Militant Feminism and the Women of the Weather Underground Organization

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MILITANT FEMINISM AND THE WOMEN OF THE WEATHER
UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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in

The Department of History

by

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May 2014
Dedicated to

James,
Carmen,
Deanna,
Jim,
and
David
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ABSTRACT

Militant feminism is characterized by two positions. First, the militant feminist believes that where the use of violence is justified, it is just as justified when performed by women as by men. Second, militant feminists hold that militant action can be justified in the pursuit of aims consistent with feminist values. Shortly after the emergence of second-wave feminism in the mid-1960’s, there is a surge of militant feminists among radical leftist organizations, such as the Weather Underground Organization. Second-wave feminists articulated a view of womanhood that was not confined to the home; militant feminists, such as those of the Weather Underground Organization, supplemented this expanded view of womanhood to include revolutionary movements where women struggled to obtain a more just society. This dissertation examines the Weather Underground Organization to show these militant feminist principles at work. Using pamphlets, political writings, position papers, and memoirs, this dissertation argues that, in fashioning their activist group, the women of the Weather Underground not only aligned themselves with accepted and recognized feminist goals but also fashioned their own brand of feminism, one that – in being international and political in scope – in many ways previewed elements of third wave of feminism, while also fitting in snugly with the second wave tradition. These Weatherwomen struggled to fashion a complex feminist platform for their organization and rose to positions of leadership in the group, in spite of elements of sexism within the Weather Underground Organization. By focusing on the neglected contributions of these Weatherwomen, the historical narrative can be adapted to include the history of militant feminism in a more comprehensive version of women’s history.
INTRODUCTION:
WEATHERWOMEN: A SHIFT IN FOCUS

On March 6, 1970, Diana Oughton’s life came to a sudden and violent end as a bomb assembled by members of the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) blew up in a Greenwich townhouse. Newspaper accounts after the explosion characterized Diana’s involvement in the WUO as inauthentic and misled, stemming from the greater-than-life personality of her lover, Bill Ayers. Defining Ayers as “charming, manipulative, and a bit cruel,” contemporary accounts concluded that he “probably exercised the single most powerful influence over Diana until her death.”¹ This treatment reflects the dominant historical narrative of women involved in the WUO and other militant leftist organizations of the late 1960s and 1970s. While there is no doubt that the ideology, goals, and methods advocated by this group were inherently problematic, it is a mistake to dismiss the participation of women such as Oughton as being motivated by misguided infatuation. Dedicated revolutionaries in their own right, the women of the Weather Underground deserve serious consideration.

Arguing that violence can be justified in the pursuit of feminist aims, and that justified violence can be used by women just as easily as by men, the women of the WUO articulated and embodied militant, revolutionary feminist principles. This dissertation excavates their long buried history and reclaims the voices of the “Weatherwomen,” a name they gave themselves.²

² I employ this terminology throughout the dissertation, in accordance to what the WUO female members called themselves in their pamphlets and publications. Furthermore, I use the WUO as an umbrella term to refer to the organization itself, throughout its many instantiations throughout the years. Chapter 1 outlines the history of the group’s name changes, as the organization existed as Weatherman (or Weather for short) until 1970, then as the WUO after 1970. See David Gilbert, Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, The Weather Underground, and Beyond (Oakland:
Assertive, tough, and idealistic, but far from naive, these Weatherwomen were determined to stamp out sexism and social injustice. As such, the Weatherwomen asserted that militancy was necessary in the pursuit of a socialist revolution that would produce a society rooted in gender, racial, and class equality. As one anonymous Weatherwoman wrote in their self-published book of poetry, *Sing a Battle Song*, “to achieve the full liberation of women means to end the ways we are dehumanized and exploited because of our sex, race or class.”

As this dissertation reveals, the WUO’s feminism derived in large part from the second wave feminist movement that was developing contemporaneously with them. The WUO articulated many of the same second wave views of the women’s liberation groups that it also severely critiqued. The WUO criticized the role of women in the home, was concerned with the subordination of women to men, attacked the gender pay gap, and supported female bodily integrity. Such issues were at the forefront of contemporary female liberation groups.

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PM Press, 2012), 166. Additionally, when attributing authorship to various WUO publications, I employ the names listed on the documents themselves, which range from Weather, Weatherman, WUO, Weatherwomen, The Proud Eagle Tribe (a name given to the Weatherwomen acting together as a unit) or the Women’s Brigade (another name given to the Weatherwomen’s unit, as the ‘tribe’ label was deemed to be offensive to Native Americans), to pseudonyms designated to signal collaborative efforts. It is also important to note that while the Weatherwomen authored some documents, other documents were written collaboratively, with men and women writing/editing together. As such, there are instances where WUO members fashioned a feminist vision together for the WUO.

4 Broadly speaking, the second wave focused on achieving equality for women in the home, the workplace, and the legal arena. It drew on the language of civil rights to call for female liberation and gender equality. However, second wave feminists tended to operate mainly from a white, middle class point of view. The third wave focused on broadening that point of view to address the needs of all women, regardless of race, class, sexuality, or other identity markers. For more on second wave issues see Linda Nicholson, ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From The Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Random House, 1970); Rachel Blau Duplessis and Ann Snitow, eds., *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices From Women’s Liberation* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Nancy MacLean, *The American Women’s Movement: 1945-2000* (Boston: Bedford Press, 2009). For more on the third
Yet, the WUO saw the women’s groups’ solitary concern with gender as overly indulgent, and as not responsive to the needs and concerns of all women. Hence, this dissertation also explores how the women of the WUO, previewing the third wave feminist movement, critiqued feminist groups of the period for their self-involvement, while articulating a feminist ideology that would incorporate multiple identity perspectives. Since this concern with intersecting identities is well before what is normally taken to be the beginning of third wave feminism (which can be dated either to 1981 when *This Bridge Called My Back* was published or 1991, when Rebecca Walker coined “third wave feminism” in her piece, “Becoming the Third Wave”), this dissertation calls this trend “proto-third wave feminism.” This work also points out that the WUO’s feminism, while situated in the time period of the second wave, promoted views associated with the third wave, which poses a significant worry for the wave motif, especially when the waves are viewed as representing distinct historical time periods. International and multiethnic in its worldview, the feminist philosophy of the Weatherwomen in particular, and the wave, see Claire Snyder, “What Is Third Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” *Signs*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2008): 175-196; Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women’s Commonality* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

In this work, I will be using the wave motif that has been standard throughout much of the work on feminist history. This motif will be useful to help establish both that the WUO are feminist since their positions and works fit into the waves and that their feminism is complex since it crosses into both the second and third waves. In a sense, the WUO disrupts the wave metaphor. While the wave motif is recognized throughout feminist literature and will be useful for this purpose, it is not without its problems. For example, it can lead to oversimplifications of certain feminists’ complex positions and it can mislead readers to believe that the waves necessarily represent progress (as if a third wave feminist is necessarily right when debating a second wave feminist). For more on this view, see Becky Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Summer, 2002), 336-360. My use of the waves is thus practical and should not be taken as a theoretical endorsement of them.

WUO in general, moved beyond the white, American, middle-class perspective to include the experiences of working class and Third World women. The Weatherwomen stated, “we are joining our lives with the needs and aspirations of poor and working class women.” Their actions attempted to make good on this promise.

The Weatherwomen’s particular brand of feminism – a brand that incorporated second wave positions, a cogent critique of the second wave’s insularity, proto-third wave positions, and an embrace of militant tactics to bring about a socialist society with true gender equality – may be difficult to label precisely. U.S. women’s history records a plethora of feminist movements forming in the second half of the 20th Century: radical feminism, Marxist feminism, cultural feminism, sex-positive feminism, postmodern feminism, among many others. With this slew of distinct standpoints, one position – the one that will provide the background for analyzing the WUO’s own version of feminism – stands out in its absence: militant feminism. Perhaps this position has been overlooked because of the seeming contradiction of its terms: militant action appears to embrace patriarchal values, accepting tactical violence over collaboration and peaceful resistance.8

7 Anonymous Weatherwomen, Sing a Battle Song.
Actual militant feminist groups – groups that embrace militancy in the pursuit of just and feminist aims – provided their own answers to this seeming paradox. While it may appear to the theoretical philosopher that feminism and militancy are contradictory, or at least inconsistent, the historical record offers several examples of groups in the second half of the 20th Century in the United States that attempted to combine a principled feminist stance with a methodology that they felt required militancy. Groups that could arguably qualify for this label would include the Black Panther Party (BPP), WITCH, M19CO, and the Red Stocking Brigade.

Despite the lack of significant recognition of their feminist leanings, the Black Panthers represent one of the earliest proponents and developers of militant feminism in modern US history. Though much is made of the sexism that abounded within the ranks and even the leadership of the BPP, the BPP supported the advancement of women to leadership positions especially at local levels, demanded an environment inclusive of and respectful to women, and supported community programs (such as the breakfast program) that fit with feminist aims. While the BPP certainly counts as an early militant feminist group, there were also clear limitations to their feminism, such as a lack of gender parity among leadership.9

9 Although none of these sources recognize the BPP’s militant feminism, for more on the BPP, see Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries in Charles E. Jones, ed., The Black Panther Party Reconsidered (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1988); Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy (New York: Routledge, 2001). In terms of gender parity in leadership, it isn’t until 1971 (five years after BPP is founded) that a woman takes an important leadership role when Elaine Brown becomes Minister of Information. Brown later becomes the Chairperson of the party in 1974, but other female leaders in the BPP on the national stage are rare. Other notable women who played important roles in the BPP, such as Angela Davis or Assata Shakur, did not rise to national leadership. See Elaine Brown, A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story (New York: Doubleday Books, 1992); Assata Shakur, Assata: An Autobiography (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987); Angela Davis, Angela Davis: An Autobiography (New York: International Publishers, 1988).
This dissertation considers how the WUO, which was heavily influenced by the BPP, was a militant feminist organization that achieved gender parity in leadership, put forth a feminist agenda, and made strides in advanced feminist thinking. The Weatherwomen firmly committed themselves to militancy, as a 1969 statement made clear: “Our liberation as individuals and as women is possible when it is understood as a political process – part of the formation of an armed white fighting force. Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, and the struggle to gain and use political power against the state is the armed struggle for our liberation.”^10 The WUO believed that liberation and an achievement of true equality were only going to happen when women actively seized their freedom in a militant fashion. The WUO’s combination of militancy with feminism certainly brought together conflicting viewpoints: it borrowed heavily from Marxist analysis, insisted on the importance of the intersections of race, class, and gender when assessing oppression (before it was common to do so in feminist theory), forged aims aligned to second wave feminism, and previewed third wave feminist positions.^11 As such, WUO’s militant feminism was nuanced, layered, and rich.

The WUO therefore blended political aims with feminist goals to respond to the problems that they perceived in the political and social milieu of their time period. This general openness to feminist aims, coexisting alongside a militant agenda and thriving in spite of macho posturing, is precisely why the concept of militant feminism fits the WUO so well. Militant feminism, as defined in this dissertation, tempers outright militancy with a respect for and adherence to ethical

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and feminist values. Thus, militant feminism, especially as exemplified in the WUO, emerges as an important historical movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s that is often overlooked in histories of larger social movements, of feminism, and of militant groups.

Though numerous commentators, including some of the Weatherwomen themselves, object to labeling the WUO as feminist, this dissertation asserts that there is definitive evidence of the organization’s substantive feminist aims.\(^{12}\) As the following chapters reveal, this feminism flourished despite the undeniable sexism within the WUO, especially from many of the male leaders. These male leaders encouraged macho attitudes within collectives and took sexual advantage of female members, all while paying lip service to sexual liberation. The main chroniclers of the WUO focus on these instances of sexism and male chauvinism, and conclude that Weather’s inherent sexism held back the Weatherwomen.\(^{13}\)

The secondary literature’s emphasis on this sexism overshadows the struggles and contributions of Weatherwomen to the project of militant feminism. Neither did the sexist male leaders of WUO make up the whole of the organization, nor was the WUO organized in such a linear, hierarchical fashion that we can pinpoint the organization’s positions simply by examining its male leadership. The WUO was a fluid organization whose leadership had a variety of sometimes conflicting messages. Focusing only on the sexism present in the WUO ignores the Weatherwomen’s very real efforts to smash sexism both in society and in the WUO itself. Such a one-sided focus also erases the many sites of empowerment for the Weatherwomen – both of a personal nature and as exemplified through leadership positions and activities. Insofar


\(^{13}\) Ibid.
as many of the women of the WUO, and some of the men, were both feminist and influential, it would be a mistake to dismiss out of hand the idea that the organization was feminist in a significant way.

Just as the overt sexism within the WUO has skewed its historical representation, so, too, has the organization’s decentering of gender. Feminists of the era did not recognize the WUO as feminist because the group did not place gender at the forefront of their movement. For some early radical feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone, women’s oppression *qua women* was the core of identity politics, and was not to be diluted with other identity or political issues. Rather, the primary job of feminists was to fight for gender equality, just as it was the primary job of other oppressed groups to fight for their own empowerment. Thus, to be a feminist, one had to put the fight for gender equality first and foremost.

The WUO did not accept this primacy of gender, so activists of the era or historical accounts of second wave feminism have not included it as feminist. Yet, as this dissertation makes clear, the group’s political analysis most certainly included gender as a special category of women’s oppression. The WUO furthered that feminist analysis with an articulation of how that oppression functioned as it intersected with class, race, and political status within the imperialist structure.

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16 For some of the position papers or pieces that exemplify this complex type of feminism for the WUO, see WUO, *Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism* (San Francisco and New York: Prairie Fire Distribution Committee, 1974); Bernardine Dohrn, “Toward a
Drawing upon the work of bell hooks and others who argue for a definition of feminism as a political consciousness that is both inclusive of differences and critical of privilege, this dissertation considers how WUO members struggled to incorporate multiple subjectivities and experiences in the brand of feminism that they were forging. The militant feminism that members of the WUO were fashioning recognized differences in class and race, and recognized the subjectivities of all women.

The dissertation locates the WUO’s militant feminism in the pages of the organization’s numerous pamphlets, communiqués, position papers, and newspaper articles. Memoirs of former WUO members add insight into the personalities, conflicts, and gender dynamics present within the WUO. These sources offer a great deal of information about the contributions – both theoretical and material – that the Weatherwomen made to their organization.

By shifting the focus from the male leadership and machismo of the group, which the literature on the WUO has emphasized up to now, to the Weatherwomen’s roles and actions, the following chapters enlarge the current historical discourse and contribute a new and unique perspective on the WUO. In doing so, this dissertation also offers a broader understanding of Revolutionary Women’s Movement,” *New Left Notes*, Special Issue, March 8, 1969, 4; also available at SDS/WUO Document Archive, [http://www.antiauthoritarian.net/sds_wuo/nln_iwd_1969/](http://www.antiauthoritarian.net/sds_wuo/nln_iwd_1969/) (accessed 26 June 2013); “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” *Osawatomie*, Summer 1975, No. 2, 6-13. *Prairie Fire* was written collectively, with WUO members editing/revising the text together.  

militant feminism and its place in the women’s liberation movement, the leftist social movements of the 1960’s, and social activism in 20th Century US history.\textsuperscript{18}

To understand how the WUO developed and put into practice its own version of militant feminism, this dissertation begins by tracing the historical and theoretical roots of the organization, along with the personal inspirations of the individual members who took up this particular cause. To this end, Chapter One provides a brief history of how the WUO developed from Students for a Democratic Society, considering how the WUO’s leadership derived their views from the works of Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, and Regis Debray. The chapter also looks at how WUO members saw the implementation of United States policies, both at home and abroad, as leading them to feel that they personally had to do something, and that some level of violence in this response would be necessary and justified.

Having established the historical, theoretical, and some of the personal underpinnings for the WUO’s belief that there was a need for a revolution that could achieve feminist goals, Chapter Two continues this discussion by highlighting the key contributions of Weatherwomen, both to the fight against the sexism of the WUO and to the production of the WUO’s feminist mission. The second chapter navigates the complex waters of understanding the sexism present within the WUO (and its predecessor, Students for a Democratic Society), as well as how female members of the organization resisted it, fighting sexism at an organizational level both by questioning male leadership and through creating feminist position papers and communications. Weatherwomen also fought against sexism on individual levels, speaking against the macho and overly-sexual attitudes of particular male WUO members.

\textsuperscript{18} Militant feminism holds that the use of violence is justified if it is done in the pursuit of just ends, including ends that are required for the building of a feminist society. Militant feminism holds that women can use violence just as capably as men, and that their use of it is justified as long as it is in the pursuit of morally required ends.
By listening more carefully to the Weatherwomen’s voices, we learn that many women found the WUO to be a locus of agency, autonomy, and empowerment. Chapter Three explains how various women within the organization felt that the WUO allowed them to excel as persons in ways that were not otherwise possible given the pervasive and intense sexism that abounded through mainstream society in the late 60’s and early 70’s. To this end, the third chapter discusses various instances of female leadership within local WUO collectives and at the national level. Personal histories establish how individual Weatherwomen were able to express their political perspectives, to prove their full capabilities, and to establish their vision for a better society, which they were taking steps to enact. These women embraced militancy in a way that shattered gender constraints that painted them as passive, weak, and incapable of working to change the patriarchal society they found themselves trapped inside. Though their methods may be morally suspect, the historical record ought to reflect that the Weatherwomen autonomously chose these methods in their attempt to break free from sexist constraints that would restrain them to a small set of gender roles in mainstream society. In short, despite claims that they were coerced or blinded by passion, the Weatherwomen were autonomously militant.

Chapter Four begins the exploration of the particular brand of feminism that the Weatherwomen articulated. Though the WUO was highly critical of the women’s liberation groups of their own time period, the WUO’s feminism had clear connections to second wave objectives and positions. These connections include the WUO’s positions and analyses made with respect to housework, childrearing, welfare, rape, sterilization, and, in general, the right to be free of patriarchy. Since the current literature usually dismisses the feminism of the WUO as non-existent, this chapter brings to light the many feminist concerns that the WUO articulated via women’s quality of life.
Chapter Five further elaborates on the WUO’s own brand of feminism as it stood in contrast to the second wave positions of their time period. This chapter argues that the WUO’s feminism was proto-third wave in significant ways. The WUO maintained that the feminism of its time period did not address the needs or experiences of women of color, Third World women, or poor women. The WUO envisioned a version of feminism that would establish an alliance with all of these women while showing a concern with responding to *all* sorts of oppressions as they intermixed in most ordinary persons’ real lives. Traditionally, this stance on the part of the WUO has been interpreted as the WUO dismissing female liberation as a bourgeois concern. This chapter shows that such a characterization is misleading and uncharitable. A more accurate interpretation that fits the Weatherwomen’s own writings focuses on the various ways in which the WUO was inclusive and anti-racist in its feminist vision. In other words, Chapter Five argues that the WUO was concerned with female liberation, but was aiming to include all women, with their various unique subjectivities. This chapter also explores instances of the WUO’s proto-third wave position in regards to women’s sexual experimentation.

The conclusion notes that the WUO offered a complex feminist agenda that was concerned with smashing sexism, breaking gender norms, and solving concrete social problems for women. Though they believed in using militancy to achieve social change, Weatherwomen also put limits on the use of violence, so that aggression would only be employed for the pursuit of just and feminist aims.

Overall then, this works aims to correct certain misunderstandings of the WUO by concentrating on the actions and writings of its female members. This work puts the Weatherwomen at the forefront – asking how they managed to work and thrive in the turbulent and patriarchal sixties. While other women fought to get out of the kitchen or the secretarial
pool, these women were stepping onto the battlefield and into positions of organizational leadership. By highlighting their contributions and experiences, this work allows the Weatherwomen to speak for themselves as the strong, autonomous, revolutionary agents of change that they were.
CHAPTER 1: MILITANT FEMINISM IN THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION

On March 6, 1974, a blast rocked the federal offices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in San Francisco. The bomb had been set by the Women’s Brigade of the WUO to draw attention to the plight of poor women, especially welfare recipients. The communiqué accompanying the bombing pronounced that:

- wait in lines for too few food stamps and brave food distribution lines because our families have to eat;
- worry through degrading forms and humiliating rule and regulations;
- are kept out of paying jobs because there are no child care programs;
- struggle to raise our children while we’re called ‘pigs at the trough’ and ‘lazy parasites’ by reactionary male politicians…

The Women’s Brigade, “Health, Education, and Welfare: An Enemy of Women, San Francisco, March 6, 1974 Communiqué,” 6 March 1974; reprint, The Weather Eye: Communiqués from the Weather Underground, ed. Jonah Raskin (San Francisco: Union Square Press, 1974), 100-101. The communiqué was delivered in commemoration of International Women’s Day, March 8, “in solidarity with the rising resistance of women.” It also listed a number of complaints: comments made by Ronald Reagan and Caspar Weinberger that blamed women for their poverty and characterized them as wanting to stay on welfare – while simultaneously the two were trying to cut back welfare benefits in the name of fiscal responsibility. See The Women’s Brigade, “Health, Education, and Welfare: An Enemy of Women, San Francisco, March 6, 1974 Communiqué,” 102, 104. Weinberger served as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare from 1973 to 1975. Reagan served as governor of California during this time period, also, instituting welfare reform in 1971 that reduced the number of people who were eligible for welfare. See http://governors.library.ca.gov/33-reagan.html (accessed 12 September 2013). Additionally, the Weatherwomen were protesting the sterilizations of women in Alabama, specifically Minnie and Mary Alice Rolf. Sterilizations were increasing in the early seventies, especially among poor, minority women. For a discussion of sterilization and black women, see Angela Davis, Women, Race, and Class (New York: Random House, 1981); The Combahee River Collective Statement (1978) at http://www.sfu.ca/iirp/documents/Combahee%201979.pdf (accessed 27 September 2013). In 1974, the Weatherwomen were voicing outrage at the fact that poor and minority women were coerced into sterilization, often times as part as a condition of HEW support. This issue became a rallying cry for feminist groups in 1977. For more on this, see Chicago Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, “Sterilization Abuse: A Task for the Women’s Movement,” (January 1977) available at the CWLU Herstory Archive, https://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/cesa.html (accessed 27 September 2013).
The Weatherwomen felt so strongly about the unfair treatment of welfare mothers that they believed that radical acts – such as bombing a federal office building – were appropriate courses of action. How had the members of the Women’s Brigade gotten to the point where militancy had become just another acceptable tool to affect political and social change?20

Wild and tempestuous, the WUO was born amidst the turmoil of the sixties and was very much shaped and influenced by the political unrest of that period. Through their militant stances and actions, the WUO was attempting to find a path to their vision of a just society, which would be a society devoid of sexism, racism, and capitalist exploitation. From the very beginning of its emergence from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the WUO was not only was committed to militancy, but also explored feminist aims. The organization exemplified militant feminism: it believed that a just society would be a feminist society while also holding that militant methods were justified in the attempt to bring that society about. The following sections briefly trace the development of this organization in an effort to understand militant feminism as a position, to locate the WUO’s position in history as a militant feminist group, and to analyze the organization’s genesis, ideology, and proper place in historical accounts of the sixties, radical leftist organizations, and feminist organizations.

20 I use ‘militancy’ as a term inclusive of violence, in that it denotes an aggressive, non-peaceful method of protest/resistance and in that it refers to a combative way of achieving political change. Thus, an organization can be militant through direct acts of violence, such as by intentionally harming people, who may be combatants or civilians, or destroying property. An organization can also be militant without being directly violent, such as an organization arming itself with weapons in open displays of self-defense, but without any intention to use those weapons or an organization that sends in bomb threats without actually planting any bombs. These latter organizations are aggressive and disruptive in ways that conjure up thoughts of violence without actually being violent.
1.1 White Mother Country Radicals: Increasing Militancy, Creating a White Fighting Force, and Embracing Manliness

Often described as a turbulent decade, the 1960’s in the United States could reasonably be characterized via a series of leftist reactions to perceived instances of injustice, which many of those leftists believed were largely perpetrated by the United States government and US corporations. These injustices revolved around the mistreatment of African Americans, women, homosexuals, impoverished individuals, and other oppressed groups at home, along with wars of aggression and alleged coup d’états abroad, such as wars in Korea (1950-1953) and Vietnam (1955-1975), and attempted and successful coups in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Indonesia (1958), Cuba (1959), the Congo (1960), Dominican Republic (1961), Ghana (1966), and others.

Initially, leftist organizations reacted to these perceived injustices through almost entirely non-violent means, such as forming non-violent organizations, arranging protests, and engaging in civil disobedience. The NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, churches, and other grassroots organizations took direct action through voting registration projects, sit-ins, boycotts, mass protests, and Freedom Rides. These actions relied on mass mobilization and non-violence – in fact, the quiet determination and dignity of African Americans protesting at lunch counters or on

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21 This title (White Mother Country Radicals) is taken from the title of a piece written by Bernardine Dohrn in the New Left Notes, July 29, 1968.
23 For a list and brief discussion of these international actions, see John Gaddis, The Cold War: A New History (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).
buses emphasized the inhumanity of white bigots.\textsuperscript{24} However, as the violent retaliation of whites escalated, many questioned the non-violent model of protest. Activists grew weary of the non-violent principles that they felt were bringing change too slowly and leaving them with no defense against harm.

Within this period of discontent, militant organizations began to appear. One of the first large militant leftist groups was the Black Panther Party (BPP), founded in 1966. Growing from a platform of protecting community neighborhoods from the brutality of police to a broad appeal for social justice, equality, and political self-determination for African Americans, the BPP quickly gained national prominence and acquired a reputation for militancy. By 1968, the Black Panther Party was working toward an agenda of international socialist revolution.\textsuperscript{25}

Other organizations also moved from dedicated non-violent stances to more militant and international outlooks, such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Formed in 1962, SDS originally upheld a non-violent platform that was designed to achieve change through community organizing, student activism, alliances with labor or civil rights leaders, and electoral politics.\textsuperscript{26} Following BPP’s prescription that white activists should not lead the protests for civil rights, SDS maintained a policy that it was improper for white activists to lead efforts for black

\textsuperscript{24} For more on mobilization and non-violence in the Civil Rights Movement, see Anderson, The Movement and the 60’s; Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Bruce Watson, Freedom Summer: The Savage Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy (New York: Viking Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{25} For more on the transition from black-nationalism to a Marxist-inspired international revolutionary platform of the Black Panther Party, see Cleaver and Katsiaficas, eds. Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party, previously cited.

\textsuperscript{26} For more on the history of SDS, see Cathy Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007); Sale Kirkpatrick, SDS (New York: Random House, 1973). Also see the Port Huron statement itself, which alludes to these themes and stakes out a SDS’s political alliance with a civil rights agenda, and with SNCC and BPP. See Port Huron Statement (1962) available at \url{www.coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html} (Accessed 26 August, 2012).
self-determination. First through the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), which aimed to address economic and political inequality in predominantly black neighborhoods, then with the Columbia University student protest of 1968, SDS worked in a supportive role, embracing an agenda of racial integration and multi-racial alliance. SDS also identified U.S. policy in national and international matters as problematic and unjust: they saw the United States’ domestic and foreign policies as supporting a racist system designed to maintain U.S. political and economic hegemony through a repression of national liberation struggles. As the Vietnam War escalated, SDS also adopted an international outlook supporting revolutionary activity, thus moving SDS closer to a more militant stance.

This militancy became more pronounced during 1968, as SDS became focused on stopping US imperialism through political and violent means. In the spring of 1969, position

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papers, including “Hot Town: Summer in the City or I Ain’t Gonna Work On Maggie’s Farm No More,” openly alluded to an increased revolutionary militancy.31 “Hot Town: Summer in the City” explicitly stated that public fights with the repressive state apparatus – and not just a sense of solidarity with those who are oppressed – would serve a strategic function in raising political consciousness and would build solidarity. Jim Mellen and Bill Ayers, the authors of the paper, wrote that, “There should be involvement by SDS people in the neighborhood issues as they come up: a fight in the park, a protest against the pigs” as part of coalition building and “political outreach into the community.”32 This fighting revolutionary spirit was no mere intellectual opposition, but rather was changing into a militant tactic.

This growing embrace of militancy was not unquestionably accepted by all the SDS members, but instead led to tension within the group. The SDS split was prefaced by the fact that two separate factions of the SDS each published conflicting revolutionary platform papers. The Worker Student Alliance (WSA), which was organized and putatively controlled by the non-student organization, the Progressive Labor Party (PL), released, “Revolutionaries Must Fight Nationalism.”33 This paper argued that all forms of nationalism – whether in the hands of oppressive colonial powers or oppressed groups that sought freedom for their nationalist peoples – were reactionary and contrary to the mission of communism. Since this PL paper appeared to

33 Progressive Labor Party (PL) was a Maoist organization that believed that the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) had become too subservient to the Soviet Union and supported non-revolutionary actions, such as participating in elections. For a more detailed explanation, see Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 5, 9-11.
attack many groups that other SDS members allied themselves with, such as the BPP who took a
stance in favor of black nationalism, and it represented a substantial departure from the group’s
previous position that national liberation groups were justified in developing a nationalist agenda
in response to attacks on their culture, society, or lives from US imperialism, it was intensely
controversial.\textsuperscript{34}

The immediate dispute with the WSA position led to a response paper from the other
main faction of SDS, the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), entitled, “You Don't Need a
Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows” in 1969.\textsuperscript{35} To draw a clear distinction
between the nationalism of oppressed groups and that of imperialist states, RYM identified black
nationalism as a necessary step in the worldwide struggle that stood in opposition to US
imperialism. This statement, referred to for short as the “Weatherman” paper, also pointed
toward the goals that RYM would try to achieve through SDS: the creation of a broad coalition
to throw out imperialism, which would include groups that embraced their own nationalism
(contrary to the PL’s demands that these groups overcome their nationalism), followed by the

\textsuperscript{34} See Bernardine Dohrn in “White Mother Country Radicals” in \textit{New Left Notes}, June 28, 1969. She explained that the BPP was leading the way to national liberation and as white revolutionaries, whites needed to form a white revolutionary movement that would support the BPP. Nationalism was also important over Vietnam: SDS supported the National Liberation Front in its struggle for self-determination; PL only supported Vietnam because it was being attacked by the United States.

\textsuperscript{35} Karin Ashley, Bill Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, John Jacobs, Jeff Jones, Gerry Long, Howie Machtinger, Jim Mellen, Terry Robins, Mark Rudd and Steve Tappis, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” \textit{New Left Notes}, June 18, 1969; reprint, \textit{Weatherman}, ed. Harold Jacobs (Ramparts Press, 1970), 72-73 (page citations are to the reprint edition). Also available online at SDS/WUO Document Archive, \url{http://www.antiauthoritarian.net/sds_wuo/weather/weatherman_document.txt} (accessed 18 June 2013). The piece staked out a position that, among others, 1) identified black people within the US as an oppressed colony that needed support in achieving self-determination; 2) pointed to youth as an ally of oppressed factions within the US and abroad; 3) pointed out that nationalism is a good tool to fight colonialism, and therefore, imperialism. These positions went against those of the PL.
installation of worldwide socialism. To achieve these goals, they would build a revolutionary youth movement (from which their name derived) that would fight the agents of the imperialist state at every opportunity.

At the June 1969 SDS National Convention in Chicago, the two sides found no way to resolve their stark differences in this factionalist divide, which led to a fracturing of the organization. Members of RYM, encouraged by the BPP, voted to expel PL members, and seized the SDS national office, which contained the national member list. Essentially, what was left of the SDS organization, after this move, was a national office that was staffed by RYM members: the WSA and their PL backers effectively were removed from power in SDS. RYM later split into multiple organizations, with the largest one being the Weathermen – an organization named after the “Weatherman” paper, which represented the SDS’ final rupture as an organization. As WUO chronicler Harold Jacobs puts it, “from the destruction of SDS something new was created – a small, tightly organized revolutionary fighting force of white youth.”

The “You Don’t Need A Weatherman” paper not only gave the budding Weathermen organization their name (the group was also known as Weather for short), but also stated their initial ideology, viewpoints, and methodology. Building on the militancy previously expressed in “Hot Town: Summer in the City,” the “Weatherman” paper stated that a fighting force was needed to take on the massive imperialist system. The Weatherman strategy was to reach out to

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36 For more on this maneuver, see Berger, Outlaws of America, 82-89; Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 13-18; Varon, Bringing the War Home, 49.
37 Initially known as Weatherman or the Weathermen Organization, this group changed its name to the WUO in December 1970 so as to indicate inclusivity and less gender bias. I employ the WUO label to identify the group through its many instantiations, except when referring to the initial development of the organization in this chapter. For the name change, see Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 166.
those disenfranchised by the current political system, especially the youth, and to tap into their discontent:

They are the ones who most often get drafted, who get the worst jobs if they get any, who are the most abused by the various institutions of social control...And their day to day existence indicates a potential for militancy and toughness. They are the people whom we can reach who at this stage are most ready to engage in militant revolutionary struggle.\(^{39}\)

Mobilizing and assembling the oppressed masses into a fighting force was part and parcel of creating change for the Weathermen. As the militant stance of the Weathermen became more pronounced, they openly espoused a militant revolutionary struggle as a way to address political problems. Ron Jacobs explains that, “Weather, on the other hand, had fewer qualms [about violence] and was convinced that planned offensive actions were necessary because what was at stake was no longer proving that it was on the right side, but seizing military power.”\(^{40}\) The time for negotiation or peaceful protest was over, largely because these methods were seen as ineffective – the imperialist system could eventually accommodate these less invasive methods and continue on interrupted. As stated by Weathermen Kathy Boudin, Bernardine Dohrn, and Terry Robbins in “Bringing the War Home,” “all those who are orderly, polite, and well behaved are welcomed to imperialism and will be absorbed.”\(^{41}\)

Their openly militant stance also appeared in the Weathermen newspaper, *The Fire Next Time*, or *FIRE!* for short. For example, the November 7, 1969 issue of *Fire!* stated that “it is neither numbers nor loud voices alone that will bring imperialism down, but real material attacks

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\(^{39}\) Ashley, et al., “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” 72-73.  
on the state.”42 Following up that pugnacious stance, the December 6, 1969 issue of Fire! had a cover that openly advocated a confrontational stance: “During the 1960’s, the Amerikan [sic] government was on trial for crimes against the people of the world. We now find the government guilty and sentence it to death in the streets.”43 The Weathermen made no attempt to sugarcoat its militancy.44

The Weathermen also embraced qualities traditionally gendered male as a revolutionary strategy. To develop into a fighting force, Weathermen maintained the position that revolutionaries needed to be competent, aggressive, and tough fighters. They needed to attract the kinds of individuals that would be unafraid to engage with the police. Cathy Wilkerson, a former Weatherwoman, explained that they were actively cultivating a tough and aggressive stance out of a sense of “trying to reach white youth on the basis of their most reactionary macho instinct, intellectuals playing at working class toughs.”45 In a similar vein, former Weathermen Mark Rudd and Terry Robbins also wrote in The New Left Notes that the Weathermen needed to be “a movement that fights, not just talks about fighting. The aggressiveness, seriousness, and toughness…will attract vast members of working class youth.”46

43 Cover page, Fire!, December 6, 1969.
46 Mark Rudd and Terry Robbins quoted by Ron Jacobs in The Way the Wind Blew, 23.
This tough image of active fighters is gendered male in that it associated revolutionary fitness with hyper-masculine qualities. However, this image did not exclude the organization’s female members from full participation. Indeed, the Weatherwomen viewed this embrace of traditionally masculine attributes as not only necessary in the pursuit of regime change, but also as personally liberating. As Wilkerson put it, “part of me, however, enjoyed the macho posturing…The toughness was an ultimate rejection of the image of feminine helplessness that had saturated the literature and manners of my childhood.”

