Gender and the Boundaries of National Identity: U.S. Women as a Citizen Class in the Long 1960s

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GENDER AND THE BOUNDARIES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY:
U.S. WOMEN AS A CITIZEN CLASS DURING THE LONG 1960S

by

Sara Bijani

A Thesis
Submitted to the
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GENDER AND THE BOUNDARIES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: 
U.S. WOMEN AS A CITIZEN CLASS DURING THE LONG 1960S

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Western Michigan University, 2012

This text analyzes the public ideologies and institutions that underpinned women’s unequal status within the national collective of United States citizens during the long 1960s, paying particular attention to the executive office of Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the national security establishment. Women were frequently framed within these institutions as a separate special class of citizen, with rights and responsibilities not akin to those of the elite--male bodied--members of the national collective. Allowing for the imaginative construction of “women” as a subject class in U.S. society, this text argues that even with the guarantee of formal political rights in place, women remained second class citizens throughout the long 1960s. Women’s citizenship status provided the constitutive binary to the androcentric hegemonic center of elite national power during the long 1960s, with women at times presented as the agents of U.S. nationalism, and at other times as its abject others. Although politically and socially conscious feminist movements proliferated during this period in U.S. history, these movements were unable to overcome popular ideologies that constructed women as members of a separate subject class, making their long term political impact fairly minimal.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER**

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1

II. WOMEN AS PUBLIC SERVANTS ............................................................................. 17

III. GENDER AND POLITICAL CULTURE .................................................................... 37

IV. DEFENDING THE NATION STATE ........................................................................ 74

V. MEMORIALIZING WOMEN’S SERVICE ................................................................. 106

VI. CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................... 139

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................ 149
Women were excluded from classification as adult citizens during the founding of the republic, and were not given formal enfranchised status until the voting reform movements of the early 20th century. Allowing for the imaginative construction of "women" as a subject class in U.S. society, I argue that even with this guarantee of formal political rights in place, women’s status as second class citizens persisted throughout the long 1960s. While a large scale politically and socially conscious feminist movement did develop during this period in U.S. history, the long term political impact of the movement was minimal. Women’s separate status persisted, as revealed through the examination of cultural discussions surrounding women’s participation in national level and ideologically charged institutions such as the U.S. Congress and the nation’s military. This ideological separation of women as a subject class constructed a fundamentally unequal platform for women’s equal participation as first class citizens of the United States.

In 1776, Abigail Adams wrote to John Adams during his tenure in the Second Continental Congress, famously imploring her spouse to “Remember the Ladies” in the drafting of the code of laws for the newly independent states. Presciently, Abigail Adams warned, “If perticular [sic] care and attention is not paid to the Laidies [sic] we are determined to foment a Rebellion [sic], and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in
which we have no voice, or Representation.”¹ Unfortunately, although the men in Philadelphia confidently proclaimed the self-evidence of all men’s inalienable equality, women’s fight for an authoritative political voice in the United States dragged on throughout the subsequent two centuries.

Rarely highly visible, politically active women like Adams remained present in the democratic process from the founding period, working in or near the normative center of U.S. political life. Refusing to accept the orthodox signification of masculinity as a prerequisite for cultural authority and rejecting the traditional separation of gendered cultural spheres, women finally crossed en masse during the long 1960s into political and military arenas that had long been coded as strictly masculine and predominantly male.² In Congress and in the nation’s military, these politically conscious women threatened to finally deliver the rebellion foretold by Abigail Adams nearly two centuries earlier.

Elected and appointed, the majority of women in politics were reformists, not revolutionaries. For many of these women, the struggle for sexual equality was rooted in classical ideas of democracy rather than modern deconstructions of gender identity. Rejecting the liberation philosophies of many of their feminist contemporaries, many of these women called back to the founding mothers of the nation. Catherine Dean May, a


² A new social and political wave of radical feminists emerged during the long 1960s. This radical feminist wave has been generally differentiated from more moderate “liberal” reformist manifestations of feminism during the same period. Radical feminists were deeply critical of the sex/gender status quo, and advocated total social revolution rather than political reform. For a helpful introduction to the early phase of radical feminism see Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader ed. Barbara Crow (New York: NYU Press, 2000). For one example of a major text from the radical second wave of U.S. feminists, see Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978). For a comprehensive overview of the history of the radical feminist movement, see Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in American 1967-1975 (University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
fairly moderate U.S. Representative during the long 1960s, in fact repeatedly described her work as the reasonable legacy of Abigail Adams. In one letter to a constituent, May defended her support for the proposed Equal Rights Amendment by reminding the skeptical woman voter that Adams' “pleas were unheeded and women were left out of the Constitution, and have been left out ever since, except on voting days.” In another letter to the editor of the publication *Family Weekly*, May defended her ties to organizations like the National Organization for Women by narrowly defining the goals of the women’s movement. Rooting feminism in the spirit of democratic resistance, May referenced Adams’ famous 1776 letter, arguing that Abigail Adams had been a pioneer in the “women’s liberation movement.” For May and other liberal feminists, the women’s movement of the long 1960s simply acknowledged that it was “way past time for action to protect women’s legal rights as citizens and human beings, to eliminate discrimination against women, to recognize women’s ability to contribute to the economic, social and political life of this Nation.” Feminism, for women politicians during this period, meant a fight for the equal representation of all adult citizens within the existing democratic political order of the United States. Despite the varying degrees to which these politicians identified with the feminist movement, none of them defined feminism as a radical revolutionary overthrow of the U.S. political system.

In the military, as in the political realm, women were present from the founding period. While these women devoted their lives to the service of the nation, their

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contributions were typically coded in different cultural terms from those of their male contemporaries. According to Cynthia Enloe, military masculinity in the early republic demanded that "women's contributions either were camouflaged or denied (e.g., by defining their roles as spies or nurses as 'civilian' and 'temporary'), or they were squeezed into conventional ideological categories such as being a 'good mother' or a 'faithful wife' - or a 'typical campfollower.'" These women have been again marginalized in the historical narrative through processes of memory that deny and minimize women's significance for the success of U.S. military forces in the early republic. Rather than recognizing and commemorating women's contributions to the founding of the nation, U.S. popular society has persistently failed to acknowledge the role played by women in early military systems. This failure of memory, in part, undergirds sexist conceits about women's role in the modern U.S. military.

Social, political, diplomatic, military, and even amateur historians have carefully described the systematic inequality of women in U.S. society, as have numerous feminist political scientists. Very few scholars, however, have approached this question of women's citizenship from the perspective of their participation in elite national spaces, as agents within the imagined national community. This is the terrain in which this thesis operates. As Benedict Anderson has famously argued, the designation of a national


community's boundaries and agents is always ideologically amorphous. In Anderson's formulation, all nations are by their nature imagined, limited, and sovereign communities, but the particular dimensions of each of these terms change frequently.⁷ Women, during the long 1960s, were at times presented as the agents of U.S. nationalism, and at other times as its abject others.⁸ This liminal cultural position, drifting between the hegemonic center and the periphery, often left women in the interstices of social and political citizenship. Elected to national office and invited to serve in the nation's military, women were nonetheless persistently reminded of their difference from their male colleagues and assured of their essential biologically determined inferiority.

While many explicit prohibitions on women's participation in political life and national defense were lifted during this period, the dominant perception of women as immature and unequal cultural agents persisted. The protective rhetoric of the cultural backlash against the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA] during the middle 1970s clearly demonstrated this idea of women as less than full and equal citizens of the nation. The campaign against the ERA was firmly rooted in a cultural tradition that described women as the simultaneous custodians and coequals of children. Arguments against the ERA frequently presented women as a special subject class in need of protection, effectively

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mobilizing a large portion of U.S. society to fight for restrictions against women's access to the center of political power in the name of keeping women safe from harm.9

A significant tension emerged during the long 1960s between the traditional construction of women as a subordinate protected class and an emergent feminist ideology that demanded U.S. society accept women and men as equals in all environments. While this tension has been well studied in public and private life, little scholarship has been devoted to the role of second wave feminism within elite levels of the national community. Although rarely described through an explicitly feminist lens, women and issues of women's embodied experiences were salient components of national-level politics and the military during the long 1960s. The construction of women as an imagined national subject class as well as the presence of real individual women within the boundaries of national institutions were reflective of the impact of feminist ideology on hegemonic ideals of citizenship during the period. By studying women as agents and subjects within critical national environments, I intend to demonstrate the significance of normative gender ideology on women's access, or lack thereof, to status as first class citizens during the long 1960s.

My study of women as a citizen class in the long 1960s begins with women's appointments within the political institutions of the long 1960s. Lyndon Johnson's White House, already well studied for questions of gender and political ideology, offers a productive analytic forum for the imagined utility of women in political roles. Johnson's

9 For a well-researched historical account of the Equal Rights Amendment, see Gilbert Steiner, *Constitutional Inequality: The Political Fortunes of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1985). Of particular interest is Steiner's treatment of the cultural conditions that undermined the final ratification process during the 1970s.
treatment of women in his administration, from staffers to ambassadors, was heavily marked by his readily apparent sense of their embodiment of norms of femininity. Eager to increase the parity of women in his administration, Johnson’s rhetoric and decision making was nonetheless marked by his own strong perceptions of their essential difference from his male appointments.

In the second chapter, I examine women’s election to political office during the long 1960s. Although popularly elected rather than appointed, women in Congressional office during this period inhabited a gendered environment similar to that of the Johnson White House. While I preserve the imagined category of “women” as a subject class throughout the text of the thesis, in this chapter I emphasize the lack of a comprehensive “women’s” platform in political office in order to demonstrate the shortcomings of this reductive and essentialist view of sex and gender identity. Although women in political office were often popularly perceived as one collective entity, their real political interests and motivations were incredibly diverse. Like male politicians, women in office during the long 1960s were influenced far more by the interests of their constituencies than by their own sense of sex or gender identity.

The second half of the thesis moves toward an examination of women’s roles within the U.S. military, emphasizing the ideological significance of restrictions on women’s full participation in institutions of national defense. In the third chapter, I argue that restrictions on women in combat reflected—and to this day reflect—an explicit designation of women as a separate class of citizen. Rejecting the possibility of separate but equal categories of citizenship, I argue that restrictions on women’s ability to
participate in the institutions of national defense prohibit their full access to status as first-class citizens in the U.S.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I examine the legacy of women's service to the nation during the long 1960s. Treating the Vietnam Women's Memorial on the National Mall as a highly symbolic artifact of nationalism and membership within the imagined community of the U.S., I reconstruct the debate over the memorial's installation to argue that women's service during the long 1960s remained marked by the construction of women as a separate subject class well into the 1980s. The refusal to recognize women's service to the nation and the consequent rejection of their full status as veterans is also evident in women's participation in veterans groups during this period. While women were respected for their service, they found little support or camaraderie as veterans within these communities. By way of conclusion, I argue that this inability to commensurably memorialize women's service to the nation was emblematic of women's overall subordinate status within the imagined U.S. community of the long 1960s, and beyond.

Tracing these conversations on women's status requires compiling a variety of sources from the public record. The Congressional Record, as an authoritative chronicle of social and political disputes considered significant by the political society of a given period, is an invaluable source for this work. Editorials and reporting from major Washington, D.C. news sources as well as autobiographies and oral histories collected by other historians also provide valuable information on U.S. society's perceptions of women in political office and the military during the long 1960s. My own study relies on
a composite of several other discrete fields of research. While the majority of these secondary texts are drawn from the field of history, political scientists have also developed a valuable literature on perceptions of women in U.S. political life.

Methodologically, my work within the developing field of gender studies has been invaluable, if largely implicit. As a frame, my questions of gender ideology and citizenship are heavily derived from Judith Butler's description of sexual differentiation as a performative and dependent cultural production. Butler's description of an "economy of sexual difference as that which defines, instrumentalizes, and allocates matter in its own service" has directly shaped my own ideas of gender as a regulatory force in culture.10 R.W. Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity also very directly informs the terms of my discourse.11

In recent years, a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the regulatory function of gender in culture. Incorporating a variety of disciplinary perspectives, some of the most useful historical surveys of gender in political, private and military cultures include Joshua Goldstein's War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa, Leo Braudy's From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity, and Stefan Dudink and others' edited collection Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History.12 While these various authors tend to emphasize the

10 Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993), 52. I follow Butler in the use of Foucauldian "regulatory ideals."


political function of hegemonic cultures of masculinity, the rise of a new feminist
consciousness during the long 1960s also contributed to the normative center of U.S.
political ideology in significant ways. Challenging traditional systems of gendered
privilege, political feminism threatened to destabilize the foundations of social and
political order in the United States.

Not all women, of course, were interested in such dramatic reform. Many elected
and appointed women during the long 1960s fought passionately against women’s full
civic equality, positioning themselves as agents of the status quo. These women, like
their male contemporaries, perceived women’s full equality as a threat to the existing
dynamics of power within their own lives and communities. Gender identity played an
important role in constructing these imaginative boundaries of cultural and political
opportunity. In the late 1960s, ideas of masculinity profoundly structured the cultural and
political opportunities of individuals within national institutions. A concern for the
preservation of hegemonic masculinity within dominant cultural establishments was
manifested in the Executive Office, in Congress, as well as in the military and other
institutions of national defense, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Women,
as well as men, established careers centered around the defense of this traditional
gendered center of the imagined U.S. community.

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13 See, for example, Julia Kirk Blackwelder, “Lyndon Johnson and the Gendered World of
Lerner (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005). Blackwelder argues that, in Johnson’s
administration, women were not constructed as serious politicians but instead as “window
dressing for political campaigns and for the White House, as well as being secretaries and
organizers,” 233.
Historical studies of gender ideology and political decision making are not common, but there are several successful monographs worth noting in this area. Robert Dean’s *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* is one of few historical monographs to directly address questions of gender identity and political ideology during the long 1960s. While Dean emphasizes the political function of hegemonic masculinity, his approach also suggests the significant influence of institutional and individual fears of feminization. Kristin L. Hoganson’s *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* takes a similar gendered approach to the study of earlier U.S. involvement in Cuba and the Philippines. K.A. Cuordileone’s *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* offers a case study of the rise of a “cult of toughness” in the rhetoric of U.S. political candidates after World War II. According to Cuordileone, this new rhetoric was representative of an imagined crisis of masculinity in U.S. culture during the Cold War. Finally, Joshua S. Goldstein’s *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* offers a highly ambitious critical look at descriptions of gender roles in war across “all known human societies.”\(^{14}\) None of these texts engage questions of women’s political citizenship within their primary thesis.

In political science, a great deal of behavioral research has been devoted to the question of women’s under-representation in political office. One of the earliest articles

to address women’s legislative role from a systematic perspective is Emmy E. Werner’s 1968 “Women in the State Legislatures.” Werner provides a persuasive analysis of state legislatures from 1920 to 1964, arguing, “There is at present a wide gap between the many needs of society, the large amounts of time and talent available to women, and the small percentage of women in political leadership positions.”15 In the study of female candidates in real political races, one of the most frequent research questions posed attempts to determine the relationship between candidate gender and perceptions of candidate viability. While an extensive body of research demonstrates parity in the rates of successful election across gender, women’s under-representation in legislative bodies persists. Researchers have adopted a variety of explanatory paradigms in attempting to rationalize this apparent disconnect between public ideology and praxis, but they tend to share an emphasis on what Jennifer Lawless describes as “deeply embedded -- indeed, stipulated -- societal sexism that often accompanies women’s inclusion in politics.”16

According to this model, gender ideology serves to disadvantage women on a structural level that is too complex to be mapped through simple parity in election results.

Perhaps most significant to my own research are the contributions of political scientists who analyze the larger ideological patterns that drive perceptions of women as political candidates. As Kathleen Dolan finds:

we can conclude that women voters do feel positively toward female candidates, but that these warm feelings are often based on considerations beyond a shared


sex identity. [ . . . ] That women respondents feel more positively toward female Democratic candidates than do men, but do not have the same affective feelings for female Republican candidates, suggests that any gender gap in evaluations of female candidates should take into account partisan differences as well as sex-based identity.¹⁷

Often, shared gender identity serves as a superficial and incomplete means of determining the real foundations of political affinity. Political scientists who research questions of gender-cued voting behavior have found that women determine political affinity according to a complex calculus of partisanship, incumbency, gender identity, and issue saliency. This research, in attempting to determine the foundations of political affinity, offers an important commentary on symbolic mobilization. While traditional feminist approaches have relied on arguments for descriptive representation in defining the importance of electing female legislators, describing women as members of an imagined sisterhood in political office, current research has been unable to defend the idea that female legislators are symbolically significant to the electorate on the basis of gender identity alone.¹⁸

Women’s representation in the U.S. military is as significant as women’s political representation for questions of women’s first-class citizenship. Studies of women in the military have proliferated over the past several decades, resulting in the broadest literature of the three discussed here. Histories that emphasize the social consequences of


women’s experiences in the military are perhaps most common, taking Melissa Herbert’s *Camouflage Isn’t Only for Combat: Gender, Sexuality, and Women in the Military* as an example. Beth Bailey’s monograph *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, which devotes a very useful chapter to the ideological integration of women into the volunteer army, is an example of a body of work that deals more directly with questions of women’s military service and women’s status as citizens. Other histories tend towards a more diplomatic perspective on women’s citizenship in the U.S., often including a perspective on women’s role as agents and objects of international relations. Ilene Rose Feinman’s *Citizenship Rites: Feminist Soldiers and Feminist Antimilitarists* offers an excellent introduction to this style of scholarship. The last two chapters of the edited collection *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* offer a similar approach from political science. Responding to traditional military historians’ common disregard for women’s combat work, Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holm, USAF (Ret.) has authored an expansive activist history of women’s participation in the nation’s armed forces from WWII through the Persian Gulf War: *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*. Finally, with the growing popularity of oral history, numerous women veterans have participated in collections of veterans oral histories, many of which have been collected in volumes by popular presses such as Kathryn Marshall’s *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam*.19

These diverse records, compiled by soldiers and scholars, share a persistent and explicit consciousness of inequality in U.S. society. For over two centuries, women have served in support of the U.S. military without equal compensation or recognition. While women's opportunities in the military did improve dramatically during the long 1960s, the U.S. armed forces continued to explicitly enforce a policy of sexually based inequality. As the Deputy Secretary of Defense argued in 1974, "the mission of the United States Military Academy is primarily to train cadets for careers in the combat arms of the Regular Army. Since the Department of the Army is opposed to women serving in combat, it is opposed to the admission of women to the Military Academy at this time." Without full integration in combat roles, women remained an unequal class of soldier, reinforcing their overall status as unequal citizens of the U.S. nation.

The failure to fully integrate women within the nation's armed forces reinforced women's marginalized positions in U.S. society at large during the long 1960s. This exclusion from the center of national authority was evident in the marginalized positions women held in numerous federal level public occupations during the period. Women's unequal status in the executive office of Lyndon Johnson, in Congress, as well as in the military and other institutions of national security can be traced to a persistent concern for the preservation of normative gendered authority during the long 1960s. Constructed outside of dominant cultural discourses, women's demands for equality and integration were rarely interpreted as legitimate claims for the full agency of citizenship. Instead,

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women were frequently presented in these debates as a separate special class of citizen, with rights and responsibilities not akin to those of the elite--male bodied--members of the imagined national community.
The construction of the U.S. as a global protectorate during the long 1960s was deeply entwined with constructions of women's particular citizenship roles. In the international restructuring of power that followed World War II, the construction of a globally empowered national identity for the United States depended on the exclusion of socially disenfranchised classes from the centers of political and military power. The logic that structured these exclusions derived from entrenched cultural assumptions regarding structures of national belonging, as well as formal legislative codes that limited the rights of women and minorities as citizens. Challenged by the civil rights movement as well as the early second wave feminist movement, the categorical restrictions that prevented women and minorities from representing the nation in international contexts posed essential questions for the political membership and civil equality of these special classes. In his 1964 remarks at a reception for recently appointed women in government, President Lyndon Johnson claimed to have addressed one component of women's fundamentally unequal access to national authority, as in optimistic rhetoric he claimed:

In this country it took us nearly 150 years to accept the simple truth of what Susan B. Anthony used to preach when she said: "It was 'We the People,' not 'We the White, Male Citizens,' nor 'We the Male Citizens,' but 'We the Whole People'"
who formed this Union." [. . .] So I greet you today not so much as women, but as enfranchised citizens and coworkers in our great and our exciting national life.21 Unfortunately, a closer examination of the period makes it difficult to locate women as the equal agents of U.S. society that Johnson's rhetoric suggested. In 1968, for example, the Fourth National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women found:

"According to the facts, women's place in our society has not improved over the past decades; it has actually receded. The facts indicate that women are gradually being eased out of professional employment, and are increasingly concentrated in low-wage and dead end jobs. [. . .] Female employees are the last to be promoted or trained; they are usually the first to be laid off or to be assigned to dead end jobs."22 In both real and ideological terms, women remained a different class of citizen.

Women have long been used as tools for the normalization of men's masculinity in the patriarchal social and political traditions of United States society. Numerous prominent scholars of gender and social privilege, as well as scholars of foreign relations and U.S. politics, have well established the foundations for this claim.23 In elite U.S.

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society during the long 1960s, feminization, as an imagined construct, and women, as an encroaching presence in political and social positions of power, posed a distinct gendered threat to the dominance of masculine culture. This threat transcended fractures in the public culture of the late 1960s, constructing an inadvertent coalition for the defense of traditional masculinity.

Women’s subordinate role within the imagined national community—their position as the feminized, passive, and abject mirror to normative constructions of aggressive masculine citizenship—played a vital role in psychological justifications for the paternalistic international policies of the U.S. during the long 1960s. In dialectical terms, the policies of the nation were frequently shaped according to implicitly gendered contests of strength, with the U.S. repeatedly described by elite male policy makers as a masculine actor. According to feminist scholar Anne McClintock, while nations are “imagined” in Anderson’s sense of the term, they are not “simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people’s identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered.”

Within the U.S., the gendered traditions of nationalism have deeply inhibited women’s ability to develop their own political authority, forcing them into the binary position of passive subject rather than active agent. During the long 1960s, this elite level dialectical structure was reflected in popular opinion and often reinforced by media messages that

were hostile toward the feminist movement’s attempt to push women closer to the center of the political agenda of the U.S.

