

Motherhood and Protest in the United States Since the Sixties

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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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Abstract

Focusing on Women Strike for Peace, the welfare rights struggle, the battle against busing and the anti-abortion movement, this thesis highlights the integral role ideologies of motherhood played in shaping women's activism during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In doing so, it challenges conventional understandings of maternalism, social protest since the sixties, and second-wave feminism in important ways. Indeed, the activists in this study, most of them mothers, many of them middle-aged, do not fit with popular images of the 1960s – centred, as they often are, on youth protests, student movements and a vibrant, colourful counterculture. Meanwhile, studies of mothers' movements tend to focus disproportionately on white, middle-class women's reform work during the early twentieth century, eliding maternalism with progressivism, the politics of respectability and nonviolence. However, by revealing the persistence of this political tradition into the 1960s and beyond, and exploring how motherhood was used by activists across the political spectrum during this turbulent era, this study underscores the flexibility, malleability and lasting appeal of maternalism. Within all of these movements, women shared a belief in motherhood as a mandate to activism and a source of political strength. But, as this thesis will show, they ultimately forged distinctive versions of maternalism that were based on their daily lives, and informed by an intersection of race, ethnicity, class, religion and local context. And as a result, there were important differences in the way these activists understood and deployed motherhood. The women in this study also combined more traditional forms of maternal protest with modes of activism popularised during the 1960s, employing direct action tactics to dramatise their maternal concerns in the public arena. Furthermore, some activists espoused a militant brand of maternalism that did not preclude the use of force if deemed necessary to protect their own or others' children. Finally, although experiences varied widely, many of the women examined here were influenced by, engaged with, and contributed to the era's burgeoning feminist movement. Thus, this study challenges the popular assumption that maternalist politics are inherently incompatible with women's liberation – while also providing a vital reminder that second-wave feminism took multiple forms.

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List of Abbreviations

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ALI	American Law Institute
ALL	American Life League
AMP	Another Mother for Peace
AVA	American Victims of Abortion
CAR	Committee Against Racism
CARASA	Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
ERAP	Economic Research and Action Project
FACE	Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act
FAP	Family Assistance Plan
FFL	Feminists for Life
HOW	Happiness Of Womanhood, Inc.
HUAC	House Committee on Un-American Activities
ITT	International Telephone and Telegraph
JRB	Jeannette Rankin Brigade
MAD	Mother's Alert Detroit Metropolitan Inc.
MAW	Mothers for Adequate Welfare
MWRO	Massachusetts Welfare Rights Organization
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAG	National Action Group
NANS	National Association for Neighborhood Schools
NARAL	National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws
	National Abortion Rights Actions League, after 1973
NARRAL	National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League
NEMA	Northeast Mothers Alert
NOW	National Organization for Women
NRLC	National Right to Life Committee
NWPC	National Women's Political Caucus
NWRO	National Welfare Rights Organization
PACE	Post Abortion Counseling and Education
PEACE	People Expressing A Concern for Everyone
PNAP	Pro-Life Nonviolent Action Project
POW	Prisoner of War
PP	Planned Parenthood
PS	Prolifers for Survival
RCAR	Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights
RCRC	Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
RIA	Racial Imbalance Act
ROAR	Restore Our Alienated Rights
SANE	National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SWAP	Seattle Women Act for Peace
WAR	Women Against Racism
WEBA	Women Exploited by Abortion
WFP	Women for Peace
WFPC	Women for a Peaceful Christmas

WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WOCPP	Women of Color Partnership Program
WSP	Women Strike for Peace
WUEW	Women Uniting to End the War
YAF	Young Americans for Freedom

Introduction

On Monday 28 August 1967, four years to the day after civil rights activists staged their historic March on Washington, more than 1,000 welfare recipients from across the United States rallied in the capital to protest proposed amendments to the Social Security Act. Singing and shouting, the crowd that assembled on Capitol Hill for this ‘Mothers’ March on Washington’ consisted mainly of middle-aged, African American women, some accompanied by young children.¹ During what was described as a ‘stormy,’ heavily policed gathering, protesters denounced the new legislation – which would introduce work requirements for mothers on welfare – as a ‘declaration of war upon our families,’ arguing that the new rules would ‘force’ women ‘out of the home.’ They also demanded higher welfare payments to meet basic costs of living, and several speakers condemned America’s involvement in the Vietnam War, claiming that escalating military spending meant that their own children were going hungry.² Importantly, by emphasising their status as mothers to justify their protests, welfare recipients drew upon a longstanding tradition within women’s activism. However, these activists were also products of a specific moment in history and – inspired by the dramatic anti-war and black freedom struggles of the 1960s – they appropriated ideologies, rhetoric and tactics that were in vogue. Indeed, the influence of the sixties can be seen in the mass, direct action character of this protest. Furthermore, many activists exhibited a racial consciousness and pride that resonated strongly with the Black Power era. Addressing the rally, Baltimore welfare rights leader Margaret McCarthy drew loud cheers when she accused lawmakers of being ‘lousy, dirty, conniving brutes’ who aimed to ‘take us back to slavery’; she continued: ‘I’m black and I’m beautiful and they ain’t going to take me back.’ Finally, welfare rights activists injected the rhetoric of motherhood with a militancy that was very much in step with the late 1960s. In her speech to the crowd, McCarthy warned that the welfare system had to be changed ‘if not by our voices, then by force.’³ Meanwhile, contending that under the proposed legislation children could be taken away from their mothers, one woman from New York declared: ‘I’m a mother and I’m going to arm myself.’⁴

¹ Carol Honsa, ‘Welfare Bill Called ‘Betrayal of Poor,’’ *Washington Post*, 29 August 1967, p. A4, in George Wiley Papers, 1949-1975, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 7, Folder 7 (hereafter cited as Wiley Papers); Louise Hutchinson, ‘Welfare Recipients Seek Dignity, Money, Power,’ *Chicago Tribune*, 29 August 1967, p. 6.

² Betty James, ‘Welfare Rally Threatens Riots,’ *Washington Evening Star*, 29 August 1967, p. A4, in Wiley Papers, Box 7, Folder 7; Honsa, ‘Welfare Bill Called ‘Betrayal of Poor.’’

³ Margaret McCarthy, quoted in Honsa, ‘Welfare Bill Called ‘Betrayal of Poor.’’

⁴ Catherine Krouser, quoted in James, ‘Welfare Rally Threatens Riots.’

At first glance, these middle-aged black women, marching on Capitol Hill with their children in tow, seem at odds with popular images of the 1960s – centred, as they often are, on youth protests, student movements and a vibrant, colourful counterculture. Nor do these activists fit the typical portrait of a ‘maternalist’ movement (generally associated with women’s activism during the early twentieth century, and seen to be respectable and nonviolent). However, as this study demonstrates, welfare rights activists were far from unique in politicising motherhood during this period. For example, within the anti-war group Women Strike for Peace (WSP, formed in 1961), activists invoked the moral authority of motherhood to campaign for nuclear disarmament, and later against the war in Vietnam. Even as WSP evolved over the course of the 1960s, becoming increasingly radical in its outlook and militant in its methods, the group’s white, middle-class members continued to rely upon their maternal identities to guide their activism. In fact, as WSP expanded its focus to include racial and economic justice during the late 1960s, a shared identity as mothers enabled WSPers and welfare rights activists to forge a cooperative, albeit tentative alliance. Furthermore, as ‘sixties’ styles of protest persisted and proliferated in the decades that followed, new constituencies of women recognised the political potency of motherhood. In the mid-1970s, the white, working-class women who organised against the use of busing to desegregate public schools emphasised their status as mothers to justify their uncompromising protests. Meanwhile, within the anti-abortion movement of the 1970s and 1980s, many women drew upon maternal ideologies as they sought to defend unborn children and ‘traditional’ family values.

Indeed, it is the flexibility, malleability and lasting appeal of maternalism during the 1960s and beyond that lies at the heart of this thesis. Focusing on Women Strike for Peace, the welfare rights struggle, the battle against busing and the anti-abortion movement, this study sheds new light on the integral role that ideologies of motherhood played in shaping women’s activism during this era. Within these various movements, women understood and deployed motherhood differently – forging distinctive versions of maternalism that were based on their daily lives, and informed by an intersection of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion and local context. Nevertheless, all the women in this study shared a belief in motherhood as a mandate to activism, a unifying identity, and a source of political strength. Combining more traditional forms of maternal protest with modes of activism popularised during the 1960s, they employed direct action tactics to dramatise their maternal concerns in the public arena; and some activists espoused a militant brand of maternalism that did not preclude the use of violence or the

threat of violence if deemed necessary. Moreover, although experiences varied widely, many of the women examined here were influenced by, engaged with, and contributed to the era's burgeoning women's liberation movement – challenging the popular assumption that maternalism and feminism are inherently incompatible.

II

By examining women's maternal activism across the political spectrum during the 1960s, '70s and '80s, this thesis makes important contributions to historical scholarship on mothers' movements, social protest since the sixties, and second-wave feminism. First, it develops our understanding of maternalism in a number of ways. Central to this study is the idea that motherhood, as a gendered ideology, has significant political implications. Of course, when referring to the act of giving birth to or raising children, motherhood is an individual and deeply personal experience. However, motherhood is also a socially constructed ideology, which is bound up with broader notions of femininity and the nuclear family and, as one scholar has explained, 'provides a gendered model of behaviour for all women, even those who have not given birth or raised children.'⁵ During the nineteenth century, for example, a gendered ideal that scholars have termed the 'Cult of True Womanhood' dictated that a woman's place was by the hearth as wife and mother, and valorised morality, purity and nurturance as virtues that all women should possess.⁶ Yet, it is important to remember that conceptions of motherhood evolve over time, and are interpreted differently within various local settings, and by women of different races, ethnicities, classes, religions, sexual preferences and political orientations. Patricia Hill Collins, for instance, has demonstrated the critical role that race plays in shaping ideas about motherhood. She has described how, since slavery, African American women have engaged in 'othermothering' (sharing childcare duties within women-centred, community-based networks) to ensure the survival of the black community – leading many black women

⁵ Jo Reger, 'Motherhood and the Construction of Feminist Identities: Variations in a Women's Movement Organization,' *Sociological Inquiry*, 71, no. 1 (2001), 85-110 (pp. 85-86). Also useful when thinking through how this study defines motherhood was Annelise Orleck's introduction, 'Tradition Unbound: Radical Mothers in International Perspective,' in *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, ed. by Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diana Taylor (Hanover, N.H.: University of New England, 1997), pp. 3-20 (p. 5).

⁶ Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,' *American Quarterly*, 18, no. 2 (1966), 151-174.

to understand motherhood as a communal rather than individual responsibility.⁷ Collins also noted that black women have long integrated economic self-reliance and mothering. In contrast to the Cult of True Womanhood, in which paid work was deemed incompatible with motherhood, black women have tended to view work as a valued dimension of motherhood.⁸ Indeed, as pioneering historians of motherhood Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden have reminded us, ‘motherhood is not a static concept nor is it a homogeneous category’ – its meanings are ‘constantly changing, shaped by structural elements and also through the individual and collective, conscious and unconscious work of mothers themselves.’⁹

It is also vital to recognise that, as a socially constructed gendered ideal, motherhood invariably has political significance. On the one hand, ideologies of motherhood have often been used to regulate women’s behaviour and confine them within an ostensibly ‘private’ sphere – as well as to punish ‘bad’ mothers who failed to conform to the dominant ideal.¹⁰ However, just as motherhood can serve as a basis for gender regulation and oppression, it can also act as the inspiration behind and foundation for women’s political activism. Indeed, throughout history, women have been moved to take political action by concern for their own children and a sense of obligation as mothers – as well as by the belief that mothers’ responsibilities for nurturance and moral guardianship extended beyond the home. Furthermore, many women have used the discourse of motherhood to ease their transition into the public arena, legitimise their activism and enhance their moral authority. In the United States, this political tradition dates back to the nation’s founding, when ‘Republican Mothers’ were celebrated for their work in raising moral and virtuous citizens, and many women emphasised their gendered contributions to state-building in order to claim an expanded civic role. Since then, successive generations of women have adopted and adapted this maternalist discourse, marshalling it in service of a diverse range of causes – from

⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 178-183. Also see Stanlie M. James, ‘Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?’, in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, ed. by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 44-54 (p. 45).

⁸ Collins, p. 184.

⁹ Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden, ‘Introduction: Mothers, Motherhood, and Historians,’ in *Mothers & Motherhood: Readings in American History*, ed. by Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), pp. xiii-xvii (p. xiii).

¹⁰ Orleck, ‘Tradition Unbound,’ p. 5. For more on changing notions of ‘good motherhood’ and ‘mother-blaming,’ see Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds, *‘Bad’ Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

abolitionist and suffrage movements, to subsistence and anti-war struggles, to nationalist and anti-communist campaigns – and female activists from across the political spectrum continue to claim the moral authority of motherhood today.¹¹

However, despite this rich and diverse history, studies of mothers' movements tend to focus disproportionately on the early twentieth century, and many scholars equate the term 'maternalism' with white, middle-class women's reform work during this period. Over the last three decades, historians, sociologists and political scientists have transformed our understanding of U.S. welfare history by documenting the integral role affluent white women played in the construction of the welfare state. They have demonstrated how early twentieth-century white women reformers, organised in a series of clubs and associations, built upon dominant notions of respectable motherhood to claim a public platform. As Seth Koven and Sonya Michel have shown, these women forged a maternalist ideology that 'exalted women's capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance, and morality.' In doing so, they were able to exert significant influence on social policy during the Progressive and New Deal eras, helping to enact an array of protective legislation for women and children. Nevertheless, by making the term 'maternalism' synonymous with white women's 'social housekeeping' during the early twentieth century, this scholarship has served to obscure the longevity and diversity of this tradition.¹²

¹¹ For more on 'Republican Motherhood,' see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980); Rosemarie Zagari, 'Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,' *American Quarterly*, 44, no. 2 (1992), 192-215. For a good indication of the breadth of maternalist politics – as well as its global scope – see Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck and Diana Taylor, eds, *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices From Left to Right* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997).

¹² Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, 'Introduction: "Mother Worlds,"' in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1-42 (p. 4). Also see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, 'Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920,' *American Historical Review*, 95, no. 4 (1990), 1076-1108; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); S. Jay Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: The Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006). Some of these scholars called for an even more precise definition of 'maternalism.' For example, Molly Ladd-Taylor reserved the term solely for those reform movements that supported the 'family wage' ideal and sought protect women's economic dependence on men – and she was careful to distinguish this ideology from 'feminism,' which, she argued, stressed women's economic independence. See 'Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History,' *Journal of Women's History*, 5, no. 2, (1993), 110-113; *Mother-Work*. Subsequently, a broad range of historians have accepted this narrow definition of maternalism. See for instance Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 6; Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 140; Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. xiv-xv.

Meanwhile, a number of scholars have shown that African American women reformers also employed the discourse of motherhood during this period. Indeed, by presenting an image of respectable black motherhood and emphasising their gendered responsibility for ‘racial uplift,’ middle-class black clubwomen sought to legitimise their own community-based welfare initiatives and make demands of the state. Importantly, these scholars provided further evidence of the critical importance of race in shaping maternalist politics, highlighting key differences in the way black and white women reformers viewed motherhood. Furthermore, they showed that the language of motherhood carried different weight and led to different outcomes depending upon race – noting that black women’s influence on federal welfare policy was minimal during this period and that many welfare programmes were expressly constructed to exclude blacks.¹³ Yet, as with the literature on white women’s activism, these studies continued to focus on the early twentieth century as the zenith of maternalist activism, and to elide maternalism with progressivism, the politics of respectability and nonviolence.

In contrast, this study espouses a broader definition of maternalism as simply political activism based upon ideologies of motherhood. While not denying that the early twentieth century was an exciting time for a particular type of progressive maternal activism, it expands our understanding of maternalism by revealing the persistence of this political tradition during the second half of the century, and exploring how maternalist politics were revised and refashioned by a new generation of activists. In particular, it suggests that, during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the politics of motherhood were not as closely entwined with the politics of respectability as they had been previously. Indeed, influenced by the rights-centred rhetoric of the 1960s, many of the activists studied here were less concerned about conforming to a particular image of ‘respectable’ motherhood as they were with claiming their ‘rights’ as mothers. Moreover, reflecting the mood of the time, many of these women embraced a militant form of maternalism, employing confrontational direct action tactics, and occasionally violence, in the pursuit of their goals. It is also clear from this project that maternalism was embraced by women from a wide range of racial, ethnic, class and religious

¹³ For more on how black and white women reformers understood and used motherhood differently, see Eileen Boris, ‘The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the “Political,”’ *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, 2 (1989), 25-49; Linda Gordon, ‘Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women’s Welfare Activism, 1890-1945,’ *Journal of American History*, 78, no. 2 (1991), 559-590. For more on the black clubwomen’s movement and the ‘politics of respectability,’ see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

backgrounds, and marshalled on behalf of both progressive and conservative causes. However, as we will see, activists forged distinctive versions of maternalism based on their daily lives and social locations, and there were important differences in the way they understood and deployed motherhood. Indeed, this thesis demonstrates that adopting a broad definition of maternalism and recognising commonalities among diverse groups of women who all used maternal arguments to justify their political activism does not have to mean ‘conflat[ing] very different ideologies and types of organizing,’ as Molly Ladd-Taylor has suggested.¹⁴

As well as shedding new light on the range of women involved in maternalist politics and the eclectic mix of protest styles they espoused, this study also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the motivations behind women’s maternal activism. Heretofore, studies of mothers’ movements – especially those organised by poor or working-class women – have often assumed that participants accepted traditional gender roles and were galvanised by a desire to fulfil their assigned responsibilities as mothers.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the popular perception of mother activists is that they are emotionally driven and politically naïve. However, this study demonstrates that, for many women, the decision to emphasise their status as mothers was also a tactical one – designed to capture media attention, secure support for their cause and protect against reprisals. This is not to deny that the majority of women studied here were genuinely motivated by concern for children (their own or the world’s at large) or that they sincerely believed that mothers held certain gender-specific responsibilities. But an examination of their internal correspondence, meeting reports and interviews with the press indicates that – regardless of class background or political orientation – many of these women recognised the symbolic power of motherhood. For example, Boston-based welfare rights activist Claradine James told one interviewer that the spectre of mothers protesting on behalf of their children was the ‘kind of thing that drew attention’; and, with striking congruity, a member of WSP described mothers and children as ‘the one thing that do get through.’¹⁶ Thus, by documenting the conscious

¹⁴ Ladd-Taylor, ‘Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History,’ p. 110.

¹⁵ This interpretation is particularly common within scholarship on poor women’s subsistence struggles. For example, in her influential article on the activism of Barcelona housewives in the 1910s, Temma Kaplan described how ‘female consciousness’ drove formerly apolitical women to take collective action in order to provide food, clothing and shelter for their families. ‘Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918,’ *Signs*, 7, no. 3 (1982), 545-566. But studies of middle-class women’s reform work during the early twentieth century also argued that women were moved to action by genuine concern for the welfare of women and children and saw their activism as an extension of their maternal role. See for instance Koven and Michel, ‘Womanly Duties’; Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*.

¹⁶ Claradine James, Transcript of Interview with Guida West, 20 June 1984, p. 16, in Guida West Papers, 1946-2006, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Box 7, Folder 25;

strategising and political savvy that went into all of these campaigns, this project challenges the prevalent image of mothers' movements as emotional, spontaneous and apolitical.¹⁷

III

By exploring the politicisation of motherhood during the 1960s and beyond, this thesis also makes a distinctive contribution to the existing literature on this beguiling era. With its inspirational social movements, dramatic public protests, and flamboyant counterculture, the sixties has attracted more popular and academic attention than any other decade in modern American history – remaining, in the words of one scholar, ‘a decade that seems to hold our imagination long after its time has past.’¹⁸ Yet, despite this ongoing preoccupation with the 1960s, the complexity and diversity of social protest during this decade has not always been apparent. Indeed, early studies of the period – many of them written by former activists – tended to focus on the decade’s progressive social movements (civil rights, New Left and anti-Vietnam War) and particularly on youth protests, with a disproportionate amount of attention focused on national organisations and male leaders.¹⁹ And when women’s activism was examined, scholars generally concentrated on the ‘revolution in the revolution’ – the young female participants in the civil rights movement and student New Left who, they argued,

Virginia Naeve, ‘Re: Mass Action,’ *National Information Memo*, 16 October 1962, p. 3, in Women Strike for Peace Records, 1958-1969, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 2, Folder 2.

¹⁷ In doing so, this thesis builds upon recent studies of Women Strike for Peace that explored the group’s use of motherhood as a tactic. See for instance Amy C. Schneidhorst, ‘“Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women”: Women’s Peace and Social Justice Activism in Chicago, 1961-1973,’ *Peace & Change*, 26, no. 3 (2001), 374-391; Amy C. Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World: Popular Front Women’s Struggle for Peace and Justice in Chicago During the 1960s* (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2011); 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 in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 84-112; Andrea Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980*, PhD thesis, Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey University, 2012.

¹⁸ Alexander Bloom, ‘Introduction: Why Read about the 1960s at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century?’, in *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, ed. by Alexander Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-9 (p. 4). Also see Simon Hall, ‘Framing the American 1960s: A Historiographical Review,’ *European Journal of American Culture*, 31, no. 1 (2012), 5-23 (p. 5); M. J. Heale, ‘The Sixties as History: A Review of the Political Historiography,’ *Reviews in American History*, 33 (2005), 133-152 (p. 133).

¹⁹ Influential early works that exemplify this focus include James Miller, *‘Democracy Is in the Streets’: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); and Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, revised edn. (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).

catalysed the feminist resurgence of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ Furthermore, hewing closely to contemporary media accounts, most early histories of the sixties ‘centred on a dramatic tale of rise and fall.’²¹ Within this popular narrative, the early 1960s was a time of hope and youthful idealism, during which civil rights sit-ins and campus demonstrations generated a rising tide of popular protest, with each new challenge to the social order inspiring others, and ideas and tactics feeding from one movement to the next. But this was followed, we are told, by a period of rapid decline towards the end of the decade as, faced with urban riots and an escalating war in Vietnam, the era’s progressive social movements succumbed to disillusionment, factionalism and violence – their demise hastened by a growing backlash and national trend towards conservatism.²² Enshrined in influential scholarly works, course textbooks and television documentaries, this ‘declension’ thesis remained, for many years, the central story of the American 1960s, and it continues to shape popular perceptions of the decade today.

In recent years, however, a new generation of scholars have begun to challenge this traditional narrative, offering a more complex picture of 1960s social protest. One of the ways they have done this is by documenting the hitherto understudied conservative movements that mobilised during the 1960s – contending that the decade was ‘a time of ferment for the right as well as the left.’²³ Indeed, historians such as Lisa McGirr, David Farber and Jeff Roche have argued that, while they generally operated away from the media spotlight in suburban coffee klatches, study groups and PTAs, conservative activists during the 1960s were critical in laying the groundwork for the right’s major political successes in the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, by tracing the roots of the New Right back to the postwar period, these scholars have challenged the idea that the conservative ascendancy was simply a ‘backlash’ against 1960s liberal

²⁰ In his 438-page history of the 1960s, Todd Gitlin devoted just 14 pages to exploring what he termed the ‘Revolution in the Revolution.’ Gitlin, pp. 362-376. For a more thorough examination of the relationship of the civil rights struggle and New Left to the women’s liberation movement, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

²¹ Simon Hall, ‘Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, no. 4 (2008), 655-672 (p. 655).

²² See Hall, ‘Protest Movements in the 1970s,’ p. 655; Heale, p. 139; Richard Moser, ‘Introduction II: Was It the End or Just a Beginning?: American Storytelling and the History of the Sixties,’ in *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, ed. by Van Gosse and Richard Moser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003) pp. 37-51 (p. 37). For examples of this approach, see Gitlin; Miller; Winni Breines, ‘“Of This Generation”: The New Left and the Student Movement,’ in *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, ed. by Alexander Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 23-45.

²³ Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 2.

excess.²⁴ Meanwhile, a move towards studying both progressive and conservative movements at the grassroots level has deepened our understanding of how local context shapes political activism – while also shedding light on a diverse range of organisations and individuals who were overlooked within conventional narratives of the 1960s.²⁵

Recent scholarship has also emphasised the notion of a ‘long 1960s.’ Indeed, by exploring the proliferation of ‘sixties’ styles of protest among feminists, gay rights campaigners and other activists during the 1970s and beyond, scholars have fatally undermined the traditional ‘rise and fall’ framework. Moreover, historians such as Richard L. Hughes and Simon Hall have argued that it was not just activists on the left who learnt valuable lessons from the 1960s. They have demonstrated that, despite drawing strength from their opposition to the progressive ideals of the sixties, conservative activists during the 1970s and 1980s frequently appropriated rhetoric and tactics popularised by civil rights, anti-war and New Left protesters.²⁶ Connected to this, scholars are increasingly recognising the value of comparing activists and organisations across the political spectrum. Of course, this is not an entirely new development.

²⁴ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); David Farber and Jeff Roche, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. by David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 1-7. Other works that explore the roots of the New Right in the 1960s include Klatch, *A Generation Divided*; Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Farber and Roche, eds, *The Conservative Sixties*; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. For a useful summary of recent trends in the growing historiography on the postwar right, see Kim Phillips-Fein, ‘Right On,’ *Nation*, 9 September 2009.

²⁵ Pioneered by scholars of the civil rights movement, this grassroots approach has since been used to study movements across the political spectrum. For more on how local histories transformed understandings of the black freedom struggle, see Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University, 2005). For examples of local studies of the anti-draft, feminist and conservative movements (respectively), see Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Stephanie Gilmore, ‘The Dynamics of Second-Wave Feminist Activism in Memphis, 1971-1982: Rethinking the Liberal/Radical Divide,’ *NWSA Journal*, 15, no. 1 (2003), 94-117; and McGirr.

²⁶ For scholarship that explores progressive activism since the 1960s, see Van Gosse and Richard Moser, eds, *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Stephen Tuck, ‘“We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left Off”: The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest during the 1970s,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, no. 4 (2008), 637-654; Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010). Meanwhile, studies that examine the influence of the sixties on conservative activism during the 1970s and ’80s include: Richard L. Hughes, ‘“The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?”: The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Struggle for Racial Justice,’ *Oral History Review*, 33, no. 2, (2006), 1-23; Richard L. Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,’ *The Historian*, 68, no. 3 (2006), 541-558; Hall, ‘Protest Movements in the 1970s’; Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). For more on these and other recent developments in the historiography on the 1960s, see Hall, ‘Framing the American 1960s.’

Studies of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), for example, have long sought to understand the motivations of individuals on both sides of these debates.²⁷ However, these early works tended to focus on conflict between ‘irreconcilable’ worldviews – overlooking significant similarities between progressive and conservative activists during and after the 1960s. In contrast, a number of recent studies have shown that analysing ‘the overlaps and parallels as well as the differences between left and right... leads to a more nuanced understanding of ideology and of social movements.’²⁸

Echoing many of these interpretive frameworks, this thesis adds to this richer, more nuanced picture of the American 1960s now emerging within the historiography. For example, by examining maternalist politics at both the national and grassroots levels, it brings to the fore numerous activists who have tended to be absent from the existing literature, while also illuminating the complex interplay between the local and the national. Furthermore, by exploring how maternal activists during the 1970s and 1980s embraced sixties styles of protest – including direct action tactics, the language of rights and the notion that the ‘personal’ was ‘political’ – this study belies any notion of declension. And, as we will see, the use of maternal ideologies to justify political activism represented another significant parallel between progressive and conservative activists during this era. But perhaps most importantly, this project deepens our understanding of the gendered nature of social protest during the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognised the centrality of women and gender to the social movements of the postwar period. For example, historians of the 1950s have begun to challenge the myth of the quiescent suburban housewife – contending that this popular image obscures the complexity of women’s roles and activities during this era. Previously, studies of women in the 1950s had focused on a powerful ideology of domesticity, which was fuelled by Cold War anxieties and, it was argued, served to ‘contain’ women within a modernised version of the nineteenth-century female sphere.²⁹ However, by uncovering the vital role that postwar women

²⁷ See for instance Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict Over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

²⁸ Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, p. 9. Also see Hughes, “Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?”; Hughes, “Burning Birth Certificates”; Hall, “Protest Movements in the 1970s”; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁹ For instance, in her influential study of families in the 1950s, Elaine Tyler May explored the links between the containment of communism in Cold War politics and what she termed ‘domestic containment.’ *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

played in labour unions, the peace movement, campaigns for racial and social justice, international relations and the nascent conservative movement, scholars have revealed that this domestic ideal was never as pervasive as commonly assumed, and that it did not necessarily breed political apathy.³⁰ Moreover, recent scholarship on the 1950s has shown that women often used domestic values to their advantage, emphasising their culturally sanctioned roles as mothers and homemakers to legitimise their political activism. Indeed, as historian Joanne Meyerowitz has argued: ‘The postwar domestic ideal not only offered justifications for women to stay at home; as in the early twentieth century, it also authorized maternal activities in the public realm.’³¹

Similarly, as historians of the ‘long 1960s’ have begun to pay greater attention to women’s activism and to apply a gendered lens to the study of social protest, they have increasingly documented the diverse ways that women politicised their identities as mothers during this period. Amy Swerdlow, for instance, has explored the use of motherhood within Women Strike for Peace.³² Meanwhile, the growing body of literature on women in the black freedom struggle has shown that – as they organised around issues such as voters’ rights, school desegregation and economic justice – black women often sought to claim authority as mothers.³³ This thesis builds upon this recent scholarship, which has shown the continuing relevance of the postwar domestic ideal to women’s lives and activist identities, while also demonstrating how activists during the 1960s employed new strategies and styles of organising. However, whereas recent studies have primarily focused on individual movements, this thesis stands out by exploring maternalism as a broad trend that operated across the political spectrum during the 1960s and beyond. In doing so, it sheds new light on the gendered nature of

³⁰ See for instance Susan Lynn, ‘Gender and Post World War II Progressive Politics: A Bridge to Social Activism in the 1960s U.S.A.,’ *Gender & History*, 4, no. 2 (1992), 215-239; Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women’s Organisations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*.

³¹ Joanne Meyerowitz, ‘Introduction: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960,’ in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. by Meyerowitz, Joanne (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. 1-16 (p. 6).

³² Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

³³ See for instance Jeanne Theoharis, ‘“They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,”’ in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University, 2005), pp. 17-44; Tiyi Morris, ‘Local Women and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi: Re-visioning Womanpower Unlimited,’ in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 193-214; Nancy A. Naples, *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty* (New York: Routledge, 1998). For an examination of how white women in the civil rights movement also based their activism on their identities as mothers, see Rhoda Lois Blumberg, ‘White Mothers as Civil Rights Activists: The Interweave of Family and Movement Roles,’ in *Women and Social Protest*, ed. by Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 166-179.

social protest during this era, and particularly on the flexibility and malleability of maternalist politics. At the same time, by exploring how women from a variety of different backgrounds understood and used motherhood differently, this study sharpens our understanding of how gender intersects with race, class and religion to shape political activism and social change.

IV

Finally, this thesis makes a vital contribution to ongoing debates over the complex, often contradictory relationship between maternalist and feminist politics. Indeed, the relationship between maternalism and feminism has long been a contentious issue, particularly among feminists themselves. Central to this debate is the question of whether political movements that build upon ideologies of motherhood advance or undermine feminist goals – and whether participants in such movements can accurately be described as ‘feminists.’ Of course, these questions hinge on one’s definition of feminism – which, for the sake of clarity, this study defines broadly as a commitment to gender equality and to challenging women’s subordinate status.³⁴ Furthermore, this debate has been directly related to evolving feminist thought on motherhood.

On the one hand, numerous critics have contended that movements that embrace separate gender roles and stress women’s innate capacity for nurturance are fundamentally incompatible with the feminist goal of sexual equality. At best, scholars have labelled such movements as politically immature, limited in scope and ‘not to be confused with feminism.’³⁵ At worst, feminist critics have accused movements that emphasise the mother role of perpetuating an essentialist view of women that reinforces their marginality and inhibits the struggle for female equality and empowerment.³⁶ Notably, this critique was particularly prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s – a time when many participants in the emerging women’s liberation movement denounced motherhood as a patriarchal site of oppression, agitated for access to birth control and

³⁴ I have tried to define feminism broadly – so as not to exclude those who did not identify as ‘feminist’ or make gender oppression their primary focus, but who nonetheless actively fought to improve women’s status – yet precisely – recognising, as Nancy Cott has pointed out, that expanding feminism too far ‘equates the term with “what women did” and renders it meaningless.’ For further discussion of some of the difficulties involved in defining feminism, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 3-10 (quotation on p. 9).

³⁵ See Julia Wells, quoted in Collins, pp. 193-194. For other works that distinguish between ‘maternal politics’ and ‘feminism,’ see Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, p. 3; Storrs, p. 6.

³⁶ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 238.

abortion, and called for the right not to mother.³⁷ For example, writing in 1968, pioneering feminist Shulamith Firestone condemned female peace activists who ‘played upon the traditional female role’ and appealed to the public ‘as wives, mothers and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears.’ She also argued that playing up to gender stereotypes actually hindered the cause of peace by encouraging men ‘to develop aggression and militarism to prove their masculinity.’³⁸ More recently, however, a number of scholars have begun to challenge the view that maternalist movements are inherently incompatible with feminism. In her work on Women Strike for Peace, Amy Swerdlow concluded that ‘women who build on traditional female consciousness to enter the political arena do not have to be trapped in that culture or bound forever to stereotypical notions of maternal rights and responsibilities.’³⁹ Furthermore, several scholars have stressed the importance of race in shaping feminist discourses. Patricia Hill Collins, for example, asserted that critics of maternalist politics often fail to recognise that black women have long viewed motherhood as a symbol of power – and that this been an enduring theme in politicising them and prompting them to take actions that they otherwise might not have considered.⁴⁰

The findings of this study also suggest that the relationship between maternalism and feminism was more complex. Indeed, although the women examined here emphasised ostensibly traditional notions of maternal responsibilities in order to enter the political arena, they simultaneously undermined the domestic ideal by politicising motherhood and transforming it from a private to a public role. By claiming the moral authority of motherhood, the predominantly black women in the welfare rights movement also contested racialised notions of femininity, in which ‘good motherhood’

³⁷ It is also important to note, however, that feminist critiques of motherhood were never universal, even at their height during the ’60s and ’70s. As Lauri Umansky has pointed out, they were always accompanied by a more positive feminist discourse that viewed motherhood, free from the trappings of patriarchy, as a source of power for women. For more on feminist thought on motherhood and how it has evolved, see Lauri Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Linda Rennie Forcey, ‘Feminist Perspectives on Mothering and Peace,’ *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, 3, no. 2 (2001), 155-174; Andrea O’Reilly, ‘Feminist Perspectives on Mothering: Power and Oppression,’ in *Gendered Intersections: An Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies*, ed. by Lesley Biggs and Pamela Down (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005), pp. 235-240; Andrea O’Reilly, *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism and The Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006).

³⁸ Shulamith Firestone, ‘The Jeannette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?’, in *New York Radical Women, Notes from the First Year*, published pamphlet, New York, June 1968, in Donna Allen Papers, 1960-1987, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Additions, 1962-1976, Box 1, Folder 11.

³⁹ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 243.

⁴⁰ Collins, pp. 193-194.

was codified white. Furthermore, this thesis suggests that political activism could be an empowering experience that led women to recognise and to challenge gender hierarchies. Within WSP and the welfare rights movement, for example, many women came to develop a feminist consciousness over the course of their activism, and they often moved from seeing themselves simply as mothers acting on behalf of their children to identifying as part of a broader struggle for women's liberation. Yet, for WSPers and welfare recipients, embracing a feminist outlook did not necessarily entail rejecting the maternal ideologies upon which their earlier activism had been based. Instead, they formulated distinctive versions of feminism that were rooted in their daily lives and social locations, and shaped by their identities as mothers. Epitomising this, Boston welfare rights activist Betsy Warrior argued that mothers were best placed to fight the male-dominated establishment because:

mothers will fight for their children, to supply their needs, and they will struggle for as long as it takes for their children to grow up. They possess both will and sustained determination to demand long and loud that the political structure allow their children enough to live on decently, and in doing so change the political structure.⁴¹

Indeed, for many welfare rights and peace activists, motherhood offered a powerful basis from which to fight for social justice and feminist change.

Significantly, by exploring how maternal activists during this period engaged with and contributed to feminist discourses, this thesis complicates existing narratives of second-wave feminism. Recently, numerous scholars have challenged the popular assumption that the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was predominantly comprised of young, middle-class white women. Instead, they have documented the diverse range of people who contributed to feminist discourses during this era, including in their narratives both women who explicitly identified as feminists, as well as 'activists for whom the elimination of sexual or gender oppression was not a primary goal, but who fought to elevate women's status in their own communities and in larger society through movements for economic justice and black liberation.'⁴² Indeed, this has

⁴¹ Betsy Warrior, 'Females and Welfare,' in *Radicalism and Reactionary Politics in America, Series I: The American Radicalism Collection*, from the holdings of the American Radicalism Collection, Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries (Woodbridge, C.T.: Primary Source Microfilm, 2004), Reel 234.

⁴² Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 5. Also see Becky Thompson, 'Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,' *Feminist Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2002), 337-360; Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Whose Feminism? Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) U.S. Women's Movement(s),' in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. by Nancy Naples (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 31-56; Benita Roth, *Separate*

led several scholars to conclude that what is generally referred to as ‘the women’s movement’ was actually a loose conglomeration of local and national groups, demarcated by racial, ethnic and class perspectives, and often espousing conflicting aims and ideologies – that ‘second-wave feminism’ was in fact ‘second-wave feminisms.’⁴³ Nevertheless, while recent scholarship has shed valuable new light on the contributions of women of colour and working-class women of all races to women’s liberation, we continue to know little about the feminist activism of mothers and mothers’ movements during this period.⁴⁴ This is no doubt related to the fact that the young white feminists who dominated the early scholarship were the same cohort who often denounced motherhood as an oppressive institution and scorned movements that emphasised the mother role – thereby fuelling the perception that second-wave feminism was ‘anti-motherhood.’ Thus, by demonstrating that maternal activists could be active participants in the struggle for women’s liberation, this study challenges conventional wisdom regarding the relationship of motherhood and maternalism to second-wave feminism – while also contributing to a critical reassessment of the women’s movement that looks beyond the experiences of young, middle-class white women.

However, it is important to recognise that not all those who politicised motherhood during this period came to embrace a feminist outlook. Indeed, recent scholarship on conservative women has argued that feminism was never the only female intellectual tradition guiding U.S. women’s history, nor was it the sole route to women’s political advancement.⁴⁵ Similarly, as well as demonstrating that second-wave feminism

Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organisations, 1968-1980* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Stephanie Gilmore, ed., *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Nancy MacLean, ‘The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women’s Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class,’ *Feminist Studies*, 25, no.1 (1999), 53-78; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴³ See Umansky, pp. 6, 14; Hall, *American Patriotism*, p. 53; Roth, pp. xi-xii. Notably, by documenting the multiple ‘feminisms’ that peaked at various points throughout the postwar period, a number of scholars have challenged the ‘wave’ framework itself – with its exclusive focus on the late 1960s and early 1970s as the ‘heyday’ of modern feminism – instead calling for an expanded view of feminist history. See Thompson; Gluck; Cobble.

⁴⁴ Of course, many those who feature in the existing literature on second-wave feminism were or became mothers. But, as Andrea Estepa has pointed out, they are rarely identified as such, and ‘Very little has been written specifically about women’s struggles to integrate feminist ideas and/or activism with the practice of motherhood during those years.’ ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 104. Two notable exceptions to this are M. Rivka Polatnick, ‘Diversity in Women’s Liberation Ideology: How a Black and a White Group of the 1960s Viewed Motherhood,’ *Signs*, 21, no. 3, (1996), 679-706; and Umansky.

⁴⁵ See Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 169; Michelle Nickerson, ‘Moral Mothers and Goldwater Girls,’ in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. by David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang, 2003),

took multiple forms, this project explores how other activists constructed alternative political ideologies based on their own experiences and particular social locations. Within the anti-busing and anti-abortion struggles, for example, women tended to remain either ambivalent or actively opposed to organised feminism. Although many women in these movements developed new skills, increased self-confidence and a sense of commonality with other women, they rarely came to question gender hierarchies – instead fighting to defend ‘traditional’ family values. Thus, opponents of busing and abortion aligned themselves with a growing anti-feminist movement, and they played a critical role the rise of the New Right. Nevertheless, this study contends that it would be overly simplistic to view the relationship between conservative women and feminism purely in terms of conflict. Indeed, even as they attacked ‘women’s libbers’ and their goals, anti-busing and anti-abortion women subsumed aspects of feminist thought within their own ideologies, and they appropriated important tactics from the feminist movement. Meanwhile, both movements contributed significantly to the political empowerment of women during the 1970s and 1980s. Notably, in a recent historiographical review, Kim E. Nielsen argued that, although conservative women’s activism and advancement may be individually empowering, it can also be used to enhance opportunities to exploit, and she stressed that: ‘Empowered women do not necessarily feminists make.’ Nielsen went on to assert that ‘in this age of the tremendous economic and political advancement of some women, feminists must be emphatic that seeking and attaining equal opportunity to exploit, to create repressive hierarchies, and to oppress is not feminism.’⁴⁶ Yet, while this study recognises the need to define women’s political activism with care, it also serves as a vital reminder that divisions between conservatism and feminism during this era were never as hard-and-fast as commonly assumed.

V

This thesis examines the politics of motherhood during the 1960s and beyond through four distinct chapters on Women Strike for Peace, the welfare rights struggle, the campaign against busing and the anti-abortion movement. Within each chapter, several key themes are explored. First, this study investigates the process by which women

pp. 51-62 (p. 62); Kim E. Nielsen, ‘Doing the “Right” Right,’ *Journal of Women’s History*, 16, no. 3 (2004), 168-172 (pp. 169-170).

⁴⁶ Nielsen, ‘Doing the “Right” Right,’ pp. 169-170.

were politicised and the role that ideologies of motherhood played in that process. Within all of these movements, motherhood was an empowering identity that played a major role in motivating women's political involvement – and as a result, activists relied heavily upon maternal rhetoric to justify their protests and enhance their moral authority. However, drawing upon notions of 'multiple consciousness' first introduced by black feminist theorists, this project also examines how women's gender identities were mediated by race, ethnicity, class, religion and other identities.⁴⁷ Indeed, recognising that activists constructed their maternalist politics out of their everyday lives, this thesis highlights important differences in the way these diverse groups of women understood and used motherhood. For instance, while some women were primarily motivated by immediate threats to the safety or well-being of their own children, others conceived their maternal responsibilities more broadly and were galvanised by concern for all the world's children and for the preservation of life itself. And still others were prompted to take action by concern for their own children, but went on to see themselves as part of a larger struggle for social change, waged on behalf of all children. Indeed, this study assesses the impact that activism had on women's political consciousness – ultimately contending that these activists defined themselves in ways that were both 'multilayered and evolving.'⁴⁸

A second major theme is the impact that motherhood had on the strategies and protest styles of these movements. This thesis examines how activists during this era appropriated direct action tactics popularised by civil rights and anti-war protesters to dramatise their maternal concerns in the public arena. Within all of these movements, women employed a variety of methods to highlight their status as mothers – including displaying maternal imagery and slogans during public protests, staging special 'mothers' marches' and Mother's Day actions, using street theatre tactics, and bringing their children along to demonstrations. Furthermore, some activists exhibited a willingness to use violence or the threat of violence if they deemed it necessary to protect their own or others' children. This project also considers the extent to which activists' use of maternal rhetoric and symbolism resulted from conscious tactical choice. Of course, there is no doubt that many of the women studied here were genuinely motivated by concern for children or that they sincerely believed that

⁴⁷ See for instance Deborah K. King, 'Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,' *Signs*, 14, no. 1 (1988), 42-72; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,' *Signs*, 17, no. 2 (1992), 251-274; Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, 'Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism,' *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996), 321-331.

⁴⁸ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. xvii.

motherhood entailed certain gender-specific responsibilities. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that some women were also using their status as mothers deliberately – aware of the potential of motherhood to capture media attention, win public sympathy and ward off counterattacks. In addition, this study examines the ideological and practical difficulties activists faced when attempting to balance political activism and mothering responsibilities. For many women, their children became part of their activism – they brought them along to marches and rallies, and often used their presence for strategic effect. Yet, while women tended to justify this with a strong conviction that their activism was in their children’s best interests, children’s presence at demonstrations could also be an added strain and some women expressed concerns about their safety. At the same time, other women found that political commitments (frequent demonstrations, long meetings and, sometimes, arrests) caused them to neglect children and domestic duties – resulting in a potentially paradoxical situation in which they were active on behalf of their children, while finding that activism increasingly took them away from the home. This thesis explores the practical solutions activists devised to these problems and how they reconciled potential contradictions in their ideologies – shedding light on the nitty-gritty work that goes into maintaining social movements but which frequently gets overlooked.

The third theme in this study is the possibilities and limits of maternalist politics for effecting social change. Although none of the movements examined here can be said to have achieved its ultimate goal, they were not without their share of successes. Indeed, within all of these movements, activists found that leveraging motherhood could result in tangible concessions and gains. Nevertheless, the limits of maternalism are also explored. Again, it is important to recognise how race and class intersected with gender to shape perceptions of these movements, as, for a number of women in this study, it was racial and class stereotypes that rendered them outside the bounds of respectable motherhood. But others found that their ability to claim the strategic advantages of motherhood could be undermined simply by failing to conform to traditional notions of maternal virtue – particularly through violence or association with violence. Moreover, many women found that their activism was hampered by competing interpretations of maternalism emanating from other movements. Indeed, this thesis pays close attention to the connections between these, and other, maternalist movements throughout – exploring common themes, mutual influence, and attempts at coalition building based on a shared identity as mothers. But it also examines how maternal activists contested each other’s claims to be defending children or to speak ‘for

mothers' – and how this limited the success of these movements by belying any assertion of a universal maternal perspective. However, this study does not measure the success of these movements solely in terms of the social and political changes they were able to effect. It also considers the impact they had on the lives of their participants, many of whom came to develop new skills and experienced a lasting sense of empowerment.

Finally, this project explores how participants in these movements were influenced by, engaged with and contributed to contemporary feminist discourses. Indeed, the relationship between maternalism and feminism is a central theme of this thesis. It examines how, over the course of their activism, some women came to question gender hierarchies, and to identify as part of a broader struggle for women's liberation. This shift often resulted from women's struggles against, and conflicts with, male-dominated power structures and, in some cases, men within their own organisations – and it was undoubtedly encouraged by the growing visibility of the mainstream feminist movement during this period. Nevertheless, women in this study tended to develop their own versions of feminism that were rooted in their race and class backgrounds, and tied to their identities as mothers. Furthermore, although activism was regularly an empowering and life-altering experience, not those who politicised motherhood during this era came to embrace a feminist outlook, and this study also examines how other activists constructed alternative political ideologies based on their own experiences and particular social locations. Thus, it ultimately demonstrates that feminism took many forms – and that it was never the only route to women's political advancement.

Drawing upon a wide range of archival collections and microfilmed sources – including local as well as national newspapers, and personal papers and oral history transcripts as well as movement publications – all of these chapters shed light on activists and organisations who have tended to be overlooked within existing histories of this era. However, the geographical scope of this study differs notably between chapters. While Chapters 1 and 4 examine Women Strike for Peace and the anti-abortion movement at the national level, Chapters 2 and 3 analyse maternalism within the welfare rights and anti-busing struggles through the use of local case studies. Specifically, Chapter 2 looks at welfare rights organising in Boston, and Chapter 3 explores the campaign against busing in Boston and Detroit. In both cases, these locales were selected because they represented vibrant sites of movement activity that illuminate broader themes within these struggles, but which, for the most part, have

remained hitherto understudied.⁴⁹ In part, the different approaches taken in these chapters acknowledges the fact that WSPers and anti-abortion activists achieved a degree of national communication, coordination and action that was lacking within the other two movements.⁵⁰ But the divergent focuses also reflect important differences in how broadly these groups defined their maternal responsibilities – and therefore the scope of their activism. Indeed, whereas welfare rights and anti-busing activists were primarily motivated by concern for their own children – their activism deeply rooted in the immediate surroundings and local context – women in WSP and the anti-abortion movement generally believed that they had a duty to protect all children and even life itself. Nevertheless, within the welfare rights and anti-busing movements, women often came to view their activism as having a national dimension and grassroots campaigns around the country shared a number of common themes. Meanwhile, local conditions continued to play a significant role in shaping women’s peace and anti-abortion activism. Thus, despite being nominally either ‘local’ or ‘national,’ all of these chapters will explore the interplay and symbiosis between the two.

⁴⁹ A notable exception to this is the anti-busing movement in Boston, which has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention. Nevertheless, this study contends that the existing literature has largely overlooked the movement’s important gendered dynamics.

⁵⁰ This is not to deny that welfare rights activists succeeded in building a national organisation aimed at coordinating disparate campaigns around the country. Nevertheless, for the majority of participants in the movement, activism continued to be centred on the local level. Indeed, few welfare recipients could afford to attend centralised demonstrations in Washington, D.C. and most grievances existed at the local level anyway. Meanwhile, attempts at national coordination among anti-busers were generally fleeting and small-scale.

Chapter 1: Women Strike for Peace and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement

On 23 June 1965, around 400 members of Women Strike for Peace (WSP) picketed the White House to demand an end to the war in Vietnam. Participants in this ‘Mothers’ Protest’ were mainly white, middle-class, middle-aged women, and it was headed by a South Dakota woman who had recently lost her son in Vietnam. The demonstrators, many of them dressed in black, carried signs with slogans such as ‘Old Men Play War Games, Young Men Die,’ ‘Why Are Americans Dying in Vietnam?’ and ‘Why Must Mothers Mourn?’¹ America’s military involvement in Vietnam had escalated dramatically during the first half of 1965. Earlier that year President Lyndon Johnson, who had been elected on a peace platform, launched an intense bombing campaign against North Vietnam, and sharply increased the deployment of U.S. ground troops. Although the year began with just 21,000 military ‘advisors’ stationed in the South, by mid-June there were 54,000 American troops in Vietnam.² In an advertisement in the *New York Times* in the run up to the event, WSP explained: ‘We are going to tell the President that we will not remain silent while our sons are sent to Vietnam to kill and be killed.’ They planned to inform the president: ‘you’ve listened to the Generals... Now hear the Mothers!’³ However, Johnson refused to meet with the demonstrators. Instead, the crowd was addressed by a Michigan congressman who had recently voted against the war, while a small delegation was granted an audience with the first lady’s press secretary. In a statement read aloud at this meeting – during which she claimed to speak on behalf of ‘American mothers’ – WSP founder Dagmar Wilson emphasised the suffering of civilians in Vietnam, particularly women and children, and she concluded: ‘We will not give the lives of our children to a fruitless... unfair and immoral cause.’⁴

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, as America’s military involvement in Vietnam intensified and opposition to it grew, WSPers (pronounced ‘wispers’) regularly staged protests in the capital, as well as organising innumerable smaller demonstrations

¹ ‘Pickets Protest Vietnam Policies,’ *New York Times*, 24 June 1965, p. 2.

² Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Lincoln, N.E.: iUniverse, Inc., 1994), p. 19; Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), p. 104. U.S. involvement in Vietnam dated back to the end of World War II when it began providing military advisers, supplies and funding to the French in their efforts to re-establish control and fight Communist expansion in the area. For a concise summary of the conflict, see Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, Series: American Social and Political Movements of the Twentieth Century (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 7-9.

³ Women Strike for Peace, ‘He graduates in June of ’65. Will he die in Vietnam in June of ’66?’, *New York Times*, 21 June 1965, p. 23.

⁴ *Memo*, vol. 3, no. 22, p. 1-2, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection* (Microfilm. Wooster, Ohio: Micro Photo Division, Bell & Howell, 1972), Reel 9; Dagmar Wilson, ‘Statement to President Johnson,’ June 23, 1965, in Women Strike for Peace Records, 1958-1969, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 2, Folder 12 (hereafter cited as WSP Records).

in towns and cities across the nation. This did not stop with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973. On 22 May 1973, now with a different president in the White House and military activity in Southeast Asia dragging on, the women of WSP once again came together in Washington, D.C. Joined by members of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), some 300 women gathered on the steps of the Capitol to protest the bombing of Cambodia, military expenditure and cutbacks in domestic funding. But while this rally demonstrated the longevity of the movement, it was also clear that a lot had changed over the course of nearly a decade. For instance, WSP was no longer simply concerned with the immediate human costs of the conflict; they also highlighted the social and economic effects of the war. Marchers carried placards with slogans such as ‘2 Weeks Bombing = Health Cutbacks’ and ‘1 Bomb = 1 Library.’ Furthermore, while earlier protests tended to be largely white, this demonstration saw activists join forces with the low-income, predominantly black women of NWRO – thus illustrating an unusual and often overlooked alliance between WSP and the welfare rights movement. Addressing the crowd, welfare rights leader Beulah Sanders called for a coalition with WSP to fight for a reduction in military spending and support funds for health, education and welfare. It was also apparent that WSP had moved from seeking to influence the men in power, to demanding that women be better represented within the nation’s social and political institutions. Again, several members of congress spoke at the rally; but this time one of those representatives was WSP’s own leader Bella Abzug. At a time when the Watergate scandal was rapidly eroding President Nixon’s authority, Abzug urged women to seek more political power, arguing that ‘Women of all kinds have an obligation to reflect on the fact that there are no women Watergate witnesses, and no women in the Pentagon Papers.’ There was, however, one striking continuity in WSP’s rhetoric and protest style: activists continued to appeal to the public as women and as mothers. Indeed, leaflets for the event issued ‘A Call to All Women,’ and promised ‘an action by women who feel that people are more important than bombs.’ Moreover, in her speech to the rally, Abzug explained: ‘What we do here today, we do for our children and the children of the world.’⁵

By invoking their maternal identities to justify their appeals for peace, members of WSP were drawing on a well-established tradition within women’s anti-war organising. Indeed, women have long argued that, as the givers of life, they have a

⁵ ‘Timely Action in D.C.’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, June 1973, pp. 1, 3, in *Herstory 1 – Update* (Microfilm. Berkeley, California: Women’s History Research Center, 1974), Reel 17; Women Strike for Peace and the National Welfare Rights Organization, ‘A Call To All Women’ leaflet, 1973, in George Wiley Papers, 1949-1975, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 32, Folder 3.

special concern with and responsibility for preserving life, and women's peace activism is often seen as the archetypal form of maternal protest. This maternalist rhetoric has been echoed by a myriad of individual activists and women's peace organisations over the years. During the Progressive era, for example, women reformers drew heavily upon the moral authority of motherhood to critique both domestic and foreign policy. This period saw the formation of the first autonomous women's peace organisation, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which grew out of the 1915 Women's Peace Party and is still functioning today.⁶ And even during the periods of low participation and disunity that resulted from two world wars and the anti-communist climate of the early Cold War, women's anti-war organising carried on and activists continued to make connections between motherhood and peace.⁷ Furthermore, maternalist arguments persisted beyond the Vietnam era, with feminist philosophers and members of women's peace encampments during the 1980s and 1990s contending that the 'maternal thinking' that arose from the social practice of mothering could provide a powerful basis from which to restructure society and create a more peaceful world order.⁸ Indeed, in her study of women's peace activism from the 1820s through the 1990s, Harriet Alonso observed that one of the defining elements of this movement was 'the idea that women, as the childbearers of society, have a particular interest in peace.'⁹ Moreover, illustrating the lasting appeal of maternalist ideologies, calls for peace continue to be made in the name of motherhood today.¹⁰

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that each generation of women peace activists has interpreted and used these maternal arguments differently according to the

⁶ Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 30, 33. For more on women's peace activism during the early twentieth century, see Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993), Chapters 2-4.

⁷ Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, p. 14; Amy C. Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World: Popular Front Women's Struggle for Peace and Justice in Chicago During the 1960s* (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2011), p. xii. For more on how McCarthyism affected women's peace organising, see Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, Chapter 6; Harriet Hyman Alonso, 'Mayhem and Moderation: Women Peace Activists During the McCarthy Era,' in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. 128-150.

⁸ See for instance Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). On the women's peace encampment movement, see Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, Chapter 8.

⁹ Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, pp. 10-12, 263.

¹⁰ For contemporary examples of maternalist peace rhetoric, see Kathryn Abrams, 'Women and Antiwar Protest: Rearticulating Gender and Citizenship,' *Boston University Law Review*, 87, no. 4 (2007), 849-882; Michelle Moravec, 'Another Mother for Peace: Reconsidering Maternalist Peace Rhetoric from an Historical Perspective 1967-2007,' *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 1, no. 1 (2010), 9-29; Cindy Sheehan, 'Mom Power,' *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 3, no. 2 (2012), 181-187.

particular conflicts they confronted, the political climate and opportunities for dissent, and the gender norms and expectations of the day. Furthermore, understandings of motherhood have invariably been shaped by activists' racial, class and religious backgrounds, and local contexts. Focusing on Women Strike for Peace, this chapter examines how maternalism was used to campaign against the Vietnam War from the early 1960s through to the early 1970s. Although they participated in all the major national demonstrations and staged countless independent actions against the war, the middle-aged women of WSP – and older women activists in general – have remained largely invisible within the scholarship on the 1960s peace movement.¹¹ Instead, most histories of the anti-Vietnam War movement have centred on 'career activists' and leaders of national organisations, who were predominantly young and male. As Amy Schneidhorst observed, women's peace organisations are sometimes included in these narratives, but they are peripheral and primarily used 'to embellish the larger movement narrative as they provide contrast to others who are viewed as the "real" movement.'¹² Indeed, Schneidhorst's recent book on WSP in the Chicago area and Amy Swerdlow's 1993 monograph on the national group remain the only two full-length published studies of this organisation.¹³

Thus, by examining how WSP employed maternal ideologies to claim a central role in the anti-Vietnam War movement, this study complicates existing understandings of this era. First, it explores the multi-faceted and often complex ways that members of WSP understood and used motherhood. As they campaigned against the war in Vietnam, WSPers consistently claimed to be motivated by concern for children, and a

¹¹ Throughout this chapter, I refer to WSPers as 'middle-aged' or 'older' women, although a lack of membership lists or other data on participants makes women's exact ages difficult to determine. According to historian and former WSP member Amy Swerdlow, most of the women who joined the movement when it began in 1961 were in their mid-thirties to late forties, which would make them in their forties and fifties by the time the anti-Vietnam War movement was at its height in the late 1960s and early '70s. But this period also saw an increase in younger women joining the group – particularly wives and mothers in their early twenties who felt more comfortable in WSP than in the era's student organisations – and it is clear that WSP always involved women from a range of age groups. Nevertheless, the fact that they consistently claimed to speak as 'mothers,' and often differentiated themselves from 'students' and 'younger' activists, suggests that many WSPers identified as part of an older generation of activists. Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 1, 67; Andrea Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980*, PhD thesis, Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey University, 2012, pp. 256, 308.

¹² See for instance, DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*; Charles Chatfield, *The American Peace Movement: Ideals and Activism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992); Wells, *The War Within*; Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1995). For an excellent recent literature review of women in the 1960s peace movement, see Amy C. Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women': Women's Peace and Social Justice Activism in Chicago, 1961-1973," *Peace & Change*, 26, no. 3 (2001), 374-391 (pp. 375-376, quotation on 375).

¹³ Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*.

sense of responsibility as mothers – and they drew heavily upon maternal language, just as countless other women peace activists had done before them. However, WSP also formulated a distinctive version of maternalism that reflected its members' status as white, middle-class women, and was influenced by Cold War domestic ideals. At the same time, the women of WSP were very much products of 1960s protest culture and, as they mobilised against the intense and prolonged conflict in Southeast Asia, activists regularly combined more traditional forms of maternalism with direct action tactics that were in vogue. Importantly, without denying that the majority of women in WSP held genuine maternal concerns, this chapter also explores how activists used motherhood as a tactic. Indeed, while early scholarship on WSP often reduced the group to the maternal rhetoric and imagery it presented, more recent studies have shown that WSP's emphasis on motherhood stemmed, at least in part, from strategic considerations – with many activists viewing maternalism as an effective means to legitimise their position and ward off counterattacks, capture media attention, and appeal to the 'ordinary' American women they sought to attract.¹⁴

And indeed, in the organisation's early years, many WSPers appear to have found maternal rhetoric and imagery to be effective tools. However, this chapter also looks at how WSP's maternalist politics – and the reception it received – transformed over time, in the face of a changing political landscape and internal developments in the organisation. With the exception of an excellent recent study by Andrea Estepa, scholars have tended to portray older women peace activists during this period as moderate, maternalist and unchanging. But, as Estepa has shown, WSP in fact evolved a great deal over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s, redefining both its strategies and its goals. For example, the group broadened its agenda to include issues of racial and economic justice, and members began to forge alliances with a variety of student, black liberation and anti-poverty groups. Moreover, as the women of WSP began to advocate more radical social change, they became much more confrontational in their tactics. Indeed, while the majority of WSPers remained committed to

¹⁴ As feminist law scholar Kathryn Abrams observed, critiquing war has always been a 'particularly vexed act of citizenship' for women due to the way that wartime experiences have been gendered. Indeed, because gender norms in most countries have long dictated that men fight wars, they have tended to assert authority over issues of war and peace, claiming that it was their lives at risk. Consequently, Abrams argued, many women have found it necessary to invoke their own gendered experience – especially their roles as mothers – as a source of legitimacy and knowledge. 'Women and Antiwar Protest,' pp. 852-855. For recent studies that explored WSP's use of motherhood as a tactic, see Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies,'" Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*; 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 in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 84-112; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*.

nonviolence, many came to embrace the principles of civil disobedience and it was not uncommon for WSP protests in the late 1960s to end in arrests. What is striking, however, is that, even as they became increasingly militant, WSPers continued to bring their maternal identities to bear on their campaigns. Nevertheless, in the radically altered political context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, WSP's relationship with the authorities also changed, and members found maternalism to be increasingly less effective at winning support and offering protection.¹⁵

Finally, the relationship between WSP and the burgeoning feminist movement will be explored. In her recent study, Estepa demonstrated convincingly that WSP was a vital part of the larger 'Movement' of the 1960s and should be taken seriously, not just within the literature on the anti-war movement, but as part of the mainstream of post-World War II social movement history.¹⁶ This chapter builds on these arguments – in particular, by examining how the middle-aged women of WSP were both influenced by and contributed to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Heretofore, members of WSP have been viewed more as symbols of the traditional gender conventions that younger feminists railed against, than as active participants in the emerging women's movement. But this one-dimensional portrayal of WSP overlooks the fact that many participants came to develop a feminist consciousness over the course of the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, influenced by the growing visibility of the feminist movement – as well as by their own experiences of activism – WSP increasingly identified itself as part of the broader women's liberation movement. Moreover, by formulating their own version of feminism that was tied to their identities as mothers, and reflected their particular age- and class-based concerns, the women of WSP made important contributions to the feminist discourses of the era.

When assessing the maternalist peace politics of WSP, this chapter primarily takes a national approach. In part, this acknowledges the fact that WSP had chapters in towns and cities across the country throughout the 1960s, and maintained an impressive degree of national communication and coordination from the start. But this broad focus also reflects the fact that the women of WSP defined maternalism broadly. Indeed, unlike some of the activists in later chapters who were primarily motivated by imminent threats to the safety and well-being of their own children – their activism deeply rooted in their immediate surroundings – WSPers regularly expressed concern for all the

¹⁵ My arguments regarding WSP's transformation build upon the work of Andrea Estepa, including her 2008 article in *Feminist Coalitions*, and her 2012 doctoral thesis. See Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off'; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*.

¹⁶ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 104; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*.

world's children and for the preservation of life itself. At the same time, however, WSP's loose structure and emphasis on grassroots autonomy ensured that local context continued to play an important role in shaping the priorities and activities of any given chapter. Thus, as well as exploring common themes that united WSPers across the country, this chapter pays close attention to regional variations within the movement.¹⁷ In particular, it does this through a detailed examination of Women Uniting to End the War in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Women for a Peaceful Christmas in Madison, Wisconsin – two local groups that emerged during the early 1970s and were loosely affiliated with WSP, but have hitherto received scant attention in histories of the movement. Moreover, by analysing WSP alongside other social movements from across the political spectrum, this study sheds new light on the diversity within maternalist politics. Indeed, while recent scholarship has made significant contributions to our understanding of WSP – probing activists' use of motherhood as a tactic, documenting local variations within the group, and showing how it evolved over time – these works sometimes risk eliding maternalism with progressivism – and with nonviolence.¹⁸ In contrast, this study examines how race, class, religion and political ideologies intersected to shape the maternalist politics of a diverse range of women – thereby illustrating important particularities in the way white, middle-class women in WSP understood and used motherhood.

II

Although this chapter is primarily concerned with how women mobilised maternalism to campaign against the Vietnam War, WSP actually predated mass opposition to this conflict and was born amid the heightened Cold War tensions of the early 1960s. On 1 November 1961, an estimated 50,000 women in over sixty communities across the United States staged a one-day protest against nuclear testing and the arms race with the Soviet Union. The idea for the protest was conceived six weeks earlier by a group of Washington, D.C.-based women, who were active in the local branch of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and had been brought together by children's book illustrator Dagmar Wilson. Wilson was frustrated by the dangers posed

¹⁷ For recent works that illustrate the regional diversity within WSP, see Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*.

¹⁸ See for instance Schneidhorst, "Little Old Ladies,"; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*; Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off'; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*.

by nuclear testing and the apparent apathy of those in power, and sought to discuss what women could do to make themselves heard.¹⁹ In a call sent out across the country, the Washington organisers asserted that ‘it is the special responsibility of women – who bear children and nurture the race – to demand for their families a better future than sudden death,’ and they urged women to suspend their normal activities for a day to demonstrate their outrage at the nuclear threat.²⁰ This message was spread rapidly and informally, by word of mouth, letter and telephone, to friends in other cities and contacts in PTAs, church groups and women’s clubs around the nation.

The popular response to the strike was surprising, even to its founders. Participants in the protest tended to be white, middle-class women in their mid-thirties to late forties and, although many of the organisers were civic-minded women with long activist histories, they identified themselves to the public simply as ‘housewives – working women – and for the most part, mothers.’²¹ Demonstrations took place in cities from Philadelphia to Portland and from Chicago to Miami Beach, and actions varied greatly from place to place.²² Women marched, rallied, staged public debates, and lobbied elected officials at all levels. In Washington, around 800 women presented identical letters to Jacqueline Kennedy at the White House and Nina Khrushchev at the Soviet Embassy, calling upon the two first ladies to urge their husbands to work for peace.²³ Inaugurating the tactic that would become their hallmark, women across the country appealed to the public as mothers, highlighting the dangers of nuclear testing to the lives of their children and the survival of the planet. Epitomising this, the letters to the two first ladies implored: ‘Surely no mother today can feel that her duty as a mother has been fulfilled until she has spoken out for life, instead of death, for peace, instead of war.’²⁴

Following the success of their one-day action, the Washington organisers put down roots to form a permanent group. But, having been active in more formal organisations such as WILPF and SANE, they were keen ‘to escape preoccupation with

¹⁹ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 17; Ethel Barol Taylor, *We Made a Difference: My Personal Journey with Women Strike for Peace* (Philadelphia: Camino Books, 1998), p. ix.

²⁰ Quoted in Mary Clarke, ‘KPFK Commentary,’ May 1969, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

²¹ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 1; Schneidhorst, “‘Little Old Ladies,’” p. 376; Women Strike for Peace, ‘For Immediate Release,’ 9 October 1961, p. 2, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 3.

²² Women Strike for Peace, ‘Dear Friends,’ 9 October 1961, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 5; ‘Women Strike For Peace In Demonstrations Today,’ *Chicago Daily Defender*, 2 November 1961, p. 5.

²³ ‘Women to March In Plea for Peace: Idea for ‘Strike’ in Capital Spreads Across U.S.,’ *New York Times*, 30 October 1961, p. 18; ‘300 Women Protest Here Against Nuclear Testing,’ *New York Times*, 2 November 1961, p. 5.

²⁴ Letter to Mrs. John F. Kennedy, 1 November 1961; and Letter to Mrs. Nikita Khrushchev, 1 November 1961, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 9.

structure, hierarchy and self-perpetuation,' which they saw as inhibiting spontaneous action and obscuring the movement's goals.²⁵ Partly in response to the red baiting that had plagued both WILPF and SANE, the organisers decided not to require official membership, not to charge dues, and not to have any national officers or boards.²⁶ They also felt that a loosely structured, action-orientated group would allow more room for participation, autonomy and creativity at the grassroots level. Although a National Information Clearing House was established in Washington, D.C., this was more to facilitate communication than to give orders, and local groups were encouraged to pursue their own initiatives. Furthermore, WSP's organisers were keen for the movement to remain ideologically inclusive. As Washington founder Eleanor Garst put it: 'You don't have to be a Democrat, a Republican, an anti-Communist amateur or professional, a Communist, Fascist, Socialist, or any of the "ists" by which we have chosen up sides in our society. You just have to be a human being, aware of that first and foremost.'²⁷

This emphasis on inclusivity, diversity and local autonomy led to much variation among chapters, as evidenced by the different names adopted by local groups. For instance, on the East and West Coasts, women tended to keep the original epithet Women Strike for Peace. But in other areas, particularly the Midwest, protesters worried that the word 'strike' was too confrontational and leftist-sounding, simply calling themselves Women for Peace (WFP). Meanwhile, in Seattle the movement was called Seattle Women Act for Peace (SWAP).²⁸ Local branches differed in more than just their names. During the organisation's early years, chapters disagreed on a range of issues, from what position to take on the Soviet Union, to whether to endorse political candidates or support other issues such as civil rights, to what level of national coordination was necessary.²⁹ Nevertheless, members of WSP tended to view their diversity as a strength, as long as women shared a commitment to stopping nuclear proliferation and preserving the planet for future generations. 'What united us was our concern for the safety of our children,' recalled Philadelphia WSP leader Ethel Taylor

²⁵ Eleanor Garst, 'Women: Middle-Class Masses,' *Memo*, April 1970, p. 5, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 18-19; Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, pp. 202-203. Garst's article was written when WSP was one year old and originally appeared in the 1 November 1962 issue of *Fellowship* magazine.

²⁶ Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, p. 204. Although WSP prided itself on its 'un-organisational' structure and did not entail formal membership, this chapter at times refers to it as an 'organisation' and to participants as 'members,' partially for ease, and partially to reflect the fact that most women did consider themselves to be part of a cohesive movement.

²⁷ Garst, 'Women: Middle-Class Masses,' p. 6.

²⁸ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. x; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, p. 47.

²⁹ For more on these internal debates during WSP's early years, see Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, Chapters 1 and 2.

in her 1998 autobiography. She went on to note: ‘We were solid where it counted – against the nuclear arms race, and increasingly against the horror of the war in Vietnam.’³⁰

During the early 1960s, as WSP was formulating its innovative political style and campaigning for a nuclear test ban treaty, Vietnam was not a country that many Americans knew very much about. Most accounts tend to portray the mass anti-Vietnam War movement as emerging in 1965, with ‘teach-ins’ spreading across America’s university campuses and the first national demonstration against the war in Washington taking place in April, organised by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).³¹ It is significant, therefore, that the issue of Vietnam first came up during WSP’s second annual conference in Urbana, Illinois in June 1963. Although many WSPers initially knew little about the U.S. role in Vietnam, after much discussion, it was resolved that WSP would work to ‘alert the public to the dangers and horrors of the war in Vietnam and to the specific ways in which human morality is being violated by U.S. attacks on civilian population – women and children.’³² Thus, WSP became one of the earliest peace groups to take action on this issue.

In the years that followed, WSP conducted an intense and wide-ranging campaign against the war in Vietnam – lobbying, marching and rallying; initiating lawsuits and consumer boycotts; sending delegations to meet with women in Vietnam; counselling young men against the draft; and aiding and abetting draft resisters.³³ This activism brought WSPers into contact with younger New Left activists and they often worked in coalition with other peace groups. Yet, WSP also staged countless independent actions – and members continued to inject a distinctive maternalist style into all their efforts. Importantly, most WSP women came to their opposition to the war as another critique of U.S. Cold War militarism, and they initially tended to view the conflict simply as mistaken foreign policy.³⁴ When it took part in WILPF’s Vietnam Lobby Day on 7 April 1964, instructions distributed by WSP cautioned women not to ‘attribute bad motives to the government,’ and stressed that the purpose of the lobby was ‘to urge humane, feasible and honorable alternatives to continuing the war and to

³⁰ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, pp. x, 9.

³¹ Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, p. 5, 12-18; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, p. 63.

³² Quoted in Barbara Bick, ‘Women and the Vietnam War,’ *Memo*, April 1970, p. 9, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 129.

³³ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 129-130; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, p. 1.

³⁴ Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, p. 62.

promise our support for such an alternative.³⁵ Over the course of the decade, however, many WSPers came to view the war as symptomatic of a fundamentally flawed political system that perpetuated repression abroad, and racism and poverty at home.³⁶ Indeed, by 1970, WSP had resolved to dig in and work for ‘radical change – in our country, our Congress, our institutions, and our thinking.’³⁷

III

As they campaigned against the war in Vietnam, WSP consistently appealed to the public as ‘ordinary’ housewives and mothers. In public statements, interviews with the press and publications, activists claimed to be motivated by concern for their children, and a sense of responsibility as mothers. In a statement published in the newsletter of New York WSP in October 1965, a group of women from Great Neck, Long Island who identified themselves as ‘mothers of draft-age sons’ declared: ‘although we are aware of our sons’ obligation to serve in the armed forces for the defense of our country, we are also aware of our obligation as mothers, to strive for peace and life, rather than war and death.’ The Long Island women urged other mothers to join them in demanding negotiations in Vietnam, arguing that: ‘This is the only way to help our sons and all mankind.’³⁸ Yet, as this statement indicates, the women of WSP understood motherhood, not as a private or individual responsibility, but as encompassing a broader public role.³⁹ As well as fear for their own children, they expressed concern for children the world over and for the preservation of life in general. This was encapsulated in WSP’s oft-used slogan: ‘Not My Son, Not Your Son, Not Their Sons.’⁴⁰

Importantly, the women of WSP had been socialised at a time when Cold War political culture and family ideologies were intricately linked, with motherhood widely viewed as the foundation of a civil society and even a bulwark against communism.

³⁵ Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, ‘Vietnam Lobby Day – April 7th, 1964,’ in Donna Allen Papers, 1960-1987, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 8, Folder 12 (hereafter cited as Donna Allen Papers).

³⁶ Thus, WSPers increasingly aligned themselves with the ‘radical’ faction of the anti-war movements. For more on ‘liberal’ and ‘radical’ critiques of the war, see Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, p. 128.

³⁷ Amy Swerdlow, ‘We’re Not Blowing Our Horn...Just Sounding The Alarm!’ *Memo*, April 1970, p. 2, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

³⁸ ‘Mothers of Draft-Age Sons,’ *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), October 1965, p. 2, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 6.

³⁹ James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 132.

⁴⁰ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 130.

During the 1950s, a host of government officials and social commentators had told women that they could best serve their country by maintaining traditional gender roles and raising good American citizens.⁴¹ However, as they campaigned against nuclear testing and later against the war in Vietnam, WSPers often turned this ideology back on the government. They contrasted their assigned responsibilities as nurturers with the state's apparent disregard for life in Vietnam, and they accused those in power of undermining their important work as mothers.⁴² In an open letter to President Johnson in 1967, WSP lamented: 'We women gave you our sons, lovingly raised to live, to learn and to create a better world... you use them to kill and you returned 12,269 caskets and 74,818 casualties to heartbroken mothers.'⁴³

Nevertheless, although many WSPers would later denounce both the war and America's domestic problems as symptomatic of a deeply flawed system, they were initially careful to couch their protests in the language of patriotism – or what I term 'patriotic maternalism.'⁴⁴ As one Los Angeles WSPer explained in 1967: 'We feel we're the patriotic ones. We're the ones who love our country, not the ones who want war.'⁴⁵ Indeed, WSPers often contended that it was they, not the government, who had America's national interests at heart. Emphasising their responsibility to raise good American citizens, activists argued that it was their a patriotic duty to speak out against those forces that endangered their children. As historian James Farrell observed, WSP 'made it clear that the state's authority was contingent on its ability to serve human needs.'⁴⁶ In a Voter's Peace Pledge circulated in 1966, WSP declared:

We want our sons to build cities in America, not to bomb and burn villages in Vietnam. We want our sons studying and working to build a better world through peaceful, non-military means. AND WE WANT OUR LEADERS TO FIND A WAY TO LET THEM DO SO.⁴⁷

⁴¹ For more on how Cold War political culture shaped 1950s domestic ideologies, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Elaine Tyler May, 'Cold War – Warm Hearth: Politics and the Family in Postwar America,' in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. by Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 153-181; Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescriptions for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Farrell, p. 131.

⁴² Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 3; Farrell, p. 131.

⁴³ Women Strike for Peace, 'An Open Letter To President Johnson,' *New York Times*, 17 September 1967, p. 112

⁴⁴ For more on the use of patriotic protest within the broader anti-war movement, and how this changed over the course of the 1960s, see Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), Chapter 1.

⁴⁵ Mrs. Ptashne, quoted in Burt Prelutsky, 'Women Strike for Peace,' *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1967, p. L8.

⁴⁶ Farrell, p. 131.

⁴⁷ 'This Mother's Day,' *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), April 1966, p. 1, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23.

Meanwhile, the women of Berkeley-Oakland WFP relied upon a strikingly maternal analogy to defend against the accusation that peace workers were ‘anti-American.’ Writing in their October 1965 newsletter, they argued that ‘the wise and loving parent does not ignore obnoxious or aggressive behavior on the part of his child.’ They reasoned that to do so would be to do that child a disservice, explaining: ‘If a mother, through laziness or blindness, allows her child to persist in anti-social behavior, it is likely he will grow up to be a lonesome and unhappy adult.’ Equally, ‘the citizen who truly loves his country, when he is confronted with the evidence that his government is pursuing an aggressive and paranoid foreign policy, will not be put off from protesting by laziness or fear that his actions will be construed as anti-American.’ The East Bay women maintained that protesting America’s military aggression ‘no more implies hatred of one’s country than the restraining of a child means hatred of the child.’⁴⁸ Thus, WSP used an ideology of patriotic motherhood to facilitate a radical critique of the government’s foreign policy in Vietnam; they portrayed anti-war activism as their patriotic duty as good citizens and loving mothers.

WSP highlighted a number of ways that the war in Vietnam threatened innocent and vulnerable lives that they, as mothers, were charged to protect. First and foremost, the women of WSP expressed fear for the lives of their own draft-age sons, and outrage at the suffering of Vietnamese children. As WSP’s 1966 Voter’s Peace Pledge explained: ‘We don’t want our sons to die for a corrupt Saigon regime whose own people do not support it... We do not want our sons to kill women and children whose only crime is to live in a country ripped by civil war.’⁴⁹ Indeed, during the mid-1960s, most WSPers focused on the human costs of the escalating conflict, condemning the ‘endless sacrifice of human lives,’ both American and Vietnamese.⁵⁰ However, some WSP chapters took their critique of America’s military involvement in Vietnam further by exposing the domestic effects of the war and their impact on children’s well-being. For example, early in 1967 Detroit WFP expressed concern about the relationship between ‘the violent foreign policy we as a nation have committed ourselves to’ and ‘the violence that has become rooted in our society,’ manifesting itself in the steadily increasing crime rate in the Detroit area and ‘the continued violence and injustice perpetuated against the Negro.’ In particular, Detroit women decried the damaging

⁴⁸ ‘A Little Essay on Love and Patriotism,’ *Berkeley-Oakland Women for Peace Newsletter*, October 1965, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

⁴⁹ ‘This Mother’s Day.’

⁵⁰ Wilson, ‘Statement to President Johnson.’

impact this ‘violent culture’ had on the lives of young people.⁵¹ Furthermore, members of WSP increasingly sought to highlight the economic effects of the war, arguing that military spending diverted funds away from domestic programmes that were vital to the lives of poor children in America. A Mother’s Day plea published in WSP’s national newsletter *Memo* in 1965 began with the usual condemnation of the loss of life in Vietnam, declaring: ‘We grieve for the Vietnamese and Americans whose lives are destroyed in pursuing a military solution.’ But it also lamented: ‘We grieve for the deprived children here who could anticipate a fair future through the president’s poverty and education programs, which will be the first thing to be cut back by more military solutions.’⁵² Concerns about the domestic costs of war, particularly questions of racial and economic justice, would become much more pronounced within WSP’s rhetoric in the years to come. Thus, by highlighting the ways that the war harmed young people at home and abroad, WSPers sought to demonstrate that children were their primary concern. Their 1965 Mother’s Day appeal concluded: ‘We plead for children everywhere who are never considered in waging a military solution. For that is what our work is all about: to save the children.’⁵³

Significantly, as several recent historians have noted, WSP’s emphasis on motherhood stemmed, at least in part, from strategic considerations. Heretofore, the dominant interpretation of WSP has derived from the work of Amy Swerdlow, a former WSPer who did much pioneering work to historicise the group. Swerdlow contended that most of the women who joined WSP were devoted to full-time motherhood and domestic duties. Drawing on the work of Elaine Tyler May, Swerdlow argued that WSPers had willingly sacrificed careers and personal projects because, influenced by 1950s domestic ideologies, they viewed motherhood as a vocation in itself, and an important and fulfilling one at that.⁵⁴ Thus, WSP’s maternal rhetoric has often been viewed as reflecting the motivations of its members, who were overwhelmingly housewives and mothers. However, more recent scholarship has shown that WSP’s use of motherhood was more complex. Indeed, historians of the 1950s have recently begun

⁵¹ Olga Penn, Chairman of Detroit Women for Peace, ‘Dear Friend’ letter, 17 January 1967, in Social Action Vertical File, circa 1960-1980, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 17 (hereafter cited as Social Action File); ‘Conference on Violence In Our Society,’ *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, January 1967, p. 1, in Social Action File, Box 17; ‘We’ve Done It Again,’ *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, April 1967, p. 1, in Social Action File, Box 17.

⁵² ‘For Mother’s Day... We’d Rather Have Been Given Peace!’ *Memo*, 15 May 1965, p. 5, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

⁵³ ‘For Mother’s Day... We’d Rather Have Been Given Peace!’

⁵⁴ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 3, 40; Amy Swerdlow, ‘Ladies’ Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC,’ *Feminist Studies*, 8, no. 2 (1982), 493-520 (pp. 514-515); May, *Homeward Bound*; May, ‘Cold War – Warm Hearth,’ pp. 167-168.

to challenge the myth of the quiescent suburban housewife – contending that this popular image obscures the complexity of women’s roles and activities during the postwar period.⁵⁵ Susan Lynn, for example, contested the notion that the domestic ideal was ubiquitous within American society, noting that many liberal commentators during this era urged women to combine domestic duties with paid work, community and political activities, or both. Examining women’s progressive social activism during the 1950s, Lynn suggested that a significant minority of middle-class women chose this ‘alternative path to fulfilment.’⁵⁶ Building on this revisionist scholarship, recent work on WSP by historians such as Schneidhorst and Estepa has shown that a significant number of those who joined the movement were employed outside the home and that many were civic-minded women with a history of activism. Thus, these scholars contended that motherhood was not necessarily the primary motivation for WSPers, and that the decision to foreground activists’ maternal and domestic identities was often a tactical one.⁵⁷

Of course, disentangling activists’ motivations from their rhetoric is inherently problematic and always somewhat speculative. Some women in WSP may have been genuinely motivated by grave fear for their sons and a belief that mothers held certain gender-specific responsibilities. Others may have couched their arguments in the language of motherhood in order to legitimise their controversial positions, drum up support for their cause, or ward off counterattacks. It may also have been the case that women’s sincere concern for the welfare of the world’s children dovetailed with their belief in the power of maternal rhetoric to influence and effect change. What is clear, however, is that many WSPers were convinced of the political potency of motherhood and resolved to use it to good effect. As Estepa noted: ‘From the first, WSP was sensitive to the importance of creating, projecting, and maintaining a sympathetic public image.’⁵⁸ Writing in 1970, New York WSPer Jeanne Webber admitted that:

WSP has an image – sometimes, in the cartoons, not so favorable. We vigorously deny that we’re all busty, grim, and wear hats, as the caricatures have it. But it is a tribute to WSP that an image exists, even if unflattering. It’s

⁵⁵ See for instance Susan Lynn, ‘Gender and Post World War II Progressive Politics: A Bridge to Social Activism in the 1960s U.S.A.,’ *Gender & History*, 4, no. 2 (1992), 215-239; Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women’s Organisations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ Lynn, p. 215.

⁵⁷ Schneidhorst, “‘Little Old Ladies,’” pp. 376, 378; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, pp. 7, 16; Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 88; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, pp. 14-17.

⁵⁸ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 87.

an indication that the women's peace movement has become a familiar part of the U.S. scene.

She maintained that: 'Into the making of the WSP image have gone hundreds of ingenious ideas and hundreds of hours of hard work. But there was no deliberate design.'⁵⁹ However, Webber perhaps sold the organisation short here, as WSP's respectable, middle-class, maternal image was in fact carefully crafted. Indeed, the minutes of an annual retreat of Washington WSPers, reprinted in *Memo* in October 1968, demonstrate that activists discussed and evaluated their tactics at length. During this meeting, one woman argued that 'people are readier to listen to us than any other group of people now protesting in the country because we remind them of those closest to them – their mothers, their wives, their sweethearts.' She maintained that: 'We have to use what we really are – our middle-class, fairly well-educated, thinking, perceptive, sensitive women.'⁶⁰ As well as drawing upon maternal language, WSP activists also sought to cultivate an image of traditional motherhood through their conventional dress and behaviour.⁶¹ Notwithstanding Webber's gripe at the matronly caricatures of WSP, activists clearly took pride in their respectable image. A *Memo* report on WSP's role in the 27 November 1965 March on Washington celebrated the 'full and sympathetic' newspaper coverage the event received, noting that the press were 'puzzled at the "well-dressed", "middle-aged", and "peaceful" appearance of the demonstration.'⁶²

WSP's respectable motherly image was not only designed to capture media attention and win public sympathy, it was also crafted to appeal to the nominal 'ordinary American woman' who activists sought to attract. Indeed, by fostering a collective identity as women and mothers, WSP hoped to recruit new members and attract broad popular support for their cause. As Taylor recalled:

We hoped that our conventional attire would allow women, seeing us on television and reading about us in the news, to identify with us, despite the fact we were engaged in actions that might seem a tad unorthodox. We hoped they would understand that most of us were mothers who were struggling to find some way to keep our sons and their sons from being enmeshed in a brutal war in a place we had no business being, a place not many people could point to on a map.⁶³

⁵⁹ Jeanne Webber, 'You've Come A Long Way!', *Memo*, April 1970, p. 13, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

⁶⁰ Barbara, quoted in 'Think Peace,' *Memo*, October 1968, p. 9, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 1.

⁶¹ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 73.

⁶² 'March on Washington,' *Memo*, 30 November 1965, p. 4, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 9.

⁶³ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. 34.

Furthermore, WSP often celebrated the power of motherhood to disarm resistance to women's actions from police and other officials.⁶⁴ Following one demonstration in 1968, New York WSP's *Peaceletter* reported that leader Irma Zigas was allowed to borrow the police bull-horn because the policeman in charge recalled: 'I remember you... you're the respectable one.'⁶⁵ Thus, while many activists may well have been motivated by genuine maternal concerns, there is little doubt that WSP also employed motherhood tactically to gain legitimacy for their cause, recruit members and deflect reprisals.⁶⁶ Even Swerdlow conceded that, when stressing their maternal outrage at the threat the Vietnam War posed to children, activists were not just expressing their own personal fears, they were trying to speak to the American people in a language they believed would be understood and accepted. Recalling her own motivations, Swerdlow explained that she emphasised her maternal interests, rather than her radical politics, 'because I believed that my genuine motherly concerns would be received and understood by non-political women, the media and public officials.'⁶⁷

IV

By invoking their identities as mothers to claim a special role in resisting the war in Vietnam, WSP echoed the maternal rhetoric of countless women's peace movements through the ages. However, unlike older groups such as WILPF, WSP expanded the boundaries of maternalist peace politics beyond lobbying and petitioning. Although they did not jettison more traditional forms of maternal protest such as letter-writing campaigns, educational initiatives and consumer boycotts, the women of WSP also sought to dramatise their maternal concerns in a host of new and creative ways. Drawing upon direct action tactics popularised by young civil rights and anti-war activists during the 1960s, they organised mass marches, rallies and peace vigils. Furthermore, as the decade progressed and America's bloody venture in Vietnam dragged on, WSP became increasingly militant and confrontational in their methods, engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience and embracing street theatre. But, rather than simply adopting the rallying cries of younger New Left activists, WSPers maintained

⁶⁴ Schneidhorst, "Little Old Ladies," p. 380.

