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Pearls and Politics: White Clubwomen's Activism in the Postwar South

Kelly E. Liles
University of Southern Mississippi

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Pearls and Politics: White Clubwomen's Activism in the Postwar South

by

Kelly E. Liles

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Approved by

Rebecca A. Tuuri, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser
Professor of History

Kyle F. Zelner, Ph.D., Chair
Department of History

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

Abstract

Elite white women's organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the American Association of University Women, provide a unique perspective on history. These political women's clubs, which range from liberal to conservative, are discussed in the context of how they responded to the postwar era of McCarthyism and the Civil Rights Movement. These women wanted to become respected political actors; however, they understood this was only achieved in a manner that was considered acceptable for women. This study begins by analyzing who these women were, including their political inclinations and motivations and also by addressing how these organizations challenged the women's club model and overcame being labeled as politically un-active housewives. This study also addresses the liberal and conservative opinions of these three groups and how their political positions affected them during the McCarthy era, a time that challenged the ability of women to become political actors. Finally this study focuses on these three groups and their responses to the Civil Rights Movement, in particular Freedom Summer. Reacting in an acceptable way during this movement meant that these women were unable to challenge the status quo without consequences, especially in the South. In conclusion this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these groups and their sentiment, expressions, and political motivation during two influential periods of history.

Key words: League of Women Voters, LWV, Daughters of the American Revolution, DAR, American Association of University Women, AAUW, civil rights, McCarthy era

Dedication

For my parents and my sister.

Thank you for your endless enthusiasm and encouragement. I am incredibly grateful to have your support in all of my academic endeavors.

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I owe my thesis adviser, Dr. Rebecca Tuuri, many thanks for her incredible motivation. You consistently reminded me of the importance of undergraduate research and that these women were important to study. I could have never completed this project without your wisdom and support. You challenged me to be a better and more diligent worker and for that I am thankful. Thank you.

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List of Abbreviations

AAUW	American Association of University Women
CAW	Congress of American Women
DAR	Daughters of the American Revolution
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
GFWC	General Federation of Women's Clubs
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
LWV	League of Women Voters
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NACW	National Association of College Women
NWCCR	National Women's Committee on Civil Rights
UN	United Nations
WEC	Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WSP	Women Strike for Peace
WUUN	Women United for the United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

White women of the postwar era through the early 1960s are rarely studied, and according to many scholars, these women need to be studied. Many scholars believe that the historiography of the McCarthy era and the Civil Rights Movement will be incomplete until stories of white women's activism are developed to the same extent as male activists.¹ It could also be argued that the historiography is not complete until women's voices, black and white, activist and segregationist, are explored. Further, it is important to study all types of women because without their perspective, a significant portion of society is left out of the historiography. In terms of the Civil Rights Movement, scholar Wini Breines, believes there should be more accounts about women of different races and sympathies towards the Civil Rights Movement because these women "are more likely to explore the subjective ramifications of gender and sex and race [could] provide deeper, and more painful, insights into social-movement politics."² Breines continues by adding that studying white women during times when they played only a small role in social movements can help explain how consequent women's social movements of the 1970s developed.³

In terms of the historiography, analyses of women's motivations as political activists have often been limited. As historian Alisa Y. Harrison claims, activism of southern white women of the 1960s usually is only depicted through their relationships with black women. Black women, on the other hand, were inspired to be political

¹ Joan C. Browning, "Invisible Revolutionaries: White Women in Civil Rights Historiography." *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 186.

² Wini Breines, "'Sixties Stories' Silence: White Feminism, Black Feminism, Black Power." *NWSA Journal* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 105.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

activists by the struggle of their maternal ancestors, according to scholars. As a result of these simplistic explanations of women's activist influences, Harrison claims that the full context of white women's political activism during social movements has not been explored.⁴

The analysis of women's political activism extends beyond the work of historians. In a political psychology study, Elizabeth R. Cole, Alyssa N. Zucker, and Joan M. Ostrove, discovered a link between activism and political inclination of women activists of the 1960s. Further, women who were involved in activism tended to have "higher measures of leftist political orientation and political efficacy, reported greater current political participation" than women who were not involved in political activist groups.⁵ Further the study claims that women, who were involved in the 1960s social movements, whether in a liberal or conservative capacity, were much more inclined to be participants of the women's movement of the 1970s.⁶

Specifically, white women's organizations are important to study because of their contribution to social movements. According to one political psychology study, "white women organizations [of the 1960s] were concerned with membership in community organizations and women's issues" and "activists were more significantly and more likely than nonparticipants to belong to community organizations and organizations

⁴ Alisa Y. Harrison, "Women and Girls' Activism in 1960s Southwest Georgia: Rethinking History and Historiography," in *Women Shaping the South: Creating and Confronting Change*, ed. Angela Boswell and Judith N. McArthur (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 234-235.

⁵ Elizabeth R. Cole, Alyssa N. Zucker and Joan M. Ostrove, "Political Participation and Feminist Consciousness Among Women Activists of the 1960s," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 2 (June 1998): 349.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 354.

concerned with women's issues."⁷ In other words, organizational involvement has been linked to direct political activism in women, which is important to this thesis, as the three organizations studied were very politically active during the 1960s. Further, for these women, being organizationally active also meant being political active during later social movements.

Additionally, Cole et al. addressed the types of roles generally given to women during social movements and the typical categories of women's activism. This study interviewed women who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement. To begin, the study claims that generally women were limited in the types of roles given to them during these movements. According to many of these interviews, these women faced limitations in their power, authority, and direct participation during the movement. Many of the women claimed that they were "relegated to second-class status by mostly male leadership, who assigned the women to menial, behind-the-scenes tasks."⁸ Darren E. Sherkat and T. Jean Blocker also discussed this sort of limitation of women's participation during the Civil Rights Movement. They claim:

women were fearful of participation in the high-risk Freedom Summer crusade, or were not encouraged or may have even been denied participation because of movement's leaders fears about women's safety or propriety in the movement and were asked to perform menial tasks.⁹

⁷ Abigail J. Stewart, Isis H. Settles and Nicholas J.G. Winter, "Women and the Social Movements of the 1960s: Activists, Engaged Observers, and Nonparticipants." *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (March 1998): 75.

⁸ Cole et al., 353.

⁹ Darren E. Sherkat and T. Jean Blocker, "The Political Development of Sixties Activists: Identifying the Influence of Class, Gender, and Socialization on Protest Participation," *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (March 1994): 826.

Further white women during social movements have typically been described in terms of three categories of activism. Stewart et al. defined these categories of activism as “those with indifference to social movements; those extremely interested in social movements and read about the ideas it promoted and felt sympathetic with its goals and activities; and some were active or indirectly opposed to these movements.”¹⁰ These interdisciplinary studies are important to this historical study and its analysis of white women’s organizations political activism. Understanding the motivations and limitations of white women presented from an interdisciplinary framework identifies some of the perspectives of the three organizations that will be discussed.

Part I: Purpose of Study

This study focuses on white, educated, and middle-class women. More specifically, this study analyzes the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), American Association of University Women (AAUW), and the League of Women Voters (LWV) from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. These groups were chosen over other contemporary women’s political groups because they are under researched, despite their longevity. These groups were also chosen because of their political influence during this period of study, and yet they also they differ significantly from each other. The DAR is traditionally a much more conservative women’s organization. With its founding in the early 1890s, its membership and policies were much more defined. Both the AAUW and the LWV were founded in the 1920s, directly after women achieved the vote, and both have an underlying concern for social justice. All of these groups; however, responded

¹⁰ Stewart et al., 67.

differently in their goals and reflections on both Cold War and civil rights tension. This study will also focus on southerners, with the primary research drawn from the records, minutes, and manuscripts of southern branches of these elite organizations.

It is important to note that while this study attempts to understand social movements and politics from the 1950s and 1960s through the perspective of white, southern, middle-class women, it does not mean to undermine the value of working class and black women's contributions to activism. As can be assumed, working class women and black women had vastly different responses and motivations to these social movements, and but in the context of this study they will not be discussed.

It should also be noted that what defines liberal opinion and conservative opinion changes through the periods discussed in this study. In the context of these women during the McCarthy period, the LWV and AAUW were defined as liberal organizations because of their support of the United Nations. The DAR, on the other hand, was defined as a conservative organization during the McCarthy period because of its firm opposition to the United Nations. These definitions of liberal and conservative do change slightly during the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, in chapter three these three groups are defined more by what they say about civil rights as opposed to liberal vs. conservative terms.

The three organizations discussed in this study wanted to become respected political organizations; however, they understood this was only achieved in a way that was considered acceptable for women. In other words, white women could and wanted to be organizationally active, yet they could only achieve this if they were conscious of the political climate and avoided politically sensitive topics. This chapter addresses the way

in which the LWV, DAR, and AAUW overcame not only the traditional women's club model but also the challenges to their respectability as political actors. The LWV, DAR, and AAUW's efforts to confront these two challenges shaped their political style as well as the ways in which the women of these organizations responded to the McCarthy era and the Civil Rights Movement.

Part II: Political Organizations Remaking the Women's Club Model

World War II brought middle class women into the workforce. At the end of the war, however, many women were pushed back into the home. With this return, middle class women began joining clubs at an increasing rate. One such club was the General Federation of Women's Clubs, or GFWC, founded in 1890 that consisted of women's clubs in local communities whose mission was to encourage women's volunteerism in their communities. The GFWC is important to discuss in that not only did it differ in organizational structure from the LWV, DAR, and AAUW, but it also differed in the type of members to whom it appealed. It was considered to be a much more social organization than a political organization.

However the GFWC, like many women's social groups, shifted into a more political role after WWII. As scholar Abby Scher writes, WWII was paramount in "renewing women's commitment to public welfare and their communities."¹¹ This commitment to public welfare not only encouraged participation in GFWC, but also renewed interests in well-established women's organizations such as the LWV, DAR,

¹¹ Abby Scher, "Cold War on the Home Front: Middle Class Women's Politics in the 1950s" (Ph. D diss., New School for Social Research, 1995), 47.

and AAUW. In other words, this renewed interest in political women's organizations such as the LWV, DAR, and AAUW during the postwar era conflicted with the more volunteer minded and less politically active GFWC. Further, the war instilled a passion for middle class women to participate in their community in a new political manner.

Middle class women of political women's organizations began to see a shift in the context of the work they were doing. While women's clubs still concerned themselves with issues pertaining to women and children, the LWV, DAR, and AAUW attempted to create a much more organized and political voice. These women's political organizations redefined the club model and as these clubs grew in mission and purpose, women's clubs too found their voice in politics. In other words, clubs shifted from community issues to more political and nationally focused issues based on the influence of the political women's organizations. As Kara D. Ellis writes, southern women "progressed from missionary society, to temperance society, and then to other women's clubs" that focused on the politics of the 1960s and their own political activism.¹²

Further, according to Scher, the LWV redefined the "the traditional women's club pattern of members educating themselves by listening to experts" and became the "experts" themselves, as opposed to the GFWC who relied on outside experts to educate its members on issues. In other words, the LWV's efforts to be self-reliant and by remaking the women's club model proved promising and it even caused its membership to triple in size after WWII.¹³

¹² Kara D. Ellis, "Assuming Responsibility: The Little Rock Branch of the American Association of University Women and the Little Rock School Desegregation Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2009), 7.

¹³ Scher, 1.

While the General Federation of Women's Clubs was originally less politically involved than the LWV, DAR, and AAUW, its influence in shaping women's politics is still important to discuss. Women's clubs provided an outlet for young mothers to better their communities at a grassroots level, which is the similarity that connects it to the organizations studied in this paper. Yet women's clubs, in particular the GFWC, are also important to discuss because the GFWC illustrates the model for how women were supposed to be organizationally active. The LWV, DAR, and AAUW, on the other hand, demonstrate the politically active model for women's organizations, which in turn challenged the traditional club model for women.

The impact of the political women's organizations influenced women's clubs to change their model and become lobbyists. In other words, the women of the political women's organizations demonstrated that women could have an impact and role in politics. Consequently, the two models for women's organizations arose: the more traditional (and less political) model based on the GFWC and the newer model (rooted in politics) based on the LWV, DAR, and AAUW. As the postwar era progressed into the 1950s, women's clubs became influential lobbyists and community builders. According to an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which discussed both politically minded women's organizations and women's clubs, by 1951 almost five million women were clubwomen and there were about 19,000 women's clubs. Beside the sheer number of these women's clubs, their subtle influence over policy is a reason of their importance. As the *Post* reporter claimed, "very often when they appear to be running a cake sale, a rummage sale, or a show, they are in reality building a new library, promoting a sewage-

disposal plant or thwarting delinquency.”¹⁴ Ellison describes these women as the doers of the community not only for their public service for because these women were the force behind social services. These women were generous donors of scholarships, cared for the orphans of their own community as well as globally, but also these women created projects that would greatly impact their community.

Following this postwar model of women’s activism in clubs, Raffaella Baritono has defined white women’s work under the umbrella of “sisterhood” and “motherhood.” In other words, these organizations were organizing under motherly type roles such as “running nurseries, schools, shelters for the poor and unmarried mothers, juvenile reform institutions.”¹⁵ The term “sisterhood,” which Baritono defines as one that “contributed to crossing national frontiers, creating new alliances, and a new imagined community,” idealizes the concept of international cooperation between women.¹⁶ Thus women in the post-war era were strengthening their political activism through ‘motherly’ and ‘sisterly’ type roles.

Baritono specifically discusses the LWV, AAUW, and the DAR particularly during the postwar era, claiming that these groups “developed within a dialectic tension between appeals for sisterhood and a process of nationalization that continually called upon them to affirm their loyalty to the nation.”¹⁷ Baritono claims the DAR chose to reaffirm its loyalty by exalting “motherhood, and encouraging the up-bringing of children

¹⁴ Jerome Ellison, “Is the U.S. Really Run by Women?” *Saturday Evening Post* 223, no. 47 (May 19, 1951): 40.