The construction and preservation of a predominantly supportive—or at least cooperative—public is imperative for the successful maintenance of hegemonic authority in U.S. culture. As McClintock argues, a nation’s civic body is constructed from the arrangement of dissonant and unequally empowered individuals. In order to maintain a defensible image of popular unity, a nation must therefore construct dialogues that connect national level policy making to the interests of individual members of the nation-state. In this context, the Johnson administration’s persistent struggle to connect with the public becomes politically significant. Aware of the important of establishing a dialogue with the public, Johnson was nonetheless frequently frustrated in his attempts to effectively communicate his policies to a broad national audience.

According to historian Melvin Small, the Johnson administration would frequently disregard opinion polls and expert scholarly analysis, preferring their own crude internal analyses. According to Small, “Public opinion was what government officials thought it was, whether or not their notions conformed to the neat flow charts created by the scholars.” Influencing the trend of public opinion required a sensitivity to complex cultural trends that Lyndon Johnson, in particular, often failed to demonstrate. Emphasizing Johnson’s demand to be “accepted or loved by everyone,” Small argues that Johnson had an unusually difficult time processing dissenting views within his administration, and that he habitually resisted accountability for public disapproval of his

administration’s policies. Ultimately, Small concludes that the Johnson administration’s strategy of processing dissent was “inconsistent and indecisive,” most coherent in retrospect when analyzed as the product of deeply defensive political and personal postures.26

Small’s description of subjectivity in presidential assessments of the public resonates with later scholarship by historian Robert Dean. Analyzing Lyndon Johnson’s relationship with the public, Dean argues: “LBJ wavered between his fear of appearing weak to domestic and foreign audiences and the apparent wisdom of those who counseled against escalation, simultaneously endorsing caution and disparaging the unmanly weakness of those who urged it.”27 Johnson frequently adopted the gendered lens of masculinity in the process of evaluating public opinion, imposing his own gendered prejudices in an attempt to understand the desires of the American public. For Johnson, the maintenance of an empowered political position demanded the disavowal of all things feminine.

While patriarchal social constructions structured the patterns by which individuals gained access to authoritative positions in society and politics during the long 1960s, they also framed the policy making context of the nation. According to Robert Dean’s persuasive analysis of gender politics in U.S. Cold War era administrations, “the process of foreign policy calculation does not exist in an abstract realm of reasoned calculation of ‘national interest.’ [. . .] the men who make the decisions are complex, socially

26 Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, 151, 155.

27 Robert Dean, Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 216.
constructed beings, who act from a repertoire of possibilities that are a product of their experience.” Not only individuals, but “foreign policy too, is thus culturally constructed and reproduced; a full analysis demands an account of the formative patterns of class and gender among the policymakers.”

In part, Johnson’s gendering of public opinion resulted from his persistently gendered evaluations of his own political actions. In 1970, Johnson reflected on his presidency: “I knew from the start [. . .] If I left the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. [. . .] But if I left that war and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.” This passage demonstrates, with unequivocal clarity, Johnson’s understanding of the gendered limitations of political and military action. As George Ball had predicted in 1964, Johnson quickly lost the ability to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam without the risk of incurring a very public “humiliation” and devastating the international image of the U.S. According to former White House Press

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30 George Ball, “A Compromise Solution in South Vietnam,” in *The Pentagon Papers: Abridged Edition* ed. George C. Herring (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 122-128. Assessing the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, George Ball presciently argued: “Once we suffer large casualties, we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot—without national humiliation—stop short of achieving our complete objectives. Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives—even after we have paid terrible costs.” (italics in the original)
Secretary George Reedy, Johnson was fundamentally incapable of imagining an alternative “to feeding more and more draftees into the meat grinder [of Vietnam].” Haunted by potential accusations of feminine “softness,” Johnson was unable to extract the U.S. from a war that he privately acknowledged it was unlikely to win.

Johnson’s gendered logic corresponds to a particular hegemonic legacy that locates the preservation of the political and military strength of the U.S. in aggressive masculine enterprise. A number of U.S. presidents and their advisors have articulated a connection between the preservation of traditional narratives of masculinity and the defense of the nation. Following this tradition, Johnson’s cabinet shared his concern for the preservation of the public display of masculinity within the administration and the nation at large. According to Robert Dean, the counsel of Johnson’s top advisors encouraged his gendered imagination. Chairman of the Armed Services Committee Richard Russell offered contradictory advice to Johnson, for example, in which “the politics of manliness dictated continuing engagement in a losing battle, but the foreseeable damage to the national interest resulting from growing military intervention


demanded withdrawal."³³ Trapped in this paradox, the gendered imagination of
Johnson's White House proved incapable of imagining a way to communicate an
acceptable resolution of the conflict in Vietnam. Constructing the conflict in Vietnam
through the complicated lens of defensive masculinity, Johnson was often unable to so
much as explain his rationale for the war. As Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare
Wilbur Cohen recalled in an interview years later, when asked "'Why are we in
Vietnam?' [...]. The president took half an hour to answer, and the answer didn't make
any sense whatsoever. [...]. If he had given that answer publicly, he would have been
laughed out of court."³⁴

The gendered contradictions in Lyndon Johnson's public actions and private
rhetoric make him an especially useful subject for the analysis of women's equal
opportunity during the early period of second wave feminism. While by no means a
traditional feminist, Johnson did sign Executive Orders 11246 and 11375 banning
discrimination in Federal employment on the basis of sex. Johnson also strongly
supported a ban on sex based discrimination in employment, as legislated by Title VII of
the Civil Rights Act of 1964.³⁵ As part of his efforts to reform the federal government,
Johnson conducted a well publicized campaign to increase the number of women in high

³³ Dean, Imperial Brotherhood, 217.


(Santa Barbara, CA), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=59153.; Lyndon B. Johnson,
“Executive Order 11375: Amending Executive Order 11246, Relating to Equal Employment
Opportunity” in The American Presidency Project [online], ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard
Peters (Santa Barbara, CA), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=60553.; Lyndon
B. Johnson, “Remarks at the White House Conference on Equal Employment Opportunities,
August 20, 1965,” in The American Presidency Project [online], ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard
Peters (Santa Barbara, CA), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27170.
level government positions. Johnson's private attitudes toward women, however, deeply complicate any assessment of his position on women’s rights.

In her tape recorded diary, Lady Bird Johnson herself noted her husband's fixation on attractiveness in women, describing a prominent female journalist as “sort of soft and cheerful and pretty,” and concluding “those are the chief qualities Lyndon wants in a woman.”36 These ideal qualities were not merely private desires for Johnson, but important considerations in his political appointments. Describing Johnson's interest in the wardrobes of women in his close circle, including his wife and personal staff, former White House Social Secretary, Bess Abell, remembered Johnson prescribed: “No saddle blanket fabrics, which are thick, woolly things. He likes the things that show the shape of your figure if you have one to show.” Further, Abell noted, “He does that not just with his wife, he does it with his daughters and he does it with his secretaries and he does it with anybody who will sit still and listen.”37

Beneath the paternalistic and controlling attitude he displayed toward his female staff, Johnson actively worked to expand women's leadership roles in government. Often, however, his activities seemed to benefit his own political objectives more than those of the women he appointed. According to Julia Kirk Blackwelder, “Intentionally or otherwise, [Johnson] patronized women and thus kept them in their place. Condescending interchanges with or about women form a continuous strand through his


private conversations during his White House years.”

Perhaps no exchange better exemplified this approach to powerful women than Johnson’s conversation with Jacqueline Kennedy on December 21, 1963, in which he teasingly warned Kennedy:

“When I got ready to go to home for my Christmas, the Congress just said they’d spank me and hit me right in the face and wouldn’t let me go, and that’s the way I am going to do you next time if you don’t tell me goodbye.”

Similarly, in his sudden inspiration to appoint Jacqueline Kennedy Ambassador to Mexico, Johnson gave further evidence for what Blackwelder described as his “shotgun approach” to cabinet appointments, in which Johnson “thought first of the wives of his associates when trying to explain the types of positions he sought to name, and he invited the wives of his political allies to fill some positions.”

Johnson was himself aware of the implications of his treatment of Kennedy. Despite his gushing projections that Kennedy’s appointment would “electrify the Western Hemisphere. . . . She’d walk out on that balcony and look down on ‘em, and they’d just pee all over themselves every day,” Johnson was also savvy enough to question if “they’d think we were trying to use her or something?” Confirming the President’s doubts, White House press secretary Pierre Salinger replied, “That’s really what I’m concerned about.”

Johnson, however, was not so easily dissuaded.
In an April 1965 call to Dean Rusk, Johnson described his objectives in cabinet appointments straightforwardly. Discussing candidates for the position of ambassador to Luxembourg, Johnson persisted in recommending Patricia Robert Harris, an African American law professor at Howard University. Disregarding Dean Rusk’s advice that Harris would be far more useful for the administration in the position of deputy legal advisor, Johnson explained his reasons for favoring Harris in the Ambassador position: “These women—I want to move them up. Women and Nigroes.”

In a classic paternalistic exercise, Johnson took responsibility for the advancement of symbolically representative women and racial minorities into his own hands, while simultaneously disrupting and disregarding the real leadership that individual women and racial minorities had cultivated.

Johnson's attempt to fill another open Ambassadorship, to Finland, again revealed his hasty and superficial approach to appointing women cabinet members. Initially, Johnson attempted to pressure Mary Lasker into the position, despite her own clear objections. Fixated on his own goal of increasing the number of women in his cabinet, Johnson pushed Lasker to accept the position without considering her own very domestic career objectives in the area of public health. When a deeply hesitant Lasker asked to discuss the terms of the appointment with Johnson in his office, he warned “Yes, you can come, but I'm not going to take no.” Attempting to reject the appointment later in the conversation, Lasker claimed, “You know I feel honored because you'd even think of me, but I'd feel miserable [in Finland].”

With complete disregard for Lasker’s

objections, Johnson warned her, “‘I’m going to have a press conference tomorrow or next
day, and I’d hate to announce that you’re going to be ambassador and then have you say
you couldn’t.’”43 Disregarding Lasker’s own particular skills and career objectives,
Johnson viewed her primarily as an object in his own design for an appearance of gender
parity in U.S. politics.

Later, accepting that Lasker was unlikely to accept the position, Johnson told
Dean Rusk “‘I want to get some real outstanding woman in this country [Finland] pretty
soon, so you think of that.’” Johnson then suggested that Rusk consider Katherine
McBride, president of Bryn Mawr College, although he didn’t personally know the
woman, and could not remember who recommended she be considered.44 Finally,
Johnson successfully appointed Aline Saarinen, a woman he knew primarily as the wife
of a prominent Finnish architect. Attempting to describe the new ambassador to his
social secretary, Johnson revealed his lack of familiarity with his new appointment,
describing her as “‘Ms. Saarinen, or whatever her name is--the wife of the architect that’s
going to be my new lady ambassador to Finland.’”45 In later discussions concerning the
appointment, Johnson continued to have difficulty recalling Saarinen’s name, referring to
her as “‘this Sarensen woman’” and “‘this Saarinen, or whatever her name is.’”46

While he may have been unable to remember his new appointment’s name,
Johnson had little difficulty recalling her face. In discussing Saarinen’s qualifications


with George Ball and Robert McNamara, Johnson described her as "just smart as hell, and prettier than she is smart." Attractiveness, for Johnson, was an important trait in a female cabinet member. The beauty of a woman at times seemed more important to Johnson than any real political acumen she may have demonstrated, even in a woman commissioned with representing the United States abroad.  

In his January 25, 1964 news conference, the president publicly described his campaign for increasing the number of women in government, promising: "you are going to find more attractive, capable women working for this Government than you ever saw before." This rhetorical emphasis on the attractiveness of his new cabinet members was not incidental, as Johnson's telephone records reveal. In a call to prominent New York stylist and makeup artist Eddie Senz, Johnson revealed his fixation on the appearance of the women in his close association. Aware that his actions were unusual for a man in his position, Johnson asked Senz, "Can I talk to you now without getting in the paper and getting it advertised?" After receiving a vow of confidentiality from the stylist, Johnson told him, "I got a wife and a couple of daughters, and four or five people that run around with me, and I like the way you make them look." Later, while Senz was working, Johnson called his wife for an update on the stylist's progress. After Lady Bird reported that long time Johnson staff member Yolanda Boozer had not appeared for the appointment, Johnson instructed his wife, "tell him I want him to do Yolanda,"

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because she's got to have about a bale cut off if I'm going to look at her through Christmas.'”\textsuperscript{50}

Johnson's fixation on feminine beauty was a significant factor in his relations with each woman in his personal life and administration, regardless of her position or accomplishments. In a 1964 call with White House Staff Director Liz Carpenter and Special Assistant to the President Ralph Dungan, Johnson discussed the potential appointment of Katherine May, asking first for her political affiliation, and then for her personal information. The conversation follows:

President Johnson: And how old is she?
Dungan: She's 47, as I recall.
President Johnson: That's a little old for me.
Dungan: [Laughs] She's a spry 47.
President Johnson: Is she good-looking?
Dungan: No, she's--
President Johnson: Well, I'll be damned.

Responding to Johnson's clearly apparent priorities in his appointment, Dungan's first response to the President's next question, "What about Pat Harris?" is to inform him, "She's very attractive."\textsuperscript{51} Although Johnson publicly avowed his commitment to improving women's opportunities in the workplace and in politics, his own clearly

\textsuperscript{50} The Presidential Recordings: Lyndon B. Johnson, vol. 2, 737.

discriminatory process of selecting female candidates for political appointment revealed a far more complex agenda.

Johnson’s fixation on women’s appearance again emerged in his January 1964 conversation with John Macy, chairman of the U.S. Civil Service Commission, when Johnson asked for “‘the five smartest, best-educated, fastest, prettiest secretaries in Washington’”52. In a revealing speech before the Pittsburgh League of Women Voters, Johnson fell back on his notions of gender in his description of broad support for his anti-poverty programs: “We have men of both parties; we have people of all colors; we have women of all religions, all races, all shapes, all kinds of dresses, all different hairdo’s.”53 Even before an audience of extremely politically active women, in Johnson’s rhetoric men had political parties while women had shapes, dresses, and hairdo’s. While he may have felt a sincere commitment to increasing parity of the sexes in political office, Johnson’s own embedded cultural prejudice made it impossible for him to truly assess men and women through the same lens.

Although Johnson maintained a serious commitment to increasing female cabinet appointments throughout the early years of his presidency, many of his most visible appointments were mere tokens to appease calls for women’s equality as well as pressures from civil rights leaders. Rather than seriously attempting to recruit capable and enthusiastic women, Johnson sought attractive, well connected, and safe women to improve his public image. His appointment of Gerri Whittington, an African American woman, to the presidential secretarial pool was one example of this tokenism. As

Johnson explained to assistant press secretary Andy Hatcher, “I think I'll take this girl if I can get her [Gerri Whittington]--used to be in Ralph Dungan's office--and just put her in my personal office. And I think I'll furthermore get a Mexican and bring him in here, and put him on the staff here in the White House. I've already got a good Italian--Jack Valenti.”

Delivered in a tone more appropriate for a proud collector of rare artifacts than a civil rights leader, Johnson’s litany of minority appointments emphasized his superficial approach to political equality. Later in the same conversation, Johnson again revealed his lack of familiarity with a new appointment he had himself selected, asking Hatcher: “what's this girl--do you know this Wilkinson girl?” to which Hatcher corrected, “Gerri Whittington.” After Hatcher confirmed, “Yes, she's very good.” Johnson decided “Well, now, why don't we just put her outside here and be my secretary? […] I'm just going to get her a job, and put her out here in my office.” This questioning of Whittington’s ability as a secretary seems almost an afterthought. The symbolic value of seating a black female employee outside the President’s office door was the consideration Johnson weighed longest in the appointment of Whittington.

Similar patterns can be observed in the military's policies toward women in the period, as Carol Parr, 1977 Chair of the National Coalition for Women in Defense, argued: “we are progressing from a military force that was more than 98 percent male to a military force that will be 93 percent male [by 1982, under present goals]. That can hardly be called a fantastic increase. It can more appropriately be described a a slight

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change in the degree of tokenism." In Johnson’s administration as well as in other elite national arenas, token approaches to women’s appointments were reinforced by traditional gendered values. These values were by no means unusual, as similar ideologies were frequently cited by defenders of traditional social and political codes of behavior.

These social traditionalists intentionally constrained the boundaries of women’s potential political and societal advancement, arguing that any true movement toward sex-based equality would irreparably undermine the social order. William G. Reitzer, with degrees in theology and law, submitted a statement to be considered in the 1971 hearings before House Subcommittee No. 4. that argued against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment on the basis of traditional social codes of gender. Using a literal interpretation of Old Testament scripture, Reitzer argued: “the Bible is predicated on the precept that it contains principles of truth for all men for all ages as long as the earth shall last. Hence, it is incumbent upon legislators to have the Biblical principles of a legal issue well in mind and to give them great weight.” Arguing against the legislation of equal rights on the basis of sex, Reitzer wrote: “An equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution on the basis of sex violates a number of Biblical principles. Therefore, to enact such an amendment into law would be detrimental to the general welfare.” This particular construction of the supposed general welfare, however, was highly motivated

56 Joint Economic Committee, The Role of Women in the Military, 98.
57 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 572.
58 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 572.
by an ideological agenda that placed men in an imaginatively unassailable position of
cultural dominance.

Reitzer revealed his own patriarchal social agenda very clearly when he argued
later in the same document: “A man is proud of his masculinity. He does not want a mate
that would challenge and compete with his masculinity. Therefore he delights in wife's
femininity.”59 Pointing even more directly to his fear of women's equal competition with
men, Reitzer also argued:

When a woman does enter the labor market, it would seem consistent with
Biblical principles that she avoid situations that would place her in competition
with and ascendency over men. [. . .] It is generally psychologically (consciously
or subconsciously) distasteful to a man to have to compete with a woman. [. . .]
It is generally psychologically annoying to a man to have to submit to female
authority. This reflects on his manliness.

Later in the same passage, Reitzer addressed the issue of equal pay for equal work,
arguing “Equal pay for women is also demeaning to a man. [. . .] The problem is best
avoided if women refrain from competing in the labor market with men.”60 Significantly,
as Reitzer himself acknowledged, “the question in these areas of man-woman relations is
not one of capability, but one of propriety. If God ordained that women be subordinate to
men, then that order should be respected wherever possible.”61 Having established that

60 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 577.
women were equally capable of performing the tasks traditionally assigned to men, the question then became one of social custom, as Reitzer questioned whether traditional society would willingly accommodate challenges to patriarchal structures that kept women from achieving full social and political equality.

Many career politicians displayed this reluctance to adapt patriarchal structures, creating hostile climates for women within elite national spaces and refusing to accept women as equal agents within the imagined U.S. community. While the equal participation of women in both domestic and foreign spheres of U.S. authority was emphasized by numerous scholars in the late 1960s, it remained difficult to imagine foreign policy as anything more than an exchange between elite men in the overtly sexualized rhetoric of President Johnson. Defending his recent response to a situation in Vietnam to editor in chief of the Scripps Howard newspaper chain, Walker Stone, Johnson explained his actions with an anecdote: “you may not be sleeping with my wife, but if I catch you with your britches down and you're coming out of her bedroom and she's in the bed, by god, I might do something bad.”

Playing to classic themes of masculine defensiveness, Johnson treated women as passive and exploited objects in these narratives, leaving little room to imagine women as equal agents in the drama.

Even Senator Margaret Chase Smith, ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee and one of the most decorated women in politics in the era, received the peculiar condescending praise that Johnson reserved for female associates. In a particularly indulgent moment, Johnson called Smith in December of 1963 to tell her:

"you're a mighty sweet girl and a mighty big patriot, and you know what we think of you. I had one minute and I wanted to spend it telling you so." It is nearly impossible to imagine Johnson addressing a male ranking member of the Armed Services Committee in similar terms.

In 1970, Representative Emanuel Celler, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, offered his own suspiciously saccharine praise for women in United States politics while simultaneously offering his own reductive interpretation of the contest for women’s equal rights. According to Celler, "Neither the National Women's Party nor the delightful, delectable, and dedicated gentlelady from Michigan [Mrs. Griffiths] can change nature. They cannot do it. There is as much difference between a male and a female as between a horse chestnut and a chestnut horse--and as the French say, vive la difference." Following a long established tradition of paternalism in elite level political circles, Johnson and Celler summarily dismissed the political contributions of Smith and Griffiths without any real consideration for their actual and measurable political achievements. Women, in the minds of these politicians, were immeasurably and essentially different from men. Within this discursive ideological tradition, women’s very real steps toward becoming empowered members of the elite national community were often met with skepticism, and at times unequivocally disregarded. For women members of Congress who campaigned for women’s political and social empowerment, this masculinist working climate often resulted in patronizing treatment from their male colleagues as well as limited political opportunities.

64 Senate Committee on the Judiciary, S.J. Res. 61 and S.J. Res 23, 21.
CHAPTER III

GENDER AND POLITICAL CULTURE

The gendered expectations of the masculinist political establishment of the long 1960s made it difficult for women to define their own unique terrain as politicians. Often, women were forced into frames that defined their political interests around their embodied sex, rather than the needs of their constituents. While ideological differences between male politicians were accepted as the normal business of a two party political system, women in Congress were frequently expected to form a politically coherent coalition around issues of sex equality. With the growing popularity of second wave feminism’s imagined “sisterhood” for all women, female politicians were increasingly defined by their relationship—or lack thereof—to the women’s movement by feminists and anti-feminists alike. This single issue framework, however, has little historical precedent as an accurate barometer of women’s real political concerns and alliances.