⁶⁵ 'It Pays To Be 'Respectable,' *W.S.P. New York Newsletter*, June 1968, p. 2, in Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection.

⁶⁶ Schneidhorst, "Little Old Ladies," p. 386.

⁶⁷ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 235-236.

their own distinctive style, heavily infusing their direct actions with maternal rhetoric and symbolism.

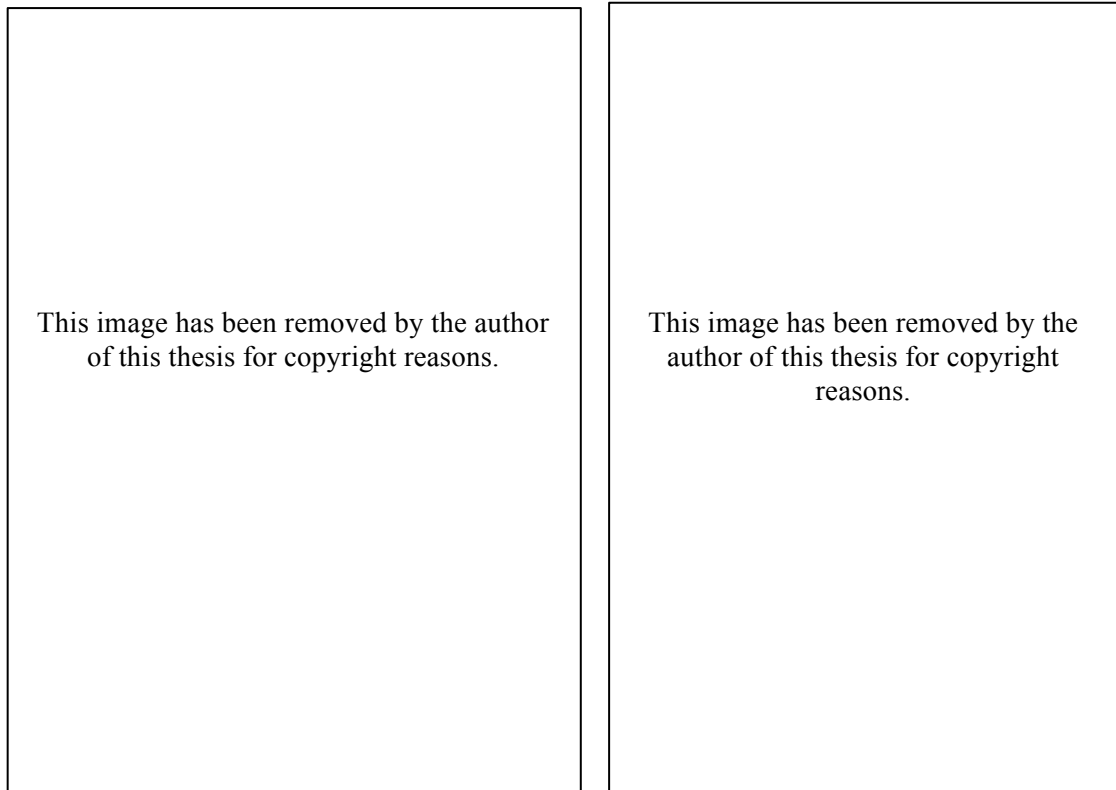


Figure 1: Front covers of *The Washington WSPer*, January 1966 and *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, August-September 1972.⁶⁸

From the onset, WSPers made extensive use of maternal imagery to emphasise their status as mothers and concern for their children. Indeed, WSP literature and publications were regularly adorned with images of mothers, children and babies, as well as flowers, doves and other universal symbols of peace. Many of these pictures were hand-drawn and designed to appear amateurish, in order to bolster the group's folksy maternal image. As well as gracing the pages of WSP's national *Memo*, this imagery abounded in the local newsletters produced by various WSP chapters. For example, Chicago WFP's newsletter adopted a mother and child graphic as its masthead; the *Washington WSPer* was headed by an image of a young girl clutching a daisy; and, from the early 1970s onwards, New York WSP's *Peaceletter* featured a silhouette of a child reaching out to grasp a dove (see Figure 1).⁶⁹ These local news bulletins varied greatly, in terms of both content and presentational style; and it is

⁶⁸ Left to right: *The Washington WSPer*, January 1966, p. 1, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 4; *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, August-September 1972, p. 1, in Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection.

⁶⁹ Schneidhorst, "Little Old Ladies," p. 378; *The Washington WSPer*, March 1974 and June 1974, in Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection; *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, May 1970-, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23 (continued in *Herstory 1 - Update*, Reel 17).

notable that Southern California WSP's newsletter *La Wisp* chose as its masthead, not a child motif, but a simple stencil of women marching in a line with placards.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, variations on these maternal images appeared in the pages of the vast majority of WSP publications. Furthermore, similar imagery was used to decorate the placards, signs and banners activists carried at demonstrations.

WSP also sought to use photographs of children to shape public opinion. During their earlier anti-nuclear campaigns, it had been common for protesters to carry large paper flowers with pictures of their own children in the centre.⁷¹ However, at the height of the Vietnam War, WSPers more often displayed graphic photographs of dead or injured Vietnamese children, clearly aimed at the conscience of Americans. As historian Richard L. Hughes observed, anti-war activists during this period increasingly recognised the power of photographs to move audiences and shape public perceptions of the war.⁷² While disarmament had been abstract, images of the war in Southeast Asia were everywhere, and WSPers hoped to use shocking photographs of maimed children to demonstrate the human cost of war.⁷³ In particular, they sought to highlight the gruesome effects of chemical weapons like napalm on Vietnamese children and other civilians. WSP leaflets included images of napalm's young civilian victims, along with accusatory phrases such as 'Would YOU Burn Children With Napalm?' and 'How Can You Be Silent?'⁷⁴ Furthermore, WSPers regularly displayed large, graphic photographs during marches and rallies. Of course, the women of WSP were not the only ones to be shocked by the war's civilian casualties, many of them children. Over the course of 1966, growing concern about the effects of napalm within the larger anti-war movement led to a national campaign against its use, with many activists relying on images to educate the public about the 'immoral' nature of the conflict.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, WSP was

⁷⁰ *La Wisp*, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23 (continued in *Herstory 1 - Update*, Reel 17).

⁷¹ Dorothy Bernstein and Harriet Shapiro, 'Report: The Hague Conference,' in WSP Records, Box 3, Folder 5; 'Mother's Lobby,' *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, June 1963, p. 1, in *Radicalism and Reactionary Politics in America, Series 1: The American Radicalism Collection* (Woodbridge, C.T.: Primary Source Microfilm, 2004), Reel 16 (hereafter cited as *American Radicalism Collection*).

⁷² In particular, Nick Ut's 1972 Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of nine-year-old Kim Phuc, naked and severely burned by napalm, came to symbolise the cost of war in Vietnam. See Richard L. Hughes, 'Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,' *The Historian*, 68, no. 3 (2006), 541-558 (pp. 551-553).

⁷³ Hughes, 'Burning Birth Certificates,' p. 551.

⁷⁴ Women Strike for Peace, 'Would YOU Burn Children With Napalm?' leaflet, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 8; Women Strike for Peace, 'How Can You Be Silent?' leaflet, in Donna Allen Papers, Box 4, Folder 4.

⁷⁵ Martin Luther King, for example, claimed that seeing graphic pictures of napalmed Vietnamese children in *Ramparts* magazine helped prompt him to speak out against the war in April 1967. See Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, pp. 22-24. For more on the growth of a national campaign against napalm, see H. Bruce Franklin, 'Burning Illusions: The Napalm Campaign,' in *Against the*

consistently at the forefront of this campaign – publicising the devastating effects of napalm, particularly on children, and helping to coordinate a nationwide consumer boycott of Dow Chemical Company, the foremost producer of napalm.⁷⁶

As well as taking part in large coalition-sponsored demonstrations against the war, WSP staged many independent actions. Reflecting activists' belief in women's special role in the peace movement and their desire to foster opposition to the Vietnam War among other women, these were usually designed as exclusively women's events, and often as 'mothers' protests.' Indeed, since its founding, WSP regularly had organised mothers' marches in Washington, picketing the White House and lobbying congressional offices on Capitol Hill to press for nuclear disarmament and, later, for an end to the war in Vietnam. These protests were generally crafted to present an image of ordinary, respectable American mothers – appealing to the nation's leaders on behalf of their children – and they were invariably steeped in maternal rhetoric and symbolism. For example, on 9 February 1966, when around 1,500 women gathered in the capital to demand a cease-fire in Vietnam, they carried black balloons and wore cardboard doves pinned to their coats and hats. 'They were members of Women Strike for Peace,' reported the *New York Times*, 'Few beatnik types were visible among them. For the most part they appeared to be moderately well-to-do young and middle-aged housewives, predominantly white... The picketing... was peaceful and uneventful.'⁷⁷ Similarly, the previous December, one hundred WSPers marched to the White House to deliver 75,000 Christmas cards to President Johnson, signed by women from across the United States. The delegation was made up of mothers of draft-age sons, or sons serving in the Vietnam War, and included at least one woman whose son had been killed in Vietnam. One by one, the women deposited plastic bags filled with cards, all bearing the message: 'Mr. President, For the sake of our sons, For the sake of all children, Give us Peace in Vietnam this Christmas.' The solemn procession was led by a woman carrying a Christmas tree, decorated with more peace cards, which she pushed along in a baby's stroller.⁷⁸ Thus, these actions in the capital showcase the creative, often

Vietnam War: Writings by Activists, ed. by Mary Susannah Robbins (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999), pp. 62-75.

⁷⁶ WSP played a leading role in educating the public about napalm after two members traveled to Hanoi in spring 1965, where they met with Vietnamese women and learnt first hand about the horrors of this new weapon. For more on the Hanoi trip and WSP's involvement in the anti-napalm campaign, see Bick, 'Women and the Vietnam War'; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, pp. 192-196; 223-225.

⁷⁷ '1,500 Women Peace Marchers Picket and Lobby in the Capital,' *New York Times*, 10 February 1966, p. 8.

⁷⁸ 'Mothers Deliver Christmas Peace Plea Cards to White House,' *New York Times*, 16 December 1965, p. 3; 'Peace Plea,' *Memo*, December 1965, p. 4, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 19; *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, December 1965, p. 2, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 16.

theatrical, ways that WSP employed maternal rhetoric and imagery during their direct actions; but similar tactics were replicated in countless smaller WSP demonstrations at the local level.

In particular, WSP regularly used Mother's Day as an opportunity to appeal to the public on the basis of motherhood. Mother's Day has long affected a political tone. In fact, some of the first attempts to establish a Mother's Day in the United States came from women's peace groups. In 1872, New York peace activist Julia Ward Howe called upon women 'to awake to the knowledge of the sacred right vested in them as mothers to protect the human life,' and sought to instigate a Mother's Day festival 'devoted to the advocacy of Peace Doctrines.'⁷⁹ However, these early observances did not succeed beyond the local level, and Mother's Day as we know it was not established until 1908. Created as a day to honour mothers, it was initially promoted by the Protestant Church as a way to affirm a particular vision of Christian motherhood, whose popularity seemed to be waning with the growth of the women's suffrage movement and the unsettling social changes brought about by urbanisation and immigration. The church used Mother's Day to glorify a female role centred on domesticity and self-sacrifice, and to criticise women's demands for public power. Furthermore, the custom really caught on during the First World War, when it was used by the military to praise mothers for their willing sacrifice of sons to the war effort. By establishing Mother's Day as a permanent national custom, these wartime observances also helped to secularise the holiday and, in the decades that followed, it became increasingly commercialised.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, for as long as it has existed, women have reinterpreted Mother's Day on their own terms, and the holiday has been politicised in the service of a diverse range of causes.

WSP never failed to rise to this occasion. During its early years, WSP often used Mother's Day to campaign for nuclear disarmament. On 7 May 1963, 'Two thousand women waving paper sunflowers' gathered on Capitol Hill for WSP's Mothers' Lobby for a Test Ban Treaty. Seeking out their senators and representatives, women demanded

⁷⁹ It seems some in WSP were aware of these historic links. In a note in WSP's *National Information Memo* (an early version of *Memo*) in April 1963, a WSPer from Cambridge, Massachusetts included this quote by Julia Ward Howe, along with the line: 'How can we use this?' Julia Ward Howe, quoted in Elizabeth Boardman, 'Mother's Day,' *National Information Memo*, 19 April 1963, p. 2, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 2.

⁸⁰ The idea for the holiday originated with Anna Jarvis, a Philadelphia woman who sought to commemorate her own mother's death by creating an annual day to honour mothers; but it was the Sunday school movement and the Protestant Church that provided the institutional backing necessary for Mother's Day to develop into a national custom. See Kathleen W. Jones, 'Mother's Day: The Creation, Promotion and Meaning of a New Holiday in the Progressive Era,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 22, no. 2 (1980), 175-196.

a ‘Mother’s Day gift – the precious gift of life, health, and security for our children.’⁸¹ Similarly, during their campaign against the war in Vietnam, WSP frequently published Mother’s Day appeals with slogans such as ‘For Mother’s Day... We’d Rather Have Been Given Peace!’⁸² In the run up to Mother’s Day 1966, WSP placed adverts in newspapers and periodicals around the country stating: ‘This Mother’s Day, keep your candy, keep your flowers. Help bring our sons and husbands home.’ This Mother’s Day appeal was part of a nationwide drive to demonstrate opposition to the war ahead of the midterm elections and it called upon people to sign a Voter’s Peace Pledge, ‘As your gift to American mothers, Vietnamese mothers, and mothers the world over.’⁸³ Meanwhile, WSPers organised countless Mother’s Day actions at the local level. Indeed, it is striking that, even as the conflict in Southeast Asia wore on and WSPers became increasingly militant in their tactics, they continued to observe the second Sunday in May with more traditional, sedate forms of maternal protest – most commonly, by deluging elected officials in Washington with Mother’s Day letters and cards.

Finally, a central tenet of these women’s maternalism was their use of their own children to remind the public of the movement’s primary concern. From the onset, children – particularly young toddlers and babies in strollers – were a common sight at WSP protests. Indeed, some of WSP’s earliest literature, detailing the November 1961 strike, encouraged women: ‘Bring your children! It’s their lives we’re striking for.’⁸⁴ This advice was regularly repeated in flyers advertising WSP’s anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, and it seems many WSPers took these instructions to heart. For example, during the 1967 Spring Mobilization in San Francisco, many protesters were seen ‘leading small children by the hand or pushing youngsters in strollers.’⁸⁵ San Francisco WFP played a key role in organising the ‘women’s section’ of this march, which placed a strong emphasis on children’s involvement. In the run up to the event, WFP organised a Children’s Art Party to design posters for women and children to carry during the parade, and they appealed for children’s poetry, artwork, songs, and

⁸¹ Marjorie Hunter, ‘Women Besiege Capitol, Demanding a Test Ban,’ *New York Times*, 8 May 1963, p. 17; Dagmar Wilson, ‘Statement by Women Strike for Peace on the Occasion of the Mothers’ Lobby for a Test Ban,’ 7 May 1963, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 3.

⁸² ‘For Mother’s Day... We’d Rather Have Been Given Peace!’ *Memo*, 15 May 1965, p. 5, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

⁸³ ‘This Mother’s Day,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1966, p. C21. Also see copies of this ad reprinted in *Memo*, April 1966, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9; and *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), April 1966, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

⁸⁴ ‘Dear Friends,’ 9 October 1961.

⁸⁵ Daryl E. Lembke, ‘40,000 Parade in San Francisco for Viet Peace,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 16 April 1967, p. C401.

stories to display at a children's peace art exhibit on the day. It was hoped that the presence of large numbers of children, carrying their own drawings and slogans, would 'make a powerful impact on the public' and highlight the women's section's theme of 'peace for all children.'⁸⁶ However, while the women's section of the San Francisco Spring Mobilisation was planned to be something of a colourful gala, WSPers also brought their children along to more volatile, confrontational demonstrations. Indeed, young children were often present during WSP's anti-draft activities, which ranged from draft counselling and supporting draft resisters, to staging vigils at the homes of draft board members and chaining themselves to the gates of induction centres.⁸⁷ Encapsulating WSP's strategic use of children, the cover of the May 1967 edition of *Memo* showed a young boy at an anti-draft demonstration, with a large hand-lettered sign attached to his pushchair reading: 'Hell No! I Won't Go' (see Figure 2).

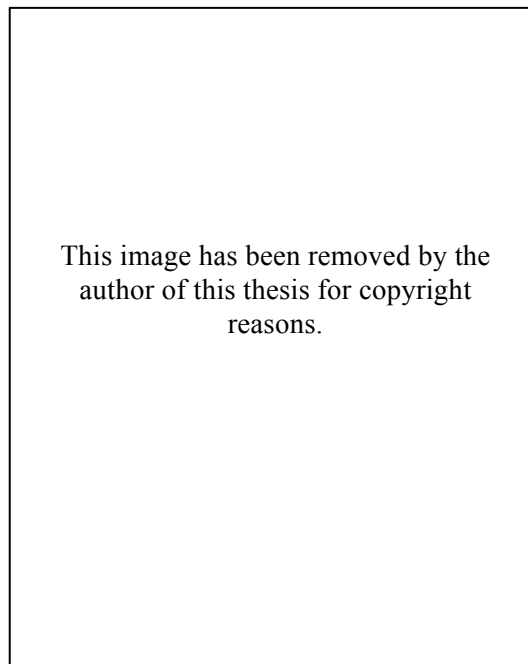


Figure 2: Front cover of *Memo*, May 1967.⁸⁸

Thus, it seems that WSP's use of children was, in part, tactically motivated; it stemmed from activists' belief in the power of children to capture the public's attention and state the case for peace simply and emotively. This can also be seen in numerous proposals for action submitted by WSPers over the years. For example, in a letter to

⁸⁶ San Francisco Women for Peace, 'Wed. April 5, 8 P.M. General Meeting,' pp. 1-2, in Social Action File, Box 42.

⁸⁷ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 130; 'Anti-Draft Actions Increasing,' *Memo*, May 1967, pp. 4-7, 10, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; Homer Bigart, '9 in Chains Stage Draft Protest,' *New York Times*, 3 July 1968, p. 37.

⁸⁸ *Memo*, May 1967, p. 1, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

WSP's *National Information Memo* (an early version of *Memo*) in 1962, Vermont WSPer Virginia Naeve proposed a mass demonstration in Washington, featuring children of all ages holding balloons declaring: 'I WANT TO LIVE.' Naeve acknowledged that the presence of large numbers of children 'would create a lot of problems,' but she emphasised that: 'Children are one thing that do get through.'⁸⁹ However, women's willingness to bring youngsters to demonstrations also stemmed from a conviction that their activism was in their children's best interests. As Naeve explained: 'They are entitled to join with us. Two of my children (6 and 7 years old) walked by their own consent 5 miles on a peace march. Children are our prime concern, so let us work together to all continue to LIVE.'⁹⁰ Furthermore, it is likely that many WSPers were influenced by children's involvement in the civil rights movement. Coretta Scott King, a prominent civil rights leader and a long-time supporter of WSP, was a keen advocate of the view that children had a role to play in the campaign for racial justice. Speaking at a WSP luncheon in 1965, King praised the participation of young people in the civil rights struggle, contending that: 'Being a part of the fight makes them much better citizens. They're helping to earn their rights.'⁹¹ Similarly, WSPers argued that political activism had positive benefits for children. In San Francisco, a committee dedicated to collecting children's peace poems and drawings asserted that: 'Children can help to make peace. They are effective because they say simply and directly what the wisest men say more elaborately. It is good for them to be active for peace, to do something about the wars that worry them.'⁹² Indeed, these women's willingness to bring their children to demonstrations stemmed not only from the belief that children were politically effective, but also from a conviction that protest benefited their children, by teaching them the merits of responsible citizenship, as well as by safeguarding their future.

On the whole then, the women of WSP were happy to bring their children along to demonstrations and viewed their presence as a strategic advantage. However, many WSPers also found that their responsibilities as mothers limited their activism, and resulted in numerous practical difficulties and personal tensions. During the 1960s, before a proliferation of women's liberation groups challenged traditional gender

⁸⁹ Virginia Naeve, 'Re: Mass Action,' *National Information Memo*, 16 October 1962, p. 3, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 2.

⁹⁰ Naeve, 'Re: Mass Action.'

⁹¹ Coretta Scot King, quoted in 'Mrs. King Asks Women to Help in Rights Fight,' *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1965, p. A.

⁹² Helen Rand Miller, 'Children's Peace Messages: A Crusade by Women for Peace,' *Memo*, March 1968, p. 10, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

assumptions, it was still widely accepted that men and women had separate roles, and that women were responsible for the domestic realm. Thus, women's activism had to coexist with their expected gender roles in the home.⁹³ This was a challenge for many WSPers – some more than others. In a discussion paper circulated in 1963, Washington WSPers explained that their location in the capital was 'not an unmixed blessing' due to the added responsibilities they assumed for dealing with government agencies and disseminating information around the country. Calling for more clerical help to meet these demands, the Washington women stressed that they had readily suspended home responsibilities to volunteer at WSP's *de facto* 'national office,' 'but even so – kids get mumps, cars break down, husbands have to be fed.'⁹⁴ This problem was not limited to the capital, however. An article on WSP's L.A. headquarters, published in the *Los Angeles Times* in June 1967, reported that volunteers typically spent one or two days a week working at the office, noting: 'Any more that that and the Peace Mothers run the risk of war in their own homes.'⁹⁵ Thus, it seems that for a number of women, domestic responsibilities curtailed political involvement.

For many others, however, the contest between familial roles and anti-war activism was a battle in which the cause of peace triumphed. Indeed, activism took some WSPers all over the country, not to mention overseas to embattled Vietnam, and it was not always practical to bring children along.⁹⁶ Furthermore, as women put in long hours organising, and at times risked arrest and imprisonment, the movement frequently caused them to neglect children, husbands and domestic duties. This was certainly true for WSP's founder. In an interview with the *Washington Post* in 1966, Wilson described the impact WSP had had upon her once tranquil family life. 'We used to have a very smoothly running household,' she recalled, 'It was informal but well organized. It was very relaxed. Now it's hit or miss all the time. Our standard of living has gone down.' Thus, like many WSPers, Wilson faced the dilemma of being active on behalf of their children, while finding activism increasingly took her away from the home. She explained that, in order to overcome these difficulties, the family had begun to divide the housework more evenly; her daughters helped out with cleaning and laundry, and her husband had 'reluctantly' learned to cook.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, activists across the country

⁹³ Schneidhorst, "Little Old Ladies," p. 385.

⁹⁴ 'Policy Paper # 3: For Thought and Discussion,' 15 January 1963, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 6.

⁹⁵ Prelutsky, 'Women Strike for Peace.'

⁹⁶ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Dagmar Wilson, quoted in Richard Dudman, 'Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace,' *Washington Post*, 3 April 1966, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 11.

sought a range of solutions to reconcile the potential tensions inherent in combining motherhood and activism.

On a practical level, WSP instigated a variety of measures to help women alleviate the strains of taking care of a family while maintaining an active public role. As well as bringing children along to protests, activists organised communal childcare facilities during meetings and demonstrations. Like Wilson, they also called upon husbands to shoulder more of the domestic responsibilities and to assist with their protests. An advert for the initial 1961 strike ended: ‘Say, Fellows! Where’s that Men’s Auxiliary you keep muttering about? We sure would like a barbecue at the end of The Day!’⁹⁸ And when WSP sent a delegation to the Geneva Disarmament Conference in April 1962, it was reported that ‘husbands were left with instructions on the care and feeding of children and themselves.’⁹⁹ Meanwhile, ‘men’s auxiliaries’ received periodic thanks in WSP’s newsletters for anything from contributing to the movement financially, to sending flowers to show their support, to hosting dinners to honour their wives.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, many WSPers were aided by the fact that their husbands and male friends shared their commitments and were supportive of their activism. In her autobiography, Taylor described her late husband, Bill, as her ‘greatest supporter’ and ‘peace partner.’¹⁰¹ Of course, not all women in WSP found their spouses to be quite so supportive. The husband of one of the women who coordinated the Geneva trip told the press: ‘We ate food sent from the drug store most of the time... Our little boy kept asking “When is peace over?”’ Another member of the Geneva delegation confessed that her husband had been more supportive of peace before she got into the movement.¹⁰² Indeed, as Schneidhorst has noted, even men in the peace movement, who sought to challenge existing political and economic assumptions, could be remarkably mainstream in their gender assumptions.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, activists relied upon maternal ideologies to ease the more philosophical tensions they faced. Indeed, they defended their absence from home with the same maternal rationale they had used for bringing children to demonstrations – that activism was ultimately in their children’s best interests. In late 1962, when the House

⁹⁸ ‘Dear Friends,’ 9 October 1961.’

⁹⁹ Jeanne Molli, ‘Women’s Peace Group Uses Feminine Tactics,’ *New York Times*, 19 April 1962, p. 26.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance ‘Message from Dagmar Wilson, Washington WISP,’ *Women’s Peace Movement Bulletin*, 19 May 1962, p. 2, in *Miscellaneous Serial Pamphlets* (Microfilm. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2010), Reel 12; ‘WSP Conference Notes,’ *Memo*, November-December 1966, p. 3, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 1; ‘The Men’s Auxiliary,’ *Women’s Peace Movement Bulletin*, 20 February 1963, p. 3, in *Miscellaneous Serial Pamphlets*, Reel 12.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. xvii.

¹⁰² Molli, ‘Women’s Peace Group Uses Feminine Tactics.’

¹⁰³ Schneidhorst, “‘Little Old Ladies,’” p. 385.

Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) subpoenaed fourteen members of WSP to investigate the supposed communist infiltration of the American peace movement, Carol Urner was among hundreds of WSPers who volunteered to testify in support of the organisation. She admitted that her resolve not to divulge the names of others in the movement could lead to her imprisonment and that ‘no mother can accept lightly even the remote possibility of separation from the family that needs her.’ ‘But mankind needs us, too,’ she declared, explaining that ‘it is our basic love and responsibility to our own families, and to the family of mankind, that has brought us where we are.’¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Swerdlow recalled that she justified leaving her children for ‘movement jet-setting’ with the conviction ‘that WSPers had to leave the home to save it.’¹⁰⁵ Thus, by arguing that their maternal duties extended beyond the home, activists portrayed time spent away from their own children as rooted in a broader concern for all children and the future of the planet.

However, aware of the cultural prescriptions against gender deviance, WSPers were often keen to stress that they had not forsaken their domestic identities altogether.¹⁰⁶ Ahead of WSP’s November 1961 strike, Wilson told the press: ‘We are not striking against our husbands, we are doing this as much for them as for ourselves. It is my guess that we will make the soup they will ladle out to the children Wednesday.’¹⁰⁷ Indeed, although WSP’s founder would later talk frankly with reporters about the chaotic impact her political activism had upon her family life, most women in the movement downplayed any conflict between domesticity and political activism, claiming to be able to balance the two. In the preface to a cookbook released by Los Angeles WSP in 1965, one woman described being heckled at a recent peace march by an elderly man who shouted: ‘Your place is in the home!’ The Los Angeles WSPer agreed: ‘My place is in the home... but it’s on the peaceline, too.’ She went on to reassure readers:

we women of WSP have walked thousand of miles, written planeloads of letters to our President, our congressmen and the heads of states... At the same time, we’ve made hundreds of thousands of beds, changed a million diapers and cooked two million meals, not to mention the mountains of dishes we’ve washed. As a matter of fact, we never ever left home!¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Carol Urner, quoted in Women Strike for Peace, ‘For Immediate Release,’ 12 December 1962, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 3.

¹⁰⁵ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ Heather McDonald, ‘Women’s Strike For Peace – A Man’s Idea,’ *Baltimore Sun*, 29 October 1961, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 15.

¹⁰⁸ Harriet Van Horne, ‘Pots And Peace,’ *New York World Telegram*, 3 March 1966, reprinted in *Memo*, March 1966, p. 14, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

Thus, many WSPers stressed their ability to work for peace without relinquishing their domestic duties or sacrificing their femininity.

V

When the women of WSP are mentioned at all in the historiography on the anti-Vietnam War movement, they tend to be reduced to the moderate, middle-class, maternalist image they presented. WSPers are portrayed as suspended in time, in their hats and white gloves, picketing the White House on behalf of the world's children. The complex ways that women understood and used motherhood as a tactic are generally overlooked; as are the struggles they engaged in to balance their political activities with their expected gender roles. Furthermore, assuming WSP's maternalist politics to be static, scholars frequently fail to recognise the dramatic transformations that occurred in the organisation's goals and tactics, in response to the changing political landscape of the late 1960s and internal developments in the organisation. Indeed, by the late sixties, members of WSP had broadened their agenda to include issues of racial and economic justice; started to build coalitions with activists from different racial, class and generational backgrounds; become much more militant and confrontational in their tactics; and begun to advocate radical social change. Importantly, however, WSPers continued to bring their maternal identities to bear on their activism (although they were notably less concerned with the idea of respectability). But, in the radically altered political context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, WSP's relationship with the authorities also changed and women found maternalism to be increasingly less effective at offering protection.¹⁰⁹

Of course, the evolution of WSP cannot be divorced from a broader process of radicalisation that took place within an array of progressive social movements during the latter half of the 1960s. Estepa, one of the few scholars to explore the transformation of WSP in any depth, observed that since the group's founding in 1961, 'the United States had, in many ways, become a different country.' Indeed, the years immediately following WSP's first strike had seen a significant growth in civil rights activity; the escalation of the Vietnam War and the development of widespread opposition to it; and

¹⁰⁹ My arguments regarding WSP's transformation build upon the work of Andrea Estepa. See Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 86; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*.

the birth of the New Left and its vibrant counterculture.¹¹⁰ Yet as the decade wore on, activists confronted a situation in which *de facto* forms of racial oppression persisted, in spite of new civil rights legislation, and the war in Southeast Asia only increased in brutality, despite mounting opposition to it. The late 1960s also witnessed the proliferation of more militant, self-consciously black nationalist organisations; the development of mass anti-poverty campaigns; a succession of riots in America's cities; the assassination of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy; and the increasingly overt suppression of revolutionary and nationalist movements, at home and abroad, by the U.S. government. In this context, many in the anti-war movement became disillusioned with the prospects of ending the war in Vietnam without a fundamental restructuring of American society. During WSP's earlier anti-nuclear campaign, its organisers had asserted that most women in its ranks were not 'extremists of any sort, but solidly in the midstream of American life.'¹¹¹ Similarly, when they turned their attention to the war in Vietnam during the early to mid-1960s, the organisation initially echoed those in the 'liberal' camp of the anti-war movement, who argued that military intervention was a misguided policy on behalf of a well-intentioned government.¹¹² However, the events of the tumultuous 1960s had a profound impact on the group's political outlook. This is apparent in a commemorative edition of *Memo*, published in April 1970, which marked 'the end of a decade of hard work for peace – and the beginning of a decade of struggle.' In the forward to this special issue, Swerdlow described the sixties as an 'age of innocence' for WSP, and explained:

We have learned through bitter experience in the past few years that it will take much more than hard work and long peace marches to get rid of the Pentagon and provide for the people. It will take change – radical change – in our country, our Congress, our institutions, and our thinking.¹¹³

However, while Estepa explained the evolution of WSP largely in terms of these external developments, the organisation was also affected by significant changes from within during this period. Particularly important was an increase in younger members joining the group. Indeed, many WSPers saw the growth of the student left and the feminist movement as a vital recruitment opportunity and, from the late 1960s onwards, they began to make a concerted effort to attract younger women into the organisation. In May 1970, as part of its efforts to 'reach out to new and younger women,' WSP

¹¹⁰ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 85.

¹¹¹ Garst, 'Women: Middle-Class Masses,' p. 6.

¹¹² Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, p. 14.

¹¹³ Swerdlow, 'We're Not Blowing Our Horn...Just Sounding The Alarm!' pp. 1-2.

appointed twenty-seven-year-old Trudi Young as its first full-time, paid national coordinator.¹¹⁴ New York *Peaceletter* declared: ‘We welcome her ability, her experience and her youth.’¹¹⁵ These recruitment efforts were not without their success. During the late sixties, WSP’s newsletters regularly reported that the group was ‘involving younger women’ and ‘inspiring new WSPers.’¹¹⁶ Furthermore, these new members undoubtedly influenced the course WSP took during the second half of the decade. In summer 1970, *Memo* published an article entitled, ‘Can Radical Young Women Work in WSP?’, in which they interviewed several young women active in the Washington chapter. These activists argued that, in order to make the group more meaningful to women like themselves:

WSP shouldn’t be afraid to have a collective discussion of what our analyses are of the American system as we establish an overall direction. We need to answer the question of whether peace is possible under our present system, and if not, what we are going to do about it?¹¹⁷

It was clear that, for a number of its younger members, WSP was not responding fast enough to the urgency of the times. They accused WSP of having developed an ingrown and entrenched leadership structure; of elitism; and of avoiding tough ideological discussions and thus lacking a sophisticated political analysis of the causes of the war.¹¹⁸ According to Young, these frustrations meant that WSP was losing many of the ‘new’ women it recruited; indeed, it led to her own resignation as national coordinator in May 1971, just one year after taking up the position.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite the persistence of generational conflicts, the involvement of younger women during the late 1960s and early 1970s undoubtedly contributed to WSP’s radicalisation. By introducing different perspectives and sparking new conversations, these young recruits encouraged veteran WSPers to begin to re-evaluate their relationship to ‘the establishment.’¹²⁰

WSPers’ changing views on the American system were also tied to their growing concern over the country’s economic and racial problems. During its early

¹¹⁴ ‘WSP National Office Moves to New York, Trudi Young Named First National Organizer,’ *Memo*, Summer 1970, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9; Trudi Young, ‘Dear Sisters,’ 1 May 1971, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

¹¹⁵ ‘New National Organizer,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, June 1970, p. 5, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

¹¹⁶ ‘Mothers’ Lobby: Prelude to Political Action,’ *Memo*, February 1966, p. 6, in WSP Records, Box 1, Folder 19; ‘Conf. Inspires New WSPer,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, November 1971, p. 2, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 99.

¹¹⁷ ‘Can Radical Young Women Work in WSP?’ *Memo*, Summer 1970, pp. 12-14, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

¹¹⁸ Young, ‘Dear Sisters’; ‘Can Radical Young Women Work in WSP?’

¹¹⁹ Young, ‘Dear Sisters.’

¹²⁰ Swerdlow, ‘We’re Not Blowing Our Horn...Just Sounding The Alarm!’ p. 1.

years, although there was much debate over the subject, WSP never took an official stand in support of the civil rights movement. Activists tended to argue that WSP's strength was its single-issue focus and ability to appeal to the 'ordinary' American housewife with a simple feminine message. While most WSPers claimed to support civil rights in principle, many were concerned about distracting from their anti-nuclear message and alienating potential support.¹²¹ Following a heated debate over the issue at WSP's second national conference in 1963, Taylor argued that: 'We will be helping no cause if we dilute our participation in work for peace in order to work for freedom.'¹²² New York WSPer Lyla Hoffman was also wary about taking stands 'on any and every injustice and trouble spot plaguing our world today,' and stressed the need to maintain 'policies which exclude no one of good will, policies which exclude no one of limited desires or understanding from working for peace.'¹²³ At the conference, it was agreed that WSP would not as an organisation support civil rights, but that activists would be free to work on these issues individually or in their local groups.¹²⁴ During the early 1960s, a number WSPers did participate in civil rights activities at the local level. Nevertheless, at times activists' reservations about focusing on civil rights undoubtedly came across as lack of concern, or even hostility, towards black women and their issues. In March 1962, for example, a group of black women from Detroit called the Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb sought inclusion in WSP's delegation at the Geneva Disarmament Conference. The black women saw the struggles for disarmament and civil rights as inseparable, and they felt that the delegation should include someone who could speak for the unity of these two movements. However, the Detroit group was told by WSP organisers in New York that there were already six black women in the delegation of fifty, including Coretta Scott King, and that they 'didn't want to "overbalance" the group with Negroes,' not wishing to appear as a hostile group or bring up issues that would reflect badly on their country.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Lyla Hoffman, 'A Personal Reaction to Reports on the Urbana Conference' and Ethel Taylor, 'A Personal Reaction to the Urbana Conference,' in *National Information Clearing House Issues for Discussion # 1*, 8 July 1963, pp. 1-3, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 6; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, p. 54; Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' pp. 90-91.

¹²² Taylor, 'A Personal Reaction to the Urbana Conference,' pp. 2-3.

¹²³ Hoffman, 'A Personal Reaction to Reports on the Urbana Conference,' pp. 1-2.

¹²⁴ Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, p. 54.

¹²⁵ Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb, Letter to Dagmar Wilson, 24 March 1962, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 7. This was not the first or the last time that Detroit's Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb was snubbed by members of WSP. Later that year, at WSP's first national conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan in June, the Negro Committee had to fight to be seated after another group claimed to be the official Detroit affiliate. In fact, the Negro Committee had formed after Detroit WSP had objected to them carrying placards at WSP actions bearing the slogan,

Significantly, early discussions among WSPers about the relationship between the nuclear disarmament campaign and the civil rights movement foreshadowed a larger debate over ‘multi-issuism’ that would vex the peace community throughout the Vietnam era. As Simon Hall has observed, the question of whether to concentrate solely on ending the conflict in Southeast Asia, or focus on domestic concerns as well, divided anti-war activists from the start. On the one hand, some participants in the movement believed that incorporating additional issues, such as civil rights, would weaken the anti-war struggle and alienate potential middle-class support. On the other hand, a number of activists argued that the war was fundamentally linked to important social, economic and political issues, and should be viewed within a broad framework.¹²⁶ Equally, from the onset, some members of WSP maintained that the campaign for peace and the movement for black equality were indivisible. As the Detroit Negro Committee showed, the few black women in the organisation tended to view the causes as linked, contending that, without racial justice, peace would be meaningless.¹²⁷ Most prominent among these was Coretta Scott King, who consistently argued that: ‘Peace among nations and peace in Birmingham, Alabama, cannot be separated.’¹²⁸ Significantly, proponents of a multi-issue perspective within WSP often couched their argument in the language of motherhood, emphasising women’s responsibilities as mothers and their concern for children both at home and abroad. At a demonstration at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to mark WSP’s second anniversary on 1 November 1963, King delivered a speech in which she argued that ‘there will be no peace outside our nation until there is peace within.’ Calling upon women to rally around these two interrelated struggles, she asserted that: ‘God has chosen woman to be his co-worker in the protection of the human species.’¹²⁹ During the early 1960s, a number of WSPers came to share King’s view, asserting that the goals of the peace and civil rights movements were the same: ‘a world where every child may live and grow in peace and

‘Desegregation Not Disintegration.’ The white Detroiters felt that combining the two issues might confuse or alienate potential supporters, and they had thus refused to allow the black women to join their delegation at the national conference. See Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 90-91; Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 90.

¹²⁶ Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 141-142.

¹²⁷ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ pp. 91-92; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 90-92.

¹²⁸ Dorothy Bernstein, ‘Report – May 7 et seq: Test Bann Lobby,’ in Donna Allen Papers, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹²⁹ ‘Progress Hailed by Peace Women: March to the United Nations Marks Crusade’s 2nd Year,’ *New York Times*, 2 November 1963, p. 10; Coretta Scott King, ‘Peace and Racial Justice – Two Moral Issues of Our Day,’ reprinted in *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), December 1963, p. 3, in Peace Collection, 1825-1984, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Box 6, Folder 3 (hereafter cited as Peace Collection).

dignity.’¹³⁰ But, on the whole, the organisation did not make civil rights a priority during its early years.

However, in the altered political context of the late 1960s, many more WSPers came to recognise ‘the interrelationship between the fight for peace and the fight for freedom.’¹³¹ They increasingly made connections between militarism overseas, and violence and racism in the nation’s cities, and they began to view escalating military spending as linked to social deprivation.¹³² Furthermore, as activists came to recognise that ‘peace is not an isolated issue,’ they argued that: ‘WSP cannot stand alone in the fight.’¹³³ Around this time, Anci Koppel of Seattle Women Act for Peace (SWAP) circulated a memo calling for WSPers to ‘break out of our essentially middle-class isolation and our one-issue orientation.’ Contending that ‘only through drastic socio-economic changes will we achieve the goals we have projected,’ Koppel argued that WSPers needed work with ‘the rank and file in their unions, the black people, the welfare people.’¹³⁴ Indeed, as they developed a growing commitment to racial and economic issues during the late 1960s, members of WSP began to address the fact that they were primarily a white, middle-class group. While they had previously concentrated on recruiting white, middle-class women like themselves, WSPers increasingly sought to develop alliances with poor and minority activists in civil rights, Black Power and anti-poverty organisations.¹³⁵ However, activists continued to focus on mobilising women, who they saw as united by universal maternal concerns that transcended race and class.

Although it has gone almost unnoticed within the scholarship on both movements, WSP made a particular effort to build coalitions with the low-income, predominantly black women in the burgeoning welfare rights movement.¹³⁶ As Chapter

¹³⁰ See for instance, Alice Hamburg, et al., ‘Proposal for a Women for Peace Delegation to the State of Mississippi,’ *National Information Clearing House Issues for Discussion # 1*, 8 July 1963, p. 2, in WSP Records, Box 2, Folder 6.

¹³¹ ‘WSP Statement on Crisis in American Cities,’ *Memo*, 12 February 1968, pp. 14-15, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

¹³² Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ pp. 85-86, 93-94.

¹³³ Swerdlow, ‘We’re Not Blowing Our Horn...Just Sounding The Alarm!’ p. 2.

¹³⁴ Anci Koppel, ‘Memorandum, Re: A New Approach to Changing Priorities,’ in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

¹³⁵ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ pp. 86, 93.

¹³⁶ The alliance between WSP and NWRO during the late 1960s has been largely overlooked within recent scholarship on both movements, receiving at best a passing mention. An important exception to this is Estepa’s study of the evolution of WSP during the late sixties, which explored how WSPers built coalitions with welfare rights activists. Estepa argued that it was their identities as mothers that defined WSP’s relationship with their coalition partners. This study builds on Estepa’s article, which primarily looked at the coalition from WSP’s perspective, by also examining the alliance – and ideas about motherhood more generally – within welfare rights movement (see Chapter 2). Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ pp. 86, 93-95; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, pp. 257-260.

2 demonstrates, during the late 1960s, women on welfare had to grapple with inadequate monthly payments, an increasing emphasis on work requirements for mothers on welfare, and a host of regulations that encroached on their privacy and restricted their sexual freedom – not to mention an escalating war in Southeast Asia that many saw as undermining social welfare programmes and killing their sons in disproportionate numbers. As a result, welfare recipients across the country increasingly organised to demand economic resources and more control over their lives.¹³⁷ Importantly, it was their identities as mothers that enabled these two very different groups of women to establish a cooperative, albeit tentative, alliance during this period. Indeed, members of WSP related to the women in the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) as mothers trying to make the world a better place for their children, and they sought to join forces with them to lobby for anti-poverty and child welfare legislation, while also hoping to win welfare recipient's active support for the anti-war effort.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, welfare rights activists also viewed motherhood as a basis for unity. In a statement published in *Memo* in 1970, NWRO leader Beulah Sanders maintained that: 'Women Strike for Peace and Welfare mothers have much in common. We are all working to save the children.' Sanders argued that: 'All mothers, black and white, poor and middle class, must get together to wage a stronger fight against the government to change our priorities from death and destruction to human needs.'¹³⁹

Cooperation between these two movements took a variety of different forms. From the late sixties onwards, WSP's local and national newsletters regularly printed articles that educated their middle-class members about welfare and encouraged them to donate money or attend demonstrations in support of welfare rights.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, WSP's leaders frequently endorsed or participated in the welfare rights movement's various campaigns. For instance, WSP supported NWRO's crusade to defeat Nixon's

¹³⁷ For a more detailed account of the emergence of the welfare rights movement, see Chapter 2.

¹³⁸ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' pp. 86, 94.

¹³⁹ Beulah Sanders, in *Memo*, April 1970, p. 20, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

¹⁴⁰ See for instance 'San Francisco, Calif.: A WFP-Welfare Rights Committee,' *Memo*, September 1968, p.4, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; 'Every 3 Seconds,' *La Wisp*, August 1970, p. 3, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; 'Warfare Versus Welfare,' *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, February 1971, p. 3, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; 'WFP Join Welfare Mothers in Sacramento,' *San Francisco Women For Peace Newsletter*, March 1971, p. 4, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; 'Nixon's Family Assistance Plan,' *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, June 1971, p. 4, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; 'Welfare Rights Conference,' *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, October 1971, p. 2, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; 'Whose Welfare?', *East Bay Women for Peace Newsletter*, October 1971, p. 2, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 3; "'Children's Survival March' Planned,' *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, February 1972, p. 4, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; 'Children's March for Survival,' *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, March 1972, p. 1, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 14.

proposed Family Assistance Plan (FAP), which welfare rights activists argued provided inadequate monthly payments and contained punitive work requirements without the guarantee of adequate childcare. During the early 1970s, WSPers joined welfare recipients in Washington for demonstrations against the FAP, using slogans such as ‘WSP asks why: \$5500 every 3 seconds for war and only \$1600 a year for a family?’¹⁴¹ WSPers and welfare rights activists also came together at the local level for a number of actions highlighting the links between war expenditure and domestic poverty. On 8 March 1971, International Women’s Day, representatives from the San Francisco WFP joined a delegation of around fifty welfare rights activists in Sacramento to protest Governor Ronald Reagan’s proposed welfare cuts. The WFP women argued that the real cause of California’s financial crisis was not welfare but military spending, and they accused Reagan of using welfare recipients ‘as scapegoats of a sick, militarist society.’¹⁴² Two days earlier WSPers and welfare recipients in Philadelphia organised a ‘women’s coalition conference’ to explore how they could work together to end poverty, war and repression.¹⁴³

However, while a common identity as mothers helped bring WSP and NWRO together in the early seventies, the divides of race and class ultimately hindered the development of a more sustained alliance. Indeed, despite assertions of a universal maternal perspective, WSP women and welfare rights activists both ‘operated from a worldview constructed out of their daily lives.’¹⁴⁴ For the white middle-class women of WSP, concerned with protecting America’s sons and safeguarding all the world’s children, putting an end to the war and the draft was always the top priority. In contrast, welfare recipients often faced more immediate threats to their children’s well-being, such as the daily perils of poverty and racism.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, it is important to note that not all welfare rights activists opposed the war – some saw the military as an opportunity for their sons to escape unemployment, demoralisation and drugs.¹⁴⁶ And even among those who objected to the costs of war, peace tended to be a peripheral concern. These differences did not always go unacknowledged. A report on the Philadelphia conference noted that ‘suburban women whose sons go to college learned firsthand about the lives

¹⁴¹ ‘e/NWRO,’ in ‘Expanded National Consultative Council Minutes,’ Milwaukee, 15 November 1970, p. 5, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; ‘Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan.’

¹⁴² ‘Warfare Versus Welfare’; ‘WFP Join Welfare Mothers in Sacramento.’

¹⁴³ ‘The Philadelphia Story: New Women’s Coalition to Fight Poverty – War – and Repression,’ *Memo*, Spring 1971, p. 31, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

¹⁴⁴ Stephanie Gilmore, ‘Thinking About Feminist Coalitions,’ *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 1-18 (p. 2).

¹⁴⁵ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 94.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Philadelphia Story’; Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ pp. 92, 94.

of poor and black women whose sons are underfed and undereducated until they reach 18, when the military is eager to grab them.’¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, at the suggestion of welfare rights activists, several WSP chapters encouraged their members to live on a welfare budget for a week to deepen their understanding of what these issues meant in terms of real hunger.¹⁴⁸ As well as these symbolic actions, some WSP chapters sought to offer more tangible support by encouraging members to donate money to ‘help more welfare mothers exercise their political rights.’¹⁴⁹ Thus, for many WSPers, their involvement in the welfare rights movement led to a new recognition of the way in which women’s experiences were differentiated by race and class. But, as Estepa noted, not all WSPers were radicalised to the same degree and, although the organisation’s leaders increasingly focused on organising across race and class divisions, this did not always resonate with the rank-and-file. In particular, local context seems to have been important in determining WSPers’ priorities. As Estepa observed, support for issues such as welfare rights was strongest in large urban areas – such as Philadelphia or San Francisco – where women were more likely to be exposed to the effects of poverty, and where the welfare rights movement itself was better established. Meanwhile, other local chapters continued to be wary of straying too far from their primary task of stopping U.S. militarism or alienating white, middle-class support, and tended to focus on more traditional campaigns.¹⁵⁰ As a result, WSP’s rhetorical commitments were not always backed up with grassroots support or sustained action.¹⁵¹

As they began to see militarism, racism and poverty as products of the ‘American system,’ WSPers also became increasingly willing to work with other radicals within the anti-war movement. By 1967, the larger peace movement had come to be dominated by those who sought not just to protest the war, but to actively resist it.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Philadelphia Story.’

¹⁴⁸ ‘Philadelphia Story’; ‘Seattle Women Join Welfare Mothers,’ *Memo*, Spring 1970, p. 27, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Warfare Versus Welfare’; ‘A Call To All Women.’

¹⁵⁰ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ pp. 97, 100-101.

¹⁵¹ WSP’s attempts to work with Vietnamese women similarly demonstrate both the possibilities and the limits of using maternalism to organise women across racial, class or national boundaries. As Jessica M. Frazier has demonstrated, in a series of meetings during the late 1960s, members of WSP emphasised the common bonds of motherhood to forge alliances with representatives from North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam. However, transnational collaboration was often undermined by differing understandings of motherhood. In particular, while WSPers tended to portray mothers as inherently nonviolent, several of the Vietnamese women they worked with had participated in the national liberation struggle and most saw fighting to defend their homeland as central to their maternal role. ‘Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam: The Interactions of Women Strike for Peace, the Vietnamese Women’s Union, and the Women’s Union of Liberation, 1965-1968,’ *Peace & Change*, 37, no 3. (2012), 339-365. As we will see from Chapter 2, welfare rights activists also differed from WSPers in their views on nonviolence, and their version of maternalism did not preclude the use of violence or the threat of violence if deemed necessary.

Indeed, as the conflict in Vietnam intensified despite widespread opposition to it, many anti-war activists became radicalised and militant new groups emerged, leading to a growing focus on tactics designed to resist the draft and disrupt the government's ability to wage war.¹⁵² However, historians have tended to portray the women of WSP as 'moderates' and as oppositional to the growing militancy of younger New Left activists, when in fact WSP was heavily involved in the radical wing of the peace movement throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁵³ Again, it was women's identities as mothers that shaped their relationship with younger anti-war activists. As Estepa argued: 'WSPers served as mothers of the Movement – supporting and attempting to protect, but also scolding and criticizing their political children.'¹⁵⁴ For example, WSP often played a supportive, maternal role in the draft resistance movement. In 1968, a group of WSPers in Philadelphia launched a campaign that encouraged women to 'adopt' young anti-draft workers, 'providing funds for housing, food and office expenses; criticizing, encouraging and listening; raising money for court costs and fines.'¹⁵⁵ As this statement suggests, WSPers did not shy from critiquing the behaviour of the young New Left activists they worked with. In particular, they were often critical of the militant style and tactics of young radicals, arguing that this deterred more moderate women from participating in demonstrations and damaged the movement's public image.¹⁵⁶ But 'instead of disassociating themselves from hippies and yippies,' they resolved to work with them, hoping to provide a link between the militants and the wider community, and to ensure that the movement continued to appeal to non-radicals.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, WSPers believed that their very presence within the radical anti-war cohort would help refute the 'notion that all dissenters are hippies.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, p. 29; Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, pp. 121, 158.

¹⁵³ See for instance, Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, p. 30; Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, p. 158.

¹⁵⁴ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 86.

¹⁵⁵ 'Mothers Against the Draft; Or How to Stop the War and be a Good Jewish Mother,' *Memo*, 12 February 1968, p. 7, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9. For more on the draft resistance movement, see Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For more on women's involvement, gender roles and sexism within this movement, see Amy Swerdlow, "'Not My Son, Not Your Son, Not Their Sons': Mothers Against the Vietnam Draft,' in *Give peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement: Essays From the Charles DeBenedetti Memorial Conference*, ed. by Melvin Small and William D. Hoover (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1992), pp. 159-170; Michael S. Foley, 'The "Point of Ultimate Indignity" or a "Beloved Community"? The Draft Resistance Movement and Gender Dynamics,' in *The New Left Revisited*, ed. by John McMillian and Paul Buhle, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), pp. 178-198; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁶ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 96; Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 96.

¹⁵⁸ 'Say Their "Peace"' *Chicago Tribune*, 25 September 1968, p. 16.

However, while WSP initially sought to temper the militancy of young leftists, many women were influenced by their involvement with radical anti-war groups and, with the war continuing to escalate, they became increasingly confrontational themselves. As Taylor explained:

As more and more Americans died, as the bombing became more brutal, and as more so-called leaders promised an end to war and didn't produce, we became more militant. We supported draft resisters, we met with the women of Vietnam as friends, not enemies, and some of us went to jail for our beliefs.¹⁵⁹

WSP's growing militancy, its increased association with radicals, and some members' willingness to risk arrest was apparent in the group's participation in the March on the Pentagon on 21 October 1967. Organised by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (the Mobe), this action involved more than 100,000 protesters and led to hundreds of arrests. Although the day began with a more traditional rally at the Lincoln Memorial, this was soon overshadowed by mass civil disobedience at the Pentagon which went on late into the night, and the demonstration was heavily influenced by those activists who advocated tactics of disruption and espoused a countercultural style (it featured an attempt to levitate the Pentagon and a number of activists tried to storm the building).¹⁶⁰ As part of the loose coalition planning the event, WSPers were not without their reservations about these confrontational tactics, but they nevertheless urged members to participate in the protest, at which Wilson was a featured speaker, in order to 'show the government and the world that the movement against this war will not be stopped!'¹⁶¹ On the day itself, Wilson was among the long list of those arrested at the Pentagon; she was apprehended by two military policemen for sitting in an off-limits area at the building and, according to *La Wisp*, 'was bruised being dragged to the paddy wagon.'¹⁶²

WSP's independent mothers' actions also grew more radical during the late 1960s. 1967 – a high tide of anti-war activity with the Spring Mobilization in New York and San Francisco, Vietnam Summer, and the infamous March on the Pentagon in October – was bookended by two particularly dramatic mothers' demonstrations.

¹⁵⁹ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. xiii.

¹⁶⁰ Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, pp. 28-34.

¹⁶¹ 'October 21 Demonstration,' *Memo*, October 1967, p. 13, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; 'Confront the Warmakers,' *Detroit Women for Peace Newsletter*, October 1967, pp. 1-2, in Social Action File, Box 17; New York Women Strike for Peace, 'Urgent Memo to WSP'ers and their Families!' leaflet, 1967, in Peace Collection, Box 6, Folder 2.

¹⁶² Joseph A. Loftus, 'Guards Repulse War Protesters at the Pentagon,' *New York Times*, 22 October 1967, p. 1; 'Confrontation at the Pentagon,' *La Wisp*, November 1967, p. 2, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23.

Indeed, eight months before the Mobe ‘confronted the warmakers’ at the Pentagon, WSP staged their own high profile demonstration there. On 15 February 1967, with the bombing of North Vietnam intensifying, some 2,500 women took part in WSP’s Women of Conscience Confront the Pentagon and Congress demonstration. Advertisements for the event called upon ‘women of conscience’ to come to Washington and register a strong protest against the daily atrocities committed against ‘innocent civilians and children’ by U.S. troops.¹⁶³ The assembled crowd – the biggest protest at the Pentagon to date – carried placards such as ‘Don’t Draft Our Sons to Burn and Destroy’ and shopping bags emblazoned ‘Mothers Say Stop the War in Vietnam.’ They also displayed enlarged black and white photos of napalmed Vietnamese children and chanted ‘Shame, Shame!’ at military officers. Having tried for weeks in advance to secure an audience with Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, the women were frustrated and angry when officials ordered the building locked against them. With shouts of ‘McNamara Come Out!’ and ‘Where’s Mac The Knife,’ many protesters surged past the guards at the main entrance to hammer on the locked doors of the Pentagon. A number of women even removed their shoes and banged them on the doors. The next day, the *Washington Post* ran a front-page photograph of the demonstration, along with the headline ‘2500 Women Storm Pentagon Over War,’ and newspapers around the country reported that the Pentagon had been ‘besieged’ by the ‘shopping-bag brigade.’¹⁶⁴

Later that year, WSPers again made headlines in Washington. On 20 September 1967, over 500 members of WSP rallied outside the White House, before marching to the Selective Service Headquarters carrying a black coffin draped with a banner that read ‘Not My Son, Not Your Son, Not Their Sons.’ The protest was designed to demonstrate women’s support for ‘those brave young men whose conscience has led them to resist the draft,’ and event literature promised that ‘a mother in defense of her

¹⁶³ ‘Call for Women to CONFRONT Pentigon & Congress FEB. 8,’ *Memo*, January 1967, p. 2 [sic], in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9; ‘Women of Conscience Confront the Pentagon and Congress,’ *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), February 1967, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; ‘Women of Conscience Confront the Pentagon and Congress,’ *The Washington WSPer*, February 1967, p. 1, in Donna Allen Papers, Box 4, Folder 4; Women Strike for Peace, ‘Women of Conscience Confront the Pentagon and Congress: A Nationwide Call to Save the Children’ leaflet, in Peace Collection, Box 6, Folder 2; ‘Sorry About That. What Did We Bomb Today In Vietnam?’ *New York Times*, 27 January 1967, p. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Jean M. White, ‘2500 Women Storm Pentagon Over War,’ *Washington Post*, 16 February 1967, pp. A1, A11; ‘Pentagon Is Stormed by 2,500 Women,’ *New York Times*, 16 February 1967, p. 4; Jean M. White, ‘2,500 Women Protest Viet War at Pentagon,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1967, p. 19. Also see newspaper clippings and report in *Memo*, February 1967, pp. 1-6, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9. For accounts that describe women banging their shoes on the Pentagon doors, see Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. xvii; Irma Zigas, ‘KPFK Commentary,’ May 1969, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

family is not easily turned aside.’¹⁶⁵ This proved to be a fair warning. When the assembled crowd refused to abide by a recent edict limiting the number of people who could picket outside the White House to one hundred (they saw this as an arbitrary restriction of their right to dissent), many women came head to head with helmeted police officers with billy clubs. Newspaper reports described the resulting clash variously as a ‘noisy fracas,’ a ‘wild melee’ and a ‘bloody brawl,’ during which several women were knocked to the ground.¹⁶⁶ To protest their treatment by the police, the women staged an impromptu sit-in in the middle of the street, shouting ‘Hell, no! We won’t go!’ and ‘We shall not be moved!’ Two members of WSP were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.¹⁶⁷

As these dramatic mothers’ protests show, WSPers continued to rely heavily upon maternal rhetoric and imagery in their direct actions. However, they also demonstrate that WSP had begun to adopt a much more aggressive and confrontational activist style by 1967. A far cry from the ‘peaceful and uneventful’ mothers’ pickets of just a few years earlier, both these actions involved loud chants, civil disobedience and clashes, sometimes violent, with the authorities. Following the September demonstration, WSP released a statement condemning the restrictions placed upon them and defending their own conduct; they declared that the women who broke through police lines had been ‘strengthened by their conviction that they were fighting for the love of their sons, the survival of the people of Vietnam, and the right to petition the President.’¹⁶⁸ But despite attempts to justify their militancy with a maternal rationale, the demonstration clearly marked a shift in tactics for an organisation that had previously eschewed civil disobedience for fear of alienating the ‘average American woman.’ WSP’s statement warned: ‘Neither billy clubs nor bruises will deter us. We will not be stopped.’¹⁶⁹ Similarly, in a statement earlier that year, Los Angeles WSPer Mary Clarke declared: ‘Women Strike for Peace does not disavow civil disobedience... We are descendants of the Suffragettes.’ Yet despite their increased involvement in civil disobedience, WSPers remained committed to the principles of nonviolence. Indeed,

¹⁶⁵ Women Strike for Peace, ‘An Open Letter To President Johnson,’ *New York Times*, 17 September 1967, p. 112; Women Strike for Peace, ‘Give a Day – Come to Wash. D.C. Wed. Sept. 20, Challenge the Draft Calls! Support the Boys Who Wont Go!’ leaflet, in Peace Collection, Box 6, Folder 2.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Women for Peace in Battle at White House,’ *Washington Post*, 21 September 1967, p. E1; ‘Women’s March Erupts Into Washington Melee: Police Arrest 4 as Peace Demonstrators Challenge Regulations on Picket Numbers,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 21 September 1967, p. 26; James Yuenger, ‘Cops, ‘Peace’ Women in Bloody Melee,’ *Chicago Tribune*, 21 September 1967, p. B6.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Women for Peace in Battle at White House’; Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 84.

¹⁶⁸ Women Strike for Peace, ‘For Immediate Release,’ 22 September 1967, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; ‘Women for Peace in Battle at White House.’

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

when reprinting Clarke's statement, the editors of *La Wisp* were careful to define civil disobedience as 'a non-violent act of conscience and courage directed against unjust laws and evils of government.'¹⁷⁰

At the same time, WSP's public protests also became increasingly theatrical. This was apparent in spring 1971, when *Memo* published an article describing new 'instant guerrilla demonstrations' that had recently been pioneered by a number of WSP chapters. It included colourful suggestions for actions, such as using portable tiger cages to protest the South Vietnamese government's treatment of prisoners of war (POWs); setting up displays of Styrofoam tombstones listing the number of Americans killed in Vietnam each year since the conflict began; and staging die-ins in which activists laid down in the street to represent those killed each day in Southeast Asia. Describing this strategy, one activist from San Francisco explained: 'Find a symbol that will trigger curiosity and an empathetic response from the public. Try to find a symbol that is visual and photogenic... and the media will take your message to even more people.'¹⁷¹ A number of these ideas caught on. In April the following year, several hundred WSPers staged what Taylor later described as 'the Mother of All Lie-Ins' outside the headquarters of ITT (International Telephone and Telegraph) in New York, to protest 'the company's complicity in the killing of Indochinese.' The event was part of a larger campaign against the company that made Wonder Bread, as well as sophisticated electronic weaponry for use in Southeast Asia. About ninety women blocked traffic for an hour as they stretched out on the sidewalk holding signs across their bodies that read alternatively: 'I Am A Dead Laotian' – 'I Am A Dead Cambodian' – 'I Am A Dead Vietnamese.'¹⁷² Recounting the ITT demonstration in her autobiography, Taylor reflected: 'As I look back now, I marvel at our disregard for comfort, our disregard for the possible risks we faced from hostile passersby, and of course our disregard for the risk of arrest.' She explained: 'Our anger at this new phase of impersonal slaughter, when the war was winding down, transcended our fear of the risks.'¹⁷³ What Taylor did not mention, but what was also apparent in this demonstration, was activists' increasing disregard for their once-prized respectable image.

Thus, by the early 1970s, WSPers had become a lot more radical: activists had broadened their agenda to encompass racial and economic justice; attempted to build

¹⁷⁰ 'La Wisp on Civil Disobedience,' *La Wisp*, July 1967, p. 7, in Donna Allen Papers, Box 7, Folder 7.

¹⁷¹ 'Instant Guerrilla Demonstrations – A New WSP Technique!' *Memo*, Spring 1971, pp. 12-13, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

¹⁷² 'Die-In at ITT National Headquarters,' *Memo*, Spring 1972, p. 17, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, pp. 79-83; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 142.

¹⁷³ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. 82.

alliances with welfare rights groups and New Left activists; become more confrontational and theatrical in their methods; and begun to advocate systemic social and political change. And in the process, they appear to have grown less concerned with respectability. However, there was also much continuity in WSP's activist style. Most notably, even as their goals and tactics evolved dramatically, WSP retained a distinctive maternal image. As we have seen, activists' identities as mothers continued to shape their actions and mediate their relationship with other groups. Furthermore, internal debates over militancy and respectability persisted, and there remained much regional discrepancy in WSPers' priorities and tactics. Indeed, some women continued to argue that WSP's increasingly radical stance risked damaging the group's public image and alienating support.¹⁷⁴ As a result, WSP did not abandon its earlier tactics altogether; instead, at both the national and local level, new campaigns were frequently interspersed with more traditional forms of maternal activism.¹⁷⁵

However, although presenting an image of respectable motherhood had served WSP well in the past, in the dramatically altered political context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, activists found maternalism to be considerably less effective at winning over the public or offering protection from the authorities. As Estepa has argued: 'The more WSPers allied themselves with those who could not rely on the protection of white skin and white gloves, or who rejected the trappings of middle-class respectability, the less effective those protections became for the WSPers themselves.'¹⁷⁶ Indeed, as members of WSP came to be associated with the more radical elements of the peace movement and became more militant themselves, they began to be seen as more deviant; suggesting that women's ability to use motherhood to their advantage during this period could be undermined not just by race or class, but simply by failing to conform to society's expectations of how white, middle-class women should behave. Furthermore, as anti-war demonstrations grew larger, more frequent and more confrontational, the treatment of protesters at the hands of the police became more repressive and officials were no longer willing to make allowances for gender or age.¹⁷⁷ Since WSP's inception, its members had often faced 'the stares of unfriendly

¹⁷⁴ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' pp. 97, 101.

¹⁷⁵ In particular, WSP continued to observe Mother's Day with more traditional forms of maternal protest, such as letter-writing campaigns that were designed to reach out to 'ordinary American mothers' who opposed the war but, wary of mass anti-war demonstrations, had heretofore remained silent. See for instance 'Dear President Nixon,' *Los Angeles Times*, 7 May 1971, p. F18; 'Mother's Day, 1971,' *La Wisp*, April 1971, p. 1, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23.

¹⁷⁶ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 86. For more on this argument, see Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁷⁷ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 86; Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies,'" pp. 381-382.

policemen,' in spite of their maternal image.¹⁷⁸ But in the volatile climate of the late 1960s, WSPers were now being arrested on a regular basis, and experienced police brutality and intimidation first hand.¹⁷⁹ When a large anti-war demonstration in Los Angeles in June 1967 ended in violent clashes with armed police, *La Wisp* reported that: 'Savage treatment was meted out to everyone, including women. A large number of incidents of violence against children and obviously handicapped persons were also reported. Many WSP mothers and children were victims.'¹⁸⁰

In addition, WSP often faced harassment and physical threats from counter-demonstrators. Of course, backlash was nothing new. The group had been founded at the height of the Cold War when McCarthyism was still rife, and WSPers were no stranger to being heckled with shouts of 'Better Dead than Red!' or hostile jeers of 'Go back to your kitchens!'¹⁸¹ However, as they became more radical and came to be associated with an anti-war movement that was growing more unpopular among Americans than the war itself, WSPers increasingly found themselves the target of counter-demonstrations. As Webber recalled in 1970:

It wasn't all fun and games... WSP demonstrators often had to face hostile crowds, counter-demonstrations from the John Birch Society or the American Nazi Party. Sometimes we were physically attacked by these extremists... several WSP leaders have received letters threatening their lives.¹⁸²

In June 1970, for example, the New York WSP office was invaded by six members of the conservative youth group, Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), who 'entered the office and took it over by force.' It was reported that the young men 'proceeded to deface posters, steal the files and dump papers on the floor.' They then 'commandeered the phones, informing all callers that they had "liberated" the office to protest WSP opposition to the Vietnam war.' It took the police an hour to arrive at the scene. In the end, however, the WSP leadership decided not to press charges. Taking a more motherly approach, they argued that the young men 'should be given a chance to reconsider their illegal and outrageous behavior' and to recognise that 'their action was inimical to the freedom and democracy they profess to uphold.' The New York women also stressed that 'WSP and the entire peace movement could not be intimidated by

¹⁷⁸ Webber, 'You've Come A Long Way!', p. 13; Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies,'" p. 381.

¹⁷⁹ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 97; Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies,'" p. 381.

¹⁸⁰ 'Bloody Friday,' *La Wisp*, July 1967, p. 2, in Donna Allen Papers, Box 7, Folder 7.

¹⁸¹ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. 12; Webber, 'You've Come A Long Way!?', p. 13.

¹⁸² Webber, 'You've Come A Long Way!?', p. 14.

such coercion.’¹⁸³ Similarly, Webber noted that: ‘Attempts at repression and the unheeding attitude of the government bred a more militant spirit in WSP.’¹⁸⁴ Indeed, it seems that WSP’s exposure to police violence and counter-demonstrations only contributed to the group’s radicalisation, encouraging activists to re-evaluate their relationship to the state and, increasingly, their place within the gender hierarchy.

VI

As well as evolving significantly over time, it is also vital to recognise that WSP’s goals and tactics varied greatly from place to place. Indeed, the group’s loose structure and emphasis on grassroots autonomy ensured that local context consistently played an important role in shaping the priorities of individual chapters and other local affiliates. Yet, even when WSP is acknowledged within the historiography on the anti-Vietnam War movement, scholars tend to gloss over the diversity of the organisation. This study has already noted some of the ways that WSP chapters differed. It will now examine these regional variations in more depth by focusing on two groups – Women Uniting to End the War in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Women for a Peaceful Christmas in Madison, Wisconsin – which emerged during the early 1970s, were connected to one another, and were loosely associated with WSP, but have hitherto received scant attention in histories of the organisation. Importantly, these local groups reflected the context out of which they emerged, in both cases highly-educated, relatively liberal college towns, which were surrounded by more conservative small-town communities. Indeed, within both groups, activists did not simply follow the lead of WSP’s national steering committee; they theorised and strategised for themselves, tailoring suggestions to suit their local circumstances and coming up with their own ideas for actions. However, because both groups initiated campaigns that would become national in scope, they also shed light on the symbiotic relationship between the local and the national.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ ‘WSP Office “Invaded” by Radical Right,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, July-August 1970, p. 2, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; ‘WSP Invaded and Occupied,’ *La Wisp*, August 1970, p. 3, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

¹⁸⁴ Webber, ‘You’ve Come A Long Way!’, p. 14.

¹⁸⁵ Influenced by recent scholarship on the black freedom struggle, social movement historians are increasingly highlighting the importance of grassroots activism; the local roots of tactics and ideologies; and the symbiosis between the local and the national. See Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, ‘Introduction,’ in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 1-16 (pp. 2, 6).

Early in 1971, a group of ‘eight housewives’ in Ann Arbor, Michigan came across a statistic that they found to be spectacular: a recent Gallup Poll had found that 78% of American women wanted out of Indochina by the end of that year. The women, several of whom were already active in WSP or other peace groups, immediately began discussing ideas for a national action to dramatise this staggering national figure, and demonstrate mass opposition to the war among American women.¹⁸⁶ Torry Harburg, a writer and mother of three sons who had been active in Ann Arbor WFP since the early 1960s, later explained: ‘There seemed to us large areas, in the middle of the country especially, still largely untouched by peace activity.’¹⁸⁷ There is no doubt that the local context helped shape this perception. Of course, as the birthplace of SDS in 1962 and the scene of the first anti-war ‘teach in’ in 1965, Ann Arbor was known by the late sixties for its active progressive community. But the city had not always had such a reputation. In fact, during the first half of the decade, the University of Michigan had thrived on military contracts for its work in developing missile guidance systems and ‘Cold War thinking’ had been pervasive in the city. Furthermore, as residents of a small Midwestern city, anti-war activists in Ann Arbor had long recognised that to be effective they would always have to reach out to others across political boundaries.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, this might help explain why the women who came together in 1971 were keen to initiate a campaign that an individual woman anywhere could take part in, ‘whether or not she was involved with any kind of organization, regardless of her class, geographical, marital, or occupational situation.’ In the end, they settled on the idea of a daylong, nationwide consumer boycott, calling upon women, ‘on June 21st, the longest day of the year,’ to ‘vote no to the longest war’ by spending no money on goods or services. ‘We knew that 78% of the women don’t go to the polls,’ reasoned Harburg, ‘but they all shop.’¹⁸⁹

This action was not without precedent. In fact, whether they were aware of it or not, these women built upon a long tradition of consumer-based activism by women’s groups. Throughout the twentieth century, many women, often denied access to more

¹⁸⁶ Torry Harburg, ‘The Longest Day of the Longest War: June 21: Women’s Consumer Power Creates Peace Power,’ *Memo*, Fall 1971, pp. 18-19, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9; Torry Harburg, ‘Women Uniting to End the War – An Assessment,’ draft for publication in national Women Strike for Peace *Memo*, pp. 1-3, in Women for a Peaceful Christmas Records, 1971-1974, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 1, Folder 10 (hereafter cited as WFPC Records); Torry Harburg, ‘Some Questions,’ pp. 1-12, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10.

¹⁸⁷ Harburg, ‘Some Questions,’ p. 2. For a brief biography on Torry Harburg, see Harburg, ‘Women Uniting to End the War – An Assessment,’ p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ For more on Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, and the development and activities of Ann Arbor WFP, see Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, pp. 85-110.

¹⁸⁹ Harburg, ‘Some Questions,’ p. 2; Harburg, ‘The Longest Day of the Longest War,’ p. 19.

traditional avenues of power, used their identity as consumers to claim authority in the public realm.¹⁹⁰ The Ann Arbor group also had more immediate examples to follow, as consumer protests were nothing new within WSP. Indeed, as they became increasingly conscious of how embedded the military was in the political and economic structure of the nation, the women of WSP had begun to initiate a number of actions to protest the wartime economy. These ranged from selective consumer boycotts targeting companies such as Dow and ITT that produced components for military weapons alongside basic household goods, to more general spending stoppages that sought to harness women's consumer power to apply economic pressure on the government to end the war. At Washington WSP's 1968 retreat, several women stressed the need to harness women's consumer power. Noting that 'wars will end when people refuse to pay for them,' one woman argued: 'Women have a tremendous power over the way money is spent in this country... Women certainly control their household budgets and to a very large degree the way in which money is spent.'¹⁹¹ As this Washington discussion indicates, consumer boycotts were popular with WSPers across the country during this period. Nevertheless, for women based in big cities on the East and West Coasts, these tactics tended to be viewed as supplementary to the large public demonstrations into which they poured most of their energies. In contrast, in towns and cities in the middle of the country, where women could not so readily participate in mass anti-war demonstrations, consumer campaigns seem to have had more traction. Indeed, many of these actions originated in the Midwest. At the beginning of 1971, for example, a WFP chapter in Chicago's North Shore suburbs began organising a once-a-month boycott on spending called 'Don't Buy War,' that would prove influential to the Ann Arbor campaign.¹⁹²

Building on these earlier examples, the Ann Arbor women set about organising the first of what was to be a series of seasonal no-spend days on 21 June 1971. Through these boycotts, they hoped to engage isolated, hitherto inactive women by offering them an opportunity to protest the war with a low level, individual, private if needs be, act,

¹⁹⁰ During the 1930s, for example, many women seized upon an emerging consumer identity as an opportunity to make claims on those wielding public and private power in U.S. society. Although historians have paid more attention to the growth of male-dominated labour unions representing producers, the decade saw an upsurge of consumer activism by middle-class women's organisations. As they lobbied for government protection in the marketplace, or orchestrated boycotts to protest high prices, these women gave the cultural and economic role assigned to them in the household as consumers a new and lasting political significance. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage books, 2004), pp. 13, 31-41. Also see Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹⁹¹ Sally, quoted in 'Think Peace,' p. 8. Also see Louise, quoted on p. 7.

¹⁹² Harburg, 'Some Questions,' p. 2; WSP National Consultative Council (NCC), 'Announcing a National WSP Action on June 21st: The Longest Day of the Longest War!', 28 May 1971, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' pp. 100-101.

‘coupled with the knowledge that unknown, uncountable others were doing the same thing.’ The group decided to call themselves Women Uniting to End the War (WUEW) because, like WSP’s founders, they ‘didn’t want to sound too organizational’; instead, they hoped to encourage ‘local autonomy’ and ‘cooperation from other peace groups under their own auspices.’ In May, they sent out flyers to personal and political contacts all over the country, bearing the Gallup figure and calling on women to say ‘No’ to the war by spending no money on 21 June. WUEW encouraged women to use their time instead to engage in constructive anti-war efforts, but they told local groups to ‘do your own thing, you know your turf.’¹⁹³ The Ann Arbor group later declared the action ‘a success beyond our wildest expectations,’ having ‘reached countless women everywhere,’ including ‘women new to organized groups’ and ‘such old timers as Women Strike for Peace.’¹⁹⁴ Indeed, on 28 May, WSP’s national office announced that it endorsed the action and would be making it the basis of a national campaign.¹⁹⁵ WUEW also received endorsements from other women’s peace groups, actors, authors, singers, and women religious leaders.¹⁹⁶ On the day itself, a diverse range of activities took place across the country, garnering much local newspaper coverage. In Los Angeles, members of WSP opened up their homes for a ‘living room lobby for peace,’ calling on women to come round and write letters to legislators protesting the war.¹⁹⁷ Meanwhile, in Great Neck, New York, women organised ‘a baby-buggy parade’ through town.¹⁹⁸ Harburg also reported that: ‘Eugene, Oregon got a big splash in their papers and to our knowledge, prior to June 21, we didn’t have a soul there.’¹⁹⁹

WUEW’s initial mailings had advertised a second seasonal spending boycott on 21 September, as well as promising to make the Christmas season in December ‘a true time of peace.’²⁰⁰ As it happened, however, organisation of the Christmas action was taken over by a group of women in Madison, Wisconsin, with WUEW providing resources and support. The Madison group was spearheaded by Nan Cheney, a long-time friend of Harburg’s who had also been active in the peace movement for some

¹⁹³ Harburg, ‘Some Questions,’ pp. 2-4, 7; Torry Harburg, Letter to Nan Cheney, 21 May 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10; Harburg, ‘The Longest Day of the Longest War,’ pp. 18-19.

¹⁹⁴ Harburg, ‘The Longest Day of the Longest War,’ p. 19.

¹⁹⁵ WSP NCC, ‘Announcing a National WSP Action on June 21st.’

¹⁹⁶ Torry Harburg, ‘Women Uniting to End the War: Progress Report No. 3,’ 10 June 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10; Harburg, ‘The Longest Day of the Longest War,’ p. 19.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Write In For Peace-Effort To End War,’ *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 24 June 1971, p. C5.

¹⁹⁸ Harburg, ‘Progress Report No. 3’; ‘June 21: Longest Day of Longest War,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, June 1971, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

¹⁹⁹ Torry Harburg, Letter to Nan Cheney, 30 June 1971, p. 2, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10.

²⁰⁰ Women Uniting to End the War, ‘Monday, June 21, 1971: The Longest Day... The Longest War. A Nation of Women Uniting to End the War!’ leaflet, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10; Harburg, ‘Some Questions,’ p. 2.

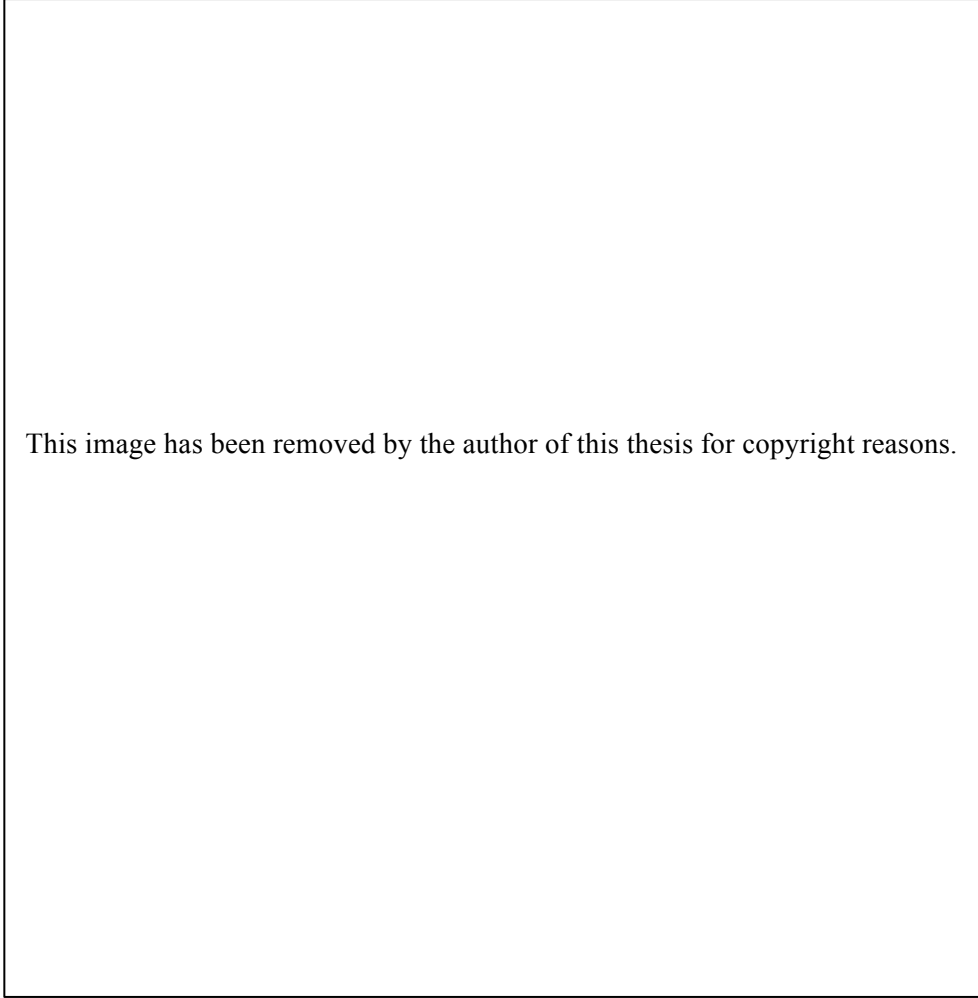
years and was becoming increasingly frustrated with the failure of more traditional means of protest to affect the government's foreign policy. Responding to Harburg's call, Cheney helped organise the 21 June boycott in Madison. Yet, while the Madison women agreed that 'money talks,' they felt that the 'symbolic' act of not shopping on three days of the year was not a strong enough statement. As a result, they formed their own group, hoping to act as 'another straw to add to the camel's back.' Calling themselves Women for a Peaceful Christmas (WFPC), the Madison women focused on organising a national three-way protest of the Vietnam War, pollution of the environment by rampant consumerism, and Christmas season commercialisation. Like their Ann Arbor neighbours, Cheney's group believed that women had a unique power as consumers, contending that 'women are the money handlers, especially at Christmas time, and women are most often initiators of how the family celebrates Christmas.'²⁰¹ In mailings sent out in the run up to Christmas, they called on women to protest the war economy by joining a selective consumer boycott and only buying essential goods and services. Instead, they encouraged participants to give handmade gifts, or to make a donation in their name to a peace candidate or an ecology group (see Figure 3). Bumper stickers and buttons distributed by the group contained the slogan: 'No More Shopping Days 'Til Peace.'²⁰² As with the Ann Arbor action, WFPC received endorsements from well-established peace groups like WSP and WILPF, who all launched similar Christmas boycott campaigns.²⁰³ Furthermore, following publicity in national publications such as *Woman's Day* magazine, *Christian Science Monitor* and WSP's *Memo*, the group was inundated with letters of support from people across the country. In Madison, WFPC organised a Peace Festival on the weekend after Thanksgiving, traditionally a time of heavy shopping, which included a craft fair selling handmade gifts and Christmas tree decorations, a second-hand toy sale, craft demonstrations, puppet shows, and other activities for children.²⁰⁴ This would become a yearly event in Madison throughout the first half of the 1970s.

²⁰¹ Nan Cheney, 'Women for a Peaceful Christmas,' pp. 1-5, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 6.

²⁰² Women for a Peaceful Christmas, 'For Immediate Release,' August 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 8; Women for a Peaceful Christmas, 'Dear Friends,' August 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 2; 'Women for a Peaceful Christmas Urge Economic Action,' *Memo*, Fall 1971, p. 29, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

²⁰³ 'Women's Peace Groups Launch National Boycott Campaign,' 20 October 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 3.

²⁰⁴ 'Wisconsin Women Organize: No More Shopping Days 'Til Peace,' *American Report*, 19 November 1971, p. 10, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 8; 'How to Have Peaceful Holiday: Keep It Simple, Women Urge,' *Capital Times* (Madison), 25 November 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 8.



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Figure 3: Women for a Peaceful Christmas leaflet.²⁰⁵

WUEW and WFPC were clearly influenced by wider trends within the women's peace movement, and both remained loosely affiliated to WSP. However, both groups were also shaped by local circumstances. For instance, the women who founded these local organisations, many of whom had been active in the peace movement for over a decade, appear to have experienced a similar process of radicalisation to many women in WSP. Indeed, by the early 1970s, veteran activists such as Harburg and Cheney became increasingly disillusioned with the chances of peace without fundamentally challenging 'the scientific-military-industrial establishment.'²⁰⁶ But while WSPers on the coasts and in big cities sought to challenge the American system by staging increasingly confrontational public demonstrations, activists in these Midwestern groups tended to focus on transforming the nation's values at the grassroots level. This

²⁰⁵ Women for a Peaceful Christmas, 'Christmas...A Time of Peace And The War Goes On...' leaflet, in Social Action File, Box 57.

²⁰⁶ Harburg, 'Some Questions,' pp. 6-12.

reflected activists' recognition that many women, particularly in the middle of the country, could not readily attend large-scale anti-war demonstrations, and their desire to engage these women by providing a way for them to work for peace in their daily lives. These women also believed that marching and rallying alone would not transform America's militaristic culture, and that women had a responsibility to introduce more 'maternal' values into their own communities. Harburg, for instance, felt that many peace groups had become 'structured, centralized and vulnerable to cooption,' and argued that, 'as long as dissent groups continue to act out, uncritically, the cultural values, forms, and imperatives of the scientific-military-industrial state itself,' they would never have any real influence on society.²⁰⁷ In line with this, adverts for WFPC's festive boycott declared that 'women in the peace movement have to take more self-sacrificing directions and that people of peace must match their personal priorities and life styles with their ideals.'²⁰⁸

Furthermore, members of WUEW and WFPC often questioned 'the missionary urge to work with nonpeers' expressed by other peace groups during this period. 'If I am a middle class, white woman over forty, how does that really qualify me to work with welfare mothers, youth, or assembly line workers?' Harburg asked. She contended that: 'Working at one's own expense on uphill causes is difficult enough' without feeling obliged 'to include someone from every disadvantaged group in our ad hoc groupings on a given issue.' Harburg was also sceptical of efforts 'to reach the black community,' because she 'did not understand why most black people would consider the war in Vietnam their primary problem.'²⁰⁹ Thus, at a time when many of WSP's larger urban chapters were attempting to build coalitions with activists from different racial and class backgrounds, these activists concentrated on appealing to white, middle-class women like themselves, who may not yet have been touched by the peace movement. Moreover, while many in WSP were beginning to embrace civil disobedience, WUEW and WFPC tended to avoid any tactics that might alienate the 'isolated individuals' they sought to recruit.²¹⁰ Flyers for WUEW's seasonal no-spend days stressed that: 'All our activities and publicity will be peaceful, legal, and nondisruptive.'²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Harburg, 'Some Questions,' pp. 8-9.

²⁰⁸ 'Women for a Peaceful Christmas Urge Economic Action.'

²⁰⁹ Harburg, 'Some Questions,' pp. 10-11.

²¹⁰ Torry Harburg, Letter to Nan Cheney, 30 June 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10.

²¹¹ 'Monday, June 21, 1971: The Longest Day...The Longest War'; 'Tuesday, September 21st: A Nation of Women Uniting to End the War!'