¹⁵ Raffaella Baritono, “An Ideology of Sisterhood?: American Women’s Movements Between Nationalism and Transnationalism.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 2 (June 2008): 186.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

as members of the political community.”¹⁸ In terms of the LWV and the AAUW, Baritono claims these groups choose a different route by exalting “sisterhood” and these groups “shared Eleanor Roosevelt’s idea of world citizenship, and promoted initiatives to encourage women not only to educate their children to democracy but also to take an interest in international affairs.”¹⁹

Not only did women’s organizations grow tremendously following WWII, they also became more politically polarized in that much more conservative groups like the DAR were competing with more liberal groups such as the LWV and the AAUW. As Scher writes, “many of the younger generation had to make a choice between them, while their mothers had easily maintained membership in both the DAR and the LWV.”²⁰ This polarization, full-fledged in the post-war era prompted the groups to respond to both the Cold War and civil rights differently.

Part III: The Challenges Housewives Presented to Political Women

Women’s clubs and the remaking of the traditional women’s club model were important to helping women find their political voices. However, the reality was that many women were politically un-active housewives during the 1950s and 1960s. As one historian states, the 1950s were “perceived as an era of domestic bliss” with fertility rates doubling and the rise of the suburban lifestyle. Women became politically silenced and immersed themselves in their own domesticity and aimed for “ever-higher levels of

¹⁸ Ibid., 189.

¹⁹ Ibid., 195.

²⁰ Scher, 136.

consumership and cleanliness.”²¹ These housewives maintained their home by supporting their husbands and of course by raising their children. This sole purpose of what it meant to be a woman during the 1950s propelled their societal and debutante role in politics and its reemergence during the McCarthy Era and later, the Civil Rights Movement.

In other words, housewives illustrate a major challenge in how women were perceived in society and what was considered the cultural norm for women of this period. Also the housewife persona created a stigma for women who wanted to be politically involved. Women in political organizations faced barriers of credibility and authoritative ability in politics when the women’s role was primarily viewed to be in the home. The women of the three organizations discussed in this study had to overcome obstacles of what was expected of them to instill policies and have political opinions on issues such as international policy and civil rights. Further, the housewife persona presented challenges to politically minded women because it undermined women’s political organizations’ attempts at gaining respectability as political actors.

An article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, published in 1962 titled “The American Woman,” illustrates the social context of what it meant to be the stereotypical housewife. Unlike the women of the LWV, DAR, and AAUW, the majority of the women cited in “The American Woman” were not involved in political women’s organizations and very few had more than a high school education. While they were similar in that they were middle class women, there were few similarities between the women studied in this article and the women studied in this thesis. However, it is important to study this

²¹ Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement across Three Decades of Change* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 14.

stereotype of the housewife. The article was based on a survey of 2,300 women that attempted to create a portrait of the American woman. Based on the results of the survey the American woman of the 1950s was approximately:

35 years old, happily married for 14 years to only one husband, and has slightly more than three years of high-school education. She has two children and wants one more. She is a full time housewife and mother; she is not employed outside the home. She is happier than her mother was, and she gets more fun out of life than her parents did.²²

Despite the fact that of the 2,300 women surveyed in this study only 1,813 of them were married, this article pushed forward the notion of the woman as a wife and mother. The study claimed, “practically every one of these married women said that the chief purpose of her life was to be either a good mother or a good wife.”²³ Any role in politics was downplayed. Women’s roles were to keep the family together and organized, provide stability and dependability to both their children and husband, and remain involved in local community projects.²⁴ Other women of this study even devalued their personal worth outside the context of the home, claiming “the female doesn’t really expect a lot from life. She’s here as someone’s keeper—her husband’s and her children’s.”²⁵ Another woman added to this concept stating “a woman needs a master-slave relationship whether it’s husband and wife, or boss-secretary. This shows she’s needed and useful. Women who ask for equality with men are fighting nature; they wouldn’t be happy if they had it. It’s simply biological.”²⁶

²² George Gallup and Evan Hill, “The American Woman” *Saturday Evening Post* 235, no. 46 (December 22, 1962): 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

Some of the most interesting aspects of this study were the comments women made about their own lifestyle. One Texas woman claimed, “I’m my own boss. If I don’t want to do the dishes or the laundry right now, I can do them later. My only deadline is when my husband comes home. I’m much more free than when I was single and working. A married woman has it made.”²⁷ This woman may have been right that during the 1960s, life was easier for married women than working women. (Although this ignores the housewife’s financial dependency and vulnerability.) In the 1960s, working women experienced a large pay gap, sexual harassment, and unfair working conditions in the workforce.

While this study in the *Saturday Evening Post* portrayed the housewife, it mentioned little about women’s involvement in clubs and organizations. A little more than half of the women surveyed were members of an organization and if they were members, they tended to be in women’s clubs that “ranged from the auxiliaries, church guilds, and sororities through garden groups and volunteers to poker clubs and sewing circles.”²⁸ In terms of women’s involvement in politics, the article gave little credit to women’s political influence and importance. It did however, give women the credit in public policy claiming that women “fought to end illiteracy, child labor and venereal disease, to shorten the work week for women, and for pure foods and drugs.”²⁹ The article even cited some of the LWV’s involvement in politics crediting it for “pioneering in nonpartisan get-out-the-vote campaigns.”³⁰ However the study limited the work of

²⁷ Ibid., 168.

²⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁹ Ibid., 32.

³⁰ Ibid.

these women's political organizations in that its "desires [were] largely oriented toward child and family."³¹

As mentioned above, some housewives did join women's clubs and organizations. Further, Mrs. Hiriam C. Houghton, President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, even believed local women's clubs were created out of a need for intellectual stimulation for housewives. Houghton claimed that:

housewives need the mature social contacts women's clubs offer, as companions, small children are frequently amusing and always beloved, but they are not intellectually stimulating. Neither is an unrelieved regimen of laundry, cookery, and dishwashing.³²

Scher interviewed Judy Salzer, a Norfolk LWV member, who claimed that women joined organizations during the post-war era to escape the domesticity of housework. As Salzer claimed, "I think there were not that many distractions, there were not many choices. Women were mostly home, not working. They mostly had young children. They wanted to get out of the house and exercise their brains."³³

In terms of women's involvement in politics, "The American Woman" briefly discussed the role of women's organization referencing President Kennedy who claimed, "women have brought into public affairs great sensitivity to public need and opposition to selfish and corrupt practices."³⁴ Along with Kennedy's testament about the influence of women in politics, the article referenced the statements of the LWV President, who claimed: "it seems that much more than a coincidence that the period of great strides in social legislation, in education, and in working together internationally has occurred

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ellison, 41.

³³ Scher, 122.

³⁴ Gallup, 32.

during the years the women have had the vote.”³⁵ However, the role of women’s political organizations in larger issues such as international affairs was shadowed by some of the sentiments of the women interviewed in the study. One woman claimed that women do not have a place in international politics, stating “I let my husband take care of the big things such as who’s going to be secretary of the UN and whether we’ll get to the moon first. I take care of the little things such as what club we’ll join, and where the children will go to college.”³⁶

While this study is important in illustrating the cultural identity of housewives of the 1950s and 1960s, it fails to address other voices of women during this time period. This study surveyed unmarried and highly educated women; however, there is little commentary about these women and how their life differed from married women, their role in politics, and general commentary about their happiness as unmarried women. Further this article painted a picture of what its readers viewed as the ideal woman and not the whole perspective of woman of the 1950s and 1960s.

Part IV: The League of Women Voters

The LWV was established during the 1920s under the leadership of suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt. The first president of the LWV was Maud Wood Park and since its establishment the LWV has been first and foremost a political women’s organization.

Scher indicates that the purpose of the LWV to be both the:

vision of settlement pioneer Jane Adams, who proposed that women become involved in the social reconstruction of their communities without necessarily taking on a party membership, with the vision of suffrage leader Carrie Chapman

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Catt, who wanted the League to promote women assuming responsibilities of holding office, making policies, and joining political parties.³⁷

This organization uses, what Cott refers to as, “pressure politics” to both advance public education and lobbying efforts to encourage bills. In other words, pressure politics meant that the LWV understood it would achieve its goals better by intense lobbying of bills and the formation of lobbying committees as opposed to fighting for its members to run for political office.³⁸

The LWV’s primary function is to educate. The structure of the LWV is composed of national officers with both a national board and executive committee. While the local leagues are primarily the major players in implementing projects and policies, the whole of the League meets every two years at the national convention to discuss national policies and initiatives. This is also when the LWV enacts its supreme policy-making body to propose changes to its constitution as well as deciding upon what the LWV calls its National Current Agenda for the organization.³⁹

A major aspect of the LWV, and creditably why it is so respected is its emphasis on nonpartisanship. The LWV values its commitment to take no single stand on issues. While individual members can choose to be members of a political party and even take on leadership roles within that party, officers in the LWV whether on the national, state, or local level are not permitted to run for political office or be an active party worker.⁴⁰

³⁷ Scher, 35.

³⁸ Nany F. Cott, “Across the Great Divide: Women in Politics Before and After 1920.” In *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 167.

³⁹ Warner Oliver, “The League of Frightened Women.” *Saturday Evening Post* 227, no. 17 (October 1954): 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Nonpartisanship, to the LWV, also includes understanding every single aspect of an issue before proceeding with action. In an attempt to understand an issue, the LWV seeks to “reduce confusion on any plane, high or low, and to this end it labors with diligence and dedication at the national, state, and local levels.”⁴¹ The LWV trusts its members to be “active and informed participants in the democratic processes.”⁴²

As mentioned previously the national League was divided into sub-units for each state and even further for local district leagues. In 1954, there were over 959 LWV branches in the nation and, for the most part, these branches worked at a local level, establishing projects that were beneficial to the needs of its community.⁴³ The local branches implement the most changes and policies. In other words, the local branches are the hands and feet of the LWV. Susan Ware describes the local branches as a “corps of committed volunteers whose contributions to the functioning of government, especially on the local level, were vital to the democratic process in the US.”⁴⁴ The impact of the organizational structure of the LWV was that by 1954 it had about 130,000 members and organized chapters in each state, as well as the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and Alaska.⁴⁵ Further, the LWV’s focus on being community and locally driven means that the LWV’s were deeply involved in the issues of their communities. The growth and spread of its branches also indicates that the LWV was a well-respected organization and welcomed in many types of communities.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴² Susan Ware, “American Women in the 1950s: Nonpartisan Politics and Women’s Politicization.” In *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 282.

⁴³ Oliver, 97.

⁴⁴ Ware, 281.

⁴⁵ Oliver, 33.

The LWV is also unique to study because of the demographics of its members: its members were generally well supported by their spouses and its members came from affluent families. To begin, the husband of the League's national president in 1954, claimed that "I take my politics from my wife because she has time to study these things."⁴⁶ This is important because it illustrates that generally men had confidence in LWV members to be educated and able to make political decisions. These women also gained this confidence because they typically came from affluent families. Further in 1956, the median family income for its members was approximately \$9,300 (twice that of the US average median family income).⁴⁷

The LWV, according to Ware, appealed to and was composed of white, educated, middle-class women. By the 1950s, the LWV had integrated its branches; however, it was unusual for black women to join the LWV. As such the LWV shared a similar demographic of political women's organization of its time: white and middle class. The demographic for women's organizations was "high access to education, marriage to white-collar or professional workers, and concentration in the most desirable neighborhoods or small towns."⁴⁸

The LWV believed it was much more than just a "ladies sewing society."⁴⁹ In fact the LWV was well respected by many politicians not only for its tenacity and dedication but also for "squeezing any issue dry of its pros and cons, and to examine these as

⁴⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁷ Ware, 284.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 288-290.

⁴⁹ Oliver, 97.

intelligently and unemotionally as it can.”⁵⁰ These efforts of fully understanding political issues allowed the LWV to spearhead political items such as the:

Food and Drug Administration Laws of the 1930s, the improvement of the merit system in government, the entry of the displaced persons, the reorganization of Congress, civilian control of atomic energy, reciprocal-trade agreements, and the mutual security program and the United Nations.⁵¹

Progressing into the late 1950s and early 1960s, some women were beginning to challenge the role they had been given. According to an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post*, some women’s groups such as the League of Women Voters began to show interest in politics and encouraged publication with intelligent information about political candidates and their qualifications. The LWV is important to study because it gave women a platform for their political voice. As one editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* claimed, the LWV provided “the best insurance imaginable for domestic tranquility: no longer do women feel impelled to climb on statues burn effigies or march around in bloomers as ways of pointing up their potential as voters.”⁵² In other words, according to editorial author Ralph Knight, women did not need to become overwhelmingly visible (and disruptive) as they fought for equality. Instead, through the LWV, women activists could be more level-headed in their activism and could also help educate women away from “vot[ing] for a candidate simply because he has dimples or a fatherly look, even if his platform is no more substantial than custard pudding.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁵¹ Ibid., 33.

⁵² Ralph Knight, ed, “Women Voters Have Made Our Politics Very, Very Different.” *Saturday Evening Post* 233, no. 9 (August 1960): 10.

⁵³ Ibid.

While Knight is complementing the LWV, he does so by using sexist assumptions about women's political behavior. His editorial indicates just some of the hurdles political women's organizations had to contend with while they did their work. Knight wrote about these women as though they were hysterical figures that voted for a candidate without logic or reason. Yet, the LWV challenged this role and made women more knowledgeable about the candidate and their platform. The "civic-mindedness" of LWV women and their consistency to challenge women's roles in politics is what makes them important to this study.

The LWV is also important to study due to its contribution to history. In 1950, the LWV donated its records to the Library of Congress. This donation consisted of two-tons of papers with about two million items of records and according to Dr. Louise Young, the Library of Congress curator at the time, it has been said to be one of the largest manuscript collections at the library. When speaking at a LWV conference, Young even reiterated the importance of the LWV and its donations by saying,

There hasn't been a moment in your history when you weren't engaged with the most important issues of that particular time. There isn't any kind of scholar who is interested in the record of human activity who will not find your records useful. They are already doing it. They are clamoring to get them on the shelves.⁵⁴

The impact of the LWV is not only important for this study but for subsequent studies. Historian, Susan Ware, believes that the LWV is also important to study because of the little attention that has been given to women's organizations and their impacts in the field of history and political science. Ware also claims that because this organization is titled as a "self-interested political group," it receives little attention in the realm of

⁵⁴ Oliver, 33.