In 1917, Jeanette Rankin became the first woman to serve in the U.S. Congress. The first and last woman elected to the U.S. Congress from Montana, Rankin was a pacifist, a suffragette, and a lobbyist for the extremely progressive Sheppard-Towner Act. Four years later, Alice Robertson became the second woman to serve in the U.S. Congress. Robertson, an anti-suffragette from Oklahoma, refused to support civil rights and women’s equality legislation and was in favor of increasing the U.S. military
commitment abroad.65 These two pioneering women, politically polar opposites, frustrated their contemporaries as well as future scholars in any attempt to define a uniquely female style of legislating. Rankin, an avowed feminist, actively promoted legislative discussions of social equality. Robertson, a social and political conservative, was openly dismissive of all class based legislation and venomously critical of the early feminist political agenda. While Rankin attempted to break open the hegemonic political class from the inside, Robertson positioned herself as an outside defender of the traditional order.

Congresswomen who followed in these political footsteps were forced to contend with a largely unchanging patriarchal praxis in national political culture, resulting in implicit challenges to their status as equally empowered first class citizens. An entrenched connection between sex and gendered capability characterized the political culture of the U.S. in the late 1960s. Popular concern for the preservation of normative gendered authority influenced the composition of many of the nation’s most powerful arenas during the period, including the U.S. Congress. The composition of the congressional body, even today, reflects this deep inequality. Despite their majority status in the overall population, only 274 of the approximately 12,000 individuals who have served in the history of the United States Congress have been women. Of those 274 women, only 24 have served in party leadership positions, and just 26 have chaired congressional committees. These congressional women, moreover, have been overwhelmingly white. In one hundred and twelve Congresses, only forty-three “women

65 Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, Climbing the Hill: Gender Conflict in Congress (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 4, 6.
of color” have served as U.S. Representatives, and only one has served as a U.S. Senator. No African American women served in the U.S. Congress before Shirley Chisholm’s landmark election of 1968. During the long 1960s, establishing a position of authority in this white male dominated cult of masculinity—where feminization, as a metaphor, and women, as a reality, posed a distinct gendered threat—was no easy task for any woman.

Political decisions in the U.S. were described through a starkly gendered lens under President Johnson’s leadership. Ever haunted by potential accusations of feminine “softness,” Johnson was unable to extract the U.S. from a war that he privately acknowledged it was unlikely to win. In 1970, Johnson reflected on his presidency:

I knew from the start [. . .] If I left the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. [. . .] But if I left that war and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.

Analyzing Lyndon Johnson’s relationship with the public, Robert Dean argued: “LBJ wavered between his fear of appearing weak to domestic and foreign audiences and the apparent wisdom of those who counseled against escalation, simultaneously endorsing


caution and disparaging the unmanly weakness of those who urged it.\textsuperscript{68} During Johnson’s tenure, foreign and domestic policy calculations were debated within the ideological limits of hegemonic masculinity. Like Johnson, women in political office during the U.S. war in Vietnam gained strength with certain electorates through their disavowal of feminine softness. With their difference already visibly marked by the popular expectations of their sex, socially and politically conservative women often went to great lengths to demonstrate their political support for a strong U.S. military. Other congressional women, commonly those representing constituencies with more domestically oriented political concerns, challenged this cult of political masculinity.

Political scientists who research voting behavior have established the importance of intersecting political factors in electorates’ perceptions of women candidates. Women, when imagined as a political interest group, tend to be defined in reductive terms that often fail to account for intragroup variation as well as intergroup similarities. Not all women legislate alike, and not all voters assess women candidates exclusively in terms of their sex. In many cases, apparent instances of voting cued by gender affinity have been attributed to a more complex process of candidate identification. As Kathleen Dolan warned:

\begin{quote}
we can conclude that women voters do feel positively toward female candidates, but that these warm feelings are often based on considerations beyond a shared sex identity. [ . . . ] That women respondents feel more positively toward female Democratic candidates than do men, but do not have the same affective feelings
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{68} Robert Dean, \textit{Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 216.
for female Republican candidates, suggests that any gender gap in evaluations of female candidates should take into account partisan differences as well as sex-based identity.\textsuperscript{69}

Shared gender identity has served as a superficial and incomplete means of determining the real foundations of political coalitions in the long 1960s. Rather than the electorate's straightforward expression of gendered affinity, the election of female candidates more likely functioned "at some level, a function of idiosyncratic circumstances of particular elections--such things as the mix of candidates, their positions, the issues of the day, media coverage, and public awareness."\textsuperscript{70} Contrary to a simplistic reflection of gender affinity, electors determined their support for a given candidate through a broad evaluation of individual competency and overall political viability.

At the height of political feminism in the long 1960s, partially as a result of the visibility of the informal feminist political caucus, the public and the press often associated female candidates with the more liberal Democratic party. This presumptuous, and often false, association encouraged the popular supposition that women politicians would demonstrate a stronger tendency toward liberal policymaking. According to the research of Schwindt-Bayer and Corbetta, however, "being a woman does not have a significant influence on the degree of liberalism reflected in roll-call votes in the U.S. House of Representatives. This finding holds true not only across political parties but


also when we compare the voting patterns of men and women with the same political party affiliation.\textsuperscript{71} Constituency, far more than a single identity factor such as candidate sex, had the strongest overall impact on a congressperson’s voting record. For women, as for men, gender identity was one factor in a complex formula of political ideology. In order to fully conceptualize the operation of power in gendered terms, an analysis of political influence must take these multiple variables into account. As Kane and Whipkey warn, one-dimensional models of gender research have a tendency to “strip experience from its historical and political context and neglect questions of power and conflict.”\textsuperscript{72}

The methods by which individuals and groups ultimately prioritized their political activism in the long 1960s were far more functions of various intersectional cultural positions than they were simply the product of sex difference. Systemic relationships of economic and cultural advantage were far more constraining than simple sex and gender identity. In determining political activism, “among more advantaged citizens, the gender differences are relatively muted; among those less well off, there is a decided focus of attention among women on issues associated with poverty and poor living conditions.”\textsuperscript{73} These intersectional influences on political identity help to explain the differences in legislative interests between women members of Congress during the long 1960s.

\textsuperscript{71} Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer and Renato Corbetta, “Gender Turnover and Roll-Call Voting in the U.S. House of Representatives,” \textit{Legislative Studies Quarterly} 29 no. 2 (2004): 224

\textsuperscript{72} E. Kane and K. Whipkey, “Predictors of Public Support for Gender-Related Affirmative Action: Interests, Gender Attitudes, and Stratification Beliefs,” \textit{Public Opinion Quarterly} 73 no. 2 (2009): 234

As a recent longitudinal study of Congress concluded, “when, at the aggregate level, preferences, length of tenure and institutional position are taken into account, there is no real demonstrable difference between the effectiveness of men and women House members.” The electorate has typically reflected the lack of clearly gendered behavior displayed on the candidate level, as women’s voting behavior refuses to follow a clear line of affinity with women candidates. One recent study of women in the electorate found “there are more differences between women than between women and men on a variety of values, attitudes, and policy positions such as support for women in public office or support for the key feminist issues of the ERA and abortion.”

The persistently transitioning concerns of constituents, including but not limited to practical political considerations, individual political ideology, and broad party ideology, defined the platforms of both men and women political candidates during the long 1960s.

U.S. politics have long been conducted in the shadow of an androcentric hegemonic legacy that locates the preservation of the political and military strength of the U.S. within heteronormative constructions of forceful masculinity. A number of U.S. presidents and their advisors have articulated a direct connection between the preservation of traditional narratives of masculinity and the defense of the nation. Following this tradition, numerous male and female Vietnam era politicians cultivated public postures of political masculinity. According to Robert Dean, the counsel of Johnson’s top advisors encouraged his gendered imagination.


services Committee Richard Russell offered contradictory advice to Johnson, for example, in which "the politics of manliness dictated continuing engagement in a losing battle, but the foreseeable damage to the national interest resulting from growing military intervention demanded withdrawal." This starkly gendered posturing pushed Johnson and politicians like Johnson toward what would have been otherwise untenable positions on the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Congress, the most representatively democratic of national political forums, nonetheless maintained oppressive patterns of traditional gendered access throughout the 1960s. As Pamela Fiber and Richard L. Fox argue:

Because they have been excluded from their communities' economic and political elite throughout much of the twentieth century, women's paths to Congress have often taken different forms. Widows of congressmen who died in office served as the first wave of successful female candidates. Between 1916 and 1964, 28 of the 32 widows nominated to fill their husbands' vacancies won their elections, for a victory rate of 88 percent. Across the same time period, only 32 of the 199 nonwidows who garnered their party's nomination were elected, for a 14 percent nonvictory rate.

In these early years, a woman candidate's chances for election were closely tied to her ability to construct herself as the loyal helpmeet of an established male politician.

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76 Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*, 217.

Women who campaigned without these spousal connections were often presented as political outsiders, and were far less likely to be elected.

Social ideas about women’s difference were commonly expressed by influential men in the long 1960s, emphasizing the construction of women as weaker, more unpredictable, and more unreliable human beings. President Johnson’s rhetoric has provided a great deal of evidence for this casual disavowal of women’s equal value as citizens and politicians, but he was far from alone in his biases. Journalists, presidential advisors, and numerous Congresswomen and Congressmen shared Johnson’s perspectives on women’s essential difference, presenting challenges to women’s status in the imagined community of the U.S. from various elite positions.

Dr. Edgar Berman, a close confidant of Hubert Humphrey who served as a White House and State Department consultant for over a decade, eventually resigned in 1970 after offering numerous public pronouncements on women’s inferior biological conditioning. In a discussion with Representative Patsy Mink, Dr. Berman argued that women were physiologically incapable of serving in demanding and high stress national positions. Offering the example of a “menopausal woman President” forced with an international crisis, Berman argued the President’s rationality would be limited by “the curious mental aberrations of that age group.” Outraged, Mink wrote to Humphrey, demanding Berman’s resignation. Ultimately, while Berman did resign, he rejected Mink’s protests as “a typical example of an ordinarily controlled woman under the raging
hormonal imbalance of the periodical lunar cycle.” Refusing to apologize for his claims, Berman instead publicly lamented the “uptight” nature of “the whole world.”

Women in the long 1960s faced an uphill battle for election to national political office. Historically underrepresented and socially coded as fundamentally different, women politicians were frequently dismissed as less serious than their male peers. The U.S. Congress in the 1960s did not bend easily to the demands of women’s integration. While women’s low prestige committee appointments and infrequent election to positions of party leadership imply this inequality, the discourse on Congressional facilities confirms Congresswomen’s separate status. The well-publicized fight for women’s equal access to Congressional exercise facilities illustrates the presumption of certain Congressmen that “a woman’s place is in the home, not the House.”

Referring to women’s election to the U.S. House and Senate as “an intrusion,” the journalist who reported this particular story on women’s access to congressional facilities was hardly more sensitive than the unnamed Congressman to the rights of female Representatives and Senators. Casually erasing these women’s political differences from one another, the story opened with the warning that, “the 11 ladies of the House, determined suffragettes all, are clamoring shrilly for equal swimming privileges.” Reducing women’s fight for equal access to workplace facilities to a battle for equal “privileges,” the article entirely avoids any discussion of larger rights violations.


80 Anderson, 22.
experienced by women in Congress. Playing to a presumed opposition between men and women’s distinct legislative interests and activities, the article generously concludes, “It would be wrong to suppose that congresswomen are unappreciated. The men have welcomed their feminine frills, courted their votes, even admired their minds.” Despite their increasing presence in Congress during the long 1960s, women politicians were still frequently coded as anomalous and inconsequential.

Lyndon Johnson’s description of Hattie Caraway, the first female U.S. Senator to be elected to a full term, as a “poor little helpless woman” in need of a man’s protection from “those powerful interests arrayed against her” by the political institutions of 1933 revealed a great deal about women’s opportunities in the political culture of 1966. Initially appointed to fill her deceased husband’s Senate seat, Caraway slowly developed a legislative consciousness. Caraway spent her first ten years in office closely mimicking her husband’s voting behavior, but in 1943 she became a cosponsor of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, demonstrating her commitment to women’s full political and social equality.

Despite Caraway’s progressive and self-directed actions in the U.S. Senate, Johnson chose to emphasize the memory of her earlier passive inheritance of political office. In many ways, the intervening thirty years had left gendered political inequality fully intact, a fact exemplified by the careers of conservative female politicians such as

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81 Anderson, 23.
83 Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, 11.
Margaret Chase Smith and Catherine Dean May. At the same time, however, these institutional structures were being seriously contested by women with a gendered consciousness of the fundamentally oppressive nature of congressional convention. This apparently radical ideological shift can be tied to the activities of politicians such as Shirley Chisholm, Bella Abzug, and Patricia Schroeder in Congress.

In the winter of 1970 the underground feminist newsletter NOW Acts, printed by the National Organization for Women, published a “Blueprint for Political Action.” This tract encouraged women to challenge the traditional gendering of political roles through the development of a feminist political stance. According to this publication, “It is vital that women become active in political clubs. It is equally vital that this activity focus on ‘our thing’ rather than get absorbed into routine, supportive roles in which women have been traditionally locked.”84 This opposition between the traditional political roles for women and the new feminist demands of the 1960s and 1970s offers a useful perspective for analyzing the gendered activity of women in Congress during the long 1960s. While the call for women’s political empowerment is noble, a close analysis of women in the Congressional body during the long 1960s demonstrates the difficulty of defining women’s unique political “thing.” Elected by different constituencies, shaped by different social and political influences, each Congresswoman defined her agenda around a broad set of interests and objectives. While the public and the press may have imagined a separate women’s agenda, Congresswomen themselves rarely all agreed on any policy issues.

Margaret Chase Smith was one woman politician who disagreed with the majority of feminist demands for women's political and social empowerment. One of the longest serving women in the U.S. Congress, Smith was first seated by special election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of her husband in 1940. Over the subsequent three decades, she became the first woman to serve as both U.S. Representative and Senator. Reelected to the House of Representative for the 77th-80th Congresses, Smith won a seat in the Senate on November 2, 1948, where she served in the 81st-92nd Congresses. Smith was also the first woman elected to the Senate during a regular election, without first having been appointed to fill a vacant seat.85 Despite these pioneering achievements, however, Smith maintained a very traditional view of her gendered responsibilities in government.

Smith's perspective on her political role was not uncommon among conservative female Republicans. Conservative female legislators have commonly rejected the liberal feminist construction of "women's" legislative priorities. In the long 1960s, these conservative women actively and passionately challenged "the feminist perspective that liberal policies are in the interest of women."

Entering politics as a congressman's wife, Smith described her role in those early years as first and foremost "Clyde's wife," emphasizing that "though I knew it was important to Clyde to cultivate the women's vote for him, I had never been a feminist."87

Throughout her political career, Smith persistently maintained this pose of feminine


87 Margaret Chase Smith, Declaration of Conscience (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 65.
subservience, emerging as a strong supporter of the Johnson administration’s rhetoric of defensive masculinity. In her memoir, Smith was careful to refute any allegations to the contrary, noting:

I was perhaps identified more with WAVE [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] legislation than any other. It left the impression, I’m afraid, that I was a feminist concentrating on legislation for women. And if there is any one thing I have attempted to avoid it is being a feminist. I definitely resent being called a feminist.\(^{88}\)

Smith’s position on military policies was, indeed, far more aggressive than most feminists and other members of the 1960s counterculture would have countenanced, tying her political opinions very closely to those of the masculinist establishment.

Invited, along with other select members of Congress, to a private meeting with President Johnson on October 23, 1967, Smith described her feelings about the war in no uncertain terms. Responding to a discussion on Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s doubts regarding the effectiveness of the bombing campaign in Vietnam, Smith expressed her accord with the hawkish sentiments of Representative George H. Mahon and Senator Russell Long. Invoking a traditional masculinist narrative of justification for military action, Smith praised Johnson and his administration’s military strategy. Explaining her position, Smith argued, “I don’t know the President’s alternative but I don’t think you should stop the bombing. I have great admiration for the firm stand

\(^{88}\) Smith, 85.
you have taken.”89 In the official record and in her memoirs, Smith presented an unequivocally masculinist approach to national policy, explicitly resentful of the idea of being assigned a feminist political identity on the basis of her identity as a woman.

Catherine Dean May, a far more moderate Republican than Smith, served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1959 until 1971.90 While May advocated for women’s increased political presence, in this sense aligning herself with one aspect of the second wave liberal feminist agenda, she also actively positioned herself as a traditional Republican. May’s support for the Equal Rights Amendment, for example, was tempered by her frequent warnings that she was not a member of any feminist organization. In a legislative sense, she firmly believed that “we should and must amend the Constitution to provide that equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”91 May’s perspectives on feminism as a social movement, however, were heavily guarded. As she reassured one of her constituents, “I certainly can agree with you that many of those involved in the Women’s Liberation movement are not expressing my views on equal opportunities for women.”92

Although she strongly approved of legislation that attempted to improve gender parity in U.S. society and politics, May hesitated to align herself with feminist

89 “Notes of the President’s Meeting with the Democratic Leadership” 5:36 PM to 7:04 PM, 23 October 1967 in Lyndon B. Johnson’s Vietnam Papers, 512.


organizations and repeatedly demonstrated her suspicion of any platform that presumed to speak for all women. Referring to the National Woman’s Party as a “kookie outfit,” May revealed her discomfort with the political ties she had forged of necessity with members of the organization. In an unguarded moment of frustration, May complained, “I am stuck with this battle to get equal rights for women, though I’m not so darned sure we would want them if we got them!”

This same resistance to universal discussions of women’s interests was evident in May’s response to Representative Silvio Conte’s request for cosponsors of a resolution to designate August 26th as Susan B. Anthony Day. While May enthusiastically agreed to sponsor the resolution, she also warned Conte, “I did note in your letter that you are ‘inviting all the women members of the Congress to cosponsor it’ and wonder if this isn’t a wee bit discriminatory?”

Rejecting the assumption that all women legislators would share an interest in the resolution, critical of the presumption that men legislators would be uninterested, May pointed to the implicit bias in Conte’s treatment of the resolution.

Shirley Chisholm, a markedly different politician from Margaret Chase Smith and Catherine Dean May, was elected to the 91st Congress and seated on January 3, 1969. Reelected to the 92nd through 97th Congresses, Chisholm was the first black female Representative elected to the U.S. Congress.

While Smith, May, and Chisholm shared little in the way of legislative agendas, the three were similarly unwilling to claim a


95 Lewis, Women and Women’s Issues in Congress, 122.
feminist identity. While Margaret Chase Smith rejected feminism as contrary to her own interests, Catherine Dean May pursued a feminist agenda while persistently denying her identity as a feminist. Like May, Shirley Chisholm was proud to describe her political career as one marked by the advocacy of marginalized people, but she hesitated to describe herself as a feminist. As Chisholm described her candidacy for the Presidency of the United States:

I am not the candidate of black America, although I am black and proud. I am not the candidate of the women’s movement of this country, although I am a woman, and I am equally proud of that. I am not the candidate of any political bosses or special interests. . . . I am the candidate of the people.\footnote{Chisholm, \textit{The Good Fight}, 71.}

This same construction applied to Chisholm’s earlier campaign for congressional office, where she developed a careful rhetoric that emphasized local ideological affinity over national political affiliations.

Following the 1968 court ordered redistricting of the Brooklyn, NY neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Chisholm faced James Farmer in an open seat election for the U.S. House of Representatives. Farmer was a fairly daunting opponent for the relatively unknown Chisholm. For the most part, the two candidates held similar positions on local, domestic, and international issues. Furthermore, Farmer’s affiliations with the Congress for Racial Equality and the Freedom Riders defined his deep significance for the civil rights movement. Farmer, however, possessed a deeply misogynistic rhetorical flourish, and frequently targeted female politicians in general and Chisholm in particular. Farmer
was fond of claiming that in black communities “women have been in the driver’s seat” for too long, arguing that the new congressional district needed “a man’s voice in Washington.” Referencing Chisholm’s early work as a public school educator, Farmer frequently referred to his opponent as a “little schoolteacher,” and publicly questioned her ability to lead the community.97 Chisholm, in her campaign slogan “unbought and unbossed,” successfully answered Farmer’s challenge, using Farmer’s misogynistic rhetoric to draw attention to the discrimination that she and other women faced.

Despite Chisholm’s defeat of her well regarded and more politically experienced opponent, many congressmen remained skeptical of her effectiveness as a politician. When Chisholm announced her highly symbolic candidacy for the 1972 Democratic Party’s Presidential nomination, many members of the political establishment dismissed her as frivolous and insignificant. Chisholm openly acknowledged the impossible nature of her campaign, admitting that “as a black person and as a female, I do not have a chance of actually gaining that office in this election year.” Nonetheless, she described her candidacy as vital for the political consciousness of marginalized people in the U.S. As Chisholm claimed, “my candidacy itself can change the face and future of American politics--that it will be important to the needs and hopes of every one of you--even though, in the conventional sense, I will not win.”98

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Reflecting on her 1972 campaign, Chisholm wrote, “I ran because most people think the country is not ready for a black candidate, not ready for a woman candidate.”99 Unfortunately, however, many politicians demonstrated that Chisholm was right to assume they were unready for her candidacy. Displaying the same casual misogyny as Farmer, numerous politicians dismissed or ignored Chisholm’s efforts. U.S. Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio, a prominent civil rights politician, simply shrugged and laughed when a reporter asked for his opinion on Chisholm’s candidacy. U.S. Representative Clay Stokes, brother to Louis and also of Ohio, answered the same reporter, “Who’s Shirley Chisholm?”100

Aware of the alienating potential of a political platform that openly criticized the ideological constructions of dominant political and social culture, Chisholm was careful to qualify her public expressions in ways that would not estrange her larger constituency. In her 1970 autobiography *Unbought and Unbossed*, published in the early years of her political career, Chisholm offered a careful positioning of the dimensions of gender and race in her politics. Responding to political attacks that accused her of racial and sexual radicalism, Chisholm equivocated:

I am not antimale any more than I am antiwhite, and I am not antiwhite, because I understand that white people, like black ones, are victims of a racist society. They are products of their time and place. It’s the same with men. This society is as

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antiwoman as it is antiblack. It has forced males to adopt discriminatory attitudes toward females.\textsuperscript{101}

Three years later, established in her national political role, Chisholm offered a less careful analysis of male privilege. Responding to criticisms of her presidential candidacy from within the black male community of the U.S., Chisholm wrote, “if anyone thinks white men are sexists, let them check out black men sometime.”\textsuperscript{102} While operating in political solidarity with the black community at large, Chisholm nonetheless found it necessary to describe and critique the dialogues of masculinist privilege operating within that community.