Susan Stern, another Weatherwoman, explained that acquiring revolutionary toughness and organizing for the revolution made her feel like she, “would never again know how to be or want to be Susan Stern – student, housewife, potential mother.” This attitude – that the embrace of toughness or violence could be liberating for women – alludes to the tempering of chauvinist tendencies that otherwise could have overtaken the Weathermen.

Though an unreflective embrace of masculine attributes often marks patriarchal thinking in a way that furthers the oppression of women, these women were autonomously choosing to accept and adopt these masculine attributes as their own. The acceptance of the masculinity inherent to their organization by the Weatherwomen does not entail that the men were right in the beginning to develop and encourage this movement towards reinforcing gender norms. It does though suggest that a simple denunciation of the practice ignores how the women themselves responded to it. The Weatherwomen took these aggressive and militant gender norms, which elsewhere would be oppressive, as subversive and liberating, thus prefacing the WUO’s militant feminist position.

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1.2 Living Your Conscience within the Heartland of a World-Wide Monster: The Theoretical Underpinnings of the WUO’s Militancy  

The WUO was not afraid to take an openly militant stance; in fact, they saw their militancy as part of a second American Revolution. But the WUO’s militancy was not simply coming out of pre-theoretical dissatisfaction with the current political system, but out of a well-developed Marxist analysis.

One of the main tenants of Marxism is that capitalism necessarily exploits labor, thus alienating the worker from his (or her) labor, the product of that labor, the value of that labor, and even of the worker’s humanity since the capitalist treats the worker as a product-making machine whose labor can be monetarily evaluated and used without reference to the worker’s humanity. The exploitation and alienation inherent in the capitalist system is also seen in the practice of colonialism, which Marxists have likewise condemned. After all, colonized people are being alienated from their land (it is treated like it is not theirs to value, theirs to protect, or theirs to hold domain over), alienated from the natural resources that derive from their land, alienated from the value they have created in their country, and alienated from their humanity as...
the colonizers will now make decisions for them as if they were children. Thus, at both home and abroad, Marxists would necessarily critique an American system that oppressed through capitalist economics and imperialist foreign policy.

As Marxists, members of the WUO critiqued what they saw as America’s capitalist and imperialist policies. The WUO linked labor to the need for socialist revolution, proposing that once the workers realized the extent of their alienation and oppression, the process of dismantling of the capitalist system would begin. Harold Jacobs explains that they “argued in this debate that most all Americans are workers in the Marxist sense and that socialist revolution was in almost everybody’s objective interest. Instead of seeking to curb student violence, Weatherman [sic] saw the onset of a sustained armed struggle against the state as the best means of creating revolutionary consciousness among American people.”

Moreover, the WUO saw a concrete causal connection between capitalist wealth in the U.S. and imperialist aggression abroad, stating that, “We are within the heartland of a worldwide monster…The US empire channels wealth, based upon the labor and resources of the rest of the world, into the United States.” Therefore, the WUO advocated an alliance with all Third World nations, and saw itself as part of an international militant socialist struggle. Summing it up nicely, the WUO’s FBI file encapsulated this stance as “an unshakeable faith that imperialism will only be defeated through a world-wide linking up of the revolutionary process.”

In addition to Marx, Herbert Marcuse offered another theoretical foundation for the WUO. Marcuse, in his 1965 essay “Repressive Tolerance,” articulated the foundation for the

56 The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weatherman Underground, part 1a, 34.
right to resist oppressive state behavior.\textsuperscript{57} This right to active intolerance to the state apparatus served as the WUO’s basis for its insurgency as Marcuse allowed for extra-legal measures to achieve social change.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, Marcuse’s \textit{One Dimensional Man} linked the exploitation of labor with social repression and domination, advocating the concept of the “Great Refusal,” which would lead to the abandonment of the entire system.\textsuperscript{59} The WUO saw itself as following a Marcusian mandate to resist the system through their militant actions.\textsuperscript{60}

The WUO’s militant actions were styled according to the teachings of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Regis Debray. Argentine Marxist revolutionary and guerilla fighter Che had declared that, “To wish the victims [of imperialism] success is not enough; the thing is to share their fate, to join them in death or victory” and had also called for the creation of “two, three, many Vietnams” as a way to achieve national liberation and defeat imperialism. The WUO associated itself with Che, and with the tactics he upheld.\textsuperscript{61} Che proposed a strategy of mass-guerilla warfare to lead a revolutionary war, and also supported a \textit{foco} strategy, which was discussed in Debray’s \textit{Revolution in the Revolution}.\textsuperscript{62} A French journalist who had written his book to communicate the lessons of the Cuban Revolution, Regis Debray explained that a small group of fighters could create a mass revolution. The idea was that a few guerillas could act together to swiftly attack the enemy, vanishing easily. In the process, they would come to inspire

\textsuperscript{58} Ron Jacobs, \textit{The Way the Wind Blew}, 4, 5; Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 42.
\textsuperscript{59} Herbert Marcuse, \textit{One Dimensional Man} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991[1964]).
\textsuperscript{60} Ron Jacobs, \textit{The Way the Wind Blew}, 4, 5; Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 7. Also, for an even closer connection, note that Naomi Jaffe, a member of the WUO, was a graduate student under Herbert Marcuse at Brandeis University. See Becky Thompson, \textit{A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 391.
\textsuperscript{62} Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 57.
the oppressed masses, raising their consciousness and encouraging them to engage in revolution. As Ron Jacobs puts it, “The importance to Weatherman of Debray’s book is impossible to overstate. In addition to underground newspapers and other Left periodicals, well-thumbed copies of Revolution in the Revolution? were to be found in every Weather collective’s house.” The FBI concluded that the heavy influence of Debray’s theory showed the WUO’s commitment to guerilla action. Foco groups appealed to the WUO: they did not need to be deterred by their small numbers in the struggle against the state. They could attack the state from small autonomous cells while also inspiring and educating the masses.

1.3 Personal Underpinnings of the WUO’s Militancy

In addition to this theoretical commitment to militancy, the members of the WUO felt a personal commitment to social change. Each member’s sense of duty was born out of a respect for human life and out of a horror at the varied human suffering seen in Vietnam, the Third World, and at home; whether it was derived from poverty, political repression, or racism, it moved the members of WUO to feel they had to do something to try to cease the suffering. For example, Weatherwoman Bernardine Dohrn stated that, “In my view white supremacy and anti-imperialism were at the core of what we understood and were right about.” For this Weatherwoman, militancy was not about blind rage or a willful destruction of property, but was, at its core, about a dedication to fighting racism and promoting national liberation.

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64 Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 17.
65 The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weatherman Underground, part 1a, 35, 37.
67 Berger, Outlaws of America, 54. Also see The Reminiscences of David Gilbert (June 16, 17, 18, 19, 1985), 193, in the Columbia Center for Oral History (hereafter CCOHC).
Weatherman David Gilbert expressed much of the same sentiment, articulating that revolutionary struggle was the way to achieve a fairer, more just, less racist society. “I did not want to pass on to my children a society wracked by racism and unjust wars,” Gilbert explained, “where the almighty dollar was valued far above human beings. Joining with the Black struggle for human rights was a key to achieving a more humane society for white people also.”

Sharing in the same convictions, Weatherwoman Kathy Boudin said that, “I felt very keenly the decimation and murder created by the United States all over the world. I felt if we didn’t commit ourselves to resisting it full time, nothing would change.” For Boudin, taking action gave concrete expression to her beliefs. To do any less would have been unconscionable.

Perhaps it is Naomi Jaffe who best clarifies the militant commitment of the WUO:

Violence can mean a lot of different things. We felt that doing nothing in a period of repressive violence is itself a form of violence. That is the part that I think is hardest for people to understand. That if you sit in your house and live your white life and go to your white job, and allow the country that you live in to murder people and to commit genocide, and you sit there and you don’t do anything about it, then that’s violence.

In the WUO’s estimation, tangible actions – not discussions or polite demonstrations – were needed to stop the very real oppression that existed in the world. To do any less was to become part of the problem.

For this reason on October 1969, the WUO mobilized for The Days of Rage in Chicago. Over a period of three days, the WUO marched in the streets of Chicago, engaged with police,

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70 *The Weather Underground*, DVD, Sam Greene and Bill Siegel (Free History Project, 2002).
71 Discussions, polite demonstrations, or the winning of any reform from the government were all equated with ineffective action, and with selling out for an insignificant concession. See Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 21.
and caused damage to businesses and private property. These militant demonstrations were followed by a series of bombings, from June 1970 to June 1975. The bombings were intended to protest imperialism and were picked for their symbolic significance in terms of maintaining or causing oppression. Thus, police stations were targeted in protest of racism or in solidarity with political prisoners, the Capitol was targeted as a symbolic act for U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and the Federal Offices of Health, Education and Welfare were bombed for the repression and harassment that the WUO members felt these institutions visited on poor women. The special oppression of women – especially poor women and women of Third World nations – was a particular concern of the WUO, and reflected the organization’s feminist underpinnings.

The WUO was not the only group during the time period that was using bombs as a form of protest. In April 1970, for example, there were 121 bombings, and none were associated

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72 Women’s actions at the Days of Rage will be discussed in subsequent chapters. For more on the Days of Rage, see Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 75-82; Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 28-31; Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 107-112.

73 For a list of bombings, see Gilbert, *SDS/WUO: Students for a Democratic Society and the Weather Underground* (Montreal: Arm the Spirit Press and Abraham Guillen Press, 2002), 32-38. Also, it should be noted that if the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (an above ground group associated with the WUO and formed by WUO members not underground) is subsumed under the WUO label, then the bombings lasted until February 1977 (one more bombing and one attempted bombing would be included in the list).

74 Gilbert explains that the association of the sites with oppression was a way to raise the consciousness of the people and a way to inspire them to stand up to the oppression that was being targeted as the problem. The Reminisces of David Gilbert, 217.


with the WUO. By comparison, over a five-year period, the WUO took credit for 17 bombings. While the WUO was certainly a militant organization, they clearly were neither alone in their militancy nor the most violent organization of the period. There were, instead, numerous groups that saw the suffering caused by their own government and felt they were justified in using militant means, including violence, to combat the great injustices created by a system that perpetrated sexist, racist, and imperialist oppression. Thus, from what they witnessed around them, different individuals formed or joined the WUO with the intent to do whatever they could to bring about a more just, socialist, racism free, and feminist society.

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79 While the WUO is remembered as the most violent group of the sixties and seventies, in actuality, other groups of the decade were even more militant/violent. As Dan Berger writes: “In the fall of 1968, there were 41 bombings on college campuses, almost double what the Weather Underground did in total throughout its seven-year existence. In the spring of 1969, before the ‘Weatherman’ statement even appeared, there were 84 bombings on school campuses and then off-campus bombings by movement radicals. In the 1969-1970 school year, extremely conservative estimates say that there were at least 174 – and as many as 5000… From September 1969 to May 1970, there was at least one bombing or attempted bombing somewhere in the United States every day by the progressive and radical movements.” See Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 116. The WUO’s bombing record is low compared to that of these other groups. Additionally, the WUO’s bombings were conducted carefully, after extensive reconnoitering and during off work hours, so as to prevent loss of life. See Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 162; Ayers, *Fugitive Days* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, Chapter 26. In fact, the WUO did not kill anyone throughout their anti-imperialist bombing campaign except for three of their own members. This event was the Townhouse explosion in March 1970, where Weather members assembling a bomb blew themselves up.
80 For example, the Cattonsville Nine conducted an action in May 1968 where they used hand made napalm to destroy draft records at the Selective Service Office in Cattonsville, Maryland. The protesters were tried in Federal Court, then went underground and were sought by the FBI. Fred J. Solowey, “Berrigan Appears at Fest; Continues to Elude FBI,” *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Vol. 86, No. 122, 20 April 1970, 1. The Young Lords (a Puerto Rican nationalist group) had a militant protest/action in New York City where they engaged with the police in summer of 1971. Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 115. For more on the Young Lords, see Miguel “Mickey” Melendez, *We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights With the Young Lords* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003).
1.4 A Multifaceted Feminist Stance

The WUO, despite their open militancy and embrace of macho qualities, was nevertheless feminist. In fact, militant feminism was the WUO’s answer to the era’s “woman question.” Women were well represented in the group’s local and national leadership and took an active role in developing WUO papers and positions. In these tracts, the Weatherwomen were able to articulate feminist stances while representing the WUO’s position on political issues. Though the WUO was not singularly a feminist organization – it was neither a single-issue organization nor did it escape the sexist trappings of its time period – these key elements (female representation in leadership and the taking of feminist positions) show that feminism was an important part of the organization, especially through the voices of the Weatherwomen.

The heavy inclusion of women in both general membership and leadership positions attests to a commitment to gender equity and women’s liberation. For example, Cathy Wilkerson played an important organizational role from the group’s beginning, serving as a link between the SDS (for which she was a national secretary) and the newly formed WUO. Furthermore, Naomi Jaffe, Kathy Boudin, and Diana Oughton helped focus and refine the vision and mission of the WUO. Bernardine Dohrn was influential in leading the WUO from its inception to its demise, and acted as the voice of the WUO in announcing its military targets and the reasons behind its bombings.

As the organization matured, it also developed decidedly feminist stances on several issues, some of which fit snugly with second wave feminist aims of their time period, such as a rigid theoretical stance against sexism, a belief in a woman’s right to be free of patriarchy, and an opposition to the gender pay gap. At other times, the WUO advanced a proto-third wave feminist vision, one that openly warned against a preoccupation with middle class, straight, white, and American female oppression and advocated for the inclusion of the experiences of poor and colored women at home and of Third World women abroad in the fight for female liberation. Overall, the WUO put forth its own type of feminist program, one that was in certain ways ahead of its time period, weaving together class, race, and gender with a Marxist analysis concerning the need for social and political change. In a conscious effort to signal support for female liberation, and to be “more gender neutral and inclusive,” in December 1970, the organization even changed its name from “Weatherman” to “Weather Underground.”

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86 Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 166; Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 183. Also see Bernardine Dohrn, “New Morning, Changing Weather: December 6, 1970 Communiqué,” 6 December
This placement of militant feminism in the WUO agenda was gradual and by no means without struggle. Clear instances of sexism or machismo within the WUO must be noted. Yet, simply to concentrate on these problems, as most of the existing literature on the WUO has thus far done, ignores the group’s feminist leanings and further silences the voices of the Weatherwomen who developed and promoted feminism within the organization. While WUO members were primarily politically oriented, many of them, including people in key leadership positions, saw feminism as central to that orientation. Their position was that the primary fight against imperialism would lead to an egalitarian, feminist, socialist society. For the WUO, socialist revolution would necessarily lead to gender equality: the revolution could not be completed if it did not include the empowerment of women. Even though feminism was not the sole or even the primary focus of their revolutionary struggle, the WUO recognized that it had to be addressed as part of that struggle or else their movement would not be truly revolutionary.\(^8\)

As the Weatherwomen wrote, “Women’s liberation is a matter of survival. We need food, decent medical care, good schools, and community-run day care. For this, we need revolution.”\(^8\)

The struggle to wage a feminist revolution was not without challenges. The following chapter explores the sexism present in the SDS and then the WUO. As such, Chapter Two considers the sexist challenge against the WUO being feminist, while also expressing the position that while sexism was a significant and unfortunate part of the WUO, it did not represent the organization as a whole.

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\(^8\) For people of 1960’s social movements, “revolution” was a normatively loaded term that would not allow the possibility of a conservative or oppressive revolution. Thus, feminists of the time period felt that any true revolution would have to also include the empowerment of women. Not all leftist organizations of the period, though, would include that feminist claim.

CHAPTER 2: RESISTANCE AMIDST SEXISM

In 1967, Cathy Wilkerson, then editor of the New Left Notes (NLN), reached out to Jane Adams, a fellow Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) activist, to share a recipe for soup. Wilkerson printed the recipe in NLN for other SDS activists to have on hand. Wilkerson thought that students, who, while living as cheaply as possible, were dependent on donations and fundraising for sustenance, would greatly appreciate having a recipe for a “tasty and nutritious soup, costing almost nothing.” Wilkerson saw having this information “as critical a part of building a movement as theory was.” After all, large numbers of SDS conference attendees and student workers needed to be fed, and cheaply—idealism and theory alone did not fill a hungry belly. As Wilkerson put it, “In an organization that often had no funds, this was a good way to make the organizing dollar stretch more.” What was meant as an act to support the development of the student movement, however, was later misinterpreted. Wilkerson recalls, “Interestingly, in the years to come, the recipe was sometimes cited by feminists as an example of SDS’s sexism, a charge I thought revealed some inattention to the challenges of supporting a low budget movement in action.”

As illustrated by this vignette, sexism could be misattributed where there was none. Additionally, where the historical record accurately notes the presence of sexism or chauvinism, it is necessary to avoid attributing a victimhood mentality to the women involved. Maintaining a focus on the female protagonists as active agents allows for an investigation of what the women did in response to sexist attitudes.

89 Cathy Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun, 108.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 109.
92 Ibid.
One of the main reasons that historians of the WUO do not usually recognize the organization as being feminist is that there was a good deal of sexism in the organizational structure, in the male leadership, and in the sexual attitudes of many of the WUO’s members, especially many of the men. Though there is good evidence for this widespread sexism, a unitary focus on the sexism, as has been common in the literature on the WUO, both oversimplifies the gender relations and gendered positions within the organization and implicitly assumes a privileged male point of view – as if the men of the WUO provided the main, or even the only, representation of what the WUO truly was and represented.

The reality of the WUO is, in fact, much more complicated than a blanket pronouncement of the organization as fully sexist and not at all feminist could possibly encapsulate. While it is true that the WUO (much like its predecessor, the SDS) had a sexism problem, it also had powerful women in the membership who stood up to that sexism and prescribed solutions for smashing it. As the founding manifesto itself proclaimed, “Revolutionaries must be made to understand the full scope of women’s oppression, and the necessity to smash male supremacy.” Weatherwomen acted on this revolutionary line, challenging chauvinist and sexist assumptions wherever they found them, all the while carving out positions of leadership for themselves. Since these women were leaders of the WUO and vocal representatives of the WUO’s positions, a full analysis of the WUO as an organization requires not only locating the sexism of the organization, but also the internal fight against that sexism and the anti-sexism work of the women and some of the men within the WUO.

This chapter seeks to correct the literature’s myopic focus on the WUO’s sexism by placing the narrative in its proper historical context. Moreover, this chapter also introduces the

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manners in which the organization’s female members both experienced and responded to the sexism they faced. In doing so, this chapter demonstrates how the naming and eradication of sexism within the organization and larger society actually became an important ideological and material commitment of the Weather Underground Organization.

2.1 Tea Time for the Ladies: Gender Contradictions of the 1960’s

When future Weatherwomen Diana Oughton and Kathy Boudin were accepted to Bryn Mawr in the early 1960’s, they were counseled to bring a tea service with them, to best partake of the afternoon teas that the ladies – students and professors alike – were expected to enjoy at college every day from four to five in the afternoon.95 Conservative notions of a woman’s place reigned at Bryn Mawr, and elsewhere, the dictum mostly being that women got educated, married, and then died.96 While the 1960’s were bringing a sense of change, at the beginning of the decade, progress was still slow.

The social and cultural milieu of the early 1960’s was still imbued with the 1950’s conservatism, which included the belief that women were of secondary status to men, whether in private or public life.97 Weatherwoman Cathy Wilkerson remembers that skirts and stockings were mandated in school for women, and that “the role projected for women was very subservient as far as I was concerned.”98 Women were still expected to marry and shape their

95 Powers, Diana, 20.
96 Ibid., 20-22. For more on this conservatism and rigidity of gender roles for women, especially with respect to education, see Ruth Rosen, The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America (New York: Penguin Group, 2001), 41.
97 The conservative 50’s still permeated the atmosphere at the beginning of the 1960’s. For more on the sense of conservatism of the 1950’s, see Carolyn Lewis, Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Anderson, The Movement and the 60’s; Collins, America’s Women, previously cited.
98 The Reminisces of Cathy Wilkerson (February 17, 1985), 11, CCOHC.
lives around that of their husbands. Women were still supposed to prioritize being wives and mothers above any other interests or aspirations. Meek, quiet, and in the background, they were meant to occupy a supportive and secondary role to their spouses. As radical feminist Shulamith Firestone said in 1966, it was a time when the primacy of the male gender was recognized, as “boys would say in morning prayers, ‘Thank you, lord, for not making me a woman!’”99 Overall, the remnants of the 1950’s “culture of exclusion” when it came to women were hard to dismiss.100

Women coming of age during this time period faced a particular challenge borne out of the distinct social expectations – those of 1950’s conservatism versus 1960’s liberalism – that already were butting heads during the early sixties.101 Historian Ruth Rosen explains that even though men and women were rebelling against the constraints of the fifties and reaching toward a less rigid way of life, women experienced a crisis that emerged out of these conflicting social tensions: young men rejected their parents’ politics, but still insisted on fatherhood and a traditional marriage modeled on a fifties mold.102 Men also experienced anxiety in regards to women’s increasing assertiveness.103 Thus, women faced an untenable situation: as they reached for liberation from restrictive gender norms, resistance and backlash was part of their everyday experiences.

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100 Ruth Rosen coins this term in her discussion of women’s lives in the shadow of the 1950’s. See Chapter 1 in The World Split Open, especially 36. Also see Collins, America’s Women, 422, 426, 428.
101 This term is used to indicate a more free, less rigid way of life for women, as Rosen uses it in her work. See The World Split Open, chapter 3.
These cultural tensions played out on a political level, too. For example, John F. Kennedy appointed a presidential commission to explore women’s secondary status in the United States, yet appointed no women to his cabinet.\(^{104}\) The proposed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was met with laughs in the House of Representatives. Though it eventually passed, it was ridiculed as “The Bunny Law” when newspaper editorials wondered if, in the wake of the law, Playboy clubs would now have to employ male bunnies.\(^{105}\) A *New York Times* editorial concluded, “This is a revolution, chaos. You can’t even safely advertise for a wife any more.”\(^{106}\) Radical feminist Dana Densmore later recalled, “A thorough-going, smirking disrespect for women permeated every aspect of society.”\(^{107}\)

In the context of this prevalent male chauvinism, it is not surprising to find that student groups and New Left organizations also were infused with sexism. Casey Hayden’s and Mary King’s “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo,” based on their experiences and work within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), noted that male chauvinism was deeply entrenched, and that an adherence to traditional gender norms permeated even progressive groups.\(^{108}\) “Sex And Caste” pointed out the inequality in the treatment of men and women in the


Movement: women were usually given secretarial work, while men led.\textsuperscript{109} This sort of labor division showed that gender role normativity was alive and well within the Movement.

Similarly, Densmore recalls that working for “The Resistance,” a group of anti-Vietnam War activists, was an exercise “in self-lacerations for women. It went without saying that we cooked and cleaned up while the men bonded, strategized, and postured.”\textsuperscript{110} Densmore explains that a gender hierarchy reigned in the group, even though in all reality the female members were just as committed to the cause, and acted in concrete ways to support it, even going to jail for their convictions.\textsuperscript{111}

Feminist historian Barbara Winslow also recollects a similar experience during her activism in Seattle during the late sixties: “One night at a party, friends told me that they were going to call me Mrs. Vietnam Committee because they didn’t know my name.”\textsuperscript{112} Even though she and her husband shared the same political vision, it was his name that stood out to the group; he was the recognized leader. Her role was to be in a supportive position – encouraging, empathetic, helpful, but not outspoken. In fact, Winslow confesses that she was passive at lectures or meetings and hardly ever spoke up, having internalized proper womanly gender performance. It seemed out of place, even to her, to break out of that pattern.\textsuperscript{113}

When women challenged gender normativity, their actions were seen as threatening by their male colleagues. Unsurprisingly, the actions of women’s liberation protests were met with

\textsuperscript{109} Race also played a role in how women experienced this sexism. White women felt marginalized by secretarial roles. Black women were leaders in local, field positions. Still, they were not recognized as leaders on the national stage, were men were usually identified as either decision makers or movement leaders. See Cynthia Fleming, \textit{Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson} (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

\textsuperscript{110} Densmore, “A Year of Living Dangerously: 1968,” 73.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} Winslow, “Primary and Secondary Contradictions,” 227.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
derision and violence. Winslow recalls that a protest against a Playboy bunny appearance at the University of Washington was met with aggression on the part of the males in the auditorium’s general student audience: When protesting women took the stage, “A group of fraternity and student government men grabbed the women, started punching them, and dragged them off the stage.”¹¹⁴ Resistance to women’s empowerment was strong.

Nevertheless, within this general context of fierce misogyny, the women’s movement was born. Despite – or perhaps because of – the resistance they faced, women’s liberation took off as, in historian Rosalyn Baxandall’s words, “women were catching fire and coming together to change the world.”¹¹⁵ Not surprisingly, women within leftist student organizations were at the forefront of this movement. This phenomenon – of women coming together in the face of sexist opposition – occurred first within SDS, and then again within its offspring organization, the WUO.

2.2 The Sexist Ramparts of SDS¹¹⁶

Like other leftist groups of the sixties, SDS did not have women in leadership positions. An activist in SDS and later a Weatherman, David Gilbert recalls that even though, “women were central and critical to the early anti-war movement… as consistent workers but also as initiators and strategists… in those days almost all visible leaders and speakers were male.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 232.
¹¹⁶ This title is based on a quote from David Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 58.
¹¹⁷ Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 56.
Cathy Wilkerson, active in SDS and later a Weatherwoman, recalls much of the same, adding that, “no women really were listened to when they spoke or when they spoke at meetings.”\textsuperscript{118}

Women did not generally feel comfortable speaking up in SDS meetings. But they were deeply interested in the debates, and found inventive ways of inserting their opinions into the mix. For example, Gilbert recalls that at the July 1967 SDS National Convention in Ann Arbor, Michigan, students were planning workshops for the convention, when, “Betty, very bright and extremely shy, was sitting next to me and whispered, ‘We should have one on women’s liberation.’ So I raised my hand and made the proposal, and it was added to the list without any discussion.”\textsuperscript{119} This anecdote is telling of the slow progress that was being made within SDS: Betty was not comfortable being up front, but easily negotiated an important change – introducing a women’s platform workshop into the SDS conference – through the help of a friendly male colleague, who was immediately taken seriously.

The rest of Gilbert’s story illustrates the depth of resistance SDS women faced when they questioned their status within the group or society. SDS member Marilyn Buck was supposed to present the report on the women’s liberation workshop to the plenary at the convention. As she expressed that this item was a report on women’s liberation, “all hell broke loose. Men hooted and whistled from the floor, threw paper planes at Marilyn, and shouted such gems as ‘I’ll liberate you with my cock.’ …The circus response revealed the depth of sexism within SDS.”\textsuperscript{120} This violent outburst is a clear testimony to the prevalence of male supremacy within sixties’ culture – even in such a broad-minded organization as SDS – but it also serves as an example of persistent female resistance to sexism. In the face of the hostile response from the crowd,

\textsuperscript{118} The Reminiscences of Cathy Wilkerson, 19.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 58; Gilbert, \textit{SDS/WUO}, 13.
Marilyn Buck firmly stood her ground and pushed the report through. The report was eventually accepted by the plenary, with other women’s (and some men’s) voices supporting it from the audience. In doing so, Gilbert observed, “Women’s liberation had breached the sexist ramparts of the New Left.”\(^{121}\) It was a battle hard won, but it paved the way for SDS (and later for the WUO) to become committed to women’s liberation.

This shameful response to the issue of women’s liberation in 1967 became one of the least known causes of the split that occurred within SDS two years later. While the usual reason for the split of the SDS is given as the disagreement between the Progressive Labor (PL) and the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)/future WUO faction over the question of national liberation, which was significant, this concern with female liberation was another important factor. Gilbert explains that,

> PL, like many old-line Marxist groups, saw class as the fundamental contradiction, with problems like racism and sexism as secondary. They agreed that the Left should oppose ‘male chauvinism’ which defined the problem mainly in the realm of ideas and culture, and not as a fundamental structural problem that included oppression within the working class and the Left. Women who insisted on independent forms of organization as a power base were accused of being ‘divisive.’\(^{122}\)

Part of the PL side of the dispute, which ended up splitting SDS’s membership, was that Marxism required a primacy of class issues over all other issues, such as issues of gender or race. For the PL, if there was a social problem that revolved around race or gender, then either it should be reduced to a class based problem or, if it could not be reduced in that fashion, then the problem should be minimized in importance.

For example, consider the problem of inequality in the home. If women were treated poorly in the home because they were alienated from paid labor and forced to be economically

\(^{121}\) Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 58.
\(^{122}\) Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 59. Also see The Reminisces of David Gilbert, 184-184.
subordinate to their husbands, then this women’s issue could be analyzed as a class issue. If, on the other hand, women wanted to have as much power over household decisions as their husbands, but they did not seek economic parity, then this was a lessor problem for people who took the PL position. Gender problems, for the PL, were only important if they were in actuality class problems that just happened to be plaguing women for the current situation. The RYM faction felt this reductionism of gender and racial problems was offensive.123

Writing in 1976, an anonymous Weather group, Sisters of the WUO, agreed that this disagreement was central to the SDS split, and added that the PL’s reductionist position was actually incorrect as Marxist analysis.124 They argued, “This is not a Marxist-Leninist analysis. The material basis of women’s oppression, and its concrete expression in the institutions of society – the family, schools, courts, laws, religion and the state – are left out.”125 In other words, any analysis that immediately reduces all social issues to class issues ignores the various human relations that provide the basis for women’s oppression. Men and women relate in certain ways to survive and reproduce (roughly speaking, “the base,” in Marxism). Those relations are recognized and replicated in cultural, political, and economic institutions (roughly, “the superstructure,” in Marxism).126 An understanding of women’s oppression requires a comprehension of these base relations, which are, in a theoretical sense under Marxism, more

125 Ibid.
126 For more on the base/superstructure relation, see Peter Singer, Marx (New York: Sterling Books, 1980), 67-77.
fundamental than the economic class system that exists under capitalism, which makes up part of the superstructure. Thus, according to the Sisters of the WUO, RYM’s complaint was justified: the PL were wrong in their Marxist analysis that reduced gender and racial issues to class issues.  

Weatherman Jeff Jones also takes up this same point. He explains that due to feminist activity in SDS – particularly that of Naomi Jaffe, Bernardine Dohrn, and Susan Sutheim who were organizing SDS women in the wake of the demonstrations against the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City – PL saw this concern with sexism and women’s liberation as divisive. Conversely, the RYM/WUO faction of SDS saw sexism as a deeper problem that needed to be studied and solved. The RYM identified it as a special oppression of women, with the unreceptive, chauvinist men actually the ones who were being truly divisive.

This viewpoint was expressed in the original “Weatherman” paper, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman,” which outlined RYM’s ideology, which would also be the foundation for the future WUO’s ideology, and also played a part in the split of SDS. The “Weatherman” paper recommended the stomping out of sexism, and labeled the special oppression of women ‘male supremacy.’ This position paper also heavily criticized SDS’s slow reform in regards to women, stating that “SDS has not dealt in any adequate way with the women question; the resolution passed at Ann Arbor did not lead to much practice, nor has the need to fight male supremacy been given any programmatic direction within the RYM.” Additionally, the document recognized the revolutionary potential of women. Drawing a parallel between the

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127 Ibid.
128 The Reminisces of Jeff Jones, 42.
129 Ibid. Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 59. Also see The Reminisces of David Gilbert, 184-185.
131 Ibid., 79.
alienation of youth/workers within the capitalist system, the tract stated that “The cultural revolt of women against their ‘role’ in imperialism (which is just beginning to happen in a mass way) should have the same revolutionary potential that the RYM claimed for ‘youth culture.’”\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, the essay advocated the breaking of traditional gender norms for women, calling for the creation of a new society.\textsuperscript{133} Thus, the “Weatherman” paper laid out RYM’s feminist stance – thus previewing the future feminist stance of the WUO – and called for female liberation through revolution.

The feminist women of SDS responded to this call, having resisted being cast as second-class citizens through much of the existence of SDS. Prior to the split, SDS women had become increasingly adamant about taking an active role in the organizational life of the group. As SDS Interorganizational Secretary (and future Weatherwoman) Bernardine Dohrn characterizes that period, “Women were speaking up and acting up in droves, pressing against male supremacy and sexist assumptions of our appropriate role.”\textsuperscript{134} Women’s caucuses appeared as part of SDS convention programs. Women insisted on chairing meetings and started becoming public speakers. They even traveled to Cambodia to discuss anti-Vietnam War efforts and looked to Vietnamese women as worthy revolutionary examples, who were achieving equality in their early attempt to build an independent nation.\textsuperscript{135} Cathy Wilkerson went on lengthy speaking tours

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\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 70. “You Don’t Need a Weatherman” included an encouragement for women to break out of traditional “female” and “mother” roles as everyone shapes new ways of life not stuck in “the plastic 50’s.” It also provided an encouragement to organize around issues such as the pay gap, around building self-consciousness, and around analyzing the male supremacy consistently present in women’s lives. These issues were seen as tying directly into the economic and social oppression for women – and were clearly tapping into the special oppression of women \textit{qua} women.
\textsuperscript{134} Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,”10.
\textsuperscript{135} Wilkerson states that she believes that the Vietnamese asked for women to be part of the delegation. There are two important things to notice here: 1) The Vietnamese are providing an
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throughout the country in the wake of that trip, raising consciousness as to the Vietnamese people’s plight. As she traveled, she learned public speaking. In the Seattle chapter of SDS, the Research and Propaganda groups were given female revolutionary names, such as Harriet Tubman, Mother Jones, or Sojourner Truth. Future Weatherwoman Naomi Jaffe reports that women’s study groups were also organized within SDS, including a women’s group devoted to developing theory. Women’s only meetings also existed, to give voice to women’s concerns and to best analyze female oppression.

There are also key examples of SDS men supporting women in these efforts to combat SDS sexism. For example, Winslow remembers that it was an SDS man, Ed Mormon, who encouraged her to speak up in meetings and have her voice heard in the decision-making process. David Gilbert also reports having the realization that women’s voices were not often heard, and that women’s ideas were usually recast in male voices.

example of including women in political action and strategy, an example that the WUO takes to heart and follows throughout its career, and 2) even if the Vietnamese initiated the idea that women should be involved, SDS went along with the request and the women who went on the delegation in part became empowered as part of their experiences on the trips – whether it was through their subsequent organizing work, through their speech making, speaking tours, etc. See The Reminiscences of Cathy Wilkerson, 54. In regards to Vietnamese women as exemplars, see Bernardine Dohrn, “The Liberation of Vietnamese Women,” New Left Notes, October 25, 1968. The piece explains that Vietnamese women, through fighting, were building a new society based in equality. It also mentioned that DRV policy included the position that women were equal to men and that the fight for women’s rights was an important issue to address as the nation moved forward. For more on Vietnamese women and their involvement in the war, see Karen Gottschang Turner with Phan Thanh Hao, Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War From North Vietnam (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998); Sandra C. Taylor, Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

136 Winslow, “Primary and Secondary Contradictions,” 244.
137 Berger, Outlaws of America, 58.
138 Stern, With the Weathermen, 79.
139 Winslow, “Primary and Secondary Contradictions,” 227.
140 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 56. Gilbert also reports another incident at which he felt deep outrage for how women were treated by sexist males: right before the split from SDS, in the
When it came to theorizing the male leadership of SDS did not usually respect women’s contributions.\textsuperscript{141} Gilbert also recalls that SDS women nevertheless persisted in creating theoretical bases for explaining social or political oppression. Gilbert explains that future Weatherwoman Naomi Jaffe, while still in SDS, was very active in this regard, as she, developed a new working class theory in relationship to the role of women in advanced capitalist society, and we had a lot of discussion, although I ended up receiving more recognition and credit, on analyzing the prodigious drive to boost consumption within the domestic economy – both the economic role and cultural impact. Naomi went on to relate this to the changing sexist stereotypes and the pressures placed on women.\textsuperscript{142}

Although Gilbert says he ended up receiving the credit and recognition for these ideas, Naomi Jaffe’s sophisticated analysis linked gender oppression to economic oppression, which previewed the Marxist analysis that would later appear in the WUO’s own brand of feminism.