“mainstream political activity.”⁵⁵ According to Ware, these women are also important to study because of the impact of the local levels on the policies of their community. For example, the LWV were “some of the first involved in the desegregation battle,” and its members “studied such issues as public housing and the differences between district and at-large elections soon found themselves deeply involved not only in city politics but in civil rights.”⁵⁶

Part V: The Daughters of the American Revolution

The Daughters of the American Revolution, DAR, was founded in 1890 in response to women’s rejection in trying to gain memberships to the Sons of the American Revolution. It was organized by white educated women and according to Carolyn Strange, is considered “one of the largest women’s descent societies and one of the country’s most prominent women’s organizations.”⁵⁷ Throughout much of its early beginnings, the DAR focused intensely on the pedigree of its membership. However, it overcame the obscurity of being a pedigree organization and found its voice in politics. Just five years after its founding the DAR proved they were “women of action, not ladies of leisure, which earned them wider respect” as it stepped into a more political frame and context.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ware, 282.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁵⁷ Carolyn Strange, “Sisterhood of Blood: The Will to Descend and the Formation of the Daughters of the American Revolution,” *Journal of Women’s History* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

Consequently, the DAR's early concentration on pedigree influenced and shaped how it became an elitist organization. As Strange points out, "white lineal societies imagined the nation as a kind of extended family, held together by the blood tie of kinship."⁵⁹ Further, these white lineal organizations believed in the "ideas of good blood and a kind of genealogical determinism, while they also claimed to stand up for American values and democracy."⁶⁰ These ideas of patriotism and democracy supported by the "good blood" created an interesting paradox when answering the question of race in its members.

The DAR excluded women that challenged the whiteness of its membership. It denied membership to African American, Jewish, and Indian women, despite if these women shared lineage to patriots of the revolutionary era. There is little mention as to what other ethnic groups the DAR denied membership to; however, it is unlikely the DAR extend its membership to white women of foreign ethnic groups, as Strange writes, the DAR "regarded foreign-born immigrants as the greatest threat to national integrity."⁶¹ This exclusion was crucial to the DAR remaining an elitist organization; surpassing historical importance in maintaining racial exclusion. Local chapters could also deny membership to otherwise qualified members based on what the DAR women believed were the "dubious morals, unconventional tastes, or unpleasant dispositions" of non native-born, white women.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁶¹ Ibid., 119.

⁶² Ibid., 115.

Not only did the DAR face criticism of elitism in terms of opposing membership to African American, Indian, or Jewish women, the members “had reason to question the quality of their patriotic blood five generations removed from the revolutionary era.”⁶³ In other words, its own members were critiqued on the accuracy of their own patriotic lineage. Many critiqued the DAR and its members in that their members could not prove their own heritage, yet it was denying membership to women of minority ethnic groups who could trace their heritage. Further, the DAR’s definition of “acceptability” was based off of its own prejudiced definitions of class and race.⁶⁴ To become a member of the DAR, women had to prove their genealogy in a documented form that illustrates that their “ancestors had fought on the side of the victors in the American Revolution.”⁶⁵ The process itself was strenuous and taxing and many women who applied were not accepted. As Scher reports, “one in five applicants were rejected for invalid claims.”⁶⁶

The DAR’s history as an elitist organization for white native-born women links to its identification as a conservative women’s organization. Its growth in conservative style politics can be attributed back to the appeal it made to middle-class white women. Unlike the other organization discussed it was not formed or followed the pursuit of the Women’s Suffrage Movement and it is not a woman’s rights organizations.⁶⁷ The DAR nearly doubled in size between 1910 and 1932, which illustrates the influence of the DAR’s conservative tactics that made it attractive to women and helped it to increase its

⁶³ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁶⁵ Scher, 138.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Strange, 106.

membership. In 1948, the DAR was considered one of the largest and most conservative groups with about 158,000 members.⁶⁸

According to historian Nancy Cott, the DAR during the 1920s and the 1930s was “loudly anticommunist and enthusiastic in red-baiting, which advocated military preparedness.”⁶⁹ Strange adds to this by claiming, that the DAR moved into right-wing extremism and that “its move into ultra-conservative politics, including red-baiting, the persecution of pacifists, and even, for some members, participation in the Ku Klux Klan, was not a decisive break from its first decade of liberal progressivism.”⁷⁰ One example of the DAR’s liberal progressive efforts in its first decade was its dedication to its nation-building agenda and educating immigrants on American history. Further, the DAR “sponsored English instruction and civics classes for immigrants of diverse cultures” in an effort to “weave immigrants into the American fabric.”⁷¹ On one hand, the DAR wanted to strengthen patriotism in immigrants through peaceful efforts such as “teaching the foreign-born about American history and political values.”⁷² However, the DAR also believed in preserving patriotism by rejecting those immigrants whom challenged its ideals of patriotism. In this sense, the DAR justified its members’ roles in red-baiting, the persecution of pacifists, and their participation in the Ku Klux Klan.

In line with its ultra-conservative method, the DAR was heavily scrutinized and criticized for two major racial controversies. The first occurred in 1939 when the DAR National Board refused Marian Anderson, a black renowned singer, to perform at its

⁶⁸ Scher, 137.

⁶⁹ Cott, 165.

⁷⁰ Strange, 120.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 118.

concert hall. The board claimed that allowing Anderson to perform violated the terms of the lease of the concert hall. The backlash of this decision caused Eleanor Roosevelt to resign from the DAR. Roosevelt even made amends with Anderson for the racism the DAR showed towards her by arranging for Anderson to sing at the Lincoln Memorial.⁷³

Another DAR racial controversy was in 1945 when again it refused a black performer, this time Hazel Scott, to perform at its concert hall.⁷⁴ This time a Congresswoman and DAR member, Clare Booth Luce, choose to speak out against the DAR. Luce resigned from the DAR and publicly exposed its racism in a radio address. In her radio address, Luce compared the racism of the actions of the DAR to being no different than Hitler's persecution of Jews, claiming that:

like every other intelligent citizen of our country, a DAR knows that all theories of blood or race which hold that they make one group of people naturally superior to another are wrong, both on material and spiritual grounds.⁷⁵

Luce believed that the DAR did indeed understand that Hitler's belief in a superior race was wrong; yet she still called it out as a racist organization because of its refusal to let Scott perform. In this sense, Luce not only addressed the racism of the DAR but the hypocrisy within the organization as well.

The DAR is important not only for this study but for further examinations of white middle class women because it demonstrates a very conservative political opinion. The ultra-elitism and ultra-conservatism of its members is what separates it from both the LWV and the AAUW. But it is also separated in terms of its age. As an older

⁷³ Scher, 139.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 143.

organization that did not find its political voice from the suffrage movement, the DAR shows a different reaction both in civil rights but also to international security.

Part VI: The American Association of University Women

The AAUW's members were from a younger generation than those of the LWV and the DAR. Its members had to be graduates of accredited collegiate institutions and many of the women who qualified to be a member became one immediately following graduation. The AAUW evolved from the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in 1921 and it sought to address the needs specific to women college graduates.⁷⁶ The AAUW is similar to the LWV in that it rose out of the suffrage movement. However the AAUW is very different from the LWV both in form and function. The AAUW focused on education and is not as politically expressive as the LWV, yet during the 1950s and 1960s it tended to side with the LWV on international issues.

The AAUW, like the other organizations discussed in this study, remains primarily racially exclusive. Its members were middle-class, white, and highly educated women. While black collegiate alumnae women were never openly excluded in the bylaws from the AAUW, few black women ever joined the AAUW. Instead black collegiate alumnae created their own racially excluded organization, called the National Association of College Women (NACW).⁷⁷ The purpose of the NACW included the same purpose of the AAUW except black collegiate women also sought to create "better

⁷⁶ Cott, 164.

⁷⁷ Janice Leone, "Integrating the American Association of University Women, 1946-1949," *The Historian* 51, no. 3 (May 1989): 436.

conditions of contact between white and black college women.”⁷⁸ AAUW General Director of the 1930s and 1940s, Kathryn McHale, even advised branch membership directors to exclude black women from membership instructing members to steer black applicants to the NACW instead.⁷⁹

Yet, despite some of these efforts to keep the AAUW segregated, the AAUW still had to address integration within its branches. In 1946 Mary Church Terrell, a well-educated and prominent black woman who would later be a cofounder of the National Association of Colored Women, submitted her membership to the Washington D.C. Branch of the AAUW. The Washington D.C. Branch, composed of entirely all white women at the time, refused her request of membership, which caused both the regional office and National Board to interfere.⁸⁰ The National Board of the AAUW addressed the branch stating that on a national level it would “reaffirm its established membership policy that all women who meet the educational requirements are entitled to be members” and that the branch’s by-laws could not deny membership on the “discrimination on racial, religious, or political grounds.”⁸¹

The Washington D.C Branch did not accept the proclamation of this address very willingly, though, and claimed that the National Board had overstepped its authority and the branch “adopted a resolution reserving the right to establish the policies of the branch in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the membership” which allowed the local branch the right to deny or accept membership based on its own discretion.⁸² In

⁷⁸ Cott, 164.

⁷⁹ Leone, 436.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 423.

⁸¹ Ibid., 429-30.

⁸² Ibid., 430.

response the National President, Althea Hottel “issued an ultimatum to the D.C branch:” update its bylaws or “exclude themselves from the AAUW.”⁸³ Hottel’s statement to the D.C Branch created a three-year dispute about the local branches right of autonomy and even lead to a District Court case. D.C Branch members claimed that they were more concerned with autonomy issue as opposed to the race issue with branch members stating “no connection existed between the autonomy issues and racial prejudice.”⁸⁴ However this statement seems much more like an excuse in their attempt to cover their racial prejudices.

Regardless, the Washington D.C Branch of the AAUW eventually disbanded, as it could not accept the National Board’s decision of integration and claimed its departure was not because of racial basis. Upon reviewing personal letters of members who were on the anti-integration side, historian Janice Leone found that the decision to disband had everything to do with race. The letters of AAUW Member Anna Kelton Wiley who claimed “segregation is the only method we have of protection from intermarriage of the races” revealed that “without a doubt that her fear of racial integration was the real issue.”⁸⁵

The result of this three-year integration battle established the AAUW, or at least the National Board, as a tolerant and progressive women’s political organization “with a clear membership policy intended to prohibit racial discrimination within its own ranks.”⁸⁶ Yet, previous years of denying membership to black women and referring black

⁸³ Ibid., 431.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 433.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 434.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 426.

women to other organizations reinforced the AAUW as a racially exclusive organization. However, just because the AAUW was considered a racially exclusive organization did not mean that it fought for segregation within schools. In fact the Little Rock Arkansas Branch of the AAUW worked with the Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, or WEC, to stop Little Rock school board from closing the schools in protest to integration in the fall of 1958.

The Little Rock AAUW feared how publically supporting integration would affect its membership and therefore the Little Rock AAUW supported the WEC and integration in subtle ways. To begin the branch conducted a study how school closures would affect the local economy. The branch also supported teachers who had been fired without warning prior to the school closing and encouraged the community to speak out against segregation in schools.⁸⁷ The Little Rock AAUW was very adamant in supporting the teachers because some of these teachers were also AAUW members. The Little Rock branch believed that one reason these women were fired was due to the accusations that these women were of “communist influence.”⁸⁸ In support the Little Rock AAUW petitioned for the teachers to be given either their jobs back or be given a reason for why they were fired.⁸⁹ The branch also received donations from its members and the community to support the teachers as they transitioned to other employment.⁹⁰

The Little Rock AAUW case illustrates just one of the conflicting reasons white women’s organizations supported or opposed civil rights issues. As Ellis writes, the

⁸⁷ Ellis, 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 95.

“tendency of women’s groups to maintain respectability applied to white society in general, as the silent southern moderates only spoke when segregationist activities threatened their community image” and in the case of Little Rock, the AAUW supported integration for economic reasons to “restore their city’s image.”⁹¹

The LWV, DAR, and AAUW represent three unique political voices of white educated middle class women during the Cold War and Civil Rights. At the helm of McCarthyism and redbaiting, the DAR became much more conservative in its politics while the LWV and the AAUW shifted towards a more liberal approach. While these groups differed vastly on the issues of the United Nations and civil rights, each illustrate the way women found their political voice.

In terms of civil rights, historian Jacqueline Jones claims that “most southern white women’s associations pursued their own interests, removed and aloof from the support preferred by the blacks of both sexes.”⁹² White women did not just remain removed from the interest of blacks but Jones claims that the “incremental everyday work of these well-to-do white women seemed to reinforce inequities and injustices throughout the region.”⁹³ Jones, believes that these inequalities between black and white women were most pronounced in the home due to the fact that white women were the ones who “daily exploited their black domestic servants.”⁹⁴ In turn, Jones claims these inequalities

⁹¹ Ellis, 16.

⁹² Jacqueline Jones, “The Political Implications of Black and White Women’s Work in the South, 1890-1965.” In *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 115.

⁹³ Jones, 116.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

hindered the effective organization of interracialism in that these women and their black domestic servants “reinforced a social division of labor that had originated in slavery.”⁹⁵

Scher, on the other hand had a different opinion claiming that, “in the racial conflict after WWII, many white women’s clubs felt forced to make a choice between white supremacy and desegregation.”⁹⁶ While both nationally and locally the DAR leaned towards this white supremacy, the national LWV and the AAUW choose a different route: one that encouraged the elite status of white women organization to embrace diversity and tolerance. The LWV, DAR, and AAUW challenged the status quo by being more politically active and by refusing to follow the traditional clubwomen model and by refuting the housewife persona. While women of these organizations challenged the status quo and found their own political voice, they aimed to do so in a way that was acceptable for white elite women especially during the McCarthy era and the Civil Rights Movement.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Scher, 292.

Chapter 2: Unifying on the United Nations and the Cost of Communism

The divide between liberal and conservative women organizations during the Cold War is important in understanding how these organizations became political actors in a societally-acceptable way. To begin, the division between the liberal and conservative women's organizations made it difficult for women to be unified in issues of women's rights. Conservative groups were undermining the value of liberal groups and their liberal ideas of peace style politics by accusing them of being communists. Liberal groups were undermining conservative groups by accusing these groups of being unsympathetic to ideas of international and later interracial cooperation.