Another important difference between these groups and WSP chapters elsewhere was the role religion played in their campaigns. Of course, there is no doubt that many women in WSP held religious convictions that may have helped motivate their anti-war activism. For example, Schneidhorst noted that WFP leaders in Chicago tended to be Jewish, and became involved in politics through the influence of the Jewish Left.²¹² For the most part, however, WSP tended to emphasise its religious inclusivity. As well as claiming to represent ‘women of all races, creeds, and political persuasions,’ the group stressed: ‘Our religions run the gamut – Quakers, Unitarians, Methodists, Jews, Presbyterians, [and] Catholics.’²¹³ This desire to be as inclusive as possible generally meant that religious references were absent from WSP’s rhetoric at the national level. In contrast, religious arguments were much more central to the local groups in this study. WFPC in particular was, by nature, rooted in a Christian ethos. In part, the group’s decision to focus on Christmas resulted from tactical concerns. Organisers felt that, because Christmas was something that ‘grabs most of us,’ the campaign would have wide appeal. They also saw the church as a useful way to recruit members, particularly women ‘who wouldn’t go near a “regular” peace group but who probably belong to a church.’²¹⁴ Furthermore, activists recognised the holiday’s significance as a major time of consumption, arguing that the boycott would have a particular impact because Christmas time was ‘when 45% of the yearly retail sales are transacted.’²¹⁵ But WFPC’s organisers also expressed ‘a distaste for the commercialization of a very intimate, family kind of season,’ and a desire ‘to uncloud the clear and simple meaning of a true Christmas.’²¹⁶ In adverts for the campaign, women stressed that they were not calling for ‘an abandonment of the peace, love and joy that the Christmas season brings’; rather, they were ‘calling for a rejection of the mass commercialism and mass consumption which so often characterises the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Peace.’²¹⁷ WUEW’s seasonal spending boycotts also had religious undertones. One of the activities organised in Ann Arbor to mark the 21 June was an ecumenical peace vigil at a local church.²¹⁸

²¹² Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, pp. ix-x.

²¹³ ‘National Policy Statement Adopted,’ *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), Summer 1961, p. 1, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, p. 16.

²¹⁴ Harburg, Letter to Nan Cheney, 30 June 1971, p. 1.

²¹⁵ Cheney, ‘Women for a Peaceful Christmas,’ p. 5.

²¹⁶ Cheney, ‘Women for a Peaceful Christmas,’ p. 5.

²¹⁷ ‘Women for a Peaceful Christmas Urge Economic Action.’

²¹⁸ Harburg, ‘Progress Report No. 3.’

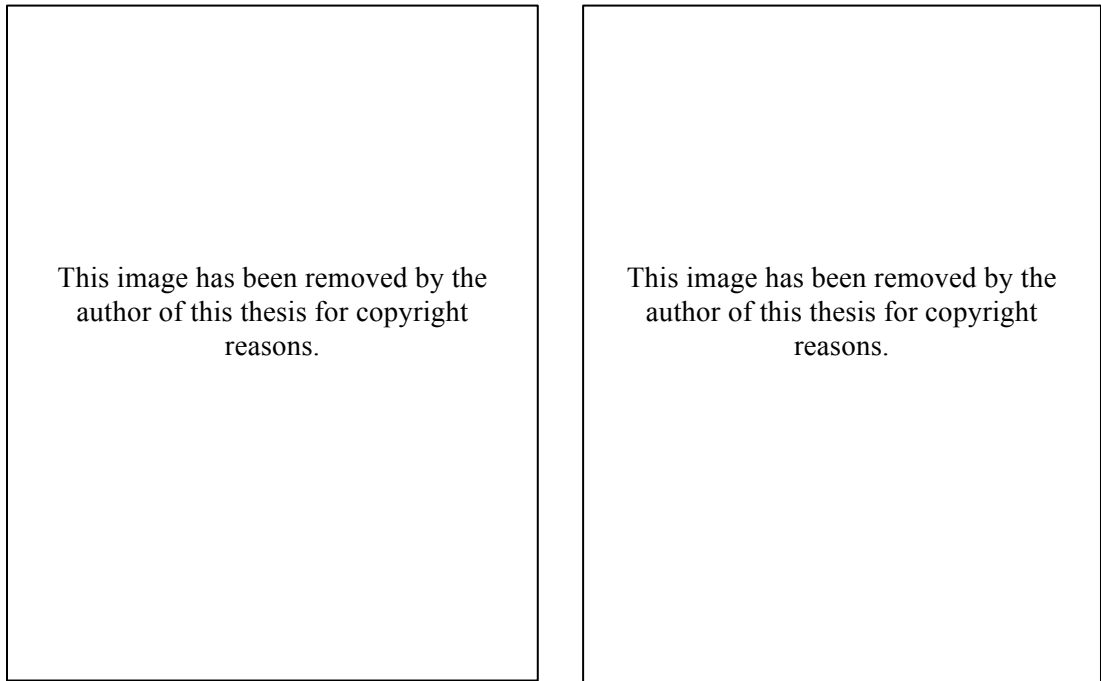


Figure 4: Instructions by Women for a Peaceful Christmas on how to make ‘6 Felt Ornaments’ and a ‘Tote Bag.’²¹⁹

Nevertheless, despite these regional and cultural influences, common themes transcended spatial boundaries, unifying the regional chapters and autonomous local groups within WSP. Perhaps most striking of these was the notion that women, as mothers, had a special role to play in the peace movement. As well as the Gallup figure, WUEW’s flyers reprinted a quote by historian Arnold Toynbee that declared: ‘The Mothers of America have still to go into action. I believe this is a battle the Pentagon cannot win.’²²⁰ Adverts for WFPC in Madison also contained the Gallup figure and Toynbee quote, reflecting activists’ belief that ‘women have a special contribution to make in the labor of making peace.’²²¹ This shared sense of responsibility as women and mothers no doubt helps explain why two actions initiated in small cities in the Midwest had such national appeal. Catherine Rothenberger from New York wrote to tell WFPC that she supported their action and planned to organise her own boycott of ‘Big Business Christmas,’ explaining: ‘I feel very strongly that only women can turn around the priorities of this country, starting with an immediate end to the slaughter in

²¹⁹ Women for a Peaceful Christmas, instructions on how to make ‘6 Felt Ornaments’ and a ‘Tote Bag,’ in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 6.

²²⁰ ‘Monday, June 21, 1971: The Longest Day...The Longest War’; Women Uniting to End the War, ‘Tuesday, September 21st: A Nation of Women Uniting to End the War!’ leaflet, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 10.

²²¹ Women for a Peaceful Christmas, ‘Dear Friends’; Women for a Peaceful Christmas, ‘Christmas...A Time of Peace And The War Goes On...’ leaflet, in Social Action File, Box 57; Cheney, ‘Women for a Peaceful Christmas,’ p. 3.

Indochina... if women started affecting the economy, then our government would no longer dare turn a deaf ear to our yearning for peace and our great domestic needs.²²² Yet, while these actions received nationwide support, they appear to have had more appeal in certain areas than others. Rothenberger, for example, admitted that she was wary about suggesting the action in New York because ‘vocalizing one’s ideas on homemade Christmas to a roomful of typical do-for-me New York women made me feel as if I were either showing off or slightly daft.’²²³ Indeed, whether or not this was always the case, there was certainly the perception that in busy urban areas, where women had more traditional forms of protest available to them, the idea of combating U.S. militarism by making handmade Christmas tree ornaments might be viewed as folksy, trivial or ineffective (see Figure 4).

Something else members of WUEW and WFPC shared with WSPers across the country during this period was the difficulty of balancing their activism with their roles as mothers. Harburg recalled that, in the process of organising WUEW, several women ‘were forced to withdraw by pressure from their families.’²²⁴ Meanwhile, a number of women who participated in WFPC struggled with the difficulty of how to explain their seasonal boycott of the war economy and commercialism to children, when ‘all they know is that they want a doll who lights up.’²²⁵ Nevertheless, the majority of women in these local groups found activism to be a transformative experience. Harburg reflected that: ‘It has been our experience that women’s action for peace and women’s liberation are intertwined.’ She argued that anti-war activism helped women ‘find and exercise latent skills and doing abilities,’ noting that: ‘Once any human being has “jumped in”, she can never go home again the same person.’²²⁶ This would prove to be another experience shared by countless WSPers across the country during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

VII

Finally, this chapter examines WSP’s relationship to second-wave feminism, contending that these middle-aged peace activists both influenced, and were influenced

²²² Catherine Rothenberger, ‘Dear Sisters,’ 28 November 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 4.

²²³ Rothenberger, ‘Dear Sisters.’

²²⁴ Harburg, ‘Some Questions,’ p. 6.

²²⁵ Cymerly Carmack, ‘Dear Madam,’ 19 November 1971, in WFPC Records, Box 1, Folder 3.

²²⁶ Harburg, ‘The Longest Day of the Longest War,’ p. 19; Harburg, ‘Women Uniting to End the War – An Assessment,’ pp. 2-3.

by, the burgeoning women's liberation movement. Heretofore, members of WSP have tended to be viewed more as symbols of the traditional gender conventions that younger feminists railed against, than as active participants in the women's movement. Recently numerous scholars have shattered the myth that the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was predominantly comprised of young, middle-class, white women, instead revealing the diversity of participants and their goals.²²⁷ But, while scholars have highlighted the race and class biases in early narratives of the women's movement, few have recognised the generational blinders and there continues to be little attention paid to the feminist activism of middle-aged women and mothers. However, by the late 1960s, many WSPers had begun to question their earlier assumptions about gender roles and to identify themselves as part of the larger women's liberation movement. Furthermore, by formulating a distinctive version of feminism that was rooted in their particular generational and class perspective, and tied to their identities as mothers, the women of WSP made important contributions to the feminist discourses of the period.

In part, the neglect of older women and mothers in the scholarship on second-wave feminism is symptomatic of their marginalisation within the movement itself. Indeed, although by no means all those who espoused feminist ideals during the 1960s and 1970s denounced motherhood, those who did often did so vocally and vehemently.²²⁸ In particular, many of the young women who identified as 'radical' feminists during this period came to see motherhood as an oppressive institution that perpetuated an essentialist view of women and limited their independence, and they

²²⁷ See for instance Becky Thompson, 'Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,' *Feminist Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2002), 337-360; Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Whose Feminism? Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) U.S. Women's Movement(s),' in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. by Nancy Naples (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 31-56; Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organisations, 1968-1980* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2008); Stephanie Gilmore, ed., *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Nancy MacLean, 'The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class,' *Feminist Studies*, 25, no.1 (1999), 53-78; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²²⁸ This undoubtedly helped fuel the perception that motherhood and maternalist movements were inherently incompatible with feminism. However, it is important to note that feminist critiques of motherhood were never universal, even at their height during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Lauri Umansky has pointed out, they were always accompanied by a more positive feminist discourse that viewed motherhood, free from the trappings of patriarchy, as a source of power for women. Nevertheless, the so-called 'negative discourse' continues to hold sway within the literature on second-wave feminism, and relatively little attention has been paid to those women who attempted to balance motherhood and feminist activism during this period. For further discussion, see Lauri Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' pp. 103-104; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, Chapter 7.

became increasingly frustrated with movements that emphasised the maternal role.²²⁹ These frustrations frequently found expression in criticism of women's role within the anti-war movement. A dramatic example of this occurred on 15 January 1968, when around 5,000 women from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C. for the Jeannette Rankin Brigade (JRB). WSP had played a key role in organising this all-women peace action, which was intended to demonstrate the strength of female opposition to the war. It was led by Jeannette Rankin, the first woman to be elected to Congress and the sole member to vote against U.S. entrance into both world wars. Now aged eighty seven, Rankin had recently declared: 'If we had 10,000 women willing to go to prison if necessary, that would end it. You cannot have wars without the women.'²³⁰ WSP's publicity called upon 'Ten Thousand Mothers' to come to Washington, dressed in black, to demand that Congress, as its first order of business on its opening day, 'end the war in Vietnam' and 'use its power to heal a sick society at home.'²³¹ 'The hand that rocks the cradle is going to rock the boat,' the Brigade's organisers warned.²³²

However, rather than showcasing Rankin's vision of united 'woman power,' the action instead revealed the ideological and generational conflicts that divided women. First, a number of the younger radical feminists who participated in the protest questioned the effectiveness of petitioning Congress, which they saw as 'an impotent

²²⁹ During the 1960s and early 1970s, groups of predominantly young, white women who focused on critiquing gender roles and combating male supremacy referred to themselves as 'radical' feminists, and this term has been widely used within the historiography, often to differentiate these women from 'socialist' feminists who opposed both sexism and capitalism and continued to work within mixed-sex New Left groups. However, a number of scholars have highlighted the problems of assigning the term 'radical' solely to young, white anti-patriarchal feminists. For example, Becky Thompson pointed out that women of colour and white anti-racist activists also identified as 'radical' during this period, as they forged an analysis that integrated race, class, gender, and imperialism. Similarly, Amy Swerdlow noted that many WSPers 'had always thought of themselves as radical in terms of left-right politics.' Thus, while this chapter follows convention in referring to young anti-patriarchal feminists as 'radical,' it also recognises that these women did not have a monopoly on radicalism, and that the term 'radical' was itself always contested. Thompson, pp. 345-346; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 140. The distinction between 'radical' and 'socialist' feminists largely derives from the work of Alice Echols, an early historian of the women's liberation movement. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

²³⁰ 'Jeannette Rankin Speaks Up: War's Unremitting Foe,' *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 May 1967, p. 9, reprinted in *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, June 1967, p. 5, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23.

²³¹ 'Calling Ten Thousand Mothers,' *Women Strike for Peace Newsletter* (New York – New Jersey – Connecticut), July 1967, p. 4, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; 'Brigade Formed to Confront Congress' *Memo*, November 1967, p. 6, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; 'Jeanette Rankin Brigade Finalized,' *Memo*, December 1967, pp. 1-2, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; Jeannette Rankin Brigade, 'A Call to American Women' leaflet, in Social Action File, Box 17.

²³² 'Jeannette Rankin Brigade – January 15th: You Cannot Have Wars Without Women!!', *La Wisp*, January 1968, p. 1, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23; Linda Matthews, 'Women's Antiwar Brigade Will March in Washington and L.A.,' *Los Angeles Times*, 14 January 1968, p. EB.

political body' that 'has never even had the chance to vote for or against the War in Vietnam.'²³³ Moreover, members of radical feminist organisations such as the Radical Women's Group, which brought together women from New York and Chicago, took issue with the tactic of protesting 'under the banner of motherhood, women's acceptable role.'²³⁴ Reporting soon after the event, Shulamith Firestone of New York Radical Women accused the Brigade's organisers of invoking traditional gender roles that were synonymous with women's powerlessness, declaring: 'They came as wives, mothers and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears.' Radical feminists also suggested that playing up to gender stereotypes actually hindered the cause of peace by encouraging men 'to develop aggression and militarism to prove their masculinity.' To drive their message home, the radical women organised a counter-demonstration to follow the main JRB protest in Washington – a theatrical funeral procession and burial of 'Traditional Womanhood' in Arlington Cemetery. According to Firestone, they carried a larger-than-life dummy on a funeral bier, 'complete with feminine getup, blank face, blonde curls, and candle. Hanging from the bier were such disposable items as S&H Green Stamps, curlers, garters, and hairspray. Streamers floated off it and we also carried large banners, such as "DON'T CRY: RESIST!"'²³⁵ Leaflets distributed to the rest of the Brigade proclaimed, 'You are joyfully invited to attend the burial of Weeping Womanhood,' and urged women to unite 'not as passive supplicants begging for favors,' but as 'a political force to be reckoned with.'²³⁶

For many WSPers, who 'had always thought of themselves as radical in terms of left-right politics,' the Brigade was their first encounter with the ideas of second-wave feminism, and they were hurt and put-off by the disdain with which radical young feminists dismissed their tactics and goals.²³⁷ Nevertheless, these experiences were often consciousness-raising. Swerdlow, who witnessed the radical women's

²³³ Marilyn Webb, 'Rankin Rebuttal,' *Washington Free Press*, 20 February 1968, p. 10, in Donna Allen Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

²³⁴ Radical Women's Group (New York and Chicago), 'Women: Why Are We Here?' leaflet, in Pamela P. Allen Papers, 1967-1974, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 4, Folder 1 (hereafter cited as Pamela Allen Papers). However, it should be noted that, although some of the Brigade's publicity addressed women as mothers, the protest itself was actually relatively free from maternal rhetoric. See Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 138; Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), p. 202.

²³⁵ Shulamith Firestone, 'The Jeannette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?', in New York Radical Women, *Notes from the First Year*, published pamphlet, New York, June 1968, in Donna Allen Papers, Additions, 1962-1976, Box 1, Folder 11.

²³⁶ Radical Women's Group (New York and Chicago), 'You Are Joyfully Invited to Attend the Burial of Weeping Womanhood' leaflet, in Pamela Allen Papers, Box 4, Folder 1.

²³⁷ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 4-5, 137, 140.

Washington demonstration first hand, later recalled that the conflicts with radical feminists, ‘were provoking, frustrating, and even confusing, but for some WSP women they were also a transformative experience, one that changed our lives.’²³⁸

Indeed, during the late 1960s, many members of WSP began to identify themselves as part of the broader women’s liberation movement. Importantly, however, this shift was not solely down to the influence of radical young feminists; women’s own experiences within WSP were just as significant in shaping their feminist outlook. Having spent nearly a decade working in a separatist movement apart from men, many WSPers had developed a strong sense of sisterhood that predated the ‘advent’ of second-wave feminism. In fact, several scholars have suggested that WSP’s non-hierarchical, ‘un-organisational’ format played a key (although unacknowledged) role in shaping the women’s liberation movement.²³⁹ Indeed, by creating a female activist community that valued participation, collective leadership, personalised politics, consciousness-raising and support for others, WSP undoubtedly foreshadowed modes of organising more commonly associated with the feminist movement of the late 1960s.²⁴⁰ This was not lost on participants at the time. In her autobiography, Taylor claimed: ‘we were the harbingers of the women’s liberation movement. Our discussions were certainly consciousness-raising as we tossed about ideas for a strike against the powers that threatened our kids and the world.’²⁴¹ At the same time, peace activism helped many women realise their own abilities and develop new skills. Swerdlow noted that, over the course of the 1960s, ‘the women of WSP transformed themselves from “ordinary housewives” and mothers into leaders, public speakers, writers, organizers, political tacticians and analysts.’²⁴² Consequently, although some women had initially claimed that they would return to the domestic sphere once the crises that threatened their children subsided, most no longer perceived the home as the centre of their lives.²⁴³ As one participant at the 1968 Washington retreat explained: ‘once we’ve been unleashed, which we have, and once we’ve acquired skills, which we have, and once we’ve found out what commitment means, and we’re kind of liberated in a sense – it would be a shame to close shop.’²⁴⁴ But, as well as furnishing them with new skills and

²³⁸ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 137.

²³⁹ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 12-13, 240-241; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, p. ix; Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 101; Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off*, Chapter 7.

²⁴⁰ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 240-241.

²⁴¹ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. 2.

²⁴² Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 240.

²⁴³ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 239.

²⁴⁴ Folly, quoted in ‘Think Peace,’ p. 7.

a heightened sense of personal efficiency, political struggles also brought women into conflict with male-dominated power structures and, at times, with sexism in the anti-war movement. Indeed, WSPers increasingly began to perceive the forces that held them back, both personally and politically.²⁴⁵ Writing in 1970, a member of San Francisco WFP noted that ‘veteran peace women’ like herself had found that ‘many of the anti-war, anti-racist, anti-oppression, etc. males have no compunction about oppressing the women residing in their homes.’²⁴⁶ By the end of the decade, these internal developments – coupled with the growing visibility of the feminist movement – led many WSPers to question their place within the gender hierarchy.

In particular, members of WSP began to view war and militarism as inextricably linked to women’s underrepresentation within the nation’s social and political institutions. Indeed, they increasingly moved from seeking to influence men in power to better protect the world’s children, to demanding that women be included in the decision-making bodies concerned with issues of war and peace.²⁴⁷ By uniting women into a strong political force, WSP hoped to turn the nation’s priorities around, and to insert a more human, caring, emotional dimension into the political establishment.²⁴⁸ At the 1968 D.C. retreat, for example, Wilson advocated forming a Women’s Party ‘that would pull the whole darned female sex together to be a force in this country for the first time,’ and ensure the passage of protective legislation for children. She was clearly influenced by the ideas of radical feminists when she argued that, ‘instead of reacting,’ women needed to form ‘a very strong organized program of our own with which we forge ahead no matter what.’²⁴⁹ Although the Women’s Party never got off the ground, WSP’s desire to be an influential force in the political arena can be seen in the active role it played in Bella Abzug’s election to Congress in 1970. Abzug, a WSP founder from New York and the organisation’s national legislative chairperson, ran as a peace candidate, while also expressing strong support for the rights of women, minorities and the poor – making her, in Estepa’s words, ‘the perfect representative of WSP’s late sixties fusion agenda.’²⁵⁰ Around the country, WSPers proudly supported Abzug’s campaign and celebrated her victory as showcasing their increased political strength. At

²⁴⁵ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 234.

²⁴⁶ Joyce McElvane, ‘Personal Impressions of Women’s Liberation Rally,’ *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, September 1970, pp. 5-6, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23.

²⁴⁷ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 141.

²⁴⁸ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 154.

²⁴⁹ Dagmar Wilson, quoted in ‘Think Peace,’ pp. 4-5, 12.

²⁵⁰ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 98. For more on Abzug’s congressional campaign, see Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, pp. 153-155; Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, pp. 83-85.

one fund-raiser in Los Angeles, WSPer Orpha Goldberg contended: 'We are not chic or radical chic. That went out with us a long time ago. Along with ladies' luncheons and teas. We are activists. We are mothers who care. We do not sit around thinking what we are going to wear to dinner. We are politically involved.'²⁵¹ Abzug went on to become an outspoken opponent of the war and campaigner for women's rights within Congress, and in July 1971, she played an instrumental role in the founding of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), a non-partisan organisation aimed at increasing the number of women in public office.²⁵² Like many in WSP, she had come to blame the continuing war in Southeast Asia on a 'masculine mystique,' and argued that, were it not for the 'white, middle class, middle-aged, male power structure' in the United States, the 'insane priorities of this country would be different.'²⁵³

Furthermore, as well as demanding more power for women within national and international politics, WSPers increasingly challenged examples of gender discrimination and abuse against women. In particular, they began to make connections between militarism and male violence against women, and to contend that war was a feminist issue.²⁵⁴ For example, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, WSP published a number of articles highlighting the brutal torture of women POWs in South Vietnam, and they accused the U.S. government of condoning the use of rape as a weapon in Southeast Asia. In the fall 1971 edition of *Memo*, WSPers reprinted an article by Renee Blakhan, a reporter for the *National Guardian*, which declared:

Contrary to the previous beliefs of many women, the war is a feminist issue. The visitor's tales of women brought to hospitals with their breasts sliced off by the bayonets of GIs; with beer bottles brutally inserted into the vagina; women refused permission in jail to wear clothes or bathe, even during menstruation... these special tortures against women by U.S. and satellite troops left no doubt that the struggle against the Indochina war is intimately related to the struggle by women everywhere for dignity and equality.²⁵⁵

As well as arguing that women 'suffered many of the greatest humiliations and personal losses brought about by the war,' WSP also began to recognise the significant role women were playing in the struggle for peace and self-determination in Vietnam.

²⁵¹ Orpha Goldberg, quoted in Alan Cartnal, 'Battling Bella Brings Campaign to Beverly Hills,' *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1970, p. 20A.

²⁵² Eileen Shanahan, 'Women Organize for Political Power,' *New York Times*, 11 July 1971, p. 1.

²⁵³ Bella Abzug, quoted in 'Blames U.S. Ills on Male Chauvinism,' *Chicago Daily Defender*, 5 April 1971, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 230.

²⁵⁵ Renee Blakhan, 'War is a Feminist Issue,' *Memo*, Fall 1971, p. 15, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9.

Declaring support for ‘our Vietnamese sisters,’ activists argued that the only root to equality for all women was ‘the ending of this war that endangers the world.’²⁵⁶

WSP also expressed increased support for the fight against gender discrimination in America and, by the late sixties, WSP’s national and local newsletters were publishing articles on a growing array of ‘women’s issues’ – including battles for day care, the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the abortion rights campaign, police brutality and the repression of women in prisons, and black feminism.²⁵⁷ Of course, this is not to suggest that all these issues were active concerns of WSP, but it does demonstrate that they were on members’ radars. Furthermore, as part of their efforts to work with the welfare rights movement, some WSP chapters joined in protests to demand day care facilities that would enable low-income mothers to become more independent. On 7 December 1972, when welfare rights activists in New York staged a ‘Save Day Care’ demonstration at Governor Rockefeller’s office, members of WSP turned out with signs that read ‘WSP Supports Day Care Centers – Opposes Budget Cuts.’ New York WSP’s *Peaceletter* reported that ‘there was a warm welcome from the marchers and much discussion on the relation between the availability of billions for destruction, but not even millions for life-needs.’²⁵⁸ Clearly then, by the early seventies, WSP had come to define itself as part of a larger women’s movement. On 26 August 1970, WSPers across the country participated in the first Women’s Strike for Equality to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the achievement of women’s suffrage.²⁵⁹

Of course, this transformation of consciousness was not always clear cut, nor was it uniform throughout WSP. It was a complex, often incomplete, process that

²⁵⁶ See for instance, Cynthia Fredrick, ‘Women Play Key Role in Growing Saigon Peace Movement,’ *Memo*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 12-14, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 9; ‘Struggles for Liberation Brings Equality to Women,’ *La Wisp*, May 1971, p. 3, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23. Importantly, WSP’s growing recognition of, and admiration for, Vietnamese women’s role in the revolutionary struggle prompted some members to rethink their belief in women’s inherent nonviolence. For more on how WSPers moved from seeing Vietnamese women as victims of war to praising their equal participation in the national liberation struggle, see Frazier.

²⁵⁷ See for instance, Elinor C. Guggenheimer, ‘The Battle for Day Care,’ *Memo*, Spring 1972, pp. 14-15, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; ‘Day Care and Us,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, January 1973, p. 7, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; ‘2 Abortion Laws to Support,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, February 1971, p. 6, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; ‘Women Map Abortion Fight,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, September 1971, p. 6, in *Herstory Women’s History Collection*, Reel 23; ‘A New Feminist Group – the Network for Economic Rights,’ *East Bay Women for Peace Newsletter*, June 1972, p. 3, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 3; ‘On the Road to Woman Power: From Ann Arbor to Houston, From WSP to NWPC,’ *Memo*, Spring 1973, pp. 20-21, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; ‘Women’s Political Convention,’ *La Wisp*, March 1973, p. 7, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; ‘Women in Prison,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, March 1972, p. 4, in Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection; ‘Angela Davis on Women,’ *Memo*, Winter 1973, p. 23, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17.

²⁵⁸ ‘Day Care and Us,’ *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, January 1973, p. 7, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17.

²⁵⁹ Estepa, ‘Taking the White Gloves Off,’ p. 102; Judy Klemesrud, ‘Coming Wednesday: A Herstory Making Event,’ *New York Times Magazine*, 23 August 1970, p. SM4.

occurred at different stages and to different degrees within WSP's various regional chapters. For example, those who lived in big cities such as New York – where WSP was more actively involved with the welfare rights movement and where activists were more likely to encounter radical feminists at mass anti-war demonstrations – tended to be more exposed to feminist ideas than those who lived in more remote areas. Furthermore, while many WSPers challenged gender discrimination in the political arena, they were often less willing to re-examine gender roles within the home and family. Indeed, a significant number of WSPers continued to view their maternal roles as a powerful basis from which to fight for social justice and feminist change. This was apparent in the 1970 commemorative edition of *Memo*; although many articles celebrated how far WSP had come in terms of its goals and tactics, they also showed some striking continuities. In one article, Webber asserted that WSP's greatest strength was 'a womanly, emotional commitment to making the future safe for our families.' She reassured readers: 'As we move now into more militant times in which women are challenging the old truisms about women's role, we continue to find a valid footing in the idea that women, as givers of life, have a special role to play in working for world peace.'²⁶⁰ As Alonso observed, many activists of WSP's generation attempted a balancing act during the 1970s, as they sought to embrace the feminist ideal of gender equality, while also arguing that women's traditional domestic roles and values should be respected for their moral contribution to society.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, several scholars have noted that WSP's long-time association with a stereotypical motherly image continued to alienate radical young feminists, even as the group came to insist that peace was a feminist issue.²⁶² As Estepa put it, the fact that WSPers 'claimed rather than critiqued the role of mother and housewife made them part of the problem, rather than part of the solution in the eyes of many younger feminists.'²⁶³

However, what is less often acknowledged is that criticism went both ways. Indeed, as they engaged with feminist discourses during the late 1960s and early 1970s, WSPers regularly challenged the goals, priorities and tactics of others within the women's liberation movement. In particular, the middle-aged women of WSP, socialised to place a high value on motherhood and self-sacrifice, found the notion of putting women's rights on a par with issues such as war, poverty and racism difficult to

²⁶⁰ Webber, 'You've Come A Long Way!', p. 18.

²⁶¹ Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, p. 226.

²⁶² Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 241; Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 102.

²⁶³ Estepa, 'Taking the White Gloves Off,' p. 104.

accept.²⁶⁴ In 1968, when Wilson explained her vision for a Woman's Party, she stressed that it would not 'just concentrate on things like wages and legal rights of women – which are just a teeny-weeny issue – but really on basic human rights,' such as peace and the right to live without the fear of annihilation.²⁶⁵ Similarly, WSP criticised the organisers of the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality for not calling a strike for equality *and* peace. Although members of WSP supported the strike's goals of free abortions on demand, universal access to childcare, and equal education and jobs, they believed 'that equality and liberation cannot be achieved by American women while our sisters in Vietnam and elsewhere are bombed, burned, murdered and raped.'²⁶⁶ WSPers also argued that feminists had no hope of achieving the programmes they demanded 'while the war in Indochina rages on, and our national resources go for bombs and napalm.'²⁶⁷ Furthermore, members of WSP sometimes accused participants in the women's liberation movement of acquiescing to 'male' values or 'behaving like men.'²⁶⁸ For example, in 1972, Swerdlow began criticising the feminist publication *Ms.* for running adverts recruiting 'talented professional women' for executive positions at ITT. In a series of letters to the magazine's editors, Swerdlow asked: 'Does the emancipation of women mean that females will be following the life-styles and values of American males who have sacrificed soul and self to climb the corporate ladder?' Describing ITT's role in manufacturing the electronic devices that 'guide the planes that drop the bombs that kill our sisters in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia,' she argued that women needed to realise their power as workers and consumers by holding companies like this to account for their policies. Swerdlow concluded: 'Surely Women's liberation means more than a piece of the corporate pie for a few American women. Isn't it time we changed the rotten pie?'²⁶⁹ As these letters indicate, many WSPers felt that a prevalence of 'male' values (individualism, competition, militarism) was to blame for both war and sexism and, for them, 'women's liberation' meant the introduction of more 'maternal' values into society. Thus, women in WSP foreshadowed key arguments articulated by the cultural feminists of the late 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the notion that women were more caring and peaceful than men, discredited during the feminist movement's early

²⁶⁴ Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 242.

²⁶⁵ Dagma Wilson, quoted in 'Think Peace,' p. 12.

²⁶⁶ 'August 26: Women's Strike for Equality – And Peace!', *Memo*, Summer 1970, pp. 1-2, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 9; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. 242.

²⁶⁷ 'August 26: Women's Strike for Equality – And Peace!'

²⁶⁸ See for instance, Madeline Duckles, 'Indochinese Women's Conference,' *East Bay Women for Peace Newsletter*, May 1971, p. 2, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23.

²⁶⁹ Amy Swerdlow, 'Ms. Magazine Recruits for ITT,' *Memo*, Spring 1973, p. 19, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17; Amy Swerdlow, 'ITT – MS. – YOU = !', *N.Y. WSP Peaceletter*, November-December 1972, p. 9, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17.

days, became almost commonplace by the early 1980s, as many feminists celebrated a separate 'female culture.'²⁷⁰

But while WSPers frequently questioned the priorities of their younger comrades, they ultimately hoped to work with them, influencing the women's movement from within and ensuring that peace was on the feminist agenda. At WSP's national conference in Santa Barbara, California in December 1972, Abzug noted that the women's movement 'takes varied forms and it is not necessary to agree with the demands or views of each little group to understand that the heightened consciousness of millions of women provides a highly favorable environment in which WSP can operate.' She went on to argue that these groups had much to learn from each other, explaining:

Women in WSP can develop an appreciation of the many-faceted independent role of women, and the young militant feminists can learn from us that the enemy is not man *per se* or the young male foot soldiers, but the male generals and male corporate executives and the male presidents who send our young people to war.²⁷¹

Nevertheless, despite their pleas for inter-generational cooperation and mutual learning, the older women of WSP frequently found themselves and their issues marginalised within the women's liberation movement. Writing in East Bay WFP's newsletter in June 1971, one woman complained that younger women tended to dominate most feminist organisations. She asserted that:

Many women who are already involved in commitments to relationships with husbands, children, jobs, etc., want a share in the liberation of their sex. However, they have different problems and outlooks than younger women who are trying to organize their lives in new and better ways from the start.

The East Bay woman hoped to bring together small groups of women over the age of thirty 'to analyze the problems women with established relationships face as they experience the consciousness-raising impact of the Women's Movement.'²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Alice Echols, "'Women Power' and Women's Liberation: Exploring the Relationship Between the Antiwar Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement,' in *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement: Essays From the Charles DeBenedetti Memorial Conference*, ed. by Melvin Small and William D. Hoover (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1992), pp. 171-181 (p. 176); Rosen, p. 203; Umansky, pp. 103-104.

²⁷¹ 'Perspectives for WSP: A Message from Congresswoman Bella S. Abzug to the Women Strike for Peace National Conference,' *Memo*, Winter 1972, p. 6, in *Herstory 1 – Update*, Reel 17.

²⁷² Maxine Raz, 'Women's Groups Forming,' *East Bay Women for Peace Newsletter*, June 1971, p. 4, in *Herstory Women's History Collection*, Reel 23.

VIII

Clearly then, ideologies of motherhood were central to the activism of the white, middle-class, middle-aged women of WSP; just as their activism was central to the broader anti-Vietnam War struggle. Indeed, as they mobilised against the war, WSPers consistently claimed to be motivated by concern for their own draft-age sons and for Vietnamese children, and – echoing the maternal rhetoric of countless women peace activists before them – they emphasised their responsibilities as mothers to justify their protests. However, members of WSP also formulated their own version of maternalism that was tied to their social location as white, middle-class women, and heavily informed by Cold War gender ideals. Furthermore, drawing upon 1960s styles of protest, WSPers combined more traditional modes of maternalism with direct action tactics that were in vogue. Importantly, while many activists were motivated by genuine maternal concerns, it is clear that WSP also used motherhood tactically to gain credibility, appeal to the media and the public, and protect against reprisals. As this chapter has demonstrated, maternalism was an enduring theme that united WSPers across the country. But this study has also highlighted key ways that WSP's maternalist politics varied from place to place – and perhaps more importantly, it shows that the group evolved significantly over the course of the 1960s.

Indeed, although it has rarely been recognised within the historiography, WSP had experienced a process of radicalisation by the late 1960s: activists had broadened their agenda to include a commitment to racial and economic justice; forged alliances with welfare recipients, feminists and New Left activists; become more confrontational in their methods and increasingly willing to risk arrest; and begun to advocate systemic social and political change. What is striking, however, is that, even as their goals and tactics transformed dramatically, WSPers continued to bring their maternal identities to bear on their activism – viewing motherhood as a useful basis for coalition building and a proven source of political strength. But, while presenting an image of respectable motherhood had served WSP well in the past, activists soon found that their late-1960s brand of militant maternalism was considerably less effective at winning public support or offering protection from authorities.

Nevertheless, while the anti-war movement's role in ending the war in Vietnam has been much debated by scholars, WSP clearly had a significant impact on the lives of

its participants and on the broader protest culture of the period.²⁷³ As we have seen, involvement in WSP often led women to develop new skills and a heightened sense of personal efficiency. Furthermore, by the late 1960s, influenced by interactions with ‘radical’ young feminists and by their own experiences of activism, many WSPers came to question their place within the gender hierarchy and to identify as part of the larger women’s liberation movement. Indeed, while the voices of these older women were frequently ignored by other feminists at the time, and have since been overlooked by historians of the women’s movement, WSP should be seen to have made significant contributions to the feminist discourses of the era. As this chapter has shown, WSPers formulated a distinctive version of feminism that was rooted in their particular class and generational perspective, and shaped by their identities as mothers – and they foreshadowed many of ideas later articulated by cultural feminists. Thus, studying WSP demonstrates that ‘the women’s liberation movement’ was not singular, but consisted of a diverse range of participants, who in turn espoused a range of different ideologies, tactics and goals.

WSP’s lasting influence is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that it survived long after the 1973 Paris Peace Accords brought an end to America’s military involvement in Vietnam – with many participants remaining politically active well into old age. Indeed, after the Peace Accords went into effect, members of WSP continued to apply pressure on the U.S. government, demanding the implementation of the ceasefire, unconditional amnesty for draft resisters, freedom for the thousands of POWs in South Vietnamese jails, and a reduction of the military budget. The group also began to refocus its energies on its original goal of universal disarmament.²⁷⁴ Admittedly, with the winding down of the conflict in Vietnam, the organisation’s membership declined significantly. And as we have seen, many younger women were put off from joining during this period by WSP’s matronly image and aging membership body. As Taylor explained, by the early 1990s, WSP was ‘suffering from an onset of galloping attrition in membership all over the country. Our hopes that our daughters would follow in our footsteps did not materialize.’ Taylor also noted that, with the end Cold War, most Americans became less concerned about nuclear weapons, and support for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty waned.²⁷⁵ As a result, in the summer of 1991, WSP

²⁷³ For a useful discussion of these debates, see Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, Chapter 6.

²⁷⁴ Nadine Brozan, ‘Women’s Group Began as One Day Protest, 4,215 Days Ago,’ *New York Times*, 16 May 1973, p. 52.

²⁷⁵ Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, p. 153.

was finally forced to close its national office.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, WSP survived for nearly two decades after the end of the Vietnam War and, during that time, it helped to shape the anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s, which integrated both feminist and maternalist rhetoric. Interestingly, in doing so, WSP also played an important – although largely unacknowledged and perhaps undesired – role in influencing a small cadre of anti-nuclear activists who defined themselves as ‘pro-life.’ As Chapter 4 demonstrates, this group bore many similarities to WSP. Indeed, as these activists launched a joint campaign against nuclear arms and abortion, they too sought to harness the political power of motherhood.

²⁷⁶ Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, p. 263.

Chapter 2: The Welfare Rights Struggle

Children are sleeping on floors because beds are missing.

But I hear people saying “Sorry, it’s none of our business.”

Rats and roaches are taking over the home, eating and sleeping with our children

...“I’m sorry, but it’s none of my business.”

Windows are broken, ceilings are leaking. “That apartment is too large for such a large family.”

...“Shame, shame, but it’s really none of my business.”

Kids are dressed in rags, their feet are bare where shoes should be.

...“Sad, sad, but it’s none of my business.”

Diseases are spreading everywhere, for the slum streets are filled with filth and debris.

...“Disgusting, disgusting, but it’s none of our business.”

Our children in despair, turning into drug addicts and hoodlums. They feel there is nothing to look forward to.

...“You’re right, but it’s none of my business.”

Education is poor. Too many children in one class, and not enough good teachers.

...“That’s a problem, but really it’s none of our business.”

Children are hungry; babies without milk.

...“I sympathize with you, but it’s none of my business.”

For these reasons and many others, mothers are forced to organize; get arrested; and treated like criminals. But still we hear

...“It’s a shame, but it’s none of my business.

– Extract from ‘Sorry, It’s None Of Our Business,’ by Claradine James¹

On 30 June 1969, around 3,000 people assembled on Boston Common to demand that President Nixon ‘Stop the War on Us Poor.’ The rally was sponsored by the Massachusetts Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO), and was made up of low-income, predominantly black women on welfare, and their middle-class supporters. Its principal speakers included renowned baby doctor Benjamin Spock and founder of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) George Wiley. In his keynote address, Dr. Spock, a prominent peace activist, made connections between the escalating costs of the war in Vietnam and social deprivation at home. In particular, he emphasised the devastating effects poverty had on the nation’s youngest citizens, contending that it was ‘absolutely disgraceful for this country to be handicapping its children.’² However, while nationally known figures such as Spock attracted the mass media and ensured a

¹ Claradine James, ‘Sorry, It’s None Of Our Business,’ in Massachusetts Welfare Rights Organization Records, 1968-1972, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 2, Folder 6 (hereafter cited as MWRO Records). Also reprinted in *Welfare Fighter*, December 1969, p. 3, in Guida West Papers, 1946-2006, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Box 97, Folder 3 (hereafter cited as West Papers).

² F. B. Taylor, Jr., ‘Dr. Spock Tells Welfare Rally U.S. Handicaps Poor Children,’ *Boston Globe*, 1 July 1969, pp. 1, 3, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 14; Earl Marchand, ‘Spock Leads Welfare March to HEW Office,’ *Boston Herald Traveler*, 1 July 1969, p. 3, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 14.

good turnout on the Common, the women who headed MWRO felt strongly that welfare recipients themselves should also address the rally.³ Claradine James, an African American welfare recipient and Massachusetts's delegate to NWRO, was one of those who took to the podium, where she read aloud the above poem, which she had written for the occasion.⁴ Like Spock, she highlighted the dire conditions faced by poor children and criticised widespread apathy to their plight. But, in contrast to middle-class, male supporters who tended to keep the focus on children's needs, welfare recipients also sought to foreground their own status as mothers. In the final stanzas of her poem, James declared:

For centuries mothers have cried inside, but now we realize that crying outside is the only solution. We must make the whole United States cry with us and our hungry babies.

We will continue to organize across the country until there is adequate income for all the poor and the sick. If this means having our constitutional rights taken away from us because we are trying to find a life for our children in this society, then we are willing to go to jail 365 days a year.

Thus, James politicised the individual act of crying by suggesting that mothers' tears could be used strategically; and she emphasised welfare recipients' protective instincts as mothers to justify their militant activism and appeal for support. She concluded: 'As mothers, we say to people everywhere: This war on poverty is your moral and human obligation... VERY MUCH YOUR BUSINESS.'⁵

Welfare recipients in Boston were not alone in politicising their identities as mothers. The Boston rally was the centrepiece in a series of coordinated demonstrations on 30 June, to mark NWRO's third 'birthday' and launch its campaign for a guaranteed adequate income of \$5,500 for a family of four. On what was billed as a national day of action, recipients in nineteen different states staged marches, sit-ins and vigils, with an estimated 20,000 people taking part nationwide.⁶ In Boston, the rally on the Common was followed by a march to the regional office of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, where, accompanied by Spock, welfare recipients presented their demands for a guaranteed adequate income.⁷ Significantly, although the Boston demonstration

³ Lawrence Neil Bailis, *Bread or Justice: Grassroots Organizing in the Welfare Rights Movement* (Lexington, M.A.: Lexington Books, 1974), p. 107.

⁴ Claradine James, Transcript of Interview with Guida West, 20 June 1984, pp. 17-18, in West Papers, Box 7, Folder 25.

⁵ James, 'Sorry, It's None Of Our Business.'

⁶ 'NWRO Celebrates Birthday In the Streets,' *NOW!*, July 1969, pp. 1-4, in *NOW! National Welfare Leaders Newsletter* (Microfilm. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1970), Reel 1.

⁷ Taylor, 'Dr. Spock Tells Welfare Rally U.S. Handicaps Poor Children'; Marchand, 'Spock Leads Welfare March to HEW Office.'

was part of a national campaign, it was also shaped by the immediate political context, and reflected a number of local concerns. For example, welfare recipients called for an end to the Massachusetts Welfare Department's recent 'furniture freeze,' eliminating the availability of special grants for basic household furnishings; and they protested against the introduction of a new anti-demonstration policy, designed to limit organised activity in Boston's welfare offices.⁸ Nevertheless, while specific goals and tactics varied from place to place, common themes united welfare rights demonstrations throughout the country – one of the most prominent being welfare recipients' attempts to harness the political power of motherhood. Indeed, at protests across the nation on 30 June, activists carried identical signs reading 'We Care For Children' and 'Mother Power.'⁹

Focusing on the movement in Boston during the 1960s and early 1970s, this chapter explores the centrality of motherhood to the welfare rights struggle. On the face of it, there are striking parallels with the use of maternalism in Women Strike for Peace. Like their WSP counterparts, welfare rights activists drew heavily upon a language of motherhood to justify their protests and make demands of the state. They consistently claimed to be motivated by concern for their children's well-being, and they emphasised their status as mothers to bolster calls for larger benefits and fairer regulations. As with members of WSP, welfare rights activists also viewed motherhood as a powerful basis for gender solidarity. Although the movement in Boston was mainly comprised of black single mothers on welfare, it always included a significant number of white welfare recipients, as well as some Latina and Native American women. In addition, welfare recipients appealed for support from middle-class, white women (and some black) in Friends of Welfare Rights groups and other women's organisations. In both instances, a shared identity as mothers helped facilitate coalition building across racial and class divides. Although differences remained and alliances tended to be fraught with tensions, common concerns about children enabled women from diverse backgrounds to come together to address concrete, immediate issues.¹⁰ Furthermore, like peace activists, welfare recipients' use of maternalism extended beyond the rhetorical level and they

⁸ Roberta Grant, Letter to Friends of MWRO, 11 June 1969, in MWRO Records, Box 2, Folder 4.

⁹ See photographs printed in *NOW!*, July 1969, pp. 1-3, in *NOW! National Welfare Leaders Newsletter*, Reel 1.

¹⁰ 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: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 178-195; Cynthia Edmonds-Cady, 'Mobilizing Motherhood: Race, Class, and the Uses of Maternalism in the Welfare Rights Movement,' *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 3/4, (2009), 206-222; Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana, Illinois, 2008), p. 45.

steeped direct actions in maternal symbolism, taking every opportunity to remind the public of their roles as caregivers.

However, despite some significant commonalities, gender was intricately entwined with race and class, and this chapter highlights important differences in the way black single women on welfare understood and used motherhood. Indeed, welfare recipients' conceptions of motherhood were rooted in their particular social location, and were often shaped by their experience of an intersection of race- and class-based discrimination. In their daily struggles within the welfare system, recipients regularly confronted negative stereotypes about poor black women and grappled with racialised notions of femininity, in which 'good motherhood' was codified white. Furthermore, the prevailing family ideal of a male breadwinner and female homemaker marginalised single mothers, who were frequently stigmatised as sexually immoral. As a result, welfare recipients tended to view motherhood as involving an element of struggle. Although, like WSPers, many welfare recipients believed that mothers had innate qualities and special responsibilities, they rejected a sentimental or idealised view of maternalism.¹¹ Instead, committed to protecting their children and defending the value of their maternal labour, welfare rights activists espoused a more militant brand of maternalism from the onset. Significantly, in contrast to the women of WSP who remained wedded to the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, welfare recipients' militant maternalism did not preclude the use of violence or the threat of violence if deemed necessary.

Yet, this chapter also examines how race and class combined with gender to shape popular perceptions of the welfare rights movement in Boston. For, although welfare recipients saw motherhood as a basis for unity and a source of political strength, they often struggled to establish their moral authority as mothers. Despite activists' best efforts to refute them, stereotypes about black welfare mothers persisted, marring their relationship with welfare officials and the public. As historian Anne Valk has argued, the success of the welfare rights movement was ultimately limited by these discordant views about black motherhood.¹²

Finally, this chapter looks at how the welfare rights movement evolved over time, particularly exploring the development of a feminist consciousness among Boston

¹¹ Cynthia Edmonds-Cady has termed the maternalist politics employed by welfare recipients 'experiential maternalism,' distinguishing this from what Molly Ladd-Taylor defined 'sentimental maternalism.' See Edmonds-Cady, 'Mobilizing Motherhood'; Molly Ladd-Taylor, 'Towards Defining Maternalism in U.S. History,' *Journal of Women's History*, 5, no. 2 (1993), 110-113.

¹² Anne M. Valk, "'Mother Power': The Movement for Welfare Rights in Washington D.C., 1966-1972," *Journal of Women's History*, 11, no. 4 (2000), 34-58.

welfare recipients. Indeed, as they struggled to secure more economic resources and recast stereotypes about poor black single mothers, welfare recipients increasingly recognised gender as indispensable to their marginalisation. They made connections between women's vulnerability to poverty and their subordinate status within society, and they began to argue that welfare was a women's issue. By the 1970s, many welfare rights activists in Boston and around the country had come to define themselves as part of a larger women's movement, and they frequently participated in feminist coalitions and events. However, like women in WSP, welfare recipients did not simply adopt existing feminist ideals; instead, they reinterpreted concepts such as 'women's liberation' and 'reproductive freedom' on their own terms. As leading welfare rights historian Premilla Nadasen has argued, welfare recipients formulated a distinctive version of radical black feminism, rooted in their experience of an intersection of gender, racial, and class discrimination, and centred on a commitment to self-determination and autonomy for poor black women.¹³ Furthermore, as this chapter demonstrates, recipients' emerging feminist ideology was tied to their identity as mothers, and they continued to view motherhood as a powerful basis for radical change. Thus, welfare rights activists made important contributions to the discourses of second-wave feminism, providing further evidence that the feminist activism and theorising of mothers cannot be discounted.

By employing their status as mothers to justify their activism, welfare recipients were drawing on and contributing to a well-established tradition in African American women's political organising. During the early twentieth century, middle-class black clubwomen regularly tied their reform work to their identity as mothers, striving to present an image of altruistic, nurturing and, above all, respectable black motherhood.¹⁴ In fact, maternalism played a key role in the construction of early welfare policy during the Progressive era, as both black and white women's clubs invoked the moral authority of motherhood to press for protective laws for women and children.¹⁵ However,

¹³ See Premilla Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights,' *Feminist Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2002), 270-301; Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Premilla Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁴ See for instance Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that black women's influence on welfare programmes was negligible during this period. Furthermore, the white women reformers who helped shape early welfare policy supported a system of means testing and distinguishing the deserving from the undeserving that was frequently used to exclude blacks. See Linda Gordon, 'Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945,' *Journal of American History*, 78, no. 2 (1991), 559-590; Eileen Boris,

understandings of motherhood were profoundly shaped by race, and black women's emphasis on the mother role was more than simply an attempt to appeal to mainstream white sensibilities. As Molly Ladd-Taylor has argued, successive generations of slavery and mothering in a racist society made it difficult for African American women to idealise motherhood in the same way as white women reformers. Because black women had historically been denied the right to care for their children, their appeals to motherhood were often conceived as a challenge to the subordination of African Americans.¹⁶ Furthermore, Patricia Hill Collins has highlighted the importance of traditions of 'othermothering' within African American communities for understanding black women's political activism. With roots in both African culture and slavery, 'othermothering' denotes a practice among African American women of sharing childcare responsibilities within community-based networks to ensure the survival of the black community. As Collins and other scholars have noted, this practice tended to stimulate a more generalised ethic of care among black women whereby they felt accountable to all the black community's children, and it frequently provided a foundation for women's community activism. Influenced by their experiences as 'othermothers,' many black women activists viewed mothering and nurturing as forms of resistance.¹⁷

Building on these traditions, African American women during the 1960s and 1970s frequently sustained the black freedom movement at the local level – engendering a diverse range of community-based struggles that defy easy distinctions between 'civil rights' and 'Black Power.' As they organised around issues such as voter registration, the desegregation of housing and schools, tenants' rights, black unemployment, and economic justice, black women often sought to claim authority as mothers. For example, Tiya Morris has shown that many of the local black women who fed, clothed and housed civil rights activists in the South during the early 1960s based their activism on the notion of a unique female role, seeking to provide the practical and psychological support necessary to sustain the movement. Meanwhile, examining black women's community work in New York and Philadelphia during the War on Poverty,

'The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the "Political,"' *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, 2 (1989), 25-49.

¹⁶ Ladd-Taylor, 'Towards Defining Maternalism in U.S. History,' p. 112.

¹⁷ See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2000), Chapter 8; Stanlie M. James, 'Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?', in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, ed. by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 44-54; Andrea O'Reilly, 'Feminist Perspectives on Mothering: Power and Oppression,' in *Gendered Intersections: An Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies*, ed. by Lesley Biggs and Pamela Down (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005), pp. 235-240 (p. 237).

sociologist Nancy Naples has illustrated how activists drew on traditional female identities as they attempted to improve the lives of their families and communities. Naples argued that women's community activism was heavily influenced by traditions of 'activist mothering,' which she defined as 'political activism as a central component of motherhood and community caretaking of those who are not part of one's defined household or family.'¹⁸

But despite drawing upon a long history of maternalist politics, black women activists in the 1960s and 1970s were also products of a specific moment in history. On the one hand, their activism reflected the ways in which the sixties decisively altered the terrain for social protest. As several scholars have shown, the decade's highly visible civil rights and anti-war demonstrations inspired others to question injustices, provided examples of activism for them to build on, and legitimised new forms of confrontational protest.¹⁹ This is evident in Rhonda Williams's study of poor black women's activism around public housing during the 1960s. As Williams noted, public housing tenants had a long tradition of politicising their familial roles and drawing upon the moral authority of motherhood to make claims for decent living conditions. However, influenced by the rights-centred rhetoric of the 1960s, activists departed from their earlier emphasis on respectability and the enactment of middle-class behaviours, and demanded respect and dignity as their human rights.²⁰ Similarly, women in the welfare rights movement were less concerned about conforming to the ideals of respectable motherhood than they were

¹⁸ Tiyi Morris, 'Local Women and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi: Re-visioning Womanpower Unlimited', in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 193-214; Nancy A. Naples, *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 11-12. For more on black women's activism as mothers during the postwar black freedom movement, see Ruth Feldstein, "'I Wanted the Whole World to See": Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till,' in *Mothers & Motherhood: Readings in American History*, ed. by Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), pp. 131-170; Jeanne Theoharis, "'They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid": Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston," in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University, 2005), pp. 17-44; Adina Back, 'Exposing the "Whole Segregation Myth": The Harlem Nine and New York City's School Desegregation Battles,' in *Freedom North: Black Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 65-91. For an examination of how white women in the civil rights movement also based their activism on their identities as mothers, see Rhoda Lois Blumberg, 'White Mothers as Civil Rights Activists: The Interweave of Family and Movement Roles,' in *Women and Social Protest*, ed. by Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 166-179.

¹⁹ See for instance Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 22-23; Stephen Tuck, "'We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left Off": The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest during the 1970s,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, no. 4 (2008), 637-54; Van Gosse and Richard Moser, eds, *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁰ Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 10.

with invoking notions of mothers' 'rights.' Building on the example of other social movements, particularly the black freedom struggle, welfare recipients deployed direct action tactics, engaged in civil disobedience, and regularly risked arrest. Furthermore, by organising around issues such as birth control and refusing to renounce their sexuality, welfare rights activists asserted that the 'personal' was 'political.'²¹ On the other hand, however, black women activists in the 1960s faced a particular set of pitfalls in their attempts to claim the moral authority of motherhood. Although black motherhood had long been denigrated by racist and classist assumptions, this period saw renewed focus on black women's 'moral deficiencies,' as a host of policy makers cast 'the black matriarchy' as the fundamental problem facing black society. Thus, for black single mothers on welfare – who often found themselves at the centre of these debates – basing their activism on their identity as mothers was in itself an act of resistance.²²

Long neglected by historians, the welfare rights struggle has been the focus of a steady growth of scholarly attention in recent years. Importantly, while the few early works on the movement – most of them written by former allies and participants – tended to focus on middle-class organisers like themselves, more recent scholarship has placed welfare recipients firmly at the centre of the story.²³ Furthermore, as literature on the movement has blossomed, a number of scholars have begun to examine how gender, and in particular ideas about motherhood, shaped welfare rights activism. Nadasen, for example, addressed this well in her pioneering recent work on the movement.²⁴ Meanwhile, in case studies of welfare rights organising in Las Vegas and Washington, D.C., Annelise Orleck and Anne Valk both looked at how welfare recipients explained their demands within the context of their maternal role.²⁵ However, other recent works

²¹ Valk, *Radical Sisters*, pp. 44-45; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 23.

²² Theoharis, 'They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid,' pp. 18-20.

²³ For early studies of the welfare rights movement, see Nick Kotz and Mary Lynn Kotz, *A Passion for Equality: George A. Wiley and the Movement* (New York: Norton, 1977); Frances Fox Piven and Cloward, Richard A., *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Martha Davis, *Brutal Need: Lawyers and the Welfare Rights Movement, 1960-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Premilla Nadasen has written extensively on the welfare rights movement in recent years. Although not an exhaustive list, see Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*; Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement'; Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem'"; Premilla Nadasen, "'We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary': Johnnie Tillmon, Welfare Rights, and Black Power,' in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. by Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 317-338.

²⁵ See Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Annelise Orleck, "'If It Wasn't For You I'd Have Shoes For My Children': The Political Education of Las Vegas Welfare Mothers,' in *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices From Left to Right*, ed. by Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck and Diana Taylor (Hanover,

have continued to neglect the gendered dynamics of the movement, suggesting that there is still more to be done in this area. In her study of the welfare rights movement in New York City, for example, Felicia Kornbluh focused on how ideas about rights and citizenship shaped welfare rights organising. Although she recognised that gender influenced welfare recipients' vision of citizenship, this received no more than a passing mention in her lengthy study.²⁶

At the same time, a growth of local studies has demonstrated the importance of place to the welfare rights movement. This was something lacking from Nadasen's detailed national study, which, although emphasising the 'multiple consciousness' of poor black women on welfare, tended to neglect the impact of regional identity on welfare recipients' activism.²⁷ Yet, as social movement scholars are increasingly showing, local concerns and opportunities play a critical role in shaping political activism.²⁸ As local studies by Orleck, Valk and Kornbluh make clear, this was particularly true within the welfare rights struggle, a movement deeply rooted in participants' day-to-day lives and immediate surroundings. Building on this recent scholarship, this study focuses on Boston – an early and vibrant site of welfare rights activity that has yet to be studied in any depth. A notable exception to this is social policy scholar Lawrence Bailis's 1974 study of welfare rights organising in Massachusetts. But, like most early scholarship, Bailis focused primarily on the movement's middle-class staff and did not allow women on welfare much agency.²⁹ In contrast, this chapter looks at the actions and motivations of welfare recipients in Boston, illustrating the centrality of motherhood to the movement. It examines how location shaped the militant maternalism adopted by Boston welfare recipients, while also exploring the symbiotic relationship between the local and the national, and noting themes that transcended regional boundaries. Furthermore, by comparing the welfare rights movement with social movements across the political spectrum during this period, this study highlights important particularities in the way welfare recipients

N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997), pp. 102-118; Valk, *Radical Sisters*, pp. 38-59; Valk, "Mother Power".

²⁶ Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

²⁷ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. xvii.

²⁸ Influenced by recent scholarship on the black freedom struggle, historians are increasingly recognising the importance of studying social movements at the grassroots level. For example, in her study of feminist activism in Memphis during the 1970s, Stephanie Gilmore argued that regional affiliation, particularly notions of 'Southernness,' were important in the construction of feminist organisations, tactics and goals. See Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Stephanie Gilmore, 'The Dynamics of Second-Wave Feminist Activism in Memphis, 1971-1982: Rethinking the Liberal/Radical Divide,' *NWSA Journal*, 15, no. 1 (2003), 94-117.

²⁹ Bailis.

experienced, understood and used motherhood – moving beyond simplistic notions of a monolithic maternalist tradition.

II

The origins of the welfare rights struggle can be found in the early and mid-1960s, when recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) around the country began organising to address the inadequacies of the welfare system. AFDC was first introduced as part of the 1935 Social Security Act to provide assistance to single parent families with children and, in its early years, it tended to be limited to poor white widows and others considered ‘worthy’ of assistance. However, as a result of high poverty rates, urban migration and widespread racism in employment, AFDC came to disproportionately serve black single mothers in the post-World War II decades. This led to increasing political attacks on welfare. Relying on longstanding racial and gender stereotypes, politicians and the press characterised welfare recipients as lazy, promiscuous and undeserving.³⁰ Furthermore, racialised discourses encouraged a host of new regulations designed to restrict the welfare rolls, such as ‘suitable home’ clauses denying aid to mothers who had children out of wedlock; ‘man-in-the-house’ rules revoking assistance to women if there was any evidence of a man present in their home; and work requirements for mothers on welfare.³¹ Meanwhile, caseworkers wielded an inordinate amount of power to enforce these policies and routinely searched recipients’ homes, encroaching on their privacy and restricting their sexual freedom. Significantly, although AFDC was jointly funded by regional and federal governments, it was administered by the state, meaning that payments and eligibility criteria varied widely from place to place, shaped by local politics.³² Nevertheless, welfare recipients across the country faced a degrading and dehumanising system by the 1960s and, in response, they began banding together in local communities to demand higher monthly benefits, more respect from caseworkers, and greater control over their lives. Many women were inspired by the civil rights campaigns that swept the North and South earlier in the decade. However, the biggest impetus driving welfare recipients’ activism was the harsh realities of daily life in the welfare system. While recipients initiated many local groups

³⁰ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. xvi.

³¹ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 6.

³² Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 1, 6.

themselves, others were organised with the help of student and civil rights activists, local churches, and social services agencies.³³

The movement in Boston began in summer 1965, when welfare recipients in the predominantly black neighbourhood of Roxbury-North Dorchester founded a group called Mothers for Adequate Welfare (MAW) with the help of members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Having opened an action centre in the community the previous fall under the auspices of its Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), SDS initially focused on organising unemployed men.³⁴ But student organisers soon turned their attention to welfare issues, after finding welfare recipients to be the most eager and active constituency.³⁵ Importantly, a number of those who joined MAW had a history of political activism and had already been involved in civil rights campaigns in the city.³⁶ Moreover, it was welfare recipients who tended to feel the brunt of broad demographic and economic changes that were thrusting Boston into a state of urban crisis by the 1960s. Following the pattern of other major cities at the time, Boston's black population had nearly tripled between 1940 and 1960, as African Americans migrated from the South, amassing in neighbourhoods such as the South End, Roxbury and North Dorchester.³⁷ At the same time, however, the city saw a mass exodus of middle-class whites to the suburbs, while deindustrialisation meant scant employment options for arriving black migrants. Thus, Boston's black residents found themselves living in increasingly segregated and deprived neighbourhoods.³⁸ Meanwhile, less affluent whites who lacked the resources to escape to the suburbs also remained trapped in the inner city, clustering in neighbourhoods such as South Boston and Charlestown.³⁹ Indeed, unlike other northern cities, such as Washington, D.C. or Detroit, where blacks made up the vast majority of the welfare rolls, a significant proportion of welfare recipients in Boston were white.⁴⁰ However, Boston's meagre welfare payments did

³³ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. xv.

³⁴ Gordon Brumm, 'Mothers for Adequate Welfare – AFDC from the Underside,' *Dialogues Boston*, January 1968, p. 2, in George Wiley Papers, 1949-1975, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 25, Folder 3 (hereafter cited as Wiley Papers); Jenifer Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 65.

³⁵ Frost, pp. 1, 3-4.

³⁶ Frost, pp. 67-68.

³⁷ Joshua Smith, 'Boston: Cradle of Liberty or Separate but Equal?' *Theory into Practice*, 17, no. 1 (1978), 54-66 (p. 55); Frost, pp. 65-66.

³⁸ Frost, pp. 65-66, 68.

³⁹ Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Bill Pastreich, Letter to Dr. Benjamin Spock, 6 June 1969, p. 2, in Wiley Papers, Box 33, Folder 15; Valk, *Radical Sisters*, p. 40; Cynthia Edmonds-Cady, 'Motherhood and Agency: American Welfare Rights Activists' Resistance to State Control over Sexuality and Reproduction,' *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 3, no. 2 (2012), 134-149 (p. 142).

little to alleviate the problems of inner city poverty for black or white recipients. Although allowances in Massachusetts were some of the highest in the country, they still fell below designated poverty levels (in 1968, a family of four on AFDC in Boston received \$2,976 a year, compared to the federal poverty standard of \$3,300).⁴¹ And Boston was rapidly becoming one of the costliest cities in which to live.⁴² As a result, welfare recipients tended to live in overcrowded, substandard housing, and often could not afford basic food, clothing or household goods. In addition, they complained of unfair and arbitrary treatment by social workers, and black recipients alleged frequent instances of racial discrimination in the administration of AFDC.⁴³ In this context then, many recipients were eager to join a group that targeted the oppressiveness of the welfare system. Initially taking root in Roxbury and the South End, MAW chapters soon spread and, by 1968, the organisation claimed six branches in the Boston area, with an active membership of between fifty and sixty, and a mailing list of 1,000.⁴⁴ From the beginning, MAW was an interracial group and, although predominantly black, it included a number of white and Puerto Rican welfare recipients.⁴⁵

However, like welfare recipients across the country, activists in Boston began to recognise the limits of local organising and, over the course of 1966 and 1967, MAW took part in a series of events aimed at building a national welfare rights movement. These efforts were spearheaded by George Wiley, a black civil rights activist who had recently resigned a leadership post in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to concentrate on working towards racial justice through economic opportunity.⁴⁶ After founding the Poverty/Rights Action Center in Washington, D.C. in May 1966, one of Wiley's first actions was to help turn a local welfare rights march from Cleveland to Columbus, Ohio into the first nationwide demonstration of welfare recipients. On 30 June 1966, as Ohio marchers arrived at the State Capitol in Columbus at the end of their 150-mile, ten-day 'Walk for Decent Welfare,' simultaneous demonstrations took place in twenty-five cities across the country, with an estimated 6,000 people taking part

⁴¹ Brumm, pp. 9-10; F. B. Taylor, Jr., 'Welfare Mothers Carry Fight Into 3rd Year,' *Boston Sunday Globe*, 18 August 1968, p. 22, in MRWO Records, Box 1, Folder 12. In Washington, D.C., for example, the average annual income of women on welfare in 1970 was only \$1,409, less than half the designated poverty level. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, p. 40.

⁴² Formisano, p. 14.

⁴³ Brumm, pp. 4, 9.

⁴⁴ Brumm, p. 2.

⁴⁵ John Case, 'Welfare Work,' *Dirt and Flowers: A Newsletter for the Movement in New England* (published by Students for a Democratic Society), 30 July 1966, p. 9, in Marya Randall Levenson Papers, 1966-2003, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork (hereafter cited as Levenson Papers).

⁴⁶ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, p. 28; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), p. 227.

nationwide.⁴⁷ In Boston, around thirty-five women and children marched from MAW's office in the South End to Boston Common and the State House. At a picnic-style rally on the Common, welfare recipients passed around a loudspeaker, taking turns to voice their grievances. Significantly, many of their concerns involved their children. One woman said she had come: 'Because I ask my social worker for some furniture and other household goods and she screams at me and tells me to get out of her office and take my illegitimate children with me.' Another declared: 'I need prescription shoes for my baby and my social worker refused them.'⁴⁸ Protesters then went on to the State House to present their demands, which included an adequate living allowance, representation on welfare appeal boards, and written regulations detailing their rights and obligations.⁴⁹ As we have seen, this date would come to be commemorated by activists as marking the birth of the national welfare rights movement. In the months that followed, participants in the 30 June demonstration met several times to devise plans for a national group. MAW representatives attended all these early meetings, including a convention in Washington in August 1967, at which 178 delegates from seventy-five welfare rights groups around the country came together to officially form the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO).⁵⁰

Although NWRO was conceived as a mass interracial movement, the overwhelming majority of its members were black women on welfare. In contrast to WSP, which prized its 'un-organisational' format, NWRO adopted a more formal structure from the onset. Members of affiliated local groups were required to pay dues to a national office, and the organisation was headed by a national committee of welfare recipients, made up of elected representatives from across the country.⁵¹ The prominent role men played in NWRO also sets it apart from WSP. Having been instrumental in its founding, Wiley stayed on as NWRO's executive director, hiring a staff to help him fundraise and coordinate local campaigns – most of whom were middle-class men, often white.⁵² Significantly, NWRO's first paid field organiser, Bill Pastreich, was sent to Boston, where he would be influential in directing welfare rights activity from 1968 onwards. Pastreich, who grew up in an affluent Jewish neighbourhood in Brooklyn, had

⁴⁷ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ Doris Bland, 'MAW's March and Rally,' *M.A.W. Newsletter*, 25 July 1966, pp. 6-7, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

⁴⁹ Case, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁰ Bailis, p. 11; Pat Moody, 'National Welfare Rights Movement, Washington, D.C.,' *M.A.W. Newsletter*, September 1967, p. 1, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork; White, p. 228.

⁵¹ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 31-32.

⁵² Nadasen, "'We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary,'" p. 323; Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, p. 32.

begun organising public housing tenants during graduate school at Syracuse University, under the training of community organising pioneer Saul Alinsky.⁵³ After being hired by Wiley in June 1968, he initiated a series of mass recruitment drives in Boston, prompting a second wave of welfare rights organising in the city. By October 1968, Pastreich had helped organise nine new groups in the Boston area, which came together to form the Massachusetts Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO).⁵⁴ With a formal structure that closely mirrored the national association and a steadily growing membership body, MWRO soon replaced MAW as the state's official representative to NWRO. For its part, although MAW had been involved in NWRO's founding, the group became increasingly disenchanted with the top-down approach of the national organisation and its new Massachusetts affiliate.⁵⁵ Reflecting the influence of SDS, MAW favoured participatory democracy over hierarchical structures, and had always functioned without formal membership or elected leaders. MAW members were particularly wary of the prominent role played by non-recipient male organisers at both the national and statewide level.⁵⁶ As a result, the original Boston group ceased paying dues to NWRO after January 1968, and fought to maintain its autonomy as MWRO expanded in the area.⁵⁷ Importantly, these struggles with male organisers would be significant in the development of a feminist consciousness within MAW, and similar tensions would later arise in the ranks of NWRO.

There is no doubt that the formation of NWRO strengthened welfare rights organising across the country: coordinating disparate campaigns, bringing publicity and funding to the movement, and fostering a sense that local groups were part of something bigger.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, for welfare recipients in Boston and elsewhere, activism continued to be centred at the local level, and shaped to a large degree by local opportunities and concerns. Indeed, few recipients had the resources to attend centralised demonstrations in Washington and most grievances existed at the local level anyway. As James explained in a 1984 interview with sociologist Guida West: 'We wanted a national change. But we were doing things to change on a local basis in

⁵³ Bill Pasteseuch [*sic*], Transcript of Interview with Guida West, 20 June 1984, pp. 1, 11-14, in West Papers, Box 9, Folder 23; Robert L. Levey, 'The Organizer,' *Boston Globe Magazine*, 29 September 1968, in MWRO Records, Box 2, Folder 8.

⁵⁴ Bailis, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Frost, p. 168.

⁵⁶ Bailis, p. 11; Brumm, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Dietz, 'Organizer Forced on Us'; Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement,' p. 277.

⁵⁸ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 31-33.

Mass.⁵⁹ Similarly, fellow MWRO leader Roberta Grant asserted that the welfare rights movement always operated ‘on the basis of the local. Everybody had to deal with their own.’⁶⁰ In Boston, MWRO expanded rapidly after 1968, soon earning the city a reputation as one of the largest and consistently most militant sites of welfare rights activity in the country. By June 1970, more than 4,000 welfare recipients had joined over fifty local affiliates in Massachusetts, with the majority concentrated in the Boston area. Thus, in terms of dues-paying membership, MWRO was second only to the New York City affiliate, an organisation that had nearly six times as many welfare recipients to draw from.⁶¹ While the prominence of national organisers in Boston undoubtedly aided this growth, it also had much to do with the unique local context. Indeed, Boston had a long history of resisting authority, which dated back to before the American Revolution and flourished during the antebellum period when Bostonians led the nation’s movement to abolish slavery.⁶² Highlighting the importance of this radical heritage, MWRO leader Kay Hurley declared: ‘I think people who grow up in Boston tend to be very political. It sort of comes from the territory.’⁶³ More bleakly, however, the intensity of welfare rights organising also reflected the level of crisis the city faced by the 1960s, with dire living conditions and racial conflict increasingly blighting Boston’s reputation as a ‘cradle of liberty.’

III

For most welfare recipients in Boston, activism initially stemmed from everyday concerns, the most pressing being their struggle, as low-income mothers, to provide adequately for their children. The story of MAW leader Gertrude ‘Nicky’ Nickerson clearly demonstrates the centrality of motherhood in shaping welfare recipients’ political identities. Nickerson, a white welfare recipient living in Boston’s interracial South End neighbourhood, was born in 1926 in Quincy, Massachusetts. Her family moved to Boston when Nickerson was fourteen after her father, a fireman, broke both his hips and was admitted to the Veteran’s Hospital there. After quitting school at

⁵⁹ James, Interview with West, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Roberta Grant, Transcript of Interview with Guida West, 20 June 1984, p. 9, in West Papers, Box 7, Folder 11.

⁶¹ Bailis, p. 2.

⁶² Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 14-15, 26-27.

⁶³ Kay Hurley, Transcript of Interview with Guida West, 21 June 1984, p. 21, in West Papers, Box 7, Folder 23.

sixteen in order to work, Nickerson took a variety of jobs, including working at a local five-and-dime store, cleaning, and factory work during World War II.⁶⁴ ‘In the past, I’ve done just about everything except scrub toilets,’ she explained.⁶⁵ She first applied for welfare in 1960, when she found herself unable to support her newborn daughter. Although she had briefly lived with the child’s father, an African American man named Charles, the pair had never married.⁶⁶ As she put it: ‘My one mistake was I picked the most irresponsible creature alive to be Andrea’s father.’⁶⁷ However, welfare did little to alleviate Nickerson’s situation and she found it a constant struggle to support herself and her daughter on its meagre allowances. She later explained: ‘Welfare is never no good, there’s no way you can live and raise a child sensibly and sanely.’⁶⁸ During one particularly cold winter, Nickerson recalled having her gas cut off when her bill exceeded the amount the welfare department budgeted for utilities. In the end, she restored the gas by cutting through the lock with a hacksaw, declaring: ‘I’d go out and kill to keep my child warm, that’s one thing them dummies don’t realize about mothers you know, if you’ve got a kid, you’re going to do anything to take care of that kid.’⁶⁹ Thus, even before she became active in the welfare rights movement, Nickerson had taken covert measures to resist the welfare department’s strictures, justifying these individual acts of defiance with a maternal rationale. She later became one of the first to join MAW after being approached by SDS organisers in her neighbourhood. ‘I was impressed with the thought of mothers organizing,’ she told one reporter, ‘I think it’s my temperament. When I don’t like certain things I have to sound off my mouth and see if I can possibly change them.’⁷⁰

Although Nickerson’s individual situation was in many respects unique – as a white woman, for instance, she was not typical of welfare rights activists in the city – her experience of being moved to take action to better care for her child was shared by countless others in Boston and across the country. As a result, these women often viewed activism as an extension of their maternal role. Indeed, a clear indication of this was the fact that Boston recipients chose to call their group *Mothers for Adequate*

⁶⁴ Nicky Nickerson, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 278, undated, pp. 1-2, 7, in J. Anthony Lukas Papers, 1940-1997, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 11, Folder 3 (hereafter cited as Lukas Papers).

⁶⁵ Gertrude Nickerson, quoted in Sara Davidson, ‘Part Mata Hari, Part Robin Hood,’ *Boston Globe*, 30 June 1966, p. 6, in West End Community Council Records, 1963-1970, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 10, Folder 1 (hereafter cited as West End Community Council Records).

⁶⁶ Nickerson, Tape 278, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁷ Nickerson, quoted in Davidson, ‘Part Mata Hari, Part Robin Hood.’

⁶⁸ Nickerson, Tape 278, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Nickerson, Tape 278, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁰ Nickerson, quoted in Davidson, ‘Part Mata Hari, Part Robin Hood.’

Welfare, and regularly referred to themselves as ‘the MAWs’ (‘ma’ in Boston dialect). They were not alone in this respect. While NWRO would later encourage local groups to adopt WRO as part of their name to display their affiliation (an edict followed by MWRO), many early welfare rights groups explicitly identified as mothers’ groups – including ANC Mothers Anonymous in California, the AFDC Mothers Club in northern Colorado, and Minnesota’s AFDC Mothers Leagues.⁷¹ Furthermore, MAW’s campaigns often centred on children’s needs and activists relied heavily upon the language of motherhood to justify their activism. MAW’s first actions included organising an after-school programme for neighbourhood children, campaigning for a federal surplus food programme, and pressing for a rent survey to highlight the inadequacy of the welfare department’s rent allowances.⁷² Writing about these activities in SDS’s newsletter in August 1965, MAW member Carole Johnson explained: ‘All of the things they want to change and improve involve their children. The common denominator is kids...’⁷³

The needs of children also stood at the fore of campaigns for special grants initiated in Boston over the course of 1968 and 1969. In most states at this time, welfare recipients were entitled to special grants for things such as school clothing, furniture, and household necessities not budgeted for in their standard monthly checks. Yet, few welfare recipients knew these provisions existed and, when they did, the welfare department often refused to award them.⁷⁴ In Boston, MAW was the first to organise around special grants, conducting campaigns for Thanksgiving dinners and back-to-school clothing during 1966 and 1967.⁷⁵ However, the campaign did not take off on a mass scale until 1968, when NWRO made it the focus of its first major mobilisation, encouraging welfare recipients across the country to apply for special grants. As Kornbluh has observed, this strategy of demanding welfare departments meet their own basic minimum standards was ‘the yeast that made the welfare rights movement rise.’⁷⁶ Nowhere was this truer than in Boston. In an organising model that would be replicated across the nation, Pastreich used the promise of special grants to significantly increase participation in the movement.⁷⁷ Beginning in July 1968, recipients in Boston launched

⁷¹ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, p. 32; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 31.

⁷² Brumm, p. 2; Case, p. 9.

⁷³ Carole Johnson, ‘Mothers Unite for Adequate Welfare,’ *Action Center News*, 5 August 1965, p. 1, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

⁷⁴ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 53-54.

⁷⁵ Taylor, Jr., ‘Welfare Mothers Carry Fight Into 3rd Year’; Brumm, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁶ Kornbluh, *Battle for Welfare Rights*, p. 55.

⁷⁷ For more on the ‘Boston Model,’ an organising strategy designed by the middle-class staff of MWRO and studied by welfare rights groups throughout the country, see Bailis, pp. 19-53; Marjorie Miller, *The*

a series of mass requests for special grants for furniture and telephones, and later for back-to-school and winter clothing – marching, picketing, and sitting-in at local welfare offices if their requests were denied. They also pressed for the establishment of uniform guidelines for the distribution of furniture and clothing grants, setting out exactly what recipients were entitled to.⁷⁸ Although MAW took part in many of these actions, the campaign was spearheaded by newer welfare rights groups, under the direction of Pastreich.⁷⁹

However, while middle-class, male organisers primarily saw special grants as an effective recruitment tool, the women who sustained the movement at the grassroots level tended to view the struggle somewhat differently.⁸⁰ Indeed, welfare recipients consistently framed special grants as necessary to improve their children's lives, and they made the campaign their own by imbuing it with the rhetoric of motherhood. Speaking at a press conference on 2 August 1968, Roxbury welfare rights leader Roberta O'Neil told reporters that, after rent, her basic allowance of \$30 a week was barely enough to feed and clothe her family, meaning that her children had to sleep without sheets. Defending requests for special grants, she stated: 'The mothers are getting tired. It hurts me to say to my kids at nighttime that I don't have any soap to give them a bath. Why sometimes I can't even get them a seven-cent ice cream.'⁸¹ Later that month, at a special legislative commission hearing on welfare at the State House, Nickerson also explained the special grant protests in terms of children's needs and mothers' responsibilities. Despite remaining critical of 'outside' organisers such as Pastreich, who she claimed had been 'foisted' on local activists without invitation, the MAW leader warned that demonstrations would continue until officials took measures 'to guarantee us the necessities of life.' In an eloquent address to the commission, Nickerson declared: 'Neither bombs nor guns – neither the state nor God – will stop us from fighting for our children. It is not us you punish when you deny us our rights, it is our children.'⁸² Thus, recipients emphasised the damaging effects poverty had on their children's well-being and justified their activism by stressing their protective instincts as mothers.

Pastreich Principles of Organizing... An Argument for Community Organizing, American Studies Senior Thesis, University of California Santa Cruz, December 1977, in West Papers, Box 9, Folder 22.

⁷⁸ Bailis, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Jean Dietz, 'Organizer Forced on Us – Mother,' *Boston Globe*, 13 August 1968, pp. 1, 10, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

⁸⁰ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 57-58.

⁸¹ Roberta O'Neil, quoted in 'Welfare Tactics Criticized,' *Boston Globe*, 3 August 1968, pp. 1, 3, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

⁸² Gertrude Nickerson, quoted in Earl Marchand, 'Cohen Hits Welfare Sit-ins,' *Boston Herald Traveler*, 14 August 1968, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

Notably, welfare recipients' definition of what constituted 'basic necessities' transcended the food and clothing needed for base survival. As they campaigned for special grants, recipients often argued that they had a right to all the trappings of 'normal' American life.⁸³ But activists also framed claims to full citizenship as beneficial to their children, highlighting the less tangible effects poverty had on them. In a 1968 article on the group, reporter Gordon Brumm observed that MAW leaders conceptualised need broadly, arguing that they should be able to live in a way that approached the average for the society around them. According to Brumm, a key reason for this was that: 'Children are involved, and they are notoriously sensitive to unfavorable comparisons with other children.'⁸⁴ Similarly, at a sit-in in South Boston in August 1968, one woman told a reporter for the *Boston Globe*: 'My kids come and tell me the neighbor kids have good toys. They ask me why can't they?'⁸⁵ Tapping into contemporary ideas about the importance of psychological health and emotional well-being, activists argued that special grants would enable their children to have the same experiences as their peers, fostering healthy development and more chance for success in later life.⁸⁶ Thus, recipients portrayed their activism as firmly rooted in concern for their children's future.

This child-centred rhetoric enabled welfare rights activists in Boston and elsewhere to claim a moral high ground, and often facilitated a radical critique of the government's priorities. During special grant campaigns in Massachusetts, for example, recipients regularly accused officials who refused their demands of showing disregard for the nation's children. On 7 November 1968, when members of MWRO were told that their requests for winter clothing for their children would only be approved 'in emergency situations,' one activist charged that welfare officials 'don't think a child without boots or a winter coat is an emergency case.'⁸⁷ A week later, when protesters at the State House were told they could not meet the governor because he was on vacation in the Virgin Islands, one woman yelled indignantly: 'Governor Volpe is down there getting a tan while my kids don't even have a coat.'⁸⁸ Similar critiques abounded at the national level. In December 1968, a cartoon in NWRO's newsletter *NOW!* depicted a

⁸³ Felicia Kornbluh, 'The Goals of the National Welfare Rights Movement: Why We Need Them Thirty Years Later,' *Feminist Studies*, 24, no. 1 (1998), 65-78 (pp. 71-72).

⁸⁴ Brumm, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Janet Riddell, 'They Sat on Chairs, on Tables and on the Floors,' *Boston Globe*, 13 August 1968, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

⁸⁶ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 90-91.

⁸⁷ Jill Watts, quoted in F. B. Taylor Jr., 'Hundreds Jam Welfare Centers for Winter Clothing,' *Boston Globe*, 8 November 1968, p. 6, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12.

⁸⁸ Quoted in F. B. Taylor, Jr., 'Sargent To Fill Volpe In,' *Boston Globe*, 14 November 1968, p. 22, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 13.

classroom full of children being taught about the Apollo space programme, with the caption: ‘24 Billion Dollars for Project Apollo, but the Welfare Agencies won’t give Mama money to buy us winter clothes!’ (see Figure 5). By contrasting the government’s astronomical spending on ventures such as space exploration with the amount it budgeted to aid poor children, welfare recipients sought to bolster their moral authority and make their demands appear more reasonable.

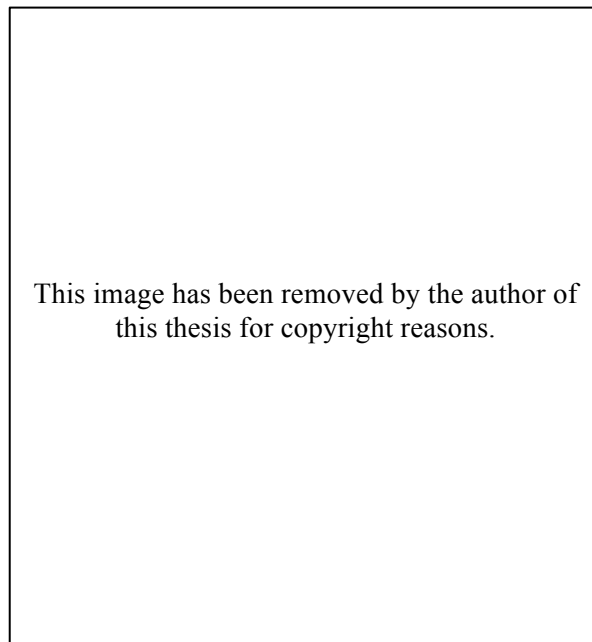


Figure 5: Cartoon in *NOW!*, December 1968.⁸⁹

Yet, the most significant way that recipients challenged the government’s priorities was with regard to the war in Vietnam. During the late 1960s, it was common for speakers at welfare rights marches and rallies to denounce U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and many welfare recipients took part in anti-war protests around the country. Indeed, welfare rights activists were some of the first within the anti-war coalition to connect domestic and foreign concerns, consistently arguing that the costs of war would come out of the mouths of low-income children.⁹⁰ Welfare recipients also highlighted the hypocrisy of a government that they claimed allowed children to go without adequate food and clothing, yet expected them to fight for their country when they grew up. In a statement reprinted in *NOW!* in July 1968, New York activist Irene Gibbs insisted that children should be ‘decently clad, decently fed, and decently housed’ if

⁸⁹ ‘24 Billion Dollars for Project Apollo’ cartoon, *NOW!*, December 1968, in *NOW! National Welfare Leaders Newsletter*, Reel 1.

⁹⁰ Welfare rights activists helped influence other anti-war groups to broaden their agenda to include both foreign and domestic issues. See Bailis, p. 147. As we have seen from Chapter 1, these arguments also laid the basis for the alliance between NWRO and WSP in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

they were expected to serve in Vietnam, accusing officials of wanting ‘our undernourished, illegitimate and undereducated children to be gun food in Vietnam.’⁹¹ In Boston, MAW leaders such as Doris Bland took part in SDS-sponsored anti-war demonstrations in the mid-1960s, carrying the slogan ‘Welfare not Warfare.’⁹² Similarly, members of MWRO participated in the national Vietnam Moratorium protests on 15 October 1969, with its own Kay Hurley speaking at a mass rally on Boston Common. MWRO also staged its own anti-war demonstration the day before, so that its message was not lost within the plethora of activity on the day itself.⁹³ On 14 October, in what was billed as ‘a symbolic protest against the nation’s priorities,’ roughly 150 welfare recipients, led by Pastreich and Wiley, marched on Boston’s Army Base to call for an end to the war and demand that surplus food and clothing from military installations across the nation be turned over to the poor. Protesters displayed signs such as ‘Kill Poverty Not People’ and ‘Baby Powder Not Gun Powder,’ and they chanted ‘Stop the war and feed the poor.’⁹⁴ As this event suggests, it was not just the expense of the war in Vietnam that welfare recipients objected to; some activists also described the war’s costs in human terms and questioned the cause itself.⁹⁵ Speaking at MWRO’s second annual convention at Boston College in February 1970, New York welfare rights leader Beulah Sanders argued: ‘We’re going to have to change a lot of things in this country, not only the priority system of grants, but the system of taking our boys off to fight in a war that doesn’t mean a thing.’⁹⁶ Thus, welfare recipients situated their demands within a broader critique of ‘the system’ – contrasting their own concern for their children with the government’s disregard for life at home and abroad.⁹⁷

However, as well as stressing their children’s needs, activists in Boston also claimed to be defending their own rights as mothers. Importantly, welfare recipients’ understandings of motherhood were rooted in their particular social location, and heavily informed by race and class. Like members of WSP, many recipients had come of age during the 1950s and 1960s, when traditional stay-at-home motherhood was

⁹¹ ‘Irene Gibbs Tells Goldberg Like It Is,’ *NOW!*, 22 July 1968, in *NOW! National Welfare Leaders Newsletter*, Reel 1.

⁹² Frost, p. 160.

⁹³ Bailis, p. 14.

⁹⁴ Bill Pastreich, ‘Dear Family,’ 13 October 1960, in MWRO Records, Box 2, Folder 4; ‘Welfare Group at Army Base,’ *Record American* (Boston), 15 October 1969, p. 3, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 14.