Shirley Chisholm was well aware of the institutional inequalities faced by women in public positions of authority in the U.S. As she testified during the 1970 Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment:

More than half of the population of the United States is female, but women occupy only 2 percent of the managerial positions. They have no even reached the level of tokenism yet. No women sit on the AFL-CIO Council or the Supreme Court. There have been only two women who have held Cabinet rank and at present there are none. Only two women now hold ambassadorial rank in the diplomatic corps. In Congress we are down to 1 Senator and 10 Representatives.\textsuperscript{103}


\textsuperscript{102} Chisholm, \textit{The Good Fight}, 30.

Discussing the complex social realities of class based inequality, Chisholm argued for the value of a comprehensive approach to both racial and sexual equality. Critical of the stark categorical differences set up by mainstream feminists, Chisholm pointed out that “white women are at an economic disadvantage even compared to black men, and black women are nowhere on the earnings scale.”104 As a non-traditional politician who embodied these multiple classes of oppression, Chisholm saw herself as a necessary agent of change within national politics. As she explained, “I ran because someone had to do it first.”105 Anticipating the improbability of her election during her Presidential campaign, Chisholm argued that “Regardless of the outcome, they will have to remember that a little hundred-pound woman, Shirley Chisholm, shook things up.”106

Chisholm was in fact not taken seriously, by male candidates or by the fourth estate. In one of the few extended reports on Chisholm’s 1972 candidacy, Stephan Lesher emphasized his evaluations of Chisholm’s numerous personal and political shortcomings. Most startling, perhaps, was Lesher’s insistence that Chisholm has offered too generous a physical description of herself in her autobiography. According to Lesher:

Though her quickness and animation leave an impression of bright femininity, she is not beautiful. Her face is bony and angular, her nose wide and flat, her eyes small almost to beadiness, her neck and limbs scrawny. Her protruding teeth probably account in part for her noticeable lisp.107

104 Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed, 165.
105 Chisholm, The Good Fight, 3.
106 Lesher, SM13.
107 Lesher, SM15.
Paired with campaign coverage that emphasized her frequent failure to generate an audience, as well as a personal biography that emphasized Chisholm’s difficult relationships with numerous men in her personal and political sphere, Lesher’s short polemic on Chisholm’s flawed beauty rounded out his flat dismissal of her seriousness as a candidate. Deeply critical of Chisholm’s political legacy, Lesher referred to her as “an unloved prickly pear” whose candidacy nearly single-handedly fractured an apparent coalition of black voters in the 1972 primaries.108

Chisholm was no stranger to critiques of the variety composed by Lesher. In 1970, she warned of the political implications of men’s attacks on women’s femininity. Discussing the instruments by which gendered difference was maintained in political society, Chisholm argued, “one distressing thing is the way men react to women who assert their equality: their ultimate weapon is to call them unfeminine. They think she is antimale; they even whisper that she’s probably a lesbian.”109 This awareness seems evident in Chisholm’s warning to male Senators during the 1970 Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment. Arguing for women’s equal rights, Chisholm argued that men had a responsibility to uphold a fully equitable social contract. Chisholm warned the Senate, “May I also remind you, gentlemen, you are the power, and as such you are then the focal point of the struggle. It is not the intention of American women to become a nation of Amazons.”110 Rejecting women’s separate status, Chisholm carefully played to cultural fears of women’s masculinization. If men agreed to support the legal foundation

108 Lesher, SM16.

109 Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed, 168.

for women’s social and political equality, the existing gendered order of society would remain intact.

Although Chisholm frequently addressed systemic patterns of gendered inequality, her quest for fair and equal cultural access was not bound to one particular category of identity. Locating the defense of universal social rights as her primary political agenda, Chisholm was not afraid of making grand public statements for justice. Criticizing the constitutional foundation of the United States, Chisholm argued that “the Constitution they [the founding fathers] wrote was designed to protect the rights of white, male citizens. As there were no black Founding Fathers, there were no founding mothers—a great pity, on both counts.”111 Operating according to an agenda defined by a poverty stricken inner city constituency, Chisholm emphasized domestic concerns over foreign policy, offering dissenting views on the war in Vietnam primarily in terms of the damage caused to domestic conditions in the U.S as a result of the war.

Discussing the foundations of her congressional opposition to the war, Chisholm carefully noted that:

I am not a pacifist. Ending the war had not been a major theme of my campaign [. . .] But when President Nixon announced, on the same day, that he had decided that the United States would not be safe until we started to build an ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] system, and that the Head Start program in the District of Columbia was to be cut back for lack of money, that was enough for me.112


112 Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed, 95.
In response to these concerns, Chisholm began to vote against every appropriations bill for the Department of Defense to come before Congress. Chisholm defended this decision in clear language, writing, “What I wanted was perfectly plain. It was not to deny support to servicemen in Vietnam, for heaven’s sake, but to bring them home at once.”

Both traditional politician and countercultural revolutionary, Chisholm’s domestic agenda deeply shaped her views on the U.S. war in Vietnam. Responding to the same domestic concerns that haunted Johnson throughout his presidency, but unhampered by Johnson’s internalized ideology of gender that demanded the international defense of a masculinist nation, Chisholm was able to stage a public opposition to the same war that Johnson had rarely dared to even describe. Legislators on the margins of engendered political hegemony, such as Chisholm, were not always popular, but they were among the first to publicly act in opposition to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Many early women in Congress were limited in their ability to influence foreign and military policy by an inability to access elite level committee assignments. Patricia Schroeder and Marjorie Holt, two of the first women appointees to the elite House Armed Services Committee, were met with prejudice and hostility by their fellow appointees. Despite their shared experiences of gendered exclusion, however, these women once again demonstrated the absurdity of a presumed woman’s coalition in Congress.

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113 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 98.

114 According to David L. Anderson, Johnson avoided openly discussing his decision to pursue war in Vietnam, and instead “tried to proceed by measured steps that disguised the magnitude of the decision in order to avoid public debate.” “A Question of Political Courage: Lyndon Johnson as War Leader” in *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light* ed. Mitchell B. Lerner (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 111.
Schroeder and Holt legislated within the same committee from almost diametrically opposed political platforms, without explicit consideration for their common experiences as women Representatives within an acutely patriarchal Congress.

A strong fiscal conservative, Marjorie Holt served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973-1987.115 Holt's economic politics compelled her rejection of all manner of class based legislation, as she consistently promoted a reduced federal government. Holt’s policymaking as a member of the House Armed Services Committee was also influenced by an electorate that included Fort Meade, the National Security Agency, The United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, and Andrews Air Force Base.116 Unlike Schroeder, Holt explicitly rejected the significance of feminism for her own life. As a journalist reported during Holt's campaign, “Mrs. Holt doesn’t expect sex to be an issue in the campaign, one way or the other.” Despite all evidence to the contrary, Holt stubbornly maintained that “I’ve always thought of myself as a person and I certainly haven’t been discriminated against.”117

One example from Holt’s own congressional career demonstrates the folly of her dismissal of sex based inequality. In the 95th Congress, Holt was a serious contender for a party leadership position, until the Republican party Whip interfered. In a highly unorthodox maneuver, the Whip took the floor immediately before the vote and encouraged party members to vote for Holt’s opposition. While there were numerous


political factors involved, Holt’s sex was a significant issue for the existing party leadership. As one anonymous member of Congress at the time observed, “Those fellows just couldn’t have been as relaxed with Holt as they were with one another. Frenzel [her opponent] is good, but I think that the leadership would have supported Ivan the Terrible rather than be saddled with a woman in that position.”118 Rather than admitting any instances of inequality in her own career, Holt aligned herself with anti-feminists. Jacqueline Cochran, a renowned pioneer in women’s aviation history who had herself served in non-combat military services during WWII, was one such anti-feminist.

Appearing as an expert witness during hearings on the elimination of sex discrimination in military academies, Cochran testified passionately against opening combat service to women. Arguing that “a woman’s primary function in life is to get married, maintain a home, and raise a family,” Cochran described her own military service as an affront to her sense of self. Escalating her argument, Cochran boldly claimed, “there are certain areas where women—as the future mothers of this country—have no business being. Even if they want to, they should be restrained.” Rejecting women’s right to volunteer for combat service, Cochran escalated her suggestion of restraint. Discussing women who volunteered for combat service, Cochran warned, “you don’t let crazy people run around the streets. You put them in a home. I think women are nuts if they want to go into combat.” Rather than interrogating any of Cochran’s threats to women’s autonomy, Holt offered effulgent praise for her contributions to women’s liberation. As Holt rhapsodized, “I think it is interesting to hear some of your statements because you have probably done more for the women’s movement than any of us.”

Revealing her own agenda, Representative Holt commiserated, “I have some of the same very great fears that you have that if we aren’t careful we are going to destroy the family in this country and I really think that is important.”

Like many anti-feminist women of the 1970s, Holt was most fearful of the private consequences of women’s social and political equality. In rhetoric that emphasized her “grave concerns about what is happening to our families today,” Holt expressed her own clear class privilege, failing to even mention the benefits of two incomes for working class households, or the benefits of a stable career for a working single mother. Instead, Holt framed her critique around biology, confessing, “I feel so strongly about the privilege of childbearing I think that that does enter into it.” Oddly, right after this confession Holt admitted, “I know that that doesn’t have to have anything to do with it.” Holt’s own position as a working woman likely forced her admission that women entering the workforce weren’t causing the so-called decline of the family. As she freely admitted, “I have had a legal career and a political career, and I have three children and three grandchildren and it hasn’t interrupted that.”

The lack of a political consciousness of systematically disadvantaged people was further evident in Holt’s persistent campaigns to overturn the federal appropriations rules that tied federal funds for education to the achievement of racial parity in public schools. Reporting on Holt’s legislative activity, a journalist warned:

It was Title VI of the Civil Right Act that provided this incentive for compliance with the law, via its ‘cut-off’ provision. And it is Title VI that now is threatened.

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by a pernicious amendment to an appropriations bill. The amendment would have the same undermining effect on other federal statutes, including that which prohibits sex discrimination in education programs.\(^{121}\)

In defense of her actions, Holt claimed to be primarily concerned with improving the quality of public education. Unfortunately, her proposals suggested a return to the separate but equal justification of earlier racial policies on education. As the post-reconstruction experiment in the U.S. clearly demonstrated, institutions segregated on racial foundations were rarely truly equal.

Proponents of federal desegregation programs shared Holt’s concern for improving the quality of public education. They disagreed, however, with her claim that “critically-needed financial resources are being spent for purposes that have little or no connection with the goal of quality education for our children.”\(^{122}\) Historically, racial segregation in the U.S. has been deeply tied to economic realities of class difference. “White flight,” so frequently referenced by Holt in her testimony, has operated as a phenomenon of class inequality. As Holt pointed out, “many authorities agree that a white, middle-class exodus occurs when a school district having a large number of black students is required to impose racial balance on its schools by transferring great numbers of students.”\(^{123}\)

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Rather than interrogating the legacy of racism that compelled these white families to flee programs of racial integration, Holt presented the phenomenon as nothing more than “a purely voluntary movement of individual families” who felt persecuted by federally mandated desegregation of schools.\textsuperscript{124} In a bizarre non sequitur, Holt dismissed the value of federally mandated school desegregation, claiming that the debate reminded her “of medieval theologians debating how many angels could stand on the point of a pin.” Holt’s concern was evidently strongest for the white middle-class residents of these desegregated areas, as she argued, “The stability of surviving white neighborhoods has been sorely tested by [the imposition of racial balance in public school systems].”\textsuperscript{125} This claim entirely disregarded the efforts of mainstream civil rights organizations like the NAACP to ensure the best possible education for all children. As representatives of the NAACP argued in a 1963 statement before the Boston School Committee:

\begin{quote}
In the discussion of segregation in fact in our public schools, we do not accept residential segregation as an excuse for countenancing this situation. […] This “best possible education” is not possible where segregation exists. Inadequate educational standards, unequal facilities and discriminatory educational practices exist wherever there is school segregation.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{125} U.S. Congress, House, \textit{Hearings: Equal Opportunity in Housing}, 75.

Branding the dramatic educational reforms that organizations like the NAACP advocated as “totalitarian” exercises, Holt implicitly offered a defense of the racial status quo as the only reasonable alternative.127

Patricia Schroeder was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972, where she served in the 93rd-104th Congresses.128 An outspoken critic of the racial and sexual status quo, Schroeder was a proud feminist and a Democrat who opposed excessive defense spending. Schroeder met a great deal of resistance from the overwhelmingly conservative members of the Armed Services Committee. Outspoken feminists in Congress were rare in the early 1970s. Representative Bella Abzug was one of the earliest Congresswomen to be elected on an explicitly feminist platform, and Schroeder’s male colleagues often compared the two women, describing them both as unwelcome outsiders. F. Edward Hebert, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee in 1972 and an unrepentant self-described “male chauvinist,” resented Schroeder’s election to the committee. In one of their earliest meetings, Hebert warned Schroeder, “I hope that you aren’t going to be a skinny Bella Abzug.”129 Accustomed to vetting all appointees to the Armed Services Committee, Hebert was unprepared for the emergence of political feminism and the changing concerns of the national Democratic Party platform.


Remembering this early period in her career, Schroeder argued that Hebert, "a conservative Southern Democrat who boasted about his male chauvinism, did not consider me worthy of the seat. Women, he claimed, knew nothing of combat, since they had never been a part of it."\textsuperscript{130} Under Hebert's leadership, Schroeder was originally forced to share a seat in the committee room with Ron Dellums, a newly elected representative of the Congressional Black Caucus. Describing this remarkable display of racism and sexism, Schroeder wrote that Hebert "said that women and blacks were worth only half of one 'regular' member, so he added only one seat to the committee and made Ron and me share it."\textsuperscript{131} Of course, black men in recent U.S. history knew disproportionately more combat than any other demographic in the population.\textsuperscript{132} Hebert's hostility toward Dellums, a veteran of the U.S. Marines, undermined his emphasis on combat experience as a deciding factor in appointment to the Armed Services Committee. Ultimately, Hebert was simply reluctant to accept any committee member whose politics radically contradicted his own.

Schroeder's experiences on the Armed Services Committee illustrate the catch-22 of women's quest for political citizenship in the long 1960s. Women's mandated exclusion from combat service was frequently used to justify their restriction from deliberations on nearly half of the federal budget. Rhetoric that emphasized the cultural and biological differences between women and men was often used in the attempt to


\textsuperscript{131} Lowy, 5.

\textsuperscript{132} For one discussion of these demographics, particularly in terms of casualties of U.S. troops in Vietnam, see Christian Appy, \textit{Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam} (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
justify women’s exclusion from formal combat roles. Proponents of limiting women’s access to combat positions in the U.S. military argued that society viewed women--along with children--as members of a protected class, implying that women protecting themselves undermined the gendered ideology of U.S. society. The elite membership of the Armed Services Committee used these ideas of women’s difference to build their own poorly justified logic of women’s incompetence on matters of national defense.

As Schroeder argued, “the committee often justified its actions in the name of defending women and children and yet it never bothered to ask women and children what they wanted.”133 This paternalism deeply offended Schroeder’s feminist sense of justice. Despite the emphasis placed by numerous Congressmen on Schroeder’s lack of combat experience, military service was not actually a requirement for election to the Armed Services Committee. Many of the male committee members had never served in the armed forces, and yet they frequently dismissed Schroeder’s opinions as those of an amateur civilian. Schroeder remembers these non-veterans asking, “How can you serve on this committee? You have never been in combat.” On this point, she would remind these men, “you and I have a lot in common.”134

Schroeder, despite her immense popularity in her own district, was never without her share of detractors. In 1972, Schroeder was the second youngest woman ever elected to Congress, and the first woman with young children to serve in national political office. Media coverage of Schroeder’s early campaign emphasized these feminine and maternal parts of her identity, as journalists often referred to her as a mother rather than an

133 Schroeder, 25.
134 Schroeder, 25.
accomplished attorney or a public school teacher. Even Bella Abzug, perhaps the most zealous feminist in Congress at the time, contacted Schroeder shortly after her election to warn that “I don’t think you can do the job” while also caring for young children.135 Clarence Decker, Schroeder’s opponent in the 1972 congressional primary, went so far as to distribute flyers door to door, “condemning Schroeder for premeditated neglect of her three pre-schoolers.”136 Once in office, these attacks only reinforced Schroeder’s support for the legislation that improved the lives various classes of working women.

Dismissing the concerns of her critics, Schroeder argued that women could be highly effective as both mothers and women with careers. As Schroeder explained:

I soon learned that children don’t care who does their laundry or grocery shopping or who makes their beds. In fact, they don’t care if anyone does it. The mystique that such tasks must be done by the hands of the mother should be buried forever so that no more guilt will be generated by it137

Sweeping away many of the remaining threads of the century old Cult of True Womanhood, Schroeder argued that women were not defined by their domestic roles. When politicians rejected right to work and welfare legislation, they often used rhetoric that portrayed their choices as a defense of the traditional family. These arguments entirely failed to take the experiences of millions of working mothers like Patricia Schroeder into account. Responding to a reporter who asked how she could be both a

135 Lowy, 41.


137 Schroeder, 15.
U.S. Representative and a mother, Schroeder famously retorted, “I have a brain and a uterus and I use them both.”\textsuperscript{138} Feminists like Schroeder strongly rejected traditional pressures for women to choose either a career or a family, claiming a woman’s right to choose both.

Schroeder’s concern for working mothers was most strongly expressed in her work on the Family and Medical Leave Act. When Schroeder first authored the act in 1985, she wasn’t able to find a single member of Congress to cosponsor the legislation. Although Schroeder reintroduced the bill in subsequent congressional sessions, it wasn’t passed until 1993, following the surge of new women Representatives in Congress.\textsuperscript{139} Meanwhile, in her work on the Armed Services Committee, Schroeder extended her feminist agenda to the needs of military women. Often positioned as the sole voice on the committee for ordinary servicemen, servicewomen, and their families, Schroeder pushed through a number of important legislative changes. As Joan Lowy explains, “Schroeder tried to improve the lot of military families, pushing to spend more defense dollars on such things as moving allowances and schools.” She was also concerned with the status of military housing, education, health care, and childcare.\textsuperscript{140}

Not all feminists understood or agreed with Schroeder’s concern for women in the military. As Schroeder confessed, “I really get an awful lot of flak from women who normally support me saying they don’t approve of my support for women in the military.” In response to these critics, Schroeder argued, “feminism isn’t about opening up the jobs


\textsuperscript{139} Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, 128.

\textsuperscript{140} Lowy, 80.
you want, it’s about opening up jobs some women may want.”  

Later in her political career, Schroeder was very critical of the military’s explanations that women were restricted from certain combat positions for their own protection. As a feminist, Schroeder defended equal opportunities for women in all fields. Discussing women’s access to equal promotion in the military, Schroeder explained, “we are not asking for a separate competitive system, we are not asking a quota or anything else, but rather that sex would not be considered as a disqualifier before you got to any of the other qualifications.”

Discussing women’s rights during the Gulf War, Schroeder claimed that women were not being protected from combat, but were nonetheless being restricted from the pay and promotion benefits of combat status. According to Schroeder, “I say the only thing they protect women from is promotion. This war shows that I was right. They’re indeed in the line of fire just like men are, and every bit as exposed to danger and attack.”

In the long 1960s, a small number of congressional women were actively attempting to blur the boundaries between culturally oppositional identity markers such as race and gender. While these women often disagreed on the specific outlines of their targets, they were occasionally able to orchestrate highly visible and successful protests of the status quo. Although retired by 1968, former Senator Jeanette Rankin famously led the Jeannette Rankin Brigade in a march on Washington to protest U.S. involvement in

141 Anne Summers, “Pat Schroeder: Fighting for Military Moms,” Ms. 1 no. 6 (May 1991): 90.

142 U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee No. 2 of the Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on H.R. 9832: To Eliminate Discrimination Based on Sex With Respect to the Appointment and Admission of Persons to the Service Academies, 92nd Cong., 2nd Sess., May, June, August 1974, 22.

143 Summers, 91.
Vietnam. In 1918, Rankin had openly opposed the Great War, campaigning for the U.S. House of Representatives on an anti-war platform. Sixty years later, Rankin used the march as a political vehicle to connect “well behaved and orderly” women in Congress with women in the New Left “in miniskirts and high boots,” forming a temporary political coalition that crossed commonly established boundaries of culture. Shortly after this march, in 1971, Bella Abzug “rode the anti-Vietnam War movement to Capitol Hill,” using experience gained through her work in the New Left to enter the sphere of traditional politics. For a brief period in the political history of the U.S., the outspokenly feminist political voices of politicians like Abzug struck fear into the political cult of masculinity, appearing as a salient challenge to the established masculinist order of the national community.

The strength of this unofficial openly feminist political caucus, however, was short lived. Evaluating the actions of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, radical feminist Shulamith Firestone argued:

It is naive to believe that women who are not politically seen, heard, or represented in this country could change the course of a war by simply appealing to the better side of congressmen. [. . .] They came as wives, mothers and: mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than

144 Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, 4.


146 Karen Foerstel and Herbert N. Foerstel, 31.
organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears.\textsuperscript{147}

Refusing to accept the traditional patterns of privilege in culture, an emergent class of self-identified feminists outlined new terms for the conversation on gendered equality.\textsuperscript{148}

These radical women of the late 1970s proposed a redefinition of femininity, posing straightforward and aggressive challenges to hegemonic systems of gendered identity. For the most part unelectable, these women nonetheless continued to influence the boundaries of women's activities in political office, while simultaneously posing implicit challenges to limits on women's opportunities in other elite national arenas. Debates over women's status in the U.S. military during the long 1960s provide one alternative lens on the influence of this feminist agitation in regard to women's status as first class citizens of the imagined nation-state.


