought to in the first place organize our own communities if that is possible. And in that process women of color may need to be supported by whites in that effort. And that support could be in the form of skill development, finances, or other forms of support'.²⁶⁹ Lythcott's position was reiterated elsewhere in the conference report: in a section entitled 'Meaningful

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 88

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 90

Inclusion of Women of Color', participants suggested what could be done for more racially integrated work and how white-dominated national feminist organizations could become more inclusive. Participants argued that 'it is crucial for these organizations to share resources and assist in organizing efforts within people of color communities'.²⁷⁰ Lythcott critiqued the past behaviour of mainstream groups and emphasised the responsibility of national organizations to share available resources. In some cases, resource sharing was beginning to happen; NOW's donation of \$40,000 to enable the 1987 Conference on Women of Color and Reproductive Rights, for example, demonstrated an example of a 'mainstream' organization sharing or providing resources while encouraging women of colour to be the primary organizers.

As the previous two chapters have demonstrated, the practical efforts of some mainstream feminist groups did not always match up to their rhetorical commitment to adhering to women of colours' requests. This, paired with their historic underrepresentation of racial diversity and tokenistic attitudes, meant that many women of colour continued to perceive them as capitalising on their struggles. Lythcott said that 'we feel like we're being pimped. We feel like the people are fundraising around people of color and poor white women - and yet we're not part of what happens with that money'.²⁷¹ Here, Lythcott is referring to the rhetoric used by many feminist groups who rallied against issues such as the Hyde Amendment or the Webster decision. They frequently acknowledged the struggles that women of colour disproportionately faced because of these issues, and sought sponsorship, funding and donations around them. In many cases, though, women of colour were still not represented in these organizations at senior levels - and, as a result, were not involved in financial decision-making. In 1986, for example, the NOW national board voted on using 'canvass/minority outreach' as a platform for fundraising. The vote passed by a large majority, and NOW explicitly highlighted 'minority issues' in their canvassing in Washington DC to gain more members and more funds. At the same time, NOW continued to be criticised for not having adequate representation of women of colour at its highest levels.²⁷² Not sharing

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89

²⁷² Board Minutes (February 1986), in 'National Organization for Women Papers', Boston, MA, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, MC496, Box 6,

resources not only made it harder for smaller community-led groups to organize, it also indicated short-sightedness on behalf of the national organizations. Women organizing at the grassroots urged white organizations to live up to their rhetoric by helping smaller groups with resources, platforms for discussion, and finances.

Organizers and participants also recognised the importance of resource-sharing in other coalition contexts. Byllye Avery highlighted the importance of building coalitions with labour unions and other groups working on broader reproductive rights issues, such as poverty, welfare and AIDS. These coalitions, she said, 'require us to be respectful of one another and give equal weight to the concerns of other groups. Resources, knowledge and materials should be shared systematically to avoid reinventing the wheel'.²⁷³ Sharing resources, then, was beneficial in several ways. It would prove quantifiably beneficial to groups of women of colour and community activists who struggled to mobilise the same level of resources that the larger, national groups could. It would also ensure that groups and organizations could benefit from the work that had been done by other groups, and work more efficiently by capitalising on the foundations laid by other organizers. Finally, it also created networks between wealthier, national groups and small, community organizations, which could be used both for resource sharing and for education across race and class lines. The benefits of resource-sharing with other groups that did not necessarily define themselves as 'feminist' demonstrated the potential benefits of resource-sharing within multiracial feminist coalitions.

The conference also provided an opportunity to pick out and tackle the internal racism within many national, mainstream reproductive rights and feminist organizations. Lythcott stated that the

'first thing that [she] thought was important to happen was for [...] national organizations to recognize their racism [...] it is the kind of struggle that is something internal to the organization. [...] It is time for those organizations to acknowledge their racism and to talk about that'.²⁷⁴

Folder 24,

²⁷³ Conference Report., p. 75, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 85

Women of colour actively instructed white-dominated mainstream groups to tackle their own personal and organizational racism. They pushed for white feminists more widely to acknowledge their internalised biases, rather than leaving self-examinations of racism to more radical, anti-racist white feminist groups. These anti-racist feminist groups tended to remain small, and efforts to tackle internalised racism within national, powerful feminist groups were not widespread. The insistence of women of colour at *In Defense of Roe* that these larger groups had to interrogate their own racial biases before forging coalitions and relationships, then, demonstrates a shift in power, strategy and control. At the conference, women of colour took the lead on strategizing for cross-race coalitions, and were insistent that white-dominated mainstream organizations consider their own racism and engage with internal education before attempting to forge relationships.

One of the strategies that national organizations were encouraged to use was running cross-cultural sensitivity workshops. Conference participants suggested that they would help to create a supportive and respectful environment.²⁷⁵ One such example of a workshop that included cross-cultural sensitivity training in preparation for coalition building was held by the Ms. Foundation's Reproductive Rights Coalition Fund (RRCF) in October 1989. Participants from ACLU, RCAR and the NBWHP attended, as well as several other groups and coalitions. The theme of the day was 'Continuing to Build Rich and Strong Coalitions'. Speakers discussed how to attract members, how to 'build diversity', and 'the Three Rs (roles, responsibilities, relationships)'.²⁷⁶ These issues were then further discussed in small discussion groups, much as at *In Defense of Roe*. The literature disseminated before this event included a checklist of questions entitled 'Criteria to Evaluate the Success of a Coalition as it Develops' which emphasised the importance of mutual trust and participation, and shared credit and recognition.²⁷⁷ It also emphasised the necessity of promoting leaders from within the ranks or grassroots of the coalition to ensure

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64

²⁷⁶ Ms. Foundation Reproductive Coalition Fund, 'Training Conference, October 1989' p. 1-2, 'Charon Asetoyer Papers', Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Box 2, Folder 6

²⁷⁷ Anon, 'Criteria to Evaluate the Success of a Coalition as it Develops', in 'Charon Asetoyer Papers', Box 2, Folder 6; Marc Caplan, 'Ten Elements of Successful Coalition Building' (August 1988), in 'Charon Asetoyer Papers', Box 2, Folder 6

an equal sense of ownership and power. These criteria clearly reflect calls made by women of colour at *In Defense of Roe*. Luz Martinez, for example, stated that 'we will set forth a set of criteria...[that] include having been considered and empowered in the framing of the issues, and in setting the agendas...[and] only endorsing and supporting those organizations that have women of colour represented adequately on their boards and on their staff'.²⁷⁸ The recommendations made by women of colour at *In Defense of Roe*, then, were representative of contemporary broader criteria that was being used to ascertain the success of coalition building. The links between successful multiracial activism and coalition building are clear, and in the eyes of many contemporary feminists, inextricably linked.

²⁷⁸ IDOR Video.

Conclusions

The case studies examined in this section – the National Women’s Conference, the activities of the Reproductive Rights National Network, and *In Defense of Roe* – are representative of a shift that occurred among the feminist Left between the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. This shift in strategies towards multiracialism from ‘recruitment’ to ‘coalition’ represented changing attitudes, rhetoric and practices among many white feminists during and after the late second wave. Prior to 1977 and the National Women’s Conference, many white-dominated organizations’ attempts at multiracial organizing followed a ‘recruitment’ or ‘outreach’ strategy. This strategy was based on efforts to reach out to and recruit women of colour into existing organizations. White women who followed this strategy sought multiracial activity for two main reasons. Firstly, they wanted to create or extend a feeling of solidarity and ‘sisterhood’ based on gender across racial boundaries. While some scholars have suggested that white second-wave feminists were naïve to racial differences, their high levels of participation in the Civil Rights Movement suggests that race, and racial difference, was at least acknowledged.²⁷⁹ Indeed, the inclusion of the diversity clause in Bella’s Bill indicates how multiracial organizing and representation was a priority – even in more moderate groups of the feminist Left. In the case of the National Women’s Conference, the predominantly-white IWY Commission espoused the importance of representation of *all* women at Houston and in the subsequent National Plan of Action. While differences based on race were acknowledged by white feminists, their shared gendered identities were, they believed, more important – and so racial differences were ignored. It was easier, and (in their opinion) more useful, to focus on what united them rather than what divided them. Participation and interest was assumed to be based on women’s overarching shared identity, and their shared oppression as women was assumed as transcending racial difference. Reaching out to diverse women seemed, to many groups, the natural continuation of the feminist movement and for creating ‘sisterhood’.

The second reason that some white feminists followed a recruitment strategy was to facilitate education. A growing awareness of differences based

²⁷⁹ Roth, “Organizing One’s Own” as Good Politics’, p. 114

on race and ethnicity prompted white feminists to seek out information to try to understand these differences. They hoped that understanding different women's racialised experiences would both inform their activism and attract women of colour into their groups – thus meeting their aims of forging relationships based around womanhood and facilitating further education across race. They saw the primary value of women of colour's membership in white feminist spaces as their ability to educate white women – that is, the ways in which they could help white women.

Education was also seen to flow in the other direction, too; in some cases, white-dominated groups felt that it was important to attract women of colour into their ranks so that they could inform them – and, by extension, their communities – about issues that the groups assumed women of colour did not understand. April Lacy's letter to Dorothy Height when planning the Abortion Rights Action Week was a prime example of this; Lacy assumed that the black community did not understand the extent to which they were affected by abortion. She saw a relationship with Dorothy Height, an African-American woman, as a platform for educating the black community about abortion. The 'recruitment' strategy was, then, sometimes a vehicle for white-dominated organizations to exercise their paternalistic attitudes towards women of colour. By assuming that women of colour should or would join white-dominated feminist organizations, some white women expected that their understanding of feminism and of important issues was a universally appropriate one, to which all women could and should subscribe to. These attitudes were reiterated when white women assumed greater knowledge than women of colour and therefore attempted to 'teach' them about important issues without being asked to do so.

A fundamental problem with the 'recruitment' strategy was that many white-dominated feminist groups failed to use an intersectional framework to understand oppression. As a result, they imagined 'gender' issues and 'race' issues as separate, and so believed that it would be possible to organize around gendered similarities while downplaying racial differences. This same simplified notion of identity underpinned their focus on education; education through self-help methods and consciousness raising sessions was a stalwart of the earlier feminist movement. By assuming that women of colour would educate them, they drew on their understanding of women educating women as

being a feminist tradition. Similarly, their desire to 'educate' women of colour came from both this understanding of a tradition of educating *and* the belief that, because their identity as women was shared, they shared the same issues, and so their educating women of colour was, to them, entirely appropriate. When it became clearer that all women needed to take an intersectional approach to identity politics, coalition-building as a means towards multiracial activism began to emerge as a more satisfactory strategy.

By the mid- to late-1980s, many white-dominated feminist groups understood that their previous tactics had not achieved their goals of creating multiracial organizations in which gender transcended race. Taking advice from women of colour, many white women's organizations took a step back from attempting to force multiracial organizing by bringing women of colour into their own work, and tried to ascertain how they needed to change their own practice to allow for future multiracial organizing opportunities. Groups like R2N2 voiced this as early as 1981 – for example, regarding the Sterilization Abuse slideshow that R2N2 produced alongside WARN. Karen Stamm's suggestion that R2N2's internal education about race and racism should precede attempts to create coalitions underpins the fundamental change between the 'recruitment' and 'coalition' strategies. White women struggled to create sustainable or effective relationships across race before learning about and understanding their own internalised racism, both as individuals and within their organizations. By actively and consciously examining their own attitudes and approaches, and identifying the prejudices in their own working practice, white women's organizations could then do internal anti-racism work. This work made white women more mindful of their potential racism, even when it was not intentional. In turn, this made creating multiracial relationships more appealing to women of colour.

Of course, this shift was neither immediate nor complete. In many cases, white feminists understood the importance of an intersectional approach and articulated the rhetoric that suggested that they had moved away from a focus on recruitment, but they did not change their working practice to reflect their rhetoric. Many white feminists saw anti-racism as something that they should *do*, rather than something that they *were*. As a result, antiracism did not underpin their work around reproductive rights. Because antiracism was

something that white feminists thought they needed to *do*, it was possible for it to decrease in priority in preference for 'gender issues'. If antiracism was something that feminists needed to *be*, it would be an integral and inherent part of their organizing.

By the mid- to late-1980s, events such as the *Between Ourselves* forums and the *In Defense of Roe* conference demonstrated a further shift; education continued to be emphasised, but was based on a different power dynamic. Whereas Lacy's letter to Dorothy Height implies the presumed superiority of RCAR's knowledge of abortion as driving the flow of education (that is, the idea that 'knowledgeable' white women should educate 'ignorant' women of colour about issues that affected them), later understandings of education were based on more equal power relationships. Indeed, by the mid- to late-1980s, attempts towards multiracial coalitions were based on women of colour leading efforts, with the support of white women and white-dominated organizations. The 'flow' of education in this method of coalition-building continued to be characterised as women of colour teaching white women about their experiences and issues. The difference, however, was that in coalitions, women of colour decided what, how and why white women should be educated about issues that they faced. White women were expected to take responsibility for learning, rather than assume that women of colour were responsible for teaching. When women of colour were recruited into mainstream organizations, white women expected – and even demanded – that women of colour educate them. Coalition-building strategies allowed for educating across race on a more equal level.

When white women became more willing to compromise their own priorities, women of colour were more able and willing to work with them – as they could approach coalitions on their own terms. Coalitions, as new entities, had the potential to be multiracial from their formation, and so women of different races were theoretically able to approach them as equals. On the other hand, when white-dominated organizations had simply recruited women of colour into their existing organizations or projects, it became clear that the white organizers maintained control of the groups, and could demand that they operated on their own terms. White women maintained a higher level of power through using this approach. At a fundamental level, then, coalition-building

created spaces for women of colour to approach working with white women as equals and allies.

Network building and creation were both methods through which the recruitment and coalition strategies played out, and desired outcomes of each strategy. Existing networks were necessary avenues through which to attract diverse women into organizations or coalitions. When following their recruitment strategies, white women used their contacts within organizations of women of colour and anticipated that they would draw on their own networks to attract poor women and women of colour from the grassroots into the mainstream women's movement. They tried to capitalise on existing networks, even if they were not part of those networks themselves. The importance of using existing networks augmented further when coalition-building, but the approach to using them changed. Rather than expecting to draw on existing networks that they were not necessarily part of, white women and women of colour mobilised their own constituencies through their own networks. After doing this, the mobilised communities were more likely to come together in coalitions on their own terms.

Creating multiracial networks was also important to women in their activism. In some cases, such as the National Women's Conference, creating this network and multiracial relationships was perceived as part of the multiracial organizing itself. In others, such as the *Between Ourselves* forums and the *In Defense of Roe* conference, the development of networks was both a desired result of the events and a resource to draw on for future multiracial organizing. Unsurprisingly, there was a difference between what 'recruitment strategy' networks and 'coalition strategy' networks looked like. For women following a recruitment strategy, building sustained and coherent multiracial networks for their own sake was an important outcome, irrespective of their efficacy or usefulness. For many women following a coalition strategy, networks they built were meant to be useful tools for future multiracial coalition-building, even if they were only temporary.

The changing use of racially autonomous spaces both reflected and contributed to this shift from recruitment to coalition. Creating spaces for women who shared racial and ethnic identities to coalesce was frequently unplanned, but happened often. White women's interpretations of these spaces evolved throughout this period; during the Alaska State Meeting for the IWY conference,

for example, white women assessed the success of the Native Women's caucus based on *their* notions of success – building sisterhood and transcending (read: ignoring) racial difference. Notably, white women did not often caucus themselves as a racial group during the late 1970s – highlighting their understanding of themselves as not raced. By perceiving race as something that was applicable only to women of colour, some white women failed to apply an intersectional lens to their activism, creating obstacles to multiracial organizing.

The uses of racially autonomous spaces shifted during this period. By the early- to mid-1980s white women, particularly those in more radical feminist groups, had begun to engage in racially autonomous caucusing as well as women of colour. This correlated with ongoing discussions around the ways that white women could and should learn about their internalised personal and organizational racism. These spaces were formed both as attempts to facilitate more effective future organizing, and as responses to crises, as in R2N2's 1983 and 1984 conferences respectively. Finally, towards the end of the 1980s, racially autonomous spaces became spaces of empowerment and solidarity which allowed women to work and converse in 'safe spaces'. In these cases, racially autonomous spaces became important tools for coalition building, as they ensured that women of different races were coming to coalitions from similar positions of power. They allowed women to respect their racial diversity and specific racial positions, while acknowledging and celebrating racial difference. The different uses and interpretations of racially autonomous spaces, then, reflect the larger shift from recruitment to coalition that part one of this thesis has traced.

When recruiting, white women's organizations expected women of colour to care about and engage with the issues that the white women were interested in or concerned about. When coalition-building, white women compromised on their initial priorities to engage with the issues that women of colour were interested in – thus creating a foundation for working together. At this point, women of colour and white women could approach multiracial organizing on a more equal level, which was a fundamentally important prerequisite to coalition-building. The shift towards coalition marks white women's move away from the notion of a universal sisterhood or organizing based on gender. Instead, their

desire to work multiracially was based on a different priority: creating a united front to defend against the rising political and religious Right.

Part Two:

Representation and the Rise of the Right

As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change [...] Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women [...] know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.

Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' (1984)¹

You never think you're making history.
You just think you're doing the work.

Loretta Ross, Interview with Author (2016)²

¹ Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984),

² Ross, 'Interview with Author',

Introduction

The late 1970s and 1980s saw an unprecedented rise in the influence and power of the religious and political Right. Whereas previously religious and secular conservatism had broadly operated independently of each other, by the late 1970s it became clear that the Republican Right, the secular New Right, and fundamentalist Christian ideals were inextricably linked. The simultaneous rise of Ronald Reagan, the Moral Majority, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and a strong antifeminist backlash - and the subsequent political shift to the Right, including the Bush administration - presented a real and pervasive threat to the feminist movement. As a result, many feminists – particularly white feminists – wanted to present feminism as a strong, united front against the threat of the Right. To them, this meant representing women as united across racial difference and as a multiracial movement. The rise of the Right as a catalyst for attempts at creating and representing coalitions is evident throughout the period; Marc Caplan's 1988 'model for [...] progressive coalition building', for example, included a document entitled 'Roles, Rules and Responsibilities of Building and Maintaining Coalitions'. In it, he highlighted the importance of responding to Operation Rescue and anti-abortion violence.³ The urgency of representing feminism as multiracial did, however, mean that some feminists made efforts to make their multiracial work and relationships *appear* smooth and coherent, without necessarily making changes to their actual organizing or working practises.

This section will trace the evolution of feminist responses to the threat of the New Right alongside the changing tactics and strategies of right-wing forces. In doing so, it will examine the extent to and the ways in which those feminist responses affected attitudes towards multiracial activism. Reflecting the trend seen in the previous section, earlier responses to the threat of the Right seem to have prompted a rhetorical and theoretical commitment to multiracial organizing by many white feminists, whereas later organizing (as the threat of the Right grew) saw these feminists changing their working practice to facilitate the types of multiracial activism that they saw as being more useful in

³ Unknown Author, 'Rules, Roles and Responsibilities of Building and Maintaining Coalitions', (Undated, c.1988) from Marc Caplan, *Ten Elements of Successful Coalition Building* (August 1988), in 'Charon Asetoyer Papers', Box 2, Folder 6

combatting the rising Right. Notably, this shift developed from a desire to protect their extant rights (e.g. the right to abortion) to one that acknowledged the disproportionate effects of the Right on women of colour and working-class women, and so sought to create coalitions based on their needs. This shift also affected the ways in which feminists wanted to represent feminism; when following a recruitment strategy, white feminists wanted to be representative of all women based on a shared gender identity. A coalition strategy, though, indicated some white feminists' desire for representation *for* all women – taking their individuality into account.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services*, Marlene Fried bemoaned the stagnancy of the reproductive rights movement as a result of the rising Right.⁴ A newly energised abortion rights movement emerged in the 1980s – she suggested, in response to the threat of a constitutional amendment that would ban all US abortions.⁵ However, the threat made the pro-choice movement attempt to 'sanitize its own demands' as demanding abortion or women's rights was 'seen as too threatening, too risky, too selfish. Instead, the movement turned to the more innocuous and ambiguous language of "choice" and "personal freedom"'.⁶ It focused on the intolerance and extremism of the Right, rather than ensuring accessible abortion for all. This shift to a defensive approach to abortion rights and reproductive rights, Fried argues, was inherently racist: to defend existing rights was to neglect those who did not feel secure in those rights anyway – in this case, predominantly poor women and women of colour. She suggests that the defensive strategy ultimately highlighted the white, middle-class mainstream of

⁴ *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* was a Supreme Court decision that upheld a Missouri law and restricted the use of public funds, facilities and employees from performing abortions. It also found that life begins at conception, and as such, dictated that 'all state laws be interpreted to provide unborn children with the same rights enjoyed by other persons'. See *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* [<http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/492/490.html>]

⁵ Marlene Gerber Fried, 'Transforming the Reproductive Rights Movement: The Post-Webster Agenda', in *From Abortion to Reproduction Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, ed. by Marlene Gerber Fried (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), p. 5. In the early 1980s, several Human Life Amendments were proposed; in 1981 and 1983 respectively the Hatch, and Hatch-Eagleton amendments proposed that 'a right to abortion is not secured by this Constitution'. See National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, 'Texts of Major Human Life Amendments Introduced in Congress', 2007 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20070927034445/http://www.nchla.org/datasource/idocuments/HLAmajortexts.pdf>>.

⁶ Fried, 'Transforming the Reproductive Rights Movement: The Post-Webster Agenda', p. 6

feminism. Importantly, Fried also noted that the defensive strategy posed problems for multiracial organizing efforts. She wrote:

Abortion campaigns offer unprecedented opportunities for alliances between activists and groups fighting for the rights of poor women, yet many of these opportunities have been missed. The women's movement has a history of trading away the rights of women of color and working-class women in favour of gains for more privileged women. Because of this history, we must consciously and aggressively make clear that we are not about to repeat this pattern in the present or future. Steps must be taken to develop a multi-racial and class-conscious movement for abortion rights.⁷

Fried was writing in 1990, a year after the final events considered in this chapter. Clearly, she believed that a multiracial and class-conscious movement would be the strongest base from which to resist the Right. She also clearly understood that this had not been achieved by 1990. Part two of this thesis, then, will chart the development from rhetoric to changing practise, from the late 1970s and through the 1980s.

Of course, not all feminists responded to the threat of the Right in the same way. In their book *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*, Silliman, Fried, Ross and Gutiérrez commented that the 'pro-choice' and 'reproductive rights' movements were discrete entities and responded to the Right – particularly anti-abortion forces – in significantly different ways. The pro-choice movement (including groups like the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and Planned Parenthood), they argued, was dominated by middle-class white women, who made a conscious decision to try to broaden their base in the face of the rising Right. To do so, they changed their rhetoric from fighting for 'abortion rights' to struggling for the 'legal right to choose', critiquing encroachments by 'big government' on tradition, family and privacy. This attracted anti-government, pro-family voters into their pro-choice coalition, but alienated those who sought to fight for access to abortion – including many women of colour. A critique of government intervention into women's decisions about abortion could not be reconciled with critiques of the Hyde Amendment of 1977. While this strategy broadened their base, Silliman et al suggest, 'it was at the expense of dividing feminists, alienating poor women, women of color, more radical white activists, and those

⁷ Ibid.

from the holistic women's health movement'.⁸ Essentially, by attempting to broaden their support base because of fears of the Right, the pro-choice movement served to deepen splits that divided feminists along lines of race and class.

Silliman et al also suggest that the reproductive rights movement failed to satisfactorily integrate a critical intersectional analysis in their working practice in the early 1980s, though those active in it *did* see the limitations of the pro-choice movements' responses to the Right. Groups like R2N2 and CARASA wanted to take action at the grassroots, 'where the Right-to-Life Movement has organized, in order to create a truly popular movement for reproductive freedom and not just a panel of experts'.⁹ The pro-choice movement, they believed, failed to move beyond their narrow agendas and had thus undermined the reproductive freedom of many women. These groups' approaches to activism, responses to right-wing reproductive threats and abuses (such as coercive sterilization) and broad agendas were designed to be inclusive of women of colour and working-class women, even if this did not always work out in practise.

These different reactions to the threat of the Right reflect what Myra Marx Ferree has distinguished as the differences between *resonant* discourses and *radical* discourses. Resonant discourses, she suggests, 'appear mainstream and offer conventional forms of success', whereas radical ones 'are attractive to movement actors who seek a restructuring of hegemonic ideas'.¹⁰ In this case, the pro-choice movement can be seen to use *resonant* discourses, while groups in the reproductive rights movement used (or attempted to use) *radical* discourse. Importantly, Ferree states that

When movements seek the advantages [that] resonance offers they also accept political costs, particularly in marginalized alternative frames, the speakers who offer them, and the constituencies they express. Narrowing public framing of feminist claims to those that are more *resonant* is expedient for the purposes of influencing policy, gaining public support, and forestalling countermovement attacks; however, such strategic framing also excludes interests and needs that – while no less feminist in principle – are *radical*, that is, less

⁸ Silliman, p. 31-2

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33

¹⁰ Myra Marx Ferree, 'Resonance and Radicalism: Feminists Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany', *American Journal of Sociology*, 109.2 (2003), p. 305-6

defensible in that discursive context, but whose success implies more fundamental change.¹¹

Liberal pro-choice feminists' attitudes towards the rising Right and their attitudes towards multiracial activism were fundamentally interrelated, and yet mutually contradictory. Their approach (the 'countermovement attack') gained short-term benefits, attempted to undermine the Right, and prompted them to want to create – or at least represent – a coherent, united multiracial feminist movement. However, it simultaneously excluded women of colour who sought more fundamental change. These approaches were founded in what Barry Staw et al have described as pressures towards uniformity in the face of threat. Threats, they argue, increase pressure towards uniformity within organizations as 'group members perceive uniformity as necessary to move toward a collective goal'.¹² Threats, then, act as the variable that 'initiates pressures for uniformity rather than group cohesiveness'.¹³ This pressure to demonstrate uniformity prompted some organizations, groups and individual women to prioritise what they saw as collective – and therefore unifying – goals as part of their efforts to struggle against the threat of the Right. It also placed pressure on feminists to present themselves as uniform within the larger movement to portray group cohesiveness, even if that was not necessarily the case in practise.

Importantly, this section will consider the importance of the *representation* of the feminist movement in the eyes of the media, the general public and those with political power and clout. William Saletan has claimed that, between 1989 and 1992, pro-choice organisations fundamentally altered their strategies, in that 'arguing in the courts, confronting right-to-life activists in the streets, or turning out loyal pro-choice voters' were neglected in favour of conveying persuasive pro-choice messages through the mass media.¹⁴

¹¹ Marx Ferec, 'Resonance and Radicalism: Feminists Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany', p. 306

¹² Barry Staw, Lance Sandelands, and Jane Dutton, 'Threat Rigidity Effects in Organizational Behavior: A Multilevel Analysis', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26.4 (1981), p. 509

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 510

¹⁴ April 1992 saw *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, argued in the Supreme Court. It challenged several Pennsylvania state regulations regarding abortion, particularly surrounding notions of enforced waiting periods and consent from parents or husbands; the court ultimately upheld the Constitutional right to have an abortion. See *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey* (91-744), 505 U.S. 833 (1992) <<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/91-744.ZS.html>>; William Saletan, 'Electoral Politics and Abortion', in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 112

Feminists were anxious to portray themselves as the true representatives of American womanhood – which is why they often downplayed identity differences and tensions within the movement. This is not to suggest, however, that efforts to work multiracially and representations of multiracial work represented a binary: white feminists' desire to represent multiracial unity was based in their wish for 'successful' multiracial activism; they were fundamentally interrelated. Many white feminists considered the ways that they should represent themselves and the movement when planning their activism, while at the same time imagining shaping feminist narratives to be part of their efforts to work multiracially.

Many conservative women and antifeminists also perceived themselves as representing the 'everywoman' of America. Kim Nielsen writes that 'women on all parts of the political spectrum often claim to be speaking for all of womanhood, even while they critique its broad sweep'.¹⁵ She warns against dismissing women on the Right as 'possessing only false consciousness, as illogical or irrational'.¹⁶ With this in mind, it is important to highlight that the sense of legitimacy and urgency felt by feminists was *also* felt by antifeminists, and they equally felt entitled or obliged to be responsible for the production of the public narrative surrounding womanhood and feminism.¹⁷ As a result, the ongoing 'battles' between feminists and the New Right were not simply about the actions and reactions of both sides: there was a fundamentally important undercurrent which focused on who would 'win' the right to represent womanhood in the USA. To preserve their assumed right to this narrative, feminists wanted to make sure that they represented feminism as positively as

¹⁵ Kim E. Nielsen, 'Doing the "Right" Right', *Journal of Women's History*, 16.3 (2004), p. 170

¹⁶ Nielsen, p. 169

¹⁷ Notably, this thesis does not attempt to write or explore a history of Right wing feminism or feminists – nor does it fully explore the experiences and motivations of women who were active in the Right wing. Broadly, when discussing feminism in this thesis, I am referring to women who were active in Leftist-oriented activism, and not Right-wing women who identified as feminists. For more on women in the Right wing in this period, see Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Sara Evans, chaps 13–14; Kathleen Blee, *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Rebecca Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Temple University Press, 1988); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (New York: Crown, 1991); Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Ronnee Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008),

possible and rejected the accusations of exclusivity, superiority and elitism highlighted by the Right. To establish a narrative of inclusivity and broad representativeness, feminists needed to represent the movement as united across racial difference.