⁹⁵ Kornbluh, *Battle for Welfare Rights*, p. 157.

⁹⁶ Beulah Sanders, quoted in ‘500 Attend Talks at B.C. On Welfare,’ *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, 22 February 1970, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 14.

⁹⁷ Valk, *Radical Sisters*, pp. 45-46.

valorised as a woman's principal vocation and the foundation of a healthy democracy.⁹⁸ However, in contrast to the white, middle-class women of WSP, welfare recipients – particularly black welfare recipients – generally found themselves excluded from this domestic ideal. Having rarely found the 'family wage' ideal of a male breadwinner and female homemaker to be attainable, black women had a long history of employment outside the home, and were often viewed more as labourers than mothers.⁹⁹ As a result, black mothers claiming public assistance to support them in the work of childrearing were considered less deserving than other women and stigmatised as lazy and unwilling to work. At the same time, as single mothers raising children independently of men, welfare recipients defied conventional mores about proper family structure, and were regularly accused of sexual immorality, having failed husbands or other moral deficiencies.¹⁰⁰ Black single mothers, in particular, came under attack during this period, as a host of social commentators blamed them for the so-called ills facing black families. Debates about the black family, gathering force since the early twentieth century, escalated in the 1960s with the publication of an influential report on the subject by Assistant Secretary of Labour Daniel P. Moynihan. Published in 1965, the Moynihan Report, as it was popularly known, concluded that the 'deterioration of the Negro family,' signalled by the rising number of female-headed households, was the fundamental problem facing black society. It argued that a long history of slavery, racism, and unemployment had emasculated black men and created a pattern of 'matriarchy' in black families, characterised by high divorce rates, male desertion, increasing out-of-wedlock births, and welfare dependency.¹⁰¹ But Moynihan also suggested that black women, by being too 'matriarchal,' contributed to this disintegration in family structure and perpetuated the 'tangle of pathology' in which black families were trapped.¹⁰² Thus, black single mothers on welfare came to be viewed, not only as lazy and sexually immoral, but as damaging to society – their work as mothers stigmatised and devalued. Even though the 'black matriarchy' thesis generated much debate among anti-poverty reformers during the 1960s, few commentators disputed the basic assumptions contained within it: that single motherhood constituted a social problem, that welfare exacerbated family dysfunction

⁹⁸ See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁹⁹ Marissa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 13; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ White, p. 232; Valk, *Radical Sisters*, p. 45.

¹⁰¹ Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, pp. 37-38; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors* p. 144.

¹⁰² Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, pp. 142-143.

by encouraging female independence, and that the long term solution to black poverty was male employment and the re-establishment of patriarchal family norms.¹⁰³

As a result, the understanding of motherhood that welfare recipients brought to the movement was qualitatively different from that of their counterparts in WSP. Although participants in these two movements shared a gendered vision of citizenship that saw mothers as having a special responsibility for raising the next generation of Americans, welfare recipients were acutely aware of how dominant gender ideologies were constructed to exclude them. Consequently, as sociologist Cynthia Edmonds-Cady has argued, recipients viewed motherhood as something that required ‘struggle and celebration simultaneously.’¹⁰⁴ Indeed, women in the welfare rights movement were motivated in part by a desire to defend their status as mothers, and they regularly emphasised the value of their maternal labour. Early on in the movement, for example, MAW activist Mary Murphy countered the popular perception that recipients did not pull their weight in society by arguing that a welfare mother ‘insures the country of productive, self-reliant, self-supporting citizens’ and by ‘fulfilling her most important and satisfying role... is a more useful and productive citizen herself.’¹⁰⁵ Similarly, during MWRO’s 1970 convention, New York welfare rights leader Jennette Washington drew cheers of ‘right on’ from Boston recipients when she declared: ‘We’re part of this nation just like the wealthy... I’ve made up my mind I’m not going to work. I’m contributing to this country by being a mother.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, welfare recipients couched their demands for an adequate income in the language of patriotic maternalism. Although they were often highly critical of the government and its priorities, recipients stressed their own dedication to fulfil their patriotic duty, in Nickerson’s words, ‘to bring up our children with care and offer the state good, dependable citizens when they are grown up.’¹⁰⁷ At the same time, by justifying welfare as compensation for the raising of children, recipients rejected artificial distinctions between domestic and waged work, suggesting that mothering was valuable and productive labour.¹⁰⁸

Welfare recipients also challenged the stigma surrounding single motherhood. Indeed, unlike black women reformers earlier in the twentieth century who had based their claims to motherhood on their adherence to middle-class ideals of respectability

¹⁰³ Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ Edmonds-Cady, ‘Mobilizing Motherhood,’ pp. 215, 217.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Murphy, quoted in Frost, p. 137.

¹⁰⁶ Jeannette Washington [*sic*], quoted in F. B. Taylor Jr., ‘Welfare Leader Scorns Nation’s Priorities,’ *Boston Sunday Globe*, 22 February 1970, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 14.

¹⁰⁷ Nickerson, quoted in Marchand, ‘Cohen Hits Welfare Sit-ins.’

¹⁰⁸ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 32, 232.

and chastity, recipients acknowledged their status as single mothers and did not shy away from addressing issues of sexuality.¹⁰⁹ In an interview with Brumm in 1968, several MAW leaders argued that ‘motherhood – whether the mother is married or not – is a role which should be as fully supported, as fully rewarded, as fully honored, as any other.’ Contending that traditional marriage tended to be a ‘means for domination more than... [a] means for expressing love,’ the MAW women advocated more freedom for women in their personal lives. Thus, welfare recipients sought to legitimise their status as single mothers and demand that the state compensate them for their maternal labour. At a time when unwed motherhood was still widely considered a sin, MAW’s leaders maintained that ‘ultimate values’ – namely, love, responsibility towards others, and the nurture of children – were more important than ‘fixed rules and institutions.’¹¹⁰

As well as shaping their relationship to the state, ideologies of motherhood also mediated welfare recipients’ relationships with other women in the movement and with their middle-class allies, often facilitating coalition building across race and class. First, for black and white recipients in the movement, a shared identity as low-income mothers provided an important basis for interracial solidarity. At both the national and local level, participants in the welfare rights struggle were committed to interracial organising from the start. In Boston, although MAW was predominantly comprised of African American women, it also included a significant number of white and Puerto Rican welfare recipients.¹¹¹ And when Pastreich began recruitment drives in Boston in 1968, he remained dedicated to building an integrated organisation. While high rates of residential segregation in the city ensured that most neighbourhood-based groups were racially homogenous, MWRO’s statewide leadership always represented a range of racial and ethnic groups.¹¹² Nevertheless, race was clearly integral to the welfare rights struggle, and the movement was not devoid of racial tension. As we have seen, welfare recipients’ activism was rooted in their daily struggles as low-income mothers and, for black women in the movement, resisting racial discrimination and challenging the stigma associated with black motherhood were paramount. Furthermore, with the rise of Black Power in the mid-1960s, black welfare rights activists frequently appropriated a language of racial consciousness and black pride as they protested racism in the welfare system.¹¹³ Within MAW, the growth of black nationalism and the development of close

¹⁰⁹ Valk, *Radical Sisters*, pp. 44-45.

¹¹⁰ Brumm, p. 11.

¹¹¹ Case, p. 9.

¹¹² Bailis, pp. 26, 103; Nadasen, “‘Welfare’s a Green Problem,’” p. 180.

¹¹³ See Rhonda Y. Williams, ‘Black Women, Urban Politics, and Engendering Black Power,’ in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. by Peniel E. Joseph (London:

ties with militant black groups in the Roxbury area eventually led to calls for white SDS organisers to leave the group.¹¹⁴ Importantly, however, this heightened sense of racial identity does not appear to have foreclosed white recipients' participation in the movement in Boston. In part, this reflects the fact that, unlike white student organisers, black and white recipients shared a class consciousness and 'outsider' status as low-income women on welfare. As Nadasen has argued, poor white women in the movement, many of them from ethnic or immigrant backgrounds, often identified with the marginalisation experienced by African Americans, fuelling a commitment to interracial organising.¹¹⁵ Again, Nickerson's story is instructive here. Nickerson, who had both Irish and Native American heritage, clearly identified with the black freedom struggle. Speaking to journalist J. Anthony Lukas in the late 1970s, she declared:

I think that many of my people, poor people, they're voiceless... We're not even considered... Whatever has ever been done for these poor folks all the way down has been fought for by us poor folks ourselves. And let me tell you the biggest leadership in fighting for things has been the black movement. They knew how to fight; they knew where to go for what was rightfully theirs and get it.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, Nickerson's ability to relate to African Americans in the movement was undoubtedly strengthened by the racial prejudice she encountered whilst bringing up a mixed-race child, highlighting a very particular way that the experience of mothering shaped political consciousness for one woman. When living in an all-white tenant building soon after going on welfare, she had been harassed regularly by her white neighbours. Nickerson explained: 'when those people got wind of me and my kid, they were something else again. I used to come down every morning and find bags of garbage in my baby carriage.'¹¹⁷ Soon after this, Nickerson moved to the racially mixed South End neighbourhood, where her neighbours included African Americans and 'interracial folks like myself,' and where she would eventually join MAW. '[W]e were always integrated in the South End,' she later recalled, 'you could feel at home in a place like this.'¹¹⁸

Routledge, 2006), pp. 79-103; Nadasen, "We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary"; Nadasen, "Welfare's a Green Problem."

¹¹⁴ Marya Levenson, Transcript of Interview with Valerie Cacace, 25 March 2003, p. 5, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: Interview with Professor Marya Levenson; Marya Levenson, untitled speech, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

¹¹⁵ Nadasen, "Welfare's a Green Problem," pp. 186-187.

¹¹⁶ Nicky Nickerson, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 279, undated, pp. 27, 30, in Lukas Papers, Box 11, Folder 3.

¹¹⁷ Nickerson, Tape 278, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁸ Nickerson, Tape 278, p. 12.

Of course, not all white women in the movement could relate to African Americans in this way. Nevertheless, a shared identity as low-income mothers and common concerns about children often encouraged interracial cooperation. In an interview with the *Boston Globe* in November 1968, a white welfare recipient explained how her children's needs had helped her overcome her initial reservations about joining the movement. 'I'm white. Me. I'm not a fighter,' she said. 'I don't like demonstrating and making a fool out of myself... I feel like it's lowering myself. But if it will do something for my children I'll do it.' In the interview, she described the difficulties she had encountered trying to recruit other white recipients in her housing project, explaining: 'The whites are still running scared. They've got too much pride and are afraid their friends will find out.' Nevertheless, she believed that once a few whites joined the welfare rights struggle, others would follow, ultimately arguing that:

There's no difference between colored and white when you're on welfare. The colored are the only ones who've got nerve enough to fight... Colored and white, we all want the same thing. Not homes and big cars, but just to be able to live right and to be able to dress the children right and not having them looking like orphans.¹¹⁹

As this interview demonstrates, despite a shared class status, white recipients were not immune from racial prejudice. Many were initially reluctant to identify with the movement or associate with black recipients who they considered more militant and perhaps less deserving than themselves.¹²⁰ However, the ability to relate to one another as poor mothers struggling to raise their children decently on welfare clearly helped black and white recipients to overcome these difficulties, fostering greater understanding and cooperation between the races.

At the same time, the common bonds of motherhood helped welfare recipients bridge class divides between themselves and would-be supporters. Indeed, from the start, when welfare rights activists appealed to other women and women's groups for support, they did so 'as mothers.' This was epitomised in a 1967 letter sent by long-time NWRO chair Johnnie Tillmon to a variety of middle-class women's organisations, explaining:

We are mothers from that "other America" – mothers on welfare struggling to raise our children decently on welfare grants that average less than one dollar per day per child. We are organizing ourselves to obtain adequate income,

¹¹⁹ Janet Riddell, 'Colored and White, We Want Same,' *Boston Globe*, 11 November 1968, p. A19, in MWRO Records, Box 2, Folder 8.

¹²⁰ Bailis, p. 30.

justice, dignity and democratic participation in the decisions that effect our lives and our families. We need you support and encouragement – help from American mothers who are already organized and participating in making this country a better place to raise children.

Tillmon suggested a number of ways women's groups could help, including financial support, raising awareness among their members, and assisting with legislation.¹²¹ However, while motherhood often facilitated strong coalitions among women on welfare, alliances between recipients and middle-class supporters tended to be more tenuous. In her study of the welfare rights movement in Detroit, for example, Edmonds-Cady revealed important differences in the way African American welfare recipients and middle-class, white women in Friends of Welfare Rights groups understood and used maternalism. She argued that, although a shared status as mothers helped bring recipients and Friends together, differences in race and class hindered the development of a more sustained alliance.¹²² This is also borne out by evidence from Chapter 1 on the relationship between NWRO and WSP, where gulfs of race and class inhibited lasting cooperation, belying assertions of a universal maternal perspective. Furthermore, many welfare rights activists worried that coalition building would dilute the welfare rights message and force recipients to compete for power with people who were wealthier and better educated than themselves. As a result, while they welcomed the support of middle-class women, recipients often sought to limit their involvement to providing financial help and auxiliary services such as transportation and babysitting.¹²³

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that welfare recipients' identity as mothers helped define their relationship with younger middle-class organisers in the movement, many of whom were men. Although much has been made of ongoing tensions with male organisers and how this contributed to the growth of a feminist consciousness among female recipients, it is also important to recognise that organisers were a valuable source of support for many women in the movement. Speaking to West in 1984, Grant was full of praise for the work performed by Pastreich and others in Boston. Grant joined the first group that Pastreich helped organise in the Mission Hill housing project in Roxbury, and she recalled that organisers educated her about her rights and empowered her to help organise others. 'Bill was just a genius,' the former

¹²¹ Johnnie Tillmon, 'To Womens' Group Leaders,' [sic] c. 1967, in Wiley Papers, Box 10, Folder 5.

¹²² Edmonds-Cady, 'Mobilizing Motherhood.'

¹²³ Kornbluh, *Battle for Welfare Rights*, p. 171; Martha F. Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights in the 1960s,' in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, 2nd edn., ed. by Robert Griffith and Paula Baker (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 389-400 (pp. 389, 394-395); Edmonds-Cady, 'Mobilizing Motherhood,' pp. 218-219.

MWRO chair declared, ‘I just love him.’¹²⁴ However, this support did not just go one way. Much like the women in WSP who served as ‘mothers of the Movement’ to younger anti-war activists, welfare recipients often assumed a maternal role within the welfare rights struggle, seeking to nurture the activism of their college-age supporters.¹²⁵ Indeed, recipients opened their homes to organisers, provided them with contacts and took time to educate them about their concerns, while also not hesitating to criticise their tactics if they disagreed with them. Grant, who was still in touch with several MWRO organisers in the 1980s, said she had always been willing to help younger activists with their projects and push them to achieve their goals. As she put it: ‘They were all my kids. They were just kids from college, and I said they were all my kids, they were nice kids.’¹²⁶

IV

As we have seen, welfare rights activists were motivated in large part to provide adequately for their children, and they invoked maternal language to justify their activism and make demands of the state. Furthermore, although recipients’ understandings of motherhood were rooted in their daily lives as poor black women on welfare, they often emphasised a shared status as mothers to forge alliances across race and class boundaries. However, welfare recipients’ use of motherhood was more than just a rhetorical exercise – they also sought to dramatise their maternal concerns using direct action tactics that took them into the streets and placed their own and their children’s bodies in the public view. As Tillmon later explained: ‘I believe in rhetoric to a certain extent. But you can only rhetoricize so long and then you have to deal with fact. Now, I can do as much rhetoricizing as the next person. But sometimes I had to start a mess to get to the facts.’¹²⁷ Drawing upon the black freedom movement of the 1960s, welfare rights activists marched, rallied, picketed and staged sit-ins at welfare departments and seats of government across the country. Unlike earlier generations of

¹²⁴ Grant, Interview with West, pp. 6, 9, 13, 28-29.

¹²⁵ Historian Andrea Estepa coined the phrase ‘mothers of the Movement’ to describe WSP’s relationship to younger New Left activists. ‘Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and “the Movement,” 1967-73,’ in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 84-112 (pp. 86, 96).

¹²⁶ Grant, Interview with West, p. 13.

¹²⁷ Johnnie Tillmon, in Brian Lanker, *I Dream A World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*, revised and enlarged edn. (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999), p. 96.

black women activists who prized respectability, welfare recipients adopted a militant posture from the outset and it was not uncommon for demonstrations to end in arrests. And in contrast to the women of WSP who remained wedded to the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, recipients adopted a more pragmatic stance that did not preclude using violence or the threat of violence if necessary. Nevertheless, their actions were invariably steeped in maternal symbolism and imagery, and carefully crafted to showcase their own militant version of motherhood.

Around the country, welfare rights demonstrations were awash with reminders of activists' status as mothers and their concern for their children. For example, signs at marches and rallies regularly contained maternal rhetoric and were reputed to 'tell it like it is.'¹²⁸ From the very first MAW-led actions in Boston, it was common for recipients to carry hand painted signs detailing their children's needs. At the march on Boston Common on 30 June 1966, one woman held a large placard that read 'Let Welfare Kids Save for College,' reflecting MAW's demand that recipients should be allowed to save for their children's education and the welfare department should match each dollar saved.¹²⁹ But, while these signs often highlighted local issues and demands, they also illustrated a broader concern for children that resonated with welfare recipients nationwide. Furthermore, with the formation of NWRO in 1967, activists around the country displayed identical flags and banners to show their affiliation with the national organisation. Along with 'More Money Now' and 'Bread and Justice,' NWRO's most widely used slogans were 'Mother Power' and 'We Care For Children' (see Figure 6). Meanwhile, popular slogans such as '¡Viva Mama!' and 'Revolución de las Madres' demonstrated the strong presence of Latina women in the organisation, who also sought to emphasise their maternal role.¹³⁰ Notably, during the late 1960s, the official NWRO flags were made in Massachusetts, reflecting the state's prominence as one of the largest sites of welfare rights activity and an important organising hub.¹³¹ In addition to these child-centred slogans, placards sometimes featured photographs or hand-drawn images of children, reminding the public of who welfare recipients were campaigning on behalf of. Similar maternal imagery also adorned leaflets, newsletters and other publications, at both the national and local level.

¹²⁸ Under a photograph in *NOW!* of welfare rights marchers carrying a 'Mother Power' banner, the caption reads: 'The signs of the march told it like it is.' *NOW!*, 6 June 1968, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

¹²⁹ Davidson, 'Part Mata Hari, Part Robin Hood.'

¹³⁰ Richard Rogin, 'Now It's Welfare Lib,' *New York Times Magazine*, 27 September 1970, p. 80. Also see photographs in *NOW!*, 6 June 1968, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

¹³¹ Pasteseuch [*sic*], Interview with West, p. 19.

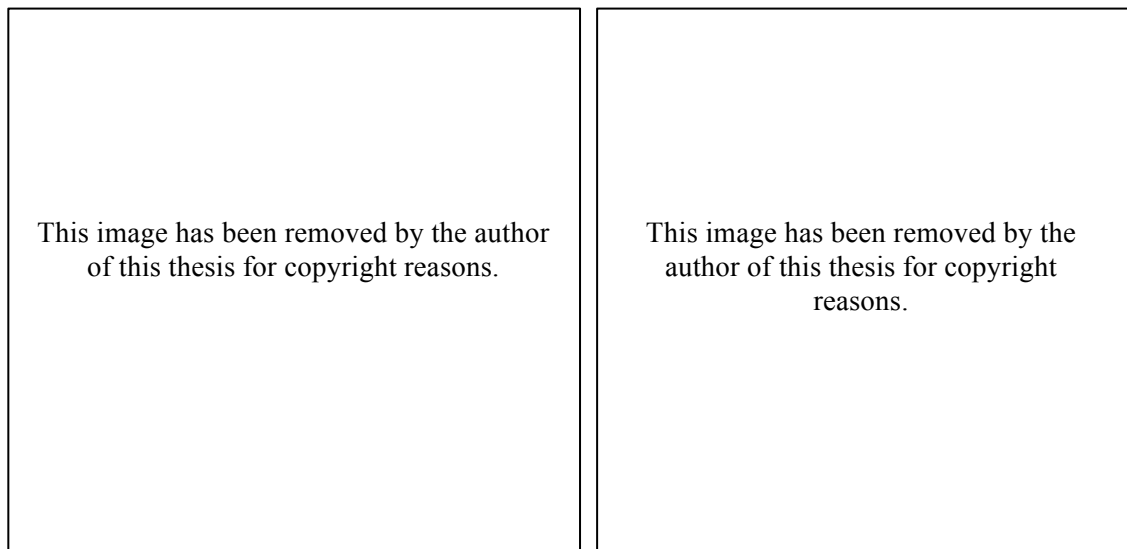


Figure 6: NWRO ‘Mother Power’ and ‘¡Viva Mama!’ flags.¹³²

Like members of WSP, welfare recipients often framed demonstrations as ‘mothers’ protests,’ reflecting their belief that activism was an extension of their maternal role. At the national level, NWRO organised several ‘mothers’ marches’ in the capital. On 28 August 1967, for example, NWRO’s first national convention was capped off with a ‘Mothers’ March on Washington’ to protest proposed amendments to the Social Security Act. Four years to the day after civil rights activists staged their historic demonstration on the Mall, more than 1,000 welfare recipients, including members of Boston’s MAW, rallied outside the Capitol to protest the new bill, which would require women on welfare to find work or accept job training as a condition of aid.¹³³ Yet, while aspects of this protest recalled WSP’s ‘Mothers’ Lobbies’ against the war, welfare recipients also exhibited their own, more militant, style. During what was described as a ‘stormy’ rally, welfare rights activists denounced the legislation as a ‘betrayal of the poor’ and a ‘declaration of war upon our families.’¹³⁴ Noting that the bill gave states increased power to remove children from ‘unsuitable homes,’ one woman from New York declared: ‘I’m a mother and I’m going to arm myself.’¹³⁵ Similarly, Baltimore welfare rights leader Margaret McCarty warned that the welfare system had to be changed ‘if not by our voices, then by force’; and New York leader and NWRO vice chairman Beulah Sanders threatened that welfare recipients would tear

¹³² NWRO, ‘Mother Power’ and ‘¡Viva Mama!’ flags, in Social Action File, Box 36.

¹³³ Carol Honsa, ‘Welfare Bill Called ‘Betrayal of Poor,’’ *Washington Post*, 29 August 1967, p. A4, in Wiley Papers, Box 7, Folder 7; Moody, ‘National Welfare Rights Movement, Washington, D.C.’

¹³⁴ Betty James, ‘Welfare Rally Threatens Riots,’ *Washington Evening Star*, 29 August 1967, p. A4, in Wiley Papers, Box 7, Folder 7; Honsa, ‘Welfare Bill Called ‘Betrayal of Poor.’’

¹³⁵ Catherine Krouser, quoted in James, ‘Welfare Rally Threatens Riots’; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 49.

down the Capitol if government officials did not listen.¹³⁶ One of NWRO's first national actions, this demonstration showcased the outspokenness and militancy that would go on to characterise welfare recipients' particular brand of maternalism.

Like WSPers, welfare rights activists also staged special Mother's Day actions in an effort to claim the moral authority of motherhood and appeal to other women for support. Perhaps the most famous of these was a Mother's Day March through Washington's black community on 12 May 1968, led by Coretta Scott King (see Figure 7). Organised by NWRO in conjunction with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), this event was designed to launch the Poor People's Campaign, a mass movement to demand greater federal assistance for the poor, conceived by Martin Luther King, Jr. shortly before his assassination.¹³⁷ But it was also part of NWRO's drive to the repeal the 1967 Social Security Amendments, and was accompanied by smaller Mother's Day actions organised by welfare recipients across the nation. In an advert for these events in *NOW!*, activists appealed for 'the support of all mothers in our struggle for adequate income, dignity, justice and democracy.'¹³⁸ Despite intermittent rain on the day, around 5,000 people turned out for the procession in Washington, with welfare recipients and their middle-class supporters marching together under large banners that read 'Mother Power' (see Figure 8).¹³⁹ Notably, representatives from WSP were present, carrying their own flags.¹⁴⁰ King, who had lost her husband only a month earlier, wore black and was accompanied by her four children.¹⁴¹ Speaking at a rally in a neighbourhood high school stadium, King explained: 'Today is Mother's Day, a day when we pause to pay tribute to those noble virtues of motherhood and womanhood.' Emphasising the potential of 'mother power,' she argued that women had a special role to play in the struggle against poverty and racism. As she put it: 'Since women have been entrusted with the sacred task of giving birth and rearing children, transmitting the values and cultural heritage of the nation, we have a special commission at this time to nurture, protect, and save these lives from destruction.'¹⁴² Importantly, these were very

¹³⁶ Margaret McCarthy and Beulah Sanders, quoted in Honsa, 'Welfare Bill Called 'Betrayal of Poor.''

¹³⁷ Ben A. Franklin, '5,000 Open Poor People's Campaign in Washington: 5,000 Open Poor People's Campaign,' *New York Times*, 13 May 1968, p. 1.

¹³⁸ 'NWRO Mothers Day Action Across the Nation,' *NOW!*, 6 May 1968, in *NOW! National Welfare Leaders Newsletter*, Reel 1.

¹³⁹ Franklin, '5,000 Open Poor People's Campaign'; 'NWRO Mothers Launch Campaign,' *NOW!*, 6 June 1968, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

¹⁴⁰ Elsie Carper, 'Mothers Day Parade Opens Poor People's Drive,' *Washington Post*, 13 May 1968, p. A10.

¹⁴¹ Vincent J. Burke and Ronald J. Ostrow, 'Mrs. King Leads Mothers in Protest Against Welfare Cuts,' *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1968, p. 1.

¹⁴² 'Woman Power,' Speech by Mrs. Martin Luther King Junior, NWRO/PPC Mother's Day March, 12 May 1968, reprinted in *NOW!*, 6 June 1968, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

similar arguments to those made by King – and other WSPers – to advocate for women’s participation in the anti-war movement. Furthermore, King’s involvement with both the white, middle-class women of WSP and the poor black women of the welfare rights movement demonstrates the potential of maternalism to traverse race and class boundaries. Of course, King’s identity as a middle-class black woman helped her bridge these divides, as did her status as the popular widow of a slain civil rights hero. But she also leant heavily on the rhetoric of motherhood to advocate for gender solidarity. At the Mother’s Day rally, she called for women of all races and economic levels to join a ‘campaign of conscience’ to remake society ‘based on the principles of love, nonviolence, justice and peace.’¹⁴³ At the same time, however, King’s participation in the welfare rights movement also hinted at divisions that lay beneath this universalising maternal rhetoric. Most notably, although King delivered a lengthy and impassioned plea for nonviolence, this section of her speech elicited no applause from the welfare recipients in the crowd.¹⁴⁴

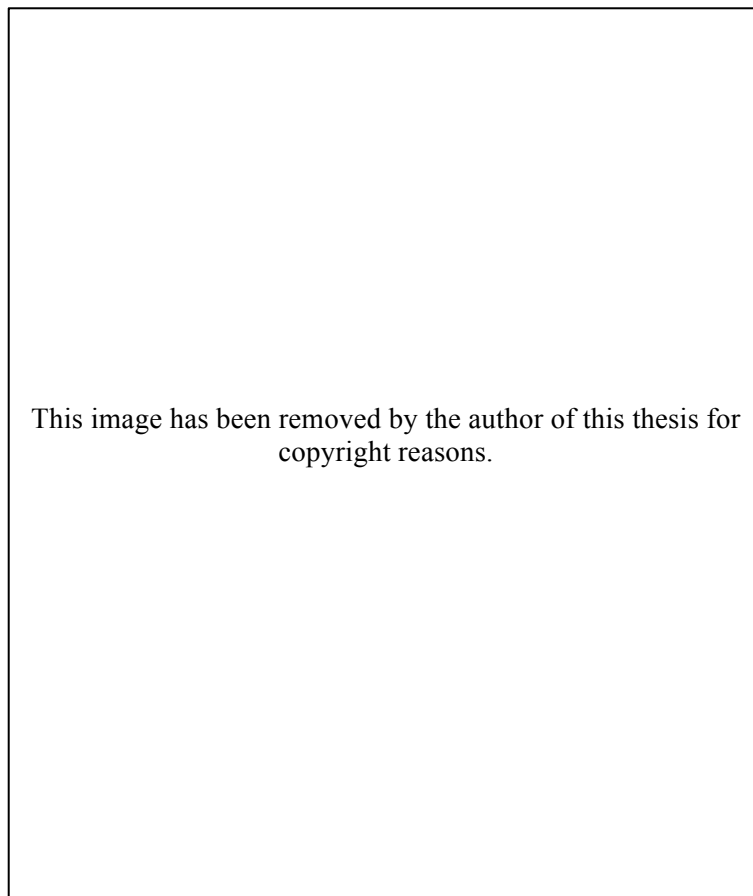


Figure 7: Front cover of *NOW!*, 6 June 1968 shows Johnnie Tillmon and Coretta Scott King during NWRO’s Mother’s Day March on 12 May 1968.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ ‘Woman Power.’

¹⁴⁴ Burke and Ostrow, ‘Mrs. King Leads Mothers in Protest.’

¹⁴⁵ *NOW!*, 6 June 1968, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

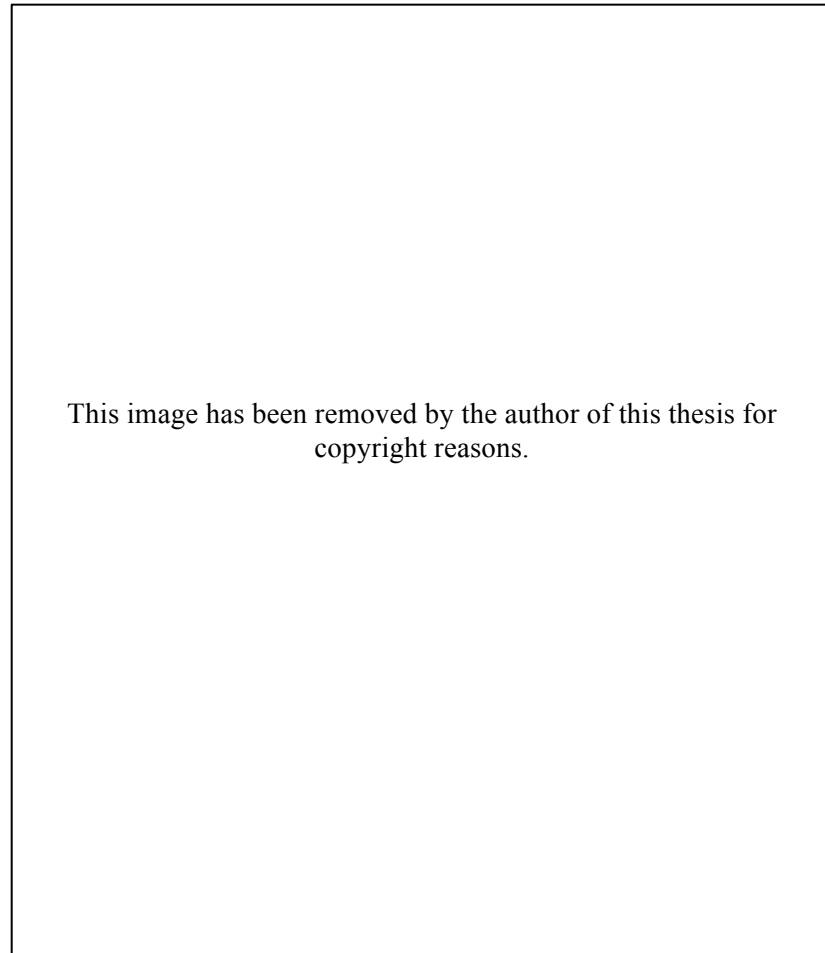


Figure 8: Photographs in *NOW!*, 6 June 1968 showing marchers carrying a large ‘Mother Power’ banner during NWRO’s Mother’s Day March on 12 May 1968.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, although WSPers and welfare rights activists both staged ‘mothers’ actions’ and sought to harness the symbolic power of Mother’s Day, there were important differences in the style and tenor of their activism. Particularly during its early years, WSP’s protests were carefully crafted to present an image of respectable motherhood and members were reluctant to engage in activities that might alarm ‘ordinary’ American women. Furthermore, even as WSPers became more confrontational over the course of 1960s, their maternalism continued to be fused with a philosophical commitment to nonviolence. In contrast, welfare recipients espoused a more militant maternalist politics from the onset, and it was not uncommon for them to employ confrontational language and real physical force in their quest to secure basic material necessities for themselves and their children. As historians Rhonda Williams and Premilla Nadasen have argued, the welfare rights movement exhibited a tactical flexibility that complicates simplistic dichotomies between nonviolence and self-

¹⁴⁶ *NOW!*, 6 June 1968, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork..

defence. While welfare recipients generally preferred the tools of nonviolent direct action, they were also prepared to use self-defence and the threat of violence if they felt it was required.¹⁴⁷ This willingness to use violence was no doubt influenced by the ‘by-any-means-necessary’ sentiment articulated by many black activists during the Black Power era.¹⁴⁸ In Boston, for example, MAW hosted a talk in 1966 by Charles Sims, president of the Bogalusa, Louisiana Deacons for Defense and a proponent of armed self-defence in the South long before the ‘advent’ of Black Power.¹⁴⁹ But welfare recipients’ militancy was also shaped by their own experiences of state-sponsored violence and repression. In June 1967, the welfare rights movement in Boston hit the national scene when a sit-in of around thirty MAW members at the Grove Hall welfare office in Roxbury was met with excessive police force, leading to a weekend of rioting in the black community. The MAW women, who were protesting a member being cut off benefits without explanation and had chained themselves inside, were allegedly kicked and beaten by the police who physically dragged them from the building.¹⁵⁰ Nickerson, who took part in the sit-in, recalled seeing one woman being dragged out by her hair, while others fought back by jumping on policemen’s backs, kicking and biting.¹⁵¹ The Grove Hall demonstration and the heavy-handed response it evoked from the authorities would live long in the minds of welfare rights activists in Boston. Furthermore, as Williams observed, recipients conceptualised state violence broadly, and also saw the government’s dehumanisation of the poor and neglect of children as forms of abuse.¹⁵² As a result, they often justified their militancy using a maternal rationale and framed rhetorical and real force as an appropriate response to the threat posed to their children.

The infamous Grove Hall sit-in took place just two months before NWRO’s first national convention and ‘Mother’s March on Washington’ in August 1967. Nevertheless, in Boston and elsewhere, activism continued to be centred at the local level, and the major battlegrounds of the welfare rights struggle were local and regional welfare departments, city halls, and state capitols across the country. In Boston, demonstrations were often styled as ‘mothers’ protests’ and were consistently cited as

¹⁴⁷ Rhonda Y. Williams, ‘Nonviolence and Long Hot Summers: Black Women and Welfare Rights Struggles in the 1960s,’ *borderlands e-journal*, 4, no. 3 (2005), 1-38 (pp. 8, 20); Nadasen, “‘We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary,’” pp. 324-325.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, ‘Black Women, Urban Politics, and Engendering Black Power,’ pp. 95-96.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Mothers for Adequate Welfare Presents: Charles Sims’ flyer, c. 1966, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

¹⁵⁰ Earl Caldwell, ‘Women Pressing Boston Demands,’ *New York Times*, 4 June 1967, p. 30; Bailis, p. 11; Nickerson, Tape 278, pp. 29-31.

¹⁵¹ Nickerson, Tape 279, p. 1.

¹⁵² Williams, ‘Nonviolence and Long Hot Summers,’ pp. 27-28.

being some of the most militant in the country. At both neighbourhood and citywide protests, Boston activists expressed a willingness to use forceful action if more peaceful means fell short. Roberta O’Neil articulated this position during a sit-in to demand back-to-school clothing in September 1968. ‘Up to this point we’ve been trying to use brains and not brawn,’ the Roxbury welfare rights leader explained, ‘But apparently you people don’t respect our attitude. If you want force, we’ll give you force.’¹⁵³ At a demonstration a couple of months later, this time calling for winter clothing, a member of the newly formed MWRO tied the threat of violence directly to the defence of children. She stated that, if recipients’ demands were not met in a timely fashion, ‘these girls are going to break loose. They have children in the hospital with pneumonia because they had no clothes to wear and we can’t keep them under control.’¹⁵⁴ Forceful words were not mere posturing and welfare recipients sometimes raised their fists to protect their own and their children’s rights. In November 1968, the winter clothing campaign in Boston culminated in a series of confrontational citywide demonstrations, which at times brimmed over into violence. On 12 November, for example, around 200 welfare recipients from across the city took over the state welfare headquarters in downtown Boston, putting their feet up on desks, overturning files, and shoving social workers who got in their way. Notably, the women who occupied the offices also sang ‘We Shall Overcome’ – the anthem of the nonviolent civil rights movement – demonstrating how welfare recipients’ use of force often operated in tandem with the language of nonviolence.¹⁵⁵ Again, activists justified their actions by emphasising the urgency of their children’s needs. Speaking to a local reporter, one recipient from South Boston declared: ‘What are our kids supposed to do without hats or mittens in the snow. It’s just ridiculous... our mothers are angry and they will not stand for this.’¹⁵⁶ Two days later, over 100 welfare rights activists staged an all-day sit-in at the State House, leading to forty arrests. The women, who refused to leave the building until their demands were met, at one point clasped hands in a circle to better withstand the police who had been ordered to remove them. This time, as well as singing ‘We Shall Overcome,’ protesters chanted ‘We Shall Fight and Win.’ In the end, however, most

¹⁵³ Roberta O’Neil, quoted in Ollie Brennan and Jack Kendall, ‘125 MAWs Invade Welfare Office,’ *Record American* (Boston), 5 September 1968, p. 2, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Taylor Jr., ‘Hundreds Jam Welfare Centers for Winter Clothing.’

¹⁵⁵ ‘Mothers Rush Ott’s Office,’ *Boston Globe*, 12 November 1968, pp. 1, 21, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12; ‘Mothers Ejected In Wild Disorder At Welfare Dept.,’ in *Record American* (Boston), 13 November 1968, pp. 2, 17, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12.

¹⁵⁶ Dorothy Baron, quoted in ‘Mothers Ejected,’ p. 17.

recipients allowed themselves to be escorted peacefully from the building.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, these protests in Boston encapsulate the militant maternalism of the welfare rights struggle.

However, the confrontational tone of their activism did not deter welfare recipients from allowing sons and daughters to accompany them on demonstrations. Hurley, a white recipient from South Boston whose children were very young when the movement was at its height, recalled: 'I took them everywhere with me.'¹⁵⁸ Indeed, during protests in Boston, reporters frequently observed that welfare recipients were accompanied by pre-school age children – wheeling baby carriages and holding toddlers by the hand.¹⁵⁹ On 13 August 1968, *Boston Globe* reporter Janet Riddell painted a vivid picture of the scene outside a South Boston welfare office, where welfare rights activists sat on the steps watching their children play 'amidst a traffic jam of baby buggies.' Encapsulating the tedium of long welfare rights demonstrations, overshadowed in most accounts by recipients' militant rhetoric and clashes with officials, she noted: 'A little girl played in a puddle with two broken pretzels and a cigarette stub occasionally looking over enviously at two boys who were tossing a rubber ball.'¹⁶⁰ Similarly, when East Boston recipients staged a sit-in at their local welfare office the following day, one reporter described a scene in which 'nine women and 16 children curled up in blankets and munched on sandwiches.'¹⁶¹ For low-income single mothers in the welfare rights movement, bringing children to protests was largely a matter of necessity. Lack of affordable childcare was a major issue for these women and often formed part of the reason they had gone on welfare in the first place.¹⁶² Nevertheless, welfare recipients clearly saw their children's presence as a way to drum up sympathy for their cause. When MAW members in the neighbouring town of Lynn, Massachusetts marched to their City Hall in August 1968 to demand furniture and household appliances, they brought along small boys wearing signs that asked 'Where Is Ours?'¹⁶³ In this way,

¹⁵⁷ F. B. Taylor, Jr., '41 Welfare Mothers, Students Arrested,' *Boston Globe*, 15 November 1968, pp. 1, 45, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 13; Robert J. Anglin, 'Police Outnumbered Welfare Protesters,' *Boston Globe*, 15 November 1968, p. 45, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 13; James, Interview with West, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁸ Hurley, Interview with West, p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ See for instance Janet Riddell, 'Protesting Mothers Say Goal Is to Disrupt Welfare System,' *Boston Globe*, 1 August 1968, p. 1, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

¹⁶⁰ Riddell, 'They Sat on Chairs, on Tables and on the Floors.'

¹⁶¹ Robert A. Jordan, '16 Children in Blankets,' *Boston Globe*, 14 August 1968, p. 15, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

¹⁶² Explaining why she first applied for AFDC, Roberta Grant stated: 'My problems was child care at the time... I couldn't get nobody to care for my children properly... So I just decided to stay home with my baby.' Grant, Interview with West, pp. 1, 5.

¹⁶³ Jean Dietz, 'Lynn Mothers Ask Same Welfare Benefits as Boston,' *Boston Globe*, 6 August 1968, p. 4, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

recipients reminded the public that their children's welfare was their primary concern. Furthermore, the presence of children served to underscore their poverty and the gravity of their needs. At a 1969 MWRO demonstration, for example, it was reported that women wheeled their babies in shopping carts – a stark contrast to the popular image of middle-class WSP women pushing baby carriages in their hats and white gloves.¹⁶⁴ In addition, recipients soon learnt that the presence of large numbers of restless children could add to the effectiveness of demonstrations by creating maximum disruption in welfare offices and making officials more likely to give in to their demands.¹⁶⁵

Moreover, like the women of WSP, welfare rights activists believed that their activism was ultimately in their children's best interests. Indeed, their decision to take children to confrontational demonstrations was not simply born out of expediency. Nor was it purely tactically motivated. Many welfare recipients felt it was fitting for children to be present because they saw protests, fundamentally, as an attempt to improve their children's lives. In a letter to NWRO organisers in October 1967, members of Boston's MAW asked whether it would be possible for children to accompany them to Washington for a forthcoming demonstration against the Social Security Amendments. The MAW women advocated bringing children ranging from the age of eleven to eighteen, arguing, 'since this bill H.R. 12080 will affect their lives as well as ours, that they should also be present.'¹⁶⁶ In addition, welfare rights activists agreed with WSPers that activism benefited children by raising their social consciousness and making them more responsible citizens. On this point, welfare recipients may also have been influenced by Coretta Scott King, who consistently asserted that children should play an active role in the interrelated struggles for peace, and racial and economic justice. In her speech to the 1968 Mother's Day rally, King drew attention to the fact that many welfare recipients had brought their children with them, just as she had brought her own children with her from Atlanta. She declared:

This I believe is a marvellous way to teach them about the problems and the ills in our society which afflict them so drastically... Children are taught and learn by precept and example. When there are better homes, improved economic conditions, better educational advantages, and a deep concern for one's fellow man, then we can expect better men and women, better leaders and politicians, yes a better society, a better nation and a better world.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ 'Welfare Group at Army Base.'

¹⁶⁵ Bailis, pp. 50, 102.

¹⁶⁶ Katherine Moore, Letter to Timothy Sampson at the Poverty Rights Action Center in Washington, 6 October 1967, in Wiley Papers, Box 25, Folder 3.

¹⁶⁷ 'Woman Power.'

In Boston, Grant was also a proponent of the idea that that children benefited from activism. Speaking in 1984, she noted that members of MWRO had always included their children in the movement, believing it was important to do so. When they went to demonstrations, she recalled, ‘we took them with us, they knew what was happening.’ Then, when women got back home, they would explain to their children why they were protesting; in particular, Grant would emphasise the need to help other children who were even worse off than themselves.¹⁶⁸ Looking back over a decade later, Grant clearly saw this as having had positive effect on her children’s lives; she declared: ‘it made my kids get up and do really good things for themselves.’ For instance, she noted that her youngest son, who ‘was just about 3 and can remember everything I said,’ now aspired to be a lawyer.¹⁶⁹

Like members of WSP, welfare recipients sometimes experienced difficulties combining political activism and mothering. As mothers of young children who lacked the funds to pay for childcare, there were doubtlessly occasions when activists had to miss meetings or demonstrations due to familial responsibilities.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, although recipients often welcomed the chaos children caused at protests, this disruption also caused problems and could be an added strain. In April 1969, when 300 MWRO members staged a ‘shop-in’ at a Sears department store in Cambridge to demand consumer credit, it was reported that children ‘roamed freely throughout the demonstration’ and that activists’ departure had to be delayed while missing children were rounded up.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, some women worried that movement activities caused them to neglect their children. This was a particular concern for the few women in MWRO who had to travel as a result of their involvement in the movement. As Massachusetts’s representative to NWRO, James regularly attended national meetings in Washington and demonstrations all over the country, reporting on MWRO’s activities and relaying national strategies back to activists in Boston.¹⁷² Although she welcomed the opportunity for travel she would not otherwise have been able to afford, James recalled: ‘I got tired and my kids were growing up... I felt that I was being away from my kids too much, and I wanted to be home more.’¹⁷³ However, compared to the white, middle-class women of WSP, welfare recipients did not perceive the same level

¹⁶⁸ Grant, Interview with West, pp. 32, 37-38.

¹⁶⁹ Grant, Interview with West, p. 31.

¹⁷⁰ Balis, pp. 101-102.

¹⁷¹ ‘Sears Blitzed by 300,’ *Record American* (Boston), 4 April 1969, p. 4, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 13.

¹⁷² James, Interview with West, pp. 12-13.

¹⁷³ James, Interview with West, p. 13.

of a tension between their domestic responsibilities and their political involvement. Again, this was indicative of the way that gender ideologies were shaped by race and class. As low-income black women, who were generally excluded from the domestic ideal and expected to be economically active, most welfare recipients had plenty of experience juggling paid work and mothering. Many had worked prior to applying for welfare and some women continued to supplement meagre benefits with part time employment. Thus, balancing political activism and motherhood was not all that different for these women. If anything, welfare recipients found that being in the movement made managing these various commitments easier. Indeed, involvement in the movement often fostered lasting friendships among women on welfare and provided an invaluable network of support. James recalled that, even though work in MWRO ‘was all day and late evenings,’ her children were well taken care of because ‘when we worked the other mothers in the WRO helped attend your kids. That’s how I got to travel. The other mothers helped watch the kids.’¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Grant claimed that she made many friends through the movement, and that they would regularly babysit each other’s children. Describing the organisation in Massachusetts, Grant declared: ‘It was like, a whole big family.’¹⁷⁵ Within the movement, recipients also benefited from the assistance of middle-class organisers, who often helped run free babysitting services during meetings and demonstrations.¹⁷⁶

Thus, welfare recipients drew public attention to their status as mothers by staging special ‘mothers’ marches’ and Mother’s Day events, displaying child-centred signs and slogans, and bringing their children along to demonstrations. They combined this maternal symbolism with aggressive rhetoric, and sometimes employed violence, justifying their militancy as necessary to provide for their children. Welfare recipients’ emphasis on motherhood stemmed, in large part, from a deeply maternalist worldview and a conviction that activism was an extension of their responsibilities as mothers. At the same time, however, there is evidence to suggest that both organisers and recipients recognised the potential advantages of foregrounding women’s maternal identities. As one student organiser in Cleveland succinctly put it: ‘nothing besides the FBI is so sacred as American Motherhood.’¹⁷⁷ Similarly, James recalled that members of MWRO in Boston often planned to be arrested because ‘whenever they threw the mothers in jail the TV was there. And they would blast it on the news... And it would shame people.

¹⁷⁴ James, Interview with West, p. 12.

¹⁷⁵ Grant, Interview with West, p. 33.

¹⁷⁶ Bailis, p. 67.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Frost, p. 117.

Mothers talking about they don't have food to feed their kids... it was a kind of thing that drew attention.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, many welfare recipients viewed motherhood as an effective means to capture media attention and win support for their cause. Nevertheless, while recipients were often cognisant of the symbolic power of motherhood, they were also cautious about letting themselves or their children be exploited for political gain. This sometimes created tensions with organisers. In spring 1969, during a statewide drive to demand special grants for Easter clothing for children, Pastreich proposed that MWRO members all go down to the Division of Child Guardianship to collectively give up their children for foster care, highlighting the fact that state guidelines gave new spring clothing to foster children but not to children on welfare. In his plan, women would also volunteer to take a foster child, so that they would in effect merely switch children and everyone would get Easter clothing. However, welfare recipients rejected this tactic outright, worried that they would not get their children back.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, women in the movement tended to be wary of strategies that sought to focus on children as a way to distract from black single mothers on welfare, always a more stigmatised constituency.¹⁸⁰ Welfare recipients wanted to draw attention, not only to their children's needs, but also to the value of their own work as mothers.

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However, while recipients in the movement saw motherhood as a source of political strength and emphasised the value of their maternal labour, they often struggled to establish a moral high ground as mothers. The reactions of government officials, welfare administrators and members of the public reveal how race and class combined with gender to shape popular perceptions of the welfare rights movement. Despite activists' best efforts to combat the stigma surrounding public assistance and claim a positive identity as concerned mothers, race and class stereotypes persisted, and welfare recipients continued to be branded as lazy and sexually immoral. Furthermore, recipients' confrontational tactics and vocal demands of the state often fuelled public hostility towards them, exacerbating the widespread perception that they were unseemly

¹⁷⁸ James, Interview with West, p. 16.

¹⁷⁹ Miller, *The Pastreich Principles of Organizing*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁸⁰ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, p. 121.

women who were out to get something for nothing.¹⁸¹ At the national level, Russell Long, a Democratic Senator from Louisiana, became infamous for his fierce opposition to the welfare rights movement and unflattering portrayal of its participants. In September 1967, when activists in Washington testified before the Senate Finance Committee to protest proposed work requirements for mothers on welfare, Long charged that: ‘If they can find time to march in the streets, picket, and sit all day in committee hearing rooms, they can find time to do some useful work.’ He suggested that protesters should be ‘picking up the litter in front of their homes,’ instead of disrupting the workings of Congress.¹⁸² A year later, Long incensed welfare rights activists further by referring to them as ‘brood mares,’ and refusing to let them testify altogether.¹⁸³ Although D.C. recipients consistently attempted to draw upon the moral authority of motherhood, the senator’s remarks exposed the deep-seated stereotypes about poor black women that continued to plague the movement.¹⁸⁴ They reflected the prevailing ethos that black women ought be economically active and that dependency – although promoted for white women with husbands to support them – only encouraged laziness and other moral deficiencies among black women.¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, Long’s use of the term ‘brood mares’ was rooted in longstanding assumptions about black women’s supposed promiscuity, often used to explain high birth and illegitimacy rates.¹⁸⁶

In her work on the movement in Washington, Valk argued that conflicting views about black motherhood ultimately limited the success of the welfare rights struggle.¹⁸⁷ The same was undoubtedly true for welfare rights activists in Boston. Although the maternal rhetoric employed by Boston recipients won sympathy among some sectors of the public – with clergymen, students and black liberation groups all offering forms of support – disapproval of welfare rights activity in the city was widespread, and was tied to similar myths about poor black single mothers on welfare. Indeed, many Bostonians also associated the receipt of welfare with laziness, illegitimacy and vice. In a 1972 Boston-area survey, it was found that people of all social classes believed welfare recipients were idle and dishonest, and had more children than was actually the case.¹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, at a public hearing on welfare in Faneuil Hall following the Grove Hall sit-in of June 1967, one woman caused outcry among welfare recipients when she

¹⁸¹ Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*, p. 15.

¹⁸² Russell Long, quoted in Valk, ‘Mother Power,’ p. 40.

¹⁸³ Russell Long, quoted in Valk, ‘Mother Power,’ p. 40.

¹⁸⁴ Valk, ‘Mother Power,’ pp. 34-35, 41.

¹⁸⁵ Edmonds-Cady, ‘Motherhood and Agency,’ pp. 138-139.

¹⁸⁶ White, p. 235.

¹⁸⁷ See Valk, “‘Mother Power.’”

¹⁸⁸ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 197.

suggested that some of them were prostitutes. This uproar was further increased when a former social worker accused recipients of producing ‘litters of illegitimate children,’ who posed a serious problem to a healthy society.¹⁸⁹

However, as several commentators observed, the issue of sexual immorality was often not as important to the general public as the ‘morality of work’ and the widespread perception that welfare recipients were getting a free ride.¹⁹⁰ Despite activists’ attempts to frame mothering as valuable labour, many Boston residents continued to believe that welfare recipients took money from ‘hardworking taxpayers’ and gave nothing in return.¹⁹¹ In particular, working-class families often resented welfare due to the perception that recipients were getting things they themselves could not afford.¹⁹² In a letter to the *Boston Globe* in August 1968, Florence Murphy said that she was ‘sick and tired of reading and seeing those people in the papers and on TV howling for phones and furniture,’ and asked: ‘Why don’t they do an honest day’s work and pay for those extras?’ She went on to assert: ‘My husband worked hard for the city of Boston for over 30 years to keep me and my seven children... We never got anything free.’¹⁹³ Interestingly, although Murphy identified herself as a stay-at-home mother who was supported by her husband, she portrayed dependency on the state in a negative light, suggesting that single mothers on welfare should be working. Meanwhile, a woman who wrote to a local paper in Worcester, Massachusetts also complained that welfare recipients ended up better off than working-class families. ‘Nobody will give me money to buy new furniture, to put clothes on my back or food on my table as long as I have a job,’ she said, ‘The poor people could afford to march to Washington and demonstrate for weeks, I couldn’t, I’d starve to death.’¹⁹⁴ Another Worcester resident claimed that MAW’s troubles could be solved if members spent half as much time seeking employment as they did demonstrating for ‘unfounded demands,’ and

¹⁸⁹ F. B. Taylor, Jr., ‘Illegitimacy’ Charged: Shouts Shock Welfare Talks,’ *Boston Globe*, c. June 1967, in Wiley Papers, Box 14, Folder 9; Bill McGrath and Tom Sewell, ‘Prostitution’ Charge Causes Uproar At Welfare Hearing,’ *Boston Traveler*, 29 June 1967, p. 36, in Scholarship, Education and Defense Fund for Racial Equality Records, 1944-1976, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 23, Folder 19 (hereafter cited as SEDF Records).

¹⁹⁰ Brumm, p. 11; Tom Henshaw, ‘What’s Wrong with Our Welfare System?’, *Boston Herald Traveler*, 9 July 1967, in SEDF Records, Box 23, Folder 19.

¹⁹¹ Brumm, p. 11.

¹⁹² Janet Riddell, ‘The Welfare Mothers’ Budget,’ *Boston Globe*, 9 September 1968, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12.

¹⁹³ Florence Murphy, ‘We Never Got Anything Free,’ *Boston Globe*, Letters to the Editor, 8 August 1968, p. 12, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

¹⁹⁴ Marilyn Thayer, ‘She’s Too Busy To Demonstrate,’ *Evening Gazette* (Worcester, Massachusetts), The People’s Forum, 17 August 1968, p. 6, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 15.

suggested that the group change its name to MMW: Mothers for Meaningful Work.¹⁹⁵ As these statements show, welfare recipients' very public activism often created further hostility towards them, by seeming to support the popular view that poor black women on welfare were lazy, ungrateful and demanding.¹⁹⁶ In addition, the press coverage of demonstrations perpetuated a less-than-flattering image of welfare recipients. Although mainstream newspapers of the same period referred to members of WSP as 'ladies' – often describing them 'well-dressed,' 'respectable,' and 'peaceful' – Boston's leading papers characterised 'welfare mothers' as 'angry,' 'protesting' and 'militant.'¹⁹⁷ Thus, while reporters' language was less inflammatory than some of the letters found in the opinion pages, they nevertheless reinforced the notion that women in the welfare rights movement were unladylike and aggressive.

At its most visceral, public resentment against welfare recipients manifested itself in counter-demonstrations and the harassment of activists. In fall 1968, for example, special grants protests in Boston were met with a series of organised counter-demonstrations, often spearheaded by white working-class housewives. On 5 August 1968, Anne Goggin, a working-class married mother of six from Dorchester, presented the welfare department with a petition complaining about the abuse of welfare benefits by 'unreasonable mothers.' Signed by over 200 people, the document demanded that requests for special grants for clothing and household items be refused, and that the department conduct a thorough investigation into recipients' eligibility to receive such benefits. Alternatively, the petition argued that school clothing should also be granted to working families who were 'earning the money and paying the taxes to allow these people to do what they are doing.' Asserting that working families had just as many financial problems as welfare recipients, Goggin explained: 'I don't want my children to wear the hand-me-downs they have worn in the past.' After delivering the petition, Goggin was met by half a dozen other women on the steps of the State House, where they quietly demonstrated, 'Armed only with baby carriages.'¹⁹⁸ The following week, as welfare recipients sat-in overnight at an East Boston welfare office, a groups of local women picketed the building carrying signs that read 'Will MAW Put Food On Our

¹⁹⁵ 'Cash Instead of Vouchers?', *Evening Gazette* (Worcester, Massachusetts), The People's Forum, 17 August 1968, p. 6, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 15.

¹⁹⁶ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 197; Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*, pp. 15, 241-242.

¹⁹⁷ See for instance 'Moms in 4 Welfare Protests,' *Record American* (Boston), 8 November 1968, p. 4, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12; Janet Riddell, 'Protesting Mothers Say Goal Is to Disrupt Welfare System,' *Boston Globe*, 1 August 1968, pp. 1, 10, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11; James Southwood, 'What's Behind The Mounting Welfare Crisis,' *Boston Herald Traveler*, 11 August 1968, p. 44, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

¹⁹⁸ Gloria Boykin and John Sullivan, 'Petition Raps 'Unreasonable Mothers,'' *Record American* (Boston), 6 August 1968, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

Table? NO!', 'Why Should They Have What We Can't Afford!' and 'If I Can Work Why Can't They?' One of the women explained: 'We're fed up with hearing these mothers keep demanding things we have to work for. I have four children and my husband works two jobs to support us. I'm not against welfare, don't get me wrong, but there's such a thing as overdoing it.'¹⁹⁹ Significantly, these counter-demonstrations often mirrored many aspects of welfare rights protests, with activists bringing their children along and drawing upon maternal language to justify their arguments. However, working-class women presented a very different vision of what constituted 'good' motherhood. By suggesting that the state should only reward those mothers who were prepared to work, or were supported by husbands who paid taxes, they challenged welfare recipients' claims that motherhood itself was meaningful labour. In addition to these organised expressions of opposition, welfare rights activists regularly faced harassment and intimidation from disgruntled passersby. On 26 August, as MAW members met with officials at a downtown welfare office, construction workers dropped lunch leftovers and containers of water on them from above. The workers also fired insults at the women and called out: 'We work, why don't you try it?'²⁰⁰

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, this backlash against welfare, coupled with a rightward shift in the national mood, created an increasingly hostile political climate for welfare rights organising. Up until this point, the welfare rights movement had not been without its successes. In Boston, activists were able to secure favourable changes in the day-to-day administration of welfare, greater transparency as to their rights and responsibilities, and representation for recipients on policy-making boards – not to mention thousands of dollars worth of special grants.²⁰¹ Meanwhile, recipients won similar concessions across the nation. However, as public resentment towards welfare grew, particularly among the white working-class, government officials began to make AFDC a key focus of attack, simultaneously feeding off and fuelling anti-welfare sentiment. Furthermore, the welfare backlash was symptomatic of broader political changes, as many 'middle Americans' lost patience with confrontational demonstrations, urban rebellions and a federal government they believed pandered to minority interests, buoying the ascendancy of politicians who vowed to maintain order

¹⁹⁹ Alan Sheehan, 'Welfare Head Acts to End Sit-Ins,' *Boston Globe*, 13 August 1968, pp. 1, 10, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

²⁰⁰ Ollie Brennan, 'Water and Food Tossed as MAW Meeting Is Held,' *Record American* (Boston), 27 August 1968, p. 4, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12.

²⁰¹ Jean Dietz, 'Boston Led Way on New Welfare Rule,' *Boston Globe*, 20 November 1968, pp. 1, 21, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 13; Bailis, pp. 141, 144; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 125.

and scale back liberal government programmes.²⁰² This increasingly conservative mood was apparent in the stiffening of official responses to special grants protests in Boston. Initially, city welfare administrators appeared keen to make concessions and avoid confrontations with recipients (often with the memory of the 1967 Grove Hall sit-in and the riots it ignited looming large).²⁰³ Yet, as demonstrations grew bigger and more militant, the state's reactions became more hostile, mirroring broader patterns of police repression in the 1960s (also seen in Chapter 1).²⁰⁴ At a press conference on 12 November 1968, as MWRO's campaign for winter clothing reached its height, Acting governor Francis W. Sargent told reporters that he would not tolerate any more disorder or abuse of workers in welfare offices. Evoking highly racialised images, the lieutenant governor declared: 'We can't turn America into jungle warfare.'²⁰⁵ Two days later, when MWRO staged a sit-in at the State House, forty members were removed by police, bringing the movement its first mass arrests.²⁰⁶ In March the following year, the Massachusetts Welfare Department issued a new edict stating that if recipients demonstrated at welfare offices or attempted to enter in groups, requests for special grants would not be approved and they would be arrested.²⁰⁷ There is no doubt that this increased harassment from welfare officials and the police took its toll on welfare rights activists, many of whom had young children. Reflecting on why MWRO started to decline after 1970, Hurley later explained:

The movement was really starting to wind down because the harassment and people were being put in jail... People were coming to meetings, but people weren't ready to go out on the streets and have sit-ins. People were afraid. Times were just very different. Previous to this people had been arrested and people were charged with trespassing. They were beginning to charge people with conspiracy. Things that had much higher charges and stakes. And people who had children and no money – can't risk that much.²⁰⁸

State officials also sought to undermine welfare rights organising in Massachusetts by introducing changes to the welfare system. In December 1969, Sargent, who was now Governor, announced major 'welfare reforms' that would eliminate special grants payments, replacing them with a 'flat grant' system. These new grants would be an increase over existing basic payments and would supposedly take

²⁰² See Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 194-199; Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*, pp. 240-243.

²⁰³ Sheehan, 'Welfare Head Acts to End Sit-Ins.'

²⁰⁴ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 95.

²⁰⁵ 'Mothers Blockade Welfare Offices,' *Record American* (Boston), 13 November 1968, p. 2, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 12.

²⁰⁶ Taylor, Jr., '41 Welfare Mothers, Students Arrested'; Bailis, p. 13.

²⁰⁷ Grant, Letter to Friends of MWRO, 11 June 1969; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 94.

²⁰⁸ Hurley, Interview with West, pp. 8-9.

into account recipients' needs for clothing, furniture and other additional items.²⁰⁹ Similar changes were adopted across the nation, and represented a direct response to the success of NWRO's special grants campaign. Indeed, it was no coincidence that the first states to implement flat grant systems were New York and Massachusetts, two of the largest centres of welfare rights activity where special grants demonstrations had proved extremely successful at winning concessions and building membership.²¹⁰ Although welfare officials often argued that reforms would make the system fairer, the changes were clearly designed to quell protests and cut welfare costs.²¹¹ When he announced the introduction of flat grants in Massachusetts, Sargent asserted: 'No longer will those who clamor loudest receive most.'²¹² Sargent later made much of his welfare reforms and ability to resist welfare rights demonstrators in his successful 1970 re-election campaign. In one widely broadcast radio advertisement, the incumbent governor played to popular resentment against welfare recipients among working-class voters, declaring:

The way it used to be, to get a new refrigerator, you'd demand one, you'd demonstrate for one... Working people have special needs too. But they don't get special needs payments... This isn't money from heaven, this is taxpayers' money. And I've got a responsibility to see it is... not wasted.²¹³

Although activists in Boston organised to fight the state's welfare reforms, their efforts were ultimately in vain. Across the country, the abolition of special grants robbed welfare rights organisations of a tried and tested strategy for generating publicity, forcing concessions and recruiting new members.²¹⁴ However, this blow hit particularly hard in Boston because MWRO's organising model, formulated by Pastreich, centred heavily upon using the promise of material benefits to develop a mass movement, with organisers often prioritising amassing membership over nurturing indigenous leadership and building sustained organisations.²¹⁵ As a result, the welfare rights movement in Boston declined rapidly following the implementation of flat grants, with only a handful of MWRO chapters remaining active after summer 1970.²¹⁶ While mass demonstrations carried on longer in other states and NWRO continued to wage a national battle for a

²⁰⁹ Mike Beatrice, 'Sargent's Welfare Plan is Jeered by Mothers,' *Boston Globe*, 3 December 1969, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 14.

²¹⁰ Bailis, p. 141.

²¹¹ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 95-96.

²¹² Beatrice, 'Sargent's Welfare Plan.'

²¹³ Francis Sargent, quoted in Bailis, pp. 138, 142.

²¹⁴ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 96.

²¹⁵ See Miller, *The Pastreich Principles of Organizing*; Bailis; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 84-87.

²¹⁶ In fact, Bailis noted that many local MWRO affiliates were already in a period of decline before the implementation of the flat grant system. Bailis, pp. 55, 143.

guaranteed annual income into the mid-1970s, large-scale actions in Boston were few and far between during this period.

Nevertheless, a core group of welfare rights activists in Boston remained active into the 1970s and beyond, revealing the lasting impact the movement had on the lives of its most active participants. Notably, several of the local groups that survived were led by former members of MAW, who often had a more long-term commitment to social change from the start.²¹⁷ Although activists no longer commanded the same level of grassroots strength and gradually downplayed the use of direct action, they continued to seek other means to reform the welfare system and improve their day-to-day lives.²¹⁸ For example, several welfare rights activists joined governing bodies within the welfare system, capitalising on the movement's success at winning welfare recipients recognition as a legitimate participants in the policy-making process.²¹⁹ Furthermore, a number of recipients used the skills and experience they had gained in the welfare rights struggle to launch new community-based ventures, such as advocacy centres for poor women, day care facilities, and educational programmes teaching teenagers about family planning. Importantly, these projects often reflected an increasingly feminist outlook among welfare rights activists in Boston. Indeed, the public hostility and state repression they experienced encouraged many recipients to recognise how gender intersected with race and class to stigmatise them, contributing to the development of a feminist consciousness within the welfare rights movement.

VI

The welfare rights struggle – like the activism of black and low-income women more generally – has long been neglected within mainstream narratives of second-wave feminism.²²⁰ However, as they organised to demand more economic resources and better treatment from the state, many welfare recipients came to recognise gender as indispensable to their marginalisation. In 1972, in the inaugural issue of *Ms.* magazine, NWRO leader Johnnie Tillmon published an article that would come to epitomise the emerging feminist politics of the welfare rights movement. In a piece entitled 'Welfare is a Women's Issue,' Tillmon made explicit connections between women's vulnerability

²¹⁷ Bailis, p. 57.

²¹⁸ Bailis, p. 16; Valk, 'Mother Power,' p. 49.

²¹⁹ Bailis, pp. 141, 144, 148.

²²⁰ Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement,' p. 294.

to poverty and their subordinate status within society. She also highlighted the way institutionalised sexism within the welfare system reinforced women's dependency. In one oft-quoted passage, Tillmon likened welfare to a 'super-sexist marriage' due to the control it exerted over every aspect of a woman's life, from her finances to her sexuality. She contended that women on AFDC simply traded in 'a man' for 'the man.'²²¹ But, while Tillmon's essay was widely circulated at the time and has since been heavily cited by historians, she was not the only one to develop a feminist consciousness. In Boston, when West asked Hurley how the welfare rights movement had impacted upon her life, she replied:

I think it made me more political and a feminist. I began to see in terms of more of how women are discriminated by society... It's very clear that welfare doesn't support women. Women are really held back. And maybe its not just welfare, it's everywhere. It's here and an international problem. It's really a women's problem.²²²

This transformation of consciousness was a gradual, and often incomplete, process that occurred at different stages within various local groups. And even then, not all activists embraced feminism.²²³ Nevertheless, by the early 1970s, welfare recipients across the country had come to define welfare as a 'women's problem' and to identify themselves as part of the broader women's liberation movement. In part, this shift resulted from ongoing struggles with the state (which, as Tillmon's article makes clear, recipients increasingly viewed as masculinised), and from internal tensions with male organisers in the movement. At the same time, it was encouraged by the growing visibility of the feminist movement, offering welfare recipients potential new allies and new frameworks for understanding their grievances.²²⁴

Importantly, however, welfare recipients constructed a feminist politics based on their daily lives, and their analysis was rooted in their experience of a combination of

²²¹ Johnnie Tillmon, 'Welfare is a Women's Issue,' *Ms.*, 1 (Spring 1972), p. 111, in *Radicalism and Reactionary Politics in America, Series 1: The American Radicalism Collection* (Woodbridge, C.T.: Primary Source Microfilm, 2004), Reel 234 (hereafter cited to as *American Radicalism Collection*). Also reprinted in *Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents, 1935-1996*, ed. by Premilla Nadasen, Jennifer Mittelstadt and Marisa Chappell (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 177-179. Nadasen has argued that, as well as being a metaphor for institutionalised sexism, 'the man' was shorthand for the white power structure, revealing Tillmon's understanding of the racial and gendered nature of the welfare system. "'We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary,'" pp. 333-334.

²²² Hurley, Interview with West, p. 11.

²²³ Roberta Grant, for example, said she refrained from getting involved in the women's movement. She claimed she did not view welfare as a women's issue because there were too many men she knew who were also on welfare. Grant, Interview with West, pp. 29, 39.

²²⁴ Valk, *Radical Sisters*, pp. 52, 54; Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement,' p. 274.

race, class and gender oppression. Illustrating this intersectional perspective, Tillmon's 1972 article began:

I'm a woman. I'm a black woman. I'm a poor woman. I'm a fat woman. I'm a middle-aged woman. And I'm on welfare. In this country, if you're any one of those things – poor, black, fat, female, middle-aged, on welfare – you count less as a human being. If you're *all* those things, you don't count at all.²²⁵

Consequently, welfare recipients tended to define women's liberation differently from other feminist activists at the time. As Nadasen has argued, women in the welfare rights movement formulated a unique strand of radical black feminism that integrated race, class and gender, and centred on a commitment to autonomy and self-determination for poor black women.²²⁶ Furthermore, as this chapter demonstrates, welfare recipients' feminist politics were infused with a positive understanding of mothering, and activists continued to view motherhood as a powerful basis from which to fight for social justice and feminist change. In addition, this chapter highlights the importance of local context in shaping feminist ideologies. Indeed, it is notable that Hurley never actually saw Tillmon's seminal article in *Ms.*, suggesting that local activists came to their own conclusions about the gendered nature of welfare, influenced less by national directives than by their own experience of struggle and the feminist landscape in their particular locale.²²⁷ Thus, by articulating a distinctive version of women's liberation based on their daily lives and immediate surroundings, welfare recipients made significant contributions to the feminist discourses of the period.

In Boston, welfare rights campaigns, particularly those spearheaded by MAW, contained aspects of feminism from the start. In a 1966 interview with the *Boston Globe*, for example, Nickerson articulated what sounded a lot like a feminist agenda, arguing that MAW was just as concerned about helping women on welfare gain more control over their day-to-day lives as they were about winning more material benefits. 'We mothers on welfare have had good reason to discover that money isn't the answer to our problems,' Nickerson explained, 'We need education, birth control information, mental health facilities, job training, day care centers, economic counseling.'²²⁸ As this

²²⁵ Tillmon, 'Welfare is a Women's Issue,' p. 111.

²²⁶ The development of a unique form of feminism within the welfare rights struggle is a prominent theme throughout Nadasen's writings on the movement, but it is particularly well developed in Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement'; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, Chapter 7; Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, Chapter 8. Although Nadasen termed recipients' distinctive ideology a black feminist perspective, she noted that white, Hispanic and Native American women also subscribed to a form of the same perspective. Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. xvii-xviii.

²²⁷ Hurley, Interview with West, p. 12.

²²⁸ Nickerson, quoted in Davidson, 'Part Mata Hari, Part Robin Hood.'

statement indicates, gaining access to birth control was a central part of welfare recipients' quest for self-determination and independence, as it would later be for many feminist groups. MAW's 'Bill of Rights' demanded that the welfare department provide information about birth control methods, and a manual produced by the group to educate recipients about their rights contained details about family planning clinics in the area.²²⁹ Furthermore, activists sought to challenge state law, and welfare department policy, limiting access to birth control to married women.²³⁰ At the June 1967 public hearing on welfare, Nickerson argued: 'why do your rules say birth control should just be for married people? Married people aren't the only ones who fall in love.'²³¹ In demanding equal access to birth control for single women, recipients also challenged the stigma attached to single motherhood and sought to legitimise alternative family forms. Thus, although not consciously framed in feminist language, early welfare rights campaigns focused on empowering single women on welfare and challenging their subordinate status within society, and they addressed a number of issues that would come to be viewed as feminist concerns.²³² Furthermore, by asserting that the personal was political, welfare recipients foreshadowed a key tenet of the emerging women's liberation movement.²³³

Members of MAW also believed from the onset that welfare recipients should control their own movement, and the group's struggles with male NWRO organisers strengthened its emerging feminist ideology.²³⁴ When Pastreich arrived in Boston in spring 1968, having been recently hired by NWRO, he made little attempt to work with the existing welfare rights groups in the city.²³⁵ Nor was he particularly concerned about learning what local welfare recipients wanted or nurturing indigenous leadership.²³⁶ Instead, Pastreich's focus was boosting the membership of the national organisation and using mass actions to win concessions from the welfare department. As the movement in Boston expanded and local groups coalesced to form MWRO, Pastreich enlisted a team of staff and volunteers to help him, most of them middle-class men. According to Bailis, MWRO organisers, trained to prioritise 'tangible results,' relied upon top-down methods from the start – they planned every detail of meetings and demonstrations in

²²⁹ Mothers for Adequate Welfare, 'From the MAW Bill of Rights,' in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork; Mothers for Adequate Welfare, 'Your Welfare Rights Manual,' p. 11, in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork.

²³⁰ Brumm, pp. 8-9.

²³¹ Gertrude Nickerson, quoted in Taylor, 'Illegitimacy' Charged.'

²³² Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights,' pp. 392-393; Frost, p. 144.

²³³ Frost, p. 144.

²³⁴ Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement,' p. 277.

²³⁵ Pasteseuch [*sic*], Interview with West, pp. 1-2.

²³⁶ Levey, 'The Organizer'; Bailis, p. 98

advance, sought to limit independent decision-making by welfare recipients, and even attempted to influence the election of recipient leaders.²³⁷ Grant, one of MWRO's first recruits, also hinted that Pastreich could be very controlling; although Grant believed that Pastreich's attention to detail made him a good leader, she recalled that he often helped draft what recipient leaders said in meetings: 'he wanted to know what you're going to say perfect. Roberta don't want you to get up going to say nothing if you aren't going to say it right, don't say it.'²³⁸ An even clearer indication of Pastreich's top-down organising style was the fact that Grant referred to him as a 'good boss.'²³⁹ In addition, male organisers could be condescending and sexist towards female recipients, and often implied that they were not capable of running their own organisation. Describing MWRO's general membership in a letter to Dr. Spock in 1969, Pastreich stated: 'Basically they are not political. They do not vote. They do not read news articles in papers regularly. They do not watch TV. They usually know who the President is... People join a local WRO because it improves their day to day life. Self interest leads to political action which leads to political education.'²⁴⁰ Speaking to a student group in the same year, Pastreich said that he would advise against picking a welfare recipient as an organiser, 'because she doesn't have time to put in the hours on that kind of stuff. I also think women in general are bad leaders. They have to take a week off to have emotions.'²⁴¹

In contrast, MAW members not only believed that recipients could run their own movement, they felt it was vital that they did so, and they resented attempts by those they saw as 'outside organisers' to control the direction of the welfare rights movement in Boston. Indeed, many members of MAW were just as concerned about empowering women and helping them become active participants in the intuitions that governed their lives as they were about winning higher benefits. In part, MAW's belief in participatory democracy and disdain for 'elitist leadership' reflected the ideologies of the SDS activists who helped found the group in summer 1965. From the onset, student organisers in Boston had emphasised the need to create a 'true grassroots movement' that was controlled by welfare recipients themselves (and this was no doubt a key reason why the level of antagonism that developed between MAW and NWRO's male

²³⁷ See Bailis, Chapter 3.

²³⁸ Grant, Interview with West, p. 28.

²³⁹ Grant, Interview with West, p. 13.

²⁴⁰ Pastreich, Letter to Dr. Spock.

²⁴¹ Bill Pastreich, quoted in Nadasen, 'Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement,' p. 288.

organisers did not occur with the group's SDS founders).²⁴² In one article, SDS activist Marya Levenson criticised NWRO organisers in Boston for focusing on economic changes and failing to give welfare recipients the tools to deal with their own problems. Reflecting on her own organisation's philosophy, she explained: 'We knew that MAW organizers would not be acting much differently from welfare workers if all we did was bring mothers to offices to get a little more money, since the mothers then walked out just as dependent on us as they had been on the workers.'²⁴³ Furthermore, while many ERAP projects replicated SDS's masculine culture, the Boston project was dominated by women.²⁴⁴ In this environment, working alongside strong recipient leaders, several female organisers developed a feminist consciousness and began to challenge sexism, not only in the welfare system, but also in the national welfare rights movement.²⁴⁵ Building on her earlier statement, Levenson later argued that 'if you believe welfare women are oppressed as women, a male local and national staff perpetuates and encourages female dependence and powerlessness.'²⁴⁶ However, MAW's participatory, recipient-led format did not simply reflect the proclivities of student organisers, as scholars such as Bailis have suggested.²⁴⁷ It was also rooted in members' daily experiences as poor women in welfare, their desire for autonomy, and, in some cases, a deep distrust of men that stemmed from abusive relationships or failed marriages. Thus, different organising philosophies set MAW members and NWRO staff on a collision course from the start. Having ceased paying dues to the national association early in 1968, MAW refused to join MWRO when it formed in October and the group fought to maintain an independent voice as the newer organisation expanded in the state.²⁴⁸ This struggle undoubtedly helped hone MAW's feminist outlook. Not long after national organisers arrived in Boston, one MAW activist complained: 'I don't understand why there are all guys running it. Wiley and Pastreich. It's guys who messed us up in the first place. Why aren't mothers running their own organization?'²⁴⁹ Similarly, testifying before a hearing on welfare at the State House in August 1968, Nickerson explained that

²⁴² Marya Levenson, 'Welfare Organizing: Its Goals and Methods,' undated, in MWRO Records, Box 4, Folder 12; Case; Bailis, pp. 11, 118.

²⁴³ Levenson, 'Welfare Organizing.'

²⁴⁴ Marya Levenson, 'Remarks at the Memorial Service for Sarah Eisenstein,' 1978,' in Levenson Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAW Artwork; Frost, p. 23.

²⁴⁵ Levenson, 'Remarks.' In her study of ERAP, Jenifer Frost argued that, for women organisers, feminist consciousness evolved less from sexist treatment by movement men than from interacting with community women, and recognising their unequal position in society as related to their gender. Frost, pp. 163, 166.

²⁴⁶ Levenson, untitled speech.

²⁴⁷ Bailis, p. 118.

²⁴⁸ Dietz, 'Organizer Forced on Us.'

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Levenson, 'Welfare Organizing.'

MAW had initially allied with Pastreich when he first arrived in Massachusetts: ‘But like a young bride and her husband, after the honeymoon they (MAW) woke up.’²⁵⁰ Nickerson maintained that ‘the only ones who can handle welfare right are the recipients.’²⁵¹ Significantly, by likening the control of male organisers to a domineering husband, Nickerson foreshadowed Tillmon’s analogy between the welfare system and a sexist marriage by four years, illustrating MAW’s early feminist consciousness.

Notably, within MWRO and its local affiliates, relations between welfare recipients and male staff members appear to have been less acrimonious, at least to begin with. While MAW regularly called for the dismissal of non-recipient organisers, and welfare rights groups in other parts of the country similarly argued that recipients should hold the reins of power, their counterparts in MWRO tended to defend ‘their’ staff.²⁵² In part, this loyalty resulted from the fact that working closely together in a hostile climate – putting in long hours organising, confronting authorities during demonstrations, and getting arrested – often solidified strong ties between welfare recipients and MWRO staff.²⁵³ Furthermore, recipients in MWRO came to rely upon middle-class organisers for valuable practical assistance, such as fundraising, babysitting and transportation, and legal services. It may also have been the case that some welfare recipients accepted organisers’ assessment of their own importance and necessity to the functioning of the movement.²⁵⁴ Thus, the example of MWRO illustrates that divisions between welfare recipients and organisers in the welfare rights struggle were never clear cut; these relationships varied from place to place, as well as within different organisations in the same city.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, clashes between recipient leaders and male organisers became increasingly common over the course of the movement, as welfare recipients across the country gained skills, experience and a heightened sense of personal efficacy.²⁵⁶ According to Bailis, disagreements within MWRO grew at an accelerating pace. As time wore on, MWRO’s recipient leaders began to argue that they should have a larger role in the running of the organisation and they attempted to increase their decision-making power at the expense of the staff.²⁵⁷ It

²⁵⁰ Gertrude Nickerson, quoted in Frank Reilly and John Sullivan, ‘Mothers Rap Ott’s Attitude,’ *Record American* (Boston), 14 August 1968, p. 3, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

²⁵¹ Gertrude Nickerson, quoted in ‘Mothers Rap National Group,’ *Record American* (Boston), 14 August 1968, p. 3, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

²⁵² Bailis, p. 75.

²⁵³ For example, having worked closely with Bill Pastreich, Roberta Grant was fiercely loyal to him and regularly praised his dedication to the movement. See Grant, Interview with West, pp. 6, 28-29.

²⁵⁴ Bailis, p. 75.

²⁵⁵ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 126.

²⁵⁶ Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, pp. 96, 100.

²⁵⁷ Bailis, pp. 71-76.

is likely that these power struggles encouraged the development of a feminist consciousness among MWRO activists such as Hurley, as they had done earlier within MAW. At the national level, these internal conflicts culminated in Wiley's resignation from NWRO in 1972, with Tillmon replacing him as executive director.

At the same time, the rising feminist movement of the late 1960s encouraged welfare recipients to think about their situation in new ways and to view welfare as part of a larger nexus of forces keeping women down. As they came to identify as part of the women's liberation movement, and with growing pressure to find new allies to revive the waning movement, welfare rights activists across the country increasingly engaged in feminist coalitions and events. On 26 August 1970, for example, NWRO endorsed and participated in the national Women's Strike for Equality, along with a diverse range of women's organisations that also included Women Strike for Peace.²⁵⁸ The following year, NWRO leaders Tillmon and Sanders joined some 200 women in Washington, D.C. to found the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), in an effort to bolster women's political power.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, NWRO's fleeting partnership with WSP in the early 1970s was based, not only on a shared identity as mothers, but on both group's newly defined status as feminist organisations and a common understanding of war and poverty as women's issues. Indeed, when Tillmon wrote to WSP in 1970 to appeal for support, she argued that the link binding NWRO and WSP was 'the fact that we represent two of the most effective women's organizations in this country.'²⁶⁰ NWRO also developed a tentative alliance with the National Organization for Women (NOW), which would be strengthened after Tillmon took control of the organisation in 1972.²⁶¹ Importantly, these efforts were facilitated by the fact that middle-class white feminist groups began to take a greater interest in poverty during the early 1970s, with both NOW and NWPC endorsing NWRO's goal of a guaranteed annual income.²⁶²

However, while most scholarship has focused on NWRO's relationship with liberal feminist organisations such as NOW at the national level, local welfare rights activists entered into a diverse array of feminist coalitions. These tended to be shaped by the immediate political context and the opportunities for feminist activism in a

²⁵⁸ Judy Klemesrud, 'Coming Wednesday: A Herstory Making Event,' *New York Times Magazine*, 23 August 1970, p. SM4.

²⁵⁹ Ethel L. Payne, 'Women Gird for Action,' *Chicago Daily Defender*, 15 July 1971, p. 10.

²⁶⁰ Johnnie Tillmon, quoted in 'Warfare Versus Welfare,' *San Francisco Women for Peace Newsletter*, February 1971, p. 3, in *Herstory Women's History Collection* (Microfilm. Wooster, Ohio: Micro Photo Division, Bell & Howell, 1972), Reel 23.

²⁶¹ For further discussion of NWRO's relationship with NOW, see Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights'; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 219-222; White, pp. 240-242.

²⁶² Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 219-220.

particular locale. In Boston, the emergence in the late 1960s of some of the country's earliest radical and socialist feminist groups provided many welfare recipients in the city with their first introduction to the women's liberation movement. Hurley, for example, became involved in the socialist feminist organisation Bread and Roses around this time. Founded in the summer of 1969, Bread and Roses was predominantly made up of young, college-educated, white women, many of whom had been active in the civil rights, anti-war and student movements.²⁶³ In fact, Bread and Roses member Jean Tepperman had been involved in Boston's ERAP project in 1965, demonstrating how welfare rights organising could help foster a feminist consciousness among student activists. Yet, while Bread and Roses maintained ties to the left and identified capitalism as central to women's oppression, members increasingly focused on liberating women from male supremacy. Through consciousness-raising groups, they sought to redefine female sexuality, the family and personal relationships.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, historian Wini Breines has argued that Bread and Roses continued to be concerned about issues of race and class, and that members always evidenced 'a consciousness that was broader than their own personal fulfilment or equality with men.'²⁶⁵ In one example of this, some members organised meetings to reach out to poor and working-class women in the community, which were attended by welfare recipients such as Hurley.²⁶⁶ In particular, those who had worked as community organisers continued to be concerned about inequality among women. As Tepperman recalled: 'Those of us who had been in ERAP were anxious to find ways of organizing women that truly engaged and represented working-class women, not just middle-class women.'²⁶⁷ In addition, the welfare rights movement in Boston had connections to radical feminist groups such as Cell 16. A small but influential cadre formed in 1968, Cell 16 has been described as 'the quintessential radical women's liberation group' due to its programme of celibacy, separatism and karate.²⁶⁸ Although the group did little to reach out to low-income women in the community, one of its founding members was

²⁶³ Wini Breines, 'What's Love Go to Do with It? White Women, Black Women, and Feminism in the Movement Years,' *Signs*, 27, no 4 (2002), 1095-1133 (pp. 1100-1101). According to historian Alice Echols, Bread and Roses was the first 'socialist liberation women's organization' in the United States. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 330, n. 172.

²⁶⁴ Breines, pp. 1102-1104.

²⁶⁵ Breines, p. 1103.

²⁶⁶ Although Hurley does not mention any other MWRO members attending these meetings with her, it seems likely that, as active community women, some of them did. Hurley, Interview with West, p. 11; Breines, pp. 1103-1104.

²⁶⁷ Jean Tepperman, quoted in Frost, p. 167.

²⁶⁸ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, p. 158.

white welfare recipient and MWRO activist Betsy Warrior.²⁶⁹ Finally, illustrating the diversity of the feminist projects welfare recipients engaged with, James became involved in a group called Mid-Life, running discussions for older women on topics such as divorce, single motherhood, and children leaving the home.²⁷⁰

But, despite these attempts at coalition building, interaction between welfare rights activists and middle-class white feminists was limited. Although women's organisations expressed concern about poverty and some rhetorically supported a guaranteed income, they rarely took much sustained action on the issue. Often this was because efforts to address poverty originated with movement leaders and were not backed up with grassroots support.²⁷¹ Furthermore, middle-class feminists tended to be more interested in educating their own constituencies about the issue of poverty than actively working for welfare reform.²⁷² Ultimately, however, race and class differences led welfare recipients and middle-class white feminists to adopt very different priorities. Within NOW, for example, members viewed equal opportunity in the labour market as the surest way to address women's poverty, and they were generally ambivalent about NWRO's opposition to work requirements for women on welfare.²⁷³ In contrast, welfare rights activists virulently opposed mandatory job-training programmes, arguing from experience that they led to low-wage, menial jobs that did little to ameliorate poverty, and they fought for the right to stay home and care for their children.²⁷⁴ Thus, as Martha Davis argued, close collaboration between NOW and NWRO 'foundered on the divides of race [and] class.'²⁷⁵ On the face of it, socialist feminists, for whom class was central to women's oppression, seemed better equipped to address welfare recipients' concerns.²⁷⁶ As well as challenging unequal wages in the workplace, socialist feminists analysed how women's unpaid labour in the home contributed to their subordination and some called for 'wages for housework.'²⁷⁷ But coalitions between welfare recipients and socialist feminists in Boston did not fare much better than alliances with liberal feminist organisations. In part, this was because white women in groups such as Bread and Roses did not recognise the way race intersected with class and gender to shape

²⁶⁹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, p. 158.