The Red Scare began in the 1920s following the end of WWI and it was marked by a period of general anticommunist fear. Following the Bolshevik Revolution and the end of World War II, the United States began a campaign that resulted from what historian Harriet Alonso has called a "raging government campaign to uncover communist traitors."⁹⁷ These "traitors" were often not communists, but citizens who had opposed WWI or those who believed that the US would benefit from societal reforms. The Red Scare waned somewhat during the Great Depression and World War II, but according to historian Daniel Horowitz, the 'red-baiting' of the 1930s and 1940s still marked a period of "government investigations," which "resulted in the dismissal of

⁹⁷ Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 157.

employees and the destruction of people's futures, without procedures to protect civil liberties that the Constitution supposedly guaranteed."⁹⁸

For instance, in 1940 Congress passed the Alien Registration Act, also known as the Smith Act, which made organizations that attempted to overthrow the US government with force or violence an unlawful act. The Smith Act, sought to eliminate the Communist party in the US as well as socialist-inclined organizations that discussed the overthrow of the capitalist system of the US.⁹⁹ After the end of World War II, the long period of the Cold War identified by tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union and heightened 'red-baiting,' began. Although the Smith Act was passed during FDR's presidency, Truman furthered the Cold War in 1947 by calling for the investigation and questioning into the loyalty of more than three million US government employees.¹⁰⁰

McCarthyism expanded on the ideas of the Red Scare, yet; it was defined more by the level of hysteria and fear of the 1950s. The red baiting of the Cold War was at its height when, in 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy produced a list of two hundred plus government officials McCarthy claimed were communists. The result of McCarthy's claim was what Alonso's calls "hysteria" on a whole new level. In little time, the Red Scare transformed into the era of McCarthyism which was epitomized by "a series of nonstop hearings before the House Un-American Activities Committee, or HUAC."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Daniel Horowitz. *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 123.

⁹⁹ Alonso, 158.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

While HUAC was established in 1938 in the House of Representatives, the hearings were most prominent from 1947-1954. By the late 1950s to the 1960s HUAC hearings were much less frequent; however, HUAC was not completely abolished until 1975.¹⁰² Further, Horowitz calls this new period of ‘red-baiting’ as the “recklessness of McCarthyism” that “ruined the lives of many Communists, ex-Communists, suspected Communists, fellow travelers, and Popular Front participants.”¹⁰³ This period of McCarthyism also marks the beginning of the atomic bomb and the nuclear arms race.¹⁰⁴ This period was also defined by what was known as subversive activity or subversives, who were defined as individuals suspected of being communists or inclined to communist ideals.

Part I: Liberal Women During the Red Scare and McCarthyism

McCarthyism and ‘red-baiting’ traversed the political sphere. Liberal women and women’s groups, faced the wrath of McCarthyism as well. Conservatives during the Red Scare, and later the McCarthyism era, targeted liberal women for their stance on peace style politics and their support for the United Nations. In the postwar era of the 1920s, women’s peace organizations grew in large numbers. However, due to this growth the U.S. War Department attacked these women on all fronts, accusing them of “internationalism, socialism, and subversion.”¹⁰⁵ Conservatives and red-baiting government officials feared that women’s liberal, peace organizations would be

¹⁰² Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Racial Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 123.

¹⁰³ Horowitz, 124.

¹⁰⁴ Alonso, 157.

¹⁰⁵ Swerdlow, 34.

detrimental to national security as these women would “not only vote against the war, but would also raise sons who would refuse to fight.”¹⁰⁶

Influential suffragette, Carrie Chapman Catt, also founder of the LWV, was labeled subversive despite her moderate stance on many issues. In 1923 Catt, refuted this label against her by stating that the opponents of peace were also the same people who had opposed women’s suffrage. Catt claimed that “the little group who seem to have got this entire country hoodooed on the question of peace is almost the same groups that held woman suffrage back in Washington for ten or fifteen years” and is also the “very man who called all the suffragists Red.”¹⁰⁷ Not only did Catt make this statement against those who opposed the women’s peace organizations, she also organized the largest women’s peace group in 1924 that consisted of eleven different women’s organizations and that called for the prevention of war.¹⁰⁸

Historian Amy Swerdlow believes the origin of labeling women’s peace organizations as subversive began when former suffragists opposed Secretary of War John D. Weeks and his campaign to earn a Senate seat. Weeks, in his retaliation to this opposition, created a “spider web chart” that “diagrammed the ways in which women’s organizations and individual women’s leaders had spun a web of international Communist conspiracy to enmesh ordinary women and undermine national security.”¹⁰⁹ The chart included various women’s organizations including both the LWV and the AAUW. The result of the diagram was disastrous to many women groups in that it linked

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 34.

their members to subversive activities. According to Swerdlow, the expected effect of the spider web chart was to “sow suspicion and distrust among women who had previously worked together, to isolate the woman’s peace movement from so-called patriotic groups such as the DAR, and to move the entire female peace constituency to the right.”¹¹⁰ In fact the chart did accomplish some these goals; however, it neither discredited nor disbanded the LWV or the AAUW.

The Red Scare and the McCarthy era challenged liberal women’s organizations and their political influence. Alonso claims that redbaiting tactics threatened the work of groups like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, or WILPF, as well as other women’s peace organizations.¹¹¹ Further, Horowitz claims that HUAC would use “gendered language” towards women and that HUAC would often label “strong women as betrayers, with union men too weak to stop their disloyal behavior.”¹¹² Similarly, the Congress of American Women, or CAW, founded in 1946 was another women’s organizations that linked the issue of peace to women’s rights and social justice. While CAW was founded by an international coalition of women who were pro-Soviet, CAW served in the US by focusing its purpose to women’s rights.¹¹³ Swerdlow calls CAW “pro-Soviet” because it originated from the “old Communist left” that “initiated a series of popular front peace organizations calling for friendly relations between the East and West.”¹¹⁴ While CAW was composed of some Communist members, many of its members were “liberals who were willing to work with the [Communist] party on a

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹¹¹ Alonso, 159.

¹¹² Horowitz, 140.

¹¹³ Swerdlow, 37.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

minimum coalition platform.”¹¹⁵ Further, CAW worked to fight issues such as inflation, racism, and inequalities in equal pay and equal work.¹¹⁶

According to Horowitz, the red-baiting of CAW, is another good example of how the Red Scare challenged women’s activism, “drying up middle class support for trade unions, especially militant ones, turning most unions against radical activity by women, and scaring many in the rank and file away from commitment to progressive causes.”¹¹⁷

HUAC claimed that CAW was:

just another Communist hoax specifically designed to ensnare idealistically minded but politically gullible women and a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current ‘peace’ campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States and democratic nations generally, in order to render them hapless in the face of the communist drive for world conquest.¹¹⁸

Yet, the majority of the work CAW was actually focusing on was women’s rights and supporting the United Nations.¹¹⁹ The organization traced its roots back to Susan B. Anthony and the Suffrage Movement. However they were still put under the fire of Communist claims with HUAC calling CAW “one of the most potentially dangerous of the many active communist fronts.”¹²⁰ The challenges of the Red Scare were most severe for CAW and it even resulted in its disbandment in 1950.

In 1938 HUAC accused WILPF of being a “left bourgeois organization” with a “duty to facilitate and hasten by nonviolent methods the social transformation which would permit the inauguration of a new system, founded on the needs of a community

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Horowitz, 113.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 149.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹¹⁹ Alonso, 187.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 189.

and not on profit.”¹²¹ In other words, HUAC was claiming that WILPF was too socialist in its methods and linked that this influence drew from the Communist party. Of course, WILPF claimed differently saying “we must insist that because we are espousing a cause which the Communists are also working on, does not mean that we are communists, fellow-travelers, communist-infiltrated, etc.”¹²²

Another women’s peace organization was Women Strike for Peace, or WSP. This group was founded in 1961, after white middle class women staged a national peace protest. What is interesting about WSP is its identification as a group of ‘concerned housewives’ who were calling for the end of the arms race.¹²³ While WSP did not face the pressures of ‘red-baiting’ like so many women’s organization of 1920s and 1950s, it did trace its roots back to the postwar era as women who “built upon the celebration of domesticity and motherhood to challenge militarist definitions of national interest and male control of foreign policy and the atom bomb.”¹²⁴ WSP sought to counter “male world leaders” who, in its opinion, were “recklessly threatening the health and life of future generations.” These women saw the actions of who they called ‘male world leaders’ in opposition to the feminine ideal of women and their “prescribed role of nurturance and life preservation.”¹²⁵

Helen Laville defined both the LWV and the AAUW as hesitant “Cold War warriors,” who saw themselves as “leaders of women of the world, and their own

¹²¹ Ibid., 169.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Swerdlow, 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 234.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

organizations as the ideal.”¹²⁶ It was the LWV and AAUW’s liberal political stance that afforded these groups this perception of themselves. Both the LWV and the AAUW believed they carried an “international responsibility” to “educate and advise women of other nations who lacked their experience and expertise.”¹²⁷

The AAUW in particular, challenged the hysteria of redbaiting and communist accusations of the McCarthy era. The AAUW challenged book bans and censorship on college campuses claiming that “many people confuse teaching about communism with indoctrination.”¹²⁸ The AAUW also linked communism to be no different in mission from the tactics of McCarthyism or what it called the “methods of witch-hunting.”

Further in 1953, the AAUW National Board claimed that:

We believe that to attempt to fight communism by using totalitarian techniques is not only ineffectual but actually aids the communist enemies of democracy by undermining our free institutions. We do not have to choose between communist infiltration and methods of witch-hunting, character assassination and demagoguery. Both are evil; both are threats to freedom and democracy. We repudiate them both.¹²⁹

Much like the AAUW, the LWV was accused of subversive activity in the 1920s and later in the 1950s. To begin, conservatives attacked the LWV in the 1920s calling its members “Reds” who advocated for the “socialization of the US government.”¹³⁰

Conservatives believed the LWV’s members were socialists because “they backed federal aid to education, federal aid for women’s and children’s health programs, and military cutbacks that their opponents charged would leave the US underprepared to face the

¹²⁶ Helen LaVille, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women’s Organizations*. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 55, 111.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹³⁰ Scher, 152.

communist threat.”¹³¹ The LWV, like many liberal women’s organizations of the 1920s, were persistent in its efforts, despite conservatives calling these efforts unpopular ideas. The same accusations it received in the 1920s reemerged in the 1950s and it is believed that the accusers of the 1920s; such as the US Department of Defense, the DAR, and the American Legion, were the same accusers of the 1950s.¹³²

In response to some of these accusations of subversive activities, the LWV made reforms in its political organization in the 1950s. As Scher writes, “the League began sidestepping stands on foreign policy issues in particular and provoked in some members the fear of speaking up.”¹³³ This fear instilled in members is important because the LWV was generally a “safe haven for discussion.”¹³⁴ The LWV also took a closer look at its members. A LWV official claimed that “communists actually took over the leadership of several leagues” because “they were generally most active members” and “highly trained in how to take over an organization.”¹³⁵ In response to this acknowledgement, the LWV did not ban communist members outright; however, it encouraged chapters to select its representatives and leaders from women who have been established with the League for several years and who had a respectable political background.¹³⁶

Part II: Conservative Women During the Red Scare and McCarthyism

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 117.

¹³³ Ibid., 97.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 115.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

In opposition to liberal women and their respective women's organizations that focused on peace efforts of international politics, conservative women's groups claimed a very different stance. According to historian Michelle M. Nickerson, these women joined as a collective group in "support of military preparedness after WWI."¹³⁷ Further, these conservative women groups used ideas of patriotism to create a framework of "nationalism and antiradicalism as the natural outgrowths of women's innate tendencies to protect" which in turn created a "wave of female-sponsored counter subversive activity."¹³⁸ For the most part, these women came from backgrounds that historian Mary C. Brennan defines as "middle class, married, white, reasonably intelligent, and well educated."¹³⁹ During the Red Scare of the post World War I era and well into the era of McCarthyism, these women contributed to 'red-baiting' tactics like "spying on disloyal citizens in their communities" and through the DAR and the American Legion Auxiliary "formed special national defense committees that functioned very much like the wartime intelligence agencies by training women to become experts on the American left."¹⁴⁰

Conservative women's groups like the DAR asserted their authority by showcasing the otherness of liberal women's groups. These conservative groups defined their purpose as patriotic societies, which indicate these groups viewed their liberal opponents who advocated for "labor, progressive, and peace movements [as] unpatriotic

¹³⁷ Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Mary C Brennan. *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism*. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 35.

¹⁴⁰ Nickerson, 3.

or un-American.”¹⁴¹ It is with this language that these conservative ‘patriotic’ groups used supposed superiority over liberal groups and reacted with the development of “many of the radical watching techniques and institutions that came to characterize female political culture on the right.”¹⁴² Nickerson, also discusses the logic behind conservative women’s “superiority” pointing out that these women believed they were a “more enlightened” and “smarter, more informed” example of middle-class female citizenship.¹⁴³ In reality, though, these women degraded women’s peace organizations and sought to diminish the political value of these organizations by labeling them as communists.

These women challenged and degraded liberal women’s associations by becoming what they believed were “experts on subversion.” Their efforts to become experts on subversion included researching the communist opinion and then linking this opinion to the movement of liberal women’s association.¹⁴⁴ They also used radical watching techniques such as spying and keeping a detailed “file of meeting notes and literature from their opponents.”¹⁴⁵ Conservative women were motivated in their approach in challenging liberal women’s associations. As Brennan points out, for conservative women “the situation was simple-fight communism or risk your children’s lives and the American way of life.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Brennan, 32.