Historiography: Threat of the Right

Writing in 1983, Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray identified three main sectors of the New Right – the secular New Right, the Religious Right, and the ‘pro-family’ movement. The secular New Right, they argue, was based in traditional conservative ideals of capitalism, economic stability, and suspicion of big government and federal intervention. The Religious Right perceived traditional religious, family and moral values as being threatened by contemporary social movements – including feminism. Similarly, the ‘pro-family’ movement perceived traditional family values as the highest priority in defending society against the ‘threat’ of feminism and other liberal movements.¹⁸ All three of these sectors represented threats to feminists, and particularly to their work surrounding reproductive rights. The Right’s aversion to government intervention threatened to undermine the abortion rights that feminists had won in 1973 in *Roe v. Wade*, as well as the Medicaid abortion provisions. Indeed, in 1976, the secular Right succeeded in barring the use of federal funds to pay for abortions, except in the cases of rape or incest. This legislation – the Hyde Amendment – was included as a rider on a Health, Education and Welfare Appropriations bill worth \$60.1 billion.¹⁹ Though contested in the Supreme Court, the challenges that claimed it was unconstitutional were defeated in 1980 in *Harris v. McRae*.²⁰ This was a major victory for the secular Right, who argued against federal intervention into women’s private decisions such as abortion – ironically, the same argument that was made in 1973 in *Roe v. Wade*. The Hyde Amendment also pleased many in the religious Right, who did not want to be complicit in providing (in their

¹⁸ Johnston Conover and Gray, p. 75-76

¹⁹ Martin Tolchin, ‘On Abortion, The Houses Still Remain Miles Apart’, *The New York Times*, 27 November 1977, p. 176

²⁰ *Harris v. McRae* established that abortions which could not be paid through Medicaid were not required to be funded by individual States, and that the Hyde Amendment did not violate the Constitution. See: *Harris, Secretary of Health and Human Services c. McRae et al*, 1980
<https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=8833310949486291357&hl=en&as_sdt=2006>

opinion, immoral) abortions, even indirectly through federal funding. For many feminists, the passage of the Hyde Amendment was the first major indication of the rising Right and the threat to their reproductive freedoms. For many, then, the Hyde Amendment marked a change from an offensive feminist movement that fought for change to a defensive one which sought to maintain the rights that they had already won. A strong defence, they believed, required a united front of women.

One of the effects of this escalation of right-wing, antifeminist sentiment and policy was that it provided an impetus for some white feminists to try to create feminist collaborations across race, first through recruitment techniques, and later within multiracial coalitions. While most white-dominated organizations wanted to create these collaborations, many mainstream pro-choice groups had alienated themselves from women of colour precisely because of their responses to the Hyde Amendment. Silliman et al note that

In 1977, when Congress passed the Hyde Amendment [...] the leading women's organizations that had rallied for *Roe* did not marshal a large-scale response. This issue was of primary importance to women of colour, who are disproportionately low-income. Thus, this was a divisive and watershed moment for the pro-choice movement. It could have confronted the white supremacy of the Right's agenda and its own internal racism, had it made overturning Hyde and fighting for public funding a priority. By not doing so, it seemed to women of color that the pro-choice movement was not concerned with their rights.²¹

Mainstream feminist organizations were torn between a desire to forge multiracial unity in the face of threats and doing what they saw as politically necessary to protect the right to choose. Seemingly unaware of the friction that their response to Hyde had caused, many white women still wanted to create – or at least portray – strong collaborations across racial lines.

Sociological studies of mobilization have identified two main 'paths' to collective action within coalitions: first, political opportunity, and second, threat.²² Charles Tilly describes 'opportunity' as 'the extent to which other groups, including governments, are [...] vulnerable to new claims which would, if successful, enhance the contender's realization of its interests', and 'threat' as

²¹ Silliman, p. 30

²² Paul Almeida, 'Opportunity Organizations and Threat-Inducing Contention: Protest Waves in Authoritarian Settings', *American Journal of Sociology*, 109.2 (2003), p. 346

when those powerful groups are ‘threatening to make claims which would, if successful, reduce the contender’s realization of its interests’.²³ In this case, the powerful groups were the religious and political New Right and antifeminist movement, and the ‘contenders’ were feminists. Put simply, coalitions formed around opportunity would be what feminists considered offensive organizing and those formed due to threats were defensive. Paul Almeida suggests that the ‘threat’ path ‘denotes the probability that existing benefits will be taken away or new harms inflicted if challenging groups fail to act collectively’.²⁴ Almeida extends Tilly’s thesis then; not only would threats make it more difficult for social movement organizations to achieve their stated goals, but they also had the potential to undermine and remove gains that had already been won. In the case of second wave feminism, this understanding of mobilization around threats is crucial; the rise of the New Right not only made progressive feminist organizing more challenging, but also endangered their existing achievements, such as the right to abortion. The Hyde Amendment is an example of this. When feminists saw explicit, direct threats to abortion rights, they began to galvanise into coalitions and collaborations to try to protect their existing rights. Suzanne Staggenborg identifies the Hyde Amendment as the first major countermovement victory. This victory, she suggests, acted as an incentive to coalition work at both national and local levels.²⁵ Though Staggenborg’s study of coalition-building focuses on white-dominated groups, and does not explicitly discuss the practicalities of creating coalitions across race, I posit that the same understanding of the relationship between threats and coalition building can be used to analyse attempts towards multiracial work.

Staggenborg emphasises that cooperation and coalition is ‘particularly likely to occur with the mobilization of a strong countermovement and with countermovement successes’.²⁶ Clearly, the rise to prominence of the various arms of the New Right represented this countermovement and its successes. Extrapolating from Staggenborg’s assertion, then, would suggest that the social movement context in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s was prime for the

²³ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (University of Michigan, 1977), p. 3-5

²⁴ Almeida, p. 347

²⁵ Staggenborg, ‘Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles’, p. 380

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 375

creation of coalitions. Nella Van Dyke has established that the presence of a Republican antagonist in the White House increases the likelihood of cross-movement coalition work among student populations by over 40 per cent, including collaborations between women's groups and ethnic minority groups.²⁷ Indeed, she identifies the Ronald Reagan's campaign and Presidency as a key impetus for student mobilization to coalitions. Threats, then, were an impetus for social movement organization coalition-building.

Elizabeth Borland develops Staggenborg's argument in an examination of feminist coalitions in Buenos Aires in the wake of the Argentinian political and economic crisis in 2001. She suggests that it was not the crisis, or the 'threat' itself that caused coalitions. Instead, she suggests that activists' *perceptions* of the threat acted as a catalyst for overcoming social barriers, and highlighted 'how external conditions activated internal dynamics within the movement [...] that play a role in coalition formation'.²⁸ These internal dynamics included a recognition of common ideological perspectives, pre-existing social and network ties, and bridge-building – which clearly link to the dual themes of education and networking discussed in the previous section. She states that

Crises alone do not create coalitions or other kinds of alliances. Activists seeking to cooperate must translate the crisis moment into fertile ground for a coalition, and this process is fraught with difficulty.²⁹

Of course, for coalition formation to occur, all parties of the potential coalition must both perceive the changes in the environment as threatening, and balance the difficulties of coalition building with the perceived benefits that such collaborations could provide. Benita Roth explains that potential cooperation between groups must be perceived as useful: 'external environmental factors', she writes, 'cannot will coalitions into being; decisions have to be made by social movement participants in particular organizational settings'.³⁰ This decision-making could, and did, look different in different feminist groups.

²⁷ Nella Van Dyke, 'Crossing Movement Boundaries: Factors That Facilitate Coalition Protest by American College Students, 1930-1990', *Social Problems*, 50.2 (2003), pp.243-245

²⁸ Elizabeth Borland, 'Crisis as a Catalyst for Cooperation? Women's Organizing in Buenos Aires', in *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, ed. by Nella Van Dyke and Holly J. McCammon (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 241

²⁹ Borland, p. 259

³⁰ Roth, "Organizing One's Own" as Good Politics', p. 105

Staggenborg acknowledges that the heterogeneity of feminist groups meant that organizations and groups agreed to form coalitions for a variety of reasons and with a variety of aims.³¹ Indeed, different groups of feminists interpreted the varying threats of the New Right differently which affected their attitudes towards when, how and in what capacity to work together. Following the Hyde Amendment, for example, some white-dominated feminist groups contested the ruling because it would disproportionately affect low-income women, and therefore more low-income women would have children, which would swell the welfare rolls. Unsurprisingly, many women on welfare – who were disproportionately women of colour – saw this argument as inherently classist and racist. Loretta Ross has also highlighted the capacity for the threat of the Right to exacerbate divisions rather than heal them. Arkansas NARAL, she recalled, ran a series of focus groups that established an anti-government strategy in their focus towards abortion rights, drawing on arguments of privacy, bodily autonomy, and no government intervention. This, she said, was the ‘legacy of the people who fought against desegregation’ and was intended to appeal to more liberal Republicans.³² The result of this, Ross argued, was that it

shifted the entire pro-choice movement to the Right, away from us at the time arguing for increased government support for abortion like [...] repealing the Hyde Amendment, into fighting for anti-government positions. And so, the whole shift to the Right also affected the pro-choice movement, that also shifted to the Right. Th[ey] started echoing the calls from the Right that no government funds should be used for abortion, really splitting off women of colour from their movement, because women of colour were incensed that the mainstream movement was not fighting Hyde the same way that we were fighting it. [This] reflected a degree of racism in the movement, where you’re willing to make common cause with former segregationists as a way of weakening your opponents, but it took place at the expense of increasing the support by women of colour.³³

Evidently, different feminists responded to the threat of the Right in varied ways, which in turn affected their ability or desire to work together effectively.

Contextualising the New Right

Abortion rights and provision proved to be a powerful target for all branches of the New Right. The Hyde Amendment, while theoretically the work of the

³¹ Staggenborg, ‘Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles’, p. 380

³² Ross, ‘Interview with Author’

³³ Ibid.,

'secular right', reflected the emerging rhetoric of morality espoused by the religious Right and pro-family movement. The religious Right was epitomised by fundamentalist and evangelical Christian leaders who used personal networks and mass media to spread their messages. While the religious Right was not homogenous and included a variety of denominations, they tended to share similar values based on simple tenets – that God should be in control of Americans' lives, the 'devil cannot triumph if Christians stick together', and that the greatest enemy of the USA was 'secular humanism [...] which promoted evolution, immorality, abortion, wealth redistribution, energy conservation and disarmament'.³⁴ The real danger posed by secular humanism, they argued, was that it placed society's focus on the individual and individuals' rights, rather than on Christian community and 'family values'. Feminists' focus on abortion access as an individual's right, then, was anathema to the religious Right.

Perhaps the most famous activist on the Christian Right was Jerry Falwell, a Southern Baptist pastor and televangelist from Lynchburg, Virginia. He identified the legalisation of abortion in 1973, which he referred to as 'biological holocaust', as his own motivation to become involved with politics. Despite this, however, Laura Kalman suggests that Falwell did not actively preach against abortion until 1978.³⁵ The passage of the Hyde Amendment and the first bombings of abortion clinics in the preceding two years indicated that opposition to abortion was becoming more widespread – or, at least, more visible. Importantly, Laura Kalman argues that Falwell's focus and message was guided by his 'troops'. She states that conservative women taught Falwell 'which issues would send them door to door in the precincts'.³⁶ This created a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby Falwell preached on the issues that his followers told him were important – notably abortion and the ERA – and his preaching provided a platform for further discussion and opposition to these issues among the rank and file of the religious and political Right.

Falwell used mass media and networks to gain influence. He founded the Moral Majority in 1979 as an effort to build a coherent, national movement of Christian evangelicals. He, with other New Right leaders, drew on the many

³⁴ Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2010), p. 252

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254

conservative Christian groups of the 1970s which organized around single issues, such as prayer in schools, pornography, homosexuality and, of course, abortion. Peter Gemma, the director of the National Pro-Life Political Action Committee, stated that 'there [was] a sudden growing awareness on the part of all of us working in various single issues that if we pitched in together, we could get a lot more accomplished.'³⁷ By 1980, the Moral Majority's periodical, *Moral Majority Report* had a circulation of 840,000, and over half of all Americans knew who Jerry Falwell was. Membership estimates varied from 500,000 to 3 million, and the organization had local chapters in forty-seven states.³⁸ Evidently, Falwell's organization, and, as a result, his antifeminist and anti-abortion message, spread widely and quickly through the country.

Falwell hoped to simultaneously reach conservative Christians at the grassroots *and* to influence legislation and politics at a national level through this new organization.³⁹ His efforts to influence politics were realised during the summer of 1980. In July, the Republican Party (GOP) convention in Detroit demonstrated a significant shift to the right. While in 1976, abortion had been a minor talking point; by 1980 it dominated discussions. An organized presence from the Moral Majority prompted GOP candidates to 'affirm [their] support of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children', and support the Hyde Amendment.⁴⁰ Delegates at the convention noted the application of fundamentalist Christian ideals to political, legislative and judicial conversations, highlighted in the proposed platform plank that an 'anti-abortion stance [be] a litmus test for federal judgeships'.⁴¹ Throughout the convention, pro-family rhetoric dominated, demonstrating the clear links that had been established between the three branches of the New Right.

This mutual endorsement between the religious and political Right was made even more explicit at a 'National Affairs Briefing' rally in Dallas a month later. Both Reagan and Jimmy Carter were invited to attend and address the rally alongside high-profile televangelists, including Falwell and James

³⁷ Peter Gemma, quoted in J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter: The Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), p. 279

³⁸ Brooks Flippen, p. 293

³⁹ Robert C. Liebman, 'Mobilizing the Moral Majority', in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), p. 49; 54

⁴⁰ Brooks Flippen, p. 278

⁴¹ Ibid.

Robinson, the rally organizer. Falwell used the opportunity to speak out against abortion and to defend traditional family values, and Robinson preached that 'God had to take over the country'. He finished by exhorting 'God's people to come out of the closet' against 'radicals, perverts, leftists and liberals'. At the end of Robinson's sermon, Reagan took to the stage for his keynote speech. Addressing Robinson and Falwell, he stated, 'you can't endorse me, but I endorse you'.⁴² J. Brooks Flippen has identified this moment as a turning point in the history of the New Right, stating that 'for some, it appeared to be the consummation of Reagan's marriage to the Religious Right. For others, it appeared to be confirmation that the newly united Religious Right was a potent voting block'.⁴³ Whichever it was, this moment fortified the links between the religious and political Right, and impressed the inextricable nature of the two in the minds of the American public.

The merging of the political and religious Right marked the beginning of a new era of defensive organizing for feminists who sought to protect their existing rights. Though dramatically different in their outlooks, the New Right and feminist movements were fundamentally shaped by each other. Multiple scholars attribute the rise of the New Right and the antifeminist movement to a reaction against the successes of the feminist movement. Optimistically, Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon suggested that the strength of the right-wing backlash was 'a measure of how threatened conservatives were by popular backing for women's liberation' and that, despite the money spent and attention garnered by the New Right, public opinion was still overwhelmingly supportive of feminist issues.⁴⁴ More pessimistically, William Saletan suggests that conservatives 'won' the 'abortion war' as a result of valuing tradition, family and property. He suggests that public opinion favoured those ideals more than women's rights. In the mid-1980s, Saletan argues, pro-choice feminists – in particular, leaders of the mainstream, white women's liberation movement – created tentative alliances with some conservative voters by framing abortion restrictions as 'big government' encroaching on tradition, family and property. Ultimately, though, this strategy collapsed when questions of government

⁴² Brooks Flippen, p. 286; Matthew D. Lassiter, 'Investing Family Values', in *Rightward Bound* (Cambridge, MA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), p. 14

⁴³ Brooks Flippen, p. 286

⁴⁴ Baxandall and Gordon, p. 425

spending on abortion arose and the alliance dissolved, and public opinion turned against pro-choice feminism.⁴⁵ For Saletan, then, the actions of pro-choice feminists themselves were (at least partially) responsible for the rise of the Right.

Rosalind Petchesky understood the foundation of the New Right as directly related to feminist issues. She suggested that the politics of the family, sexuality and reproduction were the primary vehicle for right-wing forces' rise to power, and argues that the New Right gained both 'ideological legitimacy and organizational coherence [because of] its focus on reproductive and sexual issues'.⁴⁶ For Petchesky, then, reactions towards some of the fundamental issues of feminism became the foundation of the New Right. Accordingly, the New Right became a direct threat to feminism, as it targeted some of the central tenets of the movement such as abortion and the ERA. Marjorie Spruill places the foundations of the New Right religious and political coalition squarely within a feminist space, arguing that the National Women's Conference held in Houston in November 1977 'inspired Christian conservatives to action just as Republican strategists began their efforts to broaden the political power of conservatives by reaching out to the religious Right'.⁴⁷ Just as the abortion debate and the ERA provided an ideological battleground between feminists and the antifeminists of the New Right, the National Women's Conference provided a physical arena for these tensions to be played out.

⁴⁵ Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War*, p. 2

⁴⁶ Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, 'Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right', *Feminist Studies*, 7.2 (1981), p. 79

⁴⁷ Marjorie Julian Spruill, 'Gender and America's Right Turn', in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 78

Ch. 4: The National Women's Conference

Introduction

As previously noted, Marjorie Spruill has identified the National Women's Conference, held in Houston in 1977, as a flashpoint in the rise of the Right. 'Despite the intentions of IWY leaders', she states, 'the [State and National] conferences galvanized antifeminists as well as feminists, [which] contributed significantly to the rightward turn in American politics as social conservatives began rallying around gender issues'.⁴⁸ For Spruill, the National Women's Conference, and the lead up to it, was a catalyst for antifeminism within the New Right. While other scholars have not considered the conference as so central in the development of the Right, many scholars that discuss the New Right and its relationship to feminism have used it as an illustrative example. Matthew Lassiter suggests that the 'confrontation between feminist and antifeminist forces reached a climax' at the conference, and Catherine Rymph suggests that the Conference marked a shift in public perception of Republican women. Instead of moderate Republican feminists, she argues, women of the right-wing came to be represented by Phyllis Schlafly, her Eagle Forum and committed antifeminists.⁴⁹ Indeed, the common usage of the term 'pro-family' – and the resulting redefinition of feminists, the ERA, gay people and democrats as 'enemies of the family' – has been attributed to the Conference by Laura Kalman.⁵⁰ Clearly, the National Women's Conference has a significant part to play in the history of feminism and the New Right. Though it is debatable whether antifeminist sentiment was founded on or merely exacerbated by the run up to and happening of the Conference, the media fixation on the Conference as a 'battleground' between women on the Left and the Right certainly galvanised both antifeminist activism *and* feminist reactions to them.

Winifred Wandersee wrote that

the impetus, the political clout, and the organization skills for the Houston conference were provided by the liberal mainstream feminist movement. [Another] group of women – the New Right – provided a counterpoint to the conference and to the philosophy it advanced [...]

⁴⁸ Spruill, 'Gender and America's Right Turn', p. 71

⁴⁹ Lassiter, p. 22; Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 227

⁵⁰ Kalman, p. 263

Thus, the Houston conference was both the culmination of reform feminism and a portender of a changing political climate.⁵¹

It seems, then, that fears of the Right – in this case, the antifeminist women of the New Right - were not necessarily responsible for the conception of the event itself, nor for the centrality of multiracial inclusivity to its foundations. As mentioned in chapter one, the call for racial diversity was made in Bella's Bill, which stated that the delegations sent to the National Conference should reflect the racial diversity of women in the nation. The formal requirement to create a multiracial event, then, came from the Abzug in her position as the leader of a government appointed Commission, rather than from feminist groups themselves. However, one impact of the right-wing threat was to encourage white feminists to reframe the mandated multiracialism as a demonstration of multiracial unity and strength at the conference.

At both the state and national levels, the IWY meetings and conference polarised women in two distinct groups. Pro-life, anti-ERA and broader antifeminist groups formed alliances, while mainstream feminists actively supported their 'lesbian sisters' from homophobic attacks. Marjorie Spruill identifies these moments of unity as 'single-issue groups forging alliances with the enemies of their enemies'.⁵² The presence of right-wing forces at the state and national conferences prompted some women to prioritise creating alliances across race and between disparate groups. For many white women, the threat of the Right provided an impetus to demonstrate loyalty to the feminist cause and, importantly, to demonstrate the strength of the feminist movement. These women sought to paper over the cracks caused by differences in race, class and sexuality to portray the feminist movement as coherent, cohesive and united in the face of danger. This show of unity was intended for two audiences and for two purposes. First, it was to demonstrate to members of the New Right themselves that the feminist movement would not be easily beaten and would and should control narratives surrounding feminism, and was broadly representative of womanhood in America. Secondly, it demonstrated to the government that feminists would not stand for the rise of the Right and the dissolution of their hard-won rights. For the conference organizers, the short-

⁵¹ Winifred D. Wandersee, *On The Move: American Women in the 1970s* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1988), p. 176

⁵² Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 10

term effectiveness of the Houston Conference was dependant on the ‘mood of the men who control congress, the Presidency, and the state legislatures’.⁵³ They saw the conference as an opportunity to finalise the details of the National Plan of Action that had been drafted in the run up to, and during, the state conferences. This National Plan detailed the action that the government should take, and the expectations that American women had of them. Consequently, the ‘mood’ and attitude of men in government would, they believed, affect the way that they received and understood the Plan of Action – and therefore potential changes to the reality of women’s lives in America. Presenting a strong front to Congress, the President and policymakers was important to conference organizers in their desire to ensure policy and attitude changes in favour of women’s liberation. Conference organizers feared that presenting a split or divided movement would weaken their case to the government, and therefore jeopardise their claims on substantive political and legislative change around women’s issues.

Threat of the Right

The response of the Right to the National Women’s Conference was significant and widespread. Though the women on the IWY Commission were moderates and centrists, they – and their agenda – were still perceived as a threat to the pro-family values of the Right. Indeed, Jill Ruckelshaus - who was originally appointed as chair of the Commission by Gerald Ford, but resigned in July 1976 – was criticised as ‘the Gloria Steinem of the Republican Party’ by Phyllis Schlafly.⁵⁴ Schlafly had been actively voicing an anti-ERA stance for almost five years by the time of the Houston Conference, and had established a vocal minority within the GOP by the 1976 election. While she was not able to change the Republican Party’s official (positive) stance on the ERA, she ensured that the controversy of the ERA was on everybody’s minds. Unsurprisingly, Schlafly was an outspoken opponent of the IWY conference. In January 1975, when the IWY Commission was created, she protested that ‘the militant women who are determined to erase all differences of treatment between the sexes in order to

⁵³ *1977 National Women’s Conference: A Question of Choices*, 1977, Texas Archive of the Moving Image <texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013_02597>.

⁵⁴ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 56. By equating Ruckelshaus with Steinem, a very well-known feminist, Schlafly sought to demonstrate the IWY commission as inherently Left-leaning and sympathetic to the feminist cause.

force us to conform to a “gender free” society are not willing to compete fairly in the marketplace of ideas’.⁵⁵ In August that year, she formed her Eagle Forum, which she described as the ‘alternative to women’s lib’ and by December, it had over 40,000 members – more than NOW. It was committed to an ‘all-out offensive against the full range of feminist goals, to roll back the movement’s gains, and to end collusion between the federal government and feminism’.⁵⁶

Notably, the Eagle Forum framed feminism as backed by the federal government. The question of the relationship between women and the government is central to discussions about the National Women’s Conference. Because it was a government sponsored event, coupled with a visible presence of political figures, women on both the Left and the Right associated the conference closely with the federal government – though this prompted different responses. Many feminists saw the government-sponsored event as a platform for directly communicating to decision-making bodies of the government, and potentially as a route into politics themselves. Indeed, Karen DeCrow, former president of NOW, exclaimed that ‘everybody [at Houston] was saying, “Why do we have to go through Carter to the Congress? We could *be* the Congress”’.⁵⁷ For some feminists, then, the governmental links with the conference were perceived as a source of strength. At the same time, some radical feminists and feminists of colour felt that their input was stifled by the moderate nature of the conference – which was informed by its government-sponsored status.⁵⁸ Irrespective of this, the conference’s link to the federal government was broadly portrayed as a positive indication of the government’s acknowledgement of women’s issues being worth time and expenditure. Antifeminists and other women on the Right, though, believed that the governmental sponsorship of the Conference indicated that the odds would be stacked against them. They perceived the government as supporting feminism, and so understood the conference as biased towards feminism and themselves as victimised from the beginning. In addition, many right-wing women were sceptical about federal

⁵⁵ Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1977), p. 134

⁵⁶ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 111

⁵⁷ ‘What Next for US Women?’, *Time Magazine*, 5 December 1977, p. 26

⁵⁸ See the ‘Parliamentary Procedure and Conference Facilitation’ section on p. 179 of this thesis for further information on criticisms of the moderate nature of the National Women’s Conference.

interference into the 'private sphere' of women's issues, and saw the proposed ERA and *Roe v. Wade* as examples of personal power and responsibility as being shifted from the individual from the government, and the IWY conference as indicative of that intervention.⁵⁹ Women on the Right were careful to portray themselves as victims of an oppressive, elitist feminist movement with the weight of the federal government behind it.⁶⁰

Marjorie Spruill identifies December 1975 as a turning point; outraged by the approval of Bella's Bill, Schlafly galvanised her Eagles against the proposed conference which would cost 'Uncle Sam' five million dollars. The following year saw Schlafly's ad hoc campaign develop into a widespread social movement, and after the 1976 election, Schlafly's followers prepared to fight feminists, focussing initially on the upcoming state meetings.⁶¹ After these meetings, the threat of the Right to feminists at IWY became even more intense; at the conference itself, feminists were fighting against the Right on two fronts – against Schlafly and her pro-family counter-demonstration held two blocks from the conference, and against those right-wing forces within the delegations themselves. Twenty percent of the elected delegates for Houston were conservative women who identified as anti-ERA, and 15,000 'pro-family' advocates attended Schlafly's counter protest. Houston, then, provided a public and highly visible platform for the antifeminist Right; the state meetings were miniature battlegrounds in which both the Right and the Left prepared to face off to each other. Marjorie Spruill has written detailed accounts of conservative activity at many of the state meetings, and suggests that many social conservatives mobilized for these meetings 'to challenge feminists for the right to speak for American women'.⁶² This chapter will focus on one of the most

⁵⁹ Pollack Petchesky, p. 222

⁶⁰ Michelle Nickerson discusses the idea of 'housewife populism' as a way to describe the opinions and attitudes of women on the Right who saw themselves as representative of the grassroots women of America. Though her work focuses on the 1950s and women's anti-communist work, Nickerson's conclusion states that right-wing women's backlash against feminism was characterised by right-wing women 'represent[ing] themselves as champions of real, ordinary people battling a rarified class of secular elites [feminists] so entombed in the trappings of their privilege that they lost touch with the basic principles of morality' (p. 172). See: Nickerson; Rebecca Klatch has also examined the complex relationship between right-wing women, feminists and the federal government: see Klatch, pp.147-153. For further discussions of Right-wing women's conception of themselves as victims and of feminists as elitist and oppressive, see Klatch, pp. 51-53 and Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*,

⁶¹ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 112-3

⁶² Marjorie Julian Spruill, 'The Mississippi Takeover: Feminists, Antifeminists, and the

(in)famous state meetings – the Mississippi meeting – which was recognised as a major success for conservative forces. It will also consider the New York and Arizona state meetings, which demonstrated some of the strategies that feminists used to try to defend against the force of the conservative Right.

Mississippi

Marjorie Spruill describes the Mississippi state meeting as the ‘most notorious of the conservative victories as well as the most complete’ as all 29 elected delegates were white and anti-feminist; six men were part of the delegation, and one woman was the wife of the KKK Grand Imperial Wizard.⁶³ On the 8th and 9th of July 1977, nearly 1500 people descended on the Holiday Inn Downtown in Jackson, Mississippi. The women who attended were, according to the official State report, ‘fairly representative of the state’s female population with varied ages and different races’.⁶⁴ The report implied that the state meeting had attracted predominantly middle-class women, highlighting that most of the women who attended ‘appeared well dressed and there seemed to be a perhaps higher than average intellectual and educational level among the women’.⁶⁵ This was, they suggested, ‘due to the nature of the conference’ – presumably, this referred to the institutional and bureaucratic nature of the conference which broadly attracted middle-class women and reflected ‘mainstream’ white-dominated organizing.⁶⁶

State meeting organizers also identified a number of ‘vociferous’ men who attended, who, they suggested, wanted ‘to “guide” the women with whom they came’.⁶⁷ They did not comment on whether or not the right-wing women who attended wanted to be ‘guided’. A minority caucus of liberal women objected to the wording of many of the resolutions that began ‘Mississippi women...’, on the basis that nearly 150 men had voted for them, too – and that

International Women’s Year Conference of 1977’, in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives*, ed. by Marjorie Julian Spruill, Elizabeth Anne Payne, and Martha H. Swain (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2010), II, p. 287

⁶³ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 186; 170-1. Despite the state’s 37% black population, only one black woman was initially elected. She resigned when she realised the make-up of the rest of the delegation. See Gilbert Leader and Rusch Hyatt, p. 55

⁶⁴ Typed Additional Preface to Mississippi State Meeting Report (undated, c. July/August 1977) p. 1, in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the attending voters did not adequately represent Mississippian women.⁶⁸ The threat of the attending men was more than simply their presence; Karen Kester, the leader of the minority caucus, suggested that a small number of these men were leading an organised and powerful ‘takeover’ of anti-ERA and antifeminist groups.⁶⁹ Without the men, Kester suggested, it might have been “an all-right conference [...] as it was, they were voting anti-women resolutions. The women would seem to just be starting to think about an issue and then they would realize they were supposed to vote a certain way’.⁷⁰ Kester implies that the conservative women would have understood the minority caucus’ approach to issues as being better for *all* women – not just those who identified as leftist feminists – had they not been being controlled by conservative men. This simultaneously portrays feminists’ attitudes as objectively superior for women, and right-wing women as subservient to men.