Furthermore, in collaboration with future Weatherwoman Bernardine Dohrn, Naomi Jaffe also wrote “The Look Is You.” This 1968 piece of feminist theory was penned in response to a \textit{Ramparts} magazine cover that consisted of a headless woman’s bust. As such, “The Look Is You” called out the sexism of \textit{Ramparts} (a New Left journal) for allowing such a cover, and analyzed the special oppression of women within the Movement and U.S. society. Reducing women to “two tits and no head” was proof positive, per Jaffe and Dohrn, that women were “unfree [sic] within the Movement and in personal relationships, and in the society at large.”\textsuperscript{143}

They were the victims of a systematized oppression that taught them specific gender roles and

\textsuperscript{141} Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 71.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 71-72.

\textsuperscript{143} Naomi Jaffe and Bernardine Dohrn, “The Look is You,” \textit{New Left Notes}, March 18, 1968, 5.
ways of being, and then took advantage of them economically. In other words, “The Look is You” criticized the objectification and sexualization of women’s bodies, linking capitalism and consumerism to proper gender performance for women.

In a Marxist vein, Jaffe and Dohrn explained that economic markets defined persons as consumers and stifled their authentic, autonomous development. They added that women were, paradoxically, both the beneficiaries and victims of the economic system since, “the same new things that allow us to express our new sense of freedom and naturalness and movement…are also used to force us to be the consumers of the endless flow of products necessary for the perpetuation of a repressive society.”¹⁴⁴ Jaffe and Dohrn urged women to realize that true independence did not come from buying, but rather from authentic self-growth – “‘choosing oneself’ in commodity form is a choice pre-defined by a repressive system,” they warned.¹⁴⁵ These strands of theoretical thought constitute a complex feminist critique and also a preview of the Marxist tone of the WUO’s later feminism – however, this piece is not usually analyzed in the literature, nor is it recognized as significant despite the fact that the authors become influential members of the WUO.¹⁴⁶

2.3 Sexism and Female Leadership

After the split, and despite the militant feminist ideology of many of its members, the WUO did not emerge as a feminist utopia. Indeed, as with SDS, there was a good deal of sexism

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ While Berger mentions this piece written by Jaffe and Dohrn in his Outlaws of America, his treatment of it is brief – four sentences – and does not fully address the nuances and theoretical richness present in the text. See Berger, 58. Ron Jacobs also mentions this piece, but gives it only two sentences. See Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 11. Varon, in Bringing the War Home, does not mention it at all.
within the WUO. Just as women’s liberation broke through SDS’s misogynist barricades, so did it pierce through the WUO’s chauvinism. While the sexism within the organization was real, it was not the whole story: Weatherwomen stood up to it and pushed through gender equity in leadership, refined theoretical arguments for the oppression of women, and generally fought to “smash sexism,” as they would say. While it is true that Weatherwomen were negatively affected by sexism, they were not passive victims of it – they fought against it, challenged males’ misperceptions, and proved their agency along the way.

One form the WUO’s sexism took was in the organizational structure, in that the WUO’s political program saw women as potentially capable fighters, but little more. As Gilbert puts it,

> Our political program about women’s issues was reduced to extolling women guerillas in the Third World and urging women here to become fighters. Doing so was an important role and contribution of women, but limiting our focus to armed struggle was not only a negation of the many other crucial battles against patriarchy but also tended to promote a macho concept of struggle.\(^\text{147}\)

In other words, this charge regarding the WUO’s sexism is that the organization limited their positive appraisals’ of women’s abilities to their fighting abilities. A closer analysis, though, reveals that through this stance, the WUO was making a strike against patriarchy by seeing women as capable of fighting just like men. The fact that the WUO saw women as capable fighters – at a time when women were not seen as potential soldiers, and therefore were deemed second class citizens at least in terms of being able to fulfill military service – was a reversal of larger social attitudes.\(^\text{148}\) This position actually enlarged women’s gender roles by going beyond

\(^{147}\) David Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 60.

\(^{148}\) For more on citizenship and women, see Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Young, 1998). As Kerber argues, women were not generally seen as being capable of soldiering, and were therefore denied that obligation, and the benefits, of full citizenship.
the accepted gender roles of the time period, which limited women completely to the home and hearth.

The Weatherwomen largely embraced this view of themselves as fighters. They found the fighter role liberating and empowering. For example, Susan Stern found strength and liberation through being a fighter: “the nights of rioting and fighting together had made bonds among the women that years of talking had not done…We were tasting the macho strength that characterizes men, but we felt it keenly as women. Eyes glowing, we looked at each other warmly. Like a sweet perfume in the air we breathed in our first scent of sister-love.”¹⁴⁹ For Stern, the WUO’s program of fighting women was akin to liberation.

Yet, in another sense, even with this gender breaking, the Weathermen’s view of women was overly narrow since they encouraged their female members to see themselves as fighters more easily than they encouraged female roles as leaders or intellectual contributors. As Gilbert put it, the WUO, “lacked any kind of women’s program beyond promoting women as fighters.”¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, women were ascending to leadership positions and were carving out positions of influence and power for themselves – a task perhaps made even harder by the fact the WUO did not have a nation-wide, programmatic commitment to women’s causes, but the Weatherwomen, nevertheless, did achieve gender equity in leadership.

Much like they had done within SDS, the women who joined the WUO after the split in the summer of 1969 almost immediately created groups to build female solidarity and to organize against political and social oppression from their male colleagues. Many of the WUO collectives included women’s caucuses that challenged male misperceptions of women and

¹⁴⁹ See Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 86.
worked to advance female leadership. Within the organization at large, these Weatherwomen shared their feminist growth with the rest of the group.

In a piece written by Columbus collective Weatherwoman Lorraine Rosal titled “Who Do They Think They Could Bury You?” women’s voices came together and discussed the problem of sexism and what women were doing about it. The piece reported that the six Weatherwomen in the collective, “dealt with male chauvinism simply by attacking chauvinist and paternalistic remarks by men.”151 The criticisms, it is implied, were numerous, cutting, and of a personal nature, and, as Rosal said, they were “handled liberally and personalistically [sic].”152 These Weatherwomen used their solidarity and power to speak freely as a base from which they could attack the Weathermen’s sexism, so that “we began defending each other because we were women, not because we were politically correct.”153 The Columbus Weatherwomen even engaged in “a few fistfights when the men’s chauvinist baiting reached an unbearable level.”154 Upon further reflection – and not wanting to engage in a male/female contest of wills and fisticuffs that would take away from constructive dialogue – the women eventually concluded that they were behaving just as badly as the men, from a position that essentialized gender. Thus, the Weatherwomen decided that they themselves were literally “using chauvinism as a bludgeon” and that they needed to move toward more fruitful ways of pointing out sexist behavior.155 Importantly, the women decided that they would still stand up to sexism when men exhibited it, but do so in a constructive manner that allowed men to reflect on their wrongs in

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152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid., 148.
less confrontational environments, so that the men could actually undergo a transformation in their thinking.

Nevertheless, Rosal reports that the Columbus women did not achieve political respect from men until they began engaging in feminist action against the larger community. In one such activism event, Rosal recounts that the Weatherwomen attended a Stanly party, an affair which a hostess threw so as to get her friends to buy Stanly products, which the Weatherwomen defined as “the more you screw your friends by getting them to buy products they can’t use, the more points you get and the more worthless products you acquire; i.e., the more the Stanly Company screws you.” At the party, the Weatherwomen attacked consumerism, gender roles, discussed family structure, and women’s wages. As such, the Weatherwomen saw themselves as educating the young party-goers as to their limited roles in society – as subordinate to their husbands and bound by domesticity and lower wages. This kind of organizing was feminist in nature, and also earned the Weatherwomen respect from the male members of their collective.

The sexism of the Columbus Weathermen was real and solid – so much so that the Weatherwomen had to argue their way to respect, exchange punches over it, and then prove themselves in action, but eventually the Weatherwomen succeeded in garnering the respect they sought from their male peers. Their reward was access to leadership positions within the Columbus collective. By sharing the experience of the Columbus Weatherwomen in the nationally distributed newsletter of SDS, *New Left Notes*, these women could encourage other

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156 Ibid. The Stanly Company offered an array of products, ranging from household care products, such as cleaners and mops, to personal care items.
157 Ibid., 149. Rosal does not mention what the specific leadership positions were.
women to take more direct action in combatting sexism – and perhaps instruct male readers in how not to treat women.158

In other collectives, such as in Seattle, women successfully combatted sexism and moved into positions of leadership. According to Susan Stern, another Weatherwoman, Beverly, often made decisions within the group, controlled the group’s finances, and was looked at “for direction” by everybody.159 Members of the collective were also dedicated to smashing sexism, so much so that, at first, they even objected to Stern joining the collective on the grounds that she was living with two men who were notorious chauvinists and was working as a go-go dancer, which the Weather members disapproved of as a job that they did not see it as fitting the women’s liberation movement.160 Once she joined, Stern discovered that work within the collective was not divided along gender lines – there was no cleaning set aside for women, no important work set aside for the men (unlike SDS). The point was to get things done in a collaborative manner. Men and women had to learn to be self-sufficient in all aspects of life so that traditionally gendered work could be done by everyone, regardless of gender.161 Contrary to the implication that women only broke gender roles in terms of fighting, in this collective, women also learned to be automobile mechanics. And everyone shared housework. Stern recalls, “We all took turns cooking and cleaning the house…Suddenly we would get a free half hour and

158 This article came out during the first few months of WUO’s existence (August 1969), after the spring (June 1969) split from SDS. Thus, it would have had tremendous instructional value to women of the newly formed WUO collectives and to the former SDS members who had transitioned to the WUO and had brought with them not only their zeal, but also their New Left sexism.
159 Stern, With the Weathermen, 95, 103. Stern only provides a first name. This practice comes up repeatedly in other texts or from other authors, as a means to disguise the identity of group members. Other times, the names provided are aliases or pseudonyms.
160 Ibid., 89-90. Stern was living at the time with Garrity and Indian in a house across the street from the Weather collective.
161 Stern, With the Weathermen, 106, 115. Stern also recalls that Jay often cooked.
a mop and broom would appear and we would clean frenetically. For a day and a half there would be no dust, and no oily layer of dirt anywhere. Then it would accumulate all over again, and two days later the house looked like a trashcan.”

In the Seattle collective, the revolution included breaking away from traditional gender roles. The collective in Seattle advocated breaking gender roles for women and for men.

Across the organization, as women fought the never-ending battle against sexism, many of the men responded positively. Gilbert remembers that women took the time to point out instances of sexism and tried to get men to alter their internalized male supremacy. He saw this effort not only as loving and redemptive (for the men), but also as incredibly beneficial to the WUO’s overall dynamics. He says, “There’s actually an act of love to try to critique someone in a constructive way...in that being attuned to relationships, being committed to people to try to develop a more collective approach, I think that all of those things – that the women in general and the women’s movement made a real contribution to that.”

Weatherwomen also saw their efforts as making important advances within the WUO. Weatherwoman Laura Whitehorn believes that, “sexism within the organization would have been much worse if women hadn’t been doing some of the best most serious anti-imperialism across the country.” Weatherwomen attacked men’s sexism in self-criticism sessions, and men began to self-identify their own problems.

Thus, while instances of male chauvinism – including the objectification...
and sexualization of women – existed within the WUO, they were fought against. In this sense, the WUO’s anti-imperialist revolution literally began at home.

From the literature, Mark Rudd emerges as a living example of the male exploitation and oppression of women. Rudd confessed to this charge of chauvinism, “Women were definitely to me a type of object, to be used to build up my already inflated ego.” But even in the face of this sexist and influential leader, Weatherwomen worked to curtail his negative effects, eventually having to force him out of the WUO. As Dohrn told Jane Alpert in a July 1971 meeting, “A lot of our women feel the same way about him that you do [that he is sexist]. It’s the main reason he was asked to take some time off.”

Perhaps one of the WUO’s strongest leaders was Bernardine Dohrn. But even her leadership was contested. Evidence from 1976, published within a pamphlet of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (a group formed in 1976 by the above ground portion or supporters of the WUO), charged that women such as Dohrn were promoted to WUO leadership for the wrong reasons or that women were “tokens” within the organizational structure, were not imbued with any real power, and were usually associated with a powerful male. Even Bernardine Dohrn released a tape where she referred to herself as a token, greatly enhancing the evidence for this complaint.

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Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 248.
Despite Dohrn’s statement, her activities within the group hardly seem to be that of a
token. Dohrn led the split of SDS at the Chicago 1969 convention. In July 1969 Dohrn went to
Cuba to formulate strategy for the Days of Rage, and later led women into battle at the Days of
Rage in Chicago, in October of the same year. She also was the one who initiated the strategy of
moving away from bombing civilians and to bombing symbolically. Moreover, Dohrn was the
voice of the WUO.\textsuperscript{171} She wrote many position papers developing the WUO’s feminism and
discussing women’s rights.\textsuperscript{172} In fact, the WUO, commenting on Dohrn’s contributions as of

\textsuperscript{35} This document was most likely produced by Dohrn because she wanted to redeem the WUO
leadership from the fallout at the Hard Times conference in 1976. The conference had been
organized in collaboration by PFOC members and by underground members of the WUO.
Because WUO leadership members were underground and not present at the conference, they
were not able to be on scene to respond to the concerns of audience members/delegates on the
convention floor. Leadership over the conference was also contested between the underground
WUO and the PFOC, because the PFOC organization was led by Clayton Van Lydegraf. Van
Lydegraf, a former Weatherman, had become disenchanted with the WUO’s move away from
violence, and was actively trying to mobilize support away from WUO leadership at the time.
But when events at the convention were deemed to be problematic, the WUO and not the PFOC
was blamed. For more on these events, see Jones, \textit{A Radical Line}, Chapter 10; Diana Block, \textit{Arm
the Spirit: A Woman’s Journey Underground and Back} (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 101-105,
118, 130; Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 211, 215-217.

\textsuperscript{171} Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 83, 111; Ron Jacobs, \textit{The Way the Wind Blew}, 26, 30, 47, 51;
Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 81, 85, 98, 180, 182; Rudd, \textit{Underground}, 151; Kopkind, “The
Real SDS Stands Up,” 27; Stern, \textit{With the Weathermen}, 148, 151; Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close to the
Sun}, 211, 214, 256, 304, 357; Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, Chapters 19, 20, 25, 27; Ayers, “Revisiting
the Weather Underground,” 24; Jones, \textit{A Radical Line}, Chapters 7, 8, 9; The Reminisces of Jeff
Jones, 40; The Reminisces of David Gilbert, 78; The Weather Underground, “A Declaration of a
Communiqués from the Weather Underground}, ed. Jonah Raskin (San Francisco: Union Square
Press, 1974), 16 (page citations are to the reprint edition); Weather Underground, “New
Morning, Changing Weather: December 6, 1970 Communiqué,” 26; Federal Bureau of

\textsuperscript{172} For some of the papers written by Dohrn in part or in whole, see Ashley, et al., “You Don’t
Need A Weatherman;” Naomi Jaffe and Bernardine Dohrn, “The Look is You;” Bernardine
Dohrn, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Movement;” Bernardine Dohrn, “An Open Letter To
July, 1970, stated that “Bernardine Dohrn is no token; she’s one of the strongest revolutionary leaders we have.”

The literature on the WUO points out another issue with female leadership: women who made it into leadership were almost always partners in heterosexual couples, where often times, the male was a strong leader in his own right. Both Gilbert and Wilkerson bring up this point. Gilbert states that, “Women’s participation and percentage of leadership were very strong, but in practice, a woman had to be part of a heterosexual couple to be a top leader.” Wilkerson implies that, for women, power flowed through men to the women. As was the case in SDS and civil rights organizations such as SNCC, it often seemed as the only route to leadership for women was through their personal relationships with men.

These facts cannot be disputed, but they are not as damning as they initially appear. Not only are there counterexamples to this arrangement – for example, Susan Stern was a leader within her collective and slept with men outside of the WUO – this bias tended to cut both ways. After all, many men in national leadership were also part of heterosexual couples (John Jacobs, Bill Ayers, and Jeff Jones stand out as key leaders who were part of power couples).

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174 Gilbert, SDS/WUO, 20.
175 Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun, 275.
176 Gilbert, SDS/WUO, 20; Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun, 275.
177 Stern, With the Weathermen, 89, 206; Jones, A Radical Line, Chapter 9.
178 John Jacobs and Bill Ayers will be discussed shortly. Jeff Jones dated and eventually married Eleanor Raskin. Eleanor was active in the WUO, and active in SDS before the WUO. She established her revolutionary credentials when she led protesters and picketers in the Columbia protest in 1968 while married to her first husband, Jonah Raskin. Divorced in 1969, and as a Weatherwoman, she joined the Cuban delegation led by Dohrn – thus Eleanor emerges as politically active in her own right with her first husband and as a single woman, before her involvement with Jeff Jones. Furthermore, she authored The Bust Book: What To Do Till the Lawyer Comes with Kathy Boudin (the bust book was a book dedicated to educating activists as to what to do when arrested, before their lawyer arrived), and was involved in the
Weatherman David Gilbert, one of the people who made this claim about women, agreed that men in leadership tended to need to be in relationships with women as well.\textsuperscript{179} This criticism may point to a bias against single people, which may be significant for a group that attempted to smash monogamy (which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter) but still gravitated towards power couples in leadership.

Dohrn was part of just such a power couple. Early on in SDS, and for the first few months of the WUO’s existence, Dohrn dated John Jacobs (known simply as J.J. in WUO circles), the principal author of the “Weatherman” paper, and a proponent of revolutionary violence. By this time, though, Dohrn had already established her own revolutionary credentials through her work in SDS – she had been elected Interorganizational Secretary of SDS on her own merits, and had been active on behalf of the National Lawyer’s Guild. She was also one of the authors of the “Weatherman” document. Thus, it could be argued that as two dedicated revolutionaries in their own right, each individual saw commonalities in the other that resonated with their own commitments and interests, and therefore entered in a relationship without any machinations as to power or influence.

Significantly, Dohrn acted on her own when it came to organizational matters: for example, she went alone on the trips to Cuba, leaving Jacobs at home.\textsuperscript{180} This point would support the position that, if there were a primary leader of the WUO, it could be argued that it

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\textsuperscript{179} The Reminisces of David Gilbert, 320.

\textsuperscript{180} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, Chapter 19.
was Dohrn. Furthermore, Dohrn threw Jacobs out of the organization when he insisted on violence against persons, again denoting her higher status or influence within the group.

Dohrn was also involved with Bill Ayers. She brought Ayers into national prominence, as Ayers saw himself as unfit for leadership in the years prior to his relationship with Dohrn. Ayers says of his own leadership capabilities during that time period: “I had no firm idea, really, of what a collective was, even though I was part of the national leadership collective and a leader in the Detroit collective.”[^181] In his own estimation as a leader, he emerges as somewhat bewildered and as fueled by theory and idealism. He also adds, when commenting on the Days of Rage, that he would have followed Dohrn anywhere, as she inspired him.[^182] Ayers, then, in a sense, is secondary to Dohrn. Thusly, the critique that that power flowed from men to women makes sense based on certain typical gendered assumptions, but a closer look reveals that in some key instances at least, power also flowed from women to men.

### 2.4 Honky Tonk Women in the Heart of the Mother Country[^183]

Women fought against sexism in theory as well as in practice. By producing feminist position papers and theoretical frameworks supporting the equality of women, the Weatherwomen and the WUO were engaging in what they identified as feminist work. Because the WUO did not prioritize gender over other sites of oppression, however, self-proclaimed feminist groups of the era, such as The Bread and Roses collective, dismissed the organization as being not feminist enough or not feminist at all. Rather than replicating this myopia, it might be

[^181]: Ibid., Chapter 18.
[^182]: Ibid., Chapter 20.
[^183]: This title, “Honky Tonk Women in the Heart of the Mother Country,” is based on the WUO position paper, “Honky Tonk Women.” See “Honky Tonk Women,” 320. The sentence cited goes on to say that these revolutionary women, the Weatherwomen, do not just demand “Bread and Roses… but bombs and rifles” to achieve women’s liberation.
more useful to consider what this suggests about the fluidity of feminist theory and practice in the late 1960s and early 1970s.\textsuperscript{184} The feminism practiced within the WUO might have been different from that championed by mainstream feminist organizations, but it certainly was not absent.

In fact, the WUO debated which model of feminism to adopt. For example, in the late 1970s, “Letter From Sisters” was a document from some Weatherwomen to the PFOC organization that critiqued seven years of WUO activity as sexist.\textsuperscript{185} The Sisters charged the WUO with downplaying women’s special oppression in “The Women’s Question Is A Class Question,” which appeared in Osawatomie, the WUO’s magazine. The Sisters complained that, “The material basis of women’s oppression, and its concrete expression in the institutions of society – the family, schools, courts, laws, religion and the state – are left out” and that male supremacy is liquidated [erased] and sexism seen as unimportant.”\textsuperscript{186} In essence, the Sisters were saying that “The Women’s Question” article did not address the special oppression of women because it reduced women’s issues to class issues.\textsuperscript{187} This concern, that gender was not given prominence in the analysis of women’s oppression, however, does not erase the fact that the article was feminist.

“The Women’s Question Is A Class Question” stated:

The subjugation of women arose along with exploitative class relationships, as the direct result of the development of private property. The family became the economic unit of society. From that point in human history women and women’s work were considered outside the economic life of society and were held in

\textsuperscript{184} For example, the Bread and Roses collective dismissed the WUO’s feminism in “Weatherman Politics and the Women’s Movement,” 327-336, previously cited.
\textsuperscript{185} Sisters of WUO, “Letter from Sisters in the WUO,” previously cited. This document tried to point out that the brand of feminism that the WUO had did not fit the Sister’s brand of feminism. It also correctly pointed out that a concern with sexism was central to the split form SDS.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{187} In agreement with the Sisters on this interpretation, see Berger, Outlaws of America, 219.
contempt. Home and child-rearing became a private burden and doom rather than a valued form of social labor.\textsuperscript{188}

In the voice of the pseudonymous author Celia Sojourn, the WUO was addressing the oppression of women in this article, but did so in a way that was derivative of the economic status of women. The article saw the family as a locus for women’s oppression, but primarily in an economic sense. In this piece, then, an analysis of how and why women were treated as lower class citizens was present, as opposed to an analysis that addressed women’s oppression in and of itself. The Sisters were correct to feel that the WUO took a reductionist position in this piece.

Although “The Women’s Question Is A Class Question” contained the kind of reductionism that the Sisters were worried about, the paper also explained that the WUO would continue to “struggle fiercely against all forms of sexist behavior and always fight to root it out from among the people,” and also would build coalitions in their effort to achieve their overall goals of building a “movement that reaches into every office, sweatshop, household and high school to demand jobs, equal pay, adequate income, day care, the right to unionize, an end to every type of racial discrimination and equality for women.”\textsuperscript{189} The paper clearly comes out strongly in favor of fighting against male supremacy and for increasing the power of women.

Hence, “The Women’s Question Is A Class Question” emphasized class struggle (perhaps to the point of reductionism), but did so in alliance with feminist aims and with an understanding that a movement for female liberation must account for class oppression, economic oppression, and racial oppression. The WUO was a politico organization; it also deeply believed that men and women struggling together against chauvinism was the best way to

\textsuperscript{188} Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 3.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 3, 5.
stamp out all oppression collectively. The WUO wove together all of these threads in its own brand of feminism.

Other scholars add to the criticism against “The Women’s Question is a Class Question” by pointing out that this article neither addressed the plight of female prisoners nor engaged in a discussion of the need of women to defend themselves against rape – concluding that, on this basis, the WUO was out of touch with mainstream feminism. But the WUO published more than one article. While it is true that the “The Women’s Question is a Class Question” did not focus on rape or the Joan Little case, other Osawatomie articles did. The Osawatomie cover for the Autumn 1975 issue was dedicated to prisoners. Importantly, a special section titled “Women Locked Up” discussed sexual assaults against women, specifically referencing the Joan Little case and the special oppression of women in jail. This article, and the issue of Osawatomie it was printed in, came prior to the issue that carried “The Woman’s Question is a Class Question.” Thus, allegations that the WUO was not in touch with the heart of feminism – that it ignored discussions about rape and the plight of female prisoners – is uncharitable.

190 For more on this, see Harold Jacobs, “Inside the Weather Machine: Introduction,” Weatherman, ed. Harold Jacobs (Ramparts Press, 1970), 303. Also see Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun, 244. The term politico is discussed by Echols. These were feminist groups that were involved in political action, were not seeing gender based oppression as the primary oppression, and saw capitalism as oppression in itself. These were leftist groups. For more on female separatist groups and politico feminists, see Echols, Daring to be Bad, 84-85. Also see “The Reminisces of Cathy Wilkerson,” where she discusses the damaging conflict between separatist groups and the WUO. She explains that at the time, she couldn’t understand the need for a separatist movement, as she felt committed to the needs of Vietnamese women and not just white women. But she concludes that all the women involved in factional struggles between politico or separatist groups would now see their work as interrelated. See The Reminisces of Cathy Wilkerson, 50, 51.

191 Berger, Outlaws of America, 219-220. Specifically, he states that the editorial made no mention of Joan Little’s plight – she was a black woman who had killed a guard who was forcing her to perform oral sex on him. Berger concludes that this absence shows that the article and the WUO missed the main points of the feminist movement.

192 “Break The Chains,” Osawatomie, Autumn 1975, No. 3, 7-13; the special section on women is on 12.
This anti-sexism message is prominent in other WUO papers, indicating that the organization, in spite of its sexism, was attempting to locate and provide a feminist message. The “Weatherman” paper itself, previously discussed in this chapter, prescribed the smashing of sexism and the breaking out of restrictive gender norms for women. Furthermore, another WUO piece, “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” explained that most women, at work, suffered from a lack of daycare and maternity leave (and that these women were trying to unionize to get help alleviating these problems). The WUO identified this dearth as leading to women’s everyday oppression. These concerns were, in a sense, very much the domain of women and intrinsically constituted a feminist platform – the WUO’s attempt to support working women in unionizing and solving these urgent issues was neither an exclusionary nor anti-feminist position.

“A Mighty Army” further explained that working women also worked a second shift at home that was devalued and unappreciated. The piece added that working women “are last hired and first fired” and are paid the least, with the pay gap widening. Additionally, the piece discussed the special gender bias against women workers, namely that they are treated in a paternalistic fashion and expected to fall in line easily, and are prey to the sexual advances of bosses. While the WUO, in its papers, could be interpreted as being overly preoccupied with class or economics (and thus interpreted as reductionist), these same WUO papers were

193 “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” 6-13. Perhaps the unionizing aspect/organizational aspect is why the Sisters dislike the piece – as that method might seem as a less desirable way to raise women’s consciousness about their oppression. But organizing/unionizing specifically because of these issues would imply that women’s consciousness has already been raised as to the injustice and oppression that these issues represented. Also note that the title of the piece suggested that women were thought of as a powerful source for fighters in the battle against imperialism.

194 Ibid., 9.
attempting to provide substantial analyses and real solutions to women’s oppression. They were feminist, even though they might not have fit the feminist mold of the other feminist groups of the time period.

Perhaps another reason as to why the WUO was not recognized as feminist by other feminist groups of its time period was that the WUO attacked those other groups as bourgeois. Dohrn, in the same tape where she called herself a “token,” stated that, “I have attacked the women’s movement as bourgeois, separatist, anti-communist, divisive, anti-Third World, and a grave danger to revolution.” Gilbert recognized that “we tended to have contempt for those who formed an independent women’s movement.” Finally, the Sisters of the WUO, writing in 1976, argued that the WUO named bourgeois feminism, as the main concern for women.

In spite of these largely unfair attacks on feminist groups, many feminist women joined the WUO. To understand why, one must keep in mind the choice that anti-imperialist feminists of the day had to make. Feminist organizations of the day not only failed to take up anti-imperialist activities, but also took racist and classist positions. On the other hand, anti-imperialist organizations, like the WUO, were sexist. Women who were both feminists and anti-imperialists had to choose between organizations that took on a singular focus that missed much of what they felt required fighting against, or organizations that were inherently sexist. As Gilbert recalls,

Only later did I learn from Naomi and others what a difficult, almost schizophrenic period it was for them: politically ‘at home’ neither in the anti-

195 Unlike the PL, which thought a concern with these issues was divisive and did not merit attention. So while it is true that the WUO is concerned with class, as the PL was before the SDS split, this concern is not akin to PL’s view of feminism.
196 Dohrn, “Tape from Bernardine Dohrn,” 34-35.
197 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 60.
199 Berger, Outlaws of America, 293.
imperialist Left, with its still rampant sexism, or the predominantly white
women’s movement, which distanced itself from frontline national liberation
struggles and gravitated toward defining women’s issues from a white and often
middle class perspective.200

This choice could not have been easy for women who were feminists but also race, class, and
colonialism conscious. Instead of building a strong coalition with women’s liberation groups, by
attacking those groups, the WUO undercut any chance for an alliance, and isolated women who
may have wanted to join both types of groups.

The fact that Weatherwomen had to make this choice did not mean that they were not
also developing a feminist tradition within the WUO.201 Weatherwomen of the Columbus
collective were actively educating themselves on feminist issues, and forming feminist study
groups. They were also advancing a theory of feminism that blended anti-racism, anti-classism,
with anti-sexism, all within an analysis of the capitalist/imperialist system. Dohrn was
developing a feminist theory along the same lines, in “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s
Movement.” This piece attempted to explain that the problem with mainstream, second wave
feminism was that it resulted in a “middle class single issue” type of activism that privileged
gender as the locus of oppression at the cost of all other loci of oppression. Dohrn explained that
the WUO’s feminist vision was more inclusive and responsive than mainstream feminism.

A revolutionary women’s movement must be politically based on the most
oppressed sectors – black, brown, and white working-class women. This does not
mean that movement women are not a significant part of that movement, or that
we must wait until there is a working class women’s movement. It does mean that
we must be conscious of our perspectives and the class interests which our
demands represent. It means that our immediate job is to organize masses of

200 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 60.
201 See Rosal, “Who Do They Think Could Bury You?,” 149. Dohrn was also developing a
feminist theory along the same lines. See Dohrn, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s
Movement,” 4.
women around the full scope of radical demands – including the destruction of male supremacy.\textsuperscript{202}

Though the WUO should not have implied in their papers that the bourgeois traits of women’s liberation groups were worse than patriarchy, it does not mean that bourgeois feminism was not problematic: women’s groups at the time advocated a middle class, white female perspective. Historian Becky Thompson points out that the choice of joining a white women feminist organization was limiting to the activist women of that era: the radical feminists of the time denounced anything that was not primarily couched in gender oppression, and frowned on anti-war, anti-racist, militant women as being somehow duped by men into ignoring gender.\textsuperscript{203}

The WUO was right in insisting that the voices and experiences of poor and Third World women be added to the mix.\textsuperscript{204} Additionally, as we have seen, the WUO’s brand of feminism identified sexism and patriarchy as problems that must be defeated, and that were perpetuated (and taught to the populace) by the imperialist/capitalist system. Thus, the WUO advocated revolution as a way to gain true female liberation. So, far from being anti-feminist, the WUO, unlike most feminist organizations of the period, insisted on a proto-third wave feminism where the subjectivities of all women were considered. The WUO may have engaged in reductionist evaluations of women’s oppression in some papers, and they did openly attack women’s

\textsuperscript{202} Dohrn, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Movement,” 4.
\textsuperscript{203} Thompson, \textit{A Promise and A Way of Life}, 121, 130.
\textsuperscript{204} Feminist theory has recognized that second wave feminism was strongly associated with a white, middle class point of view; that this focus minimized the oppression experienced by other groups of women, and led to an elitist point of view – the very same qualities that the WUO critiqued. See Elizabeth Spelman, \textit{The Inessential Woman} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Iris Young, \textit{Justice and the Politics of Difference} (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990); Becky Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” 336-360. Also see Marilyn Boxer, “Rethinking the Social Construction and International Career of the Concept ‘Bourgeois Feminism,’” \textit{The American Historical Review}, 112, 1 (accessed 23 March, 2010). Boxer explains that socialist feminism is opposed to bourgeois feminism as a way to create a binary in feminism, but that both strands are part of the feminist movement.
liberation groups. However, in many of their other papers, the WUO critiqued the oppression of women on its own terms; in almost all of their papers on the issue, they show an appreciation for the importance of fighting women’s oppression. Though they attacked women’s liberation groups, their attacks pointed to legitimate concerns, and, thanks largely to the Weatherwomen, they were making important proto-third wave advances beyond those groups. Though there is sexism in the WUO’s papers, it is not nearly enough to declare the organization as a whole as sexist.  

2.5 Feminist to a Person: Finding Feminism in spite of Sexism

Based in large part on the instances of sexism discussed above, the secondary literature argues that the WUO cannot be feminist. This conclusion clearly draws to a large extent from a focus based on the men of the organization. The premises upon which this claim is based

205 We should note that even the sexism at issue here is not what we normally think of when we say writings are sexist. The WUO papers neither express belief in the inferiority of women nor the superiority of men in any sense. They neither sexualize women nor make sexist jokes in their papers. Instead, the sexism at issue is that they explain gender issues through the light of class analysis and they too enthusiastically point to the racism and classism of women’s liberation groups of the time period. One of the key things to remember in analyzing these charges of sexism is that they are mostly addressed to the male leaders and members of WUO. Insofar as the Weatherwomen responded within the organization to these same problems, the organization can be both sexist (with respect to what many of the men were doing) and feminist (with respect to what many of the women and some of the men were doing) at the same time.  

206 This quotation (“Feminist to a person”) comes from Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 11.

207 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 293, 294. While Varon concedes that the WUO was more receptive to feminism by the late 1970’s, he nevertheless concludes that the WUO attacked anything that would take away from its anti-imperialist focus. Even more strongly, Berger concludes that, “Weather did not have a feminist internal culture.” Berger’s assessment is based on the sexist actions of men described above. Berger draws this conclusion even after pointing out that, by 1970, women made up three quarters of the members of WUO, and after noting that women challenged sexism from men in criticism, self-criticism sessions. In response, Berger says, “few men in the organization viewed the struggle against patriarchy as important, and women’s initiatives did not change the overall culture of the WUO.” Berger, Outlaws of America, 291-294.
appear to be that almost all of the men were sexist, the men held more power than the women, and the women were unable to change Weathermen’s sexist culture. While there was a good deal of sexism among the men, this does not mean that men held so much more power than women that only the men’s positions should count as the organization’s positions or that the organization had a singular mission that only captured the male point of view. Rather, positions, roles, and activities of the Weatherwomen ought to be recognized as significant in their own right.