These conservative women's groups became contributors to the hysteria of the McCarthy era and claimed that women, who advocated for peace, reform, and even radicalism, should be considered a "monolithic threat that menaced the nation from the outside in, through aliens who took advantage of the status of progressive women."¹⁴⁷ It is most intriguing to analyze the explanation given by these women as to why they were attacking other women. In their opinion, the conservative approach to international politics and combatting communism meant establishing an "appropriate female relationship with an appropriate use of state power."¹⁴⁸ Brennan contributes the reasoning behind their personal attacks due to a "fear of communism" that "compelled these women out of their homes and into the public arena to try and educate others about the seriousness of the situation."¹⁴⁹

It was this fear that encouraged conservative women to "frighten, challenge, or cajole other women to join the crusade."¹⁵⁰ Yet in doing so they diminished the value of a collective women's movement and its liberal methods. As Nickerson claims these conservative groups, "enhanced the power of the national security state to pry into people's lives, which they saw as acceptable, but diminished the power of the welfare state, which they judged to be dangerous."¹⁵¹ Conservative women believed it was their duty to their country to expose subversive activity through all means possible. The "red threat" of communism was a domestic issue to these women and "any economic or

¹⁴⁷ Nickerson, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Brennan, 64.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Nickerson, 7.

political party, any cultural practice, any social norm that diverged from what they considered ‘the American way’ could be perceived as communistic.”¹⁵²

The redbaiting of the Red Scare of the 1920s and its reemergence with McCarthyism in the 1950s drove these conservative women to act and respond. It not only brought these women out of the domesticity of the home into community activity, but it also encouraged conservative women to strengthen their political voice and the formation of a strong political right-wing movement.¹⁵³ Conservative women supported women’s place in the home, therefore when threats of communism were linked to the home and family they believed it their responsibility to “be involved in the hunt for spies and fellow travelers.”¹⁵⁴ They also combatted communism by joining clubs; writing letters, newsletters, books, and articles; and even running for political office.¹⁵⁵

Part III: The Response to the United Nations

Women’s organizations faced difficulties in determining how to handle communistic threats, but these organizations also faced the impacts of supporting or not supporting the United Nations. Based on the attitudes of the Red Scare and the McCarthy era, liberal women’s organizations sought to support the United Nations and its mission of international cooperation. These liberal women believed they had a “special role in promoting international understanding through the UN.”¹⁵⁶ Conservative women’s organizations, in keeping with their fear of communism and attempts to stomp out any

¹⁵² Brennan, 35-6.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ LaVille, *Cold War Women*, 96.

system that challenged the ‘American way,’ strongly opposed the United Nations. As Nickerson writes, conservative women viewed the UN as the “antithesis of family” and these women believed that the UN “aimed to realize a communist vision of global egalitarianism by eliminating national distinctiveness.”¹⁵⁷

To begin, at a national level both the LWV and the AAUW wanted to strengthen the United States’ relationship to the United Nations.¹⁵⁸ These two groups did view themselves as “liberal internationalists” who hoped the UN would create a “new world order” that would improve life for all peoples and also serve as an outlet for countries to “mediate disputes and create conditions for peace.”¹⁵⁹ Both the LWV and the AAUW believed in the ideals of the UN. The LWV expressed its support of the UN by writing a passionate letter to President Truman advocating for his approval of the United Nations.¹⁶⁰ The AAUW expressed its support by issuing a response in their *Journal of the AAUW* in 1945. In the journal the AAUW claimed that:

for many years the AAUW had endorsed international co-operation as the basic principle of our foreign policy and now for the first time in world history there is a chance of putting that principle into effective operation.¹⁶¹

The LWV and the AAUW even joined liberal women’s coalitions such as the Women United for the United Nations, or WUUN, organized in 1951 to gain support of the United Nations and its efforts in promoting international cooperation. During the

¹⁵⁷ Nickerson, 27-8.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Radical Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 2.

See also Scher, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Lynn, 103.

¹⁶⁰ LaVille, *Cold War Women*, 98.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

1950s it sought to educate others about the United Nations through what historian Jennifer De Forest calls “non-threatening methods.”¹⁶² WWUN defined its activities as non-threatening because it aimed to avoid controversial issues as well as “marches, strikes, and boycotts” using mainly educational initiatives to further its cause.¹⁶³ Further, De Forest calls WUUN, primarily an “ideological coalition” of women who supported both “liberal internationalism and negotiation as a means to resolving interstate conflicts.”¹⁶⁴

The more conservative, DAR, on the other hand, strongly opposed the UN. The DAR’s distrust of the UN can be traced back to the UN’s inception and has remained fairly consistent. The DAR even made a resolution in 1946 that both supported a system to create world order but also criticized the UN for creating an unwanted union of the US and other nations.¹⁶⁵ The DAR strongly opposed the UN because it believed the UN would “lead us down the road of international friendship” and the world government would “supersede the U.S. Constitution.”¹⁶⁶ Further these women feared that “UN leaders would undermine federal and state constitutions in the name of international peace.”¹⁶⁷ In its most outlandish claims, the DAR claimed it distrusted the UN because it believed the UN was created by the Soviet Union, “who conceived and created it for her

¹⁶² Jennifer De Forest, “Women United for the United Nations: US Women Advocating for Collective Security in the Cold War.” *Women’s History Review* 14, no. 1 (2005): 71.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁵ Martha Strayer. *The D.A.R.: An Informal History* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1958), 97.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶⁷ Brennan, 71.

own evil purposes.”¹⁶⁸ With the 1946 DAR Resolution and the paranoia of the outbreak of the Cold War, the DAR has remained “deeply suspicious of the idea of collective security.”¹⁶⁹ Mrs. James Luca, the executive secretary of the DAR, even claimed in February of 1953 that the DAR sought to “expose the fallacies inherent in the world-government idea” claiming that the UN and similar organizations that sought to unite people of the world was an “absurd idea.”¹⁷⁰

In response to the DAR’s 1946 Resolution, both the LWV and AAUW responded by continuing their support for the UN. This support for the UN did not waver as the Cold War broke out either when “conservatives denounced the UN as ineffective and detrimental.”¹⁷¹ As a result though both the LWV and AAUW received backlash and criticism from conservatives and became targets of conservative political attacks.

In response the AAUW, “attempted to maintain a balance between defending civil liberties, especially academic freedom, and a commitment to anti-communism.”¹⁷² The AAUW believed that the UN “could create world co-operations” and it advised that the “US lead by example by improving and strengthening the practice of democracy at home, especially in terms of civil rights.”¹⁷³ The AAUW was also supportive of the UN because many of the UN special committee members were also AAUW members.¹⁷⁴

Dorothy Kenyon, US delegate to the UN Sub Commission on the Status of Women, was

¹⁶⁸ Strayer, 113.

¹⁶⁹ Patricia C. Walls, “Defending Their Liberties: Women’s Organizations During the McCarthy Era” (Ph. D. diss., University of Maryland, 1994), 70.

¹⁷⁰ Brennan, 71.

¹⁷¹ Walls, 68.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷³ LaVille, *Cold War Women*, 102.

¹⁷⁴ Walls, 69.

one such AAUW member who faced criticism and charges of subversion. Kenyon, in fact was one of the government officials Senator McCarthy turned in to HUAC for investigation of subversive activities.¹⁷⁵

The AAUW also challenged conservative's perspective of book bans. Many conservative women's groups called for book bans and the "removing books that seemed too subversive"¹⁷⁶ The AAUW challenged this perspective claiming that this censorship of the American education system went against its national resolutions on academic freedom. Further in 1941, the AAUW Board of Directors passed a resolution in support of the "free selection of school textbooks in response to appeals from local branches requiring assistance against groups that sought to remove certain textbooks from the curriculum as subversive."¹⁷⁷ One Californian AAUW member even stated, "censorship of books is treason against freedom of thought."¹⁷⁸ The consensus among AAUW women was clear in their opposition to censorship in books; yet they differed in their opinion on requiring teachers to take loyalty oaths.¹⁷⁹ The AAUW both on a national and local scale stood firm in its opposition of censored education. In 1952, the AAUW even published material for members that would assist them in handling the "effects of anti-communist and conservative attacks on the educational system."¹⁸⁰

The LWV and its national board challenged attacks conservative women made about the UN and what conservatives called the "failure of its collective measures and

¹⁷⁵ LaVille, *Cold War Women*, 103.

¹⁷⁶ Walls, 133.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

disorganization in the Security Council.”¹⁸¹ Of course, doing so only increased the number of red-baiting attacks on the LWV and its members. A LWV national board member claimed that “the league was not immune to the McCarthy period when so many groups decided that the wisest course of action was to stay as far away as possible from anything having to do with the Soviet Union.”¹⁸² Regardless the LWV increased its membership in the 1950s and continued its “extensive campaign defending the United Nations against right wing attacks and defending civil liberties.”¹⁸³

In many ways, the LWV supported the UN not just because of its belief in the “importance of economic growth and international stability” but also as a way to “combat conservatives’ increasing attacks.”¹⁸⁴ The LWV sought to counter not only conservative attacks but also oppose Communism in general by supporting the “Marshall Plan, the Four Point development program in Asia, and the United Nations.”¹⁸⁵ Conservative women believed that collective measures could not be successful and the Security Council of the UN was too disorganized to be successful. However, the LWV refuted conservative women’s beliefs and continually supported the UN. The LWV even harnessed a campaign called the Freedom Agenda that defended civil liberties and challenged conservative women who attacked the LWV and labeled its members as subversive.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Scher, 116.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-6.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

Part IV: Subversion in the South

According to Nickerson, conservative women linked the UN and civil rights as “twin threats that worked in tandem to force mixing across racial lines and international boundaries.”¹⁸⁷ It was typical for liberal women to support not only international institutions like the UN but also issues such as interracial cooperation. Conservative women responded differently and were distrusting of integration and UN educational programs, which they believed were “furtive attempts to simultaneously dissolve racial and national identity.”¹⁸⁸ The South represents this juxtaposition between international cooperation and interracial cooperation quite well. Further, the conservative South and the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission illustrate how conservative groups linked communism to civil rights.

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was a state agency organized from 1956-1977 and formed to supposedly protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, particularly from federal encroachment. The agency claimed to protect state’s rights, but its main goal was to disrupt the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. One such way the agency accomplished this was by linking civil rights with communism. Both individuals and organizations were labeled as “subversive” meaning that they were identified as a “communist or communist-front organization.”¹⁸⁹ Mississippi’s political leaders, such as Senator Eastland, began linking communism and civil rights in the early 1960s. According to white leadership, the term “subversive” was used much more loosely

¹⁸⁷ Nickerson, 28.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States’ Rights* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 87.

and they identified a “subversive” as “anyone or any organization that had anything to do with black Mississippians’ civil rights struggles.”¹⁹⁰

White public opinion in Mississippi followed the agency’s lead in linking civil rights with communism. A 1963 editorial furthered this idea arguing that the communist party stood for “justice, rights, and equality for the negro” not because communists were sympathetic towards civil rights but because communists viewed civil rights as a method to “mobilize both colored and white for proletarian revolution and the overthrow of our government.”¹⁹¹ Of course, there was little proof that did indeed connect civil rights activists to communism other than sheer speculation. Nonetheless, the effect it had to instill fear, speculation, and hatred towards civil rights activists in the South was just as influential.

The tone that Mississippi’s political elite used to describe civil rights as propaganda of communists in actuality was, as one historian describes, the “most effective means for Mississippi’s white leadership to undermine the credibility of the people who were involved in the civil rights activities in the state.”¹⁹² Like Eastland, Governor Barnett also made public remarks that civil rights were “all part of the world communist conspiracy to divide and conquer our country from within.”¹⁹³ And undermine they did as public opinion began believing that blacks were being coerced and deceived by communists in believing in civil rights. Some editorials even discussed the probability that Martin Luther King Jr., while not a communist himself, was creating a

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Earl Lively Jr, *The Invasion of Mississippi* (Belmont, Massachusetts: American Opinion, 1963),19.

¹⁹² Katagiri, 88.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

circle of support from communists.¹⁹⁴ There were even false accusations made against the NAACP that the members were composed of “Communists, Communist fronters, fellow travelers, socialists, self-styled “Marxists” –all shades of collectivists, from rosy pink to scarlet red” and other racial groups are forming by the “party as part of its interlocking networks of fronts.”¹⁹⁵

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission employed various methods to discover those suspect of subversive activities. Of course to the agency anyone mentioning civil rights was considered subversive, but to add to its pseudo credibility it ordered searches and investigative programs on “individuals whose utterances or actions indicate they should be watched with suspicion on future racial attitudes.”¹⁹⁶

Part V: From International Cooperation to Interracial Cooperation

In terms of race and international politics, Mississippi political leaders were already drawing connections to civil rights and communism as mentioned previously. However, the DAR had long experienced controversy in how it handled race and international politics. Eleanor Roosevelt left the DAR when the organization refused to allow a black performer, Marian Anderson, to sing at Constitution Hall. As such Roosevelt became a public dissident of the DAR and was quickly labeled as a “radical in the Red Network.”¹⁹⁷ In other words, Roosevelt left the DAR because of race inequality and shortly after she was labeled a communist for her work and support with the UN. The

¹⁹⁴ Lively, 26.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹⁶ Katagiri, 89.

¹⁹⁷ Strayer. 170.

LWV and the AAUW, on the other hand, sought to fight the “conservative tone of U.S. politics” such as that coming from the DAR and sought to “keep alive a vision of an international and interracial human fellowship.”¹⁹⁸

At the final session of the fifty-seventh annual state conference of Mississippi Society DAR, the state organization reaffirmed its stance on the UN and encouraged the U.S. ‘to get out of the United Nations before it is too late’.¹⁹⁹ At the same annual state conference, the DAR passed a resolution that it would “vigorously oppose” the United Nations Declaration on Racial Discrimination as the DAR claimed the declaration would “destroy many of the individual rights of United States citizens and our institutions, and would nullify the unquestioned sovereignty of our Nation.”²⁰⁰ This was an interesting perspective of other issues of the 1960s. The LWV, meanwhile, supported the United Nations both on a national and local scale. This difference helps to illustrate another reason why the DAR was a more popular women’s organization in the South than the LWV. Consequently, the DAR and LWV or AAUW were most likely to not have crossovers in their meetings and local agenda.

For all organizations, their political identities did have important effects on their organizational aspects such as membership. The LWV expressed how the national stance affected the League on both a state level and local level. The LWV faced its toughest criticisms in 1962 after reports surfaced that claimed the League nationally supported the

¹⁹⁸ Lynn, 39.

¹⁹⁹ Resolutions Are Adopted by State DAR Conference. 3 March 1964, Clarion – Ledger (Jackson, MS). James W. Silver Collection, Archives and Special Collection, Digital Archives, University of Mississippi Libraries.

²⁰⁰ State Resolutions, Mississippi Society, Annual State Conference Yearbook (1963-1964), Box 2, Folder 16. DAR Collection, Records, Archives, and Special Collections, McCain Library, The University of Southern Mississippi.