\textsuperscript{148} Groups of radical feminists that emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s include Redstockings and its precursor New York Radical Women, Radicalesbians, and the National Organization for Women's splinter group The Feminists. Although short-lived as an organized movement, radical feminism offered a challenge to the traditional ideology of liberal feminism that has since influenced many conversations on the construction of gendered identity.
Popular discourse has long struggled to reconcile the implicit conflict between women’s traditional gender identity and their important contributions to military culture. While these conversations typically fail to engage in an explicit discourse on women’s status within the larger imagined community of the nation, they do reveal a great deal in terms of women’s designation as a separate and unique class of citizen. Discourses on sexuality have played an especially important role in the definition of women as a military subject class.

War literature, an important cultural outlet for service members as well as the source of a great deal of civilian stereotypes about the military, has emerged as an overwhelmingly heterosexist and masculine genre. More importantly, the extreme and often violent posture of heteronormative male sexuality has become a

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common theme in war narratives. Jim Webb, author of the now notorious 1979 Washingtonian article, “Women Can’t Fight,” clearly demonstrated this sexualized posturing in his work. In one graphic recollection, Webb casually described one of the men he commanded in Vietnam, who undressed a dead Vietnamese woman “while under fire, just to see if he really remembered what it [a woman’s genitals] looked like.” Despite this bizarre and morally questionable behavior, Webb described the young man as “a wholesome Midwest boy,” excusing his behavior as the reasonable action of a man in combat. The normalization of this urgent heteronormative male sexuality implied sinister consequences for the women who served alongside these men.

Following his unmediated celebration of heteronormative male sexuality in combat, Jim Webb suggested that if men were behaving badly in sexualized contexts in the military, women were to blame. Webb paralleled women’s increasing military presence with increasing sexual violence in the domestic U.S., arguing:

This is the only country in the world where women are being pushed toward the battlefield. The United States also has one of the most alarming rates of male-to-

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female violence in the world: Rapes increased 230 percent from 1967 to 1977 and
the much-publicized wife-beating problem cuts across socioeconomic lines.
These are not separate issues, either politically or philosophically.\textsuperscript{152}

These were not issues that Webb held any apparent interest in further deconstructing. Rather than examining the complex culture of sexual violence in the military, Webb blamed women who pushed against gendered inequality for the problem of violent individuals in society. Extending his backlash against feminism, Webb offered a telling defense of a well established essentialist mythology:

\begin{quote}
When the layerings of centuries of societal development are stripped away, a basic human truth remains: Man must be more aggressive in order to perpetuate the human race. Women don't rape men, and it has nothing to do, obviously, with socially induced differences.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

Clearly designating rape as a natural part of male sexuality, Webb offered an implicit justification for the now well documented abuse experienced by female soldiers at the hands of their compatriots.\textsuperscript{154}

In his discussion of combat, Webb reduced the military’s functional objective to an expression of sexualized male aggression. The very real consequences of this normalization of sexual violence can be seen in cultural artifacts such as popular historian

\textsuperscript{152} Webb, “Women Can’t Fight.”

\textsuperscript{153} Webb, “Women Can’t Fight.”

\textsuperscript{154} Cynthia Enloe has extensively studied the experiences of women in combat arenas, arguing that traditional patriarchal definitions of power have led to the extensive sexual and psychological abuse of enlisted women by their fellow soldiers. See, especially, \textit{The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War} (University of California Press, 1993) and \textit{Nimo’s War, Emma’s War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War} (University of California Press, 2010).
David Howard Bain's treatment of the 1977 death of Le My Hanh in Queens, New York. Bain treated Louis Kahan’s brutal and unprovoked assault, rape, and strangulation of Le My Hanh as the predictable and unsurprising consequence of Kahan’s service in Vietnam. According to Bain, Kahan simply did what “he was trained to do,” implying that the military training Kahan had received endorsed the rape and brutal murder of civilian women.\textsuperscript{155} This presentation of the military as an organization that treated women as reasonable targets for assault and rape contributed to women’s devalued status as servicemembers as well as veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

The military establishment’s inability to publicly acknowledge and reward women’s contributions in the U.S. military held real implications for women’s demands for parity during the long 1960s. Women have a long history of disappointing terms of employment in the U.S. military. As a World War II letter from a member of the Women’s Army Corps to a prospective recruit, dated Feb 22, 1944, warned:

You make up your own mind what you want to do about joining up with the WAC . . . I'm not homesick and I'm not sorry for myself, but I've had the biggest disappointment of my life. You know I loved basic training with all the hard work, discipline, and things I felt I was "taking" in order that I might become a good soldier. I still do not mind having to sleep in an upper bunk with few comforts that I had at home .... I have no complaints about the requirements and restraints . . . but the biggest disappointment is the utter lack of respect for the personnel of the

WAC. At first I was indignant, but lately . . . instead of being a proud soldier, I am embarrassed that I am a Wac. The soldiers have absolutely no respect for us.\textsuperscript{156}

Service women were frequently disrespected not just by fellow soldiers, but by the standards of the institution itself. Dr. Bernice Sandler, on behalf of the Women's Equity Action League, testified before the 1971 House Subcommittee No. 4 concerning the obstacles placed against women's ability to become career officers in the various branches of the military. Pointing to the policy that excluded women from enrolling in military academies such as West Point, Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy, Sandler argued, “Women have been in the military for over 30 years. They need higher qualifications than men to enlist, and they receive less fringe benefits than their male counterparts. There are numerous women colonels and several generals. We do not deny a military career to these women but we say, in effect, ‘No matter how qualified, no matter how talented or skilled, you cannot obtain the kind of military education that your brother can get; you cannot overcome the handicap of being born a female.’”\textsuperscript{157}

In 1973, a report by the Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women described the status of women in the military: “Standards for admissions of women are higher for women than for men in all services. Enlisted women have to be high school graduates while men do not, and they must make higher scores on the educational tests. A man may enlist at age 17-1/2, a woman at 18. A man needs parents' consent if he is under 18, a woman if she is 21, unless she lives in a State that has lowered the age of


majority.\textsuperscript{158} Many of these same limitations remained in place in 1977, when Robert
Nelson, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, agreed with
Senator Proxmire's assessment that "in every category [educational attainment,
standardized testing, retention] it seems the women improve the quality of the army."\textsuperscript{159}
Despite positive reviews of female service members, however, hostility toward women's
equal opportunities in the military was often supported by the command leadership.

Following popular associations drawn between nursing and women's traditional
caregiving roles in society, for many years, women were primarily recruited for military
service as nurses. Ironically, despite long standing concerns about women's exposure to
combat from both the private and military sectors, of all women in service, nurses were
most likely to see combat. In an analysis of women's exposure to combat during World
War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam conflict, Stephen Dienstfrey found "Slightly
more than one female veteran in twenty has been exposed to combat. [. . .] Almost three-
quarters (73.5\%) of those exposed to combat were nurses, predominantly in the Army
Nurse Corps (54.2\%)."\textsuperscript{160} These statistics complicate the often repeated claim that the
military was protecting women from the dangers of combat by refusing to station them on
the front lines of war.

This situation speaks to Senator Proxmire's point that women were often placed in
"non combatant positions" that were in reality more dangerous than certain "combat"

\textsuperscript{159} Joint Economic Committee, The Role of Women in the Military, 27.
positions, making it “rather illogical to say that women couldn’t go on an aircraft carrier because somehow it is a combat ship whereas they could serve in other capacities in which their life and limb is in greater danger?” Military women’s memories of the U.S. conflict in Vietnam reflect the danger to which even non-combatants were often exposed in Vietnam. As First Lieutenant Bernadette Sanner, Retired, remembered the beginning of her tour as a nurse in Vietnam: “My first thought about the country of Vietnam was, we were being mortared when I landed. That was my initial orientation into the place.”

Despite the reality of military women’s experiences at war, and regardless of women’s proven ability to perform in combat type situations, elite political and military leaders refused to consider women as full and equal members of the institution. Even General Elizabeth Hoisington, female Director of the Women’s Army Corps from 1966 through 1971, warned against more open enlistment policies for women. According to Hoisington, “The recent acceleration of the women’s liberation movement and the publicity it attracts from the news media, in my opinion, threatens to overwhelm good sense and perspective in the management of Women’s Army Corps personnel. [. . .] I feel obliged, therefore, to warn against any rash, unwarranted, and unsound decisions affecting the enlistment, utilization, retention, and cost effectiveness of women in the Army. [. . .] I cannot be silent on issues and decisions affecting the Women’s Army Corps that do not consider twenty-eight years of experience we have had in judging the morale,

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utilization, and discipline of Women's Army Corps personnel.”\textsuperscript{163} It is unclear what Hoisington intended to imply by her reference to the lessons of “28 years of experience,” but later studies are available that more empirically evaluate women's performance in the military.

A 1977 study by the Army found “women recruits surpassed male recruits in terms of educations and scores on standardized tests. Women have a higher retention rate than males. And women lose about 50 percent less time than men while on the job--including the pregnancy factor. That facts are that women lose 0.63 percent of days available for service, mainly due to pregnancy, which men lose 1.10 percent of days available for service, mainly due to desertion, alcoholism, and drug abuse.”\textsuperscript{164} Despite these positive assessments of women's performance in the military, in 1977 the Army reported a projected “pause” in the expansion of women's military service, with the size of the female force leveling off at 50,000 in 1979 and without any projected increase through 1982.\textsuperscript{165} As Senator Proxmire noted, “This pause seems inconsistent with public opinion and the positive results of studies of women's performance.” While Robert Nelson, representing the Army, agreed with Proxmire that the pause seemed unusual in light of Army studies that found women's contributions essential to military growth, he was unable to provide a clear explanation for the enlistment cap. Instead, Nelson merely


\textsuperscript{164} Joint Economic Committee, \textit{The Role of Women in the Military}. 70.

\textsuperscript{165} Joint Economic Committee, \textit{The Role of Women in the Military}. 15.
suggested: "I don't believe that we have reached a firm plateau from which we will not
move."\textsuperscript{166}

As Lieutenant Colonel Mary Chatfield remembered her service in the military
during this period, "we [women] never felt that we were, on the whole, respected as full
members of the military. I don't know how else to explain that. They just kind of put up
with us. I don't really feel that we were recognized as we should have been. There was a
lot of sexual harassment in those days, and of course we didn't have a term called 'sexual
harassment.' It was not too neat."\textsuperscript{167} This failure to respect women in the service could
be traced to individual military personnel as well as official military policy. As has
already been suggested, overt discrimination against women in the armed forces was
common well into the civil rights era.

Entry and retention standards for the Women's Army Corps came under
examination in 1970. At this time, the commander of the Army Recruiting Command,
Major General Donald McGovern wrote, "The movement for more liberal moral
standards and the rising emphasis toward equality of the sexes require that this command
be prepared to answer an increasing number of questions and charges concerning the
validity of allegations of discrimination against female applicants for enlistment."

Considering criticisms of the Army's policy of dismissing women, but not men, with
illegitimate children or a record of venereal disease, McGovern asked the director of the
Women's Army Corps to prepare a statement on the issue. The reply received by

\textsuperscript{166} Joint Economic Committee, \textit{The Role of Women in the Military}, 14.

\textsuperscript{167} Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, Veterans’ History Project, Mary Chatfield
Collection (AFC/2001/001/28357), http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/28357
McGovern pointed to the "higher moral character" American society demanded of women, explaining: "Having a history of venereal disease or having had a pregnancy while unmarried is an indication of lack of discipline and maturity in a woman." These obvious double standards reflected traditional gender ideology, and influenced military policy toward women throughout the period.

In 1971, comparing the recruitment policies of the FBI to those of the military, Representative Martha Griffiths argued, "Federal practices not only fail to correct sex discrimination, but also affirmatively and blatantly promote discrimination. For example, the FBI flatly refuses to consider women for the position of special agent. Regardless of a woman's educational achievements or her competence in self-defense and marksmanship, she will be automatically rejected if she applies to be an FBI agent. Obviously, the administration's much publicized policy of equal employment opportunity in Federal service has fallen on deaf ears." In 1971 Faith Seidenberg, Vice-President for Legal Affairs for the National Organization for Women, sent a letter to J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, in which she expressed the National Organization for Women's concern that "the FBI refuses to interview women for possible employment as agents" and demanding that "all jobs [in the FBI] be opened to women according to ability, not according to sex."


In response, Hoover explained, “it is not the intent of the FBI to confine this position to males without there being every good reason to do so.” Turning to the traditional rhetoric of the essential gendered difference between men and women, Hoover claimed: “With only one class of Special Agent, each assumes a certain mortal risk for himself and others with whom he may be associated in an assignment in the more dangerous aspects of our work, and we continue to hold firmly that this is inappropriate for women.” Echoing the rhetoric of male journalists and military men, Hoover denied women’s full access to the FBI on the basis of a normative ideology of gendered ability. As Hoover explained: “If the credibility of the FBI is to be maintained in the eyes of the public, [...] we must continue to limit the position to males.”

Appealing to the cultural authority of the public, Hoover followed Lyndon Johnson and other powerful men in presuming that the majority of Americans demanded the uncompromising display of hegemonic masculinity within their institutions of cultural power. As far as Hoover was concerned, women, generally presented as weak and incapable of self-defense, would be an embarrassment to the nation in the position of FBI agents.

Much of the resistance to women's full integration in the military was purely ideological. As Major General Jeanna M. Holm, U.S. Air Force, Retired, argued:

Increased utilization of military women has always been a difficult concept for the military to accept. Military decision makers have traditionally thought of military women as the resource of last resort, after substandard males, minorities, and civilians. The fact that women improve the quality and cost effectiveness of the

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171 J. Edgar Hoover to Faith A. Seidenberg, 10 June 1971, Subject: National Organization for Women
force is a concept that military personnel planners have been reluctant to accept. At the root of these attitudes is, I believe, a sincere but unsubstantiated conviction that somehow women will jeopardize the ability of the Armed Forces to perform their operational missions. Also, there is a deeply held belief that national defense is a man's job.\footnote{Joint Economic Committee, \textit{The Role of Women in the Military}, 91.}

This belief was reflected in recruitment material, such as the Army leaflet that emphasized “women in the military will not be trained to do or even allowed to do ‘men's work.’”\footnote{Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, \textit{Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971}, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 380.} Drawing on established norms of gendered risk, the military and U.S. political society were able to place limitations on women’s opportunities with little to no empirical foundation for their claims that compelled differential treatment on the basis of sex.

When it came to women’s opportunities in combat, tradition argued louder than the feminist opposition that demanded equivalent standards be applied to women and men.

While a great deal of debate centered on women's service as Army nurses, women's numerous other roles in the military were less recognized, and women's leadership often went unrewarded. As a 1967 report from the House Committee on Armed Services found, “Women officers serve in a variety of fields. […] At present legal restrictions on career advancement prevent women officers from advancing to higher levels of responsibility in the career fields in which they serve even though they may be fully qualified by experience and education.”\footnote{House Committee on Armed Services, \textit{Report No. 216: Removing Promotion Restrictions on Women in the Armed Forces and for Other Purposes}, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 3.}
open only to men, was one major area in which women in the military were legally restricted solely on the basis of their sex.

In a statement prepared for the House committee reviewing the debate on equal rights for men and women, law student Mariclaire Hale argued, “the Selective Service Act has traditionally discriminated between men and women on the basis of sex, withholding from women the burdens and the benefits of compulsory military service. [. . .] Undeniably the temper of the times is changing sufficiently that the traditional analysis of the role of women in the military must be rethought and examined with great care.” Considering the voluntary service channels open to women, Hale pointed out, “at present only slightly over 1 percent of the total personnel serving in the Armed Forces are women. Women taking the qualifying exams for Officer’s Candidate School [. . .] do not compete against the men taking the same exams. When serving in the military they belong to an almost wholly separate arm of the military from that in which men serve.” As a result of these inequalities, Hale concluded, “real equal rights in the area of military service will require extensive changes.”

According to legal scholar Leo Kanowitz:

Even once a woman is in the services, it appears that her opportunities are more limited than those of her male counterpart. [. . .] Of the tens of thousands of young people attending colleges with the aid of a ROTC scholarship during the past years, none have been women. [. . .] Certainly, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that few if any women are attending institutions of higher learning with [GI bill] benefits. The GI bill is, after all, limited to former military personnel

who have served in combat zones and it is the policy of the Armed Forces to keep all American women out of these zones whenever possible.\textsuperscript{176}

Reflecting on the benefits of military service, even without the additional benefits attached to the Selective Service Act, Lieutenant Colonel Mary Chatfield, Retired, claimed: “People look at your resume and see that you were an Air Force officer and that you’ve had all of these different schools that the Air Force -- that you could go to and that I took advantage of; all the management schools, battlefield nursing, every course that I could possibly take, I took. That has[... ] opened a lot of doors for me that I would not have -- the experience that I would not have had if I had not joined the military.”\textsuperscript{177}

Considering the Selective Service Act, Dr. Norman Dobsen similarly argued that women could only benefit from the ability to be drafted. First discussing the job training and veterans’ benefits that the military primarily distributed to men under the current military structure, Dobsen argued that “on a deeper level, when women are excluded from the draft--the most serious and onerous duty of citizenship--their status is generally reduced.” Expanding on the logic behind this claim, Dobsen explained, “The social stereotype is that women should be less concerned with the affairs of the world than men. Our political choices and our political debate often reflect a belief that men who have fought for their country have a special qualification or right to wield political power and make political decisions. Women are in no position to meet this qualification.”\textsuperscript{178}


\textsuperscript{177} Veterans’ History Project, Mary Chatfield Collection.

Admiral Katharine Laughton, Retired, offered her opinion on the draft as a female veteran of Vietnam, arguing, “I would like to see the draft come back, but not a draft strictly for the military, but a draft for government service of some sort. I also think that women in the military and the whole issue of women in combat is, is not important. Women can do the jobs, women should be doing the jobs.”179

As Jill Laurie Goodman, ACLU staff counsel, argued before a 1977 Congressional committee on women's role in the military, “For the few occupational specialities that do require substantial physical strength, women should be judged on the basis of individual abilities rather than class characteristics. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires civilian employers to do this. We should expect as much from the military.”180 Six years earlier Adele Weaver, President of the National Association of Women Lawyers, made a similar argument before House Subcommittee No. 4, arguing, “There is no reason whatsoever why any healthy young woman should not serve her country for a year or two in any capacity for which she is physically, mentally, and emotionally suited. No young man is required to do more.” Furthermore, she argued, “While we may not wish for our young women to be placed in hazardous battle areas, the fact remains that our military nurses are and have been subjected to such hazards.”181

By the late 1960s, women had come to serve an essential role in the military. As Johnson himself claimed in his 1967 remarks upon H.R. 5894 into law as Public Law


180 Joint Economic Committee, The Role of Women in the Military, 73.

181 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 300.
90-130, “Our Armed Forces literally could not operate effectively or efficiently without our women.” This opinion of women’s value was shared by top members of the military command. According to a 1977 statement by Robert Nelson, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, “Our leadership recognizes that women provide a significant manpower resource that can perform a vital role in today’s Army.”

Despite these commendations, however, restrictions on women’s military service remained.

In part, women’s gradually expanding roles in the army were the result of a “technological revolution in warfare” during the 1960s. As noted by Professor Leo Kanowitz, new technology had led to the creation of weapons “which minimize the strength required and maximize the precision and technological ability needed.” In this new environment of warfare, women were “more fit to wage war than ever before.”

While General Creighton Abrams, commander of military operations in Vietnam from 1968 through 1972, never considered appointing women to combat positions, the "special" characteristics long associated with women seem to recommend them as ideal candidates for Abrams’ campaign to improve human relations between the U.S. military and the Vietnamese. According to Abrams: “What we need are guys who can lead in this kind of a thing. […] It’s a respect for the Vietnamese. It’s a sensitivity, a sensitivity to


183 Joint Economic Committee, The Role of Women in the Military, 3.

184 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 373.
humans. These are the qualities that are important.” Of course, the same qualities that Abrams praised in men fueled widespread opposition to women’s unrestricted military service. The sensitivity of women was frequently invoked as a rationale for “protecting” women from more dangerous combat assignments.

By the early 1970s, women’s opportunities in the U.S. military had become a significant topic of public debate. While nations such as Israel, North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand had extended more equal military rights to women by the early 1970s, the U.S. continued to exclude women from the majority of positions in the various services. As Dr. Leo Kanowitz argued, “In a world where war is almost everywhere recognized to be more a matter of the efficient use of technology than of matching brute strength, it would seem that most Americans are still in the clutches of an anachronistic horror at the mere thought of having women serving equally with men in the military.”

Critical of the international implications of women's lack of equality in the U.S., Virginia Allan, the former Chairman of the President’s Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities, argued:

If we are to fulfill the leadership role that has been thrust upon the United States as a Nation, it is preferable that we lead. [...] I think we would not wish to maintain a course of action that created an international image of our great Nation as one lagging behind even underdeveloped countries in political, social, and economic change and progress. Unfortunately, that is what is happening in the


field of women’s rights. The image that it conveys in international bodies is that the United States is a Nation in which women do not enjoy legal, political, or economic equality.\textsuperscript{187}

Taking a different approach to the same issue of the representation of the U.S. in the world, George Quester, Professor of Government at Cornell University, wrote, “Quite apart from the issues at home, a greater use of female military personnel will have interesting and potentially important effects on the image of the United States abroad.” According to Quester, “an all-male military force smacks of an imperialist army, while female participation in combat signals a defense of what is one’s own--a signal we wish to send.”\textsuperscript{188} In this formulation, only a combined military that allows equal opportunities to female and male citizens of the nation can effectively represent the national community abroad. In practice, however, military ideology has taken a very different shape.

Unable to the control the temper of public opinion during the long 1960s, the military adopted a posture of defensive masculinity, refusing to allow women equal participation in masculine military culture. Historian Barbara L. Tischler has persuasively argued that this gendered exclusion was in fact sustained through the collaboration of the popular media, demonstrating the emergence of a coalition across apparently antagonistic cultural lines. According to Tischler: “The mainstream press of this period portrayed military women as patriotic but essentially ancillary to the war

\textsuperscript{187} Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, \textit{Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971}, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 139-140.

\textsuperscript{188} Quester, “Women in Combat,” 90-91.
effort. [. . .] Female GIs were often presented in the press as ornaments whose presence made life more ‘bearable’ for male soldiers.”