Weather did not have a linear power structure with a single leader at the top. Though the Weather Bureau at times represented a central committee, there was no central leader for the Bureau. The Weather Bureau always contained a significant number of women, whose number approached or surpassed the majority of Weather Bureau members. Given how fluid power was in the WUO and how much power women held, it seems inaccurate to reduce the organization to a unitary message that only comes from the men. The Weatherwomen’s work played an essential role in the formation and statement of the WUO’s mission and should not be liquidated by reducing that mission to a simple, unitary, and male view.

Another common misperception is that the WUO was not a feminist group but rather only an anti-imperialist or politically motivated organization.208 This view fails to recognize that there are many types of feminism, and therefore, the WUO’s vision of coalescing sexism and women’s oppression with concerns about the oppression of Third World individuals and people of color is a valid type of feminism.209 Activist Judith Mirkinnson also offers an answer to this seeming

208 Berger, Outlaws of America, 172, 203, 219, 293.
209 For more on the different kinds of feminism, see Alison Jaggar, “Political Philosophies of Women's Liberation,” in Feminism and Philosophy, eds. Mary Vetterling-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston and Jane English (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977); Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983). Jaggar distinguishes between liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism. Also see Becky Thompson, “Multi Racial Feminism;” bell hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist
dilemma, stating that it is not a question of the feminists working against the anti-imperialists, but rather of two movements working together and challenging each other.\textsuperscript{210} Weatherwoman Bernardine Dohrn puts it more succinctly: “The women of Weather were feminists to a person.”\textsuperscript{211} Their feminism, however, was blended with and inseparable from their other aims, such as the anti-war effort and anti-imperialism.

Most importantly, Weatherwomen found ways to assert themselves in the WUO, to challenge its sexism, and to contribute to the WUO’s feminist mission. Focusing on their actions gives us a different perspective on the organization, one where Weatherwomen are recognized as active contributors and are not erased from the historical record. With that shift in focus, the Weatherwomen emerge as autonomous agents due to their involvement in the WUO. The Weatherwomen’s continuing roles within the WUO are further investigated in the next chapter, which explores how these Weatherwomen found ways to autonomously express themselves and build their visions of feminism within, and because of, the WUO. As such, the next chapter illustrates how the WUO served as a locus of empowerment for some of these Weatherwomen, as it not only provided them with an arena in which to become politically active, but as it also served as a vehicle for these Weatherwomen to go against traditional gender norms and become leaders in their own right.

\textsuperscript{210} Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 293.

\textsuperscript{211} Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 11.

Oppression,” 22-27; Benita Roth, \textit{Separate Roads To Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Benita Roth, “The Making of the Vanguard Center: Black Feminist Emergence in the 1960’s and 1970’s,” 71. Roth argues that there were other feminisms besides the white middle class feminism usually associated with the second wave (which, she also argues, was not representative of the oppressions or needs of women of color).
CHAPTER 3: FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND AUTHENTICITY

In the fall of 1969, a confrontation between Weatherman Terry Robbins and several women of the Chicago WUO collective exposed both the undercurrents of sexism within the organization and the members’ efforts to identify and combat it. Cathy Wilkerson recalls:

In one [Chicago collective] meeting, he responded to one of the women with a tone of voice that many women, including myself, found offensive. We immediately challenged him, angrily accusing him of sexism, of disrespecting a woman’s opinion. While Weatherwomen were committed to fighting for those who suffered most, we could fight sexism within our own ranks along the way…[W]hen Terry at first defended himself angrily, standing up aggressively to make a point, two or three of us stood up to challenge his stance and tried to push him back into the chair. As we all wrestled, a small lamp was knocked over. The shattering glass bulb brought a quick and rather foolish end to our dramatic posturing.

Later, Terry, a few other women and I sat in the kitchen trying to resolve the conflict. The conversation evolved into an interesting discourse on what we really thought about the meaning of equality. We didn’t agree, but I was conscious of the fact that this was one of the first times since joining the collective in which there had actually been a give and take of ideas, and not just people pontificating. I felt a kinship with the other woman who had stood up with me, sensing the same passion in her, and also a kinship with Terry, for holding his ground and following through, even if I thought he had been wrong.212

Wilkerson’s remembrance highlights the multiple ways in which Weatherwomen fought – sometimes literally – against the sexism some of the men of the WUO maintained. Significantly, Wilkerson’s story also illustrates how the Weatherwomen’s direct challenge to this sexism could result in meaningful communication over a feminist issue. As Wilkerson notes, the discussion did not come to a final resolution, but it did signify progress toward gender equality, both ideologically and materially. Not only did passionate exchanges such as this one challenge personal outlooks and foster closer bonds among the members, but these moments also embodied

212 Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun*, 288.
the process through which women gained respect, became empowered, and found their autonomy both within and beyond the organization. For these Weatherwomen, the political was personal.

The women of the WUO were not simply victims of male chauvinism, as others have suggested. Rather, they were empowered political ideologues and activists who worked to confront the sexism in their midst. As a result, women in the WUO moved into leadership roles that were not otherwise readily available in other leftist organizations or in mainstream society in the 1960’s and 1970’s. In fact, Weatherwomen changed the overall leadership and style of the WUO, making it into a less sexist, more open, and more feminist organization.

This chapter begins the process of excavating the important contributions of female leaders of the WUO that have been neglected in the historical record. These women established themselves as autonomous agents and respected leaders at a time in US history when women were still expected to remain on the sidelines, in supporting roles. For a political organization that was not mainly dedicated to women’s liberation issues, the WUO had a large segment of women leading the organization, putting it at the forefront of American political organizations in terms of gender parity in leadership. Most left-wing organizations, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Panther Party, and others, had male dominated leadership throughout the 1960’s.213 Men also

213 While women were very active in these organizations, women were placed in secondary positions, with males being associated with leadership and decision-making. For example, men like Julian Bond, Bob Moses, James Foreman and Stokely Carmichael were identified as leaders of SNCC; women such as Diana Nash (one of the founders), Daisy Bates, or Mary King, while active organizers, were for the most part in secondary positions (Mary King was an assistant to Julian Bond, for example). While race played a role in this division (white women reported more of a sense of subservience; black women felt they were active), men still held control over the leadership positions and served as the public faces of the organization; the only woman in an administrative capacity was Ruby Dory Smith-Robinson, who served as executive secretary. For
controlled the leadership of most mainstream organizations, including the federal government as well as the political parties and various business groups.\textsuperscript{214} Many such organizations, especially those that were politically and socially conservative, would not integrate women into significant leadership positions for decades to come.\textsuperscript{215}

For the SCLC, the most known leaders were Martin Luther King (president of the organization until 1968) and Ralph Abernathy (president from 1968-1977). While Ella Baker was also a significant figure, she was not considered for the post of executive director of the SCLC as she was deemed inadequate (the position went to John Tilley). Baker also saw men limiting women in the political actions. See Barbara Ransby, \textit{Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision}, 184-186.

For the BPP, Elaine Brown became the Minister of Information only in 1971, amidst a still male-dominated leadership. Brown later became the Chairperson of the party in 1974, but other female leaders in the BPP on the national stage were rare. Other notable women who played important roles in the BPP, such as Angela Davis or Assata Shakur, did not rise to national leadership. See Elaine Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}; Assata Shakur, \textit{Assata}; Angela Davis, \textit{Angela Davis}.

\textsuperscript{214} For example, there were only ten women in the Senate from 1922-1969; to date, only 44 women have been in the Senate. See “Women in the Senate,” \url{www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/women_senators.htm} (accessed 8 August 2013). In the House, between 1955 and 1976 there were only 39 women. See \url{http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/Changing-Guard/Introduction/} (accessed 8 August 2013). Additionally, in 1969, the period we are interested in, there were no women in the President’s Cabinet. See \url{www.potus.com/rmnixon.html} (accessed 8 August 2013).

\textsuperscript{215} Women are still underrepresented in conservative groups or political organizations. As of the 113\textsuperscript{th} Congress (taking office in 2013), there were four Republican women in the Senate (out of 46 Republican Senators), twenty Republican women in the House (out of 233 Republican Representatives), and four Republican women governors (compared to only one Democrat woman governor). See Center for American Women and Politics Fact Sheet, \url{http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/cong.pdf} (accessed 8 August 2013). As of 8/17/13, the CATO Institute’s Board of Directors had two women out of 17 directors. See \url{http://www.cato.org/board-of-directors} (accessed 17 August 2013). As of 8/17/13, the American Enterprise Institute’s Board of Trustees had one woman out of 28 trustees. See \url{http://www.aei.org/about/board-of-trustees/} (accessed 17 August 2013).
This long history of women’s exclusion from high-profile leadership positions in American political organizations makes consideration of the ways in which women achieved gender equity in the WUO all the more vital. By examining the struggles and accomplishments of individual women, specifically Bernardine Dohrn, Diana Oughton, and Susan Stern, who rose to leadership in the WUO, the autonomy and authenticity of women in roles of leadership comes to attention and casts new light on an organization that has been historically noted more for its sexism than its gender equity.

3.1 Women Wrestling Leadership Away

Women were well represented within the WUO, at first in membership and then in leadership. As chronicler Harold Jacobs states, “If Weatherwomen occupied a secondary place within the typically male-dominated organization at its inception, less than six months later women were successfully challenging men for leadership, eventually coming to hold the majority of leadership positions.” As an anonymous Weatherwoman put it in 1970, “Much of the leadership of Weatherman throughout the country are women.”

David Gilbert remembers:

I had a coleader [sic], a woman whose politics and organizing work I admired [in the Denver collective]. Our gender balance reflected the organization as a whole. Of the five CC [Central Committee] members, two were women, with Bernardine Dohrn identified as ‘first secretary’ and primary spokesperson. On the next level, regional leadership was generally shared by a man and a woman. Such parity was almost unheard of in Left organizations of the day where men always heavily predominated. Our difference was more a tribute to the women’s individual assertive efforts to build anti-imperialists politics than to any organized program against sexism.

Weatherwomen were present, involved, and taking the reins of the WUO’s leadership.

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218 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 186-187; Jones, A Radical Line, Chapter 9.
As they obtained positions of power, Weatherwomen were not afraid to push through a feminist agenda in the WUO. For example, a report describing the events of the War Council in December of 1969 explained that the Weatherwomen had a panel discussion on women’s liberation. There, they decided that the women in the film, The Battle of Algiers were good role models for female empowerment. A popular 1966 film, The Battle of Algiers depicted guerilla warfare against the French government in Algiers, providing images of combat in which women played a significant role. Thus, the Weatherwomen upheld the film as a good model for revolutionary activity and for the cultivation of more assertive norms for women. Just as strong female leaders arose in the Battle of Algiers through an embrace of militancy, the Weatherwomen saw their own liberation as coming from taking leadership, becoming politically assertive, and not being squeamish about violence.

As women obtained authority within the WUO, breaking out of supportive gender norms and actively seeking power and influence, some men became uncomfortable in the face of female leadership. A male response to increased female autonomy and agency came in the form of impotence:

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219 The War Council was a national level meeting for the WUO organization, where the organization decided to go underground.
220 Djamila Bouhired, Zohra Dift Bitat, and Hassiba Ben Bouali were three women who were real life revolutionary activists fighting for Algerian independence from colonial rule highlighted by The Battle of Algiers. Bouhired worked as an agent for the leader of the Algerian independence forces; Bitat set bombs as part of the opening volley of the war for Algerian independence; Bouali worked with a revolutionary cell and was killed by a bomb set by the French police who were trying to find her cell. See Alistair Horn, A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962 (New York: New York Review Books, 2011); Erika A. Kuhlman, A to Z of Women in World History (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2002); The Battle of Algiers, directed by Gillo Pontecorvo (1966). The movie played in the U.S. in 1967 and was nominated for three academy awards.
Actually, even promiscuity suffered a temporary setback. With the push for women’s political leadership, there was an epidemic of male sexual impotence. Men withdrew politically and emotionally, as well as sexually. Then women had to struggle again to teach that passivity was not a form of accepting leadership but rather a way to undercut it, because everyone needs engagement and dialogue to grow.\footnote{Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 125.}

Women were breaking the passivity of their requisite gender roles, and as a response, men were displaying fragility and a lack of sexual response.\footnote{For more on the discussion of fragile masculinity in the face of women’s increasing flexibility in gender roles, see Lewis, \textit{Prescription For Heterosexuality}, Chapter 3. For more on masculinity in twentieth century U.S., see James Gilbert, \textit{Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950’s} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Bill Osgerby, \textit{Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth, and Leisure Style in Modern America} (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001).} They were also disengaging from political dialogue. Even though men were not responding favorably to women’s changing roles, their negative responses underscored that women were becoming leaders, and that women’s assertiveness was paying off. Weatherwomen were implementing their plan of achieving liberation through leadership and influence. Once they became leaders of collectives or at the national level, Weatherwomen fought against the male withdrawal response by showing the compatibility of anti-sexism, anti-racism, and anti-imperialism campaigns. Eventually, the Weatherwomen’s work resulted in the WUO becoming less sexist, as men came to value the positive contributions women were making to the WUO.

The experiences of the women in the Columbus collective illustrate this process well. Women’s actions (such as confronting working women about their objectification or about the pay gap) resulted in the men of the collective, in the words of Weatherwoman Lorraine Rosal, “dealing with us [women] as a political people.”\footnote{Rosal, “Who Do They Think Could Bury You?,” 149.} As Rosal explains it, the Columbus Weatherwomen, through their activism, were recognized for their political work. They were
acknowledged as effective organizers and gained respect as agents of the revolution. Another effect of successfully organizing women-centered actions was that the women felt more empowered. This empowerment, in turn, led to leadership positions: “It served as a real impetus for all of us to form political collectives, go out into the streets and the parks, etc., do mass work around the national action, and do some heavy and consistent organizing. Because of the women’s continuing practice, we began to really assume leadership positions.”

The Columbus Weatherwomen sincerely believed that their political work gained them respect from men, which eventually resulted in making the men less sexist (since the men realized that the women could perform the same organizing tasks as them). Women’s actions “forced guys we have been organizing to combat their chauvinism, to understand more clearly the right for women’s liberation, and to begin to see their role in aiding that liberation.” In addition, the Columbus Weatherwomen reported that,

The fact that one of us, Elizabeth Stanley (no relation to the Stanly Company) was in jail on inciting to riot charge (felony, 1-3 years, $25,000 bail) because she aided the black struggle organize against racism, did more to combat male chauvinism and bring the idea of female revolutionary leadership home – both to the kids we were working with and to the men in our own project – than all the discussion, criticism sessions, etc., that we had had about racism and male chauvinism all summer.

Concrete action, in other words, served as the women’s “credentials” and allowed them to work alongside men in a collaborative manner, where they would be trusted and respected, without

225 Ibid.
226 This work included both feminist, woman-centered work, and political activism that dealt with imperialism. For the Weatherwomen, the two were intertwined. See Rosal, 149. As they put it, “we began to see the caucus working within the larger collective as a place for women to share organizing experiences and to develop an analysis of male chauvinism and supremacy as tools of the ruling class, an analysis between white working-class women and the international proletariat.”
227 Ibid., 150.
228 Ibid.
being challenged. According to one anonymous Weatherwoman, this sort of concrete action broke down paternalistic and chauvinist male attitudes that insisted that women were weak or stupid.\textsuperscript{229} Moreover, the women were modeling alternative gender norms for males (young and old) that they came in contact with: “The kids we began organizing came in contact for the first time with strong women whose purpose in life was not to have a home and babies.”\textsuperscript{230} The Weatherwomen were modeling a new kind of womanhood – one that was aligned with the goals of female liberation and featured women accomplished at something other than being homemakers.

Leadership styles in the WUO also changed as women became leaders. As one anonymous Weatherwoman reflected in 1970, “Men can learn from women and become better leaders themselves.”\textsuperscript{231} Also, as the document “Weather Letter” attests, female leaders valued open communication, collaborative processes, honesty and frankness.\textsuperscript{232} Women leaders saw strength as deriving from collaboration and from pushed for open communication between members:

from this strength which we got from our honesty, particularly with each other, we were able to confront men and feel the power we had to change both ourselves and [the] men. A new kind of leadership began to emerge based on building each person to be strong rather than on reinforcing the power of the few at the expense of others.\textsuperscript{233}

Frankness and collaboration built trust and a sense of unity, all of which empowered women to continue working together in their revolutionary roles. Furthermore, this basis of support nourished women in their anti-sexism work. This style of leadership and communication also

\textsuperscript{229} A Weatherwoman, “Inside the Weather Machine,” 322.
\textsuperscript{230} Rosal, “Who Do They Think Could Bury You?,” 149.
\textsuperscript{231} A Weatherwoman, “Inside the Weather Machine,” 326.
\textsuperscript{232} The author(s) of “Weatherletter” was anonymous.
\textsuperscript{233} “Weather Letter,” 458.
aided men in their self-growth, as it allowed them to see that criticisms were meant to be constructive. Weatherman David Gilbert explained that this new dynamic, built on open communication and trust, made one feel as if one was worthy of love and was capable of change (when it came to realizing that one was a chauvinist pig, it was easier to change if one was mentored through that transformation). It also made for more unity within a given WUO collective when collaboration was valued over competition.\footnote{Gilbert explains that it’s “an act of love to try to take the time to not just walk away from someone but to criticize someone in a constructive way.” This act of love made the WUO into a better organization, as it was “more attuned to relationships,” and more committed to people and collectivity. See The Reminiscences of David Gilbert, 244.}

Female leadership translated, to a certain extent, into more female autonomy and empowerment.\footnote{Research seems to support the view that female leadership results in more cooperative approaches and female empowerment, while male leadership results in more competitive, and exploitative styles of leadership (which are aimed at individual and not communal gains). See J. Brad Chapman, “Comparison of Male and Female Leadership Styles,” \textit{Academy of Management}, 18, 3 (September 1975): 645-650; Roslyn H. Chernesky and Marcia J. Bombick, “Women’s Ways and Effective Management,” \textit{Affilia}, 3, 1 (March 1988): 48-61. Female leadership also fosters an interdependent style or dynamic, see Jean Lipman-Blumen, “Connective Leadership: Female Leadership Styles in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Workplace,” \textit{Sociological Perspectives}, 35, 1 (1992): 183-203. In terms of women’s leadership in social movements, such as the civil rights movement, research indicates that women’s building of personal relationships aided in building coalitions and in recruiting members to the cause. See Belinda Robnett, “African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization,” \textit{AJS}, 101, 6 (May 1996): 1661-1693; Danelle Moon, \textit{Daily Life of Women During the Civil Rights Era} (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2011).} A Weatherwoman summed it up:

Women who previously were passive and sat quietly at meetings have become political leaders (thinkers as well as fighters). The myth of the exceptional political woman is breaking down. Generally what occurred in the past was that a few women in each organization were recognized as leaders by adopting male conceptions of leadership, aggressiveness, domination, and the whole ego trip. We’ve learned that all women can become political. Much of the leadership of Weatherman throughout the country are women.\footnote{A Weatherwoman, “Inside the Weather Machine,” 321.}
Thus, female gender norms were changing. Women were becoming active, outspoken, and powerful. This promotion of new gender norms challenged men’s beliefs that women were somehow inferior or weaker than men, and therefore aided in smashing sexism. Moreover, in the very act of becoming leaders, the women themselves came to see themselves as emboldened and capable agents who preferred the model of liberated womanhood they were creating.\(^{237}\)

### 3.2 Bernardine Dohrn: The High Priestess of the WUO\(^{238}\)

A clear example of a female leader in Weather, Bernardine Dohrn not only ascended to national leadership, but also was often the face of the organization. Not only was Dohrn an author of the “Weatherman” paper that accentuated the differences between the various factions within SDS and led to its eventual split in June 1969, but she also was the person who led the walk out against the Progressive Labor (PL) forces on the convention floor to actively initiate the split. As the PL was moving away from supporting a policy of self-determination for black nationalists and Third World revolutionaries, Dohrn grabbed the microphone from a wavering and confused Mark Rudd (who was thinking about asking for a break to figure things out), and, in no uncertain terms, Dohrn announced that the real SDS needed to decide for itself if it would stand for such a shameful position.\(^{239}\) By taking that action, Dohrn precipitated the rupture of the organization. Further, Dohrn later gave the speech that convinced Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) members (many of whom would become the WUO) to expel the PL faction. In what a reporter characterized as “obviously the outstanding political speech of the whole week,” Dohrn – while standing on the stage front and center, “flanked by a dozen SDS delegates

\(^{237}\) Ibid., 322.

\(^{238}\) This title is inspired by a positive characterization made by Susan Stern about Bernardine Dohrn. See Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 150.

\(^{239}\) Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 118; Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 84.
(chicks up front) who stood Panther-style on the podium—argued convincingly that the real SDS stood for different values than the ones that the PL stood for, including a commitment to black and national liberation struggles. Dohrn effectively convinced those present to expel the PL. Dohrn’s leadership thus facilitated the birth of the WUO.

After SDS split apart, Dohrn was voted in as a member of the leadership committee, called the “National Interim Committee.” As part of the committee, Dohrn planned and organized actions, including trips to Cuba. On one such trip in July 1969, Dohrn met with representatives of the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG) who identified her as a leader of the Weatherman faction. The point of this meeting was to find ways to stop the Vietnam War, to promote resistance to the war in the United States, and build solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle. At these meetings, in order to build a fighting force in the U.S., Dohrn was advised to “look for the man who fights the hardest” and recruit that person for the revolution. Having adopted various strategies from those meetings, Dohrn was instrumental in mapping out the WUO’s tactic for militant struggle, where radical action in the streets was supposed to result in political change (the idea of which was summed up through the “Bring the War Home” slogan later used at the

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241 Ibid.,
242 Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weather Underground, part 2, 1, 2, 59, 68. Dohrn organized trips to Cuba first for SDS, then for Weather. Note that after the split, Weather considered itself the real SDS, and slowly took on the name Weather and abandoned the SDS moniker.
243 Dohrn organized the trip (dubbing herself “cruise director”), along with Julie Nichamin, another Weatherwoman. Several other Weatherwomen were involved in the trip, such as Diana Oughton, Dionne Donghi, and Elenor Raskin. See Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weather Underground, part 3; Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 26; Ayers, Fugitive Days, Chapter 19; Jones, A Radical Line, Chapter 7.
244 Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weather Underground, part 2, 59.
Days of Rage). In constant contact with Huynh Van Ba (the head of the PRG delegation) even after the July trip to Cuba, Dohrn not only was involved in all the Cuban meetings, but she also presented reports on her experiences to the rest of the Weatherman group and developed the WUO’s position of solidarity with the Vietnamese.

Dohrn also was one of the organizers of the Days of Rage, during which she was arrested. At this October 1969 action in Chicago, Dohrn was instrumental in motivating and inspiring the WUO members to act in a revolutionary fashion – after all, engaging the police was scary work, especially when only hundreds, and not the anticipated thousands, of WUO members had shown up to protest. At the first meet-up in Lincoln Park, members of the leadership, the Weatherbureau, gave speeches to the crowd assembled before them. Then Bernardine stepped up to the microphone. Weatherman Bill Ayers describes the scene:

The feverish revelry was at a peak when Bernardine Dohrn appeared on a slight rise to the left of the fire and the troops exploded into a chanting frenzy. HO, HO, HO CHI MINH, THE NLF IS GOING TO WIN! She was wearing a black leather

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245 Dohrn though was careful to maintain a balance in the struggle, so that outright violence would not take over the organization. Eventually, she even expelled the most influential proponent of violence from within the organization. This will be discussed shortly. See Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, Chapter 19; Jones, *A Radical Line*, Chapter 7.

246 Dohrn not only communicated with Van Ba through telephone calls, but she even sent him a telegram on behalf of the women contingent of the SDS/WUO, signed 100 women and Bernardine Dohrn. The telegram was a condolence message on the passing of Ho Chi Minh. See Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Weather Underground*, part 2, 68; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Weather Underground*, part 3, 11.


248 WUO members had worked throughout the summer to recruit for the Days of Rage, but those who came to the Days of Rage numbered anywhere from 400-600, and not the thousands who were expected. Those present reported being afraid. Various reasons account for this low turnout, among them a fear of the police (Mayor Daley had promised to retaliate with force, instructing his policemen to shoot the crowds) and a sense of the WUO holding itself up as an exemplary fighting force, which led to other organizations in the movement distancing themselves from the WUO’s outright aggression. See Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blowed*, 29-30; Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 108; Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 77; Jones, *A Radical Line*, Chapter 8; Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 131.
jacket over a black turtleneck, her trademark short skirt and high stylish black boots, an eye-liner pencil peeking from her breast pocket. Her blazing eyes were allied with her elegance. She had earned her role as the voice and leader of the militants through practice, but she was also a stunning and seductive symbol of the Revolutionary Woman – J. Edgar Hoover had dubbed her ‘La Pasionaria of the Lunatic Left’ – and as she stood in that frenzied park late that night, her dark hair whipped by the wind, her brilliant eyes flashing in answer to the fire, I would have followed her anywhere.\textsuperscript{249}

Masterfully, Dohrn spoke to the crowd, engaging them and building up their self-confidence.

Then Jeff Jones announced the night’s target, and the marchers were off, fighting their way through police lines.\textsuperscript{250}

The next day, October 9\textsuperscript{th}, an all-women’s action against the Chicago Draft Board office was scheduled. Weatherwoman Susan Stern remembers that the women looked “too exhausted to move, blood-spattered and smeared with grime and sweat” from the previous night’s protest – yet they had shown up to this scheduled rally, firm in their commitment.\textsuperscript{251} To inspire and encourage, Dohrn addressed these battle weary Weatherwomen, and spoke about “the strength and courage of women.”\textsuperscript{252} She praised their efforts and valor, and led them into this new encounter with the police.\textsuperscript{253} Even though they were outnumbered, the Weatherwomen charged the police lines, resolute and screaming, in two by two formation – yells and shrills were deemed to be part of a good strategy based on the Battle of Algiers.\textsuperscript{254} Dohrn fought alongside these Weatherwomen, “with genuine rage,” in the process injuring her leg and getting arrested.\textsuperscript{255}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{249} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, Chapter 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{250} Stern, \textit{With the Weathermen}, 141; Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 80; Jones, \textit{A Radical Line}, Chapter 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{251} Stern, \textit{With the Weathermen}, 147.
  \item \textsuperscript{252} Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close to the Sun}, 304.
  \item \textsuperscript{253} Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 81.
  \item \textsuperscript{254} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, Chapter 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{255} Stern, \textit{With the Weathermen}, 151.
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Once in jail, Dohrn served as an inspiration to the other women arrested with her, as her self-assurance and quiet strength encouraged the other women not to feel defeated, even behind bars. Stern recalls that Dohrn’s body language indicated contempt for her surroundings and an unyielding self-confidence.256 Stern continues,

[Dohrn] possessed a splendor all her own. Like a queen, her nobility set her apart from the other women... There was something else, a type of authority, a sense of self that one had to have before one could lead other people, before they would follow... Whatever she possessed, I wanted it. I wanted to be cherished and respected as Bernardine was.257

Dohrn’s commanding presence was also a reason why the WUO moved away from a strategy of non-discriminate violence to a strategy of symbolic bombing. After her return from the Cuba trip in July of 1969, while organizing the Days of Rage in Chicago and other protests, Dohrn was careful to maintain a balance in the struggle so that outright violence would not overtake the organization. She counseled Weatherman John Jacobs (J.J.) to be careful in his actions: “Just because you can always win, doesn’t mean you’re always right.”258 Jacobs was an influential leader first with SDS and then later with WUO; he had been involved both in the protest at Columbia and been one of the authors of the Weatherman paper.259 As leader, Jacobs advocated a policy of increasing violence that did not discriminate in its targets. This strategy eventually led to the Townhouse explosion in March 1970 in which the New York collective blew themselves up in the process of assembling a bomb meant for a dance at Fort Dix.260

256 Ibid., 149.
257 Ibid., 151.
259 Jacobs (known as J.J. for short in WUO circles) is also one of the Weatherpeople who advocates the creation of an underground revolutionary struggle at the Flint War Council in December 1969. See Jones, *A Radical Line*, Chapter 9.
260 The collective was in the process of assembling a bomb meant for a dance at Fort Dix. Thus, civilians alongside with military personnel would have been injured if the bomb making plans had been successful. Human targets would have been included. See Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 129; Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 150; Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun*, 337.
In contrast, Dohrn believed that the WUO needed to move away from the path of violent struggle. Alongside Jeff Jones, another leader within the WUO, Dohrn called a meeting to map out a new strategy. At this meeting, held in Mendocino, California in the late spring of 1970, Dohrn and Jones argued that the WUO should back away from its open militancy. This proposal was discussed for days, until “steadily, the opposition lessened until only Jacobs and a few others insisted on military action.” Dohrn’s idea of moving away from direct violent action toward targeting mere symbols of American imperialism made Jacobs frantic and adamant that his plans were still the right path for the WUO. Dohrn told the group: “We’re going to build a new political organization right here.” In spite of his influence and stature, Dohrn threw Jacobs out of the organization: “Where we’re going... you’re not welcome,” she said to him. As Thai Jones, the son of Weatherman Jeff Jones puts it, “Bernardine, who had the ultimate authority to say it, told him he was out of the organization.” Acting as an empowered leader and clearly not as a token who had no real power, Dohrn’s authoritative decision moved the WUO away from the dangerous path it was on, and ensured that no human casualties would ever occur as a result of a successful WUO bombing. Indeed, after the Mendocino meeting, the WUO, in May 1970, issued its Declaration of a State of War Communiqué, in Dohrn’s voice and signed by her,

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263 Ibid.  
265 Gilbert explains that he was “profoundly grateful” to Bernardine Dohrn, Jeff Jones, and Bill Ayers (who had also been involved in the Mendocino meeting) for “leading us out of the volcano” of violence that the WUO would have otherwise become. See Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 152.
announcing that attacks will now target “a symbol or institution of Amerikan [sic] injustice.”

Outright violence had been repudiated due to Dohrn’s vision and leadership.

Thanks to Dohrn, the group would not target children or civilians, or even people who could be seen as combatants, as Jacobs might have preferred. Instead, they could see their symbolic violence as consistent with a feminist mission since it would be used to send a message of justice that did not harm people. Dohrn was certainly no token woman: she not only removed one of the ostensibly highest male leaders from power, but also moved the entire national organization into alignment with her views and plans.

Dohrn’s leadership is also evident in her functioning as the voice of the WUO: it was her voice or signature that accompanied most of the WUO communiqués. Jonah Raskin, the ex-husband of Weatherwoman Eleanor Raskin, noted in 1974,

It is of historical significance that the leader of the organization is a young woman. Bernardine Dohrn’s emergence is a clear sign of the crucial role that women have played in the radical movement. Many women have listened to her not simply as one angry, intelligent voice but because she has articulated the


collective anger of sisters everywhere, the [cries] of women at home, in offices, factories, and schools, resisting illegitimate authority.\textsuperscript{269}

Dohrn’s leadership and collaborative style was tied into a narrative of collective work done by women who were looking for a female leader, one who would represent their interests in a political arena. Dohrn did just that as she wove feminist aims through the WUO’s agenda.

Dohrn saw her fight against imperialism as intricately linked with the fight against male supremacy. As she stated in a 1976 interview for Emile de Antonio’s documentary, \textit{Underground}, “Imperialism has as one of its underpinnings: male supremacy. It is based on a system in which men are taught to think of themselves as superior. It is – uhhh – bred into all the institutions of society: into work, into the family, into the schools, into hospitals, into medical care, into education.”\textsuperscript{270} This political system allowed for male supremacy and for the exploitation of women. For example, Dohrn explained that women became sexual commodities in Third World nations, such as in Puerto Rico, where women were trapped in the sex industry due to U.S. imperialism and economic policy.\textsuperscript{271}

Moreover, Dohrn expounded that, “A revolutionary women’s movement must be politically based on the most oppressed sectors – black, brown and white working-class women.”\textsuperscript{272} She explained that, “our immediate job is to organize masses of women around the full scope of radical demands – including the destruction of male supremacy.”\textsuperscript{273} Thus, Dohrn took the WUO in a decidedly feminist direction, placing the liberation of \textit{all} women – regardless of class, race, or nation – at the forefront of the WUO agenda. Although she was the most visible

\textsuperscript{270} Emile de Antonio, \textit{Underground}, DVD.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{273} Dohrn, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Movement.”
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.
female leader, Dohrn was not alone in her efforts to make the revolutionary mission of the WUO inclusive of women’s liberation. Diana Oughton and Susan Stern joined her in this struggle.

3.3 Diana Oughton: “My Life Is My Values”

Raised in Dwight, Illinois, Diana Oughton grew up in an affluent family, enjoying a privileged lifestyle that eventually took her overseas, as she studied for her B.A. abroad in Germany. Based on her experiences in Europe, Oughton realized that the United States was viewed critically overseas, especially with respect to U.S. imperialism. Upon graduating from Bryn Mawr, Oughton enlisted in the Voluntary International Service Assignments program and was assigned to Chichicastenango, in Guatemala. There, as she taught Native American children how to read, Oughton quickly came to despair when faced with malnourished children, overworked women, and numerous baby sized coffins (the result of what would have been, in the U.S., preventable childhood diseases).

Oughton also came to believe that U.S. imperialism was responsible for the poverty and despair she was witnessing in Guatemala. In response, she became a socialist, and upon her return to the U.S. at the end of her volunteer assignment, Oughton joined SDS. With Bill Ayers,

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274 This title is inspired by Diana Oughton’s words in a letter to her parents. See Powers, Diana, 100.
277 Powers, Diana, 39, 43; Ayers, Fugitive Days, Chapter 12.
278 Oughton connected U.S. imperialism with the setting up of puppet governments that supported U.S. interests and policies instead of looking out for the interests of their own populace. See Powers, Diana, 32-45. Nicholas Cullather, Secret History: The CIA’s classified account of its operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954 (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999). This work is a book written by the CIA historian, meant to tell the story for CIA eyes only.
she shaped the SDS chapter at the University of Michigan into the “Jesse James faction.” The Jesse James faction, so called because it believed that community organizing went hand-in-hand with radical protest, held that in order to achieve political change SDS needed to become more militant, as other methods previously taken by the local SDS chapters were deemed too tame to bring about substantial political change. 

Diana Oughton was actively involved in the Jesse James faction’s actions, serving as a hard revolutionary worker and leader within this so called “action faction.” For example, in September of 1968, she manned the bullhorn and addressed the crowds gathered at a protest confronting the University of Michigan’s stance in regards to the Vietnam War. This action resulted in the Jesse James faction taking over the SDS chapter at the University of Michigan, as the Jesse James faction attacked the ineffectiveness of SDS’s previous actions, ridiculing its polite protestations and non-involvement in the war protest. This opposition resulted in the Radical Caucus of the SDS chapter giving up its membership in the SDS chapter; as a result, the Jesse James faction took control. In December 1968, the Radical Caucus tried to get its own chapter membership back at the National Convention at the University of Michigan, but Diana blocked their attempt arguing that having separate chapters would lead to fragmentation. In this manner, she maintained control for the Jesse James faction.