²⁷⁰ James, Interview with West, p. 42.

²⁷¹ Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights,' p. 397.

²⁷² Valk, *Radical Sisters*, pp. 56-57.

²⁷³ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 220; Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights,' pp. 394, 396.

²⁷⁴ Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights,' p. 397.

²⁷⁵ Davis, 'Welfare Rights and Women's Rights,' p. 390.

²⁷⁶ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 221.

²⁷⁷ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 221; Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare's End* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 24-25.

black women's lives.²⁷⁸ As Breines has observed, despite articulating 'abstract antiracism,' white socialist feminists alienated black women by conceptualising women as an undifferentiated oppressed group.²⁷⁹ Notably, Hurley and Warrior, two of the welfare rights activists who did get involved in socialist and radical feminist groups in Boston, were white. But even white welfare recipients found themselves and their concerns marginalised within these groups, suggesting that socialist feminists never managed to fully transcend either race or class. Summarising her experience in Bread and Roses, Hurley recalled that it 'quickly turned into a very white middle class professional women organization. It really had nothing to do with the reality of my life or anybody else's that I was involved with.' Hurley argued that the welfare rights movement was the closest thing to a women's movement for 'women with my kind of background.'²⁸⁰ Thus, cooperation between these two groups was limited as welfare recipients and middle-class feminists both constructed feminist politics based on their own lives and particular social location.

Race and class differences also underlay the different approaches welfare rights activists and middle-class white feminists had to reproductive rights. Viewing women's ability to control their own bodies and reproduction as key to their liberation, many middle-class feminists campaigned vigorously for birth control and abortion rights during this period. However, while welfare recipients were vocal defenders of poor women's access to birth control, they espoused a broader definition of reproductive freedom that also included the right to bear children and the resources to raise them adequately. Importantly, welfare recipients' attitudes to birth control were informed by the fact that black women had struggled for generations for the right to bear and raise children.²⁸¹ Obstacles had included slave masters forcibly separating black children from their mothers, as well as the co-option of the early twentieth-century birth control movement by social reformers seeking to limit black fertility.²⁸² Furthermore, under contemporary practices, low-income black women were often sterilised without their knowledge or under the threat of losing their welfare payments.²⁸³ In the late 1960s, this led some black nationalist organisations to accuse birth control advocates of prompting

²⁷⁸ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 222, Breines, p. 1123.

²⁷⁹ Breines, p. 1109, 1122-1123.

²⁸⁰ Hurley, Interview with West, p. 11.

²⁸¹ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 216.

²⁸² Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 216; Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 4; Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

²⁸³ Nelson, p. 4; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, p. 216.

nothing less than ‘black genocide.’²⁸⁴ As a result, while most welfare recipients rejected the notion that birth control always meant genocide, they were careful to stress black women’s right to choice and autonomy. They saw reproductive freedom as encompassing not only access to birth control, but the right to have children, and they regularly spoke out against sterilisation abuse.²⁸⁵ Encapsulating this view in a piece printed in *NOW!* in 1968, MAW leader Doris Bland declared: ‘Ain’t no white man going to tell me how many babies I can have, ’cause if I want a million of them, and I can have them, I’m going to have them. Ain’t nobody in the world going to tell me what to do with my body, ’cause this is mine, and I treasure it.’²⁸⁶ Furthermore, welfare recipients’ views on reproductive rights were influenced by their high valuation of motherhood, and their arguments in favour of birth control often deviated from those articulated by white middle-class feminists. In 1968, the Black Women’s Liberation Group of Mount Vernon, New York, which consisted of lower working-class mothers and mothers on welfare, defended black women’s right to birth control against claims by black nationalist men that they were contributing to their own genocide. Yet, as M. Rivka Polatnick has argued, these women continued to value motherhood and children highly, defining the problem more in terms of having too many children than of having children per se. ‘Having too many children stops us from supporting our children, teaching them the truth,’ they said, contending that birth control would enable them to be better mothers to the children they already had.²⁸⁷ Similarly, welfare rights activists in Boston used a maternal rationale to advocate for the availability of birth control. At a public hearing in 1968, MAW activist Bedonia Rogers asserted that: ‘If more women could get birth control information, we could have smaller families and raise up our kids to go to school and college.’²⁸⁸

Indeed, welfare recipients’ distinctive feminist ideology continued to be rooted in their identities as mothers and shaped by a positive understanding of motherhood. Although by no means all, many feminists in the 1960s denounced motherhood as an

²⁸⁴ For more on the black nationalist critique of birth control and how black women responded to it, see Nelson; Simone M. Caron, ‘Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960s: Genocide or Power Politics?’, *Journal of Social History*, 31, no. 3 (1998), 545-569.

²⁸⁵ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 216-217.

²⁸⁶ Doris Bland, quoted in *NOW!*, 2 February 1968, in *NOW! National Welfare Leaders Newsletter*, Reel 1.

²⁸⁷ M. Rivka Polatnick, ‘Diversity in Women’s Liberation Ideology: How a Black and a White Group of the 1960s Viewed Motherhood,’ *Signs*, 21, no. 3 (1996), 679-706 (pp. 686-687); Black Women’s Liberation Group, Mount Vernon, New York, ‘Statement on Birth Control,’ in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writing from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, ed. by Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 360-361.

²⁸⁸ Bedonia Rogers, quoted in Jean Dietz, ‘Our Lives Have No Meaning Just Because We Are Poor,’ *Boston Globe*, 13 August 1968, p. 5, in MWRO Records, Box 1, Folder 11.

oppressive institution and sought to liberate women from their roles as mothers. As well as campaigning for birth control and abortion rights that would enable women to limit their childbearing, they criticised an ideology that saw women as possessing certain maternal qualities. In Boston, Cell 16's Roxanne Dunbar issued a searing indictment of such thinking in 1968, declaring:

The female human has no more maternity than any other animal. The characteristics usually attributed to women are the personality traits of Slaves – not the nature of the female. We have learned materialism and maternalism not from our closeness to reproduction, but from our experience as Slaves to men and children, our closeness to shit.²⁸⁹

Meanwhile, illustrating how the feminism of student organisers differed from that of welfare recipients in the movement, Levenson argued that women on welfare needed to be liberated from their 'unpaid lonely role as childbearer and childraiser' in order to fulfil 'their potential as full human beings.'²⁹⁰ However, for welfare recipients, who had always viewed motherhood in a more positive light, feminism was not a departure from maternalism – far from it. Not only was the right to bear children and stay home to care for them if they chose central to welfare recipients' vision of women's liberation, they also saw motherhood as a powerful basis from which to reform the welfare system and fight for broader feminist change. This position was summed up in an article written by New York welfare rights leader Jennette Washington in 1971. Calling for all women to unite to challenge 'the male power-holding group of this nation' and change a harmful welfare system, Washington declared: 'We must make them remember that we, as mothers and as women, are concerned about the survival of our children, of all human life.'²⁹¹ Similarly, Boston welfare rights activist Betsy Warrior claimed that welfare mothers possessed 'special qualities' that made them optimally placed to fight the establishment (a view she upheld even after becoming involved in the radical feminist group Cell 16). As she put it:

mothers will fight for their children, to supply their needs, and they will struggle for as long as it takes for their children to grow up. They possess both will and sustained determination to demand long and loud that the political structure allow their children enough to live on decently, and in doing so change the political structure.

²⁸⁹ Roxanne Dunbar, quoted in Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, p. 161.

²⁹⁰ Levenson, untitled speech.

²⁹¹ Jennette Washington, 'I Challenge!', *New World Outlook*, April 1971, p. 78, in Wiley Papers, Box 28, Folder 1.

In the same article, Warrior also cautioned welfare recipients against allowing themselves to be ‘used’ by male organisers, arguing that this meant running the risk of ‘becoming as competitive, aggressive and power-hungry as the males who oppress them.’²⁹² Thus, welfare rights activists challenged ‘male’ values, arguing that their maternal roles gave them the tools to create a more just society. Significantly, there were striking similarities between these arguments and those made by members of WSP around the same time. Although gulfs of race and class divided WSPers and welfare recipients, they both made motherhood the cornerstone of their feminist politics. This perhaps helps explain why the two groups were able to find common ground during this period. Furthermore, the feminism of the welfare rights struggle prefigured, and helped shape, a shift within the larger women’s movement towards cultural feminism and a more positive valuation of motherhood by the late 1970s.²⁹³

VII

Examining the welfare rights struggle in Boston – one of the largest and consistently most militant sites of welfare rights organising in the country – clearly demonstrates the importance of motherhood to the movement. Activists such as Gertrude Nickerson, Roberta Grant and Claradine James – as well as countless others in MAW and MWRO – were motivated in large part to provide adequately for their children and they viewed political activism as an extension of their roles as mothers. Furthermore, the low-income, predominantly black women in these organisations relied heavily upon maternal rhetoric and symbolism to justify confrontational protests and make demands of the state. As this chapter has shown, welfare recipients espoused a distinctive form of militant maternalism that was tied to their social location, and heavily informed by race and class. At the same time, however, ideologies of motherhood often facilitated coalition building among recipients from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and with middle-class women supporters. Although these alliances were not devoid of tension, a shared identity as mothers encouraged cooperation across race and class

²⁹² Betsy Warrior, ‘Females and Welfare,’ in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 234. Also reprinted in *Voices from Women’s Liberation*, ed. by Leslie B. Tanner (New York: New American Library, 1970), pp. 277-279.

²⁹³ Lauri Umansky argued that the strong emphasis black feminists placed on motherhood during late 1960s and early 1970s helped encourage the shift towards cultural feminism, as white feminist groups began to focus on motherhood as a way to reach out to black women. *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), Chapter 3.

divides. Of course, welfare recipients in Boston were not the only ones to politicise motherhood; this was just one of several common themes that connected welfare rights activists across the country. Nevertheless, as this chapter has highlighted, local concerns and opportunities played a vital role in shaping welfare rights organising in Boston. Indeed, studying the movement in Boston not only sheds new light on an important contingent of the welfare rights struggle that has heretofore received only passing mentions in national accounts, it also historicises a local movement deeply rooted in participants' daily lives and immediate surroundings.

However, while welfare recipients in Boston viewed motherhood as a basis for gender solidarity and a source of political strength, they struggled to establish the level of moral authority wielded by middle-class white women in organisations such as WSP. Despite activists' best efforts to refute them, stereotypes about black single mothers on welfare persisted, and they were regularly depicted as shiftless, immoral women. This negative image of black motherhood stood in stark contrast to welfare recipients' own understanding of the value of their maternal labour, and it undoubtedly limited the success of the welfare rights struggle, fuelling the public resentment and state repression activists experienced. Once one of the fastest growing movements in the nation, the welfare rights movement in Boston was also one of the first to decline, with only a handful of MWRO chapters remaining active after summer 1970.²⁹⁴ Moreover, welfare rights organisations across the country soon followed suit, as a growing conservative movement made welfare its focus of attack during the early 1970s. In March 1975, with membership dwindling and plagued by financial difficulties, NWRO was finally forced to close its doors.²⁹⁵

Nevertheless, although the welfare rights movement failed to achieve its goal of a guaranteed annual income and did not manage to change public perceptions of welfare recipients, it was not without its successes. In Boston, welfare rights activists won a series of notable concessions, including favourable changes to the day-to-day administration of welfare, a greater voice in the policy-making process, and increased material benefits in the form of special grants. More importantly, the movement had a transformative impact upon the lives of many of its participants. As this chapter has demonstrated, many women in the movement became increasingly conscious of the way gender intersected with race and class to marginalise them. By developing a unique version of feminism that was rooted in their daily lives as low-income black women,

²⁹⁴ Bailis, pp. 55, 143.

²⁹⁵ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, pp. 223-224.

and tied to their identities as mothers, welfare recipients made significant contributions to the broader feminist discourses of the period. Furthermore, welfare rights activists developed new skills and a heightened sense of personal efficiency, and many remained politically active long after the national welfare rights movement waned. Although mass-based, confrontational tactics were uncommon after the early 1970s, activists continued to seek other means to reform the welfare system and improve the daily realities of poor women – including helping to formulate welfare policy, paid employment in the social services, educational and advocacy work in the community, joining women’s organisations, and engaging in formal politics.

Indeed, the lives of several of key leaders in Boston illustrate the personal empowerment and success that often emanated from the welfare rights movement. Grant, for example, was able to come off AFDC in 1973 after securing a job at a local community centre, organising a day care programme for low-income mothers. While working at the centre, she continued to be involved in welfare rights issues, using her lunch break to help recipients with their problems, and regularly going with them to local welfare offices. In addition, the former MWRO chair sat on the board of the state welfare department throughout the 1970s, ensuring that low-income women continued to be represented in policy-making in the face of mounting welfare cuts.²⁹⁶ Meanwhile, fellow MWRO leader James left the movement in 1970 to study sociology at Northeastern University and work as a community educator. From here, she embarked on what would turn out to be a long career in sex education and family planning, working first with adults in the community, before going on to co-found a citywide peer education programme aimed at adolescents. Having become pregnant herself at sixteen due to a lack of such information, James hoped to empower other young women by teaching them about their own bodies and sexuality.²⁹⁷

Nickerson also found welfare rights activism to be an empowering experience that opened up gates for her. After MAW disbanded in the late 1960s, Nickerson was offered the role of welfare liaison in the Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs – a position she took until she realised that as a state employee she was not allowed to publically criticise the state. Following on from this, Nickerson worked at a day care centre during the early 1970s. When the centre was threatened by President

²⁹⁶ Grant, Interview with West, pp. 9-15.

²⁹⁷ James, Interview with West, pp. 1-2, 13-15, 20-36. Also see Massachusetts Policy and Organizing Leadership Academy, *The History & Legacy of the Welfare Rights Movement*, Panelist: Claradine Cowell (formerly Claradine James), Filmed & Edited by Zarah K. Hansen, Press Pass TV, 22 March 2012 <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xqe0fj_panelist-claradine-cowell-history-legacy-of-the-welfare-rights-movement_news#.UjJJeL8Qg21> [accessed 7 June 2013].

Nixon's cuts to day care programmes, she helped organise demonstrations against the cuts, in coordination with several feminist organisations.²⁹⁸ In addition, Nickerson, who had been involved in civil rights campaigns before joining the welfare rights struggle, continued to be active in the black community. Again, her activism often stemmed from her concern for her daughter. Indeed, as the mother of a biracial child, Nickerson was particularly concerned about segregation and discrimination in Boston's public schools. As a result, she became involved in the black community's fight for school desegregation and educational equity, a protracted struggle that emerged in the early 1960s and culminated over a decade later in court-ordered busing. Notably, this struggle was largely spearheaded by middle-class black women who were concerned about their children's education and frustrated by those who blamed the problem on the supposed cultural deficiencies of black families.²⁹⁹ In 1963 and 1964, prior to the emergence of the welfare rights movement, Nickerson took part in several school boycotts, helping to set up freedom schools in the Roxbury and South End communities. As the desegregation struggle waged on, and having forged close ties with the black community through her work in MAW, Nickerson later supported the creation of a more permanent alternative school system, enrolling her daughter Andrea in an independent institution called the Massachusetts Experimental School in the early 1970s.³⁰⁰ But these schools could ultimately serve only a small number of Boston's black children and, in Nickerson's case, she found that their daughter needed more a more structured school system.³⁰¹ Nickerson later reflected: 'that's why I have to laugh about all these people yipping and yapping about busing, it was the only alternative left to people. I know because I tried the prior alternatives and got nowhere.'³⁰²

However, as the next chapter demonstrates, white resistance to the implementation of busing in Boston was widespread. Although Nickerson's activism serves as a vital reminder that not all white, ethnic women opposed the use of busing to desegregate schools, a great many did. In fact, it was working-class, white women who led the confrontational campaign against busing that emerged in Boston during the mid-1970s. Importantly, like the black women and their white allies who fought for educational equity, anti-busing women based their activism upon their status as

²⁹⁸ Nickerson, Tape 278, pp. 23-25.

²⁹⁹ See Theoharis, "'They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid'"; Jeanne Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South': How Boston's School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 125-151.

³⁰⁰ Nickerson, Tape 279, pp. 4-7.

³⁰¹ Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" p. 135; Nickerson, Tape 279, p. 7.

³⁰² Nickerson, Tape 279, p. 4.

mothers. Yet, as Chapter 3 illustrates, women in the anti-busing movement developed their own version of maternalism, and their understandings of motherhood, the family and the state differed significantly from their opponents in the desegregation movement, as well as from the activists in the two preceding chapters. Thus, Nickerson's political career not only highlights the lasting impact of the welfare rights struggle, it also hints at the contested nature of maternalist politics.

Chapter 3: The Battle Against Busing

In September 1971, when Pontiac, Michigan became one of the first places in the North to introduce court-ordered busing to achieve school desegregation, protests in the small industrial town captured national attention. Leading the campaign was a group called the National Action Group (NAG), headed by Irene McCabe, a ‘feisty’ white working-class housewife and mother of three. When the buses began to roll that fall, members of NAG resisted by boycotting schools, staging sit-downs along bus routes, and enrolling their children in private and parochial schools.¹ Furthermore, in March 1972, McCabe and five other NAG members embarked on a six-week, 620-mile trek from Pontiac to Washington, D.C. to rally support for a proposed constitutional amendment banning busing.² Importantly, the women regularly insisted that they were not racist, but simply a group of mothers who were concerned about their children and wanted to keep them in neighbourhood schools. At a send-off rally for their march on Washington, McCabe called upon President Nixon to support the anti-busing amendment ‘for the sake of black and white babies both.’³

Meanwhile, on 21 March 1972, when the Pontiac women were just one week into their anti-busing pilgrimage, more than 1,000 demonstrators gathered at the State House in Boston to denounce busing. With the city facing a loss of state aid because of its failure to comply with a 1965 Racial Imbalance Act (RIA) outlawing segregated schools, and a desegregation lawsuit pending in Federal District Court, the crowd sought to register their vehement opposition to busing and demand the repeal of the RIA. The Boston protesters, who were ‘overwhelmingly white and largely female,’ also emphasised their concern for their children, and one of the event’s speakers was a ten-year-old girl.⁴

Then, three months later, a district judge in Detroit sent shock waves across the nation when he announced the most far-reaching desegregation order to date, encompassing both the city and the suburbs, and calling for the busing of 310,000 children.⁵ In the wake of this decision, a group of women from northeast Detroit

¹ Patricia Zacharias, ‘Irene McCabe and Her Battle Against Busing,’ *Detroit News*, 4 May 1997. Also see Tamar Jacoby, *Someone Else’s House: America’s Unfinished Struggle For Integration* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), pp. 259-261.

² Zacharias, ‘Irene McCabe and Her Battle Against Busing’; Jacoby, pp. 286-287.

³ Irene McCabe, quoted in ‘Six Busing Foes Begin D.C. Trek,’ *Chicago Tribune*, 16 March 1972, p. 8.

⁴ Nina McCain, ‘Crowd Demands Imbalance Law Repeal,’ *Boston Globe*, 22 March 1972, pp. 1, 6, in *Boston Busing: A Chronology, 1849-1975*, Researched and Compiled by Wendy Bauman (Microfilm. Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1975), Reel 1.

⁵ Jerry M. Flint, ‘Mass Busing Is Ordered For Detroit and Suburbs,’ *New York Times*, 15 June 1972, p. 1.

became the latest to enter the anti-busing fray, founding a group called Northeast Mothers Alert (NEMA) in August 1972.⁶ Like activists in Pontiac and Boston, the Detroit women appealed to the nation's leaders as mothers. In a letter sent to local, state and federal officials soon after the group formed, NEMA declared:

As mothers, we believe that our right to protect the life God entrusted to us supercedes the designs of man made governments... We will not accept the attitude of educators that parents do not know what is best for their children... We want our neighborhood schools, the benefits of local control, and the right to vote of any plan, Federal or State, that concerns the daily life of our families.

The letter was signed 'Mothers of Michigan' and ended, ominously: 'We will be watching.'⁷

Thus, by 1972, the once innocuous term 'busing' had entered the national consciousness, and was rapidly becoming one of the most controversial and emotive issues of the decade. Across the United States, a diverse range of whites (and some blacks) objected to the implementation of busing for school desegregation. Some withdrew their children from public schools or fled to the suburbs, while many others actively resisted by petitioning, marching and boycotting. Moreover, as the issue became political dynamite, local and state officials lined up to denounce the policy; more than 100 members of Congress announced their support for an anti-busing amendment; and President Nixon came out as strongly opposed to busing.⁸ Of course, busing was instigated in different cities at different times, and resistance varied greatly from place to place. Nevertheless, across the country, in city and suburb, the shock troops of the anti-busing struggle were white, working-class housewives.

Focusing on Detroit, Michigan and Boston, Massachusetts, this chapter explores the integral role ideologies of motherhood played in shaping these women's activism. Although anti-busing women are generally considered to be at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the welfare rights and peace activists of the preceding chapters, there were significant similarities between them. Like their counterparts on the left, anti-busing women relied heavily upon maternal rhetoric to justify their protests and enhance their moral authority. They emphasised the dangers busing posed to their children and the importance of keeping them in neighbourhood schools; and they

⁶ 'Concerned Mothers To Discuss Bussing,' *Northeast Detroiter*, 17 August 1972, in Shirley Wohlfield Papers, 1972-1988, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Oversized Scrapbook (hereafter cited as Wohlfield Papers).

⁷ Mothers of Michigan, Letter dated 30 September 1972, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

⁸ Richard A. Pride and J. David Woodard, *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 66; 'The Agony of Busing Moves North,' *Time*, 15 November 1971.

argued that, as mothers, they had a responsibility to protect their families and local communities. Activists also claimed to be defending their rights as mothers – namely, their right to bring up their children as they saw fit. Like WSPers and welfare recipients, anti-busing women took their protests into the streets, embracing the direct action tactics popularised during the 1960s to dramatise their maternal concerns in creative and theatrical ways. Furthermore, like welfare rights activists, anti-busers espoused a militant brand of maternalism, and some women were even prepared to use violence or the threat of violence if they deemed it necessary to protect their children.

Significantly, it was common for women in the anti-busing movement to use maternal arguments to defend against allegations of racism – contending that all mothers shared certain concerns, regardless of race. However, this chapter also highlights important particularities in the way anti-busers understood and deployed motherhood. Indeed, as with all the activists in this study, anti-busing women's conceptions of motherhood were constructed out of their daily lives, and thus very much shaped by their particular racial and ethnic, class, and religious perspective. For instance, these white women's concerns about protecting their own families and work as mothers from problems in 'other' neighbourhoods clearly stemmed from assumptions about black inferiority, and racialised notions of 'good' motherhood. Meanwhile, class-consciousness and anti-elitism led many activists to view standing up for home and family against unaccountable elites as a vital part of their maternal role. Furthermore, many women in the anti-busing movement held strong religious convictions and saw parental rights and family structure as divinely sanctioned. As a result, anti-busing women formulated their own version of maternalism that was populist in flavour, couched in the language of God and country, and, often, racially exclusive.

Yet, despite their attempts to claim the moral authority of motherhood, anti-busing women frequently failed to capture public sympathy, and the limits of their maternalist politics are also examined here. Perhaps most importantly, the anti-busing movement was severely undermined by the violence carried out by some activists, and the growing perception that the protesters were motivated by racism. But the campaign against busing was also hindered by class and gender stereotypes that rendered white, working-class women outside the bounds of respectable motherhood. Moreover, it was hampered by the fact that counter-demonstrators and activists campaigning for desegregation, many of them women, regularly challenged anti-busers' claims to be defending children. Indeed, with many 'anti-anti-busers' also claiming to speak as

mothers, the battle over busing often became a contest between competing interpretations of motherhood.

Lastly, this chapter looks at how the anti-busing movement evolved over time, exploring its relationship with the anti-feminist movement and broader New Right. As they organised to resist busing, women in the movement regularly developed new skills, a heightened sense of personal efficiency, and close bonds with other conservative women, and they increasingly expanded their focus beyond busing. Furthermore, many activists continued to be politically active after the busing crisis subsided. However, in contrast to WSPers and welfare rights activists, anti-busing women generally did not develop a feminist consciousness as a result of their activism. Instead, they launched new campaigns against other issues that they perceived as a threat to their families and ‘traditional’ values – such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), birth control and abortion, sex education in schools, and gay rights. In doing so, anti-busing women added strength and numbers to the anti-feminist movement of the 1970s, and played a vital role in the rise of the New Right. Nevertheless, it would be overly simplistic to view the relationship between the anti-busing movement and feminism purely in terms of conflict, and it is also important to examine how anti-busing women benefitted from and contributed to the women’s liberation movement. Indeed, even as they attacked ‘women’s libbers’ and their goals, anti-busers appropriated important tactics from the feminist movement. Meanwhile, the anti-busing movement contributed significantly to the political empowerment of conservative women during the 1970s. Ultimately then, the anti-busing struggle provides further evidence that second-wave feminism took multiple forms.

First emerging in the early the 1970s, anti-busing women built upon a long tradition among conservative women of using maternal ideologies as a basis for political activism. Indeed, recent scholarship on right-wing women throughout the twentieth century has shown that they have been just as likely as their progressive counterparts to use maternalism to legitimise their political involvement – complicating both sides’ claims to speak for all mothers.⁹ Until recently, little attention had been paid to women on the right, and what scholarship did exist predominantly focused on women’s participation in the anti-feminist movement and New Right of the 1970s.¹⁰

⁹ Kin E. Nielsen, ‘Doing the “Right” Right,’ *Journal of Women’s History*, 16, no. 3 (2004), 168-172 (p. 170).

¹⁰ See for instance Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Susan E. Marshall, ‘Rattle on the Right: Bridge

However, over the past ten years or so, as scholars have begun to trace the origins of modern American conservatism back to the postwar period, and to examine the conservative movement at the grassroots, they have increasingly highlighted the importance of women and gender to the development of the postwar right.¹¹

There are a number of important lessons to be learned from this growing body of literature. First, it has further challenged popular assumptions about the iconic 1950s housewife, demonstrating that Cold War domesticity did not necessarily render women ‘apolitical,’ and that it was not just progressive women who ventured out of their kitchens during this period.¹² Connected to this, recent scholarship has shown how women on the right capitalised upon the postwar domestic ideal, using their culturally sanctioned roles as mothers to assert authority in the public realm.¹³ Of particular significance is Michelle Nickerson’s 2012 study, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, which illustrated how conservative women in southern California leveraged their traditional female roles during the anti-communist campaigns of the 1950s. Critically, Nickerson argued that, in the wake of the Great Depression, maternalist politics on the right fused with a populist, anti-elitist fervour to create a new female political sensibility that she terms ‘housewife populism.’ Whereas progressive

Labor in Antifeminist Organizations,’ in *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest*, ed. by Kathleen M. Blee (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 155-179.

¹¹ For recent scholarship on the roots of the New Right in the postwar period, see Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); David Farber and Jeff Roche, eds, *The Conservative Sixties* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). Lisa McGirr was one of the first to examine the importance of grassroots activists, as opposed to intellectuals, in the creation of the modern conservative movement. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). While by no means exhaustive, important recent works on women, gender and the postwar right include Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2008); Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012); Marjorie J. Spruill, ‘Gender and America’s Turn Right,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 71-89. For a more detailed review of recent literature on women and the right, see Nielsen; Michelle Nickerson, ‘Women, Domesticity, and Postwar Conservatism,’ *OAH Magazine of History*, 17, no. 2 (2003), 17-21.

¹² Nickerson, ‘Women, Domesticity, and Postwar Conservatism,’ p. 20; Michelle Nickerson, ‘Moral Mothers and Goldwater Girls,’ in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. by David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 51-62 (p. 53); Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. Although a number of scholars had already begun to chip away at the myth of the ‘apolitical’ fifties housewife, they had primarily focused on women’s activism on behalf of progressive causes. See for instance Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women’s Organisations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹³ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. xiii.

maternalist reformers earlier in the twentieth century had emphasised their middle-class superiority, the housewife activists in Nickerson's study positioned themselves as 'ordinary' mothers defending family and neighbourhood against outside elites – in this case, progressive educators, school administrators and professional psychologists who they believed were 'brainwashing' their children.¹⁴ Even though anti-communist women were often white and middle- to upper-class, they relied upon their identities as 'housewives' and gender assumptions about women's connectedness to the community to play down their class advantage and claim an anti-elitist stance.¹⁵ According to Nickerson, these Cold Warriors helped introduce a new populist outlook into conservative female political culture that endured into the twenty-first century.¹⁶ And indeed, this chapter will examine how women in the anti-busing struggle adopted and adapted this populist strain of maternalism for their own era and according to their own social location.

A final point to be drawn from recent scholarship is the importance of taking women on the right seriously as political actors and avoiding "“exoticizing” [them] as a bizarre and titillating Other.”¹⁷ Indeed, a number of historians have cautioned against dismissing women on the right as irrational or illogical, dupes of men, or victims of 'false consciousness,' arguing that this limits understanding of the ideas and beliefs upon which their activism was based. Instead, recent studies have emphasised the need to examine how women constructed a conservative worldview out of their daily lives.¹⁸ In particular, Nickerson called upon scholars to pay attention to how conservative women managed to reconcile ambiguities and paradoxes in their political ideologies, in much the same way activists across the political spectrum have been doing throughout history.¹⁹

However, despite this rich and proliferating research on women and the postwar right, there continues to be a paucity of scholarship on women's participation in the anti-busing movement of the 1970s. Although much has been written about white resistance to busing and how it fuelled the ascendancy of the New Right, scholars have

¹⁴ It should be noted here that Nickerson distinguished 'housewife populism' from 'maternalism,' which she narrowly defined as referring to middle-class women's reform work during the early twentieth century that idealised motherhood and linked it to social uplift. However, this study embraces a broader definition of maternalism as simply political activism based upon women's identities as mothers, and thus seeks to explore how maternalist discourses evolved during the second half of the twentieth century. *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. xiii-xvi.

¹⁵ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. 71, 75-76, 101-102.

¹⁶ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. xv.

¹⁷ Nielsen, p. 169.

¹⁸ Nielsen, p. 169; McGirr, pp. 6-7; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. 169-170; Nickerson,

'Women, Domesticity, and Postwar Conservatism,' p. 20; Klatch, *Women of the New Right*, pp. 10, 12.

¹⁹ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. xxiv, Conclusion.

tended to portray these struggles as rooted in race, class and ethnicity, and few studies have paid more than passing attention to the movement's important gender dynamics.²⁰ Two key exceptions to this are articles by Julia Wrigley and, more recently, Kathleen Banks Nutter. Focusing on Boston, these scholars recognised the central role played by white, working-class women in the anti-busing struggle, and both explored how women's maternal identities shaped their activism and enabled them to claim leadership of the movement.²¹ As Nutter explained, in the Boston anti-busing movement: 'Gender was very much entwined with ideologies of race, ethnicity, and class... when white working-class ethnic women took to the streets to protest school desegregation they did so, they themselves proclaimed, as *mothers*.'²² Nevertheless, little has been written about how gender ideologies shaped resistance to busing outside of Boston. Therefore, as well as looking at Boston – which, during the mid-1970s, was the scene of the nation's most intense and prolonged campaign against busing – this chapter also examines women's anti-busing activism in Detroit, one of the first northern cities to be faced with court-ordered busing in the early 1970s. In doing so, it also highlights the evolution of the anti-busing struggle.

Moreover, focusing on Boston and Detroit allows for an examination of the importance of place to the anti-busing struggle. Indeed, while early studies of the New Right looked at the national level, more recent scholarship has explored the regional variations within conservatism, demonstrating the critical role local forces played in

²⁰ In particular, the anti-busing movement in Boston has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention – see for instance Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston*, 2nd edn. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Louis P. Masur, *The Soiling of Old Glory: The Story of a Photograph That Shocked America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008); Thomas M. Begley, *The Organization of Anti-Busing Protest in Boston, 1973-1976*, PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1981 (Microfilm. Ann Arbor, M.I.: University Microfilms International, 1981). On the anti-busing movement in Pontiac and Detroit, see Jacoby, Chapter 9. For more on resistance to busing elsewhere in the United States, see Pride and Woodard; Matthew D. Lassiter, 'The Suburban Origins of "Color-Blind" Conservatism: Middle-Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis,' *Journal of Urban History*, 30, no. 4 (2004), 549-582; Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1995), Chapter 7; Lillian B. Rubin, *Busing and Backlash: White Against White in a California School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), Chapter 4.

²¹ Julia Wrigley, 'From Housewives to Activists: Women and the Division of Political Labor in the Boston Antibusing Movement', in *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest*, ed. by Kathleen M. Blee (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 251-288; Kathleen Banks Nutter, "'Militant Mothers': Boston, Busing, and the Bicentennial of 1976," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 38, no. 2 (2010), 53-75.

²² Nutter, p. 55 (emphasis in original).

shaping right-wing politics.²³ In the context of the anti-busing movement – where activism was deeply rooted in ideas about place and ‘turf’ – location deserves particular consideration. Furthermore, busing was implemented in different places at different times, and specific desegregation plans varied significantly according to the racial and geographic landscape of a city or town. Therefore, this chapter pays close attention to local context and examines how resistance to busing differed in Boston and Detroit. At the same time, however, it interrogates the relationship between the local and the national, exploring how women across the country came to develop similar ideologies and tactics, and assessing the extent to which it is possible to speak of a ‘national’ anti-busing movement.

Finally, throughout this chapter, anti-busing women are referred to as ‘conservative’ and ‘right-wing,’ and a brief note on terminology is necessary at this juncture. As Kim Nielsen has observed, defining these terms is tricky because what constitutes the right is ‘partially contextual,’ defined in opposition to other political viewpoints and issues, usually those associated with the left.²⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, conservatives reacted against a range of issues, including the anti-Vietnam War movement, welfare rights, feminism, abortion, and of course busing. Furthermore, the right has always encompassed a range of individuals and groups with diverse, and at times competing, ideas.²⁵ Nevertheless, there was more to the New Right than ‘backlash’ politics, and postwar conservatism can also be identified by a number of common concerns. Foremost among these were a faith in small government, advocacy of individual freedom, and belief in traditional moral values – often leading to a deep distrust of state intervention in people’s lives.²⁶ Of course, opponents of busing came in all political stripes, and not all of them shared these ideological commitments. However, it is clear that the majority of anti-busers fell within the conservative rubric. As Jerome Himmelstein has argued, conservatism is not ‘an all-or-nothing proposition,’ and conservatives may advocate one or more aspects of this political outlook, without adhering to others.²⁷ Moreover, this chapter takes its cue from how activists defined themselves, recognising that many participants in the anti-busing movement embraced

²³ See for instance Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); McGirr. While Sugrue documented the growing backlash to racial change among white working-class ethnics in post-industrial Detroit, McGirr probed the conservative mobilisation of middle-class suburbanites in Orange County, California.

²⁴ Nielsen, pp. 169.

²⁵ Klatch, *Women of the New Right*, pp. 4, 6; McGirr, p. 10.

²⁶ For more on the content of conservative ideology, see McGirr, pp. 10-11; Himmelstein, pp. 13-15;

Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. xvi-xvii.

²⁷ Himmelstein, p. 14.

the conservative label. For example, speaking to journalist and author J. Anthony Lukas in spring 1975, a group of anti-busing women from South Boston stressed that they were not ‘revolutionaries,’ insisting instead: ‘We’re conservatives. We want to go back to the old way.’²⁸

II

By the late 1960s, over a decade after ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were ‘inherently unconstitutional,’ the U.S. Supreme Court continued to dismantle barriers to desegregation erected by intransigent school boards and local governments, and the majority of the nation’s black school children still attended predominantly black schools.²⁹ Thus, in an attempt to decisively end this delay, the Supreme Court ruled in 1968 that school boards had an ‘affirmative duty’ to eliminate segregation and ordered them to produce realistic plans for desegregation immediately. Moreover, in a landmark decision in May 1971, in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld large-scale busing as an acceptable means to achieve desegregation.³⁰ As with most stages in the battle to desegregate America’s schools, the South was the testing ground for court-ordered busing. But it was not long before busing moved north and west, becoming national policy for dealing with racial isolation in schools. In fact, as segregated schools began to decrease in the southern and border states over the course of the 1970s, it was schools in the Northeast and Midwest that emerged as some of the most segregated in the nation.³¹

In the early 1970s, nowhere symbolised the urban crisis and racial division that beset America’s northern cities during this period better than Detroit. Indeed, many of the economic and demographic changes that affected Boston, described in Chapter 2, were magnified in Detroit. Once the heart of the auto manufacturing industry and America’s ‘arsenal of democracy,’ Detroit was devastated by the deindustrialisation of the postwar period, and the city was increasingly plagued by joblessness, poverty and

²⁸ Quoted in J. Anthony Lukas, ‘Who Owns 1776?’, *New York Times*, 18 May 1975, p. 40.

²⁹ Pride and Woodard, p. 59; Walter G. Stephan, ‘A Brief Historical Overview of School Desegregation,’ in *School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. by Walter G. Stephan and Joe R. Feagin (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), pp. 3-23 (pp. 17-18).

³⁰ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 78; Pride and Woodard, p. 66.

³¹ ‘Midwest Schools Called Among “Most Segregated,”’ *Sunday News* (Detroit), 20 June 1976, p. 16A, in Wohlfield Paper, Box 1, Folder: MAD Newspaper Clippings, 1972-1976; Stephan, pp. 18-19.

physical decay.³² At the same time, as a magnet for black migrants from the South, the Motor City saw its African American population rise dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. Fewer than 10 percent of Detroit's population at the outbreak of World War II, blacks made up nearly half of the city's residents by 1970.³³ This was compounded, moreover, by the fact that middle-class whites were rapidly abandoning the city for an expanding ring of suburban enclaves. Thus, by the early 1970s, black Detroiters found themselves trapped in deprived and isolated neighbourhoods, in what was fast becoming a majority black city. This extreme segregation was mirrored in Detroit's public school system. In 1971, with the city's remaining white population huddled together on the north side of town, 75 percent of Detroit's black pupils attended schools that were more than 90 percent black.³⁴

It was in this context that District Judge Stephen Roth handed down his decision in *Milliken v. Bradley*, ordering Detroit to desegregate its schools. The ruling, which came on 27 September 1971 and was the culmination of a lengthy legal battle spearheaded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was significant for a number of reasons. It was the first unequivocal declaration from a mainstream federal judge that the *Brown* decision applied to northern cities as well, and that what was once thought to be *de facto* segregation was actually *de jure* – the result of a complex web of racial discrimination by housing, school, and government officials.³⁵ Detroit also became the biggest school district in the country to be ordered to desegregate.³⁶ Furthermore, Judge Roth's remedy, announced the following June, was the most extensive desegregation order to date, encompassing the greater Detroit metropolitan area, and calling for the busing of more than 310,000 students between the city and its overwhelmingly white suburbs.³⁷ Thus, the *Milliken* case placed Detroit at the front line of the busing struggle, and its consequences would reverberate far beyond the Wolverine State. In the end, however, metropolitan busing never came to pass in Detroit. In July 1974, amid mounting resistance to busing in Congress and in the streets, the Supreme Court overturned Roth's metropolitan plan, concluding, in a 5-4 ruling, that the suburbs were not responsible for the segregation of Detroit's schools and that 'cross-district' busing was not permitted.³⁸ Consequently,

³² Sugrue, pp. 3, 13.

³³ Sugrue, pp. 12, 23.

³⁴ Jacoby, p. 269.

³⁵ Jacoby, pp. 272-275.

³⁶ William K. Stevens, 'Detroit, Facing Court-Ordered Busing of 21,000 Students, Remains Calm,' *New York Times*, 4 January 1976, p. 40.

³⁷ Flint, 'Mass Busing Is Ordered For Detroit and Suburbs'; Jacoby, p. 281.

³⁸ Jacoby, pp. 288-290; Formisano, p. 12.

when busing was finally implemented in Detroit in January 1976, after nearly five years of legal wrangling, it was limited to the city and involved a comparatively modest total of 21,000 black and white students.³⁹

Although Boston's black population was notably smaller than Detroit's during this period (only 16 percent of the total population in the early 1970s), the city's schools were no less segregated.⁴⁰ Despite a decade and a half of sustained black activism, and the passage of the 1965 RIA, denying state funding to schools that were more than 50 percent non-white, Boston's school system continued to isolate black students in poorly funded, underequipped, overcrowded schools.⁴¹ In 1972-73, for example, 82 percent of black pupils attended majority-black schools, and more than half were enrolled in schools that were 90 percent black.⁴² Furthermore, with the all-white School Committee (the city's equivalent to a Board of Education) steadfastly refusing to comply with the RIA, segregation was actually increasing.⁴³ As a result, on 21 June 1974, Federal Judge W. Arthur Garrity concluded that 'the entire school system of Boston' was 'unconstitutionally segregated,' and ordered the city to begin desegregation immediately.⁴⁴ Significantly, because the Supreme Court's *Milliken* ruling followed on the heels of the Garrity decision, Boston's middle-class suburbs were exempt from busing and, as with Detroit, the white burden largely fell on the city's working- and lower-middle-class residents.⁴⁵ When busing began in Boston in September 1974, it involved 18,000 students, both black and white, and this was increased to 25,000 with the implementation of Phase II the following year.⁴⁶ Proportionally then, Boston's desegregation plan was the most extensive to date, and over the coming years, the city was the site of the nation's most violent and most publicised resistance to busing.

From the outset, white opposition to busing was widespread in Detroit and Boston. But, in both cities, it was working-class, ethnic communities, with large Roman Catholic populations, that produced the fiercest resistance. In Boston, this was epitomised by the working-class, Irish-American neighbourhoods of South Boston and Charlestown, where protest practically became a way of life during the mid-1970s.

³⁹ Stevens, 'Detroit, Facing Court-Ordered Busing of 21,000 Students.'

⁴⁰ Michael Kazin, 'The Grass-Roots Right: New Histories of U.S. Conservatism in the Twentieth Century,' *American Historical Review*, 97, no. 1 (1992), 136-155 (p. 149).

⁴¹ Jeanne F. Theoharis, "'We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960-1976,' *Radical History Review*, 81 (2001), 61-93 (pp. 61, 69); Formisano, pp. 35-36.

⁴² Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 79; Nutter, p. 56.

⁴³ Nutter, p. 56.

⁴⁴ W. Arthur Garrity, quoted in David Rogers, 'Garrity's Decision Speaks in 2 Voices,' *Boston Sunday Globe*, June 23, 1974, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

⁴⁵ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 79.

⁴⁶ 'More Trouble on The Busing Route,' *Time*, 1 September 1975, p. 28, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

Similarly, anti-busing activity flourished in the predominantly Italian district of East Boston on the other side of Boston harbour.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, in Detroit, the movement gained its staunchest followers in the Northeast Side, a neighbourhood dominated by blue-collar workers of Italian and Polish descent.⁴⁸ Of course, none of these neighbourhoods were monolithic, and there were important differences between communities in different cities. For instance, while Boston's ethnic enclaves were rigidly defined and bounded to varying degrees by physical barriers, Detroit's flat, feature-less landscape prevented such separation and its communities were more ethnically heterogeneous.⁴⁹ And whereas 'Southie,' 'Eastie' and Charlestown were all proudly working class, Detroit's 'defended neighbourhoods' tended to be slightly better off and often exuded a 'quasi-suburban' feel.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, all these neighbourhoods nurtured the development of powerful anti-busing organisations during the 1970s. In Detroit's Northeast Side, opponents of busing formed Northeast Mothers Alert (NEMA) in August 1972; and in 1975, this group went citywide, changing its name to Mother's Alert Detroit Metropolitan Inc. (MAD).⁵¹ Meanwhile, the main anti-busing organisation in Boston was ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights), formed in the run up to Garrity's June 1974 decision. Although ROAR had chapters across the city, it was strongest in working-class areas such as South Boston.⁵² Like welfare rights organisations, most anti-busing groups adopted a formal structure from the start, with official membership, elected leaders and written by-laws.⁵³ Yet, because many anti-busers were suspicious of outsiders, and distrustful of a 'liberal' media that they believed was arrayed against them, groups often operated with a degree of secrecy, refusing to disclose membership lists or restricting meetings to invite-only.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ See Formisano, Chapter 6; John Kifner, 'South Boston, a "Town" of Irishmen, Feels as if It's a Persecuted Belfast,' *New York Times*, 23 September 1974, p. 40.

⁴⁸ See Sugrue, pp. 235-241.

⁴⁹ Sugrue, pp. 212, 237, 241; Formisano, pp. 108-109.

⁵⁰ Notably, South Boston and Charlestown were both home to large housing projects, and included a significant number of families on public assistance. See Formisano, pp. 111-112, 121-123, 125; Sugrue, pp. 235, 237, 241.

⁵¹ Shirley Wohlfield, 'How We Were Formed,' undated, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: NEMA History and Notes, 1972-1973.

⁵² Formisano, p. 71.

⁵³ See 'Northeast Mothers Alert Proposed Constitution and By-Laws,' undated, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook; 'By-Laws of Mothers Alert Detroit, Metropolitan Inc.,' 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD Bylaws, 1975.

⁵⁴ See Manli Ho and John B. Wood, 'Opposition to Busing Led by Publicity-Shy ROAR,' *Boston Globe*, 27 September 1974, in J. Anthony Lukas Papers, 1940-1997, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 7, Folder 11 (hereafter cited as Lukas Papers); Brenda Reeber, 'Concerns Regarding School Desegregation,' 9 October 1974, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD Correspondence, August 1975-July 1976.

One of the most striking things about all of these organisations, however, was the prominence of women within them. As the busing conflict escalated, anti-busing campaigns across the country increasingly involved whole neighbourhoods, with men, women and children all playing an active role in a community-based struggle. But, more often than not, it was women who held the majority of leadership positions in anti-busing organisations, and sustained the movement at the grassroots level. This was certainly the case in Detroit and Boston, where both MAD and ROAR were dominated by white, working-class, ethnic women. Importantly, although some of these women worked outside the home, usually in low-income jobs, they tended to identify themselves, first and foremost, as housewives and mothers. Indeed, it was their domestic identities, and the gendered division of labour in these white, working-class communities, that enabled women to assume leadership of the anti-busing struggle. On a practical level, women's relatively flexible schedules often meant they had more time to carry out day-to-day organising tasks – attending meetings, planning demonstrations and writing newsletters – than husbands who worked full time. Moreover, working-class gender ideologies dictated that children and their schooling were a mother's turf. Thus, emphasising their status as mothers helped these relatively uneducated, working-class women to enter the public arena, and create an unchallengeable claim to authority within the movement.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as this chapter demonstrates, ideas about motherhood continued to facilitate and support women's involvement in the anti-busing campaign. Indeed, even as their protests became increasingly militant and confrontational, anti-busing women consistently maintained that they were simply 'homemakers concerned with their children.'⁵⁶

III

There were many different reasons for the growth of organised resistance to busing during the 1970s. Furthermore, it is always difficult to ascertain activists' motivations from their rhetoric – and this becomes particularly problematic within a movement that was aware of its public image from the start, and often conscious of wanting to avoid accusations of racism. Nevertheless, gender was clearly central to the anti-busing struggle – influencing why men and women became involved in the movement, and

⁵⁵ Wrigley, pp. 253-4, 260-1.

⁵⁶ Louise Day Hicks, quoted in Donald Lewis, 'Rights Panel Weighs Citing 3 Busing Foes for Defiance,' *Boston Globe*, 20 June 1975, p. 1, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

determining what roles they would play. Indeed, for most women in the movement, activism initially stemmed from concern for their children, and a sense of responsibility as mothers.

The case of Detroit activist Carmen Roberts provides a good example of how women's roles as housewives and mothers shaped their political consciousness. Born in 1938, Roberts grew up in Detroit's Northeast Side, where she would spend most of her life. With an Irish-American father and French-Canadian mother, her family was Catholic and solidly working-class. In 1956, when she was seventeen, Roberts dropped out of high school to get married and start a family of her own. Her husband, Donald Roberts, was a truck driver, and the pair went on to have two children. Despite Roberts's devotion to the Northeast Side, the family moved to the outlying town of Van Buren, Michigan for a brief period during in the mid-1960s. But Roberts soon became concerned when the NAACP began helping black families to buy homes in her area, complaining that 'the places quickly deteriorated.' She also missed family and friends in the neighbourhood she had grown up in and, in 1966, the family moved back to northeast Detroit.⁵⁷ Although Roberts described herself as 'a traditional housewife' prior to the advent of court-ordered busing, she was always involved in activities outside the home: volunteering for the March of Dimes Foundation (a charity dedicated to improving the health of mothers and babies), organising petition drives and meetings in the community, and playing an active role in the local PTA.⁵⁸ So when her son came home one day in 1970 with the news that he might be bused, Roberts was no stranger to local or school politics, and she immediately helped organise a meeting of concerned parents.⁵⁹ As Roberts explained, she feared for her children's safety, 'being bused across town into high crime areas and exposed to cultural and family values different from their own.' Significantly, Roberts also attributed her willingness to 'assume a public role in defence of her children' to the example set by her own mother, who, despite moving to Detroit from Montreal when she was just sixteen and spoke only French, never hesitated to take an active role in the community.⁶⁰ When NEMA was officially formed two years later, following the announcement of Judge Roth's proposed

⁵⁷ 'Sketch of Carmen Roberts,' 15 August 1986, in Carmen A. Roberts Papers, 1972-1981, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Box 1, Folder: Biographical Field Notes (hereafter cited as Roberts Papers).

⁵⁸ 'Sketch of Carmen Roberts'; John Askins, 'Diary of a Glad Housewife,' *Detroit Free Press*, 4 February 1974, p. 1C, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1974.

⁵⁹ Carmen Roberts, 'I Have A Dream Too,' speech delivered in Waukesha, Wisconsin on 15 January 1977, reprinted in *Wisconsin Report*, 20 January 1977, p. 1, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1977.

⁶⁰ 'Sketch of Carmen Roberts.'

metropolitan busing plan, Roberts became its first chairman, and she later served as president of MAD. Furthermore, Roberts's prominence in the anti-busing movement resulted in her being appointed to the regional school board in March 1973, to which she was subsequently elected four times.⁶¹ However, although the anti-busing movement had a transformative impact on her life, Roberts never renounced her domestic identity. Rather, she consistently portrayed her activism as within the purview of her role as housewife and mother. Recalling the first anti-busing assembly in 1970, Roberts later explained: 'it was the day my life was to be altered from that of a complacent housewife, to that of an active alert housewife.'⁶²

While individual stories and local contexts differed, anti-busing women in Boston – and across the country – experienced similar paths to activism. As white, working-class mothers, they were typically the ones who oversaw their children's schooling and dominated local PTAs, and many women initially became involved in the movement due to the politicisation of this traditionally female domain.⁶³ Consequently, anti-busing women often approached activism as an extension of their maternal role. As with the welfare rights movement, a number of anti-busing organisations portrayed themselves as mothers' groups by incorporating the word 'mother' into their name. In Boston, for example, School Committee member Louise Day Hicks formed an organisation called Mothers for Neighborhood Schools in the mid-1960s, as part of the campaign to repeal the RIA.⁶⁴ Originally from South Boston, Hicks would go on to become a symbol of organised resistance to busing, riding the anti-busing tide from the School Committee to the U.S. House of Representatives and Boston City Council, and co-founding ROAR in spring 1974. Notably, as the middle-class daughter of a judge and a qualified lawyer herself, she was not typical of women in the anti-busing crusade. Nevertheless, throughout her political career, Hicks tended to emphasise her domestic identity over her professional credentials, and the press regularly referred to her as the 'mother' of the anti-busing movement.⁶⁵ Similarly, anti-busers in Detroit claimed the

⁶¹ 'Sketch of Carmen Roberts.'

⁶² Roberts, 'I Have A Dream Too,' p. 1.

⁶³ Wrigley, pp. 256-260; Formisano, p. 148; Jacoby, p. 260.

⁶⁴ Ira Mothner, 'Boston's Louise Day Hicks: Storm Center of the Busing Battle,' *Look*, 22 February 1966, in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7.

⁶⁵ National and local publications alternately referred to Hicks as the 'mother,' 'matriarch,' 'founding mother,' 'godmother,' and 'earth mother' of the anti-busing movement. In part, this was an image Hicks herself encouraged. When she first ran for the Boston School Committee in 1961, Hicks campaigned as 'the only mother on the ballot.' For the media's portrayal of Hicks, see newspaper and magazine clippings in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7 – in particular, 'Backlash in Boston – And Across the U.S.,' *Newsweek*, 6 November 1967, pp. 29-30, 33-34; Gary Griffith 'Louise Day Hicks (1961-1976) R.I.P.,' *The Real Paper* (Boston), 30 October 1976, pp. 24-27; Gary McMillan, 'For Hicks, It Was the End of the

mantle of motherhood from the start by calling themselves Northeast Mothers Alert; and they retained this maternal identity when the group went citywide, becoming Mothers Alert Detroit. Meanwhile, other anti-busing organisations did not explicitly identify as mothers' groups, but became predominantly female spaces due to the strict division of gender roles in working-class neighbourhoods – with Boston's ROAR being a case in point.

Like WSPers and welfare rights activists, women in the anti-busing struggle also relied heavily upon the language of motherhood – consistently emphasising their concern for their children, and justifying their activism by stressing their responsibilities as mothers. For example, many anti-busing women said they feared for the safety of children who were to be bused to predominantly black neighbourhoods, such as Roxbury and North Dorchester in Boston, or inner city Detroit.⁶⁶ As NEMA explained: 'The safety of our children is naturally uppermost in the minds of parents.'⁶⁷ In an interview with Lukas, Charlestown activist Barbara Gillette elaborated further, declaring: 'it's a terrible, terrible thing to have to stand there and watch children who can't go to school unless they send them into an area that has always been in Massachusetts a high crime area.' She argued that it was absurd to send children into neighbourhoods 'where even the parents wouldn't go,' adding: 'I would never send my daughter into a place I wouldn't go. And I certainly would never be fool enough to walk the streets of Roxbury.'⁶⁸ Furthermore, women in the anti-busing movement often complained about the negative impact busing would have on their children's education, contending that long commutes and continual student reorganisation would undermine learning and discipline in schools. The educational impacts of busing were a frequent theme in speeches by Detroit activist Shirley Wohlfield during the mid-1970s. According to Wohlfield, busing was turning schools into a 'giant social experiment,' and 'people were tired of their kids being used as guinea pigs.'⁶⁹

At the same time, anti-busing women regularly stressed the importance of neighbourhood schools to their children's development. Schools, they argued, ought to have strong connections to the local area and a high degree of parental involvement, so

Bus Line,' *Boston Globe*, 11 November 1977. Also see Formisano, pp. 2, 30; Lukas, *Common Ground*, Chapter 9.

⁶⁶ 'Antibusing Rally at Governor Center; Most of Motorcade Misses Garrity's House,' *Boston Globe*, 9 September 1974, p. 3, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

⁶⁷ Northeast Mothers Alert, untitled press release, c.1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: NEMA Correspondence, 1973-1975.

⁶⁸ Barbara Gillette, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 276, undated, p. 5, in Lukas Papers, Box 12, Folder 9.

⁶⁹ Shirley Wohlfield, 'Real Facts of Busing Costs?', undated speech notes, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: SW Speeches Against Forced Busing, 1974-1975.

as to instil students with a sense of community and reinforce shared values.⁷⁰ A leaflet produced by the Detroit chapter of NAG explained:

The neighborhood school system is the strength of the nation. Local involvement in the school by parents is essential for the good education of children. To remove parental involvement and control and turn it over to the state is an extremely dangerous action that should be opposed by everyone.⁷¹

In Boston, where the distinct ethnic identities and individual histories of the city's various enclaves was a source of pride to many residents, neighbourhood schools assumed even more importance.⁷² For parents in the working-class 'determinedly Irish' neighbourhood of South Boston, for example, public education tended to be viewed less as a path to social mobility than as 'a socializing force, reinforcing the traditional values of family, neighborhood, religion and patriotism against the often threatening changing values of the outside world.'⁷³ Yet, though the local high school occupied a particularly revered place in Boston's white ethnic communities, the rhetoric of protecting children and preserving neighbourhood schools united anti-busing activists across the country. This was apparent on 27 October 1974, when anti-busers in Detroit staged a march in sympathy with Boston, where busing had recently begun. In response, Hicks, who was unable to attend the march due to illness, expressed her appreciation for activists in Detroit; speaking to a Detroit-based paper in the run up to the event, she described anti-busers in Boston as 'parents who want local school control and those who are fearful for the safety of their youngsters – just as the people in the Detroit area feel.'⁷⁴ Thus, anti-busing women in both cities portrayed their protests as firmly rooted in concern for their children's well-being and educational development.

It was also common for women in the anti-busing struggle to argue that they were defending their own rights as mothers against a programme that was 'un-democratic' and 'un-American.'⁷⁵ In September 1972, NEMA wrote to local parents, explaining: 'We are a newly formed organization of northeast area mothers who are

⁷⁰ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 80.

⁷¹ National Action Group, Detroit Chapter, 'Citizens Opposed To the Forced Busing of School Children' leaflet, undated, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: NEMA History and Notes, 1972-1973.

⁷² 'A Plea for Mercy,' petition signed by anti-busing leaders in Charlestown, 26 February 1975, in Citywide Educational Coalition Records, 1972-2001, Snell Library, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, Box 3, Folder 21 (hereafter cited as CECR Records).

⁷³ Kifner, 'South Boston, a "Town" of Irishmen'; John Kifner, 'Tensions and Violence in Boston Schools Are Rooted in Traditions of White Ethnic Neighborhoods,' *New York Times*, 18 May 1975, p. 48.

⁷⁴ Hicks, quoted in George Wilczynski, 'Anti-Busing March Set for Northeast Detroit,' *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 23 October 1974, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1974; '400 March to Protest Busing,' *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 31 October 1974, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1974.

⁷⁵ Lukas, *Common Ground*, p. 17.

very concerned about what is happening to our rights as mothers, individuals and Americans.’⁷⁶ Indeed, welfare recipients were not the only ones influenced by the new rights consciousness of the 1960s. In what has been described as the ‘greatest irony’ of the movement, anti-busers frequently appropriated rhetoric and tactics popularised by the black freedom struggle – including the politically potent language of ‘rights.’⁷⁷ Specifically, anti-busing women claimed that court-ordered busing usurped a mother’s right to choose where her children went to school – essentially, the right to determine what was best for her children. Thus, fashioning a patriotic strain of maternalism, they portrayed themselves as standing up not only for their authority as mothers, but for basic American freedoms.⁷⁸ This was epitomised in a telegram by Hicks, read aloud at the October 1974 march in Detroit, which declared:

I firmly believe that parents possess the inherent right and responsibility of child development. Social order through the centuries has been predicted on this essential truth. An insensitive bureaucratic governmental system with unbridled powers spells the erosion of such a system and leads to the cessation of fundamental human freedoms.

She concluded by urging Detroiters to join with her ‘to insure a better America for our children.’⁷⁹

In emphasising their authority over their children, anti-busing women were also influenced by a broader pro-family movement that was gaining ground during the 1970s. Indeed, opponents of busing often accused the state of undermining the family through busing, maintaining that ‘the family must survive, because it is the only instrument that can produce morally responsible individuals.’⁸⁰ Furthermore, as Hicks’s telegram illustrates, the issue was regularly framed in the seemingly gender-neutral

⁷⁶ Northeast Mothers Alert, ‘Dear Parents,’ 23 September 1972, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

⁷⁷ See Formisano, p. 4 and Chapter 7; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, Chapter 4; Simon Hall, ‘Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, no. 4 (2008), 655-72.

⁷⁸ For further discussion on how anti-busing activists crafted a style of protest that was ‘unequivocally patriotic,’ see Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, Chapter 4. Hall also discusses how anti-busers, particularly in Boston, America’s ‘cradle of liberty,’ utilised the rhetoric and symbolism associated with the Bicentennial celebrations of the American Revolution to advance their agenda. For more on this, see Nutter, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁹ Louise Day Hicks, Telegram to Linda Hearens [sic], 25 October 1974, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

⁸⁰ Louise Day Hicks, ‘Marching,’ *New York Times*, 3 May 1976, p. 31. For more on the perceived ‘crisis of family’ and the growing pro-family movement of the 1970s, see Matthew D. Lassiter, ‘Inventing Family Values,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 13-28; Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012); Marissa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

language of ‘parental rights’ – and this rhetoric was not limited to women in the movement. In November 1974, for example, Boston father ‘Pat O’ told *Boston Magazine* that ‘no one, I don’t care if he’s the President or the Pope, has a right to tell you where your child should go to school.’⁸¹ Similarly, at a rally in Charlestown that same month, Boston City Councilman Christopher Iannella contended that it was wrong to ‘deny the moral right of parents, which is greater than the state’s right, to educate their children as they see fit.’⁸² Nevertheless, because women tended to assume the majority of responsibility for parenting, they often felt the threat of busing most keenly, and defending ‘parents’ rights’ in effect meant preserving a female sphere of influence.

Significantly, in both Detroit and Boston, this maternal rhetoric was regularly used to defend against allegations of racism, with women in the anti-busing campaign insisting that they were not racists or bigots, but simply ‘ordinary mothers’ concerned about protecting their children. Explaining her opposition to busing in the wake of Garrity’s June 1974 decision, one Boston woman stressed: ‘It is not a black and white thing... It is just taking them out of where they belong.’⁸³ Moreover, like their counterparts in WSP and the welfare rights movement, anti-busing often argued that all mothers shared certain concerns regardless of race. In Boston, Hicks explained early on in the movement: ‘I believe that little children should go to school in their neighborhoods, with the children with whom they play. It’s as simple as that’ – and she frequently claimed that most mothers, black and white, agreed with her.⁸⁴ Speaking to a local radio station in 1968, Hicks declared: ‘It honestly doesn’t matter what color a woman’s skin is, because all mothers are interested in the same thing, the welfare of the children.’⁸⁵ With striking congruity, leaflets produced by the Detroit chapter of NAG maintained that both blacks and whites opposed busing, explaining: ‘A mother is a mother no matter what her color, creed or ethnic background. Her first concern is her child who she wants to be near.’⁸⁶ However, in contrast to the peace and welfare rights movements, within the anti-busing struggle, the rhetoric of a universal maternal perspective was rarely accompanied by active attempts at coalition building across racial lines. Furthermore, as with all the activists in this study, anti-busing women

⁸¹ Pat O, quoted in James S. Kunen, ‘Who Are These People?’, *Boston Magazine*, November 1974, p. 86.

⁸² Christopher Iannella, quoted in Joe Pilati, ‘Question 7 Opposed at Antibusing Rally’, *Boston Globe*, 4 November 1974, p. 3, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

⁸³ Susan Ryan, quoted in Ray Richard, ‘The People State Their Views,’ *Boston Sunday Globe*, 23 June 1974, p. 56, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

⁸⁴ Hicks, quoted in Mothner, ‘Boston’s Louise Day Hicks.’

⁸⁵ Hicks, quoted in J. Anthony Lukas, notes on ‘T-Group Fifteen’ debate on WBZ-Radio, c. 1968, in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7.

⁸⁶ ‘Citizens Opposed To the Forced Busing of School Children’ leaflet.

forged their maternalist politics out their daily lives, and in reality, their understandings of motherhood were inseparable from their unique racial and ethnic, class, religious, and regional perspective.

Indeed, it is vital to recognise how racial ideologies influenced women's conceptions of motherhood, and fuelled their opposition to busing. There is ongoing debate within the existing literature about the role of race and racism in motivating anti-busers. On the one hand, early studies tended to focus on the class dynamics of white resistance to busing, seeking to understand the growing alienation of working-class, white ethnics in northern cities such as Boston and Detroit. Ronald Formisano, a leading historian of the Boston movement, exemplified this interpretation, contending that 'racism alone is too simple an explanation of the resistance to court-ordered school desegregation' – 'one must consider also class, religion, ethnicity, and turf.'⁸⁷ On the other hand, however, political scientist Jeanne Theoharis maintained that what was framed as opposition to busing was in fact opposition to integration – and she criticised scholars who 'elide white ethnic working-class alienation and political powerlessness with opposition to desegregation' of 'naturalizing racism as a response for politically alienated working-class whites' and moving the discussion away from racial privilege and systemic injustice.⁸⁸

While it may be overly simplistic to attribute anti-busing resistance to racism alone, women in the movement clearly understood motherhood in racialised and defensive terms. Indeed, fears about ghetto violence and the lack of discipline in formerly black schools – or what Wohlfield provocatively termed the 'blackboard jungle' – stemmed, at least in part, from long-held racial stereotypes and racialised notions of 'good' motherhood.⁸⁹ As scholar Tamar Jacoby observed, in the minds of many anti-busing women, 'black meant poor meant less carefully brought up meant probably violent.'⁹⁰ Furthermore, influenced by the Moynihan Report and contemporary discourses about black cultural deficiency, anti-busers tended to blame problems in black schools and communities not on institutional racism, but on black children themselves, and by extension black families and particularly black mothers.⁹¹ As a

⁸⁷ Formisano, pp. xi, xiv.

⁸⁸ Theoharis, "'We Saved the City,'" pp. 63, 74. Also see Jeanne Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South": How Boston's School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,' in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 125-151 (p. 140).

⁸⁹ Wohlfield, 'Real Facts of Busing Costs?'

⁹⁰ Jacoby, p. 267.

⁹¹ For more on how anti-busers framed black children's motivation and their parent's values as the problem – as well as how black women organised to refute these dysfunctional portrayals of black

result, despite claiming that mothers from different racial backgrounds shared similar concerns, women in the anti-busing movement expressed little empathy for African American mothers who demanded educational equity for their children – instead, seeking to defend their own families and work as mothers against problems in ‘other’ neighbourhoods. ‘The coloreds aren’t getting an equal education right?’ said one South Boston mother, ‘Yet they want to put our children in these schools where they’re not getting a good education, so then our children aren’t getting an equal education. Forget it.’⁹² Although couched more diplomatically, this racialised and defensive maternalism was also apparent in an article by Hicks, published in the *New York Times* in 1976, which bemoaned that: ‘In an attempt to inject familial values into a segment of the population that had been denied them because of sociological conditions over which it had no control, the courts are taking them away from that segment of the population that managed to hold on to them in the toughest of times.’⁹³ Indeed, although Hicks was careful not to assign blame to individual African Americans here, black families and black culture were clearly framed as the problem.

Because one of the most significant victories of the black freedom struggle by the 1970s was the delegitimisation of explicit racist language, anti-busers generally relied upon what Theoharis has termed ‘covert racial language’ to express these fears (emphasising the threat that ‘ghetto culture’ posed to ‘family values’).⁹⁴ However, at times the actions and comments of certain anti-busing protesters were more overtly racist. This was certainly the case on 12 September 1974, when court-ordered busing first commenced in Boston. With protests in South Boston dominating the national news, shocking scenes emerged of white protesters, many of them women, bombarding black schoolchildren with rocks, bottles, eggs, and rotten tomatoes, and yelling: ‘Niggers go home.’⁹⁵ Similarly, when busing began in Charlestown the following September, a group of women marching past their local school were heard to shout: ‘Ain’t none of our children in there. Just niggers!’⁹⁶ These often highly publicised incidents fuelled the growing public perception that opposition to busing was driven by

families – see Jeanne Theoharis, “‘They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid’: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,” in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University, 2005), pp. 17-44.

⁹² Kifner, ‘South Boston, a “Town” of Irishmen.’

⁹³ Hicks, ‘Marching.’

⁹⁴ Thomas J. Sugrue and John D. Skrentny, ‘The White Ethnic Strategy,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 171-192 (p. 177); Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South,’” p. 142.

⁹⁵ Formisano, p. 77; Wrigley, p. 251; Theoharis, “‘We Saved the City,’” p. 76.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Lukas, *Common Ground*, p. 272.

racism, and they would ultimately prove devastating to the movement's image. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the use of explicitly racist language varied greatly from place to place – and even within anti-busing campaigns in the same city – in part due to the differing class backgrounds of activists. For instance, while middle-class leaders such as Hicks seldom made overtly racist statements, other activists were less inhibited; in East Boston, Elvira 'Pixie' Palladino, described by one reporter as 'a tough-talking, street-savvy daughter of an Italian shoemaker,' was regularly heard referring to blacks as 'niggers' and 'jungle bunnies.'⁹⁷ And while South Boston High came to be covered in racist graffiti ('Kill Niggers,' 'Niggers Suck,' and 'This is Klan Country'), such explicit racism was less frequently expressed in Charlestown, home to a number of more middle-class, moderate anti-busing groups.⁹⁸ Moreover, while racial clashes in Boston attracted national attention, explicit racist discourse was far less common in Detroit, where anti-busers tended to be slightly better off (although, as one journalist noted, the perception that 1970s Boston was more racist than other cities was also exacerbated by 'the clash between the internationally perceived liberal aura of the city and its inner reality').⁹⁹ Of course, this is not to suggest that middle-class anti-busers in Boston and Detroit were 'less' racist or opposed to desegregation – simply that they expressed their racism in a different style.¹⁰⁰ Thus, these differences hint at the way race and class combined to shape women's activism.

Indeed, without downplaying the centrality of race, it is important to explore how class and ethnicity also impacted upon women's understandings of motherhood, leading anti-busers to develop a distinctly populist strain of maternalism. The class dimensions of the anti-busing struggle have been well documented. In Boston and Detroit, anti-busers tended to be working-class and lower-middle-class residents, who believed that their neighbourhoods were under siege by judges, social planners and

⁹⁷ Ellen Goodman, 'Louise Day Hicks: "When They Call Me a Racist, I Don't Listen,"' *Ms.*, 4 (June 1976), 99-103 (p. 101), in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7; Maria Karagianis, 'Two New Faces Upcoming on Boston School Committee...Elvira Pixie Palladino,' *Boston Evening Globe*, 6 November 1975, p. 20, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

⁹⁸ Kifner, 'South Boston, a "Town" of Irishmen'; Formisano, pp. 77, 123.

⁹⁹ Alan Lupo, 'Racism in Boston: A Tradition of Bigotry,' *The Boston Phoenix*, 30 October 1979, p. 6, in Lukas Papers, Box 8, Folder 10. Although less common, the use of explicit racial language was not unheard of in Detroit. In November 1975, for example, Carmen Roberts was accused of using the word 'nigger' during a public meeting sponsored by MAD. See John Leon, Letter to Region 7 Superintendent Lila McMechan, 14 November 1975, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1973-1976, 1981.

¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Theoharis has criticised scholars for portraying white resistance to busing in Boston as a working-class phenomenon, arguing that this ignores the movement's middle-class base and the benefits whites across the city accrued from segregation, ultimately diverting attention away from the systemic basis and acceptance of racial privilege across the city. "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" pp. 141-142. Also see Formisano, pp. 233-234.

other unaccountable elites. Activists were also incensed by the class discrimination in busing plans that exempted the middle-class suburbs. During a rally in Boston in September 1974, ROAR leader Rita Graul decried: ‘We’ve lost freedoms which our suburban neighbors enjoy.’¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, fellow ROAR activist Virginia Sheehy told one journalist that the movement had given her a new awareness of her position in a social and economic hierarchy, maintaining: ‘busing is really a class issue.’¹⁰² Furthermore, class resentments were heightened by the fact that many anti-busers were second- and third- generation descendents of European immigrants who defined themselves in terms of their tightly knit ethnic communities. Indeed, with the 1970s witnessing a ‘white ethnic revival,’ activists increasingly asserted their identity as Irish-Americans or Italian-Americans, and they sought defend their own rights against what they saw as the special treatment afforded to blacks by their elite liberal allies.¹⁰³ Thus, a strong anti-elitist current ran through the anti-busing struggle, and this interplay of race, class and ethnicity has led scholars such as Formisano to regard the movement as an example of ‘reactionary populism.’¹⁰⁴

However, what is largely overlooked within existing studies is how women in the anti-busing movement forged a particular gendered form of anti-elitism that I term ‘populist maternalism’ – a variant on the ‘housewife populism’ identified by Nickerson.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, women often claimed a special role in the anti-busing struggle as housewives and mothers, the embodiment of family and local community *vis-à-vis* the state. In part, this reflected women’s class backgrounds, and the fact that they tended to have more at stake than men in the preservation of neighbourhood institutions. As one journalist in Boston noted, anti-busers were mostly white working-class women ‘whose lives for generations had been centered on their homes, their churches and their children.’¹⁰⁶ Even though some of these women also worked part-time to supplement the family income, they generally viewed this as secondary to their roles within the family and community.¹⁰⁷ Thus, arguments about community control were often highly gendered; by seeking to maintain ‘neighbourhood schools,’ women in the anti-busing movement also sought to defend a female sphere of influence. Furthermore, entrenched

¹⁰¹ Rita Graul, quoted in Bob Sales, ‘Kennedy Jeered, Hit at Antibusing Rally,’ *Boston Globe*, 10 September 1974, p. 14, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

¹⁰² Virginia Sheehy, quoted in Kathleen Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women: Militant Mothers,’ *The Real Paper* (Boston), 13 November 1976, p. 5, in Lukas Papers, Box 7, Folder 11.

¹⁰³ For more on the ‘ethnic revival’ of the 1970s, see Sugrue and Skrentny; Formisano, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ Formisano, pp. xi-xii, 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁰⁶ Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ See ‘Alice McGoff’s Recollection of Protest at City Hall,’ in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

gender norms within white, working-class neighbourhoods in Boston and Detroit often enabled women to claim leadership of the movement. In an interview with Lukas, Boston activist Alice McGoff explained:

In Charlestown, the raising of children, the education of children is considered to be a woman's job... The father earned the money. So he didn't have time to get caught up in school meetings and that kind of business. Therefore, busing was more a woman's issue in Charlestown than it was a man's issue.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Gillette argued that the fact that Charlestown was 'run by women' had a lot to do with class, as blue-collar male workers tended to be less interested in household or community affairs than more professional men.¹⁰⁹ In neighbourhoods such as Charlestown and South Boston, Irish immigrant culture also served to reinforce the importance of mothers to the community, with men tending to work long hours at hard physical jobs and many falling victim to early death or alcoholism.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, in East Boston, residents were mostly second-generation Italians who maintained 'remarkably strong family ties and traditions.'¹¹¹ For many anti-busing women then, working-class culture and ethnic identity enhanced their status within the family and strengthened their claims to represent the economically marginal. However, the anti-busing struggle also demonstrates how populist maternalism traversed class divides. As we have seen, class differences existed, both between Boston and Detroit, and within the movements in each city. But, as with the Cold Warriors in Nickerson's study, anti-busing women often relied upon gender assumptions about mothers' connectedness to the community and inherent political marginality to claim an anti-elitist stance regardless of their actual economic status.¹¹² A prime example of this was Hicks, who was seen by many supporters as one of the 'little people' despite being a qualified attorney with a lucrative law practice.¹¹³ Speaking to Lukas, fellow ROAR activist Sheehy described Hicks as just 'another South Boston mother' who 'loves children' and 'cares for her community.'¹¹⁴ Thus, a distinctly gendered anti-elitist discourse was often just as important as class identity in shaping the maternalism of the anti-busing struggle.

¹⁰⁸ 'Alice McGoff's Recollection of Protest at City Hall.'

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Gillette, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 277, undated, pp. 4-6, in Lukas Papers, Box 12, Folder 8.

¹¹⁰ Kilgore, 'The Politicization of ROAR Women,' p. 6; Formisano, p. 148.

¹¹¹ Burt Soloman, 'East Boston: Next Front in the Busing War,' *The Real Paper* (Boston), 27 November 1974, p. 4, in Lukas Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

¹¹² Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. xx, 71, 75-76, 101-102.

¹¹³ Karagianis, 'Two New Faces Upcoming on Boston School Committee.'

¹¹⁴ 'Virginia Sheehy,' in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7.

Lastly, religion played a key role in influencing conceptions of motherhood for many anti-busing women. As a number of scholars have shown, religion – particularly traditional Roman Catholicism and the resurgence of evangelical Protestantism – was central to the rise of the broader New Right during the 1970s, galvanising many conservatives to take stands against feminism, abortion, gay rights, and the perceived secularisation of American society.¹¹⁵ Similarly, theology played an important part in shaping resistance to busing in the heavily Catholic cities of Boston and Detroit. Indeed, the Catholic Church had long taught that parents had a right and a duty to determine their children’s education, and many activists viewed busing as violating rights that God conferred upon the family.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, influenced by Catholic doctrines of maternal piety and sacrifice, many women in the movement saw themselves as having a special role to play in defending these God-given rights.¹¹⁷ ‘As mothers,’ NEMA declared early on in the movement, ‘we believe that our right to protect the life God entrusted to us supercedes the designs of man made governments.’¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, in Boston, Palladino argued that activists were simply standing up for ‘the right of the people, to send their children to the school of their choice,’ explaining: ‘This is our God-given right.’¹¹⁹ Consequently, anti-busing women often claimed that God was on their side in the struggle to resist court-ordered desegregation. At a large rally in Boston’s City Hall Plaza in September 1974, Graul proclaimed: ‘God is with us and we’re doing God’s work today... We’re protecting our children.’¹²⁰ As well as spiritual sustenance, anti-busing women also looked to the church for material support, with many activists utilising existing parish networks as a basis for organising or holding meetings in church halls. In Detroit, for example, general meetings of NEMA, and later MAD, were held in the local Good Shepherd Church, and usually began with a silent prayer and pledge to the flag.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ See for instance Paul Boyer, ‘The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 29-51; Joseph Crespino, ‘Civil Rights and the Religious Right,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 90-105.

¹¹⁶ ‘Excerpts from Vatican II and Papal Documents on the Education Rights and Duties of Family, Church and State,’ in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 5; Wrigley, pp. 260-261.

¹¹⁷ For more on how conservative women have historically relied upon gender assumptions about female spirituality and moral authority to claim a public role on behalf of God, see Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. 47-48.

¹¹⁸ Mothers of Michigan, Letter dated 30 September 1972.

¹¹⁹ Elvira (Pixie) Palladino, quoted in ‘ROAR Protests Globe Coverage,’ *Boston Globe*, 9 June 1975, p. 10, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

¹²⁰ Graul, quoted in Sales, ‘Kennedy Jeered, Hit at Antibusing Rally,’ p. 14.

¹²¹ See NEMA General Meeting Minutes, 10 October 1974-17 July 1975; and MAD General Meeting Minutes, 21 August 1975-7 October 1976, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD General Meetings Minutes, 1974-1977.

However, in both Detroit and Boston, the Catholic clergy was deeply divided over the issue of busing, and this frequently led to tensions between priests and their parishioners.¹²² Indeed, while some clergymen allowed anti-busers to meet on church premises and tacitly aligned themselves with the movement, many others expressed support for the principle of racial integration and advocated compliance with court-ordered busing. This was particularly true higher up the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In Boston, Humberto Cardinal Medeiros came out in favour of the RIA in April 1974, and he later endorsed measures to prevent parochial schools from becoming a refuge from busing.¹²³ But local clergymen also faced criticism from anti-busers, and according to one Charlestown priest, the popular sentiment was that ‘if we are not exactly with them we are against them.’¹²⁴ Indeed, viewing busing as tantamount to sacrilege, many anti-busing women felt bitterly let down by clerics’ support for the court orders. Furthermore, some activists pointed to the church’s stance on other social and political issues, and expressed confusion about why it would not back the anti-busing struggle. In an interview with Lukas, Gillette implied that it was hypocritical of Medeiros to urge cooperation with busing ‘because it’s the law of the land,’ arguing: ‘Did you ever see a blessing given on abortion because it’s the law of the land? You can’t have it both ways. You either obey the law or you don’t.’¹²⁵ Meanwhile, in Detroit, Wohlfield criticised the church for concerning itself more with the anti-Vietnam War movement than with children’s education, and she asked: ‘where were all the pro Vietnam demonstrators from the churches when all the disclosures were made on the heinous atrocities perpetrated by the Viet Cong!!!’¹²⁶ At times, this disillusionment and bitterness spilled over into anger, and some clergymen faced verbal and physical harassment from anti-busers. Charlestown’s Father Joseph Greer recalled that when his parishioners found out he was on a committee tasked with the safe implementation of busing in the area, he was accused of being a communist and one woman tossed a salad in his face at a local restaurant.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the disenchantment felt by anti-busers tended to be directed towards the church power structure rather than Catholicism itself, and most women in

¹²² Formisano, pp. 72-73.

¹²³ ‘Text of Cardinal Medeiros’s Appeal to Retain Imbalance Act,’ *Boston Evening Globe*, 4 April 1974, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1; ‘Busing Foes Demonstrate in Cardinal’s Driveway,’ *Boston Globe*, 7 October 1974, 9, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1. However, when busing commenced in Boston, substantial numbers of students fled into Catholic schools despite the Cardinal’s directives. See Formisano, p. 210.

¹²⁴ Father Robert Boyle, quoted in Kay Longcope and Don Marshall, ‘Tactic Aimed at Buses, Cardinal,’ *Boston Globe*, 2 October 1975, p. 10, in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 5.

¹²⁵ Gillette, Tape 277, p. 24.

¹²⁶ Shirley Wohlfield, ‘What Ever Happened to Separation of Church & State?’, undated handwritten notes, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: SW Notes on MAD and NEMA, 1974-1977.

¹²⁷ Father Joseph Greer, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 217, undated, pp. 14-15, in Lukas Papers, Box 12, Folder 11.

the movement continued to believe that God was on their side in their struggle to defend their divinely sanctioned maternal roles.¹²⁸

IV

Thus, anti-busing women in Boston and Detroit formulated a unique version of maternalism, shaped by an intersection of race, class, ethnicity and religion – and they relied heavily upon this language of motherhood to justify their activism and enhance their moral authority. However, as with WSPers and welfare rights activists, there was also a strong performative dimension to these women's maternalist politics. Although they did not altogether abandon traditional, legal strategies such as lobbying and petitioning, anti-busing women combined these with efforts to dramatise their maternal concerns in the public arena. Indeed, as several recent scholars have shown, anti-busing activists often appropriated 1960s forms of protest, even as they reacted against the decade's progressive ideals. Not only did they co-opt the rights-centred rhetoric of the black freedom struggle, anti-busers also employed direct action tactics popularised by civil rights and student activists – staging mass marches and rallies, organising boycotts, and engaging in street theatre.¹²⁹ Yet, while the 1960s clearly cast a long shadow, women in the anti-busing struggle developed their own distinctive protest style, and their actions were invariably steeped in maternal and religious symbolism. Furthermore, although most anti-busing organisations professed to be nonviolent, in practice, many women embraced a militant posture, and they regularly demonstrated a willingness to use violence or the threat of violence if deemed necessary to protect their children. Echoing the militant maternalism of the welfare rights struggle, one Charlestown activist explained: 'when it's your children you'll just do anything.'¹³⁰

Like members of WSP and NWRO, women in the anti-busing movement made extensive use of maternal rhetoric and imagery in their public protests. Although demonstrations generally involved both men and women, often with whole communities taking part, anti-busing women seized every opportunity to remind audiences of their status as mothers and their concern for their children. A primary way they did this was through the placards that invariably adorned marches and rallies, with

¹²⁸ Longcope and Marshall, 'Tactic Aimed at Buses, Cardinal,' p. 10.

¹²⁹ See Formisano, Chapter 7; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, Chapter 4; Hall, 'Protest Movements in the 1970s'; Jacoby, p. 260.

¹³⁰ Helen McClung, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 264, undated, p. 15, in Lukas Papers, Box 12, Folder 8.

children, family and motherhood all featuring as prominent themes. At a large demonstration in Boston on 7 September 1975, protesters carried homemade signs with slogans such as ‘Protect Your Children, Resist’ and ‘The Family Is More Sacred Than The State.’¹³¹ Meanwhile, activists in Detroit frequently held aloft large banners that read ‘Northeast Mothers Alert,’ and some women had this emblazoned on the back of jackets (see Figure 9).¹³² Furthermore, activists emphasised their pledge to defend their children in songs and chants, which were a regular feature of anti-busing protests, usually replete with patriotic and religious themes. For instance, revealing their fondness for altering the lyrics to well-known ballads, activists in Boston sang a version of ‘Glory, Glory Hallelujah’ that began ‘Mine eyes have seen the horror of the coming of the bus; They are rolling down the street to take our kids away from us,’ and culminated in the chorus:

NO THEY’LL NEVER TAKE OUR KIDS FROM US
 NO THEY’LL NEVER TAKE OUR KIDS FROM US
 NO THEY’LL NEVER TAKE OUR KIDS FROM US
 NO OUR KIDS WON’T GET ON THAT BUS.¹³³

Similarly, many rallies concluded with a rendition of ‘Over there, over there, our kids aren’t going over there,’ sang to the tune of the popular World War I marching song.¹³⁴ Notably, however, rousing numbers were sometimes juxtaposed with more sombre observances, such as when Sheehy led participants at one demonstration in moment of silence for ‘our children and the children of the city who are being bused.’¹³⁵ Moreover, like WSPers and welfare recipients, anti-busing women used images of children to remind the public for whom they dedicated their efforts. In Charlestown, activist Barbara Kelly frequently carried a large poster decorated with photographs of her seven children, which she would wave at local politicians, shouting: ‘these are my kids that you’re takin’.’¹³⁶ Meanwhile, in Detroit, anti-busing leaflets regularly included folksy

¹³¹ See photographs labelled ‘Sept. 7, 1975 ROAR,’ in Gordon Hall and Grace Hoag Collection of Dissenting and Extremist Printed Propaganda, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, Box 46-7, Folder HH3763 (hereafter cited to as Hall-Hoag Collection).

¹³² See undated photographs in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

¹³³ ‘Glory, Glory Hallelujah,’ in ‘Happiness Is...Going to Your Neighborhood School,’ undated ROAR Songbook, in Lukas Papers, Box 7, Folder 11.

¹³⁴ Robert Rosenthal, ‘Building Trades Vote to Oppose Busing,’ *Boston Globe*, 7 October 1974, p. 12, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1; Lukas, *Common Ground*, p. 259.

¹³⁵ Rosenthal, ‘Building Trades Vote to Oppose Busing.’

¹³⁶ Pat and Barbara McGonagle, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 168, undated, pp. 47-48, in Lukas Papers, Box 12, Folder 8.

hand-drawn pictures of children, as well as idealised images of the homes, churches and neighbourhoods activists claimed to defend.¹³⁷

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 9: Anti-busing activists in Detroit march behind a large banner reading ‘Northeast Mothers Alert.’¹³⁸

It was often no coincidence that activists in Detroit and Boston deployed similar slogans and symbols during demonstrations, instead reflecting the interplay between local anti-busing struggles. Indeed, while it may not have been accurate to speak of a ‘national’ anti-busing movement, activists across the country clearly shared many concerns and could relate to one another as mothers or as parents, and attempts at national coordination took place throughout the 1970s. For example, activists in Boston and Detroit regularly corresponded with one another, swapping tactics and expressing mutual support – and it is safe to assume that anti-busers elsewhere in the country did likewise.¹³⁹ In a letter to anti-busing leaders in Boston in April 1975, NEMA activist Ronnie Kloock declared that there were ‘areas where we are finding that many states throughout the country have similar concerns. Maybe it’s time we begin some sort of affiliation or contact point with each other.’ She concluded: ‘Please keep in touch as we

¹³⁷ See for instance NEMA, ‘Boston Now! Detroit Tomorrow!’ leaflet, October 1974; NEMA, ‘Anti-Bussing Parade’ leaflet, June 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: NEMA History and Notes, 1972-1973; MAD, ‘First Annual Freedom Dinner’ programme, October 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

¹³⁸ Undated photographs, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

¹³⁹ Indeed, activists in Boston and Detroit also communicated with counterparts in Louisville, Kentucky, where busing was met with fierce resistance when it began in September 1975. See Wander McGuire, Letter to Carmen Roberts, 17 April 1976, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1973-1976, 1981; Wander McGuire, Letter to Carmen Roberts, undated, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Scrapbook, January-April 1976; ‘A Concerned Parents Plea,’ a song written and composed by activists in Louisville, Kentucky, and distributed by the South Boston Information Center, in Lukas Papers, Box 7, Folder 11.

are anxious to keep abreast of your situation in Boston.’¹⁴⁰ Activists also expressed solidarity with one another during public protests. In Detroit, it was common to see placards reading ‘We Support Boston’ or ‘South Boston Won’t, We Won’t.’¹⁴¹ Furthermore, movement leaders such as Hicks frequently endorsed or participated in events in other cities.¹⁴² Of course, the intensity and duration of the Boston struggle, and the national publicity it received, meant that the influence of this campaign exceeded that of other local movements.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, activists across the country undoubtedly drew strength from the existence of anti-busing campaigns elsewhere. In a telegram to protesters in Detroit in October 1974, Hicks declared: ‘It is certainly gratifying to know that there is deep concern for my position not only in the city of Boston but throughout the nation.’¹⁴⁴ Finally, anti-busers organised a number of ostensibly national events during the mid-1970s, including conferences, coordinated school boycotts, and rallies in the nation’s capital.¹⁴⁵

However, ‘national’ anti-busing demonstrations tended to be small-scale, with organisers regularly failing to meet projected turnouts. In March 1975, when ROAR sought to replicate the civil rights movement’s famous March on Washington, only fifteen hundred protesters turned out in driving rain, the vast majority of them from Boston.¹⁴⁶ Considering that busing was generally viewed as a local issue, and anti-busing campaigns were, by nature, somewhat parochial, it is perhaps no surprise that national coordination foundered. Moreover, like welfare recipients, many anti-busers simply could not afford to travel long distances to attend national demonstrations. Speaking at ROAR’s March on Washington, Palladino declared: ‘We’re poor people.