This presentation of female soldiers is unsurprising, given that the fourth estate was itself structured in similarly gendered terms of exclusion during this period. Female journalists, like female military volunteers, were viewed as essentially different from their male counterparts. As Denby Fawcett remembered, "One of the first officers I asked for permission to go into a combat area turned me down, saying I reminded him of his daughter. I swallowed hard in frustration, knowing the same commander would never say to a male reporter, 'You remind me of my son.'" Journalist Tracy Wood pointed to this same problem, describing the problem of women's equality not as one of overt discrimination, but as the product of "well-meaning men in positions of authority who honestly believed it was more important to protect women from risks than encourage them to reach for the stars.”

For female journalists, the path to Vietnam was complex, fraught with multiple locations of resistance. According to Jurate Kazickas, one of the few female reporters to cover the war from the ground in Vietnam, “most male reporters had the same attitude about a female correspondent in Vietnam as the military did. 'What the hell is a woman doing in a war zone?' they would ask, either to my face or behind my back. 'Why aren’t


you writing about widows or orphans instead of combat?' they wanted to know.’192

Women, perceived as embodying a feminine antithesis to the masculine culture of war, were often unwelcome in combat zones. These women were subject to exaggerated articulations of their defenseless femininity, and protective rhetoric advocating their exclusion from the dangerous fronts of Vietnam.

In Vietnam, female journalists could be officially “entitled to cover any military mission,” but accreditation often failed to translate into opportunity.193 In many cases, women were restricted from the field of combat as the result of a system of protective measures. This concern expressed by the military for the protection of female journalists in Vietnam was often openly shared by male journalists. Tracy Wood, reflecting on her time covering the war from Vietnam, recalls UPI foreign editor Bill Landry’s assertion that “I don’t believe women should cover wars”194 According to Wood, this sentiment was often expressed by “well-meaning men in positions of authority who honestly believed it was more important to protect women from risks than encourage them to reach for the stars.”195 Attempting to protectively shelter their female colleagues, these men effectively obstructed the careers of those women who sought to cover the war in Vietnam. Ultimately, this protective rhetoric imposed an illogical privilege in access, distributing assignments in the field according to sex rather than ability.

193 Kazickas, “These Hills Called Khe Sanh,” 122.
Similarly, General Westmoreland’s attempt to restrict the access of female journalists can be understood as the consequence of a protective impulse. According to journalist Anne Morrissy Merick, Westmoreland was compelled to propose restrictions for women in the field after discovering a female journalist working near the Cambodian border. As Morrissy Merick recalls, “the general was horrified to find a young woman, and one that he knew, in the field with his troops, especially in such a dangerous area. When he got back to his Saigon headquarters, he issued an order banning women reporters from accompanying troops to the front lines.”

The 1968 hearings on House Resolution 5894, proposing the removal of restrictions on promotions for female officers, bear a significant relationship to the popular presentation of the role of female GIs. Debate on the resolution was often reminiscent of Westmoreland’s reactive stance on women’s presence on the front lines of combat, and the final shape of the legislation failed to strongly enforce women’s right to equal participation in combat environments. This resolution, signed into legislation as public law 90-130 on 8 November 1967, guaranteed women in the military a carefully qualified expansion in opportunities for professional advancement. While this legislation served to “remove inequitable and inconsistent restrictions on the career opportunities available to our women officers,” it was by no means intended to guarantee the full protection of equality for women in the armed forces. As the legislation clearly

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197 Armed Forces--Female Officers, Public Law 90-130, 90th Cong., 1st sess. (8 November 1967).

198 House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee No. 1 Consideration of H.R. 5894, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 383.
states, “no provision of the bill is designed to provide assurance of promotion, or to establishing any special promotion opportunities.”¹⁹⁹ In the aggressively masculine culture of the U.S. military, however, failing to provide special promotion opportunities for women effectively resulted in the overwhelming failure to promote female officers. Ultimately, this bill failed to deliver the full guarantee of sexual equality initially suggested by its surface claims. Removing only one particular set of gendered restrictions, the bill failed to design a larger improved institutional structure for women's full and equal military participation. Recognizing the limited utility of public law 90-130 in terms of ensuring fair access to advancement for female officers in the U.S. military, the U.S. Congress finally officially recognized the structural context of sexual inequality in the military during the 1977 hearings on The Role of Women in the Military held before the Joint Economic Committee.

Jill Laurie Goodman, Staff Counsel to the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, argued in these hearings for a recognition and a redress of the persistently unequal treatment of women in all branches of the military. According to Goodman: “Despite the obvious and difficult problem created by partial integration, the armed services are reluctant to accept women as full participants in the military.”²⁰⁰ The military's failure to critically examine the invocation of gender as a logical foundation for women's exclusion can, in many ways, be attributed to an unexamined defense of the patriarchal cult of masculinity. Critical of the traditional protective


²⁰⁰ The Role of Women in the Military: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Priorities and Economy in Government, 1977, 73.
rhetoric of patriarchal military culture, Goodman argued that “concern for exposing
women to the dangers of war is misplaced. It is based on the untenable proposition that
the lives of women are more valuable than the lives of men.” Concluding that refusing to
support women's full and equal service in all areas of national defense directly foreclosed
women’s full expression of their rights as citizens, Goodman persuasively argued that “a
democratic society committed to the principle of equal protection under law has no
justification for allocating obligations, responsibilities, or privileges according to sex.”

Men and women at the center of the imagined U.S. community during the long
1960s tended toward constructions of women that emphasized their sexualized
differences from the traditionally masculine center of power. Johnson’s fixation on
female attractiveness as qualification for duty, as described earlier, was echoed in formal
military policy of the period. As Representative Martha Griffiths testified during the
1971 Equal Rights for Men and Women Hearings before Subcommittee No. 4 of the
Committee on the Judiciary, Air Force policy required women to “submit four
photographs of herself—a close-up front view of her face, a close-up profile view of her
face, a full-length front view, and a full-length profile view.” These requirements did not
apply to male candidates. Questioning the purpose of these different standards, Griffiths
asked: “Is this for the purposes of racial discrimination; ethnic; or does the Air Force just
want pretty girls?” In response to these accusations, the Department of the Air Force
submitted a letter for consideration by the committee, claiming: “We are not looking for

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201 The Role of Women in the Military: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Priorities and
Economy in Government, 1977, 75.

202 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women
physical 'beauty' per se but a healthy, personable appearance.” Of course, “healthy” and “personable” remained extremely subjective characteristics, the determination of which may very well have been attached to traditional ideals of feminine attractiveness.

Although other branches of the military used different recruiting procedures for women, the emphasis on femininity as an ideal trait of a female service member was universal. In her study of recruitment propaganda from the Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam war, Kara Dixon Vuic found “Recruitment material used alluring photographs and descriptions of the army nurse’s various uniforms to confirm its claims that army life would not make women ‘militarized’ or less feminine.” Female service members were described by these materials as “slender and dark-eyed,” as well as “exceptionally pretty [. . .] tall, with a full figure, trim and well-shaped,” with a clear emphasis on their youth and femininity. This message was virtually unchanged from the Navy’s World War II era recruitment material for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services [WAVES], which claimed: “[Y]ou’ll keep trim with well-organized periods of exercise and sports, and learn the importance of ladylike appearance and military bearing,” making absolutely no reference to women’s potential exposure to combat.

203 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 53.


206 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 381.
Considering the widespread emphasis among both civilian and military arms of government on women's appearance, it is important to question whether women who were being assessed in such a limited and superficial way were also being taken seriously as foreign policy representatives. The experiences of female journalists in Vietnam, operating as representatives of private U.S. industry abroad and often working deep in the front lines of combat, reveal a great deal about women's opportunities as foreign ambassadors for the nation. These reporters were evaluated as women before they were recognized for their success as journalists. As one *Time* article from October 1966 reported: "As far as the men of the Saigon press corps are concerned, on any military operation, the girls inevitably become a hindrance." This assessment was made in spite of the presence of female journalists such as Betsy Halstead, "the first reporter to witness and photograph a B-52 raid, and she was first to interview the mayor of Danang after Premier Ky called him a Communist and erroneously announced that he had fled the city."207

Popular assessments of female reporters were simply not reflective of the actual accomplishments of those journalists. As Virginia Elwood-Akers found in her study of female correspondents in the Vietnam War, "a comparison of Vietnam War accounts written by men and women reporters indicates that there was little difference between the sexes insofar as the topics of their reporting was concerned."208 Despite the empirical realities of their work, women were held to standards different from those applied to men


in the same occupation. According to journalist Beverly Deepe, female reporters were expected to fill traditional feminine roles, and were often not taken seriously as corresponds. In 1966, Deepe described her “biggest challenge as a woman correspondent is that most of the American troops expect me to be a living symbol of the wives and sweethearts they left at home. They expect me to be typically American, despite cold water instead of cold cream, fatigues instead of frocks. Always it's more important to wear lipstick than a pistol.” The failure to take women seriously as journalists revealed the enduring legacy of the United States’ patriarchal tradition, as women were forced to defend not only their journalism, but their very right to work alongside men as foreign correspondents.

The difficulties women encountered in the field as war correspondents were paralleled by challenges faced by women attempting to enlist in the military during the period. As George Quester, Professor of Government at Cornell University, argued in 1977, the exclusion of women from equal participation in the U.S. military reflected the greater civil disenfranchisement of women in U.S. society. According to Quester, “There is much in the military system that would serve the feminist movement well. The military stressed to an extreme many of the attributes that American folklore has denied that women possess—attributes which feminists desire to prove women do possess,” such as self-control and determination. The desire to act as a fully empowered citizen of the United States in domestic and foreign arenas was another opportunity presented by the U.S. military system, but systematically foreclosed to a majority of women.

209 “Femininity at the Front,” 77.

Despite the excellent performance of women in military training, who "not only handled themselves well, they did as well as the men," Major General J.P. Kingston, Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, U.S. Army, worried that women nonetheless needed to be evaluated for their ability to tolerate the stress of combat before being allowed on the front lines. Exploiting stereotypes of women's fragility, Kingston explained that the Army was concerned with locating "what the impact is in sustained environment of stress or in a combat organization" on female combatants. Significantly, Kingston made this claim even after agreeing with Senator Proxmire's assertion that "some women can stand stress and some can't, some men can stand stress and some can't, there is no sex difference."211

Mary Hallaren, former director of the Women's Army Corps, testified to women's fortitude under the stress of combat. According to Hallaren, even after being told they would not be protected as regular soldiers under the WWII Geneva Accords, the first battalion of American women to ship overseas during WWII remained committed to their deployment. As Hallaren recalled: "When we boarded ship, the troops commander asked for the list of women AWOL's. He said that we should not be surprised at any losses, as there were always AWOL's from the men's units. [...] But we were not surprised. The women were all present and accounted for." Further, Hallaren remembered that even after raids and exposure to bombing, "no one ever asked for transfer to a safe billet. I don't know whether that could be said for the men or not. Those women were superb

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under stress. Of course, they were volunteers—which may have accounted for their fortitude."212

Despite mounting evidence for women’s ability to serve with honor both in combatant and non-combatant positions, a great deal of political and military rhetoric remained opposed to women’s full integration in the military. A 1964 conversation between President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara belied the hostile assessments of female character that underwrote real military policies toward women, as Johnson discussed the incautious actions of high level male admirals and destroyer commanders in the Gulf of Tonkin. Describing these men as too quick to fire, Johnson complained “I don't want them just being some change-o-life woman running up and saying that, by God, she was being raped just because a man walks in the room! And that looks like to me that's what happens in the thirty years that I've been watching them. A man gets enough braid on him, and he walks in a room, and he just immediately concludes that he's being attacked.”213 Johnson framed his obvious frustration with the course of recent military action in Southeast Asia in terms that explicitly feminized the impulsive and poorly organized behavior of men. These remarks provide one particularly lurid example of Johnson’s well established habit of applying graphic sexualized

212 Joint Economic Committee, The Role of Women in the Military, 89-90.

metaphor to complex political situations. In this conversation Johnson casually hailed long established cultural prejudices against aged as well as abused women in his attack on male military officers, displaying an absolute lack of consideration for feminist campaigns against sexual violence.

The casual misogyny that underpinned Johnson’s rhetoric can be traced back to classical tropes that characterize both women and femininity as negative, irrational, disorderly forces. According to feminist political scientist Nancy Hartsock, “War, and the masculine role of warrior-hero, have been central to the conceptualization of politics for the last 2500 years.” Femininity has long stood as the dialectical obverse of masculinity, and the unequal distribution of gendered social privilege has been explained

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214 A great deal of President Johnson’s rhetorical style can be illuminated through a brief sampling of his metaphorical use of the body in diplomatically fraught situations. Members of Johnson’s inner circle were frequently exposed to his graphic use of the body in political rhetoric. In a conversation with a White House staff member concerning the loyalty of a potential new member of his inner circle, Johnson exclaimed: “I want him to kiss my ass in Macy’s window at high noon and tell me it smells like roses. I want his pecker in my pocket” (Halberstam, p. 434). Johnson’s heavily sexualized metaphors were by no means confined to his assessments of White House personnel. According to David Halberstam, while discussing a halt to bombing in Vietnam early in the war, Johnson worried: “I’ll tell you what happens when there’s a bombing halt: I halt and then Ho Chi Minh shoves his trucks right up my ass. There’s your bombing halt” (Halberstam, p. 624). Responding to the situation in the Dominican Republic in 1965, according to historian Walter LaFeber, Johnson described his lack of confidence in the Organization of American States by again invoking the language of the body. Fearful of multilateralism, Johnson complained that the continental organization “couldn’t pour piss out of a boot if the instructions were written on the heel” (LaFeber, p. 160). Finally, in another graphic mobilization of a rape metaphor, Johnson described his management of China throughout operation Rolling Thunder. In this particular analogy, Johnson presented his position as one of “seduction, not rape,” explaining: “If China should suddenly react to slow escalation, as a woman might react to attempted seduction, by threatening to retaliate (a slap in the face, to continue the metaphor), the United States would have plenty of time to ease off the bombing. On the other hand, if the United States were to unleash an all-out, total assault on the North—rape rather than seduction—there could be no turning back” (Pentagon Papers, p. 354). A great deal of Johnson’s political rhetoric behind closed doors was defined by abstractions of the body. Rape, however, offered a discourse of masculine empowerment and enfranchisement that clearly exploited cultural stereotypes of women’s lack of cultural and political agency.

accordingly. With normative gender ideology positioned as the nexus between political and military power, the deep ideological challenge posed by women’s integration into the armed forces threatened the very center of ideological power in late 20th century Western society. William G. Reitzer, biblical scholar and staunch misogynist, argued against women’s participation in civil service from a traditionalist position, arguing: “The Bible refers to woman as the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). This is true not only physically but also psychologically. [. . .] For this reason women are considered poor candidates for military service. Militarism is contrary not only to their physical endowments, but also to their entire disposition.”216 This deeply essentialist assessment of women’s “disposition” certainly would have been troubling news for the thousands of women employed by the military at the time.

Individual responses to this ideological threat influenced real military policies during the height of the U.S. war in Vietnam. Hostile attitudes toward women’s full integration in the military were common among high level military officials during the Vietnam period.217 In 1976, retired Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland was asked to respond to the question, “What do you think of women at

216 Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary, Equal Rights for Men and Women 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, 576.

217 For a particularly impassioned review of women’s role in the military, see James Webb’s 1979 article for the Washingtonian, “Women Can’t Fight.” In this article, the now senior Senator from Virginia argued for limiting women’s opportunities in the military, claiming that women’s presence in military academies had fundamentally changed the nature of elite level instruction. According to Webb: “Externally looking in, the system has been objectified and neutered to the point it can no longer develop or measure leadership. Internally, sexual attractions and simple differences in treatment based on sex have created resentments and taken away much of the institution’s sense of mission.” It is important to note that every notable expansion of women’s opportunities for advancement in the U.S. military has provoked similar claims as well as subsequent debate in both military and civilian forums.
West Point?” In no uncertain terms, the retired General rejected women’s ability to serve in combat positions. As Westmoreland explained:

> I think it’s silly. They’re depriving young men of the limited places that are there. The purpose of West Point is to train combat officers, and women are not physically able to lead in combat. Maybe you could find one woman in 10,000 who could lead in combat, but she would be a freak, and the military academy is not being run for freaks.\(^{218}\)

Simultaneously reinforcing men’s entitlement to career positions in the military and rejecting the right of women to serve as equal representatives of the nation abroad, Westmoreland captured the popular ideology of sex based differences in citizenship in his brief editorial response.

These attitudes toward women's military service had real implications for those women who did enlist. Denied full access to promotion and training, women were also denied the full reward of service in the U.S. military. As Professor Norman Dorsen, general counsel for the ACLU, noted in 1971: “One collateral consequence is that women at the present time do not get the benefits of service. There is a tendency to think of the service these days as a deficit operation from the point of view of the people who are drafted. Yet many people who are drafted get job training, veterans benefits and service training of different kinds. These are not inconsequential benefits if one examines the veterans legislation and the other legislation that has been passed in recent years.”\(^{219}\) In


the Executive branch, in Congress, and in the U.S. military, women were at a
disadvantage.

In 1975, the Assistant Secretary of the Army presented the contest for women’s
equal representation in the military in the context of the Equal Rights Amendment. In
response to pressure from the Department of Defense to create more equal opportunities
for women in the military, the Assistant Secretary complained, “We apparently have
become the victims of the ERA without the benefit of properly assessing the impact”220
By 1977, however, very little had actually changed in terms of women’s opportunities in
the military. While proponents of equal rights for women may have accepted some
differences between women and men, they generally hesitated to describe those
differences in any sort of essential terms. They certainly were not comfortable enough
with the institutional consequences of those differences to fully and finally incorporate
women as agents within the elite level of the imagined community of the U.S. This
refusal to recognize women as fully equal members of the national collective has
reverberated in cultural memories of the long 1960s, framing the shape of later
monuments and memories dedicated to the period. The debate over the Vietnam
Women’s Memorial, as well as the persistent failure to incorporate women veterans in
discussions of the U.S. war in Vietnam, describe the persistence of women’s status as
second class citizens of the nation.

CHAPTER V

MEMORIALIZING WOMEN’S SERVICE

The United States military was one of the first institutions in the nation to offer women extensive opportunities within a public workplace. It is also the only remaining U.S. institution that explicitly limits opportunity and advancement on the basis of sex alone. Women who served in the armed forces during the U.S. war in Vietnam experienced this sex-based inequality in unambiguous terms. As one female Army medical technician wrote to the anti-war GI publication *Fragging Action* in 1972, "'where do the promotions come in? The hard part about being a woman in the green machine is if you don't kiss the right ass or fuck the right people, forget about any more rank.'" The consequences of this discrimination extended far beyond individual women’s experience as members of the United States Armed Forces. The experiences of female service members as a group revealed a great deal in terms of the status of "woman" as a citizen class within the domestic social and political environment of the United States during the long 1960s. The failure to commend women’s military service, as particularly evident in the persistent failure to commensurably memorialize women’s and men’s military service, revealed women’s persistent second class status as citizens of the imagined national community of the United States twenty years later.

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Official national commemorations become intimately entangled in the politics of citizenship. As Kirk Savage observed, public monuments provide a space for the imagined community of the nation to materialize, as “the existence of the nation is confirmed in a simple but powerful way.”

Hearings on the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project [VWMP] conducted before the 100th Congressional Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests, reflect this entanglement. On behalf of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Diane Evans asked the subcommittee members, “Who decides who America will remember?” Referencing the collective process underlying the creation of official memory, Evans argued, “If it is the American people who decide, then we are truly a democratic nation.” While Evans spoke specifically in defense of the VWMP’s efforts to erect a national monument to women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam, this reference to a democratic process of memory suggested a far broader scope for her testimony.

National memorials, like all “official” forms of public tribute, commemorate an imagined elite citizen class. Women, as military veterans and as U.S. citizens, actively struggled to achieve recognition as members of this citizen class throughout the 1980s. National memorials, built in the space between elite discourse and popular reception,

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provided a mutable but tangible location for the public to “find the nation and to engage with it as citizens.” The construction of the Civil War monument on the National Mall is instructive on this point. Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Civil War monument defined a narrowly circumscribed vision of U.S. history and national community.

In discussing the memorialization of the Civil War on the National Mall, Kirk Savage argues that the official hegemonic narrative demanded a triumphant memorial to national rebirth, void of the marks of racial inequality that defined many vernacular Civil War memories. According to Savage, describing the Civil War memorial as a monument to a “‘common people’ with a ‘common destiny’ papered over key absences, without which the illusion of universality would have been shattered.” Similarly left out of the “universal” boundaries of official memory, women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam fought to claim their service as a mark of membership in the imagined community of the nation. The subjects of public monuments often represent the center of power and privilege within a national community. In this period, the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project promised to move women’s status toward the center of the national body politic, and one step closer to true sociopolitical equality.

While memorials always locate their symbolic referent in the past, the politics of their construction and reception are defined by the present. This symbolic

225 Savage, 10.
226 Savage, 171.
227 Patrick Hagopian has authored an extensive analysis of memorials to the U.S. war in Vietnam, arguing a presentist thesis similar to that proposed by Bodnar’s work on commemoration. See Hagopian’s *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).
displacement is not limited to physical memorials, but extends to broad aspects of public memory. According to Lorrie Smith: “Most popular treatments of the war--for all their claims to ‘tell it like it was’-- reveal more about the cultural and political climate of the 1980s than about the war itself.” Furthermore, the public reception of memorials shifts over time with often unpredictable results. As Kirk Savage notes in his discussion of the changing context of slavery at the Lincoln Memorial, “often unexpectedly, then, the monuments of the capital have galvanized that nation and created new and unexpected ‘chords of memory.’” The demands of contemporary politics have continually redefined monuments, changing the received narrative of built structures until they are rendered culturally and politically insignificant. As audiences change and social norms shift, public monuments evolve.