Civil Rights Act. As the state annual League reports illustrated, the “League positions on continuing responsibilities are unpopular at the present time in Mississippi.”²⁰¹ Further, the state League did believe that attitudes were changing but with the current conservative attitude of Mississippi that was “looking behind every door for a communist and coloring every issue with racial overtones,” the state saw its local Leagues’ membership decrease significantly.²⁰²

The Jackson League also fell under staunch claims that it was supporting the Civil Rights Act and also labeled as communist with a leftist/liberal approach to issues despite its more moderate political viewpoints. The League struggled to survive in Mississippi and the mid-1960s brought major concerns as the membership totals declined in the South.²⁰³

As mentioned previously, the Red Scare and McCarthyism created challenges to women’s organizations. While conservative groups like the DAR, used redbaiting tactics to its advantages, more liberal organizations such as the LWV and the AAUW faced challenges in trying to support international policies but still avoiding accusations of subversion. Nonetheless, these challenges helped to define these women and their attitudes towards subsequent political issues such as civil rights.

²⁰¹ State Annual Reports, pg. 22, 1965-1966, Box 8. Folder 4. LWV Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²⁰² State Annual Reports, pg. 22 1965-1966, Box 8. Folder 4. LWV Collection.

²⁰³ Annual State Report League, pg. 26, 1965-1966, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

Chapter 3: Civil Rights and the Tensions the Movement Created Between the National and Local

In 1951, the NAACP filed a suit against the Board of Education of the City of Topeka, Kansas that called for the abolishment of segregation in the school district. Other school segregation cases soon became included in the *Brown v. Board of Education* suit. The other cities included in the suit were Summerton, SC; Prince Edward County, VA; Washington D.C; and Claymont and Hockessin, DE. The suit made its way to the US Supreme Court in 1952; however by the end of June 1953 no solution had been made. The case was reheard in 1953; however it was stalled by the death of Chief Justice Fred Vinson. On May 14, 1954 the Supreme Court finally ruled state laws establishing black and white separate schools to be unconstitutional. This principle of separate but equal governed the attitude in the South; yet as historian, John Dittmer, claims “even the most

ardent segregationist would admit” that “black children in Mississippi had been denied educational opportunity.”²⁰⁴

Brown v. Board of Education became a turning point for not only southern politics but also for southern women’s organizations. As Dittmer states, “the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* extended far beyond the question of the future of public schools.”²⁰⁵ In other words, the US Supreme Court Decision was a “wake-up call” for Mississippians to reject the decision and to maintain the status quo of segregation.²⁰⁶ Southern women’s organizations had to choose between maintaining their national perspective of equality or the local perspective of separate but equal.

These women also had to contend with the arrival of groups such as the Citizen’s Council that worked to uphold the status quo of segregation at all costs. White middle class citizens of Mississippi created the first Citizen’s Council in Indianola, MS in 1954 after the *Brown v. Board* ruling, with a mission to “maintain segregation without violence.”²⁰⁷ In little time, the Citizen’s Council had more than 25,000 members with branches all across the state.²⁰⁸ The Citizen’s Council also attracted white upper-class citizens and politicians such as Senator Eastland.²⁰⁹

The Citizen’s Council also had a hand in creating the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. As discussed in Chapter Two, McCarthyism plagued the South and the formation of the State Sovereignty Commission, or what Dittmer calls “the secret

²⁰⁴ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 34.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

police force that owed its primary allegiance to the Citizen's Council" encouraged redbaiting in the South.²¹⁰ The Citizen's Council attracted groups like the DAR, who had a long history of maintaining segregation. However, the Citizen's Council challenged the LWV and the AAUW. Further race relations in the South in the wake of *Brown* challenged progressive activists who spoke for equality. Organizations like the LWV and the AAUW understood the consequences of challenging the Citizen's Council and upsetting the status quo. Further, these organizations were also struggling to survive in the wake of communist accusations. These groups understood that to publicly fight against the racist perspective in the South could lead to their own disbandment; hence these groups and their members were hesitant in becoming civil rights activists. *Brown v. Board of Education* set the stage for the struggle of equality in Mississippi. It also explains why these women's organizations reacted the way they did in the light of the early 1960s with the Civil Rights Act and Freedom Summer.

At the height of the Civil Rights Movement in 1963, President Kennedy turned to elite white women's society groups, such as the League of Women Voters (LWV), and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to work together to create the National Women's Committee on Civil Rights (NWCCR).²¹¹ The goal of this committee was to use their organizational influence nationally and locally to promote the advancement of the Civil Rights Act. Kennedy overlooked a major problem and trend of these organizations that hindered their ability to be successful in the promotion of the

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

²¹¹ Helen Laville, "“Women of Conscience” or “Women of Conviction”? The National Women's Committee on Civil Rights," *Journal of American Studies* 43, no.2 (2009): 277.

Civil Rights Act: a growing separation between the beliefs of the national organizations and their local branches.²¹²

According to historian Helen Laville, the NWCCR was unsuccessful because the organizations had limited influence in encouraging southern branches to adopt national attitudes towards civil rights. The goal of the committee was to encourage these white women's organizations to support the Civil Rights Act through the work of their organizations. However, these organizations could not fulfill this mission as these organizations were divided internally on how to address civil rights. Northern branches were willing to support the Civil Rights Act by making its passage a part of their agendas; however, southern branches were not willing to do the same and the national organizations ultimately did not force their southern branches to do the same.²¹³

Part I: Creating a Division Between the National and Local

In particular, the local southern branches of the AAUW and LWW resisted integration for several reasons. To begin, many of these Southern branches believed that any sort of inclination towards the Civil Rights Act, including integration of its own branch, would result negatively on membership as well as their public image within their own communities. Many southern branches of the AAUW even threatened to completely disband if these branches were forced to publicly support the Civil Rights Act. Southern branches also resisted integration within their own membership due to negative response from their members and their communities. After its 1949 bylaw revision that integrated

²¹² Ibid., 279.

²¹³ Ibid., 281.

its branches, the AAUW had to contend with southern branches that resisted integration. According to Leone, “southerners continually expressed their hesitation to defy Jim Crow by integrating their branches.”²¹⁴ Mrs. Rondo Westbrook of the Jackson, MS AAUW Branch claimed her branch would be willing to accept black women; yet, according to Westbrook:

in most branches it [integration] would be most difficult...customs and traditions are still so strong in the community that what we are afraid of its not the acceptance of the negro woman herself, but in the stirring up of feeling because of any flaunting of our segregation laws.²¹⁵

Further, Leone claims that these segregation laws gave “southern branches with an excuse for not integrating their organizations.”²¹⁶

While there seemed to be distinct divisions between the national and local, it is important to note that national leadership was cognizant of local issues and how a local chapter could suffer by promoting the national position towards the Civil Rights Act in its local community. The failure of the NWCCR illustrates these organizations’ willingness to sacrifice their stance on integration in order to keep their organizations intact. Of course not all women’s societal groups responded and acted like the LWV and AAUW. However the LWV and AAUW’s motivation to enter into the male-dominated world of politics is important in understanding their reactions to civil rights. It would also be a fair assessment that the language of the Civil Rights Movement sparked an interest in some groups of women to reassess their own political equality and representation. These suburban housewives were beginning to understand how they were politically limited or

²¹⁴ Leone, 442.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 443.

even silenced but, according to one historian, “until the emergence of new feminism they lacked a frame of reference in which to interpret their discontent.”²¹⁷

Part II: The League of Women Voters’ Response to Civil Rights

These groups all reacted differently and responded to civil rights in their own unique way. The attitude of these women towards civil rights not only represented their political ideology but also the tone these women wished to express towards their own rights as women. The League of Women Voters was much more outspoken in its opinions of civil rights compared to the other organizations of this study as many of its members supported civil rights in their own subtle ways. Both the Jackson League and the State League expressed support for voting rights for African Americans, desegregation and maintaining public schools, and supporting the Civil Rights Act. They also provided insightful commentary on Freedom Summer and the lack of news sources both into Mississippi and out of Mississippi.

Of all of the organizations discussed, the League of Women Voters (LWV) is seen as the most left-leaning of these women’s organizations. In fact the LWV should not necessarily be termed “liberal” as the League was much more moderate. The term “liberal” became defined in the South by the shift in political viewpoint of the New Deal Legislation. Liberalism was once marked by simply the economic reform of the New Deal had transformed into a “new liberalism” that focused on race relations and “focused less on the broad needs of the nation and the modern economy than on increasing the

²¹⁷ Ferree and Hess, 15.

rights and freedoms of individuals and social groups.”²¹⁸ This new liberalism and consequently “liberals” became synonymous with those who advocated for racial equality. Conservatives became the opposition to liberalism, and, especially in the South, conservatives were those advocating for maintaining the racial status quo of separate but equal.

According to David L. Chappell, moderates, on the other hand, were defined as those who “rejected elements of Jim Crow and accepted the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the law of the land.”²¹⁹ Moderates were much more the middle ground between the extreme left and the extreme right. As one of Harwell’s subject claimed: “the definition of a conservative and a moderate is that the former still believes in separate but equal, whereas the latter is beginning to think of separate but maybe equal.”²²⁰ The LWV can be seen not so much as liberal, largely due to its limited support of civil rights, and much more as moderates who stood on a middle ground. Regardless of liberal or moderate claims the League in conservative south Mississippi was viewed as the most radical or leftist women’s organization.²²¹

This definition of moderate is illustrated in the Jackson LWV and its views of accepting desegregation of public schools. As LWV Mississippi State President, Mrs. Betty Rall wrote in correspondence to the national board, the Jackson League supported

²¹⁸ Bryant Simon, “Race Relations: African American Organizing, Liberalism, and White Working Class Politics in Postwar South Carolina,” in *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 242.

²¹⁹ David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 214.

²²⁰ Harwell, 109.

²²¹ Debra Lynne Northart, “The League of Women Voters in Mississippi: The Civil Rights Years, 1954-1964” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Mississippi, 1997), 16.

“some token of integration but firmly believe[d] in the neighborhood school and completely disapprove [d] of shuttling children from one neighborhood to another to achieve complete integration.”²²² The Jackson League’s views of desegregation in schools placed them as moderates in Mississippi, even though they did not fully support all efforts to achieve de facto integration.

Within the Jackson League’s limited support of integration, members also felt strongly that the equality of “education of both races is the only answer to our problems,” but this equality should not be determined at the national level as the League felt “this is best accomplished at the ‘community’ level.”²²³ Further, the local Leagues did not give the national League their approval to claim this same attitude for local Leagues. In other words, local Leagues wanted to be independent of the League’s national positions and the local Leagues felt they had a right to voice their own attitudes and values, especially when it came to civil rights. The local Leagues wanted their autonomy and control over the desegregation of schools, in one sense, because it was the local League’s fight to assure this equality of education. The local Leagues also wanted control over these decisions because there was a sense that if the Leagues had a locally-driven agenda, they would be more accepted in the community as opposed to a nationally driven agenda. In other words, these southern women understood the tense political climate of the South much better than a national office member. These southern women could navigate the issue of desegregation better in their own communities than an outsider ever could.

²²² Letter from Rall to Morgan, August 1963, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²²³ Ibid.

However, it is important to note that neither the national nor the local Leagues ever officially supported or opposed school desegregation beginning in 1954 or the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As Scher, claims “perhaps the most astonishing failure in dealing with racial integration” is that the national League in the early 1960s “never took a stand, pro or con [on civil rights], in part because of the influence of its southern chapters.”²²⁴ The mission of the League was to promote informed voters within its members and its local communities; the Civil Rights and the Voting Rights Acts produced strain on the State and Jackson Leagues. It was difficult for southern League members to promote the ideal of an informed citizen and voter participation when the African American community was not afforded the right to vote. The National League encouraged its members to do research in promoting informed voters in their communities through non-partisanship; however in the staunchly conservative South, local Leagues faced challenges in keeping up appearances of being unbiased in their mission. Many members, as a result of this tension between purpose and reality, left the League as they felt they could not fully be active League members and members of their own respective political parties.

In terms of support and opposition of civil rights legislation, it is important to look at some of the materials of the National and the Jackson Branch of the League of Women Voters.²²⁵ On a national scale, the LWV first addressed the civil rights in a proposed “continuing responsibility” study focus sent out to local Leagues for approval. The focus supported Kennedy’s civil rights bill, in particular, the Equality of Opportunity

²²⁴ Scher, 114.

²²⁵ The Jackson League is discussed instead of the Hattiesburg League due to the fact that a Hattiesburg League was not formed until after the 1960s.

Act, which aimed to eliminate both racial and gender bias in employment opportunities, and the formation of the National Women's Committee on Civil Rights, as mentioned previously. The proposed focus, while accepted in many of the northern local Leagues, did not fair so well in the southern local Leagues. Nationally, the League received major backlash from its southern local leagues for its proposed study focus. As Mississippi LWV State President wrote, the national level's approval of the civil rights "came as a severe blow" and "if we do not take some action contradicting this, we will be in for a rough time indeed."²²⁶

Nationally, the LWV claimed that this proposal was "not a civil rights item in the desegregation sense but an attempt to provide the educational and employment opportunities for all persons throughout the United States."²²⁷ Nationally the League claimed and reassured Mississippi's State League that "the League does not have a national Current Agenda or Continuing Responsibility in the field of civil rights."²²⁸ However, despite this reassurance, many Mississippi Leagues threatened to disband and their League presidents threatened to "resign if the Equality of Opportunity Item is adopted nationally."²²⁹

This disapproval of supporting civil rights on a national and local scale is illustrated in several of the State League and Jackson League records. At a State Board

²²⁶ Letter from Rall to Morgan, August 1963, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²²⁷ Letter from Morgan to Rall, February 1964, Box 9, Folder 2. LWV Collection.

²²⁸ Letter from National League to Rall, August 1963, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²²⁹ Letter from Rall to June Morgan, February 1964, Box 9, Folder 2. LWV Collection.

meeting to discuss the possibility of local Leagues supporting the civil rights, many board members responded honestly but negatively stating:

we certainly can't do anything on civil rights at this time. Any mention of it by our league would kill our effectiveness because it would automatically label us as opposing the southern tradition and therefore integrationist and not nonpartisan as we claim.²³⁰

Some of the board members even felt that to side with the national level would do more than just “kill our effectiveness,” one board member believed that supporting civil rights on a local level would result in “suicide” for their leagues.²³¹

Not only did the local Leagues, such as Jackson, face internal pressures from this proposed item but also pressures from their communities to respond accordingly and in opposition to civil rights. Outside of contending with differing views of civil rights on a national and local scale, the State and Jackson League also had to contend with differing political voices within their own communities. The Jackson League, in particular, struggled in encouraging an effective two-party political system in its community, as it had to rival with conservative groups, such as the Citizen's Council.