The major threat that feminists perceived at the Mississippi state meeting, though, was the overwhelming turnout of conservative women. They operated under the name ‘Mississippians for God, Country and Family’, and ‘took over’ the meeting.⁷¹ Councilwoman Sarah Johnson estimated that more than ninety percent of the registrants were anti-ERA, among whom were male ministers, members of the Ku Klux Klan and right-to-life advocates.⁷² The conservative bloc were organized and powerful; they brought special kits with them to stop IWY discussions, and male “controllers” used walkie-talkies and handheld radios to instruct women on how to vote on the varying resolutions.⁷³ As a result, the delegation voted down all the core resolutions that were suggested by the IWY commission, and introduced a number of new resolutions

⁶⁸ Karen M. Kester, Report from the Minority Caucus of the Mississippi IWY State Meeting (16th July 1977) p. 2, in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 2: Mississippi

⁶⁹ The ‘minority caucus’ in this case refers to women who did not support the majority right-wing voting blocs, rather than to a caucus of or for women of colour.

⁷⁰ The Associated Press, ‘Pro-ERA Forces Challenge State’s Womens [sic] Delegation’ [Newspaper clipping] (10th July 1977), in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 2: Mississippi

⁷¹ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 186

⁷² Nancy Y. Stevens, ‘Four Local Women denounce conference’, *Delta Democrat-Times* (10th July 1977), in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 2: Mississippi

⁷³ The Associated Press, ‘Pro-ERA Forces Challenge State’s Womens [sic] Delegation’ [Newspaper clipping] (10th July 1977), in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 2: Mississippi; Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 187

based around conservatism, anti-feminism, morality and sin. One of the most frustrating new resolutions to feminists who were present read as follows:

I move that we express our appreciation to the Mississippi IWY Committee for the fact that all women in Mississippi were eligible to attend, that all groups were eligible to be represented, that all views were eligible to be presented in the form of resolutions, and the fact that absolutely no one who felt strongly enough about current issues facing women today was turned away or not allowed to register and vote.

Therefore, the true opinions of those people of conviction in Mississippi who cared enough to attend will be taken to the National IWY Convention. [Emphasis original]⁷⁴

This resolution must have seemed ironic to the Mississippi State Co-ordinating Committee who organized the state meeting. A multiracial and geographically diverse group of women, many of the Committee members made time to fit in meeting organization around full-time jobs and expressed a deep commitment to both the Mississippi state meeting and the larger IWY cause. In the end, the state meeting was a disappointment to them; they envisioned an open forum where Mississippian women from all walks of life could meet, discuss their problems, and share their dreams and plans. They 'never dreamed for a moment that such an innocent goal could be construed by observers as a meeting meant to tear down those institutions that all of us on the Committee hold dear; [their] families, [their] churches and [their] country'.⁷⁵ While the above resolution was technically true – no-one was turned away from attending, and all women were eligible to attend – coordinating committee members did not agree that a true representation of Mississippi women was being sent to Houston.

This opinion was shared by multiple women attending the state meeting. The workshops were recorded, and Elizabeth Powers gathered oral interviews with attendees. These interviews aimed to 'give a better viewpoint of the proceedings than any written word could present' and represented the view from the floor at the meeting.⁷⁶ Betsy Walker, from Jackson, felt betrayed by

⁷⁴ Mississippi IWY Conference Plenary Session Two – Attachment XXXIV (undated, c. July 1977), in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 203, Folder 2: Mississippi

⁷⁵ 'Evaluation of State Co-ordinating Committee', Typed Additional Preface to Mississippi State Meeting Report (undated, c. July/August 1977) p. 4, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

⁷⁶ 'Workshop Tapes and Oral Interviews', Typed Additional Preface to Mississippi State Meeting Report (undated, c. July/August 1977) p. 2, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

'her own people'. Recalling the ERA workshop on the first day of the conference, she described how, when the anti-ERA panellist was speaking,

people got up and cheered, and suddenly it dawned on me, when the first pro speaker got up and they started shifting around in their seat, and banging, so you couldn't hear the woman particularly well, something was amiss. [I thought] we've been set up. Suddenly I looked around the room and I saw all these red Stop-ERA badges, and I thought, well, S-H-I-T, what the hell is going on?⁷⁷

Others, like Norma Williams, hoped that the Mississippi state meeting would provide representation for

all of the women of Mississippi; a good cross-section of all of them. And I am afraid that I do not feel that is possible from this conference. [...] I feel very firmly that this has been rather a rigged conference, that it has quite, it has been rigged. People have been brought in who are not qualified, and are not a cross-section of Mississippi women.⁷⁸

Clearly, there were women at the conference on the floor who were unhappy with the representation of women at the Mississippi state meeting. Discussions of many issues that were fundamental in other states – including reproductive and abortion rights, the ERA, lesbian representation and sex education – were either not placed on the agenda of the Mississippi state meeting, or were stymied by the right-wing 'takeover'. It was not only controversial topics that felt under threat; Dorothy Taylor attended the workshop on education and was 'very perplexed' as she had thought that education would be a 'safe territory'. She stated that 'the hostility in the workshop was not conducive to full and free discussion.'⁷⁹ Feminists who attended the meeting said they felt betrayed, overwhelmed, and misrepresented; several women commented on their disgust at the presence and nomination of men to go to Houston. Attendees felt that the fundamental basis of IWY – the 'representation and political power for those who have been denied it' – was being undermined by the takeover.⁸⁰ Indeed, of

⁷⁷ Betsy Walker, Interview, 1977, College Park, MD, National Archives at College Park, Record Group 220, International Women's Year Oral History Project, Tape 1, Side 1,

⁷⁸ Norma Williams, Interview, 1977, College Park, MD, National Archives at College Park, Record Group 220, International Women's Year Oral History Project, Tape 1, Side 1,

⁷⁹ Mississippi State Meeting Report (undated, c. July/August 1977) p. 3, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

⁸⁰ Women for Racial and Economic Equality Poster, 'Unseat the Mississippi Delegation' (undated, c. July 1977), in 'Catherine East Papers', Cambridge, MA, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, MC477, Box 20, Folder 20

the 1469 registrants at the meeting, only 162 of them were men – yet more than one-sixth of the Mississippi delegation sent to Houston was male.⁸¹

Bonnie Littleton was the only interviewee to discuss race; she mentioned that she did not ‘feel like all the representatives that should be here is here. Cos [she] fe[lt] like the blacks [we]re really left out in this conference’.⁸² Notably, Littleton’s response that she felt left out of the conference bore little resemblance to the demographics of the state meeting attendees. The state meeting summary reported that participants reflected the racial diversity of the state. Littleton’s feeling of exclusion was based on her experiences within workshops, when many women felt silenced by the right-wing ‘takeover’. Other interviewees prioritised discussing this takeover than discussing race explicitly, despite racial diversity occupying much media attention before and after the state meeting. The plenary speakout at the meeting provided a further opportunity for involvement, though only one woman of colour was recorded in the state meeting report. Edna Rimes, a woman of Hispanic descent, ‘called for unity of all groups, [saying] “Don’t separate, combine. Cohesiveness will help solve our problems”’.⁸³ While it is unclear whether Rimes was referring to unity across racial difference or political difference, she clearly saw advocating for a united front in the face of threats as both feasible and desirable.

Littleton’s assertions that black women could not participate fully in the state meeting were reaffirmed when the delegation for Houston was chosen. The conservative majority were able to control the meeting and elect an all-white delegation which included six men, women from the white supremacist group ‘Women for Constitutional Government’ and the wife of the state KKK leader. They also elected Willie Lee Latham to the delegation, not knowing that she was black; when she understood that the rest of the delegation was white, she resigned.⁸⁴ Marjorie Spruill claims that the Mississippi meeting ‘sent shockwaves through the nation’.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Mississippi State Meeting Report (undated, c. July/August 1977) p. 1, in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

⁸² Bonnie Littleton, Interview, 1977, College Park, MD, National Archives at College Park, Record Group 220, International Women’s Year Oral History Project, Tape 1, Side 1,

⁸³ ‘Speakout’, Mississippi State Meeting Report (8th July 1977), in ‘International Women’s Year State Reports’, Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

⁸⁴ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 188

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

The influence of the Right in Mississippi curtailed feminists' ability to discuss other issues and closed off opportunities to do so. Topics such as abortion were struck down and the related resolutions were not passed. The strength of the Right at the meeting served as a 'wake-up call' for many feminists, demonstrating the need for their increased dedication to the feminist cause, and a galvanising of the movement.⁸⁶ Feminists' outraged reactions towards the all-white, mixed-gender Mississippi delegation called for unity in the face of the Right, highlighting the racism and inequality that the delegation symbolised. Women for Racial and Economic Equality, a New York-based organization focussed on representing working class women and women of colour and their children, created a poster which called upon women to 'Speak Out For Equality! Unseat the Mississippi Delegation'.⁸⁷ They highlighted the inherent racism in an all-white delegation sent to represent a population in which 36% of women were black. They asserted that:

[The Right] hope to dominate Houston IWY and divert our aspirations for equality. They include the same organizations which for decades have fomented racist hysteria. WOMEN FOR RACIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY believes that it is not possible to win equality for women without eliminating the scourge of racism from our land. Women, Black, white and brown, must join hands for forge a new unity and strength of sisterhood. Only then can we win the battles for ERA, child care, jobs, an end to discrimination, and real equality.⁸⁸

The Mississippi delegation was not unseated – the National Commission condemned its homogeneity but could not technically penalise them as they were elected through appropriate parliamentary procedure. However, their nomination alone was enough to spark outrage among women in other states. The Mississippi delegation began to represent, to other delegates and pro-choice women in the state, a common enemy against whom feminists should unite. Indeed, in the final report of the State Meeting, Janice Moor, a white Mississippian wrote that

the State Meeting made clear to us that sexism and racism are the same. Those who are against equal rights for women are also opposed to equal rights for blacks. Therefore both black and white

⁸⁶ Ellen Cohn, 'Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This', *The Village Voice*, 11 July 1977, p. 14

⁸⁷ Women for Racial and Economic Equality Poster, 'Unseat the Mississippi Delegation' (undated, c. July 1977), in 'Catherine East Papers', Box 20, Folder 20

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

women have to fight both sexism and racism or whichever one they may choose, it really means the same thing.⁸⁹

Moor's comments in the final report reflect a longer history of white women equating sexism and racism. While in this case, Moor's comments suggest that feminists' direct experience with the Right informed their understanding of the importance of unity across race, it is notable that this most accurately refers to *white* feminists. Feminists of colour, as well as some antiracist white feminists, tended to acknowledge racism and sexism as related but intersectional issues, rather than the same issue. By equating the two, Moor ran the risk of alienating women of colour who did not see racism and sexism as equivalent, even as she intended for this rhetoric to demonstrate unity and inclusivity.

Feminist Resistance to the Right at State Meetings: New York and Arizona

In September 1977, Bella Abzug wrote to Senator Jacob Javits to ask him to print her remarks in the Congressional Record to try to counter 'misinformation and baseless charges from the right-wing'.⁹⁰ In it, she expressly denied the notion that the IWY Commission attempted 'to stack the coordinating committees with pro-ERA committees and persons who favored choice in the matter of abortion'.⁹¹ Any suggestions to the contrary, she wrote, were as a result of efforts by a 'militant and well-organized group, a deliberate attempt to disrupt, to spread misinformation to infuse the state meeting process with distrust and to polarize the participants'.⁹² Though she did not explicitly state this, it is clear that the 'militant and well-organized group' refers to the conservative delegation – and in particular to Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. Indeed, in her letter to Javits, Abzug referred to Schlafly's May 1977 newsletter which encouraged her followers to disrupt all the state meetings.⁹³ However, despite Abzug's claims to the contrary, it is clear that some state organizing committees actively tried to undermine or prevent the actions of the Right.

⁸⁹ Mississippi State Meeting Report (undated, c. July/August 1977) p. 1, in 'International Women's Year State Reports', Container 203, Folder 1: Mississippi

⁹⁰ Letter and Statement from Bella Abzug to Senator Jacob Javits (1st September 1977) p. 1, in 'NCOIWY Papers', Executive Director's Office [Bella Abzug], Signature File, 1975-1978, Container 86, Folder 3

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Held on the same weekend as the Mississippi meeting, the New York state meeting seemed a radically different affair. Approximately 15,000 women attended the meeting held in Albany and elected 88 delegates to represent them at Houston. Like in Mississippi, the New York co-ordinating committee was diverse and representative of the women of New York state, geographically, ethnically and politically. They discussed outreach strategies in their first meeting, and emphasised ‘a need for unity, the need to listen to those you outreach to, [and] racial/ethnic women/American Indian Women’.⁹⁴ In a mere eight days, Angela Cabrera, the temporary chair of the outreach committee had written a seven-page memo that outlined which groups should be targeted and strategies for outreach. Councilwoman Miriam Friedlander suggested writing a ‘history of ethnic women in [New York state]’ as part of efforts to ensure racial diversity and representation.⁹⁵ Clearly, race and racial diversity was important to New York’s co-ordinating committee – as it was to Mississippi’s co-ordinating committee. The meeting itself, though, was very different; while right-wing forces ‘took over’ the Mississippi meeting, they struggled to gain any traction in New York. There are several reasons for this; for one thing, right-wing forces did not seem to have developed the same targeted campaign against the state meeting and its organizers. In addition, members of the state co-ordinating committee and other feminists actively worked to undermine the Right’s efforts to disrupt the meeting by making it difficult for them to attend in the first place.

Mary Tracy wrote a bitter press release and report about these efforts to subdue the Right. She claimed to speak for thousands of women when she described herself as eager but unable to attend the meeting in Albany. Tracy described herself as representing ‘a philosophy espoused by a very large cross section of New York State Women, whose interest is in upholding the ideals of feminine integrity, the sanctiyy [sic] of the family, and the role of the homemaker’ and ‘women of the Right to Life movement, and Eagle Forum’.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Memorandum from Fran Henry to IWY Commission and Staff (4th February 1977) p. 2, in ‘Abzug Papers’, Box 974, Folder 7

⁹⁵ Memorandum from Angela Cabrera to Bella Abzug, ‘Progress Report Before the Coordinating Committee, Albany, New York’ (12th February 1977) pp. 1-7, in ‘Abzug Papers’, Box 974, Folder 8; New York State Women’s Conference (IWY) Coordinating Committee Meeting #2, Albany (13th February 1977) p. 2, in ‘Abzug Papers’, Box 974, Folder 8

⁹⁶ Mary V. Tracy, Press Release, ‘Report of Right to Life and Eagle Forum and their attempts to obtain reservations and acceptance at the N.Y. State I.Y.W. meeting, Albany, NY (10th July

Tracy's attempts to register herself and other conservative women were thwarted by New York state committee members' deliberate obfuscation and noncompliance. In April 1977, she visited the IWY headquarters to attempt to register herself for the state meeting. Even this was difficult; the IWY office was not listed on the wall directory, and security guards did not know anything about its existence. She met with Annette Stoller, the chair of the committee, who 'gave the impression that she had just been hired, at random [...and] purported to know very little about anything'.⁹⁷ Tracy later learned that this was not true; Stoller had been purposefully unforthcoming with information, but implied that registration would open later. Stoller then almost missed their second meeting, when Tracy brought three other conservative women with her. At that point, Stoller told her that 75,000 application forms had already been sent out, and that no more were available. A month later, Stoller's secretary confirmed that there were no registration forms left, but she could send one to Tracy specifically. By July, Tracy had neither received an application nor heard back from Stoller with an explanation. As a result, Tracy concluded that members of Right to Life and Eagle Forum were being systematically excluded from the state meeting. Indeed, she asserted that:

The powers that are behind the I.Y.W. [sic], directing it and manipulating the funds, have effectively eliminated us from attending and expressing views of thousands of women whom we represent. These views differ from the women libbers, whose interests seem predominantly offered in proposed workshops. Apparently only one view will be tolerated, dramatized, and pushed down the media's throats, as the honest views of American women.⁹⁸

While it is unclear exactly how many right-wing women could attend the Albany meeting, Tracy clearly was not the only person to feel excluded from full participation in the state meeting because of her conservatism. Catherine Dillon did manage to attend the Albany meeting, but described it as 'the worst weekend of [her] life'.⁹⁹ While the parliamentary procedure benefitted the Right in Mississippi, it fulfilled the opposite function in New York. Dillon noted that:

1977) p. 1, in 'Catherine East Papers', Box 18, Folder 21

⁹⁷ Mary V. Tracy, Press Release, 'Report of Right to Life and Eagle Forum and their attempts to obtain reservations and acceptance at the N.Y. State I.Y.W. meeting, Albany, NY (10th July 1977) p. 1, in 'Catherine East Papers', Box 18, Folder 21

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁹⁹ Catherine N. Dillon, "'Minority' Report', *Newsday* (21st July 1977) p. 77, in 'Catherine East Papers', Box 18, Folder 21

There were so many irregularities in the registering, voting and parliamentary procedures that any opposition to the signed-and-all-but-delivered package was effectively blocked. [...] The pro-family views of the average women who represent the bulk of our society had to be submitted in a *minority* report.¹⁰⁰

Dillon's dismay at having to submit her 'pro-family views' in a minority report reflects right-wing rhetoric that suggested that feminists were elitists and unrepresentative of 'normal' women, and that most American women supported 'pro-family' advocates. Dillon concluded by suggesting that the IWY project should be renamed to more accurately reflect the women who she saw as controlling it: she proposed the name 'International Feminists' Year' instead.¹⁰¹ Clearly, the Albany meeting was less accessible for some right-wing women than the Mississippi meeting, due to what they understood as deliberate obfuscation and manipulation of parliamentary procedure by the organizers. The notion that feminists were actively blocking participation by right-wing women reinforced their suggestion that the IWY meetings and conference could not, and did not, represent all women, thus contradicting feminists' claims that IWY represented all American womanhood.

This was not the only concerted effort of feminists to try to block right-wing participation in the state meetings. Marjorie Spruill describes the strategies of feminists in Arizona in their efforts to diminish the power of conservative women at the meeting. Working a month before the Mississippi meeting, Arizona organizers had no conception of the level of right-wing 'takeover' that Mississippi experienced. Nevertheless, Arizona state coordinating committee members were aware of the threat of the Right. Arizona was a more conservative state than New York, having defeated the ERA several times, and attendees had been warned by women in other states about the plans of the conservatives. As a result, they devised and implemented a plan of action to prevent against the Right's interference. Spruill quotes Mary Peace Douglas, one of the pro-feminist accomplices, as she explained their strategy:

A core group of women wore a bright strip on their shoulders [...] one was assigned to monitor each workshop. If the conservatives packed any workshop that woman quietly left, went to a central location – word was quickly passed and quietly people moved into the packed

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

workshop – thus when the resolution came to a vote, we had the majority. It was simple, effective, and worked beautifully.¹⁰²

Clearly, feminists at the Arizona state meeting worked even more explicitly to undermine the efforts of right-wing attendees than their colleagues in New York. While some feminists saw the action as unfair, others saw action as necessary to prevail over the threat of the Right; Elly Anderson, a leading coordinator at the meeting was ‘tired of being a “good sport” and losing’. She said to ‘never give your enemy an even break’.¹⁰³ This blunt approach to what many feminists saw as protecting women against the Right is indicative of their perception of the threat. The fact that liberal women organizing and operating within the IWY state meetings were happy to take such actions demonstrated the strength of their feelings against the Right; this strength of feeling developed into calls for unity. Indeed, Mary Douglas described the actions at the Arizona state meeting as ‘an exciting bringing together of feminists working for a common goal!’.¹⁰⁴ Working together and forging unity, then, was seen as an important and necessary – and indeed, exciting – way to combat the force of the Right.

National Conference, Houston

The media surrounding the National Women’s Conference at Houston generally portrayed it as a showdown between feminists and antifeminists. Geri Joseph, writing for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, predicted that the conference would be a ‘historic humdinger’.¹⁰⁵ Though only around 20% of the delegates at the conference identified as pro-family, anti-ERA, anti-abortion or antifeminist, the presence of the Right was still keenly felt and explicitly mentioned by most media coverage of the event. Phyllis Schlafly organized a counter-conference which focussed on ‘pro-family’ issues across town, which attracted around 15,000 attendees to protest the IWY conference, the ERA and liberalised abortion laws, and to demonstrate support for traditional pro-family values. Joan Zormeir, a mother of six from Montana, was one of the attendees to Schlafly’s counter-demonstration, and stated that the ‘true pulse of America’ would be

¹⁰² Mary Peace Douglas, quoted in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 153

¹⁰³ Elly Anderson quoted in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 153

¹⁰⁴ Mary Peace Douglas, quoted in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 153

¹⁰⁵ Geri Joseph, Untitled Newspaper Column, *Minneapolis Tribune* (26th September 1977), in ‘Sarah Harder Papers’, Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, M94-068, Box 15, Folder 4

displayed at the pro-family demonstrations.¹⁰⁶ The threat of the Right, then, was visible both within the conference delegation itself and as an external force.

Both manifestations of the Right prompted fears among feminists. Sally Verdugo de Martinez, a brown woman from California, was alarmed by the threat of disruption to the conference by conservative delegations and white supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan who were present. Paulette Dodge, on the other hand, was concerned that the media would concentrate on the more exciting pro-family counter-demonstrations than on the 'long, difficult and boring plenary sessions' of the IWY conference.¹⁰⁷ The right-wing threats, then, manifested itself in different ways; both as a direct threat to contemporary feminist activism, and as a threat to the way in which feminism could and would be represented to wider society. Feminists were especially concerned by the ways that the Right represented them – as elitist, militant, and enemies of 'ordinary' women who were supported by and beholden to the Federal Government, rather than everyday women.¹⁰⁸ These representations threatened to undermine the ideal of an inclusive feminism that many feminists were keen to portray. Both threats affected the reasons why and the ways in which feminists understood and strove for multiracial unity. Understandably, direct racist threats, such as the attendance of KKK members, were something that many white women felt that they had to stand against in solidarity with women of colour – or, at least, to espouse the rhetoric of solidarity. The threat that the Right posed to representations of the IWY conference, and of feminism in general, was more subtle, and yet potentially just as harmful.

“In Perfumed Combat”: Representation and the Media

Sherna Berger Gluck has called the Houston Conference 'pivotal' in making the gender-focussed activism of women of colour – and by extension the notion of multiple feminisms and multiracial feminist coalition – visible to the public and the larger movement. Doreen Mattingley and Jessica Nare suggest that the official report of the Houston conference 'paints a utopian picture of inclusion',

¹⁰⁶ Joan Zormeir, quoted in Judy Klemesrud, 'Houston Meeting "A Kaleidoscope of American Womanhood"', *The New York Times* (19th November 1977), in 'Sarah Harder Papers', Box 15, Folder 4

¹⁰⁷ Sally Verdugo de Martinez and Paulette Dodge, quoted in Judy Klemesrud, 'Houston Meeting "A Kaleidoscope of American Womanhood"', *The New York Times*, (19 November 1977), in 'Sarah Harder Papers', Box 15, Folder 4,

¹⁰⁸ Denton, p. 270

emphasising that it was the first time that so many diverse women were able to gather in one place.¹⁰⁹ While it did not represent the first instance of multiracial organizing, it was, according to Gluck, the first example of it in the public eye, and one which reshaped the women's movement and the future of feminist activism irrevocably.¹¹⁰ The significance of Houston's diversity, then, was that it occurred on a highly visible public platform with lots of media attention. Indeed, much of the media coverage following the Conference espoused enthusiasm and optimism about the diversity of the Conference and its significance. *Time Magazine's* cover story read that 'American women had reached some kind of watershed in their own history, and in that of the nation' as a result of the 'hectic, fractious, exhilarating days in Houston'.¹¹¹ The same article described the Conference as a 'rainbow of women', and stated that 'no previous women's gathering could begin to match its diversity of age, income, race, occupation or opinion...[the delegates] were white, black, yellow, Hispanic and Indian - and four were Eskimo'.¹¹² For many of the public, Houston represented the first major visibly multiracial feminist event. This proved to be central to organizers' representations of the conference as inclusive, and by extension, their representations of *feminism* as inclusive.

The way in which feminism as a movement was represented was fundamentally important to many feminists – and antifeminists. The IWY Commission went so far as to produce a pamphlet which outlined media guidelines for the fair representation of women and women's activism. In it, they noted that 'too often news media have reported conflict among women and ignored unity. Coverage of women's conferences is often limited solely to so-called "splits" or fights'.¹¹³ The danger of the media focussing on perceived splits in the movement, they believed, was that it would show weakness and vulnerability to their enemies on the Right.

¹⁰⁹ Doreen J. Mattingly and Jessica L. Nare, "A Rainbow of Women": Diversity and Unity at the 1977 US International Women's Year Conference', *Journal of Women's History*, 26.2 (2014),

¹¹⁰ Gluck, p. 32

¹¹¹ 'What Next for US Women?', p. 19; 'National Women's Conference 1977 Documentary',

¹¹² 'National Women's Conference 1977 Documentary',

¹¹³ National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, *Media Guidelines* pamphlet (July 1976), in 'National Women's Conference 1977 Papers', Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, M82-288, Folder 1

The Commission's concerns were founded in a larger context of the media portraying any disagreements or differences between women in the public eye as catfights or childish and irresponsible bickering. Kimberly Wilmot Voss has traced the use of the 'catfight model' in media representations of feminist debates over the ERA in Florida in the early 1970s. Women's comments about other women's femininity, disagreements about the ERA between female leaders of organizations, and women splitting their votes in the Florida House Committee were all framed as examples of the 'catfight' image.¹¹⁴ Susan Douglas argues that 'this was what debates about feminism got reduced to in the mass media: a catfight' and that the 'news media will opt for the simplistic yet coercive metaphor of woman-on-woman violence whenever possible'.¹¹⁵ In doing so the media reduced the differences of opinion and political stances of women from the Left and Right to childish 'catfights' that delegitimised their importance. This served to portray American women's political choices as a binary choice between (apparently) radical feminism and radical antifeminism. In addition, it framed women's relationships as being characterised by either 'competitive individualism' (in which women 'duked it out with each other') or 'utopian sisterhood'.¹¹⁶ Because of this, Jennifer Drake emphasises that 'the catfight model disables serious feminist discussion about difference and coalition'.¹¹⁷ This model further widened divisions and exacerbated tensions. Kaitlynn Mendes suggests that this portrayal of difference served to split the second wave of feminism into 'legitimate and illegitimate sections', while Rhonda Hammer suggests that the 'catfight' narrative was (and is) used by media culture in collusion with antifeminist women in attempts to trash and discredit the women's movement.¹¹⁸ Mendes posits that men in the media portrayed feminists as 'deviants' to uphold

¹¹⁴ Kimberly Wilmot Voss, 'The Florida Fight For Equality: The Equal Rights Amendment, Senator Lori Wilson and Mediated Catfights in the 1970s', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 88.2 (2009), pp. 192-201

¹¹⁵ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994), p. 222, 244

¹¹⁶ Douglas, p. 222; Jennifer Drake, 'Review: Third Wave Feminisms', *Feminist Studies*, 23.1 (1997), p. 98

¹¹⁷ Drake, p. 98

¹¹⁸ Kaitlynn Mendes, 'Reporting the Women's Movement: A Cross-National Comparison of Representations of Second Wave Feminism and Equal Rights Issues in the United Kingdom and United States Daily Press, 1968-1982' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Cardiff University, 2009), p. 196; Rhonda Hammer, *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism: A Critical Feminist Perspective* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 14

patriarchal values. This strategy can also be identified in tensions between feminists and antifeminists – each wanted to portray the other as the ‘deviant’ to delegitimise their claim on the public narratives surrounding feminism.

Official IWY press releases tended to gloss over right wing opposition and highlight the success of multiracial participation and organizing at the conference. A release from October 1977 was entitled ‘Diverse Delegations to Attend National Women’s Conference’, and focused on the diverse groups of women who were due to congregate in Houston the following month. The first sentence claimed that ‘the voices and faces of American women delegates to the National Women’s Conference will reflect the diversity of this country’s female population’, and further down the page, it emphasised that ‘a comparatively high percentage of minority and ethnic women will be delegates’.¹¹⁹ It went on to provide a quantitative analysis of the delegates, stating the number of delegates of different races and the percentage of the delegation that they represented. As well as racial diversity, the press release highlighted the diverse ages, employment, religions and organizational affiliations of the delegates. The first four pages of the six-page press release were dedicated to highlighting and celebrating diversity of the conference, demonstrating the centrality of the narrative of unity across diversity to the IWY Conference Committee’s efforts to represent the event. The issue of right-wing opposition, while actively and explicitly covered in many media outlets, was minimised in this official press release. It is not until the penultimate page of the release that the Right is mentioned, and even then, the writers stated that:

Throughout the meetings leading to the National Women’s Conference, the IWY Commission has faced an onslaught of radical right-wing allegations. Disruptions hampered about one-fifth of the State/Territorial meetings. Overall, however, analysis shows that the radical right-wing influence is limited to a small number of delegates from a few states. [...]

Although a few states faced extreme right wing tactics, an overwhelming number of the State meetings observed the Congressional intent of Public Law 94-167 [...] to include “groups which work to advance the rights of women [...] with special emphasis on the representation of low income women, members of diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups and women of all ages”.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ ‘Diverse Delegations to Attend National Women’s Conference’, Press Release, (3rd October 1977) p. 1, in ‘Sarah Harder Papers’, Box 15, Folder 4

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5

The disruptions to the State Meetings were glossed over as small hiccups rather than fundamental challenges. They represented, the IWY statements suggested, a minority of women, up against a majority whose feminism was defined by their adherence to the mandated multiracialism.