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280 Bill Ayers, Diana Oughton, Terry Robbins, and Jim Mellen were members. Thus, the Jesse James faction was populated by WUO leaders and was intrinsic to shaping WUO policy, from the beginning with the Weatherman paper (several authors were members of the Jesse James faction) to the end of the organization. See Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 6, 48; Powers, Diana, 87; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weather Underground, part 5, 32.

281 See Powers, Diana, 88-89, 104.
At the National Council meeting at the University of Colorado in October 1968, Oughton and other delegates discussed the concept of youth culture and how to tap into its alienation to lead a revolution.\(^{282}\) This conceptual undertaking would eventually result in “Toward a Revolutionary Youth Movement,” written by Mike Klonsky in December 1968.\(^{283}\) Oughton was also named SDS regional organizer for Michigan and served as a negotiator between the Jesse James faction and the University of Michigan administration.\(^{284}\)

On the basis of all this work, by the December 1968 SDS National Convention meeting, held at the University of Michigan, Oughton had emerged as a recognized leader and as a “radical ‘sister’ in her own right.”\(^{285}\) Even the FBI characterized her as “having demonstrated leadership within New Left activities” and deemed her to be a danger to the security of the United States.\(^{286}\) After the SDS split, Diana continued to lead and organize, this time for the WUO. Some of her actions include the organization of ‘Cuba Month,’ a series of films on the Cuban revolution at the University of Michigan campus held in early 1969. In July, Oughton joined Dohrn as a delegate on the Cuba trip. Later that summer, she worked for the Days of Rage, even arranging travel for WUO groups to Chicago, eventually being arrested in the all women’s action there. Finally, in December 1969 she participated in the Flint War Council.\(^{287}\)

\(^{282}\) Ibid., 92-3.
\(^{283}\) This document signaled a turn toward militancy for SDS, and stated that youth, students, and workers could be radicalized based on their alienation with capitalism. This document also supported self-determination for oppressed groups and nations. Thus, it paved the way for the Weatherman document itself.
\(^{286}\) Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Diana Oughton*, part 1.
Overall, Diana Oughton emerges from the historical record as being completely committed to her cause of socialist revolution, asking friends who shared her political outlook, “How can you think that way and then do nothing?” To Oughton, inaction was inexcusable. In the face of injustice, Oughton believed that action was morally required. The WUO offered Oughton a path toward making a real difference in the world and she embraced that path fully, as an autonomous agent in her own right.

Not only was Oughton committed to anti-imperialism, but she also was committed to women’s liberation. As early as July 1967, Diana was involved with a women’s caucus within SDS at the same convention where, according to Gilbert, women’s liberation pierced SDS’s sexism, as SDS women put forth an agenda of stamping out male chauvinism, and acknowledged women’s leadership capabilities. Additionally, in March 1968, Oughton started her own women’s liberation group in Ann Arbor. Discussions in the group focused on the subordinate role of women in the Movement, and on the problem of sexism within the movement and society as a whole. The group also explored the idea of women’s leadership within SDS. Moreover, Oughton and Ruthie Stein, another activist, had conversations with Bill Ayers about the male privilege imbedded in the concept of free love. As such, the women discussed the concept of free love with him, clarifying to Ayers that “free love only meant that movement men could screw any woman they could get, free of emotional encumbrances” and noting that relationships

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part 1 and part 2. The FBI file notes that an informant overheard Diana state that at the Days of Rage, protesters would “confront the police,” “bait the pigs,” and “resist arrest.” See Federal Bureau of Investigation, Diana Oughton, part 2, part 3 and part 4.  

288 Powers, Diana, 94.  

289 Powers, Diana, 72; Ayers, Fugitive Days, Chapter 13.
between men and women were not always equal.\textsuperscript{290} Oughton elucidated these points to Ayers, making him aware of his own intrinsic sexism when it came to relationships.\textsuperscript{291}

Oughton did not restrict her feminism to the Movement. In conversations with her sister, she tried to express her stance against conformist beauty norms and other restrictive gender norms. Specifically, Diana believed that women should be doers and helpers, and not be bound by their homes and babies in the bourgeois lifestyle. Oughton believed that the trappings of femininity encumbered women and forced them into spending money that could otherwise be used to fund the revolution or alleviate real social problems, such as poverty in black neighborhoods or Third World countries. She advocated a lifestyle that was based on gaining worth based on one’s activities and one’s commitment, not one’s beauty.\textsuperscript{292} Thus, when her sister Christina “simply stood titling away, mouth agape, eyes wide, holding her hand in troubled hands” and generally acted shocked at the fact that Diana had cut off her long, luxurious hair, Oughton explained that cutting her hair short was a way to achieve liberation and freedom.\textsuperscript{293}

Like Dohrn, Oughton also cautioned against the full valorization of violence. Believing that “we create a moral space when we cry out against harm,” Oughton fully dedicated herself to changing society and bringing about a socialist revolution.\textsuperscript{294} But she firmly believed that violence was a dangerous tool to employ to achieve this goal. Thus, when Terry Robbins, a Weatherman and author of the original “Weatherman” paper, expressed that “a man of principled violence” had a place in the revolution, Diana asked him, “How many innocents killed or hurt

\textsuperscript{290} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, Chapter 13
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{292} Ibid., Chapter 14.
\textsuperscript{293} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{294} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, Chapter 13; Powers, \textit{Diana}, 97, 158.
would be acceptable?’ She further counseled, “You know you can catch the very disease you’re fighting, Terry – you want to stop the war, you become warlike. You want to fight inhumanity, and you become inhumane.”

Tragically, Oughton was one of the fatalities of the Townhouse explosion in March 1970, making her a victim of the inhumane violence she cautioned against. Ayers indicates that Robbins convinced Oughton to travel to the New York collective (led by J.J. and Robbins) and supposes that Oughton consented to go there to talk down Terry from using explosives indiscriminately. Cathy Wilkerson additionally states that Diana had misgivings about using explosives against human targets. In any case, Oughton was unsuccessful in convincing Robbins and her body was found next to his in the basement where he was assembling the bomb. After this incident, Dohrn used Diana Oughton’s tragic death as an example of why this violent path should not be maintained.

3.4 Susan Stern: The Personal Journey of a Revolutionary Woman

Like Diana Oughton, Susan Stern was a Weatherwoman who came to the organization and became a well-recognized, feminist leader. Stern began her radical journey in 1966, with the crossing of the country, East to West. She and her husband were relocating to Seattle, as Robby

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296 Ibid.
297 Ibid., Chapter 25, 30.
298 Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun*, 404.
299 Ibid., 334; Powers, *Diana*, 3-6. Oughton was an autonomous agent in the WUO. Even when she had been warned by her concerned mother to leave the WUO so as to preserve her life, she’d adamantly chosen the revolution. “‘Honey,’ her mother had warned, ‘you’re only going to make things worse. You're only going to get yourself killed.’” Diana responded, “It’s the only way, mummy. It’s the only way.” Diana Oughton autonomously lived – and died – for her beliefs. See Lucinda Franks and Thomas Powers, “Story of Diana: The Making of a Terrorist, Part 4.”
300 This section title is inspired by Stern’s memoir title.
was going to start law school and Susan was going to pursue a Masters degree at the School of Social Work. Stern remembers that she was very much a traditional wife back then, and was very dependent on Robby’s moods and happiness.

Slowly, Stern changed. She became involved with student groups at the University of Seattle, came into contact with hippies, and started questioning gender norms that the couple had taken for granted. As she explains:

We fell into a routine. I went to school, held a job, cleaned the house, cooked, and helped Robby type his papers. Robby went to school. As time wore on I wore thin. It seemed to me grossly unfair that we should both go to school, and then I first had to do all the housework while he relaxed or watched the news or studied. We both considered housework shit work; why did I end up doing it all?\(^301\)

As the couple explored these differences, they became enmeshed in the counterculture flourishing in Seattle’s University district along University Avenue and Hippie Hill. By now, it was the Summer of Love, and Stern was experimenting with drugs. She had “decided not to be straight anymore…I threw most of my clothes into a valise…I got my ears pierced and wore long, dangling, vividly colored earrings. I let my hair curl naturally. I went without make-up. I gave up shoes and underpants.”\(^302\) As she was experiencing this newfound personal freedom, Stern was also embracing a new political outlook, where she identified the System as preying on flower children and sending them off to fight its wars.\(^303\)

As Stern became increasingly anti-war, she also developed a feminist outlook. In 1968, she read Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*.\(^304\) Stern realized that she was not alone in her

\(^{301}\) Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 12.
\(^{302}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{303}\) Ibid., 16-17.
\(^{304}\) *The Feminine Mystique* is an influential work usually credited with sparking the second wave feminist movement in the United States. It focused on the unhappiness and alienation of housewives and advocated the choosing of an autonomous life path for women, where they would not be restricted to domesticity.
dissatisfaction within her marriage, and self-identified as one of the first “babies” of the Women’s Liberation Movement – she saw herself as a feminist spawn borne out of Friedan’s work. Stern, talking with other Movement women, set up a women’s group, which slowly came to be known as “Radical Women.” They offered classes and lectures on women’s liberation issues, and even staged a demonstration against a Playboy bunny appearance on campus. Stern was nourished by all these activities:

I talked incessantly. And as I talked, I grew. And as I grew, I thought more. And as I thought more, I read more widely. As I read more widely, I felt more secure in my knowledge. As I felt more secure in my knowledge, I felt a new sense of pride…off came the sloppy jeans and on went the miniskirt and knee high boots, and I developed my Style. Zip, zap, I was a new Susan Stern, and honey, when I walked, I threw back my head, and moved with determination. People moved out of my way as I strode through them. When I entered a room, I did so with a flourish, and people looked at me, and God damn it, when I talked, they listened, finally they listened.

With this newfound confidence, Stern was picked to serve as the Chairwoman for the General Assembly meeting of the Seattle SDS. She then went to the Berkeley area to find a political platform that spoke to her more clearly. There she met SDSer and future Weatherman Mike Klonsky, who invited her to Chicago for the 1968 Democratic convention. In Chicago, she met SDSer and future Weatherman John Jacobs. Side-by-side, they marched in the streets, fighting with the police. Stern recalled, “we gobbled up the night in a singing roar, violent and wild, saying clearly that we were on the side of the Vietnamese, on the side of freedom.”

This experience left Stern shaken at the state’s response to protest and she became thoroughly convinced that she was on the side of righteousness. As she replayed the events in her head at night, “A new feeling was struggling to be born in me. It had no name, but it made me

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305 Ibid., 19.
306 Ibid., 21-22.
307 Ibid., 33.
want to reach beyond myself to others who were suffering. I felt real, as if suddenly I had found out something true about myself; that I was not helpless, that life meant enough to me to struggle for it…now I would fight.” Just as Stern found empowerment through her political awakening, her autonomy laid in her political action: who she wanted to be as a person was an active agent who was changing what was wrong in the world.

Stern traveled to New York next, working for the SDS chapter there and for the SDS Regional Office, organizing, passing out leaflets, and staging protests, some of them women’s actions. As she attended the June SDS National Convention in 1969, Stern identified with the Weatherman faction, stating that after Dohrn’s speech against the PL, she “believed in the revolution with every quivering bone in [her] body. I was prepared to take on America, to do no less than save the world. I felt that I was a warrior of the people and that I was fighting for freedom.”

On the wings of this conviction, Stern returned to Seattle and joined the Weatherman collective there. During the summer of 1969, she planned and organized for the Days of Rage, and engaged in criticism, self-criticism sessions. These meetings were required sessions where members of the group were supposed to criticize one another and reflect on their actions, whether they were personal or political. Of this process, Stern noted that “our aim was to make ourselves equal, men and women, practically interchangeable…the process of criticism, self-criticism, transformation was the tool by which we would forge ourselves into new human

308 Ibid., 36. Thursday, August 22, 1968 is most likely the night she is referring.
309 Some of these included two demonstrations in January 1969, primarily planned and led by women, against Marine recruiters. Stern was also involved in the Columbia protest. See Stern, With the Weathermen, 48-51, 57-58. As part of all of her work, Stern also met Kathy Boudin, Bernardine Dohrn, and Mark Rudd. Both women inspired and intimidated Stern, who stated that she wanted to achieve their strength and self-possession one day. See Stern, With the Weathermen, 46-47, 59-60.
310 Ibid., 71.
This process was by no means easy as everyone attempted to strip themselves of their past and their preconceived notions, had their most mundane habits analyzed, from the way they dressed to the way they ate, all in an attempt to forge themselves into revolutionary warriors who were fair minded and bent on treating everyone equitably.

Stern quickly immersed herself in Weather activities and rose to leadership within the collective. In criticism, self-criticism sessions, she wanted to set an example for others. As she recalled, “I grappled desperately with my past in an effort to change, hoping to set an example for other women and men to follow.” She organized at the high school levels, talking and educating students about Vietnam and the upcoming Days of Rage in Chicago. She laid out leaflets and typed them up, then passed them out, working often to the point of exhaustion.

Stern also planned numerous demonstrations and actions for the collective, including an all women’s action against an ROTC building in Seattle. Working in collaboration with the Seattle SDS women, Stern suggested making the Air Force building their target, as “it’s so small we can just run on one end, do our shit, and run out the other end.” With a quick getaway being key for avoiding arrest, the women agreed. Scheduled for September 30, 1969, the action was planned and executed entirely by women. Women made the stink bombs and paint bottles that were used to destroy draft papers and the contents of filing cabinets. By WUO standards, the action was a success, and the women were aware of the role their gender played in this. In the melee, one woman was grabbed by ROTC males, but “shrieking at the top of our lungs, we ran back toward her, and began smashing at the ROTC trainees. Because they were caught

\[311\] Ibid., 102.
\[312\] Ibid., 102, 108.
\[313\] Ibid., 109.
\[314\] Ibid., 114-117.
\[315\] This action was a collaboration between Stern’s Weather collective – the women in the collective – and the SDS women. Ibid., 128.
completely off guard by the violence of our attack, and by the fact that women would fight a
group of men, it took just a second for us to get free.”

Stern’s feminism became increasingly visible in her leadership. On October 2, 1969, she
gave a rousing speech to students and SDSers that blended anti-imperialism with feminism:

Stalking up and down in front of them, shaking my fist at them, reaching my open
hands to them, begging for them to join me, crouching, bending, twisting and
pacing, I urged them to action…The time has come not merely to protest, but to
fight for what we believe in. The war is going – we must join it now. I know you
don’t want to wait any longer. And in fighting, women will discover strengths
they never knew they had. They will take leadership and, along with men, create a
new world on the ashes of the old. Fighting is the key not only to the liberation of
women, but to the liberation of all human beings.

Stern’s impassioned speech resulted in an impromptu attack on yet another ROTC office, this
time in Clark Hall on the University of Washington campus. The roused masses followed Stern
into the building, spray painting walls and engaging ROTC personnel in a scuffle, injuring two
ROTC cadets.

Stern also attended the Days of Rage in Chicago and continued developing as a
Weatherwoman and an activist. She reports of her experience that, “I felt that I had finall
connected with my personal destiny; that I had a place, a function in life. That place with the
Weathermen, that function was to fight for the revolution to the best of my ability…For the first
time in my life that I could remember, I was happy.”

Stern’s revolutionary activity, her awakening to politics and feminism, had allowed her to
develop as an autonomous woman: she had discovered that her agency did not lie in accepting a

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316 Ibid., 129. For more on the action also see Mike Calovinch, “Female Protestors Stage Raid on
318 Stern, With the Weathermen, 131-132; Martin Works, “Young Animals Attack ROTC,”
Seattle PI, 3 October 1969.
319 Stern, With the Weathermen, 72.
dependency on her husband, but instead involved an embrace of militancy. This example of autonomy widened through the embrace of militancy was not rare among the three Weatherwomen discussed here, but instead was spread through many of the women in the organization.

3.5 Autonomy Through Militancy and the WUO

All Weatherwomen engaged in militancy, whether it happened as part of an ROTC building invasion, at the Days of Rage, or at a jailbreak.\textsuperscript{320} Through their militancy and their involvement in the WUO, these women expressed their agency as they made difficult decisions for themselves and others. They reshaped their lives around WUO collectives, choosing to live an uncomfortable existence as they fought for their commitments to revolutionary change.

In The Theory and Practice of Autonomy, Gerald Dworkin defines “autonomy” as the “equivalent to self rule or sovereignty, sometimes identical with freedom of the will...usually equated with dignity, integrity, individuality, independence, responsibility, and self-knowledge.”\textsuperscript{321} In this sense, the Weatherwomen acted autonomously as they chose the direction

\textsuperscript{320} “Jailbreak” was the term used for high school demonstrations, where Weatherwomen would run through the halls, yelling “Jailbreak” to the students. The idea was that the state treated schools as tools for social control, tracking students according to race and sex, teaching them the state’s approved political and social narrative, jailing the minds and the determining the futures of students. See Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 128.

\textsuperscript{321} Gerald Dworkin, The Theory and Practice of Autonomy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6, 29. For more on autonomy, see Marilyn Friedman, Autonomy, Gender, Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 26-27, 42-43; Robert Noggle, “Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation,” in Personal Autonomy, ed. James Stacey Taylor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 102-104; Michael McKenna, “The Relationship between Autonomous and Morally Responsible Agency,” in Personal Autonomy, ed. James Stacey Taylor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 223; and Alfred Mele, Autonomous Agents (New York: Oxford University Press), 3-4, 156-165. Though few make this point as clearly as the above, it is the standard position that personal autonomy ought not to have substantial requirements, which implies that immoral acts can be autonomous. For such views, see: Isaiah
their lives would take as political activists. As the examples of Bernardine Dohrn, Diana Oughton and Susan Stern demonstrate, when women joined the Weather Underground, they did so as a conscious rejection of mainstream political, economic, and gender values. Their political realignment both reflected and reinforced changes in their personal lives. They embraced this self-growth and development, seeing it as a crucial part of the making of what they saw as a new society that would be just and fair. These were not women who were duped into militancy through their relationships with men. Instead, their militant actions reflected their autonomously emerging ideology. For example, the Weatherwomen of the Columbus collective saw themselves not only as active agents and revolutionary fighters, but also as models for the society at large to follow. They said of their organizing activities that, “The kids we began organizing came in contact for the first time with strong women whose purpose in life was not to have a home and babies, but to pick up the gun and fight in a communist revolution.” Thus, their militancy was linked with the breaking up of gender norms and liberation. They believed picking up a gun would achieve a new world, where gender parity was the norm.

At the WUO War Council, the document “Honky Tonk Women” expressed the view that women will achieve liberation through fighting:

Our liberation as individuals and as women is possible when it is understood as a political process – part of the formation of an armed white fighting force. Political


Rosal, “Who Do They Think Could Bury You?,” 149.
power grows out of the barrel of a gun, and the struggle to gain and use political power against the state is the armed struggle for our liberation.\textsuperscript{323}

The message was once again one of liberation – liberation that was going to be achieved through a militant struggle in which women would actively fight to destroy the paternalistic chains that held them back as political agents.

Weatherwomen engaged in this struggle for liberation in various ways. In the summer of 1969, the women of the Motor City Collective (Detroit) undertook an all-woman action at McComb Community College. This action constituted an example of female and feminist leadership in action as the aim of the women was to discuss anti-imperialism and how female liberation played an important role in the revolution. The nine Weatherwomen in the collective went to the community college to disrupt a sociology class; as it happened, the class was taking its final exams. As the women themselves reported in the \textit{New Left Notes}, each had assigned roles for the action, and they were prepared for any eventuality:

One woman distributed Chicago leaflets while the rest of us lined up in front of the classroom…one woman began to address the class. She rapped about how American imperialism fucks over the people of the world, and about people’s struggles for self-determination. Another woman spoke about how imperialism oppresses the black colony within America. When a third woman began to talk about the material oppression of women and the necessity to break out of subordinate roles and join the struggle, some men got uptight and tried to charge the door…\textsuperscript{324}

The Weatherwomen were prepared for this response, and another source explains how they dealt with the interruption:

When they began to talk about how women are kept down in this country, two men got up to leave the room. It is reported that the Motor City Nine responded to such an exhibition of male chauvinism and general pig behavior by attacking the

\textsuperscript{323} Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 314.  
men with karate and prevented them from leaving the room. They then continued
to discuss how women are used as slave labor in the household, exploited on the
labor market, and turned into sexual objects.\textsuperscript{325}

The Detroit Weatherwomen made sexist males listen, administering karate chops as a much-
needed remedy to the males’ misogyny.

The Weatherwomen were proud of their action, and explained their rationale for
engaging in it:

It was women who made the situation happen. Organizing women through
exemplary action is key to the way we work. It is necessary to struggle to raise
consciousness of women’s oppression and male supremacy in the context of
world revolution. We do not just urge women to become fighters, nor do we just
talk to them about taking sides...The force needs fighters – both men and
women.\textsuperscript{326}

The Weatherwomen went on to explain that based on their experience at the McComb
Community College, they gained more proficiency in leading other actions: they refined their
methods and became more skilled in setting up demonstrations. Thus, they started having tactical
leaders who scouted the area and developed a plan for action. They also used affinity groups,
groups of women that acted together and looked out for one another in the midst of an action.
They also learned to use and set signals so as to communicate more easily and efficiently with
one another. All these measures were taken and implemented in the wake of the McComb action,
as the women engaged in criticism sessions and realized that they did not have good escape
routes away from the community college.\textsuperscript{327}

Additionally, the Motor City Weatherwomen’s action brought women’s efforts and
leadership into focus. It drove home the point that women were able and capable revolutionaries.

(Ramparts, 1970), 161 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

\textsuperscript{326} Motor City SDS, 154.

\textsuperscript{327} No escape routes resulted in “a bust.” Ibid., 158.
As the Motor City Nine themselves put it, the action “spoke to the new role that women have to play, and has helped bring women from McComb and around the city into our fighting movement.”\textsuperscript{328} It also resulted in yet another action, this time at Henry Ford Community College. Due to their enhanced preparation and practice, the Weatherwomen were able to raise the consciousness of college students for an entire afternoon.\textsuperscript{329} Overall, the Motor City Nine exhibited agency, attention to feminism, and militancy in their activities.\textsuperscript{330}

Similar processes took place within the Pittsburgh collective. Together with Weatherwomen from around the country, the Pittsburgh women conducted a major “jailbreak,” an action designed to raise the consciousness of students at South Hills High School in Pittsburgh in September of 1969. This action was prefaced by marches and rallies throughout Pittsburgh the previous night, all conducted by dedicated Weatherwomen. The \textit{New Left Notes}\

\textsuperscript{328} Ibid., 155.\textsuperscript{329} Ibid. \textsuperscript{330} Interestingly though, these Weatherwomen’s agency or feminism is rarely the focus in the literature, where generally speaking, this action is represented in a manner that undermines these Weatherwomen’s processes, contributions, and overall agency. For example, Berger characterizes the action as follows: “Weatherwomen invaded a classroom at McComb Community College, lectured the students on war and racism, and – using karate moves – blocked those who tried to escape. The Motor City Nine were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and assault and battery” (Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 101). While this representation is generally accurate, it makes no mention of the women’s message on sexism, nor does it discuss the fact that the women employed karate chops to respond to arrogant males who did not want to listen to a feminist message. Neither is there a discussion of female leadership in that description; indeed, the way the women organized and led the action is a testament to their agency and to their active involvement within the WUO. It is a crucial aspect of female leadership within the WUO that should not be overlooked. Ron Jacobs does much of the same thing when he describes this action. He reports that nine women entered the classroom and spoke to the students, stating that, “Some male students pushed the Weatherwomen out of the way in an attempt to leave. A fight ensued. The women failed to escape before the police arrived” (Ron Jacobs, \textit{The Way the Wind Blew}, 23). His words, while generally accurate, nevertheless impart a sense of failure for the women, in that they emerge from the text as weak, being pushed around, and unable to escape. Again, there is no mention of their feminist message nor is there a discussion of their leadership. Hence, the feminist message of the Weatherwomen is expunged, as is their commanding presence and ample contributions.
described the action, explaining that women carried the Vietnam flag throughout Pittsburgh, and even took part in “small guerilla actions around the city in sections where kids usually hang out” and engaged in several “confrontations with the pigs.” Then,

On Thursday all the women went to South Hills High School, which was by then covered with writing on the walls and sidewalks such as ‘Vietnamese Women Carry Guns,’ ‘Ho Lives,’ and ‘Jail Breaks.’ …The women marched together around the school, handing out leaflets about the National Action and rapping with the kids. They ran through the school yelling ‘jailbreak’ and then held a rally outside the school…The pigs attacked and the women fought back, protecting their sisters and the Viet Cong flag. They fought, liberating every sister that the pigs tried to arrest, and left the scene of the struggle chanting.

These women were dedicated fighters who autonomously chose to travel to Pittsburgh, engage in the multiple actions occurring in the city, and fight back and protect one another once the police tried to stop their efforts. Mainstream media did not focus on this sort of dedication modeled by the women – instead reports negatively focused on the breaking of gender roles that the women embodied. One report described the women as frenzied and unkempt, while another stated that they “bared their breasts as they rushed through corridors” – newspapers were casting the Weatherwomen as threats to gender order. After all, these women were active agents who rallied and even fought back against the police. They were not simpering females who needed protection. As such, they were threatening to the status quo. Gilbert says of the bare-breasted report, “The fact that this was totally false didn’t stop the mainstream media from reporting and

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332 Ibid.
the white Left from trumpeting this ‘news’ to discredit and dismiss us.” Equating female courage and militancy with lewd behavior, the media acted to discredit the Weatherwomen’s actions, portraying them as frenzied and out of control.

The Weatherwomen, though, saw the completion of their action in Pittsburgh as successful. They associated the action with both feminism and anti-imperialism, as they stated that, “through the collective struggle of the women in Pittsburgh we took one more step in building a fighting force of women, the very existence of which attacks male chauvinism and male supremacy and strengthens the forces of fighting imperialism and racism.” The Weatherwomen saw themselves as committed revolutionary feminists.

Another significant example of women’s militant action occurred at the Days of Rage, already briefly mentioned in this chapter. The WUO linked women’s activities here to personal liberation qua woman, and to discovering self-confidence, as posters appeared throughout Chicago proclaiming that, “More and more women are fighting on the right side now. They are realizing the strength within themselves and in women who are free and complete human beings, fighting out of love for all the people.”

Personal liberation and political liberation were the same for the WUO.

Not only did women participate in the general protests scheduled for the Days of Rage, but also they had their own, all-women’s action planned. The Weatherwomen started

336 Moreover, while Ron Jacobs describes the high school action in his treatment of the WUO, and speaks positively about it, he does not mention the whole event, ignoring the protests of the night before, the ones that occurred around Pittsburgh. See Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 26.
337 “Women’s Militia,” 165.
339 The Weatherwomen did not come from a single collective to participate in these actions, but rather from various collectives throughout the country.
gathering at 9:30 am in Grant Park, already battle weary from the night before. “One woman had a bandage over her eye, where she had been cut with glass,” Stern remembers. “Another had a bandage covering her scalp, where she had been clubbed, and had had stitches. Still another had bandages up and down her leg, and could walk only very slowly with the help of a cane.”

Far from giving up, these women wanted to fight, the one with the cane pleading to come as others insisted that she was too injured to participate in the action. These unnamed Weatherwomen were models of fortitude to the rest — injured, tired, yet autonomously choosing to enter the fray again.

The Weatherwomen were armed and ready for their encounter with the police. The Weatherwomen had helmets and clubs; some held Viet Cong flags. When Dohrn arrived around 10:15 am, she gave a speech announcing herself as Marion Delgado and explaining that through this action, “We are here to tell people that this is not a women’s movement of self-indulgence. This is not a movement to make us feel good.”

Dohrn was putting down mainstream feminism, but at the same time she was expressing a new kind of feminism, one that was about fighting and aligning with Third World peoples, one that was about class and race, well before it became the norm among feminists to link class/race/gender.

The Weatherwomen felt like the all-women’s action at the Days of Rage allowed them to offer up an example of liberated womanhood. They saw themselves as achieving a feminist

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341 The woman with the bandage over her eye and the woman with the bandage over her scalp formed their own affinity group so as to not hold anybody else up. See Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 147.
343 Marion Delgado was the code word by which Jeff Jones had started the protest the night before. Delgado was a young Chicano boy and revolutionary fighter who had derailed a train by placing a concrete block on a train track in 1947; he was a symbol of revolutionary courage to the WUO. See Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 80; Thomas, “The Second Battle of Chicago,” 205.
agenda through their militant struggle and through their breaking of gender roles; they were done
with being lady like. They were fighting for worldwide liberation and to win respect for all
women. Reporter Tom Thomas recalled that as the women approached the police line, the
Deputy Chief of Patrol James J. Riordan ordered them to stop, but they continued on anyways:

> Approximately ten women, led by Miss Dohrn, charged into the police line. The
> officers, using clubs and mace, quickly subdued the women after about a four-
> minute scuffle. One policeman, holding a demonstrator in a double armlock,
> asked: ‘Now are you going to behave like a nice lady?’ She turned and spit in his
> face.”

The police presence was intimidating. The women were outnumbered “about five pigs to every
woman,” and the police “were holding their black clubs in one leather-gloved hand and tap-tap-
tapping it steadily against the other.” But the women charged the police line anyways, with a
shrill. Stern recalled that,

> All around me women were fighting with pigs; I could hear the clubs smashing
down on them…I saw a woman from my affinity group wedged up against a park
grounds shack. Two pigs were working her over with their clubs as she lay there,
her arms wrapped around her head. Something in me clicked at the sight,
something stronger than the danger all around me. I galloped like one possessed
right toward the pigs, who were smearing the woman with her own blood. One of
them was bent over administering his pounding. I stood behind him for a split
second, and then I carefully lifted my pipe and brought it down with all the
strength I had right at the base of that motherfucker’s neck, right where it was
exposed beneath his helmet. He fell forward. I turned to find another pig towering
over me. He rammed me across the chest with his club, staring at me as I fell
backward to the ground. Then he grabbed his club with both his hands, like a
baseball bat, and he raised it as high as he could in the air, as I had just done, and
he smiled, and I saw the scar on his nose wiggle – then he brought that club down
on my face. My glasses shattered; then I was spun around as another pig kicked
me hard in the shoulder. ‘They’re killing me,’ I thought.”

Gilbert explains that, “With the police completely prepared, the women outnumbered, many felt
disappointed that they did not prove to be more of a fighting force. But to me, that was a realistic

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344 Ibid.
345 Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 149.
346 Ibid., 148-149.
result of the balance of forces. Simply having an all-women’s action at all was a major advance.”\footnote{Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 133.} The courage of these women was on display as they stood their ground even in the face of violence and personal danger out of a deep belief in doing what they thought was right. Weatherman Shin’ya Ono explained that the women’s determination and calm throughout all of the actions at the Days of Rage was an inspiration to all the Weatherpeople there.\footnote{Shin’ya Ono, “You Do Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” Leviathon, December 1969; reprint, Weatherman, ed. Harold Jacobs (Ramparts Press, 1970), 270 (page citations are to the reprint edition).}

Weatherwomen repeatedly framed their militancy as a deliberate, conscious choice that they made for themselves. Weatherwoman Linda Evans explains that this acceptance of militancy was a choice she made: “Vietnamese women fighters and Black women in the struggle were role models for me – because they were dedicated to fighting until victory was won. Their courage and dedication, their willingness to risk everything for freedom, the fact that women were being empowered by the process of struggle – all were exemplary.”\footnote{“Dykes and Fags Want to Know: Interview with Lesbian Political Prisoners,” 380-381.} Evans autonomously chose militancy as a way to achieve social change.

Weatherwoman Naomi Jaffe tells much the same story. She saw the example of Vietnamese women fighters as empowering; importantly, Vietnamese women had also achieved equality.\footnote{Dohrn, “The Liberation of Vietnamese Women.”} Jaffe identified so much with the Vietnamese fighters that she wore a piece of a shut down American plane on a necklace around her neck – she’d acquired the piece on a trip to Hanoi in 1968, after helping to shoot down the plane according to one FBI theory.\footnote{Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weather Underground, part 4, 23; The Weather Underground: Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-fourth Congress, First Session (1975). The Weather Underground. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 75.}
Additionally, the Weatherwomen of the Columbus collective saw themselves as fighters. They said of themselves, “we decided that women should train in self-defense, along with the rest of the project, but that the caucus would see itself as an affinity group, learning how to move well in the streets, and serving as an exemplary fighting unit.” These Weatherwomen were deciding to choose militancy, growing authentically in their roles as revolutionary fighters. When the Weatherwomen deliberately chose a path of militancy, which entailed breaking gender norms and going outside of prescribed social norms for women, they demonstrated their newfound autonomy.

The Weatherwomen were not only committed to changing the way women were viewed by society, they were committed to bringing justice and dignity to all the oppressed masses. This viewpoint is by no means inconsistent with feminism; nor is it inauthentic. It rather bespeaks a deep staunchness to the feminist, revolutionary cause the Weatherwomen believed in. As the following chapter will argue, this feminist ideology not only fit within the second wave, but also previewed the third wave. In other words, the Weatherwomen’s brand of feminism was complex, and attempted to address economic, social, and political oppressions for all women.

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352 Rosal, “Who Do They Think Could Bury You?,” 149.
CHAPTER 4: AS WOMEN TO THE CAUSE OF WOMEN

The active and principled sisterhood of women is a crucial part of the struggle to free all people. Unity among women enables us to be vigilant and forceful against sexism, to encourage and strengthen each other, and to develop a culture of resistance. We have worked hard to build a women’s community: developing programs around women’s issues, growing as fighters, reclaiming the true history of the people, and developing an ideology that integrates women’s experience with that of the people as a whole.

We have undertaken campaigns to identify and root out sexist behavior and ideas among comrades. Male supremacy poisons people’s lives; where it is not vigorously opposed, it holds back the development of the revolutionary forces. This struggle is an ongoing one. It changes everyone, women and men, and makes it possible to be a united and insurgent force against the state. The revolutionary community needs to contain within it the seeds of a future society where people treat each other with respect and can see the possibilities of becoming new women and new men.\(^{353}\)

In this introduction to their 1973 self-published book of poetry, *Sing a Battle Song*, anonymous Weatherwomen self-identified as feminists and reached out to the mainstream feminist movement.\(^{354}\) This explicit commitment to a full feminist revolution stands in stark contrast to the representation of the Weather Underground in the historical record thus far. While the organization itself and its female members have been dismissed by activists at the time, as well as by scholars since, as lacking feminist credentials or as not fitting within the scope of the second wave feminist movement, a closer perusal of the Weatherwomen’s writing and actions reveals that many of their positions on feminist issues fit snugly within the discourse that second wave feminists were shaping in the same time period.\(^{355}\) Committing themselves “as women to the cause of women,” the Weatherwomen believed that patriarchy and sexism were oppressive,

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\(^{353}\) Anonymous Weatherwomen, “Introduction,” *Sing a Battle Song*.

\(^{354}\) Ibid. The Weatherwomen explicitly stated that this book was “one more way to share with you our thoughts and our growth” and that “During these years we have been part of the righteous struggles for the liberation of women.”