The Citizen's Council warned Rall that it (Citizen's Council) had been informed that the national League had “expresse[d] approval” of civil rights legislation and believed that the state league board “might want to take some action in the form of a resolution that the national League did not reflect the attitude of Mississippi members.”²³² Rall issued no such statement as to the true sympathies of the state in regards to the approval of civil rights legislation. In fact, the local Leagues did not feel it

²³⁰ State Board Minutes, August 1963, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Letter from Rall to Mrs. Robert Phillips, August 1963. Box 9, Folder 2. LWV Collection.

necessary to contradict the statements the national Level claimed but rather to “work on local items and prove to our local people that we are worthy of their support even though they disagree with national’s policies.”²³³

Due to the League’s national support of the Civil Rights Act, the League both on a national and local level was considered too “liberal” for conservative groups of Mississippi such as the Citizen’s Council. The League was considered “liberal” in Mississippi not just for its lack of conservative views on civil rights but also for both the state and national’s support of the United Nations.²³⁴ This affected Mississippi Leagues, particularly the Jackson League, which faced criticism in increasing membership under liberal claims and in light of what Rall terms the “climate of public opinion which exists in Mississippi today.”²³⁵ The League seemed to be in a tight balance with who and what it could support without losing favor politically. While the League took a national stance in allowing local Leagues the freedom to promote issues important to their members, the State League did not use this as an umbrella to hide behind and promote segregation and discrimination in the South.

In fact, the State board even hinted at its disapproval of many of the political incumbents in the Mississippi State Legislature such as Governor Barnett and Senator Eastland. This is illustrated in the State Annual Reports as the League claimed, “there are no funds to do state level jobs but also no desire to become contaminated with low level of prejudice in contest for who is the most segregationist of all.” The League also claimed

²³³ Local League Jackson, Annual Report, 1962-1963, pg. 16, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

²³⁴ Harwell, 109.

²³⁵ Letter to Mrs. Wm. S. Morgan, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

it “wish we knew of an inexpensive litmus paper to stick in candidates mouths to indicate reason and public interest of candidate.”²³⁶

As the civil rights progressed into the summer 1964, the local and national leagues faced an even tougher aspect of civil rights to disagree on: Freedom Summer. The vast majority of white women volunteers of Freedom Summer were women of the North who had very different views on racism and equality than white women of the South.²³⁷ However, some southern white women supported the project discreetly by housing Freedom Summer volunteers in their homes. The risks to white southern women supporting the project were quite severe, which resulted in fears for these southern women. If white southern women did feel compelled to support civil rights, they did so subtly and not without risks. South Mississippi during the 1960s was not a comfortable place for civil rights activists as threats were an everyday occurrence. As historian Debbie Z. Harwell writes, local white women who were vocal about supporting civil rights faced threats such as, “threatening phone calls and letters, had crosses burned in their yards, were ostracized socially, or had their own or their husbands’ jobs threatened.”²³⁸

White women who stepped out of line with the local community could also put their lives and those of their loved ones at risk. Rall discussed some of these fears and concerns brought on by conservative, extremist groups of the South such as the Citizen’s Council. In expressing concerns over the political climate of the South to the LWV

²³⁶ State Annual Report, 1962-1963, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

²³⁷ Mary Aickin Rothschild, “White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers: Their Life and Work in a Movement for Social Change.” *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 473-475.

²³⁸ Harwell, 12.

National Secretary, June Morgan, Rall wrote she experienced “a feeling of such ‘fear’ that makes one afraid to voice an opinion to one’s closest friend or neighbor.”²³⁹ Rall did not just have fears because of the racial tensions in Mississippi. Rall was also concerned because she was housing several northern students in her home. Rall could have lost her position with the League or worst forced out of her home if extreme conservative groups such as the Citizen’s Council ousted her for her support of Freedom Summer and civil rights.²⁴⁰

Besides housing northern students in her home, Rall supported Freedom Summer by offering commentary to what life was like in the conservative South to both League members of the North and other interested citizens who reached out to her for information. Rall found that she became connected to Freedom Summer and Civil Rights through northern League members who wished to better understand the problems of the South and also the level of safety for northern Freedom Summer workers. League women from Massachusetts, Illinois, and California all contacted Rall to either better understand what life was like in Mississippi or because these women were sending their children to the South for the project and needed a close, trusted contact in the area.²⁴¹

Many of the tensions between the national and local Leagues resulted from a lack of dissemination of information both in and out of Mississippi, particularly in regards to

²³⁹ Letter from Rall, 1964. Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²⁴⁰ Letter from Rall to June Morgan, September 1964, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²⁴¹ Letter from Mrs. Spannaus to Rall, May 1964, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

See also from same folder: Letter from Mrs. Rall to Mrs. Spannaus, May 1964; Letter from Barbara Hayden to Mrs. Rall, 1964; Letter from Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions to Mrs. Rall, 1964; Letter from Olive Spannaus to “Betty” Rall, July 27, 1964; Letter from Barbara Hayden to Mrs. Rall, 1964.

Freedom Summer. Mississippians were given inaccurate information regarding the purpose of the project. One civil rights activist wrote in his letter to Rall, “it is unfortunate that press censorship is so thorough in Mississippi that Mississippians have not been advised of the real nature of our work.”²⁴² In a similar letter, another northern civil rights activist claimed to Rall “the most disturbing thing to me about your letter is the apparent absence of any communication between white Mississippians and the Freedom Movement.”²⁴³ According to Rall, Mississippians were given misinformation about what was happening during Freedom Summer. Rall reported that the state expected a summer of violence as the students came from the north. The public media in Mississippi, according to Rall, labeled these students, as “outside agitators” who were coming to Mississippi with the intent of “picketing, demonstrating” and the state has prepared by “doubling the police force, enlarging the jails, and creating compounds for these people.”²⁴⁴

In these letters of correspondence, Rall was able to provide accurate information on the current political reality of Mississippi to northern students coming for Freedom Summer. Also through this correspondence Rall learned, despite the extreme censorship in the South, the true reality that these student were not in fact coming to Mississippi to be violent protestors. Rall tried to express the reality of the project to her local Jackson community and tried to change the people’s minds about the project. She voiced her concerns in her correspondence to national secretary June Morgan and that she was

²⁴² Letter from Mike Kenney to Rall, 1964, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²⁴³ Letter from Edward Spannaus to Rall, June 1964, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Rall to Spannaus, May 1964, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

“trying to think of some ways to tell people that at least the majority of students coming here are coming to teach-not only how to register (or pass the test), but also health, morals, and just plain readin’, writin’, and ‘rithmetic.”²⁴⁵ The misunderstanding of the goals of Freedom Summer further deepened the fears LWV members would have in assisting these students. It can also help explain the hostility northern students experienced from southern whites during the summer of 1964.

As mentioned previously, Rall illustrated through her correspondence both with the League’s national secretary and also League members from the North the fears, concerns, and hopes she had as a white woman living in the segregated South. As Rall supported Freedom Summer by first giving guidance about the reality of the South to northern League members and then actually housing students in her home, she began to voice her concerns over the movement. Rall claimed both personal fears as well as political fears as the summer of 1964 progressed. Also during 1964, the League was facing tough criticism from Mississippi Senator Eastland, as the National League encouraged local Leagues to support Kennedy’s movement towards a Civil Rights Act.²⁴⁶ However, despite all of this, Rall, believed there was a better future for both the League and Mississippi and hoped that after Freedom Summer and the passage of the Civil Rights Act that there would be a sense of normalcy and that “distrust and violence will end [and] perhaps then our Mississippi League can really accomplish something.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Letter from Betty Rall to June Morgan, May 1964, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²⁴⁶ Letter to Mrs. Robert J. Phillips, 1963, Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

²⁴⁷ Letter from Rall, 1964. Box 9, Folder 6. LWV Collection.

Throughout Rall's correspondence it is evident there was a clear separation between her personal and public life for her own safety. As the Mississippi League's State President, Rall had to contend with political figures of all ideological spectrums both integrationist and segregationist, while privately Rall was housing Freedom Summer volunteers in her home. Rall's bravery and courage is evident in her ideal of what the League meant to her. Rall once defined the League as "not the type of organization that particularly appeals to Mississippi women."²⁴⁸ As Rall wrote, the League was not like other conservative women's organizations such as the "John Birch society or the DAR where they don their best clothes and chat gally about nothing."²⁴⁹ To Rall, the League was more than just a social group, the League offered knowledge and political understanding and women who "resent injustice, misinformation, discrimination, bigotry, extremism."²⁵⁰ Rall's opinion about the DAR merely being a social group contradicts the reality that the DAR was in fact political and active both on a national and local scale. It seems that Rall makes this claim about the DAR because the DAR's more conservative approach to civil rights challenged her more liberal approach. In other words, the DAR upheld the status quo of race relations in the South, while Rall was trying to challenge it.

It is this intellectual spirit that promoted Rall's commitment to the League but also to the Civil Rights Movement. It is important to note that not all League members felt and responded the same way towards Freedom Summer as she did. Rall's experience also illustrates an important point that these women were not all racist and in many ways

²⁴⁸ The State of the League in Mississippi. Eight Biennial Convention, 1965, Report of the President Mrs. Robert B. Rall, Box 8, Folder 8. LWV Collection.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

found some forms of resistance to support the Civil Rights Movement, whether due to their inclination towards civil rights or their own personal convictions of living up to the standard of their respective organizations. Given Ralls' perspective, it is important to note that the attitudes and inclinations towards and against the Civil Rights Movement varied not just across organizations but also internally. It would be unfair to claim that all LWV were activists. Different inclinations within organizations existed.

After extreme backlash and dissent from its southern local Leagues, the national level remained quiet on its attitude towards civil rights. However in December 1965, the national level tried another attempt to persuade its local levels to reconsider the civil rights legislation. In the organizational publication "Facts and Issues: Rights of Another Nation," the national League outlined the details, statistics, and right to equality.²⁵¹ While many northern Leagues publically supported the Civil Rights Act and this publication, this sentiment was not equally expressed in southern Leagues. Both the State and Jackson Leagues' annual reports indicated a growing concern that the national League still did not understand the local Leagues' political positions. In the Mississippi State Annual report for 1965-1966, the LWV state board expressed concerns that the national "League positions on Continuing Responsibilities [such as Civil Rights Act] are unpopular at the present time in Mississippi," and that local membership had dropped due to the League's national position on these issues.²⁵²

²⁵¹ "Rights of "Another Nation" in Facts & Issues, December 1965, Box 25, Folder 25. LWV Collection.

²⁵² Annual Report State League, 1965-1966, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

Further, in the same state report, the state board of the League expressed concerns that “‘those up there’ don’t understand our problems.”²⁵³ This distinct separation between the League’s national opinions versus its local opinions is critical in understanding the tone of the LWV chapters of the South. Local chapters faced the problem of remaining true to the League’s mission of nonpartisanship, while also not upsetting their local communities with too liberal of views.

This struggle to please their local communities but also keeping their mission of nonpartisanship did not end in the 1960s. In 1970, Charles Evers, brother of civil rights activist Medgar Evers, requested for the League to host a political event for his campaign for governor. The League refused to host the event on the grounds that “the League is absolutely nonpartisan, and can hold no meeting or meetings unless all the candidates are involved.”²⁵⁴

Part III: The American Association of University Women’s Response to Civil Rights

Unlike the LWV, which was very outspoken in its attitudes towards civil rights, both the national and the state AAUW’s silence indicate a different attitude. Despite the two cases mentioned in Chapter One, the AAUW remained fairly silent on civil rights. The first case being the National Board’s move to fully integrate its chapters in 1946 and the second case being the Little Rock AAUW’s involvement in school desegregation in 1958. Other than these two cases, the AAUW hid behind its mission of education and in many ways ignored the Civil Rights Movement. Under the AAUW State Division’s

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Evers for Governor Committee Letter, 1970, Box 9, Folder 6, LWV Collection.

tentative guidelines in 1962-3 under social and economic issues, the AAUW failed to mention race or civil rights.²⁵⁵ However, while the AAUW did not mention civil rights in its records, the AAUW did use language such as “emerging issues” and “cultural changes” in its description of the current environment of the South.²⁵⁶ The AAUW referenced these “cultural changes” in a study of “The American Family in a Changing World” in which AAUW convention speaker, Mrs. Roy W. Engle, stated, “we are living in an era of unprecedented social change.”²⁵⁷ This “change” Engle referred to was the change experienced in the family dynamic and social order. Engle claimed the families’ dependence on work has created a “highly mobile population” and a “shift of racial groups from one locale to the other.”²⁵⁸

In terms of civil rights, the AAUW is interesting in that there is little to no mention of race or of civil rights except these subtle and discreet hints of social change and racial tension. The AAUW faced less local resistance than the LWV on political issues as its mission was solely based with promoting higher education. One interesting aspect of the AAUW’s attitudes towards race was its formation and support of the AAUW Fellowship Program, an international fellowship fund. In 1965, the AAUW awarded forty-one women fellowships to come to the United States and conduct research. Of these forty-one women, only seven were African women and their fellowships aimed

²⁵⁵ Tentative Program of Work for Mississippi Division, 1962-1963, American Association of University Women (AAUW) Collection (MUM00007), Box 51, Folder 1. The Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²⁵⁶ Proceedings of the Twenty-First Biennial Conference, 1964, Box 24, Folder 6. AAUW Collection.

²⁵⁷ Program Building Session, Denver Convention, “The American Family in a Changing World,” 1963, Box 83, Folder 1. AAUW Collection.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

to “support and assist African women of newly independent countries.”²⁵⁹ Also these women were to “receive training in medical fields, education, social work, anthropology, and the teaching of English as a foreign language.”²⁶⁰ The AAUW supported the educational opportunities of international African black women but did little to nothing to support the equality and educational opportunities of African American women in the South. The AAUW’s efforts to help foreign black women through education is interesting compared to how little it helped local black women.

The AAUW “ignored racial issues” and instead focused on programs such as “federal housing program, support for the United Nations, expanded social security benefits, and consumer legislation.”²⁶¹ Susan Lynn claims that civil rights were never a priority for the AAUW. Many local branches published studies on race but racial equality itself was never a national agenda item for the women’s group. Further, with the AAUW’s commitment to education, many found it shocking that it did not mention or endorse the Supreme Court decision of school integration especially when its “primary interest was education.”²⁶²

Nationally, the AAUW danced around the subject of its views on the Civil Rights Movement; however, the reports of the 1969 National Convention illustrated the AAUW’s willingness to change its political ideologies on a national scale. Yet it was in 1969 when the AAUW finally passed resolutions in support of the Voting Rights Act of

²⁵⁹ AAUW Educational Foundation News Release, May 1965, Box 87, Folder 1. AAUW Collection.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Cynthia Ellen Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women’s Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 65.