Debates over the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project reflected the gendered cultural dynamics of U.S. society in the 1980s, as critics of the VWMP cloaked their arguments against the project in narratives that emphasized tradition, aesthetics, and the integrity of established memorial conventions. As long as these dominant cultural scripts failed to critique the unequal status of men and women, women remained marginalized in the public consciousness. From the earliest founding period, U.S. national memory has marginalized women’s contributions to military defense. As Cecilia Elizabeth O-Leary argued:

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229 Savage, 11, 21.
Beginning with the American Revolution, women volunteered as spies and provided indispensable infrastructural services to the army. The ideology of the early republic, however, reinterpreted their activism differently from that of its male citizens.\textsuperscript{230} Although women’s early contributions were applauded, they were quickly forgotten. The nation built few memorials to these women, and the ruling elite strictly limited women’s agency in public spaces. By the 1980s, women in the U.S. had won several historic battles for women’s first class citizenship, but they remained far from equal members of the imagined national community. While the advocates of the VWMP presented the monument as an important element in ensuring women’s equal status as citizen veterans, their opponents described the project as frivolous, selfish, and unnecessary.

Contemporary patterns of inequality deeply influence a society’s collective historical consciousness, as individuals interpret official cultural narratives through their various lenses of privilege and inequality. Michael Rothberg’s conception of multidirectional memory is instructive on this point. According to Rothberg, to understand memory as multidirectional means to consider it as: “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private.”\textsuperscript{231} Individual as well as social lenses on privilege and inequality are defined within the boundaries described by the many cultural locations of identity that communities and individuals transect. As Rothberg explained, “both individual and collective memory are


always in some sense multidirectional.”

History is constructed and contested within complex and dynamic environments. Understanding the construction of a collective historical consciousness requires maintaining a sensitivity to multidirectional processes within these environments, as multiple narratives on historical causation and consequence often coexist in direct as well as indirect tension with one another. This apparatus of multidirectionality allows for a more careful analysis of 1980s era debates on the commemoration of women’s service during the U.S. war in Vietnam.

An anti-draft poster from 1968 perfectly illustrates the cultural dynamics of women’s agency in U.S. militarization. The poster features counterculture icon Joan Baez, seated beside her two sisters below the bold claim: “GIRLS SAY YES: to boys who say NO.” In fine print, the poster advertises itself as a fundraising device for “The Draft Resistance.” Women, ineligible for mandatory conscription in the United States military, occupied a very particular gendered space in their resistance to the draft. While the anti-draft movement exploited women’s sexuality in resisting the war, the institution of the military exploited women’s sexuality in service. In many ways, the refusal to draft women reinforced the larger cultural marginalization of women as first class U.S. citizens. Kathie Sarachild, a member of the radical feminist Redstockings group, argued in 1989 that these systemic problems of inequality within the military impacted women’s opportunities in U.S. society on a broad scale. According to Sarachild:

232 Rothberg, 35.

One of the most illuminating contradictions radical women faced and began to understand in a new way in the crucible of the times was that their automatic exclusion from the draft was maybe not so 'lucky,' after all—that it reflected a second class position in society for which there was a still price to pay for a lifetime. [...] it was a course as well as an emblem of their powerlessness compared to the men of their generation—as their ‘No’ to the war lacked the strength the men's had of being able to say ‘We won't go'—and highlighted their more powerless and auxiliary position in the rest of society, as well.234

Women's position of relative marginalization within anti-war movements has been extensively studied, but women suffered as members of the armed forces as well.235 Regardless of their political positions, regardless of their positions on war and militarization, the abject marginalization attached to unequal citizenship affected all women in U.S. society. Women who refused the war and women who joined the war were united in their lack of a position of cultural strength and authority.

In a prepared statement for the 100th U.S. Congress, director of the National Park Service William Mott argued, “Women who served in and with our armed forces in Vietnam have done so with honor, strength and commitment. Yet they are often

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overlooked when our Nation recognizes its veterans.”236 This failure to commemorate women’s service marginalized women veterans, both ideologically and in practical terms. According to Patrick Hagopian: “The issue of recognition and representation was particularly intense for women, who did not feel that their experience was acknowledged by the public or by veterans’ organizations: they were the ‘invisible veterans.’”237

The lack of memorials to women’s service during the U.S. war in Vietnam made these veterans’ invisibility conspicuous, but women’s marginalization also appeared in military studies and policies that failed to recognize the nation’s obligations to an entire subject class of war veterans. Even feminists with a conscious concern for women’s equality often ignored the needs of military women. According to professed anti-militarist feminist Ilene Rose Feinman, political feminism since the 1980s has “depended on an antimilitarist stance which obscures the role of women in the military who share the belief in women’s equality.”238 As a Washington Post editorial noted in 1981: “Volumes have been written about the problems of the 2.8 million male Vietnam veterans, but no comprehensive study of female veterans has ever been done.”239

In 1984, Lou Harris and Associates were commissioned to investigate questions on U.S. women’s service in Vietnam. Their report established one of the earliest sets of general statistics on women’s military service. The agency found that of the over

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237 Hagopian, 293.
250,000 female veterans of the armed forces, approximately 11,000 served in Vietnam. Of these women, more than three-quarters had exposure to combat. This was a significantly high percentage. During World War II, only one-tenth of the women who served had comparable combat exposure.\textsuperscript{240}

The women who served in Vietnam were a different class of veteran when compared to the women who had served in the U.S. military before them. With their high exposure to combat type situations, these women often required access to the services provided for traditional (male) combat veterans. Despite this new demand, the Department of Veterans Affairs made no further attempt to launch a comprehensive study of the readjustment of women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam until November of 2010. Nearly 40 years after the end of the war, Cooperative Studies Program 579, titled “Health Views: Health of Vietnam Era Veteran Women’s Study,” is still in the recruiting stage.\textsuperscript{241}

Women veterans have been excluded from veterans’ studies, public and private sector research, the data on veterans compiled by government agencies, and even statistics that estimate the size of the veteran population. The Minerva Center, a non-profit foundation for the study of women in war and the military, published an article in 1988 that claimed: “Until the 1980's, the population of over a million women veterans


has largely been an almost invisible population."242 To this day, there is no accurate count available of the number of women who served in or in support of the U.S. military in Vietnam. Speaking before Congress, Donna-Marie Boulay, Chairman of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project, testified as to the confusion over the number of U.S. women who served in Vietnam. According to Boulay: “We do know that, in addition to approximately 10,000 or 11,000 military women, there were more than 13,000 Red Cross women,” as well as women in the Department of Defense, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the CIA.243 Many of these women are categorized as civilians, rather than as veterans of the war, but even those women who served in the military have been frequently disregarded as veterans.

Karen K. Johnson, a woman who served in Vietnam as a Command Information Officer of the United States Army argued before Congress: “I was an American soldier; I answered my country's call to arms; and I am an American veteran, a title I should be able to share with equal dignity with all who have served before me and will serve after me.”244 Not all women veterans, however, were equally aware of or willing to claim their status as veterans. Linda Watson, Private First Class in Vietnam, remembered: “I didn't think I qualified for benefits, because I didn't consider myself a Vietnam vet. It's just recently I came to the realization I am. I didn't see all the atrocities. But I saw enough for


This perspective was common among women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam. As Senator Alan Cranston testified before Congress:

women veterans are still much less likely than their male counterparts to use veterans’ benefits such as home loan guaranties and VA health care -- in part because they are not aware that such benefits are available. Many women veterans do not realize that some of their stress-related symptoms may have been caused by their service in Vietnam.246

The structure of the Veterans Administration [VA] in the 1980s did not encourage women to view themselves as veterans, and often failed to create inclusive therapeutic spaces for women coping with trauma related illness.

Women were excluded from categorization as veterans not only individually, but also as a subject class within larger cultural conversations on veterans’ issues. Linda Van Devanter, a national VA spokesperson for women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam, emphasized the lack of women’s inclusion in major legacy studies of veterans, as well as the fact that no women were included in 1980s studies on the effects of Agent Orange exposure.247 Van Devanter was not alone in her criticisms of the VA’s treatment of women veterans. As Gregory J. Ahart, Director of the Government Accounting Office [U.S. GAO] in 1982 warned: “because women make up only 2.5 percent (724,000) of the total [living] veteran population, VA has not adequately focused on their needs. Yet,


women have some unique needs, particularly medical, that must be addressed.”

Outlining four major areas in which the VA had failed to “effectively inform female veterans of their benefits or assess their awareness of those benefits,” the report called for a broad overhaul of the VA system.

The ideological structure of VA programs played an important role in determining women veterans’ access to care. In practical terms, however, providing adequate care for veterans also required a significant investment of capital. Robert Lloyd, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America’s Washington D.C. chapter, noted in 1987 that “Memorial recognition for the women who served as nurses in Vietnam is overdue, but tangible responses to the readjustment problem that many of them have had to face by themselves would probably be more welcome.” In 1982, according to the U.S. GAO, women veterans “could not participate in certain treatment programs at 2 of 6 VA psychiatric facilities contacted and were not admitted to 10 of the 19 domiciliaries.” As a further sign of the neglect of women’s health needs, “complete gynecological and obstetrical care were often not available” at VA facilities, with only 27% of female patients receiving documented pelvic examinations, 40% receiving breast examinations, and none receiving pap smears. VA benefits also refused to provide care for “normal pregnancy and childbirth, even if the veteran was pregnant when discharged from the military or is unable to pay for hospital care.”

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248 Gregory J. Ahart to Daniel K. Inouye, U.S. Senate (24 September 1982).
health outside of combat-related illness would not have been an unprecedented decision by the VA. In 1980, in fact, “about 89 percent of VA inpatient veterans were treated for nonservice-connected disabilities.” Ultimately, veterans organizations too frequently failed to provide women veterans with the essential health and readjustment services available to male veterans.

Public perceptions of veterans further shaped women veterans’ perspectives on their service as well as their status as civilians. If it can be argued that male veterans returned home to a “hostile nation,” female veterans shared this experience of hostility, compounded by the public’s “frequent questions about why a decent woman would want to be stationed halfway around the world with so many men.” As Linda Van Devanter points out, public discussions of women’s military service were highly sexualized. According to Van Devanter: “People figure you were either a hooker or a lesbian if you were a woman in the Army in Vietnam. Why else would a woman want to be with 500,000 men unless she was servicing them?”

Jim Webb’s well publicized 1979 editorial on women in military leadership reinforced this hostile stereotype when he claimed that promiscuity and the search for a mate led women to the Naval Academy. In a culturally rare presentation of women as sexual aggressors, Webb mourned, “it is no secret that sex is commonplace in Bancroft Hall. The Hall, which houses 4,000 males and 300 females, is a horny woman’s

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253 Barley, A13.

254 Barley, A13.
dream.” Later in the same article, Webb attacked military women even more directly, as he claimed: “Many women [in the military] appear to be having problems with their sexuality.” These popular representations of military women’s sexuality as predatory, eager, and confused had implications for women’s real experiences in service and as veterans.

Many women veterans experienced a deep sense of alienation from traditional veterans’ groups. As one woman veteran of the Army Nurse Corps in Saigon explained:

I feel isolated from the community of veterans in [this place]. I can’t speak about any other vets, because I don’t know any others. This is my first experience with veterans, and I've been active with this group for a year and a half now. I don't feel any closer to being a part of the group than I did when I first stood up and identified myself as a vet.

With limited access to treatment facilities and therapeutic “rap” groups, women more often internalized the war-time trauma that male veterans were encouraged to blame on the war. While women veterans met limited therapeutic success in woman only rap groups, the creation of separate veterans organizations for women often reinforced feelings of exclusion and isolation.

In an impassioned defense of women veterans, Sharon Culbertson argued for the importance of challenging negative stereotypes about military women:

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256 Webb.

257 Denzler, 73.

258 Denzler, 82.
I was the victim of sexual harassment while in the military. I cannot now remember any woman who was not the victim of sexual harassment. We were the victims of gender-based regulations and laws which unconstitutionally prohibit American citizens from full participation in their own national defense because the Congress and the Armed Forces are male-dominated.\textsuperscript{259}

Culbertson argued that women who volunteered for military service knew that they would serve as second class citizens, trained as soldiers but not permitted to fight. Critical of the military’s essentialist approach to sexually determined capability, Culbertson pointed out: “The degrading and demoralizing excuse given to the nation for [women soldiers’] non-participation is that these citizens have breasts and a vagina.”\textsuperscript{260}

Changing ideas in the military and in U.S. culture about women’s role in the armed forces required first changing the public perception of women in the military.

To this end, Culbertson recognized the utility of a national memorial to women’s service. According to Culbertson: “A national memorial will help to legitimize the military service of women veterans. And it will be the first actual memorial for their decades of service to the nation.”\textsuperscript{261} A public monument to women’s role in national defense promised to normalize women’s military service, allowing women veterans to claim benefits and recognition commensurate with those received by male soldiers.

\textsuperscript{259} Sharon Marie Culbertson, “Why We Need a National Women Veterans Memorial,” Minerva 3 no. 4 (31 December 1895): 97.

\textsuperscript{260} Culbertson, 97.

\textsuperscript{261} Culbertson, 98.
Memorializing women's service allowed women to join the national community of veterans.

For many women, the process of public discussion and memorialization removed the gendered stigma of their military service, allowing them to overcome long held feelings of isolation. This isolation mattered within the collective national context, but it also mattered on a personal level. "For eight years, my husband didn't know I was a vet," said Agnes Feak, who participated in an air evacuation of Amerasian children called Operation Baby Lift. "I kept my mouth shut when I came home. He found a photo of me in fatigues and said, 'Who's that?' And I said, 'That's me.'"262 Women veterans' struggles to discuss their military service with male partners and husbands form a common trope in collected oral histories of veterans. Karen Offutt explained, for example, that her service seemed threatening to her male partner's sense of self. According to Offutt: "I got married and the husband I married, he wouldn't let me talk about Vietnam. He hated it because he had graduated from USC and he had orders for Vietnam, [but] he had a friend change them. I made him feel chicken and cowardly."263 Jeanne Bell, another veteran, remembered: "I was married to a Vietnam vet. But we never talked about Vietnam. We were stationed in the same place, married for 14 years, but we never talked about Vietnam."264

Despite the fact that women were sent to live and work in the middle of a guerilla war, popular ideas about women's service in Vietnam emphasized differences between

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262 Bunn.
263 Bunn.
264 Bunn.
the wartime experiences of male and female veterans. Remembered as nurses but not as veterans, women who attempted to attend veterans’ rap sessions were typically warmly welcomed, but were rarely met with any sense of camaraderie. As one woman veteran explained: “There’s always that, every time there’s a meeting, there’s some person who was wounded who wants to thank the nurses. But that is not accepting me as a veteran who has need for the camaraderie or the sharing that goes on in the meetings.”265 This benevolent marginalization defined the experiences of women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam in personal as well as public and political terms.

As women’s military service became more normalized in the contemporary U.S. environment, increasing numbers of women who served in Vietnam spoke out against their marginalization as veterans. This quest for visibility shaped the earliest campaigns for public memorials honoring women’s military service during the Vietnam period. In 1988, defending the larger symbolic relevance of the nurse in the proposed Vietnam Women’s Memorial on the National Mall, Donna-Marie Boulay argued: “The statue of a nurse is so compatible with the existing trio of figures because the nurses’ experience so closely parallels the experience of the infantrymen—the intensity, the trauma, the carnage of war.”266 Women rarely served as nurses buried safely in the rear. With nearly 60,000 members of the U.S. military killed in action and over 300,000 wounded, the approximate 10,000 women who served as nurses in the U.S. military saw a great deal of the gruesome consequences of war.267 If the Vietnam Veterans Memorial stood to

265 Denzler, 75.


commemorate those who served their nation in war, the military nurses in Vietnam certainly qualified as subjects for memorialization.

The existing memorial at the time of the debate over the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project included the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall along with "The Three Servicemen" statue and flag. This memorial excluded women, who were restricted from combat status in Vietnam, by exclusively emphasizing the significance of U.S. infantry forces in Vietnam. John Wheeler, Chairman of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, argued in defense of including a memorial to military nurses at the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Implying a gendered bias in the existing memorial, Wheeler argued: "It is my conviction that the figure of a woman in the memorial area would help youth, young girls, understand their country better and respond in a deeper way to the memorial, and it will plant a seed that they will always remember of empathy with their country and its purposes."268 In other words, by treating women's military service as honorable and commendable, the memorial would symbolize women's relationship with the United States as first class citizens.

Individuals from ostensibly polarized political positions shared a recognition of the cultural significance of national memorials to women's military service. Invoking the cultural advances of women under second wave feminism, John Wheeler claimed, "the fact is that during the sixties and the early seventies the role of women in our country advanced more than it probably had in the last century. And there is some truth, some deep poetic truth, to the fact that the figure of a woman in the Memorial would express

that truth." Radical feminist Kathie Sarachild offered a startlingly similar contention, arguing that women might join the armed forces “for feminist reasons also, as they are still challenging eons of ‘gender and defense’ tradition, and every woman who is doing it is to some extent a pioneer asserting women's right to equality with men.” Still others defended the women’s memorial as “not a feminist issue,” but instead a monument predicated on the question of guaranteeing “immortal” recognition to all individuals who have served with honor in the U.S. military.

In the 1980s, at the height of the debate over women's right to a national Vietnam monument, the demand for women’s memorials had already been recognized at the state and local level. Locally, communities were beginning to express “a common desire to honor those who served and to heal the war's psychological wounds as well as to show a commitment to civil rights and the important role of women.” While these local movements offered a productive counter-narrative to women's exclusion from veterans’ communities, the refusal to extend these memorials beyond the vernacular level forced women veterans into a class apart from the “official” community of national war veterans. The controversy surrounding the proposed Vietnam Women’s Memorial on the National Mall demonstrated this struggle for the sanction of official discourse, as


270 Sarachild, 243.


273 I use the construction of an “official” community of veterans with Bodnar’s distinction between vernacular and official culture in mind.
women veterans and their allies fought to define the center of the narrative on women as war veterans in the U.S.

Women veterans’ demands for membership in national narratives of military service found expression in debates over the Vietnam Women’s Memorial on the National Mall. The long refusal of authorization for this statuary in Congress, despite widespread popular support for the women’s memorial, raised fundamental questions in terms of the function of representation in national memorials. Many of those opposed to the introduction of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial emphasized the aesthetic function of existing memorials on the National Mall, while proponents of the memorial focused on the sociopolitical aspects of national commemoration. The well developed tensions between these two positions referenced long standing debates over the intended and received functions of public memorials.

Once erected and dedicated, memorials become public artifacts. Individuals and communities invest these memorials with multiple layers and directions of political and personal significance. Memorials may be composed of intentional art objects, but their significance is located in the persistent cultural acts that surround and ultimately define them. These organic and fluid processes of signifying keep memorials from becoming static. The Vietnam monument on the National Mall, an active site of transaction between official and vernacular memories, is constantly edited by the citizens who visit the site. The narrative of the memorial itself is shaped by these individuals. As Patrick Hagopian explained, the structure of the memorial itself has been changed by those who visit the site. When individuals depart from the officially defined pathway for viewing
the memorial’s three elements, they engage in "‘democratic’ modes of activity in which
the movements of the multitude combined with the physical characteristics of the site to
demand the current architecture of pathways."\textsuperscript{274} The well known practice of leaving
letters and mementoes at the memorial has become an integral part of the memorial
experience, in which the vernacular narrative intersects with the official memorial. This
tension between official and vernacular narratives, however, has resulted in a deeply
contested hegemonic view of the monument. As Marita Sturken has argued, the
memorializing aspects of remembering the U.S. war in Vietnam are primarily cultural,
rather than personal or official. According to Sturken, “when personal memories of
public events are shared, their meaning changes,” and enters the realm of collective
culture.\textsuperscript{275} Analyzing these competing claims on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in
Washington, D.C. thereby reveals a publicly shared subtext of gender in debates over the
form and function of a national memorial.

Diane Stoy, a civilian nurse with no military service record, testified before the
U.S. Senate against the alteration of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Describing herself
as a member of the national memorial community, Stoy argued that “To disturb that
successful triumvirate, the wall, the flag and the infantrymen, by adding the nurse statue
would be, in my opinion, an injustice to all of us.”\textsuperscript{276} This claim conflicted in significant
ways with the arguments of the women veterans and their allies. The proponents of the

\textsuperscript{274} Hagopian, 357.

\textsuperscript{275} Marita Sturken, \textit{Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of

\textsuperscript{276} U.S. Congress. Senate. \textit{Hearing: On S. 2042: 126}.
memorial argued that the statue would guarantee recognition—and justice—for the women who served in Vietnam. Fundamentally, this conflict points to the difficulty of universalizing the experience of memorialization within the nation. While it may have been true, as J. Carter Brown argued, that “art is not legislation, subject to endless amendments by others after the fact,” the status of public memorials was more complex than traditional ideas about the ownership of art allowed.277 Particularly for a memorial that commemorated a recent living conflict, the status of the object as “art” came into conflict with the demands of the audience as commemorated subjects.

The opposition to the Vietnam Women’s Memorial was not mobilized entirely around a concern for the integrity of the artistic product. Politically, those who opposed altering the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to commemorate women’s service also often opposed women’s service in combat positions. After outlining her opposition to the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, Colonel Mary Bane, USMC, described her subscription to gendered inequality in the military. Discussing women being placed in combat roles, Bane argued, “it would be such a drawdown on the ability to carry out the mission that it would be self-defeating.”278 To this day, the entry of women into combat roles in the military is passionately debated. Proponents of removing limitations on women in the military argue for military standards based entirely on ability, rather than sex, while their opponents continue to claim that women are simply too different from men to serve their nation’s military without restrictions.


This political dynamic influenced debates over the construction of a national memorial to women's service in Vietnam. The memorial received strong support from within veterans groups, and representatives for the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Vietnam Veterans of America all testified before the U.S. Senate in favor of adding the Women's Memorial to the National Mall. As Senator Durenberger explained, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund supported the concept. All major veterans groups endorsed the proposal. Grass roots support from throughout the nation was expressed." Despite this broad show of support, the Commission of Fine Arts rejected the proposed addition, leading to the 1988 Hearing in the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands.