The mainstream media, on the other hand, conformed to the ‘catfight’ model in portraying the State Meetings. A common factor in Spruill’s descriptions of media coverage of the meetings is the sensationalism and emphasis on women’s difference between the Left and the Right. The *Montgomery Independent*, for example, described the Alabama meeting’s debates over abortion and the ERA as ‘a veritable catfight [...] they startled even some battlewise male politicians who were watching [...] Not to be cute, but the women unarguably demonstrated that in political combat, they are, indeed, the equal if not the superior of men. The Civic Centre is still smoking’.¹²¹ Similarly, the *Montgomery Advisor* described the meeting as a the ‘Powder Puff Duel’.¹²² In Michigan, the conservative press portrayed feminists at the meeting as unwilling to engage in discussion and using unfair tactics to undermine women on the Right – who called International Women’s Year a ‘yearlong joke’. On the other hand, the liberal press dismissed conservative participants by stating that they ‘didn’t understand parliamentary procedure and they tried to interrupt, hassle and bog down the meetings and workshops’.¹²³ In California, the media reiterated this dismissal of conservative women by feminists. When conservatives proposed potential resolutions for the meeting, feminists responded with ‘laughter and disbelief’.¹²⁴ By June 1977, Spruill argues, the media were fully committed to covering the IWY state meetings. Conservative male journalists, she suggests, were particularly keen to represent the meetings as spaces where ‘their women step[ped] up and deal[t] blows to the feminists. [They] seemed to be delighted to see women fighting women’.¹²⁵ Clearly, the state meetings were subjected to the media emphasis on splits, divisions and catfights that the IWY Commission had been worried about. It is unclear if either

¹²¹ ‘Editorial: In Perfumed Combat’, *Montgomery Independent*, 15 July 1977, in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 184

¹²² Ray Jenkins, ‘Editorial’, *Montgomery Advisor*, 12 July 1977, in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 184

¹²³ Elaine Donnelly and Mary Aikey, quoted in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 157

¹²⁴ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, p. 165

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173

side 'won' in these battles over media representation. They did, however, highlight the importance of the media and prompt the galvanisation of women – both feminists and antifeminists – to attempt to gain more favourable representation. They learned from the media coverage of the state meetings and changed their organizing strategies accordingly in advance of the National Conference in Houston in November.

Indeed, in the days running up to the Houston Conference, one reporter wrote that

Few of the delegates make any attempt to hide their feeling that the media has become an integral part of the conference. In casual conversation, organizers frequently tell reporters, "It all depends on you". Others candidly admit it is a "media event".¹²⁶

Crucially, this recognition of the media's importance galvanised women on the Left and the Right to consider their media strategy. Conservative women hoped 'to tap [the] rich media pool in their effort to discredit the conference as a fringe group', while feminists sought to 'present a unified stance despite very real divisions among their own ranks'.¹²⁷ This became so important, in fact, that the *Washington Star* claimed that 'both sides are convinced that appearances will count just as much as votes, and that is the focus of each side's planning' and that 'caucus strategists were holding meetings with their delegates to ensure solidarity' in these appearances.¹²⁸

This careful planning and strategizing may have been one of the reasons that the media coverage of the Houston Conference itself was not as focussed on arguments and 'catfights' between women on the Left and the Right. Ruth Rosen suggests that the 'press coverage became increasingly respectful as reporters realized the significance of a government-sponsored meeting with a stated feminist agenda'.¹²⁹ There was some speculation about potential spats in reports leading up to the conference - Lyle Denniston wrote in the conservative

¹²⁶ Unknown Author, 'National Women's Conference Puts Its Momentum to Test' (Undated, c. November 1977), 'National Women's Conference Papers', Box 9, Folder 1

¹²⁷ Ibid.; For more on media representation of Conservative women, see Ronnee Schreiber, 'Who Speaks for Women? Print Media Portrayals of Feminist and Conservative Women's Advocacy', *Political Communication*, 27.4 (2010),

¹²⁸ Lyle Denniston, 'Women's Parley: Shaping Strategies', *The Washington Star* (19th November 1977), in 'National Women's Conference Papers', Box 9, Folder 1

¹²⁹ Rosen, p. 423. See this, also, for a list of examples of national media that became 'more respectful' about the Houston Conference at this time.

Washington Star that 'there will be a small but visible, and media attracting, minority of conservatives in Houston' and Patrick Buchanan, a right-wing columnist, speculated that the conference might 'bear a striking resemblance to the bar scene in *Star Wars*'.¹³⁰ After the conference itself, though, splits and divisions between women were downplayed in the mainstream media; when covering the conference only four days after his previous article was published, Denniston emphasised the unity of women who attended. He explicitly commented on the organizers' fears of divisions, but suggested that the turning point in the conference 'came after the delegates had found themselves overwhelmingly in favour of demands for minority women: Indians, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Blacks. The sisterhood then came together'.¹³¹ In this article, Denniston clearly links multiracial unity with broader unity within the women's movement, a link that was made frequently within the mainstream media coverage of the conference.

An hour-long film which was broadcast nationally on the final day of the conference also emphasised women's unity across race at the conference; they described the delegates as an 'American Rainbow' and 'maybe the most diverse group of people ever officially assembled by a national government'.¹³² The delegates, it stated, cooperated and learned from and with each other. This film - much like the press release disseminated after the state conferences - broadly glossed over any dissent between feminists and antifeminists. Of the hour-long video, less than six minutes was dedicated to covering the counter-conference led by Phyllis Schlafly. Given the amount of attention and concern given to potential tensions between the Left and the Right in the lead-up to the conference, the lack of coverage of it in the nationally broadcast video is notable. The media decision to emphasise unity within the conference – particularly unity across race – and downplay tensions was in line with conference organizers' idealised representation of the conference.

¹³⁰ Lyle Denniston, 'National Women's Conference Worries About Image', In Focus, *Washington Star* (17th November 1977) p. 1, in 'Sarah Harder Papers', Box 15, Folder 4; Patrick Buchanan, quoted in Pat Hanen, 'IWY: Running Toward What?' *Off Our Backs* (January 1977) p. 7, in 'OOB Papers',

¹³¹ Lyle Denniston, 'A Song Helped Unite Women At Houston', *Washington Star* (21st November 1977), in 'Sarah Harder Papers', Box 15, Folder 4

¹³² 1977 National Women's Conference: A Question of Choices

Parliamentary Procedure and Conference Facilitation

Whilst Ruth Rosen suggests that this changed media narrative was a result of the reporters thinking differently about the conference given its links to the government, I argue that the strategies that conference organizers put into place for Houston created a space in which there was no real platform for debate – and thus no scope to be accused of ‘catfighting’. To ensure this, the IWY Commission advocated a strict adherence to parliamentary procedure and high levels of security, which left little opportunity for conservative dissent against the already-proposed National Plan of Action. Geri Joseph, contributing editor for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, had highlighted the need for this strict procedure in September, after the State Meetings had concluded. She wrote that

[m]any of the state meetings demonstrated a naivete and political inexperience about rules and procedures that opened the eyes of commission members. They are, consequently, spending a lot of time on rules and the selection of skilful parliamentarians and those who will preside. [...] Plans for seating inside the coliseum would permit only delegates on the main floor. Their badges will include an identifying photograph. Special sections and badges also will be assigned alternates and official observers. Access to the floor will be stringently controlled. [...] The commission staff is consulting government experts to determine what will be needed for outside security and to discover, if possible, known troublemakers who might turn up in Houston. [...] For, in truth, [the women’s movement] has lack the sophisticated political expertise and sharp focus on a few issues that could have provided a strong front against organized opposition.¹³³

Clearly, conference organizers were taking the threat of potential ‘troublemakers’ – specifically, conservative women who had disrupted state meetings – seriously. Joseph believed that the best way to defend the conference, and therefore feminism more broadly, was to use sophisticated political strategies and tactics when facilitating the conference.

A week after Houston, *Time Magazine* ran a cover story on the conference. It described the organizers as determined not to let the conference ‘collapse in the kind of controversy [...] as] some of the state conventions’. As a result, the night before the conference began, ‘some 500 delegates were instructed on debating and voting procedures. They were told not to leave the

¹³³ Geri Joseph, Untitled Newspaper Column, *Minneapolis Tribune* (26th September 1977), in ‘Sarah Harder Papers’, Box 15, Folder 4

floor without permission'. One attendee instructed fellow delegates that, 'We want to be disciplined, cooperative, supportive. Arrive early, allow for the overload in elevators and let nothing delay you, pro-plan people'.¹³⁴ The strict and rigid structure and running of the conference was conducive to only one type of rhetoric and subdued more radical discussions – or even discussions that fell outside of the remit of the conference as imagined by the organizers. One participant described the atmosphere as 'very respectable [...and a] very middle-class, not very feminist convention'.¹³⁵ This type of top-down, institution-centred activism has often been associated with white feminism, with grassroots activism commonly being associated with activism of women of colour and, indeed, multiracial feminist activism.¹³⁶ Women of colour have been seen to work primarily within community-based grassroots organizing efforts, while more white feminists were involved in 'official' organizing, such as political canvassing and lobbying. By restricting the scope for debate through enforcing a rigid structure, conference organizers consciously protected themselves from the 'threat' of the Right at the conference, but simultaneously also prevented full participation from women of colour, poor and working-class women, more radical feminists, and others who did not fit precisely into the representation of 'feminist' that conference organizers were trying to portray.

Terri Clark, an African-American attendee from Washington DC, discovered this rigidity and wrote about its shortcomings in *Off Our Backs*, a radical feminist periodical. Describing herself as a lesbian socialist feminist, she had attended the conference in the hopes of channelling government money into rape crisis centres, battered women's shelters, and community poverty relief and childcare services. This, she hoped, would support grassroots efforts that provided a platform for consciousness raising, education about

¹³⁴ 'What Next for US Women?', p. 19

¹³⁵ Janis Kelly, 'IWY Conference: D.C.' *Off Our Backs* (July-August 1977) p. 12, in 'OOB Papers',

¹³⁶ Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, p. 167, 154.; Patricia Hill Collins has suggested that black-dominated feminist organizations worked primarily within grassroots organizations and in examples of direct action, but with the ultimate focus on and aim of changing the laws and the terms of their implementation; see *Black Feminist Thought* p. 278, 129; 'Introduction' in Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*.; Anne Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Springer, 'The Interstitial Politics of Black Feminist Organizations',

intersectionality and for learning about coalition and alliance building.¹³⁷

However, her experience of Houston did not match up to her expectations. Her reflections and frustrations are worth quoting at length. She wrote:

I knew that the conference was government controlled and financed and would be dominated by middle class reformists. Still, I was not prepared for the almost total lack of dialogue or analysis of the parliamentary manipulations [that] characterized all political decision-making even in the caucuses. [...] In caucuses many women were convinced that arguing with the leadership of the plan was detrimental to any move forwards, or that they were convinced that the necessity for presenting a United front overrode any other considerations and thereby practiced voluntary censorship.

[...] Although this strategy may be necessary, its justification was never articulated by the more "radical" contingent of leadership and a definition and analysis of the right wing were never presented. In fact, the only description of the right came from the Liberal conference leaders who described the right wing as unpredictable and disruptive; hence the opportunities for education about the present role of the right in American politics today. The fear of the right prevented the expression of radical consciousness, analysis, and education within the conference. It is no wonder so many radical women felt "sold out".¹³⁸

In addition, she wrote that:

the media along with the one-sided voting gave the appearance of great unity; much optimism has been invented in the feminist press vis-a-vis this conference. This appearance gives [the] feminist movement a false sense of security. We think that the connections between single issues and the oppression of women have been made. We think that coalitions have been formed.

[...] These coalitions and others were constructed partly as a response to the perception of a right wing Menace within the convention. Much of the power of the right emanated from this fear of the right rather than from the actual numbers (probably 5 to 10% of the conference). This fear created pressure to unite and move the plan along, thus neutralizing any radical voice and forbidden criticism of resolutions as they were written in the National Plan of Action or the officially rewritten resolution supported by the pro plan caucus.¹³⁹

Terri Clark's experience demonstrates the inherent tension between conference organizers' desire to represent *all* American women and their desire to protect the public opinion and narrative around feminism from the Right. The contemporary socio-political context, in which fears of the Right permeated feminists' attitudes and activism, meant that opportunities for multiracial organizing in spaces organized and facilitated by white feminists were stifled.

¹³⁷ Terri Clark, 'Commentary: Houston - A Turning Point?' *Off Our Backs* (March 1978) p. 2, in 'OOB Papers',

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

Testimonies such as Clark's highlight the contradiction of conference organizers wanting a racially diverse group of American women to be represented at the conference while simultaneously (if unconsciously) limiting their contributions. These limitations stemmed from white organizers' assumptions that many or all women of colour shared homogenous, 'non-white' experiences, attitudes and objectives. This was evident in the originally proposed minority women's plank, which Carmen Delgado Votaw, a Latina activist, described as 'too generic and too short. People thought it was trivialising'.¹⁴⁰ Initially just a few paragraphs that essentially condemned racial discrimination, it did not consider or express differences in oppressions faced by different women of colour, and African-American women were imagined as representative of all women of colour. To rectify this, women of colour held impromptu racially autonomous caucus sessions to redraft the proposed plank. Instead of homogenising women of colour, the new draft identified the different needs of different women of colour, and communicated them at the Sunday plenary session. This caucus, though powerful, was frustrating for some women; one woman speaking during the caucus made it clear that they had wanted 'not [to] be segregated in "Minority women" on [their] own, [they] wanted to be a part of a mainstream of women, to be included in every part of the plank[s] that affected [them]'.¹⁴¹ Keeping the frustrations of women of colour quiet was part of a larger effort by IWY organizers to prove a point to the right-wing; one right-wing delegate had stated, 'if you think women are divided, wait until you see these black people and the Mexicans. The Conference will either fall apart or blow apart'.¹⁴² The Conference, according to the Right, would be undermined by racial tensions; IWY organizers were keen to demonstrate that this would not be the case.

Despite their concerns, the media were captivated by the unity that the minority resolution appeared to show; Janis Kelly wrote in *Off Our Backs* that it was 'the most moving event' of the conference and that it was

a point of incredible unity and the strongest evidence that we've seen that women in this country are sick of racism [...] after the vote there was silence, and then a sense of uplift [...] and the long-unheard

¹⁴⁰ Carmen Delgado Votaw, quoted in Suzanne Braun Levine and Mary Thom, *Bella Abzug* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 211

¹⁴¹ Unknown Speaker, Minority Caucus, 'National Women's Conference 1977 Documentary'

¹⁴² Bird

strains of “We Shall Overcome” echoing from delegation to delegation’¹⁴³

Lucy Komisar wrote in *The Nation* that ‘minority delegates cheered in elation at the overwhelming acceptance of a resolution developed by an alliance of American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asian/Pacific women, Hispanics and blacks that set forth their individual concerns; it was the first time they had worked together in such a coalition’.¹⁴⁴ In the *New York Amsterdam News*, Annette Samuels wrote that ‘there was a lot of back room politicking. But when the minority women got to the floor of the conference, they were together’.¹⁴⁵ She quoted delegates as suggesting that the caucusing would ‘form the kinds of positiveness that we need in order for white women, Black women and all other women to be able to work together in a positive direction’, and that ‘the most significant thing at the conference was the unity of the minority groups. These minority groups getting together represent numbers, which translated means power’.¹⁴⁶ For the media, then, the racially autonomous caucusing of women of colour represented a growing sense of multiracial unity, both among women of colour and between white women and women of colour. This portrayal of multiracial unity and a ‘utopian inclusion’, despite some women of colours’ frustration with the caucusing and the conference more broadly, represented the ways that IWY organizers wanted the conference – and feminism – to be seen.

Mattingley and Nare identify the conference as marking the beginning of a ‘profound shift’ in the US women’s movement in the early 1980s. They argue that, ‘as backlash grew, divisions between radical and mainstream feminists faded, and the focus shifted to protecting earlier gains and limiting further losses’.¹⁴⁷ Though this is partially true, this chapter has developed this argument by demonstrating that the divisions between feminists – both between radical and mainstream, and between white feminists and feminists of colour – had not really ‘faded’; instead, they were glossed over by white feminists who

¹⁴³ Janis Kelly, ‘National Women’s Conference’, *Off Our Backs*, 31 January 1978, p. 2

¹⁴⁴ Lucy Komisar, ‘Feminism As National Politics’, *The Nation*, 10 December 1977, p. 625

¹⁴⁵ Annette Samuels, ‘What next after Houston?’, *New York Amsterdam News*, 3 December 1977, p. 22

¹⁴⁶ Ethel Allen and Evelyn Cunningham, quoted in Samuels, p. 22

¹⁴⁷ Mattingley and Nare

wanted to represent feminists as unified in the face of vocal and threatening right-wing.

Ch. 5: Marches for Women's Lives

Introduction

Nearly a decade after the National Women's Conference in Houston, some white feminists still focused on appearing united across race rather than making practical changes to facilitate multiracial 'unity'. In 1986, and again in 1989, the National Organization for Women (NOW) organized and executed massive marches in Washington called the Marches for Women's Lives. This chapter considers the ways in which NOW's attitude towards multiracial representation shifted in response to escalating right-wing violence. NOW was dominated by middle-class white women, but wanted to portray themselves as a united and coherent multiracial organization. For them, these Marches for Women's Lives were a platform to demonstrate unity, racial diversity and inclusivity. The two marches drew similar proportions of women of colour and white women, but the 1989 march appeared more racially diverse to onlookers. This shift was a result of conscious strategies put in place by women within NOW – and particularly Loretta Ross, the head of the Women of Color Program – to make women of colour more visible at the event. Kimala Price suggests that the story of the Marches for Women's Lives in 1986 and 1989 'reflects the precarious nature of the relationship between women of color activists and the mainstream, pro-choice groups'.¹⁴⁸ The shift from a relatively invisible presence of women of colour in 1986 to the presentation of a united front of women of colour in 1989 marks both a change in efforts to work across race and within multiracial coalitions, and a shift in strategy regarding representations of unity and integration. In this chapter, I will identify and explain the ways in which the rising Right affected how these marches were conceptualised and organized. I will examine how and why NOW decided to foreground women of colour's participation in the 1989 march, and how the perceived threat of the Right affected this decision-making and prompted this strategizing.

The rise of the Right, and the increasing threat to abortion rights (and broader reproductive rights) was one of the fundamental reasons that these marches were conceptualised. The two marches bookended *Webster vs.*

¹⁴⁸ Kimala Price, 'What Is Reproductive Justice?: How Women of Color Activists Are Redefining the Pro-Choice Paradigm', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 10.2 (2010), p. 55

Reproductive Health Services - a particularly inflammatory court case which restricted abortion rights and threatened to overturn *Roe v. Wade* entirely. Its roots lay in the Missouri Abortion Act of April 1986, which declared that human life begins at conception, prohibited the use of public facilities, funds or employees for abortion or abortion counselling, and required physicians to perform 'viability tests' prior to performing abortions.¹⁴⁹ In July 1986, Reproductive Health Services of St Louis and Planned Parenthood of Kansas City filed a class action suit challenging the act, which was heard in December. It was struck down by the District Court of Missouri, which ruled that the Missouri Abortion Act 'created an undue burden on the free exercise of the right to choose abortion'.¹⁵⁰ Subsequently, William Webster, the Missouri Attorney General, appealed to the Supreme Court, where it was argued between April and July 1989, and decided in favour of Webster. Loretta Ross remembered that the *Webster* decision 'awakened a sleeping giant'.¹⁵¹ Its success meant that state laws, rather than *Roe v. Wade*, governed abortion. This catalysed a response in people – and particularly among black women, according to Ross. She suggests that the 1989 March for Women's Lives, coupled with the 1987 Women of Color and Reproductive Rights conference, galvanised activists to rally against the *Webster* decision and against the Right. The 1987 conference was developed in response to the racial dynamics of the 1986 March for Women's Lives, which had been, in turn, conceptualised as a show of unity – including multiracial unity – to defend against the threat of the Right. Clearly, questions of race, representation and the Right were central to the conceptualising and contextualising of these events.

Less renowned than *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* was the 1986 Supreme Court case, *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*. The case was based on a challenge to Pennsylvania's Abortion Control Act that required a 24-hour waiting period before abortions could be performed, parental permission for minors seeking abortion, and that married women must notify their husbands of their intent to have an abortion.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Randall D. Eggert, Andrew J. Klinghammer, and Jeanne Morrison, 'Of Winks and Nods - Webster's Uncertain Effect on Current and Future Abortion Legislation', *Missouri Law Review*, 55.1 (1990), p. 166

¹⁵⁰ Eggert, Klinghammer, and Morrison, p. 168-9

¹⁵¹ Ross and Follett, p. 212

¹⁵² 'Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey', *Cornell Law School*, 1992

In *Thornburgh*, Justice Byron White argued that *Roe v. Wade* should be overruled.¹⁵³ Though the court rejected this decision, feminists perceived an increasing threat to abortion rights from *Roe* – mainly because the 7-2 majority of support for *Roe* had shrunk to 5-4. Indeed, when advertising the first March for Women’s Lives, Ellie Smeal, the President of NOW, alluded to *Thornburgh*. She stated that ‘at the moment we are marching together, the U.S. Supreme Court will be deciding whether or not the historic Roe v. Wade decision should be reversed and abortion outlawed once again’.¹⁵⁴ She claimed ‘our marches will show the entire world that we abhor the Reagan administration’s succumbing to right-wing pressure’ and that ‘our marches will serve as a warning to anti-abortion zealots that we will not buckle under to their “Year of Pain and Fear”’.¹⁵⁵ NOW’s awareness of a rightward shift in American society and politics became their basis for organizing the Marches for Women’s Lives.

1986: Marches in Response to the Threat of the Right

The 1986 March for Women’s Lives was organized into East and West Coast marches. The first, and largest march was held on 9th March 1986, while a smaller march occurred in Los Angeles a week later. The marches would, according to organizers, ‘show the country that we who support keeping abortion and birth control safe and legal are the overwhelming majority’ and to ‘march to send an unmistakable message to the Nation that women will not go backwards’.¹⁵⁶ The fundamental purpose of the March, then, was to demonstrate that NOW – and other pro-choice feminist groups – were representative of most women in the USA. As with the 1977 Houston Conference, feminists wanted to maintain control over creating narratives about feminism and to show themselves as representative of most American women. March organizers emphasised that they were ‘determined to make the marches massive and magnificent to visually display that we are the actual majority of

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/planned_parenthood_of_southeastern_pennsylvania_v._case_y_1992> [accessed 22 January 2018],

¹⁵³ *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*, 1986

<https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=3420134328076928385> [accessed 22 January 2018],

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Ellie Smeal to NOW Activists (23rd October 1985) p. 1, in ‘Additional NOW Records’, Box 337, Folder 1

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1

¹⁵⁶ NOW National March for Women’s Lives, *March Fact Sheet* (December 1985) p. 1, in ‘NOW Papers’, Box 92, Folder 10

our nation and that we are pro-choice and from every segment of our communities'.¹⁵⁷ The Washington march was focused on the 'Congressional fight for women's rights and the national struggle to stop the Right Wing encroachments on human rights', while the LA march was centred around potential 'anti-abortion ballot measures' in California, Oregon and Washington State.¹⁵⁸ Reactions to right-wing efforts to overturn abortion rights lay at the heart of organizing the 1986 marches.

A speech written in preparation for the marches made it clear that NOW sought to frame the march as a reaction against a threatening right-wing. It stated that

If NOW had any hesitation about whether the time was right to march for abortion and birth control rights, the terrorist arm of the anti-abortion movement has proven not only that the time is right, but that we dare not wait for another season of savagery.¹⁵⁹

The speech went on to detail several instances of anti-abortion terrorism in which letter bombs and Molotov cocktails had been sent to various women's health clinics around the country. It claimed that there was a conspiracy of silence among the government and 'those sworn to uphold the Constitution', and that the President had failed to condemn right-wing terrorists at an anti-abortion rally in January of the same year. 'Clearly', it stated, 'the defense of women's lives and of women's rights has fallen to us'.¹⁶⁰

Indeed, the contemporary political and social context did not give pro-choice feminists much confidence. Alesha Doan suggests that between 1978 and 1984, 'the Christian Right went through an incredible expansionist period and experienced rapid growth and public visibility'. This growth, she argues, mobilized thousands of members and solidified the identity of those active within the Religious Right.¹⁶¹ In addition to the increasingly visible public support of the Right, feminists were discouraged by the government's rightward swing. Three years prior to the march, Ronald Reagan published an article entitled

¹⁵⁷ Form Letter from Ellie Smeal to 'Friends' (16th November 1985) p. 1, in 'NOW Papers', Box 92, Folder 10

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁵⁹ Sample Speech – National March for Women's Lives (Undated, c. March 1986) p. 1, in 'NOW Papers', Box 92, Folder 11

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁶¹ Alesha E. Doan, *Opposition and Intimidation: The Abortion Wars and Strategies of Political Harassment* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), p. 80

'Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation' in the *Catholic Lawyer*. In it, he wrote that 'we cannot diminish the value of one category of human life – the unborn – without diminishing the value of all human life'.¹⁶² He further suggested that supporting abortion was fundamentally un-American, and could potentially threaten America's future as a free nation. By unequivocally placing himself in opposition to abortion, Reagan made it clear that he and pro-choice feminists did not share the same viewpoint, and – more importantly – that feminists could not rely on the Executive to support their call to keep abortion safe, legal and accessible. A well-attended march, they hoped, would demonstrate to Congress that most American women were in favour of abortion rights, even if the President and media appeared to support the Right.

One of the reasons that the media seemed preoccupied with the militant anti-abortion Right was the prevalence of their increasingly violent direct-action tactics. In 1985, Joseph Schiedler, who has been described as an 'early pioneer of direct action tactics within the pro-life movement', published *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop an Abortion*, which taught pro-life activists direct action tactics to end abortions.¹⁶³ By the end of 1985, 92 percent of abortion clinics had reported harassment, and more than 44 attacks – mostly arson, firebombing or bombing – had occurred by the time of the 1986 March for Women's Lives.¹⁶⁴ Anti-abortion activists also used nonviolent methods of protest. While not as high-profile as violent attacks on abortion clinics, prayer vigils, sit-ins and blockading clinic entrances were notable due to the sheer numbers they attracted. Silliman et al. noted that thousands of eager participants were mobilized in the early 1980s for these actions, and by the end of the decade, nearly 25,000 people had been arrested for blockading clinics, with many more participants not arrested.¹⁶⁵ This direct-action strategy, claims Doan, 'provides visibility to the entire movement and political currency to sympathetic politicians [...it also] helps create a continual focus on abortion in the media'. Indeed, in 1985, nearly

¹⁶² Ronald Reagan, 'Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation', *Catholic Lawyer*, 1983, p. 102-3

¹⁶³ Doan, p. 84

¹⁶⁴ Brad Bartholomew, 'Fear and Darkness: Anti-Abortion Terrorism and the United States Supreme Court' (unpublished MA Thesis, Graduate School of the University of Maryland, 2006), p. 40; David A. Grime and others, 'An Epidemic of Antiabortion Violence in the United States', *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 165.5 (1991), p. 1263

¹⁶⁵ Silliman, p. 27; Carol J. C. Maxwell, *Pro-Life Activists in America: Meaning, Motivation and Direct Action* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 72

2000 abortion-related articles were published in magazines or newspapers.¹⁶⁶ One of the consequences of this surge in media focus on abortion was pressure on feminists to present themselves as united, coherent, and in control of the narratives surrounding abortion.

“You can only fight on so many fronts at the same time”: Trying to create and represent unity in 1986

Trying to create and to represent unity across race for the 1986 March for Women’s Lives was fundamentally important to NOW organizers. Jennifer Nelson highlights NOW’s desire to organize an event that did not appear racist in response to previous critiques by women of colour of their narrow agenda and organizing strategies.¹⁶⁷ The key word here is ‘appear’: while NOW organizers were theoretically committed to anti-racism work within their own organization (a NOW Anti-Racism Committee was formed at the beginning of the decade), sometimes their preoccupation with the appearance of the march and of NOW more broadly distracted them from fully engaging with anti-racist work. In a letter encouraging NOW members to attend a march, Ellie Smeal commented that participants would be making a stand, and ‘saying, in unison, “No More, No More, We Stand United, Together”’.¹⁶⁸ Presenting marches as a united front was a key objective of Smeal and indicative of what she, and others in NOW, wanted to achieve at the march itself. She publicly denied that the right-wing had control over feminist narratives; in a press release from January 1986, Smeal stated that ‘Momentum for the National March for Women’s Lives is at such a high level that I continue to be amazed when I’m told time and time again through news reports that opponents of abortion have the momentum on the issue. There are so many concrete signs that they don’t have momentum’.¹⁶⁹ Smeal wanted to represent the marches as a galvanising force for pro-choice feminists while simultaneously emphasising the inadequacies of their anti-abortion opponents.

Smeal’s attitude towards the 1986 marches was consistent with her broader attitudes towards feminism and the Right. In her campaign document

¹⁶⁶ Doan, pp. 158-9

¹⁶⁷ Nelson, “All This That Has Happened to Me Shouldn’t Happen to Nobody Else”, p. 146-7

¹⁶⁸ Form Letter from Ellie Smeal to ‘Friends’ (16th November 1985) p. 2, in ‘NOW Papers’, Box 92, Folder 10

¹⁶⁹ Press Release (21st January 1986), in ‘NOW Papers’, Box 92, Folder 10

for re-election in 1985, she described NOW's impact as a representative of American womanhood, social organizing, and importantly, feminism. She stated that NOW 'cannot abandon this role. For if we will not do it, who will?'.¹⁷⁰ She highlighted the contemporary threat of the Right, stating that 'never have the dangers to feminism been more apparent' but urged feminists to draw together in response to this threat. The strategies that she outlined for NOW to achieve this included developing 'highly visible and comprehensive campaign[s] to save abortion and birth control', to 'strengthen our alliances with minority communicates' and to 'expand participation of minorities in NOW'.¹⁷¹ Smeal explicitly proposed a large march on Washington – what became the 1986 March for Women's Lives – to show overwhelming national support for legal abortion and birth control in reaction to the anti-abortion movement that, she stated, 'believe[d] – as do many elected officials – that it ha[d] the momentum'.¹⁷² The marches were, to Smeal, a platform on which to perform this highly-visible campaign to claim abortion and birth control rights from the control of the anti-abortion movement.