²⁶² Lynn, 64.

1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing).²⁶³ It is also interesting to note that previous conventions indicated no mention of civil rights in minutes or state resolutions; yet by 1969 many northern branches did have black members, even though they were small in numbers.

This move towards an acceptance of civil rights by the AAUW was the first of many decisions it would soon make in promoting equality and changing its ideals from the top down. In 1970, the AAUW issued a new study that looked at Black Studies in The Academic Community—New Look on Campus. In particular, the study explored the discipline of black studies many northern universities were exploring as a credible academic discipline. The study sought to explore how black studies was a growing discipline in the academic field and what the new discipline meant for the organization.

State chapters reacted to the national AAUW's decision to launch this study very hesitantly. State chapters believed that, as predominantly white organizations with few chapters with black members, their members would face criticism of uncovering racism of white society if they explored this topic. Further the AAUW's discussion of this topic could become "an instrument of penance for many whites to be involved in rhetoric about blacks, unless there is honest soul searching and honest exchange between whites and blacks."²⁶⁴ Despite these concerns the national AAUW passed a resolution to change membership policies to "seek women from many rich cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds."²⁶⁵ On a national level, the AAUW was already integrated by 1970.

²⁶³ AAUW Legislative Program Fact Sheets, 1969 Convention, Box 83, Folder 4. AAUW Collection.

²⁶⁴ Letter: Second Year Implementation of the Topic. The Academic Community-New Look on Campus, Reactions, June 1970, Box 88, Folder 11. AAUW Collection.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

However, not all southern branches respected integration in their membership until after this resolution was passed.

In other words, AAUW members were resistant to opening black studies on a national agenda for fear that others would question their motives for doing so. There were also concerns that southern branches of the AAUW would not have success prompting this study in the local branches due to their strained past history with racial tensions.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the AAUW sought to truly understand how to best influence and promote this study into its branches including a worksheet to-do list activity that posed questions and misconceptions about what the black studies discipline would entail and who would be able to go to school and study this discipline.²⁶⁷ The AAUW asked tough questions about what the implications would be for white women wishing to study black studies and the AAUW also published and provided academic literature on the topic of the civil rights and black studies to its chapters.²⁶⁸ As mentioned previously, the AAUW's focus of black studies could have resulted negatively on local chapters and its membership. Further, many southern chapters struggled to fully develop this program due to tense racial relations.

It is also important to note that the Hattiesburg chapter of the AAUW had no mention of the Black Studies focus in its meetings and minutes records, indicating an apathy and silence towards the national agenda of the AAUW. While no direct link, was

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ A Do-It-Yourself Syllabus on Black Studies in the Academic Community—New Look on Campus, Box 88, Folder 11. AAUW Collection.

²⁶⁸ academic literature included in Box 88, Folder 11, AAUW Collection:
Laura Bornholdt, "Black Studies Perspective 1970," Danforth News and Notes 5, no. 2 (March 1970); Paul E. Wisdom and Kenneth A. Shaw, "Black Challenge to Higher Education," Educational Record (Fall 1969).

found between the black studies focus and the declining membership in the Hattiesburg chapter, it likely contributed to the Hattiesburg chapter's disbandment in 1980, which the branch claimed it disbanded because it believed that "the original purpose of the AAUW has been lost," this original purpose being the equality of education and women's rights.²⁶⁹

Part IV: The Daughters of the American Revolutions' Response to Civil Rights

While League members faced opposition from their own communities and the AAUW fell apart internally, the Daughters of the American Revolution, on the other hand, was revered in southern communities for its conservative viewpoints and opposition of the Civil Rights Act.²⁷⁰ The DAR, in particular the John Rolfe Chapter of Hattiesburg, was the most conservative of the white women's groups discussed. The DAR very publically opposed the Civil Rights Movement and any legislation that promoted the equality of African Americans. Compared to the other organizations, the DAR, due to its highly conservative viewpoint and support of segregation, was highly respected by many white local community and state officials of Mississippi. It is also important to note the connections between the DAR and the Citizen's Council. In many ways, these two organizations blended their programs and many of the DAR members were also Citizens Council members.

²⁶⁹ Letter to Ruby M. Thompson from Nancy C. Dunigan, Pres. Hattiesburg AAUW branch; signed June 30, 1980, Box 3, Folder 19. AAUW Collection.

²⁷⁰ Carolyn Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement. 1945-1975* (New York City: New York University Press, 2013), 105-112.

Unlike the LWV who had to promote voter participation and nonpartisanship, and the AAUW, which promoted women and educational rights, the DAR was an ancestral organization that stood for the promotion of democracy and patriotism (for whites). According to the DAR Constitution, Article 2, Object. Section 1: “the object of this chapter shall be to promote the objects and interests of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution.”²⁷¹ The DAR’s purpose offered members an umbrella to shelter them from having to answer to national pressure to support integration within its membership and encourage the Civil Rights Act on a local scale. As mentioned previously, the national DAR had been called racist on several occasions for refusing to allow black entertainers to perform at its events.²⁷² Further the DAR, with its ancestral lineage for membership, encouraged exclusion of race to solely white women. It was very difficult for women of different races and ancestral heritage to gain membership within the DAR as women were accepted based on the evidence and genealogical records the DAR supported.

The DAR Mississippi Society promoted an anti-civil rights attitude through its state resolutions. These resolutions included the opposition to the Civil Rights Act and the UN World Discrimination Ban, as well as resistance to school integration and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in its guidelines for school integration. To begin, the Mississippi DAR labeled the civil rights bill a “greedy grasp of power” that

²⁷¹ Constitution and By-Laws. Box 1, Folder 1. Daughters of the American Revolution, John Rolfe Chapter, Records, Archives, and Special Collections, McCain Library, The University of Southern Mississippi.

²⁷² Ken Chujo, “The Daughters of the American Revolution and Its Attitude Toward African Americans,” *Transforming Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (2005): 160.

would “destroy rights and freedoms” of Americans and that the DAR strongly opposed this legislation and encouraged others to do the same.²⁷³

The DAR firmly believed that the Civil Rights Bill would negatively affect many aspects of white society and life. In its resolution, it included a ten-point list of aspects of life that would be violated if the bill was passed. Some of these aspects included basic freedoms such as the “right to free speech and press” and the “right to property.”²⁷⁴ The DAR even claimed that banks’ right to “make loans and extend credit in accordance with their best judgment” would be violated.²⁷⁵ It is unique that the DAR’s would go to such lengths to strongly oppose the civil rights legislation that it would state these violations. In other words, the DAR could have simply opposed civil rights legislations subtly; yet the DAR choose to be very outspoken in its opposition to civil rights legislation.

Much of what the DAR’s state resolutions focused on though was not personal liberties of white women but rather what it claimed as violations of “businesses.” Further it urged others to be conscious of the effects of the legislation and that there be “no watering down of this proposed legislation which would give preference to certain areas of business while penalizing other areas of businesses.”²⁷⁶ This was incredibly interesting because the focus was not on how the Civil Rights Act affected them as a society group of elite white women but rather how the civil rights legislation affected their local businessmen. Many of these women were married to business owners whose businesses

²⁷³ State Resolutions, Mississippi Society, Annual State Conference Yearbook (1963-1964), Box 2, Folder 16. DAR Collection.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

would be affected if the legislation were passed. Many of these women were also in the Citizen's Council or married to Citizen's Councilmen, which explain why they were so concerned with maintaining segregation for the benefit of southern white businesses. The attitude differs from both the LWV and AAUW who used their platform to promote women's issues.

The Mississippi Society of the DAR was the most public of all three organizations discussed and as illustrated above very adamantly opposed the Civil Rights Act and believed there were massive consequences on all aspects of life if this bill was passed. The language used in the DAR State Resolutions justified why the DAR was well respected with segregationists such as the White Citizens Council and Mississippi political leaders, Senator Eastland and Governor Barnett. The DAR also opposed other legislation that sought to promote equality. At the same annual state conference, the DAR passed a resolution that the DAR would "vigorously oppose" the United Nations Declaration on Racial Discrimination as the DAR claimed the declaration would "destroy many of the individual rights of United States citizens and our institutions, and would nullify the unquestioned sovereignty of our Nation."²⁷⁷

This was an interesting perspective of other issues of the 1960s. As noted earlier, the LWV supported the United Nations both on a national and local scale. The DAR, being the more conservative voice of the South, did not hold similar expressions towards the United Nations. This difference between the LWV and the DAR can help illustrate another reason why the DAR was a more popular women's organization in the South than the LWV.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

Compared to the other women's organizations discussed it is also important to note that the DAR had fewer discrepancies with its national board as the AAUW and LWV did. While there is no direct sources that indicated how southern DAR chapters felt about the northern DAR chapters, it can be inferred that given the DAR of Hattiesburg's strong membership and support from the local community, it did not have to address contending political views from its national office.

As the AAUW changed and reflected some of its positions on civil rights and race towards the ends of the 1960s, the same cannot be said for the Mississippi Society of the DAR. The DAR passed another state resolution at its Annual Convention of 1966-1967 that opposed the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and its guidelines for school integration.²⁷⁸ While the AAUW and LWV began to start to change their national and local policies to be in favor of racial equality and civil rights by the late 1960s and early 1970s, no such evidence was found for the Mississippi DAR.

The LWV, AAUW, and DAR all had differing viewpoints and responses to the Civil Rights Movement. As these differences in political climate differed from the North and the South, southern white women's organizations struggled to hold on to a unified identity with their respective national counterparts. Nationally, these organizations attempted to address civil rights but failed in promoting it on a local scale. As a result, the local branches of each of these organizations illustrated different reactions to their national organizations' policies towards civil rights.

²⁷⁸ Resolutions, 61st Annual State Conference Yearbook (1966-1967), Box 2, Folder 17. DAR Collection.

For all organizations, their political identities did have important effects on their membership. The LWV expressed how the national stance affected its League on both a state level and local level. The LWV faced its toughest criticisms in 1962 after reports surfaced that claimed the League nationally supported the Civil Rights Act. As the state annual League reports illustrated, the “League positions on continuing responsibilities are unpopular at the present time in Mississippi.”²⁷⁹ Further, the state League did believe that attitudes were changing but with the current conservative attitude of Mississippi that was “looking behind every door for a communist and coloring every issue with racial overtones,” the state saw its local Leagues’ membership decrease significantly.²⁸⁰

The state League also struggled to maintain a strong sense of nonpartisanship as the two-party system of Mississippi struggled to stay alive by 1965. In the state reports, the league responded with “apparently nonpartisanship is the biggest problem of the Local Leagues” due to the fact that the state “is primarily a one-party state” and it was “still losing members to the Republican party.”²⁸¹ Behind all of these local issues were the claims that the largest membership problems resulted from a political disconnect between the national and local. The Jackson League claimed in its local reports of 1964-1965 that it was “still losing some who feel the League is too liberal in its National Policies.”²⁸² The Jackson League also fell under staunch claims that it was supporting the Civil Rights Act and also labeled as communist with a leftist/liberal approach to issues despite its more moderate political viewpoints. The League struggled to survive in

²⁷⁹ State Annual Reports, pg. 22, 1965-1966, Box 8. Folder 4. LWV Collection.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Annual State Report League, pg. 25 1965-1966, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

²⁸² Local League Report, pg. 1, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

Mississippi and the mid-1960s brought major concerns as the membership totals declined in the South.²⁸³

The AAUW also experienced a membership decline in the late 1960s to early 1970s. However, the AAUW remained fairly silent on the Civil Rights Movement; therefore it would be inaccurate to claim that the AAUW decline in membership resulted from its political agenda. The struggles of the AAUW were consistent in both the North and the South. Membership problems resulted from the lack of interest from both universities and recent women graduates.²⁸⁴

Unlike the LWV and the AAUW, the DAR saw its membership grow during the 1960s, most likely on account of the local DAR's popular anti-civil rights viewpoint. The John Rolfe Chapter of the DAR expanded so much that it created another DAR chapter in Hattiesburg in 1966. The DAR very publically and strongly opposed the Civil Rights Acts, which earned it popularity with groups such as the Citizen's Council.²⁸⁵ It is even more interesting to understand the dynamics of these women groups. The LWV compared to the AAUW indicates that women could do and say what they wanted as an organization, but it would be best to not mention politics. Further the criticism the LWV faced by simply commenting on civil rights created extreme backlash. While the AAUW may have had a liberal opinion of civil rights, it never mentioned this publically and as a result it did not receive the backlash the LWV faced. The LWV compared to the DAR

²⁸³ Annual State Report League, pg. 26, 1965-1966, Box 8, Folder 4. LWV Collection.

²⁸⁴ Report of Membership and Recent Graduates Workshop, Box 3, Folder 15. AAUW Collection.

²⁸⁵ Hattiesburg Chapter Reports, Mississippi Society, 58th Annual State Conference Yearbook (1963-1967), Box 2, Folder 16. DAR Collection.

illustrates that women can have a political voice as long as it does not challenge the status quo. The DAR was embraced for supporting anti-civil rights opinion. The LWV, on the other hand, chose a minority opinion in the South by supporting certain aspects of civil rights and it faced repercussions and a membership decline.

The public acceptance of some women's groups over others can also speak to the success and failure of the role women played in politics in South Mississippi during the 1960s and how they shaped second wave feminism in the late 1960s. On one hand, the LWV paved the way for it to be acceptable for women to have a political voice. However, the criticism the LWV faced by not publically opposing civil rights indicates the failure of women's groups in challenging segregation. Nonetheless, the Civil Rights Movement provided "models of moral protest and effective change that inspired women to seek full equality for themselves" and taught women skills such as "personal power, organizing people and events, and how to pursue feminist goals."²⁸⁶ Initially, most of the women discussed in this study were resistant to supporting the Civil Rights Movement. However, the Civil Rights Movements demonstrated to these women a model of effective organizing that they in turn incorporated to their own goals and organizational agenda.

²⁸⁶ Ferree and Hess, 54.

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