\(^{355}\) For example, Berger dismisses the WUO’s feminism at *Outlaws of America*, 172-174.
that women were experiencing sexual harassment and prejudicial treatment at work, that female
gender norms were constraining and limiting, and that objectification and sexualization were
methods of commodifying and appropriating women’s bodies.\textsuperscript{356} These concerns were the
platform of the second wave; thus, the Weatherwomen were very much aligned with many of the
issues with which the women’s movement concerned itself.\textsuperscript{357}

Despite their clear articulation of feminist aims, some feminists of the era attacked the
authenticity of the Weatherwomen on the grounds that their embrace of militancy was inherently
anti-feminist. A well-known example of this dismissal of the women of the Weather
Underground from the feminist movement is Robin Morgan’s 1970 essay “Goodbye to All
That.” Morgan accused the women of the Weather Underground of “run[ning] hand in hand with
your oppressors,” calling them out for being inauthentic revolutionaries and for “reject[ing] their
own radical feminism for that last desperate grab at male approval that we all know so well, for
claiming that the machismo style and gratuitous violence is their own style by ‘free choice’ and


discusses the aims of the second wave in \textit{The World Split Open}, previously cited. See Rosen, \textit{The World Split Open}, 63-294. As noted earlier in footnote 5 in the Introduction, my use of the wave
motif in this chapter is meant to be practical in that it will establish that the WUO’s brand of feminism fits in what has already been recognized as feminist in the standard second wave
classification. In the next chapter, I demonstrate that the WUO’s feminism actually disrupts the
wave metaphor, blurring the lines scholars have constructed between the second and third waves.
for believing that this is the way for a woman to make her revolution.\textsuperscript{358} In other words, Morgan excluded the Weatherwomen from feminism, arguing that their militancy appeared to have been foisted upon them by the sexist, oppressive men of the WUO. True feminists, Morgan insisted, not only eschewed male membership, but also ideas that were previously fashioned by men.\textsuperscript{359}

In contrast, the Weatherwomen felt it was important to work alongside men to realize a true feminist alignment; Weatherwomen argued that real feminist work happened only when men and women worked \textit{together}.\textsuperscript{360} Furthermore, they saw militancy not as oppressive, but rather as liberating them from gender roles that defined women as passive and meek.

Previous chapters have established the efforts of the WUO to address internal sexism, the important leadership roles played by women, and the personal significance women placed on their involvement in the organization’s militant actions in building their own sense of authenticity and empowerment. This chapter continues this discussion by exploring the complex feminist ideology crafted by the Weatherwomen. The Weatherwomen, as they put it, spoke “in many voices,” using everything from traditional outlets, such as letters, leaflets and posters, to the less conventional armed actions, to demonstrate their commitment to a broader revolution.\textsuperscript{361}

This chapter excavates the varied strands of the WUO’s second wave feminist platform from this material, illustrating that, despite their exclusion from the historical narrative, the women and men of the Weather Underground were ideologically aligned with the women’s liberation movement.

\textsuperscript{359} Ibid., 514.
\textsuperscript{361} Anonymous Weatherwomen, “Introduction,” \textit{Sing a Battle Song}. 
4.1 Chained to Family and Labor Structures that Allow Us No Freedom\textsuperscript{362}

One of the key issues facing women in the 1960’s and 1970’s was that social expectations and customs drove women towards restrictive gender roles both at home and in the workplace. The second wave can be distinguished from the first wave based on the idea that sexism and patriarchy could not be overcome simply through greater political rights. As long as women were still oppressed in the home and at work, they would not be able to achieve their full autonomy. This point, which largely defined the second wave movement, can also be found throughout the writings of Weatherwomen.

Like other second wave feminist groups, Weatherwomen saw the gendered roles women were expected to perform both in the home and at work as intrinsically oppressive. Weatherwomen identified domesticity, motherhood, and traditionally feminine careers (such as secretarial jobs) as part of the patriarchal structure of society. In their analysis, society prescribed and emphasized these gender norms at the expense of women’s agency. Just as Betty Friedan’s 1963 bestseller, \textit{The Feminine Mystique}, linked the “problem that has no name” to the special oppression of housewives who were restricted in their authentic self-development by domesticity, the Weatherwomen also saw housework as limiting women’s well-being.\textsuperscript{363}

\textsuperscript{362} This title is based on a phrase, “chained to a family structure that allows us no freedom,” which comes from the WUO packet “Honky Tonk Women” that was passed out at the December 1969 national WUO (War Council) meeting. See Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 316.

\textsuperscript{363} Friedan criticized the idea that a woman’s self-identity “rested on necessary work and achievement in the home.” Friedan also wrote that patriarchy “does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potential as human beings.” See Betty Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (New York: Norton and Company, 2013 [1963]), Kindle Edition, 1, 303, 77 respectively. Many feminists of the second wave era took up Friedan’s critical framework that linked patriarchy to the propagation of gender roles that resulted in oppression in women’s lives. For some examples, see the SCUM Manifesto, which linked domesticity and motherhood to the patriarchy and saw them as destructive to women’s self-development. See Valerie Solanas, “SCUM Manifesto;” reprint, \textit{Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader}, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 201-222, especially 206 (page citations are to
This second wave analysis of the restrictive and burdensome nature of domesticity is present throughout many of the WUO’s writings.\textsuperscript{364} For example, in an anonymous 1973 poem, titled “Riding the Subways,” a Weatherwoman provided an assessment akin to Friedan’s critique of homemaking and housework while also critiquing the second shift that many working women experienced daily:

What I wanted to ask you:
Is someone at home
your husband
your teenage son…
making dinner
getting things ready
so you can just unlock the door,
drop your packages,
say hello,
take a minute or two
without rushing…
ever mind time-clocks
never mind rush-orders
never mind good manners…
Eat good
enjoy it
make a feast of it…
because
you sure look tired now.\textsuperscript{365}

\textsuperscript{364} A feminist platform was present since the beginning of the WUO. As early as 1969, a month after the WUO was born, Weatherwoman Cathy Wilkerson wrote a piece targeting family based oppression, which stated that, “women identify primarily with the home and family. In their roles as provider, wife, and mother they are pushed by even more forces than men to ally with their oppressors. They feel more immediately the need to maintain stability so as to keep stomachs full, children clothed; they feel the threat to the stability of their position ever more acutely.” See Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” 6-7.

“Riding the Subways” presents a feminist critique of women’s unpaid labor in the home, and appeals to a shared experience of drudgery, which the poem depicts as identifiable with a single glance, from one female passenger to the next, in the subway. Asking whether a male helper existed at home to lighten the woman’s burden after a long day at work, a day that had already been lengthened by necessary household shopping in the afternoon, the poem tries to evaluate whether the woman could finally take a rest. In other words, this poem zeroes in on the problematic nature of the second shift for women.\footnote{For more on the second shift, see Arlie Russel Hocschild and Anne Machung, \textit{The Second Shift} (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).} Like other second-wavers, the Weatherwomen were critical of women’s extensive, unpaid labor in the home.\footnote{For just a few examples of second wave critiques of housework and the second shift or the double day, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, “A Feminist Memoir Project,” 11; Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, “Work,” in \textit{Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement}, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 254; “Wages for Housework;” reprint, \textit{Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement}, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 258; Pat Mainardi, “The Politics of Housework,” cited previously.}

The Weatherwomen’s feminist analysis of homemaking continued in the 1975 pamphlet \textit{Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism}. In \textit{Prairie Fire} the Weatherwomen offered a complex evaluation of women’s domesticity. Explaining that the family was the basic unit of capitalist society, Weatherwomen argued that women not only reproduce the labor force and “bear the major responsibility for the nurturing, health and education of families,” but they also complete housework.\footnote{\textit{WUO, Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism} (San Francisco: Communications Co., 1974), 126-127. As mentioned in the Introduction, footnote 16, \textit{Prairie Fire} was a collaborative effort, where ideas were presented, discussed, written, then rewritten and edited together, with all WUO collectives revising/editing. Some of the contributing members are known for their contributions, as they have claimed involvement with the creation of \textit{Prairie Fire} (for example, Bill Ayers, Jeff Jones, Bernardine Dohrn) while the majority of the rest prefer to stay anonymous. The Weatherwomen were primarily in charge of the chapter on}
alone, but it is denied any social value and it is not paid for in any formal way.”

Further underscoring this same point, in “The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” the WUO explained that “home and child rearing became a private burden and doom rather than a valued form of social labor.” Moreover, as Cathie Wilkerson indicated as early as 1969, this unpaid labor that women performed in the home contributed to their own oppression, as it made them dependent on the very men they cooked, cleaned, and bore children for.

The Weatherwomen’s analysis fit within second wave assessments of housework, which held that women’s labor was undervalued, burdensome, and inimical to women’s self-development. For example, in the article “The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” the WUO, Prairie Fire, 126. Furthermore, in “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” the WUO espoused much of the same point, critiquing the trend that devalued women’s labor in the home, and made it “invisible” and “lonely.” See WUO, “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” 6.

Celia Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 4. Osawatomie was a WUO publication, put together by men and women in the WUO. Thusly, I use “WUO” when referring to articles written in it. Celia Sojourn was an alias/pseudonym representing multiple authors (and the example the WUO members set themselves with such revolutionary women as Sojourner Truth). See the Prairie Fire section in Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970-1974, eds. Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, Jeff Jones (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 234; Berger, Outlaws of America, 186.

Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” 6-7.

This WUO view echoed second wave critiques along the same lines. For a few examples of the positions held by second wave groups, see Margaret Benston, “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation,” Radical Education Project, 1969; “Wages for Housework;” reprint, Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 258. The Redstockings, a feminist group from New York, also critiqued women’s home labor and held that women are exploited as “domestic labor, and cheap labor.” See Redstockings, “Redstockings Manifesto,” in Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women’s Liberation Movement, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 533. Even Robin Morgan espoused these views, as she wrote that “the nuclear family is oppressive to women.” Furthering her analysis, Morgan argued that it is through the family structure that a woman is kept in a dependent position, is not valued for her much needed in home labor, and not paid a real wage if employed. See Robin Morgan,
WUO argued that the family held women back when they sought employment, noting that there are many women “who want a job now but aren’t looking because of household responsibilities.” Women, to fit into society, married and exchanged freedom for a “sense of economic security, status,” competing with each other for the approval of males. Thus, the socio-cultural gender norms associated with domesticity held women back from gaining meaningful and enriching employment.

Furthermore, in *Prairie Fire*, the WUO argued that the modern family unit was “male-run” and that “male supremacy is given concrete form in the family.” So, even though women performed the majority of the work in the home, the family was still structured as another environment in which men were treated as the true leaders. The emphasis on domesticity, according to the WUO, became a “trap for women.” Hence, women’s domestic labor provided them no real domestic power; in the home, women did the work while men retained control.

To escape the oppression of enforced domesticity within the family unit, the WUO argued that women needed to be allowed to develop autonomously, which required an end to sexism and gender-based oppression. In “Toward a Revolutionary Woman’s Militia,” Wilkerson wrote:


373 Sojourn, “The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 3.

374 Ibid.


376 Ibid. This analysis of domesticity as enforced by family structure was also present in the second wave. For a few examples of second wave discussion of women and domesticity/child rearing within a marriage, see Alix Kates Shulman, “A Marriage Agreement,” 1970; reprint, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 218-219. In her essay, Shulman was identifying how domesticity stifled her existence and was also offering an alternative to this model. Also see Beverly Jones, “The Dynamics of Marriage and Motherhood,” in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women’s Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 46-61. This essay argued women were oppressed within marriage.
In high schools, for instance, we must organize girls to fight along with men against the tracking system in general, as well as the way it affects girls in particular. Girls will also struggle against pigs and against the war. At the same time we can form women's militias of high school girls which directly attack male supremacy and the broader set of bourgeois values upon which it rests. We have seen that one of the greatest oppressions of young working-class women is the restriction and surveillance of parents. ‘The family’ is constantly trying to define their identity as submissive, mateable, and skilled in family tasks.377

The WUO had a vision of female autonomy and independence that would range from education – where women would be encouraged to study whatever interested them instead of being tracked into traditionally female jobs – to dating – where women were encouraged to love whomever they fancied.378 The WUO, in other words, advocated a break from traditional gender norms, and fashioned a feminist vision rooted in autonomous womanhood.

In addition to these ideological critiques, the WUO also took up more practical considerations, such as the wage gap. In 1966, the newly formed National Organization for Women (NOW) cited statistics showing that women were paid less than men:

full-time women workers today earn on the average only 60% of what men earn, and that wage gap has been increasing over the past twenty-five years in every major industry group. In 1964, of all women with a yearly income, 89% earned under $5,000 a year; half of all full-time year round women workers earned less than $3,690; only 1.4% of full-time year round women workers had an annual income of $10,000 or more.379

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377 Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” 7. This particular paragraph, per Cathy Wilkerson, in an earlier edit was also going to have sections on how these women groups “could respond to men who were abusive or to parents who kept their daughters locked up at home.” It was a vision Wilkerson had that these neighborhood women’s groups could make men accountable for their actions or protect women who needed it, through the spread of information. This part was edited when the piece was published but it in unclear why or by whom – Wilkerson doesn’t know herself as she went traveling before she saw it printed. See Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun, 260.


Many second wave organizations tackled the ways in which patriarchy clearly discriminated against women in the economic sphere as well. The WUO was no exception.

The WUO advocated women’s rights at work, targeting the wage gap and gender bias in employment as specific problems that needed to be addressed so as to improve the lives of working women. As such, the National War Council packet “Honky Tonk Women” stated that, “Some parts of our oppression are concrete – imperialist schools track us into jobs as secretaries and housewives; we get lower wages than men, and fewer job opportunities; we are chained to a family structure that allows us no freedom. Amerika’s [sic] rules use us a surplus and domestic labor to contribute to their pile of profits.”

Similarly, in “The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” the WUO advocated fair pay for women and supported female unionization. The WUO stated that women were “caught between rising prices and dwindling checks” and were already in a disadvantaged position in the market since they earned less pay due to gender bias. The WUO explained, in agreement with other second wave feminists, that women traditionally were offered lower pay since the male wage was culturally assumed to be sustaining the family. Women were seen as “secondary

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381 Sojourn, “The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 3.
382 For a second wave feminist agreeing with this point, see Robin Morgan, “Introduction,” xv, xxxii. Morgan wrote that women worked outside of the capitalist economy, and that their unpaid labor within the family went unrewarded, “since the employer pays only the husband” and “gets the rest of the family’s services for free.” Bread and Roses, another feminist group of the time
breadwinners,” the WUO pointed out. Not only was this system grossly unfair and a “myth” in the WUO’s estimation, but it was further complicated by the fact that women were kept in traditionally feminine, unskilled jobs, most of which were not unionized. Seen as unskilled or untrained expendable labor, women were therefore open to economic exploitation. The WUO argued that economic subjugation was made worse since “there are no maternity-leave benefits and no daycare facilities.” As such, the WUO was offering a complex feminist analysis of women’s secondary status in the work place while raising consciousness of women’s oppression. Through its emphasis on collective action through unionization – a tactic recommended by women’s groups of the era – the WUO also attempted to formulate a real life solution to major problems in women’s lives.

period, held the same position, namely that the family unit stifled women’s development and that women were unable to procure employment due to family obligations. Furthermore, Bread and Roses noted gender bias in hiring and levels of pay, advocating that women be paid the same as men for equal work. See Bread and Roses Collective, “Declaration of Women’s Independence,” 1970; reprint, Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 45-46. Bread and Roses also attacked the WUO for not being feminist, in spite of the two groups holding similar views on women’s roles and their labor. See Bread and Roses Collective, “Weatherman Politics and the Women’s Movement,” 327-336. Also see Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood, “Bread and Roses,” Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, WWII to the Present, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 135. The essay’s title is not related to the Bread and Roses collective, but the essay defends a similar position.

383 WUO, Prairie Fire, 127.
384 Ibid. This same point is also made in “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” where the WUO argued that women were paid less than men, were “last hired and first fired,” and not unionized. Here, the WUO also pointed out that working women were subjected to sexual harassment from bosses and supervisors and had no recourse if they wanted to keep their jobs. See WUO, “A Mighty Army: An Investigation of Women Workers,” Osawatomie, 6-9.
385 WUO, Prairie Fire, 127.
386 The second wave was also interested in the idea of organizing female workers so as to gain better working conditions and pay. For just an example, see Renee Blakkan, “Women Unionize Office Jobs,” 1974; reprint, Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 270. Morgan was fired for trying to unionize her workplace. See Robin Morgan, “Introduction,” xiv. For more on
4.2 We Can’t Get No Satisfaction From Gender Norms\textsuperscript{387}

Even as the Weatherwomen explored these practical solutions to women’s oppression, they also continued to tackle restrictive gender norms, including ones that defined women as passive and compliant, and others that sexualized women. Like other second wave organizations, the Weatherwomen argued that social expectations encouraged women to give up their autonomy: if women were only passive, sexualized creatures, they were left little room to explore their own individualities.\textsuperscript{388} On the one hand, the WUO saw these gender norms as women’s efforts to gain equal wages to those of men, including support for collective bargaining positions, see Dorothy Sue Cobble, \textit{The Other Women: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Eileen Boris, \textit{Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Alice Kessler Harris, \textit{Out to Work: The History of Wage Earning Women} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Priscilla Murolo, A. B. Chitty, and Joe Sacco, \textit{From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States} (New York: The New York Press, 2001); Alice Kessler Harris, \textit{In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20\textsuperscript{th} Century America} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Nan Enstad, \textit{Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{387} This title, “We Can’t Get No Satisfaction,” comes from a subheading used in the “Honky Tonk Women” WUO (War Council) meeting packet from December, 1969. See Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 317.

\textsuperscript{388} Second wave feminists linked patriarchy to the propagation of restrictive gender stereotypes for women. For example, the Bread and Roses feminist collective, which was founded in Boston in 1969, held that women were socially “defined as docile, helpless, and inferior.” See Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood, “Bread and Roses,” 134. The Bread and Roses collective, founded by Meredith Tax and Linda Gordon, were a radical feminist group and lasted until 1973. See Echols, \textit{Daring to be Bad}, 387.

The Redstockings, another prominent feminist group from New York, in its founding Manifesto, also addressed this issue. The Redstockings Manifesto stated that, on a daily basis and in myriad ways, women were pressured to be submissive to men. See Redstockings, “Redstockings Manifesto,” 1970; reprint, \textit{Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader}, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 224. The Redstockings were founded in New York by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone. They were active until 1970. See Echols, \textit{Daring to Be Bad}, 388. Robin Morgan identified the color pink as emblematic of women’s gendered socialization. See Morgan, “Introduction,” xix.

For additional examples of second wavers’ critique of gender norms, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, “A Feminist Memoir Project,” 12; Meredith Tax, “There Was a
undermining women’s power by defining their personalities in a weakened fashion that placed them in an inferior position to men. On the other hand, the WUO argued that women needed to break free of the patriarchal social expectation that women be sexually available objects whose existence revolved around fulfilling male fantasies.

In “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” Wilkerson explained that women were taught to be passive and compliant. These qualities made them open to manipulation by the capitalist imperialist system and its apparatuses: the media and consumerism. Wilkerson explained: “Having been taught to feel passive and defenseless, especially in physical ways, they [women] are more threatened by the specter of black struggles as defined by the mass media, the ruling class through the PTA, women’s magazines, etc.” In other words, not only did these gender norms hold women back from developing authentically, but they also propped up various social oppressions, such as racism, middle class materialism, and a bourgeoisie lifestyle that emphasized adherence to traditional values. Since these stereotypes resulted in a tightening noose, one that was “especially tight against the necks of women,” Wilkerson advocated a program that focused on smashing sexism and fixing social problems for women, through revolutionary activity.

“Honky Tonk Women” explained that “imperialism has colonized our minds,” producing a “false consciousness of what women should be,” so that women internalized these stereotypical personality traits:

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390 Ibid.

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Men believe that we are stupid, inferior to them, and that the only way they can be strong is to dominate and possess a woman. Their strength comes from making and keeping us weak – by defining what we should look like, how we should act, and what we should think and feel. We are made into and kept half people, dependent and passive by definition.\textsuperscript{391}

In other words, women lost independence due to internalized gender norms.\textsuperscript{392} The WUO held that breaking out of these gender norms was essential for the autonomous development and human flourishing of women.

The WUO summed it up by saying that “Women are taught to think of ourselves as weak in body and mind, passive, second rate dependent objects. The organization of society teaches and reinforces the inferiority of women…The media portrays women as empty-headed, sexy and addicted consumers.”\textsuperscript{393} The media, in other words, propagated and reinforced stereotypes of women. Not only did the media push the view that women were passive and weak, but also that they were sexual objects without thoughts of their own. The WUO observed that the media’s portrayal of women held them up to oppressive beauty norms that objectified women, further limiting their autonomy. The WUO joined the second wave critique of the patriarchal idea that women’s worth was based in their beauty and sexuality. Seeing the objectification and sexualization of women’s bodies as inherently limiting to women’s development, feminists rebelled against beauty norms and against the commodification of women’s bodies for male pleasure.\textsuperscript{394}

\textsuperscript{391} Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 316-317.
\textsuperscript{392} The WUO also added that “The organization of society teaches and reinforces the inferiority of women.” See WUO, Prairie Fire, 128.
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{394} For just a few examples, see Linda Phelps, “Death is the Spectacle,” 1971; reprint, Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 175-179; Bev Grant, “A Pretty Girl Is Like a Commodity,” 1968; reprint, Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 180; Bev Grant,
The WUO’s “Honky Tonk Women” packet argued that women were alienated from themselves and their own self-interests by the U.S. culture that propagated these social norms. Thus, “Honky Tonk Women” stated that,

We [women] are objectified and used sexually – the Amerikan [sic] culture had totally dehumanized us, destroying the possibility for satisfying sexual relationships between men and women. We are taught to see other women as our enemies and to compete with them, wiping out any chance for strong, revolutionary human relationships between us women…

We [women] are taught that we should not want or expect or care about sexual satisfaction – and men are taught that sex can only be a physical encounter with an object made solely for his satisfaction. Imperialist Amerika [sic] teaches its children that this is love…

Here, the WUO argued that women were socialized to seek male approval, to define themselves through their relationships with men, and to not pursue collaborative efforts with other women (who they are taught to see as competitors for male approval) or their own sexual satisfaction. Women were commodified for the consumption of males, who, in turn, were taught that they were entitled to women’s bodies. Concluding that “We have been taught, well-taught by Amerikan [sic] society that women are weak – that thinking, struggling, and fighting are unfeminine,” “Honky Tonk Women” advised that women’s self-empowerment came from breaking through these restrictive beliefs.

The Weatherwomen saw women’s bodies as further appropriated by the social demand that women live up to unrealistic and stifling beauty norms. The Weatherwomen, and the WUO in general, noted that these beauty ideals held women back, and diverted their attention from feminist revolution to a concern with self-surveillance and fitting into beauty culture. Thus,


396 Ibid., 317.
Prairie Fire held that, “We are conditioned to look and act within narrow confines to fulfill our primary role as sexual partners and reproducers. Distorted and competitive standards of beauty are the surface over a whole system of sexual objectification…Men are taught to use women.” 397

The WUO held that the quest for beauty propped up the commodification of women’s bodies by men. Moreover, “Honky Tonk Women” linked this commodification of women and imperialism:

…This is an imperialist view of women – a Miss America standard of beauty, desirability, success, and docility. She is a pig woman. We all still believe in her, although her power grows less every day. Her image was imbedded deep within us – who among us could think she was beautiful or desirable or strong, measured against such a standard? 398

The position paper noted that beauty ideals were internalized and led to self-doubt for women. 399 Hence, it explained that “We are taught to hate our bodies, mistrust our minds, fear ourselves and everybody else.” 400 Thus, the WUO clarified that women’s bodies were used against them: women were alienated from their bodies, which became enemies to them since their figures did not sufficiently conform to male fantasies. 401 To the WUO, destroying the “pig woman” that

397 WUO, Prairie Fire, 128.
398 Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 317. Feminist groups of the time period, such as the New York Radical Women (a group founded by Shulamith Firestone and Pam Allen in 1967), actively fought against beauty ideals in protests such as one against the 1968 Miss America Pageant. See Rosen, World Split Open, 159-161; Echols, Daring to be Bad, 92-95, 388.
epitomized beauty ideals and gender norms was the only way for women to gain their self-
sovereignty.

4.3 Women’s Autonomy over their Bodies

Not only was the WUO forging a feminist platform against the objectification of women, it also
shaped a positive agenda for women to seize control of their bodies, starting with fighting for
reproductive freedom. This position was very much in agreement with that of the second wavers,
as the issues of abortion and women’s reproductive control was at the forefront of the women’s
liberation movement. 402

Weatherwomen believed that women ought to control their bodies and their destinies and
advocated for the practical application of those beliefs – for a woman’s right to choose – in
everyday life in the United States. As such, a Venceremos Brigade member and WUO affiliate
named Cathy, discussing her trip to Cuba, explained that women’s rights to their bodies were
respected there. 403 Comparing her experience in obtaining an abortion in Cuba to obtaining one

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402 Second wave feminists were deeply involved in the fight for reproductive freedom. For just a
few examples, see JANE, “Women Learn to Perform Abortions,” 1973; reprint, Dear Sisters:
Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon
Reproduction,” 1967, (drawing); reprint, Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation
403 The Venceremos Brigade was a group of young women and men who went to Cuba starting
in February 1970 to help and show solidarity with the Cuban Revolution (they had been invited
by Fidel Castro in a speech given January 2, 1969). Weather members were members and
planners of the first and second Venceremos brigades. Cathy was a member of these first two
brigades so she was a WUO member. See The Weather Underground: Report of the
Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal
Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-fourth Congress,
First Session (1975). The Weather Underground, 13; Federal Bureau of Investigation,
Weatherman Underground, part 1, part 3, 12-27. Also see Venceremos Brigade at
www.venceremosbrigade.net/ (accessed 3 September 2013).
in the U.S., Cathy noted that in the U.S., a woman was made to feel as if there was something wrong with her for not wanting a baby, as well as ashamed and embarrassed for not wanting to keep the pregnancy. She stated:

…a nurse asked me if I wanted a baby. My simple ‘no’ sufficed, and by nine the next morning, after spending the night in the hospital, I was waking up from sodium pentathol [sic], the D-and-C operation completed. At no time in the hospital or afterwards in the Brigade did anyone, Cuban or North American, imply that there was anything wrong with my not wanting a baby, even though I was a married woman. I felt completely free to explain why I had been in the hospital. This is such a contrast to my feeling previously in the U.S. When I had an abortion there, out of embarrassment and shame for not wanting a child, I told no one…

This experience has liberated me, because it has given me my first complete understanding of my rights – not privileges or special favors, but rights regarding my body and my life.  

Weatherwomen believed that a woman should choose what to do with her body. In her memoir, Wilkerson bemoaned the fact that prior to Roe v. Wade (the 1973 Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal in the U.S.), women had difficulty obtaining an abortion. Wilkerson defended a woman’s right to choose, explaining that women obtained abortions even though they feared being “mutilated or even raped” in a back alley abortion.

This respect for women’s innate rights over their own bodies was something that came up again and again in the WUO’s writings. In Prairie Fire, the Weatherwomen stated clearly that

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404 The Venceremos Brigade, Venceremos Brigade: Young Americans Sharing the Life and Work of Revolutionary Cuba – Diaries, Letters, Interviews, Tapes, Essays, Poetry by the Venceremos Brigade, eds. Carol Brightman and Sandra Lawson (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 258. Material from the book comes from the first two brigades (Feb-April, 1970) and therefore includes former SDS, now WUO members. Also see Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weatherman Underground, part 1, 26-29; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Weatherman Underground, part 3, 12-27.

405 For more on Roe v. Wade and the fight to legalize abortion, see Leslie J. Reagan, When Abortion Was a Crime (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Rosen, The World Split Open, 157-159.

406 Wilkerson, Flying Close to the Sun, 78-80. Wilkerson herself had an abortion, autonomously deciding that it was not the right time for her to have a baby in her circumstances at the time.
women wanted birth control and determination over their reproductive choices. They advocated a cultural change in the way society viewed women. They wrote, “We live in an anti-life culture, where women are denied control of our bodies, where sexual repression and taboos go hand in hand with prostitution and exploitation. Men are taught to use women.”

A move away from this schema was imperative in the Weatherwomen’s estimation. The stance of the Weatherwomen on this issue fit in rather snugly with the standard positions of the second wave, which was that male control of women’s reproductive capacities was an outright obscenity.

Sexism and imperialism were also responsible for sustaining rape culture. Defining rape and sexual abuse against women as “the prerogative of the conqueror, a means of undermining women’s resistance, a murderous assault, part of the arsenal of control and domination” of women, the Weatherwomen explained that women as a whole needed to rise against this type of oppression.

The Weatherwomen saw rape in the U.S. as part of mainstream culture and as an increasingly significant problem for women’s lives. They wrote: “Rape – a massive, brutal system of terror perpetrated on women by men. Most rapes are not reported so the statistics are

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407 WUO, Prairie Fire, 88.
408 Ibid., 128.
410 WUO, Prairie Fire, 88.
411 Ibid., 128.
far lower than the reality, but attacks on women constitute the fastest growing category of crime in the US.\textsuperscript{412} Seeing rape as a tool of repression against women and as a systematized apparatus ensuring women’s subjugation, both the Weatherwomen and the WUO held that a revolutionary women’s movement would lead the way to creating a woman-oriented culture where rape would be minimized.\textsuperscript{413}

### 4.4 Empowering Women through Action and Theory

The WUO not only critiqued the problems that arose due to patriarchy, but it also posed solutions. Some of these remedies were hotly contested by other women’s liberation groups of the time period. This most especially was the case with the group’s advocacy of militancy. Nevertheless, other solutions reflected mainstream feminist approaches to patriarchal problems.

Interpreting the embrace of violence or the taking on of qualities generally associated with masculinity (such as aggressiveness) as inauthentic and non-feminist, second wavers attacked the Weatherwomen’s feminist credentials. However, as Benita Roth explains in *Separate Roads to Feminism*, feminist groups of the era had different approaches and

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{413} The second wave feminist movement was also organizing around issues of rape. Eminent second wave feminist, Susan Brownmiller, wrote in “The Mass Psychology of Rape,” that rape was “not only a male prerogative, but man’s basic weapon of choice against woman.” Rape, in other words, kept women subordinate and was used to prop up male supremacy. See Susan Brownmiller, “The Mass Psychology of Rape,” 1975; reprint, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 196-197. For just a few examples of second wave discourse regarding rape, see Karen Lindsey, Holly Newman, and Fran Taylor, “Rape: The All American Crime,” 1975; reprint, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women’s Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 195-196; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 181-185. The WUO and the second wavers align in their critique of rape.
epistemologies – each had a distinct ethos and “idea about what constituted good politics” – but a difference in judgment did not preclude the fact that they were all feminists.414

Whereas feminist groups categorized violent action as masculine and chauvinist by its very nature, the Weatherwomen saw an embrace of militant, aggressive action as liberating and as necessary for smashing male privilege. As previously noted, Morgan, in her 1970 essay “Goodbye to All That,” accused the Weatherwomen of running hand in hand with their oppressors, “for claiming that the machismo style and gratuitous violence is their own style by ‘free choice’ and for believing that this is the way for a woman to make her revolution.”415 The Bread and Roses collective also objected to the Weatherwomen along the same lines, noting that “a woman becomes a heroine in Weatherman circles when she is a tougher, better fighter than the men.”416

Weatherwomen fought back against these attacks. In “Inside the Weather Machine” a Weatherwoman explained that at a conference in September of 1969, men and women became committed to the politics of the WUO because they identified strongly with the need to support black and Third World liberation struggles; the way to demonstrate that support, they believed, was to actually help in their fight for independence.417 Thus, she explained, “We had to pick up the gun.”418 This ‘we’ included women on an equal basis with men. Weatherwomen made the

414 Benita Roth, Separate Roads to Feminism, 201. Roth defines ethos as a “value judgment/directive about how to do radical action.”
415 Morgan, “Goodbye to All That,” 510.
417 These two pieces (Morgan’s and “Inside a Weather Machine”) were actually published at the same time, as if Morgan and the anonymous Weatherwoman were engaged with each other in a public conversation across the pages of Rat. See Harold Jacobs, “Inside the Weather Machine: Introduction,” 305.
choice to act militantly. As Weatherwoman Susan Stern put it, “With every pore of my body I wanted to be part of the solution,” even if that solution meant outright attack.\(^{419}\)

Moreover, the Weatherwomen believed that their commitment to militancy did not preclude feminism. On the contrary, as an anonymous Weatherwoman explained, militancy actually helped women break free of the restricting gender norms and gender roles that they had been taught. Since internalized gender norms and male supremacy kept women back, as it “prevented us from assuming any real kind of role in the revolution because most of us felt there was very little we could do,” the embrace of militancy broke down those gender norms.\(^{420}\) Becoming a political force, and picking up the gun, broke women free of their internalized inferiority. As *Prairie Fire* put it, militancy was “a rejection of the passivity and acceptance for which we are bred.”\(^{421}\) Militancy was empowering in that it gave concrete expression to women’s agency.\(^{422}\)

\(^{419}\) Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 94. Furthermore, Weatherwoman Kathy Boudin noted that “One of the things that the government tries to separate the most is that you can’t be a strong person and also a gentle person at the same time...” As such, she was warning against setting up a binary that would limit women’s behavior. See Emile de Antonio, *Underground*, DVD. *Prairie Fire* also warned against this binary, warning that “our movement will be self-defeating if we reject militancy as ‘male’ and ‘macho.’” See WUO, *Prairie Fire*, 132. *Prairie Fire* went on to explain that doing so – perpetuating this false binary – would take away from the struggles and active resistance of women to effect change, minimizing or erasing their contributions.

\(^{420}\) A Weatherwoman, “Inside the Weather Machine,” 322.

\(^{421}\) WUO, *Prairie Fire*, 132.

\(^{422}\) The WUO’s militancy program included learning karate and jogging, which were seen as enabling women and men to gain self-confidence and learn to defend themselves in fights and encounters with police. See Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, Chapter 18; Jones, *A Radical Line*, Chapter 8; Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun*, 268, 270. Interestingly, other feminist groups of the time period advocated that women learn karate specifically for these same reasons: to gain a sense of empowerment and self-reliance in confrontations. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon note that, “Although it is doubtful that karate expertise or any kind of physical resistance is the best defense against attack, women nevertheless benefited mentally and physically from the confidence, strength, agility, and discipline of these [karate] skills.” See the introduction to the karate section in *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 206. Also see Susan
The Weatherwomen also employed tactics to address sexism that other second wave groups used, such as bringing women together to create a common power base from which to act. Second wave groups believed that women working together, collectively, would help one another realize and overcome their oppression. For example, the New York Radical Women, in their founding principles, held this position, seeing collaboration – “collective wisdom” and “collective strength” – as the root of female liberation. Putting women in positions of power was another accepted second wave prescription for the liberation of women. For example, the Redstockings held that women needed to develop politically, to the best of their abilities, through participation and leadership in activist endeavors. Similarly, Cell 16, another feminist group, was developed specifically to allow women to experience leadership, as a sophisticated vanguard of women that would lead theoretically and through direct action. The WUO supported both of these methods for liberating women.