Ellie Smeal's ideal of drawing together a constituency for the 1986 march that was representative of *all* American women relied upon ensuring the representation of women of colour alongside the predominantly white membership of NOW. To do this she relied on Loretta Ross, whom she appointed as the Director of Women of Color Programs in NOW in 1985. Ross's testimony demonstrates her understanding of NOW's actions and attitudes towards race and racial difference, which might be indicative of the understandings of other women of colour. When Smeal suggested that they should organize a march for abortion rights in 1986, Ross recalled that she 'thought she was crazy', because she was 'working in communities where they can't even say the A-word, abortion'. How, she wondered, 'am I supposed to organize them to come out for a march for abortion rights?!'.¹⁷³ Despite this, prominent members of NOW were determined to ensure racial diversity at the march; Molly Yard, the Political Director for the organization, told Ross that

¹⁷⁰ 'Ellie Smeal for President NOW', (Undated, c. 1985) p. 1, in 'NOW Papers', Box 92, Folder 11

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁷³ Ross, 'Interview with Author',

‘we’ve got to try to figure out a way to organize minority women to support this, to get engaged in it’.¹⁷⁴

During the planning process it became evident to Smeal that the cost of the march would use a significant proportion of NOW’s annual budget. As a result, she decided that she had to make financial cuts in the organization to finance the march – and so she chose to cut NOW’s international department, the LGBT department and the Women of Color department. As a result, Ross also lost her position as the Director of the Women of Color programs – despite her proposed role in informing NOW’s decision-making and in attracting women of colour to the march. While she initially thought that Smeal’s actions were racist, she later commented that it ‘was really structural. She was lopping off those parts she didn’t think were necessary towards building the march’.¹⁷⁵ It is indicative of NOW’s attitude that Smeal did not consider the women of colour department as necessary for the planning and organizing of the March for Women’s Lives – even given her desire to create and present racially diverse crowds at the march. This reflects NOW’s selective blindness to the ways in which their working practises affected how attractive they appeared to women of colour, and how women of colour might choose to – or choose not to - attend NOW-organized events.

Ross’ unemployment did not last long. The night that she was fired she called Donna Brazile, the executive director of the National Political Congress of Black Women (NCBW), who then called Shirley Chisholm and various other high-profile black women. These women spoke to Smeal, who quickly offered Ross her job back as she became aware that cutting the women of colour department from both NOW and the march-planning would create tension between the organization and the ‘black women that [she] need[ed]’.¹⁷⁶ She ‘needed’ these women because, while she and NOW had links with celebrity women of colour that she could get on stage, she had no proof that NOW could bring in significant numbers of women of colour to participate in the march itself. Smeal did not want to create animosity between NOW and women of colour – either at the grassroots or within leadership positions. Ross asserts that

¹⁷⁴ Ross and Follett, p. 183

¹⁷⁵ Ross, ‘Interview with Author’

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

it became evident that firing me would cost them politically. I don't know if that made me needed, but [...] y'know, you can only fight on so many fronts at the same time. Y'know, you're taking on the Reagan administration and Congress and all of that, I mean, do you need to fight with women of colour at the same time?¹⁷⁷

The energy and resources that NOW were using to struggle against the threat of the Right – particularly a right-wing administration – meant that they could not afford to risk alienating the women of colour who were valuable to their cause.

Ross understood right-wing threats as particularly pertinent and dangerous for black women. She asserted that the 'Black community must confront – not deny – the reality that attacks on the reproductive and civil rights of women most severely affect our young Black women'.¹⁷⁸ Black women, she stated, were

being verbally and physically attacked by white men trying to deny them [abortion] services, in the so-called cause of "pro-life". Clinics are bombed, reminiscent of the racists of the 1960s, endangering the lives of many Black women, yet our community is largely silent. Our silence is being taken for weakness. These same fanatics and racists are threatening our Civil Rights also by attaching anti-abortion amendments to Civil Rights bills in Congress. The Black community must stop these encroachments.¹⁷⁹

Because black women were more at risk to attacks on their civil and reproductive rights, Ross emphasised that it was imperative that they organize against the right-wing. In *Upfront*, a newsletter that discussed black women's issues, she encouraged readers to attend both the Washington DC *Between Ourselves* forum and the March for Women's Lives. Black women's attendance there, she stated, would 'show that you will organize to defend our hard-won rights'.¹⁸⁰ The march itself, then, was simultaneously a space of feminist organizing, and a way for NOW to showcase widespread support from women of colour. Ross conceptualised the march as way to demonstrate the potential human resources that NOW (and, by extension, the broader feminist movement) had to draw upon in the future – which were, importantly, multiracial.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Loretta Ross, 'Black Women's Reproductive Rights Under Attack', *Upfront Newsletter*, Fall/Winter 1985

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

One way that Ross tried to garner support for the march from women of colour was to draw on her existing connections and extended networks. She initially contacted Donna Brazile because the NCBW were, she stated, 'so pro-feminist that it was not a hard ask, they came onboard immediately'.¹⁸¹ The Congress wrote a statement endorsing the march, which Ross then circulated around a wide range of organizations of women of colour. This statement held a lot of power, and consequently the March attracted an impressive list of endorsers – over eighty groups of women of colour endorsed the march. This was three to four times as many as had endorsed NOW's previous ERA march, and only eight of those groups had previously been involved with NOW.¹⁸² While Ross was successful in securing endorsements, this did not translate into what she has called 'massive participation'. Massive participation, she states, 'means that you tell your followers to come, you send buses to the march, you get people [to] places, and stuff like that'.¹⁸³ An analysis of the women of colour delegations at the march suggests that Black, Hispanic, Native American and Asian women were all represented in a variety of different types of groups, including charitable organizations, women of colour media, sororities, service organizations and advocacy or political groups.¹⁸⁴ Though the analysis does not include the number of women of colour who attended, it suggests that fewer groups attended the march than endorsed it. The women of colour who *did* attend ended up being 'lost in a sea of white' because they were dispersed throughout the crowds in their own delegations. Ross remembered that 'it really did look like a big white march, [a] sea of white, [with] one person of color'.¹⁸⁵ Even though significant numbers of women of colour *did* turn up to the march, it was difficult to represent the march as a multiracial event as it did not *appear* multiracial to onlookers.

¹⁸¹ Ross, 'Interview with Author',

¹⁸² Ross and Follett, p. 188; Ross, 'African American Women and Abortion', Ross, 'Interview with Author'; Court and Milloy, 'NOW Gains Support for March', *The Washington Post* (4th March 1986) pC3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 8, Folder 2. The actual number of groups of women of colour who endorsed the march is unclear – Ross herself suggests that the number is 87 in her Voices of Feminism interview, but claims that 108 groups endorsed it in her chapter in Rickie Solinger's edited collection, *Abortion Wars*. Various NOW committee meeting minutes from earlier in 1986 list numbers of around 45-50 groups, but final numbers from April 1986 are not available.

¹⁸³ Ross, 'Interview with Author',

¹⁸⁴ 'Analysis of Women of Color Delegations to March' (Undated, c. March 1986), in 'NOW Papers', Box 92, Folder 11

¹⁸⁵ Ross, 'Interview with Author'; Ross and Follett, p. 187

The marches were portrayed as predominantly white and middle-class in some of mainstream media outlets. The *Washington Post* stated that only ‘a small number of blacks’ attended the march.¹⁸⁶ Winnie Hilton, an African-American woman who marched, was quoted in the article; she stated that she was ‘aware that NOW is largely white [...] but this is a black women’s issue also. Abortion is a fundamental right. I am worried about the influence of the conservative right who speak for the rich and powerful’.¹⁸⁷ Other publications highlighted the racial diversity at the march: an article in *In These Times* stated that ‘no one could accuse this crowd of being all-white, middle-class and suburban. The speakers list makes it clear that NOW organizers wanted this to be a multi-ethnic and multi-issue event’ and asserted that this march might signal ‘a new wave of activity in the women’s movement’.¹⁸⁸ These different papers suggested different reasons behind racially diverse attendance at the march. *In These Times* implied that NOW’s efforts to create a multiracial event through creating a multiracial list of speakers and endorsers had succeeded, while the *Washington Post* portrayed the threat of the Right as a galvanising force that prompted (at least some) women of colours’ participation in ‘white’ events or spaces, like NOW.

Some of the media representation of the 1986 marches – particularly of the Washington march – framed it as a reaction against right-wing action. The *Washington Post* described the march as a ‘reaction to a January anti-abortion march’. It asserted that many women were marching because they ‘feared that the anti-abortion demonstrations had convinced the president, Congress and the media that a majority of Americans oppose abortions’.¹⁸⁹ *The Post* suggested that the voices of the abortion rights marchers were louder than their right-wing counterparts, stating that the march ‘exceeded all previous anti-abortion marches’, drawing comparisons between the 80,000 women who

¹⁸⁶ ‘80,000 March on Washington to Rally for Abortion Rights’, *The Washington Post* (Undated, c. March 1987)

¹⁸⁷ Winnie Hilton, quoted in ‘80,000 March on Washington to Rally for Abortion Rights’, *The Washington Post*, March 1987,

¹⁸⁸ Unknown author, ‘NOW Scores with pro-choice march’, *In These Times*, (19-25th March 1986) p. 4, in ‘NOW Papers’, Box 92, Folder 14

¹⁸⁹ Linda Wheeler and Lyle V. Harris, ‘80,000 March on Washington: Abortion Rights Supporters Counter Opponents’ January Rally’, *The Washington Post*, 10 March 1986, Boston, MA, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, NOW Papers, MC 496

attended the March for Women's Lives with the most highly attended anti-abortion march, which was held in 1979 and attracted only 60,000 people.¹⁹⁰ Feminist periodicals similarly portrayed anti-Right wing sentiment as central to participants at the March for Women's Lives, but suggested that this was secondary to their desire to show solidarity around abortion rights issues. Feminist periodicals like *Off Our Backs* and *WomenWise* celebrated the victory of the marchers over anti-abortion protesters who tried – and failed – to interrupt the march. Amy Markus, a NARAL member from New Hampshire, wrote that the most satisfying part of the march was chanting, “we're gonna beat back the Reagan attack!” as they marched past anti-abortion picketers, and seeing a protestor who tried to interrupt the march arrested.¹⁹¹

Though the threat of the Right prompted NOW to try to represent feminism and feminists as equal and united, their preoccupation with the threat simultaneously meant that they were unable to fully engage with the need to combat racism and change their working practice to facilitate that. In 1985, Darlene Blanc, a member of NOW's National Committee to Combat Racism wrote to Colette Roberts, the chair of the committee. In her letter she complained about the stagnancy of the committee, and berated Roberts' inaction and dishonesty about her anti-racism work: Roberts claimed to have only just 'stumbled upon' a racism test that she suggested using as an educational tool – but she had actually seen it two years previously in a reading list created when the committee was founded. Furthermore, Blanc was frustrated by Roberts' glossing over of racism within NOW as she stated that 'NOW is special, and above all this' in reference to an anti-racism workshop held in 1985.¹⁹² When Blanc called Roberts to suggest meetings and activities, and to highlight that they had not met for eleven months, Roberts dismissed her, stating, 'Don't you know that they are bombing abortion clinics?'.¹⁹³ In this case, it is clear that Roberts (even in her capacity as chair of the Committee to Combat Racism) saw the need to respond to threatening activities of the right-wing as a higher priority than the need to combat racism within the organization

¹⁹⁰ Wheeler and Harris

¹⁹¹ Amy Markus, 'March for Women's Lives', *WomenWise*, 1986, p. 1

¹⁹² Letter from Darlene Blanc to Colette Roberts (21st August 1985) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 4

¹⁹³ Ibid.

– and thus alter their working practises in order to more easily facilitate multiracial work.

Even when the committee *did* take action, structural issues within the feminist movement and organizations often meant that this same either/or approach to defence against the Right and anti-racism work was still an obstacle to working multiracially. A group of white members of Boston R2N2 attended the Women of Color and Reproductive Rights conference in 1987, organized by NOW's Committee to Combat Racism.¹⁹⁴ They reiterated the ways in which (white) feminist reactions to the Right affected their efforts and abilities to work across racial lines and to create multiracial coalitions or relationships. Though members of R2N2 were keen to target their own internalised racism and to take part in anti-racism work, they acknowledged that

we have not yet built organizational and political relationships with women of color. In part this is because our actual political priorities and strategies – usually focused on abortion – are largely set by the mainstream women's liberation movement, often in reaction to attacks from the Right.¹⁹⁵

Members of R2N2, then, recognised that the difficulties that they faced in creating meaningful relationships with groups of women of colour were due to their narrow agenda. This agenda was, they believed, as result of feminist responses to the Right and reflects Saletan's argument that the threat of the Right prompted a re-framing of pro-choice movement to focus exclusively on keeping abortion legal. These strategies of 'big' mainstream feminist groups that focused on a single-issue agenda, such as NARAL, had an impact on how other feminist groups were perceived and how they operated, which in turn affected their ability or desire to create multiracial relationships or spaces.

Why did the strategy change?

By the 1989 March for Women's Lives it became clear that NOW organizers were more committed to representing themselves as a racially diverse organization. There were several reasons for this; firstly, the publicity and debates around the Webster decision became more and more prevalent and

¹⁹⁴ Though the national R2N2 collapsed in 1984-5, some local groups continued operating into the late 1980s, including the Boston branch.

¹⁹⁵ Shelley Mains, 'Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference', *Reproductive Rights Network Newsletter* (Fall 1987) p. 6, in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 5

visible in the interim period between the marches, which prompted further defensive activity as a response. Secondly, anti-abortion violence became more frequent and overt with the establishment of Operation Rescue, a conservative Christian organization. Finally, the framework that NOW used to attract and engage with women of colour changed, largely due to Loretta Ross' efforts to highlight race-related issues in NOW and her organization of the *Between Ourselves* fora and the Women of Color Reproductive Rights Conference in 1987. The first two reasons represent the impetus behind changing approaches towards representing multiracialism in NOW, while the latter explains (at least partially) the strategies taken to make those changes.

Just over two weeks before *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* was argued in April 1989, David Andrews, the Vice President of Planned Parenthood, stated that 'the Supreme Court are just as likely to read the newspapers and be influenced by the force of public opinion [as anyone else]'.¹⁹⁶ This attitude makes it clear that both antifeminists and feminists (and particularly NOW in their efforts to organize a march of unprecedented size) saw their activism – and, importantly, the way that their activism was represented – as having a direct impact on those in positions of power whose decision-making had the capacity to define reproductive rights in the USA. Lynn Wardle suggests that 'the unprecedented media coverage of the case manifested a general expectation that some significant change in constitutional law was possible'.¹⁹⁷ The public perception of potential change, paired with assumptions that public narratives and media attention could affect decision-making in the Supreme Court, meant that both feminists and antifeminists sought to control the debates surrounding abortion to impact those Justices' agendas. Indeed, when *Webster* was tried in 1989, Justice Antonin Scalia, a conservative Supreme Court judge, described the Court as being 'inundated by "organized public pressure" directed toward influencing the Justice's vote'.¹⁹⁸ Of course, it is impossible to know whether this public pressure impacted the Justices' decisions, but feminists' perceptions that they *could* influence the

¹⁹⁶ Leslie Phillips and Steve Marshall, 'March Keys Pro-Choice Media Blitz', *USA Today* (7-9th April 1989), in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 17

¹⁹⁷ Lynn D. Wardle, 'Time Enough: Webster v. Reproductive Health Services and the Prudent Path of Justice', *Florida Law Review*, 41.5 (1989), p. 881

¹⁹⁸ Wardle, p. 934

judges shaped their organizing strategies and approaches to the ways they represented themselves and American womanhood.

McCombs and Shaw's 'agenda setting theory' states that 'in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality [and public opinion]'.¹⁹⁹ The high level of media coverage surrounding abortion in the months and years preceding *Webster*, then, was an important battleground for pro-choice and pro-life advocates in their efforts to control public opinion and narratives around womanhood. An analysis of coverage of abortion in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* provides no clear answer to whether pro-choice or pro-life forces controlled or dominated media spaces. Between 1985 and 1988, headlines mentioning pro-life forces were consistently more numerous than those mentioning pro-choice forces – though pro-choice headlines were more sustained, with the same number of stories in 1985 and 1988 compared to a decrease of 16% in headlines relating to pro-life groups and action.²⁰⁰ The higher number of stories relating to pro-life groups could be attributed to the nature of the relationships of the opposing sides to the government and contemporary legislation; anti-abortion groups were actively trying to create change, and some were using highly visible organizing strategies, including direct action and violence. Pro-choice organizers, on the other hand, were trying to maintain the status quo and defend against attacks, which could have been perceived as less newsworthy. Perse et al. suggest that there is a correlation between greater media coverage of abortion – irrespective of their position – and the acceptance of abortion in public opinion. They suggest that 'as abortion is reported more, it may be seen as more commonplace and acceptable'.²⁰¹ Having a strong media presence, then, was beneficial to feminists in terms of influencing public opinion, impacting on Supreme Court decision-making (they believed, at least) and setting the agenda and narratives surrounding feminism.

¹⁹⁹ Donald L. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36.2 (1972), p. 176

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth M. Perse and others, 'News Coverage of Abortion between Roe and Webster: Public Opinion and Real-World Events', *Communication Research Papers*, 14.1 (2009), p. 101

²⁰¹ Perse and others, p. 104

Rise of Anti-Abortion Actions

As previously mentioned, the actions of anti-abortion organizers ensured continuous coverage of abortion in the media. This coverage expanded as the violent and quasi-nonviolent direct-action tactics of anti-abortion activists became more widespread and visible. Many feminists saw Operation Rescue, a conservative Christian anti-abortion organization, as primarily responsible for these actions. In 1986 Randall Terry, a recently 'saved' anti-abortion activist from New York, joined forces with Joseph Schiedler to establish Operation Rescue, a for-profit organization which was officially launched in 1988.²⁰² Over the next three years, Operation Rescue blockaded over 400 abortion clinics and attracted thousands of members – in large part, Doan argues, as a result of Terry's charismatic leadership and knowledge of how to manage the media.²⁰³ Initially, Operation Rescue's tactics were nonviolent, and images of peaceful sit-ins, prayer vigils and 'rescuers' singing freedom songs were prevalent in the media. In 1988, for example, Jerry Falwell orchestrated a 'siege of Atlanta', a three-week series of protests and demonstrations that began after the start of the Democratic National Convention. Falwell, of the Moral Majority, funded a programme of 'civil disobedience' by Operation Rescue, claiming that 'the only way [to fight for an anti-abortion amendment to the Constitution] is nonviolent civil disobedience'.²⁰⁴ These actions led to thousands of arrests; 11,732 anti-abortion activists were arrested in 1988 and 12,358 in 1989. Activists called themselves 'baby Doe' to demonstrate solidarity with unborn children, and simultaneously clog up the courts and prisons.²⁰⁵ Links between Operation Rescue and the civil rights movement did not end with these shared strategies; Falwell praised picketers for showing the 'same sacrifice that civil rights demonstrators had shown in the 1960s'.²⁰⁶ Indeed, in 1988, Terry described Operation Rescue as 'the Civil-Rights Movement of the Nineties'.²⁰⁷ This rhetoric alienated and frustrated many people of colour and civil rights activists,

²⁰² Doan, p. 85

²⁰³ Susan B. Apel, 'Operation Rescue and the Necessity Defense: Beginning a Feminist Deconstruction', *Washington and Lee Law Review*, 48 (1991), p. 41; Doan, p. 85

²⁰⁴ Ronald Smothers, 'Atlanta Protests Prove Magnet for Abortion Foes: Falwell Endorses a Campaign of "Civil Disobedience"', *The New York Times*, 13 August 1988, p. 6

²⁰⁵ Doan, p. 86

²⁰⁶ Smothers, p. 6

²⁰⁷ Randall A. Terry, *Operation Rescue* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1988), XLVII, p. 82

who felt that Operation Rescue was misappropriating the 'moral imperative' of the civil rights movement.²⁰⁸ Victoria Johnson describes Terry's strategy of drawing both explicit and implicit links between Operation Rescue and civil rights activism as 'in order to avoid bad media coverage, not as an end into itself'.²⁰⁹ Indeed, the Operation Rescue Pledge for a San Francisco 'National Day of Rescue' started by stating, 'I understand the critical importance of Operation Rescue being unified, peaceful, and free of any actions that would appear violent or hateful to those watching the event on T.V. or reading about it in the paper'.²¹⁰ Terry's preoccupation with controlling how the media represented Operation Rescue was akin to the concerns that feminists shared regarding how the media represented American womanhood; he wanted to demonstrate the anti-abortion movement's moral imperative. Doan suggests that these tactics both attracted more supporters to the organization and increased sympathetic media coverage.²¹¹

While Terry officially advocated a nonviolent approach, numerous incidents of violent attacks on abortion clinics prompted feminists to fear that Operation Rescue, along with other anti-abortion organizations, could and would resort to violence if their civil disobedience tactics did not work. After a stint in jail in 1988, Terry realised that 'the prolife movement was not creating the tension and upheaval necessary to produce political and social change' and was 'being too nice'. He believed that 'violence is permissible as a last resort to stop or prevent greater violence'.²¹² Though it is unclear how widespread examples of violent action by Operation Rescue themselves were, they – and other anti-abortion groups – contributed to a general sense of unease and fear of potential violence, which affected the context in which both feminists and anti-feminists can and did organize. Rather than galvanising activism, the threat of violence made pro-choice activists more cautious in their strategizing and

²⁰⁸ Silliman, p. 2

²⁰⁹ Victoria Johnson, 'A Study of Movement Framing in the Practice of Quasi-Nonviolence', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, ed. by Michael Dobkowski and Isodor Walliman, 1997, xx, p. 121

²¹⁰ San Francisco Bay Area Operation Rescue, 'Operation Rescue Pledge', *National Day of Rescue Flyer* (29th October 1988)

²¹¹ Doan, p. 87

²¹² Terry, XLVII, p. 20; Faye Ginsburg, 'Rescuing the Nation: Operation Rescue and the Rise of Anti-Abortion Militance', in *Abortion Wars*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 230

more concerned with the potential behaviour of right-wing countermovement strategies.²¹³

This unease was evident in NOW's planning for the 1989 March for Women's Lives. In the weeks preceding the march – held on April 9th, 1989 – NOW became aware that the American Coalition for Life was planning a simultaneous event at the Capitol Reflecting Pool. The Pool was a mere three blocks away from NOW's planned rally in the National Mall in Washington DC. In their initial demonstration permit application, submitted in October 1988, Molly Yard, then the President of NOW, asserted on behalf of NOW that she did not believe that 'any individual, group, or organization might seek to disrupt the activity'.²¹⁴ By March, though, NOW was aware of plans to disrupt the rally by anti-abortion activists. In addition to the American Coalition for Life's activities, the Omega Alliance – a coalition of eight pro-life groups – planned a counter protest on the day of the march. They urged people to 'stand up for life [and] protest the "March for Women's Lives"', and stated that 'as these pro-abortionists gather near the Washington Monument, we pro-lifers will be gathering too [...] We will be visible, and we will show by our presence that most Americans do *not* support abortion'.²¹⁵ NOW's knowledge of the planned disruptions meant that they had to dedicate time and resources in planning to protect their event against the threat of the Right. As such, notes from their planning meeting in March – a month which had been demarcated for establishing and continuing outreach efforts in 'alternative presses' such as those targeted at communities of colour, working class communities and LGBT communities – focussed on providing security and ensuring the presence of 'peacekeepers', whose jobs included being aware of and dealing with protestors with foetuses or with red paint.²¹⁶ Organizers seemed confident that their March

²¹³ For more on the creation of a culture of fear and intimidation as a result of anti-abortion violence, see Maxwell, pp. 72-90; and Myra Marx Fereee, *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 3-24.

²¹⁴ National Park Service, National Capital Region Application for a Permit to Conduct a Demonstration or Special Event in Park Areas and Application for a Waiver of Numerical Limitations on Demonstrations for White House Sidewalk and/or Lafayette Park, (19th October 1988) p. 2, in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 16

²¹⁵ The Omega Alliance, 'Stand Up For Life' poster (Undated, c. March 1989), in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 17

²¹⁶ 'Outline of Action' (10th November 1988), p. 1, in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 16; 'Facilitators Working List of Tasks', Handwritten Notes (14th March 1989), in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 16

would outshine the countermovement event; in the March 1989 committee minutes, Molly Yard stated that their speakers would be 'very close to the right to lifers and [would] likely drown them out'.²¹⁷

On the day of the march, feminists seemed preoccupied with the Right, and vocally attempted to discredit their cause. Angela Johnson, reporting on the march in *Off Our Backs* stated that 'many of the speakers focused on anti-abortion tactics and groups such as Operation Rescue rather than focusing on the strength of the grassroots movement for women's rights and the incredible crowds of people spread out in front of them'.²¹⁸ It was not only speakers who were concerned with the Right; Jennie McKnight, writing for the *Gay Community News*, ascertained through interviews that 'most activists [...] said they thought the vast majority of marchers had turned out because of the immediate threat to legalised abortion in the *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* case scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court'.²¹⁹ For many marchers, then, the impetus for attending the 1989 march was to demonstrate solidarity against anti-abortion forces.

Loretta Ross and Developing Strategies for Representation of Women of Colour

In 1988 Loretta Ross wrote about NOW's efforts to work multiracially and to combat racism, stating that:

To accomplish our objectives, we developed a multi-year plan of action. We ceased scattergun approaches such as tokenism, incompleting projects, sporadic mobilizations, and recruitment. We empowered a permanent Committee to Combat Racism at the national board level that would cross hierarchical lines between the board, staff, and national membership.²²⁰

Ross's efforts to encourage women of colour to attend the 1989 March for Women's Lives were part of a larger endeavour to change NOW's working practises to make the organization more appealing to women of colour. By moving away from recruitment and tokenism, and ensuring adequate

²¹⁷ National Board Meeting Minutes (March 1989) p. 6, in 'NOW Papers', Box 6, Folder 41

²¹⁸ Angela Johnson, '600,000 Rally', *Off Our Backs*, 31 May 1989,

²¹⁹ Jennie McKnight, 'Abortion Activists Swamp Capital; Reproductive Rights Proponents Encouraged by Huge Turnout, Many Disappointed with Narrow Focus of March, Lesbian Invisibility', *Gay Community News*, 16 April 1989,

²²⁰ Loretta Ross, 'NOW and People of Color', *Peace and Freedom* (September/October 1988), in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 4

representation of women of colour in the upper echelons of the organization, Ross hoped to develop NOW into a more multiracial space.

Part of Ross's multi-year plan of action depending on attracting women of colour to NOW's activities, including the march. Though fears of the Right and their violent tactics stifled race-work in some cases, Loretta Ross used the violence (or threat of) to encourage women of colour's participation in the march. In February 1989 she wrote to different groups of women of colour urging them to participate in the march. Her letter opened by stating that women of colour should sponsor and attend the upcoming march 'because of unprecedented and alarming attacks against the reproductive rights of women of color launched by anti-choice zealots'.²²¹ Attached to her letter was a memo from the Coalition of Women of Color for Reproductive Health, addressed to Concerned People of Color and Allies. The memo highlighted some of the recent efforts by the Right to undermine reproductive rights. It stressed the threat of *Webster* and suggested that 'the anti-abortion war is being fought primarily against women of color'.²²² By framing anti-abortion forces as particularly threatening to women of colour and their bodily autonomy and control, Ross hoped to galvanise communities and groups of women of colour into joining the March for Women's Lives. This is reflective of Ross' changing strategies for breaking the 'conspiracy of silence' around abortion in black communities, which then made potential multiracial organizing around abortion more feasible. Ross stated that:

The frame that always worked was tying it to slavery and tying it to loss of control. That always worked. Even if you did not believe in abortion, every woman, black woman, atavistically knows what the loss of control over your body represents, and that almost always works.²²³

Ross also implemented this framework when she co-wrote *We Remember: African American Women are for Reproductive Freedom*, a statement written by a group of prominent black women in response to discussions around *Webster*. Though the statement was released after the March for Women's Lives, Ross

²²¹ Letter from Loretta Ross to 'Friends' (8th February 1989), in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 26

²²² Memo from Coalition of Women of Color for Reproductive Health to Concerned People of Color and Allies (10th February 1989), in 'NOW Papers', Box 91, Folder 26

²²³ Ross and Follett, p. 184

recalls that it was reflective of the rhetoric that she used to encourage discussions around abortion and reproductive health in black communities. The statement asserted that

Choice is the essence of freedom. It's what we African Americans have struggled for all these years. [...] The freedom – to choose and exercise our choices – is what we've fought and died for. [...] Now once again somebody is trying to say that we can't handle the freedom of choice. Only this time they're saying African American women can't think for themselves and, therefore, can't be allowed to make serious decisions. Somebody's saying that [...] we only have limited rights over our bodies.²²⁴

Drawing on raced and gendered narratives of bodily control and rights in the USA was a fundamentally important strategy of Loretta Ross to encourage women of colour's engagement with questions of abortion. She used this strategy in the *Between Ourselves* forums and conference that she organized in 1987. This was, to some extent, an effort to build networks of women of colour as resources for future events such as the 1989 march.

As discussed in the previous section, the *Between Ourselves* forums and conference were important tools in laying the groundwork for *In Defense of Roe*. They also served another purpose – to create strong networks of women of colour who would be willing to participate in NOW's March for Women's Lives in 1989, as well as other 'mainstream' feminist activities. Indeed, one of the official goals for the 1987 *Between Ourselves* Women of Color and Reproductive Rights conference was 'to develop a network of women of color for mobilization on reproductive freedom'.²²⁵ A further conference goal was to 'foster a national awareness of the importance of placing the concerns of women of color in the forefront of the pro-choice debate so that the reproductive rights movement is truly representative of all American women'.²²⁶ Once again, these forums were seen as a way to demonstrate the representativeness of the pro-choice movement, and to show that pro-choice feminists represented the majority of women in the USA – including women of colour.