¹⁴⁰ Ronnie V. Kloock, Draft Letter, undated, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: NEMA, History and Notes, 1972-1973; Ronnie V. Kloock, Letter to Richard Laws, 10 April 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: NEMA, Correspondence, 1973-1975.

¹⁴¹ See for instance Robert Selwa, ‘Hundreds March Against Busing: Officials Rally With Northeast Area Parents,’ *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 12 June 1975, p. 1, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings 1975; Dennis Tanner, ‘Demonstrations Against Busing Fail to Get Expected Turnouts,’ *Macomb Daily* (Detroit), 26 April 1976, p. 1, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, January-May 1976; undated photographs in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

¹⁴² See for instance Wilczynski, ‘Anti-Busing March Set for Northeast Detroit.’

¹⁴³ Formisano, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Hicks, Telegram to Hearns.

¹⁴⁵ See for instance Peter Anderson, ‘125 Delegates at Opening of ROAR Convention in Boston,’ *Boston Sunday Globe*, 18 May 1975, pp. 4-5, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2; B. D. Colen, ‘Busing Protesters Defy Wind, Rain,’ *Washington Post*, 20 March 1975, p. A2; Formisano, p. 142; ‘Anti-Busing Boycott Hits 20 Schools,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 7 October 1975, p. 3, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook; ‘3000 Protest Busing in Washington March,’ *Boston Sunday Globe*, 26 October 1975, p. 11, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2; David Rogers, ‘Thousands in Antibusing March, Rally,’ *Boston Globe*, 28 October 1975, pp. 1, 9, in Lukas Papers, Box 7, Folder 11; ‘Bussing Foes March on Capitol,’ *Sunday News* (Detroit), 25 April 1976, pp. 1, 18, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, January-May 1976.

¹⁴⁶ Colen, ‘Busing Protesters Defy Wind, Rain’; Formisano, p. 142.

We had to scrape together the \$57.50 to come here today.’¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, NEMA explained that ‘lack of funds’ prohibited members from joining the Washington protest.¹⁴⁸ Thus, for anti-busers in Boston and Detroit – and across the country – activism predominantly took place at the local level, and continued to be shaped by local concerns and opportunities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was Boston that witnessed the most dramatic evocations of maternalism by anti-busing women, with regular ‘mothers’ prayer marches’ taking place throughout the 1975-76 school year. As with ‘mothers’ protests’ organised by WSPers and welfare rights activists, these were intended to be women-only events and were designed to emphasise their special role in the movement. However, mothers’ prayer marches were also carefully crafted to showcase anti-busers’ particular, religious and patriotic, brand of maternalism. They began on 9 September 1975 in Charlestown, where busing had recently commenced under Phase II of Garrity’s desegregation plan. With some participants wearing ‘Mother Power’ T-shirts, and many pushing strollers or carrying small children, around 400 women marched through the neighbourhood, led by a three-year old girl waving an American flag. Inspired by prayer marches Charlestown mothers used to hold during World War II for men in service, the procession was intended to be one of silent prayer for the children who were to be bused. But, after failing in their attempts to keep marchers quiet, organisers compromised by chanting the Lord’s Prayer and reciting Hail Marys instead.¹⁴⁹ Following on from this, Charlestown women routinely held similar demonstrations, and mothers’ prayer marches quickly spread to other neighbourhoods.¹⁵⁰ They became increasingly theatrical. As Nickerson has argued, conservative women during the 1960s reacted to the counter-culture on the left by developing their own political style as counter-demonstration – ‘a cult of wholesomeness that introduced nuclear family-style suburban domesticity into political performance.’ Similarly, anti-busing women in Boston often sought to physically embody the religious and maternal ideals they claimed to defend – both in their appearance and by symbolically representing them during public protests.¹⁵¹ For example, when an estimated 500 women staged a

¹⁴⁷ Pallidino [*sic*], quoted in Colen, ‘Busing Protesters Defy Wind, Rain.’

¹⁴⁸ Kloock, Letter to Laws.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Charlestown Mothers March Against Busing,’ *Boston Evening Globe*, 9 September 1975, p. 1, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2; Dave O’Brian, ‘Shifting Moods: Cops and the Crowds in Charlestown,’ *Boston Phoenix*, 16 September 1975, pp. 9, 19, 40, in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 12; Lukas, *Common Ground*, pp. 271-273.

¹⁵⁰ See for instance James Ayres, ‘Prayers and Marches by 1000 End 1st Week of Phase 2 in City,’ *Boston Globe*, 13 September 1975, pp. 1, 27, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

¹⁵¹ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 138.

mothers' march through South Boston on 12 September 1975, the procession was led by Hicks counting rosary beads, and a woman pushing a baby carriage containing her twenty-month-old son, who wore a large badge that read: 'South Boston – 1775-1975 – Resist' (see Figure 10).¹⁵² Meanwhile, on 7 October, the Feast of the Holy Rosary in the Roman Catholic calendar, a group of Charlestown women melded maternal and religious symbolism with creative flair when they organised a 'Living Rosary' to protest busing. That evening, participants – who were mainly women, children and teenagers – marched over Bunker Hill Street, where they congregated on a local football field to form a human rosary bead and recite the rosary together. In a meticulously organised display, each person held a flashlight covered in different coloured crepe paper to represent an individual bead, with two young children at the bottom carrying a large cross.¹⁵³

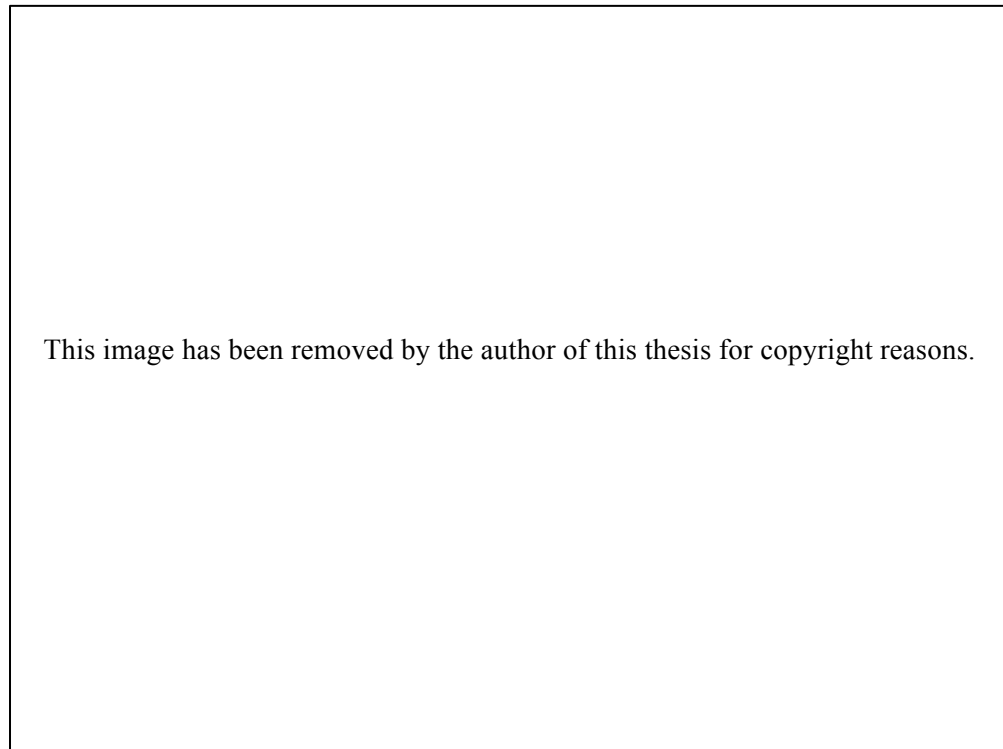


Figure 10: Louise Day Hicks leads a 'mothers' prayer march' through South Boston, 12 September 1975.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ayres, 'Prayers and Marches by 1000,' p. 27; Formisano, p. 105. Notably, the 'resist' slogan also demonstrates how anti-busers co-opted the rhetoric draft resisters who stirred much controversy in South Boston just six or seven years earlier. For more on the draft resistance movement in Boston in the late 1960s, see Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁵³ Alice McGoff, 'Living Rosary – Oct. 7, 1975,' Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 447, undated, in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 5.

¹⁵⁴ 'School Desegregation in Boston, 1974,' *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985*, Image Gallery (PBS Online, 1997-2006) <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/img_21_boston_04.html> [assessed 19 February 2014].

In terms of their frequency and their drama, nothing comparable to the mothers' prayer marches existed in Detroit. In fact, notwithstanding McCabe's 1972 'Mothers' March on Washington,' exclusive 'mothers' protests' were rare among Michigan's anti-busing women. Nevertheless, women in Detroit employed a number of other methods to highlight their special role in the anti-busing struggle. For example, they regularly timed actions to coincide with Mother's Day – with NEMA, and later MAD, publishing Mother's Day ads in local papers and using the occasion to stage anti-busing parades.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, like their Boston counterparts, anti-busing women in Detroit often combined maternal rhetoric with the strategic performance of these ideals. This was epitomised on 24 January 1976, the Saturday before busing was finally due to start in Detroit, when anti-busing women helped orchestrate a mock funeral to mourn the passing of the neighbourhood school. Marching in a 300-strong procession led by children carrying cardboard coffins, many women wore black shawls or veils, and youngsters had flecks of yellow paint on their faces to symbolise 'an epidemic of yellow measles' that organisers claimed would keep them out of school in an indefinite boycott when busing began.¹⁵⁶ Thus, protests in Boston and Detroit challenge the traditional notion of a more flamboyant left, illustrating how anti-busing women during the 1970s appropriated street theatre tactics pioneered by sixties progressive activists to dramatise their own ideologies of motherhood.

As well as this attention-grabbing performative dimension, there was also an unmistakable militant streak to anti-busing women's maternalist politics – one that resonated strongly with the militancy of the welfare rights struggle. Indeed, although most anti-busing women publically declared their support for peaceful protest, like welfare recipients, they tended to maintain a pragmatic approach to nonviolence. In Boston, for example, while middle-class leaders such as Hicks consistently claimed to 'stand for peace' and denounced more confrontational tactics, many other women demonstrated a willingness to threaten, endorse, or participate in violence if deemed necessary.¹⁵⁷ One such leader was working-class, Italian-American Pixie Palladino, whose 'colorful reputation' was embellished by tales that she once punched Senator Edward Kennedy in the stomach during an anti-busing rally, and spat in the face of an

¹⁵⁵ See NEMA General Meeting Minutes, 1 May 1975; and MAD General Meeting Minutes, 25 February 1976, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD General Meetings Minutes, 1974-1977.

¹⁵⁶ Billy Bowles, 'Busing Opponents Stage Mock Funeral,' *Detroit Free Press*, 25 January 1976, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Scrapbook, January-April 1976.

¹⁵⁷ Hicks, quoted in Robert A. Jordan, 'Hicks Pleads for Peace on First Day of School,' *Boston Globe*, 12 September 1974, p. 22, in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7.

East Boston state representative after he refused to vote for the repeal of the RIA in 1972.¹⁵⁸ Speaking to reporters in November 1974, Palladino declared: ‘We *are* nonviolent. At least that’s what we are now, and I hope that’s how it stays. But I can’t promise anything. If you back people up against the wall... I don’t know what I’d do in a fit of temper.’¹⁵⁹ Like welfare rights activists, anti-busers often justified militant rhetoric with a maternal rationale, contending that there was no length to which they would not go for their children. As one woman put it: ‘We’re not violent, but if it came to police taking kids from our homes, then we would be. We would fight, and if need be, we would be ready to die.’¹⁶⁰ And indeed, these were not empty threats – many anti-busing women proved willing to resort to physical force if protests did not go their way. This was apparent on 9 September 1974, during a large anti-busing rally in Boston’s City Hall Plaza, when Kennedy, a supporter of desegregation, was chased from the speakers’ podium by a hostile booing crowd. Protesters, who were predominantly female, pushed and shoved the senator, hurling tomatoes and eggs at him as he fled into a nearby federal office building, where they proceeded to pound on the doors, shattering a pane of glass.¹⁶¹ Amid a torrent of jeers and abuse, one woman was heard to yell: ‘You should be shot, Senator. You should be shot!’¹⁶² However, activists defended the anger and violence directed at Kennedy by emphasising their protective instincts as mothers. As ROAR leader Jane DuWors later explained: ‘Something was harming our children.’ She described the women who pursued Kennedy across the plaza as ‘scorned women, not scorned in love, but scorned more importantly... in the most important thing of their lives, their children. Their children were being scorned.’¹⁶³

Anti-busers’ militant maternalism was also much in evidence the following September, during the mothers’ prayer marches in Boston. When the first of these was initiated in Charlestown, it was styled, quite self-consciously, after the southern civil rights movement, with organiser Pat Russell announcing: ‘This is going to be a silent, non-violent march. If Martin Luther King could do it, we can do it.’¹⁶⁴ However, the strength of anti-busers’ commitment to nonviolence was soon tested when participants

¹⁵⁸ Karagianis, ‘Elvira Pixie Palladino,’ p. 20.

¹⁵⁹ Palladino, quoted in Burt Solomon, ‘East Boston: Next Front in the Busing War,’ *The Real Paper* (Boston), 27 November 1974, p. 4, in Lukas Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

¹⁶⁰ Joan Philips, quoted in Kilgore, ‘Militant Mothers,’ p. 6.

¹⁶¹ John Kifner, ‘Kennedy Jeered on Boston Busing,’ *New York Times*, 10 September 1974, p. 1; Sales, ‘Kennedy Jeered, Hit at Antibusing Rally,’ p. 14; Mary Thornton, ‘No One Expected Kennedy At Rally – Including Himself,’ *Boston Globe*, 10 September 1974, pp. 1, 14, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

¹⁶² Quoted in Kifner, ‘Kennedy Jeered on Boston Busing,’ p. 1.

¹⁶³ Jane DuWors, quoted in *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*, ed. by Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, with Sarah Flynn (New York: Bantam, 1990), p. 598.

¹⁶⁴ Pat Russell, quoted in O’Brian, ‘Cops and the Crowds in Charlestown,’ p. 19.

in this march were met with a formidable wall of police in riot gear, tasked with preventing demonstrators from getting within 100 yards of the local high school. After a lengthy standoff, during which the women knelt in the street and prayed, many of the most determined marchers surged against the police lines, trying to push their way through.¹⁶⁵ The police, aware that the media was watching and eager to avoid ‘the spectacle of a mass arrest of women and children,’ were instructed to use caution.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, as they struggled to repel the women, numerous fights broke out.¹⁶⁷ Again, activists justified their militancy and willingness to risk arrest by stressing the threat busing posed to their children, with one woman later declaring: ‘when it’s your children you’ll just do anything.’¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, women regularly complained of ‘police brutality’ against themselves and their children during demonstrations. According to Gillette, the militancy of the first mothers’ march was motivated, in part, by women’s desire to express solidarity with, and set a peaceful example for, the youths of Charlestown, who had heretofore been the main ones involved in clashes with police. She explained: ‘People will say “Look at the radical mothers taking an arrest.” If they stopped and realized that sometimes kids just need support, just to let them know, “Hey, there’s somebody that cares what happens to us.”’¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in the aftermath of this march, Russell claimed: ‘Last night our kids were shot at. That’s police brutality,’ adding: ‘We don’t need three cops for every mother when we demonstrate.’¹⁷⁰ Thus, anti-busing women often resembled welfare rights activists in their antipathy toward the police, and these skirmishes provide further evidence of the influence of 1960s protests. However, it is important to view accusations of ‘police brutality’ by anti-busers in Boston in context. Indeed, although some officers may well have been heavy-handed in their treatment of protesters, a large proportion of the police force came from neighbourhoods such as South Boston and strongly opposed busing themselves, and in reality, anti-busers experienced little of the state-sponsored repression reserved for Black Power radicals, including some welfare recipients.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Stephen Curwood, ‘US Marshals Placed on Alert,’ *Boston Globe*, 10 September 1975, pp. 1, 21-22, in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 12; O’Brian, ‘Cops and the Crowds in Charlestown,’ pp. 19, 40; Lukas, *Common Ground*, pp. 272-276.

¹⁶⁶ O’Brian, ‘Cops and the Crowds in Charlestown,’ p. 19.

¹⁶⁷ Lukas, *Common Ground*, p. 276.

¹⁶⁸ McClung, Tape 264, p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Gillette, Tape 276, pp. 1-4.

¹⁷⁰ Russell, quoted in James Ayres, ‘4 Arrested in Charlestown During Nighttime Disruptions,’ *Boston Globe*, 11 September 1975, p. 14, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

¹⁷¹ Formisano, pp. 141-142, 145-146; Wrigley, p. 282.

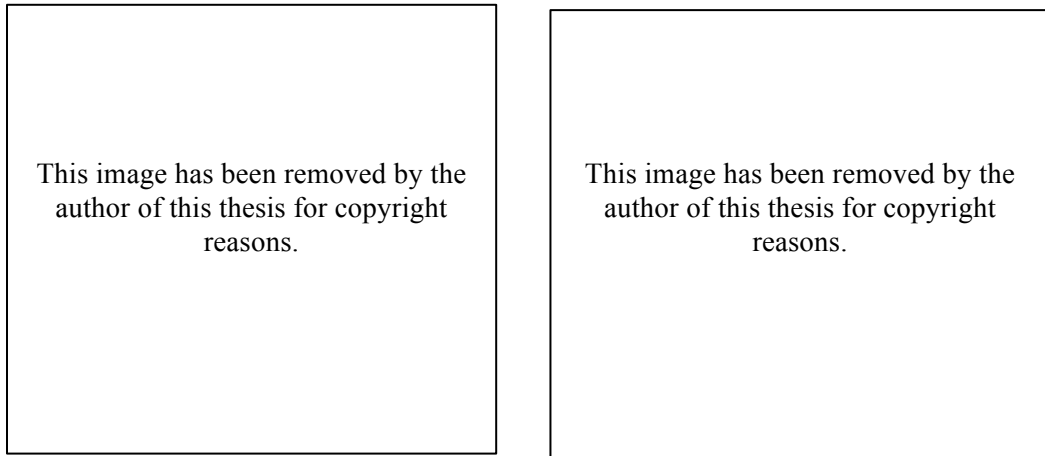


Figure 11: Carmen Roberts (right) at Mothers Alert Detroit's 'Freedom Dinner-Dance,' October 1975; beside her, a school bus-shaped piñata.¹⁷²

It is notable that, as with explicit racism, instances of violence and clashes with the police were far less common in Detroit, where anti-busers tended to come from more affluent, 'quasi-suburban' neighbourhoods, and where busing was not actually introduced until the beginning of 1976.¹⁷³ Indeed, in stark contrast to the situation in Boston, Wohlfield wrote to Detroit mayor Coleman Young in June 1976, praising the city's 'first-rate police force' for their 'full cooperation' and 'professionalism' in maintaining the peace at a recent MAD rally.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, over the course of the movement, it was not unheard of for anti-busers in Detroit to use more confrontational tactics or appear to be condoning violence. For example, a 'Freedom Dinner-Dance' sponsored by MAD in October 1975 featured a piñata shaped like a little yellow school bus for anti-busers to kick and dance around (see Figure 11). Although professed to be a light-hearted party game, this undoubtedly sent a frightening message; as one observer asked: 'what are they planning to do with the real thing?'¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, anti-busing women often employed assertive language during public protests. At a rally in March 1976, announcing MAD's plans to mark the Bicentennial with a series of anti-busing actions, Roberts declared: 'Call it militant motherhood.'¹⁷⁶ Thus, while their use of

¹⁷² Photographs, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

¹⁷³ Sugrue, pp. 235, 237, 241. On the lack of violent demonstrations in Detroit, see Stevens, 'Detroit, Facing Court-Ordered Busing of 21,000 Students, Remains Calm,' p. 40; 'Detroit's Busing Is Working,' *Macomb Daily* (Detroit), 14 June 1976, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD Newspaper Clippings, 1972-1976.

¹⁷⁴ Shirley Wohlfield, Letter to Mayor Coleman Young, 22 June 1976, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD Correspondence, August, 1975-July, 1976.

¹⁷⁵ Reeber, 'Concerns Regarding School Desegregation,' p. 4 Also see photographs of this event in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

¹⁷⁶ Carmen Roberts, quoted in Douglas Ilka, 'Detroiter Takes Her "Crusade" to Warren,' *Detroit News*, 8 March 1976, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, January-May 1976.

force tended to be more rhetorical than real, activists in Detroit also embraced a militant version of maternalism. In a letter to anti-busers in Boston in July 1976, Roberts stressed: ‘Yes, Detroit has been peaceful, but this does not mean that we are not fighting.’¹⁷⁷

However, while anti-busing women frequently used militant language and engaged in spontaneous acts of violence, it was men who assumed responsibility for more organised community defence. Indeed, anti-busing campaigns in Detroit and Boston were communal affairs – involving men and women, young and old – and in order to fully understand women’s maternalist politics, it is important to look at men’s roles within these movements and the gendered division of labour that developed. From the outset, participation in the anti-busing struggle reflected gender norms within white, working-class neighbourhoods, with women able to claim leadership due to their identities as mothers and the popular assumption that children’s education was ‘a woman’s job.’¹⁷⁸ Similarly, men’s involvement in the movement was often an extension of their roles within the family and community, as providers and protectors. In Detroit, for example, the only man on MAD’s leadership board was designated the Sargent of Arms, and was responsible for maintaining order at meetings and escorting out anyone deemed ‘not welcome.’¹⁷⁹ In addition, men acted as marshals during MAD’s anti-busing parades, where they were tasked with keeping the peace.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, in Boston, where tensions frequently ran high, men took their protective role a step further by forming permanent ‘defence squads,’ such as the South Boston Marshals and Charlestown’s Defense League. As well as being a visible force at demonstrations, these groups patrolled the streets at night ‘keeping things cool and protecting our neighbourhoods,’ and bailed youths out of jail after instances of anti-busing violence.¹⁸¹ Notably, although women took the lead in the anti-busing struggle, they often encouraged the notion that certain tasks should fall to men, relying upon traditional ideas about masculinity to call men to action. Speaking at an early meeting of the Defense League, Russell implored: ‘This whole town has to stick together, we need each other. I can raise all the money in the world for the Defense Fund but it should be

¹⁷⁷ Carmen A. Roberts, Letter to S.T.O.P., 26 July 1976, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD Correspondence, August, 1975-July, 1976.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Alice McGoff’s Recollection of Protest at City Hall.’

¹⁷⁹ Reeber, ‘Concerns Regarding School Desegregation,’ p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Dale Marsh and Ronnie Kloock, Letter to City Clerk James Bradley, 26 April 1976, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD Correspondence, August, 1975-July, 1976.

¹⁸¹ Robert J. Rosenthal, ‘500 Men Protest Busing,’ *Boston Globe*, 3 May 1976, p. 7, in Lukas Papers, Box 3, Folder 2. On the formation of the ‘Defense Fund’ (later the Defense League) in Charlestown, see Alice McGoff, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tapes 441-2, undated, in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

handled by a man. Men should be doin' this. Men should be goin' in the stationhouse and getting these kids out.'¹⁸² In Boston, anti-busing men also held a number of 'men's marches' – sometimes called 'fathers' marches' – which showcased their distinctive role within the movement. These were organised in response to the mothers' prayer marches, and were designed to show support for women in the movement.¹⁸³ On 15 February 1976, the first men's march ended in a 'bloody melee' outside South Boston High, as protesters and police battled with rocks, bottles, nightsticks, and tear gas.¹⁸⁴ However, organisers blamed this confrontation on 'police brutality,' and argued the demonstration was intended 'to let the media and the nation know that the men stand firmly beside their women.'¹⁸⁵ Similarly, participants in an all-male protest in Charlestown several months later said the event 'gave the men a chance to show the world that we, too, care about the welfare and future of our children.'¹⁸⁶ Yet it is notable that fathers' marches were far less frequent than mothers' marches, reflecting the different level of involvement men had in their children's education and in the movement.¹⁸⁷ Thus, while much more study is needed on ideas about masculinity and fatherhood in the anti-busing struggle, it is clear that men's activism was also heavily shaped by perceived gendered responsibilities – and it is crucial to view women's maternalism in the context of this gendered division of political labour.

Furthermore, tasks within the anti-busing movement varied according to age, with young people playing an important, semi-autonomous role.¹⁸⁸ As we have seen, children regularly accompanied their mothers to anti-busing demonstrations. When an estimated 7,000 anti-busers marched through South Boston on 4 October 1974 as part of a citywide school boycott, one journalist noted: 'The parade was a mixture of mothers pushing baby carriages, men who had stayed off their jobs to support the boycott, some elderly persons, many teenagers and children.'¹⁸⁹ Similarly, a 'festive' demonstration in Detroit the following June was reported to include 'about 1,200 adults and children

¹⁸² Pat Russell, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 274, undated, p. 26, in Lukas Papers, Box 11, Folder 6.

¹⁸³ Wrigley, p. 265.

¹⁸⁴ David Rogers and Nick King, 'Police, Busing Foes Battle in South Boston,' *Boston Globe*, 16 February 1976, pp. 1, 13, in Lukas Papers, Box 3, Folder 2; John Kifner, 'Police Battle Busing Foes Marching in South Boston,' *New York Times*, 16 February 1976, p. 18.

¹⁸⁵ William B. Hamilton and Marguerite Del Giudice, 'Police, Marchers Blame Each Other for Southie Clash,' *Boston Globe*, 17 February 1976, pp. 1, 5, in Lukas Papers, Box 3, Folder 2; Rogers and King, 'Police, Busing Foes Battle in South Boston,' p. 13.

¹⁸⁶ David Brown, 'Townies – They Came From All Over,' *Charlestown Patriot* (Boston), undated (c. May 1976), in Lukas Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.

¹⁸⁷ Wrigley, p. 265.

¹⁸⁸ Wrigley, p. 268.

¹⁸⁹ James B. Ayres and Maria Karagianis, 'Attendance Hits Low as Thousands March,' *Boston Globe*, 5 October 1974, p. 3, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

parading down the street with their homemade signs.¹⁹⁰ Evidently, women in the anti-busing struggle brought their children along to protests for many of the same reasons that WSPers and welfare rights activists did. In part, it was a strategic decision, with children's presence designed to evoke sympathy and remind the public of the movement's primary concern. At rallies in Detroit, for example, small children often carried placards with emotive slogans such as 'No Bus For Us,' 'I'd Rather Hide Than Ride,' and 'I Get Car Sick, I Want To Walk' (see Figure 12).¹⁹¹ As women in the movement believed that busing was harmful to children, it is also safe to assume that they too saw activism as in their children's best interests; and some women felt that protests made youngsters more politically aware.¹⁹² Moreover, like welfare recipients, these working-class women were influenced by practical considerations, as most had husbands who worked full time and few could afford childcare. This was exacerbated in Boston and Detroit by extended boycotts, which served to keep the children of anti-busers out of school for months, and in some cases years, at a time. Thus, many women took children to anti-busing protests as a matter of necessity

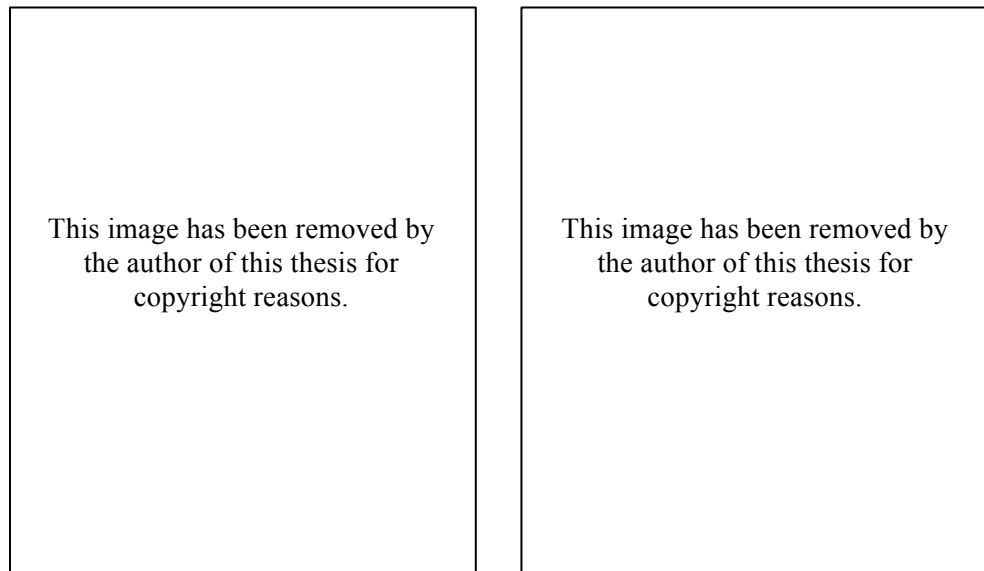


Figure 12: Children wear placards reading 'I Get Car Sick, I Want To Walk' and 'I'd Rather Hide Than Ride' at anti-busing rallies in Detroit.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Robert Selwa, 'Hundreds March Against Busing,' *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 12 June 1975, p. 1, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings 1975.

¹⁹¹ See undated photographs in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook; 'Marching for the Right to Walk,' *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 12 June 1975, p. 6A, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings 1975; Dennis Tanner, 'Anti-Busing Rallies Smaller Than Expected,' *Macomb Daily* (Detroit), 26 April 1976, p. 3A, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, January-May 1976.

¹⁹² Wrigley, p. 269.

¹⁹³ Left to right: images from 'Marching for the Right to Walk'; and Tanner, 'Anti-Busing Rallies Smaller Than Expected.'

But there was often an additional reason why children attended these events: they wanted to be there. Indeed, compared with the other movements in this study, children played a much larger and more autonomous role within the anti-busing struggle; they were not merely accessories in their mothers' maternalist politics. This was no doubt because many children in the movement were older (school age and above) and busing affected them more directly. Of course, not all children whose parents opposed busing were automatically against it themselves, and it is clear that the issue caused tension in more than one household. Joan Peters, a moderate who supported the implementation of busing in Boston, recalled: 'I talked to a lot of kids, when they weren't going to school, who would have loved to have gone. Who said themselves, "We wish our mothers and fathers would leave us alone. That we'd like to go and maybe work it out for ourselves."' According to Peters: 'It was the parents, their parents' fears and prejudices really more than the kids. 'Cause I think the kids left alone would have done fine.'¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, whether due to their parents' influence or their own volition, many young people did join the anti-busing struggle and they often conducted their own forms of protest. In Boston, anti-busing youngsters wrote letters to elected officials, staged independent marches, and initiated school boycotts and walkouts.¹⁹⁵ In January 1976, white high school students in Boston even staged an anti-busing play – a mock trial called 'Children vs. the Busing Game,' written by local lawyer Robert E. Dinsmore. With youngsters from all over the city taking part, and subpoenas sent to President Ford and Judge Garrity, the play was designed to give white students a chance to speak out about how 'forced busing' had affected them emotionally and physically.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, white youths engaged in countless skirmishes with blacks, in the classroom and the streets and, according to Wrigley, they were responsible for the majority of the violence that wracked the Boston anti-busing movement.¹⁹⁷ Notably, young people did not have the same level of independent involvement in Detroit's anti-busing campaign – perhaps because busing was not actually introduced there until five years after the initial court ruling and children were

¹⁹⁴ Joan Peters, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 236, undated, p. 27, in Lukas Papers, Box 12, Folder 5.

¹⁹⁵ See for instance Jerome Sullivan and George Croft, 'White Students Boycott of South Boston High Nearly 100 Percent Effective,' *Boston Evening Globe*, 5 November 1974, p. 9, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1; Jerome Sullivan and George Croft, 'More than 300 White Students Walk Out at S. Boston High,' *Boston Evening Globe*, 6 December 1974, p. 22, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1; '200 Whites Walk Out at Charlestown,' *Boston Evening Globe*, 14 October 1975, p. 7, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

¹⁹⁶ Ken O. Botwright, 'Boston School Busing Goes On Trial In Pupil's Play,' *Boston Evening Globe*, 21 January 1976, p. 8, in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

¹⁹⁷ Wrigley, p. 268. See for instance Richard J. Connolly, 'Hyde Park Clash Shatters Schools' Peace,' *Boston Globe*, 19 September 1974, pp. 1, 3, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1; Bob Sales, 'Whites Chase, Beat Black Man,' *Boston Globe*, 8 October 1974, pp. 1, 2, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

thus less immediately affected at first. However, once court-ordered desegregation commenced in January 1976, it was not uncommon for white students in Detroit to boycott classes, or fight with black students in schools.¹⁹⁸ Importantly, several scholars have argued that racial violence conducted by youths – usually dismissed by the authorities as the unruly, undisciplined acts of juvenile delinquents – should be recognised as closely linked to adult activities, and an integral part of movements for community defence.¹⁹⁹ And indeed, within the anti-busing struggle, juvenile violence was often implicitly sanctioned. In particular, anti-busing women frequently encouraged and supported their children’s protests – much like members of WSP and NWRO who served as ‘mothers of the movement’ to younger activists. When youths in Charlestown staged a lengthy sit-in at their local high school, Russell recalled that mothers ‘sent up all kinds of sandwiches.’²⁰⁰ Meanwhile, on 7 October 1974, as white students clashed with police in several Boston schools, some 300 parents, most of them women, staged an outdoor prayer meeting to show their support.²⁰¹

However, while most women welcomed their children’s involvement in the anti-busing crusade, it sometimes gave them cause for concern. This was particularly true in neighbourhoods such as South Boston and Charlestown, where white youths regularly brawled with black students and the police, leading many women to express apprehensions about their safety and the consequences of potentially criminal behaviour.²⁰² In an interview with Lukas, Russell criticised members of Charlestown’s Defense League for encouraging this violence, insisting: ‘I wouldn’t send a kid to do anything bad; I wouldn’t send a kid to break a window; I wouldn’t send a kid to set a fire; I wouldn’t do any of that stuff... I did not believe in the violence of the kids.’²⁰³ Some women also worried that keeping children out of school, even for short periods, would be detrimental to their education and encourage lawless behaviour. When

¹⁹⁸ See for instance ‘Busing Calm; 40.5% Absent,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 27 January 1976, pp. 1A, 6A, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Scrapbook, January-April 1976; Billy Bowles, ‘Fight Jolts Integrated School,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 12 February 1976, pp. 1A, 8A, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Scrapbook, January-April 1976; ‘Detroit’s Busing Is Working.’

¹⁹⁹ See Sugrue, pp. 254-255; Wrigley p. 268. Similarly, Karen Miller has argued that black students’ participation in school violence in 1940s Detroit, consistently dismissed as impulsive and irresponsible, in fact helped stimulate and foster a larger mobilisation for black equality. “‘We Cannot Wait for Understanding to Come to Us’: Community Activists Respond to Violence at Detroit’s Northwestern High School, 1940-1941,’ in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University, 2005), pp. 235-257 (p. 237).

²⁰⁰ Pat Russell, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 305, undated, p. 15, in Lukas Papers, Box 11, Folder 6.

²⁰¹ George Croft, ‘Crowd, Police Clash Near S. Boston School,’ *Boston Evening Globe*, 7 October 1974, pp. 1, 10, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

²⁰² Wrigley, pp. 268-269.

²⁰³ Russell, Tape 274, p. 29.

members of MAD discussed plans to participate in a ‘national boycott day’ in October 1975, it was stressed that: ‘children should remain at home and not wander around their schools!’²⁰⁴ These fears were no doubt heightened by widespread concerns about ‘youth’ in an era of urban crisis, campus radicalism, experimental counterculture, and changing sexual norms.²⁰⁵ Indeed, there was clearly a tension between anti-busers’ pledge to defend parental control and the increasing willingness of young people in the movement to defy authority.²⁰⁶

At the same time, anti-busing women frequently found that their own activism caused them to neglect their children – not to mention husbands, paid work, and domestic duties. Indeed, this often comes through in young people’s recollections of the period. Recalling the movement in Charlestown, McGoff’s oldest son Danny explained: ‘My mother was one of the strongholds of Powder Keg [ROAR’s Charlestown affiliate]... I know because there were a lot of evenings there was no supper. She was at meetings.’²⁰⁷ Prior to joining the anti-busing struggle, it had not been uncommon for white, working-class women in Boston and Detroit to combine looking after children with part-time employment. But they had generally viewed this as secondary to their domestic roles, and most women’s lives had centred on home and children.²⁰⁸ Thus, as Wrigley observed, many anti-busing women now faced an ‘ironic situation’ in which they were active on behalf of their children, but their political involvement took them away from the family.²⁰⁹

Like WSPers and welfare recipients, women in the anti-busing struggle employed a variety of solutions to overcome the practical difficulties and ideological tensions they experienced when combining political activism and motherhood. For example, activists established tutoring programmes and ‘alternative’ private schools to cope with the practical implications of extended school boycotts and ensure that children’s education was not adversely affected. In Boston, ROAR had organised alternative schools in most neighbourhoods by 1976, and three of these had even been certified by the School Committee.²¹⁰ In a further example of anti-busers drawing on the tactics of the civil rights movement, these were often modelled after ‘freedom schools’

²⁰⁴ MAD General Meeting Minutes, 2 October 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: MAD General Meetings Minutes, 1974-1977.

²⁰⁵ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 148.

²⁰⁶ For more on anti-busers and ‘authority,’ see Formisano, pp. 162-171.

²⁰⁷ Danny McGoff, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tapes 432-445-446, undated, in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

²⁰⁸ ‘Alice McGoff’s Recollection of Protest at City Hall’; Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 4.

²⁰⁹ Wrigley, p. 264.

²¹⁰ Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 5.

founded by black activists in the South – and, more immediately, on the freedom schools that welfare rights activist Gertrude Nickerson and others set up in Roxbury and the South End during the late 1960s.²¹¹ This was also a topic on which anti-busers around the country exchanged ideas. When a member of NEMA wrote to anti-busers in Boston in April 1975, she requested information on their experience of starting private schools in their homes, imploring: ‘Anything you can send us on how to begin these schools would be appreciated. It is a route that we may have to take in Detroit.’²¹²

In terms of the day-to-day strains of balancing activism with taking care of a family, anti-busing women also benefited from the fact that their husbands generally shared their opposition to busing and were supportive of their work in the movement. Indeed, many women spoke appreciatively of husbands taking on more of the household labour – cooking, cleaning and babysitting while they went to meetings.²¹³ Nevertheless, these domestic adjustments were clearly easier in some households than others, and they invariably chafed with longstanding gender assumptions in these white, working-class, ethnic communities. For example, Palladino admitted that her husband would have preferred that she stayed out of politics, ‘but did not object.’²¹⁴ Later, when she won a seat on the Boston School Committee, she listed her husband as among her biggest supporters, marvelling: ‘Babe even cooked dinner, if I didn’t get home in time. Imagine a Sicilian husband doing that? Cooking dinner is considered a wife’s job. And housework, forget it. But he did help.’²¹⁵

At the same time, anti-busing women relied upon maternal ideologies to justify time spent away from their families – insisting that their activism was an extension of their maternal role and ultimately in their children’s best interests. In a prime example of this, Sheehy told a reporter for Boston’s *The Real Paper* in 1976 that, before busing, most of the women in ROAR had had little interest in issues outside the home: ‘But when you’re a homemaker and your children are involved, then it is your job to do something about it. They didn’t want to leave the home. But they had to.’²¹⁶ Moreover, like members of WSP, anti-busing women were keen to stress that, in entering the public arena, they had not relinquished their domestic duties altogether. This was

²¹¹ Of course, as Formisano points out, these institutions also resembled the all-white academies that flourished throughout the South following the *Brown* decision. Formisano, p. 140.

²¹² Kloock, Letter to Laws.

²¹³ See for instance Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ pp. 5-6.

²¹⁴ Gary Griffith, ‘East Boston’s Curious Candidate: The Pixie that Roared,’ *The Real Paper* (Boston), 10 September 1977, p. 24, in Lukas Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

²¹⁵ Palladino, quoted in Laura White, ‘Pixie Joins School Committee,’ *Sunday Herald Advertiser* (Boston), 9 November 1975, p. 32, in Lukas Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

²¹⁶ Sheehy, quoted in Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 4.

apparent in November 1974, when Sheehy missed the grand opening of a new anti-busing information centre in West Roxbury, later explaining that she had decided to cook her family a beef roast and spend the day with them instead.²¹⁷ Furthermore, in a 1974 interview in Detroit's *Tattler* magazine, Roberts reassured readers that she considered her work with NEMA and the regional school board as 'less important than her home and family.' 'I made a pact with my husband when I got involved with the school board,' she explained, 'I promised I wouldn't let my responsibilities suffer because of that work – and I haven't. Sometimes I even end up doing the ironing at 3 a.m.'²¹⁸ Thus, women in the anti-busing movement emphasised their maternal dedication as enabling them to manage both domestic and political commitments.

Finally, it is important to note at this juncture that, as with welfare rights activists and members of WSP, there was a strategic element to anti-busing women's maternalist politics. Of course, when deploying maternal symbols and slogans, staging mothers' marches, and using street theatre tactics, most women were seeking to dramatise deeply held beliefs about mothers' rights and responsibilities. But it is clear that, for many anti-busing women, highlighting their status as mothers was also a tactical decision – designed to win public sympathy, deflect accusations of racism, and protect against reprisals. When MAD's executive board discussed plans for an upcoming march in October 1975, they explicitly noted, 'Our emphasis will be Motherhood,' suggesting that activists were aware of the political potential of this gendered identity.²¹⁹ Furthermore, anti-busing women often sought to leverage their gender roles when faced with a hostile response from police or other officials. When protesters confronted police during the first mothers' prayer march in Charlestown, Russell loudly instructed followers: 'We're going to walk through that [police] line with our arms by our sides... If they touch a woman, they won't be able to hold this town – and they know it.'²²⁰ Similarly, reflecting on this march, McGoff noted that she had felt safer confronting the police knowing: 'It would have looked very bad publicly beating up women and babies.'²²¹ And indeed, as we have seen, police in Boston did use a measure of restraint when dealing with mothers' marchers – fearful of the backlash in

²¹⁷ '3000 at Antibusing Rally Mark Center's Opening,' *Boston Globe*, 11 November 1974, p. 10, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

²¹⁸ Roberts, quoted in Lynn Dancey, 'One Concerned Parent Fears Equal Rights Law to Force Moms to Leave Child Raising to Gov't,' *Tattler* (Detroit), c. 1974, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1974.

²¹⁹ MAD Executive Board Meeting Minutes, 22 October 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder MAD Executive Board Minutes, 1973-1977.

²²⁰ Russell, quoted in O'Brian, 'Cops and the Crowds in Charlestown,' pp. 19, 40.

²²¹ Alice McGoff, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tapes 443-444, 447-448, p. 10, undated, in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

the media, as well as the reaction of men in the community. As one officer put it: ‘The whole world is watching us.’²²² In the end, however, there were limits to the strategic advantages that motherhood offered these white, working-class women, and activists in both cities struggled to secure widespread public support for their cause.

V

When Formisano concluded, in his study of Boston’s battle over busing, that ‘it was a war nobody won,’ he could also have been writing about Detroit.²²³ Indeed, in both cities, opponents did their utmost to ensure that busing programmes did not succeed, and organised resistance, coupled with white flight, meant that by the end of the decade schools were even more segregated than before.²²⁴ In Boston, the percentage of students in the public school system who were white fell dramatically from 60 percent in 1973 to 35 percent in 1980; and during the same period, Detroit’s school population went from 70 percent to more than 80 percent black.²²⁵ Furthermore, in neighbourhoods such as South Boston and Charlestown, anti-busing protests turned schools into veritable battlegrounds and disrupted education for a generation of students.²²⁶ More broadly, opposition to busing among white, northern ethnics played a decisive role in reshaping the national political landscape during the 1970s – contributing to the unravelling of the historic New Deal coalition and fuelling a rightward shift in U.S. politics.²²⁷ Nevertheless, in their fundamental goal of stopping court-ordered busing, activists must be seen to have failed. Even though an overwhelming majority of whites in both cities opposed busing, public support for the movement was limited outside anti-busers’ own communities.²²⁸ Moreover, despite receiving sympathy from numerous school and city

²²² Quoted in O’Brian, ‘Cops and the Crowds in Charlestown,’ p. 19.

²²³ Formisano, p. 203.

²²⁴ Formisano, p. 203.

²²⁵ Formisano, pp. 210-211; William Grant, ‘A Year of Busing in Detroit: Is It Working? What Next?’, *Detroit Free Press*, 23 January 1977, pp. 3A-4A, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1977; Jacoby, p. 293. However, as Theoharis has pointed out, white enrolment in Boston’s public schools was declining before busing began. Indeed, Theoharis has challenged the prevailing view that court-ordered school desegregation in Boston proved ill-conceived and ineffective, arguing that it temporarily alleviated some of the worst segregation in the city’s schools and was in fact a ‘tempered success.’ ‘“We Saved the City,”’ pp. 82-83.

²²⁶ See Formisano, Chapter 9.

²²⁷ See Formisano, Chapter 8 and pp. 235-236; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 89-94.

²²⁸ Wrigley, pp. 269, 271, 273. In Boston during the mid-1970s, 80 percent of white parents thought the court orders to be bad policy. A similar survey in Detroit found the figure to be 89 percent. See Formisano, p. 2; ‘Detroit Check Shows Most Dislike Busing,’ *Boston Evening Globe*, 2 May 1975, p. 7, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

officials, police officers, and politicians – many of whom rode the anti-busing tide into office – activists were unable to translate this into tangible political gains.²²⁹ In Boston, Garrity's decision withstood the manifold appeals mounted against it, and the school system remained under judicial control for over a decade.²³⁰ Similarly, after a long wait for its implementation, busing in Detroit remained in effect well into the 1980s.²³¹ Perhaps most importantly, the struggle against busing was thwarted by its association with violence and racism. But, for the white, working-class women who sustained the movement in Boston and Detroit, activism was also hindered by class stereotypes that rendered them outside the bounds of respectable motherhood, and competing interpretations of maternalism emanating from the campaign for desegregation.

As we have seen, despite professing to favour peaceful protest, it was not uncommon for anti-busing women to initiate violence or clash with police. Meanwhile, activists' claims that they were not racist were regularly undermined by the use of anti-black slogans at demonstrations and the racist comments of certain leaders, damaging the movement's image further. Indeed, at a time when tolerance for overt racism was declining, these racist displays undoubtedly limited the movement's success, making association with it increasingly damaging.²³² Unsurprisingly, Boston was the scene of some of the most notorious examples of racial violence by anti-busers. On 5 April 1976, for example, an anti-busing rally in City Hall Plaza culminated in white high school student Joseph Rakes being caught on camera attacking Ted Landsmark, a black lawyer who happened to be passing, with the staff of an American flag. While the resulting image earned photographer Stanley Forman a Pulitzer Prize, it also served to crystallise the anti-busing movement's reputation as not only racist, but 'un-American,' with many viewing the act as transgressing 'every principle most Americans held dear.'²³³ Notably, although assaults on blacks such as this were generally perpetrated by white youths, they tainted the movement as a whole, with anti-busing parents seen as condoning young people's actions. Following the Landsmark incident, an editorial in the *Boston Globe* denounced the attack as 'an act of unleashed racial hatred that has been nourished by a grievous failure of leadership in the home, in the schools, from community organizations and from public officials.'²³⁴ Moreover, events in Boston clearly

²²⁹ Formisano, pp. 227-228; Wrigley, pp. 275-279.

²³⁰ Formisano, p. 203.

²³¹ Grant, 'A Year of Busing in Detroit'; 'U.S. District Court Monitoring Commission Memorandum: Background Questions Re: "Channel 7 Special Report: Battle Over Bussing,"' 14 October 1980, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1973-1976, 1981.

²³² Wrigley, p. 273.

²³³ Masur, p. xi. Also see Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 85-87.

²³⁴ Masur, p. 141.

influenced responses to anti-busing campaigns elsewhere. Although explicit racism and violence were less common in Detroit, leaflets distributed in 1975 by the Committee Against Racism (CAR) accused MAD of fostering racist divisions and warned against allowing the city to become ‘another Boston.’²³⁵ Thus, highly publicised incidents of violence and bigotry fuelled the popular perception that anti-busing campaigns across the country were motivated by racial prejudice, and that what was framed as opposition to busing was in fact opposition to integration. Of course, African Americans had long been convinced of the centrality of racism to the movement. As early as 1972, NAACP activists had adopted the slogan ‘It’s Not the Distance, It’s the Niggers’ to characterise their opponents’ motives.²³⁶ And at a pro-busing rally in Boston in 1974, black activist Julian Bond coined the phrase: ‘It’s not the bus, it’s us.’²³⁷

However, while anti-busers became increasingly aware that their movement’s racist image damaged it, they tended to respond with a sense of grievance, and many blamed their failure to win public sympathy on a ‘liberal’ media conspiring against them.²³⁸ For women in the movement, who had worked hard to dramatise their plight as concerned mothers, this perceived media distortion was particularly infuriating. During a mothers’ march in September 1975, Russell grabbed a megaphone and yelled: ‘We want all the media to leave our town. We don’t want them and we don’t like them.’²³⁹ In Boston, anti-busers’ main grievances were that they were depicted unfavourably, while black assaults on whites were ignored and desegregation-related violence in schools was underplayed.²⁴⁰ These complaints sometimes seemed contradictory.²⁴¹ Covering the protests in Charlestown in September 1975, one journalist observed: ‘Half the people seemed to think the cameras made them look like animals; the other half were pissed because the reporters were saying that the opening of school had been pretty calm.’²⁴² Meanwhile, anti-busers in Detroit complained of both inaccurate reporting and insufficient coverage of their events.²⁴³ Importantly, activists in both cities often compared themselves to civil rights activists, who they believed had been portrayed

²³⁵ ‘CAR Says No! To MAD Racism’ leaflet, c. October 1975, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

²³⁶ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 79; Frank L. Stanley, ‘It is Not the Distance... It is the “Niggers,”’ *Chicago Daily Defender*, 10 June 1972, p. 16.

²³⁷ Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South,’” p. 142.

²³⁸ Wrigley, p. 273; Formisano, pp. 5, 157.

²³⁹ Russell, quoted in Formisano, p. 153.

²⁴⁰ Formisano, pp. 154-155; Wrigley, p. 273.

²⁴¹ Formisano, p. 153.

²⁴² Joe Klein, ‘The First Days of School in Boston: Prayers, Marches and Flying Rocks,’ *The Real Paper* (Boston), 23 October 1975, p. 36, in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 12.

²⁴³ See Carmen Roberts, in *Northeast Detroiter*, 19 June 1975; and Ronnie Kloock, ‘Coverage Praised,’ *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 26 June 1975, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings 1975.

sympathetically during the 1960s, and their frustration was intensified by what they saw as a double standard on the part of the media.²⁴⁴ As one Boston activist put it: ‘They were heroes and martyrs – we were racists.’²⁴⁵

Of course, as we have seen, the anti-busing movement’s racist image was largely of its own making. But, in some respects, activists’ sense of grievance was justified. For instance, historians of the movement in Boston have pointed out that, following an agreement reached in summer 1974, the city’s major news outlets did downplay violence in schools when busing began that fall, ‘justifying their actions by arguing that most of the city’s schools were desegregating relatively peacefully, and that the few trouble-spots should not dominate the news.’²⁴⁶ Moreover, Formisano has argued that popular perceptions of the anti-busing movement were profoundly shaped by the enduring myth, particularly comforting to middle-class liberals, that the lower classes of American society are primarily responsible for racism – a class-based stereotype that was only reinforced by the media’s focus on the ‘brutish public manners’ of white, working-class ethnics.²⁴⁷ Few scholars, however, have examined how gender combined with class to further stigmatise anti-busing women. Indeed, as with welfare rights activists, there was a stark contrast between the way the mainstream press characterised working-class women in the anti-busing movement – usually as ‘angry,’ ‘tough-talking,’ and sometimes ‘foul-mouthed,’ mothers and housewives – and their portrayal of the middle-class women of WSP (particularly during the movement’s early days) as ‘respectable ladies.’²⁴⁸ Describing Palladino during her School Committee re-election campaign, a journalist for the *Boston Globe* also noted this class discrepancy, observing:

If Elvira Palladino were Another Mother For Peace; if the issue were Vietnam instead of busing; if she lived in Newton instead of the tunnel, Pixie Palladino would be considered an object lesson for those outsiders trying to change the system. People would be throwing roses at her and having teas on behalf of her candidacy and eating quiche and politely applauding.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Formisano, pp. 4-5, 151-152.

²⁴⁵ James Kelly, quoted in Formisano, p. 151.

²⁴⁶ Formisano, pp. 155-156. Also see Wrigley, p. 272.

²⁴⁷ As Formisano points out, the ‘urban redneck myth’ fails to recognise subtler, more institutional forms of racism perpetrated by middle- and upper-class whites. See Formisano, pp. 233-234.

²⁴⁸ See for instance Karagianis, ‘Two New Faces Upcoming on Boston School Committee.’

²⁴⁹ Mike Barnicle, ‘Pixie Palladino Shows How to Succeed Without Even Liking Politics,’ *Boston Globe*, undated (c. 1977), in Lukas Papers, Box 7, Folder 12. Another Mother for Peace (AMP) was an anti-war group founded in 1967, which drew upon similar maternal rhetoric to WSP. However, in contrast to WSP, AMP tended to shy away from direct action tactics; instead, focusing on selling peace cards bearing the slogan ‘War Is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things.’

Interestingly, Nickerson has argued that ‘gender ideology on the right [has] long been reinforcing displays of folksiness and antielitist tough talk as appropriate female political behaviour,’ and this might explain why anti-busing women received more support within their own communities and got more favourable coverage from neighbourhood-based newspapers.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, within society at large, these women’s reputation as crude and aggressive clearly violated norms of femininity, and hindered their attempts to claim the moral authority of motherhood. As feminist scholar Kathryn Abrams has observed, while images of angry and outspoken mothers tend to be highly effective at capturing media attention, they often evoke shock and discomfort – not least because their ‘bluntness and vehemence are striking in their discord with traditional conceptions of maternal virtue.’²⁵¹ Evidently, some women in the movement also recognised the way that class and gender stereotypes limited their ability to win public sympathy. In Boston, a Dorchester woman accused the media of maligning anti-busers, complaining: ‘whenever they showed a person at the meetings, it was never, say, a person such as myself or somebody like me; it was always the woman with the curlers in her hair, the gum-chewing, wise-cracking one who was not afraid to use vulgar words.’²⁵² Meanwhile, a supporter of the movement in Boston pointed to double standards in the way male and female anti-busing were portrayed; describing Palladino’s reputation as ‘a garbage mouth,’ she argued: ‘There’s a reverse sexist attitude there... Kerrigan [a male leader] can use the same language, but when a woman uses it, it just shocks people. When Kerrigan uses it, it’s like he’s a tough guy. When she uses it, it’s an unh-unh.’²⁵³

Furthermore, anti-busing women’s maternalist politics were undermined by the fact that campaigners for desegregation also attempted to speak as mothers, and regularly challenged the movement’s claims to be defending children. In recent years, a number of scholars have criticised popular accounts of desegregation in the urban North for focusing primarily on white resistance, while ignoring grassroots black activism, and portraying African Americans simply as recipients of the court’s largesse or victims of white racism.²⁵⁴ In contrast, they have sought to document the protracted struggle that blacks across the country waged for educational equity and desegregation,

²⁵⁰ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 173; Wrigley, p. 276.

²⁵¹ Kathryn Abrams, ‘Women and Antiwar Protest: Rearticulating Gender and Citizenship,’ *Boston University Law Review*, 87, no. 4 (2007), 849-882 (p. 869).

²⁵² Quoted in Wrigley, p. 272.

²⁵³ Quoted in Griffith, ‘East Boston’s Curious Candidate,’ p. 22.

²⁵⁴ See Theoharis, “‘We Saved the City,’” pp. 63-64; Miller, pp. 236-237. Works these scholars singled out for criticism included Formisano and Sugrue, respectively.

beginning long before the 1954 *Brown* decision, and continuing into the 1970s and beyond. Significantly, as several recent studies have shown, this movement was often spearheaded by black women, many of whom based their activism on their status as mothers.²⁵⁵ In Boston, for example, a group of black parents and community activists, led largely by women, had been struggling to address racial inequality in the city's public schools since the early 1950s – holding boycotts and sit-ins, founding independent black schools, and ultimately, through the NAACP, suing the School Committee in federal court.²⁵⁶ Following Garity's 1974 decision, black women activists continued to organise to assist the implementation of busing and, while white resistance received most of the media attention, pro-desegregation meetings, rallies and marches consistently drew large numbers.²⁵⁷ Describing activists' motivations in 1965, movement leader Ruth Batson declared: 'We intend to fight with every means at our disposal to ensure the future of our children.'²⁵⁸ Similarly, speaking in 1975, Elma Lewis, the founding director of an alternative school for black children in Roxbury, emphasised the lengths activists were willing to go to for the sake of their children, explaining: 'Busing, for us, is only a means to get a good education... We'd take buses, boats, helicopters or any other vehicle to get quality education.'²⁵⁹ As Theoharis has argued, these women's public claim to act *as black mothers* 'was, in itself, an act of resistance because it stood as visible and direct opposition to prevalent ideologies of black community disrepair and declining values.'²⁶⁰ At the same time, it also helped to undermine anti-busing women's claim to speak for all mothers, effectively turning the battle over busing into a contest between competing interpretations of maternalism. Moreover, as well as using maternal ideologies to call for educational equity, black activists in Boston and Detroit frequently contested the anti-busing movement's professed concern for children – along with many white supporters of busing and

²⁵⁵ On black women's activism as mothers in Boston's desegregation struggle, see Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid." Although she does not look specifically at school desegregation, for a discussion of how black women activists in Detroit employed their status as mothers to oppose various forms of inequality during the 1940s and 1950s, see Megan Taylor Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans": African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). For black women's participation in school desegregation struggles elsewhere in the North, see Adina Back, 'Exposing the "Whole Segregation Myth": The Harlem Nine and New York City's School Desegregation Battles,' in *Freedom North: Black Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp. 65-91.

²⁵⁶ Theoharis, "I'd Rather Go to School in the South," p. 128; Theoharis, "We Saved the City," p. 64.

²⁵⁷ Theoharis, "We Saved the City," pp. 64, 81.

²⁵⁸ Ruth Batson, quoted in Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," p. 20.

²⁵⁹ Elma Lewis, quoted in Frank Thompson and Alan Eisner, '2 Busing Issue Opponents Agree on Educational Goals,' *Boston Herald Traveler*, 11 August 1975, p. 26, in Lukas Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.

²⁶⁰ Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," pp. 19-20.

moderates who disagreed with the court order but supported its peaceful implementation.

First, it was common for pro-desegregation activists and moderates to accuse anti-busers of exploiting their own children for political purposes, or putting them at risk through confrontational protests. Exemplifying this position, a Charlestown moderate said she never became involved in the anti-busing campaign because ‘we do not use children as weapons.’²⁶¹ Indeed, many of their neighbours questioned anti-busers’ concern for children in the community. In September 1975, when fellow Charlestown resident Ann Anderson wrote to a local paper to complain about noisy anti-busing motorcades touring the area at night, she asked: ‘How can you say you are concerned with children when you frighten them out of sound sleeps at 10:30 at night?’ Anderson pointed out the irony of anti-busers saying they feared sending their children to unsafe neighbourhoods, declaring: ‘Today and tonight there was more to frighten my children right here in Charlestown than in any other section of the city. It’s Charlestown’s children that you are trying to defend. Please don’t destroy them in the process.’²⁶² Some moderates also suggested that anti-busing parents set a bad example for their children by encouraging them to boycott schools. As Peters explained: ‘I think that when they make a law, you have to obey it... whether you like it or not, there’s a lot of them we don’t like... by disobeying the law, you’re showing your children that they can disobey it.’²⁶³ Meanwhile, pro-desegregation activists in Detroit accused MAD of encouraging people to harass neighbours who sent their children to school, and argued that children in the community needed protecting.²⁶⁴

More importantly, opponents regularly sought to highlight anti-busers’ lack of concern for African American children. Indeed, whether or not they accepted that anti-busers were motivated by concern for their own children, pro-desegregation activists tended to have little doubt about the movement’s disregard for black children’s education or safety. They observed, for example, that despite claiming to support ‘quality education’ for all children, organisations such as ROAR never discussed how to improve the city’s majority black schools.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, many pro-busers pointed to

²⁶¹ Virginia Winters, Transcript of Interview with J. Anthony Lukas, Tape 481-2, undated, p. 1, in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

²⁶² Ann Anderson, ‘Please Save Our Children,’ *Charlestown Patriot* (Boston), 8 September 1975, in Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

²⁶³ Peters, Tape 236, p. 27.

²⁶⁴ ‘Mass Meeting for Peaceful Integration: Protect Our Children,’ *Detroit News*, undated (c. January 1976), in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, January-May 1976.

²⁶⁵ The Weather Underground Organization, ‘The Battle of Boston: An Investigation of ROAR,’ p. 11, in CECR Records, Box 7, Folder 12.

violence against black school children, asserting that the issue was not busing but racism. As Elma Lewis put it: ‘If people are against busing, why don’t they beat up the buses and not the children.’²⁶⁶ In Detroit, a pro-busing group called Women Against Racism (WAR) frequently accused MAD of encouraging the harassment of black students at newly integrated schools in northeast Detroit. Identifying themselves as ‘an integrated group of women and mothers,’ WAR staged numerous counter-demonstrations against MAD and organised community support ‘to protect our children from abuse and attack.’²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, in Boston, a March Against Racism on 30 November 1974 was illustrative of both desegregation activists’ attempts to speak as mothers, and their efforts to challenge the maternalism of the anti-busing movement. With nearly 5,000 people taking part, most of them white, the event represented the largest pro-desegregation rally in the city to date. But the march was also significant because it was led by Coretta Scott King – a prominent advocate of ‘mother power’ and a figure who bridged the first two movements in this study with her support for peace and racial and economic justice. Addressing the predominantly white crowd, King was flanked by three of her four children and, as with her anti-war and welfare rights activism, she sought to foreground her maternal identity during this pro-busing rally.²⁶⁸ However, while her involvement with WSP and NWRO often revealed the potential of motherhood to traverse race and class boundaries, her activism here more clearly demonstrated the contested nature of maternalism. In a speech that was frequently interrupted by loud applause, King challenged anti-busers’ claim to be defending children, instead accusing them of ‘attacks on school children and integration.’ She declared: ‘Can anyone believe that people using or condoning violence as well as vulgar racial epithets are making a democratic protest against busing? No. They are making an undemocratic assault on equality.’²⁶⁹ As if in response, many in the crowd waved placards and banners that read: ‘Stop Racist Attacks on Black School Children!’²⁷⁰

Thus, the success of the anti-busing struggle was not only limited by its association with violence and racism, it was also undermined by gender and class biases that rendered white, working-class women outside the bounds of respectable

²⁶⁶ Lewis, quoted in Thompson and Eisner, ‘2 Busing Issue Opponents Agree on Educational Goals,’ p. 26.

²⁶⁷ Women Against Racism, ‘No More Violence – DEFEND BUSING!’ leaflet, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Pro-Busing Material, c. 1975-1976.

²⁶⁸ Arthur Jones, ‘Mrs. King Leads 5000 in Support of Integration,’ *Boston Sunday Globe*, 1 December 1974, p. 8, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 1.

²⁶⁹ Coretta Scott King, quoted in ‘Mrs. King Defends Boston Busing,’ *New York Times*, 1 December 1974, p. 60.

²⁷⁰ Jones, ‘Mrs. King Leads 5000 in Support of Integration,’ p. 8

motherhood. Furthermore, the movement was hindered by the fact that women's attempts to assume the mantle of motherhood did not go uncontested, with advocates of desegregation also claiming a public position as mothers, and explicitly challenging anti-busers' concern for children. In addition, the parochial nature of the campaign meant that, by the mid-1970s, anti-busing organisations in Boston and Detroit were plagued with factional infighting.²⁷¹ Accusing the Boston School Committee of doing everything in its power to obstruct the implementation of desegregation, Garrity placed the entire school system into court-appointed receivership in December 1975 and, as it became clear that busing was not going to go away, protests in both cities began to wane over the coming years.²⁷² Nevertheless, despite failing to achieve its ultimate goal, the movement had a profound impact on the lives of its participants. Indeed, many of the women who cut their political teeth in the anti-busing struggle quickly expanded their focus beyond busing, and they continued to be active long after the desegregation crisis subsided. However, in striking contrast to WSPers and welfare rights activists, anti-busing women rarely developed a feminist consciousness as a result of their activism. Although activists frequently appropriated tactics from the women's liberation movement, they channelled their energies into a growing range of anti-feminist issues and projects, ultimately fuelling America's 'right turn.'

VI

In her 2004 article on the evolving historiography on conservative women, Kim E. Nielsen observed that women on the right are often mistakenly labelled as feminists due to their very public, articulate activism; and she reminded us that: 'Empowered women do not necessarily feminists make.'²⁷³ Meanwhile, writing in 2012, Nickerson also pointed to the historiographic problems caused by taking feminism to be 'the main, if not only, female intellectual tradition driving the progressive trajectory of U.S. women's history,' or the 'central logic for determining the value of female political identity.'²⁷⁴ Similarly, this study of women's anti-busing activism in Boston and Detroit during the 1970s challenges popular assumptions that frame American women's history, and particularly the history of second-wave feminism. As it stands, the

²⁷¹ Wrigley, pp. 279-280; Nutter, p. 70.

²⁷² William F. Doherty and Alan Sheehan, 'Court Takes Over South Boston High,' *Boston Globe*, 10 December 1975, pp. 1, 3, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2; Theoharis, "'We Saved the City,'" p. 82.

²⁷³ Nielsen, p. 169.

²⁷⁴ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 169.

campaign against busing – waged predominantly by white, working-class women – is rarely considered within scholarship on the women’s liberation movement, except as part of a growing backlash against the social and cultural changes wrought by 1960s protests. However, while they were certainly hostile to those they viewed as suburban ‘women’s libbers,’ many anti-busing women found that maternalist politics led them to develop a lasting commitment to political change and to empowering conservative women like themselves. Moreover, as with WSPers and welfare rights activists, anti-busing women constructed their own vision of female advancement based on their daily experiences, and tied to their identities as mothers. Thus, examining the struggle against busing expands our understanding of women’s political activism in important ways – illustrating how anti-busing women during the 1970s developed a political ideology that embraced rather than critiqued gender hierarchies, while simultaneously encompassing aspects of second-wave feminism and advocating a prominent role for women within the conservative movement.

First, it is important to note that anti-busing women’s rejection of feminism was never total or universal. In Boston, the best indication of this was the fact that the movement’s ‘Mother Superior,’ Louise Day Hicks, was a member of NOW, and had supported the passage of the ERA during her one term in Congress (1971-73).²⁷⁵ Writing in *Ms.* magazine in June 1976, Ellen Goodman observed that, while Hicks was most commonly viewed as either a ‘representative of the “little people”’ or ‘a racist, pure [and] simple,’ she was also ‘a woman who has broken out of the woman’s place in her tight ethnic community and has taken a lead on women’s rights issues.’²⁷⁶ Yet, Goodman seemed reluctant to label Hicks a ‘feminist,’ questioning whether it was possible to ‘be a racist and a feminist at the same time.’²⁷⁷ In the end, she characterised the anti-busing leader as ‘a self-interested woman’s rightist, a woman in the world who’s experienced discrimination and believes in all “fairness” that women should get equal rights, but would be puzzled by issues such as sexuality.’²⁷⁸ Interestingly, Goodman’s description of Hicks is consistent with the worldview of those that sociologist Rebecca Klatch identified as ‘laissez-faire conservative women.’ Distinguishing them from ‘social conservatives’ within the New Right, Klatch argued that laissez-faire women were primarily concerned with economic and political freedom, and often deplored gender discrimination as contrary to their ethos of

²⁷⁵ Formisano, p. 2; Goodman, ‘Louise Day Hicks,’ p. 103; Nutter, p. 67.

²⁷⁶ Goodman, ‘Louise Day Hicks,’ p. 99.

²⁷⁷ Notably, Goodman also recognised ‘the virulence of class prejudice among those who caricature [Hicks] as racist.’ Goodman, ‘Louise Day Hicks,’ pp. 99, 103.

²⁷⁸ Goodman, ‘Louise Day Hicks,’ p. 103.

individualism and free will. However, according to Klatch, laissez-faire women rarely identified as feminists, believing individualistic solutions, rather than collective actions, to be the best method of fighting inequality.²⁷⁹ Other women in the anti-busing struggle also appear to have recognised gender discrimination and supported certain ‘women’s issues.’ Published in September 1975, an article in *The Real Paper* branded Palladino the ‘Gloria Steinem’ of East Boston because she was ‘the first woman to rise as a political leader in the insular and male-dominated Italo-American neighborhood.’ The author noted that, although she was brought up Catholic, ‘Pixie is critical of the Church and does not oppose birth control or abortion.’²⁸⁰ Meanwhile, describing a power struggle between herself and a male anti-busing leader in Charlestown, Russell told Lukas that he ‘always resented like most men do, taking orders from a woman. Let’s face it, most men do resent it.’²⁸¹ Nevertheless, it is clear that the majority of women in the anti-busing struggle better fit Klatch’s description of the ‘social conservative women’ of the New Right, who saw gender roles as ordained by God and essential to the maintenance of a healthy society – and who viewed feminism as a threat to church and family.²⁸²

Indeed, most anti-busing women were either ambivalent or hostile to the women’s liberation movement, and this opposition only grew as the anti-busing campaign expanded its focus and increasingly aligned itself with the New Right. In Detroit, NEMA concerned itself with issues other than busing from the start, and many members were also involved in the anti-feminist organisation Happiness Of Womanhood, Inc. (HOW), which launched a campaign in 1973 to repeal the state’s ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). By summer 1973, the ERA had been ratified by thirty states, including Michigan and Massachusetts, and many middle-class, white feminists continued to view it as essential for achieving equal rights and economic justice. However, the ERA was also galvanising an unanticipated yet powerful backlash led by conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly.²⁸³ Schlafly, who founded STOP ERA in October 1972, argued that the proposed amendment would give women no rights they did not already have, but would make them subject to the draft, prohibit separate restroom facilities, and eliminate a wife’s right to stay home and be financially supported by her husband – essentially taking away ‘the right to be a

²⁷⁹ Rebecca Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict Among Women of the New Right,’ *Signs*, 13, no. 4 (1988), 671-694 (pp. 674-676, 680-681). Also see Klatch, *Women of the New Right*.

²⁸⁰ Griffith, ‘East Boston’s Curious Candidate,’ p. 22.

²⁸¹ Russell, Tape 274, p. 19.

²⁸² Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict,’ pp. 675-677, 681-682.

²⁸³ Lassiter, ‘Inventing Family Values,’ p. 22.

woman.²⁸⁴ As they campaigned against the ERA, the women of NEMA echoed many of these arguments.²⁸⁵ Ahead of a public meeting in June 1973, Wohlfield warned that, if the ERA passed, ‘women will gain nothing and lose much’; and at the hearing itself, another opponent of the ERA said she resented ‘Women’s Lib’ for its ‘claim to speak for all women.’²⁸⁶ In a 1974 interview, Roberts argued: ‘I think the majority of women in the United States feel like Happiness of womanhood does. Not like your libbers do. Because the majority of women are home.’²⁸⁷

Similarly, the working-class women of ROAR regularly clashed with women’s liberation groups in Boston, accusing feminists of not representing them. The most notorious clash took place on Saturday 11 January 1975, when around 150 ROAR women wearing ‘Stop Forced Busing’ buttons and brandishing small American flags interrupted a meeting of the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women in Boston’s City Hall. When asked why they had come, the demonstrators angrily replied, because ‘we’re women too.’ Amid the noisy confrontation that ensued ‘between the mothers from South Boston, Charlestown, and Hyde Park and the generally affluent and suburban women who sit on the commission,’ Palladino at one point stood up and attempted to read a prepared statement that demanded:

Why don’t you represent us? We are poor people locked in an economically miserable situation. All we want is to be mothers to the children God gave us. We are not opposed to anyone’s skin. We are opposed to the forced busing of our children to schools other than in our neighborhood. You are supposed to defend women’s rights. Why don’t you defend ours?²⁸⁸

When Commission Chair Ann Blackman told the anti-busing women: ‘Please, you’re our guests and you’re disrupting this meeting,’ the East Boston leader shot back: ‘No, you’re our guests. This City Hall belongs to us and we are here because we want freedom for our children.’²⁸⁹ Later that spring, the hostility between anti-busing women and the women’s liberation movement in Boston was again in evidence when about fifty members of ROAR disrupted a state ERA rally, carrying signs opposing both

²⁸⁴ Phyllis Schlafly, ‘The Right To Be A Woman,’ *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, November 1972, in Hall-Hoag Collection, Box 45-1, Folder HH557; Spruill, ‘Gender and America’s Turn Right,’ p. 78.

²⁸⁵ See ‘Mothers Alert Fights Rights Amendment,’ *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 13 June 1973; Peggy Evans, ‘Women Seek Repeal of Equal Rights Amendment,’ *Community News* (East Side Detroit), 20 June 1973, in Wohlfield Papers, Oversized Scrapbook.

²⁸⁶ Shirley Wohlfield, quoted in ‘Mothers Alert Fights Rights Amendment’; Shirley Gilmore, quoted in Evans, ‘Women Seek Repeal of Equal Rights Amendment.’

²⁸⁷ Askins, ‘Diary of a Glad Housewife,’ p. 1C.

²⁸⁸ Maria Karagianis, ‘Women Protest Busing, Gov. Dukakis Stays Away,’ *Boston Sunday Globe*, 12 January 1975, pp. 1, 8, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2. Palladino, quoted in Lukas, *Common Ground*, p. 270.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Karagianis, ‘Women Protest Busing,’ p. 8.

busing and the ERA, and loudly chanting ‘Stop ERA.’ The demonstrators, who shouted down anyone attempting to speak, said they had come because anti-busing women had not been given a forum to express their views, and they accused the rally’s sponsors of failing to recognise that busing was a ‘women’s issue.’²⁹⁰ However, it is worth noting that both these protests were led by Palladino, with fellow ROAR leaders Hicks, Sheehy and Graul ‘conspicuously absent’ – providing a further indication that anti-busing women held differing views on women’s rights.²⁹¹ In addition to these public displays of opposition, anti-busing publications in Detroit and Boston regularly printed articles railing against the ERA, abortion, sex education in schools, and a host of other issues spearheaded by ‘women libbers.’²⁹²

As these, often bitter, altercations indicate, there was clearly a class dimension to anti-busing women’s opposition to feminism. Particularly in Boston, anti-busing women tended to view the feminist movement as dominated by ‘college girls and chichi women from the suburbs’; and many were incensed by what they saw as yet another example of unrepresentative elites looking down on them and threatening their way of life.²⁹³ As one moderate anti-buser from Charlestown explained, ROAR’s disruption of feminist events in the city was ‘in part based on anti-suburban feelings... ROAR feels these people are their natural enemies.’²⁹⁴ Furthermore, many anti-busers were angered by the perceived hypocrisy of middle-class feminists. An interesting example of this was an article by Sheehy, which compared the Supreme Court’s 1980 decision to uphold the Hyde Amendment – protecting a woman’s right to abortion, while limiting public funds for it – with court-ordered busing in Boston, which she argued limited a parent’s right to choose their child’s school to those who could afford it. Criticising feminists who decried the class discrimination in the abortion decision, but ‘defended busing for the poor,’ Sheehy said she was puzzled by ‘a lack of logic, inconsistency of argument, and an intellectual dishonesty which is pervasive in our society today.’²⁹⁵ Even in Detroit, where anti-busers were generally better off and class resentment was

²⁹⁰ Jean Dietz and Robert Anglin, ‘Equal Rights Rally Disrupted By Busing Foes,’ *Boston Globe*, 10 April 1975, pp. 1, 13, in *Boston Busing*, Reel 2.

²⁹¹ Goodman, ‘Louise Day Hicks,’ p. 103.

²⁹² See for instance ‘What’s Happening to Your Schools, Textbooks, Money??’, *Mothers Alert Detroit Bulletin*, December 1976, pp. 1-4; ‘Legislative Notes: ERA,’ *Mothers Alert Detroit Bulletin*, March 1977, p. 4, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, MAD Newsletters, 1976-1977; Freda Getherall, ‘ERA – A Bad Law,’ *Boston News Digest*, April 1976, p. 19; ‘On Abortion,’ *Boston News Digest*, August 1976, p. 12; ‘Women Libbers Up In Arms Again,’ *Boston News Digest*, January 1977, p. 2, in Hall-Hoag Collection, Box 46-7, Folder HH3763.

²⁹³ Lukas, *Common Ground*, p. 271; Formisano, p. 147.

²⁹⁴ Gloria Conway, Interview with Eliot Stanley and Paul Alexander, 18 April and 30 May 1975, p. 2, Lukas Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

²⁹⁵ Virginia M. Sheehy, ‘A Conflict of Rights on Abortion and Busing’ clipping, publication unknown, undated, in Lukas Papers, Box 4, Folder 7.

less pronounced, activists nevertheless viewed the feminist movement through a populist lens – frequently criticising the ERA as utopian social engineering by a government bent on undermining the rights of ‘ordinary’ mothers.²⁹⁶ Thus, much like welfare rights activists had done, women in the anti-busing struggle accused middle-class feminists of elitism and of ignoring the concerns of poor women. Moreover, like welfare recipients, anti-busing women constructed their own political ideologies, based on their daily lives and unique social location; their ‘pro-family’ agenda was not simply a reaction to the burgeoning women’s liberation movement.²⁹⁷

In particular, anti-busing women’s support for traditional gender roles was rooted in their religious and deeply maternalistic worldview. Indeed, influenced by the teachings of the Catholic Church, many of these women saw separate gender roles as ordained by God and key to the survival of the family, which in turn was essential for the maintenance of a moral and ordered society.²⁹⁸ ‘Women belong in the home,’ Roberts told the *Detroit News* in 1974, contending: ‘Let’s preserve femininity, let’s accentuate the differences between the sexes rather than trying to blend them... American society as far as I’m concerned revolves around the family unit.’²⁹⁹ At the same time, anti-busing women’s daily experiences as working-class mothers, whose lives tended to centre on their homes and children, often led them to place a great deal of importance on motherhood. Furthermore, lived experiences were reinforced by Catholic doctrines about self-sacrifice, and many women believed that: ‘Personal fulfillment comes through sacrifice to one’s children, in the traditional way of thinking, not through trying to please oneself.’³⁰⁰ As Roberts explained: ‘I feel that if I can bring my children up to be citizens that contribute to this society, I’ll have accomplished something.’³⁰¹ Consequently, many anti-busing women saw feminism, with its challenge to gender hierarchies, as threatening their traditional values almost as much as busing; and they were particularly riled by the perceived denigration of their status as mothers. ‘I’m a wife and a mother,’ Palladino told the *Boston Herald* in 1976. ‘I worked hard for my title as a homemaker. I’ve been at it for 20 years. I don’t want to be a

²⁹⁶ See Askins, ‘Diary of a Glad Housewife,’ p. 1C.

²⁹⁷ In a similar vein, Nickerson has criticised scholars of the anti-feminist ‘backlash’ for always taking the feminist movement as their starting point, and ignoring ‘other ideological currents that contributed to the powerful political momentum behind the social and cultural agenda of the new right, including housewife populism.’ As she pointed out, like the feminists they attacked, conservative women during the 1970s built upon traditions started by their political foremothers – who included the Cold Warriors in Nickerson’s study. *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 172.

²⁹⁸ Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict,’ p. 677.

²⁹⁹ Roberts, quoted in Askins, ‘Diary of a Glad Housewife,’ p. 1C.

³⁰⁰ Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 6.

³⁰¹ Roberts, quoted in Askins, ‘Diary of a Glad Housewife,’ p. 1C.

nonentity.³⁰² Similarly, Roberts accused ‘women’s libbers’ of trying ‘to make “mom” and “apple pie” sound like dirty words,’ and she argued that it was ‘wrong for people who have devoted their lives to raising children and preparing meals to be classified as unworthy or obsolete.’³⁰³ However, as Klatch has observed, women’s fears about their status as housewives and mothers also revealed an underlying distrust of men. This was particularly evident in the frequent assertion that the ERA threatened the economic position of homemakers by eliminating their right to be financially supported by their husband.³⁰⁴ As Russell explained it: ‘I feel like I’m inferior to the man. He still gives me his week’s pay, doesn’t he? Look at ERA. He’s liable to say, “Make your own dough.”’³⁰⁵ Interestingly, there are more striking parallels with the welfare rights movement here, as opponents of the ERA essentially echoed welfare recipients’ assessment of women’s economic insecurity, as well as their assertion that domestic labour was valuable work.³⁰⁶ Warning that the ERA would mean housewives would no longer be entitled to their husband’s social security, McGoff declared: ‘This woman’s spent her whole life taking care of that man. That’s the same as a job. She should be entitled to that man’s social security.’³⁰⁷ Yet, while these common concerns suggest that welfare rights and anti-busing activists were not as diametrically opposed as often assumed, the two groups proposed very different solutions to women’s economic vulnerability. Whereas welfare recipients demanded a guaranteed income to ensure their economic independence from men, anti-busing women sought to shore up traditional roles and responsibilities within the family.³⁰⁸

Because conservative women often valorised women’s traditional roles in the home, yet worked extensively in the public arena as political activists, it has been common for scholars to portray them as illogical, irrational, or victims of ‘false consciousness,’ and to revel in pointing out ‘the paradox of right-wing women’s activism.’ However, more recent scholarship has highlighted the limited utility of such approaches.³⁰⁹ As Nickerson put it: ‘It is far less useful for our understanding of conservatism to evaluate the true or false combination of political, social, and economic forces shaping the consciousness of its adherents than examining how those subjects

³⁰² Palladino, quoted in Eleanor Roberts, ‘Pixie Palladino Takes Aim,’ *Boston Herald Traveler*, 22 February 1976, p. A1, in Lukas Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

³⁰³ Roberts, quoted in Dancey, ‘One Concerned Parent Fears Equal Rights Law.’

³⁰⁴ Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict,’ pp. 684-685.

³⁰⁵ ‘Pat Russell’s Recollection of Women’s Rally at City Hall,’ in Lukas Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

³⁰⁶ Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict,’ p. 685.

³⁰⁷ ‘Alice McGoff’s Recollection of Protest at City Hall.’

³⁰⁸ Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict,’ p. 685.

³⁰⁹ See Nielsen, p. 169; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. 169-170; Klatch, *Women of the New Right*, pp. 10, 12; Klatch, ‘Coalition and Conflict,’ pp. 687-691; McGirr, pp. 6-7.

came to see the world as they actually saw it.³¹⁰ In particular, Nickerson argued, it is vital to explore how conservative women managed to resolve ideological ambiguities and contradictions, and deploy this dissonance to their advantage, in much the same way that skilful political actors throughout American history achieved their goals.³¹¹ As we have seen, for women in the anti-busing struggle, ideologies of motherhood were key to reconciling these tensions. Women were able to publically campaign against busing because they defined activism as an extension of their maternal role. Thus, when anti-busing women joined the fight to defeat the ERA and preserve a woman's traditional role within the home, they continued to conceptualise political activism within the bounds of domestic ideologies. This is perhaps best encapsulated in a 1972 statement by HOW's national president Jacquie Davison, reprinted in leaflets distributed by the Detroit branch, which declared: 'A true woman is serene until her den is threatened, then she rises like a lioness to defend it. My den is threatened. So is yours.'³¹²

Nevertheless, it would be overly simplistic to view the relationship between the anti-busing and feminist movements purely in terms of conflict, and despite drawing strength from their opposition to feminism, anti-busing women were very much beneficiaries of the women's liberation movement. Indeed, by confronting gender discrimination in U.S. society, the feminist movement created opportunities for all women in previously male-dominated arenas such as education and politics, and anti-busing women undoubtedly benefitted from these changes.³¹³ Furthermore, feminist activism during the 1960s and 1970s helped erode traditional norms against female protest, and even as they attacked 'women's libbers' and their goals, anti-busing women appropriated important tactics from their adversaries.³¹⁴ Not only did they employ confrontational tactics popularised by feminists and others on the left, anti-busing women also co-opted the language of the women's liberation movement, as illustrated by the frequent insistence of ROAR women that busing was a 'women's issue.'³¹⁵ Moreover, by organising to defend their families, communities and traditional values, women in the anti-busing struggle clearly accepted the notion that the 'personal was political' – the ideological hallmark of second-wave feminism.

³¹⁰ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 170.

³¹¹ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. xxiv, 171.

³¹² Happiness of Womanhood, Inc., Detroit, Michigan, 'Stop E.R.A.' leaflet, undated, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: Other Organizational Activities, HOW, 1973-1983.

³¹³ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. 167-168, 174; Formisano, pp. 147-148.

³¹⁴ Marshall, pp. 157-158, 173.

³¹⁵ Nutter, pp. 54, 66, 70-71; Dietz and Anglin, 'Equal Rights Rally Disrupted By Busing Foes,' p. 1.

At the same time, the anti-busing movement contributed significantly to the political empowerment of conservative women during the 1970s. Indeed, despite failing in its ultimate goal, the anti-busing campaign had a transformative impact on the lives of its participants, causing many women to develop new skills, greater confidence in their own abilities, and a sense of solidarity with other conservative women. As one commentator in Boston put it, the movement changed women from ‘peaceable homemakers to politicians, demonstrators, writers, lecturers, organizers and even lawbreakers.’³¹⁶ According to Sheehy, participation in ROAR also raised the political consciousness of white working-class Bostonians, causing them to question old allegiances, particularly to the Catholic Church and the Democratic Party: ‘It has brought us out of ourselves. It woke us up to where the power really lies.’ As a result, Sheehy asserted: ‘You can’t go back to the way things were... And anyway I wouldn’t want to... if busing went away tomorrow, I know we’d go on to something else.’³¹⁷ Echoing this prediction, Hicks told *Ms.* magazine that, for many ROAR women, busing was the first cause that brought them into outside work, and she maintained that ‘a lot of them will never go home again.’³¹⁸ And indeed, while some women returned to their domestic worlds after the busing crisis subsided, many more continued to be politically active, channelling their energies into other issues that they perceived as threatening their traditional values. As has already been noted, many anti-busing women went on to join the burgeoning anti-feminist movement of the 1970s. In Detroit, Wohlfield continued to be active in HOW and, as well as protesting the ERA, she became heavily involved in the campaign against sex education in schools, which she argued sexualised children too soon and represented ‘another usurpation of parent’s rights.’³¹⁹ Similarly, ROAR activists Terry Libby and Joan Philips moved from protesting busing to reviewing school textbooks for ‘objectionable’ content, and coordinating with other ‘concerned mothers across the country.’³²⁰ Furthermore, anti-busing women from Boston and Detroit participated in the foundation of the National Association for Neighborhood Schools (NANS) in 1976, with Roberts briefly serving as secretary for this new organisation, which was intended to coordinate local anti-busing efforts into a broad-based movement against federal intervention and for a return to community

³¹⁶ Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 4.

³¹⁷ Sheehy, quoted in Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 5.

³¹⁸ Hicks, quoted in Goodman, ‘Louise Day Hicks,’ p. 103.