Offering an alternative narrative for the Subcommittee's consideration, Sandie Fauriol, former director of the National Salute to Vietnam Veterans and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, argued that:

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not about art, and it is not about fulfilling anyone's special interests. It is about healing--personal and national healing. [...] Adding the statue of a woman at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would provide the physical symbol of honorable service by the thousands of women who worked in the war zone, just as the statue of the infantrymen does for the men who served there.

Beyond this discourse of healing, war memorials on the National Mall also visually redefine the boundaries of the national community through representations of shared sacrifice. In the process of healing the wounds of war, the public regularly constructs categories for victims, veterans, beneficiaries, and outsiders. For women veterans, a national memorial promised a major step toward signifying survival and reentry in equal terms for men and women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

The opponents of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial understood the symbolic value of memorialization beyond the status of the object as art. As Shelley Mastran, another civilian opponent of the Women’s Memorial, argued in testimony before the U.S. Senate:

A monument is a construction designed to keep alive the memory of a person or historical event. It enhances our awareness of the past. It reminds us of another community to which we belong, and thus provides a sense of cultural continuity and purpose. A monument thus functions in a symbolic way. It communicates the importance essence of the person or event memorialized.282

Mastron believed that the inclusion of non-abstract statuary—such as the proposed nurse of the Women’s Memorial—weakened this abstractly imagined national community. Unfortunately, the very real and persistent exclusion of women from the public discourse on U.S. veterans placed women outside of the abstract imagined community of war veterans. Faced with the reality of discrimination, women veterans found it difficult to assert their cultural belonging in the abstract. The literal figure of the nurse forced the

national imagination to confront the reality of women’s service, and in the process allowed women veterans to claim their membership in the national soldiering collective.

Several opponents of the memorial expressed their fear of losing the tenuous “unity” that they believed the recently constructed Vietnam Veterans Memorial had brought to the U.S. public. These opponents of the Women’s Memorial, however, universalized the experience of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at the expense of many of the women who served in Vietnam. The “equalizing and unifying” force of the existing memorial, as described by opponents of the Women’s Memorial, had clearly already been lost to those women who felt unrepresented by the existing structure of the memorial.283 As Senator Durenberger argued, the addition to the memorial was about extending a sense of “recognition and belonging” to those women who served the U.S. military in Vietnam.284

Refusing to recognize this sense of exclusion, J. Carter Brown, Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts [CAF], presented women veterans as a selfish interest group in his testimony before the U.S. Senate. According to Brown, the Commission of Fine Arts had been established as a counterbalance against “the winds of political opportunism,” and as such held an obligation to challenge the revisionist memorialization of interest groups on the National Mall.285 Leaving aside the problematic evaluation of one half of the population as an “interest group,” Brown’s defense of the artistic integrity of established memorials demands a closer examination. Brown’s Commission, formed in

1910 at the height of the modernist movement in the U.S., had a well established history of opposing representative portrait statuary. In its early years, the CAF had removed a great deal of statuary from the National Mall, and the Commission remained deeply skeptical of representative monuments in the 1980s.²⁸⁶

A product of the modernist movement, Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, sanctified established memorials in her argument against the Vietnam Women’s Memorial while similarly rejecting the value of representative monuments. Ignoring the sociopolitical environment that framed women veterans’ demands for memorialization, Lin worried for the future of the memorial as a static object. To this end, Lin asked the U.S. Senate, “If we do not set up and abide by a limiting principle, then how will you be able to prevent further additions or alterations not only to this memorial, but to other national monuments as well?”²⁸⁷ Lin never fully explained the intrinsic value she placed in the supposedly indelible nature of national monuments. She also failed to discuss the already common removals and revisions of monuments on the National Mall, most notably as conducted by her allies the CAF during the Commission’s early years.

These oppositions from the perspective of art presented memorials as completed and static, entombing each national monument within an imagined premise and a particular narrative function. While this perspective may have generated little resistance in communities where the Vietnam Veterans Memorial functioned effectively, other communities found the need for an expanded narrative of commemoration. Donald


Hodel, Secretary of the Interior, argued against the artistic vision of Lin and the Commission of Fine Arts, claiming, “the statue of a woman could be added to the Vietnam Memorial without impairing the integrity of the memorial.” Hodel argued that placing statuary at either extremity of the wall “would provide an overall balance” that the existing relationship between the Wall and “The Three Servicemen” lacked.288

While arguments against the Women’s Memorial often referred to the “complete” status of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall, “The Three Servicemen” and the flagpole were late additions to the memorial design, and were themselves initially very unpopular. The tense relationship between these earlier additions and Lin’s Wall seemed almost forgotten by many of the aesthetic defenses of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Even those critics who recognized the fraught history of the Vietnam Memorial on the National Mall often refused to allow for another revision. Referring to the women’s memorial as a “meddlesome” proposed addition to the wall, an article in the *Washington Post* “Cityscape” section by Benjamin Forgey argued, “That these elements [the flag, Hart’s statue, and Lin’s monument] do work together to form a mighty whole is something of a miracle, and one that certainly can be undone by further political tinkering.”289 While these concerns for aesthetic design implicitly denied women veterans the right to claim the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as their own, other opponents were far more explicit in their challenges to veterans’ rights.


Senator Daniel Evans, in his remarks before the U.S. Senate, argued that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall had been designed as a monument to the war dead, not as a memorial for those who survived their tours in Vietnam. According to Evans:

The Vietnam Memorial was designated to be a stark, bare and dramatic memorial. In its original form it did a remarkable job of expressing our current view of the war and symbolized the tragedy of the war by displaying the name of every American who died as a result of the fighting in Vietnam.

Evans further expressed his concern that celebrating the survivors of the U.S. war in Vietnam would detract from this reflection on the dead and ultimately weaken the effectiveness of the Wall. While this deeply politicized anti-war message was not Lin’s stated intention in the design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, the belief that the Wall memorialized the dead more than it honored the living was widespread. William Mott in fact defended the Vietnam Women’s Memorial by arguing that “those who died are memorialized in the wall, and those who served would be memorialized in the statue.”

The Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project emphasized the role women played in preserving the lives of U.S. troops in Vietnam. While military women did lose their lives in the war, their work saved the lives of many who would otherwise be listed on the Wall. Combat veterans mobilized behind this recognition of women’s work in lifesaving support positions during the war. Many veterans wrote letters to Congress in support of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial. According to Senator Durenberger, these men argued

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“that they would not be alive today if it were not for the women who served so ably in Vietnam. I think we all know that the wall would have had many more names if not for the heroism, the commitment and the bravery of American women in Vietnam.”

Emphasizing the importance of U.S. women’s service in Vietnam, Chairman of the VVMF John Wheeler explained, “the nurse that was taking care of them was the last person that they spoke with or talked with. The effect of that is that that nurse died a death with the soldier. And many of these nurses still bear that wound.”

The presentation of women veterans as an “interest group” denied the reality of women’s significant contributions to the U.S. military during the Vietnam period. Invoking this interest group rhetoric, Maya Lin argued, “In allowing this addition you substantiate the assumption that our national monuments can be tampered with by private interest groups years after the monuments have undergone the proper legal and aesthetic approval processes.” Critical of the foundation of this criticism, Senator Barbara Mikulski argued that “women are not a special interest group. Patriotism and service know no gender boundaries.” Legal and aesthetic approval of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, however well established, had not offered recognition to women for their service.

The political implications of women veterans’ exclusion from public memory extended far wider than the condescending evaluation of opponents like J. Carter Brown


allowed. According to Brown, advocates for the Vietnam Women’s Memorial were motivated by “the bronze that is there now which tends to produce envy on the part of anyone belonging to any subgroup that is not visually depicted by those three infantrymen.” As various participants in the 1988 Senate Hearing on the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project repeatedly pointed out, women comprised a majority of the U.S. population, and as such hardly qualified as an interest group. Further, the opposition’s emphasis on the “unifying” quality of the existing memorial denied well articulated tensions between women veterans and U.S. society. With their military service largely unrecognized, women veterans were incapable of joining in the imagined collective. Neither civilians nor soldiers, surviving women veterans of Vietnam had no clear place at the memorial.

Many of the critics of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial offered as an alternative the proposed Women in Military Service for America Memorial at the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery. This memorial, to date the only national memorial “honoring women who have served in our nation’s defense during all eras and in all services,” was designed to acknowledge the women who had previously been left out of national dialogues on military service and sacrifice. Critics of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial argued that women should be satisfied with the honor of this one memorial at Arlington. This, of course, in spite of the numerous national memorials to


men’s service in the U.S. military, including “The Three Servicemen” and numerous installations within Arlington National Cemetery.

Arlington National Cemetery is located four miles Southwest of the National Mall, across the Potomac River. While the monument to women’s service at Arlington is significant, its distance from the heart of the nation’s monumental core makes it less than ideal as the solitary national monument to women’s service in the U.S. military. Further, as John Wheeler of the VVMF argued, women have served--with or without official recognition--in the U.S. military for over 200 years, in a variety of different wars. According to Wheeler, the difficulty with the Women’s Memorial at Arlington:

is that that Memorial represents catch-up ball for all the wars that our country has already been in. There is an argument to be made that this Memorial [to women veterans of the U.S. war in Vietnam] ought to be done right and let the other Memorial to women represent catch-up for the some 200 years of our country's history.298

While the opponents of the Women’s Vietnam Memorial emphasized aesthetic and practical concerns, they very rarely acknowledged this difficult issue of women’s removal from the national dialogue on service and sacrifice.

The opponents of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial refused to treat women veterans’ feelings of exclusion as a serious shortcoming of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall. In Congressional testimony as well as in an editorial for the Washington Post, Robert Doubek, executive director and project director for the

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, argued that the result of including a statue for women veterans would be:

the diminution of the existing sculpture symbolizing infantry alone. This in turn opens the Pandora's box of proliferating statuary that would depict each ethnic and occupational category and subcategory, as if the memorial were some kind of legislative body. If a white Army nurse, then why not a black Navy nurse?299

Rather than recognizing the sociopolitical value of inclusive representation for marginalized groups, Doubek ridicules the campaign as adrift in a supposedly contemptible sea of cultural awareness. Accepting Doubek’s fear of proliferating statuary requires, at least to some degree, an acceptance of his position on the limits of the center of U.S. political citizenship. Why not a black Navy nurse? What would be the real aesthetic damage of a statuary garden that equally represented the races, ethnicities, genders, sexes, and other categories of citizens who have defended U.S. interests abroad? Such a garden may not stand the tests of longevity demanded of fine art, but it would certainly offer a much needed correction to a politics of memorialization that universalizes national service as white and male.

The Vietnam Women’s Memorial has been built, and as anticipated, women have found it both healing and redemptive. To date, it remains the only memorial on the Nation Mall to explicitly commemorate women as a subject class. The Vietnam Women’s Memorial will likely remain the only monument of its kind, as the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts have now declared the

National Mall "a substantially completed work of civic art." With the negligible exception of the Smithsonian's Victory Garden, no other memorial on the National Mall so much as acknowledges women's agency within the U.S. body politic. Reporting on the dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial in November of 1993, Cindy Loose spoke with a few of the women veterans who were present. Sue Rowe, who served at Pleiku in the 71st Army Evacuation hospital between 1969 and 1970, told Loose, "I couldn't afford to come here, but I just had to." Explaining her expectations of the memorial, Rowe added, "I'm determined to cure myself today, to meet these women again, to come full circle and bring things to a close."
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As this project demonstrates, the path toward full citizenship for female bodied individuals in the United States has been long marked by complexity. Women’s demands for political and social “rights” have by necessity been constructed outside of dominant cultural discourses, and have been incorporated into elite political conversations only piecemeal, without an overriding consideration for women’s full participation in the imagined national community. These traditions of tokenism, combined with the tendency to view women as a “special interest” group, hold consequences not only for the historical record, but for the shape of political and social policy in the present day. The failure to adequately resolve and commemorate discourses surrounding women’s citizenship during the long 1960s is evident in the persistent reinscription of women’s equal political and cultural status as secondary to and outside of national issues in the U.S. today. Half a century later, women remain restricted from full and equal participation in the U.S. military, and the embodied politics of women’s social and individual experiences continue to be debated within a national Congress staffed predominantly by men and women who are unallied with feminist interests.

On the political level, this persistent inequality in women’s standing within the U.S. military suggests the need for a more intentional political coalition of all sexes, genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities, and so forth. As the female bodied politicians of the long 1960s demonstrated, “women” don’t simply and straightforwardly identify with feminist political platforms. Elected officials are primarily influenced by the concerns of
their constituencies. The embodiment of politicians as female does not tend to directly impact their political objectives, and women politicians are not necessarily inherently inclined toward greater sympathy for feminist issues. Rather than simplistically focusing on the representation of “women” in Congress, real political change requires demanding the representation of an explicitly feminist agenda in Congress, promoted and practiced by men and women alike.

In practical terms, assuming equally shared responsibility for ensuring women’s status as first class citizens—regardless of individual sex or gender identity—is the only way to create a feminist political caucus in the current Congress. Without the support of the majority of political agents—who in the current period are predominantly embodied as white middle class men—equal rights legislation simply won’t be able to win majority support. In terms of political office, women are hardly more proportionally represented today than they were during the long 1960s. At the height of civil rights, anti-war, and feminist social revolutions in the U.S., during the 90th Congress, women held only 12—or 2%—of the 535 voting seats. Although women’s numbers in Congress have increased, they still hold only 90 of the 535 voting seats in both houses of Congress. While women make up over slightly over half of the U.S. population, they hold less than 17% of the seats in the U.S. Congress. Simply electing women to Congress, however, does not guarantee the representation of feminist issues within the legislative process. The differences between Nancy Pelosi and Michelle Bachmann in the current 112th Congress,


in terms of their relative alignments with feminist political issues, are in essence little different from ideological differences between women politicians during the long 1960s.

While the politics of Pelosi (D - CA) and Bachmann (R - MN) are divided along obvious partisan lines, their relationships with social legislation provide a more interesting parallel to earlier divides between female politicians such as Schroeder and Holt, or Chisholm and Smith. Social welfare legislation has long been defined as an important goal for feminist politicians. Feminists have frequently championed state subsidized social services as effective platforms for providing disenfranchised people with increased social mobility and economic stability, and feminist legislative agendas have historically offered broad support for state subsidized social welfare. In today’s political climate, perhaps the most salient social welfare issue in the U.S. revolves around the question of state guaranteed healthcare.

Pelosi, following the mainline democratic position on the issue, has expressed strong support for the current national health care plan. In one hearing before the House of Representatives, Pelosi argued that the repeal of the health care act would directly result in “the repeal of patients’ rights,” arguing that the proposed repeal of the act would be “harmful to the health of the American people.” After elaborating on the significance of nationally guaranteed healthcare for economically disenfranchised U.S. citizens, Pelosi positioned the health care act as an essential element in providing for “their needs, their strengths and the strength of our country.” In direct opposition to

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Pelosi’s position, and following the mainline Republican position, Bachmann argued for the repeal of the health care act in the same hearing. According to Bachmann, “ObamaCare, as we know, is the crown jewel of socialism. It is socialized medicine.”

Expressing concern for the cost of state subsidized welfare, Bachmann refused to engage the question of U.S. citizens’ need for federally guaranteed affordable health care, and emphasized the budgetary strain of such a large scale federal program.

These distinct political frameworks, one emphasizing the needs of the individual citizen and the other the needs of the nation-state, reflect political tensions similar to those previously explored between female politicians on opposite sides of the political aisle during the long 1960s. Recognizing this persistent tension between female legislators as a regular and expected element in Congressional decision making provides an important step toward understanding the real political challenges faced by feminists on the national level of governmentality. Women refuse to form one cohesive subject class in U.S. society, despite persistent popular dialogues on “women’s issues.” Accepting the differences among women is an important step toward defining a political agenda that effectively explores and advocates for women’s equal political and social empowerment as first class citizens. Without a more careful ideology of feminist political action, legislation that disproportionately shapes women’s public and private agency will remain fairly impenetrable.

The question of legal “personhood” is one important issue before the 112th Congress that demonstrates the ongoing importance of constructing an effective feminist

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political caucus. The “Sanctity of Human Life Act,” the “Protect Life Act,” the “Title X Family Planning Act,” and the “Title X Abortion Prohibition Act” together illustrate the persistence of federal level legal challenges to women’s embodied rights. These acts directly impact women’s access to their own bodies, implicitly defined as the gestating vessels for “personhood” within the terms of the legislation. Significantly, while three of the four bills do have some women as cosponsors, all four of the bills are sponsored by male members of Congress. Without a strong feminist political caucus in both houses of Congress, there is little traction for shifting the legislative agenda away from bills that treat women’s bodies as public political space. Similarly, without a stronger congressional emphasis on the importance of legislating protections for women’s equal access to elite national spaces--with explicit means of implementation--women will continue to be constructed as second class citizens within the imagined national community of the U.S.

Women’s role in combat operations for the U.S. military offers perhaps the most compelling illustration of the persistence of gender inequality in elite levels of the imagined community. According to a recent publication by the Congressional Research Service, “In the years that followed the passage of the Women’s Integration Act of 1948, women made up a relatively small proportion of the armed forces—less than one percent until 1973. By 1997, women accounted for 13.6% of the active duty endstrength,

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increasing to 14.5% by September, 2011. Military policy has changed very little to accommodate this slow but persistent increase in women’s presence. As Cynthia Enloe has argued, women still face persistent and unaddressed sexual harassment and violence from their fellow soldiers during wartime, and continue to be marked as outsiders in combat arenas. In recognition of this issue, the U.S. military has created an online resource for active duty soldiers to report sexual assault. Unfortunately, this resource is available only to active duty soldiers, and is likely underutilized for fear of intimidation and indirect sanctions from commanding officers.

In addition to the particular forms of harassment that military women endure, they remain under promoted and restricted from full combat operations. In 2009, Congress established the Department of Defense Military Leadership Diversity Commission [MLDC], directing this collective of ranking military officials to review a variety of diversity issues in the military services. According to this committee’s mission statement, “Diversity is recognizing, appreciating, respecting, and utilizing a variety of attributes, not just race and ethnicity. Diversity creates performance advantages through the synergy of diverse ideas and people. A diverse military appropriately reflects our nation.”

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310 http://wwwsexualassault.army.mil/


addition to questions of race and sexuality, women’s full integration into the military has emerged as a significant area for MLDC research. Despite popular fears of women’s integration, the commission has found that:

research evidence has not shown that women lack the physical ability to perform in combat role or that gender integration has a negative effect on unit cohesion or other readiness factors. Research has also not revealed that women are necessarily more likely than men to develop mental health problems from combat exposure.  

This same lack of evidence for women’s perceived inability to perform in combat operations has been demonstrated since the 1960s, but it remains a provocative and compelling argument for preventing women’s full integration in the armed forces.

Moving beyond the question of women’s ability to perform in combat situations, one recent RAND National Defense Research Institute study has determined that traditional designations of combatant and non-combatant positions are outdated and inherently unresponsive to current battlefield conditions. According to this publication, “a nonlinear battlefield really has no well-defined “front” or “forward” area, and, consequently, there is no longer a defined rear in a brigade’s AO, either. So, in today’s and future wars, there is no safe rear AO, per se, where the vast majority of service and support units can be located.”

Consequently, the report finds that these non-linear


battlefields prevent any reasonable certainty of the increased safety of non-combatant positions, as: “The nonlinear, asymmetric nature of war means that there will be a much greater likelihood (than in previous wars) that forces that are not intended to engage in direct combat (such as maintenance or transportation units) will be confronted with lethal enemy actions.”

In these present military conflicts, the traditional protective argument for excluding women from combat operations simply holds no weight. If women are present near combat arenas, they will most likely see combat, regardless of their official designation as non-combatants.

The failure to fully incorporate women into the military’s full tier of operations may very well be at least partially accountable for their marginalized positions within the institution. Although the reasons for the discrepancy are complex, female bodied soldiers are not promoted at the same rates as male bodied soldiers. According to a recent MLDC publication, “The most consistent patterns for both O-5 and O-6 command selection outcomes during this period [2006-2010] was that a vast majority (over 80 percent) of officers selected for command were white and male.”

This report was unable to conclusively determine if this inequality in selection outcomes was the product of an explicit and intentional lack of fairness, or the consequence of institutionally determined inequality. In a later report, however, the commission again explored the question of women’s selection to officer rank, finding that women’s restriction from combat assignments very likely contributed to “women’s reduced career opportunities,

315 RAND, Assessing the Assignment Policy for Military Women, 141.

particularly in the officer corps and more so in the Army and Marine Corps."\textsuperscript{317} Despite the MLDC’s subsequent recommendation that the military lift combat restrictions on women in order to “create a level playing field for all qualified servicemembers,” the policy has yet to change.\textsuperscript{318} Given the historical legacy of women’s struggles for full integration in the nation’s armed services, this stasis is unsurprising.

As patterns of ongoing sponsorship for the Equal Rights Amendment demonstrate, popular expectations that straightforwardly align female embodiment with the possession of a feminist political consciousness fail to encompass the true breadth of the feminist movement’s contemporary reality and potential. In the House of Representatives, the ERA is currently sponsored by a woman, Carolyn Maloney (D - NY), with 185 men and women as cosponsors.\textsuperscript{319} In the Senate, the Joint Amendment is sponsored by a man, Robert Menendez (D - NJ) with 14 men and women as cosponsors.\textsuperscript{320} In the House of Representatives, these cosponsors are located on both sides of the political aisle. As a landmark piece of feminist legislation, the Equal Rights Amendment offers an extremely symbolic snapshot of the outlines of feminist sympathy in the 112th Congress. The campaign for women’s guaranteed access to first class citizenship poses a fundamental


challenge to the possibility for social justice within the United States, and ensuring full
equality for all citizens is an undertaking that must necessarily be shared across a broadly
representative population. Just as the heavily gynocentric feminist movement of the
1960s was unable to guarantee the protection of full citizenship to U.S. women, until a
more conscious, intentional, and inclusive gender sensitive caucus is established within
the nation’s political center, feminists today will continue to struggle against an
entrenched masculinist national establishment. Not until that point will women truly be
able to claim equal status as citizens of the U.S. national collective.


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