²²⁴ Bylye Avery, 'We Remember: African American Women Are For Reproductive Freedom', in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism*, ed. by Kimberly Springer (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999) pp. 38-39

²²⁵ Letter from Ellie Smeal to NOW Members (March 1987), in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 5

²²⁶ 'National Women of Color and Reproductive Rights Conference' Memo (12th January 1987) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 27, Folder 5

The Women of Color and Reproductive Rights conference also provided an opportunity for Ross to demonstrate that the values of those in the reproductive rights movement were more appealing to women than those of anti-choice advocates. The anti-abortion movement sent some black protestors to the conference to hold signs that claimed that abortion was genocide – rhetoric which drew on raced understandings of reproductive rights and bodily control. Rather than having the protestors arrested for trespassing, Ross invited them into join the conference. After that, she recalled, anti-abortion forces did not send women of colour to protest at events she organized, because ‘once the six black women got inside and they saw what other black women were saying, they were no longer as tied to the anti-choice movement’.²²⁷ Not only did this send a message to the anti-abortion movement that their message was less appealing to black women than the pro-choice message, but it also suggested a broader message that reproductive rights advocates were more inclusive than anti-abortion forces.

Ross anticipated drawing on the networks created in these forums to ensure women of colour’s participation in the 1989 march; she recalled that

As a precursor to the ’89 march, I decided that, if future marches were going to come about, then we needed to have a base among women of colour, who would stand up, just as we needed politicians to stand up. And so, what I did in ’86 and ’87 was organize a lot of regional conferences [...] to organize women of colour locally to feed into a larger women of colour conference in ’87, that we could then feed into future actions for women’s rights.²²⁸

Ensuring participation – and particularly *visible* participation – in the 1989 march by women of colour, then, was one of the fundamental reasons that Ross organized the *Between Ourselves* forums and conference. To this end, they succeeded – Ross credits the forums, and particularly the conference, with leading to the participation of five thousand women of colour in the 1989 march.²²⁹

Ross’ strategies for improving representation of women of colour at the 1989 March for Women’s Lives did not just apply to the planning stage. Her strategies for organizing women of colour on the day of the march itself

²²⁷ Ross, ‘Interview with Author’

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

represented her desire to demonstrate women of colour's participation, both in the event as part of a multiracial group of feminists and as part of a larger community of women who supported abortion rights. Her experience in the 1986 march informed her that 'if you do not create a coherent, consolidated women of color delegation, you end up with women of color buried in a sea of white faces, so it looks like there are no women of color there'.²³⁰ When she did forge such a delegation for the 1989 march, it 'wonderfully increased the visibility of women of color'.²³¹ Ross's strategy was to make sure that

the women of colour delegation was concentrated at the beginning of the march, at the head of the march, so that it would be far more visible and less dispersed among the white crowds [...] we created a banner for 'Women of Colour for Reproductive Rights' that would head off the delegation, so we increased our visibility just by concentrating our forces.²³²

In the days preceding the March, Ross expressed her excitement and anticipation to a multiracial group of women of colour for a 'huge women of color delegation to the march'. She had, she said, 1800 women of colour who had confirmed that they would be marching in this delegation, and she anticipated double that.²³³ Her excitement and positivity demonstrate her certainty that her strategy to represent a more multiracial march would be successful.

Ross' strategy, and the means through which she implemented it, are indicative of the ways that she was trying to change the priorities of NOW to become more welcoming and attractive to women of colour. In previous years, banners that specifically highlighted women of colour's participation in reproductive rights activism had been created and paid for by individual organizations of women of colour. In the 1989 march, though, NOW designed and paid for the 'Women of Colour for Reproductive Rights' banner that the delegation marched behind, demonstrating their willingness to invest resources as well as rhetoric into highlighting women of colours' participation in the march. It is not clear whether this financial investment extended to providing funding for low-income women and women of colour to encourage access; in a pre-march information pack sent out in March 1989 the only suggestion of financial support

²³⁰ Ross and Follett, p. 330

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ross, 'Interview with Author',

²³³ IDOR Conference report, p. 58, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

to attend the march was in an enclosed letter from Byllye Avery of the National Black Women's Health Project which mentioned fundraising to provide free bus transport to and from the March.²³⁴ It seems that NOW's priority was to present the participation of women of colour in the march, but they still neglected to fully extend resources to encourage access and attendance. Scholarships to fund low-income women and women of colour *were* made available by the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) and the ACLU, however, for the *In Defense of Roe* conference which occurred in the days before the march. These scholarships gave some women who would not otherwise have been able to come the opportunity to attend both the conference and the march.²³⁵

Ultimately, Ross' strategy was successful in highlighting the participation of women of colour in the 1989 march. Participant Marlene Gerber Fried commented on the large contingents of women of colour attending; she stated that the march 'demonstrated that there is broad political support for abortion rights'.²³⁶ Other women interviewed commended the march's diversity and suggested that it represented a unity of women across barriers of race, class and sexuality. One woman said that 'I thought the enormous amount of all kinds of people that came for the march was amazing. And still through the crowds, the spirit of togetherness and a common cause shone through'.²³⁷ Similarly, another woman described the march as 'inspiring...I realised that through a united front we can create magic'.²³⁸ This rhetoric, and the representation of it within the media, reflect the narratives that came out of coverage of the 1977 National Women's Conference. Both the events were used to demonstrate and show off diversity to present a united front against anti-abortion forces.

The success of Ross' strategy also demonstrates the tactical usage of racially autonomous spaces of women of colour within a broader white-dominated event. By ensuring that women of colour marched together, separate from white women, Ross counterintuitively demonstrated their collective potential power by demonstrating their numbers. The racially autonomous

²³⁴ Letter from Byllye Avery to 'Sisters' (13 March 1989), in 'Ross Papers', Box 23, Folder 8

²³⁵ Letter from Faith Evans, Sabrae Jenkins and Lynn Paltrow to Pat Tyson (23rd June 1989) p. 1-2, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²³⁶ McKnight

²³⁷ Janette, quoted in Diana Harvestmoon, 'Personal Perspective on the March in Washington', *University of Missouri - St Louis Women's Studies Newsletter*, 30 April 1989

²³⁸ Lyn, quoted in Harvestmoon

space made them (literally) visible within a normally white-dominated context, which in turn prompted onlookers, including the media, to perceive the march as a multiracial event. The importance of racially autonomous spaces here, then, and the way in which they were consumed by the media reflected those at the 1977 National Women's Conference in many ways. In both cases, women of colour operated in autonomous spaces within larger white spaces, ensuring their visible presence to demonstrate the multiracial nature of the events.

Representing *All Pro-Choice Women*

As with the 1986 march, the media presence in 1989 highlighted to the organizers the importance how the march was represented. As discussed previously, feminists were cognizant of the potential benefits that positive media representation could bring to NOW and to the feminist movement more generally. In particular, NOW thought that media coverage that portrayed the majority of American women as supportive of pro-choice activists could potentially influence the judicial and legislative branches of government. Molly Yard, speaking at the march, announced that 'it is time for Congress to understand we are the majority'.²³⁹ The feminist periodical *Off Our Backs* reiterated the potential of the march to achieve Yard's objective. Angela Johnson reported that

One of the most significant aspects of the March was, of course, the tremendous turn-out of people; all the major networks covered the March, and it was on the front page of both Washington papers. This March has made it that much harder [...] to deny the widespread support for legal abortion.²⁴⁰

Yard, in a press release immediately following the march, described it as 'a warning to the government [...] that an ideological line has been drawn in the sand'.²⁴¹ This line in the sand was intended as a warning to the government, informing them of the political consequences they could face if they alienated pro-choice advocates. These advocates numbered between 300,000 and 600,000 at the march itself, but were meant to represent most American women, and thus a substantial political constituency. The importance of racial diversity, and the way that it was represented, was central in the minds of

²³⁹ Johnson

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Molly Yard, Press Release (26 April 1989), in 'NOW Papers', MC496, Box 91, Folder 17

march organizers, who relied heavily on the strategies and networks of Loretta Ross to ensure representations of diversity – if not actual diversity – at the marches. Understanding the importance of media representation of the marches, and their belief that it might sway both public opinion and the opinions of Supreme Court judges, only served to make NOW's desire to represent all women more urgent, both in practice and in the media, irrespective of race.

Though the strategies of NOW, and in particularly Loretta Ross, did work to a point – media coverage of the 1989 march focused heavily on unity of women and women of diverse identities attending – NOW's later marches for women's lives indicated their inability to substantially change their working practises to match their rhetoric. In 1992, for example, NOW was criticised for its working practise when planning the next March for Women's Lives. Once again, NOW's pragmatic approach to funding events proved exclusionary to many grassroots and community groups as they only invited groups and individuals to the planning table who could contribute financially in a significant way. This marginalised poorer women, including women of color, from the organising process.²⁴² As a result, women of colour boycotted the march. Only around 1000 women of colour marched, and many who did attend wore armbands to visually protest against the exclusion of women of colour from NOW's organizing.²⁴³ A decade later, women of colour were also initially excluded from organizing the 2004 march, but a 'storm of criticism' from a number of women of colour and anti-racist feminists forced a change in strategy, and once again Loretta Ross joined the organizing committee to ensure more equal representation among organizers and within the delegation.²⁴⁴

NOW's attitudes and efforts towards racial diversity, then, have been a consistent sore point in efforts to organize multiracially in defence of women's reproductive rights. Though it is not altogether clear the extent to which the Marches for Women's Lives in 1986 and 1989 succeeded in creating multiracial events or spaces for multiracial organizing, it is evident that representing all pro-

²⁴² Silliman, p. 41

²⁴³ Zakiya T. Luna, 'Marching Towards Reproductive Justice: Coalitional (Re)Framing of the March for Women's Lives', *Sociological Inquiry*, 80.4 (2010), p. 565

²⁴⁴ Silliman, p. 297

choice American women was high on NOW's agenda throughout the period. This desire was genuine and well-intentioned. However, the threat of the rising Right wing – both political and religious – meant that NOW believed they had to work quickly to demonstrate to both the government and to the right-wing that they were representative of American womanhood. This urgency meant that representing themselves as united, multiracial and diverse took precedence over making real changes to their working practises to develop effective working environments for multiracial activism. NOW's story is not necessarily indicative of all efforts to create multiracial events and spaces at the time, though. The *In Defense of Roe* conference took place the day before the 1989 march, and drew on similar fears to NOW. Organizers of IDOR also worried that the Right was threatening abortion and reproductive rights, and believed that representing unity to the American public was an important tool in mitigating against that threat. The 'unity' represented at IDOR, though, was based on acceptance and celebration of difference, rather than attempts to create a homogenous delegation based on gender alone. By integrating inclusive working practises from the start, though, *In Defense of Roe* was able to establish multiracial relationships, and to carefully and thoughtfully portray those relationships through different mediums and to different audiences.

Ch. 6: In Defense of Roe

Introduction

While organizers for the National Women's Conference and the Marches for Women's Lives sometimes unconsciously or unintentionally demonstrated exclusionary working practises or attitudes, organizers for *In Defense of Roe* (IDOR) were committed to multiracialism from the beginning. Their concerns about how the conference was represented focused more on how race and racial difference was represented in the context of planning for future events. Fears of the rising Right prompted real efforts to create a multiracial event that was based on coalitions and mutual understanding and would lay foundations for future organizing across race, rather than prioritising how the event *appeared*. Moving away from attempts to create a particular narrative about the success of multiracial feminism in response to the right, towards a more practical approach of how to achieve tangible gains and to create a more inclusive feminist agenda for the future did, ironically, create a context in which multiracial feminist activism seemed more achievable. This was primarily because the organization and facilitation of the event was led primarily by women of colour, and so they could, importantly, set the agenda to suit their priorities and their working practises.

For some women, responding to the Right and planning for the future seemed like mutually exclusive goals. A representative of the ACLU – probably Kate McGee – wrote to Susan Dickler of the Ms Foundation in February 1989 introducing the proposal for IDOR. Dickler responded with a series of questions about the conference, its objectives, and its anticipated outcomes. She found the 'mixtures of objectives [...] confusing', wondering whether they were 'defending Roe [...] or projecting into the 1990s?'.²⁴⁵ This attitude reflected the either/or approach that some feminists resorted to as they felt forced to choose between making short-term, superficial decisions to defend against the Right and working to lay the foundations for future multiracial feminist organizing. However, organizers for the conference did not see these as mutually exclusive goals; they understood planning for future feminist activism, and particularly for

²⁴⁵ Letter from Unknown ACLU Representative to Susan Dickler (February 1989) p. 1, in 'Ross Papers', Box 34, Folder 11

future multiracial coalition-building, to be part of their strategy to defend women's reproductive rights and build a stronger feminist movement.

The organizers of *In Defense of Roe* recognised that theirs was one of several projects being planned in reaction to the Right and in efforts to preserve *Roe v. Wade*. In addition to the March for Women's Lives, Kate McGee of the ACLU highlighted a signature drive by NARAL, a litigation campaign and public education project led by Planned Parenthood, clergy endorsements for *Roe* organized through RCAR and a campaign collecting letters to send to the Attorney General from ACLU themselves. Though these projects were valuable, McGee claimed that 'these strategies [...] were largely developed without the input of individuals and grassroots organizers who are not members of these organizations nor among their national leadership' and that 'if we are to use the attacks on Roe as an opportunity to develop a strong, lasting movement for reproductive rights, the voices of people of color and grassroots activists must be included in the strategy process'.²⁴⁶ McGee portrayed the threats to reproductive rights as an opportunity to create a stronger feminist movement, which was dependent on the inclusion of women of colour. Her letter portrayed the conference as a space where diverse women could share experiences and advice about organizing strategies that had worked in their own communities. By doing so, they could set the reproductive rights agenda for the 1990s.²⁴⁷ Right-wing threats demonstrated the need to share ideas, experiences and strategies to ensure protection against the Right in the future, rather than taking a reactionary approach to their challenges. The IDOR organizers kept their focus on the future and its legacy, rather than feeling forced to respond quickly to the Right and therefore potentially undermine efforts to create effective multiracial spaces.

This approach is reflective of broader attitudes among different feminists during the second wave and afterwards. Because many women of colour felt disillusioned with white feminists who simultaneously sought to control public narratives around feminism and had exclusionary working practises, it is feasible that their primary concern was not with shaping the public narrative

²⁴⁶ Letter from Kate McGee to Charon Asetoyer (23rd February 1989) p. 2, in 'Charon Asetoyer Papers', Box 2, Folder 5

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3

around feminism more generally. Instead, their priorities lay in achieving goals which might lead to clear and tangible gains for them and their lives. Much as a focus on abortion rights amongst white feminists in the 1960s alienated women of colour and poor women who needed broader reproductive and welfare rights, white feminists' preoccupation with controlling narratives around feminism and setting the national feminist agenda was exclusionary to many women of colour. They, along with anti-racist allies, recognised that the threats posed by the Right wing would and did disproportionately affect them, and so were motivated to organize around practical issues to try and make practical changes.

This chapter will trace the ways in which the IDOR organizers responded to the perceived threat of the Right, and trace how the event was shaped by these responses. In particular, it will consider how organizers sought to represent the event through the creation and dissemination of an official conference report and a conference video. Tensions that arose around the report and video were representative of the different responses to the Right of different women, and their subsequent priorities. Debates were frequently related to race and the representation of the conference as a multiracial space.

In Defense of Roe and the Right

As the title of the conference suggested, one of the objectives of the organizers was to develop new strategies to defend *Roe*. A newsletter from August 1989 highlighted the threat of the Right as a major impetus for the conference. It read, 'the purpose of the conference was to consciously involve women of color, community organizers and religious women in the process of setting an agenda for anticipated attacks against the landmark Supreme Court ruling of *Roe v. Wade*'.²⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, the same threats that were paramount to organizers of the 1989 March for Women's Lives applied to *In Defense of Roe* – that is, the specific threats of the upcoming *Webster* decision, and the more general threats of the right-wing government and an increasingly militant and visible anti-abortion movement. In this case, 'Roe' did not simply refer to *Roe v. Wade* and the right to abortion, but shorthand to refer to abortion rights and wider reproductive rights concerns. Organizers were acutely aware of the threats that

²⁴⁸ 'Pro-Choice Forces Join, Set Inclusive Agenda', *Common Ground - Different Planes* (August 1989) p. 6, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 5, Folder 57

reproductive rights faced; the conference opened with ‘an overview of the current threat to Roe v. Wade and reproductive freedom’, delivered by Lynn Paltrow. She emphasised that ‘even though all women are affected, it is poor women and women of color who have suffered disproportionately’.²⁴⁹

Women who attended IDOR were particularly concerned about the disproportionate effects that *Webster* would have on women of colour. In an article in RCAR’s Women of Color Partnership Program newsletter entitled ‘Women of Color and Webster: Access to Abortion Services Narrowed’, Joan Gibbs wrote that ‘this Court’s ruling places a burden most heavily and inexorably on those with already too few medical choices available to them [...it] serves as a direct attack on the health of poor women and their equal access to safe reproductive health services’.²⁵⁰ Gibbs drew on notions of inequities based on class, though the title of the article emphasises the effects of *Webster* on women of colour. To Gibbs, then, class and race were inextricably linked, and this formed the crux of women of colour’s disproportionate subjugation from *Webster*. The lived experience of many women of colour who helped to organize IDOR meant that they understood the particular dangers that they – and women like them – faced as a result of right-wing threats to reproductive rights. This understanding of *Webster* and other right-wing threats was based on an intersectional analysis of the ways that race and class affected women’s gendered experiences. Ultimately, while the threats were the same, the potential outcomes varied for different women, which shaped their various organizing priorities. It was precisely this intersectional approach that many white women struggled to achieve through education and self-analysis.

Both white women and women of colour saw *In Defense of Roe* as a space for education about the ways that race affected women’s experiences of the threat of the Right. Importantly, they understood this education to flow primarily from women of color to white women. Lynn Paltrow, a white organizer from ACLU, wrote to Loretta Ross requesting that Ross speak on the first evening of the conference about ‘the Women of Color brief in Webster, and your vision for what a reproductive rights movement should/could look like as well as

²⁴⁹ Lynn Paltrow, quoted in IDOR Conference report, p. 15, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

²⁵⁰ Joan Gibbs, ‘Women of Color & Webster: Access to Abortion Services Narrowed’, *Common Ground - Different Planes* (August 1989) p. 1, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 5, Folder 57

your sense of what the priorities should be if we lost Roe'.²⁵¹ Just as the conference was identified as a space for education across race on reproductive rights issues, it was also an opportunity to exchange ideas and understandings of the main consequences of right-wing threats, and strategies to prevent or mitigate against them. Grassroots organizers who participated at the conference wanted to explain to representatives of the 'mainstream' feminist and abortion rights groups the urgency of understanding, working on and working with women and issues at the grassroots. One participant, referring to the 'major groups', stated that

They need to be here and find out what we are saying and how it can be integrated into their movement, because their movement is going to collapse in the face of the anti-abortion movement. Because the anti-abortion movement is grassroots organizing. The major groups that are pro-abortion or pro-choice groups are not paying attention to us; we are not organizing at the grassroots level among people of color [...] It's to all of our interest because what is going to happen is that they're going to lose. And all of us are going to lose when they lose.²⁵²

This participant believed that attempting to establish links between grassroots activists and mainstream organizers – particularly across racial and class lines – were important means of protecting feminist activism against the threats posed by the anti-abortion movement.

Representing In Defense of Roe

IDOR organizers were committed to laying foundations for the future of feminist organizing. This meant that they wanted the conference and its legacy to demonstrate what multiracial reproductive organizing *could* look like, even in politically hostile climates. They perceived the conference as an archetype for multiracial activism on a larger scale. The conference was conceived of as something larger than itself; it was intended to leave a legacy, in part to fortify the future movement against right-wing threats. In the case of IDOR, then, imagining 'doing' activism and 'representing' activism as divorced from each other is problematic; the future-focused multiracial activism at IDOR meant that ideas about how to represent that activism was central to the organizing itself.

²⁵¹ Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Loretta Ross (4th April 1989), in 'Ross Papers', Box 34, Folder 11

²⁵² Unknown Participant, quoted in IDOR Conference report, p. 10, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

In short, multiracial organizing that planned for the future was inherently shaped by questions or ideas surrounding its legacy and representation. Organizers used two methods to represent the conference: a video that summarised the event, and a detailed conference report. These outputs both reported on the conference itself and acted as educational tools for future organizers.

Video

The conference video was funded and created by the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, who ‘made a commitment to the participants to prepare a video that as accurately as possible reflected the significant events and concerns raised at the conference’.²⁵³ The threat of the Right, and the response of drawing together multiracial groups to defend *Roe*, was the foundation on which the video was set. The introductory voiceover stated that

the right to control our reproductive lives is under attack. Women of colour and grassroots activists have too often been excluded from the process of setting the national reproductive rights agenda. This historic conference brought together African-American, Latina, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander and white women and men. The participants worked together to develop strategies for winning full reproductive rights for all people.²⁵⁴

The video was intended to document different participants’ strategies for defending *Roe* and for successful multiracial organizing. This would, organizers hoped, influence the future strategies of existing pro-choice organizations. In a letter from Pat Tyson to Janet Benshoof of the ACLU, Tyson wrote that RCAR ‘hoped to be able to use the video as an organizing tool in the Women of Color Partnership Program and as an educational tool within our denominational caucuses’.²⁵⁵ The legacy of the conference lay not only in the actions of the organizers and participants at the event itself, but also in the way that it was represented and how those representations were and could be used in future organizing and education attempts. Indeed, the video closes with a voiceover stating, ‘We hope that the recommendation and ideas developed at the conference will be incorporated into the struggle for reproductive rights. We hope that the conference will provide a model for inclusiveness, and a blueprint

²⁵³ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson (14th September 1989)

²⁵⁴ IDOR Video.

²⁵⁵ Letter from Pat Tyson to Janet Benshoof (8th September 1989) p. 2, ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

for an expanded reproductive rights agenda'.²⁵⁶ For many organizers and participants of *In Defense of Roe*, ensuring future successful organizing was perceived as the primary method to defend reproductive rights, rather than focusing on who controlled feminist narratives.

Organizers did, however, also consider the ways in which the video represented the feminist activism at the conference. Lynn Paltrow emphasised foregrounding the role of the threat of the Right in prompting multiracial unity in the video. She suggested that the video should open with unity statements that were written and delivered at the conference. Then, she suggested, it should feature footage of white women talking about the inclusion of women of colour in feminism. She recommended using a section from her own speech that emphasised that women 'all love in the shadow of fear', thus suggesting that a fundamental basis for unity across race was their shared fear of right-wing attacks on reproductive rights.²⁵⁷ Though this specific quotation did not make the final cut of the video, Paltrow is featured early in the film discussing the 'real threat' of *Roe* being overturned. She stated that 'we have a lot to lose', predicting a public health crisis and framing the right-wing threat as dangerous to all women, irrespective of race.²⁵⁸ Given that Paltrow opened the conference by acknowledging the disproportionate ways that women of colour and poor women were affected by the Right, her assertion that women of all races would be similarly affected by the Right is notable. As she hoped that the video would inform both the public and future organizers about the conference, she may have wanted to portray the conference attendees as a united sisterhood to continue to shape feminist narratives. Paltrow's approach to representing the conference, then, was similar to the approaches of other white women discussed in earlier chapters.

Ultimately, the video foregrounded women of colour discussing their reproductive lives – and particularly the ways they were affected by the Right.

²⁵⁶ IDOR Video.

²⁵⁷ Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Lori Hiris (July 1989), p. 7, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; I have used the word 'love' in this quotation as I am directly quoting from the source material. However, I believe that this is a typographical error, and that Paltrow meant to write, 'We all live in the shadow of fear'. I choose to read it in this way as it corresponds with Paltrow's other efforts to understand the conference as a space of shared experiences and attitudes. Nevertheless, I posit that irrespective of whether Paltrow used the term 'love' or 'live', her message is essentially the same in terms of the effects of the right-wing threat.

²⁵⁸ IDOR Video.

Nkenge Touré, an African-American woman, framed the threats to black women's reproductive rights in the long history of losing bodily autonomy and control, and said that it was 'very powerful for us [Black women] to be here among other women of colour, and among other women in general, to say that a new day is coming and a new time is coming'.²⁵⁹ Joyce Payne echoed Touré, and suggested that the power of the multiracial gathering of women of colour could translate to undermining the right-wing threat. She said that

Part of this agenda is not only about moving women to a higher order, but sending a message to the Borks, to the Reagans, to the old boys' system, to the Bushes of this country, that women will not tolerate any less than having control over their own lives. That we're concerned about the quality of life about all women in this country. The beauty of this conference today is that all of the women of colour here, all of the women who had a piece of the pie to make a difference, will have the opportunity to put this on paper, to make this a reality.²⁶⁰

In Defense of Roe, then, was simultaneously represented as a model for good multiracial organizing, and a platform from which diverse women could make their concerns and demands publicly or officially heard in response to the right-wing.

The 33-minute long video was edited from over fifteen hours of material, and so the women who weighed in on its content needed to be highly selective about what they included. Their different perspectives demonstrated their differing priorities and ideas of how the conference should be represented and what purpose the video should serve. Discussions about the video highlight some of the challenges of working multiracially – particularly in terms of who should determine how IDOR was represented. The editing process of the video was a multiracial process – though white women took initial control. Lynn Paltrow and Janet Benshoof of ACLU and Lori Hiris, the filmmaker – all white women – created the first cut of the video. Then, several women of colour from RCAR - Pat Tyson, Sabrae Jenkins and Chung Seto – provided a critique of and suggestions for this initial cut. The discussions about how the video ought to portray the conference created tensions between the representatives, which led to a split between the ACLU and RCAR. Ultimately RCAR representatives disassociated themselves from the video and its production.

²⁵⁹ IDOR Video.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

The finished video was inevitably shaped by the ACLU's desire to use it as a tool or guide for future organizing. As such, despite lip service being paid to the video primarily showcasing participants' specific strategies, only one of the five thematic sections of the video focussed on strategies for action. The rest focussed on the threats posed by anti-Abortion forces, the history of the reproductive rights movement and where women of colour fit into it, a segment on 'who we are', and a segment on 'what we want'.²⁶¹ Portraying a sense of what women of colour were working on, and how, within the reproductive rights or reproductive justice movement was represented as equally as important as communicating the actual strategies that were discussed.

Strategies for achieving reproductive freedom and combatting the Right provided a framework through which activists discussed their approaches to race and multiracial work in the video. Women explicitly discussed the ways that race affected their strategizing, and made suggestions for change within the feminist movement. Luz Alvarez Martinez was featured stating that:

women of colour, though they have given their support [to pro-choice activities] have done so with mixed emotions, because they often feel that they are being used [...] for too long we have been your tokens. To put a stop to the continuation of these practises, we will set forth a set of criteria for your consideration, that should be met in order to have our participation in future activities. These include having been considered and empowered in the framing of the issues, and in setting the agendas. In determining activities, in implementing actions, not only called upon to participate at the implementation stage. Only endorsing and supporting those organizations that have women of colour represented adequately on their boards and on their staff - and that's for us to determine.²⁶²

The time that Martinez was allocated on the video is telling - she spoke continuously for nearly two minutes, which was longer than most other speakers on the tape. The women who did appear on the tape for longer than her – Ninia Baehr, talking about the Chicago Jane Collective, and Byllye Avery, giving a closing speech – both explicitly warned against and were concerned about the threat of the Right.²⁶³ The strategy that Martinez suggested was clearly not just about organizing around reproductive rights - it was about strategies for women

²⁶¹ Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Lori Hiris (July 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶² IDOR Video.

²⁶³ The Jane Collective was a group of women in Chicago who ran an underground abortion provision service from 1969-1973. See Kaplan, *The Story of Jane*. Baehr's speech warned of the dangers that women would face if abortion was made illegal.

of colour to approach organizing within or alongside mainstream, white-dominated pro-choice organizations, groups or individuals. The video, then, portrayed the two major themes of IDOR as fighting against the Right and learning to work multiracially. Notably, the section of Martinez's speech featured on the video also listed the expectations that women of colour set out for white-dominated organizations to work multiracially. Questions of race, coalition building, and strategies for future multiracial organizing, rather than the initial plan of broadening the reproductive rights agenda, were portrayed in the video as central to discussions – and thus, central to the message that Hiris, Paltrow and Benshoof sought to communicate to future organizers. The inclusion of these achievable strategies on the video demonstrates its purpose as not only a record of discussions held at the conference, but also as an educational tool for future organizers; feminist organizers could watch this video and draw on the knowledge about and strategies towards creating multiracial events or spaces.

This appeared to work. When Paltrow showed the edited video to a group of interns and staff from the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, she noted that they paid most attention to 'what they heard as the main point - the importance of coalition building'.²⁶⁴ It is telling that the main point that viewers took from the video was the importance of coalition building rather than discussions of reproductive rights, and indicative of the centrality of the message of multiracial cooperation and organizing to the video. The portrayal of coalition-building as being as important, if not more so, than the subject matter, suggests that organizers wanted to portray the real success of *In Defense of Roe* as related to how women interacted across racial lines.

Multiracial interaction at the conference was also shown in the video – quite literally. Many speakers were 'backed' by other participants, providing powerful and effective visual displays of multiracial camaraderie. Backing somebody, or 'getting people's back', meant standing behind the speaker and physically supporting them by holding them from behind, or holding their arm, shoulder or side in a demonstration of solidarity. Participants understood this practise to be a self-help technique that focused on nurturing and supporting themselves and each other, and by the end of the conference every speaker at

²⁶⁴ Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Pat Tyson (22nd August 1989), in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

the podium had at least one 'backer', in 'recognition that it is often hard to talk about ourselves and our issues and that we should not be sent up alone when we are doing this important work'.²⁶⁵ Some of these 'backings' portrayed visibly multiracial support, as the speaker and her backer(s) were frequently of different races. For example, Luz Alvarez Martinez, a Latina woman, was supported by Byllye Avery, an African-American woman, and Linda Castro, a Latina woman, was also supported by an unidentified black woman.²⁶⁶ The conference report drew attention to the 'powerful sight' of Faith Evans, a black man, supporting Anne Finger, a white woman advocating disability rights, as indicative of the kind of multiracial support and interaction that *In Defense of Roe* represented.²⁶⁷ These visual representations of multiracial groups working together are clear throughout the video; Mallika Dutt and Naima Major, Asian-American and African-American women respectively, are featured presenting their demands for the future of the reproductive rights movement, and footage of racially diverse small group sessions is inserted throughout.