³¹⁹ See Shirley Wohlfield, ‘Who, What, When, Where, Why’; and other documents in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: SW Notes on Sex Education, 1977-1978.

³²⁰ Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 6.

control of schools.³²¹ Meanwhile, others were galvanised by issues such as abortion, the abolition of school prayer, pornography, violence in entertainment, and homosexuality; and numerous anti-busing women went on to run for political office.³²² In the process, many of these women undoubtedly experienced a sense of empowerment and personal fulfilment. Moreover, they had a profound impact on the emerging conservative movement, helping to carve out a space for women within the New Right and influencing its ‘pro-family’ agenda. But unlike the feminists they attacked, anti-busing women rarely questioned gender hierarchies, preferring to base their political identities on their traditional roles as mothers and housewives. Epitomising this political outlook, Philips explained: ‘I’ve always been a liberated woman anyway... My husband always treated me as an equal. Bill encouraged me, because it’s for our children. After all, what else is really important in life, if it isn’t your kids?’³²³ Thus, the militant maternalism of the anti-busing struggle demonstrates that during the 1970s women’s political advancement, and indeed feminism, took multiple forms.

VII

Clearly then, for the white, working-class women who dominated the anti-busing struggle in Boston and Detroit – as elsewhere in the country – ideologies of motherhood were central in shaping their political involvement. Self-identified housewives and mothers, these women were motivated, in part, by concern for their children’s safety and they conceptualised activism as an extension of their maternal role. Moreover, because working-class gender norms dictated that educational issues were a mother’s turf, women were able to claim leadership of this community-based movement, leaving men and children to assume their own gender- and age-appropriate roles. Consequently, anti-busing women consistently relied upon a language of motherhood to justify their activism and appeal for support. Like WSPers and welfare rights activists, they also took their protests into the streets, employing direct action tactics popularised during the 1960s to dramatise the maternal ideals they claimed to defend. However, as this chapter has shown, anti-busing women’s conceptions of motherhood were rooted in their particular social location, and they formulated their own version of maternalism that

³²¹ See National Association for Neighborhood Schools, Inc., *Bulletin #1*, September 1976, 1, in Hall-Hoag Collection, Box 46-6, Folder HH1390; Biographical Note on Carmen Roberts, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Biographical Field Notes.

³²² Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 6.

³²³ Joan Philips, quoted in Kilgore, ‘The Politicization of ROAR Women,’ p. 6.

was populist in flavour, steeped in religious language, highly militant, and often racially exclusive. Furthermore, comparing anti-busing activism in Boston and Detroit highlights the importance of place to the movement. Heretofore, most scholars of Boston's anti-busing struggle have focused on race, class and ethnicity, ignoring the movement's gendered dynamics, while the story of resistance to busing in Detroit has remained largely untold. Yet, by examining these two case studies together, we gain a better understanding not only of the gendered ideologies that united anti-busers across the country, but of the critical role that local context played in shaping maternalist politics.

In the end, however, anti-busing women's efforts to claim the moral authority of motherhood proved largely futile, and activists in both cities struggled to secure widespread public support for their cause. Paradoxically, while welfare recipients often found their status as mothers undermined by racial discrimination and negative stereotypes about black women's moral failings, anti-busing women's biggest hurdle was the growing perception that their actions were motivated by racism. But the campaign against busing was also hindered by gender and class stereotypes that rendered 'aggressive,' 'tough-talking' mothers outside the bounds of respectable femininity. Moreover, it was hampered by the fact that women's attempts to assume the mantle of motherhood did not go uncontested, as black women fighting for desegregation also emphasised their maternal roles. Of course, as we have seen, black women activists faced their own particular pitfalls when trying to speak as mothers. Nevertheless, along with their white allies in the pro-desegregation movement, black women in Boston and Detroit undoubtedly helped to challenge the anti-busing movement's claims to be concerned about children. By fall 1976, two years after court-ordered busing commenced in Boston, anti-busing organisations in the city were plagued with factionalism and turnouts at demonstrations were dwindling. Meanwhile, having fought for nearly five years against what was initially the prospect of large-scale metropolitan busing, anti-busing forces in Detroit were also running out of steam, and when a limited busing plan was finally introduced in January 1976, it was met with relatively little resistance. In 1977, when Hicks lost her seat on Boston's City Council, and Roberts failed in her bid for a council chair in Detroit, the waning power of the movement in both cities was evident.³²⁴

³²⁴ Nutter, p. 70; 'Carmen Roberts Looks Ahead Towards New Horizons,' *Northeast Detroiter*, 27 October 1977, p. 5, in Roberts Papers, Box 1, Folder: Clippings, 1977.

Nevertheless, the broader impact that the anti-busing movement had, on both the lives of its participants and the nation's political landscape, belies any notion of defeat. Indeed, despite failing to halt court-ordered desegregation, many anti-busing women found activism to be a life-altering experience that caused them to develop new skills and a heightened sense of personal efficiency. Furthermore, the movement often provided a springboard to other campaigns, leading women to remain politically active long after the busing crisis subsided. Thus, channelling their energies into a host of new issues that they saw as antithetical to their traditional values, anti-busing women fuelled the conservative ascendancy of the 1970s. Significantly, one of the issues that incensed many anti-busing women around this time was the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, legalising abortion. Speaking in the wake of this decision, Wohlfield argued that *Roe* reflected a culture of moral 'permissiveness' that had gone too far, and she declared that 'the killing of innocent babies in mothers' wombs' was 'degrading to human dignity.'³²⁵ As the next chapter demonstrates, anti-busing women were not alone in this view. Indeed, in the decades following the Supreme Court's decision, women often led the crusade against abortion, and ideologies of motherhood represented a key weapon in their political armoury. Like their counterparts and allies in the anti-busing movement, anti-abortion women undoubtedly played a vital role in the rise of the New Right. Yet, as with the struggle against busing, studying the anti-abortion movement also challenges rigid categories within women's political history, suggesting that divisions between conservatism and feminism were far more permeable than commonly assumed.

³²⁵ Shirley Wohlfield, 'America!', undated speech notes, in Wohlfield Papers, Box 1, Folder: SW Speeches Against Forced Busing, 1974-1975.

Chapter 4: The Anti-Abortion Movement

On 10 May 1985 – the Friday before Mother’s Day – fifteen members of the Pro-Life Nonviolent Action Project (PNAP) entered an abortion clinic in downtown Pittsburgh, where they barricaded themselves inside five procedure rooms, refusing to leave. The activists were eventually removed by the police and arrested, but not before they had decorated the clinic with anti-abortion literature and stickers, and tampered with equipment. Meanwhile, a dozen more protesters picketed in front of the building, chanting, to the tune of John Lennon’s famous peace anthem, ‘All we are saying is, “Give Life a chance.”’¹ Of those who entered the clinic, over half were women, and among them was Juli Loesch. A long-time peace activist from Erie, Pennsylvania, Loesch had founded a group called Prolifers for Survival (PS) in 1979 in an attempt to bridge the anti-abortion and anti-nuclear movements, and she described herself as a ‘pro-life feminist.’ At the time of the Pittsburgh sit-in, she was in her early thirties, unmarried and with no children of her own.² Significantly, although Loesch was later charged with criminal mischief, she justified interfering with the clinic’s equipment by emphasising the danger that abortion posed to both babies and mothers, explaining: ‘This was a deadly weapon which was dangerous to children, and any responsible adult would have done as I did: I fixed it so it wouldn’t hurt anybody.’ Hers, she argued, ‘was a prudent and sensible action, like removing bullets from an assassin’s rifle... It is easy to do and makes the clinic a much safer place for mothers and their babies.’³ The Pittsburgh demonstration signalled a growing trend within the anti-abortion movement of direct action against abortion clinics. Indeed, the very next day, a group called Citizens for a Pro-Life Society staged a similar sit-in at a clinic in Chicago, during which two women handcuffed themselves to pipes in the bathroom, before being hauled

¹ Early Kohnfelder, ‘Anti-Abortionists Arrested in Clinic,’ *Pittsburgh Press*, 10 May 1985, p. A15, in John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, 1976-1990, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 3, Folder 9 (hereafter cited as Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers). For an account of the sit-in by one of its participants, see Joseph Wall, Letter to John Ryan, 21 May 1985, in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 3, Folder 10.

² Kohnfelder, ‘Anti-Abortionists Arrested in Clinic’; Juli Loesch Wiley, Transcript of Interview with Karen Lamoree on 19 October 1994, in Juli Loesch Wiley Papers, 1974-1994, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 1, Folder 2 (hereafter cited as Loesch Wiley Papers, to differentiate from the George Wiley Papers).

³ Juli Loesch, quoted in ‘Acts of Conscience Affirm Life – And Send Activists to Jail,’ *P.S.*, September/October 1985, pp. 1, 10, in *P.S.: Prolifers for Survival Newsletter* (Microfilm. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1987), Reel 1.

away by police. A spokesperson for the group declared that, ‘With Mother’s Day coming up, we wanted to demonstrate to the world that motherhood is sacred.’⁴

At the same time, others continued to employ more traditional methods of protesting abortion. One such activist was Judie Brown, co-founder and president of the American Life League (ALL, formerly the American Life Lobby) – an organisation, founded in 1979, which supported ‘nonviolent direct action,’ but also focused on lobbying and educating the public, offering abortion alternatives to pregnant women, and forging closer ties with the New Right. In many ways, Loesch and Brown made for unlikely allies. Although both were white, middle-class and Catholic, Brown was older, married and a mother of three. She was also loosely affiliated with the Republican Party and, as well as abortion, was strongly opposed to birth control, sex education in schools, and feminism.⁵ Yet, despite their differences, both women placed motherhood at the centre of their anti-abortion efforts. In Brown’s case, this was epitomised in an editorial published in ALL’s newsletter, *A.L.L. About Issues*, in July 1985, just two months after the Pittsburgh sit-in. Motherhood was a frequent theme of Brown’s ‘President’s Column,’ but this particular article addressed recent claims by the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) to speak ‘as mothers.’ In a stinging rebuke of the pro-choice group, Brown replied: ‘Lest we forget, abortion kills motherhood – it assaults the maternal instinct with which each woman is blessed by the Lord as she accepts her rightful place in the marriage union.’ She concluded: ‘NARAL cannot respond for mothers, nor should they have ever used the word. For, thanks to them and those organizations which support them, motherhood is dying in America.’⁶

Loesch and Brown were not alone in portraying abortion as a threat to mothers or to motherhood. In the decades following the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalising abortion, women dominated the ranks of the anti-abortion movement, and this chapter highlights the vital role ideologies of motherhood played in shaping their activism. Of course, for both men and women, opposition to abortion primarily stemmed from a conviction that life began at conception and abortion represented the murder of an unborn baby. But women in the movement often believed

⁴ Debra Hale, ‘Fifteen Arrested in Abortion Protest on Eve of Mother’s Day,’ *Associated Press*, 11 May 1985.

⁵ Dallas A. Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), p. 63. See regular articles by Judie Brown in *A.L.L. About Issues*, particularly Judie Brown, ‘A Fight for Sanity,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, June-July 1986, pp. 6-8; and Judie Brown, ‘Who Does N.O.W. Represent? A.L.L. Launches Write-In Campaign,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, June-July 1986, pp. 48-49, in *A.L.L. About Issues* (Microfilm. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), Reel 2.

⁶ Judie Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, July 1985, p. 5, in *A.L.L. About Issues* (Microfilm. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1988), Reel 1.

that, as mothers, they had a particular duty to defend life. Furthermore, many were galvanised by the belief that abortion went against women's maternal 'nature' and violated a sacred bond between mother and child. More broadly, many women perceived abortion as devaluing motherhood itself and undermining their role in society. As a result, anti-abortion women drew heavily upon the language of motherhood – and maternal ideologies also undergirded many of their tactics. For example, some women organised to counsel pregnant women against abortion, hoping to 'save' mothers as well as babies. Meanwhile, others embraced direct action tactics, using marches, rallies, and clinic sit-ins to symbolically dramatise their maternal concerns. A minority even endorsed or participated in extreme violence against abortion facilities and practitioners, justifying this with a maternal rationale.

Importantly, as with all activists in this study, anti-abortion women forged their own versions of maternalism that reflected their particular social locations. Moreover, the anti-abortion movement included women from a variety of different class, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and not all of them conceptualised motherhood in the same way. Nevertheless, women in the movement tended to share a positive view of motherhood, and an understanding that abortion posed a grave threat to this maternal role. In particular, religion was key in shaping these women's maternalist politics, as many were devout Catholics or evangelical Protestants, who saw motherhood as decreed by God, and believed that they were answering to a higher authority. It is also notable that, regardless of actual economic status (with women in the movement ranging from working- to middle- and upper-middle-class), activists frequently espoused a populist brand of maternalism. Not only did these women claim to represent the littlest of all 'little people,' they also positioned themselves as 'ordinary' mothers standing up to secular elites bent on imposing their individualistic, 'masculine' values on the nation. Indeed, as with the campaign against busing, anti-abortion women from a variety of class backgrounds recognised the power of populist maternalism.

However, as Brown's July 1985 article makes clear, maternalism was not the sole preserve of anti-abortion forces during this period, and the use of motherhood within the pro-choice movement will also be examined. In her important 1984 study, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, sociologist Kristin Luker argued that, for many women, the struggle over abortion essentially represented 'a referendum on the place and meaning of motherhood.'⁷ Examining the abortion debate in California,

⁷ Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 193 (emphasis in original).

Luker maintained that the issue became so passionate and hard-fought in the wake of *Roe* because it was rooted in fundamentally different views on women's roles and, in particular, on motherhood. On the one hand, women in the anti-abortion movement viewed motherhood as central to all women's lives, and saw abortion as undermining traditional female roles. On the other hand, pro-choice women believed that motherhood, as a socially mandated role, was a barrier to women's equality, and that reproductive freedom was essential for women to achieve their full potential.⁸ Yet, while Luker cogently demonstrated the divergent worldviews that often underlay the abortion debate, by depicting the struggle as taking place between 'two sides [who] share almost no common premises and very little common language,' she overlooked key similarities between anti-abortion and pro-choice forces – not least both sides' claims to be protecting children and motherhood.⁹ Indeed, while pro-choice activists doubtlessly understood motherhood very differently from their opponents – in particular, emphasising that it should not be mandatory – they nevertheless placed a great deal of importance on the mother role. Pro-choice activists asserted that motherhood was a special responsibility not to be entered into lightly, and that reproductive freedom would enable women to choose when they were emotionally and financially ready to be mothers. They also argued that every child deserved to be a wanted child. Thus, competing interpretations of motherhood undoubtedly limited the success of the anti-abortion movement, with pro-choice activists frequently challenging their opponents' claims to be defending children. Moreover, the anti-abortion struggle was increasingly undermined by the confrontational tactics espoused by many of its activists, and the violence conducted by a number of extremists.

But this chapter also considers the wider impact of the anti-abortion movement, exploring its relationship to both the women's liberation movement and the broader New Right. Early scholarship on the anti-abortion movement almost invariably pitted it against the feminist movement, portraying the abortion debate as a battle between 'housewives' and 'feminists.' Like Luker, most studies emphasised the irreconcilable worldviews at play in the abortion conflict – worldviews that were intimately tied to activists' social locations, and shaped their opposing views on a host of other issues, including birth control, sex education, gay rights, and feminism.¹⁰ Indeed, there is no

⁸ Luker, pp. 1-10, 158-194

⁹ Luker, p. 2.

¹⁰ See Luker; Blanchard; Connie Paige, *The Right to Lifers: Who They Are, How They Operate, and Where They Get Their Money* (New York: Summit, 1983); Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict Over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Faye D. Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of

denying that the majority of women in the anti-abortion movement remained hostile to ‘women’s libbers’ and their goals. Although many found activism to be a life-altering experience, like their counterparts in the anti-busing struggle, they generally channelled their energies into anti-feminist campaigns, ultimately fuelling the rise of modern conservatism. However, more recent scholarship has cautioned against viewing the anti-abortion movement as diametrically opposed to the progressive social movements that preceded it. Historians such as Richard L. Hughes, Simon Hall, and Grace Elizabeth Hale have demonstrated convincingly that, although much of the movement drew strength from its opposition to the progressive ideals of the 1960s, it was still very much a product of that turbulent decade. These scholars highlighted a number of veterans of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements who went on to play leading roles in the anti-abortion struggle. More broadly, they revealed that opponents of abortion drew heavily upon ideologies, rhetoric and tactics popularised by civil rights and anti-war protesters.¹¹ Building on this recent historiography, this chapter contends that anti-abortion activists also appropriated important ideas and tactics from the women’s liberation movement. At the same time, by formulating a distinctive strand of ‘pro-life’ feminism, a small cadre of anti-abortion women contributed to evolving feminist discourses; and the movement as a whole fuelled the broader politicisation of women during the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, the relationship between the anti-abortion movement and second-wave feminism should be seen to have been a complex and often contradictory one, which involved ‘creative appropriation’ as well as conflict.¹²

In order to fully capture the diversity of the anti-abortion movement, this chapter focuses on a range of individuals and groups. Indeed, as well as more typical anti-abortion organisations – made up of conservative Christians with strong links to the New Right – it also examines a comparatively small and often overlooked faction of the movement that came to be known as the ‘anti-abortion left’ or ‘consistent pro-life movement.’ First emerging in the early 1970s, leftist anti-abortion groups were

California Press, 1989); Cynthia Gorney, *Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); James Risen and Judy L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); Rickie Solinger, ed., *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹¹ See Richard L. Hughes, “‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’: The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Struggle for Racial Justice,” *Oral History Review*, 33, no. 2, (2006), 1-23; Richard L. Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,’ *The Historian*, 68, no. 3 (2006), 541-558; Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), Chapter 6; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapters 7 and 8.

¹² Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates,’ p. 545.

generally led by Catholics and Quakers who had been active in the progressive social movements of the 1960s and saw the fight against abortion as the latest battleground in an ongoing struggle for civil rights. They tended to view opposition to abortion as consistent with anti-war, anti-death penalty, and anti-poverty activism, and as part of a broader respect for life.¹³ During the 1980s, these organisations were ultimately eclipsed as the movement came to be dominated by newly politicised evangelical Protestants, primarily fundamentalists, who saw legal abortion as symbolising America's moral decline and sought to defend 'traditional' Christian values. Nevertheless, leftist Catholics had a lasting influence on the anti-abortion movement and they are a testament to its diversity.¹⁴

Compared to the preceding two case studies, this chapter is also considerably more national in scope. In part, this reflects the strength of national organising that developed within the anti-abortion movement, with activists around the country connected by a multitude of national organisations and regular coordinated events (most notably, the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.). But this broad focus also reflects the fact that, like WSPers, anti-abortion women defined maternalism broadly. Indeed, whereas welfare rights and anti-busing activists were primarily motivated by concern for their own children, their activism deeply rooted in their immediate surroundings, women in the anti-abortion movement believed they had a duty to protect all unborn children and life itself. Notably, participants in WSP and the anti-abortion struggle tended to be better off than their counterparts in the welfare rights and anti-busing movements, suggesting that class was key in influencing how broadly activists defined their maternal responsibilities (not to mention, determining whether they had the resources to organise at the national level). Yet, as we have seen, many welfare recipients and anti-busing women came to view their activism as having a national dimension – and equally, local context was important in shaping the anti-abortion struggle. Therefore, while this chapter predominantly focuses on the national, it recognises that regional variations within the movement are an important area for future research.¹⁵

Furthermore, although some of the groups examined here date back to before the 1973 *Roe* decision, the majority came to the fore in the late 1970s and 1980s, and this chapter thus spans a longer time period than earlier chapters. It will therefore be vital to

¹³ Hale, p. 281.

¹⁴ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 128; Hale, pp. 284-285.

¹⁵ Studies that have begun to highlight the importance of place to the anti-abortion struggle include Luker; Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*; Gorney; Robert N. Karrer, 'The Formation of Michigan's Anti-Abortion Movement, 1967-1974,' *Michigan Historical Review*, 22, no. 1 (1996), 67-107.

explore how women joining the movement in the 1980s reinterpreted maternalism in a world transformed by the women's liberation movement and subsequent rise in power of the New Right. At the same time, however, women across the political spectrum continued to draw heavily upon 1960s-style tactics to protest abortion, revealing continuity and adaptation rather than rupture in maternalist discourses.

Lastly, it is important to note that, within the abortion controversy, language itself has always been hotly contested terrain, with each side using entirely different vocabulary to frame the issue and vehemently rejecting the terms imposed by their opponents. For example, those who identified as 'pro-life' often accused their opponents of being 'pro-abortion' or even 'pro-death,' while members of the 'pro-choice' camp referred to the other side as 'anti-choice' or 'anti-woman.' In order to move past this rhetorical stalemate, this chapter uses the terms 'anti-abortion' and 'pro-choice,' which are widely accepted within the scholarship and mainstream U.S. media, although it acknowledges that this was not necessarily how activists defined themselves.¹⁶ At the same time, this study refers to the 'left' and 'right' of the movement, while also recognising that the very notion of an 'anti-abortion left' was increasingly at odds with conventional understandings of this political spectrum, as opposition to abortion came to be viewed as the cornerstone of the New Right and a litmus test for political orientation.

II

That abortion continues to be an extremely divisive public issue in twenty-first-century America was evident in January 2001, as anti-abortion activists prepared to stage their twenty-eighth annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. Writing in the *New York Times*, Robin Toner observed that, 'For most of the 28 years since the Supreme Court handed down *Roe v. Wade*, the political debate over abortion has remained, essentially, frozen in time.' Predicting that the upcoming march would doubtlessly include counter-demonstrations, with time-honoured signs and slogans on each side, she explained: 'Science has changed, the culture has changed, public attitudes have changed, but the politics of abortion unfolds like a Kabuki play, stylized and familiar.' Thus, with this

¹⁶ According to sociologist Dallas Blanchard, the term 'pro-life' is a misnomer for, although some segments of the anti-abortion movement adopted a broad pro-life stance that also included opposition to war, the death penalty, and euthanasia, the movement at large tended to ignore these issues, while some segments supported capital punishment and the arms race. For a useful discussion on terminology, see Blanchard, pp. 1-2.

‘clash of absolutes’ regularly enacted on a national stage, it would be easy to forget that the subject has not always been characterised by such intransigence.¹⁷

Yet, for much of the twentieth century, abortion was not a public issue at all. From the late nineteenth century until the 1960s, virtually every state had laws on the books prohibiting abortion unless it was absolutely necessary to save a woman’s life.¹⁸ These laws were largely the result of an aggressive campaign waged by a group of nineteenth-century physicians who sought to improve their status by criminalising abortions performed by non-physicians.¹⁹ In the process, these doctors succeeded in redefining abortion as a medical problem, hidden from public scrutiny. Indeed, few laws stipulated what constituted ‘a threat to the life of the mother’ and the decision to abort essentially became one of ‘medical judgement.’²⁰ As a result, practices varied widely, with much disparity in women’s access to the procedure. On one hand, middle-class women, who had sufficient funds and knew of a liberal physician, may have had little difficulty obtaining a legal ‘therapeutic’ abortion in this era. Meanwhile, women with less means were forced to seek illegal ‘back alley’ abortions, or resort to ‘home remedies’ that were frequently ineffective or life threatening.²¹ From the late 1940s through to the early 1950s, an estimated 200,000 to 1.3 million illegal abortions occurred in the United States annually.²² But as long as abortion was regarded as a technical matter for medical professionals, and all other abortions were by definition ‘criminal,’ controversy over the issue remained low-key despite its widespread practice.²³

The origins of the modern anti-abortion movement must therefore be found in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the struggle to reform America’s restrictive abortion laws began in earnest. Ironically, the initial push for change came from physicians, the same profession that had helped outlaw abortion a century earlier. However, with improvements in maternal health meaning that justifications for abortions increasingly shifted from the clearly medical to the more social and psychological, a number of doctors began lobbying to bring the law into accord with

¹⁷ Robin Toner, ‘The Abortion Debate, Stuck in Time,’ *New York Times*, 21 January 2001, p. 1.

¹⁸ Marcy J. Wilder, ‘The Rule of Law, the Rise of Violence, and the Role of Morality: Reframing America’s Abortion Debate,’ in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 73-94 (p. 77).

¹⁹ Blanchard, p. 12.

²⁰ Luker, pp. 32-33, 36, 42.

²¹ Blanchard, p. 16; Wilder, p. 77.

²² Rickie Solinger, ‘Chronology of Abortion Politics,’ in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. xi-xvi (p. xi).

²³ Luker, pp. 40-41, 48.

actual practices.²⁴ In 1959, the American Law Institute (ALI) lent their support to this campaign by proposing a model statute that would permit abortion if two doctors agreed that it was necessary to preserve the life or health of the woman, and in cases of rape, incest, or severe fetal abnormalities.²⁵ At the same time, changing sexual mores during the 1960s helped to fuel the debate over abortion. In particular, the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960 gave women a new degree of sexual freedom and encouraged the notion that they should have complete control over their reproductive lives.²⁶ Furthermore, the abortion reform movement was spurred on by several widely publicised events. The first came in 1962, when Sherri Finkbine, a married mother of four from Phoenix, sought an abortion after discovering that she had taken Thalidomide – a drug known to cause severe fetal deformities. Finkbine initially secured the approval of her physician and a hospital board; but after she talked to the press about the dangers of Thalidomide, her scheduled abortion was swiftly cancelled, as Arizona law only allowed abortions to save the life of the woman. Amid intense national publicity, she was eventually forced to travel to Sweden for the procedure, but not before the ‘Finkbine case’ had ‘sensitized the public to the issue of abortion and set the stage for reform.’²⁷ Then, a rubella epidemic between 1964 and 1966 resulted in thousands of women giving birth to babies with birth defects.²⁸ In this context then, reformers began to push for states to adopt ALI-style legislation. On 25 April 1967, Colorado became the first state to pass such a law, shortly followed by North Carolina and California. In 1968 and 1969, reform laws were passed in seven more states.²⁹

It was the emergence of the women’s liberation movement in the late 1960s, however, that provided the grassroots momentum behind the move to legalise abortion. More importantly, participants in the feminist movement transformed the nature of the debate from a narrow medical issue into a broader women’s issue. Indeed, while the ALI laws had reinforced medical control over abortions, feminists began making the unprecedented claim that women had a right to abortion. Consequently, they demanded not just reform but repeal of existing abortion laws.³⁰ Radical feminist groups first voiced the call for repeal in the mid-1960s, and it was later endorsed by liberal feminist

²⁴ Luker, pp. 54-55.

²⁵ Risen and Thomas, p. 11.

²⁶ Luker, p. 111; Blanchard, p. 19.

²⁷ Risen and Thomas, pp. 11-14. Also see Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 118-119.

²⁸ Risen and Thomas, p. 14.

²⁹ Georgia and Maryland passed reform laws in 1968, followed by Arkansas, Delaware, Kansas, New Mexico and Oregon in 1969. Karrer, p. 69; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 119.

³⁰ Risen and Thomas, pp. 14-15; Myra Marx Ferree, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht, *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 29.

organisations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW).³¹ At the first National Conference on Abortion Laws in 1969, NOW entered into a coalition with physicians and population control advocates to found the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), with the aim of lobbying states to repeal their abortion laws. In March 1970, their efforts paid off when Hawaii became the first state to pass a law that repealed virtually all abortion restrictions, soon followed by New York, Alaska, and Washington State.³² Thus, by the early 1970s, almost a third of states had liberalised their laws to some degree.³³ Nevertheless, a number of feminists grew frustrated with the slow pace of state-by-state reform and, while some focused on providing women with safe and affordable abortions through underground abortion services, others began to shift their attention towards the courts.³⁴ Their aim was to use a test case to prove that the nation's abortion laws were unconstitutional; the result, according to one scholar, was 'the most important legal victory for women since achieving the vote.'³⁵

On 22 January 1973, the Supreme Court handed down its historic ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, a case challenging restrictive abortion laws in Texas. In a majority opinion, the Court found that the 'right to privacy,' guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Ninth Amendments, included a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy. The Court was careful to stress that this right was not 'absolute' and had to be balanced against 'important state interests in regulation.' It held that during the first trimester, the state could not regulate abortion in any way; in the second trimester, regulation was permitted to protect the life of the mother; and in the third trimester, when the fetus was near viability, abortion could be regulated to protect the life of the fetus.³⁶ Nevertheless, the ruling was broad enough to nullify virtually every state law dealing with abortion, including the ALI reform laws and, as a result, it sent opponents of abortion 'out into the streets.'³⁷

While the state-level reform movement had met with sporadic opposition, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling prompted the emergence of a forceful and highly organised

³¹ Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 5-6; Conover and Gray, p. 63.

³² Risen and Thomas, p. 15.

³³ Luker, p. 41.

³⁴ In Chicago, for example, a clandestine abortion service called Jane operated from 1969 through to 1973. See Laura Kaplan, *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995).

³⁵ Wilder, p. 78.

³⁶ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 118.

³⁷ Risen and Thomas, pp. 36, 39.

anti-abortion movement.³⁸ Prior to *Roe*, the Catholic Church had been the driving force behind virtually all anti-abortion efforts. Having long taught that God granted the soul at conception, the church supplied the nascent movement with financial resources, an organisational structure, and personnel. In 1972, the National Confederation of Catholic Bishops founded the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), an independent ecumenical organisation that focused on galvanising support through political lobbying and publicity campaigns, which would become the backbone of the mainstream anti-abortion movement.³⁹ As well as more traditional church leaders, the early movement also included a significant number of progressive Catholics who had been active in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, and saw opposition to abortion as part of an ongoing struggle for social justice.⁴⁰ However, *Roe* brought about significant changes in the composition of the anti-abortion movement. Up until this point, evangelical Protestants had played little role in anti-abortion organising, and some evangelical leaders had even supported the campaign to liberalise abortion laws, viewing this as necessary to enable doctors to make ‘tough moral choices.’ But as abortion came to be associated with the changing status of women and a broader culture of sexual permissiveness, evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants increasingly flocked to the anti-abortion struggle to defend what they saw as ‘traditional’ family values.⁴¹ In recent years, a number of scholars have questioned whether the legalisation of abortion was actually the catalyst that caused America’s evangelicals and fundamentalists to abandon long-held beliefs that had previously kept them out of politics, arguing that the Internal Revenue Service’s 1978 challenge to the tax-exempt status of (racially segregated) private Christian schools was the real trigger.⁴² Nevertheless, by deepening existing suspicions of secular government, the *Roe* decision undoubtedly helped shape the context in which evangelicals understood the threat of federal intervention in their schools – and the anti-abortion movement was thus well placed to benefit from the political mobilisation of conservative Christians.⁴³ Moreover,

³⁸ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 119.

³⁹ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 119-120; Risen and Thomas, pp. 16, 19.

⁴⁰ Paige, pp. 66-67; Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates,’ pp. 543, 558.

⁴¹ Scott Flipse, ‘Below-the-Belt Politics: Protestant Evangelicals, Abortion, and the Foundation of the New Religious Right, 1960-75’, in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. by David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 127-141.

⁴² See Paul Boyer, ‘The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 29-51; Joseph Crespino, ‘Civil Rights and the Religious Right,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 90-105; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 133-136; Hale, pp. 265-268.

⁴³ Boyer, p. 36; Hale, p. 266.

by encouraging evangelical Protestants to overlook historical antagonism and forge alliances with the Catholic Church, *Roe* paved the way for the emergence of a broad new political coalition, often dubbed the New Religious Right.⁴⁴ Significantly, as large numbers of conservative Christians were drawn into the anti-abortion movement, the majority of new recruits were women. Indeed, while the early movement had been driven by white-male-led organisations, the 1970s saw a shift towards a more community-organising-based model in which white women played a prominent role.⁴⁵

Yet, after the decisive blow dealt by the *Roe* ruling, opponents of abortion had few legitimate political avenues left open to them. They could either campaign for a constitutional amendment banning abortion; focus on electing conservative politicians who could change the composition of the Supreme Court in the hope that *Roe* might, in time, be overturned; or lobby at the state level to impose new restrictions on abortion (for example, by cutting federal funding for abortion, or requiring minors seeking abortion to secure parental consent). With the first two options representing long shots at best, most mainstream anti-abortion organisations settled for waging lengthy battles for incremental change. However, a growing number of activists became frustrated by the movement's inability to overturn *Roe* and criminalise abortion outright, and the late 1970s saw the emergence of more radical, action-orientated organisations.⁴⁶ These groups were initially led by Catholic leftists who had been active in the civil rights and anti-war movements and drew on 1960s traditions of nonviolent civil disobedience. But as the 1980s wore on, sixties-style tactics were increasingly co-opted by newly mobilised conservative Christians who had never been supporters of these earlier movements, and often had a questionable understanding of nonviolence.⁴⁷ Operation Rescue, which emerged during 1986 and went on to become the most prominent organisation of this new direct action wing, advocated a particularly aggressive brand of civil disobedience – blockading abortion clinics, harassing patients, and intimidating abortion providers.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as a faction of the movement grew increasingly militant, arsons and bombings at clinics became commonplace.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Flipse, pp. 127-128.

⁴⁵ Blanchard, pp. 52-53; Hale, p. 278.

⁴⁶ Risen and Thomas, p. 39; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 120; Ferree, et al, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁷ Risen and Thomas, p. 39; Hale, pp. 285-286; Hughes, “‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’”, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Hale, p. 278; Faye Ginsburg, ‘Rescuing the Nation: Operation Rescue and the Rise of Anti-Abortion Militance,’ in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 127-150 (p. 230).

⁴⁹ Wilder, p. 81.

Thus, it is important to recognise that the anti-abortion movement evolved a great deal over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, both in terms of its participants, and the goals and tactics they espoused. Moreover, it always encompassed a diverse range of organisations and subgroups – including women and men, mothers and non-mothers, Catholics and Protestants, progressives and conservatives, moderates and extremists, feminists and anti-feminists. Nevertheless, a common theme uniting the various factions of the anti-abortion struggle was the maternal rhetoric and symbolism that invariably characterised their protests.

III

There were many ideological, religious, scientific, and political reasons why people joined the anti-abortion movement. However, conceptions of motherhood clearly played an important role in motivating opposition to abortion, particularly for women in the movement. Significantly, while the low-income women in the welfare rights and anti-busing struggles were galvanised by immediate issues affecting their own children, the more middle-class women of the anti-abortion crusade expressed concern for all those they saw as unborn children and for the preservation of motherhood itself. Indeed, like WSPers, anti-abortion women tended to define their maternal responsibilities broadly. Furthermore, the movement included a number of women who did not have children of their own, for whom motherhood was a more abstract ideal.

Nevertheless, most women in the anti-abortion movement claimed to have been spurred on by personal experiences relating to children or motherhood, which ‘brought the issue home’ to them.⁵⁰ For many women, that experience was pregnancy or the birth of their own children. This was certainly true for ALL president Judie Brown, who first became involved in the anti-abortion campaign in 1969 at the behest of her church, but frequently asserted that it was her children who inspired her to take up ‘pro-life work.’⁵¹ In her account of events, it all began one Sunday morning, sitting in church with her husband Paul and three-month-old son, when their pastor told the congregation about recent efforts to liberalise abortion laws in their home state of Washington. As she later explained, ‘I was horrified for so many reasons, but that baby and his presence in

⁵⁰ Luker, p. 146.

⁵¹ See for instance Judie Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, May 1985, p. 5; Judie Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, June 1985, p. 5, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

our family was the driving force that called my husband and me to action.’⁵² Similarly, Peggy Jones, a devout Catholic from North Dakota, traced her opposition to abortion back to 1972 when, during a statewide referendum on abortion reform, she was shocked by pictures of aborted fetuses. Speaking to anthropologist Faye Ginsburg, she explained: ‘My own children were five and two, so that was even more shocking to have gone through pregnancy and know that it’s a life and all that.’⁵³

Meanwhile, other women were motivated by more difficult reproductive experiences – most commonly, an inability to conceive, a miscarriage, or the death of a child.⁵⁴ For example, Joan Andrews, a young Catholic from Tennessee who became heavily involved in the clinic sit-in movement, recalled arriving home from school one day, aged twelve, to discover that her mother had had a miscarriage. In the story she often recounted, Andrews and her other siblings were allowed to hold the three-month old fetus, which was named Joel, before it was buried on the family farm.⁵⁵ As she told one interviewer: ‘This made a deep impression. Sometimes I think people don’t know: this is a child! It has its own hands and face, it has a real life and a real death. And we loved him. We loved Joel.’⁵⁶ In an interview with Luker, another woman said she got involved in the movement after discovering that she could no longer have children herself; she explained, ‘in a way it becomes like [all] abortions were my children... all children should be all of our children. It kind of became more personal.’⁵⁷ Clearly then, like the feminists who politicised the ‘personal’ a few years earlier, many women who joined the anti-abortion struggle saw their political activism and personal lives as intertwined. Indeed, as several scholars have noted, women’s accounts of how they became involved in the movement often resembled evangelical ‘conversion testimonies,’ describing a kind of ‘political rebirth’ sparked by individual experiences of motherhood. Of course, deciphering motivations from rhetoric is always a slippery task, and the histories that activists subsequently told did not necessarily reflect how they perceived their politicisation at the time. Nevertheless, the stories themselves are clearly important. Printed in anti-abortion literature, recounted to journalists and scholars, and enshrined within the movement’s folklore, these personal narratives of

⁵² Judie Brown, ‘Pro-Life Family Feud: A Solution,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, July-August 1987, p. 16, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2. Also see Judie Brown, ‘Memories and Meditations,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, March 1989, p. 22, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

⁵³ Peggy Jones, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Luker, pp. 151-152.

⁵⁵ ‘Doing Time for a Cause: In Solidarity,’ *Denver Post*, 2 August 1987, p. 3F, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

⁵⁶ Juli Loesch, ‘Joan Andrews Interview,’ p. 1, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Luker, pp. 152-153.

motherhood undoubtedly reinforced many women's conviction that they were acting on behalf of their own children, real or imagined.⁵⁸

As a result, anti-abortion women often viewed activism as an extension of their maternal role, and they relied heavily on the rhetoric of motherhood to justify their protests and enhance their moral authority. First and foremost, opponents of abortion framed the movement as a struggle to protect children. Indeed, while specific arguments against abortion varied, activists consistently maintained that life began at conception and abortion represented the murder of an unborn baby. As has been noted, activists on both sides of the abortion debate selected their terminology carefully, and language was certainly important in framing the movement this way. Whereas abortion rights advocates referred to embryos, fetuses and the 'products of conception,' opponents invariably spoke of 'unborn' or 'preborn' children.⁵⁹ Uniting the diverse factions of the anti-abortion struggle, this message was often undergirded by Christianity. For example, PS founder Juli Loesch argued that it was 'wrong to destroy innocent human lives because... human beings were made in the image and likeness of God.'⁶⁰ But as well as religion, opponents of abortion were also influenced by concepts of victimisation popularised by 1960s progressive activists.⁶¹ In Michigan, where the movement was dominated by Catholic and Protestant housewives, an early anti-abortion pamphlet explained: 'For man to end the God-given life of an unborn child is an atrocity. It is doubly heinous because of the premeditation of the killing and the helplessness of the victim.'⁶² Indeed, activists not only portrayed fetuses as an oppressed group, they professed to champion, as one PS woman put it, 'the most helpless form of humanity.'⁶³ Thus, much of the movement's rhetoric was focused around the need to protect voiceless unborn children. Moreover, in a further indication of the New Left's influence, it was common for anti-abortion activists to express

⁵⁸ Many of the anti-abortion women interviewed by scholars such as Kristin Luker and Faye Ginsburg described their activism as rooted in personal experiences or problems relating to motherhood (Ginsburg termed these 'procreation stories'). See Luker, Chapter 6; Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, Chapter 10. On activists' stories as 'conversion testimonies,' see Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, pp. 16-17, Chapter 10; Hale, pp. 271-274. Importantly, Grace Elizabeth Hale's examination of Jerry Falwell's 'conversion-to-politics' story reminds us that it was not just women who claimed to be motivated by a sense of duty to their own children.

⁵⁹ Blanchard, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁰ Loesch, quoted in 'Portrait of a Prolife Pro,' *Salt*, October 1984, p. 7, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

⁶¹ Hughes, 'Burning Birth Certificates,' p. 554.

⁶² 'Love and Let Live' leaflet, undated (c. 1972), in *Radicalism and Reactionary Politics in America, Series 1: The American Radicalism Collection* (Woodbridge, C.T.: Primary Source Microfilm, 2004), Reel 86 (hereafter cited as *American Radicalism Collection*). For more on the early anti-abortion movement in Michigan, see Karrer.

⁶³ Mary Meehan, quoted in Nat Hentoff, 'How Can the Left Be Against Life?', *Village Voice*, 16 July 1985, p. 18, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Also see Hale, pp. 274-275, 298.

‘solidarity’ with the unborn (epitomised by the popular anti-abortion slogan ‘Former Fetus’).⁶⁴ Of course, the rhetoric of protecting children was ubiquitous within the anti-abortion campaign, and not limited to women in the movement. Nevertheless, like their counterparts in WSP, anti-abortion women often claimed that – as women and mothers – they were uniquely equipped to protect the defenceless. As *A.L.L. About Issues* contributor Virginia Evers explained in April 1985, the ‘positive woman,’ who used ‘the unique powers of womanhood,’ was ‘a zealous defender of the sanctity of human life.’⁶⁵

Women in the anti-abortion movement also employed the language of motherhood to argue that pregnant women were the ‘second victims’ of abortion. Indeed, many activists contended that abortion went against women’s nature – as women were designed to bear children and to love them from the moment they were conceived. Writing in *A.L.L. About Issues*, one woman declared: ‘Abortion is also the death of the mother in a woman. No woman wants to destroy her preborn child. She does so in contradiction to her deepest will and nature.’⁶⁶ Furthermore, many activists asserted that abortion violated a sacred bond between mother and child. Speaking to the *Washington Post* in January 1979, March for Life organiser Nellie Gray lamented that, before the ‘baby-killing movement’ came along, ‘the normal relationship between a mother and her child was loving and caring.’⁶⁷ Building on these arguments further, activists regularly claimed that abortion was harmful to women. Published across the country and often written by women, leaflets such as ‘After Abortion’ and ‘The Pain That Follows’ listed countless medical complications that could allegedly result from abortion – including intense pain, excessive bleeding, and fatal complications, as well as long-term effects such as menstrual problems, miscarriages, and infertility.⁶⁸ But more than the physical risks, anti-abortion materials stressed the psychological consequences

⁶⁴ See for instance Hale, p. 283; Juli Loesch Wiley, ‘Pro-Life: Rescue Movement In Transition,’ *Pax Christi USA*, Summer 1989, p. 12, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 13; Mary Meehan, ‘“We Will Stand Up” Takes Detroit Action,’ *National Catholic Register*, 4 October 1987, p. 8, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

⁶⁵ Virginia Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women – Their Impact on Society and the Family,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, April 1985, p. 6, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

⁶⁶ Mary M. Owen, ‘A Failure To Love,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, February 1989, p. 35, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

⁶⁷ Nellie Gray, quoted in Megan Rosenfeld, ‘Waging the New War of the Roses: The Banners of ‘Pro-Life’ and ‘Pro-Choice’ Meet on the Capitol Hill Battlefield,’ *Washington Post*, 23 January 1979, p. B1.

⁶⁸ See for instance Ann Saltenberger, ‘Every Woman Has a Right to Know the Dangers of Legal Abortion,’ c.1981, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108; Open ARMs, ‘After Abortion... Does Anyone Understand?’ leaflet, 1987, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86; Women Exploited By Abortion, ‘The Pain That Follows: Coping After An Abortion’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86; The Precious Feet People, ‘What You Should Know Before You Choose Abortion As Your Option’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86.

of abortion. They contended that, because abortion went against natural maternal instincts, it frequently caused irreparable grief, guilt and depression. This was epitomised in a 1987 leaflet published by a group dedicated to ‘post-abortion counselling,’ which claimed that:

When pregnancy occurs, all the hormonal changes designed to change a woman into a mother begin. The body machinery gears up to produce a child; the maternal mind-set begins to establish. Any thwarting of this natural process (such as abortion) upsets the body ecology and scars the psyche of the would-be-mother. **To FAIL to experience a sense of loss, of emptiness, of grief, is ABNORMAL.**⁶⁹

Thus, many opponents of abortion concluded that: ‘Women, like their babies, are victims.’⁷⁰

Again, it was not just women who argued that abortion was ‘unnatural’ and harmful to pregnant women. Writing in 1971, evangelical leader John R. Rice asserted that ‘in any normal motherhood, with Godly Christian women who have a Christian philosophy of life, the baby is loved from the time the mother knows she has conceived.’ And he stressed that ‘abortion causes more deep-seated guilt, depression, and mental illness than it ever cures.’⁷¹ Nevertheless, women in the movement often articulated a particular gendered version of this argument – portraying these violations of women’s nature as carried out by a masculinised abortion industry operating solely for profit. Indeed, while women were generally presented as victims, abortion providers were invariably characterised as villains – and usually as male figures – who made money by taking advantage of women caught in moral and social dilemmas.⁷² One woman, who joined the anti-abortion struggle after having an abortion herself, maintained that she had been exploited ‘from start to finish’ by a male-ran clinic, where ‘abortion profiteers’ failed to inform patients about the humanity of the unborn, or the physical and psychological dangers of the procedure.⁷³ Again, language played a key role in constructing this message, with pregnant women regularly referred to as ‘mothers,’ regardless of their decision to abort, and abortion providers described as

⁶⁹ Open ARMs, ‘Surviving Abortion: Help for Women Who Have Had Abortions’ leaflet, 1987, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁰ Lynda Allison, ‘The Other Victim of Abortion,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, August-September 1989, p. 44, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

⁷¹ John R. Rice, *Abortion: The Murder of the Helpless Unborn* (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1971), pp. 32, 34, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86.

⁷² Blanchard, p. 112.

⁷³ Kathleen Kelly, ‘Victim of an Abortion Profiteer,’ *Human Life International*, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86. Also printed in *A.L.L. About Issues*, May 1988, pp. 36-37, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

‘abortionists,’ ‘profiteers,’ and even ‘baby killers.’⁷⁴ Thus, activists within all factions of the anti-abortion movement claimed that the welfare of the ‘mother’ was at the heart of their concerns. During the 1988 March for Life, Syracuse Right to Life Foundation president Ann Marie Buerkle declared: ‘We’re just as concerned about the mother as the child.’⁷⁵ Meanwhile, participants in the direct action wing of the movement consistently argued that they were trying to ‘rescue’ mothers as well as babies. When Loesch was arrested in September 1987 for blocking the doorway of a clinic in Columbia, South Carolina, she told reporters: ‘We are here to protect pregnant women and their children from the violence of abortion.’⁷⁶

As well as emphasising their concern for individual mothers, anti-abortion women also claimed to be defending motherhood itself. As several scholars have shown, opposition to abortion was often tied to activists’ broader worldviews, and particularly to conceptions of the family and gender roles within the family.⁷⁷ Indeed, women who joined the anti-abortion movement tended to believe that men and women were innately different and had different roles to play – and that a woman’s most important role was that of wife, homemaker, and mother.⁷⁸ This view was often expressed in the pages of *A.L.L. About Issues*. Writing in 1985, Evers maintained:

The biological and psychological differences between men and women are basically the same today as they were with Adam and Eve and will be when the final chapter of life on this universe is written. No amount of constitutional amending or inter-changing of roles can neuterize [*sic*] the sexes. You can’t fool mother nature!⁷⁹

Yet, many women clearly did perceive abortion as a threat to traditional female roles. In their view, by giving women more control over their reproductive functions, legal abortion represented a devaluation of motherhood in American society. According to Brown, for example, the widespread availability of birth control and abortion taught young women that: ‘Being a mother is just one option for women’ and that ‘once your motherhood begins at the moment the new human being begins within you, you can arbitrarily destroy your motherhood by your ability to “choose a safe legal abortion”

⁷⁴ Blanchard, pp. 96-97.

⁷⁵ Ann Marie Buerkle, quoted in Vincent F. A. Golphin, ‘100 From Here Expected to Join National Rally Against Abortion,’ *Post-Standard* (Syracuse, New York), 22 January 1988, p. B1.

⁷⁶ Loesch, quoted in John Batteiger, ‘Protesters Arrested At Clinic,’ *Columbia Record* (South Carolina), 11 September 1987, p. 1A, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

⁷⁷ See for instance Luker, Chapter 7; Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 7, Chapter 10; Conover and Gray, Chapter 5.

⁷⁸ Luker, pp. 159-160, 176.

⁷⁹ Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women,’ p. 6.

which opens up so many other options for you.’ The end result, Brown argued, was a nation ‘where there is no respect for motherhood.’⁸⁰

Importantly, as with all activists in this study, anti-abortion women’s views on motherhood were rooted in their daily lives and specific social location.⁸¹ While by no means all, a great many women who organised against abortion were married, had children, and were not employed outside the home. And even though some did work, they tended to view this as a necessity and to identify, first and foremost, as housewives and mothers.⁸² Thus, many of these women had a very personal stake in the status of motherhood in U.S. society. Evers, for instance, was keen to stress that, for nearly all of her adult life, ‘attempting to master the fine art of wifery and mothering six children has been my career,’ declaring: ‘I refuse to give up my proud, hard-earned title of Mrs.’⁸³ Furthermore, the majority of activists held strong religious beliefs, which played a vital role in shaping their maternalist politics. Indeed, although recent scholarship has cautioned against assuming a simple causal relationship between religiosity and opposition to abortion, Christian faith was clearly a key ingredient in the anti-abortion struggle.⁸⁴ Not only did many activists believe that all human life was a gift from God, they also tended to see gender roles as divinely ordained. A devout Catholic, Brown described ‘maternal instinct’ as an innate quality ‘with which each woman is blessed by the Lord as she accepts her rightful place in the marriage union.’⁸⁵ Similarly, influenced by her own Catholic upbringing, Andrews evidently viewed traditional female roles and family structure as decreed by God. Although she was single when she joined the movement, Andrews explained that, since she was little, she had always wanted to get married and have lots of children, having been brought up to believe that ‘God does not send babies unless you are married.’⁸⁶ Thus, women in the anti-abortion struggle consistently argued that they were answering to a higher authority.⁸⁷ Furthermore, many

⁸⁰ Judie Brown, ‘No Place for the Children,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, August 1985, p. 13, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

⁸¹ However, as Luker has pointed out, activists’ beliefs and values simultaneously worked to shape the concrete circumstances of their lives. For a good discussion of the complex relationship between core values and social circumstances, see Luker, Chapter 8.

⁸² Luker, p. 138, 194-197; Blanchard, p. 20.

⁸³ Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women,’ p. 6.

⁸⁴ See for instance Ziad W. Munson, *The Making of Pro-Life Activists: How Social Movement Mobilization Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), Chapter 7; Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates,’ p. 558; Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 192.

⁸⁵ Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ July 1985.

⁸⁶ Joan Andrews, Transcript of Interview with John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe, undated, p. 19, in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 3, Folder 5.

⁸⁷ Judie Brown, for example, often contended that opponents of abortion were obeying God’s laws rather than the laws of ‘secular humanism’ and ‘self-indulgence.’ See Judy Brown, ‘Presidents Column,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, October 1986, p. 5, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2. It is worth noting, however, that the use

conservative Christians saw public acceptance of abortion as symptomatic of a deeper problem of moral decay – brought about by 1960s social movements and state-imposed secular liberalism – which threatened not only motherhood, but the sanctity of the family and basic Christian values.⁸⁸ Indeed, opposition to abortion was often linked to opposition to other issues that were perceived as a threat to ‘family values’ – such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), birth control, sex education, pornography, and homosexuality. Brown, for example, frequently warned that ‘permissive sex instruction’ in schools, with its promotion of birth control and abortion, would result in the ‘dissolution of the family as we know it’ – and she urged others to ‘Get involved now, before “family” is only a footnote in a history book.’⁸⁹ Notably, in styling themselves as part of a broader pro-family movement, many activists espoused a patriotic brand of maternalism, consistently arguing that they were standing up for the nation’s Christian heritage.⁹⁰ This was epitomised in ALL’s motto, ‘For God, for Life, for the Family, for the Nation,’ and its leaders often asserted that, as well as saving lives, they were ‘calling America back to traditional family values.’⁹¹ Meanwhile, participants in Operation Rescue regularly claimed that they were ‘rescuing’ America from the clutches of moral decline.⁹²

Class – or more accurately, anti-elitism – was also important in shaping anti-abortion women’s maternalist politics. Although opponents of abortion came from a variety of class backgrounds, the movement undoubtedly drew its greatest strength from the white middle class. Of particular significance was the growing economic power of evangelical Christians during this period. Indeed, concentrated in the rural South and West, many evangelicals profited from a postwar boom in the Sun Belt’s economy and they increasingly joined the ranks of America’s white middle class.⁹³ Nevertheless, regardless of actual economic status, women in the anti-abortion struggle often

of higher-laws ideology was widespread within the movement and by no means limited to women. See Ginsburg, ‘Rescuing the Nation,’ p. 229; Hale, pp. 287-288.

⁸⁸ For more on this perceived ‘crisis of family’ and the development of a ‘pro-family’ movement during the 1970s and 1980s, see Matthew D. Lassiter, ‘Inventing Family Values,’ in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 13-28; Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012); Marissa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁸⁹ Concern for the future the family is a frequent theme in Brown’s published writings, but this argument is exemplified Brown, ‘A Fight for Sanity.’

⁹⁰ Patriotic rhetoric was also not limited to women in the movement. For more on how activists sought to present opposition to abortion as a form of patriotic protest, see Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, Chapter 6.

⁹¹ ‘An Urgent Message from Your Editor,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, November 1985, p. 3, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1. ALL’s motto can be found on the front cover of each edition of *A.L.L. About Issues*.

⁹² Ginsburg, ‘Rescuing the Nation’; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 133.

⁹³ Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 6; Hale, pp. 275-276, 298.

expressed a sense of marginalisation as housewives and mothers, and it was common for them to describe American families as an oppressed group. Importantly, most anti-abortion women became politically active during the second half of the 1970s and 1980s, and their maternalism was profoundly shaped by the perceived success of the women's liberation movement. Indeed, although the ERA was effectively defeated by the early 1980s, women in the anti-abortion movement clearly saw feminism as having the backing of the federal government. For example, writing in 1985, Evers alleged that 'NOW has received countless millions of our tax dollars through federal grants.'⁹⁴ Consequently, like their counterparts in the anti-busing struggle, anti-abortion women forged a distinctly populist strain of maternalism. As has been noted, opponents of abortion consistently presented themselves as champions of the nation's 'tiniest, most helpless citizens.'⁹⁵ But anti-abortion women's populist maternalism can also be seen in their claims to represent 'ordinary' mothers and families against secular elites bent on imposing their immoral values on the nation. Again, this was regularly exemplified in the writings of Judie Brown. In a 1986 article entitled 'Privacy's Gift to the Eighties,' Brown described the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe* decision as part of a growing trend of state 'manipulation' of the American family, explaining:

The failure of society throughout the past 20 years to understand the ramifications of Court-legislated morality is beyond comprehension. The end result of the dissolution of the traditional family is that children are left unsupervised, except, often-times, for the "able" assistance of outside organizations like Planned Parenthood... What of parental love and care and family religious values? As outside agents continue to displace the parental roles, they purposefully displace their value systems as well.

Echoing many women in the anti-busing struggle, Brown went on to stress that 'Families are the basic building block of societies and they are the only hope for the survival of our – and any – nation.' She concluded: 'It is therefore our obligation to make certain, as we go forward to end the babykilling, that we restore the family. We must restore the strong family fabric that the Court has purposefully unravelled while Congress and the President averted their eyes.'⁹⁶

Of course, unlike anti-busers, anti-abortion women's populist maternalism was

⁹⁴ Evers, 'Positive vs. Negative Women,' p. 7. As well as the 1973 *Roe* decision, a series of government-sponsored conferences on women's rights during the mid-1970s helped to convince conservative women that feminists commanded the support of the federal government. See Marjorie J. Spruill, 'Gender and America's Turn Right,' in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 71-89.

⁹⁵ Evers, 'Positive vs. Negative Women,' p. 8; Hale, pp. 274-275, 298.

⁹⁶ Judie Brown, 'The Baby in the Womb – Privacy's Gift to the Eighties,' *A.L.L. About Issues*, October 1986, pp. 6-7, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

complicated by the fact that their immediate adversaries in the pro-choice movement were predominantly women. But this did not stop women in the anti-abortion struggle from gendering their anti-elitist discourse. Indeed, they often accused feminists of being the puppets of a masculinised state, duped into going against the interests of ordinary women for individual gain. In *A.L.L. About Issues*, Brown regularly contended that, by supporting legal abortion, organisations such as NOW ‘pitted women against their own motherhood and maternal feelings,’ and encouraged them to deliver ‘the flesh of their flesh to the altar of selfish, yet painful “me-ism.”’⁹⁷ In one September 1985 article, she lamented:

As women continue to be led into believing that a paycheck and no children are the most fulfilling goals one could possibly set for oneself... women will slide even further away from the image of that lovely, warm caring model many of us recall when we think of our own mothers.⁹⁸

Writing around the same time, Loesch was even more explicit in accusing the mainstream feminist movement of promoting a ‘masculine’ ideology. In a letter to the leftist publication *Religious Socialism*, she asserted that ‘autonomy is more naturally a masculine inclination (because men don’t bear and nurse children) and interdependence is more spontaneously feminine (become women do.).’ And she warned that, under the current policy on abortion, ‘the feminine view [was] being expunged from the human value system altogether, not least by that powerful vehicle of masculism known as modern feminism.’⁹⁹ In this way, then, these mostly white middle-class women reconciled potential contradictions between their class position and their anti-elitist stance (much as the Cold Warriors in Michelle Nickerson’s study or the more affluent women in the anti-busing struggle had done).¹⁰⁰ Indeed, drawing upon traditional gender assumptions, anti-abortion women represented themselves as a marginalised group of housewives and mothers, defending their families against secular elites – and they championed a ‘maternal’ culture of nurturing and caretaking against the intrusion of individualistic, ‘masculine’ values.

Finally, it is important to note that racial ideologies played a role in shaping the

⁹⁷ Judie Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, September 1985, p. 9, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1; Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ May 1985.

⁹⁸ Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ September 1985.

⁹⁹ Juli Loesch, Letter to the Editor of *Religious Socialism*, 19 September 1985, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.

¹⁰⁰ As with the preceding chapter, my arguments here regarding what I term ‘populist maternalism’ build upon Michelle Nickerson’s analysis of the ‘housewife populism’ espoused by anti-communist women during the 1950s. See *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), especially Introduction and pp. 71, 75-76, 101-102, 172.

anti-abortion struggle. On one hand, although they were a minority within the movement, evidence suggests that African American women also based their opposition to abortion on their identities as mothers – and that they drew upon an understanding of motherhood that was heavily informed by race, and particularly by perceptions of racism within the reproductive rights movement. Writing in the late 1980s, Erma Clardy Craven, the vice president for non-Catholic membership in the Society of Black Catholics United Against Abortion, declared: ‘As a black mother and grandmother of the Methodist faith, I stand firmly with His Eminence John Cardinal O’Connor [the Archbishop of New York], on the right to life of a preborn baby and against abortion on demand which is racist and genocidal.’¹⁰¹ Yet, despite many African Americans’ relative ambivalence toward abortion rights, the overwhelming majority of participants in the anti-abortion struggle were white, and white women in the movement evidently understood motherhood in more racially exclusive and defensive terms.¹⁰² Of course, as recent scholarship has shown, a number of the anti-abortion movement’s founders were veterans of the civil rights struggle, and early opponents of abortion consciously adopted ideologies and tactics from black activists.¹⁰³ But it is also clear that, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the strategies of the civil rights movement were increasingly being embraced by conservative Christians who had been ambivalent or even actively opposed to the struggle for racial justice.¹⁰⁴ In fact, opposition to abortion was often enmeshed in broader fears about racial and social change. That is to say that many women in the movement found legalised abortion particularly alarming because they equated it with other unwanted state intrusions into the family – such as court-ordered desegregation – viewing *Roe* as the latest instalment in a much larger assault on parental rights and traditional values.¹⁰⁵ However, as we saw in the previous chapter, explicit racism was no longer politically palatable by the late seventies, and abortion thus became an important rallying point for conservative Christians. Indeed, according to Hale, the anti-abortion struggle appealed to many conservative Christians – particularly southern fundamentalists and Catholic ethnics who increasingly found themselves stigmatised as racists and bigots – because it offered them ‘a way to see themselves on

¹⁰¹ Emma Clardy Craven, ‘Leadership Is Her Motto,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, February-March 1988, p. 31, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

¹⁰² Hughes, “‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’”, p. 21.

¹⁰³ See Hughes, “‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’”; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, Chapter 6; Hale, Chapter 8.

¹⁰⁴ Hale, pp. 285-286, 298.

¹⁰⁵ See Hale, pp. 265-268; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, p. 172; Spruill, pp. 79-80. For an interesting discussion of how the anti-busing movement helped shape the local anti-abortion struggle in Boston, see Jenifer M. Donnally, *Abortion on Trial: The Pro-Life Movement and the Edelin Manslaughter Case*, MA thesis, University of North Carolina, 2008.

the right side of history, as civil rights supporters.’ Moreover, by opposing abortion, these activists could claim an affinity with ‘the most oppressed Americans of all, “people” with fewer rights than African Americans – “the unborn.”’¹⁰⁶

IV

Thus, like all activists in this study, anti-abortion women forged a unique version of maternalism that was rooted in their daily lives, and heavily informed by religion, race and class. And as we have seen, activists consistently invoked this language of motherhood to justify their political involvement and enhance their moral authority. But maternal ideologies also permeated many of the tactics of the anti-abortion struggle.

For example, the widespread establishment of ‘crisis pregnancy centres’ both reflected and reinforced the notion that women were victims of abortion. A mainstay of the anti-abortion campaign, crisis pregnancy centres (sometimes called problem pregnancy centres or pregnancy counselling centres) were designed to persuade pregnant women not to have abortions by offering them alternative options and support. Since the first of these centres were established in Hawaii in 1969 by Robert Pearson, a former construction contractor and early leader of the anti-abortion movement there, thousands more had been set up across the country. Many operated under the auspices of national organisations such as the Pearson Foundation and Birthright International, but regional networks and independent centres also proliferated.¹⁰⁷ While individual centres varied, most offered free pregnancy testing, counselling and medical referrals, as well as practical aid such as maternity and baby clothes, cribs and, in some cases, housing for the duration of the pregnancy.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, at the grassroots level, these centres were often run by women – predominantly housewives and mothers whose relatively flexible schedules allowed them to volunteer their time and who claimed a particular authority in preparing other women for motherhood. Taking pregnancy

¹⁰⁶ Hale, p. 275.

¹⁰⁷ In actual fact, Birthright International, founded in 1968 in Toronto by Louise Summerhill, pre-dated the establishment of ‘Pearson centers.’ But Pearson is generally credited with founding the first crisis pregnancy centres in the United States. See Bryan Abas, ‘Right to Life or Right to Lie?’, *The Progressive*, June 1985, pp. 24-25, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86; Robert Pearson, ‘Reflections on Twenty Years of Fighting Abortion,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, March 1989, p. 16, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2; Blanchard, p. 68.

¹⁰⁸ See for instance Margaret Hoegen Grassi, ‘A Caring Voice,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, June 1985, p. 20, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1; ‘Our Mission,’ *Abortion Alternatives: Pregnancy Services of Greater Lansing*, November/December 1987, p. 4, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86; Feminists for Life, ‘You Have Choices’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

counselling one step further, a Birthright chapter in Syracuse, New York even established a programme called ‘Mother to Mother,’ through which young women could receive parenting classes from an ‘experienced mother’ during the later months of pregnancy and after the baby was born. Describing her involvement in this programme, one volunteer explained: ‘For me, being a mother is a special joy and I like being able to share that.’¹⁰⁹ From the start, however, crisis pregnancy centres were widely criticised for their deceptive and aggressive tactics. Indeed, across the country, centres were regularly accused of advertising themselves as abortion clinics, locating themselves near real clinics to confuse patients, having volunteers pose as physicians, and ultimately trying to frighten women out of getting abortions with horror stories about botched procedures and explicit pictures of aborted fetuses.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, insisting that abortion was harmful to women, the activists who ran these centres consistently maintained that they were as concerned with helping mothers as with saving babies.¹¹¹ Linda Wacyk, a volunteer at Pregnancy Services of Greater Lansing, Michigan in the late 1980s, said she understood ‘the pain and trauma caused by a decision to abort’ – and she argued that the centre was simply trying to provide a ‘loving alternative,’ so as to guide women to ‘a decision that is the best one for them.’¹¹² In a similar vein, publicity materials for the Pearson Foundation called for volunteers ‘to help save babies and motherhood from abortion.’¹¹³

Meanwhile, a number of activists established ‘post-abortion’ counselling groups, further developing the notion that abortion had damaging physical and psychological effects. First emerging in the early 1980s, these nationwide organisations – which included Women Exploited by Abortion (WEBA), American Victims of Abortion (AVA), Open ARMs (Abortion Related Ministries), and Project Rachel – were often run by women who had had abortions themselves and later regretted it, and their main

¹⁰⁹ Carol Rothwell, quoted in Carlyn Hachey, ‘Mother to Mother Teaches Positive Skills,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, April 1988, p. 39, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

¹¹⁰ Blanchard, p. 68; Abas, ‘Right to Life or Right to Lie?’; Pearson Institute staff, ‘The Pearson Institute: Fighting Lies and Death,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, January 1988, pp. 14-15, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

¹¹¹ Notably, organisations and individual centres responded differently to accusations of ‘deception,’ with some condemning such methods outright and others justifying them as necessary to save lives. But centres invariably stressed their concern for pregnant women, as well as unborn babies. See for instance Grassi, ‘A Caring Voice’; Abas, ‘Right to Life or Right to Lie?’; ‘The Pearson Institute: Fighting Lies and Death.’

¹¹² Linda Wacyk, quoted in ‘Volunteer Spotlight,’ *Abortion Alternatives: Pregnancy Services of Greater Lansing*, April 1988, p. 3, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 105.

¹¹³ See for instance Pearson Foundation, ‘True Christians Are Desperately Needed to Help Save Babies and Motherhood from Abortion,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, February 1985, p. 31, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

focus was on what they termed ‘post-abortion depression.’¹¹⁴ While the existence of this condition has actually been widely disputed, members of these groups claimed to represent ‘a voice of experience that no one can refute.’¹¹⁵ An Open ARMs leaflet, written by several ‘survivors’ of abortion, explained: ‘We understand the pain, emptiness, and heartache which so often follow... because we have experienced it ourselves.’ In accordance with this, as well as speaking out and lobbying against abortion, these organisations offered telephone help lines, and individual and group counselling for women who were ‘suffering from abortion.’¹¹⁶ They often worked closely with crisis pregnancy centres. For instance, a centre in Colorado Springs ran a Post Abortion Counseling and Education (PACE) programme, which consisted of a ten-week Bible study course and culminated in a memorial service for the unborn babies that participants had aborted. This ceremony, which was held in a church and involved each woman lighting a candle to signify the life of her child, was designed not only to commemorate the aborted babies, but also to help the women come to terms with their loss and begin to heal.¹¹⁷ Thus, post-abortion groups and services clearly formed an important part of the anti-abortion movement’s efforts to portray women, as well as babies, as victims of abortion. Furthermore, the PACE ceremony exemplifies another significant phenomenon of the anti-abortion struggle: the use of symbolic actions to shape public opinion.

Indeed, while opponents of abortion did not abandon more traditional strategies (such as lobbying, educating the public, and counselling women against abortion), the late 1970s and 1980s saw a growing number of activists turn to direct action tactics. As previously noted, the anti-abortion movement’s activist wing began in the early 1970s with small groups of mostly Catholic leftists. Fresh from campaigns against war and racial injustice, these activists had consciously adopted sixties-style methods of nonviolent civil disobedience, organising marches and rallies, as well as some of the first sit-ins at abortion clinics. However, by the 1980s, these tactics were increasingly being embraced by activists on the right, many of whom had not been supporters of these earlier movements. Moreover, as an influx of conservative Christians transformed

¹¹⁴ See ‘Women Exploited By Abortion Speak Out,’ *Right to Life*, March 1983, p. 3; American Victims of Abortion, ‘Olivia’s Story’ leaflet, 1986; and Open ARMs of M.S.U., ‘Help for Women Suffering After An Abortion’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86; and Project Rachel leaflet, undated, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

¹¹⁵ ‘Women Exploited By Abortion Speak Out.’ For a brief summary of ‘objective research’ into post-abortion depression, see Blanchard, p. 64.

¹¹⁶ ‘Help for Women Suffering After An Abortion.’

¹¹⁷ Sydna Hawthorne-Masse, ‘Facing Reality,’ *The Bethany Choice: A Publication of Bethany Christian Services*, Winter 1994, p. 3, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

the sit-in campaign into a mass movement, many activists began to advocate a particularly confrontational brand of civil disobedience, staging large-scale clinic ‘blockades’ that ‘pushed right up against the edge of nonviolence.’¹¹⁸ Importantly, women in the anti-abortion struggle often justified this militancy with a maternal rationale, arguing that clinic sit-ins were not protests, but ‘rescues’ that were primarily designed to save children’s lives. As Loesch explained it, ‘to actually block the way of death – to place my body between the abortionist and his intended victim, to attempt to rescue a mother and child – is to go beyond advocacy into action. This is not dissent. This is resistance.’¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, from the start, these actions also served a more symbolic purpose, and like all public protests against abortion, rescues were carefully crafted to dramatise the anti-abortion cause. For women in the movement, this meant showcasing their claims to be defending children and motherhood.

One of the ways that anti-abortion women did this was through the maternal imagery that invariably infused their direct actions. As Hughes has shown, the anti-abortion movement’s visual culture owed much to the struggle against the war in Vietnam. Indeed, as we saw from Chapter 1, groups such as WSP had frequently used gruesome photographs of dead or injured Vietnamese children to highlight the costs of the war – and not long after this, anti-abortion activists also recognised the power of images to move audiences in ways that theological or biological discussions could not.¹²⁰ Also significant was the emergence around this time of groundbreaking photographs of embryonic development, and beginning in the late 1960s, opponents of abortion relied heavily upon these images to try to convince people of the humanity of the fetus.¹²¹ As well as featuring in movement publications and educational slide shows, images of fetuses were a common sight at anti-abortion protests.¹²² Notably, although both men and women deployed this imagery, women often did so in a way that emphasised their own status as mothers or women’s special responsibility for new life. For instance, at a rally outside the Supreme Court in 1985, Michigan activist Lynn Mills wore a T-shirt with a picture of a baby *in utero* emblazoned on the front, positioned to

¹¹⁸ For more on the evolution of the anti-abortion movement’s direct action wing, see Hale, Chapter 8 (quotation from p. 284).

¹¹⁹ Juli Loesch, ‘Protest vs. Rescue,’ undated article, p. 1, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 12. Anti-abortion leaders had originally coined the term ‘rescue’ in the late 1970s to replace the leftist-sounding term ‘sit-in’ and make the direct action movement more accessible to conservative Christians – but it also dovetailed with many activists’ belief that these were life-saving interventions. Hale, p. 298.

¹²⁰ Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates,’ pp. 550-554.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 552-553.

¹²² See for instance ‘Love and Let Live.’ On slide show presentations used by the Pearson Foundation, see James F. Kappus, ‘Bob Pearson’s High Ideals Equal Large Goals,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, July 1984, pp. 18-19, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

cover her own obviously pregnant stomach (see Figure 13).¹²³ Connected to this, in an effort to encourage others to ‘choose life,’ anti-abortion literature invariably contained pictures of pregnant women, active and happy infants, and cheerful families – and similar imagery could be seen at demonstrations.¹²⁴ The front cover of *A.L.L. About Issues*, for example, regularly featured images of smiling babies, loving mothers, and happy families (see Figure 14). Furthermore, since it began in 1974, the organisers of the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. adopted the red rose as a ‘symbol of the preborn child and life and love’ – with roses adorning the event’s publicity and protesters carrying them on the day itself.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, at the other extreme, many activists began displaying graphic photographs of aborted fetuses at demonstrations – and a number even took to carrying bloodied dolls or what they purported to be actual fetuses in jars.¹²⁶ At a National Dialogue on Abortion, sponsored by NOW in February 1979, three anti-abortion women shocked onlookers when they displayed the bodies of two aborted fetuses, which they carried wrapped in baby blankets.¹²⁷ This bloody imagery was often met with harsh criticism. Members of several pro-choice groups accused their opponents of relying upon garish images (which they claimed were often enlarged, inaccurately labelled or undocumented) to shock people and distract from the real issue: reproductive freedom.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, many anti-abortion activists defended these displays, arguing that they represented the strongest possible statement against abortion and that: ‘Abortionists can continue their killing only so long as the ugly facts of their killing are not demonstrated vividly to the American people.’¹²⁹

¹²³ Photo #5 in photographs labelled ‘District of Columbia Sit-Ins, Protests or Rallies, 1985,’ in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 10, Folder 6.

¹²⁴ Blanchard, p. 98.

¹²⁵ ‘Roses for Life,’ *March for Life Program Journal* (1983), pp. 6-7, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104; ‘Abortion Foes Protest in Capital,’ *New York Times*, 24 January 1978, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates,’ pp. 553. 555; Blanchard, p. 98; Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest* pp. 126, 128.

¹²⁷ ‘Birth Control Parley Shaken as Protesters Display Two Fetuses,’ *New York Times*, 16 February 1979, p. B7.

¹²⁸ See for instance NARAL Foundation, ‘Legal Abortion: Arguments Pro & Con’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 170; Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), ‘The Issue Is Freedom’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108. Even within the anti-abortion movement, some activists worried that this imagery was sensationalist and exploited the fetus further. See for instance Juli Loesch, Letter to NOW organizers, 16 February 1979, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 4, Folder 15.

¹²⁹ Mary O’Malley and Nancy Hackle, ‘For One Shining Moment,’ undated, p. 7, in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 4, Folder 15; ‘Wages of Abortion,’ *March for Life Program Journal* (1983), p. 32, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

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Figure 13: Lynn Mills demonstrates outside the Supreme Court, 1985.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Photo #5 in photographs labelled 'District of Columbia Sit-Ins, Protests or Rallies, 1985,' in Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers, Box 10, Folder 6.

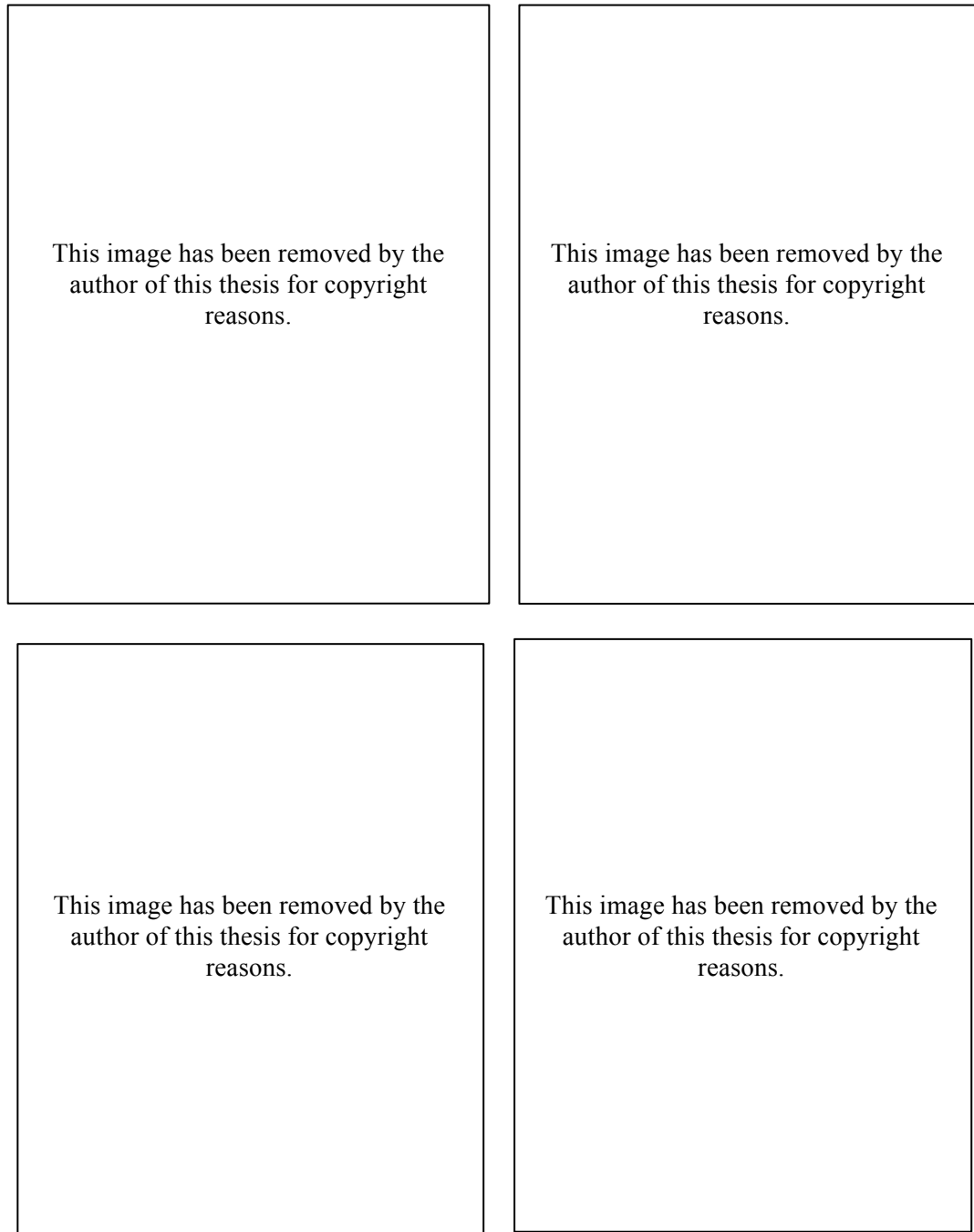


Figure 14: Front covers of *A.L.L. About Issues*, July 1984, May 1985, July-August 1987 and September 1985. Significantly, the cover of the July-August 1987 edition (bottom left) visually represented ALL's motto, 'For God, for Life, for the Family, for the Nation.'¹³¹

Alongside this emotive imagery, anti-abortion women also used signs, slogans and chants during protests to emphasise their maternal concerns. Again, this reflected the strong influence of 1960s protest culture on the anti-abortion campaign. Indeed, during a 'Six-Day Fast for Life' outside a West Coast abortion clinic in May 1985, Loesch displayed a large sign that read 'Abortion Is Not Healthy for Women and Other

¹³¹ Clockwise from top left: *A.L.L. About Issues*, July 1984, p. 1, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1; *A.L.L. About Issues*, May 1985, p. 1, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1; *A.L.L. About Issues*, July-August 1987, p. 1, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2; *A.L.L. About Issues*, September 1985, p. 1, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

Living Things’ – an obvious appropriation of the anti-war group Another Mother for Peace’s popular slogan ‘War Is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things.’¹³² Unsurprisingly, many of the placards displayed by anti-abortion activists focused on children as the victims of abortion, with slogans such as ‘Abortion Is Child Abuse,’ ‘Who Imposed Their Morality on These Little People?’ and ‘Let the Children Live!’¹³³ But one only had to look at the forest of handmade signs on show each year at the March for Life to recognise that motherhood was also a central theme – with popular slogans including ‘Stop the War On the Womb,’ ‘It’s Not Nice to Fool with Mother Nature,’ and ‘Thanks Mom, For Life!’¹³⁴ Furthermore, like their counterparts in the anti-busing struggle, opponents of abortion conveyed their message to the public in protest songs, which were a regular feature of rallies and sit-ins across the country. Often altering the lyrics to well-known sixties peace anthems, popular numbers included ‘Give Life a Chance’ and ‘Where Have all the Children Gone?’¹³⁵

In a further indication of 1960s influence, anti-abortion women also used street theatre tactics to symbolically dramatise their maternalist politics. As with the movement’s imagery, these political performances ranged in style from colourful celebrations of life to more shocking displays, emphasising death. Both were in evidence in January 1980, when the recently formed Prolifers for Survival staged a week-long ‘presence’ at the Pentagon – designed to highlight the combined threats of nuclear weapons and abortion to the unborn. With around fourteen people taking part under banners that read ‘Ban the Bomb, Not the Baby’ and ‘The Bomb Aborts Us All,’ this event included both a symbolic abortion and a symbolic childbirth. First, commencing with a candle-lit procession and accompanied by readings from the scripture, the ‘abortion’ was graphically represented by activists dumping bags filled with blood and dismembered baby dolls onto a cloth painted with an atom symbol. It was presided over by a man dressed as the ‘Spectre of Death’ and included a number of activists ‘dying in’ to express their solidarity with the unborn. Then, later that same day,

¹³² Juli Loesch, ‘Six-Day Fast for Life at an Abortion Clinic,’ *New Oxford Review*, May 1985, p. 7, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 13. See Another Mother for Peace, ‘War Is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things,’ greetings card, 1967, in Social Action Vertical File, circa 1960-1980, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Box 5.

¹³³ See photographs labelled ‘Missouri – St. Louis Sit-Ins, 1979, 1986, N.D.,’ in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 10, Folder 9; ‘Missouri – Kansas City Sit-Ins, 1980,’ in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 10, Folder 8; and ‘Connecticut Sit-Ins, 1977,’ in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 10, Folder 4.

¹³⁴ ‘25,000 in Capitol Call for Amendment to Outlaw Abortion,’ *New York Times*, 23 January 1975, p. 15. Also see photographs in ‘The March Began January 22, 1974,’ *March for Life Program Journal* (1983), pp. 51-55; and ‘March for Life, Jan 22, 1985,’ *March for Life Program Journal* (1986), pp. 27-29, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

¹³⁵ See for instance George Yourishin, ‘For Immediate Release,’ 10 July 1977, in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 5, Folder 2; Kohnfelder, ‘Anti-Abortionists Arrested in Clinic.’

protesters returned to the Pentagon with flowers, balloons and candles where, after a 'joyful procession,' two women dressed in white pretended to give birth to baby dolls, which were then washed and wrapped in cloth. According to Loesch, the founder of PS, symbolic actions such as these were an effective way to capture attention and bring the message home to people; she explained: 'We put it in sign-language for the deaf; render it in Braille for the blind; make it palpable, give it a smell and a taste to get through to the polite, the well-adjusted, the autistic.'¹³⁶ With many activists appearing to share this thinking, street theatre was a common feature of anti-abortion demonstrations across the country. On 10 September 1987, some two dozen activists protested outside a Los Angeles-area clinic as part of a national campaign for an 'abortion cease-fire' in the cities along the Pope's U.S. tour. In an effort to 'dramatize the fight against abortion,' the mostly women protesters lined the street with empty baby strollers; then, using their own children to draw around, they covered the sidewalk with small chalk body outlines (see Figure 15).¹³⁷ As these examples illustrate, anti-abortion women infused sixties-style street theatre with their own maternal and religious symbolism, and protests were designed to visually represent the ideals they articulated rhetorically. At clinic sit-ins, for example, participants were often encouraged to bring 'visible symbols of prayerfulness,' such as rosary beads, pictures of Jesus, and prayer books.¹³⁸ Furthermore, it is worth noting that rescues themselves were conceived, at least in part, as symbolic acts. Indeed, although civil disobedience at clinics was primarily intended to save lives, the nonviolence of protesters was also meant to mirror the plight of the unborn and to highlight the violence of their oppressors.¹³⁹ Describing an upcoming sit-in, Loesch explained: 'We [will be] kneeling visibly in the place of the unborn child. We will be as vulnerable as an unborn child. And if they choose to step on us, we will visibly portray what they do to an unborn child.'¹⁴⁰ Thus, like the campaign against busing, the anti-abortion struggle challenges the popular notion of a flamboyant left and a staid right, illustrating how anti-abortion women across the political spectrum transformed their particular brand of maternalism into political performance.

¹³⁶ Juli Loesch, 'Made for Each Other,' *Erie Christian Witness* (Pennsylvania), March-April 1980, pp. 2-3, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 13; 'A Brief History of PS,' *Prolifers for Survival: Chapter Handbook* (1983), p. 3, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹³⁷ See photographs in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder: Photographs of Demonstrations, Miami and Los Angeles, 1987; Brian Lewis, 'Anti-Abortionists Urge "Cease-Fire,"' *News-Press* (Los Angeles), 11 September 1987, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

¹³⁸ See for instance, Juli Loesch, 'Dear Main Men & Main Women,' 15 July 1987, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

¹³⁹ Hale, pp. 279, 289.

¹⁴⁰ Loesch, quoted in Ana Rodriguez-Soto, 'Group: Halt Abortions While Pope Visits,' *The Voice* (Miami, Florida), 10 July 1987, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

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Figure 15: Anti-abortion women draw chalk outlines of their children on the sidewalk outside a Los Angeles-area clinic, 10 September 1987.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Top and bottom right images from Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder: Photographs of Demonstrations, Miami and Los Angeles, 1987; bottom left image from Lewis, "Anti-Abortinists Urge "Cease-Fire.""

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the most evocative displays of maternalism by anti-abortion women took place on Mother's Day – with activists regularly seizing upon this date to appeal to the public as mothers, or on behalf of motherhood. Of course, opponents of abortion were not the first to recognise the political potential of Mother's Day. As we have already seen, the second Sunday of May has long affected a political tone, and a diverse range of activists have appropriated Mother's Day as a symbolic occasion on which to invoke the moral authority of motherhood. Nevertheless, women in the anti-abortion struggle often took the politicisation of this holiday to new heights. For example, it was common for activists to publish Mother's Day ads, with slogans such as 'Happy Mother's Day! Aren't You Glad *Your* Mother Was Pro-Life!' and 'Thanks Mom, For Life!' In April 1990, *A.L.L. About Issues* printed examples of these for members to use in their local newspapers, with Brown explaining that this was 'a great way to remind people in your town, during Mother's Day, that babies are happy when moms actually agree to their birth.'¹⁴² Moreover, activists across the country marked the occasion with special marches and demonstrations – and several local groups initiated annual Mother's Day events, steeped in maternal symbolism. Beginning in 1987, activists in Portland, Oregon staged an annual Mother's Day March for Life, which drew around 400 people at its height and typically included 'toddlers, babies in strollers, parents and grandparents' carrying 'signs, banners and balloons.'¹⁴³ Similarly, from 1978 through to the late 1990s, activists from Canada and the United States met each year at Niagara Falls for an International Mother's Day Walk for Life. This march was traditionally led by children carrying bouquets of red roses, which they later dropped into the Niagara Gorge to symbolise 'tears of blood.'¹⁴⁴

It was also common, by the mid-1980s, for more activist groups to use Mother's Day as an opportunity to stage confrontational sit-ins at abortion clinics. Indeed, as the battle against abortion wore on, a faction of the movement grew frustrated with the political stalemate faced by mainstream anti-abortion groups, becoming increasingly militant.¹⁴⁵ Influenced by the civil rights struggle, the organisers of the earliest clinic sit-ins had placed much emphasis on nonviolence, insisting that protests be peaceful in

¹⁴² Judie Brown, 'Mother's Day,' *A.L.L. About Issues*, April 1990, pp. 21-22, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 87.

¹⁴³ Jim Hill and Elizabeth Moore, 'Abortion Activists Hold Rallies,' *Sunday Oregonian* (Portland), 14 May 1989, p. C07; Jim Hill, '400 Pro-Life Advocates Stage Mother's Day March,' *Sunday Oregonian* (Portland), 13 May 1990, p. D04.

¹⁴⁴ Dick Christian, 'Demonstrators At Border Target Abortion,' *Buffalo News* (New York), 11 May 1998, p. 1C.