As discussed previously, female caucuses were a basis of power for women within the WUO. They allowed Weatherwomen to discuss and develop feminist themes, to provide a

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426 Female collectives/groups were seen as nurturing and empowering to women by feminist groups of the era and by the WUO. For just a few examples of second wavers on the importance
united front against male chauvinism, and they served as a foundation for female leadership within WUO collectives.\textsuperscript{427} Indeed, collectives such as the one in Columbus applied this strategy to their group. Weatherwoman Lorraine Rosal wrote that the female caucus within the collective, “took responsibility for researching and writing on the women’s question…The caucus will also be responsible for collecting study material on women’s liberation for the study sessions.”\textsuperscript{428}

The anonymous Weatherwomen’s 1973 poem “For L.” also explains the strengths of female caucuses within the WUO:

Many times
We have talked, laughed, shared.
A flash of recognition in your eyes
Told me
Whether you smiled in agreement
Or wrinkle your brow in disagreement
That you never question me, or my right
to speak up, to explore
what I think.
There is the warmth of sisterhood
And the keen eye of politics,
Watching.\textsuperscript{429}

\textsuperscript{427} Instances of female leadership within WUO were previously discussed in Chapter 3. In “Goodbye to All That,” Morgan condemns female leadership within WUO, instead demanding that women form their own movement. Morgan, “Goodbye to All That,” 515.

\textsuperscript{428} Rosal, 149. Rosal also notes that the women’s caucus in the Columbus collective was seen by the women “as a place for women to have organizing experiences and to develop an analysis of male chauvinism and supremacy as tools of the ruling class, an analysis of the relationship between white-working class women and the international proletariat, an analysis of the economic ramifications of the oppression of women, particularly young women, caused by a crisis in imperialism.”

Caucuses nourished Weatherwomen, and were generally supported specifically because they allowed women to build deep abiding bonds that supported both personal and political growth.

When it came to the choice far-left feminists had to make at the time – to work within an all female, separatist group only on women’s issues or to get involved in other work, such as anti-war or anti-racist activism – the Weatherwomen saw the benefits (but also the drawbacks) of the separatist plan. Weatherwomen agreed that separateness was good in part, so they advocated the creation of women caucuses within WUO. However, the WUO also believed that too much separatism would weaken the revolution itself. Thus, while the WUO accepted some amount of separatism in the caucuses that would fit with a second wave methodology, they did not completely accept these methods that would have women working alone solely on women’s issues.

An anonymous Weatherwoman in “Inside the Weather Machine” explained that fighting alongside men was necessary for several reasons. First, women needed to be there with the men they were trying to change so as to ensure that the men actually reformed, as “the fight against male chauvinism can only be carried out together by people struggling against their chauvinism. Separatism can only lead to a continuation of chauvinism…”430 As this Weatherwoman explained it, as revolutionary women and men, all WUO members needed to work together to create new ways of addressing and relating to one another in the new society they were envisioning. They needed to put into practice the ideals of gender equity they were espousing. Women needed to be there to model and explain appropriate behavior, and actively create the non-sexist society they were envisioning, alongside the men. As she noted, “While the struggle with men is hard, there is no other way to do it. We have to start learning how to build this new

society where people don’t destroy one another but build each other. Otherwise our revolution is bullshit and we become like the Man.”

This point leads to another fashion in which the Weatherwomen’s views were consistent with and related to second wave views: both Weatherwomen and other second wave feminists agreed that feminism required not just the advancement and empowerment of women, but also a change in how men viewed women. Men and women both needed to accept the equality of the sexes and the need to fight patriarchy, which meant that men had to renounce male privilege.

Second wave feminist groups advocated the position that for sexism to be curbed, men needed to renounce male privilege and accept the equality of women. The Bread and Roses collective stated in their paper, “A Declaration of Women’s Independence,” that, “all men and women are created equal and made unequal only by socialization” and that therefore, this arrangement must be “dissolved.” Similarly, noted feminist Roxanne Dunbar, in her “Female Liberation as the Basis for Social Revolution,” wrote that as feminists, women “demand the development of maternal skills and consciousness in men,” as well as a change in how men viewed and cared about women.

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431 Ibid. In a 1973 collective letter to the women’s movement, Weatherwomen came back to this point, defending their choice to work alongside men. They wrote: “We realize that many women distrust us because we work with men...We claim the integrity of our choice to work with them, and do not intend to either defend or reject them.” See Women of the Weather Underground, “A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement,” 78. Robin Morgan, in her 1970 “Goodbye to All That,” advocated an all women’s movement. This difference – separatist vs. working with men – is another reason why she attacked the WUO. See Morgan, “Goodbye to All That,” 515. The collective letter noted here can be taken to respond to Morgan’s critique of working alongside men.

432 Bread and Roses, “A Declaration of Women’s Independence,” 45.

The WUO similarly believed that revolution would only happen when women and men broke out of the norms they had been taught to accept as part of their lives in a patriarchal and imperialist system. Patriarchy flourished by setting up false binaries, such as setting up men against women – with men in the dominant position. Just as women needed to throw off the shackles of their internalized oppression, and needed to function as the autonomous, strong individuals that they were capable of being, men needed to stop identifying with their male privilege.

Weatherwoman Cathy Wilkerson stated that, “Men who claim to be fighting imperialism in any form must fight against their own supremacist practices and notions. Not to do so undercuts their own legitimacy as revolutionaries.”434 In other words, revolutionary males had to be feminist males. Furthermore, Wilkerson stated that the plan for revolution was to “initiate an attack on male supremacy as an essential part of our attack on those forces which push mother country working people to ally with the ruling class.”435 In the imperialist system, men felt as if they were better than women out of a false sense of superiority. This sense of superiority allowed men to dominate women and therefore to self-identify as members of the ruling class. Breaking down males’ sense of privilege then was not simply feminist work – it was revolutionary work.

Breaking men of their sexist behavior sometimes happened through “criticism, self-criticism sessions.”436 At a criticism, self-criticism session in the New York collective, Teddy Gold, one of the founding members of the WUO, got attacked for his sexism. Gilbert remembers:

434 Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” 7.
435 Ibid.
436 As previously noted, this label was what the sessions were called by WUO members. See Stern, With the Weathermen, 102. Berger notes that sexism and male privilege were part of the criticism, self-criticism sessions frequently, yet nevertheless concludes that these sessions were unhelpful. He states, “Male supremacy was a frequent criticism – which isn’t to say that men learned from or listened to the criticism, or even that all the criticisms were useful.” See Berger,
Somehow the session with Teddy became a super-marathon. He wasn’t any more male chauvinist than the rest of us, but as a leader he was the first one challenged to change – fully and immediately! The main sticking points all involved his resistance to accepting woman [sic] as equals. The session was intense and grueling. I could hear the clucking in Teddy’s dry throat as he tried to speak, but he didn’t bolt; he stuck with this excruciating process because he wanted to be a revolutionary and he knew that a full-hearted embracing of women’s equality was an essential component.  

Here was a criticism, self-criticism session that could have been interrupted or called off, but instead continued because both Weatherwomen and Weathermen were attempting to stay committed to the feminist message of gender equality.

### 4.5 A Total Change

While various connections between second wave feminist views and the views of the WUO existed, these similarities do not tell the whole story of the WUO’s feminism. The WUO was not just fighting for the smashing of gender norms and for the establishment of gender equality. Weatherwomen and the WUO, according to Wilkerson, were fighting for a sophisticated new way of relating to one another in a new kind of society: “women are not in particular demanding equality with men under the current conditions, but are demanding a whole new set of values—socialist values—by which people relate to each other in all forms of individual and collective relationships.”

People were supposed to think of themselves collectively, not simply copy and reproduce old, gendered privileges. In the WUO’s vision, society was supposed to be recreated in a socialist mold, where individuals would relate to one

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*Outlaws of America*, 105. This stance seems to ignore the important feminist work that women were undertaking in these sessions. Having the conversations in the first place illustrates that there was an awareness of the importance of smashing sexism. Whether or not the work was hard or unrewarding should not take away from the efforts of the people who were involved in it.


another collaboratively, with a new egalitarian and humanitarian consciousness permeating their everyday activities. In the 1969 article “National War Council,” the WUO members wrote that “Creating new forms for living – collectives, communist relationships – and destroying the bourgeois consciousness in ourselves that keeps us from being able to touch, love, and struggle with each other against the Man is part of and necessary to destroying imperialism.”

The world the WUO envisioned was a socialist realm based in feminist, egalitarian principles. “Inside the Weather Machine” explained that destroying the imperialist system meant destroying domination and male supremacy: “male supremacy means dominating and Amerika [sic] is about dominating and controlling…The system we live under is the oppressor and uses men to carry out its policies. By destroying this system we must destroy the relationships we had based on domination.” Getting rid of the imperialist system opened up the way to embrace socialism, and to relate to one another with respect to each other’s humanity in mind. Respecting individuals for who they were, for their intrinsic worth, and treating them fairly and equally was not only socialist, but also essentially feminist.

The WUO further drew out its feminist/socialist vision for the world in its newspaper, Osawatomie. Here, the WUO laid out a multi-step program of what it stood for; the program was based in a stance against sexism, a commitment to the freedom of women, and support for class struggle and socialism in general. The group’s program consisted of five key areas:

1. US imperialism out of the Third World.

4. Struggle against sexism and for the freedom of women.
5. Wage the class struggle. Fight for socialism. Power to the people.\textsuperscript{441}

The WUO was staking out for itself a feminist and socialist agenda. The WUO was openly aligning itself with feminist aims – such as the fight against sexism and freedom for women, akin to the second wave – while it was proclaiming that it would fight for the rights of all peoples, and for socialism. This concern with the welfare of all peoples, whether minorities, Third World inhabitants, or women, bespoke an inclusive mindset, and set the WUO apart from other feminist groups of the time. While the most visible second wave groups were concerned with the needs of women \textit{qua} women, and implicitly embraced a white, middle class point of view, the WUO was dedicating itself to work for the interests of \textit{all} peoples, in a proto-third wave mold, which is the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{441} WUO, “Who We Are,” \textit{Osawatomie}, Summer 1975, No. 2, 2; Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 207.
CHAPTER 5: THE WUO’S PROTO-THIRD WAVE APPROACH

Writing on the topic of female liberation in a collective letter to the Women’s Movement in 1973, the Weatherwomen penned these words:

We are formalizing the beginning of an ongoing women’s community in the underground. We live in many ways, mothers, lesbians, with men, with older women or alone, and are as varied as women anywhere. We look at each other in amazement, realizing how much it is possible for each one of us to grow, and that together we are part of giving birth to a new women’s culture…442

They added:

We cannot liberate ourselves in some vacuum of our own self-conception. The great majority of women in the world are bowed down by the questions of survival for themselves and their children, self-determination in their daily lives. The liberation of women cannot be realized while the United States empire [sic] remains the main consumer of the world’s food, resources and energy. That is why our movement will have to take on the question of state power. And that is why our future is tied to the liberation of the Third World.443

After nearly four years of deliberate feminist action, the Weatherwomen finally offered to other feminists a clear articulation of their ideology and intent. As the previous chapter indicated, there were many in the mainstream women’s liberation movement who denounced the Weatherwomen as inauthentic in their feminism. Here, the Weatherwomen not only responded to those critiques, but also demonstrated how their feminist ideology, in fact, went much further than mainstream women’s liberation, pushing the movement towards a more inclusive, more expansive, and more revolutionary vision of feminism that was closer aligned to what scholars have attributed to the

443 Ibid., 72. To the WUO, the Third World referred to poor, usually non-industrialized nations often times with colonial pasts, which were fighting for independence and national liberation.
third wave. This chapter explores the philosophy behind the WUO’s brand of feminism, paying particular attention to its alliance with Third World women and its openness to a broader array of sexual desires, practices, and arrangements.

Firstly, this chapter explores how the WUO’s brand of feminism was all-encompassing and meant to be responsive to all kinds of oppressions, weaving together the needs of all women, regardless of class, race, or nationality. It also was a kind of feminism that fused personal context and experience with a demand to oppose imperialist oppression. As such, the Weatherwomen believed in aligning themselves with the struggles of Third World women – and not just with the white middle class women generally associated with the second wave. The Weatherwomen stated they wanted to forge an “international sisterhood” that would work to address the needs and experiences of all women.

Secondly, this chapter excavates the WUO’s openness to alternative sexual identities and unfettered sexual experimentation – feminist positions that are usually recognized as being part

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444 The third wave aims to incorporate all identity types in its feminist practice, including race, class, and sexual identity. Thus, the third wave is interested in respecting/integrating all points of view, all kinds of backgrounds, all kinds of sexualities or gender identities. See Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*; Claire Snyder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” in *Signs*; Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women’s Commonality*; Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). As noted earlier in Footnote 5 in the Introduction, my use of the wave motif in this chapter is meant to be practical in that it will establish that the WUO's brand of feminism fits in what has already been recognized as feminist in the third wave classification. This chapter also explores how the WUO’s feminist platform disturbs the wave motif previously established by scholars, in that the WUO is temporally situated within the second wave, but previews third wave elements. While the style of feminism that the Weatherwomen espoused overlapped with the second wave tradition, it also identified and developed proto-third wave aims, such as the inclusion and recognition of all women’s subjectivities and an unrestricted vision of the sexual liberation of women.

of the third wave. The WUO, at times unsuccessfully, attempted to encourage sexual experimentation as a norm within collectives. The smash monogamy campaign was designed to break up monogamous relationships. Originating with the Weatherwomen themselves, this campaign was meant to be empowering for women, as it was meant to allow them to self-identify as their own women, as opposed to only locating their identities through associations with male partners. While there were instances where this policy led to the sexual exploitation of female members, it also allowed for a certain amount of sexual experimentation that allowed some Weather members to cast aside hetero-normativity and come out as gay or lesbian to their collectives. While there were obstacles and outright failures within the smash monogamy program, Weatherwomen and the WUO were advancing a theory of sexual freedom that would preview the more nuanced theories of sex positive feminists of the third wave.

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5.1 The Limits of Bourgeois Feminism: Universal Sisterhood

The WUO’s brand of feminism was multi-layered and complex. It was a feminism based on the intersectionalities of gender, class, race, and imperialist oppression. It fit snugly within the second wave, but also previewed third wave elements. While the WUO praised the achievements of the women’s movement, it also set new goals for revolutionary women. These goals would incorporate the perspectives and needs of poor, minority, and Third World women within the feminist movement.

This inclusive approach is a defining element of third wave feminism. As bell hooks explained in 1984, in “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression,” the second wave lacked the inclusion of all experiences and all subjectivities – instead, focusing more exclusively on the experiences of middle class white women. hooks called for inclusivity and an avoidance of giving one group primacy in the fight for female liberation. She wrote that, “broader perspectives can only emerge when we examine both the personal that is political, the politics of society as a whole, and global revolutionary politics.” Third wave feminists took up hook’s call for inclusivity and broadness of scope, as they fashioned a multiracial, multicultural, and multisexual style of feminism. From this inclusive basis, third wave feminists saw themselves as being able to achieve significant social change that was responsive to multiple subjectivities.
The WUO previewed both the inclusivity of the third wave and bell hooks’ call for a broader perspective that included multiple experiences and blended politics with female liberation and revolution. In 1974, the WUO’s *Prairie Fire* articulated that female liberation was predicated both on inclusivity and on building a coalition with Third World and poor women, not just with the so-called bourgeois feminism of the second wave (which, through its middle class focus, was limited in its scope and point of view).  

The WUO also saw as part of its mission a continued opposition to racism.

More than a decade before hooks, the WUO criticized their contemporary feminist activists as not being responsive enough to the needs of all women. In 1969, Bernardine Dohrn, in “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Movement,” pointed to this shortcoming in the mainstream women’s liberation movement. Starting out with a concern that separatist women’s groups “promote a pop personality, individualistic view of the struggle and are based on an unstated white middle class consciousness and perspective,” Dohrn articulated that the women’s movement, as it operated at the time, was not integrating the needs and contexts of all women within its vision of equality.

Building on this concern, Dohrn further explained: “Most of the women’s groups are bourgeois, unconscious or unconcerned with class struggle and the exploitation of working class women, and chauvinists concerning the oppression of black and brown women.” In Dohrn’s analysis, these groups were failing to account for class or race and the oppressions—such as poverty or racism—that these categories resulted in (and compounded)

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455 Ibid.
the injustices based on gender. By implication, Dohrn was claiming that the WUO was not making this same mistake.

Indeed, the WUO’s feminist action was rooted in alliances with people of color and with those living in poverty. Moreover, the WUO rejected any compromising of this commitment to serve larger political ends. For example, the WUO criticized New York feminist groups, who, in the fight to promote the Equal Rights Amendment, allied themselves with a white conservative Republican assemblywoman from Queens who had a platform “against busing and for white control of the NYC school system” instead of “turning to the millions of Black and Puerto Rican women in the city for support.” Not only was inclusiveness the right, moral thing to do out of a respect for each woman’s experience, but in the WUO’s estimation, it was also the strategic thing to do: feminist groups needed to align themselves with the female majority, not with racist politicians. Feminist groups needed to be aware of racism, needed to work with poor and minority women, and needed to focus on issues that affected all women.

Also echoing hooks’ concern with a false sense of equality (that of middle class white women to middle class white men, as discussed in her “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression,” on page 23) and replicating Dohrn’s analysis, stood Cathy Wilkerson’s “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia.” This piece argued that the feminist struggle should not just be about equality to men, as that simple focus could be dangerous and even racist. Rather, the feminist struggle needed to encompass anti-racism and self-determination struggles as an intrinsic component to female liberation. The WUO’s brand of feminism, according to Wilkerson, addressed women’s oppression qua women, but it was also politically informed: “White women workers who voted for Wallace could easily wage a national chauvinist struggle for equal wages with men, without understanding the relationship between their oppression and the oppression of Third World people, and therefore without understanding the relationship between their struggle and the struggles for national self-determination.” See Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” 7.

Celia Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 5.

The WUO was deeply anti-racist. For more on its anti-racist positions and its solidarity with minority groups, especially African Americans, see WUO, “The Battle Of Boston: An Investigation of ROAR,” 7-12; Anonymous Weatherwomen, “Venom II,” Sing a Battle Song, 43. Weatherwoman Laura Whitehorn spent several days in Boston, guarding African American families from attack from their white neighbors during the busing/school integration crisis in the

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The WUO believed that it was imperative for feminists not to emphasize “a biological sisterhood of everywoman,” but rather to focus on the real life, varied challenges women experienced, within their various contexts, as these were defined based on their class, race, and other sociological status. An awareness of intersectionality needed to be the foundational basis for any action – as even a feminist action could negatively impact women. The WUO noted that inequalities in power had real life consequences, such as when the pharmaceutical industry experimented on Third World women living in Puerto Rico, Haiti, and within the United States to develop the birth control pill. Procreative control for one group of women translated into loss of life or injuries for another group of women – this model, in the WUO’s estimation was problematic and unfair, because all women deserved and needed to be awarded the same dignity and respect within society. An awareness of the privileges of class and race was therefore needed so as to insure that minority, poor, or Third World women were not marginalized or exploited.


Celia Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 4.

The birth control pill Enovid, to gain FDA approval, conducted trials in Puerto Rico – as such, Puerto Rican women were experimented on (and their complaints of headaches, rashes, weight gain, etc. were dismissed as hysterical when they were in fact caused by the high percentage of hormones present in the pill). Women were also experimented on in Haiti, Massachusetts, and New York. See Linda Gordon, The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 287-288; Elaine Tyler May, America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation (New York: Perseus Books, 2010).
white working-class women.”  

This feminism – aware of the injustices, oppressions, and varied experiences of all women based on their own, unique contexts – had a better chance to achieve real change that would benefit all women’s lives. Dohrn was quick to explain that this revolutionary feminism did not mean that middle class women should not organize to address their own needs, but rather that, to achieve real, overall social change, “our immediate job is to organize masses of women around the full scope of radical demands – including the destruction of male supremacy.”

This point, that women needed to be organized so as to respond to various needs within their lives, including the need to eradicate sexism, was also present in the WUO’s 1975-1976 article, “The Women’s Question is a Class Question.” Here the WUO argued that women needed a “movement that reaches into every office, sweatshop, household and high school to demand jobs, equal pay, adequate income, day care, the right to unionize, an end to every type of racial discrimination and equality for women.” Acting from a basis of solidarity, women would be able to support each other as they worked to achieve change for one another through organized action. The article categorically stated that this effort should not be just a bourgeois movement, but should reach out to poor women and working women – to do any less, it added, would perpetuate “a false notion of women’s liberation as the property of a small and precious group of women.” Clearly, the WUO was embracing a sense of inclusiveness that was emblematic of the third wave and that moved beyond the second wave demands for equal pay and employment and educational opportunities discussed in the previous chapter.

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462 Ibid.
463 The article was part of the winter 1975-1976 issue of Osawatomie.
464 Celia Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 3.
465 Ibid.
Further underscoring the importance of inclusiveness, cooperation, and solidarity with women’s real life problems, the Weatherwomen crafted poems that aligned them with the goal of liberation for all women in *Sing a Battle Song*. With “Revolution is our way of liberation!” proudly inscribed as the epigraph for the volume’s introduction, the Weatherwomen explained that their feminism espoused a rhetoric that allied them with the needs and struggles of women everywhere, from the US to the Third World. As they put it in the introduction to the poems, “we are joining our lives with the needs and aspirations of poor and working class women; we are learning our strengths as women fighting for liberation alongside our sisters here and around the world.” Thus, their poems made references to the individual subjectivities, needs, and experiences of women from various backgrounds.

One poem in which the Weatherwomen attempt to show sympathy for real women’s issues is “Spider Poem”:

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spider, spin me a world web
touch women far away
I go slide down the strands
subway spider strands
to other lands
touch other hands
spider, spider a world web
a meeting place to share a meal…
warm baths and back rubs
shared children
shared fire
shared burdens…
we will meet
all of us
women of every land
children on backs, in
arms, in shopping carts…
to discuss
to simply discuss
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466 Anonymous Weatherwomen, *Sing a Battle Song*.
467 Ibid.
to simply discuss amongst
ourselves
our lives
and what is to be done
and with our fine spidernet
we intend
to entangle
the powers
that bury
our children.\(^{468}\)

Here, the Weatherwomen linked women’s experiences to the possibility of political, social change from shared oppression and burdens. The Weatherwomen recognized that women from other countries would have different experiences from each other (“children on backs, in arms, children in shopping carts”), but still tapped into a shared experience that helped provide a basis for female unity: motherhood and a devout interest in the welfare of children. The Weatherwomen’s shared experiences still recognized individualized subjectivities, as the poem referred to “other lands” and insisted on a frank discussion of all “our lives.”

The use of a spider’s web is a perfect metaphor for this purpose. On the one hand, it is sprawling (“a world web”) and it unites women who are both separated across the planet (“touch women far away”) and suffer under oppressive patriarchy in their own ways (“shared fire, shared burden”). On the other hand, the spider web represents a shared response against this oppression (“we intend to entangle the powers that bury our children”). What was once a fragile and weak web becomes almost a noose – a transformation nourished by the collaboration of women working across the globe – that remediates female suffering. Therefore, this poem both fits second wave feminism in its sisterhood motif and in its aim to resolve issues that touch on child

\(^{468}\) Ibid., 9-10. The poem dates from November 1974. The poetry collection was released in 1975.
raising issues, but it also clearly fits into a proto-third wave feminist narrative by recognizing the vast differences of women across nations.469

Finally, “Spider Poem” suggested that these Weatherwomen were looking for an active response to these problems. The active response for the Weatherwomen included cohesion as a basis of action: solidarity across class and race. A poem titled “For Assata Shakur” further underscored this ideal of collaboration and solidarity with women of color. From its inception, the WUO saw itself as a supporter of the Black Panther Party. With this poem, the WUO once again advertised its inclusive stance, even when it meant that it was forging a coalition with individuals hunted by the police:

And during those last months
when they hunted you hard
I was an invisible supporter,
working another front…
And when you were captured, sister,
I wept
for all of us.470

The WUO’s active response to oppression and injustice also included a commitment to militancy, which would be used to protect the interests of all women. The poem “Foodlines in Oakland” took up this point:

People are standing in lines, women mostly;
folded shopping bags, hats against the sun
swaying crowd
somber chatting glad…

469 Another poem that fits this motif is “Women’s Lament,” dating from 1971. The poem laments the death of children due to war and ends by calling on women to “wail and weep together/ so that our lament/ becomes – also – a weapon/ which we direct against the vicious demons/ who haunt our world today.” The demons listed are war strategists and the White House. Anonymous Weatherwomen, Sing a Battle Song, 27-28.
470 Anonymous Weatherwomen, Sing a Battle Song, 4. This poem dates from 1973. Assata Shakur was a member of the Black Panther Party and then became a member of the Black Liberation Army. She was arrested by New Jersey state troopers on May 2, 1973 on charges of murder, assault and armed robbery. See Assata Shakur, Assata, 3-17.
the vultures, cameramen,
descend to record the defiant dignity
the disorder
the human and ordinary need for food
Crumbs and raw anger now hurled back.
Hungry hands
empty yet
can hold a rock, clench a furious fist,
as they have held hoes and brooms and babies
for generations.471

Through this poem, not only did the Weatherwomen shine a light on the insensitive and
disrespectful portrayal of poor, minority women in the media, but they intrinsically claimed
solidarity with these women, in a proto-third wave way. The Weatherwomen expressed outrage
on these poor women’s behalf.

In “Foodlines in Oakland,” the Weatherwomen also implied that shared need and poverty
was a legitimization for militant action; the poverty of which they spoke in the poem reflected a
need for immediate social change through militant feminism. After all, the fact that there were
people, children included, starving in America, a land where there was plenty of food available
in any grocery store, was in itself a kind of violence on those hungry individuals. It was a further
attack on the hungry people to put their pain and suffering on display, as if they had no dignity
by virtue of being poor. If these people were starving, and if there were people who could help
but instead let them starve, then it would seem like those people would have rights of self-
defense to protect themselves and their children.472 The Weatherwomen were pointing out that
for starving women, violence (“hold a rock, clench a furious fist”) may be justified as a means of

471 Anonymous Weatherwomen, Sing a Battle Song, 36. This poem dates from February 1974.
472 This poem also points to the communalism of socialism. As discussed in the previous chapter,
the WUO had a vision of a socialist society where all members would help one another and live
aligned with feminist principles. Under such a system, injustices such as the ones described in
this poem would not happen, as the entire community would eradicate hunger and ensure that
needy individuals were helped.
self-defense. The WUO’s brand of feminism was therefore action oriented and inclined towards employing militant tactics for goals that would help improve all women’s lives.

5.2 Imperialism and Inclusive Feminism

The WUO’s full sense of inclusiveness integrated Third World women, but this addition would lack substance if it came along without understanding the specific nature of those women’s unique experiences – without comprehending what incidents they endured and what life obstacles they faced while living under imperialism. Both the Weatherwomen and certain third wave feminists agree upon this point. In 1997, J. Ann Tickner explained that under imperialism, state apparati tend to ignore and marginalize women’s issues in favor of upholding state interests; in 2000, Cynthia Enloe expounded that imperialism and capitalism victimized women in colonized states.473 Decades prior to these critiques, the WUO showed a similar concern with how imperialism affected women’s lives.

In Prairie Fire, the WUO articulated the following analysis concerning the connections between sexism and imperialism:

Under imperialism, the organization and fabric of society – the family, production, reproduction, and all social relations – keep women dependent and powerless. Sexism is this institutionalized and encouraged system of control. In the Third World, imperialism imposes the most brutal forms of modern sexism. Women are murdered/tortured, sterilized/raped, stifled/crippled, owned/exploited under the banner of male supremacy.474

473 J. Ann Tickner, “You Just Don’t Understand: Troubled Estrangements Between Feminists and IR Theorists,” International Studies Quarterly 41, (1997): 611-632; Cynthia Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). For example, women suffer under imperialism by being forced into the tourism sex industry, by suffering economically (being employed in low paying/unskilled jobs), or are affected by economic sanctions, militarization, rape, etc. For more on how women are affected by imperialism, see United Nations, Human Development Report (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
474 WUO, Prairie Fire, 87.
The way the WUO saw it, imperialist control of other countries translated into controlling the population of those countries – keeping the people docile and unresisting to its rule. This control extended to women, as colonized women were trained to be passive, taught that they were weak, and were generally kept in subordinate positions both in relation to their colonizers and to colonized men. Colonized men might have propagated sexist attitudes so as to maintain a sense of superiority – at least over women – in the face of imperialism, but they were also pushed to adopt sexist attitudes by the imperialist system. Praire Fire explained that the root of sexism under imperialism was premised in possession, and stated that, “Imperialism lays claim to all the natural resources of the colonized society, including the women. They are valued and controlled as laborers, breeders, and sexual commodities.” This schema positioned women in undervalued, precarious situations that further constrained their lives: the WUO argued that imperialism forced urbanization that resulted in the displacement of women and in their increased dependency on men or on factory jobs. Furthermore, factory jobs devalued women’s labor, as women were paid the worst, just at subsistence level.

Both third wave feminists and the WUO pointed out that one of the most heinous mechanisms of imperialist control was rape. In Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives, third wave feminist Cynthia Enloe discussed rape as a weapon of war against women in militarized zones. Used to intimidate, control, degrade, coerce, or

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475 Ibid., 90.
476 Ibid., 87.
477 Ibid.
478 Ibid.
humiliate, Enloe explains that state governments or troops widely employ rape to “guarantee that authority is so crystal clear that it is always – and quickly – obeyed.”

Previewing Enloe’s analysis, the WUO argued that soldiers or male invaders could adopt a sexist attitude and feel more emboldened to act unjustly or cruelly in war or invasions from an allegedly privileged position against inferior humans (that is, colonized women). As a vivid instance of this point, the WUO noted that rape was often used as a weapon of colonial wars, such as in the Vietnam War. Oppression through imperialism and sexism led to a culture that valued women as sexual commodities to be used and discarded at will.

Another oppression that the WUO pointed out when it came to Third World women related to the issues of sterilization and the loss of bodily integrity. The WUO noted that as part of population control, U.S. imperialism sterilized Third World Women; missionaries, along with various foundations and family planning clinics were limiting potentially dangerous populations through sterilizations. Simply put, imperialism required the control of the subjugated populace, or, as the WUO stated, “It is easier to kill a guerrilla in the womb than in the mountains.” The WUO pointed out that often times, when it came to Third World countries, mandatory birth control was a condition for receiving foreign aid. Moreover, in the article “Puerto Rico Is The Test of Fire of Anti-Imperialism,” the WUO focused on the economic plight of women in Puerto Rico, also noting that Puerto Rican women were sterilized without genuine

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480 Ibid., 151-152.
481 WUO, *Prairie Fire*, 88. The WUO wrote that “Rape and sexual abuse is the prerogative of the conqueror, a means of undermining women’s resistance, a murderous assault, part of the arsenal of control and domination.”
482 Ibid., 87. The Rockefellers and the Ford Foundation were listed as encouraging sterilizations. The WUO also pointed out that sterilizations were attempted against allegedly dangerous populations within the U.S., noting that Congress tried to sterilize Japanese women in internment camps during World War II. See *Prairie Fire*, 88.
Addressing mainstream, white feminist groups the WUO asked pointedly, “Do they attack the criminal fact that 34% of women of child bearing age in Puerto Rico, a US colony, have been sterilized?” Calling out white feminist groups for ignoring the plight of their sisters of color from outside the continental United States, the WUO embraced an inclusive brand of feminism, one that would respond to the needs of all women. The WUO forcefully argued that poor women and Third World women needed to not be “used for medical experimentation and profit, subject to forced sterilization, and unsafe ‘family planning.’” Third World women, in the WUO’s estimation, needed the support of allies to assert their desires and autonomously choose their own life plans.

Though the Weatherwomen were pointing to problems in the lives of Third World women, they were not taking a false perspective of superiority when looking at these women.

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485 Celia Sojourn, “Puerto Rico Is The Test Of Fire Of Anti-Imperialism,” Osawatomie, Vol. 2, No. 1, April-May 1976, 8. The WUO also noted that Puerto Rican families survived on less than $200 per year. Additionally, in this article, the WUO discussed the plight of Puerto Rican women living on welfare in New York. In “An Open Letter to US Workers” in the same issue, Bernardine Dohrn explained that solidarity was needed with Puerto Ricans, and highlighted that Puerto Rican women were suffering oppression from “the lowest-paying dangerous jobs; malnutrition and hunger for their children because 70% of the people must depend on food stamps; and a 40 year US program of forced sterilization.” See Bernardine Dohrn, “An Open Letter To The US Workers,” 11, already cited. In a previous issue of Osawatomie, the WUO published “The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” where they noted that 34% of Puerto Rican women had been sterilized. See Celia Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 5. The WUO was forcefully shining a light on the needs of poor and Third Women, in an inclusive, proto-third wave way.

486 Celia Sojourn, “Where We Stand: The Women’s Question is a Class Question,” 5. In other position papers, the WUO also noted the plight of Native American women and identified Native Americans as a group to be supported in their struggle for liberation. Among pieces that identify these positions, see the WUO’s Health, Education and Welfare Communiqué, previously cited; WUO, “Weather Underground Organization Bombs Kennecott Corporation: Salt Lake City, Utah, September 4, 1975 Communiqué,” 4 September 1975; reprint, Sing A Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970-1974, eds. Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, Jeff Jones (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 224; WUO, Prairie Fire, 12, 20, 40, 50, 104, 110, 123, 127; Bernardine Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 13.

487 WUO, Prairie Fire, 133.
Instead, the WUO saw Third World women as aspirational: Third World women were models of revolutionary feminism for the WUO. “Honky Tonk Women” explained that the women in Vietnam and Cuba were active agents and leaders in their own right and were “winning formal equality in a process that began when they picked up the gun to destroy the US. These revolutionary women are liberating themselves in a national struggle.” Thus, the WUO’s militant feminism derived from the examples they saw in the Third World, such as in Cuba or Vietnam. As the Weatherwomen put it, “The women of Vietnam were our model. We had met with them…heard their battle stories, and saw them gaining freedom in the process of their people’s war for independence.” Learning from the revolutionary examples of minority and Third World Women would make for effective, social change and achieve real equality.

Following the lead they saw in Third World women fighting for their freedom, the WUO felt the fight for a new society must be worldwide. In “Inside the Weather Machine,” the WUO stated: “Women must pick up the gun and kill the pig. Our liberation depends on this fight as well as seeing this fight as part of a worldwide struggle with all the people of the world.” In the WUO’s estimation, this worldwide focus was the key to creating meaningful change; doing any less was racist and irresponsible. As “Honky Tonk Women” indicated, if white middle class women did not realize that imperialism was problematic for the well being of the women (and men) of the world, then these white women were replicating the problem of imperialism, all the while winning false victories as part of their feminist struggle. Their victories would count as hollow, in the WUO’s analysis, because the imperialist system would give in to these women’s

488 Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 313. The motif of Third World women as exemplars is also seen in the poem “People’s War,” in Sing a Battle Song. The poem dates from 1972. See Anonymous Weatherwomen, Sing a Battle Song, 5, 7.
demands, while setting them up as a privileged class of women, at the expense of all the other women of the world, all in an effort to maintain itself as a system. As the WUO explained, “recent history shows us that imperialist pigs are willing to make great sacrifices, grant huge demands, to keep white people on their side.”