Ensuring that racial diversity was both explicitly discussed and visibly represented in the video was a conscious decision on behalf of the producers. Lynn Paltrow wanted to communicate a sense of unity and commonality between participants in the video. She encouraged Hiris to include footage of a hug between Byllye Avery and Luz Alvarez Martinez, and suggested that she include footage that spoke explicitly about the similarities between women of different races. For example, she suggested including Dazon Dixon's words that 'we all want just about the same thing, diversity and commonality'.²⁶⁸ Though at face value these seem like very different and potentially conflicting concepts, these words were a convenient catch-all to appeal to a wide range of women. They suggested that diversity was welcomed and celebrated, but that an overarching shared understanding of feminist issues created links between the different women at the conference. Communicating this sense of unity and solidarity was paramount to Paltrow - she suggested that the list of issues spoken about in the video be edited to portray those issues that united the

²⁶⁵ 'Small Groups' document (22nd August 1989) p. 12, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁶⁶ IDOR Video.

²⁶⁷ 'Small Groups' document (22nd August 1989) p. 13, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; IDOR Video.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

different women at the conference. In a letter to Hiris, she wrote 'you might want to trade some [clips of women speaking about issues] for others that say more of the consensus things', suggesting national health insurance as an issue which created consensus.²⁶⁹

The main significance of the video was the way in which it informed and inspired other people working around reproductive rights about approaches to race. It provided an important educational resource for white-dominated groups on the concerns of women of colour, and on ways to work more effectively in multiracial coalitions. For example, at a meeting for grantmakers on reproductive rights, Paltrow showed a copy of the video to Jael Silliman – who had attended the conference – and Steve Veederman, another grantmaker. Both viewers thought that the video was excellent and were impressed by the organizing shown in the video. Most of the meeting attendees were white, and Veederman used the opportunity to compliment the video and tell other (white) grantmakers that 'there are a lot more women of color out there that we could be calling on'.²⁷⁰ The video indicated to him how important such conferences and meetings could be, and he regretted not having funded it. In addition, the video inspired Veederman to ask Silliman what other opportunities there would be to fund similar events and other work by women of colour around reproductive rights in the future. This is a clear example of the video fulfilling several roles; it communicated the issues that were raised at the conference itself, educated those who viewed it (particularly white viewers about women of colours' concerns), and it inspired others to act and to seek effective multiracial coalitions based on a similar model to IDOR. The way that the conference was represented, then, paved the way for additional support and future multiracial organizing opportunities.

Not all the feedback on the video was so positive, though. The organisers sent a first edit of the video to various members of the planning committee in July 1989, who provided feedback on how it portrayed the conference. Despite the racial diversity at the conference itself, several people commented that the video did not adequately communicate the racial diversity

²⁶⁹ Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Lori Hiris (July 1989), p. 6, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷⁰ Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Pat Tyson (22nd August 1989), p. 2, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

that was present, and that women of colour were overrepresented in it: one person commented that it appeared to be ‘a video of [the] Black Women’s Health Network’, that the ‘same people [we]re repeatedly shown’ and that there was ‘not very much diversity of people’.²⁷¹ Another commenter wrote in a note to Pat Tyson of RCAR that she would ‘like to see more white people’.²⁷² The lack of diversity portrayed in this first video edit seems to have been at odds with the racial diversity of attendees at the conference. It is unclear exactly who provided this feedback, as it was written anonymously. The fact that multiple people commented on the lack of diversity suggests that the message of the video espoused ‘diversity and commonality’, while visually it did not initially portray this. It is feasible that overrepresenting women of colour in the video was a conscious decision on behalf of Paltrow and Hiris to demonstrate that women of colour took the lead at IDOR, and to consciously eschew portrayals of white women speaking on behalf of women of colour – a topic that was reiterated at the conference itself. The organizers wanted to represent the conference as making significant and effective efforts towards multiracial work, which meant highlighting the participation of women of colour and prioritising them over representations of white women. If this was a conscious decision, it is indicative of many feminists’ – particularly white feminists’ – changing attitudes towards how best to create multiracial working environments.

Different perspectives towards how the video should have represented the conference created tensions between the ACLU and RCAR that ultimately led to RCAR disassociating itself from the video in September 1989. They withdrew their sponsorship of the video, stating that they didn’t feel that it fairly portrayed their organization and that it was inappropriate for their needs. Tyson argued that ‘while the purpose of the Conference is explained at the beginning of the video, there is no connection between its stated purpose and what you see on the screen’ and that it was not useful as an effective organizing or educational tool.²⁷³ As a result, RCAR stated that they planned to produce and disseminate their own video from the other footage filmed at the conference.

²⁷¹ Unknown Author, Handwritten Notes and Commentary on Video, p. 2, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷² Unknown Author, Handwritten note to Pat Tyson, p. 1, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷³ Letter from Pat Tyson to Janet Benshoof (8th September 1989) p. 2, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

Their video, they suggested, would combine unique RCAR footage of other women of colour conferences with that from *In Defense of Roe*. It would emphasize other aspects of the conference and would approach reproductive rights issues from a religious perspective to appeal to their denominational caucuses. This, they hoped, would be a ‘dynamite and critical public education piece’.²⁷⁴ By mid-September, Janet Benshoof had agreed to include a letter with the original video when disseminating it to participants, highlighting that RCAR would produce their own video. It does not appear that RCAR’s video was ever made.

Tensions around the film arose because of disagreements over the way that the video represented both the conference itself and the organizations that participated in it. Pat Tyson wrote that there had been ‘differences of opinion regarding what took place’, and Benshoof responded that ‘it appears that you are not pleased with the conference; who attended, or what was said’.²⁷⁵ Benshoof went on to suggest that the two organizations had reached an ‘impasse’, because ‘what is available and usable in the tapes does not meet with RCAR’s approval’.²⁷⁶ Importantly, Benshoof’s suggestion that Tyson was displeased with the conference and the discussions held conflated Tyson’s experience of the conference itself with her responses to how it was later represented. Ultimately, Tyson’s unhappiness with the tape was based in her opinion that RCAR had been unfairly misrepresented in the video – not that the conference itself had been inadequate.

Tyson was particularly unhappy with a section of Byllye Avery’s speech included at the end of the video which she considered to be critical of RCAR. Though the offending comment was subsequently cut from the video, the relationship between RCAR and the ACLU remained strained.²⁷⁷ Lynn Paltrow wrote to Chung Seto of RCAR confirming that the section had been cut, and

²⁷⁴ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson (14th September 1989) p. 1, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷⁵ Letter from Pat Tyson to Janet Benshoof (8th September 1989) p. 1, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1; Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson (14th September 1989) p. 3, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷⁶ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson (14th September 1989) p. 3, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷⁷ It is not clear what the specific comment was that offended Tyson. Though several people refer to it in correspondence etc, it is always in veiled terms. As I did not have access to any earlier versions of the IDOR video I was unable to hear the original comment.

claiming that Seto had confirmed that Pat Tyson was satisfied with result. Seto annotated and forwarded this letter on to Tyson, noting '[I] said specifically that I thought differently now that I've seen the video on Byllye's speech. But "different" doesn't mean "favourable". Told her [Paltrow] specifically to ask you [Tyson] about Byllye's speech because you had problems with it'.²⁷⁸ This miscommunication between the organizations, rather than the subject of the disagreement, seems to have exacerbated the tension; Benshoof expressed her frustration when she wrote that 'your letter says you do not believe RCAR was fairly presented, [but] we have never had any specific proposals from you as to what additional footage should be used'.²⁷⁹ Clearly, the ways that the organizations were represented in the video was understood to be important enough to justify creating tensions between them.

When RCAR made the decision to pull out of the coalition, Tyson demanded that all mentions of RCAR and footage of their membership be removed from the video. Highly disappointed by this request, Benshoof stated that this would not only be very difficult to achieve, but that it would also 'be misleading and a misrepresentation of the conference'.²⁸⁰ Such a video would suggest that the ACLU was trying to claim full credit for an 'important and historical event which [they] worked on together', and it would imply a deep split between the organizations.²⁸¹ As the video was intended to reflect as accurately as possible the events, concerns and issues raised at the conference, Benshoof felt that representing the conference as just an ACLU effort would be disingenuous. She wrote that one of the significant features of the conference was that 'in and of itself it was a coalition effort'; she feared that the tensions caused by the video would undermine and fail to represent the important coalition work that occurred. Benshoof was clear in communicating that she felt that the cooperation between ACLU and RCAR was one of the success stories that came from *In Defense of Roe*, and that it had prompted 'rave reviews from

²⁷⁸ Chung Seto, Annotated Letter from Lynn Paltrow to Chung Seto (29th August 1989), in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁷⁹ Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson, (14th September 1989), p. 2, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

many of the participants'.²⁸² Honouring, maintaining and fairly representing coalitions, then, was important to Benshoof.

Importantly, both Benshoof and Tyson were anxious to maintain good working relationships; Tyson wrote that she hoped 'that this situation will not reflect badly on the future relationship of RCAR and ACLU', and Benshoof stated that, 'for all the ups and downs, I think that the planning, fundraising and conference was a good cooperative effort between ACLU and RCAR [...] Whatever problems we have now we should talk about, and look ahead, not behind'.²⁸³ It is notable that the main tensions that these two women experienced in terms of working together arose from trying to create a conference video that adequately communicated everything that they each wanted. Producing and editing the video was, in itself, a multiracial process. The fact that such severe tensions arose during the organizing that focused on how best to represent the conference, rather than at the conference itself, suggests that the conference video – and the way that the conference was represented and portrayed as a model for future organizing – may have been seen as higher stakes than the conference itself. Its legacy, then, and the part that it might play in representing both organizations and individuals present at the conference, was fundamentally important in the context of the threatening right-wing and the increasing threats to *Roe v. Wade*.

The creation of the video was contentious in many ways. It prompted tension between RCAR and the ACLU, and demonstrated the different priorities and attitudes of the different organizations regarding the ideal representation of the conference. Despite these tensions, though, members of both RCAR and the ACLU continued working together to create a second output that represented *In Defense of Roe* – a conference report which would, according to Paltrow, give special attention to the sections that were not fully covered in the video. By continuing to work multiracially on this secondary output, both Tyson and Paltrow could monitor how the conference was represented and work to ensure that it provided a useful and appropriate resource for both organizations.

²⁸² Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson (14th September 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder

²⁸³ Letter from Pat Tyson to Janet Benshoof (8th September 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; Letter from Janet Benshoof to Pat Tyson (14th September 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

Conference Report

In addition to the video of the conference, Lynn Paltrow and Pat Tyson co-created a conference report which acted as a kind of policy document for future organizing. I have used the term ‘co-created’ loosely here – Paltrow initially wrote the report, and then edited it in response to Tyson’s subsequent critiques and comments. Organizers anticipated writing this report from an early stage; in the initial conference proposal, written in February 1989, they listed ‘a report from the conference [...which] might provide a model to build on for similar conferences around the country’ as a planned outcome.²⁸⁴ In the report, they included what they perceived to be the most pertinent information for activists seeking to organize in the future. Rather than a blow-by-blow account of the conference, the 107-page report was imagined as a jumping-off point for other activists. As such, the conference itself was represented as a useful learning tool for future activists. *In Defense of Roe* did not just provide opportunities for the attending activists to educate each other, then; organizers also sought to use the lessons they learned from it to educate future activists.

The report did not, however, read like an instruction manual. Instead, it was written as a thoughtful self-analysis, from which future organizers could take inspiration and learn. It drew heavily on Paltrow’s personal experience and her sense of the collective experience on the day. By writing colloquially and frequently using ‘we’ rather than ‘I’, Paltrow portrayed the conference as friendly, informal, and united in their goals and attitudes – even when discussing contentious issues. The report was inherently personal and reflected the planners’ desires to portray the conference as simultaneously representative of successful multiracial activism which other organizers could seek to replicate, and as a useful learning tool in which future organizers could learn from *In Defense of Roe*’s mistakes.

The report presented the conference as a vibrant, evolving and growing event in which the organizers and participants learned and developed their positions from and with each other. When talking about the atmosphere of the conference on Saturday morning, for example, the report described some participants as confused about the purpose and goals of the conference, and

²⁸⁴ A Proposal for a Conference In Defense of Roe (3rd February 1989) p. 2, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

angry at the history of exclusion in the reproductive rights movement and the fact that the mainstream 'leaders' were not present.²⁸⁵ Responding to this disquiet, Byllye Avery

gave an impromptu speech that reminded us of the work we needed to do, modeled for us the loving spirit in which we could do it, and enabled us to move forward, together while preserving both our differences and commonalities.²⁸⁶

In her speech, Avery commended the flexibility of conference organizers, who changed the agenda of Saturday morning and afternoon to allow time and space for women to caucus in their own racially autonomous sessions. Speaking to all attendees, Avery said that

I want to validate the sisters who have decided that we see that things could be different here. We have to learn to relax around the agenda. After all, we are the agenda. [...] And the way this conference is going this is the way it was supposed to go, [...] how it needs to go. Trust and Listen. That's all we have to do.²⁸⁷

This flexibility, Avery suggested, would allow organizers at the grassroots and in the mainstream to reach people who felt disillusioned with reproductive rights issues as a result of what she described as 'crazy ("right to lifers") people'.²⁸⁸ Here, the conference report delivers two clear messages to future organizers: first, to be flexible in working practises to meet the needs of and support diverse delegations and to counteract right-wing disruption; and second, to create an atmosphere of mutual respect, support and 'loving spirit' among attendees. This would, as Avery said, 'preserv[e] both our differences and commonalities', which reflected the ways that IDOR organizers wanted to acknowledge individuals' differences to facilitate coalition work.²⁸⁹ The clear references to the relationships forged at the conference and the friendly, encouraging and helpful discourse described in the report portrayed a sense of the camaraderie and mutual support expressed at the conference. It was this sentiment, as much as the practical and administrative advice and comments, that the planners hoped to pass on to other conference organizers via the report.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 77

²⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 77-78

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 81

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.77-78

Though Lynn Paltrow wrote the first draft of the report, it was circulated to the planning committee for feedback before wider dissemination. Pat Tyson's comments indicated how important they understood the report to be in representing the conference, and demonstrated their differing priorities regarding what should and should not be highlighted about IDOR. Their major concerns were to represent racial diversity and to create the report as an educational tool – though they had different ideas about the best way to achieve those goals. For example, when discussing the attendance of pro-choice leaders at the conference, and their early departure, Paltrow wrote that, 'If we were to do it again, we would do it differently to ensure that these individuals would be able to participate in all the Conference activities'.²⁹⁰ Tyson responded by writing that 'it is not essential for us to say what we will do next time – only what we did this time'.²⁹¹ Ultimately, Tyson wanted to represent the conference as a model of success, while Paltrow wanted to portray the unity of the conference while also encouraging readers to learn from its mistakes and develop their own practise.

Tyson was anxious to ensure that the report would not alienate future readers – particularly women of colour, and stated that 'we must be very careful [...]. Women of color and other persons' opinions must be reflected accurately'.²⁹² Tyson's response demonstrates her sensitivity to the way in which race was considered and represented in the report. She hoped that emphasising the importance of accurately representing the opinions of women of colour would ensure the report portrayed a space where racial diversity was acknowledged and celebrated – and thus become the norm for future multiracial organizing.

Discussions of a new 'morning after' pill – named RU-486 – provided an opportunity for Tyson to demonstrate how, in this case, more accurate representations were, she believed, also more useful. RU-486 was unavailable in the USA, and Paltrow's initial report stated that 'over the course of the weekend it became clear that there was near consensus that RU-486 [...]

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 9

²⁹¹ Letter from Pat Tyson to Lynn Paltrow (17th November 1989) p. 2, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁹² Ibid., p. 3

should be made available in this country'.²⁹³ She went on to qualify this by quoting Charon Asetoyer at length, who spoke out against participants automatically supporting RU-486 without considering the implications that it might have on women of colour, poor women and rural woman. Asetoyer said

I have a hard time supporting RU-486. I can't endorse RU-486 unless women's groups first ask what does this mean for rural [and other] women? [...] Don't get me to endorse what is easiest and convenient for you without you stopping to take the time to work on the issue that are critical to me.
[...] So this is the way of putting the ball back in our court and having them have to deal with our issues as well.²⁹⁴

These words informed Tyson's critique of Paltrow's approach to these discussions. She requested that Paltrow's assertion that there was 'near consensus' be changed to: 'it became clear among *white women* that there was a near consensus that RU-486 [...] should be made available' [emphasis added].²⁹⁵ She also altered Paltrow's statement that 'most [participants] agreed that efforts need to be made to bring the drug to the U.S.' to read 'while some participants felt that efforts need to be made to bring the drug into the US and used, others expressed caution'.²⁹⁶ Tyson, then, was happy to sacrifice representations of total unity to more fairly and accurately represent the diverse viewpoints of participants. She also wanted to clearly situate concerns about RU-486 in the context of the long history of reproductive abuses experienced by women of colour and poor women.²⁹⁷ By highlighting the elements of IDOR that she thought were most important for future organizing – that is, sensitivity to racially diverse voices – Tyson hoped the report would prompt events founded in inclusivity.

However, other elements of the RU-486 debate prompted Tyson to prioritise usefulness over accuracy. Charlotte Taft, a white woman, had prompted the discussion by encouraging women to sign and return a postcard expressing their support for the drug. She responded defensively to Asetoyer's criticisms, stating 'if you don't want RU 486 – if you are uncomfortable with it,

²⁹³ IDOR Conference report, p. 65, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66

²⁹⁵ IDOR Conference report, p. 65, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; Letter from Pat Tyson to Lynn Paltrow (17th November 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁹⁶ Letter from Pat Tyson to Lynn Paltrow (17th November 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

don't send in a card. That's the beauty of this, the diversity [...] we have to be careful not to attack each other because, hey, we are not the enemy'.²⁹⁸ Taft's words demonstrated two things: first, that Asetoyer voicing concerns about RU-486 and women of colour felt like a personal attack to Taft, and second, that the idea of an 'enemy' (that is, the Right) could shut down discussions that might highlight racial difference. Tyson, upon reading the report, suggested that Taft's response – as well as Asetoyer's commentary – should simply be summarised. Tyson, then, wanted to downplay anything in the report that might suggest racial tensions in an effort to create a useful model for future organizing.

The way that the report represented the racially autonomous caucus sessions also demonstrates Tyson and Paltrow's different approaches to representing the conference. Originally, Paltrow tried to give an accurate portrayal of these sessions by including full transcripts for the 'unity statements' that each group wrote. Tyson, however, suggested that while it was 'appropriate to indicate that persons separated into ethnic caucuses, it [was] not appropriate to provide individual statements [from these groups]'.²⁹⁹ Instead, she suggested, the statements should be compiled into a single narrative paragraph, arguing that 'what we want to project is the substance from the dialogue which took place – not the substance of speeches'.³⁰⁰ Tyson was particularly concerned with the way in which the caucuses' unity statements were presented in the report, and how that, in turn, represented the conference itself. When Paltrow wrote 'white woman participated in the development and writing of these statements', Tyson responded, 'How can you have a unity statement based on exclusionary participation? Delete the statement'.³⁰¹ While Paltrow wanted to highlight the fact that all delegates participated in this race-based activity – even white women, who historically had been criticised for not fully engaging with questions of race and neglecting to see themselves as raced – Tyson wanted to portray an even playing field in which it was unremarkable that white women engaged in creating unity statements based on race, and full engagement and inclusion was to be assumed. This approach is consistent with Tyson's desire to

²⁹⁸ IDOR Conference report, p. 66, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1, p. 67

²⁹⁹ Letter from Pat Tyson to Lynn Paltrow (17th November 1989) p. 5, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

³⁰¹ IDOR Conference report, p. 83, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1; Letter from Pat Tyson to Lynn Paltrow (17th November 1989) p. 5, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

represent the conference as a model of success – she wanted future organizers to acknowledge differences between women of different races, but also for all delegates (especially white women) to be aware of their own racial positionality as standard. Tyson prioritised making the report useful for the future over accurately reporting everything that happened at the conference.

Paltrow and Tyson wanted the conference report to be an educational tool to help future organizers, but writing the report was, in itself, a demonstration of multiracial education. Through her feedback and comments, Tyson wanted to educate Paltrow about how to appropriately represent multiracial organizing. Tyson critiqued Paltrow's use of the term 'women of power groups' to refer to national white-dominated groups because it gave the impression that the 'women of power' had control over the other, 'powerless' women that attended the conference. She also highlighted some of Paltrow's language as 'condescending'; one section of the report was originally entitled 'women of color need to be the source of their own power'.³⁰² Tyson suggested that it should read 'women of color exercising their power' so that it did not play down the strength and power of women of colour, and thus undermine the actions and attitudes of those women at the conference.³⁰³ Tyson's critiques echoed critiques that feminists of colour had been making about white feminists previously. Tyson's suggestion that Paltrow's language was condescending reflected earlier women of colours' concerns about white feminists' paternalism that they demonstrated in their ideas of 'sisterhood' and outreach strategies. Indeed, Tyson commented that many women of colour critiqued the white feminist notion that 'sisterhood is powerful' as reductionist, and indicated white women's sense that they could speak on behalf of women of colour as part of a united feminism as overly simplistic.³⁰⁴ By criticising Paltrow's condescending language, Tyson simultaneously used report-writing to educate Paltrow about how to represent multiracial organizing, and portrayed the conference as a

³⁰² Letter from Pat Tyson to Lynn Paltrow (17th November 1989) p. 3, in 'RCAR/RCRC Papers', Box 7, Folder 1

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Sources which showcase and discuss women of colours' critiques of the notion of a united 'sisterhood', and by extension, that white women could or should represent them, include: Lorraine Bethel, 'What Chou Mean We, White Girl', *Conditions: Five*, 1979, p. 86; Thompson, 'Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism', p. 346; Barbara Omolade, 'Sisterhood in Black and White', in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation* (Rutgers University Press, 2007),

space where diverse women enjoyed equal power relationships – and one where white women respected and understood the importance of race and power dynamics in organizing. She hoped that portraying the conference as a microcosm of the equality and diversity that was lauded in multiracial feminist activism might ensure that future organizers would abandon the powerful/powerless dichotomy.

The conference, and the ways that it was represented, were separate but interrelated examples of multiracial work. The conference itself seems to have been an example of ‘successful’ multiracial activism based on mutual respect and understanding. One white woman called it wonderful, and felt ‘extremely privileged to have the chance to participate in the conference and hear so clearly the voices of women of colour’.³⁰⁵ Byllye Avery confirmed that the conference ‘was so much more meaningful than the march [and had] powerful implications of linking us up with other Women of Color and learning how to make each of our organizations more powerful’.³⁰⁶ However, the representation of the conference indicated the challenges of multiracial activism. These challenges were evident in Tyson’s critiques of the conference report and in the friction caused by the video. Both Tyson and Paltrow wanted the outputs to be reflective of their ideal of multiracial feminism and create a useful legacy for future multiracial organizing, but their different approaches to representation and shaping feminist narratives meant that they had different, and not always complementary, objectives.

Notably, both outputs from the conference – the report, and the video – were initially constructed by white women and then critiqued and edited by women of colour. Though it is hard to know exactly *why* Paltrow had initial responsibility for writing the report – the source material provides no reasons why she was nominated, or volunteered, to write the initial report – it reflects the broader notions discussed in this section regarding white women’s efforts and desire to control feminist narratives. In this case, white women initially took on the responsibility of representing the event, and thus the responsibility of creating and controlling the narrative around the multiracial feminist activism at

³⁰⁵ Marcia Niemann quoted in Letter from ACLU and RCAR to conference participants (24th April 1989) p. 1-2, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

³⁰⁶ Byllye Avery, quoted in Letter from ACLU and RCAR to conference participants (24th April 1989) p. 1-2, in ‘RCAR/RCRC Papers’, Box 7, Folder 1

the conference. Ultimately, though, creating the conference report was an example of multiracial work, which reflected the challenges and benefits of multiracial organizing more broadly.

The fact that the production of both the conference video and the conference report created and highlighted tensions for the multiracial teams demonstrates how important they were to the organizers. For both organizations charged with representing the conference, the stakes were high; they were faced with the impending *Webster* decision (which was decided in July 1989, while the video was in production) and general fears about how restrictions to reproductive rights would be particularly harmful to women of colour. As a result, both RCAR and the ACLU wanted to ensure that the outputs that represented *In Defense of Roe* were as useful as possible while also accurately reflecting the substance of the conference. The varying approaches of white women and women of colour who were involved in developing these outputs demonstrate their different understandings of what made a legacy useful, and thus what the most important messages were to portray. For white women such as Lynn Paltrow and Janet Benshoof, portraying a sense of unity across race while simultaneously acknowledging racial difference was important. For women of colour like Pat Tyson, it was important to represent the conference as a model of 'success', imagining the video and report primarily as useful tools for future organizers. This reflected the ongoing preoccupation of white women with shaping discourses around feminism while women of colour focused on making practical change.

Conclusions

Efforts to create multiracial feminist spaces in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s cannot be extricated from the relationship between feminism and right-wing antifeminism. The rise of the Right and the threats that it posed to feminists influenced how and why women sought to create multiracial spaces. Feminist organizing in turn affected how right-wing organizers operated. Different women interpreted the threat in different ways. In general, middle-class, white feminists tended to see the threat of the Right as simultaneously a threat to their hard-won rights – particularly abortion rights – and a threat to their control of the representation of American women and narratives of American womanhood and feminism. Many white feminists believed that they, and their approaches to issues, represented most American women, and feared that right-wing attacks would serve to delegitimise their claim of representation. To ensure that they were perceived as representative of all women, they wanted to portray feminism as fundamentally inclusive. Thus, their events and organizations needed to be multiracial. For women of colour, however, the main threat posed by the Right was the threat of future and further oppressive racist and classist reproductive rights policies. The Hyde Amendment demonstrated to women of colour and poor white women that right-wing attacks on reproductive rights would primarily and disproportionately affect them. These women, then, wanted to mitigate against future threats by educating others about how to most successfully work in multiracial spaces and coalitions. In the cases of the National Women's Conference and the Marches for Women's Lives, controlling public narratives around feminism and reproductive rights was seen as a primary way by which to protect themselves. In the case of *In Defense of Roe*, laying the foundations for future organizers, particularly in terms of how to effectively work multiracially, was understood as a more useful way to protect against right-wing threats.

The different events considered in this section demonstrate strategies that were informed by these different understandings of the threat. Both the National Women's Conference and the Marches for Women's Lives were events that were organized with the intention of being highly visible, and so were perceived as having the potential to influence public understandings and

narratives around feminism. In the case of the Marches for Women's Lives, Loretta Ross, in discussion with other women of colour, emphasised the importance of trying to make practical changes as well as simply trying to protect abortion rights and the control of the narrative. She emphasised network creation and education among women of colour to simultaneously support the Marches, represent multiracial activism at them, and create a base of organizers for future events. The conference *In Defense of Roe*, on the other hand, was a much smaller event, and organizers wanted to create a model to instruct future organizers how to organize across race. It was attended by disproportionately high numbers of women of colour, who had not historically been able to control mainstream feminist narratives, so this was not so central to their organizing and defensive strategies. For the women of colour present at the conference, right-wing threats seemed to be more direct and tangible than they did for many of the white women, who were focused on narrative creation. As a result, organizers and participants placed emphasis on making 'real', issue-based changes that would protect women of colour and poor women against right-wing attacks in a practical way.

While the perceived threats of the Right prompted some white feminists to consider the impact of race and class on reproductive rights more deeply, not all feminists approached their activism with an intersectional approach. In practise, this sometimes meant that reactions to the Right could (and did) hinder multiracial work, even when those fears had prompted efforts to work multiracially in the first place. Indeed, the very notion of the 'right to choose' – the cornerstone of the abortion rights movement – was critiqued by some as a concession to the right-wing. Framing the abortion issue as anti-big-government meant that it might hold more traction with right-wing governments and institutions, but was incompatible with critiques of the Hyde Amendment, which disproportionately affected women of colour and poor women. Most white women did not intend to cause racial tensions and did not understand their actions as malicious. Indeed, in many cases, white women reacted to the perceived threat of the Right in ways that they assumed would be beneficial for all women. They reacted by attempting to portray and facilitate multiracial unity, solidarity and coherence. Sometimes, though, their actions served to undermine or hinder efforts towards multiracial work, rather than be conducive towards

them. These actions primarily took two forms: organizational strategies, procedures and structures that gave precedence to the voices of (predominantly white) moderate feminists; and prioritising the creation and maintenance of public narratives about feminism over making concerted efforts to ensure fair representation and participation for women of colour. The emphasis on strict parliamentary procedure at the National Women's Conference is a clear example of the former, while the latter was evident when Ellie Smeal dissolved the NOW Women of Color department for the March for Women's Lives to ensure that NOW had enough money to facilitate the event. In both cases, the white feminists who took these actions did so because they assumed that their chosen course of action would be the most effective to protect against right-wing threats, and that it would be useful to all women. For many white women, their desires to work multiracially and to defend against a perceived right-wing threat were fundamentally interrelated, but in practise could become contradictory. This led to an 'either/or' approach in some cases, where defending against the Right in the short-term, and working towards multiracial coalition-creation, became seen as mutually exclusive.