¹⁴⁵ On the growing frustrations of a new generation of anti-abortion activists, see Risen and Thomas, Chapter 5.

both word and deed. However, particularly with the emergence of groups such as Operation Rescue in the late 1980s, many activists embraced a more militant form of civil disobedience, staging large-scale clinic blockades that frequently led to mass arrests. Admittedly, in publicity and training materials, these groups continued to stress their commitment to peaceful protest. But too often ostensibly nonviolent protests involved aggressive ‘sidewalk counselling,’ destruction of property, and inflammatory or threatening language – leading several scholars to question activists’ understanding of or commitment to nonviolence.¹⁴⁶

Importantly, women were involved in this direct action wing from the outset, and they often justified militant tactics with a maternal rationale – arguing that they were necessary to protect both unborn children and mothers. This uncompromising militancy was perhaps best symbolised by Joan Andrews, a long-time participant in the sit-in movement who ended up serving two and a half years in prison for entering an abortion clinic and damaging equipment during a sit-in in Pensacola, Florida in 1986. Andrews, whose refusal to cooperate with prison authorities eventually landed her in solitary confinement in a maximum-security prison – transforming her into the first martyr of the anti-abortion cause – regularly claimed that her position was a matter of conscience, explaining:

I could not countenance cooperating even remotely with the evil of the killing of my little brothers and sisters during their prenatal period of life, and the devastation that this wreaks upon their poor mothers and fathers, whether they acknowledge it or not.¹⁴⁷

During the late eighties, many women justified mass Operation Rescue-style clinic blockades in a similar manner. They argued that these interventions were not ‘protests’ – designed to capture media attention or provoke arrest – but *rescues* that primarily aimed to save lives. In fact, both men and women used this ‘necessity defence’ – particularly in court, where it was common for activists to claim that rescues were not technically civil disobedience, as they only broke the law to protect children from imminent harm.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, when citing the doctrine of necessity, women often stressed their protective instincts as further justification for their actions. For example, when announcing plans to use direct action to shut down abortion clinics during the

¹⁴⁶ Hale, pp. 281-296, and n. 6 on pp. 365-366; Hughes, “‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’”, pp. 3, 21; Wilder, p. 81.

¹⁴⁷ Joan Andrews, ‘In Prison,’ *Harmony: Voices for a Just Future*, January-February 1989, p. 9, in Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection; Hale, p. 284.

¹⁴⁸ Loesch, ‘Protest vs. Rescue’; Mary M. Radich, ‘Rescue, Not Protest,’ *Liguorian*, October 1992, p. 11, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103; Hale, p. 298.

Pope's 1987 U.S. tour, Loesch declared: 'We're not courting confrontation or arrest. But if a child is at risk of being hurt or killed, the normal response is to take protective action, even at a risk yourself.'¹⁴⁹

Moreover, as the movement's direct action wing grew increasingly confrontational, a number of activists began to engage in extremist violence against abortion clinics and providers. In 1977, there were five incidents of arsons or bombings at abortion clinics, rising sharply to thirty in 1984. There was also a surge in harassment of clinic employees, vandalism, and other acts of sabotage.¹⁵⁰ It is important to note that many women in the movement (and numerous men for that matter) publicly condemned this violence, arguing that it damaged the cause and ultimately showed a disrespect for life.¹⁵¹ However, throughout the period, a significant minority of anti-abortion women endorsed or participated in acts of violence, justifying this with a familiar maternal rationale. For example, following the highly publicised bombing of a clinic in Maryland in November 1984, activist Jayne Bray told the press: 'I am personally opposed to the destruction of property, but I respect the right of people who do it where babies are being slaughtered... I don't know who they [the bombers] are... I know no babies will be killed today.' Bray had participated in a large sit-in at the clinic just days before the bombing, and when her husband was arrested in connection with the crime, many suspected that she too had played a role. These suspicions were encouraged, moreover, by Bray's testimony during her husband's trial that she was 'tickled pink' with the results of the bombings. 'I am happy that that suction machine is not there to destroy that baby,' she declared, 'I am happy that that abortion clinic is not in operation.'¹⁵² Similarly, following a large fire at an abortion clinic in a Texas community in the early 1990s, a local woman expressed tacit support for this action, while also being quick to dismiss accusations of violence from pro-choice forces. 'There just isn't a comparison,' she stated, 'Burning a building where they kill children only seems humane. It is especially ludicrous to take the accusation seriously when it comes from a group that

¹⁴⁹ Loesch, quoted in "'We Will Stand Up': Activists Campaign to Stop Abortions During Papal Visit,' press release, 1 September 1987, p. 2, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

¹⁵⁰ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 120; James Barron, 'Violence Increases Against Abortion Clinics in '84,' *New York Times*, 5 November 1984, p. B15.

¹⁵¹ See for instance Barron, 'Violence Increases Against Abortion Clinics'; Mary Rider, 'The Firebombings: An Editorial,' *P.S.*, April 1985, p. 3, in *P.S.: Prolifers for Survival Newsletter*, Reel 1. There is debate, however, as to the extent to which anti-abortion leaders privately encouraged or helped to facilitate violence against clinics and providers, even as they publically distanced themselves from these acts. See Hale, pp. 298-302.

¹⁵² Risen and Thomas, pp. 88-98 (Jayne Bray quoted on pp. 94, 97-98).

butchers children...'¹⁵³

However, despite many anti-abortion women espousing a militant brand of maternalism, as a faction of the movement became more confrontational, it also became increasingly male dominated. As with the campaign against busing, gender was clearly important in determining the division of labour within the anti-abortion struggle. Indeed, men's roles within the movement often reflected their traditional roles as husbands and fathers, tasked with defending the family and community – if necessary by using force. It may come as no surprise, therefore, that men were responsible for the majority of clinic bombings, fires and other acts of violence (although, as we have seen, women were sometimes complicit in this violence, working behind the scenes to aid men's actions and publicly defending extremism with a maternal rationale).¹⁵⁴ Similarly, while women continued to dominate mainstream anti-abortion organisations, the more militant, action-orientated groups that emerged during the late 1980s tended to be driven by men. For example, several historians have described Operation Rescue as 'male-dominated' and 'hierarchical.' In the organisation's peak years, 1988 to 1989, between 60 and 70 percent of those arrested at clinic blockades were men, and local and national spokespersons for the group were almost invariably male.¹⁵⁵ Notably, as with the anti-busing struggle, many women in the anti-abortion movement reinforced this gendered division of labour, using masculine ideologies to galvanise men into action. For instance, when female members of PEACE (People Expressing A Concern for Everyone) stood up during NOW's 1979 National Dialogue on Abortion to reveal two aborted fetuses, the women later recounted that male members of the anti-abortion group 'stood beside us to protect and support us during this most vulnerable moment.'¹⁵⁶ But perhaps more importantly, it was common for male leaders to rely upon 'macho' rhetoric, and to portray activism as a masculinising experience. Epitomising this masculine leadership style, Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry regularly called for conservative Christians to 'do battle' in the name of God and the Ten Commandments, referring to participants in rescues as 'troops' and 'warriors

¹⁵³ Quoted in Cathy Ramey, 'Up in Smoke! Corpus Christi Mill Leveled in Fire,' *Life Advocate*, April 1993, p. 18, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103.

¹⁵⁴ Blanchard, pp. 58, 87.

¹⁵⁵ Hale, p. 288; Hughes, "'The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?'" p. 18; Ginsburg, 'Rescuing the Nation,' p. 233; Victoria Johnson, 'The Strategic Determinants of a Countermovement: The Emergence and Impact of Operation Rescue Blockades,' in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, ed. by Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), pp. 241-265 (p. 246); Juli Loesch, 'Operation Rescue,' *Fidelity*, July/August 1988, p. 24, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.

¹⁵⁶ O'Malley and Hackle, 'For One Shining Moment,' p. 7.

organizing for war.’¹⁵⁷ Thus, while this ideological matrix of masculinity, fatherhood, and protection is ultimately beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that gender was key in shaping men’s anti-abortion activism – leading them to play a prominent role in the movement’s direct action wing. Moreover, the male bias within groups such as Operation Rescue was encouraged further by their tendency to rely upon evangelical pastors for local leadership. In a 1989 article, Loesch observed that the recruitment of pastors often ‘had the indirect effect of sidelining female leadership’ – and she lamented that ‘the “voice” of the movement, especially at the national level, was, increasingly, a masculine voice.’¹⁵⁸

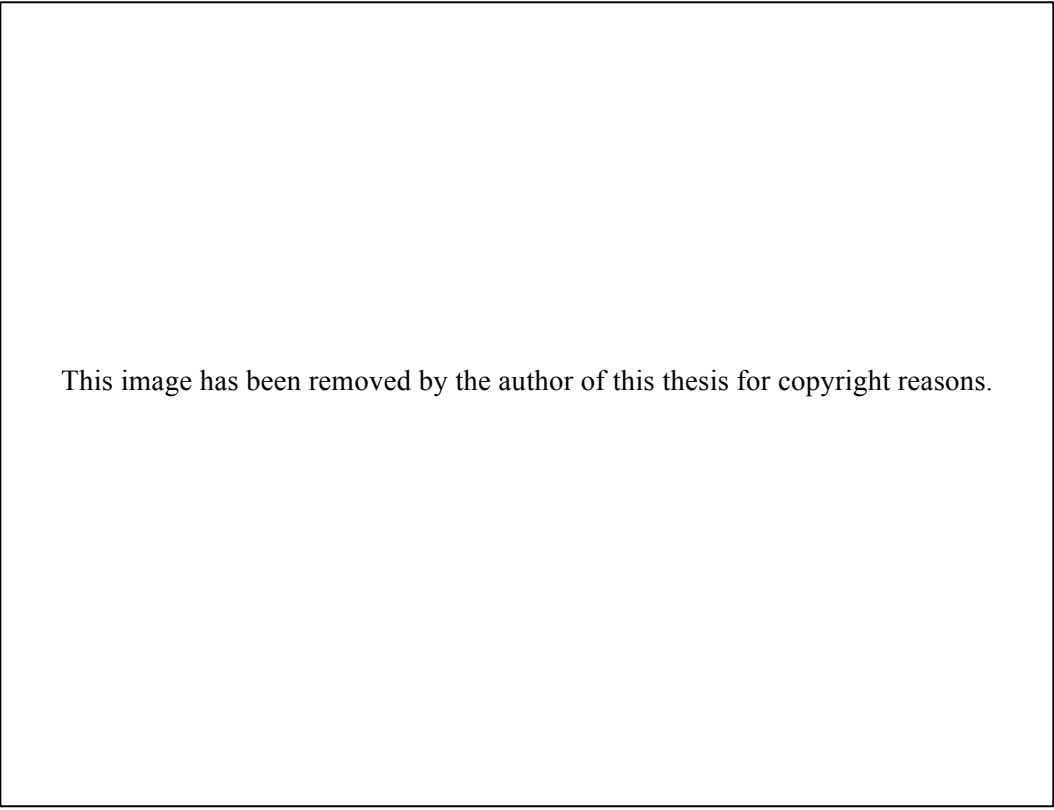
As Loesch’s statement indicates, however, this male dominance over certain factions of the movement did not always go unchallenged. From the outset, women had claimed a special role in the anti-abortion struggle based on their gender – arguing that, as women and mothers, they had a special responsibility to defend life, and that they were better equipped than men to relate to women seeking abortions. Indeed, it is notable that the earliest sit-ins at abortion clinics were primarily conducted by women, and ‘focused on solidarity with pregnant women and their children.’ For instance, when the very first anti-abortion sit-in took place on 2 August 1975 at Sigma Reproductive Health Services in Rockville, Maryland, it was decided that only women would enter the abortion clinic, with men limited to picketing and distributing literature outside. In part, this decision reflected organisers’ desire to ‘break the stereotype of misogynistic males trying to control women.’ Furthermore, instructions handed out before the sit-in encouraged women to bring their children with them, explaining that, as well as preventing abortions, the all-female sit-in was designed to capture media attention and force the clinic ‘to deal with just the group which they are so blatantly exploiting.’¹⁵⁹ Similarly, in the late 1980s, a number of women contested the rising masculinism of the rescue movement by emphasising their authority as mothers. One such activist was Teresa Harbo, a registered nurse and mother of five who organised an all-woman sit-in at a San Francisco-area clinic on the day before Mother’s Day 1989. ‘We asked our men and children supporters to stay back at a nearby church and pray for us as we did the rescue,’ recalled Harbo, explaining: ‘An abortion-bound woman will often feel instant resentment against a man who tries to intervene – “You don’t know what it’s like” – but we *do* know, and I think we can establish a level of trust that can make the difference

¹⁵⁷ Randall Terry, ‘Call to Arms,’ *Life Advocate*, April 1993, pp. 40-41, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103; Ginsburg, ‘Rescuing the Nation,’ p. 233.

¹⁵⁸ Wiley, ‘Pro-Life: Rescue Movement In Transition,’ p. 13; Ginsburg, ‘Rescuing the Nation,’ p. 233.

¹⁵⁹ Wiley, ‘Pro-Life: Rescue Movement In Transition,’ p. 12; Hale, 282-283; ‘Logistical Plan for August 2, 1975,’ in Cavanaugh-O’Keefe Papers, Box 6, Folder 3.

between life and death.’¹⁶⁰ Significantly, these examples suggest that, like many women in this study, anti-abortion women were aware of the strategic potential of motherhood, and sought to use it to full effect. This is not to deny that most anti-abortion women operated from a worldview deeply rooted in their daily lives. But it is clear that, for many women, the decision to highlight their status as mothers was also a tactical one – designed to attract media attention, foster solidarity with ‘abortion-bound’ women, and protect against reprisals. Moreover, efforts to foreground women were often designed to deflect accusations of anti-feminism, and counter the popular perception of men trying to control women’s bodies. In many cases, this latter concern simply reflected activists’ awareness, by the late 1970s, of the power of organised feminism. But, as we will see later in the chapter, some anti-abortion women were clearly influenced by the feminist movement. Writing in 1988, Loesch argued that: ‘Feminine voices and minds are needed at every rally, every press conference, and every rescue, every time, not only because it’s savvy public-relations, but because it’s right.’¹⁶¹



This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 16: A woman and her two-year-old son take part in a ‘Life Chain’ in Lansing, Michigan, Sunday 4 October 1992.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Teresa Harbo, quoted in Wiley, ‘Pro-Life: Rescue Movement In Transition,’ p. 13.

¹⁶¹ Juli Loesch, ‘The Future of Rescue,’ 12 December 1988, p. 3, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.

¹⁶² Image from John B. Albright, ‘2,000 Join in Life Chain,’ *Lansing State Journal*, 5 October 1992, p. 1B, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108.

Finally, a vital component of anti-abortion women's maternalist politics was their use of their own children to drive their message home. As we have already seen, children's presence was often encouraged, and young people – from teenagers and school children, to toddlers and babies in strollers – were a common sight at anti-abortion demonstrations up and down the country. At the March for Life, for example, it was regularly reported that 'young people made up a significant part of the rally.'¹⁶³ Indeed, it was common for reporters to hone in on children at such events. Amid the 2,000 protesters who formed a two-mile long 'Life Chain' in Lansing, Michigan in October 1992, one journalist observed eight-year-old James Munk, who 'used his mother's Abortion-Kills-Children sign for a sunshield as he stretched out to rest.' This demonstration was part of a national Life Chain, with tens of thousands of protesters holding hands in similar chains across the country (see Figure 16).¹⁶⁴ But it was not just peaceful mass marches that anti-abortion activists brought their children to – members of Operation Rescue and similar groups also took children to confrontational clinic blockades. When Operation Rescue staged a '46-day siege' in Wichita, Kansas during the summer of 1991, it was reported that some activists even laid young children in front of cars as a way to block clinic entrances.¹⁶⁵ Again, there was clearly a strategic element to anti-abortion women's use of children. Critics have suggested that the presence of so many children at Operation Rescue-style protests was a cynical ploy, designed to boost numbers and protect against police who were less likely to target 'white, family-looking protesters.'¹⁶⁶ However, activists themselves tended to emphasise the more symbolic role that children played. When asked why she brought her two daughters and seven grandchildren to a clinic blockade in Philadelphia, activist Pat O'Brien explained:

I brought these kids today as visual aids so the moms could see the joy of children. We have two babies under a year old here and if the moms would just transfer this vision to the precious babies they are carrying – the children they

¹⁶³ See for instance Leslie Bennetts, 'Thousands March in Capital, Seeking Abortion Ban,' *New York Times*, 23 January 1980, p. A12; Sara Rimer, 'Abortion Foes Rally in Joy Over G.O.P. Surge,' *New York Times*, 24 January 1995, p. A12; Michael Janofsky, 'At March on the Mall, Abortion Foes Rally Behind a New Theme: Alito,' *New York Times*, 24 January 2006, p. A14.

¹⁶⁴ Albright, '2,000 Join in Life Chain.'

¹⁶⁵ Jacquelynn Boyle, 'Protest's Effects Weaker in Buffalo: Pro-Choice Forces Make the Difference,' *Detroit Free Press*, 27 April 1992, p. 3A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103; Ryn Gluckman, 'Age Matters: Youth Politics and Protest in Wichita, Kansas,' *The Fight for Reproductive Freedom: A Newsletter for Student and Community Activists*, Fall 2001, p. 6, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108.

¹⁶⁶ Gluckman, 'Age Matters,' p. 7.

can't see – they would know that these too are part of God's plan for life in this world.¹⁶⁷

Similarly, Dawn Stover, who helped organise Portland's annual Mother's Day March for Life, described the event as 'an excellent activity to draw families together' to 'make a stand against abortion.'¹⁶⁸ Indeed, many anti-abortion women brought their children to demonstrations as a means to capture public attention and illustrate the 'family values' that they claimed to stand for. Furthermore, as we have seen, activists used children's presence at events to full effect – with young people regularly at the centre of symbolic actions, and many youngsters carrying emotive signs or red roses to denote life.

Nevertheless, there were other reasons why anti-abortion women took their children to protests, aside from tactical motivations. For example, as many of the women who organised against abortion were fulltime housewives and mothers and not all could afford childcare, it is safe to assume that some women brought children along out of necessity. Moreover, like their counterparts in earlier movements, anti-abortion women ultimately saw their activism as in their children's best interests. This philosophy was encapsulated by Roberta, a mother of two and 'full-time homemaker' from North Dakota, who was interviewed by Ginsburg in the early 1980s. Describing children's involvement in the more mundane aspects of the anti-abortion campaign, Roberta explained:

when we do mailings here, my little one stands between my legs and I use her tongue as a sponge. She loves it and that's the heart of grass-roots involvement. That's the bottom. That's the stuff and the substance that makes it all worth it. Kids are what it boils down to. My husband and I really prize them; they are our future and that is what we feel is the root of the whole pro-life thing.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, many women saw the anti-abortion movement as standing up for a worldview that valued children and family – and they felt it was only natural that children be involved.

As we have seen, however, maternalist politics come with their own set of challenges and practical difficulties – and opponents of abortion were not immune from these. For example, some women undoubtedly found that familial responsibilities curtailed their involvement in the movement – particularly mothers with very young children who were not always able or willing to pay for childcare. In a letter to *A.L.L.*

¹⁶⁷ Pat O'Brien, quoted in Joe Wall, 'Rescue Resumes at Kline's,' *Life Advocate*, April 1993, p. 17, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103.

¹⁶⁸ Dawn Stover, quoted in Hill and Moore, 'Abortion Activists Hold Rallies.'

¹⁶⁹ Roberta, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 193.

About Issues in 1987, one woman explained that she had recently started an anti-abortion prayer group in her home because, as a mother of three children under the age of three, she was 'unable to dedicate time outside the home to your most worthy cause.'¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, many others found that political activism diverted their energies away from their own children and caused them to neglect domestic duties. Speaking to Ginsburg in the early 1980s, one woman addressed the difficulties of balancing motherhood and 'pro-life work,' admitting 'there have been times when I've just spread myself too thin. And the kids are the ones that suffer if I get too involved.'¹⁷¹ Indeed, there was undoubtedly a potential conflict between these women's advocacy of traditional gender roles and their tireless activism in the public arena. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that, for a number of women – particularly younger women who were heavily involved in the direct action movement – activism actually limited their ability to start a family and to realise the maternal ideals for which they fought. This was certainly true for Andrews who, by the late 1980s, had been arrested over 100 times and served nearly three years in prison for her actions against abortion clinics. As she told one interviewer: 'Ever since I was a little kid, I've wanted to get married, and I know I'm cutting down on my chances of doing that... But when a war is going on, people have to participate in the pain and suffering.'¹⁷² While Andrews may have been an extreme case, other women cited similar problems. In letters to friends and fellow activists during the mid-1980s, Loesch often wrote about her trouble finding a man to marry and have children with – terming this search a 'pro-life' project.¹⁷³

Like their counterparts in the peace, welfare rights, and anti-busing movements, anti-abortion women sought a range of solutions to these problems. On a practical level, some groups provided free childcare services to alleviate the strains of taking care of children during anti-abortion events. Compared with more progressive movements, however, this was far less common, and it is clear that some organisations were more attune to this issue than others. For example, while the left-leaning PS regularly welcomed children at events, scheduling childcare for during meetings and workshops, conferences organised by the more middle-class, male-dominated NRLC seldom

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth Mullen, quoted in Judie Brown, 'What Can I Do?', *A.L.L. About Issues*, September-October 1987, p. 39, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

¹⁷¹ Sally, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 187.

¹⁷² Joan Andrews, quoted in Ann Stewart, 'Burden of Being a Symbol,' *News Journal Papers* (Wilmington, Delaware), 27 January 1988, p. A8, in Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers, Box 3, Folder 9. Also see Charlotte Hays, 'The Pro-Life Movement's Ultimate Activist,' *Washington Times*, 5 April 1989, pp. E1-E2, in Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers, Box 3, Folder 9.

¹⁷³ See for instance Juli Loesch, Letter to Ingrid Smith, 24 July 1985, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Juli Loesch, Letter to Steve Settle, 27 September 1985, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.

provided day care facilities.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, like WSPers and anti-busers, many women benefitted from the fact that their husbands also supported the anti-abortion cause – making them more likely to assist with domestic chores or at least be sympathetic towards women’s political commitments. In an interview with Ginsburg, one woman described her husband as a ‘staunch supporter’ of her activism.¹⁷⁵

Meanwhile, anti-abortion women relied upon maternal arguments to reconcile the ideological tensions and potential paradoxes they faced. For example, many activists justified time spent away from their own families with the rationale that their activism was an extension of their maternal role and would ultimately benefit all children. In an interview with Luker, one woman described how she overcame her initial reluctance to become involved in the movement, explaining:

I felt I belonged at home with my family... I felt very strongly about being at home with my children, and so I sat back and it [the legalisation of abortion] kept happening and happening and I guess it finally hit me that something’s got to be done, and sometimes that somebody that’s got to get involved is you.¹⁷⁶

Similarly, writing in 1984, Brown encouraged opponents of abortion, ‘no matter what our family obligations are,’ to devote one or two hours a week to the cause – justifying this sacrifice by quoting her fifteen-year-old son, who she claimed had recently said: ‘It would have been nice to have you home on Mother’s day, but somewhere I hope there is a baby who will be glad you went to Florida and spoke against abortion.’¹⁷⁷ At the same time, however, many women were keen to stress that, in entering the public arena, they had not relinquished their duties as housewives and mothers. This can be seen in profiles of women activists published in anti-abortion newsletters, which regularly praised their ability to contribute to the movement while keeping up with familial responsibilities; as one article put it, ‘Carole does it all.’¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, anti-abortion leaders frequently encouraged women to take breaks from activism to spend time with family. As Brown explained: ‘I know that this pro-life work will be with me for many

¹⁷⁴ ‘Conference,’ *P.S.*, March/April 1986, p. 2, in *P.S.: Prolifers for Survival Newsletter*, Reel 1; ‘How’d It Go in Anaheim?’, *P.S.*, August 1980, p. 8, in *P.S.: Prolifers for Survival Newsletter*, Reel 1; Blanchard, pp. 62-63, 87.

¹⁷⁵ Karen, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 184.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Luker, pp. 149-150.

¹⁷⁷ Judie Brown, ‘Taking American Life Lobby To You,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, September 1984, p. 12, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1.

¹⁷⁸ Rosemary Bottcher, ‘A Special Tribute to a Special Mother: Carole Griffin, For Life,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, May 1985, pp. 12-13, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1. Also see ‘Anna Sullivan: Rhode Island’s Unsung Hero,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, June 1985, p. 17, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 1; ‘Thank You, Jean Lynch!’ *Abortion Alternatives: Pregnancy Services of Greater Lansing*, November/December 1987, p. 3, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86.

years, but my children will not. They are growing, and I am reminded that my first obligation is to them, and to my dear husband, of course.’¹⁷⁹ Indeed, many anti-abortion women emphasised that they were ‘dedicated housewives and mothers,’ first and foremost.¹⁸⁰ Interestingly, however, activists framed their continued dedication to their domestic duties as in keeping with a ‘pro-life’ philosophy. Brown, for example, often asserted that ‘pro-life work’ ‘begins within the sanctity of our own homes, within the intimacy of our own relationships with our own children.’¹⁸¹ And when Loesch eventually did get married – in 1989 to a Tennessee Baptist she met through Operation Rescue – she described their efforts to start a family as ‘without a doubt our favorite pro-life direct action!’¹⁸²

Thus, anti-abortion women sought a variety of means to highlight their claims to be defending children and motherhood – organising to counsel pregnant women against abortion; deploying maternal rhetoric and imagery during public protests; staging theatrical displays and symbolic Mother’s Day protests; and bringing their own children along to demonstrations. Some activists also employed confrontational or violent tactics, justifying this militancy as necessary to ‘rescue’ unborn babies and mothers. Furthermore, anti-abortion women relied upon maternal ideologies to reconcile potential tensions between their domestic and political commitments. Indeed, by arguing that all children benefitted from their activism, and that the movement benefitted from them maintaining a happy family life, activists emphasised the permeability between these two roles. However, as we shall see, opponents of abortion were not the only ones to recognise the political potency of motherhood.

V

While pro-choice activists initially celebrated the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, the powerful anti-abortion backlash that followed soon convinced them that the battle was not yet won. Recognising the need for a political counterforce to the burgeoning anti-abortion campaign, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws changed its name to the National Abortion Rights Actions League (retaining the NARAL

¹⁷⁹ Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ June 1985.

¹⁸⁰ See for instance Judie Brown, ‘MOMS! Helpful Pro-Life Hints for YOU!’, *A.L.L. About Issues*, April 1990, p. 20, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 87.

¹⁸¹ Brown, ‘President’s Column,’ May 1985.

¹⁸² Juli Loesch Wiley, ‘Pregnancy: A Pro-life Adventure,’ undated, in Loesch Wiley Papers, Box 1, Folder 12; Wiley, ‘Pro-Life: Rescue Movement In Transition,’ p. 13.

acronym), and pledged to defend a woman's right to choose and obtain a legal abortion. Allied with other single-issue groups such as the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), as well as Planned Parenthood (PP) and a host of feminist organisations, NARAL organised to fight the onslaught of state and federal anti-abortion legislation.¹⁸³ Furthermore, as the tactics of the anti-abortion movement grew increasingly militant throughout the 1980s, pro-choice organisations began to work with medical facilities to organise clinic defence. They recruited pro-choice activists to 'escort' women into clinics during blockades, encouraged the police to take swift action to remove demonstrators, and often tried to get to targeted clinics prior to anti-abortion activists to occupy the surrounding area and ensure women could enter.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, the presence of large numbers of highly organised clinic defenders has often been credited with undermining the effectiveness of Operation Rescue-style clinic blockades.¹⁸⁵ However, less widely acknowledged is the way that pro-choice activists, most of them women, limited the success of the anti-abortion movement by undermining its claims to be defending children and motherhood.

From the outset, many women in the pro-choice struggle were motivated by ideas about motherhood, and they too drew upon maternalism to enhance their moral authority. However, the vision of motherhood these women articulated differed significantly from that espoused by anti-abortion activists, and the abortion debate thus became a contest between competing interpretations of maternalism. Furthermore, as we saw from Chapter 2, race and class differences played a vital role in shaping the abortion rights campaign and determining how women defined reproductive freedom – and divergent views on motherhood also existed within the pro-choice movement. On one hand, reacting against a domestic ideal that saw them primarily as wives and mothers, the mostly white middle-class women who dominated organisations such as NARAL tended to view women's ability to control their own bodies as central to their liberation. Although many of these women came from a similar class background to opponents of abortion, their personal circumstances – which typically included a college education, participation in the labour force, and exposure to the feminist movement – led them to reject the notion that women had a 'natural' maternal role to play.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Wilder, pp. 75, 78-79; Suzanne Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 58-60.

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, pp. 246-248.

¹⁸⁵ See for instance Boyle, 'Protest's Effects Weaker in Buffalo'; Johnson, pp. 246-248.

¹⁸⁶ On the composition of NARAL, see Conover and Gray, p. 65. For a discussion of how pro-choice activists' social location and personal circumstances shaped their views on motherhood, see Luker, pp. 175-186 and Chapter 8.

Nevertheless, while they believed that motherhood should not be mandatory, middle-class white feminists still placed a great deal of importance on the mother role. For example, a number of activists argued that motherhood was an honour not to be entered into lightly, as mothers had ‘an ethical responsibility to ensure that each child born has the best possible chance for a full and healthy life from beginning to end.’¹⁸⁷ Speaking to Luker, one woman explained: ‘We assume that everybody will be a mother... Hell, it’s a privilege, it’s not special enough. The contraceptive age affords us the opportunity to make motherhood really special.’¹⁸⁸ Of course, statements such as this also reveal these women’s class biases and their insensitivity to the ways that birth control and abortion could be used coercively. In fact, by framing motherhood as a ‘privilege,’ some middle-class white feminists reinforced the notion that certain types of women made ‘bad’ mothers – an enduring myth that had been central to the efforts of many early twentieth-century birth control advocates to use contraception to limit the size of poor, immigrant, and African American populations.¹⁸⁹ But despite their race and class blinders, members of mainstream pro-choice groups clearly saw themselves as being on the side of children and family as they advocated a woman’s right to choose. They contended that abortion rights would enhance the quality of motherhood by making it something women chose – and they ultimately argued that every child deserved to be a wanted child. As one NARAL leaflet put it: ‘Legal abortion helps women limit their families to the number of children they want and can afford, both emotionally and financially, and reduces the number of children born unwanted. Pro-choice is definitely pro-family.’¹⁹⁰

Meanwhile, although they are frequently overlooked within the scholarship on the abortion debate, African American women also made critical contributions to the pro-choice movement in the years following *Roe*.¹⁹¹ Like white participants in the movement, black women’s attitudes towards abortion were shaped by their particular experiences of oppression – specifically, their struggle, since slavery, for the right to

¹⁸⁷ Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, ‘Are You Pro-Life?’ leaflet, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 182; Luker, p. 181.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Luker, p. 181.

¹⁸⁹ Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: Birth Control in America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

¹⁹⁰ NARAL Foundation, ‘Legal Abortion: Arguments Pro & Con.’ Also see National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws, ‘Abortion: Questions and Answers’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108.

¹⁹¹ For recent works seeking to rectify this omission, see Nelson; Loretta J. Ross, ‘African-American Women and Abortion,’ in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. by Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 161-207; Anne Valk, ‘Fighting Abortion as a “Health Right” in Washington, D.C.,’ in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. by Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 135-162.

bear and raise children. In addition to historic links between the birth control and eugenics movements, black suspicions of ‘family planning’ were heightened by contemporary practices, which saw low-income black women regularly sterilised without their knowledge or under the threat of losing welfare payments. Indeed, during the late 1960s, this led some black nationalist men to accuse birth control and abortion rights advocates of promoting ‘black genocide,’ and to call upon black women to ‘have babies for the revolution.’¹⁹² However, while black women fully understood the racist motivations behind the establishment of federally funded family planning clinics in poor black neighbourhoods, they still tended to perceive these free services to be in their best interests.¹⁹³ As Washington, D.C. welfare rights activist Bobby McMahan put it, poor women were ‘not going to cut off a nose to spite a face whatever the real motives of you legislators may be.’¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, black women’s arguments in support of birth control and abortion often differed from those espoused by white activists. For example, as we saw from Chapter 2, black women in the welfare rights struggle tended to define the problem more in terms of having too many children than having children per se – arguing that reproductive control would enable them to be better mothers to their existing children. Furthermore, many black women dismissed declarations of genocide by black men, contending that reproductive control would benefit the black freedom struggle by strengthening black families. Writing in 1970, black congresswoman Shirley Chisholm maintained that:

two or three children who are wanted, prepared for, reared amid love and stability, and educated to the limit of their ability will mean more for the future of the Black and brown races from which they come than any number of neglected, hungry, ill-housed and ill-clothed youngsters.¹⁹⁵

But as well as articulating a strongly maternal rationale for abortion rights, black women also introduced an expanded definition of reproductive freedom, in which the right to bear healthy children and raise them out of poverty was as important as the right to terminate a pregnancy.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, organisations such as the multiracial Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), founded in New York City in 1976, and the Women of Color Partnership Program (WOCPP), established by

¹⁹² Gordon; Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 216; Nelson, p. 4; Simone M. Caron, ‘Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960s: Genocide or Power Politics?’, *Journal of Social History*, 31, no 3 (1998), 545-569 (p. 545).

¹⁹³ Ross, p. 182.

¹⁹⁴ Bobby McMahan, quoted in Valk, p. 153.

¹⁹⁵ Shirley Chisholm, quoted in Nelson, p. 78.

¹⁹⁶ Nelson, pp. 1-2.

RCAR in 1985, focused on a much wider range of issues than simply abortion – including health care for the poor, child-care, welfare rights, and an end to sterilisation abuse.¹⁹⁷ CARASA argued that all these things were necessary for ‘real reproductive freedom – the freedom to have babies if we want as well as not to have them.’¹⁹⁸ Similarly, at a WOCPP rally in October 1987, director Sabrae Davis observed that ‘Bringing a child into the world and not being able to provide the quality of love to the child is in itself an injustice.’¹⁹⁹ By the late 1980s, these arguments had had a significant impact on the mainstream pro-choice movement – helping to transform a narrow movement for ‘abortion rights’ into a broader struggle for ‘reproductive freedom,’ and encouraging groups such as NARAL to support for programmes that would benefit low-income families and enable poor women to make real reproductive choices.²⁰⁰ Thus, black women’s activism undoubtedly strengthened the movement’s claims to be on the side of children.

As well as using maternal ideologies to advocate reproductive freedom, pro-choice activists also explicitly challenged the anti-abortion movement’s claims to be defending children – much as proponents of integration had contested the maternalism of the anti-busing struggle. For example, they often criticised anti-abortion activists for bringing their own children to confrontational clinic blockades where protesters regularly clashed with clinic defenders and the police. After witnessing protests in Wichita, during which children carried ‘violent and disturbing anti-abortion signs’ and were at the centre of ‘less-than-peaceful “prayer circles,”’ one pro-choice activist concluded that ‘The rhetoric of protecting children... seemed empty in the face of putting a child in this sort of volatile situation.’²⁰¹ Furthermore, pro-choice activists accused their opponents of not caring about the welfare of unwanted children or children of low-income families. In a 1978 pamphlet, a group of Boston-based feminists contended that the ‘people who march under the banner of “Right to Life” are the very same people who virulently fight against the government playing any role in easing

¹⁹⁷ Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse, ‘CARASA Join Us’ leaflet, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108; ‘Women of Color Partnership Program (WOCPP): Vision Statement,’ in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 182; Nelson, p. 2.

¹⁹⁸ CARASA, quoted in *More Than a Choice: Women Talk About Abortion* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1978), p. 25, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108.

¹⁹⁹ Sabrae Davis, quoted in Helen Chang, ‘Access to Choice: A Survival Issue,’ *e/sa*, December 1987, p. 8, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 182.

²⁰⁰ This influence can be seen in the name changes of several pro-choice organisations, with the National Abortion Rights Action League changing its name to the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARRAL) in 1994, and the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights becoming the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) that same year. Ross, p. 199.

²⁰¹ Gluckman, ‘Age Matters,’ pp. 6-7.

hardships and providing basic and needed human services.’²⁰² Black activists were often particularly critical of the anti-abortion movement, which they saw as manipulating fears about black genocide to gain support, while showing little concern for the problems facing many low-income black children. At a forum on ‘Reproductive Freedom in the Black Community,’ held in Washington D.C. in February 1986, several speakers ‘had sharp words for those who expend their concern for Black children only prior to their birth, and then leave them and their families to fight budget cuts and other threats to their quality of life.’²⁰³ These critiques persisted into the 1990s and beyond. Writing in the *Detroit Free Press* in 1998, prominent black journalist Cynthia Tucker asserted that many opponents of abortion, particularly violent extremists, ‘couldn’t care less about crack babies, babies who are HIV positive, babies burned and battered by their parents, homeless babies, or babies whose parents lack the resources for basic medical care. Babies outside the womb hold no interest for them.’²⁰⁴ Thus, pro-choice supporters challenged the notion that the anti-abortion movement was a crusade to save children. Instead, they argued that, for many activists, ‘children are just tools to be used to bludgeon women back into their place.’²⁰⁵

However, the anti-abortion movement’s claims to be concerned about children were also undermined by the controversial and sometimes violent tactics espoused by activists themselves. As we have seen, over the course of the 1980s, many activists grew frustrated with the slow pace of the political process, instead turning to more militant tactics: blockading abortion clinics, chaining themselves to doors and railings, gluing clinic doors shut, harassing patients with aggressive ‘sidewalk counselling,’ and intimidating abortion providers at their homes. This growing militancy undoubtedly helped discredit the movement. When Michigan leader Lynn Mills published the names of two teenage girls seeking abortions, which she had found in the trash outside an abortion clinic, one commentator asked: ‘Has this busybody ever offered to adopt or finance the life of the child she so vehemently marches to protect?’²⁰⁶ Furthermore, during the late 1980s and 1990s, Operation Rescue often targeted children during its demonstrations and even began to protest at schools, displaying pictures of aborted

²⁰² *More Than a Choice*, p. 18.

²⁰³ ‘Black Women Hold Forum,’ *Options*, April 1986, p. 3, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 182.

²⁰⁴ Cynthia Tucker, ‘Pro-Life Extremists Show Anti-Women Bias,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 29 October 1998, p. 9A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²⁰⁵ Tucker, ‘Pro-Life Extremists Show Anti-Women Bias.’

²⁰⁶ Alice E. Hennessy, ‘How Low Will Lynn Mills, Right-to-Lifers Go?’, *Detroit Free Press*, 8 March 1993, p. 7A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103; Rebecca Powers, ‘Operation Rescue Members Step Up Effort to Stop Kevorkian,’ *Detroit News*, 26 February 1993, p. 4A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103.

fetuses and passing out anti-abortion literature to students. While activists maintained that they were simply ‘trying to reach young people before they reach the clinics,’ people on both sides of the abortion debate labelled these tactics as ‘inappropriate.’²⁰⁷ When demonstrations were planned at schools in Lansing, Michigan, one woman wrote in to her local newspaper to express her anger that her eleven-year-old son would be exposed to graphic images and potential violence. She declared: ‘I support its right to voice opinions, but beg Operation Rescue to let its senses rule and let my child who is already on this earth be a little less frightened.’²⁰⁸ Similarly, when Operation Rescue conducted a prolonged ‘siege’ of an abortion clinic in Westchester County, New York in 1990, a local Catholic priest denounced the group’s tactics, asserting: ‘You don’t jam a bloody fetus into the face of a 5-year-old.’²⁰⁹

If this was not enough, the violence carried by a small number of extremists damaged the movement’s image even further. As we have seen, vandalism, arson and bombings were commonplace at abortion facilities throughout the 1980s. But it was the early 1990s that brought a dramatic turning point in the anti-abortion struggle. On 10 March 1993, abortion doctor David Gunn was shot to death outside a clinic in Pensacola, Florida, in what was the first known killing of the abortion controversy. His assailant, a clinic protester named Michael Griffin, was heard to shout ‘Stop killing babies!’ as he fired several shots into Gunn’s back. In the years that followed, the number of murders and attempted murders at abortion clinics increased, and by mid-1999, the death toll had risen to seven.²¹⁰ Although this appalling violence was perpetrated by a select few, predominantly men, it clearly tainted the movement as a whole.²¹¹ Indeed, people often blamed the movement at large for fostering a climate in which such violence was acceptable – particularly as many anti-abortion leaders failed to condemn the killings outright. Exemplifying this, Donald Treshman, the national director of the group that staged the 1993 Pensacola demonstration, was quoted saying that, ‘While Gunn’s death is unfortunate, it’s also true that quite a number of babies’

²⁰⁷ Tim Martin, ‘Schools Ready for Protesters,’ *Lansing State Journal*, 3 March 1997, pp. 1A-2A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103.

²⁰⁸ Jane D. Dailey, ‘This Is My Choice,’ *Lansing State Journal*, 24 March 1997, p. 4A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 103.

²⁰⁹ Rev. Terry Attridge, quoted in Lisa W. Foderaro, ‘Town Is Caught, Shellshocked, in Abortion War,’ *New York Times*, 20 November 1990, p. B1.

²¹⁰ Gorney, pp. 520-521.

²¹¹ Although most murders of abortion providers were carried out by men, it was not unheard of for women to engage in extremist violence. In August 1993, for example, Oregon housewife Rachelle ‘Shelley’ Shannon was arrested and charged with attempted first-degree murder in the shooting of Wichita abortion doctor George Tiller. See Risen and Thomas, pp. 349-357.

lives will be saved.’²¹² In January 1995, a *Time/CNN* poll found that 61 percent of Americans believed the actions of anti-abortion groups encouraged violence at clinics.²¹³ Around the same time, one commentator in Michigan declared: ‘I find it hard to believe that the people who protest outside of clinics that perform abortions really care about life.’²¹⁴

Of course, the anti-abortion movement was not without its share of successes. In 1976, for example, Congress passed the Hyde Amendment, which prohibited the use of public money for abortion unless the woman’s life was in jeopardy, or in cases of rape or incest. This measure was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1980 and served to significantly reduce poor women’s access to abortion.²¹⁵ Then in 1989, the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Webster vs. Republic Health Services* gave states significantly more freedom to regulate abortion. Following on from this, a number of states enacted restrictive legislation, with popular measures including banning abortion in public facilities, requiring a waiting period between seeking and receiving an abortion, requiring doctors to inform patients of fetal development, and requiring parental consent.²¹⁶ Furthermore, the continued harassment and intimidation of abortion providers resulted in a decline in the number of physicians willing to perform abortions, and fewer doctors training in abortion techniques.²¹⁷ Thus, as sociologist Dallas Blanchard observed, ‘the anti-abortion movement and its sympathizers have been quite effective in making abortions more difficult to secure, especially for women in lower income groups.’²¹⁸ Nevertheless, so far, the movement has failed in its central goal of overturning the *Roe* decision, and throughout the period, opinion polls consistently demonstrated strong support for a woman’s right to choose. A 1980 Gallup Poll found that 78 percent of Americans believed abortion should remain legal in all or some circumstances.²¹⁹ The anti-abortion movement was hindered by the fact that women’s attempts to claim the mantle of motherhood did not go uncontested, with pro-choice activists also employing maternal ideologies, and challenging their opponents’ concern for children. Moreover, it was severely undermined by the militant tactics espoused by

²¹² Donald Treshman, quoted in Anthony Lewis, ‘Murder Was a Logical Next Step in Anti-Abortion Terror Campaign,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 15 March 1993, p. 8A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²¹³ ‘Poll: Shootings Raised Pro-Choice Sympathy,’ *Lansing State Journal*, 9 January 1995, p. 1A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²¹⁴ Marc Harage, ‘Not Ready for Parenthood,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 15 December 1994, p. 18A, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²¹⁵ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, p. 121.

²¹⁶ Blanchard, pp. 35, 110-111.

²¹⁷ Boyle, ‘Protest’s Effects Weaker in Buffalo’; Blanchard, p. 113.

²¹⁸ Blanchard, p. 114.

²¹⁹ Risen and Thomas, p. 107.

many activists, and by the violence conducted by a number of extremists. It has therefore been suggested that the anti-abortion movement's major impact lay in its wider significance. Indeed, several historians have explored the movement's importance to the rise of the New Right.²²⁰ However, few scholars have recognised that the anti-abortion campaign also made significant contributions to the political empowerment of women during this period and even, at times, to evolving feminist discourses.

VI

Even more so than the anti-busing movement, the campaign against abortion tends to be associated with the anti-feminist backlash of the 1970s and 1980s, and with a larger conservative movement that evolved in opposition to progressive sixties activism. Indeed, most studies pit the anti-abortion movement against the women's liberation movement, portraying the abortion debate as a struggle between 'housewives' and 'feminists.'²²¹ Of course, this conventional narrative is not without some basis. Although many women found participation in the anti-abortion struggle to be an empowering and life-altering experience, they rarely developed a feminist consciousness as a result of their activism. Instead, like their counterparts in the anti-busing movement, anti-abortion women used their new skills to campaign against other issues that they perceived as threatening to family values – and their activism undoubtedly fuelled America's rightward turn. Nevertheless, as Ginsburg has observed, the experiences of most anti-abortion women belie the stereotype of 'reactionary housewives and mothers passed by in the sweep of social change' – and the relationship between the anti-abortion movement and the feminist movement should be seen to have been a more dialectical one.²²² Indeed, even though the majority of anti-abortion women remained critical of 'women's libbers' and their goals, they often subsumed aspects of feminist thought within their own ideologies, and activists appropriated important tactics from the feminist movement. Meanwhile, by formulating a distinctive version of 'pro-life' feminism, a number of anti-abortion women made significant contributions to feminist discourses – and the movement as a whole contributed to the broader politicisation of women during this period. Thus, like the struggle against busing, the

²²⁰ See for instance Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 133-139; Flipse; Boyer.

²²¹ See for instance, Luker, p. 193.

²²² Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 193.

anti-abortion movement challenges rigid demarcations between conservatism and feminism, suggesting that ideologies of female advancement took multiple forms.

First, despite conventional wisdom, not all those who opposed abortion were zealously anti-feminist. Indeed, the anti-abortion movement was wide-ranging and diverse, and from the outset, it included in its ranks a number of individuals and organisations that claimed to be both ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-women.’ In most cases, ‘pro-life feminists’ had been active in the progressive movements of the 1960s and identified as part of the ‘anti-abortion left.’ Members of PS, for example, regularly referred to themselves as ‘pro-life feminist peaceniks.’²²³ Furthermore, Feminists for Life (FFL), the most prominent group to espouse this viewpoint, was founded in 1972 by two Ohio members of NOW who discovered a shared distaste for the feminist organisation’s stance on abortion. Consequently, these activists were often uneasy about being lumped together with politically conservative, religious-based organisations.²²⁴ As we have seen, some self-proclaimed feminists worked with groups such as Operation Rescue within the direct action movement. But they often criticised the under-representation of women in these organisations, and they tended to speak out strongly against the use of violence within the anti-abortion movement. Meanwhile, others chose to focus on educating the public and publicising their feminist critique of abortion, as well as providing practical resources and support for ‘women in need.’²²⁵

Members of FFL and similar groups essentially argued that abortion was the very antithesis of ‘true feminism.’ In their view, abortion went against the basic tenet of feminism – that all classes of human beings have an innate value and ought to have equal rights – by placing women’s rights above the rights of the fetus. Writing in the *New York Times* in 1982, New Jersey FFL member Grace O. Dermody explained: ‘Real feminism stands for equal rights for all, and that must include unborn babies.’²²⁶ Anti-abortion feminists also argued that legalised abortion was exploitive of women and that too many women were pressured into having abortions by men or male-dominated

²²³ See for instance Ann Rodgers, ‘The Evolution of a Feminist Christian Pro-life Peacenik,’ *P.S.*, April 1984, pp. 1, 5, in *P.S.: Prolifers for Survival Newsletter*, Reel 1.

²²⁴ Jacquelynn Boyle, ‘Feminists Can and Should Be Anti-Abortion, Group Says,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 17 January 1993, p. 4F, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86.

²²⁵ ‘Feminists for Life of America’ leaflet, undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²²⁶ Grace O. Dermody, ‘How Militant Feminists Are Killing the E.R.A.,’ *New York Times*, 16 May 1982, p. 26. Also see Rosemary Bottcher, ‘Abortion Poisons Feminism,’ *Living World*, 1989, pp. 10-11, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104. In their efforts to align themselves with ‘true feminism,’ anti-abortion feminists often pointed to statements suggesting that key nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist leaders had also opposed to abortion. See for instance Mary Krane Derr, ‘Opposition to Abortion: A Feminist Tradition,’ *Harmony: Voices for a Just Future*, September-October 1989, pp. 4-7, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86.

institutions.²²⁷ Moreover, they contended that the ‘abortion mentality’ pressed women into traditional male standards that prioritised material and career success, negating ‘the one awesome power that women have: the power to nurture new life.’²²⁸ As Dermody put it: ‘By accepting abortion, women deny their own worth. Bearing children is undeniably part of being female, and we must demand to be accepted equally as such.’²²⁹ Of course, many in the mainstream women’s liberation movement were sceptical of these attempts to square an anti-abortion position with support for feminism. Carol King, the director of Michigan’s chapter of NARAL, called FFL ‘a rhetorical trick’ and ‘a contradiction in terms,’ arguing that: ‘The definition of a feminist is someone who believes in equal rights for men and women. Nowhere does equality for fetuses enter into the equation.’ King went on to stress that: ‘Feminists want equality for women in every area of life and that certainly includes the most intensively personal one, which is reproduction.’²³⁰ Nevertheless, despite pro-choice activists’ attempts to speak for all feminists, these anti-abortion women should be recognised as part of the diverse range of voices that contributed to feminist discourses during this period. In fact, by rejecting the ‘masculine’ ideologies of individualism and materialism, and calling for more respect for ‘distinctively feminine functions,’ ‘pro-life feminists’ articulated a version of feminism that resonated strongly with arguments made earlier by WSPers and welfare rights activists.²³¹ They also foreshadowed key tenets of the ‘cultural feminism’ that came to dominate the women’s movement during the 1980s. As one FFL leaflet explained: ‘We believe in equal rights regardless of gender, yet we celebrate our differences, especially that of a woman’s life-giving capacity.’²³²

However, groups such as FFL ultimately represented ‘a small, seemingly eccentric minority’ within the anti-abortion movement and it was no accident that opposition to abortion came to be synonymous with anti-feminism during this period.²³³ As we have seen, many anti-abortion women saw gender roles as ordained by God and essential for the building of a strong society – and they viewed feminism as part of a

²²⁷ Boyle, ‘Feminists Can and Should Be Anti-Abortion.’

²²⁸ Gail Grenier Sweet, ‘True Feminism Is Pro-Life,’ in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 105; Bottcher, ‘Abortion Poisons Feminism.’

²²⁹ Dermody, ‘How Militant Feminists Are Killing the E.R.A.’

²³⁰ Carol King, quoted in Boyle, ‘Feminists Can and Should Be Anti-Abortion.’

²³¹ Sidney Callahan, ‘Feminist As Antiabortionist,’ 7 April 1972, reprinted in *Feminists For Life*, Vol. I, No. 1 (c. 1972) in *Herstory 2* (Microfilm. Berkeley, California: Women’s History Research Center, 1974), Reel 5.

²³² ‘Feminists for Life of America’ leaflet.

²³³ Ellen Willis, ‘Putting Women Back Into the Abortion Debate,’ undated, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 108.

broader threat to ‘family values.’ They therefore tended to be hostile to the women’s liberation movement and its goals. Furthermore, as well as religion, these women’s opposition to feminism was influenced by anti-elitism. Indeed, although they often came from a similar class background to the feminists they opposed, anti-abortion women clearly viewed the women’s movement through a populist lens. They accused feminists of being outspoken militants who had the backing of the federal government and national media, but did not represent ‘ordinary’ American women. Writing in *A.L.L. About Issues* in April 1985, Evers complained: ‘Feminists are the darlings of the major media despite the fact that they are a vociferous minority whose relentless attacks on traditional values have tattered the moral and spiritual fiber of this nation.’²³⁴ Similarly, in an article the following year, Brown said she continued to be amazed by the widespread and favourable publicity afforded to NOW. Describing NOW president Eleanor Smeal as a ‘shrill and strident woman,’ she declared:

In reality, N.O.W. speaks only for those who want to gain respectability for the lesbian and gay lifestyle and for those who believe a woman’s rights include the option to kill her preborn baby for any reason at any point in her pregnancy. I know the vast majority of American women don’t endorse these goals.²³⁵

While not mentioned here, anti-abortion women were also highly critical of the ERA, which many saw as the ‘symbol and substance’ of the modern women’s movement.²³⁶ During the 1970s and early 1980s, a growing number of socially conservative women came to believe that the ERA would abolish a woman’s right to stay home, care for her children, and be financially supported by her husband – in effect taking away ‘the right to be a woman.’²³⁷ Opponents of abortion also worried about the so-called ‘ERA-Abortion Connection’ – contending that if the ERA ever passed it would make abortion more accessible by invalidating restrictions on public funding for the procedure.²³⁸ Consequently, many anti-abortion women supported the STOP ERA campaign spearheaded by Phyllis Schlafly and her Eagle Forum organisation. Speaking in the early 1980s, March for Life president Nellie Gray declared: ‘The ERA mentality is the source of today’s social evils – hostility towards women, preborn babies, men, family,

²³⁴ Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women,’ p. 7.

²³⁵ Brown, ‘Who Does N.O.W. Represent?’

²³⁶ Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women,’ p. 8.

²³⁷ Phyllis Schlafly, ‘The Right To Be A Woman,’ *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, November 1972, in Hall-Hoag Collection, Box 45-1, Folder HH557.

²³⁸ Evers, ‘Positive vs. Negative Women,’ p. 8.

church, state, and God.’²³⁹ At the same time, organisations such as the Eagle Forum invariably opposed abortion and represented a visible presence at the annual March for Life and other anti-abortion events.²⁴⁰ Thus, it is little wonder that opposition to abortion and anti-feminism became intertwined in many peoples’ minds. Epitomising the symbolism activists used to wed these two issues together, an ad in the 1985 *March for Life Program Journal* featured a photograph of Schlafly holding a smiling baby covered in STOP ERA stickers, under the heading: ‘Eagle Forum is Working to Protect Babies’ Rights!’ (see Figure 17).

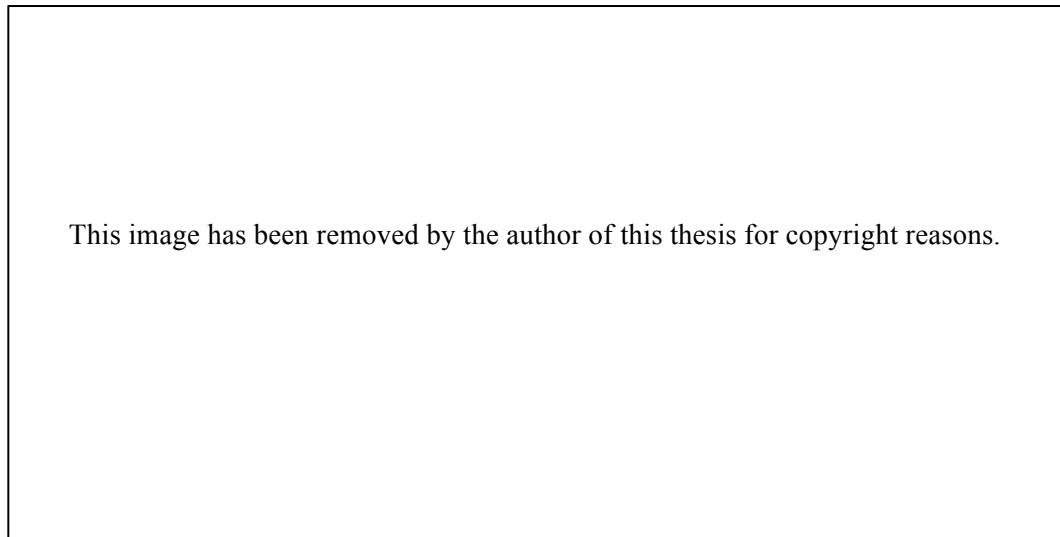


Figure 17: Eagle Forum ad in the 1985 *March for Life Program Journal*.²⁴¹

As with the anti-busing struggle, there was undoubtedly a potential conflict between anti-abortion women’s advocacy of traditional female roles and their political activism in the public arena – and this has helped to fuel the popular perception that conservative women were irrational and illogical, or dupes of men.²⁴² It seems many anti-abortion women were aware of these stereotypes. Speaking to Ginsburg in the early 1980s, one North Dakota activist observed:

²³⁹ Nellie Gray, quoted in ‘Eagle Forum is Working to Protect Babies’ Rights!’, *March for Life Program Journal* (1985), p. 16, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²⁴⁰ See for instance ‘Eagle Forum and Stop ERA,’ *March for Life Program Journal* (1983), p. 29, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104.

²⁴¹ ‘Eagle Forum is Working to Protect Babies’ Rights!’

²⁴² This popular image was reinforced by early scholarship, which often portrayed conservative women as victims of ‘false consciousness.’ For more recent works critiquing this approach, see Kin E. Nielsen, ‘Doing the “Right” Right,’ *Journal of Women’s History*, 16, no. 3, (2004), 168-172; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

If you take a stand, you're labelled as being against anything else that women stand for. And ironically, it's mostly women in our movement. The pro-choice people say about us, "Well, they must have feelings but they're so put down they can't make up their own minds, you know." And they think we're just saying what we do because that's what men have taught us. Well, if the men have taught us, why aren't the men helping us?²⁴³

However, as this statement indicates, many anti-abortion women were adept at reconciling these tensions, and they often used them to their advantage. Indeed, as Nickerson has argued, rather than simply highlighting ostensible contradictions in conservative women's activism, it is far more useful to examine how these women constructed their political ideologies – and particularly how they managed to resolve ambiguities and paradoxes, marshalling them to their own interests in much the same way that activists across the political spectrum have been doing throughout U.S. history.²⁴⁴ As we have seen, for participants in the anti-abortion movement, ideologies of motherhood were key in easing these tensions, with many women conceptualising their activism as an extension of their domestic role, and activists regularly emphasising that they were dedicated housewives and mothers, first and foremost. Epitomising this, in a special tenth anniversary edition of *A.L.L. About Issues* published in March 1989, Brown declared: 'Our Lord called me to be His follower, my husband's faithful wife, my children's loving mother, and then – and only then – a pro-lifer.'²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite drawing strength from their opposition to feminism, anti-abortion women should be recognised to have been beneficiaries of the women's liberation movement. Indeed, while feminism is often credited with inspiring a powerful backlash among America's 'Silent Majority,' few scholars have recognised that it also contributed more positively to the political mobilisation of conservative women.²⁴⁶ For example, by eroding traditional norms against female protest, the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s inadvertently created opportunities for women within the anti-abortion movement and other conservative campaigns.²⁴⁷ Moreover, by popularising the notion that the 'personal was political,' the feminist movement encouraged the political participation of a diverse range of women. As we have seen, many women who opposed abortion saw it as an extremely personal issue. Speaking to the *Washington Post* in 1979, Gray recalled that, when she first heard of abortion as a young woman, 'The

²⁴³ Roberta, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 191.

²⁴⁴ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, pp. xxiv, 169-171.

²⁴⁵ Brown, 'Memories and Meditations,' p. 23.

²⁴⁶ Susan E. Marshall, 'Rattle on the Right: Bridge Labor in Antifeminist Organizations,' in *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest*, ed. by Kathleen M. Blee (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 155-179 (p. 157).

²⁴⁷ Marshall, pp. 158, 173.

whole notion... grabbed in my gut.’ But she explained that abortion did not become an active concern of hers until 1970 because, before then, ‘It wasn’t talked about. It was known to be something not done in civilized society, something sick, and evil.’²⁴⁸ Thus, the feminist movement helped to politicise women like Gray by bringing formerly ‘private’ issues such as sexuality and reproduction into the public arena – making it necessary for opponents of abortion to organise to uphold their version of morality and ‘family values.’²⁴⁹ Furthermore, despite being openly hostile to women’s liberation, activists frequently appropriated the rhetoric of gender equality to argue against abortion. Taking on the pro-choice argument that ‘Every Woman Has the Right to Control Her Own Body,’ one anti-abortion leaflet contended: ‘Women, by dictionary definition, means “female human being.” Since sex is determined at conception and over half of those aborted are “female human beings” then, obviously, *not* EVERY WOMAN has the right to control her own body.’²⁵⁰ Indeed, it was common for participants at anti-abortion events to carry signs that read ‘Equal Rights for Unborn Women’ and ‘Half Abortions Kill Our Sisters.’²⁵¹ At the same time, opponents of abortion often contended that the ‘forgotten victims’ of abortion were men, who were ‘systematically denied the right to be involved in life-or-death decisions affecting their children.’ One leaflet asserted that ‘true equality of the sexes’ would involve ‘more democratic decisions... and the realization that abortion is no a solution at all.’²⁵²

Meanwhile, the anti-abortion movement made significant contributions to the political empowerment of women during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, despite failing in its central goal of overturning the *Roe* decision, the anti-abortion struggle clearly had a transformative impact on the lives of its participants. Reflecting on her experiences in an interview with Ginsburg, Peggy Jones said she found activism ‘to be really healthy for me because it has allowed me to be creative, to have much more self-confidence. I like what it’s done for me as a person.’²⁵³ As well as raising their sense of personal efficiency, the anti-abortion movement also caused many activists to develop close ties with other conservative women. Gloria Klein, who helped found the Michigan-based group Lifespan in November 1970, later wrote that: ‘Memories of the comradeship that

²⁴⁸ Nellie Gray, quoted in Rosenfeld, ‘Waging the New War of the Roses.’

²⁴⁹ Marshall, pp. 157-158, 173; James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 256; Flipse, pp. 138, 140.

²⁵⁰ Life Cycle Books, ‘Language of Illusion: The Abortion Slogans’ leaflet.

²⁵¹ See for instance Robin Toner, ‘Rally Against Abortion Hears Pledge of Support by Reagan,’ *New York Times*, 23 January 1987, p. 10; ‘Signs of Our Times,’ *Harmony: Voices for a Just Future*, March-April 1989, pp. 14-15, in Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection.

²⁵² Life Cycle Books, ‘Forgotten Fathers: Men and Abortion’ leaflet, 1986, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 86.

²⁵³ Peggy Jones, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 186.

developed in those brief years will never pass away.’²⁵⁴ Furthermore, although some women eventually withdrew from the movement due to familial commitments, the longevity of the anti-abortion struggle meant that many others remained politically active for decades. And as we have seen, opposition to abortion frequently led women to become involved in other issues that were seen as equally threatening to their traditional values – from the ERA and gay rights, to birth control and sex education, to pornography and the abolition of school prayer. Epitomising this, Brown consistently sought to situate opposition to abortion within a broader campaign against promiscuity, contraception and ‘permissive sex instruction’ in schools, contending that: ‘The agenda of God’s people must be as broad as that of the secular humanists.’²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, other women found that the movement provided a path into mainstream politics. Klein, who was described by one reporter as a ‘homemaker’ who was ‘uninterested in politics’ before the abortion issue came along, went on to become active in the GOP, serving as a campaign advisor for several of the state’s leading Republicans during the late 1980s.²⁵⁶ Similarly, Jones found that ‘pro-life work’ made her more politically engaged, leading her to conclude: ‘It’s really been a life-broadening experience in a lot of ways.’²⁵⁷

Of course, all this is not to deny that the majority of women in the anti-abortion movement were either ambivalent or actively opposed to organised feminism. However, it is clearly overly simplistic to view the relationship between the anti-abortion and the feminist movements purely in terms of conflict. In recent years, scholars have demonstrated that opponents of abortion were very much ‘veterans of the sixties,’ who perceived their movement, at least in part, in terms of the collective memory of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War struggles. Equally, this chapter shows that the women’s liberation movement formed a critical part of the ‘collective lens’ through which many activists viewed the conflict over abortion.²⁵⁸ By arguing that the personal was political and drawing upon the rhetoric of gender equality, anti-abortion women appropriated important ideas from the feminist movement. At the same time, a number of women in the anti-abortion movement contributed to ongoing feminist discourses by advocating the rebirth of a more ‘authentic feminism’ that celebrated women’s ability to give

²⁵⁴ Gloria Klein, quoted in Nirja Warikoo, ‘Gloria Klein: Founder of Lifespan, An Anti-Abortion Group,’ *Detroit Free Press*, 23 June 1998, Obituaries, p. 4B, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 104. Also see Edward L. Cardenas, ‘Gloria D. Klein, 60, Founder of Right-to-Life Group Lifespan,’ *Detroit News*, 23 June 1998, Obituaries, p. 2D, in *American Radicalism Collection*, Reel 100; Karrer, pp. 76, 78.

²⁵⁵ Brown, ‘A Fight for Sanity’; ‘Opportunities, Advances – Judie Brown’s Educational Strategy,’ *A.L.L. About Issues*, June-July 1986, pp 14-15, in *A.L.L. About Issues*, Reel 2.

²⁵⁶ Warikoo, ‘Gloria Klein’; Cardenas, ‘Gloria D. Klein.’

²⁵⁷ Peggy Jones, quoted in Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*, p. 186.

²⁵⁸ Hughes, ‘The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?’, pp. 3, 22; Hughes, ‘Burning Birth Certificates,’ p. 543. Also see Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, Chapter 6; Hale, Chapters 7 and 8.

birth.²⁵⁹ Moreover, by empowering activists from across the political spectrum, the anti-abortion movement fuelled the broader politicisation of women during the last third of the twentieth century.

VII

As this chapter has demonstrated, the anti-abortion struggle represented a diverse, and sometimes uneasy, coalition – its participants ranging from Catholic leftists who had cut their political teeth in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, to evangelical Christians with strong ties to the New Right. Nevertheless, maternalism stands out as an important theme that traversed the political spectrum and united anti-abortion activists across the country. Indeed, women dominated the anti-abortion movement from the start, and ideologies of motherhood clearly played a significant role in shaping their activism. Of course, it was not just women who saw abortion as the murder of an unborn child, and a threat to traditional gender roles. But women in the movement tended to be particularly alarmed by the perceived devaluation of motherhood – and many believed they had a special duty to defend life. Thus, like their counterparts in the peace, welfare rights and anti-busing movements, anti-abortion women relied heavily upon maternal rhetoric to justify their activism and appeal for support. Furthermore, drawing upon 1960s styles of protest, opponents of abortion regularly employed direct action tactics to dramatise their maternal concerns in the public arena. Yet, as with all activists in this study, anti-abortion women's understandings of motherhood were rooted in their daily lives, and they ultimately forged their own version of maternalism that reflected their particular religious and anti-elitist proclivities.

²⁵⁹ Sweet, 'True Feminism Is Pro-Life.'

However, despite their fervent attempts to claim the moral authority of motherhood, these mostly white, middle-class women often failed to garner the sympathetic media coverage they sought, and the anti-abortion struggle remained unpopular with large swathes of the American public.²⁶⁰ Meanwhile, opinion polls consistently demonstrated strong support for abortion rights. The movement was undoubtedly hindered by the fact that women's maternalist politics did not go uncontested, with pro-choice activists also claiming to speak as mothers, and challenging their opponents' professed concern for children. But perhaps more importantly, it was undermined by the confrontational tactics espoused by activists themselves, and the violence conducted by a number of extremists. Indeed, as with WSP, the anti-abortion struggle demonstrates that women's ability to claim the strategic advantages of motherhood could be limited, not just by race or class, but simply by failing to conform to traditional notions of femininity – namely, through violence or association with violence. As well as eroding public sympathy for the cause, the militancy of a growing number of anti-abortion activists eventually prompted legislative action against the movement. Most notably, following the murder of Gunn in 1993, Congress passed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE), which brought federal penalties against anyone using 'force, threat of force or physical obstruction' to 'intimidate or interfere with' a person obtaining or providing reproductive health services. Signed into law by President Bill Clinton in May 1994, this act effectively made participation in 'clinic blockades' a federal crime.²⁶¹

Nevertheless, while it has so far failed in its quest to recriminalise abortion, the anti-abortion struggle clearly had a significant impact on the lives of its participants – and on American politics more broadly. Indeed, most anti-abortion women found activism to be a transformative experience that led them to develop new skills,

²⁶⁰ Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, pp. 129-130.

²⁶¹ Hale, p. 299.

increased self-confidence, and a sense of solidarity with other conservative women. Moreover, the movement often acted as a pathway to other campaigns, and many women remained politically active for decades, battling on multiple fronts to protect the sanctity of the family. Thus, like their counterparts in the anti-busing movement, anti-abortion women played a critical role in the rise of the New Right. However, as with the previous chapter, this study of the anti-abortion struggle has also served as a powerful reminder that divisions between conservatism and feminism were never as hard-and-fast as commonly assumed. Admittedly, the majority of anti-abortion women remained hostile to ‘women’s libbers’ and rarely questioned gender hierarchies themselves, instead basing their activism on their traditional roles as mothers and housewives. But these same women appropriated important ideas and tactics from second-wave feminism, and they claimed a prominent role for women within the burgeoning pro-family movement. Meanwhile, a small cadre of anti-abortion women embraced the feminist label, seeking to dispel the popular myth that opposition to abortion was inherently incompatible with feminism. Ultimately then, the anti-abortion struggle of the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates that feminism took many forms – and that it was never the only route to women’s political empowerment.

Conclusion

In the run up to the Million Mom March for ‘common sense gun control’ in May 2000, *New York Times* reporter Robin Toner observed that, by making ‘an appeal based on the moral authority of women as mothers,’ organisers were ‘invoking a very old tradition in politics.’ She declared: ‘Political strategies come and go, but this one endures: never underestimate the political potency of motherhood.’¹ Indeed, taking place on Mother’s Day at the dawn of the new millennium, the Million Mom March signalled the continuation of maternal protest into the twenty-first century. Like many of the activists in this study, the march’s organisers claimed to be motivated by concern for children, and a sense of responsibility as mothers. Lead organiser Donna Dees-Thomases said that she had been moved to take action after viewing television footage of children, hand in hand, being led away from a Jewish community centre following a recent shooting in Granada Hills, California. She recalled that, after speaking to five or ten other women about it, she found that they all had the same reaction to gun violence; as she put it: ‘Our maternal instincts were just kicking in.’² Moreover, like earlier maternal activists, march organisers drew heavily upon the rhetoric and symbolism of motherhood as they sought to unite women across partisan divides, and to call upon lawmakers to pass tougher gun laws. Notably, these activists also faced similar criticisms to their predecessors, with a number of analysts and feminist critics accusing the event of casting women in a political role that was ‘dated and limiting: as selfless nonpartisan defenders of hearth and home.’³

Nevertheless, the Million Mom March also highlights how maternalist politics were adapted by a new generation of activists for a new era – as well as how they were constantly contested by women of different backgrounds and political orientations. One example of how the politics of motherhood evolved during this period was activists’ use of the internet as an organising tool. Indeed, the march’s ‘warm and fuzzy’ website, which emphasised organisers’ desire to ‘move beyond politics’ and contained a ‘Tapestry’ section for visitors to post personal reactions to the issue, was clearly designed to connect and mobilise ‘ordinary’ American women.⁴ But, despite their use of new technologies, activists faced opposition from the start from gun rights advocates who also sought to claim the mantle of motherhood – arguing that guns were necessary

¹ Robin Toner, ‘Pulling Strings: Invoking the Moral Authority of Moms,’ *New York Times*, 7 May 2000, pp. 1, 6 (p. 1).

² Donna Dees-Thomases, quoted in Toner, ‘Pulling Strings,’ p. 1

³ Toner, ‘Pulling Strings,’ p. 1.

⁴ Toner, ‘Pulling Strings,’ pp. 1, 6.

to keep their children safe. For example, a group called the Second Amendment Sisters challenged the notion that the Million Mom March spoke for all mothers by launching its own online campaign and staging a counter-demonstration on the day of the march.⁵ Significantly, while supporters of gun control presented an image of mothers as committed to peace and nonviolent conflict resolution, these gun rights activists appealed to ‘a different but equally common representation: women and mothers as fierce protectors of their children and families.’⁶ Thus, the Million Mom March illustrates change and contestation, as well as continuity, within maternalist politics.

It is this endurance, flexibility and malleability that has been at the heart of this study of maternal protest. Indeed, by comparing maternalism across the political spectrum during the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s, this thesis has shed new light on both the similarities and the differences in the way activists understood and used motherhood throughout this period. In the process, it has enhanced our understanding of maternalism – and social protest more generally – in a number of important ways. First, this study has underscored the integral role ideologies of motherhood played in shaping women’s activism during this era. Within all of the movements studied, women were motivated by concern for children and they viewed political activism as an extension of their gendered role as mothers. Consequently, WSP, welfare rights, anti-busing and anti-abortion activists all drew heavily upon the language of motherhood to justify their protests and enhance their moral authority. Yet, as this thesis has shown, these women ultimately forged their maternalist politics out of their daily lives – and they differed significantly in their views on which children needed protecting, what they needed protecting from, and how best to defend them.

⁵ Toner, ‘Pulling Strings,’ p. 6; Patrice DiQuinzio, ‘The Politics of the Mothers’ Movement in the United States: Possibilities and Pitfalls,’ *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, 8, no. 1-2 (2006), 55-71 (pp. 60-61).

⁶ DiQuinzio, p. 61. Notably, this image of mothers as ‘fierce protectors’ has found a prominent advocate in recent years in former Alaska governor Sarah Palin – a staunch defender of the right to bear arms who regularly referred to herself as ‘Mama Grizzly.’ For more on twenty-first-century manifestations of maternalism – which have also included Mothers Against Drunk Driving, campaigns against the Iraq War, and the recent upsurge in mothers’ advocacy groups and forums, many of them online – see Kathryn Abrams, ‘Women and Antiwar Protest: Rearticulating Gender and Citizenship,’ *Boston University Law Review*, 87, no. 4 (2007), 849-882; Michelle Moravec, ‘Another Mother for Peace: Reconsidering Maternalist Peace Rhetoric from an Historical Perspective 1967-2007,’ *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 1, no. 1 (2010), 9-29; Ann W. Duncan, ‘Motherhood, Faith, Feminism and the Legacy of the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election,’ *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 5, no. 1 (2014), 53-66; Heather Hewett, ‘Talkin’ Bout a Revolution: Building a Mothers’ Movement in the Third Wave,’ *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, 8, no. 1-2 (2006), 34-54; Judith Stadtman Tucker, ‘Rocking the Boat: Feminism and the Ideological Grounding of the Twenty-First Century Mothers’ Movement,’ in *Feminist Mothering*, ed. by Andrea O’Reilly (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 205-218.

One of the most striking findings of this study is that the fissures between these movements were not always clean cut between left and right as one might expect. Instead, this thesis has uncovered significant commonalities between the welfare rights and anti-busing struggles on the one hand, and WSP and the anti-abortion movement on the other – attesting to the power of class in shaping women’s activism. For instance, in both the welfare rights and anti-busing struggles, women were primarily motivated by immediate issues affecting their own children, their activism focused on the local level. In contrast, the more middle-class women in WSP and the anti-abortion movement generally conceived their maternal responsibilities more broadly and were galvanised by concern for all children – and as a result, they saw their activism as national (and sometimes even global) in scope. In part, this reflects the fact that war and abortion tended to be perceived as ‘national’ issues, while welfare and busing were seen as more ‘local.’⁷ But class clearly played a role in shaping the divergent focuses of these movements. Indeed, while participants in WSP and the anti-abortion struggle were able to maintain an impressive degree of national communication and many travelled to attend national or regional demonstrations, the low-income women in welfare rights and anti-busing movements often lacked the resources to organise at the national level. Moreover, both welfare rights and anti-busing activists believed that their children’s well-being was threatened – and their own rights as mothers were being usurped – at least in part, due to class discrimination. Welfare recipients emphasised the damaging impact poverty had on their children, and they demanded the right to engage in full-time mothering, just like the wealthy. Meanwhile, anti-busing women objected to the fact that their own children were being bused, while suburban children remained unaffected. Nevertheless, this study has also shed light upon an anti-elitist maternalist discourse that transcended class boundaries – suggesting that the interplay between class and gender was sometimes more complex. This populist strain of maternalism was particularly prevalent within the anti-busing and anti-abortion struggles where, regardless of their actual economic status, women often used their gendered identities to claim a marginalised status – positioning themselves as ‘ordinary’ mothers defending family and community against unaccountable elites. Thus, as well as demonstrating how class impacted upon women’s understanding and experience of gender, this thesis has also revealed the potential of gender to operate in lieu of class, enabling a wide range of women to claim a populist stance.

⁷ There was, of course, a national dimension to the campaign against busing, and particularly to the welfare rights struggle (just as local concerns and opportunities helped shape the peace and anti-abortion movements). But on the whole, these issues were viewed as more local in nature.

This study has also highlighted the vital role that racial and ethnic identities played in shaping women's maternalist politics. This comes across particularly strongly when comparing the welfare rights and anti-busing struggles. Indeed, despite sharing a class-consciousness as low-income women, there were important differences in the way these two groups conceived their maternal roles. Perhaps the most obvious of these was that the predominantly black women in the welfare rights movement espoused a much more inclusive version of maternalism than their white anti-busing counterparts. Indeed, having experienced racial discrimination in the welfare system and society at large, welfare rights activists sought to challenge negative stereotypes about black single mothers and to defend all women's right to stay home and care for their children if they chose. Furthermore, although most welfare recipients were initially prompted to take action by immediate and pressing concerns for their own children, once involved, they often came to see themselves as part of a larger struggle to ensure social and economic justice for all children. It is likely that this was related to historic differences in the way black women have viewed and practised motherhood. As several scholars have noted, African American women have a long history of engaging in 'othermothering' (sharing childcare duties within women-centred, community-based networks) to ensure the survival of the black community – and this has often led black women to understand motherhood as a communal rather than individual responsibility, and to feel accountable to children other than their own.⁸ In contrast, the white ethnic women who dominated the anti-busing struggles in Boston and Detroit tended to view motherhood in more racially exclusive and defensive terms. Stressing the perils of busing and the importance of neighbourhood schools for maintaining ethnic identity, these women campaigned tirelessly on behalf of their own children. However, influenced by contemporary portrayals of dysfunctional black families and mothers – the very stereotypes that welfare rights activists fought against – anti-busing women frequently remained unsympathetic to African American women's demands for educational equity for their children.

Religion has also emerged as a salient theme within this thesis. Indeed, many of the women studied held strong religious convictions, which influenced their understandings of motherhood in important ways. Within the anti-busing and anti-abortion movements, for example, participants tended to be devout Catholics or

⁸ See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 178-183; Stanlie M. James, 'Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?', in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, ed. by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 44-54.

evangelical Protestants, who saw gender roles as divinely ordained. As a result, these activists drew heavily upon religious language within their protests – consistently arguing that God was on their side in their struggles to fulfil their maternal responsibilities or to defend traditional female roles. In contrast, religion seems to have played much less of a role in WSP and the welfare rights movement. This is not to deny that some activists in these movements held religious beliefs that may have helped to motivate their activism. However, both of these groups tended to prioritise inclusivity and, as a result, religious references were conspicuously absent from their rhetoric. Moreover, many participants in the welfare rights struggle sought to challenge religious doctrines that stigmatised single mothers, arguing that caring for children was more important than conforming to traditional family structures. Thus, by examining how activists from a variety of different backgrounds understood and deployed motherhood, this thesis has illuminated how gender intersects with race, class, religion and other identities to shape political activism and social change.

This study has also considered the impact that maternal ideologies had on the strategies of these movements – and what it meant to combine political activism and motherhood in practical terms. Within all of these movements, activists made extensive use of direct action tactics that had been popularised by civil rights, anti-war and New Left protesters during the 1960s. But they did not simply mimic the protest styles of earlier activists. Instead, they made these tactics their own, employing a variety of methods to highlight their status as mothers during their public protests – including displaying maternal images and slogans; organising special ‘mothers’ marches’ and Mother’s Day actions; staging colourful street theatre displays; and bringing their children along to demonstrations. Indeed, a powerful visual connection between all of these movements lay in the symbolic use of motherhood and children that characterised their direct actions. Furthermore, although most of these activists professed to favour nonviolent methods, some of the women studied exhibited a willingness to use force or the threat of force if deemed necessary to protect their own or others’ children. This militant brand of maternalism was particularly evident in the welfare rights, anti-busing and anti-abortion struggles. In contrast, WSP tended to maintain a more philosophical commitment to nonviolence and, particularly during its early days, members were reluctant to engage in activities that might damage their ‘respectable’ image. Nevertheless, the willingness of many activists in this study – including, by the late 1960s, many members of WSP – to employ flamboyant and, at times, confrontational

direct action tactics clearly reveals a shift away from the politics of respectability that had characterised maternalism during the early twentieth century.

As far as it is possible to discern, these women's use of maternal rhetoric and symbolism stemmed from genuine concerns for children and a sincere belief that mothers held certain gender-specific responsibilities. But, as this thesis has shown, for many women, emphasising their status as mothers was also a tactical move – designed to capture media attention, secure public support and protect against attack. In contemporary popular discourse, mothers' movements – and perhaps mothers in general – tend to be viewed as emotionally driven and essentially apolitical. And as a result, these movements are often discredited as irrational, their demands seen to be based on emotion and not worthy of serious consideration.⁹ Conversely, maternal activists who are seen to be politically motivated are regularly accused of not representing 'ordinary' mothers, the authenticity of their message called into question.¹⁰ However, this study has challenged this reductive and dichotomous view of maternalist movements – suggesting that it is possible to be both a concerned mother and a politically engaged activist and strategist. Moreover, it has shown that activism frequently raises women's political consciousness – making them more aware of both the power structures that constrain them and the political potential of their maternal identities.

Within all of the movements studied, women found that balancing activism and mothering responsibilities could lead to numerous practical difficulties and personal tensions. For some women, the task of taking care of unpredictable, and at times unruly, youngsters during demonstrations could be an added strain. Meanwhile, many others faced a potentially paradoxical situation in which they were active on behalf of their families, while finding that political commitments increasingly diverted their energies away from their children and domestic duties. In order to overcome these challenges, activists sought a variety of solutions – they turned political solidarity into invaluable networks of support, babysitting each another's children and organising communal childcare facilities during demonstrations and events; they called upon husbands and children to shoulder more of the household labour; and they justified time spent away from the home with the rationale that their activism was ultimately in their children's

⁹ DiQuinzio, pp. 61-62.

¹⁰ For example, around the time of the Million Mom March, lead organiser Donna Dees-Thomas – who worked as a part-time publicist for CBS – was unmasked by America's right-wing media as a public relations 'pro,' and thus not representative of 'ordinary moms.' See Andrea Estepa, *Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980*, PhD thesis, Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey University, 2012, pp. 337-339; Toner, 'Pulling Strings.'

best interests. Of course, not all of these activists experienced these problems in the same way, or to the same degree. For example, compared to their counterparts in other movements, participants in the welfare rights struggle did not perceive the same level of tension between their activism and domestic responsibilities. Indeed, as low-income black women, they had long been excluded from the domestic ideal and they tended to have plenty of experience juggling paid work and mothering. Nevertheless, the difficulties and challenges that all of these activists faced – and their attempts to resolve them – serve as a powerful reminder to scholars of the need to pay greater attention to the nitty-gritty, often unglamorous work that goes into maintaining social movements.

This thesis has highlighted both the possibilities and the pitfalls of maternalist politics for effecting social and political change. The campaigns examined here were not without their share of successes. Within all of these movements, activists found that leveraging their maternal identities could lead to tangible results – including favourable legislative changes, representation on a variety of policy-making bodies and in local and national government and, in the case of the welfare rights struggle, material benefits in the form of thousands of dollars worth of special grants. Yet, when it came to achieving their central objectives, all of these movements fell short. In part, this points to the way that race and class intersected with gender to shape perceptions of these movements – and to the limits of maternalism for marginalised groups. Indeed, class biases rendered both welfare rights and anti-busing activists outside the bounds of respectable motherhood. Welfare recipients found that their status as mothers was denigrated further by racial discrimination and negative stereotypes about black women's moral failings. Meanwhile, paradoxically, anti-busing women were hindered by the growing perception that their actions were motivated by racism – as well as by the movement's association with violence. But it is important to note that the middle-class white women who dominated WSP and the anti-abortion movement also found that they lost credibility when they came to be associated with more radical activists or became more militant themselves – suggesting that women's ability to claim the strategic advantages of motherhood could be undermined not just by race and class, but simply by failing to conform to traditional notions of maternal virtue. Moreover, many women in this study found that their activism was hampered by competing versions of maternalism emanating from other movements. This was particularly a problem for anti-busing and anti-abortion women, with both pro-desegregation and pro-choice activists claiming to speak 'as mothers,' and challenging their opponents' professed concern for children. Nevertheless, despite failing to achieve their ultimate goals, all of these movements had

a profound impact upon the lives of their participants. Indeed, within all four campaigns, activists regularly developed new skills, increased self-confidence and a sense of solidarity with other women. However, where activists in this study differed significantly was in how they related to the women's liberation movement and the extent to which they came to embrace a feminist identity over the course of their activism.

The relationship between maternalism and feminism has been a central theme of this thesis. It has shown that, for some women, political activism was an empowering experience that led them to recognise and to challenge gender hierarchies. This was one area where there clearly were differences between progressive and conservative activists. Indeed, within WSP and the welfare rights movement on the left, women often moved from seeing themselves simply as mothers acting on behalf of children to identifying as part of a broader movement for women's rights. In part, this shift resulted from ongoing struggles against power structures that activists increasingly identified as masculinised. Welfare recipients were also influenced by internal tensions with male organisers in their own movement, who were frequently controlling and condescending. Meanwhile, members of WSP sometimes experienced sexism at the hands of men in the peace movement. Moreover, the development of a feminist consciousness among these women was undoubtedly encouraged by the growing visibility of feminist organising during this period. Yet, for WSPers and welfare recipients, embracing feminist ideals did not necessarily require rejecting the maternal ideologies upon which their earlier activism had been based. Instead, these activists formulated their own versions of feminism that were rooted in their race, class and generational perspectives, and were inseparable from their identities as mothers. For example, for the low-income black women in the welfare rights struggle, the right to bear children and stay home to care for them if they chose was central to their vision of 'women's liberation.' Furthermore, denouncing so-called 'male' values (such as individualism, competition and materialism), women in both groups argued that the values and practises associated with motherhood offered a powerful basis from which to restructure society. Notably, in doing so, they foreshadowed key aspects of the cultural feminism that came to the fore in the 1980s. Thus, the experiences of WSPers and welfare rights activists challenge the popular assumption that maternalism is inherently incompatible with women's liberation, providing a vital reminder that feminism takes multiple forms.

In contrast, however, the self-identified conservative women who dominated the anti-busing and anti-abortion struggles tended to remain either indifferent or actively

opposed to second-wave feminism. Indeed, recognising that feminism was never the only ideological tradition available to women, this study has explored how these activists constructed alternative visions of female political advancement based on their own lives and particular social locations. Like their counterparts in WSP and the welfare rights movement, anti-busing and anti-abortion women often found activism to be an empowering and life-altering experience. But, unlike WSPers and welfare recipients, they rarely came to question gender hierarchies. Instead, these women used their newly acquired skills to campaign against other issues that they perceived as threatening to family values – such as the Equal Rights Amendment, sex education in schools and gay rights – and they continued to base their activism on their traditional roles as mothers and housewives. Thus, opponents of busing and abortion aligned themselves with a burgeoning anti-feminist – or ‘pro-family’ – movement, and they played a critical role in the rise of modern conservatism.

Nevertheless, this study has also demonstrated that it would be overly simplistic to view the relationship between conservative women and feminism purely in terms of conflict. Indeed, whether or not they cared to admit it, conservative women undoubtedly benefitted from feminists’ efforts to widen opportunities for women in fields such as education and politics, and from their role in legitimising new forms of confrontational protest for women. Furthermore, even as they attacked ‘women’s libbers’ and their goals, opponents of busing and abortion appropriated important ideologies, rhetoric and tactics from the feminist movement. This can be seen in the insistence of many anti-busing women that busing was a ‘women’s issue’ – as well as in the popular anti-abortion slogan ‘Equal Rights for Unborn Women.’ And by organising around issues such as sexuality and neighbourhood schools, women in the anti-abortion and anti-busing struggles clearly embraced the feminist shibboleth that the ‘personal was political.’ Meanwhile, both movements contributed significantly to the political empowerment of conservative women during the 1970s and 1980s – and they helped to ensure a prominent role for women within the broader New Right. Ultimately then, the findings of this thesis call for a much broader and more nuanced understanding not just of maternalism, but of feminism and women’s activism on the right. Such an understanding would acknowledge the diversity within these political traditions and the vital role that race, class and religion play in mediating women’s gender identities and shaping their political consciousnesses. Moreover, it would recognise that maternalism, feminism and conservatism are all fluid categories, and that the boundaries between them are, in fact, highly permeable.

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