White women therefore needed to realize that “US imperialism is our common enemy, and white women must join in this fight before they can win anything but empty transitional demands.” Furthermore, the WUO charged that if white women ignored what was happening in the Third World, that behavior was racist: “For white women to fight for ‘equal rights’ or right to work, right to organize for equal pay, promotions, better conditions…’ while the rest of the world is trying to destroy imperialism, is racist.” Rather, they argued that the responsible choice for all feminists was to adopt the WUO’s brand of feminism because it deliberately incorporated all subjectivities and identified imperialism and sexism as equal threats. Thus, “Honky Tonk Women” explained “A real strategy for victory is not to get masses of people to fight with you for a few more crumbs – day-care centers for white women, equal pay with white men – but to fight with them against the source of our real oppression – pig Amerika [sic].”

The WUO’s feminism was multi-ethnic, multi-national, and attempted to incorporate all women, especially Third World women in its scope. As Weatherman chronicler Harold Jacobs stated, the WUO did not want to limit itself to “demands for material improvements in the lives

492 Ibid., 313.
493 Ibid., 314.
494 Interestingly, The Bread and Roses collective noted that this WUO analysis (that imperialism was problematic and an inclusive focus was needed for feminism) was correct, noting that “some of Weatherman’s criticism is well-founded. Our internationalism has been sporadic and apologetic.” See Bread and Roses Collective, “Weatherman Politics and the Women’s Movement,” 328.
of white women” because those were “not only readily co-optable, but avoid the most profound source of women’s oppression.”496 Thus, previewing the third wave and the movement against globalization from above, the WUO supported a position where all oppressed persons, including all women, joined together to fight against the imperialist system.

5.3 Incorporating Different Sexual Identities

In keeping with its proto-third wave approach, the WUO’s brand of feminism was also inclusive of non-heterosexual relationships, at least in theory – the Weathermen certainly did not completely overcome their homophobia and heterosexism. Harold Jacobs explained that, “Weatherman looks favorably on women developing ‘full sexual and political relationships with women’ alongside their relationships with men.”497 This sexual openness fits snugly within the third wave model, as third wavers embrace not only multiple identities but encourage and support all types of consensual sexual relations. As Mimi Marinucci in her 2010 book, Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory, stated: “this solidarity [between feminists and queer theorists] seems born of a deep understanding that the oppression of women and the suppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender existence are deeply intertwined. Feminist identity, like LGBT identity, stretches the boundaries of established categories of gender, sex, and sexuality.”498 The WUO’s feminism at least attempted to capture this sense of solidarity by including lesbian women in its feminist positions.

498 Mimi Marinucci, Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory (London: Zed Books, 2012), Kindle Edition, Chapter 8. Marinucci goes on to point out that this solidarity has not been found throughout the history of feminism, which included a great deal of “bias against lesbian women, gay men, bisexual people, and transgender people.” This point fits with the contention that while feminists of the time period may have been homophobic,
As Harold Jacobs noted above, the WUO encouraged alternative sexual arrangements between adults, supporting alternative sexual expression without judgment. Bernardine Dohrn, in a conversation with non-Weatherwoman Jane Alpert, referred to this open acceptance within the WUO: “Some of our women are lesbians and are active in the gay rights movement. A few are living in an all-women collective.” Dohrn indicates not only that WUO members were forging alliances with the gay rights movement, but also that the organization was creating space, quite literally, for women to explore alternative living arrangements and lifestyles.

Some bonds between non-heterosexual members were celebrated – and seem to have inspired WUO collective members – as the poem “For Two Sisters” indicates:

i [sic] think of you often
womanlove(rs)
sound of your steps
up the cellar stairs
emerging from the basement
in the mornings
still drowsy with sleep
lovemaking on your breath
on your bodies
aura of smells and warmth enveloped you then
it wasn’t the words we spoke
or the things we did together
that have stayed with/in me these years
but the touch of your closeness and
womandepth [sic] of your loving
that have become for me
a time worn mirror
into which i’ve [sic] often looked
seeking my reflection there

The WUO’s attempt to be sensitive of GLBTQ rights was more representative of third wave feminism. For a similar point, also see Annamarie Jagose, “Feminism’s Queer Theory,” Feminism & Psychology 19, No. 2 (2009): 157-174.

Jane Alpert, Growing Up Underground, 330. In this same conversation, Dohrn explained that being in the WUO does not mean that one has to hide his or her beliefs or way of being. Dohrn stated, “We respect anyone who can survive underground, and we’ll never ask you to compromise your beliefs, feminist or otherwise.” Alpert, Growing Up Underground, 329.

Anonymous Weatherwomen, Sing a Battle Song, 25. This poem dates from Summer 1973.
Describing the intimacy between two women – lovers and revolutionaries – this poem illustrates the beauty and acceptance of lesbian relationships within the WUO. The closeness and intimacy of the two women (“drowsy with sleep,” “lovemaking on your breath”) emerge as respected and even cherished by the author (“the touch of your closeness and womandepth [sic] of your loving that have become for me a time worn mirror”). This poem can also be interpreted as a coming out poem, as the author concludes that the love shared by the two women created a “time worn mirror” into which the author seeks her own reflection (“i’ve [sic] often looked seeking my reflection there”), perhaps as she embraces her own sexuality.

Furthermore, the Weatherwomen’s letter to the Women’s Movement stated, “We live in many ways, mothers, lesbians, with men…” alluding to acceptance and unity within the WUO.\footnote{Women of the Weather Underground, “A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement,” 78.} In some collectives, this supportive and open atmosphere enabled lesbian and gay members to come out to their peers without fear. As Weatherman David Gilbert remembers, that’s exactly what happened in the Colorado WUO collective, where two gay men came out to the rest of the group.\footnote{Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 140.}

There were difficulties when it came to fostering this supportive, inclusive attitude in regard to sexual orientation. The open attitude did not extend to all the collectives: in San Francisco, Michael Novick did not feel enough support from his collective to come out sexually or to experiment sexually with other men.\footnote{Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 105.} Gilbert explains that in his collective, in 1972-1973, WUO members tackled issues relating to sexual orientation, attempting to address concerns and to foster inclusiveness: “Our collective also held our first group discussions of the politics of sexual orientation, as lesbian and gay members explained that they felt little support inside the
organization for lesbian/gay culture and politics.\textsuperscript{504} While the having of this conversation bespeaks the reality that gay and lesbian members did not feel perfectly accepted, it nevertheless underlines the fact that heterosexual members were attempting to be sympathetic and worked on fostering inclusiveness when it came to sexual orientation.

The WUO’s attempts, while not entirely successful, to promote sexual openness were linked to their view that sexual experimentation or non-heterosexual sexual acts were revolutionary. “Honky Tonk Women” equated same-sex affairs with breaking down bourgeois values: “Women sleeping with other women, developing full sexual and political relationships with each other, indicates that we are beginning to really destroy the bourgeois values we have believed in for such a long time.”\textsuperscript{505} Evidence that sexual experimentation through same-sex encounters were viewed positively comes from the fact that some members thought these interactions may have been required to be revolutionaries. As Gilbert explained “I remember guiltily confessing to the Bureau member visiting Denver, and feeling my local leadership role was in question: ‘I don’t know why, but I just can’t get myself into having sex with a man.’ He responded with a laugh and said, ‘There’s absolutely no requirement that you do so.’”\textsuperscript{506} Though same-sex encounters were not required, they were thought to be positive experiences for revolutionaries, at least in some collectives.

In \textit{Prairie Fire}, the WUO’s stance on homosexuality was clarified. Writing on the achievements of the women’s movement, the WUO explained its own position when it came to sexual identity and orientation:

\begin{quote}
Lesbianism has been an affirmation of unity and a challenge to the partnership of sexuality and domination. Women have opposed the dominant culture’s treatment
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[504]{Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 193. Gilbert does not state the city for this collective.}
\footnotetext[505]{Weather, “Honky Tonk Women,” 318.}
\footnotetext[506]{Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 140.}
\end{footnotes}
of homosexuals – people who are harassed and assaulted, denied employment and housing, raped and even murdered because they don’t conform to standard sexual roles and morality. Not all gay culture transcends the sexism of US life, but the independence of gay people to live according to their own definitions represent an attack on sexist ideology which subjugates women. We support the right of all people to live according to their sexual preferences without discrimination or fear of reprisals.\textsuperscript{507}

The WUO’s support and solidarity with non-traditional sexual orientations or arrangements was clear. The WUO was inclusive of these identities and held the view that discrimination based on sexual orientation was wrong. Thus, while some members of the WUO definitely struggled with their own homophobia or heterosexism, the closest assessment as to an official position of the organization was that it was in favor of gay rights and supported same-sex acts as inherently revolutionary. The WUO’s view on homosexuality then was not only about being inclusive, but about a new way of thinking of sexual acts: instead of seeing heterosexual sex as only being imbued with patriarchy, as their second wave colleagues may have seen it, the Weatherwomen saw the potential for sex to be transformative and empowering, previewing the sex positive feminist movement.

5.4 Sex Positive Weather

In the 1990s, sex positive feminists argued that sexuality was a positive value in women’s lives, and that sexual pleasure and sexual autonomy were to be embraced and feted. Third wave feminists such as Linda LeMoncheck held that feminism should promote “the kind of sexual agency and self-definition for women that will maximize sexual pleasure and satisfaction,” especially when sexual activity “deviates from the acceptable norm.”\textsuperscript{508} In the third wave

\textsuperscript{507} WUO, \textit{Prairie Fire}, 129.
analysis, sexuality was “a means of transforming the repressive sexual climate of patriarchy.”

As long as sexual encounters were based on respect and mutual desire, instances of sexual expression were to be respected and embraced. Furthermore, as Neeru Tandon put it, “Sex positive feminism centers on the idea that sexual freedom is an essential component of women’s freedom.” In a proto-third wave vein, the WUO also viewed sexuality as something to be recognized, welcomed, and celebrated; sexuality was a part of a full, meaningful existence, and a necessary component of a revolutionary life. Weather members advocated openness toward sexual experimentation and toward relationships that were based on respect and equality.

The sex positivism infused the writing of the Weatherwomen. Cathy Wilkerson, in “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” argued that men and women needed to change from the way they related to one another, and to break down the entrenched gender patterns that defined male/female relationships. She wrote,

> Within the Movement it is crucial that men and women both begin to fight against the vestiges of bourgeois ideology within themselves, to break down existing forms of social relationships. Only by developing forms in which we can express love in non-exploitative and non-competitive ways will men and women develop their full human and revolutionary potential for struggle.

The WUO’s aim was to restructure relationships so that these connections would result in gender equality and mutual admiration; sexual partners were not there for exploitation but were to be respected fully, as individuals with authentic desires.

This aim was not empty rhetoric, as Weather members practiced openness and embraced various life styles within their collectives or affinity groups. As Harold Jacobs explains, WUO

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509 Ibid.
510 Ibid.
512 Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” 7.
affinity groups – made up of collective members who knew each other and had strong bonds of friendship or activism – practiced, respected, and incorporated a variety of lifestyles within their revolutionary practice.\textsuperscript{513} The WUO embraced “a plethora of life styles: some involved communal living, some are made up exclusively of women or men, and sexual and personal relationships within groups run the gamut from fairly straight to highly experimental.”\textsuperscript{514} People were supposed to be accepted for their sexuality, and collectives formed alongside these individual preferences.\textsuperscript{515}

An anonymous Weatherwoman explained the sexually liberated attitude of the WUO as leading to sexual experimentation: “Women who never saw themselves making it with other women began digging each other sexually. People who live together and fight together fuck together. What Weatherman is doing is creating new standards for men and women to relate to. We are trying to make sex non-exploitative as we don’t use our bodies to control situations.”\textsuperscript{516} In other words, Weather respected sexual autonomy. In turn, that respect inspired the formation of other sexual bonds, based on mutual respect and mutual enjoyment. Sex was supposed to be liberating and empowering, and not to be used as a weapon.

Smash monogamy was an important element of the WUO’s sexual agenda. Smash monogamy was a practice that aimed to dismantle monogamous relationships between collective members based on the idea that a couple’s exclusivity could have a controlling effect on the

\textsuperscript{513} Harold Jacobs, “Inside the Weather Machine: Introduction,” 301. Sometimes an affinity group was the core group of a collective, sometimes it was the entire collective. Affinity groups usually participated in actions together, looking out for one another during these actions (running together through police lines, helping one another if injured, etc.). These affinity groups were formed on the basis of “friendship and trust.” See Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 98.
\textsuperscript{515} David Gilbert notes that while WUO collectives would be supportive of various sexual life styles, homophobia was not necessarily eradicated in all members. Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 141.
\textsuperscript{516} A Weatherwoman, “Inside the Weather Machine,” 325.
woman in the relationship and give too much authority to the man. “Honky Tonk Women” advocated that, “monogamous relationships must be broken up – so that the people involved, but especially the women, can become whole people, self-reliant and independent, able to carry out whatever is necessary to the revolution.”

The idea of doing away with traditional monogamy – and the conservative gender norms it entailed for women – was the result of a women’s caucus meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, over the 1969 Labor Day weekend. An anonymous Weatherwomen reported in “Inside the Weather Machine” that,

women spoke about the need to break up monogamous relationships. These relationships are built around weakness and dependency. They’re usually one man/one woman, although varieties spring up. Women identify themselves through their men and usually get introduced as someone’s girl. Monogamous relationships are set up because people see them as the only way to feel secure and loved…both members are into trying to make each other feel safe…they can always hide in each other when the reality becomes too heavy; they can always protect each other from having to fight oppression.

Continuing the assessment that relationships defined women as men’s property, this Weatherwoman equated the breaking up of monogamy with liberation. She also stated that women were socially trained to seek out relationships and to measure their self-worth according to their relationship status. Women “clung to men because they had no other identity.” Breaking out of this pattern was supposed to encourage women to define themselves as their own persons. Through smash monogamy, women would grow into autonomous individuals who developed their own life plans and inclinations according to their own beliefs and perspectives. An anonymous Weatherwoman gave evidence from her own collective as to these positive

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519 Ibid.
520 Ibid.
results of the program: “Destroying the one man/one woman relationship was perhaps the most liberating thing that happened to us. We could speak up at meetings without being uptight…we became self-reliant and don’t have to protect anyone.”

Georgia, a Weatherwoman from the Seattle Collective – and a participant of the Cleveland meeting where the smash monogamy concept was introduced – also commented on the positives she had noted while in Cleveland: “Some couples broke up right there, and the women who had been real quiet before, you know, like women generally are, suddenly they were different. They looked different, talked different. They began to talk up more at meetings, and many of the men were surprised; the women had their own ideas and opinions.” In Georgia’s estimation, smash monogamy had immediate positive results, as women began to act as their own individuals and to assert their agencies. Smash monogamy, then, appealed to some Weather members and served them as a viable tool for self-empowerment.

While there were these positive stories that resulted from smash monogamy, the overall results appeared to be less favorable. As WUO chronicler Ron Jacobs put it, “Doing away with traditional forms of monogamy was not necessarily a bad idea and formed part of a strategy to end male supremacist attitudes in the organization, but the authoritarian manner in which it was undertaken caused much useless dissension and emotional stress.” According to Susan Stern, throughout WUO collectives during the summer of 1969, some couples separated in accordance with the policy, but others refused to put their love on the line for the sake of the revolution and instead left the WUO. In her own Seattle collective, Stern noted that two WUO members named Jay and Beverly refused to give up their relationship in spite of the smash monogamy line, and

521 Ibid., 325.
522 Stern, With the Weathermen, 110-111.
stuck to their exclusivity in spite of pressure to separate. “Weather Letter” noted the same phenomenon, namely that smash monogamy in its demand to separate couples actually hurt the revolution and the membership of the WUO. Thus, this 1970 document explained that the WUO reworked its smash monogamy platform, recognizing that “there are great possibilities for love between two people struggling to be revolutionaries.”

Even though smash monogamy did not work out as a viable policy for the WUO, its goals may have been valuable in and of themselves. Smash monogamy was supposed to encourage sexual liberation and break people free out of sexual repression. Like sex positive feminists of the third wave, the WUO felt that sexual liberation could derive from sexual experimentation. Weatherwoman Stern recalled that “group gropes, homosexuality, autosexuality, or asexuality” were all viewed as viable replacements for “antiquated monogamous relationships.”

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524 Stern, With the Weathermen, 121-122. David Gilbert makes the same assessment as Stern, noting that smash monogamy placed undue pressure on couples to separate. See Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 125.

525 “Weather Letter,” 460. The Weatherwomen writing the collective letter to the women’s movement also noted this outcome: they write that while it was a “battle” to instantiate the smash monogamy policy so as to ensure that “we could be free of the ‘couple form,’ be our own persons,” this policy was fraught by a “lack of realism about what it meant for most women as a demand.” See Women of the Weather Underground, “A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement,” 75.

526 In 2008, sex positive feminist Heather Corinna wrote, “there are no barriers beyond the limits of our own imagination when it comes to rewriting the scripts of our sexual ideals, our individual sexual lives, and what we present to ourselves, our sisters, our daughters.” Heather Corinna, “An Immodest Proposal,” in Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power & A World Without Rape, eds. Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 191. In both cases, these feminists (the WUO and Corinna) are calling for an opening of our minds to a variety of new ways to think sex and women’s sexuality that aren’t limited to just monogamy; both believe that such a rethinking would lead to sexual liberation for women.

527 Stern, With the Weathermen, 122. David Gilbert adds orgies to the list of sexually experimental acts but notes he only attended one. In evaluating such encounters, he notes that “I suspect that while some may have found orgies new and exciting, most just went through the motions to maintain the image of being liberated.” See Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 141.
Weatherman David Gilbert noted that even though this sexual experimentation was often contrived, it created a low affective environment in which people were at ease with non-normative sexual expression:

The new line was that being liberated meant enjoying sex with both women and men and with multiple partners as well...But even if our attempts to be ‘polysexual’ were artificial and often crude, they did help people break through the prevailing sexual repression. It was in that context that two of the men in our collective came out as gay, and it was a pleasure to see their sense of themselves open up and blossom. 528

As such, the WUO allowed for sexual expression and encouraged people to value sex as an integral part of their lives. In “Inside the Weather Machine,” an anonymous Weatherwomen stated that “sex isn’t something to happen isolated from daily work;” WUO members saw sexuality as an integral part of the revolution. 529 Similarly, Carole Vance in writing on the need to move away from the second wave’s condemnation of sex as patriarchal in practice in an early sex positive paper in 1984, states, “Feminism must put forward a politics that resists deprivation and supports pleasure...It must understand that the women to whom it speaks, and those it hopes to each, care deeply about sexual pleasure and displeasure in their daily lives.” 530 Both the WUO and the sex positive movement recognize that sex was not only a key part of women’s regular lives, but also a likely locus of female pleasure and possible female empowerment. 531

Weatherman Mark Rudd sums up smash monogamy as follows: “It was a moment of extreme sexual experimentation. Group sex, homosexuality, casual sex hook-ups were all tried as we attempted to break out of the repression of the past into the revolutionary future.” See Mark Rudd, Underground, 164. When assessing sexual liberation within the WUO, Bernardine Dohrn adds that the WUO “experimented famously with strategies for sexual liberation and lesbian rights.” See Bernardine Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 12. 528 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 140.
531 For an opposing viewpoint, namely that some women felt that they were used by men during the sexual revolution, see Paula Kamen, Young Women Remake the Sexual Revolution (New
5.5 Conclusion: A Vibrant Part of the Women’s Movement

If one idea could best represent some of the key trends of the third wave feminist movement, it may in fact be inclusivity. Building on the flaw of bigoted restrictions found in much of the second wave, the third wave of feminism opened its arms to provide access and support to women of color, lower class women, working women, Third World women, lesbian women, and all other women who did not fit into the typically narrow viewpoint that was predominant, even in the feminist movement, in the 1960’s and 1970’s among the white, straight, middle and upper class American feminist left.

The Weather Underground predated, yet embodied, this inclusive attitude. Though the WUO was flawed in many ways, it did not present itself as an exclusive organization. A commitment to inclusivity was one of the WUO’s most commendable assets, and this commitment is perhaps clearest in the WUO’s approach to feminism. The feminists of the WUO felt that feminism could not exist if it were limited to the concerns of middle and upper class, white, straight women from the United States. The WUO was concerned with the needs of all women.

Following major movements that would come years later in the third wave, the WUO also had open minds about sexuality, akin to the third wave. The WUO attempted to include gay and lesbian members without bigoted judgment, though with mixed results. The WUO also

York: NYU Press, 2000). Kamen cites a 1976 survey where women taking the Pill felt pressured to have sex. See page 99. Also see Rosen, World Split Open, 151-152. For a stance against this viewpoint, see Jane Gerhard, Desiring Revolution, previously cited. There must have been room on this continuum – between these two endpoints – where some women’s context, sexual autonomy and subjectivity allowed for pleasure and empowerment. For example, consider Susan Stern who glori ed in her sexuality and unabashedly admitted that she was “caught up in a sexual frenzy.” Stern, With the Weathermen, 41.

This title (“A Vibrant Part of the Women’s Movement”) is taken from one of Dohrn’s claim that the WUO was a part of the women’s liberation movement. See Bernardine Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 11.
attempted to create a sexual environment that would be liberating, especially as compared to male-dominated monogamous relationships that existed in the patriarchal society of the United States in the 1960’s and 1970’s. This effort, known as “smash monogamy,” was mostly a failure as it did not produce female sexual liberation, but, instead, resulted in frequent break ups and even led to some men using the unattached women to meet their own sexual fantasies. Nevertheless, the all-encompassing impulse was there, rooted firmly in the WUO’s ideology, as the organizations staked for itself a position that was accepting of all sexualities and was interested in furthering personal autonomy for its members.

This inclusivity is perhaps best understood through Weatherman Bill Ayers’ words on how to achieve meaningful social and political change in the world. Reflecting on what the crucial element is when attempting reform, Ayers stated the importance of remembering that, “We are all in this together, all passengers and crew on the same global spaceship.” Embedded in Ayers’ statement is the same inclusive spirit that set the WUO apart from other mainstream feminist groups of the time period. It is the recognition of the idea that accepting one another, celebrating each other’s differences, and treasuring each one’s subjectivities results in a deep abiding unity, which in turn informs and shapes the agenda of what needs to be changed in the world. This solidarity forms the basis of meaningful revolution that addresses the needs of all identity types, because it is predicated on, and responsive to, all of these multiple identities. This all-encompassing attitude is emblematic of the WUO, and it is the quality what sets the WUO apart as a proto-third wave organization.

533 Mark Rudd used women in this way, interpreting smash monogamy as an opportunity for him to sleep around with as many women as possible. He writes of the experience, “my fantasies were being fulfilled: I could have almost any of these beautiful, strong revolutionary women I desired.” See Mark Rudd, *Underground*, 164. Stern also indicts Rudd’s behavior. See Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 176.

534 Bill Ayers, “Revisiting the Weather Underground,” 34.
CONCLUSION

As the explosive blast shook the four-story town house on West Eleventh Street in Greenwich, New York in 1970, Weatherwoman Cathy Wilkerson recalled, “my bare feet felt the old, wood floor vibrating with escalating intensity… I began to sink down, my feet still planted on the thin carpet as it stretched and slid across widening, disjointed gaps.”\footnote{Cathy Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close to the Sun}, 345.} As she literally dropped through the floors disintegrating around her still upright body, Wilkerson was engulfed in a “noisy, moving, three-dimensional swirl” of dislodged “timber and bricks.”\footnote{Ibid., 346.}

Wilkerson survived the blast. In the absolute darkness of dust and debris that ensued, Wilkerson cried out to her friends who had been inside the house. Terry Gold and Diana Oughton had been in the basement. Their bodies were blown to pieces. Wilkerson made her way to the edge of the crater, toward the middle of what was once a house. Calculating that Kathy Boudin, who had been taking a shower, would be within hearing distance if she had survived, Wilkerson called her name. As Kathy emerged naked from the remnants of the bathroom, the two Weatherwomen held hands and blindly groped through the haze and debris, making their way barefooted toward the light filtering from the outside.\footnote{Ibid., 346-347.}

The spectacle created by the explosion, coupled with news reports that characterized the WUO as a violent organization filled with misguided, spoiled rich kids merely acting out their frustrations in a political tantrum, effectively distorted the complex message of the WUO. Moreover, as the WUO became memorialized as a macho, misguided organization, the
contributions of its female members were erased from the historical record.\textsuperscript{538} Like Wilkerson and Boudin’s escape from the destroyed home, the women of the Weather Underground have been portrayed as naked, vulnerable, and even traumatized, barely able to see or speak for themselves.

The preceding chapters have revealed that nothing could have been further from the truth. These Weatherwomen were strong revolutionaries. They were women who knew their own minds, who had a clear vision of what society could and should become, and who knowingly crafted for themselves a destiny that included political protest and militant action. When this action became violent, the Weatherwoman were cognizant of the risks that they were taking. As Diana Oughton told her mother shortly before her death, “It’s the only way, mummy. It’s the only way.”\textsuperscript{539}

This dissertation also has shown that, despite efforts to reduce the WUO to its violent end, in reality, the WUO was a multifaceted organization, peopled by committed activists – women and men – who felt that they needed to act in an unjust world. As Weatherman Bill Ayers put it,

I knew in my heart that the greater crime would be to do nothing, or not enough, as our country attacked, occupied, bombed, and slaughtered… Inaction was not an option. Stepping into history, we would make errors; staying aloof from history would be its own choice and error. And so, believing in the immense power of people to challenge fate and accomplish the unthinkable, we plunged ahead.\textsuperscript{540}

\textsuperscript{538} For example, Thomas Powers dismisses the WUO dismissed at 169-170, in Diana: The Making of a Terrorist (previously cited) and dismisses Diana as a hysterical female at 186. Also see Dan Berger who discusses this dismissal at Outlaws of America, 263.


The WUO indeed charged ahead, and was active underground until the late seventies, fighting for an intricate anti-imperialist and anti-sexist agenda that was responsive to the needs of all peoples.\textsuperscript{541}

The revolution continued above ground as well. WUO supporters and those members who had chosen not to go underground formed the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (PFOC) in 1975. Like its predecessor, the PFOC was dedicated to gender equality and to addressing the problems of oppression brought about by imperialism and racism.\textsuperscript{542} Eventually, this group unraveled, as members intensely disagreed over ideology and action. At a 1976 San Francisco conference, things finally came to a head. As former member Diana Block recalled, “at every workshop, in every caucus meeting, during every plenary, what might have been simple differences of opinion, developed into angry, personalized fights.”\textsuperscript{543} After three days of

\textsuperscript{541} WUO poems, leaflets, public actions, and symbolic bombings all pointed out social injustices, as based in sexism or imperialism. Moreover, the WUO saw imperialism as intricately linked with sexism and male privilege, as imperialism fostered a system that upheld patriarchal values and commodified women. As the WUO put it, “imperialism is sexism.” WUO, \textit{Prairie Fire}, 87. The WUO was active underground until the late seventies, as during that time members started to turn themselves in. For example, Mark Rudd turned himself in to New York City authorities in September of 1970. Other members waited longer, for example, Cathy Wilkerson turned herself in to authorities in New York City in July of 1980, while Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn turned themselves in to authorities in December of 1980. Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 334.

\textsuperscript{542} Underground WUO members were in contact with the PFOC.

\textsuperscript{543} Block, \textit{Arm the Spirit}, 106. Members of the PFOC were already highly stressed and not predisposed to trust one another. This state was due to the fallout from the previous conference, the Hard Times conference set up by the PFOC, where the WUO (which had called the conference but was still underground and not present at the conference) was criticized as a racist organization because conference organizers “had denied a request by the Black caucus to make a formal presentation at a plenary session.” Block, \textit{Arm the Spirit}, 102. In the wake of this criticism, the PFOC conducted a series of investigations as part of a so called “rectification process,” during which members were unfairly attacked (for examples, the efforts of the WUO to support unionization for unskilled workers was interpreted wrongly as support for the persecution of undocumented workers), thrown out of the organization, and generally speaking, “paranoia swirled and people were isolated from all but their closest friends.” Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 234. Jeremy Varon aptly characterizes this period as “acrimonious, even hysterical.” Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 298.
bickering, “it became impossible to continue working together.”544 As a result, the group splintered: one faction formed the Revolutionary Committee of the WUO (RC) and pledged itself to a renewed armed struggle, while another faction became the May 19th Communist Organization (May 19th). Named to honor the birthdays of both Malcolm X and Ho Chi Minh, May 19th forged alliances with revolutionary African and African American liberation groups and saw themselves as a white, feminist group “under the leadership of the Black liberation struggle.”545 The group was active until 1985, by which time most group members had been arrested.546 The leadership of the RC would also be arrested for conspiracy to use explosives against Senator Briggs of California. Nevertheless, the RC did recover, and returned to the PFOC moniker, lasting until the mid 1990’s with a website devoted to its platform still active today.547

544 Block, Arm the Spirit, 106.
545 Berger, Outlaws of America, 239. Ron Jacobs explains that the “raison d’etre lay in supporting the BLA.” Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 88. May 19th most notably helped BLA member Assata Shakur escape from prison on November 2, 1979. Former WUO members and now May 19th members Kathy Boudin and David Gilbert were also involved in the October 20, 1981 Brinks robbery, the purpose of which was to steal money to finance the BLA. In the course of the robbery, two policemen were killed and Gilbert and Boudin were tried and sentenced to 75 years to life and 20 years to life, respectively. Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 88-89.
546 Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 89; Berger, Outlaws of America, 240; Varon, Bringing the War Home, 299.
547 Senator Briggs was considering legislation that would have made it illegal for gay and lesbian individuals to teach in public schools. The RC was retaliating against this proposed initiative. The RC had been infiltrated by the FBI, as the leader of the RC, Van Lydegraf, had invited into the organization his supposed best friend, an FBI agent. Previously, Van Lydegraf insisted on violence and had seen the WUO’s move away from outright violence as a sell out of the revolutionary spirit. RC leadership was arrested November 20, 1977. Ron Jacobs, The Way the Wind Blew, 86-87; Block, Arm the Spirit, 124-125; Jones, A Radical Line, Chapter 10. The PFOC organized around solidarity with South America, Puerto Rican independence, gay liberation and feminism. Berger, Outlaws of America, 240.
Indeed, former WUO members, such as Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, remain politically active, although without their previous militancy. Some, such as Kathy Boudin, regret the violence of their past actions, even as they stand behind their ideology. They continue to fight against imperialism, racism, sexism, and economic inequality in a multitude of ways. Several former WUO members, such as Mike Klonsky and Kathy Boudin, are now members of college faculties; others, such as Naomi Jaffe, are community organizers. Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn organized protests against the War in Iraq and in support of gay rights and prison reform. For them and others, the legacy of the WUO remains as firm. After all, as Ayers states, the WUO acted earnestly and “rose hot and angry, to – in our own terms – smite the warmongers and strike against the race-haters.”

In excavating the history of the Weather Underground, this dissertation has demonstrated the organization was more than just an anti-war, anti-racism group: it was also a militant feminist group, one with a varied and complex type of feminism that has been ignored in the literature up

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548 Some Weather members recant their militancy, but remain committed to social change. For example, see Kathy Boudin, who regrets the crime she committed in the Brinks robbery. Released in 2003, Boudin now works as a law professor at Columbia, lecturing on the intersectionality of race, gender, class and the law. State of New York Division of Parole, “Minutes of Parole Board Hearing: Kathy Boudin,” August 2003, 9, 10. On the other hand, Weatherwoman Laura Whitehorn does not regret any of her militancy, stating that, “I believe that all kinds of resistance are necessary to oppose the consolidation of reactionary forces.” Released in 1999, she has worked as an activist for human rights, prison reform, and healthcare, especially AIDS. Meg Starr, “Laura Whitehorn,” in Enemies of the State (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press and Arm the Spirit, 2002), 8. Other former revolutionaries and WUO members remain active and are organizing for social, political, and economic change. For example, Mike Klonsky is a professor in education and a dedicated community activist at DePaul University in Chicago; Naomi Jaffe operates a feminist community group and foundation (Holding Our Own) and has worked on the Free Mumia campaign. Mike Klonsky, “Mike Klonsky Blog,” http://klonsky.blogspot.com (accessed 13 January 2014); Thompson, A Promise and a Way of Life, 391.
to now. As Weatherman Jeff Jones stated in 1984, the Weatherwomen “were very much a part of [the women’s movement], reading, writing, struggling.” The Weatherwomen fashioned the feminist program of the WUO; they worked alongside supportive male members in doing so. Like other second wave groups of the time period, the WUO critiqued male privilege, attacked sexism, agitated against female gender norms, and condemned the objectification and sexualization of women’s bodies as commodities for male pleasure. Furthermore, the WUO denounced rape as a system of oppression for women, and articulated a vision of a world in which women could live in safety and dignity. The WUO staked out a feminist agenda that aimed to respond to the needs of all women, regardless of class, race, or other social identities. Unlike other second wave organizations that seemed to be concerned only with the needs of the nation’s most privileged women, the WUO advocated inclusivity and an all-encompassing attitude as part of its feminist, political ideology.

Whereas previous scholars have focused on the male leaders of the WUO and their seeming descent into a violent madness that resulted in the deaths of themselves and others, this dissertation has examined the feminist inclinations of the Weatherwomen in particular and of the WUO in general. For the first time, the Weatherwomen have been at the center of the story. Doing so has made visible the organization’s dedication to feminism. This dissertation has shown that the Weatherwomen, joined by many male members of the WUO, fashioned a feminist agenda that resembled that of second wave groups, and also previewed the inclusive positions of third wave feminists. As such, the WUO’s feminism disrupts the waves metaphor used for the feminist movement, as it embodies elements from each wave.

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551 The Reminiscences of Jeff Jones, 89.
Moreover, the preceding chapters have highlighted the importance Weatherwoman placed on militancy, including violent action, as the appropriate recourse for feminist revolution. Highly critical of the gender norms that proscribed the lives of women, the WUO also was dedicated to using militancy to break through them, and the organization was firmly committed to leading a revolution to create a socialist, feminist world. Not unlike the move from nonviolence towards a more militant Black Power Movement, the Weatherwomen did not think that the fundamental problems of oppression, including but not limited to patriarchy, were being addressed by non-militant methods. For the WUO, change required concrete action. Oppression, in the WUO’s estimation, especially when looking at the hardest hit persons (which were often lower class women of color or Third World women), was so harsh and so violent that to not address it immediately and effectively amounted to allowing vast and severe suffering to continue unchecked among innocent people. In coming to this realization, the WUO was, as Bernardine Dohrn put it, “waking up.”\(^{552}\) This awakening out of complacency demanded direction action. This was no less true for anti-sexist campaigns as it was for anything else. To do nothing was the true act of violence. There was no choice but to fight. Being a feminist, bringing about an end to sexism and imperialism, required being militant as well.

The Weatherwomen fought for a new world during the turbulent sixties and seventies. Their vision would not permit them to pick out one wrong to address at the expense of another; as militant feminists, the “Weatherwomen wanted it all.”\(^ {553}\) They acted earnestly, and were dedicated to their aims. Visionary revolutionaries, the Weatherwomen were essentially feminist as they imagined a world that recognized women’s innate right to define themselves and shape

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\(^{552}\) Dohrn, “When Hope and History Rhyme,” 2.

\(^{553}\) Ibid., 12.
their own life plans autonomously. As they put it, “Women can be everything we want this time around.”

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