The ways in which feminists, and antifeminists, have sought to portray themselves and each other has been central to this section. All the events discussed in this section were influenced by organizers' desires to control public narratives around feminism. As such, much of part two of this thesis concerns a battle of *who* was entitled to represent American women, and in *what way* they represented them. White-dominated, liberal feminist groups were particularly concerned that right-wing antifeminists would take control of and dictate the way that feminism and American womanhood were perceived by the public – and importantly, by the various branches of the government. Many feminists active in the mainstream objected to the critiques made of them by women on the Right: that they were elitist and failed to represent American women. These criticisms, they feared, would undermine their claims of inclusivity and their entitlement to speak on behalf of American women. In response, feminists sought to portray themselves as a powerful force with the support of American women behind it in a united effort to defend against Right-wing encroaches on women's rights. This ideal was one of the central reasons that many liberal feminist groups espoused rhetoric of solidarity and unity across race, while their

preoccupation with maintaining control of these narratives contributed, in some cases, to tensions when working in coalitions across race. Unsurprisingly, many feminists wanted to portray women on the right as uninformed, as 'dupes' of men, and as having 'false consciousness'.³⁰⁷ This led to a media preoccupation with 'catfights' among women in the 1970s and 1980s which further catalysed liberal feminists' desires to present feminism as a coherent, united front. By presenting feminism as a united front, feminists gave the media less ammunition with which to critique and undermine perceived splits within the movement.

Feminists responded to and acted upon their presumptions about right-wing women. Their belief that feminists had more right to speak on behalf of women led them to take advantage of the parliamentary procedures in place to stifle right-wing women's voices at the New York state meeting for the IWY conference. Similarly, feminists' reports of the Mississippi state meeting portrayed conservative women who attended as 'duped' by the men that accompanied them. At the Marches for Women's Lives, NOW tried to publicly discredit antifeminists in the media, drawing on the numbers of women at the Marches for Women's Lives and various pro-life marches to suggest that NOW, and the pro-choice movement, were more powerful and representative. They emphasised women's diversity at the Marches for Women's Lives to discredit suggestions that feminism was elitist and exclusive. Loretta Ross' approach to dealing with women in the anti-abortion movement – and particularly black women – was to invite them to join feminist discussions to educate them on what she perceived as a more 'correct' way of thinking about abortion rights for black women. Though education also formed a central component of organizers' strategies against the Right in *In Defense of Roe*, they emphasised contemporary and future feminist activism, rather than right-wing women; as such, participants' perception of women on the Right was not explicitly discussed or tackled at the conference.

Given the importance to feminists of how they were represented in the public eye, it is unsurprising that the media has influenced how feminists strategized. Women on both the Right and the Left understood the importance

³⁰⁷ For more on how feminists have perceived and portrayed women on the Right, see Nielsen.

of their media portrayal. Many of the Right perceived feminists as ‘the darlings of the major media despite the fact that they are a vociferous minority’.³⁰⁸ Susan Faludi, however, asserts that ‘the press first introduced the [right-wing] backlash to a national audience – and made it palatable. [...] It cosmeticized the scowling face of anti-feminism while blackening the feminist eye’.³⁰⁹ Both feminists and antifeminists thought that they were being unfairly represented. Feminists understood the media in different ways in the events discussed in this section. The National Women’s Conference was acknowledged as being a ‘media event’, where the media interpretation and representation of the conference to the public was as important as the conference work itself. Similarly, organizers for the Marches for Women’s Lives believed that national decision-makers – such as Supreme Court justices – were likely to be influenced by media representations of feminism and antifeminism. This belief affected the ways they organized and wanted to portray themselves to the media. Finally, organizers of *In Defense of Roe* used the media (though, unlike the former two events, it was not covered in the mass media) to ensure that the conference itself was represented positively to future organizers to ensure a successful legacy of multiracial organizing. Media portrayals of activism and organizing, then, were central to all three events, as organizers perceived the way that they were represented as potentially influential to decision-makers at national, local and grassroots levels.

Ultimately, exploring the relationship between feminism, the Right, and multiracial activism highlights tensions, contradictions and difficulties as white-dominated mainstream feminist groups grappled with the realities of balancing their desire to protect against the Right, and their ideal of creating multiracial spaces and events. The varying priorities of different feminist groups meant that there was no single ideal strategy to protect against right-wing threats. As a result, some strategies undertaken by white women in attempts to protect all women in fact served to heighten the differences between white women and women of colour, and thus increase the difficulty of organizing effectively across racial lines. When fears of the Right prompted feminists to focus on practical

³⁰⁸ Virginia Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women - Their Impact on Society and the Family’, *A.L.L. About Issues*, April 1985, p. 7, quoted in Denton, p. 270

³⁰⁹ Faludi, p. 101

issues rather than on controlling feminist narratives, work across racial lines became more feasible.

Conclusion

As scholars, we often get caught up in the discussion of which movements are successful or not, but in the end, I think it's also important to consider how much we draw upon the ideas of those who come before us. Even in their physical absence, they continue to shape the way we think about certain issues and influence the methods we choose to employ in contemporary political struggles. Perhaps this is a better way of assessing the effectiveness—and measuring the success—of political movements.

Keisha N. Blain, 'On Black Women's Intellectual History' (2018)¹

In 1977, when interviewed at the National Women's Conference, Ellie Smeal of NOW claimed that, 'this time, when we go toward equality, we are going to go together [...] We [women] are not going to be divided and conquered'.² Smeal's optimism about the future of female unity reflected broader attitudes of white women who believed that shared womanhood was an adequate platform on which women of all races could stand united. Only a decade later, though, many white women had abandoned their efforts towards a concept of unity and shared sisterhood in favour of building alliances or coalitions with women of colour. Clearly, major shifts occurred in the late 1970s and 1980s to facilitate this changed attitude. This thesis has traced these shifts in white feminists' strategies and impetuses for creating relationships across race during this period, and explores several key themes, including the importance of networks, education, narrative creation and racially autonomous spaces. It has made a strong case that many white feminists' attitudes, understandings and actions surrounding race and multiracialism changed fundamentally, and has explored how and why they shifted. In short, this thesis argues that many white women maintained strong desires to forge multiracial relationships throughout this period, but that their understanding of how and why to create those relationships changed based on their own self-analysis, feedback and critiques from women of colour, and in response to threatening right-wing forces. At its heart, this thesis tackles the ways in which white feminists understood, imagined, and tried to reconcile or deal with racial difference between women. Importantly, it

¹ Keisha N. Blain, *Public Thinker: Keisha N. Blain on Black Women's Intellectual History*, 2018 <<http://www.publicbooks.org/public-thinker-keisha-n-blain-on-black-womens-intellectual-history/>>.

² Notes from personal interview with Ellie Smeal, p. 2, in 'Ruth Mehrtens Galvin Papers', Northampton, MA, Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection, Box 8, Folder 2

demonstrates the varying ways that women active from the second wave have conceptualised their own gendered and racial identities, and the ways in which that has affected how and why they have tried to organize multiracially.

In this thesis I have questioned and explored what successful activism might look like – if we look beyond traditional norms of defining ‘success’. As Blain has argued, the ways in which activists and activism shape and inform later organizing is an important indicator of their ‘success’. This thesis diverges from many scholars by arguing that many of the ‘failures’ of multiracial work - the difficulties, tensions and moments of disappointment - can be reimagined as part of a larger story that traces an evolutionary shift in strategies for multiracial activism. Traditional notions of multiracial success have been based in white, middle-class ideals that have tended to focus on integrationism and recruitment. This narrative of success has meant that most historians have neglected the (frequent) moments of multiracial feminist collaboration during the late 1970s and through the 1980s in favour of a narrative of failure and disappointment. This thesis, then, has broadened the narrative surrounding multiracial feminism and reproductive rights by moving away from the traditional binary of success/failure. It demonstrates that the success of many moments of multiracial organizing and activism during this period can be defined by the way that they have shaped and developed white feminists’ thinking about race and their own racial identities – and thus their capacity to work effectively across racial lines.

The two parts of this thesis are simultaneously distinct and interrelated. The first part – From Recruitment to Coalition – traces white feminists’ shifting understanding of how to work multiracially. The second part – Representation and the Rise of the Right – explores varying and interconnected reasons why white women wanted to work multiracially. While part one is characterised by what white feminists desired, part two is characterised by their fears. The shift from recruitment to coalition mirrors a shift in the ways that feminists sought to represent themselves in an increasingly oppressive political climate; white women using ‘recruitment’ approaches wanted to be representative *of* all women, while those who favoured a coalition-based approach wanted to be representative *for* all women. White women came to understand, and even celebrate, racial difference – and thus sought to represent feminism as racially diverse rather than as a monolithic entity based on

shared womanhood or sisterhood. Shifting strategies towards multiracial activism were simultaneously shaped by, and helped to shape, feminist reactions to the Right and crises surrounding the control of feminist narratives.

The centrality of reproductive rights activism to this thesis is indicative of its centrality to many feminists' agendas. I have explored reproductive rights activism to ascertain the ways in which white feminists have worked multiracially, both around reproductive rights and broader agendas. Using reproductive rights as a lens for this study is particularly useful because of its unique position: while all women are affected by questions of reproductive and bodily autonomy, not all women have the same experiences and so do not necessarily want to organize in the same way. As such, the ways in which feminists organized around reproductive rights changed as their understanding of racial difference, and differences of experience, developed. Reproductive rights were in many cases a platform for inclusion in theory, but a category of exclusion in practise. They were a hook that white feminists could use to invoke female solidarity, but elucidated the different needs and agendas of different women based on their varying identities. As white feminists became more aware of racial difference and moved away from a universalist perspective, so too they began to understand the different manifestations of reproductive rights for different groups of women. For example, when R2N2 co-organized the Abortion Rights Action Week, they put forward a reproductive rights agenda that included discussions around sterilization and welfare – as well as abortion rights – in a conscious effort to attract women of colour to the events and the network. However, a year later, members of the R2N2 steering committee wrote about the broader feminist movement's failure to take up a broad reproductive rights agenda that was informed by the needs of women of colour, demonstrating their shifting understanding of the racialised politics surrounding reproductive rights.³ Similarly, the 1986 March for Women's Lives tried to attract women of colour with the notion of a shared need for abortion rights, while by 1989, NOW organizers had become more aware of the intrinsic links between welfare and abortion access, and the different ways that middle-class white women, poor women and women of colour experienced 'abortion rights' in the run up to the

³ Letter from Leslie Cagan and Marla Erlan to Reproductive Rights National Network and Friends (30th January 1980) p. 1 in 'R2N2 Papers (Smith)', Box 1, Folder 1

Webster case.⁴ Clearly, the role that reproductive rights played in white feminists' organizing shifted during this period. White feminists initially used reproductive rights (usually focusing on abortion rights) to emphasise their ideas of gender as universal, to try to represent a monolithic female experience, and to encourage women of colour to join their existing organizations. As their understanding of and attitudes towards racial difference changed, so did their use of reproductive rights as a strategy and agenda. Their understanding of women's differences helped them to understand that reproductive rights needed to encompass a broad agenda, and the broad reproductive rights agendas that women of colour wanted helped to develop white feminists' education and knowledge of racial difference. The varying ways that white feminists used reproductive rights, then, mirrored their shifting understandings of race and racial difference.

The centrality of women's networks and network-creation is key to this thesis. Sociologists have highlighted the importance of networks in recruiting individuals into social movements and social activism in any context, and historians have mapped this onto the activism of second wave feminists. Roth, for example, builds on Sara Evans' conception of the second wave. Both identify the Civil Rights, the New Left and the Chicano Liberation movements as 'parent movements' of the second wave. These movements 'took women – a dispersed potential pool of activists – and put them face-to-face with each other [...] an important "precursor" for feminist emergence'.⁵ Put simply, without the creation and sustenance of networks, feminist activism – and thus feminism – could not occur. Some historians have drawn on this understanding of networks to argue that multiracial activism failed; they suggest that a lack of multiracial networks (due to the frequently separate personal networks of white women and women of colour) translated into a lack of multiracial activism. In this thesis, though, I have demonstrated the fundamental importance of networks to working multiracially, and the ways in which multiracial activism has shaped network creation among feminists. Networks have been both an important precursor to multiracial organizing, and a valuable result of it. They have been fundamentally

⁴ See section entitled 'Loretta Ross and Developing Strategies for Representing Women of Colour', starting p. 203 of this thesis.

⁵ Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, p. 16; Roth quotes Jo Freeman here: see Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York and London: Longman, 1975); Sara Evans argues that the roots of second wave feminism lay in the civil rights and New Left movements. See Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics*,

important in each of the events explored in this thesis for one or both reasons. For the National Women's Conference, for example, the IWY committee envisaged the state meetings as creating strong, institutionalised networks even before the Houston conference. This, they hoped, would strengthen the bonds between the women of America – reflecting their goal of creating and representing a universalised sisterhood – and ensure a coherent and unified delegation for the National Conference. Network creation and relationship building continued to be a central focus of Houston itself for the organizers, attendees and the media. Indeed, the media's portrayal of women conversing and forging cross-race relationships reflects Gluck's suggestion that Houston represented the first time that multiracial organizing became evident to the public – an important moment for white feminists who wanted to represent feminism as united, diverse and coherent.⁶

The centrality of network creation was evident in most of the events discussed in this thesis. One of the primary objectives of Abortion Rights Action Week was to create and further develop networks among grassroots reproductive rights organizations. Indeed, R2N2 was a network, so using ARAW to recruit diverse women was grounded in notions of network creation and expansion. While the creation of multiracial networks was not explicitly stated as an objective, the desire of ARAW's organizers to reach out to and create relationships with women of colour suggests that creating multiracial grassroots networks was a desired outcome. The *Between Ourselves* forums and conference, on the other hand, highlighted network creation as a primary objective of the events. Organizers hoped that these networks, forged both within racially autonomous groups and across racial lines, would simultaneously strengthen bonds among racially autonomous groups of women while laying the foundation for future multiracial coalition work. Similarly, at the *In Defense of Roe* conference, women of colour strengthened existing networks between themselves and developed those with white women. Notably, participants at IDOR created a legacy with their conference report and video which was intended to facilitate future multiracial network creation. The network creation at *Between Ourselves* and IDOR, then, represented the ways in which networks were used in

⁶ Gluck, p. 32

tandem with ideas of coalition; networks were a strategic tool, rather than a desirable space for belonging.

The ways that feminists of diverse races used networks to aid their organizing shifted in tandem with shifting strategies of recruitment and coalition. In recruitment strategies, white feminists often expected women of colour to draw on their own personal networks to help diversify white dominated organizations or events. The IWY commission, for example, saw local and community networks as a conduit to active recruitment of diverse women to the state meetings. Similarly, ARAW organizers drew on their extended networks to try to recruit women of colour and poor women to participate in the various events of the week. Women using coalition-focused strategies also drew on pre-existing networks, but primarily to attract participation, rather than to recruit members to an organization. Both the 1989 March for Women's Lives and IDOR benefitted from the networks created at the Between Ourselves forums. In both cases the strong networks forged at the Between Ourselves forums and conference helped to provide a more visible, and thus more powerful, contingent of women of colour, which helped to rectify power imbalances based on race in previous multiracial organizing attempts. As has been established in this thesis, this was a fundamental step in developing multiracial coalitions. Networks, then, were both a tool that women used to create multiracial spaces, and a strategic and desired outcome of multiracial feminist activism itself.

Education has also been a central theme in this study. It has focused primarily on the ways in which white feminists have perceived and participated in education and knowledge exchange. This thesis has established that some white feminists' understanding of the purpose and type of education about race and racial difference shifted alongside their shifting approaches and strategies. Their approaches to education shaped their strategies towards multiracial organizing, which in turn shaped their approaches to education; the two were interrelated and mutually dependent. Early 'recruitment' efforts were characterised by white feminists' sense of entitlement to education; they either expected women of colour to teach them about their particular issues, or they believed that their own positionality was representative of all women, and thus could teach women of colour about reproductive rights based on their own experience. By the early- to mid-1980s, though, women of colour were increasingly calling for white women to educate themselves about their own

privileges and internalised racism, both individually and organizationally. When some white feminist groups began to partake in this 'internal education', it marked an important step in the shift from recruitment to coalition strategies. Chapter two's exploration of the R2N2 most clearly demonstrates these shifting ideals and priorities surrounding education, and the ramifications of those upon multiracial organizing.

The third major theme in this thesis concerns narrative construction and self-determination. A major impetus for many white feminists to try to work multiracially was to try to create a feminism that aligned with and represented their idealised notions of multiracial sisterhood. This was, in many ways, due to white feminists' fears that the rising political and religious Right would gain control over the narratives surrounding feminism and womanhood in the USA. This fear meant that white feminists were reluctant to reveal any 'cracks' or areas of weakness within the movement – including allegations of racism and difficulties with working multiracially. In the late 1970s and early-1980s, white feminists often tended to ignore or downplay differences to create, or at least portray, a united and coherent feminism. By presenting a united front against the Right, many white feminists hoped to demonstrate a strong defence. By the mid- to late-1980s however, some white feminists had begun to engage with racial differences and thus sought to create feminist narratives that demonstrated strength that was based on diversity and inclusivity, rather than homogeneity and sisterhood. The foundations of the third wave of feminism's emphasis on individuality can, then, be identified here – the shift in narrative creation during the 1980s by some white feminist groups demonstrate a shift in the ways that feminism was idealised and conceptualised by both activists and scholars.

The racially autonomous spaces that have been highlighted throughout this study are intrinsically linked with notions of self-determination and strength. Racially autonomous spaces allowed women of all races to consolidate their knowledge and experiences. For many women of colour, this meant that they were able to come to multiracial organizing from a stronger position of power. For them, racially autonomous spaces represented opportunities to critique and reflect on the feminist narratives that some white feminists wanted to create. Racially autonomous groups of women of colour caucused at the Houston conference, for example, and critiqued the superficial written statement on minority women. They rewrote it to be more

inclusive and representative of the diversity of women of colour. This was reported widely as a highlight of the conference – in this case, the racially autonomous space provided a platform for women of colour to critique and alter the narrative surrounding feminism. Similarly, when writing the conference report and planning the conference video for IDOR, Pat Tyson was interested in representing the ‘realities’ of the conference as a record and a learning experience. Lynn Paltrow, on the other hand, wanted to portray an optimistic record of the event to represent the successes and highlights of a multiracial event.

For white women, racially autonomous spaces only really became politicised in the early- to mid-1980s. While white women often did organize autonomously before this, frequently they did not consider their own identities as ‘raced’. When white feminist groups began to work on self-analysis and internal education about race and antiracism, they began to consider their racial identity, and thus racially autonomous spaces became relevant to their conscious organizing. This was evident within R2N2, who frequently included sessions in their later conferences in which white women and women of colour would split up.⁷ In these spaces, white women could engage with internal education. If women of colour’s autonomous racial spaces provided a way for them to decentre narrative creation as a priority, and highlight the importance of responding practically to important issues – white women’s racially autonomous spaces prompted them to consider being flexible on their emphasis on narrative creation, begin to focus less on creating and dictating narratives as a defence against the right-wing, but also on practical strategies for tangible gains. Racially autonomous spaces, then, provided opportunities for women to consolidate their work, discuss race and racial difference in safe spaces, and lay foundations for future organizing.

Importantly, in addition to the historiographical interventions that it has made, the themes explored are highly relevant to social justice activism today. A shift towards Right-wing politics, characterised by the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA and a rightward shift in European politics, has created ‘legitimate apprehension and fear’ about right-wing populist parties.⁸ This reflects the

⁷ Fine, Interview with Author

⁸ Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyżanowski, ‘Right-Wing Populism in Europe & USA: Contesting Politics and Discourse beyond “Orbanism” and “Trumpism”’, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16.4 (2017). Other articles in this special issue discuss issues of the contemporary shift to the Right.

social fears held by many feminists during the late 1970s and through the 1980s. At the same time, social movements such as the #MeToo campaign have sparked renewed debates surrounding the unity and coherence of the feminism. Several women have criticised the campaign for not fully engaging with the sexual harassment and exploitation of women of colour – particularly as the original founder of the movement, African-American woman Tarana Burke, has been (in many ways) side-lined from the campaign.⁹ Moira Donegan suggests that there is a deep, serious intellectual rift among contemporary feminist approaches: ‘one approach is individualist, hard-headed, grounded in ideals of pragmatism, realism and self-sufficiency. The other is expansive, communal, idealistic and premised on the ideals of mutual interest and solidarity’.¹⁰ Clearly, there are parallels between the latter approach and those of white second wave feminists who were preoccupied with forging and demonstrating sisterhood and solidarity. In many ways, then, the debates from the second-wave surrounding the coherence and inclusivity of feminism in the face of increasing right-wing forces remain relevant today. By identifying the varying feminist strategies, this thesis could contribute to contemporary knowledge about how, when, why and how feminist activism across race can be and is effective.

This thesis is useful when tracing some roots of contemporary feminist activism, too. Discussions about education from the second wave laid foundations for contemporary discussions emphasising the importance of white women educating themselves about race and intersectionality. Online reading lists, webinars, and an increasing social media presence have provided more and more resources for white women to engage with their own racial privilege and the ways in which feminism can and should be intersectional, and emphasise the importance of white women taking responsibility for their own education.¹¹ These often pose

⁹ Emma Brockes, ‘Me Too Founder Tarana Burke: ‘You Have to Use Your Privilege to Serve Other People’, *The Guardian*, 15 January 2018; Gillian B. White, ‘The Glaring Blind Spot of the “#Me Too” Movement’, *The Atlantic*, 22 November 2017

<<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/11/the-glaring-blind-spot-of-the-me-too-movement/546458/>> [accessed 4 June 2018]. See also: Jo Reger, ‘Contemporary Feminism and Beyond’, in *The Oxford Handbook of US Women’s Social Movement Activism*, ed. by Holly J. McCammon and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017),

¹⁰ Moira Donegan, ‘How #MeToo Revealed the Central Rift within Feminism Today’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2018, section: The Long Read <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/11/how-metoo-revealed-the-central-rift-within-feminism-social-individualist>> [accessed 4 June 2018]

¹¹ Resources like these are prolific across social media and on feminist-oriented websites. A (very)

education and a racialised analysis of feminism as being central to developing a feminism that can struggle against contemporary right-wing threats. Contemporary discussions of race have been shaped by social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter which advocate centring the activism of people of colour, with white allies taking on a supportive role only. Educational resources disseminated by white ally groups encourage white supporters to educate themselves and others, and to create networks of white antiracist activists by educating other white people about race.¹² This rhetoric clearly mirrors discussions highlighted in this thesis about racially autonomous spaces and coalitioning and demonstrates the centrality of network creation and development – particularly of digital networks - in attempts to forge multiracial coalitions today.¹³

This thesis might prompt valuable future studies that draw on and develop the major themes that I have identified. The importance of networks to second-wave feminist's efforts to work multiracially demands further research; a network analysis of feminist groups active during the 1970s and 1980s would prove invaluable in ascertaining the extent and limits of multiracial organizing and coalition-building, as well to identify trends in the development and continuation of coalitions. A further exploration of the emotional history of multiracial activism would also benefit the field; this thesis has touched on the importance of both desire and fear in shaping how and why white feminists sought to work multiracially. Developing this further might inform our understandings of why feminists (and, indeed, other social activists) have operated in ways that might not necessarily seem logical. The importance of racially autonomous spaces to multiracial activism could and should also be further explored. This would not only help to complicate historical narratives that focus on

small sample includes: Kristian Wilson, '9 Books about Feminism and Gender Equality to Read Instead of Asking A Someone To Explain It', *Bustle*, 2018 <<https://www.bustle.com/p/9-books-about-feminism-gender-equality-to-read-instead-of-asking-a-someone-to-explain-it-8701832>> [accessed 4 June 2018]; Marina Watanabe, *Not That Kind of Feminist: Moving Beyond White Feminism - How to Kick Exclusionary Feminism to the Curb and Practice Intersectionality in Your Daily Life* <<https://everydayfeminism.com/beyond-white-feminism/afref/2/?campaign=Facebook>>; Facebook groups such as Everyday Feminism, My Favourite 'F' Word is Feminism and Intersectional Feminism have thousands of followers and centre intersectionality within their activism and rhetoric.

¹² White Accomplices, 'Your Self Education', *White Accomplices: Opportunities for White People in the Fight for Racial Justice* <<https://www.whiteaccomplices.org/your-self-education>> [accessed 4 June 2018],

¹³ For more on the links between social media, digital networks and contemporary activism, see: Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012),

divisions and splits as failures, but could also inform today's social activists about how to mobilise effectively across racial lines. Finally, an exploration of the ways that these themes affect historians' methods would be useful and enlightening. It is important to tackle questions such as, how do extant networks of activists affect the historical narratives that they and we (as historians) construct? How do they affect our methodological approaches and who, how and why we access some people's stories and not others? Similarly, how do desires to use historical narratives as contemporary education around race, gender and class affect the ways that we write about them? How do such desires affect activists' voices, both within oral histories and within the archival record? Clearly, the scope for further research around multiracial feminism from the second wave is significant. This, I hope, demonstrates the importance of this subject, as well as the scope for further historical enquiry

Appendices

Appendix 1.

| Name of Participant | Date of Interview | Participant's Race | Form of interview | Location | Contact through |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Loretta Ross | 8-9 th March 2016 | African-American | Telephone | Leeds/ Unknown | |
| Frances Kissling | 21 st April 2016 | White | In Person | Participant's Home, Washington, DC | |
| Sarah Schulman | 1 st May 2016 | White | In Person | Café, Manhattan, NYC | |
| Marjorie Fine | 4 th May 2016 | White | In Person | Café, Brooklyn, NYC | Sarah Schulman |
| Marilyn Katz | 4 th May 2016 | White | In Person | Participant's Hotel Room, Manhattan, NYC | Meredith Tax |
| Meredith Tax | 5 th May 2016 | White | In Person | Participant's Home, Washington Heights, NYC | Fran Kissling |
| Karen Stamm | 6 th May 2016 | White | In Person | Participant's Office, Manhattan, NYC | Fran Kissling |
| Marlene Fried | 25 th October 2016 | White | In Person | Participant's Office, Amherst, MA | Meredith Tax |
| Byllye Avery | 17 th November 2016 | African-American | Telephone | Leeds/Cape Cod, MA | Loretta Ross |

Table 1: Oral History Interview Participant Information

Appendix 2:

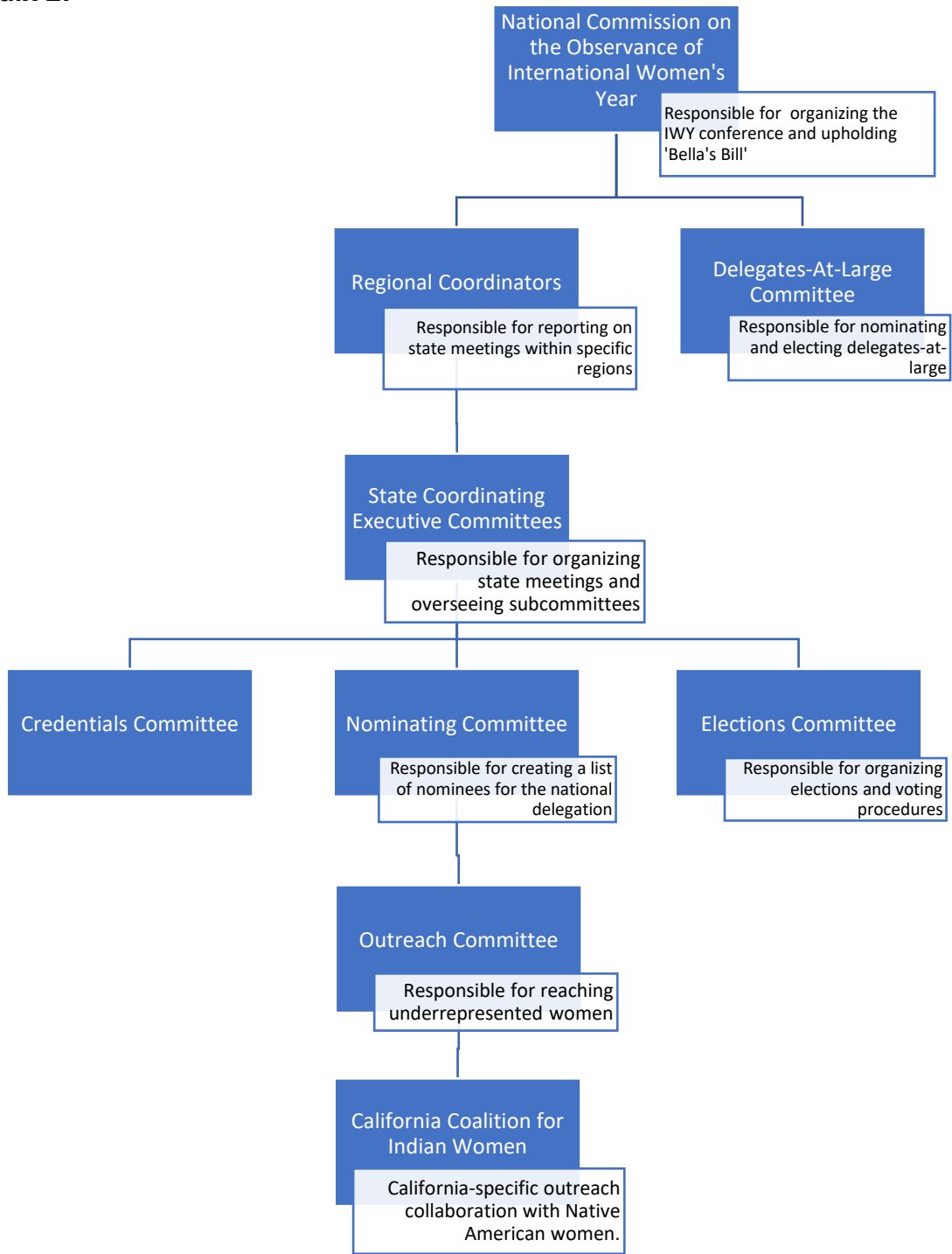


Figure 1: Committee Structure for National Women's Conference Organizations. Note: Not all state coordinating committees used the same structure; this diagram is illustrative of the state committees discussed in this thesis

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